Two Years of Perseverance and Beyond: an exploratory reflection on the Covid days in Japan

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Abstract

This study is an attempt to reflect the Covid days in Japan. It began in early 2020 and continues even after the official announcement of its end on May 5, 2023. The trend of the infection in Japan is characteristic in that the number of the infected cases showed a huge rise in 2022, when the majority of the people were vaccinated at least twice. The reason for this is yet known, however, but attitudes towards the disease and the Coronavirus changed as the infected people increased in number. Some people have adopted the idea of the government-recommended ‘New Lifestyle’ for their convenience in their daily life. This seems to have led to a new normal in the conventional customs.

Key words: Covid-19, pandemic, New Lifestyle, the idea of AVOID 3Cs, a new normal

1. Introduction

On May 5, 2023, the WHO officially announced the end of the Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 is no longer taken as a Global Health Emergency of International Concern. People tend to perceive that things have been back to how they were before the pandemic and they seem to behave as if they had not experienced the abyss of the grief brought by the disease. But it is undeniably true that we have seen and heard so many tragedies related to Covid-19, around us and around the world. People were mourning the loss of their loved ones and the new situation had us on lockdown, depriving us of our freedom of discretion. Children, who had been made to stay at home, said that they wanted to see their friends but they had tried patiently to overcome their difficulties [i.e. Anonymous 2020]. Philosophers, social critiques, academics and the like appealed the need of solidarity among us at the time of the difficulties in front of us [i.e. Giordano 2020, Žižek 2020, 2021]. Now we have lived through the days of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the memories of those days seem to have gone somewhere. But a pandemic is a disaster and it surely stamps some kind of traces on us. That is why it is worth reflecting our experiences of the Covid days.
This study attempts an exploratory reflection from an anthropological perspective on the influences of the covid experiences of the Japanese from among countless issues arising during this particular period. For this end, this paper will focus on the characteristics of the changes of the number of the infected cases, and then, the dynamics of attitudes towards the Covid-19 among the Japanese will be considered. After this, consideration will be given to the influence of the ‘New Lifestyle’ the government had recommended the people to adapt in order to cope with the pandemic.

A small-scale questionnaire survey was conducted among 31 people, all of whom gave their consent in a written form to participate as respondents in the study and gave permissions for the author to use their responses as data for discussions in some parts of this study. Of them, 10 people had participated in the author’s study of 2022, which was about their practices of the ‘New Lifestyle’ recommended by the public authority as a means of preventing infection [Suzuki 2022].

The following starts with an overview of the pandemic days in Japan, focusing on changes in the number of infected persons during this time. Then it is going to look at the changes of the attitudes towards the disease and the influences of the ‘New Lifestyle’ as a means for preventing infection. Please note that the terms Covid-19 pandemic days, Covid days or Pandemic days are all used to refer to the same period, i.e. from January 2020, to January 2024 (when the work on this paper was in process). This is because the influence of the Covid-19 still continues even after the WHO’s official announcement of the end of the Covid-19 pandemic on May 5, 2023.

2. Trend of the number of infected cases

Soon after the outbreak of Covid-19, the Japanese government categorised its legal status as a Class 2 disease under the Infectious Disease Control Law [MHLW]. It meant that Covid-19 was a serious and catastrophic infection, equivalent to SARS, bird flu (H5N1/N7N9) and diphtheria and the number of infected cases was counted daily until the WHO’s officially announced the end of Covid pandemic on May 5, 2023. After that, the legal status of Covid-19 was downgraded to Class 5, the same class as seasonal influenza for example. The system of counting infected cases was also changed to the Gathering Medical Information System (G-MIS). In this system, about 38,000 officially chosen medical institutions across the country report the number of infected persons they treated regularly, not necessarily on the daily basis. Figure 1 shows this difference.

It is quite obvious that there is a clear trend of the number of infected cases during the whole period from January 2020 to January 2024. During this time, slightly over 37 million people were infected, including those infected multiple times. Of them, the infected cases between January 2020 to December 2021 count little more than 1.7million cases, while the remaining cases, that is, about 35 million cases, representing slightly less than 95 percent of the total number of infections, occurred in 2022 and after.

The death toll also shows a similar trend. According to the official statistics by MHLW, there have been 74,096 deaths recorded from May, 2020 to May 9, 2023, the following day after the end of the Covid pandemic. Of them the first two years saw 17,781 deceased persons, and the rest, that is, 56,315 people died between January, 2022 and May 9, 2023.

What could be of interest to us is firstly that such an explosive increase happened when the full vaccination was almost over and third jab of the Covid-19 vaccination was being administered in Japan. Secondly Japan’s trend of infections in 2022 was not consistent with that of the world. According to WHO, there was a rapid increase in the first few months of 2022 but an overall world trend was somehow downward in the second half of the year [WHO]. The trend in Japan was not completely the other way round, but surely very different from it.

When the new disease caused by the new Coronavirus, later dubbed as Covid-19 was about to break out in early 2020, the Japanese government abruptly called for the temporary closure of all schools from
elementary to secondary levels nationwide from March 1 to 20. This decision was made for the purpose of stopping the spread of the new Coronavirus by reducing opportunities for physical contacts between people in the initial stage of contagion.

The major theme parks such as the Tokyo Disney Land, Universal Studio Japan and Tokyo Ueno Zoo decided to temporarily close their facilities to comply with the government request. Similarly, local governments across the country started placing ‘Do Not Use’ warnings to their playground equipment like monkey bars, seesaws, swings and the like. Entering into playgrounds themselves was banned. And it was officially announced that Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games would be postponed by one year to 2021.

Just before the temporary school closure came to end and the new academic year was to start in April, the government declared a state of emergency under the Act on Special Measures for Pandemic Influenza and New Infectious Diseases Preparedness and Response (Act No. 31 of 2012) (Ministry of Justice). This law was enacted to ‘strengthen measures against novel coronavirus infectious diseases’ (Ministry of Justice).

Although this particular act entitles the government to develop and implement new measures to deal with pandemic influenza, the law does not give the national or local governments any legally binding powers. It only gives the government authorities, central and local, the right to issue a request or requests so that the people would be expected to follow the official guidelines. They do not have legally binding powers to impose sanctions or penalties on the person(s) or bodies or institutions who do not comply with the request or requests. Nor could they place a measure like lockdown as other countries did. Second, the act for the State of Emergency can be applied either nationwide or to each of prefectural/municipal areas.

In order to prevent the spread of infection, the government proposed the guidelines, as the official requests, for shorter operation hours from 5am to 8pm, and the avoidance of people gathering for ‘unnecessary’ social occasions after 8pm. Drinking out in a group of people for a social occasion was regarded as one of the unnecessary, unurgent and offensive acts. Such requests were kept maintained until the end of 2021. According to the research on restaurant industry [Inshokuten Research 2021], approximately 90 percent of the restaurants surveyed complied with the government’s request.
During this time, from mid-July to mid-August, the once-postponed Tokyo Olympic Games were held in the name of the 2020 Olympics. None of the games was open to the public at any of the venues, following the government’s highly advocated request of avoiding gatherings unless absolutely necessary. Le Grand, an Australian journalist who visited Tokyo to cover the Olympics, admired how well the Japanese people and the public authorities coped with Covid-19 [Le Grand 2022:199-202]. Nevertheless, the number of the infected cases hit the highest (567,485 infected persons) as of that time.

By the time the year 2022 was going to start, the atmosphere around Covid-19 seemed to be changing. The UK government had already lifted the Covid restrictions such as ‘work from home’ and ‘social distancing and face mask requirements. Travel quarantine and self-isolation requirements for fully vaccinated people had been almost removed. And in March, 2022, they removed all the Covid restrictions [Institute for Government].

In Japan, the government approved the relaxations or removals of some of its Covid-related restriction requests. As a result, local governments started to alter their infection prevention programmes in response to local needs. In most prefectures, the request of shorter operation hours of shops and restaurants was removed, and the number of participants in social events proposed as a desirable measure to prevent infection was changed or relaxed. With these changes, it became possible for more than four people to sit at a table, and stay there as long as they wished. Public places such as museums, galleries, theatres and the like lifted their restrictions of entry. Professional and amateur sporting events began to invite spectators although they were expected to keep a low profile by not shouting or cheering loudly. And isolation measures as part of quarantine for international travel were gradually relaxed.

In March, 2022, the health authority announced several options for handling Covid-19 infected persons.
Except for those who would need intensive cares in hospitals, it became possible for the infected persons to choose between one-week long hotel isolation or staying at home. The cost of hotel isolation was subsidised by the government. There was no detailed explanation for why such options were made available to those infected in 2022. As can be seen in Figure 1, the number of infected persons increased dramatically. It looks as if hidden momentum had exploded in a moment. The number of the infected persons was far greater than the number of beds available for Covid-19 infected persons in hospitals all over the country. This might be a factor for a change in the way of the treatment of the patients.

What may be plausible as an explanation for such a surprising increase of the infected cases seems that people had been accustomed to the presence of the new Corona virus in their daily lives, and that because of the unfounded reassurances given by vaccination jabs, the people were not afraid to go out and have social occasions in closed settings. By mid-2022, it became apparent that people were going out to enjoy window shopping, meeting friends, eating out and the like [Cross Marketing 2022]. Phrases such as ‘fatigue from self-restraint’ or ‘fatigue of the threat of infection’ appeared in the media. There were no health authority definitions. They implied a kind of mentality of seeking a break from boredom, impatience or a sense of fatigue that had fermented out of a self-restrained state of mind. They were more like commonly accepted expressions to excuse their actions of going out or having social occasions. By the end of 2022, we witnessed one quarter of the Japanese population, as a ratio, infected with Covid-19.

3. Changes of attitudes towards Covid-19

On the evening of February 3, 2020, the American company owned cruise ship the Diamond Princes arrived at Yokohama Port with ten infected passengers on board. It was the beginning of the mass media spreading the reports which would stir up fear of infection with the new Coronavirus among the Japanese people. Certainly, some of them were scientifically based, and some were not, but in either way, they were enough to motivate people to avoid getting infected and any possibility of coming into contact with the virus and infected persons. In this atmosphere, the passengers on the Diamond Princes who were proven uninfected by the prior medical checks, began disembarking in mid-February. This opened a page which would show the fear of the Coronavirus and Covid-19 among the Japanese people.

In the article by Takanashi, a journalist of the Yomiuri [Takanashi 2022], some of the ex-passengers said that they encountered harsh anti-atmosphere upon their returning home. According to them, their neighbours looked at them as if they were defiled. One interviewee said that that even her family showed a negative attitude towards her at first. According to her, her daughter who came to pick her up at the port told the interviewee(ex-passenger) to throw out all her belongings before leaving the ship and getting into the pick-up car. A few days later, when she was ready to return to work, her immediate boss rang her up and strongly suggested that she should quit her job voluntarily. The reason, he suggested, was simply that everyone in her workplace knew that she had been on board and that this fact would be enough to worry her colleagues and customers.

Another piece of information was given to the author personally by a friend who happened to be a nurse. One former passenger on the Diamond Princes returned home after she was found to be uninfected prior to disembarkation. A few days later at home, both she and her father developed Covid-19. They went to the same hospital and received almost the same treatment. Discharged from the hospital, she was thrown into the blame games and exposed to harsh accusations and backbiting in the community.

A community reaction such as that shown in the case of the former passengers on the Diamond Princes was not uncommon. According to Takanashi again, those who had been involved in medical activities on the cruise ship as doctors or nurses also had experiences similar to what the former passengers encountered, when they returned to their workplaces or community after the missions had been over. Some of the nurses said that their young children were told not to come to kindergartens or schools because they might be infected at home from their parent or parents who had gone to work on the cruise ship.
The fear of Covid-19 itself and of infection was amplified when it was reported that a popular comedian, a celebrity who could easily afford the best possible medical care, died of the infection only a week after being admitted to hospital. It was further compounded by the following news that he returned home in ashes, having been cremated without the presence of his family members or relatives.

It might be possible to say that such attitudes of exclusion or avoidance as shown towards ex-passengers might emerge from a lack of knowledge and information about Covid-19 in the early part of Covid days. But this was not really the case. Even after more than 6 months passed, examples of explicit avoiding behaviour were reported in the media [Suzuki 2020]. This was about one young person who was working in Tokyo, away from his home town. When he was planning a holiday trip back to his hometown, he received a message from his father, in which his father said that there had been no infected case reported in the hometown and that he should not come home for fear that his return from Tokyo (an epicentre at that time) might cause the very first infected case in their neighbours (the Yomiuri Shinbun Aug 22, 2020).

Another newspaper reported that when one person returned to his parents’ house, he found a note on the front door, blaming for his homecoming. Neighbours were worried that his visit might trigger Covid-19 infection in their community (the Mainichi Shinbun Aug.11, 2020). Such examples of social or peer pressures were sporadically reported in the media in early days of the spread of Covid-19.

But as more people got vaccinated in 2022, people came to realise that vaccinations could help to prevent or alleviate severe medical conditions. More and more people saw their immediate neighbours and family members infected as the number of infected cases rose rapidly. As a result, people started to accept the fact that no one could escape from infection. With so many infected cases around them, they came to feel it would not a burden to confess or simply tell their infection. The author himself encountered such a case when he was at the front door of his house sometime in December, 2022. One of his neighbours sighting the author and coming to the door, suddenly and without hesitation started to tell the author that he had infected Covid-19 hardly before he and the author exchanged greeting words. When 2023 came, it became a kind of first greeting to exchange, ‘Have you got infected?’ Being infected with Covid-19 was not something to hide but something to be accepted. It was a surprising change of attitude towards Covid-19.

4. Remnants or a New Normal

While schools were temporarily closed in March 2020, the government introduced the idea of preventive measures against the novel coronavirus. These measures were devised on the basis of the advice by the Expert Panel at Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare [MHLW]. The purpose was to prevent or reduce the spread of the infection, for which the proposed idea emphasised the importance of avoiding Closed spaces with poor ventilation, Crowded places with many people nearby and Closed-contact settings such as close-range conversations. These three factors came to be addressed as the 3Cs, and AVOID the 3Cs was soon accepted as the phrase for the standard prevention measure.

With the government proposal of AVOID the 3Cs, it did not take time before people started to practice keeping a physical distance between people when being outside their homes, keeping doors or windows open at work for ventilation and refraining from having conversations at work (not known how this went at home). Shaking hands or hugging was not a common form of greeting in Japan nor was steeped in history. Instead, people, taking a distance, customarily bow to each other as a greeting. So, taking a distance upon meeting people was not a difficult practice from the beginning. Bumping elbows or raising a hand, which were proposed as substitutes did not prevail so much as it did in other countries.

Following the introduction of AVOID the 3Cs, the government announced the idea of what was called ‘New Lifestyle’ for the purpose of living as safely as possible under the threat of Covid-19 infection [MHLW].

The most fundamental principle underlying the ‘New Lifestyle’ was the ‘AVOID the 3Cs’. Specific approaches to this were exemplified in four sections. In the section of the basic infection prevention measures
that each person could take, the necessity of keeping a distance between two persons, wearing a face mask, and washing hands were listed as tips for self-protection. In addition, traveling was advised against except when absolutely unavoidable. And it was firmly recommended to avoid gatherings in crowded places, closed settings and spaces as ‘Basic lifestyle for daily life’.

In line with the recommendation of AVOID the 3Cs, online shopping was encouraged rather than daily visit to shops. And when shopping at shops, you were advised to make your stay shorter and to use electronic payments to avoid touching real money. Since lockdown was not placed in Japan even during the period of the state of emergency, it was possible to eat out until as late as till 8 pm, following the government guidelines. But the government advised against sitting face-to-face, chatting during the meal, and drinking alcohol beverages. And in the last section, work from home was recommended as a new work style [Cabinet Secretariat].

In the survey conducted in late 2021 [Suzuki 2022], all the respondents of 30 said they wore face masks when shopping and in places where other people gathered. More than half of them said they covered their faces with a mask when they had a walk even within 100 metres from their houses. It could be said that the people were obedient to follow the government guidelines. At the same time, however, wearing a face mask had been long accepted among the Japanese people and even before the outbreak of Covid-19, it had been a familiar scene to see people wearing a face mask in the seasons of influenza or hay fever. And it is not exaggerating to say some people have regarded a face mask as a kind of fashion item. Similarly, washing hands had been practiced among people in Japan. So, most people in Japan had, innately in a way, been practicing some of the basic measures for infection prevention before the public authority started recommending them specifically to prevent Covid-19 infection. The December 2023 survey confirmed that wearing a face mask in crowded areas and washing hands upon returning home were still practiced by more than 90 percent of the 31 respondents.

On the other hand, it was found in the 2023 survey that ‘work from home’, a symbolically advocated measure of ‘keep a distance between persons’ or ‘avoid gatherings of persons’ has become less practiced. One respondent, employed by an IT company, said that her company soon followed the government’s guidelines. They sent her a whole set of necessary devices so that she could ‘work from home’ or to practice ‘remote work’, as it was called in Japan. She continued working from home as if she had been forced to isolate herself until the government relaxed some of its anti-Covid requirements for infection prevention in early 2022. Now she commutes to work every day. She says she is a bit nostalgic for the Covid days, because working from home was much better than getting on the crowded train to work every morning.

‘Work from home’ as a form of ‘keep a distance’ or ‘avoid gatherings of persons’ was in a way over. But an underlying idea of this seems to be applied in some working places. Among the responses to the survey, several people said that it had become possible for them to use the government advice of keeping a distance or avoiding gatherings in closed settings or spaces when they want to decline the long-established customs in their workplaces. Several respondents said that in their workplaces, it was a kind of custom or obligation to go out for lunch in a group. So, they had to flock together going for lunch when they did not want to. But after the ‘Avoid gatherings of persons’ advice was advocated as an infection prevention measure by the government, it became possible for them to justify their absence from the group lunches.

Another participant pointed out that his workplace stopped holding a group party after work in accordance with the government advice against serving alcohol, chattering over the meal and going out for unurgent matters. He said that in the pre-Covid days, he had one or two invitations for such an occasion monthly on average. There was such a plausible rationale given each time as it being for solidarity among the employees. But after the outbreak of Covid-19, everyone at the workplace became very cautious of making a plan for drinking occasions, he said.

A nationwide survey conducted by an advertising company showed a declining trend in group-oriented behaviours among company employees during the Covid days. According to Hakuhodo [2023], in 1993, well before the Covid-19, 57 percent of the company employees had lunch in groups. This could be said to
represent something of a very strong group orientation which Nakane, an anthropologist, characterized as one cultural trait of the Japanese [Nakane 1970]. By 2023, however, the figure had fallen to 24.1 percent. This survey does not indicate any reason for this change. An article of the Nishi Nihon Shinbunnnewspaper [Feb 18, 2024], interpreted this as an implication that the influx of information through so many media had made people realise the importance of sorting out necessary information by isolating themselves from others when they could. That might be so, but wouldn’t it be possible to interpret like there would be more people than generally assumed, who would prefer not flocking as a group if and when possible, by avoiding group behaviours. For such people, the government’s advice to keep a distance between persons could be a good excuse to use when they want to be alone. And thanks to the experiences during the Covid days, people could not blame you for saying you want to be alone if possible. Rather they might think you were being considerate and careful of others to avoid the risk of infection. If this interpretation makes sense, the government’s recommended guideline has offered a novel way to maintain social relations at workplace where group-oriented behaviours tend to be prioritised. People in the same workplace do not have to hang around together all the time, even at lunch break or after work.

Another issue raised from among the participants concerned funeral ceremonies. One respondent said that due to the government guidelines of AVOID the 3Cs, he could withdraw his attendance from a funeral ceremony. Another person said that his family made the funeral ceremony smaller in scale than what it should be assumed.

According to the survey on the religion-related perceptions and behaviours among the Japanese [Kobayashi 2019], 62 percent say that they have no religious belief. But when it comes to funeral ceremonies, more than 77 percent choose one of Buddhist options. Since there are various Buddhist sects, it depends upon the sectarian customs, how the funeral ceremonies are conducted. However, it is generally known that funeral services in Japan tend to require many human and financial resources. When the author was in charge of his mother’s funeral ceremony before the Covid days, for example, he had to cover the cost of at least US$15,000(of today’s value) for one day. In terms of human resource, upon the deaths of his mother, the author had to inform her friends and relatives of her deaths and the itinerary of the funeral without a moment of grief. The author, having lived away from his mother for a long time, he had little clue about his mother’s friends, and unfortunately relatives, frankly speaking. He had to start with a task of checking various records his mother had kept.

Not to mention, funeral ceremonies are the occasion where people gather in order to mourn the death of the decease, to wish for a peaceful rest after death by accepting the death of the deceased and to pay tribute and sympathy to those concerned. It is true, however that any ceremony is embedded with cultural values. In Japan, the more elaborate the funeral ceremony, the more praise is given to the bereaved. And if you are a bereaved family holding a funeral ceremony for a celebrity, you are naturally expected to make a ceremony worthy of the celebrity’s fame. Of course, it is not uncommon for some families to want to make their loved one’s funeral ceremony as solemn and grand as possible, but at the same time, some families would not burden their loved one if they could. Religious faith does not play any part in this regard.

During the Covid days, funeral ceremonies became a kind of troublesome issue because they would gather people in enclosed settings, which would make it difficult to keep a distance between and among people. As a result, many funeral ceremonies came to be held by a small group of the immediate family members of the deceased. The obituaries in the newspapers at that time were filled with phrases to tell the ceremony had already taken place, implying that acquaintances of the deceased did not bother to pay respects directly to the bereaved at the place of the ceremonies. Now, almost nine months after the official announcement of the end of the pandemic by the WHO, it is not uncommon to see obituaries containing similar phrases, stating that funerals have already been held by the immediate families, not that they will be held. Additionally, funeral ceremonies do not have to be grand even if they are for those considered as celebrities.

Since funeral ceremonies have become down-sized during the Covid days, it has been possible that people could excuse their absence from the ceremonies by referring to the government’s guidelines of the ‘New Lifestyle’. One respondent said that before the Covid days, he had to make a long journey with his
family members just to attend one funeral ceremony. He said that it was fine because he could show his respect and tribute to the deceased person but that frankly it was a very tough journey. And he now thinks that the funeral organizers tend to hold the ceremonies among the immediate family members and because of this, absence from the ceremonies would not be considered as offensive to the deceased and their family members.

With regard to ceremonies embedded conventional cultural values like funerals which gather persons in enclosed settings, the government’s guidelines in the ‘New Lifestyle’ have provided various options for the ways they are conducted. Some of them have simplified the course of the ceremonies in such a way as to reduce the burdens on both the organizers and the participants. When both find merits in it, the new ways of conducting ceremonies could be adapted. It leaves some kind of remnants of the conventional form and may help to bring out a new normal, as seen in the case of funeral ceremonies during the Covid days in Japan.

5. Conclusion

The trend of the infected cases in Japan was peculiar in that the spread of the disease was well controlled during the first two years right after the outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020, while infected cases increased rapidly when Covid vaccination was underway throughout the country. It was true that just before the infected cases started to increase in number, the government changed its guidelines of infection prevention measures and people felt they were allowed to go out and eat out later. In this regard, epidemiological studies are scarce, and expected to come yet.

Since the infection quickly spread in a short time to a third of the whole population of the country in 2022, encountering infected people became in a sense ubiquitous. Not that this could not be the only reason, but attitudes towards the disease changed from the rejection or avoidance due to fear of the unknown to the acceptance, if not so, approval. And by mid-2023, people were no longer afraid to tell their friends if they had been infected with Covid-19.

Right from the beginning of the outbreak of Covid-19, people followed the government-recommended ‘New Lifestyle’ as preventive measures. Partly because some of the proposed approaches had been known and familiar to the Japanese people before the pandemic, they had been already practiced daily. And nine months after the official announcement of the end of the pandemic, it has been found that the ideas of ‘New Lifestyle’ have been applied to ceremonies of conventional values such as funerals. This could be because the government’s guidelines of ‘keep a distance’ or ‘AVOID the 3Cs’ in the ‘New Lifestyle’ have been found useful as an excuse or a rationale to save human and financial resources on both of the bereaved, the organizers of funeral ceremony and participants, some of whom feel obliged to attend. Such a usefulness of the idea in the ‘New Lifestyle’ could become a trigger to change how such ceremonies of funerals should be held even if the majority of people cling to religious affiliations on those occasions.

When the possible outbreak of the new disease was reported in late 2019, it was something that happened behind the scene and people did not pay much attention to it at least as far as many western countries and Japan were concerned. Soon, it became real and the authorities suddenly launched massive campaigns to prevent the spread of the infection. The focus was on encouraging people to wear a face mask, to wash their hands and to be cautious when in crowded settings. Those campaigns reminded us of the scenes during the 1918-19 influenza pandemic [see for example, Barry 2004, Spinney 2019, Honingsbaum 2019, Snowden 2019].

It was true that there was a difference in advertisement tactics in term that a phrasing. During the 1918-19 pandemic, they used more like a threat appeals in their posters and bill board, whereas posters and billboards in the streets during the Covid pandemic, phrases to increase altruism were used [Suzuki 2023]. But with the fact that the same things were repeated after almost 100 years, what had we learned from the
past experience of the 1918-19 pandemic? And did we learn anything from the latest Covid pandemic? Now people say that their lives are back as if nothing had happened during the hard days of the pandemic.

The pandemic is surely a disaster but it is different from mega earthquakes or tsunami. Those disasters disrupt our daily living in a moment, and leave long visible after effects. But the cause of pandemic is physically invisible, tending to be persistent, so that it would make people live under the threat of infection. People have to adapt to the new environment, part of which would be constructed socially and intentionally, while it leaves little physical or geographical visible alterations around us. Consequently, at the end of the pandemic, people tend to say that it’s over without hardly realising differences in life before and after the pandemic. In this sense, the pandemic could be an embodiment of the adage that ‘once people swallow things of high temperature, they forget how hot they were’. Danger past and God forgotten.

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WHO

Number of COVID-19 deaths reported to WHO (cumulative total)

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