

COVID-19 – Think Tank Update Asia (25. June - 16. July 2020)

SELECTED ARTICLES

[COVID-19 accelerates China's political economic transformation](#)

Source: East Asia Forum (2. July 2020)

Christopher A McNally, Chaminade University

Christopher A McNally illustrates how the 'game-changer' argument is obfuscating the profound shift taking place in China's political economy. China is shifting towards a new economic model based on domestic consumption, indigenous technology development and urbanisation. This change has been underway for a decade now, however, the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated this trend. The author highlights how Beijing's new 'Western Development' blueprint can have a profound impact on the global political economy and could lead China to function less as the 'factory of the world' and more as the "continent-sized consumer market". While this could be a dream market for many, the inward looking model could also lead China back to its imperial days where it kept foreigners at bay.

[After COVID-19: Rebooting Business in China](#)

Source: The Diplomat (7. July 2020)

Jennifer Choo, Jean Oi, Christopher Thomas, and Xue (Xander) Wu

Despite the draconian measures taken to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus, the social and economic impact of the pandemic was dearly felt by China. The authors conducted a survey among 135 senior executives in China to better understand how Chinese businesses are reopening as well as the prospective future for US-China relations. The survey results indicated few major findings. Firstly, it highlighted the vast variation between economic losers and winners coming out of this pandemic in China. Secondly, the government aid and support provided to Chinese companies are not very large and are not given frequently. Thirdly, Chinese companies are bracing out for the consequences of the US-China fall out. Fourthly, for many Chinese companies, the need for digital transformation has become imperative now. As US and China continue to build on their digital innovation, few respondents fear that it might lead to a technological cold war between the two giants.

[Reimagining global value chains after COVID-19](#)

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Political Dialogue Asia / ARC 380, 380 Jalan Besar. #11-01, Singapore 209000

www.kas.de/singapore

Source: East Asia Forum (2. July 2020)

Shujiro Urata, Waseda University

The global value chains were greatly affected by the pandemic in China. Shujiro Urata shares the experience of Japanese automobile industries and how it has recovered. Despite the quick recovery, there is a keen interest to diversify Global value chains (GVC's) among Japanese companies. The author sheds light on the subsidy programme, introduced by the Japanese government to support Japanese companies in their efforts to diversify GVCs. The important role of international economic policies and free flow of data in changing the GVC network is highlighted and some effective strategies to diversify these chains are described.

[Japan's pragmatic approach towards Covid-19 testing](#)

Source: The Diplomat (26. June 2020)

Haruka Sakamoto

Japan has managed to control the COVID-19 pandemic without introducing severe lockdown measures or conducting massive testing and isolation. The priority for Japan has been to prevent the creation of bigger clusters by retroactively tracing the chain of transmission. Haruka Sakamoto shares more about the unique and pragmatic approach Japan has taken in its fight against the pandemic. Despite the criticism the approach has received, Sakamoto points out the low mortality rate in Japan as a sign for the success of the strategy.

[Pandemic Recovery: No Need For US Leadership?](#)

Source: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore (1. July 2020)

Frederick Kliem, Visiting Fellow

With the United States not leading the global fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, the absence of its leadership has been clearly felt during the COVID-10 crisis. Although regional organisations like the EU and ASEAN were slow in their response, they have picked up the reigns with impressive determination. The EU has taken up many steps to minimise the detrimental impact of the pandemic on supply chains, trade and free movement. In the same way ASEAN has also held a virtual summit to exchange best practices as well as initiate dialogue on joint cross-border responses to retain the smooth functioning and openness of essential trade routes to protect food security and the exchange of medical equipment. The COVID-19 ASEAN-EU virtual ministerial meeting has also paved the way for more inter regional meetings beyond these two regions. If regional organisations can step up, US leadership will no longer be required in the future, argues the author.

[Southeast Asia Needs Its Own CDC](#)

Source: ThinkGlobalHealth.org (20. June 2020)

Swee Kheng Khor , Jeremy Lim, Li Yang Hsu and Jemilah Mahmood

The ten nations of South East Asia have coped well in fighting the pandemic. This can be attributed to three main factors. First, Southeast Asian countries moved with decisive speed in their responses, second, the strong partnership between the political and scientific leadership was an important factor, followed by the public acceptance and understanding of the need for public health measures like testing, tracing and tracking as the third factor. Despite the progress made, the general absence of regional collaboration in the region has been a prominent feature in the fight against the pandemic. The authors stress on the need for greater collaboration between the ten states and highlight that the COVID-19 pandemic has given ASEAN an opportunity to collaborate and also create an ASEAN Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as a formal entity sponsored by ASEAN and operating on a scientific, evidence-based and collaborative agenda.

[Southeast Asian democracies in declining health amid Covid-19](#)

Source: Lowy Institute, Australia (3. July 2020)

Melissa Crouch, Senior Lecturer, University of New South Wales

The way the COVID-19 pandemic has affected democracies in South East Asia has garnered much attention. Melissa Crouch highlights four trends which are visible in the response of the South East Asian States to the pandemic. First, Government power has been used at the expense of human rights. Second, there has been an expansion in the powers of the military with increasing security measures. The third trend is the absence of checks and balances on executive power. Fourthly, armed conflict has continued in most countries in the region. The declining health of democracy in South East Asia is of much concern and the author emphasises that the region must work together to reverse this decline.

[Vietnam's COVID-19 Strategy: Mobilizing Public Compliance Via Accurate and Credible Communications](#)

Source: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute (25. June 2020)

Hong Kong Nguyen and Tung Manh Ho, Researchers, Phenikaa University, Hanoi

Vietnam has received international attention for its successful controlling of the Covid-19 pandemic. This article reviews the communication strategies that Vietnam took before the

detection of the first COVID-19 cases from 23 January and until mid-May. The author elucidates how despite having full control of all the communication channels, Vietnam's government was transparent in disseminating information. The early and adequate dissemination of correct information about the pandemic ensured public understanding and support for the government response, thereby facilitating effective government-citizen cooperation. These are valuable lessons for other countries as well as for Vietnam for the post pandemic world.

[Hyper-surveillance under COVID-19](#)

Source: East Asia Forum (4. July 2020)

Tamara Nair and Alan Chong

Tamara Nair and Alan Chong highlight the need for greater awareness among the public on the intrusive climate of hyper-surveillance that is advancing stealthily in the name of tackling a global emergency. Several national laws do not allow this kind of surveillance, but the fear of catching the virus has left the general public in a catch-22 situation. As no explicit 'walk back' plan has been promised once the pandemic is over, the authors raise two important questions. First "Who monitors the monitoring?" and second, "Do the benign aspects of the social contract between governments and individuals apply under emergency conditions?" As global surveillance culture becomes increasingly legitimised by the national authorities as the collective saviour, it has become imperative that the public should be aware that these tools should work towards enhancing our human rights instead of trampling them in the name of a global emergency.

[The cost of conspiracy in muddling public health messages](#)

Source: Lowy Institute, Australia (6. July 2020)

Clare Murphy, National Security Advisor

Australia which is known to be a robust democracy with a trusted national broadcaster is getting increasingly challenged by the spread of misinformation and disinformation, linked to the extremist threat which Australia is facing in recent years. Extremist groups have called the Covid-19 pandemic a scam and are protesting against vaccines, pharmaceutical companies, fluoride and 5G. Despite the implementation of a new task force and activities to counter this threat, it remains a concern as these groups are increasing their influence through social media. The author elucidates how social media companies can prevent disinformation and thereby help to counter disinformation on Covid-19.

[Establishing humanitarian lanes during COVID-19](#)

Source: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore (30. June 2020)

Alistair DB Cook and Christopher Chen, RSIS

Along with all the other adverse impact COVID-19 has also severely hindered the humanitarian action and has stopped aid from reaching various communities across Asia and Pacific. The authors highlight the need for the establishment of 'humanitarian lanes' to facilitate a quick transfer. The distribution of humanitarian relief must be prioritised as the disruption of supply chains and travel routes have resulted in inadequate relief. The authors also note the importance of building local capacity to respond to disaster. As the need for humanitarian support grows, donors, transit and recipient countries must work together to provide aid across the region. As countries begin to ease lockdown restrictions, the need to consider how humanitarian lanes can link global support with strengthening local capacity and community has become imperative.

[SAARC-ASEAN: Post-COVID-19 Relationship](#)

Source: Institute of South Asia Studies (13. July 2020)

Chu Minh Thao, Deputy Director, Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam

The COVID-19 pandemic has given an opportunity to the regional organisations SAARC and ASEAN to reinvigorate the bilateral relationship and to strengthen their cooperation and promote their roles and voices in the world arena. As countries in the region are facing common challenges, Chu Minh Thao notes that these two regional organisations should accelerate cooperation with each other for mutual benefit. The author also presents the short term, medium term and long term outlook. Cooperation between regional organisations can play a pivotal role in the successful containment of the pandemic and global economic recovery. Hence the author urges both ASEAN and SAARC to map out joint efforts and priorities in order to overcome the challenges posed by COVID-19.