Students’ faces could soon put guards out of work

Students at a Beijing university are now required to scan their faces on entering dormitories, a process that may soon make security guards obsolete.

Beijing Normal University has installed 44 facial scanners at the 19 dormitory buildings for its 18,000 students on campus.

The machines have been placed at all entrances to dorm buildings, and students will have to pause and look at the sensor for a few seconds before swiping their campus ID cards.

If the face and card match, the machine will open the gate and say “welcome home.”

The machines also come with voice recognition so students without bringing their cards can scan their faces and say the last four digits of their card number, said Yang Hailiang, general manager of Beijing Peace and Joy Technology, which produces the machines. The system can recognize 26 Chinese dialects and has achieved an accuracy rate of 98 percent, Yang said.

Li Jinjun, dormitory service center director at the university, said the machines had been installed due to safety concerns.

Vendors will be deterred from sneaking in and out of the dorm buildings, he said. “Outsiders won’t be able to follow our students into the dorms.”

But there are other advantages, Li said.

“We can now find out who does not return to the dorm or returns late,” he said. “The machines will help us better monitor the students’ whereabouts.”

In China, the rapid development of facial recognition technology has led to its use in a number of innovative ways. Beijing’s Temple of Heaven used it in toilets to deter toilet paper theft. In east China’s Jinan, traffic police installed facial scanners at road intersections to catch and shame jaywalkers.

Supermarkets in some big cities have been using the technology at bag deposit areas.

Beijing Normal University debuted its first scanners in April and expanded their use during the summer break, and 70 percent of students have had their faces recorded. A facial scan is required for new students.

“I feel much safer,” said Zhao Xinyi, a physics student. “The system also relieves the security guards of their heavy burden.”

However, some students complained they were not being recognized after a

haircut.

Semester begins for China’s AI graduate students

More than 120 graduate students at Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, known as Beihang University, began attending classes on artificial intelligence (AI) Thursday.

Artificial intelligence (AI) [File Photo: sina.com]

As China’s first group of graduate students majoring in AI, they will receive joint training from both the university and AI-related companies.

The curriculum includes cognitive science, visual perception, unmanned systems and robotics. Some courses will be taught in company labs and beside production lines. Students are also required to intern and take part in project research and development for at least one year in one of the participating companies.

According to the university, 30 percent of the teachers are leading industry experts, and another 30 percent are renowned scholars. Over 90 percent of the teachers have overseas work or education experience related to AI.

Forestation efforts seen as examples for others

China has found workable solutions to desertification, as shown by successful projects like Saihanba National Forest Park, which is important for China and the rest of the world, according to the UN's top environmental protection expert.

Since 1962, when workers started planting trees, the forest coverage in Saihanba National Forest Park, 150 kilometers from Beijing in Hebei province, has soared from 12 percent to 80 percent, according to National Development and Reform Commission data from 2016.

Saihanba, the largest manmade forest in the world, forms a natural barrier against sandstorms that protects the health of millions in the capital and nearby regions.

"The transformation of Saihanba is the result of more than 55 years of hard work by several generations of experts. … That is a triumph of patience and determination," Erik Solheim, executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme, said in an interview. He has personally witnessed the successful outcome of efforts similar to Saihanba's recently in the Kubuqi Desert of the Inner Mongolia autonomous region.

The total area of greenery in the desert, the seventh-largest in China, has expanded by more than 6,000 square kilometers in the past three decades, according to data from the regional government.

"It's a case of getting the science right, and being able to think big and take that vision forward with determined leadership," Solheim said, explaining that the patience to think long-term also is necessary, which has been proved in the 55-year effort at the Saihanba Forest Farm.

"Desertification is not just a major problem for China. Nations like Iran and Iraq face similar problems, as do countries in the Sahel region of Africa, and even parts of the United States. In areas of the Middle East, desertification is also a huge public health issue. We know that this kind of environmental degradation also drives instability and conflict."

In addition to the efforts in Saihanba and the Kubuqi Desert, China has taken comprehensive measures to reduce desertification over decades, shrinking its total desert area at a rate of 2,400 sq km a year, Vice-Premier Ma Kai said at a July forum.

Solheim said in promoting the greening process, governments need to set up clear goals and a necessary framework, so private sector companies, NGOs and local communities can nurture the innovative technologies and business opportunities.

"In the successful stories of Saihanba and the Kubuqi Desert, they are really

just well-rounded business plans, and they show long-term economic benefits can outweigh the costs of the huge amount of work required," he said.

Saihanba Forest Farm has developed in a sustainable way, with economic growth relying on tourism, tree seeding, wind power generation and logging with the green sectors bringing in 100 million yuan ($15.1 million) last year, outweighing the revenue from past logging operations, data from the National Development and Reform Commission show.

"The success of projects like Saihanba and Kubuqi can form a component of China's drive to build an ecological civilization and to take that message around the world, for example as part of the Belt and Road Initiative," he said.

Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor hopes to boost legal cooperation between Hong Kong, mainland

Chief Executive of China's Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor on Thursday expressed the hope to boost legal cooperation between Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland.

While meeting with President of the Supreme People's Court of China Zhou Qiang at the Chief Executive's Office, Lam welcomed Zhou to attend the Fourth Seminar of Senior Judges of Cross-Strait and Hong Kong and Macao.

She expressed gratitude to the Supreme People's Court for its continuous support to the mutual legal assistance between the two jurisdictions as well as to Hong Kong as an international legal and dispute resolution service center in the Asia-Pacific region.

Lam said that with its talent and extensive experience in international legal and dispute resolution services, coupled with its dual advantages of "one country, two systems," Hong Kong could provide multi-faceted and professional legal and related services to Chinese mainland enterprises to complement the Belt and Road Initiative and the development plan of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

South-to-north water diversion benefits 50 mln Chinese

More than 50 million people in northern China have benefited from a massive water diversion project that pumps water from the Yangtze River in the south to the draught-prone north, authorities announced Thursday.

Since coming into operation in late 2014, the middle route of the south-to-north water diversion project has transferred 9.6 billion cubic meters of water, benefiting 53.1 million people as on Wednesday, according to the Office of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project Construction Commission of the State Council.

The middle route of the project carries water through canals and pipes from Danjiangkou reservoir in central China's Hubei Province to the cities of Beijing and Tianjin, and the provinces of Hebei and Henan.

The project has supplied 2.6 billion cubic meters of water to Beijing, serving 11 million people.

Currently about 70 percent of Beijing's water supply comes from the project. The city's per capita water resources have increased from 100 to 150 cubic meters. Previously the city's water supply came mainly from underground water.

Officials with the office said as a result of the project, underground water levels have started to rise in some areas suffering from over exploitation in Beijing and Tianjin.

The project has also helped improve the agricultural production and river and lake environments by supplying water to farmland and rivers.