

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
Faculty of Social Sciences
School of Economics and Business Administration

Nana Maminashvili

SOCIAL CREDIT SYSTEM AND SOCIAL ATTITUDES TOWARD “BLACKLISTED”
INDIVIDUALS IN CHINA

Master’s thesis

Supervisor: MA. Urmas Hõbepappel

Co-Supervisor: MA. Taavi Kivisik

Tartu 2022

I have written this Master Thesis independently. Any ideas or data taken from other authors or other sources have been fully referenced.

Nana Maminashvili

April 20, 2022

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Literature Review	7
2.1. Social Credit System	7
2.1.1. How SCS works	8
2.1.2. SCS data collection	9
2.1.3 Public opinion and personal relationships shaped by SCS.....	11
2.2. Theoretical Framework: Social Categorization and Social Identity	12
2.2.1. The Chinese concept of face and Social Identity	14
2.2.2. Prejudice.....	17
2.2.3. Prejudice and discrimination in China	19
2.2.4. Research Questions	20
4. Research Design and Methodology.....	21
3.1. Method of Analysis	24
5. Results and Discussion	27
4.1. SCS, Relationships, and Identity	27
4.2. Opinions about SCS	33
4.3. State surveillance.....	37
4.4. State legitimacy and trust in government.....	40
4.5. Anti-Western Media Sentiments	42
6. Conclusions	46
References.....	49
Appendix A.....	57
Appendix B	58
Resümee.....	60

1. Introduction

China is a big country with more than a billion inhabitants with millions of business and governmental units. Fighting against increased corruption and social unrest in the country required enormous effort (Blomberg, 2020; Zhang, 2020 Orgad & Reijers, 2019). However, a fast and strong shift of focus to infrastructure and technological development helped China to become a digital society with a lot of personal data, sharing files and information from such platforms as Alibaba, Wechat, Baidu Pay, Sesame (Zhima) credit, and many others. This gave a new possibility to the Chinese government to control and monitor all the aspects of human lives and corporations and in order to increase the trust and morality in society, the idea of the Social Credit System (SCS, 社会信用体系 *shehui xinyong tixi*) was formulated (Orgad & Reijers, 2019).

Credit and rating systems are not new to the world. The increase of globalization and digitalization is raising the similarities between countries, especially in the digital world. Western countries also tested and developed reputation technologies and consumer scoring, commercial credit systems, and loyalty programs on many platforms like Airbnb, Uber, and eBay in recent years. Still, China's SCS is considered to be a very complex and unique project that doesn't have an equivalent elsewhere (Zhang, 2020). It not only scores individuals, businesses, or governmental units in such sectors as finance or credibility as in other countries, but it rewards "honest individuals" and punishes "dishonest" ones based on their behaviors, measures their moral status, and grades every aspect of human lives whether it is related to social, economic, or political activities and affiliation. Exactly, this division into "bad" (untrustworthy) or "good" (trustworthy) citizens may have important socio-psychological implications on intergroup and interpersonal relationships that can lead to stigmatization and marginalization of these individuals. Consequently, it may increase negative attitudes/prejudice and social distance towards them, and these will affect their self-worth, self-identification, motivation, opportunities, agency, social exclusion, and engagement with wider society. It can also develop the feeling of shame in the "bad" citizens, which is a way of social control for humans to improve their behaviors based on the self-judgment caused by shame (Bedford & Hwang 2003).

The world is entering the Big Data era (Cai & Zhu, 2015; Chen & Cheung, 2017) and Chinese SCS is becoming more attractive and some other countries are considering whether to go in the same direction. For example, Russia planned to create digital profiles for at least 80% of the population by 2025 under the name "Personal development trajectory" ("персональная

траектория развития”) and the idea behind it is mirroring China’s SCS (“80% of Russians Will Have State-Gathered 'Digital Profiles' by 2025...”, 2018; Basov, 2018). Also, Chinese telecom ZTE helped Venezuela to develop and implement smart cards that are similar to the SCS (“Chinese telecom giant ZTE 'helped Venezuela develop social credit system'...”, 2018). Therefore, it is important to study the advantages and disadvantages of such systems and their implications on societal relationships because tomorrow they can be part of our everyday lives.

Despite the international media’s narrative being quite dystopian or “Orwellian” about the ongoing project, there are scholars arguing that the SCS is largely misinterpreted by the Western world (Zhang, 2020; Wenyan, 2021). The understanding of the law and intergroup relationships in China is considered different from Western ideas. According to Ding and Zhong (2021), Chinese society lived under Confucianism for centuries. The understanding of the law was connected not only to written documents but also shaped individuals’ moral aspects, ethics, and personal relationships. Therefore, the law was necessary to create harmony in society under collectivism. Collective rights were and still are above individual rights in China unlike in the West, where the law is mostly to protect individuals and their rights (Bedford & Kwang-Kuo, 2003). So, as Ding and Zhong (2021) claim, the law in China was and still is a moral guide for people.

As Kirk, Lee, and Micallef (2020) stressed, in traditional Confucianism, the morality of individuals was based on their relationships, especially with the family members. But in the digital era, the morality of individuals, additionally, relies on algorithm calculations and their offline or online behaviors as well as on their digital social networks. Digitalization linked people’s reputation and value to the internet too.

Even though the SCS caused great interest worldwide, the studies that focus on the psychological implications of the SCS on individuals and society are still scarce. According to Creemers (2018, as cited in Langer, 2020), the existing literature is largely concentrated on political developments that caused the building of the SCS, privacy, and state surveillance infrastructure issues, people’s behavior in commercial sectors, and their financial statuses. Many studies focus on Big Data and its misuse, transparency, human rights, and democratic legitimation (Chen & Cheung, 2017) but barely any of them put much effort into whether the social categorization of people based on their scores and labeling them with negative epithets can lead to social exclusion and other psychological reactions. What attitudes may emerge towards “dishonest” individuals and how public shaming and “loss of face” can shape

intergroup and interpersonal relationships as well as the identity issues of individuals and groups.

The purpose of this study is to fill this gap and evaluate the psychological implications of the SCS in Chinese society with a focus on social categorization and social identity theories. In order to achieve my study aim, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 Chinese students living in Estonia. This will allow me to assess what are the Chinese students' (living in Estonia) opinions regarding the system implementation and compared them to the previous studies measuring Chinese people's attitudes who live in China or other countries. Since Chinese students have a unique experience of living in China and abroad as well, they may have different perceptions about the SCS than their compatriots at home. Also, living abroad in Western countries may influence the Chinese students' understanding of human rights and privacy protection.

In the first part of my study, I will introduce the SCS. In the sub-chapters, I will overview its brief history, how the SCS works and collects data, and how is public opinion related to the system in China. Also, in my literature review, I will outline the theoretical background for my study - Social Categorization and Social Identity theories, how they are tested in the Chinese context, and how the concept of face is related to social identity. At the end of this chapter, I will touch on the concept of prejudice, how it can be developed and what types of prejudice and discrimination are widespread in Chinese society.

In the second part of the content, I will focus on my research design and methodology. In chapter 3, I will explain which research design and methods were used in order to achieve my study aim, and how the sample was collected and analyzed. In chapter 4, I will focus on the results and discussion, and how do my findings correspond to existing literature and theoretical framework.

In conclusion, I will focus on my main finding and how it answered my main research questions.

Keywords: Social Credit System; Prejudice; Social Identity; Social Categorization; Reputation.

Research classification code(s) (CERCS): Social psychology (S263); Sociology (S210).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social Credit System

China's SCS is based on different local or in some cases national databases for monitoring the trustworthiness of individuals, different business sectors, different organizations, and government entities (Lee, 2020). Social media networks, friend lists, publications, career information, and all the online or offline activities create a digital profile for all the citizens of China and shape their reputation, worth, credibility, and trustworthiness (Yang, Walker & Xie, 2020). As cited in Zhang's (2020) study, "The Shanghai Municipal Social Credit Regulations define social credit as "the behavior and status of a natural person with full capacity for civil conduct, legal person, or other organizations complying with their legal or contractual obligations in social and economic activities." (p.567). According to Ding and Zhong (2021), the English translation of *xinyong* is "credit" and the English-speaking countries use it mostly in commercial, or banking contexts, but the Chinese word *xinyong* also defines such moral or societal aspects as trustworthiness, honesty, and integrity and its aim is to construct harmonious and lawful society.

The idea of establishing the SCS first appeared by Xi Jinping in 2002, in official documents that discussed the improvement of the modern market system, at the Sixteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China. By 2014, Xi Jinping declared the initiative as "a top political priority", the first 2014-2020 plan was issued ("Planning Outline for the Construction of a Social Credit System 2014-2020" as cited in Zhang, 2020) and it became a root for the new ideological understanding of the "rule of law". (Drinhausen & Brusse, 2021)

The main idea of the system is to reduce corruption, develop a modern socialist market economy and increase trustworthiness (Zhang, 2020). Thus, in the beginning, the main focus was only on economic governance, thereby, the central targets were companies because of the widespread fraud and dishonesty in their financial sectors (Orgad & Reijers, 2019) but after 2011, the interest expanded to "societal morality" as well. The four major areas had to be improved: "honesty in government affairs (*zhengwu chengxin*), commercial integrity (*shangwu chengxin*), honesty in society (*shehui chengxin*), and judicial credibility (*sifa gongxin*)" (Zhang, 2020, p. 10; Ding & Zhong, 2021).

2.1.1. How SCS works

According to the report of the Chinese State Council (2014), the SCS is very important for the improvement of social harmony, integrity, governance, and a market economy. In order for the system to work, the “honest” behaviors should be honored and the “untrustworthy” actions should be penalized because this is essential for constructing a harmonious, trustworthy, and developed society (“Joint Rewards and Sanctions (JRS)” as cited in Zhang, 2020). As introduced above, the citizens with unsatisfactory scores are labeled with various negative epithets: “untrustworthy”, “dishonest”, “bad citizen”, “discredited”, “uncivilized”, “immoral”, “deadbeat” - “a person who is not willing to work, does not behave in a responsible way, and does not fit into ordinary society” (Cambridge Dictionary) or “Lao Lai” (Jingbo, 2017) while the individuals with high scores have opposite epithets: “honest”, “trustworthy”, “good citizen”, “lawful” etc. This categorization of society and punitive facets of the system causes the most controversies, criticism, and fear in the West. Because of the fact that individuals are labeled as “bad”, “immoral”, “dishonest” or “untrustworthy” who lost their face or reputation and sometimes are publicly shamed can be the reason of their social exclusion.

For reinforcing prosocial and honest behaviors, “good” citizens must be promoted everywhere so they can be models for others. For example, China publishes “the top 10 model citizens” to motivate other civilians’ good behaviors (Kostka & Antoine, 2019). The priority services and simplified procedures should apply almost everywhere for them. As the National Development and Reform Commission stated: “Honesty is the traditional virtue of the Chinese nation and an important part of the core values of socialism.” (State Council, 2020). While “trustworthy” citizens’ life becomes much easier - they have discounts in different services, deposit-free renting options, tax reduction, and others, the “dishonest” individuals are restricted from various beneficial services and also from taking fast trains or booking flights. The procedures like taking loans, rent a house, registering children for private schools and many others are more complicated for them (State Council, 2014), and as the Chinese government announced: “those keeping trust, receive benefit all respect, and those breaking trust, meet with difficulty at every step” (“Planning Outline for the Construction of a Social Credit System (2014–2020)” as cited in Zhang, 2020).

The target of the restriction can be not only the individuals but their children or family members as well. For example, in some provinces, the children can be refused to continue studies in private schools because of their parents’ low scores (Ding & Zhong, 2021; Osborne,

2019). In 2018, the accepted student in the Chinese university was denied enrolment due to his father's score who failed to repay the loan (Chan, 2018).

The sanctions depend on the level of violation too. For instance, if an individual travels without a ticket, smokes on the train, uses an outdated ticket, or eats on public transport, they should be banned from traveling by fast trains or by air (State Council, 2018). Even if the citizens do not pay bills or debts on time, jaywalk or steal toilet paper from the shopping malls, they can be restricted from taking civil aircraft, or first-class trains, have limited access to loans, and have slower internet (State Council, 2018) and they can be targets of public shaming as well (Kosta & Antoine, 2019). There are different ways of public shaming in the different provinces such as names and pictures of rule violators visible on the billboards in the streets or sending the notification messages to all the contacts the "guilty ones" have on their cellphones and notify about their bad reputation. In Sichuan and Yunnan, local courts send recorded voice messages to blacklisted persons so playing the recorded messages aloud can notify people around them about the target person's penalization (Ding & Zhong, 2021).

2.1.2. SCS data collection

In order to gather the information about citizens' and organizations' "good" or "bad" actions, the data is collected from different sources like financial and criminal records, online credit platforms, governmental reports, social media, and even peer evaluations. The video surveillance cameras (CCTV AI cameras), which can spot an individual's identity in seconds, are widely used to monitor the citizens' behaviors as well (Lee, 2020). However, there are mixed ideas regarding the approval of CCTV cameras and sharing the personal information of the citizens. As the cross-national survey conducted by Steinacker, Meckel, Kostka, and Borth (2020) showed, in China and the UK citizens had more acceptance of surveillance technology in contrast to Germany and the US. However, if the system is perceived as a threat to their privacy, the acceptance levels drop. The study also showed that the majority of the respondents approved of the system as a security guarantee to fight terrorism and crime. Thus, the approval of the system is in between security and privacy and depends on the trust level in the state (Liu, Yang, Geng, Du, 2021) and largely depends on what type of technology is used and by who (Ritchie et al., 2021). Various studies show that the Chinese society does not perceive the system as surveillance or total control, but as a system that improves their lives, safety, and trust and the "good" citizens even welcome being rewarded for righteous behaviors (Kostka, 2019; Kirk, Lee & Micallef, 2020) because the system is making them better humans already (Canales, 2021).

The above-mentioned databases are managed by different institutions: China's economic planner, the court system, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), the People's Bank of China, and additional 47 institutions (Drinhausen & Brusse, 2021). On the report of the People's Bank of China (PBOC, as cited in Lee, 2020), by the end of 2019, 1.02 billion individuals and 28.34 million companies were blacklisted based on data from the SCS, and according to the NDRC, "2.56 million people had been restricted from taking flights, 90,000 people had been prevented from using high-speed rail services and 300,000 people had been deemed untrustworthy by Chinese courts." in the same year.

Since 2014, different provinces and cities have become pilot projects for testing the SCS. For example, in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, the Public Security Department already had full information about 6.4 million people in the region in 2014 from different databases (State Council, 2014). In 2015, the Inner Mongolia Autonomous region also promoted the corporate credit system and by 2016 already had more than 5000 social and corporate credit information in the database (State Council, 2016). In 2018, the People's Bank of China and the National Development and Reform Commission announced 12 demonstration cities for establishing the SCS (Hangzhou, Nanjing, Xiamen, Chengdu, Suzhou, Suqian, Huizhou, Wenzhou, Weihai, Weifang, Yiwu, and Rongcheng). They are carrying out the pilot projects. (State Council, 2018).

Based on various official documents, Ding and Zhong (2021) overviewed that the government officials encourage those provinces/regions and sectors to have shared data and cooperation in order to build a sincere and disciplined society. Some of these provinces already have had agreements for creating inter-city credit linkages that determine mutual recognition of the "redlists" (high records) and "blacklists" (poor records) meaning that they jointly punish or reward individuals and organizations in different areas such as tourism, goods and drug industries, business administration, taxation supervision and so on (State Council, 2017). Though, it must be noted that all participating provinces/cities still have their own regulations and scoring systems. Therefore, despite the 2014-2020 plan that by 2020 the project had to be nationwide, it is still not a ready national "one credit, one code travels the world" (State Council, 2020) project with a unified scoring system and it is still under construction (Zhang, 2020; Drinhausen & Brusse, 2021). Furthermore, participation in the system is currently voluntary, however, the plan is to make it mandatory for everyone (Canales, 2021). Despite

participation in the commercial SCS being “voluntary”, survey results of Kostka’s (2019) study showed that some citizens were not even aware that they have been tracked anyway).

2.1.3 Public opinion and personal relationships shaped by SCS

Based on various studies conducted at different times by different researchers, Kirk, Lee, and Micallef (2020) concluded that in spite of the negative social implications of the SCS, studies show that there are high levels of acceptance and support for it, especially from individuals with higher education and higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Chang (2015, as cited in Kirk et al., 2020) was the first one who conducted media polling in different cities to find out the level of acceptance or neglect of the SCS. The results showed that 63.1% of respondents supported or were neutral toward the project. However, a later cross-sectional study by Kostka (2019) showed that the numbers increased and 80% of respondents were approving (or strongly approving) of the SCS. This can be explained by the views of society that if you are righteous, you don't need to hide anything (Kirk, Lee & Micallef, 2020).

The studies by Kostka (2019) were conducted at the Institute for Chinese Studies at the Berlin Free University. The study was based on an online survey filled by 2,200 Chinese citizens who were internet users. The results showed that people with higher education levels and income were the ones who were approving the system the most. The urban residents (82% approved compared to rural residents with 68% approval) were benefiting greatly from the commercial SCS. According to the participants, one of the benefits of the SCS was deposit free renting of bikes or cars, and apartments. They also benefited from priority check-in and better conditions in banks or airports. Therefore, as Kostka’s research results showed, the participants perceived the SCS as a tool to improve their living conditions, quality of life, and lifestyle. Furthermore, 72% of the respondents claimed that their purchasing decisions were influenced greatly by the SCS and 18% stated that they changed social media posting behavior and even deleted such contacts who were potential threats to their own rating.

From December 2018 to April 2019, Rieger, Wang, and Ohlberg, (2020), revisited the public opinion on the SCS and conducted anonymous internet surveys in three Chinese universities (among the Chinese students) and the results were compared to German and Taiwanese students. Around 142 participants were the young educated Chinese sub-group living abroad, outside of China. The results showed that among PRC (People’s Republic of China) students, the approval or disapproval of the system was quite mixed. However, the Chinese students were evaluating the following 4 mega policies of the SCS much more

positively (41-57%) than German students (no more than 19% approval): a) Sanctions for non-compliance with court orders; b) AI-supported fines for traffic violations; c) Comprehensive score determining privileges and restrictions; and d) Comprehensive score determining eligibility for loans. However, the approval rate was lower than Kostka's finding suggested in 2019. According to Rieger, Wang, and Ohlberg's (2020) studies revealed, Chinese people cared less about surveillance and privacy, unlike Westerners. Also, the Chinese students perceived the system as a great possibility to decrease crime.

One of the most interesting parts related to the SCS is how it controls personal relationships. Namely, the SCS is greatly connected and collects data from the commercial credit platforms too. One of the most famous is Sesame credit (Botsman, 2017) which is owned by Ant Financial Services groups (Ding & Zhong, 2021). The Sesame credit scores people in different categories: credit history, online purchases, online behavior, and personal characteristics but the most interesting category is personal relationships. The system analyzes what a person's online friends post on social media and who they are. Their actions can affect online friends' points too (Botsman, 2017; Ding & Zhong, 2021). As Helbing and colleagues (2019) hypothesized in their work, this collectivism and interdependence would strengthen "clan liability" where everyone is responsible to be a "guardian of virtue" (p.81). For that reason, individuals may be careful in choosing friends based on their credit performance. They may maintain relationships with people with high scores and "good" reputation in order to save their own reputation and distance themselves from the "blacklisted" contacts (Ding & Zhong, 2021). As a consequence, the group of "discredited" individuals can be marginalized in society and this unequal status, low reputation, and labeling them as "bad or untrustworthy citizens" can lead to prejudice towards them.

2.2. Theoretical Framework: Social Categorization and Social Identity

Categorization is a cognitive process that helps humans to perceive the world around them. People classify things into different categories in order to understand the complex world in a better and easier way but they not only classify things into different groups but they do categorize other people as well (McGarty, Mavor & Skorich, 2015). The process of categorization is a cognitive process that helps people to see differences between groups based on occupation, gender, nationality, class, and other features. It greatly shapes their identity and sense of self as well (Brewer, 1988; McGarty, Mavor & Skorich, 2015). Also, we tend to categorize not only others but we self-categorize in different groups based on the groups'

perceived characteristics (Allport, 1954). In the time of categorization, humans tend to allocate themselves to one or another or even several groups at the same time (depending on the social situations and roles: e.g. nationality, gender, education level, political affiliation, and so on.) (Killen & Rutland, 2011; Zhang, Pearce & Chen, 2019). Therefore, people identify themselves to be part of their own group (in-group) and they differentiate themselves from other group members (out-group) (Lieberman, Woodward & Kinzler, 2017).

The consequences of categorization are multifaceted. As stated by Abrams (2010), categorization highlights the status, power, and reputation of the groups and it can lead to such extreme political or social outcomes as apartheid, racially segregated schools, or Varna (caste) system in India. For example, in the study by Varma, Budhwar, and Pichler (2011), they examined the role of Social Categorization among 132 Chinese managers and their willingness to offer social support to expatriates from the US (The United States). The results argued that the categorization based on prejudice contributes to creating high and low-status groups. Thus, high-status group members have positive self-identity and high self-esteem while low-status group members struggle with identity issues and have negative self-concepts because they are perceived unsympathetically.

The Social and Self-categorization Theory is related to Social Identity Theory (SIT) to a great extent. SIT was developed by John Turner and Henri Tajfel in minimal group studies conducted in 1979. The main aim of the study was to investigate the minimum conditions that could establish between-group discriminatory behaviors and a sense of group membership. In their experiment, the 14-15-year-old boys (N=48) were told that they were members of “Klee” or “Kadinsky” groups. The abstract paintings were shown to them and told that some of them were painted by Klee and others by Kadinsky. As results of the minimal group studies showed, even mere allocation of boys, strangers to each other (without such additional variables as conflict, competition, ethnic differences, social threat, social hierarchy, etc.) into two meaningless groups caused in-group favoritism and out-group derogation and discrimination. So, even if participants didn't have any personal gains and interests, previous acquaintance with other participants, conflict, or social threat, they still demonstrated intergroup bias.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) connected this phenomenon to the concept of social identity: “groups provide their members with a positive social identity and that such positivity derives through establishing a valued distinctiveness for their own groups compared with other groups.” (as cited in Turner & Reynolds, 2012, p. 3). According to SIT, group identity greatly shapes the self-concept and self-perception of the individuals and people have a basic need to

belong to the different social groups (Zhang, Pearce & Chen, 2019). This helps them to keep their psychological well-being (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Moreover, in order to gain a positive group identity and raise self-esteem, people tend to lower out-group members' values, develop negative stereotypes and socially exclude the group members that are perceived negatively and bloom prejudice and discriminatory behaviors towards them (Killen & Rutland, 2011). Based on SIT's "self-esteem hypothesis", Killen and Rutland (2011) concluded that people feel better about themselves when their groups are perceived or they think they are perceived as better and superior because it is the way to justify their belonging and attachment to those groups and they give their groups some meaningful context.

2.2.1. The Chinese concept of face and Social Identity

Michael Harris Bond (2010) highlights that Chinese society is greatly shaped by role-based social relations. Therefore, from the self-categorization perspective, it is more relational and not categorical. He also claims that there was not much empirical evidence for that. Bond also says that some studies show that Chinese social identity is built around relationships and lacks some severe categorical boundaries. So, the identity is based mostly on relationships. The minimal group paradigm tested in China and in Japan didn't demonstrate similar results as in Western societies meaning that the mere allocation of individuals into different groups without any special conditions, was not enough for showing a high level of bias, but there is a need for additional aspects for Chinese people to self-categorize and identify themselves to the different groups and results showed that only the forced allocation of the individuals between different groups made the paradigm work (Bond, 2010, p. 586). Such social-psychological elements can shape intergroup and interpersonal relationships, identity, or social exclusion can be connected to the concept of the face in China – *mianzi* (面子) and *lian* (臉/臉). Both *mianzi* and *lian* represent the face of an individual but *mianzi* is expressing the position of a person in a social structure and *lian* is a moral aspect, the moral status of a person (Qi, 2011; Yang, Walker & Xie, 2020). According to Bond (2010), the *lian* is responsible for gaining the public trust, and losing the *lian* means losing membership in the society. Additionally, like social roles, the *mianzi* can be changed in different situations but the *lian* is only one. It is the duty of individuals to be willing to help others and if they fail to do so, they are losing their face. The loss of face, identity, and a sense of shame are connected to fear of being excluded from society (Yang, Walker & Xie, 2020). Shame is one of the drivers of personal identification and self-image because it relates to self-judgment (Bedford & Hwang 2003). As Bedford and Hwang (2003)

claimed, shame helps people maintain identity, process self-punishment, and also use it as a tool for social control. The Chinese government uses public shaming as a tool to improve the prosocial behaviors of citizens. In case of a decrease of the SCS and breaking the rule, the citizens' identity or even full names may appear on the billboards in order to develop the feeling of shame in them and avoid future wrongdoings from them.

Now is the era of globalization, and there are rapid technological and economic developments in China but the main local psychological and cultural aspects still have important roles in modern-day China. One of those elements is the above-mentioned concept of face (Yang & Kleinman, 2008). The concept of face is not exclusively an Asian or Chinese phenomenon and we see it in all cultures and societies (Lau and Wong, 2008, as cited in Qi, 2011). Nevertheless, in China, the face is an inseparable part of everyday life and plays a major role in relationships (Qi, 2011). The face helps build the self-image of how others perceive each other: "The concept of face is arguably a self-reflective assessment of interactions" (Zhang, Pearce & Chen, 2019, p.73). It is like a "looking-glass" self, a "social mirror" that also affects persons' emotional state depending on how their self-image is perceived. It can trigger a sense of pride, shame, or embarrassment (Qi, 2011). Therefore, according to Goffman (1972, as cited in Qi, 2011), it is vital to save the face and moral status in order to become a settled human being and a fulfilled adult with a sense of satisfaction, pride, and confidence.

The shame is connected to the judgment of the self and it questions the person's self-image since the shame is a loss of reputation in the eyes of oneself and the close ones as the failure to fulfill one's social role (Bedford & Kwang-Kuo, 2003). According to Li, Wang, and Fischer (2004) in China, "Shame, as a core member of the so-called conscious emotions, involves the self centrally" (p.768). They continue that it is generated in social relationships and leads to losing the face which triggers the various emotions in people like guilt and the desire to escape and wishes to hide from the close ones. The authors also mention that a sense of shame is typical for all human beings but a lot of cross-cultural studies show that there are big differences in how shame is experienced in collectivistic and individualistic cultures. In Confucianism, the highest purpose of the human being is to achieve self-perfection and it is possible only through social interactions, so shame helps people to act in socially accepted ways and it is not only an emotion like it is perceived in individualistic cultures but "moral and virtuous sensibility to be pursued" (p.769).

Zuo's study (1997, as cited in Bond, 2010) in Mainland China and Chu's study (1991) in Taiwan showed similar results on how the face of the individuals can be lost or regained.

Such behaviors as spitting, swearing, speaking loudly, throwing rubbish, violating the moral standards accepted in the Chinese society, or violating the laws can be reasons to lose face while prosocial behaviors, respecting the social rules and laws, or being hygienic can gain and maintain face. This understanding of the face has roots in the Confucian ethical system that individuals with “immoral” behavior will lose reputation while individuals with proper behavior will be respected.

Like the SIT claims, human beings have a need for affiliation which is “the desire to have personal relationships with other individuals, which manifests itself in the urge to form friendships and attachments and to join organizations and enjoy social gatherings. People with a high need for affiliation often seek the approval and acceptance of others.” (APA Dictionary of Psychology), and they seek acceptance and respect from others (Hwang et al, 2003; Zhu, 2003, as cited in Qi, 2011). Additionally, in the Chinese context, people not only need to be connected with and respected by others but this connection is based on reciprocal relationships and if individuals fail to fulfill their obligations toward others, they can become less than the “human beings”: “human nature and truly human conduct always entail living up to one's obligations as defined by one's social relationships. To be a human in Chinese society is to be linked to others - to one's parents, siblings, children, and friends-and to fulfill the obligations of those linkages. To do otherwise is to be “less than human” (Fei, 1992, p. 25).

Being embedded in social relationships, a self is discovered only through a person's role as son or daughter, husband or wife, father or mother, brother or sister, and friend. There is, in principle, no self outside of roles and relationships (Fei, 1992, p. 25). The face can be achieved, saved, maintained, or lost (Qi, 2011). To be a part of the group and being respected means that some demands are made on you and you are entitled to make some claims, this gives value to the individual in Chinese society. Therefore, “if status as a member is lost, status as a person is also lost.” (Bedford & Kwang-Kuo, 2003, p. 130). After losing the face, they lose their social capital, and social networks (*guanxi*), trust, and moral status. They become isolated and all of these lead to embarrassment, feelings of shame, social distancing, and rejection (Yang & Kleinman, 2008; Yang, Walker & Xie, 2020). Also, humans are responsible not only for saving their self-image or face but they are expected to take care of the face of others as well, especially, the face of their family members and friends (Qi, 2011). Therefore, the loss of face can be experienced not only because of one's own failures but also because of the failures of family members and friends with whom the person's reputation is bound (Yang, Walker & Xie, 2020).

2.2.2. Prejudice

As indicated above, social categorization can be a precursor of prejudice and social distancing. There are many definitions of prejudice in the existing literature. Gordon Allport, Clark, and Pettigrew (1979) interpreted prejudice as “feeling, favorable or unfavorable, toward a person or thing, prior to, or not based on actual experience” (p.6). However, the focus of this study will be on unfavorable feelings towards “discredited individuals” as a bias that underrates individuals just because of their belonging to unfavorable groups (Crandall & Eshelman, 2003). According to Aronson (2011) and Collins and Ashmore (1970), prejudice is a negative attitude towards outgroup members and these attitudes are based on incorrect or incomplete information about those groups. The prejudice can be experienced in many different ways and towards many different groups and their members. One person may express various types, frequencies, and degrees of prejudice in different situations towards the different groups and individuals (Abrams, 2010).

As Aronson (2011) and Myers (2009) argue, prejudice contains three components:

a) The cognitive: Stereotypes (existing beliefs about outgroups). The cognitive component of prejudice and stereotyping starts as soon as a human is born. Anzures and colleagues (2013) reviewed different studies on children and face recognition and concluded that if children grow up in a “monoracial” world, they show a preference for familiar faces and races as early as three months of age. Therefore, as they argue, this grouping of race, age, gender, etc. from an early age can be the first step toward stereotypes and prejudice. b) The affective: Emotions, it refers what people like and dislike of different groups or individuals based on race, gender, class etc. (e.g. dislike of Jews that led to their genocide) (Stangor, Sullivan & Ford 1991; Aronson, 2011). c) The behavioral: Discrimination. We still meet discrimination based on gender, race, status, or mental illness. In 2011, Russinova, Griffin, Bloch, Wewiorski, and Rosoklija studied the discrimination in the workplace toward people with mental illness. The qualitative analysis of the study identified various discriminatory practices on the level of collegial interactions and work performance.

Prejudice is generated by various causes (Aronson, 2011; Myers, 2009): a) Conformism: Allport (1954/1979) argued that conformity was one of the most important causes of prejudice. As he claimed, children are influenced by their parent’s and close others’ opinions. Moreover, people from similar cultural backgrounds develop similar prejudice toward the same groups because of conformity. The recent survey experiment conducted by Zhirkov and Verkuyten (2021) in the Netherlands presented the similar results. The participants

with high importance to the value of conformity showed higher levels of agreement with the statements made by political elites whether it was favorable or unfavorable. b) Social categorization as explained in the theoretical framework. c) Conflict and competition (for resources). There are multiple lines of research related to conflict and competition as a cause of prejudice as well. For example, in Sherif's (1961) classic summer camp experiment where two groups of boys could gain on behalf of others' loss, developed hostility and prejudice between them based on the conflict of interest. The recent studies also show the increase of social distance between dominant and minority groups because of economic competition and scarce resources. For example, Tawa, Negron, Suyemoto, and Carter (2015) conducted experiment based on group threat theory between Black (N=39), Asian (N=53) and White (N=118) participants. The findings showed that in the absence of resource competition, the social distance between individuals and between groups decreased and vice versa; d) Intergroup threats that can be realistic, symbolic, and economic are related to fear of losing security, culture, traditions, and workplaces and causes negative attitudes towards outgroups as well (Aronson, 2011; Myers, 2009); e) Group size and power are other bases of prejudice. The minority groups are most likely to be targets of prejudice, and powerful people may show a greater degree of stereotypes toward subordinate and minority groups (Abrams, 2010).

Based on various studies and theories, Bodenhausen and Richeson (2010, p. 349-351) concluded that there are different origins for intergroup bias and prejudice: a) intergroup dynamics where groups with lower status can be perceived as incompetent, lazy, uncivilized, etc. and groups with higher status are stereotyped with positive labels as warm, positive, likable, etc. b) Motivational forces built on Freudian defense mechanisms such as displacement (when people redirect frustration toward the target group or scapegoat), projection ("seeing our undesirable qualities in others", p. 350); c) ordinary cognitive processes (such as a process of categorization). They also pointed out that prejudice is mostly directed toward groups that are believed to lack morality or have lower status. In the SCS project, the "bad citizens" are considered to lack social morality and also will have low social status (possible deterioration of their economic and educational conditions and worsening their reputation) as a result of penalties, which can provoke negative attitudes and social distance towards them.

The classic study of Rosenthal and Jacobsen's experiment (1968, Ball, Haggerty & Lyon, 2012) "Pygmalion in the Classroom" showed that random allocation of pupils in two groups "improving" and "non-improving" categories changed the teacher's behavior, expectations, and attitudes for each category as well. If teachers were informed that the students

were from an “improving” group, their behaviors were also changed towards the “improving students” and developed higher expectations from them. Consequently, the pupils from the “improving” group did much better than the ones from the “non-improving” category.

Therefore, the changes in teachers’ expectations changed the students’ behaviors and achievements too, and the categorization had an impact not only on the categorized individuals’ identification but it had an effect on the categorizers’ behaviors and attitudes towards them too.

The recent studies testing the “Pygmalion or Rosenthal Effect” (PE) (phenomenon, when high expectations from superiors lead to high achievements of subordinates and vice versa (Friedrich, Flunger, Nagengast, Jonkmann & Trautwein, 2015; APA Dictionary of Psychology)) also revealed the similar results. For example, Friedrich, Flunger, Nagengast, Jonkmann, and Trautwein’s (2015) longitudinal study of teachers’ expectations tested 73 teachers and 1289 fifth-grade students in math class. The results showed that the PE was found on an individual level but it was also mediated by students’ self-concept as well. The same results had Szumski and Karwowski (2019) in their longitudinal study conducted among Polish students (N=1488) and their teachers. Their study revealed that the PE was not only on an individual level but on the class level as well, meaning that high expectations from the entire class improved the achievements on an individual level.

Similar findings were made by Qi, Dong, and Xue (2021) in their experiment conducted in Beijing, China, among 45 students in grades 2, 4, and 6. The results showed that encouragement in piano lessons increased the enthusiasm of the students. The pre-test and post-test revealed that the experimental group performed much better than the control group of students. Consequently, I presume that the “good citizens” with the high SCS can be treated better and the higher expectations could apply to them from society which can lead to better results from their behaviors, and “bad citizens” can have worsened achievements because society would not perceive them as capable of success as the “good” ones.

2.2.3. Prejudice and discrimination in China

There are various studies analyzing prejudice, stigmatization, and discrimination toward different groups in China. In China, the most marginalized groups are rural migrant workers (Wang et al., 2011; Tse, 2016; Zhang, Jin & Wang, 2021), people with mental or sexual health issues (Xie et al., 2019; Xu, Huang, Koesters & Ruesch, 2017; Zou, Tang & Bie, 2021). Also, gender discrimination is still a common issue (Zhang, Jin & Wang, 2021). However, because of the novelty of the topic, there are no studies that could measure the prejudice and

discrimination towards “deadbeats” (discredited individuals) in China or how the SCS can form a new, but negatively perceived and socially excluded group of “deadbeats”.

Though a couple of regional stigmatization studies focus on prejudices and stereotypes towards rural migrant workers. According to Wang and colleagues (2011), in the household registration system (*hukou*), residents were divided into two groups: urban and rural residents. The rural householders were restricted to living in urban areas. But, after industrialization, the rural migrant workers started moving toward cities and despite the mainstream Chinese media's attempts to share positive information about rural migrant workers, urban residents still perceive the group as uncivilized, undereducated, and crude. The simple categorization of people into rural and urban *hukou* can cause powerful social exclusion towards the low-status group of people from rural areas (Afridi, Li & Ren, 2015). Similarly, most probably, the simple division of people into “blacklisted” and “redlisted” individuals with similar labeling as rural migrants (“immoral”, “uncivilized citizens”, “less responsible” etc.) with low reputations and worsened socio-economic conditions (due to punishments and sanctions) can force the same development of negative attitudes and stereotypes towards them as well.

Wing Tse (2016) as well as Wang and others (2011) reached the same conclusion in their study of rural and urban communities. Tse asserted that residents holding urban *hokou* are more privileged and have better services and treatments and these societal and demographic differences cause the negative attitudes from higher socioeconomic status groups. His research also showed the negative psychological impacts this division and attitudes have on rural residents: it is detrimental to their mental and physical health and provokes identity issues.

2.2.4. Research Questions

Based on the existing literature and theoretical framework, my main research question is: How does the SCS shape interpersonal relationships and social identity of Chinese students living abroad?

Additionally, I have two supplementary research questions:

How is the SCS perceived by Chinese students living abroad?

How do Chinese students perceive the state's legitimacy regarding the SCS?

4. Research Design and Methodology

The 10 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted to answer my research questions and also explore the topic. Due to the small sample size and time constraints, I used interviews as my primary source in order to explore opinions regarding the SCS and also attitudes towards people who have low credits or lost their face. Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 and also a language barrier, it was not possible to travel to China and conduct the fieldwork for gathering more primary sources. For that reason, the most accessible research participants were the students or former students of the University of Tartu living in Tartu and Tallinn. Another and more important reason for choosing the Chinese respondents living in Estonia was their experience of living outside China. I anticipated that they might have different perceptions about the SCS and wanted to compare the results with existing literature conducted locally, in China, or among Chinese students living abroad. Also, young people have higher digital competencies and are more connected to technological developments, and they are using a lot of different apps for online purchasing, social media, and dating compared to older generations. Hence, they would have a deeper understanding of the risks and advantages of the SCS or similar products and they would feel the consequences of the SCS the most.

Before starting the interviews, I briefly introduced the participants to the research topic, informed them about the approximate duration of the interview and asked for their permission to record the interview. They were also informed that the interviews would be anonymous and their names would not appear in the research paper and would not be shared with any third parties. For that reason, fictional names were given to respondents (see Table 1). All the respondents, except one, were fine with the recordings that were made either by phone voice recorder or by Zoom. In the case of the participant who refused to record the interview, I was making notes by hand. Consequently, there is a risk that some important information could be missing from this particular meeting.

The interview guide (See Appendix A) was divided into 4 main themes. In the first part, the respondents were asked background questions regarding their age, level of education, where and how long they lived abroad, and from which city and province they were from. With the latter question, I wanted to make the assumption about how much the respondents would be familiar with the SCS and if they were from those provinces that have trial regimes because currently, not all provinces are testing the system. However, due to privacy concerns, I am avoiding naming the city or province names. Not many Chinese students study at the University of Tartu. Therefore, with the city or the province names, their identities can be easily identified.

Also, with my question “how long have you lived outside of China and in which countries?” I was curious if the length of living abroad in the Western countries would have a different impact on their perceptions related to the SCS compared to the population living in China. Although due to the small sample, no generalizations on this can be made.

Another set of questions has been related to the opinions regarding the SCS and other similar commercial apps like Sesame credit or Ali pay that also grade the citizens and propose some commercial benefits or sanctions to the customers. I was curious if they were using some of those apps, what benefits they had, and if they have heard or what they have heard about the SCS. I also asked interviewees what could be possible consequences of the SCS on society in their opinion and what they were thinking about the project overall. For example, the following codes were created to answer the questions “What do you know about SCS?” – “Doubt about correctness” and “Financial aspects” were combined under the category “Familiarity with SCS” that was included in the theme “Opinions about SCS”.

With the third theme question, I was exploring how the SCS could influence the interpersonal relationships and reputation or the face of the individuals. With the following questions, e.g. “Would you be a friend to someone with a bad reputation?”, to answer this question, the following code was created “friends and reputation” or “Would you be a friend to someone with low SCS?”, the answers from different respondents were combined under the code “friends and SCS”, “If your acquaintance has low scores would you avoid close relationships with him/her?” the responses on this question were combined under the code “acquaintances and SCS”. “How would you behave if your family member lost face or SCS?.. If a friend? ... If an acquaintance?” were united under the code “keeping reputation”. Above mentioned codes that helped me to answer the questions about social distance level depending on reputation or SCS level of family members, friends, or acquaintances were merged under the category “Reputation and SCS” and “level of closeness” which later was included in the theme “SCS, relationships, and identity”. The questions for checking the social distancing towards people with low credits or bad reputations (or both) were formulated based on the Bogardus Social Distance Scale which is widely used in psychological studies to measure the closeness and willingness to contact the different out-group members (Bogardus, 1933).

As for my closing questions, I asked their opinions regarding the public shaming as a tool to improve social behavior and how much they agreed or didn't agree if the state had a right to grade its citizens and use the public shaming, punishing, or reward based on their scores. The following codes were created for answering the following question: “Do you think

that the state has the right to grade and punish individuals?”- “privacy”, “abuse the power”. The codes were merged under the category “human rights” under the theme “State legitimacy”. See Appendix B for the table showing all codes, categories, and themes.

Interviews were conducted in April 2022. However, the saturation point was achieved at 5-6 interviews. The reason can be the homogeneity of the sample. All the participants were from China, studied at the University of Tartu, and had completed at least some Master-level studies by the time of the interviews. The mean age of the respondents was 25.8 (SD= 3.21). Four respondents were male and six were female. Two interviews were conducted face to face in the University of Tartu Delta Center, seven interviews were conducted online, through Zoom, and one interview was conducted face to face at the participant’s living complex. See Table 1 for a general anonymized summary of the interviewees.

Table1

List of participants

Respondent Number	Gender	Interview Format	Length	Fictional Names
1	Female	Zoom	38 min	Judith
2	Female	Face to Face	30 min	Danielle
3	Female	Zoom	49 min	Valeria
4	Female	Face to Face	32 min	Amelia
5	Female	Zoom	35 min	Gloria
6	Female	Zoom	40 min	Izabella
7	Male	Zoom	41 min	Tony
8	Male	Face to Face	25 min	Elvis
9	Male	Zoom	34 min	Terry
10	Male	Zoom	30 min	Dominik

Source: Compiled by the author

I used convenience sampling based on Chinese students with some study experience in Estonia. The interviews were held in English. English was a second language for both the interviewer as well as the interviewees which led to a few misunderstandings during the interviews. However, with additional questions and more examples, the misunderstandings were cleared and the issues were solved. The average duration of the interviews was 35 minutes (SD= 6.87).

The transcriptions of the 3 audio recordings were made by the Microsoft Online Word function “Dictate”. For the other 6 interviews, the transcriptions were generated from the Zoom cloud recordings automatically. I audited the transcripts and checked for errors and mistakes

that cannot be avoided by the automatic transcribe systems. I also added the emotions (laughing, surprise) or pauses (thinking time) to the transcripts that weren't generated by the automatic transcription services.

3.1. Method of Analysis

The data were analyzed with a content analysis approach. In order to analyze the interviews, the interview transcripts were cleaned, organized, and uploaded in the qualitative data analysis computer software MAXQDA (2022). The MAXQDA software was used as an aid in organizing the coding process and results in one space. However, the coding processing was conducted manually.

The initial coding started deductively, around the existing thematic questions that were derived from the previous literature and theoretical background. E.g. such topics as “Familiarity with the SCS” “Opinions about the SCS”; “SCS, relationships, and identity”; “CCTV cameras and public shaming”; and “State legitimacy” (for some examples of the coding process, see Table 2).

Table 2

Deductive analysis

Themes	Categories	Sub-Categories	Codes
Opinions about SCS	1. SCS advantages	1.1. High Scores	1.1.1. Discounts 1.1.2. No Deposits 1.1.3. Trustworthiness
		1.2. Punishment	1.2.1. Sanctions 1.2.2. Lawfulness
	2. SCS disadvantages	2.1. Punishment	2.1.1. Restrictions 2.1.2. lifetime effect
		2.2. Public Shaming	2.2.1. Displaying identity
		2.3. Human Rights Violation	2.3.1. Less Freedom of Speech
	3. Familiarity		3.1. Financial aspects 3.2. Doubts about correctness.

Source: Compiled by the author

First, I was trying to find the codes that were relevant to my research questions and topics. However, in order to explore the topic further, I continued coding the data inductively and started searching for new codes with important information worth paying attention to, accordingly, new themes and categories were discovered. E.g. “Negative attitudes toward Western media” (for some examples of code processing, see Table 3).

The codes were assigned to all sections of the interview texts, for each interview document separately. Initially, 179 codes were created for all the interview texts. Later, the codes were grouped into different categories. I was repeatedly returning to the different sections of the texts and doing re-coding or re-categorizing where necessary. After grouping into categories, some codes were attributed to new codes and new groups or were removed entirely. The same went for the categories, sub-categories, or themes.

After categorization, I analyzed the relationships between the different categories and codes in order to detect patterns of themes. This procedure also required the reading of the texts over and over again so as not to miss out on the important patterns or categories.

Table 3

Inductive analysis

Codes	Categories	Themes
1.1. Fake News	1. Western Media	Attitudes toward Western World
1.2. Prejudice towards China		
1.3. Rumors	2. Western People	
1.4. Attack the Chinese regime		
1.5. Humiliation	3. Western Countries	
1.6. Distrust		

Source: Compiled by the author

All three research questions were fully answered and explored during the interview process. As a result, a total of 28 individual codes were created, but some of them reoccurred many times in the same or other interviews. Therefore, the same codes were combined together and allocated into 11 main categories and 5 main themes (See Figure 1).

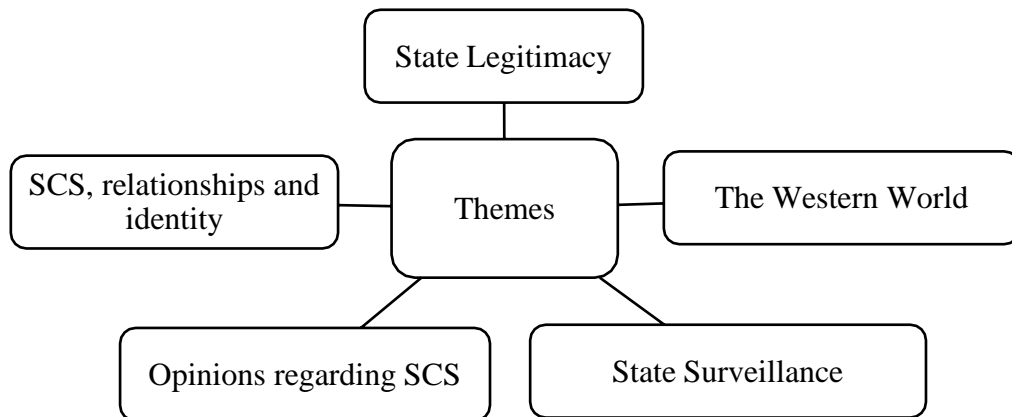


Figure 1. Visualization of the main themes.

Source: Compiled by the author

5. Results and Discussion

4.1. SCS, Relationships, and Identity

As the results showed, the relationships and identities greatly depend on the reputation of individuals and the closeness levels between them (see Figure 3). Therefore, in order for the SCS to have an effect on relationships, the most important is not the score of individuals but what reputation they have.

The findings revealed that participants don't think only the credit amount can have an impact on society or on their relationships but if there are additional traits to the scores such as labeling citizens as "good" or "bad" which are bound to the reputation and the identity of people, then it may affect their relationships. However, it also depends on the closeness and intimacy level with their contacts in order to distance or keep the relationships with them despite their credit numbers or reputation.

It cannot maybe affect relationships between family members or friends but maybe it can still create some like group of people which are not very close to us and which can be perceived as like.. maybe bad citizens or something like that because of their scores (Valeria).

All the participants pointed out that it wouldn't affect their relationships with family members because despite whether they are "good" or "bad" they are still family members. In this case, they would try to help them to improve their condition. Also, some participants said that just the number of the SCS wouldn't affect their friendship as well. One participant mentioned that in case their friends would have low scores because of some debt she would try to help her financially in order to increase her score, but the SCS wouldn't be an obstacle in their friendships. Tony stressed: "If my friends did some kind of bad thing, first I will teach them to modify their actions instead of abandoning them directly.. same goes for my family members".

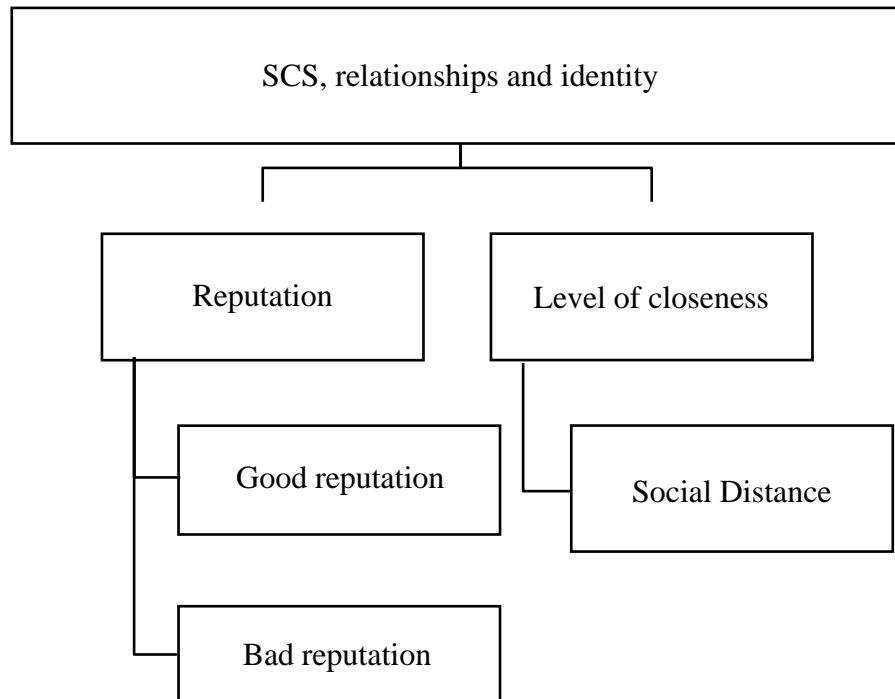


Figure 3. Visual illustration of the theme “SCS, relationships and identity” with categories and subcategories.

Source: Compiled by the author

This can be explained by understanding family and its importance in Chinese culture and social relationships. The participants care more about their family members or close friends’ reputations because in Chinese culture the family is the most important social group and family members are perceived as a whole meaning that they have a collective identity and if one member loses their face, it can affect others as well (Le, Wang, and Fischer, 2004). Therefore, just distancing oneself from family members, and in some cases from close friends, cannot wash off the shame of a family as a whole. Therefore, it is important and better to help them to improve their reputation than just avoid contact and cut the relationships because improving family members or friends’ reputation means saving the face of the person himself/herself.

Another explanation can be by Self-Determination theory (SDT) developed by Deci and Ryan in 1980s. According to Deci and Ryan (2017), one of the basic psychological need for humans is relatedness, people need to feel attached to other people, especially with friends and family. When the respondents said that they would help their family members and friends to change their behavior or conditions, they also grow their self-determination which is very important for social relationships.

When the respondents were asked if they would still keep friendships if their friends' scores would be connected to their reputation as well and if it affected their own face or scores then their narrative changed, and they admitted that it could definitely impact their friendship and if they wouldn't be able to improve the situation and if their friends' behaviors would be far from their moral ethics then they would distance themselves from such friendships.

Let's say, of course, I will think for myself and I will calculate a possible influence. So, my answer is yes, it can influence relationships. If I can anticipate there will be some bad results because of hanging out with them, of course, I will stop doing that (Amelia).

Some participants stressed that maybe it also depends on the type of behavior their friends express. However, some of them believed that even if their friends' reputation would go down because of the credits or without the SCS, they would stand for their own face and have the ability to stay "clean" but wouldn't stop friendship with them.

Findings showed that if the person is not in close contact with the participants (e.g., groupmate, neighbor, college, or a stranger) they wouldn't cut the contact with them entirely just because of scores or even unpleasant reputation, they would still have "small chats" or a cup of coffee with them, but they would definitely avoid close friendships, partnership or potential work collaboration with them in future. As Goffman (1972) and Li, Wang, and Fischer (2004) mentioned, it is vital for Chinese people to save their face and moral status so if there is a need they will socially distance themselves from others in order to save their own face.

Chart 2 shows that all the participants (N=10) would avoid close relationships with acquaintances in case of low grades and reputation, seven participants would distance themselves from friends if their scores and reputation would impact their own "image" and none of them would avoid contact with family members neither because of the SCS nor because of damaged reputation.

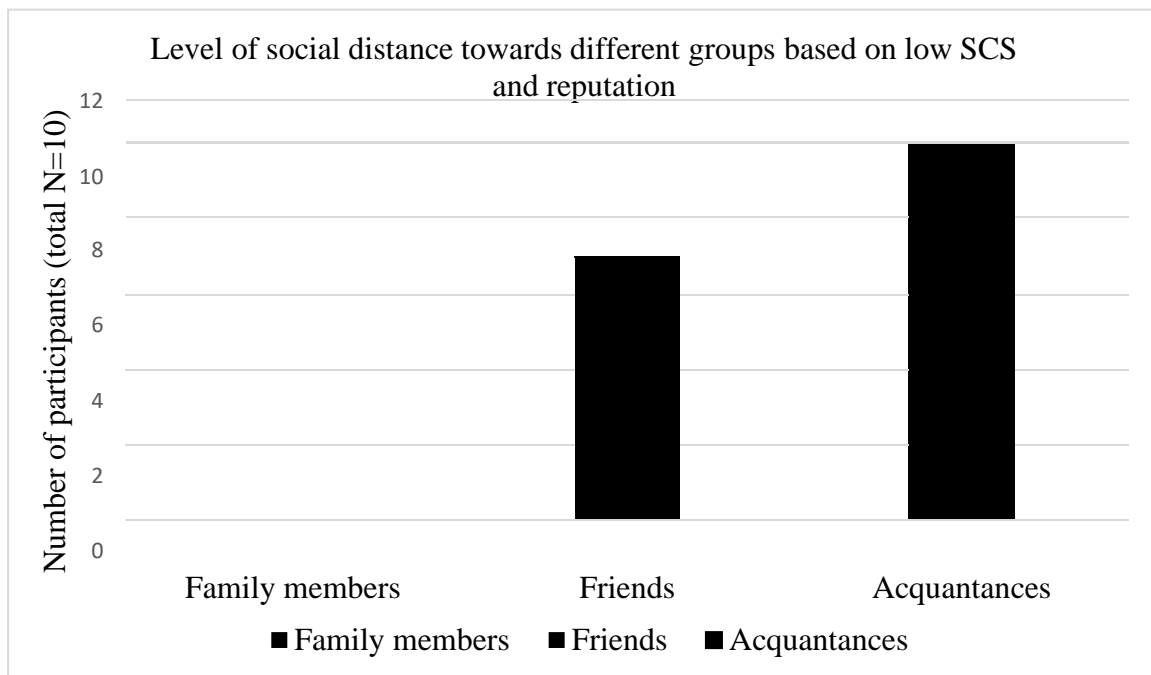


Chart 2. The chart shows how many participants would distance themselves from family members, friends, or acquaintances in case of low scores and a bad reputation together.

Source: Compiled by the author

As for the person's identity and moral status, similar attitudes were toward the SCS. Participants believed that only high or low scores couldn't measure a person's morality or identity but if they are perceived as "bad" or "dishonest" because of their grade in the system, then it can provoke negative attitudes towards them from society.

like people have some identities like Chinese or ethnic, etc. except the economic status as a middle class or whatever but with this system, they might have new identities like I am a good citizen and you are a bad citizen (Amelia).

It was interesting that when the respondents were asked what they were thinking about the people who were breaking the laws, three participants made a parallel with education. They thought that if a person is educated, they will have high morality anyways and they wouldn't break the rules. In this case, they didn't say directly that the lawbreakers lacked morality or education but there is a possible conclusion that people who break the rules and have a low reputation are perceived as undereducated.

If you have an education, then you know what is right and what is wrong and you don't need the SCS or ratings to be a lawful citizen.. Also, I studied in a prestigious high school and even there.. the students threw the trash sometimes.[on the street] (Amelia).

They also highlighted that they are educated so they identified themselves as educated lawful individuals who don't need punishment or scores in order to obey laws and social rules because it is part of their personality, and they know what is good and bad for society. This attitude can be interpreted again by SDT. The behavioral regulations that were controlled externally could be internalized by the participants and became part of their identities. Additionally, according to SDT, autonomy basic psychological need with competence and relatedness for humans (Deci & Ryan, 2017). People need to feel that they are in control of their own life, and they have autonomy and competence over it because it helps them to self-determine. Therefore, when some participants mentioned that they would follow the rules even without punishment or rewards, can be explained by the fact that, obeying the rules just because of such extrinsic motives as rewards or punishments would undermine their sense of autonomy and declined their intrinsic motivations.

In Chinese and East Asian societies education has a crucial role and educated people have more respect. Therefore, as Tajfel mentioned, "groups provide their members with positive social identity" (as cited in Turner & Reynolds, 2012, p. 3) so while participants identified themselves as members of the educated group of people, they also create a positive self-image and identity about themselves while out-group members, in this case, lawbreakers and undereducated people were belittled. This can be connected to the studies mentioned in chapter 2 regarding prejudice toward rural worker migrants. As the results showed, the urban educated citizens had prejudice towards rural residents and perceived them as an undereducated group of people who lacked morality and were uncivilized. Also, two participants called "bad people" the ones who borrow the money and don't return it. Therefore, we can suppose that other rule breakers can be identified as "bad people" as well. When they were asked if they thought they were lawful citizens, all of them answered that they are trying to obey the rules and laws. One said that she is a "good citizen" and always follows the rules. This can be related to their identity too, they perceive themselves as good citizens if they are lawful and vice versa.

However, when the participants were asked what they would do or feel if they would have low scores and restrictions they were confused and couldn't give clear answers. This can be explained by the fact that they were not familiar with the SCS and didn't have any

experience with the system's functionality, rewards, or punishments so it was hard to imagine how the system could affect their identity and sense of self. When they were asked the same question about losing their face and reputation, each and one agreed that it would be a very bad feeling for them. Gloria said that she would be so ashamed that she would try to hide until everyone forgets about her face and in general, in such cases, she is trying to escape from others until she regains the face. Also, when they were asked if they would hide their damaged face from family, friends, or society, only one participant said that she would hide it from her family. Another participant pointed out that in case he would have bans and restrictions because of the SCS, the face would be the last thing he would mind about because in case of restrictions and worsened living conditions, he would be more concerned about financial difficulties and survival than face and identity. Danielle mentioned that she would care more about keeping her face in front of professors and other authoritative figures but not in front of family or strangers. Others would mind hiding their face from society and strangers but not family members.

Overall, none of the participants would feel shame in front of friends and peers but for some, the family members (parents and grandparents) were more important, and for other strangers or authoritative individuals. Why the participants care more about saving face in front of parents or other authoritative figures and society can be explained by five human hierarchical relationships in Confucian ethics that are important in modern China too. Those five primary and core relationships (五倫) according to Confucianism are the relations between "father and son, husband and wife, ruler and subject, friend and friend, and elder and younger" (Hwang & Meyer, 2019, p. 937). So, they have respect for social hierarchy and care more to save face in front of superiors since Confucius believed that the duty of inferiors was to obey and listen to superiors. Also, it was very important to respect parents and family values and obey them. It is also called "filial piety" which is respect for ancestors and parents (Zheng, 2016).

It was hard for the respondents to directly label people as "bad or good" based on their scores because of the lack of familiarity with the system and the people who actually have low credits. The participants didn't have any personal connection with the system and neither had they known any people who had. Therefore, for them, it is hard to categorize and identify the individuals as "honest" or "dishonest" or even themselves based on the scores. But it was easier for them to categorize people based on their reputation and face.

So, as mentioned above, for the Chinese people close relationships and especially family members have an important role. Therefore, their close relationships wouldn't be

affected by the SCS but if a person would be just an acquaintance or a stranger to the respondents, then they would distance themselves from them to keep their own reputation. As the literature suggests, the face and reputation are vital for Chinese people and it is greatly connected to their identity. Consequently, if they feel the potential threat to their own face and therefore identity, distant and sometimes even close relationships become secondary. Also, the experiments testing the Tajfel and Turner (1979) minimal group studies in China showed that the mere allocation of participants in different groups couldn't create intergroup bias among the Chinese respondents (Bond, 2010). Similarly, participants claimed that a simple division of people based on their score is not enough precondition for the respondents to develop prejudice and social distance towards them but only if this division is based on the face or reputation of a person, this can increase the distance and prejudice towards the "deadbeats".

4.2. Opinions about SCS

The opinions, approvals, and attitudes toward the SCS were divided into different categories and sub-categories (see. Table 4). The category "SCS advantages" was divided into two sub-categories: benefits from high scores and punishment. This was a surprising finding that the punishment in terms of sanctions or public shaming could be perceived as an advantage of the SCS that could help citizens improve their behaviors. However, the punishment was also perceived as a disadvantage of the system. As the participants claimed, it depends on the level, type, and frequency of the crime or rule violation and also depends on the type of punishment whether it is approved and beneficial for individuals and society or not.

The SCS disadvantages are divided into three sub-categories: public shaming, the fear of human rights violation, and the restrictions (or punishment). Public shaming, like other bans and sanctions, was also justified only if the individuals wouldn't improve their wrong behaviors in a different way. However, the concerns were about showing the citizens' identities and violation of human rights. They still thought that their identities shouldn't be shown fully but only partially so the people would be able to recognize themselves and had feelings of shame. As mentioned in the literature review, shame is one of the tools which can lead to demolishing a person's self-image and it can lead to self-punishment in order for a human to regain a positive self-identity.

Table 4
Opinions about SCS

Theme	Opinions about SCS		
Categories	Familiarity with SCS	SCS advantages	SCS disadvantages
Sub-categories		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● High scores ● Punishment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Punishment ● Human rights violation ● Public Shaming

Source: Compiled by the author

Regarding familiarity with the SCS, there were no differences between respondents of this study and the participants from the previous studies conducted in China or among Chinese students studying abroad by different researchers. All of the participants mentioned that they have heard something about the SCS from their friends or Western media but some of them didn't know anything about the topic until they arrived in Europe. At first, three participants said they never heard about it. One of them even claimed that the system doesn't exist at all but after showing the name of the project in Chinese, they would recognize it. However, they didn't have deep knowledge or interest in how it worked. They were even surprised that the West was paying too much attention to the SCS and there was nothing special in this. These results correspond to the study conducted by Rieger, Wang, and Ohlberg (2020) among Chinese students living abroad. They reported that 30% of the respondents had never seen or read anything about the SCS in Chinese media and this was the highest percentage compared to German and Taiwanese students.

Similar results had Kostka in her research conducted in 2019. These results are surprising since the Chinese students have less familiarity with the project that was implemented in their own country than other students from other countries. Though, this high approval of the system or less familiarity can be explained by Chinese media and government censorship. Chinese media widely addresses such issues as cheating and fraud in society and promotes the SCS as a tool for reducing dishonesty (Kostka, 2019). However, they don't publish information about the possible risks and disadvantages of the system, the government only promotes positive stories. Therefore, Chinese society perceives the system more positively (Rieger, Wang, and Ohlberg, 2020) or do not pay attention to its existence at all since they don't feel any threat from it. Maybe less of familiarity with the system and its functionality can

be the reason why it was hard for the participants to imagine how SCS could affect their relationships.

When the participants were asked what they had heard about the functionality of the SCS, they only knew the financial aspect of the system and thought that it was like other banking credit systems also widespread in the West. Also, some of them had heard something about public shaming but they had trust issues regarding whether this information was real or not. All of the participants use or used the past the apps like Ali Pay, and Sesame (Zhima) credit. Those apps also offer some rewards or bans based on the credibility of the individual. Therefore, they thought the SCS was something similar to that of financial and commercial credit systems. Although, when they were explained that apart from the financial aspect, the SCS was also evaluated other aspects of human lives starting from relationships and ending with moral status, they had increased doubts if I was telling the truth and they were curious about the sources I was relying on since they didn't have trust in the foreign media or academic publications about China. Elvis' comment was: "To be frank, I never heard about the public shaming you said.. it sounds like a "Black Mirror" plot (laughing)". A similar answer had Judith:

You mentioned a better health service... I don't think that is true... I don't think the point can go down because of criminal behavior... I don't think there are special benefits for high scores... I don't believe they observe behind the cameras, that is impossible.

The respondents had mixed ideas if they agreed or didn't agree with the existence of such a system. Some of them were skeptical that the SCS couldn't work in the future at any rate.

The participants listed different benefits that can be the positive side of the SCS and other similar apps. A higher score gives "customers" such benefits as deposit-free booking of the hotel rooms; deposit- free rentals of the cars or apartments. Also, the bigger the score the more money can be borrowed from the bank. Additionally, platforms like Taobao (a Chinese online shopping platform) offer more discounts on online purchases based on the point amount. AliPay opens access for some additional functions in case of a high score. But most importantly, as one respondent mentioned, higher scores mean more trust in a person. Gloria said that: "There is an app for articles, if you want to post something, authorities will check it and if you have high scores, they trust you and you can post it very quickly".

The other benefits of the SCS listed by the respondents were controlling the fake news in China and protecting people from debtors because according to some of the participants, people should not borrow money if they cannot pay it back later. Therefore they claim, it is justified to punish those individuals and some of them deserve the sanctions and bans if they cannot return the money. Another advantage of the SCS in respondents' opinion is respecting the laws and social rules because "rules are very important things in China" (Gloria). According to Amelia, this is the nature of human beings to break the rules so the systems that can improve the lawfulness are necessary especially in China because the population is very big and it is hard to have control and maintain order without such systems and technological developments.

The disadvantages of the SCS as the participants discussed are worsened life conditions, lifetime influence, public shaming, and human rights violations in terms of a threat to freedom of speech. Due to the sanctions, people's normal life can become complicated and hard. One wrongdoing can influence the whole life of a person and they cannot escape from this. Amelia stressed that it won't be like a prison because in the prison you are staying some time and then you are free but in the case of the SCS, it can change the person's future forever. There is no way to escape from your score. You may be banned until you improve your score but for people who already have different sanctions and limited access to high-paying jobs, it will be very hard to increase their credits. Therefore, he approved the system only in case the punishment is fair, sanctions are limited in time, and there is no violation of human dignity. Overall, most of the participants justified the system on some level.

The similar results between the students living in Estonia and the previous studies can also be explained by the trust issues toward the West and Western news. Despite some of the participants already living outside of China for years, they may still have doubts about the trustworthiness of the Western media. Therefore, they consider Chinese media more reliable. Consequently, they might follow the same news from China regardless of where they are located. Also, like in the previous studies, interviewees of this study also showed fewer negative opinions regarding the SCS and more approval of the system. This can be explained by the culture and tradition of Chinese society as well. As mentioned in the introduction and literature review, for the Chinese people with collective identities, social stability and relationships are more crucial than individual requirements. Therefore, limiting personal freedom for the well-being of society is more common in China and in other East Asian countries than in Western societies.

4.3. State surveillance

One of the main concerns regarding the SCS is the facial recognition cameras and how it is used. Some of the participants said that they support state surveillance because of various reasons. For instance, it helps to reduce crime, and enhance the safety and the trust of the citizens. As Gloria stated: “As a woman, I feel really safe in China, I am not afraid to go somewhere at night because if someone hurts me.. they will pay for this”. Also, according to some participants, it can help elders and people with special needs navigate safely if they are lost.

I do not say that there are no criminals at all but I think it helps to find them easily, that makes me safer... sometimes people pretend that a car hit them so they can scam the drivers [because of money], so if there is a camera, it is evidence... so, cameras are needed (Danielle).

But some of them also claimed they were concerned about their privacy and personal information protection.

They do not feel that they are freer outside of China and outside of the surveillance because there are cameras and restrictions everywhere anyways. Therefore, living outside of China doesn't mean fewer surveillance cameras and more freedom in their opinion. Only two respondents stressed that they feel free outside of China. However, one of them meant only pandemic restrictions and not because of state surveillance or political regime. For others, there were not many differences and they did not feel that they were monitored or controlled in China. As Terry said: “I lived in Europe, there are a lot of cameras and a lot of restrictions (because of the Covid-19), so, one thing I feel free from China are my relatives (laughing)”. The similar opinion had Izabella: “I haven't had this kind of feeling that I am watched or monitored”.

Participants also believed that without cameras, some people wouldn't obey the laws because, e.g., they still jaywalk if there are no cameras around. Additionally, according to some respondents, the Chinese population is very big. Therefore, there is a necessity to have tools like surveillance cameras and SCS to keep the social order and stability, reduce the spreading of fake news and crime, and control misbehavior.

Chart 1 represents how many participants perceived safety as an advantage and privacy violation as a disadvantage of state surveillance. As it is visible, for participants safety

was more important than privacy violation which can be also explained by Chinese culture. As mentioned above, they would share their part of privacy for the common good.

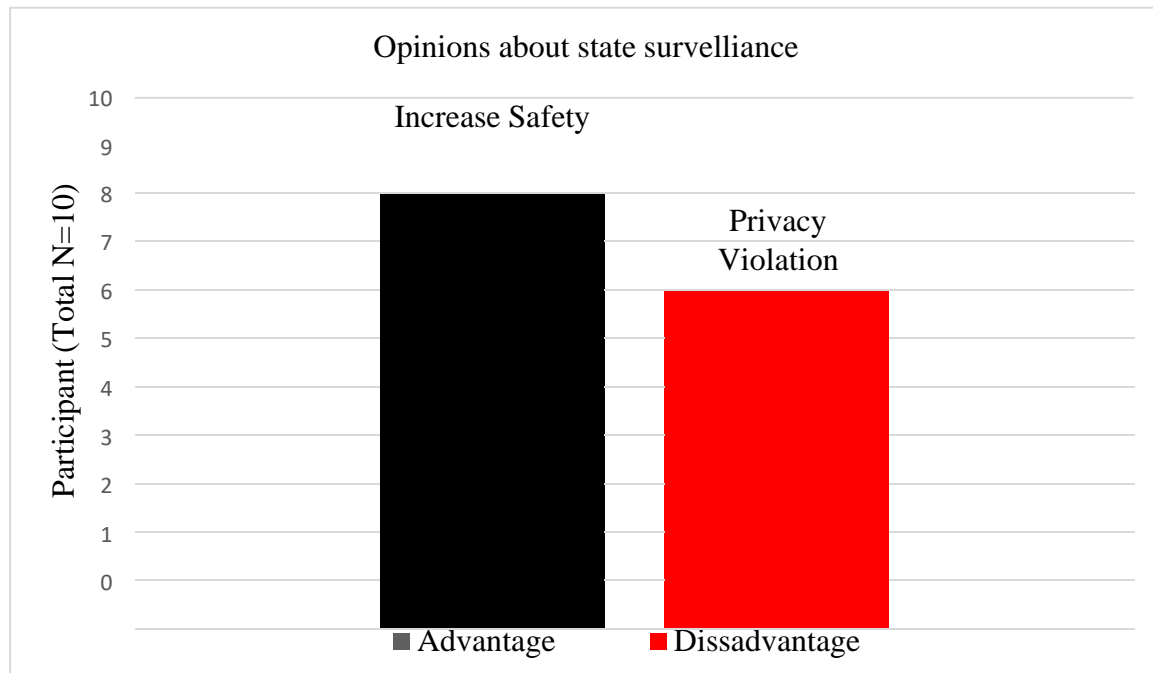


Chart 1. Opinions about facial recognition cameras.

Source: Compiled by the author.

Table 5.

The occurrence of the codes for categories “Increase Safety” and “Privacy Violation” for each participant

Respondents	Categories	
	Increase Safety	Privacy Violation
Judith	1	1
Danielle	2	1
Valeria	1	1
Amelia	2	1
Gloria	3	0
Izabella	2	0
Tony	1	1
Elvis	1	3
Terry	0	0
Dominik	2	2
Total Number of codes	15	10

Source: Compiled by the author

Table 5 shows the number of codes for the two main categories - “Increase Safety” and “Privacy Violation” for each participant regarding theme - “State surveillance” where

safety is perceived as an advantage of state surveillance and privacy violation as a disadvantage as shown in the chart 1. Though, some participants mentioned safety-related topics couple of times and similarly, some participants mentioned privacy issues as a disadvantage several times in the different contexts.

The findings from this study also correspond to various other studies about the support of state surveillance from the Chinese population. As cited in Ziller and Helbling's (2020) studies, China's 2018 World Values Survey (WVS) results showed that Chinese citizens support different forms of government surveillance. Almost 83% of the respondents showed support for CCTV surveillance cameras and 61% supported e-mail and internet monitoring. So, their studies showed that, while there was high support for CCTV cameras, only 22% of respondents had concerns regarding privacy violations meaning that participants were attentive to privacy to some extent. According to various scholars, the reasons behind the high support for surveillance cameras can be explained by the feeling of safety and a decrease in criminality as well as the desire for social stability (Ziller and Helbling, 2020). The participants of this research also support the CCTV cameras to reduce crime, have public order and stability, and push people to be lawful, but it also depends on the level of privacy protection. Therefore, they support surveillance cameras, but they should not violate human rights.

Other opinion surveys (the University of California's China Data Lab survey (2019) results) also showed support for the surveillance state. More than 70% of the Chinese respondents preferred to live in China under China's political system than in other places. (Yi, 2022).

Another explaining reason can be the collectivistic culture of the Chinese people. In the public sphere, they choose to sacrifice their privacy to increase social stability. Also, as a couple of studies showed (see section Trust in Government) they have high trust in government. Therefore, some of them believe that the state will not abuse their privacy. Though, some of the participants were more attentive to how the data could be used and by whom because they didn't trust the private business sectors but only governmental units.

Facial recognition cameras and the SCS sometimes are the source of public shaming of the rule-breakers. There were varied opinions among the respondents regarding approval of public shaming as a tool for improving social behaviors. According to the respondents, the public shaming culture e.g., corporate type shaming of the employees by the employers or beating the kids in the shops while they have tantrums still exists in China, but more and more people are against this culture nowadays. But when public shaming is related to facial

recognition cameras, billboards, and the SCS, the opinions divide into the cases and levels of the misdeed. For instance, it is justified to display the face of a pedestrian on the billboard when they jaywalk and break the rule, but it depends on the quantity as well. If a person crosses the street just one time because of an emergency situation, then there is no need for public shaming but if the same person always breaks the rules and crosses the street at a red light repeatedly, then it becomes a threat to other people's lives and safety as well. In this case, public shaming can push the person to change the behavior.

I would agree with posting the name but it should depend on how many times you break the rule. if it is one or let's say three times, I wouldn't agree to publish the identity in this case, but if it is 10 times and you never changed the action.. then yes" (Danielle)

As Amelia mentioned, during the pandemic public shaming became normal. He thinks that this tool can be used but not with displaying the identity or face on it. The picture can be blurry so the target individual can recognize himself/herself but not others, including family members, should be able to recognize them so they can protect their privacy and reputation. Izabella stressed that this is not illegal to shame the person publicly, but it is like a social way to force the person to obey the rules. Some respondents, like Dominik, think that public shaming and facial recognition cameras have already improved people's behavior. "I think it is really good. I remember when it first appeared in my city, it greatly improved the behavior of the people.. if someone's identity is hidden, then it may not help them to improve the actions" (Dominik).

One of the explanations for the disapproval of sharing the identity of individuals can also be related to the shame culture in China. Shame is a tool for people to improve their misbehaviors, though it can lead to negative psychological results as well. As Li, Wang, and Fischer (2004) discussed, shame can trigger such psychological reactions as a desire to "hide, escape or even die" (p.768). So, the participants were supportive of public shaming only in radical cases but otherwise, it would be better to save human dignity.

4.4. State legitimacy and trust in government

The last set of questions was for understanding participants' opinions regarding state rights and legitimacy in the case of the SCS. The respondents were asked if the government had the right to grade, monitor, punish or reward its citizens. The responses were quite mixed in this case

too. Only one participant reported that he doesn't agree at all that the government should have the right to use the SCS to grade citizens or cameras to monitor them. According to him, the SCS could be a new technological tool for controlling the people. Also, if the citizen thinks that the government punished him/her and it is not fair, they won't be able to sue the state because there is no power separation in China unlike in the Western world.

In the West, you can always defend your rights through the law but in China, it's impossible. Even if you know it was [credit reduction] a mistake and you are right, it will be very very difficult to regain the status of a good citizen because the judicial system is not independent, so you have to just accept your destiny (Gloria).

Another participant agreed that she would be fine if the state would have access even to her personal data because she believed she was a lawful citizen and had nothing to hide. Other participants showed various levels of trust in the state. For them, the government should have the right to monitor the citizens' behavior, but the punishment must not be harsh, and it must be depending on the level and frequency of "crime" as well. For example, if a citizen broke some minor rule one time, it shouldn't decline the credits but if it happens repeatedly, then the punishment is justified. Dominik pointed out: "Punishment is basically correct, but the severe punishment shouldn't be used... sanction times should not be too long, after some time it should be canceled in my opinion."

Also, they trust the government only in case the data is used properly. As other reports and studies showed, the participants of this study also showed higher trust in the central government than in local government or private companies. However, their trust depends on the trustworthiness of the state and the proper use of the data as well. Though, they were concerned about privacy issues. E.g., one participant mentioned that the state may have the right for public shaming if the person frequently breaks the rules but due to privacy, the person's face or full name shouldn't be visible on the billboards.

I think SCS is a bit too much...they [state] have too much information inside and that can be a threat to freedom of speech. SCS is a good idea but depends on who and how uses it but it may be too much..(Valeria).

The findings also answer the different studies on trust in government. As Wang and Yu (2015) found in their research, for Chinese citizens it is important who is handling their personal data because they don't trust private business sectors.

According to the "Edelman Global Trust Barometer" (2021) survey results, 91% of the Chinese respondents trusted the government in 2021 (*Level of Trust in government*, 2022; Yi, 2022). The reasons behind the high level of trust can be the economic growth, quick response to public concerns, and fighting corruption and pollution (Yi, 2022). However, the research papers and public opinion surveys show that trust is more hierarchical, meaning that people have more trust in the central state than in local governments (Zhenhua, Yanyu, Jingkai & Waibin, 2016). The lower the hierarchy of the government, the less honest and trustworthy it can be according to survey participants because the media published the corruption as an issue on the local level of government and not the central one. Therefore, people blamed the local government for corruption (Shi, 2008). Some scholars argue that it can be shaped by traditional Chinese values that subordinates must respect and obey the ruler and the ruler must protect its people. However, some other studies' results challenged this statement and showed that the high level of trust can be explained by propaganda and censorship. The media and the internet are greatly centralized and controlled by the government. Therefore, the Chinese media only publishes the advantages of the SCS or surveillance system (Zhenhua, Yanyu, Jingkai & Waibin, 2016). Based on some studies, the trust in government also can be explained by political control and fear of national government. The Asian Barometer Survey data showed that the fear and trust in central government had high levels of positive correlation (Wu & Wilkes, 2018).

One of the explanations can be a perceived successful fight against Covid-19 and poverty reduction. "A survey of 5,865 people issued last month by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' China Anti-Corruption Research Center showed 96 percent of respondents were satisfied with the epidemic control work." ("Chinese People's satisfaction and trust", 2021).

4.5. Anti-Western Media Sentiments

Although the interviewees were not asked any West-related questions, one of the most frequently mentioned topics by the respondents themselves was connected to Western culture, people, and media (see Chart 3). The negative opinions were expressed 20 times during the interview. See table 4 for details on how many times the attitudes were stated by each

respondent. They were comparing their culture and understandings to the Western or Christian point of view but mostly in a negative context. The Western media was especially highly criticized and perceived as an untrustworthy source regarding the SCS and in general, regarding China news.

Eight out of ten participants highlight the Western media’s hostility towards China and the Chinese people a couple of times. Some of the respondents were cynical while talking about Western media, for example Judith said: “This is so funny how people are talking about it [SCS] in Western countries (laughing)...I think Western countries make a big deal of that, but I guess they never enjoyed life at night in safety..(laughing)”.

And some of them were irritated by the news reported in Western media about China. As Amelia said: “I am lucky enough that I understand the English language and I see what Western media is talking about SCS and China.. sometimes it just pisses me off (irritated)”.

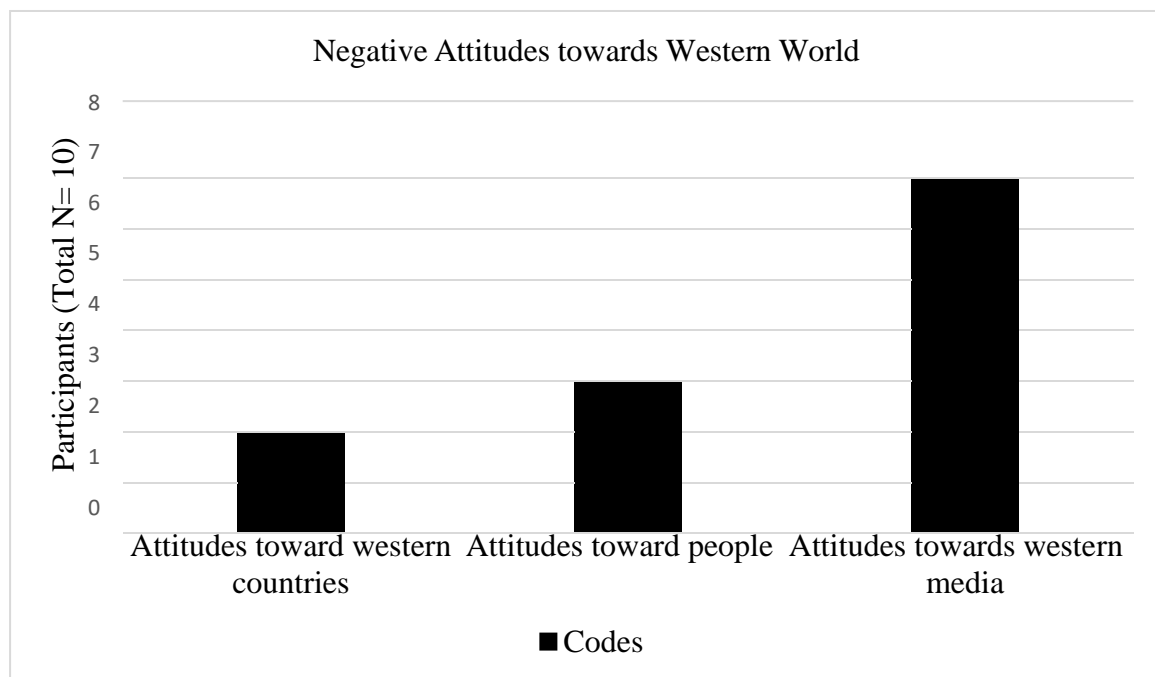


Chart 3. Negative Attitudes toward the western world

Source: Compiled by the author

Table 4

Frequency of the codes for negative attitudes toward West for each respondent.

Respondents (total N=10)	Negative attitudes Western Countries	Negative Attitudes Western People	Negative Attitudes Western Media
Judith	1	1	
Amelia			3

Tony			1
Danielle			2
Terry			1
Dominik	1	1	3
Valeria		1	2
Gloria			4
Elvis	0	0	0
Izabella	0	0	0

Source: Calculated by author

When they were asked what they knew or heard about the SCS, all of them pointed out that they heard more about the SCS from Western news and friends than in China from their friends, relatives, or news. Also, they were very skeptical regarding the honesty of the information, and they thought that Western news regarding the SCS is another tool to attack the Chinese regime and that Western media is not friends of China: “To be honest, yes, it is not hard to find such sources [from the West] related to SCS, but.. but some media.. they are not friends ..[with China]” (Tony). “This thing [SCS] was hyped in the Western media as a tool to attack regime [Chinese]” (Amelia).

Most of the participants had trust issues with the foreign sources and if they personally didn't have any familiarity with the system, they didn't believe some of the aspects of the system (e.g., displaying the faces and full names of the “deadbeats” on the billboards in the street or ban the children from the elite schools because of the parents' wrong doings) were true. Danielle also pointed out: “You mentioned there are pictures on the billboards? I do not think that is necessary and I don't believe that is true” “they [Western media] just made up because I personally never heard about it”.

Some of the respondents worried about how fake news could affect the reputation and face of Chinese society. One participant also mentioned that he thinks censorship is even better for society because people will mentally be protected from the negative and fake information the West is writing about them.

The fake information.. it's really affecting the face of millions.. I didn't do anything them to harm my reputation and we don't know what to do.. we have nothing to do with this kind of information (Terry).

Two participants believed that international students must raise awareness and talk about the truth because the prejudice toward the Chinese increased, especially after the

pandemic and Covid-19. As Dominik mentioned: "after the pandemic..how to say... they have some certain salts about China.. how to say.. rumors"

Such mistrust in the Western media and news can be explained by the general increased anti-Western media sentiments among Chinese. Chinese people have felt that the Western media is trying to humiliate and demonize China and Chinese citizens (Ford, 2008; Sheng, Siqi, Qingqing, 2021). In Chinese media, the Western media, especially BBC, CNN, and The Guardian, is largely seen as biased against China, and this also affects the ordinary Chinese citizens' attitudes towards the West (Hewitt, 2011). Chinese people believe that BBC is just an agent of the US and other Western countries' governments and very often, its coverage of China is based on fake materials and rumors. However, the Western media claims that they are not welcome in China anymore because of their critical discourse toward the ruling party (Sheng, Siqi, Qingqing, 2021). Hewitt's study (2011) resulted in a Chinese educated group of respondents having concerns about foreign media's coverage of their country.

The reasons for this distrust can be caused by publishing various unchecked information in Western media about China. For example, in October 2019, British police found human bodies in a container and one of the British media outlets and later "CNN" published unchecked information that the victims were Chinese migrants. After an investigation, the police reported that the bodies of 39 victims were Vietnamese and not Chinese. Moreover, Western media outlets do not try to apologize for such mistakes later. Therefore, those facts increase the skepticism and doubt in Chinese society, and they developed distrust not only toward Western but in general, toward foreign media reliability. On June 30, 2021 "The Washington Post" reported that China was building "Missile silos" in the West, while those "silos" were built for the wind power stations (Chunshan, 2021).

In 2019, The Global Times Research Center conducted a survey reporting Chinese youngsters' views regarding the West. The survey was collected from 119 Chinese cities and showed a dramatic shift in attitudes to the West. Especially after the pandemic, the Chinese saw that China is doing better than the West. Young people started perceiving the West as equal and not superior anymore. Also, around 28% of respondents said they lost trust in Western media and 24% don't read and pay attention to Western media at all. The respondents (77%) also believed that Uygur forced labor and human rights violations were pure lies made up by Western media to accuse China (Sheng, Siqi, Qingqing, 2021).

6. Conclusions

The aim of this study was to answer the main research question regarding the implications the SCS could have on the relationships and identities of the Chinese students living abroad. With two supplementary questions, I also wanted to explore and understand their opinions toward the SCS, state surveillance, and government legitimacy, and compare the results to the previous studies conducted by different researchers' in or outside China. To answer these questions and explore the topic, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with Chinese students studying in Estonia.

The research formulated 5 main themes to discuss regarding the SCS: opinions about the SCS; state surveillance; state legitimacy; the SCS relationships and identity and one unexpected topic that was discussed by the respondents themselves about the Western world and media.

The results were corresponding to the previous studies regarding the familiarity and opinions about the SCS in Chinese students living in China or abroad. Surprisingly, they didn't have much knowledge or familiarity with the SCS before coming to Europe. The only knowledge they had regarding the SCS was its financial aspect, and they didn't have any grasp related to other societal facets of the system like public shaming, monitoring the social networks, or its punitive aspect in terms of sanctions and bans. This can be explained by government censorship and Chinese media reporting that presents the SCS as a positive tool for social order and harmony but avoids being critical of its negative aspects. Even though the participants were explained with examples, they had little trust in the sources provided by foreign media or academic papers. They believed that the facts that are given in the Western media are fake or not reliable and they are focused on humiliating the Chinese people and attacking Xi Jinping's regime. The lack of trust in foreign media increased because of the inaccurate and unchecked news that is published by Western media about China.

In general, the participants perceived the system as more beneficial than disadvantageous. They believed that the SCS could improve social behavior, keep social stability, and push the citizens to be more lawful. Also, it could increase trust in society. Most of the participants recognized the SCS and CCTV cameras as necessary tools to fight against crime or fraud. Also, they felt very safe in the streets especially at night for women. The other commercial benefits such as discounts, deposit-free rental services, and access to some priority services were also highly appreciated. The only concerns the respondents had related to the SCS, CCTV cameras, and public shaming were privacy and identity protection. They trusted

more in the central government than private business. Also, they were questioning the system's effectiveness in case it was used untrustworthy. Therefore, it was important for the participants how the data was used and by whom.

Also, most of the participants justified sanctions or bans as a punishment for rule-breakers. Therefore, in their opinions, the punishment had to be used only in such cases, when the individuals repeat the bad behaviors and there is no other way to improve them. Therefore, the punishment and also public shaming as one of its attributes were perceived as an advantage but also a disadvantage of the system based on how they could be used.

The participants didn't believe that just the SCS could not create the "good" and "bad" citizens or worsen the relationships between people if there were no additional variables like reputation and face on that. They would avoid contact with acquaintances not because of the scores but because of the bad reputation, the SCS could cause. Keeping a face and a good reputation is very important for Chinese social identity. Since the Chinese have more collective than individualistic identities, they could be affected by wrongdoings and bad behavior of their friends therefore, if the level of influence on their reputation would be high, then participants would distance themselves from those friends. With acquaintances with low scores and bad reputations, they wouldn't cut contact, but they would avoid potential friendships with them. Regarding the family members, they wouldn't distance themselves from the family members even if they are losing their face or their scores. On the other hand, in this case, they would try to regain the reputation of their family because their own face is bound to the family and improving the face of family members means regaining their own reputation and positive self-image.

Thus, the SCS can assist the social division and social distance based on the scores but only if it is associated with a "bad" reputation and losing face. However, it cannot totally exclude or isolate the individuals from society but it can increase distance and negative attitudes toward them. Actually, the "discredited individuals" can be the ones who would isolate themselves from society until their identity would be humiliated and they would feel embarrassment and shame. As the literature showed, losing their face can lead to such psychological reactions as shame and embarrassment which motivates individuals to hide and reduce contact with others until their "normal self" is back. Therefore, the system still can trigger the social division and exclusion voluntary or involuntary.

Regarding the identity issues that can be caused by the SCS, there were no clear answers. The participants had a positive self-identity as educated, lawful citizens who didn't

feel a threat from the system to their reputation but since they didn't have any experience with the SCS it was not possible to conclude what actual impact the system could have on their self-identity. Therefore, it was one of the limitations of my study and for the future, in order to measure the impact of the SCS on identities, the studies should be conducted among the participants who experienced the advantages or disadvantages of the system and how it affected their face, self-image, and identity. Also, since I interviewed the students who were allowed to study abroad may be already the result of their affluent standing in the society and individual positive SCS.

There are other limitations to my study as well. First, the sample size was very small and homogenous. For future research, the sample size can be enlarged with people from different age groups and different educational or socio-economic backgrounds. Also, the interviews were conducted among the students from the University of Tartu. In the future, it is advisable to enlarge the research location as well and study a larger sample in the different cities of Estonia among Chinese students or workers. Third, to have more valid and reliable results, it is advisable to mix the qualitative and quantitative methods. Different opinion surveys, questionnaires, and scales could be sent to participants together with the interviews. This will enhance the chances for generalizability as well.

References

1. Abbas, A., Sunguh, K. K., Arrona-Palacios, A., & Hosseini, S. (2021). CAN WE HAVE TRUST IN HOST GOVERNMENT? SELF-ESTEEM, WORK ATTITUDES AND PREJUDICE OF LOW-STATUS EXPATRIATES LIVING IN CHINA. *Economics & Sociology*, *14*(3), 11-31.
2. Abrams, D. (2010). *Processes of prejudices: Theory, evidence and intervention*. Equalities and Human Rights Commission.
3. Afridi, F., Li, S. X., & Ren, Y. (2015). Social identity and inequality: The impact of China's hukou system. *Journal of Public Economics*, *123*, 17-29.
4. Allport, G. W., Clark, K., & Pettigrew, T. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*.
5. Allport, G. W., Clark, K., & Pettigrew, T. (1979). *The nature of prejudice* (25th-anniversary edition). *Reading*.
6. Anzures, G., Quinn, P. C., Pascalis, O., Slater, A. M., Tanaka, J. W., & Lee, K. (2013). Developmental origins of the other-race effect. *Current directions in psychological science*, *22*(3), 173-178.
7. APA Dictionary of Psychology. *Affiliation*. Retrieved from <https://dictionary.apa.org/need-for-affiliation>
8. APA Dictionary of Psychology. *Pygmalion Effect*. Retrieved from <https://dictionary.apa.org/pygmalion-effect>
9. Aronson, E. (2011). *The Social Animal*. Worth Publishers. ISBN-13: 978-1429233415
10. Ball, K., Haggerty, K., & Lyon, D. (2012). *Routledge handbook of surveillance studies*. Routledge. ISBN: 978-1-138-02602-5
11. Basov, V. (2018). *Cyberpunk 2024. What is the digital portrait of a Russian and what surveillance cameras want to know about you*. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3OEGCq3>
12. Bedford, O., & Hwang, K. K. (2003). Guilt and shame in Chinese culture: A cross-cultural framework from the perspective of morality and identity. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, *33*(2), 127-144. DOI:10.1111/1468-5914.00210
13. Blomberg, M. V. (2020). The social credit system and China's rule of law. In *Social Credit Rating* (pp. 111-137). Springer Gabler, Wiesbaden.
14. Bodenhausen, G. V., & Richeson, J. A. (2010). *Prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination*. In R. F. Baumeister & E. J. Finkel (Eds.), *Advanced social psychology: The state of the science* (pp. 341–383). Oxford University Press.

15. Bond, M. H. (2010). *Oxford Handbook of Chinese Psychology*. Oxford University Press. ISBN: 9780199541850
16. Botsman, R. (2017). Big data meets Big Brother as China moves to rate its citizens. *Wired UK*, 21, 1-11.
17. Brewer, M. B. (1988). A dual-process model of impression formation. TK Srull, RS Wyer, Jr., eds. *Advances in Social Cognition*, Vol. 1. *A Dual-Process Model of Impression Formation: Advances in Social Cognition*, 1-36.
18. Cai, L., & Zhu, Y. (2015). The challenges of data quality and data quality assessment in the big data era. *Data science journal*, 14.
19. Cambridge Dictionary. *Deadbeat*. Retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/deadbeat>
20. Canales, K. (2021). *China's 'social credit system ranks citizens and punishes them with throttled internet speeds and flight bans if the Communist Party deems them untrustworthy*. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com/china-social-credit-system-punishments-and-rewards-explained-2018-4>
21. Chan, T. F. (2018). *A Chinese university suspended a student's enrolment because of his dad's bad social credit score*. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com/china-social-credit-affects-childs-university-enrolment-2018-7>
22. Chinese People's satisfaction and trust (2021). MFA China. Retrieved from <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cgbrsb/eng/zlgxwx/t1887828.htm>
23. Chinese telecom giant ZTE 's (2018). Retrived from <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-11-16/chinese-tech-giant-zte-helps-venezuela-develop-fatherland-card/10503736>
24. Chen, Y., & Cheung, A. S. (2017). The transparent self under big data profiling: privacy and Chinese legislation on the social credit system. *J. Comp. L.*, 12, 356.
25. Chunsan, M. (2021). *Foreign Media Face a Trust Crisis in China*. Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2021/07/foreign-media-face-a-trust-crisis-in-china/>
26. Collins, B. E., & Ashmore, R. D. (1970). *Social psychology: Social influence, attitude change, group processes, and prejudice*. Addison-Wesley.
27. Crandall, C. S., & Eshleman, A. (2003). A justification-suppression model of the expression and experience of prejudice. *Psychological bulletin*, 129(3), 414.
28. Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. Guilford Publications.

29. Ding, X., & Zhong, D. Y. (2021). Rethinking China's Social Credit System: A Long Road to Establishing Trust in Chinese Society. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 30(130), 630-644. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2020.1852738>
30. Edelman Global Trust Barometer (2021). Edelman. Retrieved from <https://www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/2021-03/2021%20Edelman%20Trust%20Barometer.pdf>
31. Fei, X. (1992). *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society*. University of California Press.
32. Ford, P. (2008). *Chinese vent anti-Western fury online*. Retrieved from <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-Pacific/2008/0417/p01s01-woap.html>
33. Friedrich, A., Flunger, B., Nagengast, B., Jonkmann, K., & Trautwein, U. (2015). Pygmalion effects in the classroom: Teacher expectancy effects on students' math achievement. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 41, 1-12.
34. Helbing, D., Frey, B. S., Gigerenzer, G., Hafen, E., Hagner, M., Hofstetter, Y., & Zwitter, A. (2019). Will democracy survive big data and artificial intelligence?. In *Towards digital enlightenment* (pp. 73-98). Springer, Cham.
35. Hewitt, D. (2011). *International media coverage of China: Chinese perceptions and the challenges for foreign journalists*. Retrieved from https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2018-11/International_media_coverage_of_China.pdf
36. Hwang, K., & Meyer, D. S. (2019). Relations as the aim of education in Joseon neo-Confucianism: The case of the Five Relationships. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 51(9), 936-948.
37. Killen, M., & Rutland, A. (2011). Children and social exclusion: Morality, prejudice, and group identity. Wiley Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444396317>
38. Kirk, H. R., Lee, K., & Micallef, C. (2020). The nuances of Confucianism in technology policy: An inquiry into the interaction between cultural and political systems in Chinese digital ethics. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 1-24. DOI:10.1007/s10767-020-09370-8
39. Kostka, G. (2019). China's social credit systems and public opinion: Explaining high levels of approval. *New media & society*, 21(7), 1565-1593. DOI:10.2139/ssrn.3215138

40. Kostka, G., & Antoine, L. (2020). Fostering model citizenship: Behavioral responses to China's emerging social credit systems. *Policy & Internet*, 12(3), 256-289.
41. Langer F. P. (2020, June). Lessons from China-The formation of a social credit system: Profiling, reputation scoring, social engineering. In *The 21st Annual International Conference on Digital Government Research* (pp. 164-174).
42. Lee, A. (2020). *What is China's social credit system and why is it controversial?* Retrieved from <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3096090/what-chinas-social-credit-system-and-why-it-controversial>
43. Level of Trust in Government (2022). Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1116013/china-trust-in-government-2020/>
44. Li, J., Wang, L., Fischer, W.K. (2004). The organization of Chinese shame concepts. *Cognition and Emotion*, 18(6), 767-797. DOI: 1080/02699930341000202
45. Liberman, Z., Woodward, A. L., & Kinzler, K. D. (2017). The origins of social categorization. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, 21(7), 556-568.
46. Liu, T., Yang, B., Geng, Y., & Du, S. (2021). Research on Face Recognition and Privacy in China-Based on Social Cognition and Cultural Psychology. *Frontiers in psychology*, 12, doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.809736
47. McGarty, C., Mavor, K. I., & Skorich, D. P. (2015). *Social categorization*. In J. D. Wright (Ed.), *International encyclopedia of the social and behavioral sciences* (2nd ed., pp. 186–191). New York, NY: Elsevier.
48. Myers, D. (2009). *Exploring Psychology*. (9th ed.). University of Kentucky. ISBN-13: 978-1429215978
49. Osborne, S. (2019). *China could ban children from 'untrustworthy' families from schools under social credit system*. Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/china-social-credit-system-school-ban-family-travel-a8821371.html>
50. Qi, X. (2011). Face: A Chinese concept in a global sociology. *Journal of Sociology*, 47(3), 279-295.
51. Qi, W., Dong, X., & Xue, X. (2021). The Pygmalion Effect to Piano Teaching From the Perspective of Educational Psychology. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 3157.
52. Rieger, M. O. (2020). *What do young Chinese think about social credit? It's complicated*. Retrieved from <https://merics.org/en/report/what-do-young-chinese-think-about-social-credit-its-complicated>

53. Ritchie, K. L., Cartledge, C., Grows, B., Yan, A., Wang, Y., Guo, K., ... & White, D. (2021). Public attitudes towards the use of automatic facial recognition technology in criminal justice systems around the world. *PloS one*, 16(10), doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0258241
54. Russinova, Z., Griffin, S., Bloch, P., Wewiorski, N. J., & Rosoklija, I. (2011). Workplace prejudice and discrimination toward individuals with mental illnesses. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 35(3), 227-241.
55. Sheng, Y., Siqu, C., Qingqing, Ch. (2021). *GT survey shows 90% say China should not look up to West; experts say confident Chinese won't tolerate foreign provocations*. Retrieved from <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202104/1221496.shtml>
56. Shi, Tianjian (2008) *Democratic Values Supporting an Authoritarian System*. In Yun-han Chu, Larry Diamond, Andrew J. Nathan and Doh Chull Shin (eds) *How East Asians View Democracy*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 209–237.
57. Szumski, G., & Karwowski, M. (2019). Exploring the Pygmalion effect: The role of teacher expectations, academic self-concept, and class context in students' math achievement. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 59, 101787.
58. Stangor, C., Sullivan, L. A., & Ford, T. E. (1991). Affective and cognitive determinants of prejudice. *Social cognition*, 9(4), 359-380. <https://doi.org/10.1521/soco.1991.9.4.359>
59. State Council (December 22, 2016). *Chongqing: Use credit incentives and constraints to promote the construction of the city's social credit system*. Retrieved from http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-12/22/content_5151346.htm
60. State Council (June 27, 2014). *Circular of the State Council on Printing and Distributing the Outline of the Plan for the Construction of the Social Credit System (2014-2020)* Retrieved from http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2014-06/27/content_8913.htm
61. State Council (December 26, 2020). *Consolidate the "basic pile" of the social credit system*. Retrieved from http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2020-12/26/content_5573465.htm
62. State Council (April 11, 2017). *The four provincial capital cities in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River will establish a cross-regional social credit system*. Retrieved from http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2017-04/11/content_5184958.htm
63. State Council (March 2, 2018). *Opinions on Properly Restricting Certain Seriously Untrustworthy Persons to Take Trains to Promote the Construction of the Social*

- Credit System within a certain period of time*. Retrieved from http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/2018-12/31/content_5435023.htm
64. State Council (November 12, 2020). *The National Development and Reform Commission replied to a netizen's message on "It is recommended to establish and improve a citizen credit system, and to link credit evaluation with the standards for enjoying social welfare benefits"*. Retrieved from http://www.gov.cn/hudong/2020-11/12/content_5560663.htm
65. Steinacker, L., Meckel, M., Kostka, G., & Borth, D. (2020). Facial recognition: A cross-national survey on public acceptance, privacy, and discrimination. arXiv preprint arXiv:2008.07275.
66. Su, Zhenhua; Ye, Yanyu; He, Jingkai; Huang, Waibin Constructed Hierarchical Government Trust in China: Formation Mechanism and Political Effects. *Pacific Affairs*, Volume 89, Number 4, December 2016, pp. 771-794(24) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5509/2016894771>
67. Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33 – 48). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.
68. Tawa, J., Negrón, R., Suyemoto, K. L., & Carter, A. S. (2015). The effect of resource competition on Blacks' and Asians' social distance using a virtual world methodology. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 18(6), 761-777.
69. Tse, C. W. (2016). Urban residents' prejudice and integration of rural migrants into urban China. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 25(100), 579-595.
70. Turner, J. C., & Reynolds, K. J. (2012). *Self-categorization theory*. In P. A. M. Van Lange, A. W. Kruglanski, & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (pp. 399–417). Sage Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446249222.n46>
71. University of Oklahoma. Institute of Group Relations, & Sherif, M. (1961). *Intergroup conflict and cooperation: The Robbers Cave experiment* (Vol. 10, pp. 150-198). Norman, OK: University Book Exchange.
72. Varma, A., Budhwar, P., & Pichler, S. (2011). Chinese host country nationals' willingness to help expatriates: The role of social categorization. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 53(3), 353-364.

73. Wang, L., Ma, Q., Song, Z., Shi, Y., Wang, Y., & Pfothner, L. (2011). N400 and the activation of prejudice against rural migrant workers in China. *Brain research*, 1375, 103-110.
74. Wenyan, Z. (2021). On the Legal Issues of Chinese Social Credit System. *China Legal Sci.*, 9, 3.
75. Wu, C., & Wilkes, R. (2018). Local–national political trust patterns: Why China is an exception. *International Political Science Review*, 39(4), 436–454. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512116677587>
76. Xie, H., Yu, H., Watson, R., Wen, J., Xiao, L., Yan, M., & Chen, Y. (2019). Cross-cultural validation of the health care provider HIV/AIDS stigma scale (HPASS) in China. *AIDS and Behavior*, 23(4), 1048-1056.
77. Xu, Z., Huang, F., Koesters, M., & Ruesch, N. (2017). Challenging mental health related stigma in China: Systematic review and meta-analysis. II. Interventions among people with mental illness. *Psychiatry Research*, 255, 457-464.
DOI: 10.1016/j.psychres.2017.05.002
78. Yang, L. H., & Kleinman, A. (2008). ‘Face’ and the embodiment of stigma in China: The cases of schizophrenia and AIDS. *Social science & medicine*, 67(3), 398-408.
79. Yang, L.H, Walker, R., & Xie, J. (2020). Shame, face and social relations in northern China: Ramifications for social assistance provision. *The China Quarterly*, 243, 655-675.
80. Yi, Zh. (2021). *People's trust in CPC on rise, surveys find*. Retrieved from <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202106/15/WS60c7e1e2a31024ad0bac6a7f.html>
81. Zhang, C. X. (2020). Governing (through) trustworthiness: technologies of power and subjectification in China’s social credit system. *Critical Asian Studies*, 52(4), 565-588. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2020.1822194>
82. Zhang, J., Jin, S., Li, T., & Wang, H. (2021). Gender discrimination in China: Experimental evidence from the job market for college graduates. *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 49(3), 819-835.
83. Zhang, C. X., Pearce, P., & Chen, G. (2019). Not losing our collective face: Social identity and Chinese tourists' reflections on uncivilised behaviour. *Tourism Management*, 73, 71-82.

84. Zheng, R. (2016). *The relationships between confucian family values and attitudes toward divorce in mainland China: An exploratory study* (Doctoral dissertation, Syracuse University).
85. Zhirkov, K., Verkuyten, M., & Ponarin, E. (2021). Social conformity and prejudice toward immigrants: the role of political messaging. *Social Influence*, 16(1), 65-77.
86. Zou, W., Tang, L., & Bie, B. (2021). The stigmatization of suicide: A study of stories told by college students in China. *Death studies*, 1-11.
87. 80% of Russians Will Have (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2018/09/28/80-percent-russians-will-have-state-gathered-digital-profiles-by-2025-official-says-a63027>

Appendix A

Interview Guide.

Background Questions:

- How old are you?
- From which province and city are you from?
- How long have you lived outside of China?

Attitudes towards SCS:

- What do you think about scoring systems and loyalty programs that are used by different companies?
 - Are you using some scoring apps (E.g. Sesame Credit) for better services or promotions and discounts?
 - Have you ever heard about Social Credit System?
 - What do you know about it?
 - What do you think about this system overall?
 - Would you link your other scoring apps to SCS?
 - Do you like the idea of the system?
 - What social implications it may have on the system in your opinion?

Interpersonal relationships and identity:

- What do you think about the people who break the rules?
- Do you think rule-breakers lack some morality?
- How would you describe yourself as a citizen?
- Do you think the SCS points can measure the moral status of a person?
- How would you describe people who have low credits?
- How would you describe people who lost face?
- Would you date someone with low SCS?
- Would you date someone with a not-satisfactory reputation?
- Would you be a friend to someone with a bad reputation?
- Would you be a friend to someone with low SCS?
- How would you behave if your family member lost face? If Friend? If acquaintance?
- And how would you feel if you lost your reputation? Your SCS?
- Would you try to hide your reputation or scores from family members? Friends? Society?
- What would you do to maintain your scores?

State:

- Do you think that the state has the right to punish individuals?
- Do you obey rules because of a fear of punishment from state?

Ending:

- Would you add something as a conclusion?

Appendix B

The table for all codes, categories, and themes

Theme	Category	Sub-Category	Codes	Frequency
SCS, Relationship, Identity	Reputation and SCS		Friends, reputation and SCS	10
			Family members, reputation and SCS;	10
			Acquaintances, reputation and SCS	10
	Level of Closeness		Social Distance	9
			Keeping reputation	5
Opinions About SCS	SCS Disadvantage	Public Shaming	Displaying identity	9
		Punishment	Restrictions	6
			Lifetime effect	2
		Human Rights Violation	Less Freedom of Speech	3
	SCS Advantage	High Scores	Discounts	10
			Trustworthiness	2
			No deposits	10
		Punishment	Sanctions	7
			Lawfulness	9
	Familiarity		Financial Aspects	10
			Doubts	9
State Surveillance	Increase Safety		Caring Elders	2
			Decrease Crime	8
			Obedying Rules	5
	Privacy Violation		Public Shaming	10
State Legitimacy	Human Rights		Privacy	8
			Abuse of Power	6
Western World	Western Media		Fake News	4
			Humiliation	1
			Attack Chinese Regime	1
			Distrust	1

	Western People		Prejudice Toward China	1
	Western Countries		Rumors	1

Resümee**SOTSIAALNE KREDIIDI SÜSTEEM JA SOTSIAALSED HOIAKUD "MUSTA NIMEKIRJA" KANTUD ISIKUTE SUHTES HIINAS**

Nana Maminashvili

Minu uurimistöö "Sotsiaalne krediidi süsteem ja sotsiaalsed hoiakud "musta nimekirja kantud" isikute suhtes Hiinas" uurib Hiina sotsiaalset krediidi süsteemi (SCS) ja selle võimalikku psühholoogilist mõju Hiina ühiskonnale. SCS loodi Hiina valitsuse poolt, et vähendada ebaausat käitumist äri sektoris, valitsusüksustes ja üksikisikute seas. Ühiskonna sotsiaalse stabiilsuse ja moraali suurendamiseks premeeritakse "häid kodanikke" erinevate hüvedega, samas kui "halb" kodanikke karistatakse sanktsioonidega. Käesolevas uuringus vaatlesin SCS lühiajalugu ja funktsionaalsust. Olemasoleva kirjanduse ning sotsiaalse kategoriseerimise ja sotsiaalse identiteedi teooriate põhjal töötasin välja peamise uurimisküsimuse, kuidas SCS võiks kujundada Eestis elavate Hiina üliõpilaste inimestevahelisi suhteid ja sotsiaalset identiteeti, ning uurisin teemat ka täiendavate uurimisküsimustega, mis puudutasid arvamusi SCSi ja riigi legitiimsuse kohta seoses SCSi funktsionaalsusega. Uurimisküsimustele vastamiseks viidi läbi 10 poolstruktureeritud intervjuud Eestis elavate Hiina üliõpilastega. Sisuanalüüs tehti induktiivse ja deduktiivse lähenemisega. Analüüsi põhjal määrati viis põhiteemat: 1) arvamused SCSst; 2) riigi legitiimsus; 3) riiklik järelevalve; 4) SCS suhted ja identiteet ning 5) negatiivsed hoiakud läänemaailma suhtes. Tulemused näitasid, et osalejatel ei olnud enne Euroopasse elama asumist täielikke teadmisi ega huvi SCSi ja selle toimimise vastu. Ainus aspekt, millega nad olid kursis, oli SCSi finantsaspekt. Kuigi neil ei olnud palju teavet süsteemi avaliku häbistamise või moraaliga seotud aspektist. Nad pidasid süsteemi pigem kasulikuks kui kahjulikuks. Nad toetasid süsteemi ja riikliku järelevalve ideed, kuid ainult juhul, kui teavet kontrollib keskvalitsus, mitte eraettevõtted ja korporatsioonid. Samuti toetasid nad avaliku häbistamise ja reeglite rikkujate karistamise ideed, kuid ainult sõltuvalt rikkumiste tasemest ja sagedusest. Tulemused ei toonud palju teavet selle kohta, kuidas süsteem võiks kujundada "heade" ja "halbade" kodanike identiteeti. Kuigi tulemused näitasid, et kui punktide tase oleks seotud üksikisikute maine suurenemise või vähenemisega ning kui teiste hindad ja maine võiksid mõjutada osalejate mainet või nägu ise, siis vastajad väldiksid lähedasi sõprussuhteid tuttavatega ja sotsiaalne distants suureneks ka sõpradega, kuid mitte pereliikmetega. Tulemused näitasid, et osalejad ei usaldanud Lääne meediat ja suhtusid sellesse negatiivselt, sest pidasid seda ohuks Hiina ja hiinlaste mainele. Tulevaste uuringute

tarbeks on soovitatav kasutada suuremat valimit, eelistatavalt osalejatega, kes osalevad SCS-projektis ja omavad isiklikku kogemust.

Non-exclusive licence to reproduce thesis and make thesis public, Nana Maminashvili, herewith grant the University of Tartu a free permit (non-exclusive licence) to reproduce, for the purpose of preservation, including for adding to the DSpace digital archives until the expiry of the term of copyright, “Social Credit System and Social Attitudes Toward “Blacklisted” Individuals in China” supervised by Urmas Hõbepappel and Taavi Kivisik .

2. I grant the University of Tartu a permit to make the work specified in p. 1 available to the public via the web environment of the University of Tartu, including via the DSpace digital archives, under the Creative Commons licence CC BY NC ND 3.0, which allows, by giving appropriate credit to the author, to reproduce, distribute the work and communicate it to the public, and prohibits the creation of derivative works and any commercial use of the work until the expiry of the term of copyright.

3. I am aware of the fact that the author retains the rights specified in p. 1 and 2.

4. I certify that granting the non-exclusive licence does not infringe other persons’ intellectual property rights or rights arising from the personal data protection legislation.

Nana Maminashvili

19/05/2022