

Combating COVID-19 Through Collaborative Governance: Lessons from East Asia

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Collaborative governance plays a significant role in crisis management and greatly contributes to the fight against COVID-19. This article demonstrates how East Asia effectively combats COVID-19 through collaboration with enterprises, nonprofit organizations, and citizens. By comparing different countries' responses, this study proposes three different types of collaborative governance models employed in combating the pandemic, namely the Chinese state-led cooperation model, South Korea's state-society synergy model, and Japan's social voluntary cooperation model. The findings demonstrate that there is no one-size-fits-all model to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. The specific response initiative that the government adopts is shaped by its state intervention and coercion capacity, as well as the social voluntary cooperation norm. Each country should take anti-pandemic measures based on its specific conditions. Achieving a balance between preventing the pandemic and maintaining social economic development is a challenge for governments. The three collaboration models drawn from the East Asian experience provide valuable lessons for combating the global pandemic and future crises.

Keywords: COVID-19; collaborative governance; East Asia

The COVID-19 outbreak has posed a great challenge to the global health system. Many countries have established different initiatives to address this challenge. Collaborative governance, including different sectors' engagement, has been applied worldwide as an effective mechanism to respond to the global pandemic. East Asia is one of the most successful regions in the world when it comes to combating COVID-19. The article demonstrates how different collaborative governance models adopted by three major East Asian countries have successfully managed COVID-19 and what we can learn from the East Asian experience.

COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Collaborative governance is regarded as cross-boundary governance involving the public, private, and civic spheres in public decision making and management. Without collaboration between the government and non-state sectors, public tasks may

not be accomplished (Emerson, Nabatchi, & Balogh, 2012). Many studies have shown that collaborative governance plays a pivotal role in crisis management. Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) emphasize that both the complex and dynamically changing governance contexts and the growing complexity of wicked problems and crises lead to the rise of collaborative governance to address these challenges. To tackle complex and large-scale crises, Bynander and Nohrstedt (2020) noted that it is essential to involve resources and capacities of different actors across organizational boundaries to establish collaborative crisis management.

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Some scholars have found that collaboration with the private sector leads to effective responses to crises. For example, Donahue, Zeckhauser, and Breyer (2011) found that the private sector can provide more resources and information and possesses stronger capacity to produce better results. Abou-bakr (2013) argued that public-private partnerships (PPPs) are pivotal to managing crises because enterprises can deliver and distribute critical supplies faster than the government can, promoting rapid recovery of the industry.

Researchers have focused on collaboration with nonprofit organizations. According to the third-party government theory, a government tackles crises by utilizing “nonprofit organizations’ expertise, access to specific target groups, and ability to raise resources (for example, volunteers)” (Nolte & Boenigk, 2011, p.1387). Shi, Jang, Keyes, and Dicke (2020) found that nonprofit organizations can serve vulnerable groups in COVID-19 because they rapidly respond to community needs and government mandates; moreover, they maintain constant communication and mutual respect with communities and the government, which helps to reduce ambiguities.

Citizen engagement in collaborative crisis management also plays a significant role. Specifically, Steen and Brandsen (2020) found that governments have depended on citizens to coproduce responses to COVID-19 by complying with anti-epidemic measures and producing medical goods. Sustainable coproduction requires mutual commitments, complementarity, and legislative frameworks to support it. McQuaid (2000) argued that citizen

participation will foster greater legitimacy of policies and promote more effective policy implementation in communities.

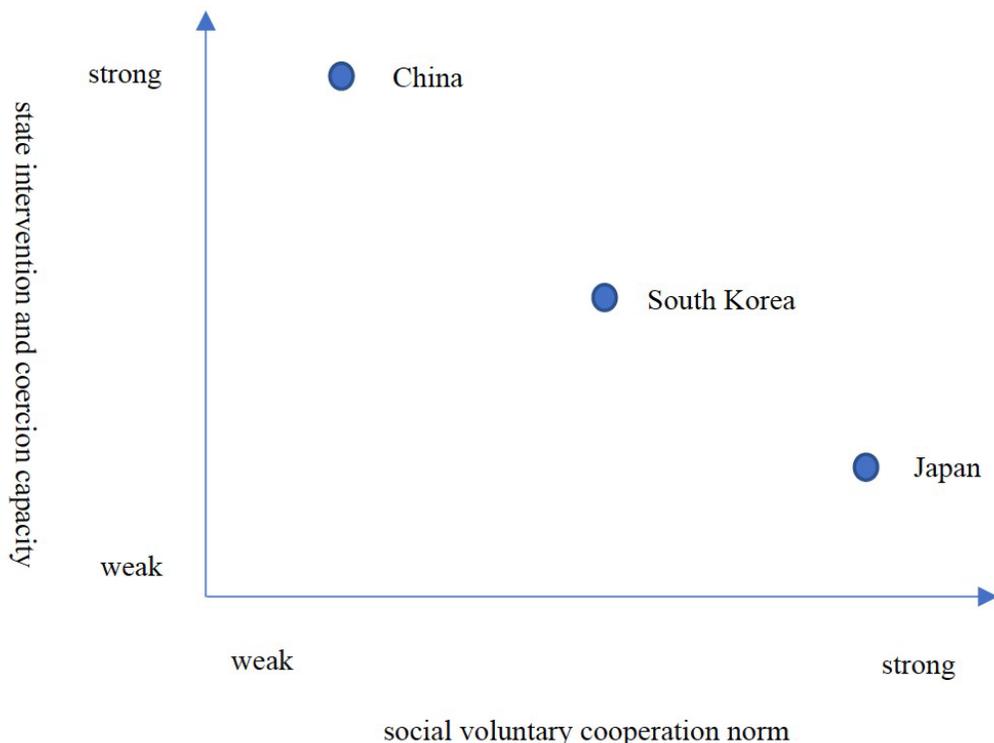
Effective responses to COVID-19 in East Asia provide us with a good testbed of how collaborative governance is employed to combat the pandemic. As many studies have attributed the East Asian success in economic growth to collaborative governance (World Bank, 1993), this article investigates how collaborative governance has contributed to the fight against COVID-19 in East Asia.

RESPONSES TO COVID-19 IN EAST ASIA

Responses to the global pandemic have varied across countries and been influenced by different governance mechanisms, as well as socioeconomic and cultural contexts (Shaw, Kim, & Hua, 2020). East Asian countries have been effective in combating COVID-19. According to the *COVID-19 Regional Safety Assessment Report* (Deep Knowledge Group, 2020), Japan, China, and South Korea ranked 5th, 6th, and 10th, respectively, among 200 countries and regions. As they belong to the top 10 safest countries combatting COVID-19 in the world, it is significant to investigate the different collaboration models that they have employed.

This study argues that collaborative governance in response to the pandemic is shaped by two factors, which are the state intervention and coercion capacity and the social voluntary cooperation norm. State capacity can be understood as the government’s efficacy in terms of decision making and implementation. It can determine how the government responds to crises (Capano, 2020). Fukuyama (2020) argues that strong state capacity plays a pivotal role in effective pandemic responses because the government is capable of implementing timely measures to prevent the spread of infection. Another critical factor is the social voluntary cooperation norm. Citizens’ voluntary cooperation including voluntary self-quarantine and social distancing significantly contributes to the effective response to COVID-19 (Moon, 2020).

Figure 1. Three East Asian Countries' Collaboration Governance Models in Response to COVID-19



Drawing from these studies, this article focuses on how different levels of state intervention and coercion capacity and the social voluntary cooperation norm shape state responses to COVID-19. The study compares different countries' responses in East Asia and proposes three types of collaborative governance models for combating COVID-19, namely the Chinese state-led cooperation model, South Korea's state-society synergy model, and Japan's social voluntary cooperation model (see Figure 1).

China: State-Led Cooperation Model

As the first country to report the COVID-19 outbreak, China faced grave threats in the early phase. However, the Chinese government successfully controlled COVID-19 by taking a strict lockdown strategy, especially in Wuhan, Hubei Province. Compared with South Korea and Japan, China's social activism and development are highly regulated by the government. Although China has a tight culture that encourages citizens to cooperate with the government (Bavel et

al., 2020), the social voluntary cooperation norm (e.g., self-quarantine, wearing face masks, and keeping social distance) in response to COVID-19 is relatively weak when COVID-19 broke out. Many citizens did not have such norms, and they did not realize the high risk of COVID-19. They were not willing to comply with counter-infection measures especially in rural areas.¹ Their cooperation was deeply driven by the mandatory policies to change their behaviors (Yan, Zhang, Wu, Zhu & Chen, 2020). A high level of state intervention and coercion effectively forces people to comply with counter-infection measures. Those who do not obey the rules will be punished. As of March 3, 2020, there were 330 criminal cases about non-compliance of counter-infection measures (Supreme People's Procuratorate, the People's Republic of China, 2020).

¹ These findings come from my interview with several local officials and citizens when COVID-19 broke out in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province in late January 2020.

Although the government plays a dominant role in combating COVID-19 (*China's Fight Against COVID-19*, 2020), it also needs cooperation of the private sector to provide more resources and enhance public support. The government has strong coercion and mobilization capacity to encourage enterprises, social organizations, and citizens to participate in disease prevention and control. Therefore, China has established a highly effective state-led cooperation model that includes different sectors in combating COVID-19.

First, the government has organized and mobilized enterprises to guarantee sufficient supply of medical and daily necessities through PPPs. For example, a lack of medical supplies became a major challenge when COVID-19 broke out during the period of the Chinese New Year holiday, with large-scale temporary suspension of production. According to the report *Fighting COVID-19: China in Action* (State Council Information Office, the People's Republic of China, 2020), the government mobilized many enterprises to accelerate the resumption of production and maximize the country's production capacity to ensure enough medical supplies would be available. To complete the government's task, many enterprises in the medical industry strove to solve the problem of a labor shortage and expanded production capacity. Some enterprises in other industries utilized their facilities for the production of medical materials. Thus, medical supply has experienced a significant increase. For the supply of daily necessities in Hubei Province, especially Wuhan, the government has established a state-business cooperation system involving nine provinces and a business coordination mechanism including 500 enterprises to guarantee timely distribution and shipment of emergent supply.

The government has mobilized enterprises to develop new technological products to control COVID-19. For example, more than 200 enterprises from the Zhongguancun National Innovation Demonstration Zone, Beijing, have contributed to epidemic prevention by utilizing their technology, such as employing artificial intelligence in diagnosis and treatment (Xinhua News Agency, 2020). In Hangzhou,

Zhejiang Province, by cooperating with enterprises, the government has developed a digital health QR code system to trace people's movements.

Second, governments have organized and mobilized citizens to participate in the fight against COVID-19 (State Council Information Office, the People's Republic of China, 2020). Governments have recruited many party members and community residents as volunteers to implement epidemic prevention measures, such as checking body temperature, monitoring people's compliance with these measures, and delivering community services to meet the basic life needs of isolated people at home. Based on these partnerships under the leadership of local governments, a strict community epidemic prevention and control network has been established to tighten community management.

Third, cooperation with social organizations contributes to COVID-19 control in terms of fundraising and service provision. Social organizations' fundraising activities should be conducted under the unified leadership of local governments (Ministry of Civil Affairs, the People's Republic of China, 2020). Yishan's COVID-19 Donations Data Platform shows that, as of March 17, 2020, 4,389 social organizations had received a total of 31 billion RMB in donations to support the fight against the epidemic (Huang, 2020). In addition to charitable organizations, the government can leverage social organizations' strengths to provide various services to combat COVID-19. For instance, in Zhejiang Province, business associations can assist enterprises and promote economic development, while community service organizations can provide social work training and psychological counseling services (Cheng, Yu, Shen, & Huang, 2020).

South Korea: State–Society Synergy Model

As a typical developmental state, South Korea is capable of handling challenges through state intervention and cooperation with society (Evans, 1995). Although South Korea faced the COVID-19 outbreak in Daegu in late February, it is recognized as one of the most successful countries in responding to COVID-19. The government did not impose

lockdown measures, instead keeping society open through the 3T system (test, trace, and treat). South Korea effectively managed the pandemic crisis based on collaborative governance, such as strong cooperation with enterprises, the medical community, and civic organizations. This state-society synergy model significantly contributes to South Korea's success.

First, partnering with enterprises was an important strategy for the government to control COVID-19, especially in terms of testing and tracing. For instance, PPPs strengthened the widespread diagnostic capacity (Oh et al., 2020). When the first case was confirmed in late January, the government immediately communicated with medical enterprises, asking them to be well prepared to develop test kits and promising emergency use approval (Fisher & Choe, 2020). Based on cooperation with the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (KCDC), KogeneBiotech developed the first coronavirus test kit to receive regulatory approval in early February. The company then had the capacity to provide kits for the KCDC and more than 50 hospitals (KogeneBiotech, 2020). Enterprises' cooperation significantly improved South Korea's testing capacity, supporting large-scale testing around the country.

Enterprises utilized their technological advantage and open government data to develop many applications to establish an effective system for tracing potentially infected people's movements to prevent the spread of viruses. The new technology can also inform citizens about the latest local situation related to the epidemic and provide information about how to buy anti-epidemic products (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea, 2020). In addition, Samsung provided the government with a firm facility to be a care center for patients. It also assisted other companies that produce face masks to increase production by improving production conditions and donating significant funds and medical supplies to governments and communities (Samsung, 2020).

Second, the medical community played an important role in combating COVID-19. In South Korea, "as of

2012, almost all clinics and about 94% of hospitals were privately owned" (Kwon, Lee, & Kim, 2015, p.14). Thus, partnerships with the private sector have effectively assisted the government to conduct large-scale testing and establish an effective treatment system to handle the epidemic. This cooperation is different from China where the medical community that provided assistance is dominated by the public healthcare system (Luo, 2020). This cooperation has also facilitated the government's development of innovative anti-epidemic measures. For instance, the medical community proposed drive-through and walk-through testing sites to reduce testing time and protect the medical staff and people waiting to be tested. The government adopted this suggestion and applied these methods to the national epidemic prevention. Another suggestion proposed by the medical community was to use pharmacies with national databases to solve the problem of duplicate purchases of face masks, which could not meet the increasing public demands at the early stage of epidemic prevention. Based on this method, the government launched a two-per-person-per-week purchase plan. In addition, partnerships with civic organizations helped the government to tackle COVID-19 by supporting vulnerable groups and communities. For example, in April, 46 civic groups sent nearly 2 million face masks to undocumented foreign workers (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea, 2020).

The engagement and cooperation of the private sector effectively relieved the pressure on the government and strengthened its capacity to fight against COVID-19. South Korea's state-society synergy model attempted to create a good balance between epidemic prevention and economic and social development. However, as COVID-19 continued to grow around the world, the government confirmed that South Korea was experiencing the second wave of coronavirus on June 22, 2020 (BBC News, 2020). The global pandemic will bring more challenges to this model in the near future.

Japan: Social Voluntary Cooperation Model

As a super-aging society, Japan is facing high risks under the threat of COVID-19. However, compared

with many Western countries, the number of confirmed cases and deaths in Japan is small. The government successfully controlled the spread of infection and announced the lifting of the state of emergency on May 25. Japan did not adopt the lockdown strategy but used a social voluntary cooperation model to fight against COVID-19. Collaborative governance, featuring voluntary cooperation from citizens and the private sector, has been key to Japan's effective response.

Although Japan may not have high social capital, mutual trust as a form of social capital that promotes social cooperation will likely increase after the crisis (Veszteg, Funaki, & Tanaka, 2015). A strong social voluntary cooperation norm is apparent for two reasons under the threat of COVID-19. First, it comes from the Japanese tight culture (Yan, Zhang, Wu, Zhu & Chen, 2020) and social norm such as bowing and keeping social distances rather than handshaking or hugging when greeting, practicing good personal hygiene, and wearing face masks to prevent infection (Iwasaki & Grubaugh, 2020). Based on these important elements, this social voluntary cooperation norm plays a crucial role in COVID-19 control.

Citizens' voluntary compliance with government requests greatly contributed to the pandemic crisis management. While a state of emergency had been declared on April 7, the state intervention and coercion capacity in Japan is relatively weak. Unlike China and South Korea, Japan did not conduct large-scale testing for COVID-19. The government asked citizens to stay at home rather than forcing them to do so. Without government coercion, counter-infection requests and policies still worked because Japan has a strong social voluntary cooperation norm. Citizen self-discipline drove individuals to comply with government requests.

Moreover, private sector participation and voluntary cooperation effectively promoted implementation of the anti-epidemic policies and improved testing capacity. For instance, although the government only requested it of the private sector and did not enforce the request, many restaurants and shops closed. The private sector has not only partnered with the

government to implement relevant policies but also actively promoted and developed more sustainable voluntary counter-infection measures in industries (Government of Japan, 2020). Many Japanese businesspeople reduced the risk to their reputation by closing to halt the spread of infection rather than pursue short-term profits (Suzuki, 2020).

At the early stage of combating COVID-19, the government did not have enough testing capacity and needed help from the private sector to provide faster, more reliable, and cheaper testing methods (Takahashi, 2020). Thus, private testing institutes played a pivotal role in developing new technology (Government of Japan, 2020). In addition, cooperation with professional organizations, such as medical associations, helped to improve the testing capacity. Nearly 100 polymerase chain reaction centers for testing had been established by May 25, 2020 (Abe, 2020).

Second, the social voluntary cooperation norm became apparent because the public widely changed their behaviors and accepted a new lifestyle promoted by the government. For example, the government adopted the cluster-based approach to prevent clusters, which speed up the spread of infection. Citizens were asked to avoid the "three Cs" (closed spaces, crowded places, and close-contact settings) (Government of Japan, 2020). According to a cross-sectional survey, by the end of March 2020, the percentage of participants practicing the social distancing and frequent handwashing measures had reached 85% and 86% respectively (Muto, Yamamoto, Nagasu, Tanaka, & Wada, 2020).

Based on these guidelines, the government solicited citizens' cooperation by effectively educating them, providing them with epidemic prevention information, and improving their self-protection awareness and skills (Yan, Zhang, Wu, Zhu & Chen, 2020). Thus, Japan's social voluntary cooperation model produced a real lockdown effect (Harding, 2020). This is recognized as a mild and voluntary lockdown.

While the Japanese model was effective in combating

Table 1. Comparison of Three Collaborative Governance Models in Response to COVID-19 in East Asia

	State-led cooperation model	State–society synergy model	Social voluntary cooperation model
Country	China	South Korea	Japan
Level of state intervention and coercion	High	Medium	Low
Social voluntary cooperation norm	Weak	Medium	Strong
Strategies in response to COVID-19	Strict lockdown through strong government coercion and mobilization for public-private partnerships	Partnering with civil society to keep society open through 3T approach (test, trace, and treat)	Voluntary lockdown based on strong cooperation from citizens and the private sector
Effectiveness	Harsh but highly effective	Effective	Effective with potential risks
ISocial and economic costs	High	Low	Low

the first wave of COVID-19, there were some potential risks because this model mainly depends on the voluntary cooperation from citizens and the private sector to drive citizens to comply with government requests. The government did not have the legal authority to impose strict strategies, such as lockdown. Whether this model could be equally resilient in a second wave in the future remains unknown (Saito, 2020).

COMPARISON OF THE THREE COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE MODELS

Drawing on the East Asian experience, this article compares three types of collaborative governance models in response to COVID-19 (see Table 1). For the state-led cooperation model, China had the highest level of state intervention and coercion. However, the social voluntary cooperation norm is relatively weak in China compared with South Korea and Japan. Social cooperation is driven by strong government coercion. The government took the strict lockdown strategy and forced citizens to comply with anti-epidemic measures. China had a strong state capacity to organize and mobilize enterprises, social organizations, and citizens to participate in COVID-19 control. Cooperation of different sectors occurred under the leadership of the government. This model is harsh, but it has been highly effective in controlling COVID-19; however, it

could lead to high social and economic costs.

For the state-society synergy model in South Korea, both the social voluntary cooperation norm and the level of state intervention and coercion were at a medium level among the three countries. Although the government conducted large-scale testing, it did not impose a mandatory lockdown, instead keeping society open through cooperation with enterprises, the medical community, and civic organizations. The aim of such cooperation was to strengthen the capacity of testing, tracing, and treatment. This model was not only effective in response to COVID-19 but also created a good balance between epidemic prevention and economic and social development. Thus, the social and economic costs were relatively low compared with those of the lockdown strategy in China.

In terms of the social voluntary cooperation model, Japan had the lowest level of state intervention and coercion. The government did not conduct large-scale testing or impose mandatory lockdowns, but instead depended on the strong social voluntary cooperation norm to fight COVID-19. Voluntary cooperation from citizens and the private sector contributed to Japan's pandemic crisis management based on a mild "voluntary lockdown," with low social and economic costs. Although this model seems effective, it may have some risks in terms of whether this voluntary

cooperation would still be sustainable if a second wave of outbreaks were to come.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The three models drawing on the East Asian experience offered insights into tackling COVID-19. First, the models indicated that collaborative governance plays a crucial role in combating the pandemic. Only depending on government intervention, such as decision making and implementation capacity, is not enough to manage such an increasingly complex crisis. PPPs are key for addressing the challenge. Collaborative governance can utilize other sectors' knowledge, provide more information, strengthen public support, and make the anti-epidemic system more open, transparent, and resilient. Thus, the government should encourage more effective participation and cooperation of enterprises, nonprofit organizations, and citizens (Yang, 2020).

Second, there is no “one-size-fits-all” model for responding to COVID-19. The collaborative crisis management scheme is shaped by two factors: the state intervention and coercion capacity, and the social voluntary cooperation norm. Instead of simply copying others' plans, each country should adopt anti-pandemic measures according to its true situation. The state-led cooperation model is more suitable for authoritarian regimes (e.g., China) with strong government intervention capacity and a weak social voluntary cooperation norm. The government can effectively control the pandemic through coercion. In contrast, the state–society synergy and social voluntary cooperation models are more effective in democratic countries (e.g., Japan and South Korea) with a lower level of state intervention and coercion and a stronger social voluntary cooperation norm. However, in some Western countries, both the government intervention and coercion capacity and social voluntary cooperation norm are weak. It will be difficult for such countries to control COVID-19. Thus, the different political institutions in place cannot easily explain the effectiveness of responses.

Third, it is important to achieve a good balance between combating the pandemic and maintaining sustainable

social economic development. Dealing with the tension between epidemic prevention and economic cost reduction is a huge challenge for governments (Gong, Zhang, Yuan, & Chen, 2020). In China, the government effectively controls COVID-19 through the state-led cooperation model at the expense of high social and economic costs in the early phase. In contrast, these costs of the state–society synergy model and the social voluntary cooperation model seem much lower. In early April 2020, Wuhan lifted its lockdown. In the next stage of normalization of COVID-19 control, China can learn from the experiences of South Korea and Japan to better balance epidemic prevention and economic development.

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