

Editor's Note for Special Issue

Economic Challenges and Changes during and after the COVID-19 in Asian Countries

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The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in late 2019 and lasted for more than three years, affected not only our physical bodies and healthcare systems, but also our entire society and economy at local and global levels. The pandemic affected everything from the stock market to the labor market, business activities and people's daily consumption. At the local level, national governments were forced to confront the challenges of adequately preventing the pandemic while mitigating the economic downturn by supporting people and industries affected by the pandemic. It also showed us what can happen when the international division of labor and international supply chains, which have grown longer and denser with globalization, are disrupted and forced to rebuild, even temporarily.

Shortly after the pandemic and after a two-year break, the 16th "Regional Cooperation and Innovation in Asia" (RICA) Conference was held at the Biwako Kusatsu Campus (BKC) of Ritsumeikan University on November 10-11, 2023. RICA is an initiative of universities and research institutions in four countries in Asia - Jinan University in China, the National Institute for Development Administration, Pusan National University in Korea, and Ritsumeikan University in Japan. The first conference was held in 2006 at the BKC of Ritsumeikan University, and since then international conferences have been held annually on a rotating basis. An important objective of RICA is to build a system of international educational collaboration at the postgraduate level, and a number of young researchers who will lead the next generation have been born from the participants. The 16th RICA "COVID-19 Pandemic and Responses against it in Asian Countries" featured four research reports and discussions. It was followed by numerous breakout sessions, where research reports were presented on a wide range of issues, including policy and the impact of the Corona disaster on local economies in South Korea, Thailand, China, Bangladesh and Japan. In the breakout sessions, 41 research reports were presented. More than 100 participants, including some from overseas, attended the event, where a lively and meaningful Q&A session and discussion ensued.

This special issue contains the four key papers presented at the 16th RICA Conference, which focus on the challenges and changes in the economy and society, including enterprises, trade, tourism, and households during and after the COVID-19 pandemic in Asian countries. It goes without saying that Asia is one of the most important centers of the global economy and a crucial sector of the supply chain, encompassing developed, developing and emerging economies. Economic globalization may not be the same as it used to be, but international connections and linkages are not going away. With this special issue, we aim to explore the possibilities for

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Published online: December 9, 2025

cooperation and sustainable development in the Asian economy in the post-COVID-19 era by examining the economic challenges and changes facing Asian countries.