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International students and their organisations in Japan during the pandemic and beyond

A virtual *u:japan lunch lecture* by Polina Ivanova

Thursday
2022-05-12
12:30~14:00



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This research examines the impact of changing times of the COVID-19 pandemic on international students enrolled at Japanese universities and on their support organisations. The crisis has significantly affected studies, health, social life, finances and career plans, both of those students staying inside the country and those stranded overseas and unable to enter their study destination. This study views international student mobility through the lens of human security and sees students as transnational agents instead of passive service recipients or guests in a conventional “guest-host” paradigm. The study increasingly relies upon digital methods of data collection: online interviews and observation of online events for international students organised by Japanese universities and alternative support providers, such as nonprofits, peer support groups, university clubs and informal hobby

groups. Forced by the pandemic, international student support organisations (ISSOs) had to adapt to the “new normal”; however, elderly volunteers often failed to catch up with time and technology changes. In the absence of adequate support, especially during the first year of the pandemic, international students proactively searched for solutions and solidarity outside their universities and pre-pandemic support providers.

As a result, transnational political activism emerged as an outcome of modern times, technologies and challenges of the pandemic. The study also follows more recent developments after the vaccine rollout, the spread of the Omicron wave and highlights fluidity of the immigration status of international students sometimes leading to their precarity.



Polina Ivanova is a visiting researcher at Ritsumeikan University and a lecturer at Kyoto University of Foreign Studies. She holds a Ph.D. in International Relations from Ritsumeikan University. Her research interests lie in the areas of civil society, migration, and international education. Her doctoral research examined thirty civil society organisations supporting international students in the Kansai area of Japan and their contribution to creation of social capital in local communities. In addition, she participated in three collaborative projects in Japan, Australia, and the United States. Based on this work, Polina published five peer-reviewed articles and presented her findings at academic conferences, workshops and lecture series in the United Kingdom, Germany, Mexico, the United States, and Japan.

Her recent projects focus on international students’ loneliness and social engagement in the United States and Japan, and civil society response to the pandemic in Japan, Australia, and the United States in the context of international student support.

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