

Rolien Hoyng and Gladys Pak Lei Chong (Eds.), **Critiquing Communication Innovation: New Media in a Multipolar World**, East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2022, 236 pp., \$50.77 (ebook).

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As digital media technologies emerge from new, globally dispersed locations, a multipolar order of communication innovation seems to be in the making. Yet recovering our ability to imagine futures otherwise requires negotiating economic, geopolitical, sociocultural, and ecological conditions, rather than reproducing them under the pretext of breaking with the present. ***Critiquing Communication Innovation: New Media in a Multipolar World***, edited by Rolien Hoyng and Gladys Pak Lei Chong, presents a collection of research articles that critically and comparatively examine multipolar innovation communication through a geographical lens, charting the “new,” “old,” and “uncertain” technological futures evoked and generated by such communication, while the infrastructures and platforms underpinning communication innovation both affiliate communities and set them apart. By integrating a much-needed critique of multipolar communication innovation, this collection identifies how modern rules of geopolitics are remade by technocultures of invention and design in the contest with platform capitalism. With a firm eye on China’s rise as an innovative platform society and AI powerhouse, this volume also addresses the broader question of a shifting world order and trends shaped by China’s influence but extending beyond its borders. This book offers readers a new pathway to collectively imagining a world beyond digital technologies of control.



Comprised of nine chapters, this edited collection elucidates new global logics of territoriality, markets, and capital by combining communications infrastructure with sovereign power. In the introduction, editors Rolien Hoyng and Gladys Pak Lei Chong give an overall presentation of the three analytical frameworks that rotate around the pairs “change/continuity,” “disruption/structure,” and “integration/differentiation,” and offer distinct advantages to the endeavor of comparing experiences of innovation and technological development in different contexts (p. xii).

In chapter 1, Lianrui Jia and David Nieborg tackle issues of formal innovation by analyzing Chinese platform power at the crossroads of infrastructure, geopolitics, and finance. They point out that the United States and China, as the largest Internet economic giants in the world, are working together to swallow up the competition and increase their global dominance. However, it finds an unavoidable geopolitical collision between the two platform ecosystems, given the two political systems’ fundamental incompatibility and their common concerns about national data sovereignty and the level playing field. Therefore, profit-seeking has intensified Chinese and U.S. digital market competitiveness and consolidation. This chapter provides readers with much implication that China’s platform ecosystems are driven forward by unprecedented financial and infrastructure power, its cutting-edge technology, and sizable domestic market.

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In chapter 2, Angela Daly explores multipolar innovation and its geopolitics in the context of the legal regulation of digital data like the EU's general data protection regulation (GDPR) in a multipolar Internet. She uses a case study of the EU's GDPR to examine the EU's role and impact as a regulatory power in data protection and privacy. From the perspective of multipolar innovation, this chapter investigates the EU's attempt to act as a regulatory power by analyzing the GDPR's extraterritorial effects and the strategies of U.S. and Chinese companies operating within the EU. This chapter suggests that since data protection requires a genuinely cosmopolitan and inclusive approach to technology and innovation governance, different stakeholder groups and activists in the EU and abroad must make it a priority to imagine and execute postcapitalist alternatives, which law and policy may help by establishing the necessary circumstances for inventive growth in sustainable and equitable ways.

In chapter 3, Serra Sezgin and Mutlu Binark discuss conflicts between global and national innovation in Turkey's game industry. Through a discourse analysis of interviews with game developers, they argue that Ankara-based game developers undermine the state's framing of indigenous innovation. They point out, exploring the discrepancies between the two sets of discourses, that the highly individualized conception of creativity that game developers cultivate reduces their resistance to the illiberal cultural milieu in Turkey. This chapter considers that the Turkish game sector is fascinating because it serves as a test bed for divergent theories on what drives innovation and creativity and how designers, consumers, and the government all fit into the equation. It indicates that the Turkish government, like China's, is trying to find a middle ground between the benefits of globalized markets and communication advances and the threats they pose to the nation-state. In addition, it suggests that the Turkish gaming sector must seek global impacts via communication advances and national protectionism, placing it between free market forces and national-oriented policies.

Chapter 4, by Daniel H. Mutibwa and Bingqing Xia, investigates the current craze of maker culture in China by discussing the making of new *shanzhai* culture and countercultural values. From the *shanzhai* culture of Shenzhen and the Pearl River Delta in the 2000s, this chapter conducts an ethnographic study of the contemporary, innovative, and entrepreneurial digital fabrication communities in Shenzhen, China, in which four Shenzhen makerspaces and hardware entrepreneurial hubs with a large body of archival material form the basis of analysis. What stands out in this chapter is how "countercultural" values are reflected in the framings of making in the context of China's technological development, engaging with ongoing discussions about maker culture worldwide.

In chapter 5, Jian Lin and Jeroen de Kloet probe platformization of the unlikely creative class, exploring the intersection of everyday ingenuity and the state-business relationship in their analysis of Kuaishou and Chinese digital cultural production, an algorithm-based video-sharing platform popular in China's second- and third-tier cities and rural areas. Their research suggests that individuals successfully appropriated the digital algorithmic system and negotiated with the state-platform governance to achieve their artistic and financial goals.

Chapter 6, by Miao Lu, emphasizes the efforts of technology translations between China and Ghana, like Transsion Holdings, a mobile phone distributor, to model themselves with indigenous innovation, becoming the largest manufacturer of cell phones for the African market. In light of the fluidity and complexity at play in

the worldwide development of communication innovation, this chapter presents the case of low-end phone design and raises questions about the binary opposition between the Global North and the Global South.

Chapter 7, by Monika Halkort, focuses on the necropolitics of innovation and technologies that have been implemented in the name of sustainability and care but have the effect of imposing surveillance and neglect. She illustrates how bioscientific sensing technologies initially designed to track changes in marine ecosystems in the Mediterranean Sea have been co-opted by the military to keep tabs on people attempting to cross the sea illegally into Europe. This chapter critically reflects on the violence inherent in technical incursions undertaken in the name of human ingenuity and progress, and on the globalization and colonization projects of the present and future that will reproduce such myths for their own legitimization.

In the concluding chapter, Jack Linchuan Qiu provocatively argues that media and communication studies have long chased cutting-edge innovations. To practice a genuine multipolarism based on solidarity, he urges us to recognize multiple futures emerging from the Global South.

In contrast to previous studies such as Irani's (2019) ethnographic portrait of the culture of entrepreneurial citizens in the name of innovation and Hatch's (2014) description of the remarkable technologies that drive positive societal change with nothing more than their own creativity and some hard work, some solid and valuable points are worth mentioning in this volume. First, it reveals how technological advancements have altered the nature of communication and the social structures that support it. Second, it delves into the broader topic of a shifting international order and related trends that affect more than just China, which helps reveal the big picture, including trends like the de-Westernization of capitalism, China's rise to world leadership, and the struggle within imperialism. Finally, via a series of case studies, it also provides a genuinely global look at how technological advances in communication affect our daily lives, political identities, and the ability to envisage and shape new futures.

Overall, this volume is innovative and thought-provoking for researchers and policymakers interested in innovative communication and the topic of new media in a multipolar world. It discusses novelties in the context of technological variety, including exploring potential new sociotechnical and even bio-socio-technical settings. It prompts us to question whether or not the quest for reimagining relationships, rather than the fetishization of novelty or "design speak" that promises quick remedies, is more suited to bringing together innovation and social justice. For this, not only originality but also a critical examination of the geopolitical, social, and ecological relations that persist despite or perhaps because of "disruptive" innovation is required. We hope this collection may serve as a forum for much-needed critique from various geographical contexts and geopolitical divides and open new doors for researchers of media phenomena.

References

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