

**Book Review**

***The Covid-19 Pandemic and Risks in East Asia:  
Media, Social Reactions, and Theories***

YAMAMOTO Nobuto (Ed.)

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Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020, the pandemic has changed the media behavior and communicative action of nearly everyone around the world. During the global pandemic, people have had to change the ways they use “old” and “new” media, get information, interact with or avoid others, and communicate with them. In response, scholars from various subfields of media and communication have had to rethink traditional research agenda in the context of the pandemic in which everything that can be mediated is mediated. During the pandemic, many media and communication researchers rushed to collect time-sensitive data. A number of research papers have already been presented at conferences and published in academic journals to address various media and communication issues related to the pandemic. Several books (mostly edited volumes) have already been published by international publishers (e.g., Jetten, 2020; Kopecka-Piech & Łódzki, 2022; Lewis, Govender & Holland, 2021; O’Hair & O’Hair, 2021; Pollock & Vakoch, 2021; Price & Harbisher, 2021; Rossette-Crake & Buckwalter, 2022) and by domestic ones in many countries. As of this writing, the strength of the coronavirus and its variants is waning, and many countries have already been returned to normal or are preparing for it. This is a good time to look back, reflect, and try to understand what we all went through during the pandemic. *The COVID-19 pandemic and risk in East Asia* edited by YAMAMOTO Nobuto with 10 contributing chapters should be an excellent resource for media and communication researchers and practitioners to use to understand and theorize about pandemic risk experienced by East Asian societies from media and communication perspectives.

This volume contains 11 chapters including the editor’s introduction. One of the strengths of this volume is the variety of issues it covers and the research methods used to address the issues. Each chapter covers a different sub-field of

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media and communication, including media sociology, journalism, media psychology, public relations, critical studies, and rhetoric. The chapters deal with a wide range of theoretical and practical issues such as information literacy (Chapter 3), infodemic (Chapter 3), misinformation (Chapter 3), fact checking (Chapter 3), online incivility (Chapter 4), risk perception (Chapter 4, 6, 7), personal risk perception (Chapter 6), social risk perception (Chapter 6), self-efficacy (Chapter 6), collective efficacy (Chapter 4), trust (Chapter 4), meaning of the public (Chapter 5), (digital) health literacy (Chapter 6), information behavior (Chapter 6), information seeking (Chapter 6), information avoidance (Chapter 6), information overload (Chapter 6), information fatigue (Chapter 6), harmony seeking (Chapter 6), avoidance of rejection (Chapter 6), media cynicism (Chapter 7), hostile media perception (Chapter 7), civic value (Chapter 7), politics of emotion (Chapter 8), post-truth (Chapter 8), hybrid media system (Chapter 8), (coro)nationalism (Chapter 9), risk society (Chapter 2, 9), social stigma (Chapter 10), LGBT (Chapter 10), digital divide (Chapter 11), and digital inequalities (Chapter 11). Except for Chapter 1 (introduction) and Chapter 2, most of the chapters are making claims through empirical evidence. Most of the chapters can be considered as case studies: Not many of them were based on specific theories. However, in one chapter (Chapter 4), hypotheses are established by combining communication mediation model, social cognitive theory, social amplification of risk, and elaboration of likelihood model (ELM). Chapter 7 is based, at least in part, on hostile media perception theory.

Most of the chapters in this volume are based on empirical research using a variety of research methods. The research methods used by the studies included in the volume are surveys (Chapter 4, 6, 7), in-depth interviews (Chapter 3, 10, 11), systematic literature review (Chapter 2), text analysis (Chapter 3, 8), discourse analysis (Chapter 9, 10), narrative analysis (Chapter 5) and mixed methods (Chapter 3, 10) combining text analysis and in-depth interviews. Some of the chapters in this volume are based on single country studies (Chapters 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11) focusing on Taiwan, Japan, or the Philippines, respectively. However, there are chapters that present studies comparing at least two countries (Japan and Korea in Chapter 6 and 7, and Japan and Vietnam in Chapter 5). Even the single-country studies discuss the particular country's pandemic experience in a larger context (e.g., the East Asian context or the global context).

The overarching message of the chapters in this volume as a whole is that East Asian approaches to the pandemic do not exist as a single category. Media and communication scholars outside East Asia seemed to have conceptualized *an* East Asian approach as a single category and have compared it with the Western approach (which, too, is questionable to be conceptualized as a single category). They tend to emphasize the commonalities among East Asian countries without paying due attention to differences. For example, many scholars outside East Asia seem to have had hard time differentiating Chinese approaches to the pandemic from

those taken by other East Asian countries. Comparing Western and East Asian approaches, they described the East Asian approach as a Confucian, authoritarian, collectivist, and anti-individualist approach common to all East Asian countries. It might be true that East Asian societies have taken different approaches than Western societies. The global pandemic provides an excellent opportunity to compare how the same risks are understood and managed differently in different societies. However, grouping the different responses of East Asian societies to the pandemic into one category is too simplistic a generalization. The chapters in this volume challenged such blind generalizations.

One of the most important contributions of this volume is to show subtle and nuanced international differences between East Asian countries. Therefore, the chapters in this volume emphasize at least two points: (1) East Asian societies have reacted differently to the pandemic than non-East Asian societies (e.g., Western societies) and (2) there have been significant differences among the East Asian countries. Each of East Asian societies has its own historical, political, economic, and sociocultural characteristics. It is impossible to discuss the East Asian experiences without considering the subtle differences between East Asian countries. Some of the chapters in the volume provide interesting examples of such nuanced differences between East Asian countries. For example, two chapters included in this volume compared Japan and Korea regarding psychological responses to COVID-19 risks (Chapter 6) and media cynicism and hostile media perception (Chapter 7). Many non-East Asian scholars have assumed that Japan and Korea are collectivist societies that are very similar in many respects. However, the two countries have developed very different political systems, media environments, and economic bases. Based on such differences, Japan and Korea have taken very different approaches to the pandemic at the systematic and individual levels. One chapter compares Japan and Vietnam regarding how people have constructed and reconstructed the meaning of *the public* (Chapter 5). The chapter contains interesting examples of how the concept of the public has been appropriated in very different ways in Japan and Vietnam during the pandemic. The differences in understanding of what the public means between the two societies could lead to significant differences in how public health agencies develop public health strategies and how individuals in each society accept them. If we just put all East Asian countries into one category, we would not be able to capture these differences.

Taken together, the chapters in this volume demonstrate both (1) the importance of considering unique East Asian approaches to the pandemic and (2) the need to consider each country's unique circumstances, rather than lumping East Asian countries together. Paradoxically, such a strength of this volume shows what more should have been filled in the volume: more comparative studies. Let me point out two things I wish the chapters of this book had gone further. First, I wished that more of the chapters included in this volume presented the results of comparative

studies. There are only three chapters that actually compared East Asian countries. It would be really interesting if there were more comparisons among East Asian societies (e.g., comparing Taiwan and Japan, China and Taiwan, Korea and Taiwan). The comparative research does not have to stop at comparing two countries. Comparing more than two countries would make comparative studies more dynamic. Second, I would like to see comparisons not only between East Asian countries, but also between East Asian countries and non-East Asian countries. No chapter in this volume presented such comparisons. We can go even further. Studies might be designed to compare multiple East Asian countries with multiple non-East Asian countries. These comparative works would require new theories and new methods that overcome western biases and take contextual differences among different societies more systematically. *The Covid-19 pandemic and risks in East Asia* provides an importance first step in that direction.

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