How can we communicate interculturally? Response and reflection from global communication scholars[1] on the COVID-19 epidemic

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Abstract: In 2020, due to the global outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic, global communication has been torn apart. Virus, infection, isolation and death not only plunge humans into fear, doubt and debate, but also inspire humans to save themselves and find paths to cooperate and coexist. Seven communication scholars from around the world have been interviewed, exploring the intercultural communication problems in the context of the global epidemic. The interviews indicate that relationships between people and environment, people and technology, people and people, constitute the core matrix of a series of problems highlighted by the global epidemic. People living on the same planet need to reflect on themselves, examine the complexity, instability and dynamics of the current information environment, and consider the fracture of social structure and the general lack of global cooperation. Scholars strongly advocate for the concept of "a community of a shared future for humankind" and call for a world of unity and cooperation to help people cope with the structural crisis, changes in world patterns and various global risks and challenges.
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In 2020, due to the global outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic, global communication has been torn apart. Virus, infection, isolation and death not only plunge humans into fear, doubt and debate, but also inspire humans to save themselves and find paths to cooperate and coexist. From the reflection and debate of philosophers and historians facing the human destiny, we can hear their anxiety about global communication.① What reflections can we hear from communication scholars? Professor

① E.g., Agamben, G. (2020, February 25). Lo statod'eccezioneprovocato da un'emergenzaimmotivata. *Il Manifesto*.

Zizek, S. (2020, February 27). Coronavirus is 'Kill Bill'-esque blow to capitalism and could lead to reinvention of communism. RT.

Harari, N. Y. (2020, March 20). The world after coronavirus. *The Financial Times*.

Bo Shan from Wuhan University suggested that I interview scholars from around the world and he helped initiate contact. Prof. Shan also enthusiastically joined in the dialogue with his old friends. Since the end of March, several scholars have sent their responses via email, including Clifford Christians, professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in the United States; David Marshall, professor at Deakin University in Australia; Donald Matheson, head of Department of Media and Communication at University of Canterbury in New Zealand; Graham Murdock, professor at Loughborough University in the United Kingdom; Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz, director of the Center for Intercultural Dialogue of the Council for Communication Associations in the United States; and Casey Man Kong Lum (Lin Wengang), professor at William Paterson University in the United States. These scholars, who were quarantined at home, conscientiously chose to answer those questions in which they were most interested. They all responded with great enthusiasm, following the intercultural interview outline, in order to reflect on global communication in the context of the global epidemic. There were individual exchanges with each interviewer, rather than a single group conversation.

Question 1

Jing Xin: *Since the outbreak of the epidemic, people have reflected that the outbreak of diseases from wild animals to human beings is the price paid by human economic development. Although human beings have reached a consensus in these areas, it is difficult to unify action and to "not cross the line". What do you think of this phenomenon?*

David Marshall: The expansion of human culture has meant that we have been crossing all sorts of environmental and ecosystem lines. There is further debate about how the human environment has to restrain itself; the problem, however, is that this kind of restraint is almost impossible to arrest something like COVID-19. What it does underline is the need to work out new trans-national governing structures that at minimum reflect our understanding of how our human growth is transforming the planet and producing new and unforeseen risks. We could call this a new ethics in human culture that may emerge from the current crisis and reflect back to our environmental crisis and our collective relation to flora and fauna and each other.

Donald Matheson: The focus on the transmission sources and vectors of diseases like the new coronavirus is important for medical science, as science helps society to understand the risks of different activities. But in cultural terms the teleological urge to find the deeper reason things have happened is less useful, as it tends so often towards the ideological. That is, the beginning of this particular disease in wild animals and in food practices of some people in a culture other than our own (looking from the west into

China) becomes an easy explanation of the rise of a disease in difference. If people all lived like 'us', the thinking goes, we wouldn't have this disease. So the discussion of bats or pangolins takes us in completely the wrong direction. Instead we need to, as Ulrich Beck argued, each look within our own practices and the risks that we create through short-sighted activities.[①] I'd favor an ecological approach, that is, looking at the longer-term impact we all have on people and the world through the macro-societal structures we build.

Graham Murdock: The increasing transmission of diseases from wild animals to humans is the direct result of the accelerating destruction of natural habitats. The last three decades have seen the wholesale clearing of forests around the world as a result of intensified logging operations and the conversion of forest cover to grazing land for cattle to meet the increased global demand for meat based diets. As a consequence, the ecological balance that previously obtained, with many wild species relatively isolated from contact with humans and interactions between animals regulated by self-sustaining systems, has been destroyed. To this we can add the global trade in exotic species. The net result has been a very significant increase in the amount of contact between humans and animals that had previously been only rarely encountered, introducing new strains of virus. If nothing changes we can expect virus pandemics to occur on a regular basis. The solution needs to go beyond measures to develop effective vaccines and better medical responses, to confront the present organisation of global food and materials supply. The present pandemic can only be properly understood once we place it firmly in the context of the wider ecological and climate crisis.

Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz: I have colleagues who study the Anthropocene, trying to get people to notice the many unintended ways in which their behavior influences the physical world. Perhaps this pandemic will help make it clear how important their work is for us all. One of the best videos I've seen linking the pandemic to the human impact on the earth is titled *#Ascolta* in the original Italian,[②] and"An Imagined Letter from COVID-19 to Humans" in the English. One possible beneficial side-effect of COVID-19 that I've seen proposed is that countries might use climate-focused jobs as a way to economic recovery. In the best-case scenario, this would also require considerable international cooperation.

Casey Man Kong Lum: From one perspective, embedded in human development is a Faustian bargain[③] of some kind, in that there is always a price to pay for everything we

[①] Beck, U. (1992). *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: SAGE Publications.

[②] Ascolta, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a2gdztJU1zY

[③] A Faustian bargain is one made or done for present gain without regard for future cost or consequences.

gain. Hence, the question is really not only about whether the outbreak of diseases in this context is a price paid for human economic development. An equally important question to ask: Who is paying what price and to what extent are they paying and why? In addition, inherent in these questions is a socio-moral dimension related to social justice and equity. In fact, not everyone in society pays the same price for development or progress of any kind. Some of the most devastated hot spots with the highest death rates in New York City, for example, are working-class neighborhoods in which many people in the economic under-class live in very small apartments while many of them rely on the mass transit system out of necessity. These people stand a much better chance of contracting the coronavirus in part because it is so much more difficult for them to exercise proper social distancing. Workers who cannot perform their duty online sustain a great deal more financial trauma than those who can work from home. Not all people across the entire socio-economic class spectrum suffer from the same death rate or shoulder the same extent or proportion of financial loss. Hence, while the coronavirus does not discriminate as the source of a disease, we must remind ourselves time and again that social inequity does.

Bo Shan: SARS coronavirus, avian influenza, swine influenza, Ebola virus and so on have attacked human beings one after another since the 21st century. Viruses have repeatedly indicated the interaction between human and animals: contagions can be exchanged between domestic and wild animals, either between the same species or across species boundaries, which are determined by contact opportunities and the susceptibility of a potential host.[①] But every time after feeling the heartbreaking pain, why do the living people still lose their awe of this kind of interaction? In addition to scholars' views above, there are two important reasons that continue: One is the rational conceit. Men who invent vaccines, new drugs or cure are also "invented" as rational people who can defeat viruses. Men, who appreciate their own rational ability and once again strengthen the belief of anthropocentrism, will get rid of the entanglement of the virus temporarily and will naturally change: "once on shore, I pray no more". The other is the scattered responsibility. Reaching a consensus on the protection of animals and ecology does not necessarily lead to "joint action", because people always expect others to take more responsibilities. When such ideas or actions occur, the trust relationship between people is very fragile. People easily enter into the "rational state of non-cooperation" in doubt.

Question 2

Jing Xin: *The COVID-19 epidemic has spread all over the world, resulting in universal isolation and threatening intergroup communications. What impact will it have on globalization?*

① William, H. M. (1998). *Plagues and Peoples*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group.

Clifford Christians: Social science research shows that one-half of the world's population does not have online technologies, and therefore have a reduced resource of medical and business information during crises like this one. For those populations, oral-aural intergroup communications on which their societies are based has been curtailed by the isolation and quarantine necessary to control the virus. History teaches us that only in scattered ways and in limited form do social and cultural transformations occur after the crisis. The digital divide that exists today will be improved in minor form in the years ahead, not because of the coronavirus epidemic across the globe, but from commercial and political dynamics that were in place before the crisis.

For advanced industrial societies who have made the crisis a twenty-four hour a day event through computer-based technologies, surveillance for tracking and prevention has skyrocketed in scope and intensity. Governments that have highly developed information networks have used them to gather data, develop trend models, administer supply distribution, and plan strategies. Digital technologies are vital during the crisis for personal interaction and for making entertainment and news resources available locally. But that positive phenomenon has been overshadowed by the exponential growth in invasion of privacy and citizens' freedom.

The technological systems that are being used in the pandemic will undoubtedly continue unchanged in the future. A globe divided into technology-abundant cultures and those with only primitive resources will not be restructured to meet the next world crisis more equitably. The use of information networks for the benefit of the powerful for social control will continue unchanged. However, if serious comparative research were done after the virus, comparing the different information systems in the countries of the world, these studies could provide the basis for global thinking of benefit to the World Health Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the United Nations in developing equitable strategies when the world as a whole is caught up in its next global crisis.

David Marshall: Conceptually, globalization is understood in many ways. It is generally perceived as an extension into wider cultural activities of markets and economic exchanges. It has a certain fragility because it may or may not have deeper cultural linkages. At the core of our current globalization is a sensibility that I would call a culture of convenience: convenient technology,[①] clothing, household goods, food, travel and cars.

COVID-19 might identify how simple it is for this kind of globalization to break down. A new naturalization may develop where one is always checking cultural difference to see if there is risk and potential danger.

Trust - which may have been too business-centric - may break down as nations begin

[①] Zuboff, S. (2019). *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (pp. 383). New York: Public Affairs-Hachette Book Group.

to work on what can make them truly independent and autonomous culturally and economically. It is a new definition of what is safe in our world that may break down a broadly capitalist system that has differentiations in its form, but fundamentally depends on linked markets and the capacity to trade relatively freely across markets and cultures.

Donald Matheson: Coronavirus will not undo globalization, but it will change the value we place on different aspects of the global. The large-scale movement of people across the world, both short-term via tourism, and longer-term, via migration, is being questioned. The reliance on long supply chains, particularly in critical areas such as health and major industries, is also being questioned. Some of those concerns will probably be forgotten as the world returns to some business as usual, but I think there will be a shift. In particular, I think the assumption that more movement of people and goods is always a benefit will not be returned to, and so global activity will be a little more rules-based and restricted. A key problem there is the criteria we use to evaluate activities. I think racialized, colonial and western-centric structures will become stronger in the west, and there may well be similar responses in other cultures, such as a strengthening of Hindu nationalism or Han or Korean cultural insularity. But in communication terms, I think coronavirus is reminding us of a level of global interdependence that extends beyond that economic base and that pushes against that racialization. I have consumed a large amount of news about Spain, Italy, China, Iran and Sweden in the first few months of 2020, both because my own situation cannot be understood in isolation but also because the disease has been a leveller, affecting the rich countries more than the poor (at least in its first few months), and crossing cultural and political boundaries. News about the virus in other countries has hugely increased in nearly all countries.

Graham Murdock: Globalization is not a single process. It operates along a number of dimensions which have different implications for inter-group relations and transnational co-operation. On the one hand we see a marked resurgence of responses to the pandemic crisis based on national rivalries. This is most marked in President Donald Trump's reactions which have included attempts to secure exclusive access to vaccines under development, diverting medical supplies originally intended for Europe, and blaming China for the outbreak of the virus. Given that his presidential campaign was based around the slogan 'America First' this is not surprising. But given the strategic position that the US still occupies on the global stage it has the effect of making it much more difficult to secure an international response to the pandemic. Trump's threat to withdraw support from the World Health Organization and his consistent dismissal of the expert advice it has provided is a major obstacle to forging a global response to the present emergency and to future pandemics.

We also see a marked anti global impetus in the priority given to national responses to the economic fall-out from the pandemic. Unlike the financial crisis of 2008 there is

little or no international co-ordination of policy interventions. Countries are preoccupied with addressing rising levels of unemployment, poverty, business failure, within their own borders. It is already clear that the most severe health and economic impacts will be felt in the low income countries of the global south, but there is no concerted international plan, or will, to address the huge human costs this will entail.

Against these negative movements towards greater national isolation however, we can place the transnational cooperation within the scientific community. The willingness to share data and ideas in pursuit of solutions to the emergency is creating a genuinely new global republic of research and intellectual energy. This is precisely what is most needed now, not only in response to the immediate emergency but as a longer term strategy for tackling the environmental and economic policies which have allowed the virus to achieve global reach.

Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz: I think there are several very different outcomes. In terms of physical travel, I personally canceled several trips originally scheduled across the rest of the year and suspect I will travel far less in the future. I would be surprised if overall physical travel between countries does not substantially decrease. At the same time, I am hearing far more often, from far more colleagues around the world, via email, WhatsApp, FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, and other forms of digital contact while we all are housebound. Some of them are checking in to see that I'm still healthy, but others are designing new projects to keep us all busy, academia being one of the few professions where working at home is often pretty easy (and especially easy for those like me who are retired, and so not grappling with the difficulties of learning how to teach online mid-semester). So, at the same time that we are likely to less often physically travel to distant places, I suspect more of us will more actively stay in touch with friends, family, and colleagues, regardless of where they live. In that way, globalization might be maintained.

In addition, I suspect that the impact of global health and supply chains is now clearer to everyone, and that perhaps in the future, there might be more cooperation between countries, at least those in the same geographic region, to cooperate, so that everyone can stay healthy. Just as the coronavirus does not respect geographic boundaries, we can learn that our response requires global consultation and cooperation.

Casey Man Kong Lum: Globalization as it has been known before COVID-19 should expect a degree of continued transformation. In fact, there has already been a rising tide before COVID-19 of anti-globalization and anti-immigration rhetoric, as well as national policy-making, with the recent Brexit as a manifestation of some aspects of such sentiments. During the pandemic, we witness the rise of inter-group prejudice and biased acts based on race, nationality, regional background, and so on. However, none of these new currents should prevent pre-existing inter-group communication from continuing. From one perspective, it is reasonable to suggest that people who have already been receptive or committed to cross-cultural interaction with people and cultures

other than their own would continue to do so. Nonetheless, this is also a critical moment in our pursuit for world peace to double up our efforts in helping to address issues arising from the aftermath of the pandemic and enhance inter-group communication, intercultural understanding, and cross-border cooperation.

Bo Shan: The most destructive effect of COVID-19 on intergroup communication is that when the possibility of asymptomatic infection is confirmed by medicine, people tend to regard the strange others as "potential infectors". It is also easy to suspect acquaintances who have not been tested for the virus, resulting in psychological obstacles in ingroup communication. Giorgio Agamben strongly attacked the exaggeration of "contagion". People also know the importance of positive communicating psychology, but medical science does not help people to relieve their concerns. Usually, under the pressure of "political correctness", people try their best to suppress the display of prejudice. In fact, if there is no reflection based on communicative rationality, prejudice can easily be transformed into implicit prejudice. When faced with the potential pressure of virus infection, implicit prejudice will turn to explicit prejudices, such as discrimination and insults. With the viral spread of discrimination and insults, positive communicating psychology will be exhausted, and the intergroup communication relationship will fall into danger.

Question 3

Jing Xin: *There is a rather confusing view: the development trajectory of the virus is not only related to the nature of the novel coronavirus, but also related to the culture. What do you think of this view?*

David Marshall: I am not sure I understand this question. The development trajectory of COVID-19 is certainly related to how it invades the human body and its greater capacity to infect and to be exchanged from one carrier to another.

I think there are clear differences in cultures and how they gather that has a certain affiliation with the spread of the virus. For instance, those cultures where there is closer proximity of living arrangements appear to be more susceptible to its spread. Thus, in Italy families live in the same home across three generations partly because of the cost of housing: this has been a reason for its proliferation apparently and the high death rate in Italy with the oldest generation in regular contact with the younger generation that is not dangerously affected by comparison.

I have thought that our patterns of social comportment have probably been influenced by a culture's relationship to Others during similar periods of pandemics. Thus, perhaps the English and their island culture have a pattern of distance from others even those relatively close to them. In contrast, the Israeli culture are driven by generally standing very close to others. Some cultures do not touch hands; while others embrace

guests on their arrival and departure. We may see new patterns of proxemic cultural identity and comportment emerge from this pandemic as different cultures deal with the virus, but also deal with how risk of unknown others is dealt with in the longer term. The United States, for instance, is demonstrating their particular relationship to governance and probably law that is fundamentally different than other cultures: sadly, that libertarian-based sentiment is producing the greatest pandemic on the planet.

Donald Matheson: The trajectory of the virus is linked much more to public health phenomena such as good public health information, containment and management policies, the extent to which a country is globalised and to the existence of large public gatherings. So the fact that people travelled across China in January is much more important than the cultural festival that led to that movement, just as it doesn't matter so much that Rhineland Germany celebrated Fasching in February and the Irish celebrated St Patrick's Day in March. It does matter that there were large parties just as the disease was spreading there. There are differences in cultures. Sweden has a large proportion of single-occupier dwellings and India a large rural population, which have implications for disease spread, but it is really false logic to explain the spread of the virus in these cultural terms. I think a more important dividing line is political culture, particularly the extent to which a country has a stable social contract between different parts of society and trust in government. My own home, Aotearoa New Zealand, along with China and Germany and other countries where outbreaks have been better managed, have less of an ideology of small government and distrust of political governing classes. These contracts are vulnerable and always changing, so they should not be overstated – it is often said that the authoritarian Singapore will maintain its legitimacy only as long as people feel well-off and safe – but they do have roots in political culture.

Casey Man Kong Lum: There are many perspectives from which to address this important question. To begin with, the current coronavirus crisis is indeed more than just about the biological nature of a disease from a scientific perspective. Instead, it is also one that is profoundly enmeshed in human culture, that is, people's differing ways of life, belief systems, everyday life norms and practices, and so on. After all, the world has already had centuries' worth of experience with epidemics or pandemics of various kinds. As such, one may argue that people or countries around the world should have been able to do a much better job than what we have been witnessing thus far in anticipating and dealing with the outbreak of the coronavirus based on our existing medical-scientific knowledge. Hence, it is one thing to talk about the scientific discovery or realization of the virus, it is another as to how such a discovery or realization is being understood and then communicated or acted upon in differing socio-political cultures. One can find other examples in this regard in how people in different societies or countries relate to the wearing of masks during the outbreak in terms of everyday personal wellness management, public health policy making, etc., as well as the diverging beliefs and

attitudes toward these practices. In short, while we do need to understand the virus as a matter of medical science, we must also critically reflect upon COVID-19's ramifications from the perspective of social construction and cultural understanding.

Bo Shan: It is a doubtful view that the development of COVID-19 is related to culture. It can easily lead to a static perspective of culture rather than a developmental perspective. In my opinion, culture not only a means to interact according to a certain cultural concept, but also means to create a certain way of interaction in communication and competition. For example, people tend to look at the use of masks from the perspective of binary opposition between individualism and collectivism, but there is no such absolute division. When people in any culture realize that masks can avoid the risk of droplet infection, they would understand the significance of masks in maintaining basic communication, and thus adjust the way of using masks. For example, young people in East Asia who wear masks are not naturally affiliated with collectivist culture, but use masks as a tool of self representation or isolation from others, which is due to the interaction of daily life. To summarize the appetite of consuming animals and dining together as major features of Chinese food culture is an overgeneralization. It does not notice the diversification, scientific and personal changes. It is precisely because culture would create ways of interaction that there will be cultural hybridity and cultural intersection. It is difficult for us to create an opportunity for communication if we ignore it.

Question 4

Jing Xin: *Has the COVID-19 virus become a "magnifying glass" for cultural differences? When people see the other and present the other, they seem to pay more attention to the differences, such as whether to wear masks, whether to impose lockdown in cities for epidemic prevention, whether they are democratic, whether they respect human rights, and so on. What are the implications of this epidemic for communication between different cultural groups?*

Clifford Christians: Yes, COVID-19 is a "magnifying glass" for cultural differences. This is a keen analysis put in question form. The examples given are a disturbing reality. Many countries are reporting prejudice against cities where the virus is concentrated, against ethnic groups who are thought to be the first carriers, against businessmen who dismiss their employees rather than help them survive the epidemic. Social distancing rules are sparking conflicts and they promote online shaming. The ongoing prejudices based on class and education and age and income have increased by the psychological stress of the epidemic. In the United States, COVID-19 has magnified its disturbing racial imbalances. African American communities are being infected at twice or triple the rate of affluent neighborhoods. The Native American population is suffering three times over the average rate of infections. The coronavirus has shown

higher rates of diabetes and high blood pressure among minorities which add to the likelihood of death from exposure, and less access to good health care. The magnifying glass showing these inequities indicates clearly that public health agencies in the United States must expand their resources and effectiveness so that quality health resources are available equally regardless of socioeconomic status.

David Marshall: I would agree: COVID-19 accentuates difference as each of us negotiates our relationship to the unknown. The reality of our contemporary non-village life is that we do not know others and have to read the kinds of dress, masks, walking style, and apparent connection to decide whether they are friends or not part of the culture. Although not generally understood, Australian culture is highly law-abiding, possibly one of the highest levels of compliance among citizens I have seen. This deference, however, sometimes produces an inordinate fear of outsiders. The lockdown within the Australian context has not been overwhelming; but because it is an island， it has the technique for decades of checking all that arrive. For years, this was to protect the flora and fauna of a fragile separated continent. Under COVID-19, its construction of boundaries could become a new level of cultural differentiation. These changes will only get to this profound level if the COVID-19 pandemic or a further mutation/coronavirus pandemic goes for years.

Donald Matheson: The magnifying glass metaphor is very useful. Small differences, such as the color of skin or habits around face masks, can become magnified in the context of poor information, fear and uncertainty. These are often racialising explanations, in the sense of someone's difference from 'us' in appearance or culture or history being used to explain other, more difficult to understand phenomena. Neither of them makes much rational sense. Whether these instinctive racialising responses become longer-term trends depends on levels of fear, the quality of information flows from experts and authorities and on leadership. My own government gave four principal pieces of health advice during the spread of the disease, one of which was 'be kind'. When the British Prime Minister came out of hospital, he praised a Portuguese nurse for helping save his life. My hope is that the nonsense is challenged by such statements.

Graham Murdock: Faced with an unprecedented threat to their normal way life people are predictably looking for someone or something to blame for their misfortunes. Anti-Chinese prejudice has a long history in western culture anchored in the imperial past, particularly in Britain and the United States, so it is not surprising to see elements of this resurfacing in the present emergency. In common with all systems of prejudice it offers a ready-made stock of assumptions and images that can be easily drawn on and immediately understood at a popular level. Its currency has been further boosted, particularly in the Unites States, by the deep seated sense that the US is losing its position as the world's premier global power replaced by an ascendant China and that as a result America is now engaged in a new 'cold war'. We see this in its most extreme form in the

conspiracy theories that circulate on social media claiming that the virus was manufactured in a secret Chinese laboratory. By repeatedly describing the virus as the 'Chinese Virus' President Trump gives these imaginings a veneer of respectability.

More generally, research on emergencies consistently reveals a marked tendency to blame external forces. This has the convenient consequence of diverting attention away from the internal failings that have contributed to the situation. In Britain for example, a decade of austerity and cuts to public expenditure have left the health system seriously under resourced and badly prepared to respond to a pandemic, even though authoritative research conducted several years ago indicated that a major viral outbreak was unavoidable.

Locating blame outside the system also has the effect of reinforcing a simple binary division between 'us' the nation and 'them' the outsiders, obscuring the deep internal divisions within the society. The evidence we have to date is not complete enough to come to a firm conclusion, but it strongly suggests that, like other chronic medical conditions, the virus is likely to impact most severely on the poor and people living in overcrowded conditions with poor levels of nutrition and other underlying health problems.

The virus shines a harsh and unavoidable light on the organization of social divisions and inequalities that are usually pushed to the background because, in the changed situation, they have become quite literally a matter of life or death.

Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz: It has been important to realize that different cultural assumptions, about the value of wearing masks for example, have had a substantial impact on the progress of COVID-19. A Chinese friend implored me to wear a mask, and buy a substantial number, at a time when the USA was officially saying that there was no need to do so. It is pretty clear now that different cultures have responded in a wide variety of ways. Countries like Vietnam and South Korea have been far more successful in minimizing the spread of COVID-19 than the USA, and there will be much work in future to learn exactly what worked best, and how that information can influence the fight against future pandemics, for there surely will be another.

Casey Man Kong Lum: Yes, while all sorts of cultural difference have long been in existence before this time, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a whole new set of current issues, case studies, and data to think with. If we manage to learn from the current lesson, then the world can stand a better chance in knowing how better we can overcome intercultural differences for better overall cross-border understanding and cooperation.

Bo Shan: We should live in a multicultural environment and avoid disappearing in the process of homogenization, which is the basis of our reflection on "differentiation". Paradoxically, we do not want to lose ourselves in the process of homogenization, but we are used to classifying others into a highly homogenized cultural group in a differentiated

way. Overcoming cultural differences often evolves into erasing cultural differences and directly entering into interest-based cooperation. In the case of failing to understand cultural differences and construct cultural relations, cooperation can only be a strategy of self-interest, and it is impossible to move towards "co-existence with others".

Question 5

Jing Xin: *Some scholars believe that the greatest threat of the COVID-19 is the barbarism under the mask of human nature. What is your attitude towards this point of view?*

Clifford Christians: "Barbarism under the mask of human nature" is a version of the problem of evil. Intellectual history points to a long tradition in moral philosophy of distinguishing good and evil, typically arguing that human nature is corrupt rather than beneficent. The concept of evil does illuminate the human condition across national and cultural boundaries, with evidence of blatant evil across the globe and over the history of the human species. But the problem of evil has only had limited intellectual pay-off. Its generalities do not point to productive political action or meaningful cultural changes, and likewise for analyzing the COVID-19 epidemic.

Related concepts such as "unjust" and "immoral" can be acted on politically and economically and culturally. "Unjust" and "immoral" are negative terms but have more positive rhetorical resonance than does "evil". "Unjust" policies and practices by governments and business and citizens in response to the epidemic can be researched and communicated to the public. "Immoral" acts such as theft, assault, violence and abuse in homes, can receive warnings and discipline. Analyzing and discussing the epidemic in terms of barbarism, that is, human evil or the total depravity of human nature, are categorical generalities that condemn and oppose without advancing cultural healing and transformation.

Donald Matheson: I don't find the word 'barbarism' useful. It originates in Greece, where it described people who didn't follow Greek cultural practices, and since then has come to mean people who are less civilized because they don't follow 'our' civilization. Cultural hierarchical thinking often justifies ruling classes and colonialism. The term is, though, too broad for me to describe 'othering' responses to the coronavirus that I have come across. There are many overlapping cultural categories that are being drawn on to form prejudicial statements and some of the most powerful are fairly new. One major one is the reaction against scientific authority, which has motivated many of the strange remedies circulating in non-official channels such as social media, linking to concerns about vaccination, expert elites and the power of the state in general. There is also a trend in the US that links – without any of this making much sense – China's success in combating the virus, its geopolitical and economic strength, the US's struggles to contain

the virus, and the economic links between the US and China into various conspiracy theories about China. While none of these politically-inflected explanations lasts long as new ones come along, they combine to create division based on prejudice.

Graham Murdock: One dimensional thinking is never much help in addressing complex problems. It is more productive to think of the COVID-19 pandemic as highlighting the structural fault lines that run permanently though societies. On the one side we see actions governed solely by possessive individualism and the desire to secure maximum personal advantage. In the West the pandemic has seen massive hikes in the price of essential medical supplies, brawls in supermarkets as people battle to commandeer as many foods and other goods as they can pack into their cars, and a surge in on-line frauds as criminals devise new ways of parting vulnerable old people from their life savings. On the other hand, we also see acts of great generosity, altruism, and solidarity. In Britain over a half a million people have responded to the call to volunteer to help support the health services. Substantial numbers of retired doctors and nurses have returned to hospitals out of sense of civic duty. And self-organized groups of volunteers have sprung up in every neighbourhood to support the elderly and housebound.

COVID-19 reminds us, in the starkest way possible, of the social and moral choices that we face in balancing personal freedom against solidarity in pursuit of a good society.

In thinking about this on a wider, more global scale however, we need to remember that the term 'barbarism' was first coined by the Ancient Greeks to describe anyone who did not speak Greek or follow Greek customs and was later adopted by the Ancient Romans to characterize the Celts and other European tribes they set out to subjugate. This reminds us that 'othering' and erecting hierarchies of value and respect was central to the formation of Western conceptions of 'civilization'. This dualism has proved remarkably resilient with contemporary western discourse still peppered with reference to 'primitive' indigenous peoples and 'underdeveloped' societies. These dismissive terms are used to justify discriminatory interventions. The Brazilian government's recent use of the pandemic emergency to legitimate the appropriation of tribal lands in the Amazon basin is a particularly stark example. What is stake here is a fundamental opposition between two diametrically opposed views of human responsibility towards the natural world, pitching indigenous cosmologies and practices of custodianship and sustainability against the drive to extend the commercial exploitation of finite resources. As I mentioned earlier, these destructive incursions into long-standing human and natural ecosystems are generating the conditions for both new pandemics and climate catastrophe. If we are serious about addressing these existential threats and cooperating on developing alternatives that guarantee both social justice and environmental sustainability, we need to abandon the opposition between 'barbarism' and 'civilization' and listen attentively to the voices of indigenous peoples.

Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz: So far as I have seen, the pandemic has brought out both the worst and the best in people. The number of stories about those going out of their way to help family, neighbors, and even strangers, has been far higher than the number of those who have used this as an opportunity to revert to barbarism, which is a sign of hope.

Casey Man Kong Lum: Human goodness is at its best when it is manifested and acted upon. On the other hand, evil is at its worst when it is disguised as something else. Therefore, in principle it is a good thing if and when we can shed light on and get to know them clearly. In relative terms, people around the world have responded to what they know about the COVID-19 pandemic in a great number of ways. In the process, the ways in which people – either individually or collectively (as in groups, communities, institutions, etc.) – act upon various aspects of the crisis helps to shed light on a rather fascinating spectrum of world views, assumptions, emotions, and behaviors. While we witness a great deal of negative forces such as fear, apprehension, ignorance, hostility, discrimination, etc., we have also been graced by all sorts of positive energies such as kindness, generosity, sound judgement, mutual respect, decency, and so on. Since we are currently in the thick of the pandemic and may not be able to see the big picture as clearly as we can, I think historians in the future can help us better understand what may have been the greatest threat of COVID-19.

Bo Shan: I agree to understand the impact of COVID-19 from a dialectical perspective. In the sense of the evolutionary history of life, viruses have always relied on biological hosts. About 8% of the sequences in human genome come from viruses. The process of human resistance to viruses is also a process of co-evolution with viruses. The word "virus" contains contradictory meanings. It refers to snake venom, being endowed with the meaning of "destruction"; it also refers to human semen, showing the meaning of "creation". "Virus" represents deadly venom on one side and life-giving substances on the other. As a mammal, human beings have formed an inseparable mixture with viruses. Viruses not only block social communication, but also stimulate the power of social support. Therefore, we can see that the support from different social groups has become the immunity against social collapse.

Question 6

Jing Xin: *Some scholars believe that the continued spread of the COVID-19 virus has activated a large number of ideological viruses dormant in human society, such as fake news, stigmatization, paranoid conspiracy and racism, and even triggered a war of communication. How do you think of this?*

Clifford Christians: All the research evidence I have seen verifies this conclusion. The alarming number of ideological viruses that have been unleashed is especially

difficult for us in communication who want public communication to meet the challenge of this crisis, and not be affected negatively by it. However, while facing these awful realities honestly, I interpret them differently. Yes, ideological viruses are growing, but they have not overwhelmed the truth. The truth is the heart of a healthy society, and necessary for science and education and business, and the core norm for personal relationships. And that bedrock idea from ethical systems around the world has proved to be true in the COVID-19 epidemic as it has been over history. In almost every society, medical facts prevail. Doctors, scientists, laboratory technicians are believed as the most accurate guide to the state of the virus. In the United States, governors who are guided by health officials, who present the facts whether they are good or bad, these governors have the highest credibility rating. The truth about death rates, hospitalization, age and condition of those who survive, and whether drugs have been tested properly, is what finally matters to government officials and citizens. There are conspiracy theories and snake-oil remedies and racist taunts among the public, but these practices do not negate the principle of truth as essential to our social welfare in times of crisis.

David Marshall: I am not sure we can link all of these "ideological viruses" to COVID-19. There is no question that a war of communication has been circulating globally in different contexts for several years. The new instability generated by this new communication war-game has generated what I have called in my writing the "new word-of-mouth culture"[①]: social media-conveyed news and sharing is now intensively linked to the industrial algorithmically-derived models of linking individuals' activities to other echo-chambers of information. COVID-19 has produced many examples that have exacerbated the weaknesses and instability of our new movement of information. It has also produced an industrial system of surveillance of our interests that has been preyed upon in a very commercial and sometimes politically-driven direction.

Donald Matheson: There are a large number of statements circulating in social media, news media and conversation about the coronavirus, which draw on these kinds of discursive structures. Discursive social psychology[②] describes these as interpretive resources that people draw on in order to make sense of situations and justify their responses. It is important to place these in a bigger picture, though. There are, firstly, historical parallels. For English-speaking cultures, Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) echoes across 300 years, particularly in accounts of health remedies, fears of animals, social class divisions and heroism or selfishness which abounded. The parallels

[①] Marshall, P. D. (2020). Celebrity, Politics, and New Media: An Essay on the Implications of Pandemic Fame and Persona. *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, 33, pp.89–104.

[②] Potter, J. and Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour*. London: Sage Publications.

suggest that some of these discursive resources are longstanding; they also suggest that the current information environment is more channel than cause. Secondly, the circulation of stories is likely to go through a series of stages, as more information becomes available, as the situation becomes more stable in each location and as people move through shock, grief, anger and other emotional stages. I think a key question is how we move through those stages and how professional communicators can help sift material, emphasise socially cohesive communication, build scientific literacy and hold those who promote different stories accountable.

Graham Murdock: Using metaphors of viruses and contagion is not helpful in understanding the spread of conspiracies and fake news over digital networks. A virus has no conscious intention and so notions of responsibility are inapplicable. We can more usefully begin with the French crowd psychologist, Taine, commenting in 1878 on the chaotic information flows during the height of the French Revolution: "no one knows who is speaking, nobody is responsible for what he say. Each is there …borne along in the whirl of sounding phrases, or ready-made news, growing rumours, and other exaggerations by which fanatics keep outdoing one another". There are strong resonances here with our present situation but there is one crucial difference. Our principle mode of communication now is the internet and many of the lies and misrepresentations that appear on its major platforms are very deliberately designed for either commercial or political purposes conveniently concealed behind posting that appear anonymously or under invented names. Much of the most misleading information and assertions around and the pandemic is coming from the same sources that are denying the climate crisis. We see the same dismissal of established scientific evidence and the same prioritising of immediate economic and political interests. The responsibility for this lies squarely with the internet platforms, led by Facebook, that have failed to implement adequate editorial controls, and with politicians, led by President Trump, who are prepared to endorse and relay damaging rumours and misrepresentations.

Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz: Again, I think that the pandemic has caused diametrically opposed reactions: On the one hand, some people have reacted by spreading fake news stories, and increasing the stigmatization and racism towards others. But on the other hand, many people have reacted by noticing the essential humanity of us all: any one of us can die as a result of a virus, no matter who we are, what position we hold, or how much money we have. Of course, those with more money and a more secure position in life are having an easier time because they are more likely to have enough money to cover unexpected costs, health insurance to cover unanticipated medical needs, and a safe space in which to "shelter in place." So clearly the pandemic has shown anyone who had doubts that stigmatization and racism still exist and have a substantial effect on people's lives and well-being. COVID-19 has also revealed the truth of immigration: most immigrants play substantive roles in society, helping locals rather than hurting them. This

has been made especially clear in the figures showing the large percentage of immigrants in sectors of society that turn out to be essential: not only health care, but farming and all aspects of the supply chain, from truck drivers to grocery clerks.

Casey Man Kong Lum: Indeed, racism, conspiracy theories, disinformation, discrimination, or the like has existed long before the advent of the current generation of web-based social media. Of course, based upon Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, and Neil Postman's media ecological theories, digital social media have introduced a totally new set of temporal and spatial biases (or omnipresence) as to how fact or opinion, prejudice, fake news, paranoid conspiracy, political manipulation, etc., are manifested, spread, accessed, comprehended, and acted upon. As information of all kinds from a multitude of sources implodes onto us via the smart phone we are holding in our hands, for example, we often are not given much time to comprehend what we see on the tiny screen before reacting, let alone making sound judgement or decisions in a morally sustainable manner. Hence, communication scholars and educators must play an important role in advocating and helping improve upon media literacy and information literacy on all educational levels, as well as among the citizenry.

Bo Shan: Ideological virus is a kind of false consciousness virus, which assumes the unequal relationship between normal and abnormal, modern and non-modern, and us and others. In order to get rid of the ghost of ideological virus, it is necessary to employ Rawls' thinking of "the curtain of ignorance" to restore human beings to the same kind that coevolved with the virus, to consider all human beings in the relationship between nature, biology and things, and to restore human to the people living on the "virus planet". A free and harmonious communication relationship can be established on this basis.

Question 7

Jing Xin: *The social media seem to be at the forefront of this epidemic. How do you evaluate the role and function of social media in the COVID-19 epidemic?*

David Marshall: There are a few points I would make about social media and COVID-19 pandemic. First, it is overlooked that the self-isolation has actually shifted older generations to greater use and monitoring of social media platforms. Thus, before the pandemic, most social media platform use skewed younger. Now you will find a full array of the populace playing in this space. The repercussions of this are manifold. Memes are now moving in entirely new directions. News following has begun to follow similar patterns of regularity of use by many. And very broadly, our emotional forms of sharing and exchange are now done by an even larger sector of the population with routine and through the many minutes of every day. So, there are more posts by more people of their dogs playing, of themselves exercising, more jokes, more rewrites of songs with a pandemic transformation. What it identifies is a new normal of emotional

sharing and connection that is dwarfing past media forms completely.[①]

I should add one more development that relates to our use of mobile technology. COVID-19 has made it acceptable for the protection of others to expand our personal surveillance: we may be experiencing what Soshana Zuboff describes as a "hive" mentality in our future, where it is normal to be watched and monitored for the apparent good of all.[②]

Donald Matheson: In the west, social media have been widely criticised for amplifying misinformation (the sharing of wrong or inadequate information) and disinformation (the deliberate sharing of such material), during the 2016 US presidential election campaign and the poor quality public discussion in the UK around the referendum over membership of the European Union. The largest social media companies in the US have been forced to take some responsibility for two trends, firstly, the weakening of professional news media as the financial viability of news companies has weakened, and secondly, the widespread sharing of poor quality news material through structures that encourage the fast dissemination of shareable content. In response, YouTube (owned by Google) has changed its algorithm and pinned official information to the top of its page. Facebook and Twitter have also responded, largely by taking down material. Conversely, western media reports have celebrated the role of Weibo in publicising the emergence of the virus in Wuhan and in netizens sharing information not present in state-controlled media. These two dominant narratives – of information pollution and the benefits of freedom of speech – create a false dichotomy. I think a powerful role of social media that has been overlooked is in community building during social disruption and isolation, as families, friends, neighbours, workplaces and others have found ways to build connection and share views. This may not all be socially constructive. Social media communities may be fostering surveillance, rumour-sharing and the building of 'self' and 'the other' structures as much as community support.

Graham Murdock: During the pandemic social media use has expanded rapidly wherever people have been confined to their homes under various "lock down" arrangements where access to normal work, social, and cultural spaces has been closed. This increased internet use has followed the pattern established for some time now but in an intensified way. Four trends are clearly visible. Firstly, there has been a very significant increase in people working from home and holding virtual business meetings. The relative success of these initiatives may have significant implications for the longer

[①] Marshall, P. D., McStay, A. and Bakir, V. (2020, April 21) (Mediated) Emotion in the Age of COVID-19 Pandemic, International (Virtual) Workshop Seminar, Deakin University.

[②] Zuboff, S. (2019). *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (pp. 445-474). New York: Hachette.

term organisation of work. Secondly, public cultural institutions have been making their expertise and productions available for anyone to access free. Museums, theatres, art galleries, orchestras, and universities have all been offering an expanded range of on-line material and experiences laying the basis for a new cultural commons. Again, this is likely to have a significant impact on future policy. Thirdly, there has been an explosion of vernacular creativity as people confined to their homes look for ways to maintain social contacts and express themselves. Citizens are dressing up to imitate famous paintings and people in Australia filming themselves in the elaborate costumes they have put on to wheel their rubbish bins to the end of the driveway for collection, one of the few opportunities they have to leave the house Elsewhere people have been joining virtual dance groups, singing together, and having virtual dinner parties. These are all confirmations of the optimistic projections for the internet from early commentators who saw it as the technological basis for new forms of popular expression and sociality. Fourthly however, as noted earlier, we also see a marked increase in damaging rumours, fake news, and offensive speech.

All four of these responses have been written into the possibilities presented by digital networks from the outset but the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified them and made them more visible to more people. The challenge however remains what it has always been—how best to combine the positive potentials and minimise the negatives. Once again, the experience of the pandemic has dramatized the choices facing public policy in a connected world and focused renewed attention on two major issues.

The first concerns the resilience of 'digital divides', the social and cultural dynamics that exclude significant sections of the elderly population and those living in poverty from accessing and using the full range of opportunities for creativity, social connection, and information offered by the internet. The second concerns the commercial and governmental tracking and collating of people's digital footprints and the urgent question of determining who has access to this data and its possible uses. The use of smart phone apps for contact tracing during the pandemic has brought this issue into sharp focus. Until both these issues are addressed and resolved any expansion of social media will remain problematic.

Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz: The positive side of having social media during a pandemic is that they permit us to gather information easily from a wide range of sources, and stay in touch with friends, neighbours, and colleagues. They have been used for everything from birthday parties, to maintaining contact with distant elders, to organizations holding meetings even while employees work from home. The negative side is that many people do not have the skills to separate false stories from true, and so, quite often inadvertently, share stories that should never be taken seriously. This shows that we need more training in media literacy, for a lager population. I already know of several colleagues who have begun research studies investigating the role of social media in this time. Hopefully we

will learn useful lessons for the future.

Casey Man Kong Lum: To a great extent, social media have already become one of the most prevalent and vital communication infrastructures for many people, especially those who have access to them. Having digital social media as a communication tool can be understood as a form of Faustian bargain. On the one hand, social media allow people to promptly share information, resources, and insights about the virus that can help a massive number of people in fighting the spread of the disease. On the other hand, they can also be used to create a great number of problems, such as the widespread dissemination of fake news, rumors, or other disinformation, in that they have become venues for propagating misinformation, prejudice, and inter-group conflict. In my humble opinion, how well or positively can social media can be used during the COVID-19 pandemic, and any other crises in general, depends in part on how well or the extent to which we can promote sound media and information literacy among the populace.

I would like to share a few other humble observations.

First, the kind and extent of digital divide separating the haves and the have-nots "Before Corona" continues to manifest, if not magnify, itself during the COVID-19 pandemic. I did a simple survey among my students at a public university in New Jersey and found that not all of my students have equal access to digital information technology while they are sent home under the government's "stay at home" mandate. Some of my students do not have at home a fully functional computer (e.g., no webcam, broken audio, slow processing speed), an Internet data plan with an adequate bandwidth or capacity, a sufficient level of Wi-Fi connectivity, or such. In my view, such a digital divide has presented issues related to equity, or the lack of it, in education. The findings from my simple survey have helped me a great deal in converting my in-person lessons to the online, remote teaching edition in ways that are more equitable to all my students. On a larger level, we also must be very mindful of such a digital divide existing in other segments in society (e.g., among socio-economic classes, among different age or gender groups, between the urban and the rural) and among nations at differing industrial or technological development stages.

Second, teaching classes entirely online during the COVID-19 also helps highlight a literacy divide that separates those who can read and write from those who cannot do so at their grade level. On another level, there is also a literacy divide between people who have been educated in traditional, print-based reading and writing vs. those who are versed in a new language in writing and comprehension in digital media in which short text messages are often juxtaposed with various multimedia forms of expression. We must gain a better understanding of these different forms of literacy divide to help improve upon our work in education and foster better and more effective communication among people everywhere.

Third, as I briefly highlighted above, we must do our best to promote media and

information literacy education not only among school-age students on all levels but also people from all walks of life in society. Similar to all other forms of communication, social media can only be as good as we know how to use them. Social media can be used to inform and, conversely, they can also be used to dis-inform. As more and more people use social media and other forms of web-based communication technologies to access information and entertainment, or otherwise getting to know about the world around them and beyond, they should have the skills-set to evaluate and comprehend what they see in the media while being able to make sound, critical reasoning and judgement in their decision-making process. In short, advocating for media and information literacy education is one of the next frontiers in communication scholarship and education.

Bo Shan: This still needs to be understood from a dialectical perspective. On the one hand, people who "wander" in the online social space are besieged by the traffic-driven viral transmission and confused by rumors carried by the infectious media. One the other hand, those seeking solutions participate in the construction of the public space, and discuss in the context of grief and comfort, seek help and help others, doubt and empathy, argument and mobilization.

Question 8

Jing Xin: *In the face of the COVID-19 epidemic, in addition to relying on the grass-roots administrative system and community organization system for mass mobilization, a few Chinese provinces and cities have also adopted some local cultural symbols, such as online micro-videos of local dramas, various sitcoms adapted by Internet celebrities and other means to mobilize for epidemic prevention. Is there any epidemic prevention mobilization based on local cultural elements in your area? What is the effect?*

Clifford Christians: Our local area includes numerous churches, and some synagogues and mosques. They have produced many kinds of visual products that teach families how to enjoy each other in isolation. Liturgies and homilies and music and at-home activities are made available on YouTube, Facebook, Zoom, Skype, and by livestreaming. For these religious centers, it is especially tragic to see the infected dying in isolation without their friends and families present. Many songs, prayers, poems and paintings are created locally and sent online to help those who are grieving death.

Local school teachers have found interesting ways to teach and entertain students and preschoolers too. Some teachers have emphasized interactive communication by showing pictures and games and pets and puzzles that children create and show to one another. On the upper class levels, teachers using all kinds of online communication link their subjects to aspects of the virus around the world. They create chat rooms where students can learn from each other and give each other emotional strength and cultural

insights that are geared to their age levels. A few are compiling ideas and stories into an online encyclopedia as a resource used whenever necessary and by whomever finds it helpful, whether locally or for their friends and contact elsewhere.

Bo Shan: In Wuhan, I was most impressed by the "national mask campaign" in order to persuade people to wear masks in the early days of the lockdown. In this campaign, people who go out wearing masks become mobile isolators, making masks as isolators of viruses and extending them into a medium of prevention, while at the same time turning them into "goods for New Year" and "tight supplies". Masks become the medium of resource allocation and relationship connection. Pop stars who are used to wearing masks or young people who play cool, all employ masks as a tool to reduce communication discomfort. Now masks have become a tool to express love between people and between groups. "Don't forget to wear masks" and "send you a box of masks" have become the warmest greetings.

Question 9

Jing Xin: *Do you think that the COVID-19 epidemic will change the world pattern, and the historical experience will thus be divided into B.C. (Before Corona) and A.C. (After Corona)?*

David Marshall: Yes. I think we are going through a profound change. It is both cultural and economic. The change is also a realization that there may need to be a reconsideration of humanity's relationship to the world and how we may need to change that to make it a more environmentally sustainable planet. The breakdown of industry, the decline in driving and the general decline in air pollution has made many begin to see the wider world and humanity's relationship to that wider world a little bit differently.

What is also clear is that we need to develop what I would call a new global citizenship. In other words, COVID-19 will construct fears in our world that will work against intercultural exchange and communication; but fundamentally we need to work out how all of us should be included and enfranchised in how our world moves into the future, how it protects cultures, how it connects ideas and innovations, and how it protects cultural groups. We do not now have an effective full-population connection to global decision-making and this crisis is making it clear that we should all be clear proxies in these wider decisions and pathways in our global culture.

Graham Murdock: It is now clear that COVID-19 has precipitated a structural crisis that impacts on every level and dimension of modern social life.

It has generated an economic crisis in capitalism which commentators are increasingly comparing to the Great Depression of the 1930s. In the United States up to one quarter of the workforce may lose their jobs. Many bricks and mortar businesses are likely to fail and close. The major beneficiaries will be the major internet companies

leading to a further consolidation of corporate power. The pandemic has exposed the fragility of the global just-in-time supply chain and is likely to fuel demands for greater national economic self -sufficiency.

The restricted range of choices open to shoppers during the pandemic, coupled with the ever present threat of contracting a fatal virus, has prompted increasing questioning of an economic and social order based on hyper-consumption and forced a reconsideration of priorities and conceptions of what constitutes a good life.

Taking people and cars off the streets with enforced lock downs has rapidly improved air quality and reduced pollution levels bringing into sharp relief the negative environmental impact of mass car ownership and underlining the need to take climate change fully into account in any proposal for change post-pandemic.

Shared subjection to risk has prompted new forms of social organization at the neighborhood level and an enhanced sense of solidarity together with a reconsideration of the social value of different kinds of work. In Britain, every Thursday at 8pm people come out onto the steps of their houses or lean out of the windows of their flats to applaud all those working in the health and care services who are putting their own lives at risk to save others. There is a growing recognition that it is these workers together with the delivery drivers who bring food parcels to the house and the rubbish collectors who take away the trash who are indispensable to social life and that the celebrities and influencers who have previously enjoyed such extensive publicity are dispensable.

The pandemic has also brought the deep social inequalities that have been exacerbated by neoliberal economic polices into sharp focus with recent official research in Britain demonstrating shocking differences in mortality rates between the economically advantaged and those living in poverty and between citizens from black and Asian communities and the majority white population.

COVID-19 has opened cracks in all of the walls that have supported everyday life in advanced capitalism and challenged comfortable assumptions. What changes will follow from these disruptions once the pandemic is under control will depend, as it always does, on the balance of contending forces. But the least likely outcome is a return to the familiar "normality" Before the Corona (BC).

Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz: This is not the first time I've seen this suggestion. Among others, Thomas Friedman wrote an opinion piece entitled "Our New Historical Divide: B.C. and A.C. — the World Before Corona and the World After".[①] Given the number of places where people have been homebound for weeks or months, and the impact on everything from the number of deaths to unemployment rates to closing businesses and

[①] Friedman, T. (2020, March 17). Our New Historical Divide: B.C. and A.C. — the World Before Corona and the World After. *New York Times*.

damage to the supply chain, it would be difficult to argue that there will not be a clear divide.

Casey Man Kong Lum: This is a very big and complex question since it alludes to a "world pattern". But it is conceivable that certain cross-border business practices along the line of globalization may shift in some fashion and to varying degrees, such as how multinational corporations may come up with new strategies in re-appropriating or structuring their global supply chains. New patterns or practices in international tourism and travel of all kinds would likely emerge even after the current travel restrictions are lifted. On the other hand, one would sensibly hope that a more co-operative global framework would be worked out among nations from around the world for more effective coordination and mutual assistance in anticipation of future cross-border crises in such a profound scale.

Question 10

Jing Xin: *The mainstream view in China is that the epidemic further highlights that mankind is a community with a shared future, and only through unity and cooperation can we deal with various global risks and challenges. Do you agree with this statement?*

Clifford Christians: Yes, I agree fully with this mainstream view. My reason for agreeing is based on my understanding of human morality. The epidemic is clarifying the moral universe, in a way that I believe validates the need for a world of unity and cooperation that is based on communal ethics. Let me elaborate how the COVID-19 crisis is giving prominence to the philosophy of social justice rooted in the ethics of community.

Several idea systems that are prominent in the world today guide our conceptions of right and wrong during upheavals produced by the epidemic. One morality that has dominated North America and much of Europe is utilitarianism. The goal personally and of leaders is the greatest good for the largest number, while seeking minimal harm to the few. This would mean accepting casualties for some, if the majority benefits. A few leaders think this way, believing that economic plans that benefit the country as a whole are the key rather than focusing on those hospitalized and dying. But a money-view of promoting happiness for the most has little credibility anywhere in the world as the right way to deal with the epidemic.

A morality of individual rights is prominent also, with the right to live for oneself which cannot be determined by anyone else but myself. There have been too many instances in the United States, for example, of parties and selfish panic-buying in defiance of the rules for fighting this communicable disease. But an individual rights philosophy is not considered by most people in nearly every country a legitimate approach when there's a worldwide crisis of life and death.

The ethics of John Rawls is widely promoted also in the West, and to various degrees around the world. In Rawls' strategy, whether we are rich or poor, behind "the veil of ignorance" humans seek the safest alternative for themselves and do not to put themselves at risk. Welfare politics is, therefore, one credible way to insure that everyone will have the basic necessities. Rawls' thinking is the most advanced form of social contract theory, and operates reasonably well in times of affluence and with visionary governments. The magnitude, speed, and unknowns of COVID-19 has produced turmoil and inequalities and division rather than a coherent strategy on the national level for dealing with the crisis effectively. It leaves debates and contradictions about the need for employment versus the medical safety of others, and the desire for freedom is eroded by the networks of virus information and control.

Communitarian ethics, sometimes called communal morality or the ethics of the common good, is another moral universe put to the test by the pandemic. In this ethics, we derive our identity from the community of which we are members, so that individual rights are not as important as community norms. How to live a good life depends on living together in community. When self-isolation or quarantine or containment are necessary, the virus is attacking the very heart of the communal ideal. But the core communal idea of our lives-in-relation, whether from Confucius, or from feminist ethics, or from African Ubuntu, or from religious thinkers as a worldwide commitment is actually meeting the coronavirus test. This morality has the possibility of being credible for unity and cooperation when the epidemic is finally under control. A morality of the common good is based on moral heroes in the community who encourage and inspire its members to live cooperatively. Moral heroes have emerged all over the world—doctors and nurses, teachers and public health workers, mothers and fathers and children who care for each other and everyone else they possibly can, servant-hearted policemen and security personnel—the list is almost endless. The news is now carrying their stories, showing that these millions of moral heroes in their communities are the key to our survival in this crisis and to our public flourishing when the epidemic is under control.

David Marshall: It does have a shared future; but we have probably allowed ourselves not to understand what that collective future entails. We have to work out how we deal with difference and differentiation affirmatively and with equality. Disparities in wealth may be the one element we should try and ensure are just not part of our future collective world.

Donald Matheson: After significant global crises, this question often arises. My hope is that the unilateralism that has been one major thread of foreign policy in the early years of the twenty-first century (such as the US invasion of Iraq) will give way to more multilateral approaches. As the World Health Organisation's and Italy's leaders have

noted, there is no protection in having a first-class cabin on a sinking ship. So the modes of global cooperation are crucial. Strong moral leadership, that expresses care for others and mutuality, along with communicative and political structures that do not privilege the rich and powerful over others, seem increasingly important. Notions such as soft power, the global rights of corporations and information control need to be challenged as operating in the interests of the few over the many. Communication between epidemiologists and virologists has been one model that deserves further scrutiny to tease out how well it operated to encourage cooperation. At first glance, though, the coordinated, rapid communication between scientists operating in the global public good, through well-resourced national and global information exchanges, is a model we could learn much from.

Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz: The American Medical Association's President, Patrice Harris, said: "This virus knows no boundaries. This is a global pandemic. It certainly requires global cooperation."[①] That quote has shown up multiple times on my social media feeds, most often without attribution. But it sums up the obvious response. If we have a global challenge (as we do also with climate change), we must prepare a global response. This is the reason so many science fiction books, assuming an alien invasion, take for granted that local or national quarrels will immediately be set aside in order to fight a common enemy. We have that invasion now, so we must cooperate in the common fight.

Casey Man Kong Lum: Agreed. In fact, the view that "only through unity and cooperation can we deal with various global risks and challenges" is among the most notable perspectives shared by many constituencies on all the continents around the world. Of course, while such is a laudable ideal, various forms of conflicts such as the like of cross-border finger pointing or political infighting over who is to blame, would most likely continue in the foreseeable future. Hence, a key question to ask is: How can diverse nations, cultures, as well as geo-political interests around the world cooperate to achieve such a noble calling?

Bo Shan: A community with a shared future for mankind must be based on common understanding. This common understanding is not only based on the understanding of certain ethical rules, but also on the understanding of common situations. That is, through understanding the process of co-evolution between human and virus, to understand the interdependence of all things and the interaction between human and all things, so as to truly understand the social communication relationship formed by "everything is medium".

Question 11

[①] Lemon, J. (2020, April 15). American nurses association calls decision to halt funding to WHO 'misguided', implores Trump to reconsider. *Newsweek*.

Jing Xin: *How can we better prepare for the next global challenge?*

Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz: It would really help if we did not have to reinvent the wheel each time. Sharing information, not only with other countries but also with future generations, would help. Increasing, rather than decreasing, funding to major international organizations, such as the World Health Organization, would help. Thinking about what needed to have been done this time that wasn't, and then doing that for the next time, would help.

Casey Man Kong Lum: The world has witnessed a multitude of triumphs and blunders in how stakeholders from across diverse geo-political borders, as well as cultural milieus confront the COVID-19 pandemic. It should be clear by now that no one society or country has done everything right in confronting the many issues and challenges engendered by the coronavirus' rapid and far-reaching outbreak. As such, how to better prepare for the next global challenge would require a great deal of expertise in diverse fields. In this regard, we can begin our preparation with a survey of "best practices" around the world: in how people can more sustainably relate to our natural world in general and to animals in particular; in how leadership can better serve their constituencies with sound public health education and crisis management; in how policy-makers can improve upon public health policy and guidelines that allow for transparent, timely, and equitable communication to the general public the right kind and amount of information that can help safeguard people's well-being; in how nations can better facilitate cross-border cooperation among themselves; in how media and communication scholars can better help foster intercultural understanding and inter-group interaction in an age of digital telecommunications; and so on. Of course, stakeholders in this regard would also need to know how best they can localize or appropriate the best practices they learn from around the world for their respective constituencies.

Jing Xin: Having been in Wuhan, the center of the epidemic, I have received concerns and greetings from relatives, friends and colleagues around the globe since January 2020. In the following months, the epidemic in Wuhan has been gradually controlled, but the global epidemic has become increasingly severe. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to seven distinguished scholars for their keen insight and profound reflection on global communication in the context of the epidemic while overcoming many difficulties to fight against the virus.

These scholars have sharply pointed out a series of problems highlighted by the global epidemic, which can be arranged into an anxious matrix around three sets of core relationships. First is the problem of people and environment. It is shortsighted only to deal with the relationship between humans and the virus in the epidemic

crisis. It is urgent to face up to the interaction between humanity and nature, biology and things, as well as to pay attention to the broader climate and ecological background. Second is the problem of people and technology. The deepening digital divide, increasingly widespread network surveillance and privacy violations, and growing clusters of fake information in the miscellaneous information environment are the focus of attention put forward by scholars through rich instances. Third is the problem of interpersonal communication. The fragile trust, social division and inequality, racism, colonialism and western centrism have been actively or passively magnified in the epidemic, which not only break the long-standing structural fracture layer in the global society, but also try to drag more people surging through dangerous fracture zones. Scholars believe that the interpersonal communication problem is one of the root causes of the crisis, and feel particularly anxious.

In response to these problems, scholars involved in the interviews put forward at least three aspects of reflection. First is self-reflection. From the unfair and immoral behavior of individuals in the epidemic, to the human consumption carnival, rational conceit, blind worship, the belief of anthropocentrism, and so on, all deserve introspection. Second is to rethink the complexity, instability and dynamics of the current information environment. It is urgent that the discipline of Journalism and Communication actively contribute to this area. Cultivating quality media, advocating and promoting media literacy and information literacy education are frontier directions worthy of tracking and expanding. Third is to consider the rupture of social structure and the general lack of global cooperation. Global policy interventions and international cooperation in the current epidemic are very limited. In the intertwined swing of globalization and anti-globalization, fractured layers and even fractured zones are gradually shaping up. Scholars strongly advocate for the concept of "a community with a shared future for humankind", and call for a world of unity and cooperation to help people cope with the structural crisis, changes in world patterns, and various global risks and challenges, so as to live on the same planet and to have a promising future. At the same time, we pay tribute to moral heroes around the world who have brought us hope and power, and to the sincerity, generosity, and kindness they bring to people in real and virtual communities.

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[1] **Brief introduction to scholars**

Clifford Christians (Ph.D., Litt.D., D.H.L.) is Research Professor of Communications, Professor of Journalism, and Professor of Media Studies Emeritus at the University of Illinois-Urbana. With Bo Shan he co-edited *The Ethics of Intercultural Communication* and with Kaarle Nordenstreng, *Communication Theories in a Multicultural World*. His most recent book is *Media Ethics and Global Justice in the Digital Age* published by Cambridge University Press.

P. David Marshall holds a Professorship and Personal Chair in New Media, Communication and Cultural Studies at Deakin University in Melbourne Australia. He is the world leading scholar in the study of celebrity and public personality systems. Along with many articles and book chapters, Professor Marshall's books include *Persona Studies: An Introduction* (2019), *Advertising and Promotional Cultures: Case Histories* (Palgrave, 2018), *Celebrity and Power* (Minnesota, 2nd edition 2014), *Celebrity Persona Pandemic* (Minnesota, 2016), *New Media Cultures* (Oxford Arnold, 2004), *Web Theory* (2003) and *Fame Games* (Cambridge, 2000).

Donald Matheson is head of Media and Communication at the University of Canterbury, Aotearoa New Zealand. He is the joint editor of the journal *Ethical Space* and a co-director of his university's Arts Digital Lab. He writes on journalism and public communication, particularly in relation to emerging digital practices and ethical questions around the public spaces that those practices enable. He works on discourse, drawing on small-scale and computational methods of studying language use. His books include *Digital War Reporting*, and *Media Discourses: Analysing Media Texts*.

Graham Murdock is Emeritus Professor of Culture and Economy at the Department of Social Sciences at Loughborough University, has held the Bonnier Chair at the University of Stockholm and the Teaching Chair at the Free University of Brussels. He is currently Vice President of the International Association of Media and Communication Research (IAMCR). His recent books include: as co-editor, *Money Talks: Media, Markets, Crisis* (2015) and *Carbon Capitalism and Communication: Confronting Climate Crisis* (Palgrave 2017). A new edition of the influential text *Researching Communications,* written jointly with colleagues will be published by Bloomsbury later this year.

Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz is Director of the Center for Intercultural Dialogue, Professor Emerita of the University of Wisconsin-Parkside (both in the USA), and Associate Faculty at Royal Roads University (Canada). She has held a variety of visiting positions in Paris and Lyon (France), Coimbra (Portugal), Beijing and Macau (China). Her books include *From Generation to Generation: Maintaining Cultural Identity over Times*, *Semiotics and Communication: Signs, Codes, Cultures*, *Wedding as Text:*

Communicating Cultural Identities through Ritual Socially Constructing Communication, and *Social Approaches to Communication*.

Casey Man Kong Lum is Professor of Communication and Founding Director of the M. A. in Professional Communication Program at William Paterson University. A co-founder of the Media Ecology Association in the United States, Professor Lum's areas of research and teaching include media ecology, intercultural communication, media literacy education, urban foodways and communication, media and globalization, media ethnography, as well as Asian American media. He is a prolific author and the recipient of a number of scholarship and teaching excellence awards. Among Professor Lum's most recent publications include his book *Perspectives on Culture, Technology and Communication: The Media Ecology Tradition* (2nd ed.) and article on Media Ecology and Media Education: Reflections on Media Literacy in a Globalized Communication Ecology.

Bo Shan is Professor of Journalism and Communication, Director of Center for Studies of Media Development, Wuhan University. Research fields include intercultural communication and comparative journalism. Main works include *The Problems and Possibilities in Intercultural Communication*, *The Ethics of Intercultural Communication*, *The Illusion of Intercultural Communication through Global Media*, *National Image and Intercultural Communication*, and *The Intercultural Turn of Journalism and Communication*.