TENTATIVE PROGRAMME

03.00 p.m.	Introduction & Welcoming Remarks by Moderator: Dr. Nurul Akqmie Badrul Hisham, KITA Research Fellow & UNESCO Chair on Social Practices in Intercultural Communication and Social Cohesion (UNESCO-UKM Chair) Manager
03.05 p.m.	Presentation of discourse: **Prof. Dr. Mayumi Ishikawa** Internationalizing the "Plural Society": An Ethnographic Study of International Universities in Malaysia
04.00 p.m.	Q & A session
04.30 p.m.	Closing

About KITA Discourse Series

KITA Discourse Series provides a platform for interested scholars and graduate students to present his or her ideas on any social issues pertaining to ethnicity which may be subsequently published in the UKM Ethnic Studies Paper Series. For further information on KITA publications including UKM Ethnic Studies Paper Series and the Journal of Ethnic & Diversity Studies (JOEDS), please contact the Editor via email at rachelchansuetkay@ukm.edu.my or visit KITA website at https://www.ukm.my/kita/resource-centre/ .

Disclaimer: The views expressed in the presentation(s) under the KITA Discourse Series are those of the presenter(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of KITA.

KITA DISCOURSE SERIES 5/2026

Internationalizing the "Plural Society": An Ethnographic Study of International Universities in Malaysia

Presenter:
Prof. Dr. Mayumi Ishikawa
Institute for International Initiatives,
The University of Osaka, Japan

23 October 2026 (Friday)
03.00 p.m. – 04.30 p.m.

KITA Meeting Room
Level 4, Administration Building
Kolej Keris Mas
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
Bangi, Selangor

This seminar will be broadcasted online via:
Zoom & KITA Facebook Live

ABSTRACT

Conventional understanding of the internationalization of higher education is primarily concerned with the transnational mobility of students from Global South to Global North, or the expansion of English-language programmes modelled after Western universities. This study, based on ethnographic research of three international universities in Malaysia, analyzes the rise of an alternative model of university internationalization suited to specific post-colonial national and regional contexts. It addresses how Malaysia's multiethnic social fabric or "plural society" (Furnivall, 1939), constructed during British colonial rule, is strategically deployed to cultivate transnational partnerships, recruit international students, and respond to emerging regional economic opportunities.

The institutions studied are 1) International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), 2) Xiamen University Malaysia (XMUM), and 3) Manipal University College Malaysia (MUCM). They forge transnational ties with an Islamic organisation, overseas Chinese commercial networks, and a private Indian higher education provider. Together, these institutions attract students seeking high-quality international education that is sensitive to non-Western intellectual heritages, ethno-religious consciousness and regional aspirations. Their appeal is reinforced by demand for Islamic education, linkage to Chinese economic networks, and private medical education.

Malaysia promotes international education as part of its national development strategy. The plural society thus has become a leverage to respond to the emerging needs of students, families, communities and policymakers under globalisation. The study highlights the underexplored significance of Asian international universities in improving access, facilitating social mobility, and reshaping perceptions of multiethnicity in contemporary Malaysia.

References:

Ishikawa, M. 2025. "Asian Models of International Universities: Contextualized Internationalization and Student Mobility beyond the Global North," in A. Courtois, S. Marginson, C. Montgomery, & R. Sidhu eds. *The Future of Cross-Border Academic Mobilities and Immobilities:* Power, Knowledge, and Agency, Bloomsbury, 189–204.(Open access) https://www.bloomsburycollections.com/monograph-detail?docid=b-9781350502437&tocid=b-9781350502437-chapter13

Ishikawa, M. 2026. South-to-South Pathways Reshaping International Student Mobility: The Case of Malaysia, *International Higher Education*, vol. 128 Fall 2026. https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/ihe/article/view/22000

PRESENTER'S PROFILE



Dr. Mayumi Ishikawa is Professor Emerita and affiliated researcher at the University of Osaka, Japan. Her research interests include the globalization of higher education and ethnographic studies of universities, the internationalization of higher education, educational migration of students and scholars, higher education and science policy, world university rankings and the emergence of hegemony in academia, and power in the construction of knowledge by focusing on Japan, East and Southeast Asia. For her research profile, please see:

https://rd.iai.osaka-u.ac.jp/en/748817e38d369806.html#container_published_papers