

2022 FALIA ESSAY COMPETITION, Review by the Selection Committee Chair

We received 35 entries for this year's essay competition. There were several more submissions than last year. Japanese universities experienced a huge impact from COVID-19 last year, but this year many universities held in-person classes, and students have returned to campuses. We must remain vigilant against COVID-19, but in addition to vaccines, medicines are also being developed, so I expect things will gradually return to normal. In following, the study and research environments for international students will surely also return to normal.

As with last year, the applicants were primarily from East and Southeast Asia, but we also received entries from other regions, for a total of 24 countries, the largest number to date. There was an even wider distribution of prizewinners, including Effort Awards, than ever before. Ever since we began accepting English essay submissions, Japanese submissions all but stopped, but we had some Japanese submissions last year and again this year. Not only that, but one of those submissions even won a prize. Whether English or Japanese, language skill is part of the evaluation, but the selection committee places more emphasis on the content when making its selections.

The outline of the selection process is as follows. In the first screening, all of the entries were narrowed down to a shortlist of about 20 essays. Each of these was then examined in detail and given scores in the second screening. Finally, we convened a final selection committee for careful face-to-face deliberations to rank the entries. Independent of this process, the secretariat used dedicated software to check all entries for plagiarism. While the software flagged some essays that were doubtful, but none of them crossed the line into plagiarism. We referred to such results in the selection process. My advice for those who plan to enter in the future is the same as last year, which is to avoid casually copying and pasting content from websites when you conduct your research.

In the final round, the essay by Ms. Fritzie Rodriguez of the Philippines, entitled “Life Insurance Same-Sex Couples, and Gender Equality: Lessons from the Philippines” won First Prize. The essay focused on how insurance companies that allow same-sex couples to enroll in insurance can improve gender discrimination. Rodriguez introduces examples from the Philippines, but the interpretation of those examples is based on opinions provided by a university professor who is also a lawyer. Some selection committee members thought inclusion of the author's own analysis of the examples would have made the essay even better, but the essay was praised for overall its quality including the author's awareness of the issue, and English ability.

In response to this “lesson from the Philippines.” I researched how Japan is responding to this, and I found that at least in the case of Dai-ichi Life Insurance Company, they have a policy in place to not decline a contract simply for the reason the applicant is LGBT. I was not able to check with other life insurance companies individually, but I think their policies are similar to that of Dai-ichi Life Insurance Company. Even so, I think that it's an important issue for Japanese life insurance companies to take care that their life insurance contracts are not being handled in a way that promotes discrimination against LGBT people.

After careful deliberation, the second prize was awarded to Mr. Cosmos Amoah of Ghana, for “Predicting Life Insurance: Evidence from Japan and Ghana.” This essay offers analysis on factors determining expenditure on life insurance in households. The author used econometric analysis to compare Japan and Ghana. Although the results were meaningful, there were points raised about the instability of the statistical model, and the necessity to carefully

examine confounding factors when selecting the models, but we agreed it was a solid empirical analysis essay.

Two applicants were selected for third place; Ms. Gay Margaret Gange of the Philippines with “Insurance Expenditure During Covid-19 Pandemic: The Case of Filipino Households” and Ms. Lu Xiao Han of China with “Research on Morals and Risk Prevention Measures in Life Insurance Regulations: Mainly Death Insurance in Cases where the Insured is Underage.” The first essay used the difference-in-difference method to analyze the impact Covid-19 had on insurance expenditure in households. Analysis-wise, no significant differences were found, and the task set forth in the essay was not necessarily accomplished, but the solid empirical analysis was admirable, and it was determined to be deserving of third prize. The second essay pointed out that, unlike Chinese Insurance Act, Japanese Insurance Act doesn’t have particular risk prevention stipulation in case of death insurance for underage insured persons. On the basis of that, it concluded that regulations in Chinese Insurance Act tend to be too strict and it should be left up to voluntary restraint of the insurance industry or industry’s business law as in Japan. Although it wasn’t exactly a full-fledged law dissertation, the Insurance Acts of Japan and China were thoroughly researched, and we admired the attempt to get something out of it from a comparative legal perspective, and determined it to be worthy of third prize.

Although they unfortunately missed out on the top prizes, the following seven essays were recognized with the Effort Award.

Mr. Abid Aziz(Bangladesh) *“The Endless Potential of Life Insurance in Bangladesh: What the country can do to expand and elevate the Life insurance sector through adapting useful strategies”*

Mr. Gangaram Bhattarai(Nepal) *“Relation between Insurance and Growth: Evidence from Nepal”*

Mr. Karma Thinley Wangchug(Bhutan) *“Educational attainment and the demand for life insurance: a case of Bhutan”*

Ms.Nguyen Van Anh(Vietnam) *“Implementation of Life Insurance in Improving the Living Standards of Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam by Working towards the Achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)”*

Mr. Puntsag Davgadorj(Mongolia) *“Life insurance development of Mongolia and some recommendations to improve it”*

Mr. Rovshan Namazov(Azerbaijan) *“Health and life insurance system of Azerbaijan: The impact of implementation challenges on Society”*

Mr. Savchyn Roman(Ukraine) *“Life Insurance in Ukraine before and during the War”*

There is no decisive difference between the top winning essays and those receiving the Effort Award. The only real differences are in the finishing, the accuracy of the citations, the logical development, and the provision of sufficient references. We selection committee members place emphasis on degree of awareness and wholesomeness with regard to the issues. In that sense, we found that some of this year’s submissions were simply technical analysis without sufficient awareness of the issues or establishing of the problem. In empirical analysis, it should be necessary to clarify the awareness of the issues and the problems first, before considering the model and examining the results.

I hope that all of the international students who applied have deepened their understanding of life insurance through

this opportunity, and that they make life insurance useful for their home countries in some way once they return.

Finally, I would like to finish my comments by expressing my gratitude to all of the international students who participated, and to the university instructors who supported them, as well as to everyone at FALIA for supporting this program.

Takau Yoneyama

Chair

FALIA Essay Competition Selection Committee

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