Annual Activities Report 2020-2021

DIRECTOR: Dr. Ying Zeng (since Fall 2019).

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Ying Zeng reports to Dr. Paulo Zagalo-Melo, Associate provost, Haenicke Institute for Global Education.

ESTABLISHED: 2006 by WMU Board of Trustees

CORE FACULTY (Specialists in Japanese studies)
- Dr. Jeffrey Angles, Professor of Japanese Literature &Translation, Department of World Languages & Literatures, Associate Director of Soga Japan Center
- Dr. Steve Covell, Professor of Japanese Religion, Chair of Department of Comparative Religions, Secretary of Soga Japan Center
- Dr. Priscilla Lambert, Associate Professor of Political Science, Department of Political Science
- Dr. Carlos Pimentel, Assistant Professor of Japanese Language & Linguistics, Department of World Languages & Literatures
- Dr. Diane Riggs, Faculty Specialist I, Department of Comparative Religions
- Dr. Rika Saito, Associate Professor of Japanese and Women’s Studies, Department of World Languages & Literatures, Head of Japanese Language Program
- Dr. Takashi Yoshida, Professor of Japanese History, Department of History

STAFF
- Ms. Michiko Yoshimoto, Japan Program Manager

ADVISORY BOARD (Faculty with personal or research-related connections to Japan)
- Dr. Pavel Ikonomov, Industrial & Manufacturing Engineering
- Dr. Hiroaki Kaku, Assistant Professor, Center for Immune Biology, School of Medicine
- Dr. Lisa Whittaker, College of Aviation
OBJECTIVES

♦ Promote and disseminate faculty and student research on Japan.

♦ Stimulate creative curricular development, as well as extra-curricular activities that enrich student and area residents’ understanding of Japan.

♦ Support students pursuing Japanese studies, those interested in study in Japan, and recruitment of students from Japan.

♦ Serve as the nexus between WMU and the Japan-related business, arts and civic communities in western Michigan.

♦ Facilitate ties between WMU, the Kalamazoo community, and our partner institutions and alumni groups in Japan.

♦ Collaborate with faculty and university administration to put in place effective and efficient learning experiences, instructional strategies and scholarly inquiries.

BRIEF HISTORY: Western Michigan University’s links to Japan date back more than 50 years, with WMU’s first Japanese alumnus earning a graduate degree in psychology in 1955. In 1961, the first academic partnership with a Japanese university occurred when Keio University sent a group of 66 students and three professors to WMU for a Summer Institute program. Currently, more than 500 WMU alumni reside in Japan.

In 2006, efforts on both sides of the Pacific Ocean have resulted in the establishment of WMU’s Michitoshi Soga Japan Center (hereafter SJC). For more than 35 years, Dr. Soga, a WMU professor emeritus of physics, worked tirelessly to establish a network of connections in West Michigan for individual visitors, as well as for businesses and Japanese partner universities and colleges. The Center was created and approved by the WMU Board of Trustees as one of a number of centers that exist under the auspices of the Diether H. Haenicke Institute for International & Area Studies.
Soga Japan Center Activities in AY 2020-2021

**FACULTY & STAFF BUILDING:**
Since June 2014, Ms. Michiko Yoshimoto has been working for SJC as a full-time outreach coordinator. Ms. Yoshimoto continues to visit grade schools, libraries, community centers, summer camps, etc. across western, central, and eastern Michigan in order to teach about Japan. She also supports current programming at WMU by coordinating Japanese-language tables, on-campus SJC events, advising the Japan Club, etc. The kind of outreach work that Ms. Yoshimoto does is important to spreading knowledge about Japan in our community, as well as establishing WMU as a major center for Japanese studies. Furthermore, it significantly aids in recruiting. The work that she does is critical to the expansion and longevity of Japanese studies at WMU. In September 2015, Ms. Yoshimoto’s efforts are acknowledged and awarded by the University. She was one of four WMU staff who received the Annual Make a Difference Awards.

**PROGRAM BUILDING:**
SJC continued to seek opportunities to strengthen its ties with companies, schools, and other institutions in Western Michigan and Japan. This includes Humphrey Products, Battle Creek Saturday Japanese School, and Communities in Schools Kalamazoo. The highlight of AY 2020-2021 between WMU and Japan was that SJC talked with the International Division of Shiga prefecture in Japan and three Japanese high schools concluded agreements with WMU for their students. Dr. Ying Zeng offered a virtual information session to introduce WMU to Japanese high school students. The schools which concluded agreements are Ritsumeikan Moriyama Senior High School (private school), Torahime High School (public school) and Hikone Higashi High School (public school) in Shiga prefecture in Japan.

**COST-SHARING:** SJC continued its mutually beneficial relationship with the Battle Creek Saturday Japanese School (BCSJS). SJC dispatched Ms. Yoshimoto to teach and be a financial officer. In return, BCSJS paid SJC $25,000 in AY2020-2021.

**OUTREACH EVENTS AND PROGRAMS:** SJC engaged in many outreach activities over the year. Yoshimoto’s work is essential to the long-term development of Japanese studies at WMU. Not only does she perform a critical role by promoting knowledge of Japan in the community, she has also built a strong profile for WMU in Japanese studies by actively promoting us as a center for Japanese studies in Michigan. She has been
advertising the Japanese major, and we have students who choose WMU for our Japanese program and study abroad opportunities after hearing about them through the outreach programs.

− Virtual “Bonenkai“ end-of-year gathering with Kalamazoo Numazu Sister City Committee members, supporters of SJC and WMU students in December, 2020. (13 people participated)

− Virtual Japanese Girls’ Day Celebration Series collaborated with States’ 4-H, Michigan 4-H, Kentucky 4-H and WMU Soga Japan Center. Four sessions in February and March 2021. Each session focused on a different aspect of Japanese culture such as Japanese life style, songs, Origami, food, Furoshiki Fabric Wrapping and Haiku Writing. (197 families including 295 youth and 181 adults registered, and average participation was 200 individuals per session.)

− Virtual Special Talk by Dr. Hiroshi Ota, the Director of Hitotsubashi University Global Education Program "How Will Study Abroad and Student Exchange Evolve in Japan during and after COVID-19?" in March 2021. (68 people registered, and the recorded video were viewed over 200 times after the event.)

− Virtual Japanese Golden Week Celebration Series collaborated with States’ 4-H International Exchange Programs, Michigan 4-H, Kentucky 4-H and WMU Soga Japan Center. Two sessions in April and May, 2021. (Over 100 participants from 14 different states.)
Virtual Japanese Lessons for K-12 students. Two sessions in August 2021. (14 students registered, 9 students participated.)

Regional Outreach: Below is a list of places that she provided virtual lessons to represent WMU and Japanese studies.

- Humphrey Products and Battle Creek Saturday Japanese School

**FUTURE PLANS & NEEDS:**

- Support for the Japan program manager: Currently, the manager position has been paid through funds cobbled together from HIGE and SJC. However, HIGE has been experiencing serious budget constraints, and SJC needs to find a stable source of income that can support this critically important position. This position contributes enormously to the community and puts WMU on the map in Japanese studies. This is one of SJC's most fundamental and important needs.

- Outreach to Japanese businesses: We need to continue to develop stronger ties with the local business community.

- Virtual programs: After the COVID-19 pandemic, WMU and off-campus circumstances have been changed and all in-person programs were suspended. We will keep seeking to create new types of outreach activities/programs to connect people among WMU, local community and Japan.