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## ONE APP, TWO VERSIONS: TIKTOK AND THE PLATFORMIZATION FROM CHINA

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The increasing presence of Chinese internet companies (to name but a few: Tencent, Tiktok, Alibaba and Huawei) in the global platform society (Van Dijck et al 2018) has aroused grave concern in the West over the issues of privacy and surveillance especially due to their inextricable connections to the Chinese Party State. If domestically Chinese platform economy represents an alternative cyber ecology that is deliberately nurtured by the Chinese state to counteract the global, silicon-valley based platform ecosystem, then this 'parallel universe' now also constantly attempts to expand its system and exert greater influence on the global stage. Together with the 'parallel universe' also comes an 'alternative globalization' that is rooted in China, in comparison to the globalization that is dominated by the European-American transnational capital and power.

Moreover, the existence and the expansion of this 'parallel universe' also drive us to rethink the conception of platform logics and platformization. Technically, Chinese platforms share with their western counterparts for the feature of computational programmability and business intermediacy. However, the fundamental distinction between the two ecosystems lies in the configuration and practice of platform governance: in terms of how platforms govern and how platforms are governed. In China, the disruptive and infrastructural nature of the platform power is always intermingled with and subject to the state power, evidenced by numerous cases of administrative penalty and online censorship, as well as all the promotional policies for internet economy. At the same time, these Chinese platforms enjoy more immunity from the charges of violating user privacy and the responsibility of protecting citizen well-being. There is a missing agenda in Chinese internet policy to account for the concern of privacy and civil rights in the online spaces. Instead, datafication becomes more than a fundamental mechanism for platform business, but is also envisioned, by the Party-State, as the crucial tool for social/cultural governance.

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This study adopts a comparative approach to explore the globalization of Chinese platforms through the lens of TikTok. By developing two versions of the same platform, TikTok manages to establish its business in two highly distinctive platform ecosystems. It represents the process of 'platformization from China', which refers to the penetration of platform logics that are largely developed in the techno-political economy of contemporary China into the global society. This uncanny system of governance fosters a highly innovative and commercialized platform ecology, in which platform companies like Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok) have to constantly innovate its platform affordances to meet with regulatory requirements of the authorities, the financial interests of the capital and the monetary and expressive expectations of the users.

As a result, the Chinese platform seems to have developed a much more advanced system of monetization, content moderation and algorithmic operation, which outperforms its western competitors when entering the global market. The problem is that, however, these platform logics developed in the Chinese context seem to contradict the governing values of the international platform societies, as recent disputes in the international society about TikTok can illustrate. Although compared with Douyin TikTok has already adopted a more restrained approach in its affordances, commodification and content regulation, the platform remains questionable for its potential supposed connection to the Chinese state and the concomitant censorship policy. The problem is that when expanding globally, these platform logics developed in the Chinese context seem to contradict the governing values and logics of the international platform societies. If platforms developed in the American-centric ecosystem can easily identify themselves as global, then the challenge for Chinese platforms going global lies always on this figurative 'Chineseness', which is not necessarily defined by the content and culture, but by the techno-political logics embedded in the affordances and operational mechanisms.

To address this particular "Chineseness" that characterizes the inherent platform logics shown in the globalizing practice of TikTok, this paper analyzes the affordances and business strategies of TikTok and its parent company ByteDance through a comparative study of its operation both in domestic Chinese and global markets. Through a digital walk-through of the interfaces of its Chinese and international version, as well as based on the archival research of industrial and media reports, this study sheds light upon the specificities of Chinese social media platforms going global – the contradictions behind their business discourses and platform governance and the challenges brought by them to the global platform society. Domestically Douyin needs to fit into the Party State's aspiration to economic restructuring through Internet Plus and social/political stability, resulting in a platform logic that encourages participatory online culture while also circumscribes it within the scope of being financially profitable and politically secure. Internationally, however, the discursive call for open internet in the global societies contradicts this "Chinese" platform logics, constantly questioning the content moderating practice of TikTok, which has been forced to distance from the supposed "Chineseness" both discursively and in user interface and content moderation. The study adds a new lens to the existing scholarship on platform governance (Van Dijck et al. 2018; 2019; Gorwa 2019), platform imperialism (Jin 2015; Winseck 2017; Mann & Daly 2019) and participatory digital culture (Jenkins et al. 2015;

Burgess & Green 2018; Cunningham & Craig 2019) through engaging with the globalization of Chinese digital platforms. Exemplified by the case of TikTok, this article attempts to have dialogue with the existing conceptions of platform governance from a global Chinese perspective and elaborates on the geopolitics of platform logics caused by the distinctions between Chinese and the international (American-centric) platform ecosystems. Looking forward, I assess the possibility that Chinese digital media industry and culture may anticipate on the one hand a new phase in Chinese soft power and cultural globalization, in which innovative platform technology infused with authoritarian state power in generating and disrupting existing social relations and digital culture. On the other hand, the project examines the challenges brought by the globalization of Chinese Internet facing global platform governance and how this platformization from China may anticipate a new form of digital online culture.

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