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Citation	Reconceptualizing Cross-Border Academic Mobility in the Interdisciplinary Research Agenda. 2025, p. 1-2
Version Type	VoR
URL	https://doi.org/10.18910/101335
rights	
Note	

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The Role of Academic Exchange in Addressing Global Social Issues: With Reference to Ethical and Regulatory Challenges of Reproductive Tourism

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As the Chief of the Study Abroad Support Section in the International Affairs Office / International Exchange Center, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for your participation in the international seminar "Reconceptualizing Cross Border Academic Mobility in the Interdisciplinary Research Agenda" organized by the International Affairs Office of the School of Letters/Graduate School of Humanities, the University of Osaka. This seminar aims to foster an environment for integrating cross-border and interdisciplinary research in the humanities and social sciences. By facilitating discussion from diverse perspectives and generating new ways of thinking, we aspire to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of various issues, ultimately leading to the development of innovative ideas. We are very pleased to provide young researchers with the opportunity to share their research findings with international scholars, receive valuable feedback, and refine their work further.

From my own research perspective, I strongly believe that actively creating opportunities for academic exchange across borders and engaging with issues beyond disciplinary boundaries is becoming increasingly crucial. My research interests lie at the intersection of science, technology and society, with a focus on the ethical and social challenges arising from advancements in reproductive medicine. Specifically, I examine the societal implications of the development and spread of reproductive technologies and the regulatory frameworks established to address these challenges.

In recent years, reproductive tourism has emerged as a significant issue in the field of reproductive medicine. Advances in reproductive technology have enabled individuals to conceive children through sperm or egg donation. While originally developed as a treatment for heterosexual couples facing infertility, these technologies now extend to individuals who were not traditionally considered as intended users, such as same-sex couples and single individuals. Consequently, the role of reproductive medicine has shifted from being solely a medical intervention to a means of family formation.

In response to these developments, different countries have established varying regulatory frameworks for reproductive medicine. Some countries restrict access exclusively to heterosexual couples, while others permit same-sex couples and single individuals to utilize these services. Such regulatory disparities have significant implications: they may either reinforce existing norms that conceptualize reproduction within the framework of heterosexual couples or, conversely, challenge these norms and contribute to the diversification of family structures.

More broadly, regulatory differences also arise concerning the rights and protections afforded to gamete donors, as well as the ethical considerations surrounding the commodification of human biological materials. While some countries prohibit financial compensation for sperm and egg donation, others permit it. Similarly, surrogacy is prohibited in many countries to protect the rights of women involved, whereas it is legally permitted in others. These regulatory inconsistencies create conditions where procedures banned in one country may be legally pursued elsewhere.

This situation has given rise to the phenomenon of reproductive tourism. For instance, since egg donation is rarely practiced in Japan, couples seeking this service often travel to countries where it is more readily available. Taiwan has become a popular destination due to its geographical proximity, lower travel costs, legal framework permitting egg donation, and the relative ease of finding donors who resemble Japanese individuals.

However, the full scope of reproductive tourism remains unclear, necessitating further investigation into various aspects of the phenomenon. Key questions include: What challenges do individuals who become parents through reproductive tourism encounter? What forms of support are needed for children born through these practices? What social and ethical concerns arise in countries that accommodate reproductive tourism due to an influx of foreign recipients and donors?

The expansion of reproductive tourism underscores the limitations of national regulations and highlights the need for international agreements to address these challenges effectively. Tackling such complex cross-border issues requires robust academic exchange and interdisciplinary collaboration. I firmly believe that fostering a platform for scholars to identify pressing issues, exchange knowledge, and develop solutions is of paramount importance.