

Regulating Play: Key Features of the State Control in the Chinese Gaming Industry

Menglu Lyu

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

College of Arts and Media

lyu.menglu@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

The Chinese state's control over the gaming industry, particularly regarding censorship and internet addiction regulation, has long been a focal point for academic research, news media, and public attention (Cao and Downing 2008; Fung 2018, 71-104; Rosenberg 2021). Discussions often criticize, from a Western liberal perspective, how an authoritarian state extends its power through regulation, highlighting the negative impact on the gaming industry. However, the logic behind these regulatory measures and their specific features remain underexplored.

This study adopts a political economy perspective, employing document analysis and in-depth interviews as research methods. It examines typical aspects of Chinese state intervention, such as the differentiated treatment of various game types in the game approval process, selective regulations on internet addiction, and censorship mechanisms, offering a detailed analysis of state power in the gaming industry.

This research argues that the Chinese state's control in the gaming industry is characterized by flexibility, cost-effectiveness, contingency, and class-related features. This regulatory approach enables the state to achieve its governance objectives—national development and social stability—with maximum efficiency and minimal cost.

This study addresses the existing gap in Chinese game studies by building upon the work of Zhao (2008, 21-47), Sun and Zhao (2022), and others who have examined the features of state power in China's media industry, extending their insights into the gaming sector. Furthermore, it transcends the essentialist critiques prevalent in Western liberal discourse by offering a nuanced and contextualized interpretation of the role of the Chinese state in the media industry.

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BIO

Menglu Lyu holds a PhD in Mass Communication and Media Arts from Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Her research focuses on the political economy of communication, with a particular emphasis on China's gaming industry. Menglu's dissertation traces the development trajectory of China's gaming industry and analyzes how the industry's growth contributes to a reconfiguration of transnational capitalism. The dissertation received the Outstanding Dissertation Award from the Association for Chinese Communication Studies. Menglu's current research examines how China's expanding gaming industry contributes to a cultural contraflow, with broader implications for global media power and ideological circulation.