Impacts of the COVID pandemic on international faculty's academic activities and life in Japan

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Abstract
The purpose of this study is to explore impacts of the pandemic on the academic activities and life of full-time international faculty at Japanese universities, drawing on findings from semi-structured interviews with them. Main findings include three points. First, although the vast majority of the interviewees believed that the pandemic has had more negative impacts on their academic activities and life, the case study of Japan suggests that there are both negative and positive impacts from the pandemic that are unique on international faculty’s academic activities and life. Second, the study reveals that the impacts on international faculty vary according to the backgrounds of the interviewees such as their academic disciplines, countries of origin, and work roles and duties. Finally, participants may have experienced discrimination etc., but not felt comfortable talking about it. It seems that no interviewees, particularly those from China and other parts of Asia, experienced social exclusion and xenophobic attitudes and, at times, became victims of discrimination and verbal assaults.
1 | INTRODUCTION

The COVID-pandemic has not only affected our life and work significantly, but also posed various challenges for all levels of education. Higher education institutions (HEIs) are no exception, especially regarding the cross-border movement of international students, researchers and university faculty members (Lennox et al., 2021). This is particularly true in Australia, the USA, the UK, China, India, and the European Union in which there has traditionally been a great number of internationally mobile students and scholars (QS, 2020; UNESCO, 2020). For example, according to national data there were 123,508 international scholars in the US in 2019/20, but the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to a 9.6% decrease from the prior year. Without a doubt, the global travel limit is one of the most important factors affecting personal movement from one country to another. Other factors, such as the change in visa policies in some countries like the USA, has made it more difficult for foreign scholars to work in US universities (Subbaraman & Witze, 2020).

From an international and comparative perspective, Japan's government appears to have imposed more restrictive and rigid responses to the impact from COVID-19 than the US, the UK, and many European countries, but has taken more loose measures to fight against the pandemic than some centrally controlled countries such as China. Despite these differences, Japan's international higher education has also been significantly affected by the pandemic. Since the operation of Japan's HEIs is also largely affected by market forces given nearly 80% of Japan's universities are private universities and colleges and all national universities and the majority of local public universities have become corporations since 2004 (Huang, 2020). As discussed in the following section, while more supportive measures have been taken by the Japanese government to help inbound international students, less efforts have been made to develop specially designated policies for international faculty.

Compared to many earlier studies on the impacts from the pandemic on both inbound and outbound international students in Japan and other countries, little is known of how the pandemic has affected international faculty in Japan, and how they viewed these impacts. The purpose of this study is to explore what impacts the pandemic has had on full-time international faculty at Japanese universities drawing on findings from semi-structured interviews according to phenomenographic research protocols.

There are three main findings. First, the case study of Japan suggests that there are both negative and positive impacts from the pandemic that are unique to international faculty's academic activities and life. Second, the study reveals that the impacts from the pandemic on international faculty and the extent to which the impacts on them vary according to the backgrounds of the interviewees such as their employment status, academic disciplines, time of being hired (newly recruited or not), countries of origin, and work roles and duties. Finally, it seems that no interviewees, particularly those from China and other parts of Asia, experienced social exclusion and xenophobic attitudes or reported being victims of discrimination or verbal assaults.

The next section presents a short introduction to the research context. The third section reviews the literature and presents methodology. The fourth section focuses on data analysis, followed by a discussion. The study concludes by presenting the main findings, implications, and limitations in this study.

2 | CONTEXT

2.1 | Japan's higher education and international faculty in Japan

Different from many Western countries, private universities and junior colleges make up for the largest share of Japan's HEIs. According to national statistics (MEXT, 2021), the proportion of both private students and institutions accounts for around 80% of the total institutions and student enrolment respectively as of May 2020. Moreover, the national and public sectors are mainly established, founded, and administered by national government and
local authorities respectively, while the private sector is established and operated by school corporations and is
largely dependent on tuition fees. As such, these three educational sectors are expected to play different roles
and fulfil diverse functions within the broad higher education system. Except for a very few private universi-
ties that were founded before WWII like Waseda and Keio, most private universities provide educational pro-
grames in humanities and social sciences that are more responsive to market influence. Local public institutions
are primarily concerned with fostering graduates for regional economic development and the prosperity of local
communities. In contrast, national universities (all became national university corporations in April 2004) mainly
provide educational programmes in the STEM fields, and the faculty members in the national sector, particularly
those from the seven former Imperial Universities, are more engaged in basic, applied, and large-scale scientific
research. A greater number of them enjoy a global reputation in their research activities and producing graduates.

There is little doubt that the features of three sectors of Japan's universities also affect international mem-
bers' academic activities, work roles and responsibilities according to their affiliations. For example, a majority of
international faculty members at national universities have a stronger preference in research and spend a greater
time on research than on teaching. In contrast, although the largest number of international faculty is hired at the
private sector, they are primarily involved in language teaching activities.

As policy ideas for general education were enforced in Japan by the US occupation forces soon after WWII,
foreign language, especially English language, has become one of the university-wide courses and constitutes one
part of general education programmes in Japanese HEIs. Since it is one of compulsory courses, almost all under-
graduate students are required to learn and most of Japan's universities have hired international faculty to teach
foreign language courses. As language teachers, most of these international faculty come from English-speaking
countries such as the USA, the UK, Australia and Canada (Huang, 2018a; RIHE, 1980). Since the early 1980s
when the Japanese government issued a law to allow non-Japanese nationals to be hired as tenured professors in
national and local public universities, the number of international faculty expanded rapidly. According to national
statistics (MEXT, 2021), as of May 2020, the share of full-time international faculty accounted for around 4.8%
(9187) of the total full-time faculty.

By country of origin, compared to the early 1980s when a majority of international faculty came from English-
speaking countries as mentioned above, the number of Chinese academics in Japan has been rising for the past
two decades and is now the largest cohort, comprising around 22% of all foreign academics at Japanese universi-
ties, overtaking scholars from the US at 19% (Huang, 2018a). Further, compared to most of the language teachers
before the 1990s, the number of international faculty who are involved in both teaching and research has ex-
panded quickly since the early 2000s. The important factor affecting this change is that both Japan's government
and individual universities, particularly national research-intensive universities and the universities that are listed
in national projects such as “the Global 30 Project” of 2010 (MEXT, 2009) and “the Top Global University project”
of 2014 (MEXT, 2013), have formulated quantitative goals to recruit international faculty whose main duties are
concerned with publishing research papers in indexed journals, promoting international collaboration of their uni-
versities with foreign partners, and developing international degree programmes for both inbound international
and domestic students. Apparently, the aim to enhance the international competitiveness and global reputation
of Japan's universities has become one of the decisive factors affecting changes in international faculty in Japan.

2.2 | Japan's responses to the COVID-19 pandemic

In addition to preventive measures such as early detection and strategic (geographically targeted) PCR (Polymerase
Chain Reaction) tests, the Japanese government has also adopted strategies to help individual universities and
students, including inbound international students (MIC, 2020). For example, the MEXT (Ministry of Education,
Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan) allocated a supplementary budget of US$93 million for all uni-
versities to ensure a good teaching and learning environment for students in 2020. Also, all Japanese universities
were subsidized if they reduced the amount of students' tuition fees or increased the number who are exempt from these fees by implementing more flexible systems to pay scholarships for some international students. Regarding support for students, as a large number of both local and international students have to pay for their tuition fees by doing part-time jobs in Japan, the MEXT allocated an additional subsidy for approximately 430,000 students enrolled in all HEIs, including inbound international students. For example, all inbound international students were given US$950. In late 2020, the MEXT offered handouts of US$1900 to international students in Japan if they had a grade point average (GPA) of at least 2.30. If some international students had difficulties to get to their universities from their home countries, they could be awarded scholarships if they met the relevant requirements.

Individual universities also made various efforts to help their students. For example, due to the temporary relaxation of immigration restrictions in mid and late 2020, the University of Tokyo has managed to secure appropriate accommodation for most inbound international students for the 14-day self-isolation period, helped to pay for their accommodation by providing a fixed sum of money and assumed responsibility for overseeing their health while staying at the accommodation facilities. In addition, almost all universities have built up risk-management frameworks and special committees, which have previously been rare in national and local public universities.

Compared to the supportive measures primarily focused on students, including inbound international students, it seems that no special strategies or measures have been carried out to help international faculty at Japanese universities. With the global spread of the pandemic, Japan has implemented similarly preventive measures such as a two-week quarantine period for visitors from affected countries and areas and the international travel ban, as well as terminating the issue of new visas for newly recruited private international students and most academics to come to study and work in Japan. Furthermore, inbound international students and international faculty are not allowed to leave Japan without sufficient reasons. Without a doubt, these restrictions have largely affected international faculty’s life and academic activities (Kakuchi, 2020). Further, a long-time state of emergency restrictions for their cities, a restricted access to their campuses or work places, and the sudden shift away from a face-to-face teaching mode to the rapid rise of e-learning where teaching and lab experiments are conducted remotely and on digital platforms have significantly altered international faculty’s academic activities and life, too.

3 | LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 | Previous studies

The theme of this study is generally concerned with two broad areas. One is about the impacts from the pandemic on international higher education and research, including internationalization of higher education and global research. The other is relating to the impacts from the pandemic on international faculty hired in HEIs. For the former area, almost all the existing research suggests that the pandemic has exerted a profound impact on higher education, especially international mobility of students and global research. For example, since 2020, QS, Educations.com and StudyPortals have carried out several international surveys of students and prospective students on the COVID-19 impact on their study or mobility plans (Education.com, 2020; QS, 2020; StudyPortals, 2020). Some international and regional organizations also made global and cross-national analyses of the impact of the pandemic on higher education such as the survey report published by the International Association of Universities and the ACA (The Academic Cooperation Association) report. All these survey reports show that the pandemic has largely influenced the spatial mobility across country borders for purposes of study and research and it is expected that there would be less international mobility of students and researchers in the near future (ACA, 2020; IAU, 2020). Other research by individual scholars reveals that the pandemic especially has a major impact on international students with regard to their wellbeing, their international movement, family life and academic activities and scholarship (Bilecen, 2020; Firang, 2020; Kanwar & Carr, 2020; Marinoni et al., 2020; Mok et al., 2021). For example, the report issued by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is the first comprehensive analysis
of these data to understand how the pandemic has reshaped border management and human mobility—and what the lasting ramifications may be throughout 2021 and beyond (Benton et al., 2021). A recent research argued that the exclusive focus on mobility of students and faculty should be removed and efforts need to be made to foster more sustainable and inclusive internationalization practices (Crăciun & de Gayardon, 2021). While it seems that more arguments are made about the negative impact on higher education from the pandemic, some scholars also point out that it may create opportunities for stakeholders to consider the future of higher education and more efforts need to be made to reshape this future. For example, some scholars investigate the impact of COVID-19 on higher education with a critical approach and present sustainable internationalization recommendations for HEIs (Mok et al., 2021; Tasci, 2021). Others point out that the current crises in the world and in higher education from COVID-19 can also be seen as opportunities or even necessities for the future of higher education and its internationalization (de Wit & Altbach, 2021).

For the latter area, while there are plenty of studies on the impacts of COVID-19 on international students, there is very little research on the impact on university faculty. One such study draws on findings from a cross-Canada survey of university faculty, and found the pandemic has had a disproportionately negative effect on women and racialized faculty including hampering their career progress (Davis, 2021). Although Dahdouh-Guebas and Vandebroek (2021) mentioned impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on scholars who participate in international study exchange and research programme, the focus of their discussion is placed on internationally mobile students rather than mobile academics or faculty members. While some attention has been devoted to the negative impact from the pandemic on university faculty’s mental health and well-being such as their struggling emotionally, socially, financially and legally more than usual (Bavas, 2020), very little is known of the unique impacts on international faculty. Almost no research has been undertaken into how the pandemic has impacted on full-time international faculty’s life and academic activities in Japan based on empirical evidence. Therefore, this study attempts to address the following two broad research questions:

1. How has the COVID pandemic impacted international faculty’s academic activities?
2. How has the COVID pandemic impacted international faculty’s life?

3.2 | Methodology

Regarding methodology, the study employs qualitative research methods with the majority of the data collected via semi-structured interviews with 10 full-time international faculty from different universities in Japan. The phrase of full-time international faculty refers to those non-Japanese nationals who are hired based on fixed-term contract, ranging from three years to five years, and those who hold tenured positions in this study.

The study used several interview questions relating to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international faculty’s work and personal life since early 2020. We asked participants to share their observations and reflections on the impact from the pandemic on both work and personal life in light of their experiences—both positive and negative—as a full-time international faculty in Japan. The key questions included: “In your opinion, has the pandemic impacted your academic activities and life?” “If any, in what way?”; “What do you think of the impact from the pandemic on your academic activities and life in Japan?”; “Any negative or positive impacts on your current work and life in Japan”, “if any, what are they?” For some sensitive topics such as their comments on whether they have received any discriminations just because they originally came from China, we did not ask some of them directly to avoid causing them discomfort, but in an indirect way.

Regarding recruiting participants for the interviews, following ethical approval for the research project, we contacted potential key persons by taking into consideration their country of origin, gender, disciplines, and academic ranks, sector and type of universities where they come from, and invited them to participate via email. A lot
of information on potential participants in this regard is publicly available in the websites of the universities they belonged to. For some international faculty whose information on their nationality or citizenship is not publicly available, we e-mailed them and confirmed their personal profiles.

Despite a greater number of part-time international faculty who are hired as language teachers in private universities and colleges in Japan, this study only invited full-time international faculty who worked in Japan’s national research-intensive universities, national universities that are regionally based, and private research-intensive universities. Therefore, the phrase of international faculty is being deployed in a limited sense in this study, as it only refers to full-time non-Japanese nationals at Japanese four-year universities who are hired based on fixed-term contract from three years to five years, and hold tenured positions. Four of them received their master’s or doctoral degrees from Japanese universities, but no interviewees obtained their bachelor’s degree or first degrees in Japan.

One rationale for selecting the participants is that, compared to part-time international faculty, and full-time language teachers without any tenured positions, the participants from these types and sectors of universities are engaged in a wider variety of academic and administrative responsibilities in their institutions. Namely, in addition to teaching, they spend more time on research, organize and participate in faculty development activities, serve as members of academic and administrative committees at the institutional and faculty or departmental levels, and undertake international collaborative activities for their institutions and/or academic unit, etc. In relation to the sectors and types of universities in which they were hired, there are five national research-intensive universities that were founded before WWII (five of the seven so-called “imperial universities”), two national universities that were established soon after WWII in local areas, and two private universities, including one research intensive private university and one teaching-centred one.

As Table 1 indicates, we interviewed with 10 full-time international faculty. By nationality, four of them come from Asian countries, three from Anglo-American countries, and three from European continental countries. There are two professors, five associate professors, two assistant professors and one lecturer. They represent different disciplines: “Social Sciences” (n = 3), “Sciences” (n = 3), “Humanities” (n = 2), “Engineering” (n = 2). Due to a very low proportion of full-time female international faculty at Japanese universities, only two female participants were invited. As the interviewees represent a group of international faculty with a variety of backgrounds and experiences, they can present a somewhat representative picture of the impact that the pandemic has had on full-time international faculty who are hired at national and private research-intensive universities and comprehensive national universities that are regionally based in Japan.

Regarding data collection, all the interviews listed in Table 1 were undertaken from January to late February 2021. We conducted online semi-structured qualitative interviews with these participants via Zoom. Before organizing interviews, we sent a summary of the research project including interview questions to participants. English was basically used for the interviews as the study is part of an international joint research project. Normally, we began by briefly explaining the measures and action that we would take if our research involves compliance with the related laws and regulations and explaining the research purpose, the use of interview data and ethical regulations, and some key terms of interest in the research project based on our review of literature. Except for two interviews, all interviews were recorded and transcribed. Some participants reviewed and approved their transcript as a precondition of participation. The duration of interviews varied depending on individual interviews and topics, but most lasted between one and one and half hours.

With regard to the analytical process, to gain an understanding of participants’ reflections and observations on the negative and positive impacts from the pandemic on their academic activities and life, we followed phenomenographic principles (Åkerlind, 2005). Firstly, we read all relevant transcripts of interviews and tried to be familiar with their main ideas and key points (Marton et al., 2005). Secondly, we searched for key words and phrases in relation to the two research questions. Thirdly, we reviewed and developed a set of categories or groups of descriptions by sorting, comparing, and differentiating their answers to the interview question. The set of categories of descriptions provide a fundamental source for the different thematic analysis of the
| Interviewee | Affiliation                  | Nationality   | Title                | Gender | Discipline     |
|-------------|------------------------------|---------------|----------------------|--------|----------------|
| A           | Former Imperial Univ. I     | Anglo-American| Professor            | Male   | Sciences       |
| B           | Former Imperial Univ. II    | Anglo-American| Professor            | Male   | Engineering    |
| C           | Former Imperial Univ. III   | European      | Associate Professor  | Male   | Social Sciences|
| D           | Former Imperial Univ. IV    | European      | Associate Professor  | Male   | Sciences       |
| E           | Former Imperial Univ. V     | European      | Associate Professor  | Male   | Humanities     |
| F           | National Univ. that is regionally based I | Asian | Associate Professor | Male   | Engineering    |
| G           | National Univ. that is regionally based II | Asian | Associate Professor | Male   | Sciences       |
| H           | National Univ. that is regionally based III | Anglo-American | Assistant Professor | Male   | Social Sciences|
| I           | Private Univ. I             | Asian         | Lecturer             | Female | Social Sciences|
| J           | Private Univ. II            | Anglo-American| Assistant Professor  | Male   | Humanities     |
study and help us analyse their observations in a more systematic and explicit way. Finally, we organized all main findings and produced a research report based on the research questions, which is presented in the following section of Data analysis.

4 | DATA ANALYSIS

By using the phenomenographic approach, this study identified four broad types of participants' observations that are more connected to the research questions through the analytical process above. Details of data analysis are presented below.

4.1 | Impacts on interviewees' academic activities

4.1.1 | Type 1: Negative impact

All the interviewees admitted that the pandemic has exerted plenty of negative impacts on their teaching, research and other academic activities, including the use of online teaching in all courses and supervising students' dissertations virtually, not being able to attend conferences in person, and doing field work in Japan and abroad vital for sharing research findings and ideas with colleagues and collecting data and information on their ongoing research. For example, many interviewees made similar observations and some seem to be dissatisfied with online teaching below.

It (the pandemic) also affects the field survey and data collection in study regions because in our lab, most of study regions are in Southeast and South Asia. (F)

The key problem involves restricted access to campus which stopped work in my laboratory for a period. (A)

Although online teaching is available via the internet, I feel that offline teaching cannot be totally replaced by online teaching because of the higher efficiency of face-to-face communication. (G)

Even though some of the interviewees' job responsibility was primarily engaged in research based on lab experiments and in support of their principal investigators without much field work or travel abroad, they also felt the inconvenience caused by the pandemic.

The pandemic of course influences the laboratory everyday life. We have to implement prevention measures such as social distancing, wearing masks, online classes, avoiding face to face meeting with people outside the university. (D)

Although domestic faculty have also been impacted by the pandemic in a similar way in many of their academic activities, most interviewees pointed to a few negative impacts that are unique on international faculty.

particularly since I'm very much motivated towards international collaboration, so all my international collaboration, collaborative activities, have basically gone to online mode, which has a lot of limitations. (B)
Besides, the same professor also expressed his worry about contract expiry. below.

I have one more year on my contract... I don't really know what will happen at the end of that period, and whether my contract will be extended or not...if my university doesn't have a higher level of ambition around international collaboration, then I guess I would just have to look somewhere else. yeah, and also pursue opportunities. so, you know, that's the reality that I am facing. (B)

... other two participants also made similar statements below.

Well, so the most immediate result is that my tenure case was derailed by. I'm sure there might be other reasons why, but I think it is mainly because I do not meet with the requirements of applying for a tenured position by publishing as sufficient papers in international journals. You know, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, more submissions of articles for indexed journals in my field has led to delays in processing articles at each stage of the review process. In my case, the process of reviewing and publishing my submitted articles has taken significantly longer than the original timescale. Also, the academic job market is very tough because of the pandemic...it adds a lot of uncertainty and stress. (C)

I was a signee of the letter from international faculty about our worries about loss of labor by the eyes of the state in trying to leave the country for any reason, which, while addressed, continues to worry me for obvious reasons. (H)

my inability to travel to promote our degree program abroad as I am recruited as an international coordinator on the Japanese side to take full responsibility for it. (J)

Further, some interviewees mentioned that they cannot do teaching or research as they expected because their universities did not make quick and appropriate responses to the pandemic, neither did their universities improve their academic and professional environments, and help them to better deal with the impacts from the pandemic.

the need to teach all of my classes online (including an experimental course for which I had to develop a series of computer-based simulations of the laboratory work to reproduce the experience as closely as possible. But the instructions of using some university online systems are only written in Japanese and I have many difficulties to understand and get used to them. Other problems include too much time spent on preparing for these online laboratory work because I had communication problems with local technical and administrative staff who are responsible for purchasing lab equipment and experiment facilities, and others, but not all of them can speak English quite well. (A)

It seems that some newly recruited international faculty had faced more challenges.

international faculty suffer more stress from their jobs, especially those who are just entering the laboratory as they cannot catch up well with the others because they don't have any opportunities to work with their team members physically. And you know, you cannot learn all these through online discussion. (D)
I was hired as assistant professor and am working in a session which is supposed to support the online teaching for the whole university. Because of the pandemic, lots of meetings and lots of events to organize. Also, I got my first course to teach in 2020 so that I had to prepare a lot for the online teaching. The workload is heavy. At the meantime, I began to hate my job now. I am tired of organizing the workshops. (I)

4.1.2 | Type 2: Positive impact

Despite various issues international faculty faced, three interviewees believed that the pandemic also had some positive impacts on their academic activities. Some of them claimed they could not have been as actively engaged in their university-wide academic activities without the outbreak of the pandemic. Some said that they have learnt new knowledge and equipped themselves with new competences while trying different methods of instruction since online teaching and learning was enforced in their universities in April 2020. One interviewee even stressed that he should be thankful for the pandemic because he did not have to fly from one place to another all the time as he did in the previous years, and could instead budget more time on working on research articles at home, increasing his productivity.

I am actively involved in projects on campus to develop collaborative online international learning (COIL) so I expect that my role in those projects will continue in the future, but perhaps compared to other faculty that especially less savvy or supportive of technology, I feel more or less okay with my adaptations to the new formats and continue trying to innovate to provide high-quality educational activities and learning experiences for my students as resilient practices in the face of the pandemic. (H)

4.2 | Impacts on interviewees' lives

4.2.1 | Type 3: Negative impact

Regarding the impact on the interviewees' life in Japan, compared to domestic faculty, the global travel bans made by the Japanese government and governments in other countries have made it extremely difficult for them to return to their home countries to get together with their parents or relatives abroad as they usually used to do. Neither could their parents, spouses, relatives, or children come to Japan and visit them. This has made many of them feel isolated, lonely, and stressed.

it's impossible to go anywhere, and even for me to go home to my country. So, that was something of a constraint. (B)

I cannot come back to my home country, neither can my parents come to Japan. I feel isolated. (E)

Other negative impacts on the interviewees include being unable to communicate with Japanese people in person, experiencing the Japanese culture, and building their social network with domestic people. This was especially true in the case of young international faculty and newly recruited international faculty who want to have a better understanding of Japan, including the values of Japanese culture and ordinary people of Japan, and wished to be well integrated into the Japanese society. Two typical illustrations are presented below.
Because I started during the COVID period, all the social events to welcome newcomers were cancelled. So, I couldn't really meet anyone else, except the lab members. So, I don't know if I am isolated now because of natural isolation or just because when I arrived, there was no party, no event, no one mixing. So, in the end, I said 2, 3 months in my apartment, and that's why maybe I could not really establish contact. (E)

my community activities have obviously been completely shut off within the last year, which was a blow to my social well-being. The loss of a gym on campus has also been a major influence that I can see continuing. All these have made my interactions with local people nearly zero. (H)

4.2.2 | Type 4: Positive impacts

However, it seems that the pandemic did not exert equally negative influences on all the interviewees. For example, one of the interviewees mentioned that, although his research was significantly affected by the pandemic, his personal life was not affected as follows.

On emergency times, my personal life is OK. I don't feel much repercussions from these measures. (D)

Surprisingly, one of them even believed that she benefitted from the local-down policy and working at home from the perspective of her personal life, because she could spend more time communicating with her family who stay in her home country virtually.

for my life. I got more communication with my family in China. We talked more than before. This made me to reconsider the thing I am doing now and my future. (I)

5 | DISCUSSION

In addition to some similar impacts that the pandemic has had on domestic faculty in Japan, some impacts on international faculty are distinctive and unique. There are several reasons why the pandemic has produced particular impacts on international faculty's academic activities and lives. First, apart from language teachers, a large number of international faculty have been hired as specially appointed associate professors or professors based on specific programmes such as the Global 30 Project and Top Global University Project or on institutional programmes mentioned above. In most cases, they are hired based on fixed-term contract. Except for professor (A) and two associate professors (F and G), all the interviewees were hired at their current universities based on fixed-term contract. Some of them have to leave and search for new positions when their contracts expire. Others may apply for tenure or tenure-track positions in their current universities, but they need to be evaluated based on key performance indicator (KPIs) systems developed by their institutions. Different from domestic faculty, some (or many) international faculty are expected to publish more in international peer-reviewed periodicals and books and it is especially true for those from hard sciences (Ishikawa & Sun, 2021). Because one of the important indicators to determine whether they can obtain tenure or tenure-track position is to evaluate the number and quality of their publications in indexed journals and academic presentations made in international conferences. As a result of the significant disruption of their ongoing academic activities and normal process of reviews on their submitted manuscripts that is being caused by the pandemic, some international faculty could not attain their goals of academic performance that are predetermined in their fixed-term contracts. Due to the deteriorating situation of
Japan’s academic job market since early 2020, it is impossible or incredibly difficult for them to travel from Japan to their home countries or other countries to find a job; most of them have to limit their search to new jobs only in Japan.

Second, previous studies suggest that international faculty in Japan are confronted with more challenges than domestic peers. Some of them believed that they were just a show window to externally visualize the internationalization of Japanese universities (McVeigh, 2002) or “tokenized symbols” of internationalization (Brotherhood et al., 2020). Most of them complained about being marginalized, and/or lament their inability to fully engage in decision-making process within the universities they belong to and to participate fully in academic life. There is little doubt that a reduced interaction and communication between international and domestic faculty in their workplaces due to the lock-down of universities has made them more difficult participate fully in administrative or academic life.

Third, according to the existing research (Huang, 2018b), except for language teachers, the largest number of international faculty at Japanese universities are hired to commit to duties and undertake any activities which cannot be easily accomplished by Japanese faculty. In most cases, they are expected to be primarily involved in international activities. Obviously, the factors such as global travel bans, closed borders, and suspended international flights, and locked-down cities and campuses have made it difficult for many international faculty to perform their duties and responsibilities related to international activities abroad as described in their employment contracts. Also, as a result of the implementation of these responses to the pandemic taken by their home countries and Japan, international faculty found it difficult to return to their countries of origin or meet with their families or friends in Japan as they did in normal times.

Finally, the lock-down of cities and campuses where they lived or worked made it more difficult for many newly recruited international faculty from both European countries, the UK and the USA to experience cultural diversity or differences in Japan through more campus culture, in-person communication with students and local people outside campus. Informal communication and connection with students and local people play an important role in helping them to have a better understanding of people’s daily life and different values of culture in their hosting countries (Beelen & Jones, 2015). This is particularly true in the case of international faculty from Anglo-sphere countries. A recent national survey of international faculty in Japan shows that international faculty at Japanese universities claimed that they experienced many challenges at national, institutional and personal levels. Especially the American and British junior faculty from the Humanities seem to encounter more difficulties than any other categories of international faculty (Huang et al., 2019). Compared to those from Asian countries like China and Korea, they are less familiar with values of culture of Japan.

As every coin has two sides, in some cases, the need to deliver online programmes for international students and domestic students has provided opportunities for some international faculty to grow and to play a more active and important role in developing various internationally collaborative courses with their partner universities. This is one of reasons why one interviewee mentioned that the pandemic has made him contribute more to his university by undertaking a wider variety of internationally collaborative activities, focused on developing international online teaching and learning programmes. Also, many international and domestic conferences changed to a virtual format, drastically reducing the cost of registration and attendance, and saving international travel time, allowing for greater and more inclusive participation of international faculty.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

As analysed and discussed above, the main findings from the study can be summarized as follows.

First, although the vast majority of the interviewees believed that the pandemic has had more negative impacts on their academic activities and life, the case study of Japan suggests that there are both negative and positive impacts from the pandemic that are unique to international faculty’s academic activities and life.
Second, the study reveals that the impacts from the pandemic on international faculty and the extent to which the impacts on them vary according to the backgrounds of the interviewees such as academic disciplines, time of being hired (newly recruited or not), country of origin, and work roles and duties. Among which, it seems that their disciplines, duties and responsibilities are more closely related to how and to what extent the pandemic affected their academic activities and life. It seemed that many of the challenges faced were by those in science or engineering fields involving lab work. Social scientists/humanists would not have these problems. However, probably due to the limited number of interviews, no significant differences could be confirmed in their observations with regard to gender and sectors (national and private) or types of universities (former imperial universities and universities that are regionally-based).

Finally, some findings are consistent with previous studies on the impacts from the pandemic on international students (Bilecen, 2020; Mok et al., 2021). For example, as almost all the interviewees were stuck on deserted campuses and cities in which the state of emergency restrictions was implemented, many became lonely, anxious and concerned not only for themselves, but also for their family members in their country of origin or in another country.

Participants may have experienced discrimination etc., but not felt comfortable talking about it. No interviewees, including those from China and other parts of Asia, reported experiences of social exclusion, xenophobic attitudes or became victims of discrimination or verbal assaults. This implies that, at least by the time when the interviews were carried out, it seems that no racial discrimination resulting from the pandemic could be empirically identified in the case of the few international faculty we interviewed.

The implications derived from the study include the following aspects.

First, as discussed above, some challenges the interviewees mentioned are unique to themselves, this means that international faculty are confronted with their own difficulties in responding to the issues introduced by the pandemic. Although the rate of new infections has begun to slow down in Japan at the time of writing this article, it is still unclear exactly when the Japanese society and Japan’s universities can return to fully normal activities. Therefore, universities in which international faculty are hired need to gather longitudinal data and information on their international faculty in relation to the impact from the pandemic on their academic activities, career progress, health and well-being, and personal life. By doing that, they could have a better understanding of international faculty’s situation, the issues they face, and know how to support them. Particularly for some newly recruited international faculty who have never received any professional training to deliver online teaching and learning, their universities should provide them with timely and specially designated faculty development programmes and help them adapt to new modes of teaching and learning and new academic and professional environments.

Second, as some interviewees mentioned that the COVID-19 pandemic has had many negative impacts on personal life including social integration to local community not only should the universities that hire them, but also the local communities in which they live should consider how they can support international faculty by building up partnerships that allow them to have intercultural experiences.

Finally, while the pandemic has posed numerous challenges for the academic activities and personal life of globally mobile students and scholars, including international faculty, it has also created opportunities for universities, local communities, and individual international faculty to work together and consider the future of higher education, and reshape higher education to be more adaptable and flexible for the post-pandemic times.

There are several limitations in this study. First, no part-time international faculty were interviewed and the number of full-time international faculty was only ten. As the number of part-time international faculty constitutes more than 60% of all international faculty in Japan and they are mostly engaged in teaching, the target group is not representative of all international faculty at Japanese universities.

Second, no data were collected from other types of national universities focused primarily on teaching activities, institutions of teachers training, or focused on one main discipline like foreign language studies, medical sciences or dentistry. The collection of more numbers of international faculty from other types of universities...
and colleges will provide stronger evidence based on more variations of international faculty's observations and experiences.

Third, perhaps a more focused research into international faculty from China needs to be undertaken in the future is warranted. This is partly because they constitute the largest proportion of the total international faculty in Japan, and partly because the largest number of them is engaged in research at Japanese universities and research institutes, particularly in the “hard sciences”. Although no international faculty who originally came from China reported any racial discrimination at the time when the interviews were undertaken, coverage of rising anti-Chinese sentiment and discrimination in Japan more generally as a result of the association of the pandemic with its apparent beginning in China, the increased checks on both Chinese students and faculty, and the introduction of stricter rules by the Japanese government to tackle foreign interference could make domestic researchers reluctant to work and collaborate with international faculty, particularly Chinese faculty in high-tech fields. Furthermore, it may discourage international faculty, particularly those from China, from coming to Japan, or even make it difficult for them to conduct some “sensitive” research that might be used in national security and national defence in Japan (Mallapaty, 2020).

Finally, the interview questions merely address the impact from the pandemic on participants' work and life from early 2020 to the time when the interviews were conducted. No comprehensive questions were asked about how they navigated the barriers created by the pandemic and the impact on the future of their work and life. A further study in this aspect may provide useful insights for international faculty in other countries and give them reassurance and confidence as they get back to work in the "new normal". These weaknesses of this study need to be addressed and improved in future studies by expanding the number of interviews with more diverse backgrounds and developing more comprehensive and in-depth interview questions.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
No conflict of interest has been declared by the authors.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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ENDNOTE
1 Most Japanese universities seem to employ a 4-scale grading system, but Japanese GPA systems vary considerably depending on different sectors and types of universities. GPA is a simple numerical value of students’ overall academic performance and achievements and 2.30 is beyond medium score in Japan.

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