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«This word [government] must be allowed the very broad meaning it had in the sixteenth century. «Government» did not refer only to political structures or to the management of states; rather, it designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed – the government of children, of souls, of communities, of the sick... To govern, in this sense, is to control the possible field of action of others.» — Michel Foucault, The Subject and Power, 1982.

1. Introduction and thesis statement

1.1 Public management on the edge of IT-backed authoritarianism.

The introduction of digital technologies into public administration and policy is accompanied by discussions on the benefits, challenges, tasks, and risks of the digital world. Digital technologies have a significant impact on national economies, social, cultural, and political life, therefore states proclaim strategies and implement comprehensive national programs in which political actors, businesses, and society participate. Technological innovations open some new opportunities for the transformation of different spheres of society and the state. The interaction of scientific and technological progress and political sphere is a separate object of research interest in political science.

The significance of information technologies is massive nowadays, as they have become, in a certain sense, one of the main positive symbols of technological progress worldwide. A mythology of «secular millennialism» (Trachtenberg, 2019) has developed around electronic means of communication since their beginning. It is on the basis of this rhetoric and under the influence of the ideology of new public management the concept of «electronic/digital government» was formed in the 1990s, assuming, that the introduction of information technologies into public management will make it possible to turn rigid vertical bureaucratic structures into a flexible, horizontally integrated and operative «state on demand» (ibid.). Over the last three decades the new form of governance has been emerging, basing on the new

understanding of the means of efficient and effective governing, which entails a complex process with several public authorities and multiple stakeholders involved (Sørensen, 2009). This form of governing is carried out through diverse activities which denote not only technological shifts in the development of digital technologies, determining the features, capabilities, and configurations of the functioning of modern government institutions, but also the self-governing capabilities of individuals. Technology's development in the political sphere belongs to the formation of the management processes in power systems, which is implemented through the expansion of communications systems, the creation of special software products for public administration and automation of several management processes, associated with a reduction of bureaucratic procedures.

During the last twenty years, the Chinese government and China's biggest technology companies have been experimenting with various forms of social scoring systems that assign individuals and organizations with scores based on a combination of their personal, financial, and behavioral data (Creemers, 2018).

The Social Credit System was approved in 2014 by the State Council of the People's Republic of China after being presented as a «Planning Outline for the Construction of a Social Credit System 2014 – 2016», a document, which set the task of constructing a system for evaluating citizens' behavior based on all data produced using information technologies, so that «those who have justified their trust enjoy all the benefits, and those who have lost their trust cannot take a single step» (Kovacic, 2017). The core element of information collection is a massive surveillance carried out through the fully controlled Internet services, phone applications, facial recognition systems and video cameras (Mozur, 2018). In 2014 the massive installation of surveillance objects started with an approximate estimation of 600 million monitoring cameras of the separate surveillance Skynet system to be installed in mainland China, by the end of 2020 (Deyner, 2018). The facial recognition techniques enable the government to record people's activities and link those to the personal credit score, whereby the information is collected and stored in a perceptible way. These algorithmic surveillance systems make up a

Social Credit System, where the observed compliance with rules and regulations is being encouraged, and disobedience leads to serious sanctions.

In «Discipline and Punish» 1977 Foucault argues about implementing certain disciplinary techniques for creating a docile productive workforce in industrializing countries, which would inevitably lead to the capital accumulation and further development (Foucault, 1977). Indeed, according to Hoffman, the Chinese social scoring systems have their roots in the economic sphere, as the initiative behind the project was supposed to bring the trust in the market, where the untrustworthy activities constrained the economic growth (Hoffman, 2017). The potential of the system was soon realized by the state, and its scope was expanded to compliance with legal requirements and to the broader notion of moral conduct and trust-keeping. The government has started to address trust issues in Chinese society and one of the main motivations behind building a unified social scoring system was that it should have «strengthen sincerity in government affairs, commercial and social sincerity and the construction of judicial credibility» (Creemers, 2018). The result is supposed to show the trustworthiness of citizens publicly and make it comparable to others, promoting «trust» and building a «culture of sincerity» (Botsman, 2017).

Along with the general techno-optimistic background associated with the informatization of public administration, techno-pessimistic expectations related to the plans of the Chinese government to create a Social Credit System stand out sharply. The announcement of the Chinese government's intention to create an SCS gave rise to a series of articles in the world's leading media accusing China of its intention to put an Orwellian nightmare into practice and create a state of total observance. Headlines from «The Economist» magazine give an idea of how these plans are covered in the most reputable publications: «China Invents a Digital Totalitarian State» (Feng, 2016) and «Chinese Digital Dictatorship» (Kefferpütz, 2016).

Previous research on the Social Credit System has mainly focused on perceptions of the implemented system from both Western and Chinese perspectives. From the Western point of view, the system has been repeatedly perceived mostly as a surveillance infrastructure employed for controlling citizens, violating the human rights for privacy (Creemers, 2018; Fukuyama, 2019; Hoffman, 2017; Shen, 2019). Only few studies on public opinion have shown that there is

a high degree of a system approval from Chinese citizens, especially among socially advantaged (well-educated, wealthier) groups, who believe that the SCS technology will fix the current social problems and lead to more sufficiency, trust and better life (Kostka, 2018; Fan, 2019). According to Creemers, the purpose of the social credit system is cyber-surveillance, monitoring of human behavior, and immediate retaliation for offenses, though, he considers, a frequent comparison of the system by Western scientists with anti-utopia is exaggerated (Creemers, 2018).

1.2 Why does this topic matter?

Social scoring systems are gaining attention in the global international context, as can be observed from some other related systems implemented (or planned to be implemented) in several countries, such as: financial scores in the US and in Germany, measuring the likelihood of financial insolvency; Venezuela and its «carnet de la patria», a smart ID-card with a database of medical and employment histories, political and social preferences; and a Russian Digital Economy Program planned to be implemented by 2024, which will focus on recording the «personal development trajectory» (Michaelsen, 2018). Another excellent example of a «nudge theory» implementation is the Behavioural Insights Team operating within the United Kingdom, which cooperated closely with the government, agencies and local authorities with a purpose of policy improvements through providing behavioural insights and social engineering techniques application (Bell, 2013).

Reputational scoring is a new model of social management that changes the nature of relations in society, requiring a detailed consideration of the potential opportunities and privacy threats of citizens, as well as targeted distribution of social benefits. Currently, some social scoring models are implemented for the development of information infrastructure for business and healthcare evaluations, dating services, insurance systems, housing rental and trading (Michaelsen, 2018).

However the main feature of the Chinese Social Credit System that distinguishes it from any other reputational scoring is its disciplinary character, which along with the thoroughly elaborated system of «sticks and carrots», as well as with its core element of massive

surveillance, raises a discussion on power relations and governmentality established in modern societies as well as the use of digital technologies in public administration and policy. The use of such schemes for implementation of social scoring systems may be immensely appealing for the large range of practical advantages it may offer for all forms of governing and strongly facilitated through technological development.

1.3 Thesis objectives

Since the installation of surveillance objects in 2014, the Social Credit System has been transforming the way of life in the biggest Chinese cities into the new form, where interpersonal interactions, behavioural habits and information emerge from understanding the system as one that provides citizens with social goods for obedience and punishes for delinquencies, without being personally guarded. Therefore, the system generates intentions among citizens to act in the desired manner without direct intervention of state actors, but with public authorities determining the basic parameters of evaluation of citizen's behaviour. My assumption here would be, that through subjectification as a governmentality tool, the government creates a disciplinary society, in which citizens are deterred from going against the government, disciplined to act based on what is officially considered to be appropriate, and are willing to self-censor their own behaviour without actual presence of authorities. Therefore, they internalize the instruments of the state and thus become a self-governing society.

Based on this assumption, two research question arise:

1. How does the concept of subjectivity explain the implementation of the Chinese Social Credit System as a governmentality tool?

2. How does the Social Credit System contribute to building a self-governing society in China?

In this research paper, my main objective would be to analyze the Chinese Social Credit System through the lens of Michele Foucault's theoretical framework with a focus on subjectivity and disciplinary power applied as governmentality tools. Besides, I will suggest that one of the possible outcomes of such form of governmentality in the modern world of rapidly developing