

POLITICAL REFLECTION

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Cause* adhered to in the
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“ADVANCING DIVERSITY”

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What Should be Done to Ensure A Better Post-COVID-19 Future?

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Introduction

It is believed that viral infections, including tuberculosis, have been overcome in developed countries and are regarded as issues affecting developing countries. SARS and MERS had little impact and even the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on lives was as small as the usual annual damage of influenza in Japan. In fact, the excess mortality of Japan in 2020 was reported “minus 15,000,” including an effect of the COVID-19 pandemic impacts (Bando 2021). The trend in Japan eventually changed in August 2021 due to spread of delta strain (Kurita et al 2022) and the excess mortality of Japan in 2021 was reported “plus 12,293,” including an effect of the COVID-19 pandemic impacts (National Institute of Infectious Diseases 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented crisis to every country/area. The government of Japan has been addressing this issue for years and finds a solution after all. Yet, an uncertain situation remains in the surrounding countries, including China, which promotes the zero-COVID policy. In contrast, the U.K. lifted all the restrictions related to COVID-19. This makes an extraordinary gap of COVID-19 policies between countries. Currently, moves to mutate the COVID-19 into a highly infectious virus and to carry out the third and fourth vaccination are simultaneously progressing, and the battle between the two still continues in some countries while accidents caused from vaccination appear.

The COVID-19 pandemic has emerged as a global issue. Why did it so happen? It is supposed that the COVID-19 pandemic attacked the weakest areas of the contemporary world. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have extended to general policies, including politics, the economy, employment, education, and people’s lifestyle (Sakurai 2021). Given these challenges, what should be done to ensure a better future after COVID-19? This is the research question that this essay intends to answer. Some views responding to this question have appeared (i.e., Yuval 2020; CFR 2021; Ciravegna and Michailova 2022). This essay is based on interdisciplinary studies, particularly the literature survey on global governance and adult protection in English and Japanese. The scope of consideration is not limited to the national health policy but also general policies. The discussion is focused on Japan, but most of it would presumably find global application.

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Impacts of COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic is examined to understand its most popular impacts. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have extended to general policies, including politics, the economy, employment, education, and people's lifestyle. They are summarized as below in the domestic and the global impacts.

Domestic impacts:

- (1) A lack of national leadership was revealed. The national leaders could not communicate effectively to the people by their own words in the event of a national crisis. The bureaucrats and academic experts turned out to be less reliable to cope with a crisis than thought.
- (2) Information from the mass media lacks a good balance. The mass media has reported the risk of the COVID-19 pandemic like the pandemic was a flood, thereby instilling fear in the public; the information lacked scientific data-based analysis and they could not project the medium to long-term impacts.
- (3) Tremendous peer pressure was seen in Japanese society. Peer pressure contributes towards ensuring discipline even in natural disasters. But everyone, including a child, an elderly, and a person with a disability, is forced to comply with the regulations or guidelines shared among people in daily life, such as washing hands, wearing nose masks, social distancing, leaving windows open for proper ventilation, and keeping silent in a closed public space.
- (4) The COVID-19 pandemic has had a serious impact on all industries. Along with the rapid slump in demands, the working environment for clerical workers changed drastically, with a switch to the online work from home method. Whilst there are some industries obtained excessive incomes due to malfunction of certain manufacturing goods and its global logistic chains.

Global impacts:

- (5) Diplomatic relations between nations have deteriorated, increasing threat of potential conflicts. The conflicts may lead to divisions of the global community into two or more. The global community has not been possible to effectively respond to potential conflicts between nations.
- (6) It was suspected that international organizations, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), are under the influence of a certain country. Whilst international cooperation was needed to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, effective international cooperation could not be practiced at least during the initial stage.

- (7) The role of SNS expanded rapidly, and in some cases untrue information was spread over, intentionally or unintentionally. A ban or control of the public opinion by SNS providers clearly demonstrates that the position of the international SNS speech theater is not always neutral nor safe but is under threat for the freedom of speech.
- (8) The alienation of vulnerable people, particularly older adults in nursing-home and persons with disabilities, has become prevalent. Due to the suspension of economic activities, many have become unemployed worldwide, and the number of people who are in financial difficulty has increased.

Future Condition Settings

To consider the research question, it is necessary that certain conditions are set for the future. Four settings are addressed as below.

- (1) A society with a declining birthrate and an ageing population is expected. The ageing of the population is a global phenomenon, and it is predicted to continue in the future. In particular, the ageing of the population in Europe and East Asia is expected to have a profound effect on the medical, aged care and social security policies of each country.
- (2) A society in which the role of artificial intelligence (AI) is increasing with progress in information technology (IT) is expected. It is expected that developed countries will shift from post-industrial societies to AI societies in the 2030s. This society includes the risk for surveillance society and needs effective safeguards to avoid an excessive surveillance by the government to restrict human rights.
- (3) Possible increase in depersonalization is expected. Loss of employment opportunities particularly for young workers in part because of the society's dependence on AI, social ties will be gradually weakened, and suspicions will be widespread, making it difficult for people to establish trust and interdependence in communities.
- (4) The conflict of universal values (i.e., the principles of freedom, democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and peace) between countries is expected. Japan may suffer from contradictory double standards of values, namely, the relations with countries that share the universal values and relations with countries that do not. It is unpredictable how much conflict between multiple powers will hinder economic globalization, and this is a serious key point.

What to Do for a Better Post- COVID-19 Future

Based on the above-mentioned impacts and settings, what should be done for a better post-COVID-19 future are examined as follows.

- (1) Japan's participation in international co-research activities that envision a future society is vital. It seems essential to adopt the leadership of Japan that are clear enough to the Japanese people and the global community.
- (2) It is important for Japan to contribute a unique future concept to the global community. This is to ensure Japan's national identity in the international community and to encourage national security in a broad sense through the contribution. Issues common to all countries/areas in the world include a declining birthrate, ageing of population, and social security reform. Ageing of population is one of the most serious issues facing Japan at present, but it is conceivable that Japan, which constitutes the world's most aged society, will take advantage of this and produce countermeasures.

Due to COVID-19 pandemic experience, it has become clear that elderly people are most vulnerable, and ageing of population is a serious issue in national governance. Japan should take leadership in an international cooperation to cope with ageing of population, based on the policy experience between 1945 and 2021 regarding the welfare and social security system (JICA 2021), under the concept of "human security." Such soft and smart power contributions would be acknowledged by countries who may share or may not share the universal values.

The international cooperation project can be called the "Japan Program for the Wellbeing of the Ageing Populations (JPWAP)," which comprises four parts, namely, (a) Cooperation in Legislation and Policymaking, (b) Cooperation in Healthcare and Aged Care for the Elderly, (c) Cooperation in Community Business Activities for the Elderly, and (d) Cooperation in Elderly Education in Schools and Communities.

- (3) A review of neoliberalism and its policy is important, which seeks to rely more on the functioning of the market, trading, and globalization, to identify the roles of the public sector and domestic industries. To deal with risks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters that may inevitably occur in the future, it is necessary to incorporate some area of business into the government policy by changing the philosophy of neoliberalism as a general direction.
- (4) The reconstruction of a society that can respond to multiple societal risks, including the infectious disease outbreak and natural disaster

risks, is important. It is recommended to incorporate the response to risks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, into primary and secondary school education curricula as a learning program, and to scientifically research the risk of responses to infectious diseases in higher education and research institutions.

- (5) There is political leadership and freedom of speech to deal with the risk of the COVID-19 pandemic and other risks. Regardless of political beliefs, it may be necessary for talented people with political competence to create a policy system for people like them to become politicians.

Conclusion

Based on the above-mentioned impacts and settings, what should be done for a better post-COVID-19 future are examined. The following five actions should be executed to ensure a better post-COVID-19 future: (1) Japan should participate in international research activities to envision a future society, (2) it is necessary for Japan to adopt a unique future concept to address declining birthrates, ageing populations, and social security reform and thus to contribute to, (3) a review of neoliberalism, which seeks to rely more on the functioning of the market, (4) construction of a society that can respond to societal risks, including the risk of the COVID-19 pandemic, and (5) political leadership and freedom of speech to deal with the risk of the COVID-19 pandemic and other risks should be championed.

Particularly for the action (2) above, an idea of the “Japan Program for the Wellbeing of the Ageing Populations” is proposed, which will establish steady international cooperation under the concept of “human security” that can overcome the potential conflicts regarding the universal values. The future is created by the people, especially the young people who will lead the next generation. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a major social challenge, it will hopefully present a unique opportunity for resetting the future and leading discussions to activate that future.

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