Luzhou Li, **Zoning China: Online Video, Popular Culture, and the State,** Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019, 312 pp., $40.00 (hardcover).

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　　In **Zoning China: Online Video, Popular Culture, and the State**, the author, Luzhou Li, studies the development and comparison of video content on traditional media TV and new media websites in China. The book uses and deftly analyzes a clear and novel framework—cultural zoning—throughout the whole text. "Zoning" means that the Chinese government has relatively lax regulation of online video, though it tightly controls broadcast content. While the market has dominated the development of online video, television has been a largely state-controlled domain. As a result, online video has become a relatively open and unregulated space for people to express critical opinions.

　　In terms of chapter arrangement, the book roughly follows a chronological order. The first few chapters discuss TV, and the next few chapters mainly discuss online video, while reflecting the interactive relationship with the still broadcasting and operating TV industry.

　　There is a long tradition of media system studies, beginning with Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956), that wrestle with the question of why the media take different forms in different political systems. Related studies are concerned with why and how the development patterns of media in different contexts are different; how different types of media are related to each other and influence each other (Hardy, 2012). While Western, capitalist media systems have received significant research and attention, the media ecology and industry of China and other developing countries are less recognized and understood. Therefore, this book breaks new ground by providing detailed portrayal and analysis of China's media industry and culture. The author precisely captures the characteristic of this media system as a kind of exquisite design and management. The author argues that China's media system has changed from relative authoritarianism to a mixed and complex system in which traditional media and the Internet have different characteristics (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Importantly, the system arose out of a process of strategic design by the Chinese state, who "configured the cultural realm into multiple zones in relation to the market, which allows it to enjoy the fruits of economic development while simultaneously retaining socialist legacies through its own state media" (p. 3). This finding has important implications for enriching research on media systems by illustrating how China's dual cultural sphere formed. The book focuses on topics such as copyright, censorship, and freedom of media content that are important from a Western
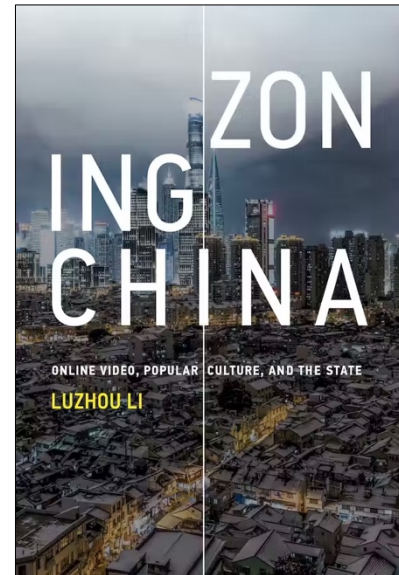
perspective, which is of great value in explaining China's media environment in a relatively objective and neutral manner.

This study mainly uses the political economy perspective, which is an approach to conducting media systems analysis. The author argues that "the state's decision to focus more on market relations in the 1990s set the tone for how it would govern the internet sector, including online video" (p. 75). From this perspective, this book is of great significance for understanding China's media system, content, and policies. The book explores the complex and wide range of participants and power relations, including the state (top leaders and central government), government agencies (e.g., the State Administration of Radio and Television and the Ministry of Culture), audiences (consumption and participation in the production of videos), media (television stations and online video platforms), market operators (companies that create, produce, review, and manage film and television and video content), foreign film and television companies (e.g., Hollywood), and legal institutions (lawyers and courts). Moreover, it also explains the mutual influence of different participants, even within the same group, such as TV and online video platforms, competition between different online video platforms, and the overlapping or conflicting functions of multiple regulatory agencies.

One strength of the book is its synthesis of analytical levels and approaches, which incorporates large number of observations, interviews, and literature. Traditional political and economic studies often focus on macroscopic descriptions, and seldom show the individual's acceptance process, participation, and initiative of media content or policies, so the characterization of individuals or ordinary people is neglected or vague. In this book, the author vividly portrays personal images and roles, truly reflecting the thoughts, aspirations, policy interpretation, and emotional expression of ordinary people in the changing media and policy environment. The specific individuals interviewed here include, among others, staff of Chinese government agencies, film and television companies, TV stations, video platforms, amateur creators, film and television fans, lawyers, and operators of Hollywood film and television groups.

To provide a robust explanation of the process of cultural zoning in Chinese media industries, the author triangulates multiple information sources and materials, inquiries about policies and news, and interviews with participants in multiple events. In particular, the policies analyzed include small-scale policies and measures, specific data details in the policy, and the Chinese government's policy trend for online video. Foregounded through the analysis are the contingencies and inevitability of history in China's media management system, such as the relative relaxation of management following China's overall reform and opening up, integration with international standards following China's entry into the World Trade Organization, and enhanced management under the rule of President Xi Jinping.

However, the book only focuses on online video platforms in China such as LeTV. In the past five years, with the popularity of short video platforms or social media applications such as Douyin and Kuaishou, China's current video culture has undergone tremendous changes. These short video platforms offer shorter but more entertaining content. Then, it remains an open question whether short videos can be included in the partition of online video, or if they disrupt the original two-part zoning. In addition, the status and identity of traditional media in China have changed with media convergence and the adoption of distributed content on new media platforms, which also challenges the extent to which the previous

cultural divisions still exist today. Relatedly, the Xi administration has significantly tightened control of the Internet in China in the past decade, and with it, ideological discourses and content. Will the culture on the Internet be homogenized, or its difference with the content of traditional media be narrowed?

In the era of digitalization and globalization, *Zoning China* offers a critical perspective on understanding China's media system and the subtle interaction of complex political, economic, and technological factors shaping this system. Scholars and students who study comparative media systems, global communication, Chinese media, and media policies would benefit from reading this book. Given the book's emphasis on historical analysis and political economy, academics and practitioners in the fields of political science, sociology, and economics could also derive insights from the book.

References

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