

The book project on COVID-19 in East Asia was initiated by the SNUAC Civil Society Program in March 2020, led by Hyun-Chin Lim, the founding director of SNUAC. The project aimed to explore and compare the responses of East Asian countries, including South Korea, China, Japan, Taiwan, and Vietnam, to the COVID-19 pandemic. The organizing committee, including professors Haeran Lim, Taekyoon Kim, and research professor Suk-Ki Kong, conducted a series of hybrid international conferences in May 2021 and February 2022.

The first conference focused on each country's response to COVID-19, highlighting the effectiveness of South Korean and Taiwanese strategies compared to the US and EU. The second conference addressed the social impacts and transformations in the post-pandemic era, recognizing that East Asia was not immune to global changes.

The book consists of two parts: the first part analyzes the diverse responses to COVID-19 in East Asian countries, while the second part explores the political, economic, social, and cultural impacts of the pandemic. The authors examine key issues such as the retreat of democracy, digital surveillance states, the return of the state, re-globalization, platform economy, precariatization of labor, untact societies, empathic civilization, nationalism, nativism, populism, and US-China rivalry.

The COVID-19 pandemic increased the power of illiberal political leaders and led to the retreat of democracy in some cases. Digital platform economy and gig economy rapidly expanded, transforming labor conditions into precarious and unprotected employment. The pandemic's aftereffects continue to affect social minorities, care and education sectors, self-employed individuals, and platform workers.

Despite the official end of the pandemic, East Asia remains exposed to global risks such as the Ukraine crisis, climate change, and the Fukushima contaminated water issue. The authors emphasize the importance of continued research on COVID-19 and its wide-ranging impacts from quarantine measures to socioeconomic protection. They hope that this research contributes to addressing the ongoing risks and threats in East Asia.