

SPECIAL ARTICLE

The Role of Interculturalism in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Outcomes of online discussions

Sangsoo Kim

Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Korea

terence@chol.com

ABSTRACT: This article reports on the results of online discussions held in February-March 2022 to share different perspectives on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis upon interculturalism. Organized under the title “The Role of Interculturalism in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic”, the editors of *InContext* invited scholars from various academic backgrounds. The aim of this discussion was not to provide practical solutions nor to draw a coherent picture of the current crisis provoked by the pandemic. Rather, it endeavored to test the possibility of analyzing this crisis in terms of interculturalism, thereby seeking the possibility of broadening the approach in general. There has been a large amount of scholarly research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic upon global community in various academic fields. In order for intercultural studies to make a contribution to this task, it is urgent to encourage active exchange of opinions among those whose academic interests lie in cultural communications and interactions.

This article first summarizes some notable academic discussions on intercultural studies, including politics, education, art, and literature. Comparing the opinions submitted for the discussions is the basis of the present research before drawing any significant academic implications. Among those who provided their opinions through various channels, five scholars were chosen to represent different aspects of the topic: the psychological aspect of the COVID-19 crisis; the implications of cyber literature access for youth education; the efforts of a regional community to maintain its creative spirit in arts and culture; and the crisis of liberalism in international relations. The

contribution from these five scholars provided the basis for the case studies presented here and analyzed through an intercultural lens for the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on humanity.

Just as the scope of intercultural studies is shaped and enriched by contributions from many academic fields, the participants in the online discussions cited here also entertain the hope that this article will help *InContext* shape the agenda in the field of interculturalism and thereby spearhead academic endeavors to include divergent perspectives in the quest to understand humankind and the diverse cultural manifestations which are its reflection.

KEYWORDS: interculturalism, online discussion, COVID-19 pandemic, cultural communications, cultural interactions

논문초록: 이 글은 코로나 19 유행병 위기가 인터컬츄럴리즘에 끼친 영향에 대해 학술적 의견을 교환하기 위해 2022년 2~3월에 진행된 온라인 토론회의 결과 보고서다. 『*InContext*』 편집진은 '코로나 19 유행병 시기 인터컬츄럴리즘의 역할'이라는 제목으로 진행된 이 토론회에 다양한 학문적 배경을 가진 학자들을 초빙하여 의견을 교환했다. 이 토론회의 목적은 유행병이 촉발한 위기에 대해 실용적인 해결책을 제시하거나 이 현상을 일목요연하게 설명하려는 것이 아니라 이 위기를 인터컬츄럴리즘 차원에서 접근하여 분석할 수 있는 가능성을 시험해보려는 것이다.

코로나 19 유행병이 지구촌 공동체에 끼친 충격에 대해서 이미 다양한 학문분야에서 많은 연구가 진행되어왔다. 인터컬츄럴리즘 연구분야가 이러한 흐름에 기여하기 위해서는 문화의 소통 및 교류에 관심이 있는 학자들이 활발히 의견을 교환하도록 촉구하는 것이 시급하다. 이 글은 일단 인터컬츄럴리즘, 정치, 교육, 예술, 문학 등에서 어떤 종류의 주목할 만한 연구들이 진행 중인지 간단히 소개한다. 토론회에 제출된 의견들을 비교해보는 것은 향후 이 분야가 의미 있는 학술적 함의를 도출하는 데 매우 유용한 기초작업이 될 것이다.

다양한 경로를 통해 제안된 의견들 중에서 이 글은 5명의 학자가 보내온 네 종류의 의견, 즉 코로나 위기가 촉발한 심리학적 변화의 측면, 청소년 교육을 위한 사이버 문학 접근성의 함의, 예술과 문학 분야에서 창조 정신을 유지하기 위해 노력하는 지역사회의 사례, 국제관계에서 발생한 자유주의의 위기를 선별하여 비교 검토한다. 이들 다섯 학자의 의견은 이 글에서 제시한 사례연구의 근간이 되며, 이에 대한 인터컬츄럴리즘 관점의 분석은 코로나 19 유행병이 인류에 끼친 영향에 대한 이해를 넓혀준다.

인터컬츄럴리즘이라는 학문 자체의 영역이 다양한 학문 분야들의 기여를 통해 형성되고 확장되듯이 온라인 토론회의 모든 참여자들은 이 글이 『*InContext*』의 향후 출간

에 있어서 인터컬츄럴리즘 분야 논문들이 다룰 수 있는 의제를 설정하는 데 도움을 주리라 기대한다. 이 글은 또한 인류가 창출해내는 풍부한 문화적 징후들을 더욱 다양한 관점들을 통해 이해하기 위한 학술적 탐구 과정의 선도 역할을 하고자 한다.

핵심어: 인터컬츄럴리즘, 온라인 토론, 코로나 19 유행병, 문화 소통, 문화 교류

1. Introduction

After the World Health Organization (WHO) announced in March 2020 that COVID-19 should be characterized as a pandemic, it became obvious that we would not be able to halt the worldwide spread of the virus and that it would pose a global threat not only to our health but also to many other aspects of human activity. As famous political scientist Pierre Legrain predicted, this pandemic would result in the revival of nationalism in a more fissiparous form (Legrain, 2020). In response to this threatening international situation, the editors of *InContext* decided to hold a series of online discussions on how the pandemic crisis might impact intercultural studies, particularly in relation to the probable crisis of multilateral communications and interactions between various cultures on the globe.

This paper summarizes the results of a series of discussions held in February-March 2022. Organized under the title “The Role of Interculturalism in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic”, we invited scholars from various academic backgrounds related to interculturalism. Whereas the Special Article of this journal’s inaugural issue was written about translation studies, the subject matter of which was relatively homogeneous, this paper deals with topics raised by those whose academic interests are in various genres of intercultural studies.

After gathering various opinions from many scholars on this issue, the editors chose four of the most relevant ones. Not least because the term ‘interculturalism’ encompasses a wide range of academic disciplines and geographical regions, it is almost impossible to put these opinions under a coherent logical structure. Nevertheless, this paper attempts to present them in the order of their subject matters’ scopes. Starting from personal aspects of the pandemic’s impact, it deals with relevant social questions and concludes with international relations: Hassan draws attention to the psychological

aspect of the COVID-19 crisis in Malaysia; Hidayatullah and Yudisia jointly focus on how to educate youth through cyber literature in order to encourage cultural exchange; Wisatsana presents the efforts made by the Balinese to maintain their creative spirit in the fields of arts and culture; and Yong-min Kim observes that the crisis of liberalism puts stress on the role of the so-called middle powers in international relations. Table 1, below, provides an overview of the profile of the five contributors.

Table 1: Participant profile

Contributor	Domain of opinions shared	Area of expertise	Profession
Umami Hani Abu Hassan	The psychological aspect of the COVID-19 crisis	Literature	Senior lecturer, University of Malaya
Irfan Hidayatullah	The implications for educating youth through cyber literature	Literature & education	Lecturer, University of Padjadjaran
Sinta Yudisia	The implications for educating youth through cyber literature	Literature	Novelist
Warih Wisatsana	The efforts of a regional community to maintain its creative spirit in arts and culture	Literature & art	Poet and art curator
Yong-min Kim	The crisis of liberalism in international relations	Political science	Professor, Konkuk University

The aim of this discussion was neither to provide practical solutions to issues nor to draw a coherent picture of the current crisis provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic but to test the possibility of analyzing this crisis in terms of intercultural studies. For this purpose, the following sections present the participants' opinions based on a transcript of the oral discussions, edited for readability.¹

¹ As the opinions were submitted in the forms of notes and preliminary drafts, readers are kindly requested not to use them as sources of verbatim quotation.

2. Theoretical Background

Before presenting the opinions expressed during the online discussion, it will be useful to have a look at some prior research in related disciplines. First, from the perspective of interculturalism as a whole, a group of renowned scholars in this field led by Steve J. Kulich draws attention to concerns very similar to ours. “As scholars focusing on intercultural communications/relations, education, management, psychology, and social issues,” they observe, “the global COVID-19 pandemic has revealed a range of intercultural problems or issues that need to be researched to better understand related aspects of human suffering, social disruption, and economic inequalities” (Kulich et al., 2021, p. A1). They propose a number of relevant issues to be dealt with from the perspective of interculturalism: reconsidering human needs and intercultural variations in trying times; COVID’s potential intercultural impacts on international issues and identities; its potential impacts on intercultural social networks; interculturality and cross-cultural cooperation; understanding cultural needs, values, and emotions; intercultural education and training; inter-group contact; cross-cultural taxonomies; and intercultural relations. The opinions collected for our discussions are also related to these questions and further research based on these opinions will make a meaningful contribution to this trend.

Political scientists are also alarmed by the pandemic’s ever increasing impact on human activities they are interested in. Florian Bieber, for example, observes that the pandemic might give rise to an aggressive form of nationalism, as foreshadowed by the following: the recent trajectory of nationalism and its social relevance prior to the pandemic; the rise of authoritarianism as governments suspend or reduce democratic freedoms and civil liberties; the rise of biases against some groups associated with the pandemic; and the rise of borders and de-globalization, and the politics of fear (Bieber, 2020). Bieber expects that although the rise of “exclusionary” nationalism might not be the ultimate result of the pandemic, there is a high possibility that it might well strengthen the existing nationalist dynamics of the international politics. Similar issues are dealt with by Yong-min Kim in the last section of this paper.

Education is one of the areas most influenced by the pandemic, not least because it restricts traditional face-to-face teaching in many ways.

This implies that educators have to find an alternative way to facilitate communications between teachers and students as well as to encourage students to learn using new technologies. According to Sumitra Pokhrel and Roshan Chhetri, more than 90% of the students of the world were impacted by the closure of schools and other learning spaces. Teachers and educational experts have been endeavoring to innovate and implement “alternative educational system and assessment strategies” (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021, p. 131). This is a time for adapting ourselves to the so-called digital learning such as on-line teaching and AI-related EdTec. Hidayatullah and Yudisia’s ideas on cyber literature submitted for our discussions are also related to this topic.

New technologies are also becoming important in the field of art. As people could not go out or travel around or gather together to enjoy concerts, exhibitions, fairs and festivals due to public health measures that were put in place, traditional ways of engaging in cultural activities were widely banned, transforming the way people engaged in cultural activities. Hannah Stower and Marianne Guennot conducted a survey on how people (readers of an online medical journal) used art to describe their sense of uncertainty in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic: a medical laboratory technologist used her own art as “real-time documentation” at her workplace in Kuwait; a clinical research fellow in India installed a pop-up art exhibit in a field hospital; a data scientist in a laboratory for psychiatric genomics illustrated scientific concepts in a digital format to communicate science concepts to others and find some relief from her workload (Stower & Guennot, 2021). All these scenes show us that making art is an integral part of living as a human and that even in an isolated situation art can be a useful tool for communicating with each other, with or without the assistance of new communication technologies. Wisatsana’s description of the efforts of the Balinese to create alternative ways to participate in cultural activities is also related to this issue.

Indeed, everything around us seems to be drastically changing and adaptation to the new environment and technologies is regarded as a life-support system for humankind. However, just like the people living in the industrialized cities of early 20th-century England preferred spending leisure time in their small gardens or nearby parks for relaxation from their everyday hard work, people seek more traditional and natural ways to find spiritual and emotional refuge in a gloomy situation. New bits may be added on, but old bits are rarely taken away. Although the pandemic has also changed themes

of contemporary novels, this conventional genre still soothes our emotions. Gabino Iglesias Iglesias (2022), a literary critic and the author of *Zero Saints* and *Coyote Songs*, predicts:

We are naturally inclined to stay away from things we find unpleasant, and there's a chance pandemic literature strikes some readers as precisely that. However, the narratives we've seen so far have shown that the pandemic can be a starting point for any story—and that writing about it can be a way of processing trauma, an exercise in trying to understand its impact on our psyche. This literature can add to a growing map of work that helps us navigate not only recent history but also our present and immediate future.

Thus Hassan's opinion on Malaysian literature will be a good starting point for the summary of the contributions of the invited participants before presenting other opinions which are related to less traditional topics.

3. Aspects of Psychology: The COVID-19 Narrative in Malaysian Literature

Umami Haniffa draws attention to the psychological aspect of the COVID-19 crisis in Malaysia. This country is well known as a multi-ethnic country and its scholars have many opportunities to ponder upon intercultural subjects. According to Hassan, a number of Malaysian writers began to raise the humanitarian issues of the COVID-19 crisis. By presenting their efforts, she suggests that literature can help humankind overcome this crisis:

Nobody would have expected 2022 to be as it is now, with the whole world sharing in this experience. Life has become especially trying if masks and vaccinations are unavailable and if a community does not practice social distancing and follow new norms of interaction. Worse still, our freedom is considerably more limited compared to our lives before the emergence of COVID-19. We are akin to prisoners who are expected to only receive orders from all directions and aspects. Malaysia, a multi-ethnic country with a Muslim majority, has begun to experience a severe psychological crisis. This is evidenced by a 1.4-fold increase in suicides compared to before the

COVID-19 outbreak. It would thus appear that without strong mental and spiritual preparation, individuals regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, and social status will lose in this seemingly unending pandemic battle.

Through the works of Malaysian literature, especially short stories written between 2020 and 2022, writers from both new and older generations have been unable to restrain themselves from rushing headlong into addressing the humanitarian issues of the COVID-19 era. These concerns are based on personal experience and the surrounding communities, and are even supported by the mass media that continuously supports those who have fallen by the wayside. The writer as catalyst shares his or her imagined illustration of this plague for the reader to fathom, ponder, and take comfort from. Interestingly, Malaysian writers have used multiple points of view to illustrate the different types of impact which COVID-19 has had.

For example, Zainal Rashid Ahmad, Malaysia's leading master of the short story, considers COVID-19 to be a 'winged devil' character that can penetrate any place in the world. He was among the first to record the bitter plight of COVID-19 through the short story '*Senja dalam Lima Ayat Paling Sempurna*' (Sunset in the Five Most Perfect Verses). Another writer who is fascinated by YouTubers known as 'Kynryyy from Seoul' has tried to capitalise on his experience of communicating with teenagers around the world through the Omegle app. In his narrative, Zainal created two characters from Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur respectively, who are each confined to a small room but manage to overcome the tragic story of the world stemming from COVID-19 through virtual space. The shared loneliness felt by these two geographically distant humans causes them to reflect on life and death, which is ultimately concluded as the immortality of Almighty God.

In addition to serious social and economic issues such as loss of employment resulting in homelessness and broken families, Malaysian writers have not missed the opportunity to delve into other perspectives on COVID-19. Shang kang, a Malay writer who is an engineering graduate from the University of Manchester, UK, wrote a short story with the title 'Virus Didale 30'. The author writes of an imagined virtual virus that detains humans in the future, similar to how COVID-19 has us 'imprisoned'. Mankind in the new millennium is locked up in the digital realm, and needs to find a way to return to reality. The author alluded to the greed of cybercriminals taking advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic, where the impact of their crimes was

more devastating than the pandemic itself.

The same transition was applied by writer Lokman Hakim with his narrative titled '*Baca Pada Nada Seekor Paus*' (Read in the Tone of a Whale). The question of what a whale has to do with COVID-19 is ultimately an intriguing one. From a brief look at the mother's character, Lokman Hakim shows us the idea of Post Truth that was fine-tuned before being labelled as an authentic fact. It is mentioned by the mother in this short story that the whale will come after the plague. The strange things that appear are believed to be events that threaten to disrupt normal life. The author attempts to contradict assumptions about new issues after the emergence of COVID-19 disrupted most people's regular routines. For him, the 'half-baked truths' that society believes is a virus that is far more capable of infecting humans today.

There are certainly many more stories that have been told with considerable skill within the pandemic literature in Malaysia. A horrific, terrible, illogical, or heartbreaking experience is something that has its own beauty and value. The authors seem to tell their readers to learn from viruses that can undoubtedly change, adapt, and act faster than humans. As long as this pandemic battle is not over, the human race must rise to the occasion with whatever weapon it can wield, the strongest being the mind. And therein lies the function of literature—to somewhat release the tensions felt and experienced by the entire world.

The questions dealt with by Hassan are mainly related to how individuals can overcome their psychological difficulties by reading literary works in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The next section will broaden our perspectives to interactions between individuals in the face of the pandemic crisis.

4. Aspects of Education: Educating Youth through Cyber Literature

Hidayatullah and Yudisia focus on the use of cyber literature as a means to educate younger people for the purpose of encouraging cultural exchange. Younger generations were already more familiar with various kinds of cyber activities even before the COVID-19 pandemic. New educational technologies are becoming more convenient and more efficient than the

traditional methods of off-line education at school. Cyber literature was already gaining in popularity among Asian youth before the pandemic and the ubiquitous use of online communication during COVID-19 lockdowns has further strengthened that popularity. This genre can now be utilized as an alternative education tool for the younger generations, who easily acclimate to new cultural forms and transform them in their own ways in a process known as acculturation. Hidayatullah and Yudisia suggest several ways to harness this new trend to educate younger generations in as positive a way as possible:

According to the *World Youth Report* in 2018, there were 1.2 billion young people aged 15-24, accounting for 16% of the global population. In 2021, the youth population of the world was about 1.8 billion (aged 10-24). For a more precise figure, in 2021, the youth population aged 9-24 was 8.306 million, which accounted for 16.0% of the total population. According to Worldometer, there are about 102 countries from 235 countries with a median age under or equal to 30 years old. The number goes up to about 180 countries when the median age population includes those who are under 40 years old.

In 2021, the younger generation in South Korea comprised 17% (8.31 million) of the total population, while in Indonesia, 65 million young people aged 10-24 comprised 28% of the population. There are more than 1.1 billion young people aged 15-29 living in the Asia-Pacific region, representing more than 25% of the population. The Asia-Pacific is home to 60% of young people in the world, making it the youngest region.

This statistic shows the high potential of youth population, making these young people the primary target audience in a multitude of areas: consumerism, markets, ideology, culture and also education. The younger generations, as agents of change, can accelerate essential changes in the global world to maintain peace in this world, including the issue of the environment, physical and mental health, and cross-border communication.

The younger generation requires not only formal education, but informal education as well. They receive formal education at school, college, and university; but the world outside teaches more. The younger generation is very closely linked to culture, especially modern culture, which comprises music, movies, and multiple forms of entertainment. With the internet, people can

access information more easily and entertain themselves with more flexibility. The telephone in hand is very versatile; it has changed the way we accomplish all manner of tasks. For writing and reading, the younger generations are more familiar with using software applications on hand-held devices.

As education, the internet, and electronic devices become inseparable, we find that teaching the younger generation nowadays is very different from the past. What the younger generations need now is purpose, profit, and acknowledgement (Tuff, 2019), although here the meaning of profit is different from the old one. The younger generation needs to be seen, to gain more attention and affirmation. In education, they do not like direct instructions but want team-bonding activities. Does this have a correlation with the internet and cyber-world? Yes. Because the younger generation desires constant feedback and wishes for their opinions to be validated. They like to search the internet constantly, consume the abundantly available information, and they want to have interactive reciprocal communication with their friends all around the world.

Even though the younger generations are full of energy and eager to learn about all things, there are still problems that need to be solved. With technological literacy and an open mind, the younger generations of this century are very “hyper-customized” (Stillman & Stillman, 2017). They want their schools, workplaces, and everything else to be customized according to their preferences. Being unique and different is not a fault, but not everything can be customized. The younger generation is only interested in reading about and being exposed to the information they want, and with the algorithm of the internet, cyber information could be a trap. Violence, sex trafficking, overshopping and self-harming are some of the issues in the youth world. When people click the same kind of information every day, the algorithm of the internet will lead there and that is how the cyber-world molds our perception.

Cyber literature is a necessity in our world. This consists of how we write on computers or devices, distributing it via the internet and how people read it online. The younger generations are experts in the production and dissemination of text in various forms. Educators have to teach them how to responsibly distribute messages and respond to comments wisely.

While engaging with electronic devices, the younger generations come in to contact with a large number of people with various backgrounds and cultures. They come in to contact with people on Twitter, Instagram,

Facebook, etc.; they read stories on online platforms such as Wattpad; they read and blog in WordPress or Tumblr. The younger generations acclimate to new cultural trends more easily, and they have an easier time acculturating.

Acculturation is defined as a developmental process towards adaptation to, and gaining competence in, more than one cultural setting. Unlike assimilation, which is a one-way process by which the inferior culture gives way to the superior culture, acculturation is assumed to affect both parties and to be reciprocal.

In South Korea, from the 1970's to the 1990's, the younger generation developed a unique culture that offered not only entertainment from "another world", but also a cultural space for creative development and self-realization. Known as youth subculture, this culture created a new generation of trends in music, writing, clothing, drawing, make-up and other fields. In the late 1990's, when the South Korean government lifted the ban on the sale of Japanese publications, *otaku* (a term that describes fans of Japanese *manga* and *anime*) culture became popular among the youth. This phenomenon illustrates the fact that the younger generations are more readily involved in cultural exchange, political issues notwithstanding.

Cultural diversity was indispensable for the development of a well-functioning modern society. Acculturation culture is even more a necessity, particularly when people from different countries live side by side, such as youths studying abroad and people working in another country as laborers or professionals.

Cyber literature refers to written literary texts that are distributed and read on electronic devices. While the younger generations are well-acquainted with electronic devices, understanding cyber literature has become a responsibility for young people. They update their statuses on Twitter, take photos and caption them for Instagram, and send comments on Facebook. Some young people engage in much more elaborated writing activities: They post stories on platforms like Wattpad. Wattpad is well known all around the world, including in South Korea and Indonesia. In Indonesia, there are some local platforms such as Kwikku, KBM App, Cabaca, etc. The stories are presented not only in text format, but also combine visuals as well, such as in graphic novels and comics. In Japan, this genre is known as *manga*, and called *manhwa* in Korea.

There are several reasons why cyber literature can have a positive effect on younger generations, especially when they enjoy reading and writing.

Cyber literature is characterized by its flexibility and its ability to entertain. It helps its readers share their emotions, improves their writing skills, promotes constructive and fruitful interactions, and encourages acculturation.

Of course, these positive traits do not emerge so simply without any constraints. We must consider the more negative effects such as violence, unhealthy sexual behavior, bullying, aggressiveness, racism, and so forth. The following are some suggestions as to what we can do to promote positive engagement with cyber literature: incorporate stories with various cultural backgrounds (*Dedes*, a Line Webtoon comics with Indonesian history in the medieval age, for example); acculturate Indonesian culture and Korean style of depiction in comics, which will enrich the readers' knowledge; hold a youth story competition on novels or comics, based on local culture or acculturation; and increase the volume of translated stories, ranging from traditional folktales to modern novels.

Indeed, the education of youth through cyber literature involves many forms of new technology. Using them in the field of education used to be an experimental challenge, but it is now becoming an integral part of education in many regions of the world. The COVID-19 pandemic facilitated further development of such technologies in many other fields. Although art might have been regarded as a human activity that would not be easily affected by the advance of cutting-edge technologies, the way people participate in or enjoy it has changed significantly since the crisis.

5. Aspects of Art: *Gering Agung*, Bali and the COVID-19 Pandemic

Waruh Wisatsana shows how the Balinese tried to maintain their creative spirit despite the gloomy situation. Although the pandemic crisis seemed to have frozen the everyday life of all the Balinese people, politicians and artists endeavored to take advantage of this situation and let it serve as momentum for change for the future of the island. This also presents us with a very positive version of human reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in terms of cultural activities.

Have you ever wondered how Bali is nowadays? A place that is well known for its thousand temples, or as a last paradise? How are the Balinese undergoing, encountering, and trying to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic? Before answering those questions, we need to take a look into the general portrayal regarding the socio-cultural and historical background of Bali Island and its society, especially about its minority status and the fact that this region has its own identity, and the majority of Balinese people adhere to the Hindu Dharma religion while most Indonesians are Muslims.

It is worth noting that Hindu Dharma, as a belief or a faith, has been confirmed to be not fully identical to its origin, namely India, and having acculturated over time with animist and dynamist beliefs (the local wisdom) growing and existing in that region for a long time. Thus considering the uniqueness of the Balinese social culture and history, the attractiveness and the ultimate charm of this region as a top-tier national, regional, and even international tourism destination is inevitable. Thousands of hospitality facilities in this region surround all the Bali area (in 2019, the number was 123,399 rooms) and these facilities include inns, villas, and even the five-star hotels under the governance of a multinational management network.

All of a sudden, the COVID-19 pandemic came to Bali. The first case was reported on March 10, 2020. This pandemic was followed by a megaflood of information about COVID-19 from social or online media immediately and simultaneously received by individuals via phones. Fake news stories caused a great deal of confusion about the basic facts of current issues. It was not uncommon that this news had the sense of incitement and prejudices assuming that the COVID-19 pandemic is a part of a global political conspiracy resulting in racial and primordial prejudices. It was even worsened by the emergence of identity politics indicating the latent strains based on ethnicity, mixed with racism, religion and nationalism fundamentalists, or a combination of all those problems. This issue was triggered by illusion and delusion about the unknown reality of this pandemic.

The policy implemented by the *Pemberlakuan Pembatasan Kegiatan Masyarakat* (PPKM; Community Activities Restrictions Enforcement) and the application of Health Protocols suddenly changed the social-cultural life of the people in this island, which was traditionally communal because it is an agrarian cultural heritage. After the outbreak, we found a deserted airport. As news of the COVID-19 outbreak spread, international tourism, a major

component of the local Balinese economy, came to a virtual standstill.

The absence of economic development in Bali brought some effects. It brought a total shock, shaking the ecosystem of the people's lives in general. Many companies closed their doors and sent their employees home because 80% of the Balinese economy depends on the tourism sector. Daily social activities were automatically stopped. Even the annual occasion named *Pesta Kesenian Bali* (Bali Art Festival), which would have been its 42nd iteration, was canceled. The art, cultural, and religious activities could not be held the way they used to be.

This global pandemic inevitably demands not only adaptation, but also a complete transformation, especially for the Balinese people, where customs, religion and traditions are integrated into the practice of daily life, and are upheld by families, villages, and wider communities. Understanding the problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as realizing that the creative spirit of the Balinese is art and culture, under the direction of the Governor of Bali Province, Wayan Koster, Prof. Dr. I Wayan Kun Adnyana, head of the Culture Service, along with cultural observers, artists, and academics across several fields, formulated strategic policies. On the one hand, these addressed how artists and creators could continue to do art; on the other hand, priority was placed on maintaining the immunity of the community in the face of the COVID-19 virus.

So it was determined that the pandemic must be treated as a momentum for change, in accordance with the adaptation process and a series of transformations in response to the level of spread and positive cases of COVID-19 which turned out to be fluctuating with the succession of the Delta and Omicron variants. The implementation of social distancing and healthy protocol discipline should also trigger a new awareness about how to live now and in the future, including efforts to maintain the creative spirit of creation in the arts in order to survive.

Two major events on the annual Balinese art and culture calendar (the Bali Arts Festival and the Bali Jani Arts Festival) were held online in 2020 in a virtual format through YouTube channels and various social media in order to maintain the creative spirit of the Balinese art community. To emphasize the theme of adaptive change and transformation, the 2020 organizers labelled the event "Bali Art Center as Creativity Lab", inviting contributors to collaborate across areas of specialization.

The organizers emphasized to contributing artists and to the general public that art during the pandemic is not only an expression of beauty, but also a call for environmental awareness, solidarity, tolerance, and efforts to care for humanity. The 2020 efforts, adapting the format in order to support and showcase the Balinese creative spirit, were extremely successful. In 2021 the events were once again held in their original offline format.

But beyond ensuring the momentum of these annual Balinese events by converting to a virtual format during the first year of the pandemic, the virtual art presentations constituted a learning process and accelerated the awareness of all stakeholders of a new reality, i.e. Virtual Reality, a multimedia format which requires imagination and creativity from all members of the artistic communities. For most of the contributing artists, it was an introduction to new ways of creating and presenting their art forms. Skills in cinematography and editing, as well as collaborative and other forms of video compositions were developed. The experimentation required was the momentum for change and unleashed a creative response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the second year of the pandemic, in 2021, this creative momentum was carried forward when the 43rd Bali Arts Festival (PKB), held from 12 June to 10 July, and the 3rd Bali Jani Arts Festival (FSBJ), held from 23 October to 6 November, were held in a hybrid format (partly online, partly offline). Communication was carried out online, as well as in face-to-face formats; discussions or live performances (offline) were held with a limited audience, but broadcast through virtual meeting and streaming platforms.

Unlike the previous Bali Arts Festival, which had only one discussion program on the agenda (called *Widyatula2* in Balinese), in 2021, it had six topics related to environmental awareness, considering the pandemic is part of ecological damage caused by human activities. The discussion topics included: (1) Environmental Performing Arts (Body, Rites, and Conservation); (2) Environmental Visual Arts (Visual Art, Rites, and Interruptions); (3) Environmental Literature (Word, Rites, and Testimonials); (4) Eco-Design (Entrepreneurs and Lifestyle); (5) Digital Art (Visual creation and Revitalization); and (6) Environmental Architecture (Wastucitra and Restoration).

This event involved no less than 1,000 artists and creators across fields and generations. The festival concepts were: (1) Exploration: the achievement of innovative art based on personal creativity, while ideas and exploration

subjects remain based on local traditions or values and new discoveries; (2) Experimentation: the achievement of modern/contemporary art based on creativity and experimentation of the medium/media; (3) Cross-border: new artistic achievements based on media transfer, multi-media and transmedia; (4) Contextual: the achievement of new art that is thematically relevant to the context of the theme and time of the Bali Jani Arts Festival; and (5) Collaboration: the process and achievement of modern/contemporary art based on synergy and cooperation between Balinese or foreign/overseas artists.

In particular, the 3rd Bali Jani Art Festival dialogues (*Timbang Rasa*) had seven topics presented by national and international reputed speakers, including: (1) Building a Modern Theater Ecosystem in Bali: Stagnation, Dynamization, and Achievement; (2) Thematic Variety of Modern Balinese Poetry: Exploration and Innovation Efforts; (3) Art as a Call to Consciousness: Harmony of Self and Earth; (4) Media Transfer in Art: Collaboration and Current Stylistic-Aesthetic Variety; (5) Today's Balinese Music Creations: Harmonious Square in Exploration; (6) Today's *Taksu* of Dance: Cross Creativity and Authenticity; and (7) Performing Arts: Creativity across Boundaries.

What this overview of the Balinese adaptation of two of their major artistic events reveals is that the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the implementation of social distancing and healthy protocol discipline, have triggered the emergence of a new awareness and new paradigms on how to function under current guidelines and how to envisage living with the pandemic in the future, including efforts to maintain the creative spirit and the existence of arts and culture. A new paradigm is only possible if we realize that the reality we are facing today is multi-faceted (virtual reality, visible reality, imaginary reality, and their overall mix).

In the process of adapting to a new reality, it is not sufficient to simply explore stylistic, aesthetic or thematic variations. A new paradigm must be proposed. Accelerated change has been triggered by the development and dissemination of information technology. If it is not managed and organized through comprehensive planning, it encourages the occurrence of 'social-cultural chaos', in which self-identity (individual/communal) is transformed into a socio-cultural area that has no clear direction. It is even possible that many individuals are alienated, lose their critical attitude and are carried away

in various forms of “social amnesia”.

Display of audiovisual content on telephones and other devices is rhythmic and suggestive, gradually ‘conjuring’ the viewer, turning a once-free subject into a hostage of the device, and it may lead to an ‘obsessive and delusional’ society. A new awareness is needed, based on the reality of life infused with technological advances. The fundamental question which the pandemic has brought to the fore is this: “How will humanity function in this digital era?” Meanwhile, art as a call for new awareness is needed for artists to express their ideas in artworks. “The I” is a reflection of the real actor who experiences and understands the “change”.

Collaborations between arts experts in different fields as well as interactions between artists and the public faced serious setbacks due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As Wisatsana demonstrates, however, people can find alternative ways to facilitate cultural communications and interactions. In this sense, the pandemic crisis is a catalyst for change from convention to creativity. Creation usually follows destruction. The last section of this paper draws attention to some ruptures of the international order, envisaging the birth of a new balance of power.

6. Aspects of International Relations: Possibilities and Limitations of Middle Powers in International Cooperation against the COVID-19 Pandemic

Yong-min Kim observes the retreat of liberalism in international affairs after the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and puts stress on the role of the so-called “middle powers” in international relations. Those countries that have usually been regarded as “superpowers” such as the US, China and the EU member states are now under heavy criticism for not being able to cooperate in the face of the pandemic crisis. Kim compares Korea and Japan on one side and Taiwan and Singapore on the other in international relations, in order to analyze the possibilities and limitations of the role of these middle powers in the international community after the pandemic crisis:

In 2020, humanity suffered a massive infectious disease pandemic that has

made history and will long be remembered. When COVID-19 was still being underestimated early in 2020, some argued that the virus would disappear before summer, or that it was no more serious than the flu and people were overreacting to it. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has become the biggest global health and security crisis for all humans since the Spanish flu pandemic in 1918. It is unclear whether the end of the pandemic will bring a return to the pre-coronavirus world, even if vaccines and treatments are developed. In the changed world we now live in, a high possibility exists that we will not be able to resume our pre-coronavirus life as usual and will have to endure some changes. The unknown factor is the direction the world will take in the post-pandemic era. Will nations focus on independent survival? Or will international cooperation be integral to shaping the new world? It seems that the globalization of the modern world has already progressed too far for the national egoism of the great powers to prevail. Even if face-to-face is replaced by virtual, and offline meetings move online, the fact that humans are social animals remains unchanged, and international cooperation is still valid.

In the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the two major superpowers, the United States and China, are not performing properly. The United States' response to the pandemic was criticized as the country recorded the world's largest number of COVID-19 infections and deaths, and many countries have developed negative feelings toward China, as China was the geographical starting point of the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the denials of Chinese government officials. Indeed, international organizations, like the two great powers, are not free from criticism for failing to properly fulfil their roles. The members of the European Union, which had previously instituted free passage between member states and was a symbol of regional integration, when faced with the threat of overwhelmed medical facilities and unacceptably high numbers of death among its citizens, proceeded to close national borders, even to their own citizens attempting to return from abroad in some cases. The World Health Organization (WHO), responsible for global public health, was also not free from criticism of some of its decisions during the pandemic.

Therefore, the question remains as to who should promote international cooperation while these existing powerful countries and international organizations fail to take the necessary leadership role? Due to its inherent disadvantages, the new world order is not free from confrontation between

the United States and China, and a conflict of interests exists for each country. Thus, the four middle power countries in Asia, which are included in the economically successful countries, need to play an important role in international society based on their relatively good quarantine performance. In particular, infectious disease crises have been continuously occurring in the realm of health security (SARS, MERS, COVID-19), and the interval between outbreaks is growing shorter and shorter.

What is important in the diplomacy of middle power countries is not traditional security and hard power but the soft power of international law, human rights, health security and international cooperation. Four Asian countries with the ability to realize these values for the international community must also play a role in the international community after the COVID-19 crisis. The limitations are clear, but the strengths are also clear, so it is necessary to find a way to maximize them and to find a path for international cooperation that preserves the strengths and values of middle power countries. COVID-19 is an unprecedented disaster in human history, but the very common-sense conclusion that the way to overcome it lies in cooperation and mutual trust should not be ignored in international relations.

Kim's opinion on the role of the middle powers in international relations provides us with an opportunity to think about the possibility that the new world order will be of a more complicated and multifaceted nature with multilateral communications and interactions. As the middle-power countries do not possess military power equal to that of the superpowers, the cultural role they play in the international arena will be of more significance. It is thus its analysis of the role of middle powers as cultural brokers that political science can contribute to intercultural studies.

7. Epilogue

There can be various ways to examine the COVID-19 pandemic crisis from different points of view in many academic disciplines. As one of the main aims of *InContext* is to provide an academic space in which scholars from diverse backgrounds exchange their professional knowledge, this Special Article summarizing the discussion of the role of interculturalism in the time

of the COVID-19 pandemic also presents scholarly opinions from various perspectives: psychology, education, literature, art projects and international relations. This effort will hopefully contribute to the existing research on this theme.

Because the editors of *InContext* had not limited the scope of our discussion and because the participants did not have opportunities to make detailed comments on one another's opinions, this article does not attempt to put them in dialogue with each other. Nevertheless, this article starts from an individual and micro level of approach, through the social and mezzo perspective, and finally to the international and macro point of view, in order to show that intercultural studies can deal with every nook and cranny of our world from multifaceted viewpoints. Although the opinions submitted for this article are not organically related to one another, they do share some intercultural questions. Hassan's focus on emotional and psychological aspects of COVID-related literature can provide insights to the educational program suggested by Hidayatullah and Yudisia. The synthetic collaboration between the artists and administrators of Bali demonstrated by Wisatsana can be a model for politicians of the middle power countries to cooperate in the international relations.

Most of these contributions draw attention to the advance of the new communication technologies in everyday life. The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly accelerated this trend, enabling people in many regions to gain access to new opportunities. Although the pandemic has certainly caused a worldwide crisis, it has also provided a good chance for facilitating intercultural communications and interactions. Further discussions in more depth and detail will broaden our perspectives on this question.

All the participants of the online discussions and the editors of *InContext* hope that this article will help the journal set the agenda in the field of interculturalism in its forthcoming publications. We also plan to adapt ourselves to the new academic environment accelerated by the pandemic. Subsequent issues of *InContext* will occasionally present reports on other scholarly discussions convened in offline, online or hybrid formats.

References²

- Bieber, Florian. (2020). Global nationalism in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Nationalities Papers*, 50(1), 13-25. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2020.35>
- Iglesias, Gabino. (2022, February 24). Are we ready for COVID-19 as a central theme in literature? *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/2022/02/24/1079823095/are-we-ready-for-covid-19-as-a-central-theme-in-literature>
- Kulich, Steve J., Adam Komisarof, L. Ripley Smith and Kenneth Cushner. (2021). Re-examining intercultural research and relations in the COVID pandemic. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 80, A1-A6. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2020.12.003>
- Legrain, Philippe. (2020, March 12). The coronavirus is killing globalization as we know it. *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/12/coronavirus-killing-globalization-nationalism-protectionism-trump/>
- Pokhrel, Sumitra and Roshan Chhetri. (2021). A literature review on impact of COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning. *Higher Education for the Future*, 8(1), 131-141. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2347631120983481>
- Stillman, David and Jonah Stillman. (2017). *Generasi Z: Memahami Karakter Generasi Baru yang Akan Mengubah Dunia Kerja* [Generation Z: Understanding the character of a new generation that will change the world of work]. Gramedia.
- Stower, Hannah and Marianne Guennot. (2021, March 15). Art in a pandemic: A digital gallery. *Nature Medicine*. <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41591-021-00009-5>
- Tuff, Chris. (2019). *The Millennial Whisperer: The Practical, Profit-focused Playbook for Working With and Motivating the World's Largest Generation*. Morgan James Publishing.

Bibliography

- Annamalai, Nagaletchimee, Tan Kok Eng and Amelia Abdullah. (2013). Exploring the effects of an online writing platform on students' performances in narrative writing. *Malaysian Journal of Distance Education*, 15(2), 1-18.

2 The references refer to works cited directly by the author of the present article; the bibliography consists of sources used by the discussants. Other useful resources include: (a) a series of video clips featuring a virtual media-based art performance held in 2020 in UPTD Taman Budaya Provinsi Bali (https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLU_CE3tid7O9FIdLzCVHjT2l87jj1tdqE); (b) video clips from the 43rd Bali Arts Festival (PKB) in 2021 (https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLU_CE3tid7O8MRpVOl4U9gZcTJ_TkAZrj); (c) video clips from the 3rd Bali Jani Arts Festival (FSBJ) in 2021 (https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLU_CE3tid7O9SvYy7eWreSa-8qwj0yYr-); and (d) a local news article explaining the Bali Jani Arts Festival 2021 involved no less than 1,000 artists (Rhismawati, 2021).

- Annamalai, Nagaletchimee and Kok Eng Tan. (2014). Social presence of the Community of Inquiry (CoI) model on an online narrative writing platform via Facebook. *Malaysian Journal of ELT Research*, 10(2), 1-18.
- Chibisova, Olga Vladimirovna and D. J. Ha. (2015). New generation culture as specific South Korean youth subculture of the twentieth century. *Paradigm of Knowledge*, 4, 176-178.
- G., Amritha, Manasi Suresh and Indu Bhadran. (2019). Literary trends in cyber space: Portrayal of the metamodern “wings of Poesy”. *International Journal of Innovative Technology and Exploring Engineering*, 8(10), 3103-3106. <https://doi.org/10.35940/ijitee.j1168.0881019>
- Kapteijns, Lidwien and Abukar Arman. (2008). Educating immigrant youth in the United States: An exploration of the Somali case. *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*, 4(1), 18-43.
- Lim, Chae-Kwan and Ji-Yoon Kim. (2021). The influence of perceived characteristics of middle-aged web novel users on satisfaction and continuous use intention: Mediating effect of flow and resistance. *Review of International Geographical Education Online*, 11(8), 527-541.
- Mills, Kathy A. and Vinesh Chandra. (2011). Microblogging as a literacy practice for educational communities. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 55(1), 35-45. <https://doi.org/10.1598/jaal.55.1.4>
- Pianzola, Federico, Simone Rebora and Gerhard Lauer. (2020). Wattpad as a resource for literary studies. Quantitative and qualitative examples of the importance of digital social reading and readers’ comments in the margins. *PLOS ONE*, 15(1), e0226708. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0226708>
- Pinasthika, Lalitya Talitha. (2020). Why they use Wattpad: An emotional design analysis on the free online reading platform. *Proceedings of the International Conference of Innovation in Media and Visual Design (IMDES 2020)*, 136-143. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.201202.067>
- Rahimi, Mehrak and Samaneh Yadollahi. (2017). Effects of offline vs. online digital storytelling on the development of EFL learners’ literacy skills. *Cogent Education*, 4(1), 1285531. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186x.2017.1285531>
- Rhismawati, Ni Luh. (2021, October 21). Festival Seni Bali Jani 2021 libatkan 1.000 seniman. *Antara*. <https://www.antaraneews.com/berita/2473957/festival-seni-bali-jani-2021-libatkan-1000-seniman>
- Statistics Korea. (2021). *Statistics on the youth*. Retrieved March 6, 2022 from <http://kostat.go.kr/portal/eng/pressReleases/13/3/index.board>

Professional Profile

Sangsoo Kim is Professor at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Republic of Korea. He received his PhD in history from the University of Cambridge in 2004: 'The language of socialism in public debate in Britain, 1880-1914'. He teaches British history, issues on the British Empire and the Commonwealth, EU-related issues and historical methodology. His major publications are: 'Socialism without socialists: The status of socialism in public debate in Britain in the 1890s' (2012); 'The scientific and technological networks of the British empire: Rethinking the relationship between the metropole and peripheries' (2014); and 'Little prefects: The embodiment of masculinity in interwar Britain' (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).