Annual Activities Report 2021-2022  

December 1, 2022

**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, Associate Professor of Japanese Language & Linguistics, Department of World Languages & Literatures
- Dr. Diane Riggs, Faculty Specialist I, Department of Comparative Religions
- Dr. Rika Saito, 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

**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 2021-2022

FACULTY & STAFF BUILDING:
Since June 2014, Ms. Michiko Yoshimoto has been working for SJC as a full-time staff member. 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 in 2014-2015.

PROGRAM BUILDING:
SJC continued to seek opportunities to strengthen its ties with companies, schools, and other institutions in Western Michigan and Japan. The highlight of AY 2021-2022 was that the Japan Club at WMU reformed the organization as RSO (Registered Student Organization) with the support of SJC. Their activity had been stopped since March 2020 because of COVID-19 pandemic. The new e-board members worked hard to rebuild the organization and hosted many in-person programs on campus.

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 $30,000 in AY 2021-2022.

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/minor, and we have students who choose WMU for our Japanese program and study abroad opportunities after hearing about them through the outreach programs.
Virtual Japanese Conversation Table collaborated with Mayville State University, University of Central Oklahoma, University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Western Carolina University in fall 2021, spring 2022 and summer I 2022. (23-29 people registered each season)

Virtual “Bonenkai“ end-of-year gathering with members of Kalamazoo-kai, supporters of SJC and WMU students in December 17, 2021. (14 people participated)

Virtual Japanese Culture Presentations on February 25, 2022 collaborated with Mayville State University, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Western Carolina University. 5 college students and 2 Japan outreach Initiative coordinators presented following topics: “Japanese Café”, “Japanese movies”, “German Loanwords in Japanese”, “Japanese Christian girl school and Buddhist girl school”, “Learning language and culture together” and “What I like about Japan”. (7 presenters and 24 people registered, 31 total.)

Virtual Japanese Girls’ Day Celebration on March 3, 2022 collaborated with Michigan 4-H, Central Oklahoma University, Mayville State University, University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Western Carolina University. (16 people participated.)
♦ WMU to YOU Event for admitted students at Meijer Garden in Grand Rapids on March 23, 2022.

♦ Virtual lecture “Spreading Indra’s Net in Manhattan: D. T. Suzuki’s Columbia University Seminars” on April 11, 2022. (34 people registered.)

♦ Memorial gathering for Dr. Michitoshi Soga in Kalamazoo on April 14, 2022. (24 people participated.)

♦ Virtual Japanese Golden Week Celebration collaborated with States’ 4-H. We had participants from 8 states registered from California, Wisconsin, Illinois, Kansas, Nevada, Kentucky, Nebraska and Michigan on May 5, 2022. (48 youth, 26 adults and 74 total registered.)
Cultural Festival at Moorsbridge Elementary School on Friday, June 3, 2022. Participants enjoyed Japanese calligraphy, Origami and bookmarks with their names written in Japanese. (Approximately 150-200 people participated.)

JAFAX (Annual Japanese visual culture convention) in Grand Rapids on Sunday, June 26, 2022. SJC provided 4 panels with WMU volunteer students. We provided following programs: “Presentation: Japanese daily life with some Anime/Manga scenes”, “Japanese 101: Language lesson for beginners”, “Japanese Conversation Table”, and “Yukata Workshop.” (Approximately 100 participated in total.)

Regional Outreach: Below is a list of organizations that Ms. Yoshimoto provided lessons.

➢ 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. We will keep seeking to create new types of outreach activities/programs to connect people among WMU, local community and Japan.