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Citation	Proceedings of International Seminar 2021 : Coping with the "New Normal" and the Promotion of International Exchange. 2022, p. 1-2
Version Type	VoR
URL	https://doi.org/10.18910/89114
rights	
Note	

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Thinking Future Studying Abroad between Parallel Worlds: The Crisis and Optimism

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Abstract: What we need to do as supporters of international student exchange is to make good preparations for the future, expected to be coming after the present crisis. That is, in the other words, to bridge the separate parallel worlds, crisis and optimism. Not only out-bound but also in-bound international students who want to come to Japan are waiting for the opening of the border. We need to prepare for them as well. Students need moral support. I believe it is the most important thing we can provide. Help them imagine an optimistic, exciting future, so that they will be able to study abroad, overseas as well as in Japan in the coming years.

To begin with, let me quote an article from a newspaper. It was in a Japanese newspaper, *Mainichi-Shinbun*, published on the morning of 7th August 2021, so the text was written in Japanese. I translate:

The article’s title is: The Parallel Worlds. I quote. “Athletes live in the parallel worlds.”— Regarding the relationship between the rapid spread of the novel Corona virus and Tokyo Olympic games, the spokesman of International Olympic Committee, IOC, answered: The Olympic Village was wrapped with a bubble sheet (Please note. It’s not an answer sheet for computer-scored tests, but a metaphor of a kind of plastic air bubble sheet), and, so it was a different world from the real world of Tokyo. So he seemed to want to say that the prior PCR tests were sufficient enough, and that the infection had never spread to the city of Tokyo. But, in reality, the so-called bubble sheet was with full of holes. More than 380 positive results for the athletes and tournament officials have been revealed [as of 7th August 2021]. So it was hard to say that it was a different world. However, I, the author, would rather feel the parallel worlds were somewhere outside of the venue of the Olympics and the city of Tokyo. The first one is a “crisis world,” filled with senses of crisis on the outbreak of the Covid-19 infection, as well as on the collapse of medical care. The other one is the “optimistic world” that was bubbling with gold medals obtained by Japanese athletes. In the “crisis world,” the medical experts warned many times of the rapid spread of infection. Holding the Olympic games might indirectly lead to the spread of infection, even if it wasn’t direct impact. Vaccination of Tokyo citizens was not in time. Above all, the worst effects of the highly infectious Delta variant were unpredictable. Actually, we are now following the worst-case, the most pessimistic scenario, according to which the declaration of state of emergency doesn’t change people’s mindset, and the spread of infection still continues increasingly....’ [Aono, 2021]

Well, I’m not necessarily on the side of those people who believe in the “optimistic world.” However, it is true, actually, I sometimes feel like as if I am going back and forth between the parallel worlds— the one “crisis world” and the other “optimistic world.” At a time I’m obliged to teach courses online, not allowed

to go out, while at another time I imagine traveling overseas as I did often in the past years.... When it comes to the surroundings of students' studying abroad, the present situation is difficult. It seems increasingly difficult in terms of the prevention of the spread of Novel Corona Virus and emerging new variants, which don't stop appearing. However, at the same time, they still hope and anticipate the day when, hopefully, they can travel to study overseas and enjoy their real-life physically, not virtually, in some host countries in the near future. They seem to be going back and forth, they too, between the present crisis and optimistic future.

Now, I think what we need to do, as supporters of international student exchange, is to make good preparations for the future, expected to be coming after the present crisis. That is, in other words, to bridge the separate parallel worlds, the crisis and optimism. I know it is not an easy task, though. Practically, there are many things to do. Getting the students who want to go abroad vaccinated is one of the most urgent tasks, since France, for example, has introduced the vaccine passport system and so the students who want to study in France have to get it; and the other EU countries will follow France sooner or later, I guess.

Not only out-bound but also in-bound international students who want to come to Japan are waiting for the opening of the border. We need to prepare for them as well, we need to find dorm rooms, apartments and lodging houses for them before their arrival, we also need to be prepared for the cases when foreign students get infected with epidemic diseases: How we contact them, how we transport them to the hospital in case of emergency, etc.

Students need moral support. I think that is the most important thing we can provide. Help them imagine an optimistic, exciting future, so that they will be able to study abroad overseas as well as in Japan in the coming years. Finally, let me quote from the lyric of John Lennon's song, *Imagine*: "Let's hope it's a good one without any fear."