

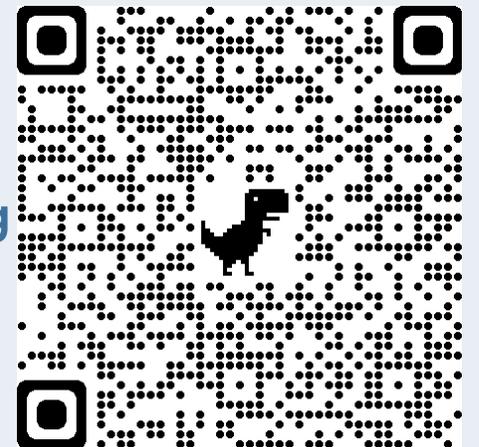
**Economic Policy for a  
Pandemic Age**

*April 8, 2021*



# Lessons from East Asia and Pacific on taming the pandemic

Martin Chorzempa and Tianlei Huang



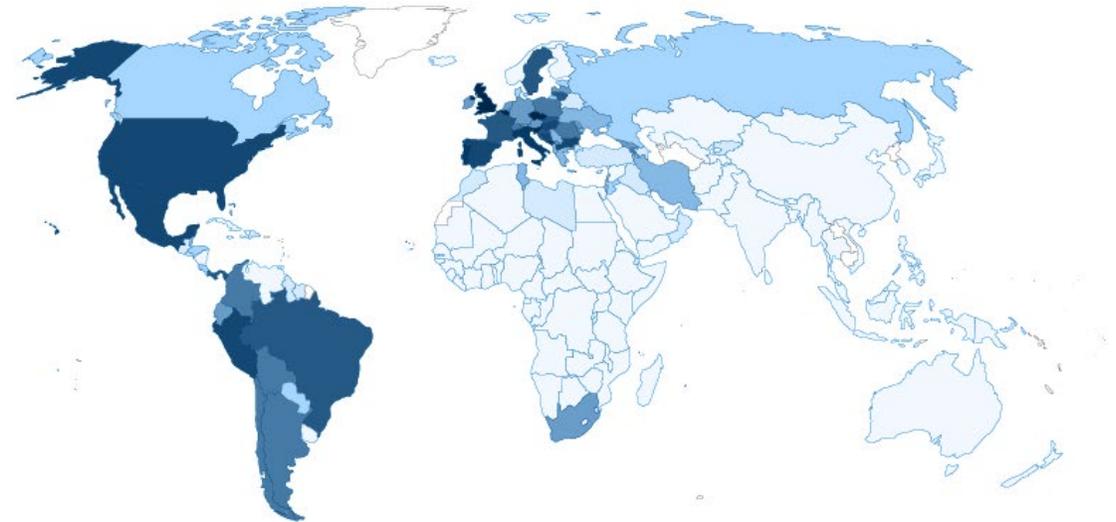
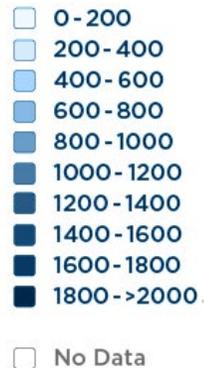
# Why Learn from East Asia?

*Public health and economic success: controlling the virus long-term with limited recourse to devastating lockdowns*

4/8/2021

## There is a striking contrast in levels of COVID-19 deaths between East Asia and Pacific and the West

Cumulative confirmed COVID-19 deaths per million population through March 3, 2021



**Source:** Johns Hopkins University CSSE COVID-19 Data via Our World in Data. See Ensheng Dong, Hongru Du, and Lauren Gardner, "An interactive web-based dashboard to track COVID-19 in real time," *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*, volume 20, issue 5, pp. 553-54.

# How applicable is EAP's experience?

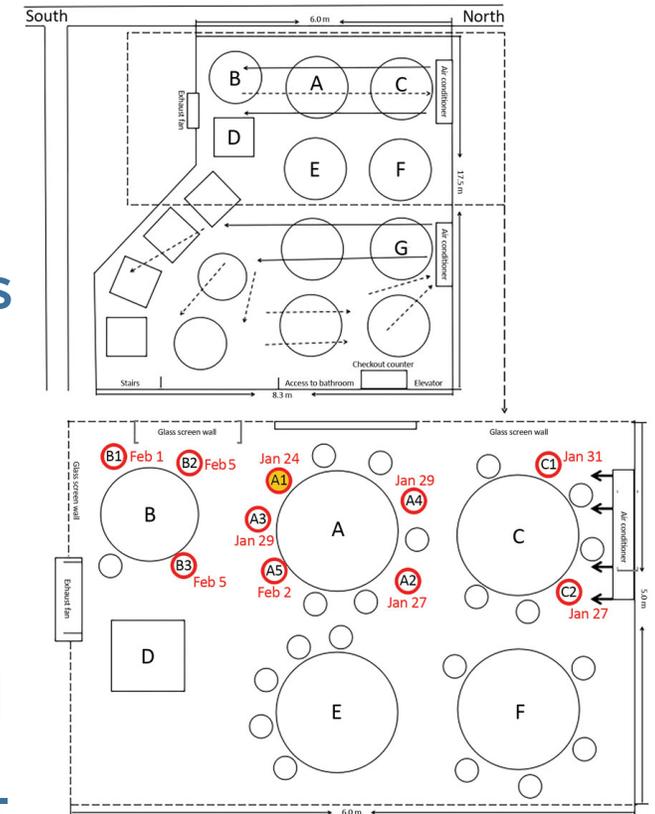
- Common success despite heterogenic geography, cultures, and political systems
  - small, developed island democracies (Taiwan, New Zealand)
  - large middle-income countries with authoritarian political systems (China, Vietnam)
- Recent experience with SARS and MERS prepared many countries for SARS-COV2, suggesting societies can learn from earlier learning
- Not about “compliance” or other stereotypes
  - Korea is near the bottom of int'l rankings of trust in government, and China's plunged after death of whistleblowing doctor Li Wenliang

# Policy Response

- Some different policies
  - Lockdowns, then preventative measures: China, Australia, Vietnam
  - Preventative measures: Korea, Taiwan
- Yet, many commonalities
  - Masks: Social norm of mask wearing when sick, then in pandemic mass mask mandates and provision to populations, unlike US officials who disastrously dismissed them early on.
  - Ventilation: WHO and US focused on distance, while Japan, HK quickly incorporated evidence of aerosols' importance
  - Widespread testing: Remembering MERS, Korea rapidly encouraged multiple testing providers, while US obsessed over accuracy and central control. By March 2020, Korea tested 31x more per capita. China repeatedly beat back new clusters with mass testing.
  - Digital contact tracing: supplementing slow, incomplete manual tracing with data. Korea used to great effect, and China's temporary health codes helped reopen without new outbreaks.
  - Enforced quarantines for travelers and known exposures, avoiding reinfections from abroad or infectious people seeding outbreaks.
  - Clear communication to build trust, compared to top officials in some Western

# Reconciling Public Health and Civil Liberties

- Some responses gave up too much liberty
  - Chinese authorities welding doors shut
  - Publishing personal information of infected people (Korea and China)
  - Data collection with weak security leading to data leaks (China)
- Maximizing health benefit while minimizing intrusion on liberties
  - Voluntary quarantine facilities for infected or exposed individuals
  - Limited pandemic exceptions to privacy laws for digital contact tracing of known infectious individuals (CCTV footage, phone location, credit card tx, public transport use), without publishing their personal information online



Source: Lu et al 2020

# Conclusion

- Temporary, targeted restrictions and monitoring are better for liberty than lockdowns of millions and death of hundreds of thousands
- Specific, strong, and sustained government policies with societal buy-in, often with serious opposition, built results and earned trust
- Success in EAP cannot be dismissed as products of different cultures or values
- To extent compatible with local values, others should emulate the policy approach to face less of a trade-off between health and economics in pandemics