

“The Coronavirus Crisis: Disability Politics and Activism in Contemporary Japan”

Date: Wednesday, October 14

Time: 7pm-8pm (Tokyo time)

Presentation will be followed by Q and A

On Zoom. Open to all; Language English Please register here:

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=p-YOaaVN3E-iFrtZnYKIOpSDtnsMuJVAtzRnSitkskJURE1VREpZUTRMSEZKRFZOWFhGRDNKWUYwTC4u>



The spread of COVID-19 across Japan has exacerbated accessibility issues born out of the nation's past, creating difficulties for disabled people in the present and anxieties about the future. In this article, I consider some of the historical contingencies and geopolitical circumstances that have fueled a precarious pipeline to risk and institutionalization for many disabled individuals. My analysis reveals how inadequate installation and inappropriate use of accommodations like ramps and elevators in various public venues has prevented disabled people from obtaining key supplies. It suggests that some disabled people have survived the current moment by relying on professional caregivers, but others have been unable to do so due to service cancellations and fear of contagion.

For individuals without support networks, assisted living facilities have offered a means of survival. However, many assisted living facilities have long grappled with funding issues and lack of willing workers. Accordingly, their residents have been exposed to neglect, abuse, and now, viral infection.

Aware of the situation, government officials have instituted emergency policies to provide disabled people and assisted living facilities with personal protective equipment and flexible financing. And yet, as activists have argued, those policies have often failed to pan out in practice. The future of disability in Japan remains uncertain. But as I suggest, the current crisis is our chance to intervene. I contend that we must use this opportunity to identify and resolve barriers to accessibility in Japan and build an inclusive society for domestic and international populations of disabled individuals.

Mark Bookman is a PhD Candidate in East Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Pennsylvania. His research examines the history and politics of disability in Japan. Outside of the academy, Mark also works as an accessibility consultant. He has collaborated with the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT), the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT), the United States Embassy in Tokyo, and the United Nations. Mark's publications can be found in *The Japan Times* and on websites such as *Accessible Japan*. For additional information, see Mark's [homepage](#). Mark will be discussing his recently published paper: "[The Coronavirus Crisis: Disability Politics and Activism in Contemporary Japan](#)" from our collection in the [Asia Pacific Journal: Japan Focus](#)

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.