

Chia Yu Lien // By April 16, COVID-19 had infected 2,101,164 people and killed 140,773 globally. Located 81 miles from China, as predicted by John Hopkins University, Taiwan should be one of the hardest-hit countries from COVID-19. So far, however, among its population of 23 million, only 385 people have been infected, and only 6 have died. Of all the people who tested positive, more than three-quarters were travel-related. Travel is common between Taiwan and China; about 407,000 Taiwanese work in China. What did the Taiwanese government do, or not do, to halt the spread of the virus? How are their measures being received?

Taiwanese cases were detected early. Informed by travelers that there may be atypical pneumonia cases, in December 2019, Taiwan started to inspect passengers from Wuhan, China, for fever and upper respiratory tract infections. Following the inspection, a series of policies and actions were taken to contain the virus. Under COVID-19, ordinary norms are suspended and lives are interrupted, but not all interruptions are similarly devastating. This essay will briefly introduce the main coronavirus policies and actions, examining them through Foucault's theory of biopower. What does Taiwan's proactive response tell us about governmentality?

Policies and Actions

Expecting an outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Taiwan's Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC) was activated on January 20 as a disaster management center, providing centralized leadership in communications and decision-making with and among central, regional, and local authorities. The CECC thus coordinates medical authorities as well as transportation, economics, labor, education, and environmental protection administrations. By the end of February, the CECC had issued 124 actions and policies in three categories: 1) border control, travel restrictions, and case finding; 2) resource allocation; and 3) communications and politics. The CECC actions and policies are communicated daily to the public via press conference, television news, newspapers, Facebook, Instagram, and Taiwan's online communications system, the LINE app.

Border control and travel restrictions first applied to people from Wuhan, followed by other provinces of China. Travel restrictions require those returning from overseas to quarantine for 14 days upon arrival. Recent travel history was integrated into the National Health Insurance Administration database, allowing physicians and clinical professionals to access the information. Each traveler's cell phone was registered upon arrival, giving CECC officials the ability to track movements and know immediately if a person violated the quarantine order. To prevent shortages and price hikes, the Taiwanese government launched a National Mask Production Team. Taiwan increased its face mask production from 1.2 million per day to 13 million by purchasing 60 mask

machines for the private sector. The government also set a price limit of around USD \$0.17 per mask and a purchasing limit of 9 masks every other week.

In addition, colleges and K–9 schools were prescribed guidelines about shifting classes online in case of community spread. Some large events such as the Mazu Pilgrimage (March 2020), the Taipei International Book Exhibition (February 2020), and the Presidential Inauguration Ceremony (May 2020) were cancelled. It is worth noting that, apart from the Presidential Inauguration Ceremony, the other events were canceled not under state order but under pressure from the public. Gatherings and activities were less affected, although restaurants, night markets, and the travel industry lost a large number of customers. Finally, in addition to communicating updated policies and cases to the public on a daily basis, the government also declared that spreading fake news about the pandemic would incur a fine of up to USD \$33,000.

Governmentality and Reception

A public opinion poll has shown that the Taiwanese people hold a positive attitude toward the government's response to COVID-19, with more than 90% satisfied with the policies and actions. President Tsai Ing Wen's approval rate increased to 54% in February and 60% in March. Head of the CECC Chen Shih-Chung's approval rating increased from 82% to 90%. But not all policies and actions are without controversy. A few celebrities criticized the government's mask-export ban as "selfish" and "a policy against China." Doctors, nurses, union members, and others also criticized the travel ban for professionals as "unconstitutional" and "a violation of human rights." Also, lawmakers and scholars worried about the effects that surveillance technologies could have on privacy and the expansion of executive power.

In his book *Security, Territory, Population* (1978; published 2009), Michel Foucault notes that in the contemporary art of governance, the government asks: what is the rate of a disease? What can be done about it and what is the cost of increasing or decreasing the rate? He contrasts the apparatus of security and the apparatus of discipline. The latter indifferently issues the same prohibition on everyone in a given space, while the former builds upon chance and probability of the entire population, identifying the relation between mortality, morbidity and demographic features. People are categorized in different groups, and the "abnormal" ones are brought in line with normal. This is not to say that the apparatus of discipline has vanished; the power of government is exercised more on populations than on bodies of individuals.

In Taiwan, lives have been interrupted by COVID-19, but not all people face the same interruptions. People traveling internationally are distinguished from the rest and subjected to both disciplinary and security power. As mentioned before, most of them are ordered into 14 days' quarantine, reinforced by the phone-tracking system. A journalist who was in quarantine writes that he was called twice and received a knock on the door when he missed calls. He was told firmly that he would be fined up to thousand dollars if he violated the order again. On the other hand, to promote good behavior, he received a thermometer, face masks, snacks, sodas, instant noodles, and an amulet. A woman with two children posted that she and her children had received calls

from a government official, asking her if she and her family were eating well, sleeping well, and feeling well. The official explained to her that people might feel depressed staying at home for such a long time; if that is the case, the government could provide resources for mental health. Meanwhile, people who had not traveled or been in contact with travelers in this period suffered less from the state apparatus. In this regard, people have been categorized into different groups based on their travel history and contact, each of which is prescribed different behavioral norms.

As a liberal democracy, the elected officials in the Taiwanese government are re-evaluated every two years in elections, and this prevents the government from imposing rules that will not be perceived as positive. In February, the government unofficially announced a travel ban for medical professionals, out of fear that if they traveled and then had to spend 14 days in quarantine, this would result in a shortage of health workers. The policy encountered a good deal of criticism and, as a result, underwent modification. The government can fine people for spreading fake news, yet it cannot fine people for criticizing the mask-export ban. It assigns countries different levels of travel restriction, yet it cannot stop people from traveling to those countries. It canceled the Inauguration Ceremony but had no means to cancel religious and other activities prior to community spread.

The government's limitations in making and implementing policies are offset by micro-interactions between individuals. Celebrities criticizing the mask-export ban have been widely condemned. Temples hosting the Mazu Pilgrimage received thousands of requests to cancel the event. People monitored their neighbors and friends who were traveling abroad and violating quarantine. In "The Subject and Power," Foucault (1982) proposed another type of power in opposition with the power of authority over people. This power, embedded in everyday life, is exercised between individuals in groups or institutions such as family, medicine, education, and private ventures. It is the power that a person exercises over others to turn others into subjects of certain norms. As Foucault notes, the power acts not on others but on "their actions: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future.... It is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult" (1982:789). People exercise power in their relations with others to increase or decrease the possibilities of certain behaviors. In regard to COVID-19, people in Taiwan complement the government by shaping each other into good citizens. Currently, a "good citizen" is one who is not traveling internationally and is complying the quarantine and other orders.

Power is everywhere, as Foucault told us, "a society without power relations can only be an abstraction" (1982:791). What matters most is not dreaming of a power-free society, but thinking about particularities: which people are subjected to power in this particular moment for what reason and in what way. In the case of COVID-19, people who are subjected to the apparatus of power are travelers, presumably of higher socioeconomic status. People who are less affected, compared with travelers and compared with people around the world, are the rest of the population: those who work, study, and live in Taiwan. By April, Taiwan only had limited community spread. Some industries such as travel agencies and restaurants are going through a depression, but other businesses and schools remain functioning. The government has not (yet)

seen the need for shelter-in-place or self-isolation. In Taiwan, lives are interrupted, but not suspended. People, though worried about the future, continue to live an ordinary life.

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