Guobin Yang, Bingchun Meng, and Elaine J. Yuan (Eds.), **Pandemic Crossings: Digital Technology, Everyday Experience, and Governance in the COVID-19 Crisis**, East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2024, 290 pp., $49.95 (paperback).

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Pandemic Crossings: Digital Technology, Everyday Experience, and Governance in the COVID-19 Crisis is a compelling exploration of how digital infrastructures and technologies have transformed governance, particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The edited book examines governance through digital mechanisms, focusing on China but offering broader insights into global political, economic, and social dynamics. This review critically engages with the key themes and arguments presented in the book, assessing its contributions to debates on digital governance, public health policy, workplace surveillance, and global narratives about governance and crisis response.

Part 1 of the book examines how digital media play a fundamental role in governing society. The first chapter begins by defining "infrastructure" and its intersection with digital governance, emphasizing that the public is "an always-negotiated and contested entity" (p. 6) within this intersection. It highlights the neoliberal shift in public administration, where personal responsibility has overtaken state-led collective responses. The chapter critiques this paradigm by advocating for "collective action" (p. 11) as a governance model. However, this stance raises questions: Is collective action always democratic and beneficial? The rise of Trumpian populism, which also invokes collective action, complicates this narrative. Another key theme is the "new public value paradigm" (p. 11), which echoes civic republican ideals, emphasizing a deliberative public sphere. However, the discussion struggles with conceptual consistency, as it critiques yet ultimately endorses this paradigm. The portrayal of the public sphere assumes a Habermasian ideal of rational deliberation, but the pandemic era was rife with misinformation and polarization (p. 13). This raises the question: Has there ever been an unproblematic, consensus-driven public sphere? The chapter acknowledges this challenge (p. 14), leaving it to the reader to determine how the public can resolve the tensions it identifies.

The second chapter explores how mobility was controlled in China through three mechanisms: community-based governance, public health surveillance, and digital platforms (pp. 26–27). These mechanisms collectively created what the author terms "pandemic infrastructures" (p. 27). A critical question arises: Where does the state fit into this evolving governance model, particularly regarding security and safety? The chapter provides insightful discussions on *shequ* (community-based governance), where local grid workers enforced restrictions while simultaneously providing care (p. 31). The health code
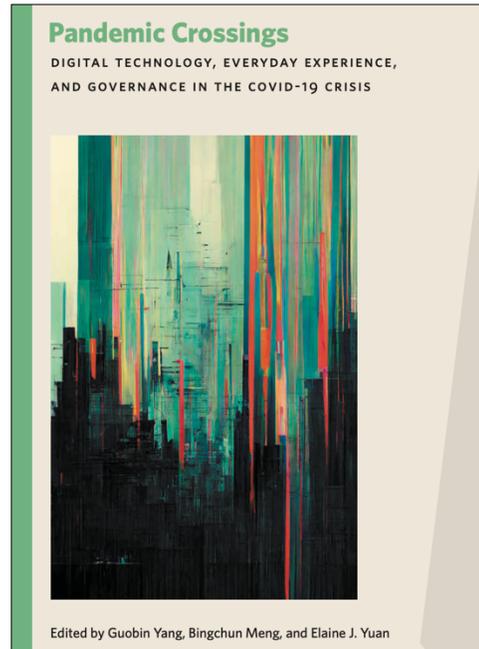
system functioned as a tool for both public health and surveillance (p. 34). However, while the chapter highlights inequalities in mobility access based on economic class, it does not sufficiently explore labor exploitation or platform workers' struggles under this system, a topic more directly addressed in the next chapter. Gendered dimensions of care work are briefly mentioned in the conclusion, but a more in-depth engagement would have strengthened the analysis.

The third chapter shifts focus to digital workplace surveillance in China, particularly through the DingTalk app. The author applies Zuboff's "instrumentarianism" framework to highlight the invisibility of labor exploitation in non-Western contexts (p. 51). DingTalk's functionalities—read receipts, geolocation tracking, and automated attendance monitoring (p. 52)—illustrate heightened control over workers. One of this chapter's strengths is its discussion of resistance. Workers engaged in "counterveillance" (p. 56), challenging surveillance mechanisms through small-scale acts of defiance. A lingering question is how to fully assess their long-term effectiveness or structural implications (Andrejevic & Volcic, 2021). Are these resistances meaningful, or do they merely reinforce the system's adaptability?

The final chapter of Part 1 takes a unique turn by examining accessibility within a disability reading group. It argues for "access as a method," an ongoing struggle rather than a fixed goal (p. 69). The discussion offers a nuanced discussion of technological barriers, such as inadequate sign interpretation and biased captioning (p. 85). By highlighting these challenges, the chapter broadens digital governance discussions to include marginalized communities, making a valuable contribution to the book's overall themes.

The first two chapters of Part 2 examine how Chinese students, both domestic and overseas, navigated the tensions between cosmopolitanism and nationalism during the pandemic. The first chapter analyzes the evolving narratives of Chinese students studying abroad. Before the pandemic, these students associated "freedom" with individuality and personal choice (p. 110). However, the pandemic exposed contradictions within this concept, revealing how freedom could manifest as fear and selfishness. The next chapter offers a critique of cosmopolitan ideals, arguing that they are fundamentally unstable (p. 119). This perspective, conceptualized through the framework of "articulation," provides valuable insights into phenomena that connect "elements that do not necessarily belong together" (p. 129). However, the chapter could have more thoroughly interrogated liberal freedom as a problematic ideal.

Analyzing 4 million Weibo posts, the final chapter of Part 2 traces how social solidarity in China evolved from unity to moralized division (p. 138). This shift illustrates how public health was not just a scientific issue but a socially constructed discourse. Notably, China's low infection rates legitimized heightened public surveillance (p. 159), reinforcing the intersection of governance and collective scrutiny.

The three chapters in the final part of the book examine different domains, exploring how the contestation of the pandemic's normalizing discourse shapes nation, race, and international relations. The chapter titled "K-Quarantine and Biopolitical Nationalism" critically examines South Korea's pandemic response through the "K-quarantine" narrative, arguing that it merged citizens' mutual surveillance with nationalist pride, facilitated by the country's advanced information-technological infrastructure (p. 171).The chapter effectively critiques how Western narratives framed Asian governance through the lens

of Confucian collectivism (p. 173), highlighting the persistence of Orientalist biases. The pandemic discourse of biopolitical nationalism echoes the public sentiment of "Hell *Choson"* (p. 178), an antinationalist popular response to the neoliberal restructuring of South Korean society over the past three decades. However, the analysis leaves unresolved how the cynical, self-deprecating discourse of Hell *Choson* genuinely distances itself from the nexus of nationalism and neoliberalism, as it remains entangled with persistent aspirations for a polarized view of political and economic life (Sung, 2019).

The final chapters analyze China's international image management, particularly in Africa and on Twitter. While China sought to counter negative portrayals through "Wolf Warrior" diplomacy (p. 190), the reception was ambivalent—both critical and xenophobic (p. 208). The discussion of Twitter diplomacy (p. 216) illustrates how states strategically shape digital narratives, though these chapters could have further explored how such efforts influence domestic Chinese audiences.

The book makes significant contributions to the understanding of digital governance, particularly in its discussions of public health, mobility control, and workplace surveillance. It successfully complicates simplistic East–West binaries, emphasizing governance as a negotiated and contested process. However, readers may find certain limitations, such as conceptual inconsistencies and a lack of analytical and theoretical elaboration on digitally mediated care, labor, and assumptions about the public sphere—issues often found in edited volumes. Despite these critical points, *Pandemic Crossings* remains a crucial resource for scholars of governance, technology, and public policy. It raises important questions about the role of digital infrastructures in shaping power dynamics, making it a valuable addition to contemporary debates on governance in the digital age.

References

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