

# Preface

In the 1997 annual Harvard AIDS Institute think-tank meeting at the Endicott House in a suburb of Boston, Dr. Natth Bhamarapravati of Thailand reported an interesting observation: emerging infections in Asia seemed to have become a regular event. Not only had we seen new pathogens such as Nipah virus appear in the region, but infectious diseases originating elsewhere in the world also seemed to be spreading more rapidly in Asia. By then, many of us were convinced that Asia would soon surpass Africa in the number of people living with HIV/AIDS because the total population of Asia is much larger than the population of sub-Saharan Africa.

Then came the 2003 SARS epidemic. Soon after the so-called “atypical pneumonia” appeared in southern China, Dr. Ruan Li of China CDC started frequent telephone discussions about the disease with us at the Harvard School of Public Health, where he had previously spent a sabbatical leave as a Fogarty scholar. Our communication continued even when he himself was quarantined. During those difficult times, we often recalled the previous discussions about the increasing vulnerability of Asia to becoming an epicenter for new infectious diseases. It was also at that time that we decided to put together a book about SARS in Asia after the outbreak was under control and we had collected more facts.

The plan to publish this book was finally formulated in 2004, following the editing process of the book *AIDS in Asia*. The first section of that book is a “snapshot” of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in each of the Asian countries or regions. We asked our contributors to include a historic review of the AIDS epidemic in the context of the infectious diseases in their respective home countries. After all the chapters were submitted, we began to face some interesting questions. Why has Asia become a hotbed for new infectious diseases? Is it really a recent phenomenon or just periodic renewal of our attention?

We asked our contributors to consider these questions when they wrote their chapters, and we hope that our book can help readers make their own conclusions and ask more questions. This volume focuses on SARS, AIDS, avian influenza, and several other emerging infectious diseases that originated in Asia. It does not include “old” infectious diseases like Dengue fever, Japanese Encephalitis, and rabies, all of which seem to have gained new strength in recent years.

This volume also does not include recent events that have occurred since 2006, such as the Chikungunya outbreak in India. This disease is not new and did not originate in Asia. The Chikungunya virus was first identified in Tanzania in the 1950s and was shown to cause limited outbreaks in Africa and southeast Asia transmitted by the *Aedes aegypti* and *A. albopictus* (Asian Tiger mosquito).

There are also other emerging animal infectious diseases in Asia that should be closely monitored. For instance, serious regional outbreaks of foot and mouth diseases have frequently been reported since the 1990s. In 2007, the spread of Porcine Respiratory and Reproductive Syndrome Virus (PRRSV) in China reached a crisis level in the pork industry.

Infectious disease outbreaks limited to animals such as these were not a focus for this book. However, outbreaks of diseases in animals should serve to remind us that some animal infections move to people, as did SARS and flu. This reminds us that we must mobilize our vigilance. This may then raise our awareness to ask the right questions.

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Emerging Infections in Asia

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2008, XVIII, 250 p. 43 illus., 1 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-0-387-75721-6