INTRODUCTION: GLOBALIZATION
AND ANTI-GLOBALIZATION OF SARS
IN CHINESE SOCIETIES

Alvin Y. So and Ngai Pun

It is well known that SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) is a product of globalization. Otherwise, it could not possibly spread so fast to so many countries in such a short time. From Metropole Hotel in Waterloo Road on February 21, 2003, SARS spread to the entire Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, Singapore, Vietnam, and Canada, and then further spread in a few weeks through international air travel routes to other countries in Asia, North America, and Europe. However, if globalization has facilitated the spread of SARS, it also has laid the foundation for controlling it. The global agency of WHO (the World Health Organization) quickly launched a Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN), linking together 112 existing networks that together possess much of the data, expertise, and skills needed to keep the international community alert to SARS outbreaks and ready to respond.¹

Perhaps owing to WHO’s global network and prompt action, SARS cases were quickly detected and isolated in the world, with the result that further transmission was either avoided entirely or kept to a very small number of cases. By

early June 2003, SARS seemed to be under control in most countries. This rapid containment of SARS is in strict contrast to the deadly Spanish Flu in 1918 that is believed to have killed more than 50 million people.

Instead of studying how globalization affects SARS, however, this special issue examines the intricate relationship between the global and the local, and between pro-globalization discourses and resistance to them from below. Not without ambition, this special issue highlights the other side of the equation, i.e., how SARS has affected the globalization process as well as national policies and social movements. Business reports, of course, have argued that SARS will have little long-term impact on globalization because transnational corporations have not yet pulled their investments out of Asia. Besides, they believed that SARS’s adverse economic effects would recede quickly once SARS ended, because the broad fundamentals for Asian investments are still fine.

Going beyond this pro-globalization view, this issue will focus on whether SARS is globalization. Could SARS become a resistance movement to globalization? Can SARS hold back or even challenge the hegemony of globalization?

This special issue probably cannot provide clear-cut answers to the above questions. As Ho-fung Hung said, SARS comes and goes. But what we can learn from SARS about globalization is profound and has long-lasting implications for our understanding of globalization, a buzzword that has triggered intense debates. Benefiting from a multidisciplinary perspective, and based on research on SARS in Chinese societies, we hope to shed light on the meaning of globalization and anti-globalization-especially with reference to the discussion of the potential and the prospect for SARS to become an anti-globalization movement-and on the way SARS helped to generate civil solidarity in two Chinese societies.

---

2. Ibid., p. 4.