

A Comparative Study of Cultural Value Transmission under Media Governance in China and the United States

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Abstract. Media governance may influence the ideas and values that circulate within a culture, shaping cross-cultural understanding. The present study compares Chinese and U.S. media governance systems and their effects on cultural communication. Using secondary research and qualitative content analysis, the study examines selected films and television dramas from each country. The findings suggest that the two countries demonstrate convergences and divergences in media governance frameworks. While China's media governance, exhibiting varying degrees across different domains, may proactively construct and disseminate specific narratives, U.S. media governance, operating through constitutional protections and private sector self-regulation, may incorporate a variety of narratives. The findings contribute to media and communication scholarship by clarifying how policy shapes the ideas and values conveyed in media and thus influences cultural understanding.

Keywords: Media Governance, Content Moderation, Ideas and Values, Cross-cultural Understanding, Comparative Analysis

1. Introduction

Media governance influences how cultures are presented and understood. In China, news, internet and entertainment are characterized by content moderation and governance systems [1]. In fact, National Radio and Television Administration strategically implements access restrictions on several foreign websites and integrates content filtering, prioritizing national security and social harmony as defined by state policy [1]. According to Freedom House, China's "Great Firewall", one of the world's sophisticated internet governance systems, gives netizens access to a regulated web in order to protect those who lack independent judgement from exposure to harmful external materials such as drug-positive content [1,2]. However, entertainment media, such as specific genres of film, music and literature, operate with relative creative latitude, provided content avoids several themes. A 2016 propaganda regulation authorizes filmmakers to produce content except productions which endanger national unity or detrimental to youth [1].

Media governance in the USA, in contrast, operates within a circumstanced framework, though it maintains targeted regulatory mechanisms. The First Amendment ensures that even "vulgar and offensive" content is protected except in narrow cases [3]. In practice, U.S. broadcasters have discretion to choose programming, subject only to minimal FCC rules on indecency (e.g. banning obscenity at all times and restricting "indecent" content to late hours) [3]. U.S. press freedom

monitors note that media generally operate free from government interference [4]. Nevertheless, media governance in the USA maintains targeted regulatory mechanisms. Social media provide instructive empirical evidence: according to Vogels et al., 73% believe technology platforms censor political viewpoints [5].

In summary, the two systems demonstrate convergences and divergences in media governance frameworks, which merit further comparative examination. Therefore, the present study explores how these governance systems shape cultural communication, comparing the narratives conveyed by Chinese and U.S. media. To achieve this objective, the present study is structured into five sections, including this introduction. The subsequent section reviews literature in relation to Chinese and USA media governance systems, followed by a methodology section detailing data collection and analysis methods. The fourth section presents results and analysis, and the final section concludes the present study.

2. Literature review

2.1. Chinese media regulation

A body of literature indicates that China exhibits varying degrees of media governance across different domains. When it comes to the Internet, the “Great Firewall” became operational in early 2000s, making Chinese internet operate within a framework that involves comprehensive technical measures for content management, access regulation, and information prioritization [1,2]. As for political media, China’s press, according to Xu and Albert, is among the world’s most regulated, with the administration strategically providing oversights and guidelines for newspapers and streaming platforms [1]. There are, however, certain fields experiencing relatively less restrictive governance. Non-political entertainment media, such as specific genres of film, literature, and gaming, operate with comparatively greater latitude, conditional upon adherence to established content boundaries [1]. In addition, academic publications in mathematics, engineering, and other natural science fields generally face fewer restrictions, particularly when content represents non-political [6].

The media governance in China generates both endorsement and scholarly debate. Proponents of the governance framework suggest that it can safeguard netizens who lack independent judgement from exposure to harmful external materials, such as content promoting drug use or adolescent violence [1,2]. Media management also serves as an order preservation during crises: it can mitigate risks in a populous, diverse society by limiting the rapid dissemination of destabilizing information and rumor-driven panic [7]. Notably, media governance can protect social values and prevent cultural assimilation in the face of globalization, shaping a coherent national cultural identity [8]. Critics, by contrast, argue that media governance can create structured barriers to information accessibility, to some extent: citizens encounter systematic limitations in accessing global news sources, academic databases, and diverse perspectives, which may constrain their cross-cultural contact and educational opportunities in particular [9,10]. These contrasting perspectives, however, provide a multifaceted insight into China’s media governance framework.

2.2. Media content under Chinese governance

Media governance demonstrates correlations with the thematic narratives of cultural production in China. Otten reports that Chinese cultural authorities provide policy guidance and support for the production and distribution of films that align with national cultural and educational objectives [11].

In fact, as part of market operations, cinemas are required to allocate a portion of their screening quota to films aligning with national historical and cultural narratives [11]. Moreover, Otten notes that content moderation provides support for productions which promote national values, while restricting materials regarded as unsuitable [11]. Analysis of the films that comply with the regulatory framework indicates a recurring focus on national heroes, historical achievements, patriotism, social harmony and prosperity [11,12].

On the other hand, narratives – including political dissent, intense familial conflict, and supernatural horror - are typically minimized or excluded from publicly distributed media. For example, in 2024 regulators reportedly removed over 700 online mini-dramas featuring intense familial conflicts, stating that such portrayals undermine family values [13]. Similarly, a 2016 regulatory directive prohibited portrayals of several horror scenes on publicly released films and TV series [14]. These examples demonstrate how media governance proactively constructs and disseminates specific narratives.

2.3. U.S. media regulation

In the United States, media governance operates within a circumstanced framework, though it maintains targeted regulatory mechanisms. The First Amendment creates presumption against media governance, the Supreme Court has ruled that government may not impose prior restraints on speech, and the Communications Act expressly limits the FCC in managing broadcast material [3,15]. In practice, the government generally do not prevent broadcasters to publish information (subject to licensing rules), and stations program news, drama, comedy and commentary without state approval [3]. They may address controversial subjects; for example, Hollywood films routinely portray corrupt politicians, social uprisings and taboo topics. Similarly, PEN America notes that films such as *Vice* openly depict real political figures in a critical light [16].

Some form of media governance, however, also exists in the United States. The FCC retains narrow powers: obscene broadcasts are strictly prohibited, while indecent or profane content is limited to late-night hours (10 pm–6 am) [3]. Nevertheless, these rules are less restrictive. An FCC review explains that banning viewpoints would violate the First Amendment, so the FCC instead focuses on time-of-day and context for potentially offensive material [17]. Moreover, commercial considerations contribute to self-regulatory mechanisms. Wade documents that major studios alter scripts to align with other cultural norms [18]. Furthermore, political considerations are linked with the governance in the United States. A case in point is that the United States refused release of some Chinese films such as *Battle at Lake Changjin*. Thus, it seems that the U.S. media governance system operates through constitutional protections and private sector self-regulation.

The American governance system, though seemingly less restrictive, is not without its limitations. A significant limitation is associated with misinformation: the U.S. media governance can facilitate the rapid spread of false information, conspiracy theories, and manipulated content, with documented consequences on public health, electoral integrity, and social cohesion [10,19]. In addition, private sector self-regulation is often criticized for algorithmic amplification. According to Vogels et al., the design of media platforms that prioritizes user engagement may amplify sensational, divisive, or misleading content over accurate, nuanced information [5,20].

2.4. Media content under U.S. governance

Media governance also exhibits correlations with the thematic narratives of cultural production in the USA. Under a circumstanced framework, Hollywood movies and American TV series

incorporate a variety of narratives, such as minority experiences, political conflict, and social justice issues. For example, entertainment franchises have produced shows on racial inequality (Atlanta, 2016) and political satire (Veep, 2012–19). At the same time, researchers note that media ownership concentration and corporate interests do shape content behind the scenes [1]. However, without strict governance, even controversial artistic expression can reach American audiences [3,16].

The literature also highlights social attitudes toward governance, with public opinion in the U.S. being divided. Conservatives often allege that social media companies have a liberal bias, while liberals worry about hate speech and misinformation. Pew Research Center finds that 65% of U.S. adults support tech platforms limiting false information, and 71% support restricting extremely violent content [19]. In other words, many Americans favor some media governance, suggesting that, even without formal governance, societal values and corporate policies in the U.S. do place boundaries on media content. Nevertheless, in recent years, some scholars argue that governance pressures have flown to the United States, with U.S. censoring cinematic scenes that exhibit specific values. The Pen America's research provides instructive evidence: Chinese-produced films intended for global distribution encountered regulatory adjustments when entering the American market [16].

In summary, the reviewed literature reveals both convergences and divergences in media governance frameworks in China and the USA. China's media governance, exhibiting varying degrees across different domains, may proactively construct and disseminate specific narratives, whereas U.S. media governance, operating through constitutional protections and private sector self-regulation, may incorporate a variety of narratives.

3. Methodology

The present study is secondary research, and will analyze existing media content. This method relies on existing films, public archives, and textual analysis, which is appropriate for studying communication patterns and avoids ethical issues of experimental governance [21]. In line with established methods, the study will use qualitative content analysis to examine narratives in selected films and TV drama series from China and the U.S [21]. According to Tunison, content analysis is defined as a systematic technique to identify patterns in recorded communication [21]. The present study will begin by investigating scholarly studies, policy documents and news reports on governance in each country. Key data sources include official regulations, Freedom House and RSF reports, and prior literature such as Kodia on governance effects [2,22].

For the media analysis, the article will select representative works that illustrate each system's influence. For China, examples may include a recent film or popular TV drama that underwent governance. For the U.S., examples may include contemporary films and series. All chosen works are publicly released content (commercial or widely viewed series).

A coding scheme will be developed (for instance, categories such as patriotism, social conflict, authority, minority issues, romance). These categories will be defined clearly in a codebook to ensure consistency. The present study will analyze dialogue, themes, and imagery for instances of each code. Intercoder reliability will be measured and any discrepancies discussed until consensus is reached [21]. This approach ensures transparency and replicability of the content analysis [21]. By comparing frequencies and contexts of coded themes across the Chinese and U.S. samples, the present study will infer how media governance shapes cultural narratives in the two countries. 2017). By comparing frequencies and contexts of coded themes across the Chinese and U.S. samples, the present study will examine the hypothesis: China's media governance, exhibiting varying degrees across different domains, may proactively construct and disseminate specific

narratives, whereas U.S. media governance, operating through constitutional protections and private sector self-regulation, may incorporate a variety of narratives.

4. Findings and discussion

The comparative analysis of sources and media content confirms the convergences and divergences in cultural communication in the two countries. Media governance in both countries demonstrates correlations with the thematic narratives in cultural production, though exhibiting distinct characteristics in content manifestation.

In China, cinematic and televised narratives developed within a governance framework, for example, tend to exhibit specific values. In film industry, historical epics often celebrate China's past achievements, while contemporary shows highlight family cohesion, social harmony and prosperity [3,23,24]. News media also promote the ethos of 'positive energy' [13]. On the other hand, several narratives are minimized or excluded. Films and series, in China, tend to eschew themes which could be construed as sensitive [23]. Research shows that mainstream Chinese dramas highlight national achievements and historical triumphs, while seldom depicting historical complexity [11,12]. This, according to St. Aubin and Liedke, may limit critical discussion to some extent [19]. Foreign films released in China undergo content filtering: the references to several violent content, during the localization review process, are removed [18]. Subtitles and translations in China also undergo localization to align with domestic cultural norms, a practice which Wade characterizes as a form of managed cross-cultural communication [18]. For example, in *Mission Impossible III*, the line "Christ, I miss the Cold War" was changed to "I miss the old times" in Chinese cinema, showing a removal of both political sensitive and superstitious elements. This media content regulation, on cross-cultural understanding, may create limitations on certain cross-cultural contact. Lu's research indicates that translations, within a media governance framework, may alter meaning, potentially causing misunderstandings [9]. In addition to film and TV industry, journalists typically avoid detailed coverage of specific social issues, aligning with the prioritization of social stability and national identity in media governance [1].

However, it should be noted that the selective emphasis and omission of certain narratives in Chinese media governance may be beneficial to some extent. The selective emphasis can mitigate risks in a populous, diverse society by limiting the rapid dissemination of destabilizing information and rumor-driven panic [7]. The omission of certain narratives – such as violent content – can safeguard audiences who lack independent judgement from exposure to harmful external materials [1,2]. Indeed, Bi notes China's cultural industries, including film, gaming, and digital media, are targeted at young audiences to cultivate international soft power [25]. The government employs both content regulation and cultural promotion: by managing informational boundaries and highlighting appealing cultural elements (such as history and language), it seeks to cultivate international appreciation, although it encounters skepticism abroad [26].

Interestingly, China's media governance reaches beyond its borders: studies of film distribution show Hollywood studios increasingly "Chinafy" content to gain market access [27]. This may suggest that media regulation in China can indirectly shape international media as well.

In contrast, U.S. media, though seemingly incorporating a variety of narratives, experience restriction on or removal of certain content categories. Hollywood and American TV produce content that includes criticism of government, discussions of race, gender, and other topics, presumably due to that U.S. media generally operate without government direction [4]. American films can entail narratives that would otherwise be regulated in many countries. A case in point is that the U.S. holds limited governance on bloody scenes and violent scenes. The U.S. system does

not aim to limit viewpoint diversity, so cultural symbols are negotiated through public debate. U.S. media carry competing ideologies, which means cultural messages are contested rather than centrally imposed [26]. Nevertheless, U.S. narratives still carry ideological meanings (e.g. American exceptionalism), albeit produced through a seemingly open process.

On the other hand, U.S. media are not immune to influence. Wade documents that major studios alter scripts to align with other cultural norms (e.g. changing a patriotic line in *Casino Royale*), suggesting economic considerations lead to some self-governance [18,28]. For example, in the Chinese film *People Mountain People Sea*, the ending scene is edited when entering the U.S. film market. In the international version, the villain was killed by miners underground and some miners died in the final explosion, while the domestic version has the villain apprehended by the police and all miners are saved from explosion. This difference may contribute to the formation of perspective with limited scope on China's social complexity, in line with the surveys which show concerns about media governance in terms of misinformation [19]. Political considerations are also linked with the governance in the United States. A case in point is that the United States refused release of several Chinese films such as *Battle at Lake Changjin*. Thus, while there seems to be no official mandate in the U.S. to manage cultural content, occasionally official intervention and other forces indeed exert restrictions on U.S. media.

In summary, the findings support the present study's hypothesis: China's media governance, exhibiting varying degrees across different domains, may proactively construct and disseminate specific narratives, whereas U.S. media governance, operating through constitutional protections and private sector self-regulation, may incorporate a variety of narratives. These governance models do more than content management – they actively shape how each society's culture is communicated. Understanding them is crucial for grasping how news, film and television ultimately influence public perceptions in each country.

5. Conclusion

The present research has outlined a comparative study of Chinese and U.S. media governance frameworks and their impacts on cultural communication. The literature has shown that China exhibits varying degrees of media governance across different domains, whereas in the United States, media governance operates within a circumstanced framework, though it maintains targeted regulatory mechanisms. The content analysis of existing films and television series has illustrated how the governance models in China and the U.S. produce distinct cultural outcomes. It has been found that China's media governance may proactively construct and disseminate specific narratives, while U.S. media governance may incorporate a variety of narratives.

By anchoring secondary sources and case studies, the present study has demonstrated that media governance demonstrates observable correlations with the narratives in both Chinese and American cultural production. It does more than content management: media governance determines the narratives a society depicts about itself and the world. These insights contribute to media and communication scholarship by clarifying how policy shapes cultural discourse. Ultimately, the study will show that media governance systems significantly influence the ideas and values that circulate within a culture, shaping cross-cultural understanding.

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