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Governmentality and Materiality: A New Approach to the City

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to analyze the advantage of approaching the city from the perspective of governmentality, studies of which have become more globally widespread in recent years and are also concerned with the subject of governing the city.¹ Although the study has value as the successor of Michel Foucault, little is known in Japan. Therefore, I wish to demonstrate the merits of analyzing the city from the perspective of governmentality based on the argument of Foucault.

In particular, this paper shall conclude that the governmentality study may have an advantage because it provides an alternative framework in analyzing the material aspects of cities, such as the urban infrastructure and natural environment. The traditional sociological frame for approaching the city has neglected to address the material aspect; however, it can be understood as the political technique connected with the human existence from this alternative point of view. In other words, the materiality of the city is regarded as not only the backdrop sustaining urban daily life but as playing a more positive role. Therefore, the perspective of the government allows us to think about what the city is and can shed a new light on the problem.

In the following sections, I will briefly review literature concerning governmentality released in recent years. I will then review the notion of milieu that Foucault mentions in his argument on governmentality, particularly in public health. Finally,

I will demonstrate the advantages to the perspective of governmentality.

STUDIES ON GOVERNMENTALITY

Governmentality studies were further developed by Foucault's successors in Anglo-Saxon after the 1990s. "Governmentality" (*Gouvernementalité*) is known as the concept that Foucault considered in his lectures at the Collège de France from 1977 to 1979 (Foucault 2007, 2008). Ulrich Bröckling states that François Ewald and Jacques Donzelot were primarily engaged in governmentality studies with Foucault in France, but after Foucault's death, the foundation of The History of the Present Network by Nikolas Rose in 1989 and the publication of *The Foucault Effect* (1991) shifted the center of the study to Anglo-Saxon themes (Bröckling et al. 2010). For example, studies on issues such as crime, insurance technology, and statistics in *The Foucault Effect* join issues pertaining to education, accounts, corporation, medicine, psychiatry, child abuse, and the appearance of the social and its crisis in the age of neoliberalism, in gaining popularity (Bröckling et al. 2010: 7-10; Rose 1999: 7).²

In a word, the analysis of governmentality traces the power operation that actions structure the possible field of the action of the other. Nikolas Rose defined the "government" as "the conduct of conduct": programmes, strategies, techniques for acting upon the action of others towards certain ends" (Rose 1989

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[1999]: xxi). Some of post-Foucauldian scholars attempt to understand the urban space, as it is one environment intervened upon by power, and they point out that it has been organized as a space of vitality.

Rose, for example, understands that the intervention in urban infrastructure is one of the practices making up the possible condition of liberal society, stating that “modern systems of rule have depended upon a complex set of relations between state and non-state authorities, upon infrastructural powers, upon networks of power, upon the activities of authorities who do not form part of the formal or informal state apparatus” (Rose 1999: 15). He analyzes “a series of dreams of the healthy ‘liberal’ city” in a program for governing urban space during the 19th century in Britain (Rose 1999; Osborn and Rose 1999). He considered the transition of the city through city planning from a dangerous and unhygienic space into a well-ordered space for maintaining morality and public health as the practice of government for the security of population. He never grasped the relationship between freedom and the government as the confrontation but questioned “government through freedom.”

Thomas Osborn also discusses the rationality of government through infrastructure by comparing the public health of the 18th century with that of the 19th century in Britain (Osborn 1996). He stated that diseases in the closed spaces, such as hospitals and military camps, became the primary sanitary issue and were addressed through quarantine and discipline in 18th-century Britain. On the contrary, in 19th century, the issue of governments suitable for open space appeared with the birth of the concept of “environment” as the factor that defined diseases. In order to solve this problem, Chadwick focused on the water supply system such as sewers and drains, and tied body, city, and economy together into one system. Osborn indicates that these infrastructures

could change the private home into a sanitary space without direct intervention; they are literally neutral and anonymous because they do not require direct intervention into private homes and disciplinary means. Therefore, public health is believed to be the suitable path to political rationality to make the liberal space in the Victorian era. Osborn stresses the need to address the mundane and material aspects of public health in the 19th century. In other words, he insists on the importance of infrastructural elements such as sewage or drainage that are the base of the city, although he admits the role of doctors and medicine are important as well.

Similarly, Tony Bennett and Patrick Joyce, editors of a book entitled *Material Powers*, point out the significance of the material form in the practices of government (Joyce and Bennett 2010). They suggest searching the infrastructure to understand concepts such as “non-human” or “material agency.” They maintain that infrastructure is a good location that traces how material powers can operate outside human consciousness and language. Due to its power operation, durability and connectivity are created for power. In fact, other authors in this book pay attention to infrastructures and attempt to understand how power was made up and exercised through examination of the roles of material infrastructures in the organization of state power and in the organization of colonial forms of governance. They focus on specific objects including communication, road, railroad, and filing system. In addition, some research suggests the significance of practice to maintain these infrastructures because the durability and connectivity of infrastructure results in the role of power becoming more efficient (Otter 2005).

Thus, the recent literature on governmentality actively accumulates the research on the city and urban infrastructures based on careful comprehension of Foucault’s work. One of the characteristics of Post-Foucauldian research is the emphasis of the role

of materiality in governing a city, paying attention to the infrastructure and considering how its power operates.

However, it is not clear if they understand Foucault's works because his studies are not well known in Japan. It is worthwhile to examine the subject more closely, but for the present, I shall confine our attention to the public health.

THE NOTION OF MILIEU

It is known that Foucault described the mechanism of power in the Western societies from the middle of the 18th century as "bio-power," which was termed slightly differently in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* and in lectures on governmentality at the Collège de France (Foucault 1979, 2007, 2008). Here, I roughly define this term as the mechanism of power that regulates and controls the human as living beings or the human species. The target of power is "population," which is understood statistically. The specific domain "population," which is recognized in the form of the level of health, lifespan, and the mortality rate, is regulated and controlled through "the mechanism of security" (*les mécanismes de sécurité*). Foucault indicated that "public health" (*hygiène publique*) was one example of this mechanism. Immediately following the most famous passage describing "anatomy-politics of the human body" and "bio-politics of the population" in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, he stated:

The old power of death that symbolized sovereign power was now carefully supplanted by the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life. During the classical period, there was a rapid development of various disciplines—universities, secondary schools, barracks, workshops; there was also the emergence, in the field of political practices

and economic observation, of the problems of birthrate, longevity, public health, housing, and migration. Hence there was an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of "bio-power." (Foucault 1979: 139-140)

However, he only mentioned public health marginally in this book. That will make us further referent the discussion he had during that same period.

First, let us consider the notion of "population" again and consider the relationship between "population" and "materiality" (*matérialité*). Foucault discussed this topic in "The Politics of Health in Eighteenth Century": the means for guaranteeing the public interest during 17-18th century was known as "police," the control of "social body" (« *corps* » *social*) (Foucault 2014: 117). "Social body" here refers to "a complex and multiple materiality that includes, apart from the 'body' of individuals, the ensemble of material elements that insure their life, constitute the framework and results of their activity, and allow for transportation and exchange" (Foucault 2014: 117).³ Although it is well known that this indicates that the target of police is the collective beyond individual, we must focus on the fact that Foucault uses the term "materiality" to indicate this word. Moreover, he continues, police "was responsible for the 'physical' element of the social body: the materiality, in some sense, of this civil society" (Foucault 2014: 117).⁴ It is important for him to utilize the concept "the materiality of civil society" as the paraphrase of "physical element" of social body, although he did not expand its concept after that. In addition, "an element appeared at the center of this materiality, an element whose importance unceasingly asserted itself and grew in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: it was the *population*" (Foucault 2014: 117). In short, the

population is not a collective entity understood statistically, but the figure divided in the ensemble of material elements.

Similar discussion can also be seen in the first lecture of *Security, Territory, Population*. Foucault discusses restarting his work known as “bio-power” at the beginning.⁵ He uses the first lecture to primarily explain the mechanism of security and demonstrates the appearance of “a political technique that will be addressed to the milieu” (Foucault 2007: 23) as its fundamental element. “What is the milieu? It is what is needed to account for action at a distance of one body on another. It is therefore the medium of an action and the element in which it circulates. It is therefore the problem of circulation and causality that is at stake in this notion of milieu” (Foucault 2007: 20-21).⁶ This indicates that the milieu is not the artifact or the natural environment but the medium; it is constructed as something connected with the human as living beings or something that affects the population. It is said that architects and urban planners in the 18th century began to work on and maintain the urban space in the frame that was suitable for this notion. Concretely speaking, “the milieu is a set of natural givens—rivers, marshes, hills—and a set of artificial givens—an agglomeration of individuals, of houses etcetera. The milieu is a certain number of combined, overall effects bearing on all who live in it” (Foucault 2007: 21). In this manner, the target of the mechanism of security, which works through “milieu” newly understood as the object of intervention, is neither the legal subjects nor the disciplined individuals, but a population; “a multiplicity of individuals who are and fundamentally and essentially only exist biologically bound to the materiality within which they live” (Foucault 2007: 21).

The position of public health becomes clear only after understanding the bio-power or the mechanism of security. Foucault addresses the birth of public

health in his lecture entitled “The Birth of Social Medicine,” given in Rio de Janeiro in October 1974 (Foucault 2000). He provides the example of social medicine (public health) as one of the sciences for population. In this lecture, he regards public health as a technique that urban planners used to maintain the environment, referring to knowledge regarding natural elements such as water and air in urban medicine that developed in France from the second half of the 18th century.⁷ It is, as I mentioned above, one of the interventions into the environment of the city: medicalization. In other words, public health is “a technique for controlling and modifying those elements of the environment which might promote that health or, on the contrary, harm it” or “the politico-scientific control of that environment” (Foucault 2000: 150-151).

Therefore, what Foucault suggests in a series of lectures is the mechanism of new power that controls the population through intervention into the environment. This type of power began to arrange the environment that influences the existence of the humans as living beings. The public health is exactly the political technique for the environment and the population is the target of intervention through it, Foucault’s original notion of the milieu.

MERITS OF THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE GOVERNMENT

In view of Foucault’s theories, let us then consider the advantages to analyzing a city from the perspective of the government, in comparison with the existing researches. First, this perspective allows us to analyze the material aspects of the city, which is particularly important when discussing urban sociology or urban studies in Japan. Sufficient discussion has been rare to concerning the natural environment and the material infrastructure that sustain city life, except for some sociologists.⁸ The city tends to be understood as

containing an urban lifestyle, community, or classes or ethnicities within it, and the social consciousness of the urban resident. The urban sociology in Japan, which was developed under the strong influence of the Chicago School, has described the city as a place of conflict between social heterogeneity such as race, generation, and class. However, although the physical environment of urban space sustains these elements, it has only been observed as background in them.⁹ In addition to that, starting in the 1970s, analysis of the city was regarded not as substance but as text, and to decode its symbolic operation. The work by Ai Maeda is well known for this semiotic approach (Maeda 1982). This approach reduces the material thing to the medium of the meaning. In criticizing Maeda's work, Shunya Yoshimi does not just analyze the city as the text, but focuses on the practices that produce the meaning, particularly the bodily aspect (Yoshimi 1987). However, his work does not contain enough analysis of the material aspect that is included in this paper.¹⁰

It is remarkable that New Urban Sociology brought new perspectives into urban sociology around 1980. The attempts to analyze the relationship between the urban space and society appeared under the influence of Henri Lefebvre and Manuel Castells.¹¹ They focused attention on urban infrastructures such as the built environment or the communication and transportation technology by regarding urban space as the medium of the reproduction of capitalistic social relation. It is undeniable that they oversimplified the role of urban infrastructures. They understood the urban infrastructures as the means for distributing humans and resources spatially, that is to say, defining them as the technologies in subordinate to the system of capitalism. On the contrary, as we shall demonstrate later, the perspective of governmentality considers the practices of government organizing the role of material, although it also looks at the role of the material aspect in the city, particularly to the

power operation.

Moreover, the governmentality studies do not only target the physical environment of the city. It is significant that this approach also allows us to broaden our horizons when considering human life in relation to urban infrastructure and the natural environment. As we have seen with the notion of milieu, in this perspective, the city is understood not only as the stage for the community and the congealed result of capitalistic logic, but as closely connecting human life. Therefore, management of the urban environment is perceived as one of the arts for regulating the population.

In this way, governmentality studies allow us to understand the environment of the city, which has previously been viewed as "neutral" and "anonymous," to borrow Osborne's phrase, as useful when considering the living conditions of humans. Of course, this does not mean that the perspective of governmentality resolves the issues that urban sociology and urban studies have been exploring. However, it has significance because this perspective enables us to analyze the aspect that previous works have not seen. This allows us to think about what the city is and can shed new light on the question.

Second, this perspective also enables us to understand the role of materiality in the city. It is an important point to remember that recent governmentality studies are strongly affected by Bruno Latour. For instance, Rose stated that Latour and Ian Hacking greatly influence his discussion (Rose [1989] 1999: xxv). Mitchell Dean also discusses the relationship between Foucault and Latour (Dean 1996). It is well known that the characteristics of Latour's discussions are that non-human is treated equally to human and forms the network as the symmetrical presence with human (Latour 1987). "Non-human" contains not only technologies, experimental instruments, and artifacts but also creatures or nature; he does not attribute the

agency to only human. He considers the non-human as the significant actor that causes actions. Because scientific knowledge is created by the network between human and non-human, the relationship of alliance or opposition between them must be described. The analytics that non-human elements such as nature and material items are the object of analysis is becoming widely accepted—advantage that the traditional sociological frame presupposing the distinction between nature and society does not have.

Similarly, governmentality studies address the non-human in the operation of knowledge/power. Of course, governmentality studies that have adopted Latour's idea are too involved of a subject to be addressed here in detail. However, there is little doubt that the role of materiality in governing is emphasized in recent governmentality studies. The materiality of the city is open to a discussion as the significant actor. This adoption of Latour's idea makes it more persuasive to use the perspective of governmentality study as the framework for approaching the city.

We must be careful in defining a particular operation of the city itself, although this perspective stresses the material aspect of the city, in other words, the non-human. It is impossible to decide in advance what the agency is because the practices of government organize it. What Foucault analyzed by the notion of milieu is the condition under which the urban infrastructure becomes an influential actor. It is impossible to define what nature is, what artifact is, and what life is without searching this condition. Therefore, it is indispensable to investigate the historical specific condition that decides the distinction and the relationship between human (society) and materiality (technology).

CONCLUSION

I have considered the advantages of the analytics

of governmentality while referring to recent studies. Some of the post-Foucauldian works tend to emphasize the role of materiality in governing a city. Although these recent research achievements are based on the governmentality study by Foucault, discussion concerning them has not been sufficient in Japan. I have demonstrated that both the urban infrastructure and natural environment are understood as the means for intervention into the human life through consideration of Foucault's works, most notably his notion of milieu.

In conclusion, the advantage of the perspective of governmentality is to regard the material element of the city more positively and to discover the power operation within it. This perspective leads us to criticize the power in an alternative manner. In this sense, one can safely state that it sheds a new light on the city or the infrastructural element that is the city's condition of existence.

Notes

1 Portions of this work have previously been presented in my doctoral paper.

2 See Patrick Joyce to discover examples of governmentality studies in each countries (Joyce 2003). In particular, see Collin Gordon regarding the particularity of the reception of Foucault's work in Britain (Gordon 1996). Moreover, Goro Yamazaki summarizes briefly the recent research trend on the bio-power and governmentality in Japan (Yamazaki 2011).

3 The original text is: "(il s'agit) d'une matérialité complexe et multiple qui comporte, outre les « corps » des individus, l'ensemble des éléments matériels qui assurent leur vie, constituent le cadre et le résultat de leur activité, permettent les déplacements et les échanges" (Foucault 2001: 730).

4 The original text is: "(La police) ..., a en charge l'élément « physique » du corps social: la matérialité, en quelque sorte, de cette société civile" (Foucault 2001: 730).

5 "Before" here refers to the last chapter of "Right of Death and Power over Life" of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* and the last lecture (March 17, 1976) of *Society Must Be Defended*.

6 The original text is: "Le milieu, qu'est-ce que c'est? C'est ce qui est nécessaire pour rendre compte de l'action

à distance d'un corps sur un autre. C'est donc bien le support et l'élément de circulation d'une action. C'est donc le problème de circulation et de causalité qui est en question dans cette notion de milieu" (Foucault 2004: 22).

7 The purposes of urban medicine developed in France from the second half of the 18th century are: (1) an analysis of the zones of congestion, disorder, and danger within the urban precincts, (2) an establishment and control of a good circulation of water and air, (3) an organization of distribution and sequences about the different elements (fountains and sewers) necessary to the shared life of the city (Foucault 2000: 146–149), because "the location of different districts, their dampness and exposure, the ventilation of the entire city, its water and sewer systems, the location of cemeteries and slaughterhouses, the population density—all these constituted factors that play a decisive role in determining the mortality and morbidity of residents" (Foucault 2014: 120).

8 It appears this tendency is not only in Japan. See, for example, the discussion by Chris Otter (Otter 2010).

9 We can find the ethnographic works on the urban infrastructures in recent western researches. For instance, above-referenced book *Material Powers* is from the intersection of this urban anthropology and the governmentality study. It is possible to extend this perspective and is expected to accumulate this kind of works in Japan going forward.

10 Although Akihiro Kitada takes over Yoshimi's awareness of this issue, it appears that his interest moves from the city to information technology (Kitada 2002).

11 For example, see papers in *The Imagination of Urban Space* (Yoshihara ed. 1996).

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