CHAPTER 1

Creating and Contesting Meaning in a Global Health Crisis

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Abstract

In response to disruptions during COVID-19, individuals and communities have creatively utilised discursive systems to navigate tense social atmospheres in the Asia-Pacific region. The interactions between layers of discursive practice are a crucial component of agentative meaning making which can facilitate contestation and inclusivity at local and national levels. In this introduction we map out the terrain of research to date, and identify the key themes which extend across the volume. Four "threads" which emerge from the exploration of discourses of disruption are woven together to present the key findings. These four threads are: discourses of disruption as sites of power struggle, impact of public discourse on social cohesion, contested meanings and identity, and intersections of language and culture.

Keywords: COVID-19, Asia, discourse and power, disruptions, national identity, crisis discourse

1. Communication in a Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about major shifts in the ways in which individuals, organisations, and nations operate in the world. As the virus spread through the globe, human movements were restricted and public health measures such as mask wearing and social distancing became the "new normal." Health authorities such as the World Health Organisation and disease control centres around the world issued updates and recommendations, leaders and governments engaged in public messaging to ensure proper implementation of public health measures, and individuals tried to make sense of what was happening by engaging with each other through social media and on- and off-line modes of contact. In a collective effort to contain this large-scale health emergency, communication has emerged as a crucial element of this disruptive global crisis.

In crisis situations, the meanings we create, and the way we create those meanings impact on the life and death of people. The primary aim of this volume

is to highlight the centrality of communication in the face of such a global health crisis. Our focus is on the ways in which "disruptions" in relation to COVID-19 were created, addressed, and exacerbated in public discourse in Asian contexts.

COVID-19 has caused not only illness to individuals, but also disruptions to our health systems and social coherence. Public health communication therefore not only sought to contain the virus, but also to mitigate the other disruptions it has caused (O'Hair and O'Hair, 2021). The WHO and leaders around the world made appeals to the public through social media or press conferences to change their behaviour or routines in the hope of containing the virus, and government health departments continuously updated health directives on their websites to keep the public up to date on current best practice. The language of these directives was not merely instrumental; it was often aimed at creating a sense of solidarity in the face of threat, with a goal of bringing people together (Dada et al., 2021; Molnár, Takács, and Harnos, 2020).

While these communicative events were aimed at alleviating confusion and providing useful information, discourses of the pandemic and its impact have themselves created disruptions to social cohesion and further deepened the social divides which already existed. With these layers of disruption associated with COVID-19 in mind, the chapters in this volume offer insights into the various roles communication has played in public discourse, with a focus on the Asian region.

2. COVID-19 and Discourses of Disruption

Crisis comes in many different forms and is both "socially and discursively constructed" (De Rycker and Mohd Don, 2013, p. 10). The COVID-19 pandemic crisis has resulted in far-reaching large-scale disruptions. Health provision has been disrupted. Movement has been disrupted. Education and schooling have been disrupted. Work has been disrupted. Social and communal gatherings have been disrupted. All aspects of life and death, it could be argued, have been disrupted. COVID is, therefore, not only itself a disruption of physical health but also a cause of social disruption through which issues of power and agency come into focus in ways which have previously been obfuscated by "normativity" (cf. Coupland, 2020).

COVID-19 emerged in the era of widespread international interconnectivity, often referred to as globalisation. "Language-in-motion" is one resource for creating and understanding meaning within "various spatiotemporal frames interacting with one another" (Blommaert, 2010, p. 5). Blommaert argues for the importance of approaching language at "different, layered ... scale-levels." Scaling is, as Gal argues, "a relational practice that relies on situated comparisons among events, persons, and activities" (2016, p. 91). We scale by creating comparisons which

extend over both space and time (Summerson, Carr, and Lempert, 2016). With digital connectivity a shared reality across the globe, and between private and public spaces, meaning is made and contested locally and globally from diverse perspectives using scales such as less/more, better/worse, equal/not equal and so on. In our inquiry into discourses of disruption, we cannot avoid the issue of mobility (and lack of it) and the inequalities it creates. However, as Dong (2021) suggests, the pause in global movement caused by the pandemic may require us to reconsider our conceptualisations of language in globalisation. To better understand discourses of disruption in COVID-19 as global, social, cultural, and political phenomena, this volume will attempt to unpack the multi-layered functioning of discursive resources.

3. Studies in Language and Discourse of COVID-19

Central to this volume is the examination of communication and language in the context of the COVID-19 global crisis as it unfolds in the Asia-Pacific. While the COVID-19 pandemic has been extensively studied from medical, public health and political perspectives, the crucial role of language and communication during the COVID crisis has received less attention. Of a number of key studies which have emerged in this area, several of those outlined here are related to the Asia region.

An early special issue of *Multilingua* (Piller, Zhang, and Li, 2020) focused on crisis communication in the Chinese context, including linguistically and culturally diverse communities within China as well as diasporic communities internationally, and with a focus on bringing peripheral academic voices into the global discourse. A close look at sociolinguistic research during the pandemic is presented by work in a special issue of *Linguistics Vanguard* (Sneller, 2022; Abtahian et al., 2022) on international students from East Asia and South Asia, focusing on ethical concerns related to researching personal experiences of the pandemic and looking for ways of improving public discourse during a crisis. More recently, the longer-term effects of COVID on national place branding have been investigated in a special issue of *Sociolinguistic Studies* (Tovar, 2023) with studies examining nationalistic governmental attempts to highlight their positive responses to the pandemic and promote tourism, but which can also engender negative reactions, resistance, and subversion from the public. These include case studies from Japan (Carlson and Hatano, 2023) and the Philippines (Vitorio and Valdez, 2023). Edited volumes have focused on humanities and social science perspectives, including pandemic crisis communication through journalism, literature, and advertising (Zhao et al., 2021, which includes several chapters on Chinese contexts) and problems arising specifically from translation and interpreting in both the Global North and Global

South (Blumczynski and Wilson, 2023; Liu and Cheung, 2022). The contributions in Musolff et al. (2022) examine discourses of public debate in several countries, reflecting on agenda setting, metaphor, and performativity by a wide range of actors, including those in Asia.

Chapters in the above-mentioned compilations, together with several individual studies, have highlighted a number of key themes arising from the study of language and communication during the pandemic, several of which are examined in chapters of this volume. Crisis and risk communications during the pandemic occur at a range of scales from the global to the national to the very local (Krystallidou and Braun, 2022). At the level of the nation state, in addition to public health messaging for their constituencies, governments have engaged in pandemic-inspired public relations campaigns. These involve biopolitical nationalism in East Asia (de Kloet and Lin, 2020) and place branding in Southeast Asia (Mathayomchan, Taecharungroj, and Wattanacharoensil, 2022), Japan, and the Philippines (Tovar, 2023), whereby nations promote their pandemic responses in a kind of nationalistic rivalry, to assert a positive global image, stimulate popular support, and revitalise tourism. Ideological responses to the pandemic have also influenced newspaper reporting and have been used in East Asia to attack international rivals and push for pro-business reforms (Fox, 2021).

A major issue originally identified by the World Health Organization during the SARS epidemic, and which became increasingly problematic during COVID-19, is what has been termed an "Infodemic" of misinformation and disinformation (Dang, 2021, on Southeast Asia; Dong, 2021, which includes the experience of migrant workers in China). Linguistically and culturally diverse communities are particularly vulnerable to such problems of communication (Krystallidou and Braun, 2022) and much of the research on language issues during the pandemic has centred on the needs of more marginalised communities. These are usually minority populations within societies dominated by a larger linguistic group, and they may be identified with indigenous languages (Sakhiyya et al., 2022 on Indonesia; Sengupta, 2022, which compares countries with high linguistic diversity including China, India, and Indonesia), the languages of permanent migrants, or of temporary visiting workers and students (Jang and Choi, 2020; Li et al., 2020). Many of the efforts to improve communication channels for marginalised groups have involved grassroots, bottom-up efforts by community members themselves. Zhang and Zhao (2020) have discussed vlogs in home languages, produced by Chinese YouTube micro-influencers living in the diaspora, as a way of communicating health messages to migrant communities. Indigenous Austronesian communities in Taiwan took it upon themselves to develop their own public health messaging campaigns in local languages, in the face of primarily Mandarin-language messaging

from the government (Chen, 2020). Indeed, volunteer translating and interpreting initiatives have been developed by many local and migrant communities to fill the gap left by inadequate government information programmes, as evidenced in the examples from China (Jiang, 2021; Zhang and Wu, 2020; Zheng, 2020). One cause of this inadequacy in some jurisdictions has been an English-mediated multilingualism, which assumes that English is the default "foreign" language and is mistakenly believed to be adequate for communicating with migrants from a variety of linguistic backgrounds—an issue identified in, for example, China (Jiang, 2021; Li et al., 2020; Zheng, 2020) and Japan (Nakamura, 2022). Due to these problems, there is a noted increase in the valorisation of minority languages (e.g., Bai, 2020 on Inner-Mongolia, China; Li et al., 2020 on China) along with a call for greater government support for marginalised language communities (Chen, 2020 on Taiwan; Heinrichs, Kretzer, and Davis, 2022 on Australia; Jang and Choi, 2020 and Shen, 2020 on China; Sengupta, 2022 on several countries including China, India, and Indonesia).

These bottom-up efforts contrast with frequently less effective top-down government approaches. Public health messages may be ineffectual when the language proficiencies of the general population are not considered by governments, as Sakhiyya et al. (2022) argue based on their study in Indonesia. On the other hand, uncritical translation into migrant languages can also have a negative impact: Chesnut, Curran, and Kim (2023) show that the choice of languages for the translation of government public signage in Korea is based on stereotypes about perceived behaviours by specific migrant groups; this in turn reinforces these negative stereotypes in the broader community. Nonetheless, the power and resources held by governments make them vital players in public health communication, and key themes to emerge are the importance of support from authorities for grassroots efforts and the need for all actors to look for coproduced solutions (Jang and Choi, 2020 on South Korea; Krystallidou and Braun, 2022 covering several jurisdictions including China and Taiwan).

In sum, there is an increasing volume of studies on language and communication related to COVID-19, covering a range of areas such as multilingual communication, linguistic minority communities, translation and interpreting, public health communication, media discourse, and language and national identity. Chapters in this volume also cover these areas of inquiry, with a specific focus on how people, media, organisations, and governments dealt with the extraordinary challenges of disruptions posed by COVID-19 through their meaning-making activities in Asian languages. The contributors to this volume, all of whom have expertise in Asian studies, bring much-needed insight to discourses of the pandemic beyond the Anglophone world.

4. Overview of the Volume

The chapters in this book focus on the multiple disruptions to people (individuals), entities, and governments in the Asian region where a "new normal" has brought into question "normality." These ongoing disruptions affect shared community values, human rights, and everyday activities. At first constructed as "unexpected," to those not in the relevant fields of epidemiology, COVID-19 disruptions have controlled narratives in public discourse. Since early 2020, this ongoing state of disruption has become normalised.

The contributions to this volume are set within scholarship from disciplines such as Asian studies, translation studies, sociolinguistics, and discourse analysis. The individual chapters examine media flows, public discourse, and issues of translation. Using diverse approaches to, and issues regarding, languages in societies from the Asian region, the chapters explore the struggles over national identity and manifestations of socio-political issues in the context of disruptions caused by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Methodologies include discourse analysis, sociolinguistics of stance, pragmatics, and translation studies. Data derive from public discourses in Cantonese, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Malay, and Australian English. The types of texts under scrutiny in this volume range from news articles and official government announcements to social media posts by the general public.

In Chapter 2, Susanna Ackroyd provides insight into how the Communist Party of China (CPC) constructs and manages discourse around public health crises such as the SARS and COVID-19 pandemics. Specifically, using a Critical Discourse Analysis approach, this chapter examines how the CPC employs a battle-hero-saviour narrative to leverage the Party's revolutionary history and strengthen the legitimacy of its rule, thus informing the larger story of Chinese governance and nation-building under the CPC.

The pandemic has also revealed challenges of public health communication in the era of globalisation. Since timeliness of communication is crucial in order to avoid further disruptions to health crisis management, government agencies have become increasingly dependent on machine translation. Examining the performance of Neural Machine Translation (NMT) tools in translating Chinese language journal articles about COVID-19, Wayne Wen-chun Liang, Ester S.M. Leung, and Chun Hin Tse in Chapter 3 identify what MT evaluation metrics fail to reflect in the quality of translation, while also presenting a refined set of quality assessment metrics to explore how the evaluation of machine-translated texts can better be undertaken. The chapter highlights the importance of cultural, emotional, or ideological dimensions when communicating across languages.

The public health emergency of COVID-19 brought disruptions not only to the everyday lives of the citizens, but also to the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. In

Chapter 4, Claire Maree explores how disruptions caused by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic created tensions and clashes with the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games' vision of "Unity in Diversity" and "United by Emotion," as seen in increasing xenophobia and protest against the Games. It is argued that the polite undertones of おもてなし [*omotenashi*] (selfless hospitality) resonate with the impolite demands to "get out" in a way that demonstrates the fragility of *omotenashi* as an act of un/welcoming the foreign.

Turning to the disruptions which threaten the effort to unite a nation to fight against the pandemic, Ikuko Nakane focuses on efforts to stop discrimination due to COVID-19. This chapter discusses discursive resources and underlying ideological stances of the producer of public messages against coronavirus discrimination. The analysis reveals intersecting layers of discourses which emerge from the different socio-political positionings of the creators of these messages. Along with Susanna Ackroyd's chapter, Nakane's chapter demonstrates how the "war" metaphor is used as a powerful tool for health crisis management, but at the same time may obscure underlying problems in the society.

Chapter 6 further explores the issue of social tension caused by the pandemic. Jun Ohashi examines how perceived social norms and moral concerns for self and others have shaped the discourses and practices of mask wearing during the COVID-19 pandemic. Focusing on how social norms and social identities are formed in online discussion forums in Japan and in Australia, the chapter argues that the topic of (non-)mask wearing provides interesting material for the study of interpersonal language and (im)politeness.

Mi Yung Park and Hakyoon Lee in Chapter 7 present the unexpected impact of the disruption which COVID-19 brought to the increasingly multicultural and multilingual Korean society. The chapter discusses how bilingual and bicultural capacities of marginalised minority women in South Korea give them agency in contributing to public health initiatives. Importantly, it is argued that the women's contribution amidst the nation's struggles with COVID-19 has impacted upon the discourses of identity politics.

In Chapter 8, Richard Powell and Zarina Othman examine discourses of "confusion" found in reports and in reader comments in the online news portal *Malaysiakini*, focusing on uncertainty about COVID-19 containment measures. Employing a Critical Discourse Analysis framework to explore the stances behind these discourses, the chapter argues that such confusion concerns how such orders and procedures are communicated, while also indexing political frustration and dissatisfaction with the health measures themselves.

In Chapter 9, Craig A. Smith and Dayton Lekner examine how one of the key binaries of Chinese thought—that of 内–外 [*nei–wai*] (internal–external)—has evolved in Taiwan during the COVID-19 pandemic and is reflected in its discourses

on its neighbours. The chapter argues that the pandemic has served as a meta-catalyst in which material and discursive conditions continue to transform the way that Taiwanese construct and understand their identity and their place in the world.

Finally, in Chapter 10 Lachlan Thomas-Walters, Suqin Qian, and Delia Lin highlight the complexity of communicating public health information to culturally and linguistically diverse communities. This chapter argues that quality translation is the foundation of the coherent and well-informed approach to communication which responsible government bodies owe linguistic minorities in times of health emergency.

The overarching theme of "discourses of disruption," therefore, emerges from interdisciplinary and intradisciplinary collaboration between the authors. It addresses the multiplicity of communication modes and mediums which are critical in the management of public health crises, and the ways in which these are impacted on by social, political, and cultural fissures.

5. Emerging Threads of Discourses of Disruption in Asia: Creating and Contesting Meaning in the Time of COVID-19

This edited volume focuses on the earlier stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, reflecting on 2020 to mid-2021, not the "COVID normal" third year phase. Four **threads** emerge from the study of *Discourses of Disruption in Asia: Creating and Contesting Meaning in the Time of COVID-19* in this earlier stage and in the context of the Asia-Pacific and languages from the region: sites of power struggle, disruptions to social cohesion, contested meanings, and intersections of language and culture.

5.1 Thread 1: Sites of Power Struggle

Communication is central in times of disruption. The chapters in this volume offer an analysis of a variety of texts—newspaper articles, journal articles, medical texts, official government announcements, health directives, comments by the "general public" on social media apps and comments by civil society actors—which offer alternatives to Anglo-European perspectives of the pandemic. When compiled, the analysis of this wide variety of texts demonstrates how public discourse emerges as a site for power struggle where, for example, governments attempt to implement measures to contain the disease. In Ackroyd's story grammar analysis of the *People's Daily* newspaper and Nakane's discussion of government leaders' video messages against "corona discrimination," the "war" metaphor emerges as a discursive resource to mobilise and unite the nation against a disease which could disrupt not only the health system but also trust in the government. Public discourses on

COVID-19 also emerge as a site for power struggle in relation to geopolitical conflicts in the Asia-Pacific. Polarised "us and them" positioning over the handling of the health crisis is illustrated by the discussion of antagonistic voices in traditional and social media in Taiwan (Chapter 9, Smith and Lekner).

The discourses of COVID-19 disruption have also created a space for the public to express their discontent with authorities, threatening the authorities' power and control. Maree's discussion of contrastive おもてなし [*omotenashi*] (Japanese hospitality) and 帰れ [*kaere*] (go home!) discourses highlight the dynamic workings of linguistic politeness in Japanese in the articulation of dissent against the power holders, illustrating disruption to the management of a global event in the midst of a pandemic. In Powell and Othman's chapter, the analysis of the news media discourse in Malaysia sheds light on how the public might capitalise on the discourse of confusion over the communication of public health regulations to express their discontent and opposition to the government. Powell and Othman also argue that inability to avoid confusion creates a challenging context for power struggle, especially if the authority is regarded as "untrustworthy" or "incompetent." Such research explicates how discursive resources are deployed by nations and governments, not only to protect their people from the virus but also to maintain their power during a significant health crisis which presented an opening for potential disruptions to the regime. Indeed, studies in this volume demonstrate that discursive strategies with varying modalities are adopted by citizens and journalists and at times even threaten a regime's control of its political power.

5.2 Thread 2: Disruptions to Social Cohesion

A second key thread which emerges from the work presented in this volume points to how public discourse contributed to disruptions to social cohesion, creating, exacerbating, or reconfiguring social tensions and discrimination. Ohashi's analysis of public forum discussions on mask wearing in Japan and Australia reveals new social tensions arising as people expressed their stances towards public health measures and expected behaviour. In the Japanese forum, norm-conforming pressure resulted in aggressive and impolite language used against the opposing group in Japan, while solidarity-oriented discourse prevailed over willingness to conform to the new norm of mask wearing in the Australian forum. This highlights tensions over normative behaviour and illustrates how discourse on such behavioural norms is enacted in digital spaces.

Disruption to social cohesion has also manifested itself in rising discrimination against people who contracted COVID-19—even essential workers, including health workers. While we have seen public displays of support for health workers and calls for solidarity in many parts of the world, governments, health authorities such

as WHO, and human rights groups also launched campaigns against discrimination associated with COVID-19. Nakane's chapter reveals a range of linguistic and semiotic resources which Japanese leaders used to address a threat to social cohesion driven by discrimination. Their varying approaches have implications for effective leadership communication in times of national and global crisis.

Public discourse on COVID-19 has also been discussed as a locus for exclusion and inclusion of minority groups. The pandemic has resulted in exclusion of linguistic minorities due to lack of access to quality services and information (Piller, Zhang, and Li, 2020). A pitfall of multilingual policy in the health crisis context is closely examined by Thomas-Walters, Qian and Lin in their study of multilingual public health communication. Contradictory consequences of exclusion and inclusion in public health translation practice emerge in their study, whereby the authorities' aspiration to be inclusive by providing multilingual information on COVID-19 public health measures falls short at times, as poor-quality translation entails risks of miscommunication, potentially causing disruption to social cohesion.

In the cases of Taiwan and Korea, contradictions are found when discourses of integration and inclusion are scrutinised in relation to the pandemic's disruptions. Smith and Lekner argue that there is a disjuncture highlighted in the scaling of discourse around the pandemic in that Taiwan's New Southbound Policy rhetoric of collaboration with Asia does not align with the prevalent portrayal of Southeast Asian migrant workers as outsiders in traditional and social media. Nor does it align with their exclusion from the information network. Smith and Lekner also contend that Taiwan's public discourse projects conflicting positionings vis-à-vis the international community over its positive COVID-19 management. Park and Lee's chapter also focuses on exclusion and inclusion, critically addressing social tension in the context of *wuli* (we) discourse. Their analysis of personal narratives of migrant women in newspaper articles illustrates how the disruptions to daily activities in a host community due to COVID-19 restrictions affected the women's sense of belonging and opportunities to be part of the community. Of particular interest here are the evolving and at times contradictory roles of migrant wives' bilingualism/biculturalism in the "new normal" context of the pandemic in Korea.

5.3 Thread 3: Contested Meanings

The work in this volume presents examples of how "crises and conflicts (like wars) play an important role in the formation and discursive construction of identities" (De Rycker and Mohd Don, 2013, p. 40). Contestations of meanings intensified as nations, governments, and individuals faced the challenges of shifting dynamics in the world around them caused by the pandemic. Intersecting with these social divisions is the issue of identity.

One of the subthemes of identity highlighted in this volume is that of national or regional identity. Through manipulating these conceptualisations of identity, a governing authority sets itself apart from others in its public discourse, describing its own nation or region as superior to others in their management of the health crisis. Examples from the *People's Daily* discussed by Ackroyd illustrate how China is portrayed as a successful leader in the international community in opposition to the negative image of the U.S. On the other hand, Taiwanese public discourse distanced itself from the PRC, capitalising on its own (initial) success in managing COVID-19 and othering the mainland Chinese community (Smith and Lekner). Taiwan's paradoxical identity positioning also played out in the public discourse which indulged in negative stereotyping of nationalities in their handling of the disease.

The health crisis has also highlighted how the agency of different groups of people intersected with the power endowed by linguistic repertoire. The analysis of news articles on foreign marriage-migrant women in Korea (Park and Lee) reveals that their cultural and linguistic minority status could lead to two contrary perceptions of their identity: valuable multilingual/multicultural members of mainstream Korean society who actively make positive contributions to society, or powerless and incompetent women who are a burden on its prosperity.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only reconfigured identity positioning or intensified existing "us and them" discourse, but has also generated identity categories built on orientation to health measures and the disease. This is illustrated by the study of social media discourse on masks (Ohashi), where "pro-masker" and "anti-masker" identities were constructed through various discursive resources. There are other types of newly emerging identity categories associated with COVID-19 such as "pro-vaxxer" and "anti-vaxxer" which deserve future investigation from discourse perspectives.

5.4 Thread 4: Intersections of Language and Culture

Chapters in this volume demonstrate the significance of the complex and nuanced ways in which language and culture intersect in understanding discourses of COVID-19 disruption. The two chapters addressing translation issues (Thomas-Walters, Qian, and Lin; Liang, Leung, and Tse) identify layers of meaning embedded in the cultural and historical context of health-related communication, and highlight the challenges of ensuring effective and inclusive translation practice in culturally and linguistically diverse communities at the time of a global health crisis. The volume also touches upon an interesting aspect of multilingual communication, namely code-mixing, which is a discursive resource for both the making and the contestation of meaning, as discussed by Nakane, and by Powell and Othman.

Cultural terms which are grounded in specific sociolinguistic contexts are also used to both make and contest meaning. For example, the Japanese terms *meiwaku* (annoying) (Ohashi) or *omotenashi* (selfless hospitality) (Maree), and the caricaturised descriptions of how people from other nations handled the pandemic (Smith and Lekner), are drawn upon as powerful drivers of discourse which provide relevant sociocultural contexts of the discourses of disruption beyond the health crisis itself. This focus on the intersection of language and culture allows our work to move between etic and emic perspectives, in our attempt to capture how discourse operates at different scale-levels.

6. Creating and Contesting Meaning through Asian Languages

COVID is in and of itself a disruptive disease which causes physical and material harm to the individual body. These bodies are also "containers" through which the disease is distributed, hence the limits placed on both domestic and international movement. At local and global levels (cf. De Rycker and Mohd Don, 2013) governments and regimes have been invested in controlling the discourse of disruption as well as controlling disruptions to dominant discourse.

Communication of disruption has been essential to ensuring the ongoing functioning of local communities, regions, and countries. At the local level, individuals require details of what and how their everyday lives are to be affected by public health measures. At the same time, this volume highlights communication *as* disruption, where it has itself caused further disturbance due to a perceived lack of clarity, or unintentional misreading. As there are multifaceted individual and/ or institutional goals in addressing disruption, these often reinforce social norms, regimes of discrimination, and social injustices, the effects of which are diverse and intersectional.

Disruption causes both material and affective responses. The material effects of misinformation, for example, can lead to issues in accessing healthcare and essential services. A multiplicity of affective responses to that disruption can lead to, for example, feelings of frustration, grief, anger, or confusion. Due to such material and affective repercussions, the pandemic has tested the trust and confidence the public place in their government and political leaders. The actions and messaging of local leadership came under constant public scrutiny, not only because the nature of the new virus was unknown and confusing information circulated widely, but also because the threat of the new virus amplified pre-pandemic tension amongst socially divided public opinions about governance. Uncertainty and fear over a newly discovered health threat caused tension and conflicts in communication.

Social media platforms and spaces emerged as key sites of contestation and negotiation of meaning. SNS channels offered individuals opportunities to seek information online and also to express their opinions, instantly accessible by millions of others.

The pandemic also gave rise to redefinitions of national and regional identities. The discourse of "us vs them" became visible soon after a new coronavirus was identified and its first outbreak in Wuhan was reported. As cases spread around the world, racism against Chinese people began to rise as the virus was called the "Wuhan virus" or the "China virus" (Vazquez, 2020) with a xenophobic tone. "Discourses of disruption" associated with the pandemic, then, also cause disruption to social structures, human relations, and existing ideologies about them both. One of the key concerns of this volume, therefore, is to address how identities are redefined through discourses of the pandemic as a disruption and as a cause of disruptions. Gallois and Liu (2021) also warn of social and individual in addition to health consequences if the diverse orientations of the population within the community are not taken into account. By focusing on alternative discourses, power structures and social norms are brought into relief.

In the evolving context of the "new normal" of the pandemic, public discourses became a locus of contestations which generated further disruptions such as discrimination, reconfiguration of identities, and power struggles. This volume of work explores the impact of COVID-19, unpacking it from a combination of local meaning-making perspectives and wider sociocultural perspectives. The multiple perspectives outlined in this volume enable us to explore complex and multifaceted roles of communication as disruptions are created and circulated throughout the global community. The contributors' translingual and transcultural lenses bring to light how communities around Asia made sense of the monumental challenges posed by the pandemic from inside and outside. Our work aims to show that discourses of disruption do not necessarily entail negative consequences, but can give new openings for contesting and making meanings to reimagine the world around us. The work in this book focuses on public discourse to complement studies of discourse on and of COVID-19 in other genres and thus to further our understanding of health crisis communication.

The COVID-19 pandemic has gone through a number of phases since the virus was first reported in 2020. This project does not include discussion of discourse on COVID-19 vaccination or easing of restrictions beyond the third year of the pandemic. Given the centrality of language and communication in this global health crisis, further investigation of disruptions in these new phases of the pandemic from discourse perspectives will have important implications, not only for public health but also for solidarity of, and hope for, humanity.

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