

Journal Pre-proof



Culture vs Policy: More Global Collaboration to Effectively Combat COVID-19

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1 **Culture vs Policy: More Global Collaboration to Effectively Combat COVID-19**

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31 **Abstract:** The outbreak of COVID-19 seriously challenges every government for its capacity and
32 management of public health systems facing the catastrophic emergency. Culture and
33 anti-epidemic policy do not necessarily conflict each other. All countries and governments should
34 be more tolerant to each other in seeking cultural and political consensus to overcome this
35 historically tragic pandemic together.

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36 The outbreak of COVID-19 has rapidly become a global pandemic. It seriously challenges each
37 government for its capacity and management of public health systems facing the catastrophic
38 emergency. Many countries have already gained early success in controlling the spread of the
39 disease by limiting the population movement to a near standstill and by effectively redistributing
40 medical resources to meet the demand, while many countries are still in the fight against the
41 ever-fast spread of the disease. This historical pandemic has imperiled the global financial market
42 as well as the world economy to an unprecedented extent, which might further trigger plausible
43 geopolitical and social turmoil that most countries must face and get prepared.

44 No single country is an island that can remain immune to the epidemic. What matters most to a
45 country is the actions taken by the government to minimize the negative impacts on the whole
46 society. Global collaboration becomes even more crucial to the mitigation of negative impacts.
47 Good experiences may help to shape effective responses to the outbreak, even though they may
48 have certain limitations from countries to countries because of differences in cultural and political
49 systems and social or economic development. At the time of writing, the novel coronavirus is still
50 spreading at high speed in America, Russia, Brazil, and African countries. Moreover, many
51 developing countries could experience an even higher risk of having massive outbreaks due to the
52 lack of medical resources, virus detection technology, and accurate epidemic data.

53 The massive outbreaks across the world have caused severe impacts on the global economy and
54 international relations, which are being exacerbated by the measures of limiting the cross-border
55 movements of people and goods. As a result, every government is making difficult decisions
56 facing the trade-offs between economic stability and normal social functioning to fight the
57 epidemic. The pessimism aroused by watching the ever-increasing daily death toll often reflects
58 on public opinions of “isolating from the danger.” Countries with different social structures,
59 lifestyles, and cultural backgrounds tend to adopt different policies to contain the spread of
60 COVID 19. They should strive to strike a balance between culture and policy¹. It is imperative for
61 all countries in the world to come up with an acceptable consensus to embrace the inclusiveness
62 and responsibility of the world community, to put aside national and cultural disparities, and to
63 strengthen international cooperation in order to effectively combat this once-in-a-century
64 pandemic². Otherwise, we would be fighting a whack-a-mole war in which individual country’s
65 manpower, medical resources and economic stimulus will become exhausted in the struggle to
66 drive down the impacts of the epidemic.

67 First, cross-cultural communication and collaboration, especially among scientific and
68 technological communities, should be strengthened in the face of the epidemic. Multilateral
69 collaboration around the world can play an important role in the sharing of experience,
70 accelerating the tracing of the novel coronavirus, vaccine development, and global deployment of
71 epidemic prevention materials. In particular, the tracing of the new novel coronavirus is the
72 responsibility of the scientific and technological community all over the world, and cooperation
73 and information sharing must be strengthened to accelerate the tackling of this scientific problem.

74 Second, all countries and governments in the world should strengthen the data and information
75 sharing system to effectively track-and-trace coronavirus research and jointly develop low-cost
76 testing kits, vaccines, and effective therapeutics under the initiatives of international organizations
77 such as WHO. Furthermore, the resulting intellectual property rights should be shared by all
78 countries.

79 Third, with its own cultural and societal considerations, every country or government should

80 seriously adopt the early experience learned in other countries including the aspects of “timely
81 and reasonable control of local population flow”, “vast and quick virus test for the general public”,
82 “extensive use of communication platforms and big data technology to trace the confirmed,
83 quarantined, and contacted cases”³, and the coordinated allocation of nationwide medical
84 resources using modern information management platform to avoid potential saturation of medical
85 capacities.

86 Fourth, every country and government should take this unique opportunity to evaluate its
87 current public health system, to establish community-based and grid-based “early warning and
88 prevention system” for public health, and to utilize the latest big data, artificial intelligence,
89 blockchain and advanced computing technologies for sound policymaking in preparation of future
90 pandemics.

91 Fifth, although WHO and medical societies timely discourage the use of the phrase “social
92 distancing” and recommend the phrase “physical distancing”, just being physically apart without
93 the sense of communal cohesion may aggravate our mental health and well-being issues. All
94 governments should develop novel strategies to promote communities virtually. This should also
95 be accompanied by adequate advocacy and education to the public. The current coronavirus may
96 provide better opportunities to prepare plans for the government informing society in advance.

97 Finally, coronavirus shutdowns have yielded unintentional climate and environmental benefits,
98 such as clearer air and cleaner water. Carbon emissions have dropped significantly. However,
99 these benefits may be lost or weakened if governmental policies do not support them when
100 everything gets back to normal⁴. Therefore, countries should challenge the systems that may
101 possibly destroy the environment for keeping clean environment, air, and water, which are
102 essential to life on the planet.

103 Culture and anti-epidemic policy do not necessarily conflict with each other. Different societies
104 with various cultural backgrounds will adopt different policies to fight for their best interests in
105 this pandemic. Yet, a consensus of combating COVID-19 collectively and inclusively by all
106 countries and governments is supported by most scientists and economists in the world. The whole
107 world is one community with a shared destiny, as the epidemic may befall anytime, anywhere
108 again, as long as the coronavirus does not disappear. In this context, all countries and governments
109 should be more tolerant of each other in seeking cultural and political consensus that will lead to
110 conquer this historically tragic pandemic together.

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114 **Declaration of Interests**

115 The authors declare no competing interests. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in
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