

BOOK REVIEW**“THE NEW GLOBAL THREAT:
SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME AND ITS IMPACTS”**

Editors: Tommy Koh, Aileen Plant, Lee Eng Hin

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The severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak will always remind us how painfully vulnerable we are to emerging infections in this highly interconnected world that we live in. “In the age of globalisation and interdependence, one country’s policies often have great consequences beyond its border. China’s initial silence on SARS not only jeopardised lives in China, but also those in other affected countries” writes Dr Shiping Tan, Deputy Director for the Centre for Regional Security Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in a new book published by World Scientific Publishing, Singapore.

The New Global Threat: Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome And Its Impacts, edited by Professors Tommy Koh, Aileen Plant and Lee Eng Hin, is a compilation of essays by a diverse group of people, including academicians, politicians, sociologists, healthcare providers, psychologists, and scientists. The book is divided into sections based on the different regions affected by the outbreak. Each section discusses and analyses the events surrounding the outbreak while tackling its major impacts in affected countries.

The essays deal with wide-ranging issues of SARS from its discovery and the excitement of cracking the viral genome to its impact on regional politics, economies, policies, infection control, and psychology. The book focuses on China, Hong Kong and Singapore, and gives mostly an overview of the outbreaks in Taiwan and Toronto. There is a little overlapping of themes in the China and Hong Kong sections but this is made up for by the essayists’ diverse writing styles and candor “...the success against SARS depended on the timing of quarantines and not on the elites’ preferred political philosophies” notes Professor Lynn White, an expert in politics and international affairs at Princeton University.

Overall, the highlights of the book are its dissection of the political and economic fallout while presenting the anatomy of the outbreak in affected countries. The book was written in the immediate aftermath of SARS and therefore is not current but nevertheless, it is an interesting and insightful read.

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