

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.