

Editorial

As One Door Closes, Another One Opens

New Opportunities from COVID Crisis

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Volume 21 of the Journal of Urban Culture Research was researched and written as society has begun to emerge from the dark days of COVID lockdown. Social restrictions were eased in June and again further in September; while social distancing and mask wearing remain key intervention strategies, shops and entertainment venues have reopened but with some lockdown rules in place.

When the government imposed a lockdown and closed educational institutions, faculty lecturers had to reassess how to deliver their respective curricula to students participating via video link. Lecturers and students have had to deal with the loss of face-to-face communication and with online platforms. This has been a difficult process for all involved but it has opened up learning possibilities that might have not been considered if there had not been a global pandemic – as the saying goes: As one door closes and another one opens.

One avenue that has opened for students is the use of online platforms to teach music and singing. Several popular musical contests, for singing and various instruments, were reconfigured into online competitions such as ‘Wind from Home’ and ‘Sing from Home’ and students enthusiastically received by students.

In August, the Department of Thai Music conducted a *Wai Khru* ceremony (to pay homage to teachers) for Thai music via the online platform Zoom. This was the first time in the department's 37-year history that a *Wai Khru* ceremony had been conducted online.

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Thailand has an important tourism industry that generates income and provides employment for many Thais and when the pandemic started in earnest tourism was hit hard; visitors disappeared almost overnight. The effect was devastating but within a couple of months, cultural and educational institutions had joined together to create “Pathumwan Arts Routes or the PARs Project, a collaborative project between these institutions and nearby local communities in the Pathumwan district, which includes the historic Baan Krua of Muslim community.

Chulalongkorn University joined initiating organizations like Bangkok Art and Culture Center and the Jim Thompson House Museum to create a map of art and culture within the Pathumwan district. Chula's Art4C (Art for Communities) gallery kicked off the activities, which brought families together to learn and produce their art works including singing and dancing to create the comfort zone and releasing stresses which caused by COVID-19.

There is no question that we are living in difficult times. ‘Normal’ ways of teaching and conducting research have been undermined by the COVID pandemic and the human cost has been tragically high in terms of loss of life and economic devastation. Nonetheless, the pandemic has also opened up opportunities for us all to reassess and adjust, to seek new innovative ways of teaching and learning while contributing to the communities we live in.

Urban communities are enthusiastic about collaborating with artists and researchers to share their unique ways of living while artists develop new safer ways to collaborate amongst themselves and connect with their audiences.

In our upcoming Urban Culture Research Forum (teleconferenced), March 8th & 9th, 2021 we will bring together creative minds and personalities under the theme of: *Arts and Cultural Activities with COVID-19*. See the URP website for details.

Urban culture researchers have many facets to explore during this time of change and influx of technology & social media while trying to maintain supportive social connections and our vibrant humanity.

Please enjoy our diverse cultural window offered in this recent volume of JUCR. We have a collection of eight articles with a pair concerning two views on creative cities from South Korean and Thai authors; an Iranian article measuring a city's quality of life and relative competitiveness; a look at Vietnam's cultural development policies while from South Africa and Ghana a view of modernistic painting rooted in traditional motifs; an article exploring the question of Chinese entrepreneurs' connection to charitable giving and a pair of music articles; one a new look back to Schumann's last piano work and another bringing traditional ASEAN drums into contemporary compositions.

As more and more vaccines are announced and distributed please maintain safe behaviors till the opportunity reaches you and your loved ones.