

“COVID-19 in Japan: A Nighttime Disease”

Date: Wednesday, December 9
Time: 7pm-8pm (Tokyo time)
Presentation will be followed by Q and A
On Zoom. Open to all; language English



Please register [HERE](#)

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When the state of emergency was declared in Tokyo, it was less a mandatory order than a request for cooperation and for *jishuku* (self-restraint). Along with the ambiguous status of such a request in a time of pandemic, this confusion was further compounded by uneven enforcement. While wealthier, middle class areas were left relatively unpatrolled, the areas around the redlight district of Kabuki-chō in Shinjuku, Tokyo, were very strictly monitored despite the lack of any conclusive data at that time regarding the infection patterns or rates. In targeting workers in the “night business,” the Tokyo Metropolitan Government reenacted centuries old prejudices against those working the sex trades. This paper focuses on how the advent of COVID-19 affected the lives of people working in the *settai* (business entertainment) industry, in particular hostesses in hostess bars, *kyabajō* (hostesses in clubs), and male hosts. Their voices tell us how, through the government’s actions as well as mass media and social media discourse surrounding their work, these laborers were stigmatized, resulting in a worsening of their already precarious positions as they have been expected to do difficult and increasingly dangerous work, almost always without any contract or insurance protection, in a time of pandemic.

Valentina Giammaria is a PhD Candidate in Japanese Studies in the Graduate Program of Global Studies at Sophia University in Tokyo. Giammaria is also a research assistant in the same graduate program. As a PhD candidate majoring in Japanese Premodern and Modern Literature, her research focuses on the depictions of Kabukichō in Modern Japanese literary works, with particular attention to the analysis of the literary space. Giammaria is the organizer of the symposium “Crossing Over to the Other Side - Perspectives on Postwar and Contemporary Japanese Art and Literature” (Sophia University, Jan 2020) and participated to the international conference “Murakami Haruki’s 9th International Symposium” (Hokkaido University, Jul 2020) and to “The 22nd Annual Asian Studies Conference Japan” (ICU, Jun 2018).

Valentina will be discussing her recently published paper: “[COVID-19 in Japan: A Nighttime Disease](#)” from our collection in the [Asia Pacific Journal: Japan Focus](#)

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Notes on the full series: This discussion is the first in a series we will hold over the autumn on the causes, effects and current status of vulnerable populations in Japan during the Covid-19 pandemic. Each discussion will be moderated by David Slater and will give listeners a chance to meet the authors and others associated with the articles (advocates, activists, supporters, and participants). The authors will provide insight into the articles, as well as background to the conditions of data collection in the age of Corona, an update on the situation and a look forward—asking if we are any better prepared for next time.

An introduction to the whole collection here: [Vulnerable Populations in Japan under Covid-19: A lull in the storm](#) by David H. Slater

Abstract for the full collection of papers: This is a collection of original articles on diverse vulnerable populations in Japan in the wake of the new coronavirus pandemic. The effects of COVID-19 are felt differently, with some among us at much greater risk of infection due to preexisting health and welfare conditions. For others, perhaps more than the risk of infection, it is the precautions taken to mitigate the risk for the whole population, such as lockdowns and business closures, that have pulled away the already fragile safety net of state and civil society organization (CSO) support, leading to increased marginalization and social exclusion. The goal of this set of papers is to document the conditions of those that have been most directly affected by the virus and to provide background on the conditions that made them vulnerable in the first place, notably chronic conditions that are brought into more obvious relief in light of emergency measures. Each of the authors had a pre-established relationship with those affected populations and employed various ethnographic approaches, some face to face, others digitally via Zoom interviews and SNS exchanges. In this moment of what appears to be relative calm, we hope that our collection, quickly compiled in an attempt to capture the ever-changing situation, will give some insight into how those most vulnerable are faring in this time of crisis and provide information that will allow us to prepare better before the next wave comes our way.

