Explaining the Legitimacy of the Chinese Dynamite Zero-COVID Policy based on Weber and Foucault

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Abstract. When the novel coronavirus turned into the emergent events of public health, different countries adopted different policies to prevent the epidemic. While most countries opt for the herd immunity, China has defined a new approach according to its national situation called the Dynamite Zero-COVID policy. The academic community has analyzed and evaluated the policy's phychological and social impacts on mental health to varying degrees, however, the mechanism of the Dynamite Zero-COVID policy and the interaction between the public and the government still lacks theoretical analysis. Therefore, this paper will apply Foucault and Weber's theory to explain the important operational logic of China's epidemic prevention policy. After providing a descriptive analysis of the embedded legitimacy and automatic obedience, the articleshows that the unique legitimacy of the Dynamic Zero-COVID policy guarantees the operation of the policy through building up the authority of regulations and fostering the autonomy.

Keywords: CIVID-19, Dynamite Zero-COVID policy, Michel Foucault, Max Weber.

1. Introduction

In April 2020, after the massive spread of novel coronavirus pneumonia epidemic in Wuhan, China enters normalized prevention and control until August 2021, and the policy after this period is the well-known as the Dynamic Zero-COVID [1]. The strategy intends to effectively combat the Delta variant by localizing the cases and cutting off the transmission chain. When finding out the positive patients, epidemic prevention staff would search the close contacts to screen the potential infected individuals with the help of the big data system. Afterward, the relevant quarantine measures would be published according to risk levels [2]. Therefore, China has adopted the Dynamite Zero-COVID policy for a long period, which states that whenever a case is discovered, an epidemiological investigation and the isolation of pertinent individuals would be carried out to restrict the virus's effect. Meanwhile, other states chose the herd immunity that most people have immunity to infectious illnesses, protecting those who do not against infection. When discussing about the Dynamite Zero-COVID, an increasing number of researchers paid attention on psychological health response such as the prevalence of anxiety and depression [3] from Chinese citizens especially during the lockdown. Most scholars examine thedifferences between groups like the health conditions of nurses, youngsters, and stigmatized groups[4-6]. While some studies focus on scientific survey to reflect Dynamite Zero-COVID policy's implications, others analyse the social influence related to the policy such as the class division and cohesion [7]. Limited studies have concerned about the implement of this policy especially the relevant jurisdiction of that. As a result, this study aims to explain the underlying relationship between the citizens' compliance and the policies' legitimacy within the context of Foucault and Weber.

How does this mandatory policy accepted by citizens even though more and more individuals recognize the essence? Why do few genuinely resist commands such as the unpredictable quarantine? To answer these questions, this paper would make connection between the policies and the theoretical opinion from scholars exploring the underlying logic of Chinese citizens' obedience. According to Foucault's philosophy, the major axis of inquiry is disciplinary power. He employed the Panopticism as an equivalent tone of analysis to reveal how power operates subtly in human society. The Health Kit and the Communications Big Data Travel Card as two technological platformshelp the

government to monitor the movement of people and exercise disciplinary power. As for Weber, the three pure types of authority provide various forms of legitimate domination throughout various covid-19 time periods.

The article is mainly divided into two parts. The two theoretical tools will be introduced first. They are Foucault's disciplinary power discussed in his *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison* and Weber's three ideal types of authority discussed in his *Economy and society: an outline of interpretive sociology*. Secondly, the specific applications based on different indigenous social and theoretical backgrounds would be demonstrated in order to make the theory more explanatory.

2. Theoretical consideration

2.1 The disciplinary power discussedby Foucault in Disciplineandpunish: thebirthoftheprison

Human law before the nineteenth century often chose torture and ritualized killings rather than implicit and flexible discipline. However, with the increasing awareness of humankind and the promotion of justice and humanistic principles, jails have shifted from physical to spiritual captivity of inmates. Behind the rising socialization and laxity of punishment processes, one may see a shift in the point of action of punishment and a new interaction between power and knowledge. According to Foucault, shifting its point of application results in a new corpus of knowledge and practices entwined with the practice of the power to punish. As punishment eventually becomes a political technique and alters the connection between power and object, mind control would involve more covert power activities. Eventually, all citizens will enter a new era of self-sanction governed by universal power discipline and power punishment. In terms of the regulation of power micromanagement, Panopticism discussed by Foucault is an ideal mode. A mechanical system enables the administrators to monitor the prisoners closely. One of the particular forms of this building is a circular, annular jail with a central watchtower from which the guard can see all the cells [8]. This technological framework ensures the spontaneity of power activities because in an information-closed environment-- power is apparent but unknown, and under these conditions, members subconsciously follow norms and disciplines. In conclusion, Foucault enlarged the influences of the disciplinary power in society based on the mechanism of Panopticism.

2.2 Threeauthorityfrom Weber in Economy andsociety: an outlineofinterpretivesociology

According to Weber, every authority is requested to provide a legitimacy explanation, and he defined three ideal types of authority: rational, traditional, and charismatic grounds consisting of distinctive features. These three authorities justify the legitimacy of dominance and ensure that the obedient will profit from this voluntary submission. To begin with, the traditional authority is based on the belief in the rationality of conventions and traditions such as tribal chiefs and monarchs. Under the traditional authority, the ruler's power is attributed to the people's belief in tradition, and the foundation of ruling power is based on time-honored customs and traditions. On the contrary, the rational authority is formed by the enacted laws through empowered institutions applying to every citizen without partiality. Finally, the charismatic authority obtains the loyalty on the basis of leaders' extraordinary personal characteristics [9-10].

3. PracticalApplication

China has established an extensive, aggressive virus-tracking system that has attracted some criticism because of the privacy concerns [11]. When the government successfully promote the technological platforms in tracking citizens, it seems like citizens have been tolerant of the official supervision [12]. The analysis found that the initial execution of the Dynamite Zero-COVID is grounded in the political and cultural history of the Chinese system and complete the cycle of policy implementation through increasing ideological domestication and institutionalizing policy. Weber's

theory may be used to explain the coercive power of policy throughout the stage, while Foucault's theory can be used to explain the source of policy's spontaneous obedience in later stages.

3.1 The suitability of three authority in the context of the Dynamite Zero-COVID policy

There are three sources of legitimacy but in fact only the traditional and rational-legal authority can explain the causal relationship between the policy's coercive power and the population's compliance. The ineffectiveness of the charismatic authority is due to China's political characteristics. What is essential to bring out is Confucius that created the philosophy of guardianship for over two millennia. The family was the model of governance according to Confucius, which placed emphasis on the moral value of utilizing authority to preserve stable and harmonious social connections. However, the boundary between bloodlines and equity lacks clear definition, which means that mandarin elites could monopolize the state's authority based on their selfish desires [13].As a result,this proposition grants the politicians discretionary power in policymaking and limits public engagement in the discourse.In the tendency of modernization and democratization, China selected Leninism as its ultimate option and Leninism emphasize on elitism and collectivism reinforcing the inherent divisiveness of the discourse [14]. When successive generations embrace this idea about ruler and subjects, people will prefer to follow rather than exercise their rights when unpredictable calamity comes.Therefore, in the beginning, most individuals decided to accept the government's and professionals' understanding when confronted with a more deadly infectious disease like covid-19 since the general populace initially has inadequate awareness of the illness. They believed the government could adequately allocate medical resources. In terms of charismatic authority, most leaders in China are described as larger-than-life figures without negative comments and they are regard as the supreme individual [15]. As a result, the leader's personality is too flawless to be appealing.Meanwhile, the leaders as the agent and representative of the government are more likely to attract the public's trust in the system rather than themselves as the individuals.

In addition to the government's gradual establishment of process-oriented epidemic prevention policies, the public is aware of the epidemic to some extent. The achievement of policy legitimacy primarily depends on rational authority rooted in the law and hierarchy. At this level, the policy for epidemic prevention is set by mandates. According to the Law of the PRC on the Prevention and Treatment of Infectious Diseases, patients with contagious illnesses must be promptly reported to local management authorities [16]. In addition, the Law of the PRC on Public Security Administra mandates public places to comply with the closed-off management and health status inquiry policy [17]. Therefore, regulations that establish policies have a coercive impact that causes individuals to follow them based on practical reasons.

3.2 The causality betweensurveillance and autonomy

The invasion of privacy and governmental supervision is not necessarily related to each other. On the one hand, the invisible surveillance structure integrates pervasive information resulting in the construction of specific networks to compensate the decreasing face-to-face social bonds [18]. In the process of interpersonal communication, the exchange of exclusive personal data would encourage the mutual trust and this desirable behavior provides the possible intervention of public supervision [19]. People manage to achieve certain goals through these reciprocal activities without paying too much attention to the underlying privacy crisis. If people cannot "quit" their dependence on the Internet, we will gradually accept and adapt to the new surveillance rules. In this situation, surveillance establishes enforcement on the basis of individuals' active surrender of privacy. Few would deny that excessive surveillance can put people in danger if it lacks acceptance and consent. The development of technology ensures the interconnection between political, social, and economic fields then enables the circulation of privacy in multiple sectors. Government would use the inertia of consciousness that citizens are familiar with the process of privacy collection to spread the scope of surveillance power until citizens participate in the surveillance themselves.

Moving back to Foucault's theory about the disciplinary power in *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison*.There is a noticeable distribution of the disciplinary power that it improves the operational process of surveillance especially in terms of autonomous monitoring. The mechanism of internalization formed due to the uncertainty and pervasiveness of official surveillance. Although people are aware of the existence of supervision, they still fail to get rid of it [20]. The panopticon strengthens the invisibility has been seen as a metaphor when discussing about the growing surveillance in modernity [21]. When the asymmetry of relations ignores the willingness of individuals, this unidirectionality would make them have a gradual sense of privacy's oppressive violation.

The Chinese pandemic policies, which mainly rely on the Health Kit and the Communications Big Data Travel Card to supervise citizens and maintain disciplinary power. The Health Kit records citizens' information about the frequency of nucleic acid testing (NAT) and the vaccination record, and the Communications Big Data Travel Card records the location of residents. They are used to demonstrate the people's health conditions, and there is a corresponding punishment for violating the epidemic prevention policy. According to the legislation, both software must be displayed in public spaces such as subway stations, and the staff has the authority to limit the personal freedom of a defaulter by rejecting entry to a place, sometimes engaging in moral humiliation, and contacting the police if the situation is more serious. When the Communications Big Data Travel Card monitors persons visiting the exact location as a positive patient, those individuals will be subject to obligatory quarantine measures based on their degree of exposure. Some would be sent to a centralized quarantine facility, while the rest would be quarantined at home. As a result, due to the random nature of the epidemic's propagation, everyone is afraid of the unknown and opts to self-examine their NATs to obtain 'safety' and 'freedom' in line with the continuously updated regulations. Recently, most cities have asked citizens to have NATs regularly. To prevent being banned from going outdoors, almost everyone makes an effort to check NATs in the monitoring stations despite the inconvenience of waiting in line. Thus, the government acts as the monitor in the epidemic prevention policies, and the populace should submit to this authority. It is difficult for people to escape the power system's underlying mind control, which always assists society in furthering the dominance and domestication of the populace. Consequently, when the ability to punish transforms into the power to discipline, the Health Kit and the Communications Big Data Travel Card as the new data monitoring technologies translate knowledge into disciplinary power that convinces the panoptic mechanism.

4. Summary

The article focuses on the legitimacy of Dynamite Zero-COVID policy in China and the theoretical sources of citizens' compliance based on Weber's three authority and Foucault's disciplinary power and the model of Panopticism. After briefly reviewing the stages of epidemic prevention and introducing the relevant policy, the essay distills the key concepts' discursive logic from the writings of the two scholars—Weber and Foucault. According to existing research and Chinese social backgrounds, the traditional authority and rational-legal authority prove to applicable to explaining the inner cultural and outer political reasons about people's obedience. TheConfucianism and Leninism embedded in Chinese mindsets have reinforced the hierarchy and the reliance of policies, which provide the possibility for traditional authority and rational-legal authority to be operated. Next, surveillance sometimes respects the willingness of individuals when they agree to cede some of their privacy and assimilate them to exercise 'duties of surveillance'. However, the development of technological platforms such as the Health Kit and the Communications Big Data Travel Card place people under constant and omnipresent surveillance, which has the same mechanism of Panopticism argued by Foucault.

The paper contends that the operational logic of the Dynamite Zero-COVID strategy is predicated on the power and autonomy of regulations. This may demystify the sanctified policy, and this would increase public awareness of the intellectual underpinnings of the compliance.When someone is

determined to obey, it might be helpful to pause and consider what motivates them—is it a political preference, a cultural tradition, or something else?

Current examination of the Dynamite Zero-COVID policy is still in the justification phase, and it may need further mass psychology research, i.e., additional sampling, to explore the concerns of various individuals about the Dynamite Zero-COVID policy. It is also conceivable to include an evaluation of the local Dynamite Zero-COVID policy in various areas, providing a more comprehensive picture of the operating mechanism of the Dynamite Zero-COVID policy.

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