TRENDING

The China's Coronavirus Health Code Apps Raise Concerns over Privacy

By bestfolkmedicine · 07/04/2020 · 3 min read



Three days after the government of China put Hubei under lockdown, a local government official more than thousand kilometres away received data from telecom carriers that alerted her about people who had left Hubei and entered her town.

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The data had traces of the estimated locations of the mobile phones of users and showed that a lot of them had driven back along the highways from Hubei to Guangdong province where the official works in one of the towns.

Thanks to this data, her team could find everyone that came from Hubei.

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However, for another town in the Guangdong province, the acquired information was less comprehensive.

A second official said that they did identify a man from Hubei at high risk on the list. They looked for him, but were unable to track him down.

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Freedom of Movement Depends on Phone Apps

With millions of Chinese citizens going out from weeks of lockdowns, their movements largely depend on phone apps now.

The so-called 'health code service' runs on the Alipay and WeChat platforms and was specifically developed for the Chinese government.

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The users are given color-coded designations on the basis of their health status and travel history and the QR code can be scanned by the authorities.

The apps are specific to a city or a province; however, generally, people with a green code can travel without any limits.

Those with a yellow code should be in home isolation whereas a red code means that the person is a registered covid-19 patient and they should be in quarantine.

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This app has become a major part of how the Chinese government manages people and their movement from and in the impacted areas.

Some hotels, shops, and restaurants also ask for the patrons to show their codes before they go in.

In Wuhan specifically, people with a green code are the only ones allowed to ride in a public transport.

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Many Are Worried about the Intrusion of the App into People's Privacy

Some Chinese social media users complained about these apps' lack of transparency about how it works and what data it holds.

> *China: Alipay Health Code app controls movement in China*
>
> *More updates* in: https://t.co/6psMvFdqww*
>
> **A global network of activists is tracking #Surveillance #DataExploitation #Misinformation by tech companies and governments in the fight against #COVID19. Support us! pic.twitter.com/irz5Ta3cvo*
>
> *— Privacy International (@privacyint) March 20, 2020*

Some were apparently unable to change the red designations and questioned the reliance on internet and surveillance.

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One user said 'why should we allow companies to monitor and trace us with this health code?'

The app relies on a combination of self-reporting and governmental information such as personal medical records, people's travel history, and potential contacts with people diagnosed with covid-19.

Screenshots from the English language version of the app show that the applicants are asked to put in their contact and passport details, as well as recent travel.

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According to Ant Financial, an affiliate of Alibaba which operates Alipay, they don't provide or operate the service and have no access to the data that's going into it.

The company did provide tech support to the Hangzhou city government when it developed its version of the software.

Sources:

THE GUARDIAN

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NY TIMES

Read online: https://bestfolkmedicine.com/2020/04/the-chinas-coronavirus-health-code-apps-raise-concerns-over-privacy/
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