



# Research Office Newsletter

## THE COVID-19 Edition

Strict lockdowns, rising unemployment, travel restrictions, closing down of businesses, protests and demonstrations..... These are but some examples of how the 2019 Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has affected our world within the past seven months. Needless to say, the list does not end here. Going forward, the COVID-19 pandemic will likely establish a new “normal”, drastically changing our way of life.

This issue of the Research Office Newsletter brings to light how researchers at APU have incorporated COVID-19 and its impact in their research. Read on to find out Professor KAWAZOE Satoshi, Associate Professor LEE Geunhee, Associate Professor DAHLAN Nariman, and graduate student NGUYEN Hong Kong’s academic perspectives on COVID-19 vis-à-vis their respective research fields!



### College of International Management

#### Professor KAWAZOE Satoshi

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Budget Deficits -  
a Monetary Perspective



Faculty Database Profile

The Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has caused a plethora of problems for mankind. In attempting to curb the spread of the disease, physical contact between human beings has been reduced to a bare minimum, hindering social interaction. This has severely damaged the global economy, which up until recently, functioned on the premise that people were able to interact freely with one another. Leaders across the world have unanimously referred to this damage as the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression. Fortunately, unlike the Great Depression, governments today refrain from adopting austerity measures, which would exacerbate recessions. Instead, they have implemented fiscal measures designed to prevent economies from falling apart. Those measures will, however, raise budget deficits and government debts to unprecedented levels. According to conventional macroeconomic thinking, once the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided, and our lives have reverted to their pre-COVID-19 state, governments will be faced with a difficult choice: reducing the debt overhang with a drastic increase of taxes or with inflation. One aspect of my research examines if and to what extent the world is faced with such an inconvenient truth, and if not, what kind of future awaits mankind.

Putting aside cross-border economic activities for the time being, economic activities in Japan and elsewhere can be divided into the “necessities” sector (e.g. the food industry) and the “non-necessities” sector (e.g. the tourism industry). The demand for goods and services belonging to the former has remained relatively stable in spite of the COVID-19 outbreak, while the demand for goods and services belonging to the latter has been decimated as a result of the adoption of “self-restraint lifestyles” in response to the outbreak. Consequently, income of workers in the “necessities” sector has more or less remained stable, whereas income of workers in the “non-necessities” sector has plummeted. As workers of the “necessities” sector do not (or cannot) spend as much of their income on “non-necessities” as before, their savings will have to increase.

The Paradox of Thrift argues that such leakage of nominal demand (as savings) from the economy will cause a downward economic spiral. As stressed by proponents of the Modern Monetary Theory (MMT), in order to prevent this, the government will have to absorb savings of workers in the “necessities” sector by issuing bonds and redistributing spending power to workers in the “non-necessities” sector who have lost their income. Such financial intermediation by the government is, in the broadest sense, necessary, sustainable, and unlikely to cause inflation.

Having said that, problems may still arise after the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided and people begin spending the money they have saved up during the pandemic. I hope to conduct research on what these potential problems may be and consider the appropriate responses to such problems. I hope to lay out policy recommendations once the outcomes from this research have become clear as a contribution by APU to the society.



## **College of International Management**

### **Associate Professor LEE Geunhee**

Changes in Consumption Behavior after the COVID-19  
Outbreak



Faculty Database Profile

What have you been spending your money on since the start of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic? As a researcher in the Marketing and Consumer Behavior fields, I have developed a keen interest in finding out how people's spending patterns will change during this unprecedented pandemic. Even now, I find myself amused and intrigued by the items people chose to purchase as well as the items people chose to forgo over the past few months.

Let us consider the example of cosmetic products. In Japan, it is common for women to beautify themselves by purchasing and applying cosmetic products. Many women might even perceive putting makeup on as a mandatory aspect of their daily routine. It can be assumed that such consumption behavior exists because human beings are essentially social in nature. However, with the recent reduction in person-to-person contact as a result of the pandemic, women's perceived value of cosmetics dropped drastically, resulting in a decline in the sales of cosmetic products. In like manner, this pandemic sheds light on the kind of products that appeal and lose their appeal to consumers in varying situations. I had hoped to conduct research based on such marketing information, which will hopefully elucidate the industries that have potential for expansion and those that do not. I believe this research will guide entrepreneurs who wish to start their own business as well as industry players looking to expand their target markets.

In embarking on this research, I have gathered relevant data on consumption behavior through magazines, newspapers, and the television. I realized that consumption behavior in general has undergone drastic changes throughout the past few months. As such, consumption behavior observed in February might become irrelevant for the month of March. Likewise, consumption behavior observed in March may be deemed immaterial in April. I initially intended to proceed with analyzing the data obtained over the past few months. However, given the immense speed of changes in consumer behavior, I found it necessary to analyze data obtained over a longer time span. Furthermore, since the COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing, it is impossible to discern which stage of the pandemic we are currently at. As a researcher, it may only be possible to finalize research outcomes after the pandemic has fully subsided.

Consumers' once unchanging perceived value of particular goods and services are unexpectedly dropping. This, coupled with the immense speed with which consumer behavior is changing throughout the pandemic, suggests that our society will be increasingly difficult to predict going forward. Having said that, there are valuable questions to be asked: Is the consumption of all goods and services unpredictable? Or will the consumption of certain items be predictable to some extent? To answer these questions, it is necessary for us to collect more information on different industrial sectors while analyzing the service sector in more detail. In scrutinizing the service sector, we can categorically and systematically define which services are indispensable or ultimately subject to the surrounding circumstances. I hope that this case study of Japan will deepen our understanding of global changes in consumption trends.



## **Education Development and Learning Support Center**

### **Associate Professor DAHLAN Nariman**

A Case Study: How to improve online course delivery for  
practice-based courses?



Faculty Database Profile

Due to the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and subsequent declarations of states of emergency by governments across the world, universities worldwide are being forced to take extraordinary measures such as banning students from entering campus and implementing distance learning via the Internet. Consequently, the development of electronic learning (hereafter 'e-learning') content and provision of e-learning opportunities have transformed into some of the most rapidly expanding areas in education.

Having said that, practice-based courses in relation to online distance learning are highly problematic due to varying performance levels of PCs, operating systems (OS), versions of applications, internet speeds and Internet and Communication Technology (hereafter 'ICT') environments. The aforementioned factors, coupled with differences in students' basic skills and abilities, and their social and cultural backgrounds, beg the fundamental question: How can we deliver online classes and teaching in a way that optimally benefits all students?

I posit that in order to maximize and improve effectiveness of practice-based distance learning, it is necessary to utilize assorted forms of ICT and media content rather than simply delivering lectures via online meeting platforms such as Zoom. While there are plenty of wonderful ICT tools available, we must consider the most suitable, efficient and effective method and mechanism for each situation. The main objective of this study is to assess students' preferences and satisfaction towards online learning systems for practice-based ICT courses such as Computer Literacy and Programming courses. More specifically, it focuses on (1) Students' preferences towards various media types in online learning systems, (2) Analyzing significant factors affecting students' satisfaction towards different types of media content and their respective features and (3) Determining the extent to which each factor in (2) affects the students' levels of satisfaction.

The following study was primarily implemented during Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University's (APU) Computer Literacy course in the Spring 2020 Semester amidst the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic. Said course was conducted online via Zoom and incorporated lectures explaining the practice target of each class section, online consultations and face-to-face interactions during practice sessions. The course was also supplemented with e-learning media content (such as digital textbooks with visual graphics and video instructions) made available on a Learning Management System (LMS) officially known as *manaba*. A real-time online survey system, *respon*, was used to monitor students' levels of understanding and improvement before and after each practice session.

A Cross-Sectional study, which is considered to be effective in providing a snapshot of students' current behaviors, attitudes and perspectives, was used to identify factors associated with students' satisfaction levels in online learning. More specifically, descriptive analysis and factor analysis were used to tabulate the relevant data, which was collected twice at two separate classes held on May 18, 2020 and June 8, 2020. In general, students were satisfied with the e-learning content. Factor analysis indicated that approximately 76.4% of students preferred online learning. This can be attributed to three main factors - The quality of the digital textbook and its visual graphics, the quality of video instructions and the option of real-time consultations through Zoom. In fact, 54.2% of students expressed satisfaction towards the quality of visual graphics and sentences in the textbook, suggesting that visual graphics and video explanations were useful and helpful for the majority of the students in following instructions and completing practices for the course.

However, the correlation between features to which students have expressed satisfaction towards is still unclear. It is paramount that we consider the most important features of each component in digital textbooks and conduct correlation analyses of said features. Furthermore, comparative studies between the first half and latter half of the course is required to clarify the relationship between students' requirements and their preferences.



## **Graduate School of Asia Pacific Studies** **(Master's Program)**

**NGUYEN Hong Kong**

Vietnam's COVID-19 Strategy

In collaboration with several researchers, I have written two research papers on Vietnam's response to the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, focusing largely on the local public health measures and communication strategies. The purpose is to shed light on how Vietnam's efforts to contain the pandemic has been more successful than expected, and whether there are lessons other developing and emerging economies can draw from.

As I was doing this research, it became clear to me how biased Western media had been in covering the Vietnam case—not only were there few reports about Vietnam back in March, those that later touched on this topic were quick to dismiss the Vietnamese response on political and social apparatus grounds. In our research, we examined the policy responses as well as the digital media content (including mainstream outlets and social media platforms) at both the top-down and bottom-up levels during the first five months of 2020. Vietnam's successful efforts to slow down the rate of infections and to already open up its domestic economy again highlight the importance of early risk assessment and preventive measures; comprehensive contact tracing; and timely quarantine and isolation. In addition, consistent leadership and communications helped to reinforce public understanding of the COVID-19 threat, and thus, their corresponding compliance to strict anti-virus measures. I believe that any arguments that dismiss the government interventions for political reasons have essentially failed to account for the works of frontline physicians, employees and the voluntary engagement of citizens. In analyzing the Vietnamese media during the January-May period, I noted that, although open and timely communications do not solely contribute to Vietnam's containment of COVID-19, its absence or failure could create public distrust and panic, or worse still, a complete misunderstanding of the disease and thus disregard for early preventive measures. This could be a valuable lesson for other countries as well as Vietnam in the post-pandemic era.

Going forward, I am interested in studying the impacts of COVID-19 on Vietnam's foreign affairs, particularly how the government has employed the so-called "virus diplomacy" to promote its image of transparent governance, national unity, and international collaborator.

You can read NGUYEN Hong Kong's articles on Vietnam's COVID-19 strategy via the QR codes below.

["Vietnam's Low-Cost COVID-19 Strategy"](#)



["Vietnam's COVID-19 Strategy: Mobilizing Public Compliance Via Accurate and Credible Communications"](#)

(Co-written with Graduate School of Asia Pacific Studies student HO Manh Tung)



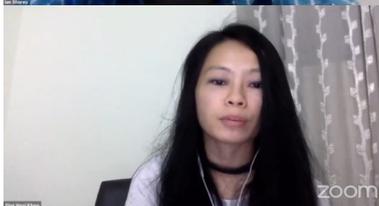
## Event Report

### RCAPS Current Research Seminar

#### The Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic and the Responses of the International Society (Japanese)

On May 15, 2020 (Fri), RCAPS held an online Current Research Seminar entitled "The Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic and the Responses of the International Society" via Zoom.

The speakers for this seminar were Professor SATO Yoichiro, Professor GHOTBI Nader, and Assistant Professor HIRANO Mihar, all from the College of Asia Pacific Studies. Each speaker analyzed the COVID-19 pandemic from their respective fields of politics and international relations, public health, and international law. They also explained a wide range of topics, including the current state of communication between people as well as international law and cultural and social rules.



### RCAPS Seminar

#### Politics and International Relations in Southeast Asia amid the COVID-19 Pandemic (English)

On June 17, 2020 (Wed), RCAPS held an online RCAPS Seminar entitled "Politics and International Relations in Southeast Asia amid the COVID-19 Pandemic" via Zoom.

The speakers for this seminar were Dr. STOREY Ian J. of ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute (Singapore) and Dr. KHOO Ying Hooi of the Department of International and Strategic Studies, University of Malaya (Malaysia), with Professor SATO Yoichiro of APU's College of Asia Pacific Studies moderating the event.

The seminar covered a wide range of topics: International security and diplomatic relations in Southeast Asia in general, specific international maritime issues in the South China Sea dispute, and domestic political issues in the current context of the coronavirus pandemic.

You can view recordings of the aforementioned seminars on YouTube via the QR codes below.

[The Novel Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\) Pandemic and the Responses of the International Society \(Japanese\)](#)



[Politics and International Relations in Southeast Asia amid the COVID-19 Pandemic \(English\)](#)

