

Analysis of the Construction of "Resilient City" in China from the Perspective of Foucault's Biopolitics

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Abstract. The COVID-19 pandemic has promoted the theoretical exploration of building "resilient cities" in China according to Foucault's theory of positive biopolitics. From the perspective of constructive biopolitics, China's anti-epidemic measures with a top priority on the protection of human life have achieved good results. Its measures against COVID-19 lead to effective epidemic prevention activities through constructive biopolitics, and discipline individual behavior to deal with exceptional states with the political effects of medical science. In the construction of social responsibility and ethical care for "resilient cities" in the epidemic and even post-epidemic era, China not only needs enough respect for life and health, carries out microscopic governance with cities as the unit to standardize individual behavior and social order, but also promotes the modernization of national governance capacity and governance system as a whole with sustainable development as the value goal.

Keywords: Foucault; COVID-19 pandemic; Biopolitics; Microscopic governance; Resilient city.

1. Introduction

Having already become the hallmark of the times, the COVID-19 pandemic as an exceptional state alerts people to the concern for life and health and urges governments to form a microscopic social governance system with life as the core during the epidemic. The CPC Central Committee's proposals for the formulation of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) for National Economic and Social Development and the Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035, which was reviewed and adopted by the fifth plenary session of the 19th CPC Central Committee, put forward the major decision of building "resilient cities" in the form of national strategic deployment for the first time. It can be said that the COVID-19 pandemic has driven unprecedented attention to biopolitics. This paper chooses Foucault's constructive concept of "biopolitics" to interpret China's microscopic governance measures during the epidemic period, so as to gradually build "resilient cities" and improve the modernization of the national governance capacity and governance system.

2. Definition of "Biopolitics"

The overall perception of biopolitics presents a negative tendency. Constructing social ethics and cultural concern with "biopolitics" requires "positive" biopolitics as the theoretical basis. Therefore, this paper selects Foucault's biopolitics theory to analyze the applicability and feasibility of taking biopolitics as a theory of a "resilient city".

2.1 "Positive" Biopolitics

Biopolitics is a technique of governance directly affecting people's physical life, with Foucault, Agamben, Negri, Esposito, etc. as its representative figures. To tell the difference between Foucault's biopolitics and others, it is most necessary to distinguish it from the "negative" biopolitics. The most representative of the latter is Agamben's theory of biopolitics, which generally regards biopolitics as a critical theory of capitalism with the hypothesis of power conspiracy, a technique of control and domination. He argued that the modern state essentially links power to physical life. This concept of intertwining biopolitics and power is endowed with negative meanings in a preconceived manner. Up against the COVID-19 pandemic, Agamben cautions against the abuse of the exception state of plague

to draw people into "concentration camps" labeled as the protection of people's life and health in disregard of the legal and ethical guarantees.

In the Birth of Biopolitics, Foucault suggests that the use of the term biopolitics is intended to indicate "an act starting from the 18th century that rationalizes the problems posed to governmental practice by phenomena characteristic of a set of living beings forming a population: health, hygiene, birthrate, life expectancy, race...[1] The practical relevance of biopolitics in his works lies in the productive significance of "making people live", and thus in this way examines the capacity and system of national governance. The third power in Foucault's genealogical construction of power is the right to life. It emerged after the 18th century and did not replace the second power (the right to social discipline) or even the first power (the power of the monarch). It opposes the control and killing of the first power and holds that the power of the government should lie in making people survive and thrive, improving happiness, and providing a sense of safety and security guarantees. The government should enhance quality of life by attaching great significance to their livelihoods, such as birth rate and happiness index. Foucault believes that the state assuming a new position in social management shoulders the responsibility of life, that is, realizes the investment in life and construction of the whole society through the discipline of individual life and population governance. "Acquisition" is no longer the main form of power and the main perception and requirement of the population, but "becomes a supplement to the power that actively manages, consolidates, increases specifically controls and regulates life as a whole".[2]

Therefore, the theoretical basis of this paper is Foucault's "positive" biopolitics. We should deal with the COVID-19 epidemic, mobilize national governance and protect human life under the guidance of this theory.

2.2 Reality of "Resilient City" Required by Biopolitics

Foucault sets store by a series of urgent safety risks arising from the operation of political power. With the dramatic growth of the urban population since the 18th century, the increasingly crowding of enclosed living spaces in cities has become a realistic governance problem. In terms of population health status, the reality of social demands for cities to move from closed to open circulation due to economic exchange triggered a potential danger of disease raging in urban space. Leprosy and plague in the Middle Ages, cholera, and smallpox in the 18th century are lessons from the past. In the case of smallpox, a classic medical practice of urban management was carried out in the 18th century. The highly transmissible, widespread nature of smallpox, the high mortality rate, and the short outbreak cycle exposed the city of London to health risks every five years. Therefore, biopolitics is included in the primary value to be pursued in governance considerations, putting the protection of human physical survival first. The government should cut off the transmission route in the closed mechanism to preemptively reduce the infection rate, promote the collection of personnel information and find pathogens from a statistical perspective. Thereafter, vaccinate residents and standardize the city's water source system as well as cultivate residents' good living habits to improve the health of the population. In a word, in the fight against smallpox, the government has developed urban anti-risk thinking. In the spatial political operation of cities, the power to life, which directly acts on people's lives, plays an important role in urban governance.

This COVID-19 epidemic is the first infectious disease that has spread in an all-around way since World War II and caused indiscriminate losses to all countries. Therefore, the concept of human survival practice has been elevated to an unprecedentedly high status, and higher requirements have been put forward for national governance and urban operation. During the epidemic period, urban management has become the scope of unitary governance under macro-dispatch and assumed great responsibility in the overall prevention and control, and functioning. Therefore, the theory of putting the ethical concerns and governance concepts of biopolitics into the construction of a national resilient city has strong applicability in reality.

3. Realistic Characteristics of Biopolitics in China during the COVID-9 epidemic

3.1 Shift of the Focus of Political Life: Protection of Physical Life

When the epidemic broke out, China's compulsory quarantine measures have been in sharp contrast to the lack of corresponding measures under the Western concept of "freedom weighs more than life." Habermas and Rawls' theories construct an "authorized" qualified life. In procedural politics, people pay attention to the holding of voting rights, with human existence and value embodiment emphasized in the realization of political life, such as the right to participate in politics and the certification of citizenship.

Normal biopolitics has incorporated the examination of physical life, the most typical of which is the census work. In November 2020, China carried out the seventh census. The census integrates people as individuals into the governance of the community, not focusing on individual conditions but on the whole of human physical existence, which is a crucial embodiment of life politics in the dimension of national governance. Up against the epidemic, people's most basic right to subsistence is the real object to be protected, and "people" are regarded as "protected objects", and the continuation of race or life group should be considered in the long run. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought back the importance of physical life from a realistic point of view. The virus itself is not political, and will not be selectively infected due to different countries, regimes, and systems. Under the exceptional state, traditional politics is suspended, and the idea that "spiritual life is nobler" needs to be corrected by the new biopolitics of "biological limit". At this time, the political nature of life is no longer overemphasized. Everything must make concessions for human survival. People's political life and power must be temporarily suspended in the most basic dilemma of life and death.

3.2 Non-breakthrough Power Use: Effective Pandemic Prevention Under Political Leadership

During the epidemic, China's decisions such as compulsory quarantine and suspension of resumption of work and production are all self-help regulation activities of political power in tough times. In this special period, the status of political power comes to the fore and becomes the leading force in the functioning of society. The habitual notion of taking economic construction as the center has been hindered by the reality that politics is no longer determined by the economy but decisively regulates and controls the economy. Correspondingly, democracy and law are relaxed to ensure that politics has greater discretion under exceptional conditions.

Although it is undeniable that political power has gained great autonomy, looking at the operation of political power to prevent and control the epidemic, China has gradually explored a more effective epidemic prevention policy system. During compulsory quarantine, community self-governance organizations at the primary level carry out ideological work, communities and villages reach harmonious cooperation with corresponding material supply institutions, volunteers and related officials work tirelessly to serve the people in compulsory isolation and ensure their most basic living conditions. At the same time, various cities have provided diverse policies and materials for related activities amid compulsory quarantine. Political power with more autonomy and huge say has become a vital hub for effectively organizing social functioning, mobilizing resources, and safeguarding people's life safety in the fight against the epidemic. The convenience created by the ceded part of the power benefits the masses.

3.3 Political Efficacy of Medical Science: Double Discipline Under Exceptional Conditions

As the epidemic rages on, the role of medicine in saving lives has gained unprecedented attention and respect. Foucault's "knowledge—power" system of modern politics can be used to explain the transformation relationship between medicine and politics.

In clinical medicine, doctors observe patients before determining symptoms, form scientific and empirical treatment, and prescribe as a way of restraint. As a result, medicine continues to gain the power to control the body. Modern society is a disciplinary society. Rational technology realizes the

construction of power through restriction and observation, and knowledge obtains the power to become a science that achieves physical training, intervention, and planning of the external world. Power interferes with the body through training and monitoring technology, which becomes a means of knowledge production. In the case of the epidemic, health codes and access certificates reflect the political need to "conform" to people who can only qualify to travel if they prove themselves healthy. Big data allows individuals to be exposed and placed under greater regulation, while the suggestions of experts such as Zhong Nanshan have become the basis for public and government activities. At each transportation toll gate, the temperature measurement registration is carried out to track people's health status in real-time, and people are required to be forcibly quarantined if needed according to the national governance. Its fundamental purpose is not to show power, but to ensure the universal life safety of the overwhelming majority of the people. In the fight against the epidemic, the government, as the enforcer of political power, does not appear in the form of punishment but regulates people by mastering and implementing safety technology. Biopolitics is Foucault's criticism of political genealogy, where he reflects on the formation of power from the perspective of power operation and explores the avoidance of unreasonable abuse of power. When it comes to political governance, China must answer this question head-on and avoid going down the negative road of theory. The prominent role of medicine and science in the epidemic does not mean "politicization of medicine", nor does science become an appendage of power and be manipulated by politics.

4. Social Responsibility and Ethical Concern for China's "Resilient City" Construction

4.1 Concern for Life and Social Health

Nietzsche, whose *The Gay Science* was composed when he was recovering from an illness, wrote: "what was at stake in all philosophizing hitherto was not all the truth but rather something else – let us say health, future, growth, power, life ..." [3] Hobbes' *Leviathan* was also written after he experienced the test of life and death. It seems that the activities naturally ignore the prerequisites for the health of the actors themselves. The activities seem to be carried out rightfully ignoring the prerequisites for the health of the subjects of actions. The epidemic forces one to see in the experience of an unhealthy state what one does not see in a healthy state. Social governance is a process of life-giving participation.

Biopolitics also can be traced in the past political operations, which are political in the sense of medical and life science. Pasteur pointed out that infectious diseases are caused by microorganisms, which directly promotes people's concern for public health conditions and proactive interventions and construction, forcing the population to develop good health habits to increase the survival rate. Hobbes's "state medicine" regards the governmental behavior as a "doctor", and makes the country heal as an "organism" through medical means. As a developing country, China is enhancing its national governance capacity and system. Public epidemic prevention and basic medical care must be incorporated into the governance capacity and system and are highly valued.

4.2 Microscopic Governance of Urban Units Under the Concept of "Norms"

The key concept of Foucault's biopolitics theory running through realistic governance is "norm". As an important unit of human civilization, cities bear multiple functions of operational activities. The construction of urban space by discipline mechanism is mainly reflected at the micro-level. In his book *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault discussed the birth of prison and put forward the construction of a "circular prison". The "discipline" of a "free state", which puts prisoners under the eyes of guards without "shadow", erodes people's complete freedom and self-reliance. In this mechanism, people are deemed as models to adapt to the corresponding society. Prison is a well-regulated building, and the city is even more so. Although the city does not emphasize a state of

"surveillance" in its functioning, the maintenance of a functioning society through a system of micro-regulation does not erase the essence of its "discipline" governance behavior.

The COVID-19 pandemic shows that physical condition needs to be the target and object of supervision, analysis, intervention, and adjustment in national governance and social operation. "To prosper the country, the population issue is perhaps the biggest and most dynamic factor. In this regard, health, birth rate, and hygiene have naturally turned important." [4] The response to the plague crisis, for example, also took the disciplinary mechanism. At the end of the 17th century, a decree was issued: when a plague appeared in a city, "the strict spatial quarantine was implemented: the city and its suburbs were closed and people were strictly forbidden to leave the city; offenders were put to death and all animals that roamed about were killed; cities were divided into several districts in the charge of respective district governor; each street was headed by a warden, who closely monitors the street affairs." [5] Implementing the quarantine policy which is historically traceable and relatively widely applicable is not exclusive to China.

The proposal points out to promote new urbanization with people as the core. During the epidemic period, in terms of information technology, following the basic information of ID card, the social information of file registration, and the two-dimensional code linking consumption and network information, the green code was added to monitor people's health and safety information, which was directly docked through big data and acted on the microscopic governance of each people. In terms of unit governance, the community has become the basic autonomous unit for scheduling and coordinating people's lives, and has become an important exploration to refine the overall health and safety of the society to each individual and maximize personal health.

4.3 Construction of "Resilient City" from the Perspective of Sustainable Development

"Resilient city" means that a city can calmly cope with disasters and ensure the normal functioning of the city. In the 19th century, the raging Cholera in Europe aroused people's attention to modern sanitation and urban renewal. Baron Haussmann of Paris put forward the plan of the "City of Light", which made the slums in Paris replaced by modernized and beautified boulevards, street lamps, and monuments, actively building a modern livable city. In 2013, Rockefeller Foundation founded the "Global 100 Resilient Cities" project, aiming to help cities around the world become more resilient to the increasingly frequent natural, social and economic challenges in the 21st century. New York, Paris, and London are all its member cities. At present, four cities in China have been selected for this project. The dynamic changes of cities require experts in city resilience to give appropriate opinions to help the government make better decisions and collaborate on development.

A resilient city is not a new concept in China either. In recent years, the term resilient city has been included in the government work reports and master plans of cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Chengdu. In June 2017, China Earthquake Administration put forward the concept of a "resilient city" in terms of earthquake prevention, which was recognized at the national level. From the perspective of realistic conditions, China's modern urban development is characterized by network development: well-equipped facilities, more diversified functions, and various nodes are available to make cities more ecological, livable, and resilient. In the face of unexpected exceptions, cities should improve their self-sufficiency and interconnection ability, and build ecological security barriers to avoid systematic collapse. Cities can resist disasters with their ability, reduce disaster losses, and rationally regulate resources to recover quickly from disasters. The application of emerging technologies such as big data, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, the Internet of Things, and 5G will better implement life governance for everyone in the construction of resilient cities.

"Resilient city" resorts to the urban sustainable development, and cities' affective response to various changes and crises to reduce the uncertainty in the development. What must be clear through the epidemic is that it is safety and health that should make urban life better and enhance people's well-being. Urban planning and governance initiated by public health and basic medical care should be raised from the current epidemic prevention to the perspective of comprehensive governance

capacity and modernization of the governance system, otherwise, the potential economic achievements will be devalued.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, in the current epidemic prevention and control and even in the post-epidemic era, Foucault's positive biopolitics theory has extremely important reference, and strong theoretical applicability for the ethical responsibility of building a "resilient city" in China. To effectively prevent and control major public health incidents, the government, medical industry, community and individuals must form an ecological chain linked from top to bottom. To strengthen the prevention and control of the COVID-19 epidemic, we must face up to the problems of life care and life governance in this period. These practices, including increasing the investment in the life and health in urban construction management, paying attention to people's life, health and safety by the application of life technology, adopting the biopolitical concept into the microscopic functioning of urban units, can enhance the resilience and vitality of the city itself. The above-mentioned is of great significance in promoting the modernization of national governance capacity to cope with exceptional situations such as epidemic situations, boosting sustainable development, and improving people's overall standard of living and well-being.

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