

Platform Governance by Competing Systems of Political Economy: The US and China

Conference co-organizers:

- Dr. Milton Mueller, Internet Governance Project, Georgia Institute of Technology;
- Dr. Yik-Chan Chin, School of Journalism and Communication & Internet Institute, Beijing Normal University

The purpose of this conference is to compare and contrast the American and Chinese systems of platform governance. Participants will include experts in platform businesses and infrastructure as well as academics specializing in communication-information policy and law, internet governance, international relations, privacy and cybersecurity policy. Recognizing that the digital economy is highly globalized, the conference will also analyze US-China transnational interactions in the platform economy. This includes those elements of trade policy, cybersecurity, finance and capital investment regulation that affect the operation and regulation of platforms.

The term platform governance refers to the rules, practices, and design decisions used to influence the way multi-sided markets or information intermediaries manage users, data and content.

We do not look at platform governance issues in isolation, but consider them to be expressions of two different systems of political economy. The US and China have the two largest and most innovative internet economies, but there are major differences between their political systems, economies, foreign policies and approaches to international law and global governance. Some observers believe that the US and Chinese systems of political economy are incompatible, and cannot cooperate but can only conflict.

The belief in incompatibility may be true or it may be based in ignorance. There is very little empirical comparative analysis of US and Chinese platform governance. If we look, we may find as many similarities as differences. When there are notable differences, it is also important to understand what has created these differences and to assess the degree to which they really do lead to incompatibility or conflict. This conference is intended to allow Western and Chinese scholars and experts to conduct a dispassionate and objective comparative analysis of each other's platform governance regimes.

The virtual conference will take place June 23-25, 2021. We invite 800-1000 word abstracts on any of the topics listed below by April 15. Submissions in English and Chinese will be considered. We intend to offer simultaneous translation of paper presentations.

Send emails by April 15 to us-china-conference@internetgovernance.org. All submissions should be focused on comparative analysis. It is our intention to do a special issue of a journal for selected papers presented in the conference.

- **Placing platforms in their political-economic context**

Both the US and China have economic systems that could be characterized as “capitalist” and/or market-driven. China relies more on state- owned enterprises and state direction. The U.S. has a more powerful private sector and a more autonomous civil society. The differences of their political systems, however, are profound, with a single party playing a leading role in China and the US having institutionalized competition between two parties.

- How do the social, economic and political role of platforms differ in the US and China?
- What are the government regulatory institutions involved in governing platforms in the US and China? What determines the roles of government and the platforms themselves in governance?
- How does the presence or absence of competition between political parties affect political communication and economic policy?
- How do the US and Chinese governments handle the problems of transnational and extraterritorial jurisdiction in platform governance?

- **Social media, politics and content governance**

- What are the principles and mechanisms underlying content management in the US and China?
- What are the liability frameworks for platforms in the US and China? If Section 230 immunities are a critical factor in the American approach, would amending or ending those immunities make American social media more or less like China's?
- When American social media platforms restrict so called “coordinated inauthentic behavior” from China, what is the role of the US government? How does it compare to China's efforts to restrict foreign information services' access to Chinese citizens?
- What kind of coordination of content governance is taking place among national governments, and the platforms themselves? Does this coordination embrace Western and Chinese platforms, or only Western ones?

- **Cybersecurity and privacy**

- How do US and Chinese standards, national policies and laws regarding end to end encryption by platforms compare with each other? What are the similarities? What are the differences?
- How does US-China cyber conflict - defined as inter-state rivalry using cyberspace for espionage - affect each country's policies towards platforms? Is the economic success of each country's platforms seen as a strength, a vulnerability, or a risk?
- What role do alleged or real cybersecurity risks play in opening or closing each country's cloud market?
- How do US and Chinese efforts to create national policies and laws regarding data privacy compare to one another? How do they intersect with other policy regimes governing data privacy transnationally?

- **Platform agglomeration economies and regulation.**

Digital platforms are expanding into multiple areas, including app stores, digital payments, lending, e-commerce, food services and possibly even cryptocurrencies.

- Is the number of platforms in China and the US increasing or decreasing? How concentrated are US and Chinese platform markets? Which one is more concentrated?
 - How do the paths toward agglomeration in the US and China differ?
 - How are competition policy authorities in the US and China reacting to the growth of platforms? What methods are used by the regulators to measure market power or abuse of dominance?
 - Would competition from US platforms entering China's markets help Chinese consumers? Would competition from Chinese platforms entering US markets help American consumers?
 - How do American platforms' positions in payment systems compare to Chinese ones?
 - How have the financial system and the policies of financial regulators in the US and China been affected by the rise of platforms, how do they react?
-