



Annual Activities Report 2022-2023

November 28, 2023

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 II, 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 60 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 2022-2023

FACULTY & STAFF BUILDING:

Since June 2014, Ms. Michiko Yoshimoto has been working for SJC as a full-time staff member. Yoshimoto continues to visit local schools and communities. She also supports current programming at WMU by coordinating virtual Japanese-language tables, on-campus SJC events, advising the Japan Club, etc. The kind of outreach work that 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 2015, 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. In 2023, Yoshimoto was selected to receive Michigan State University (MSU) Extension Key Partner Award for our partnership with the MSU Extension children and Youth Institute and the 4-H Youth Development program to promote Japanese culture and language in the community.

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 2022-2023 was that the Japan Club at WMU strengthened the foundation as RSO (Registered Student Organization) with the support of SJC. The members of 2022-2023 worked hard to host many events on campus and they supported SJC's events off campus to represent WMU's Japanese program.



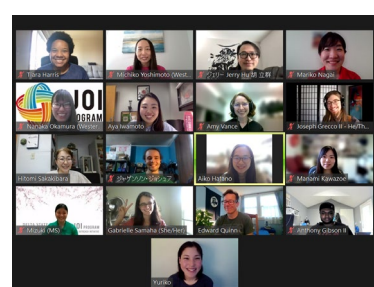
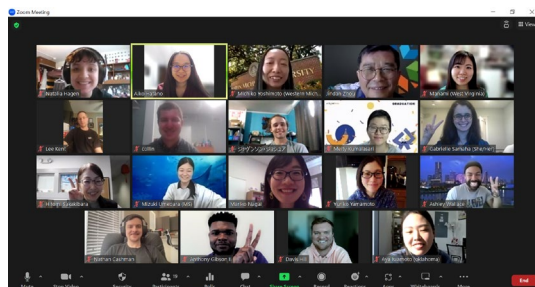
COST-SHARING: SJC continued its mutually beneficial relationship with the Battle Creek Saturday Japanese School (BCSJS). SJC dispatched Yoshimoto to teach and be a financial officer. In return, BCSJS paid SJC \$30,000 in AY 2022-2023.

FUND RAISING: In AY2022-2023, the total amount of the endowment spending bucket available to SJC was \$15,141. In addition, SJC received a total of \$15,421 donations in honor of Dr. Michitoshi Soga, SJC's namesake who passed away in 2013. Yoshimoto also raised additional \$3,515.

GRANT WRITING: SJC wrote and submitted an application, Education Grant of Japan Foundation New York, with the Kalamazoo Book Arts Center and a local artist Mary Brodbeck. We were awarded a full amount of \$5,000 for the exhibition of Japanese Woodblock prints by Yoshisuke Funasaka and Mary Brodbeck at the Kalamazoo Book Arts Center that was held from May 12, 2023 to July 28, 2023, and some outreach programs to bring these artis to some local high schools.

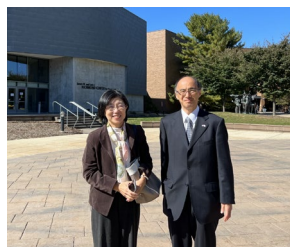
OUTREACH EVENTS AND PROGRAMS: SJC engaged in many outreach activities over the year. Yoshimoto's work is essential to the long-term development of Japanese studies at WMU. Not only does she perform a critical role by promoting knowledge of Japan in the community, she has also built a strong profile for 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 Japan Outreach Initiative coordinators located at University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Western Carolina University, West Liberty University, Mayville State University, Japan America Society Kentucky, Texas State Museum of Asian Cultures, Central Oklahoma and Delta State University in fall 2022, spring 2023 and summer I 2023. (45-67 people registered each season)



- ♦ Early Childhood in Kalamazoo County with Japanese translation at KRESA West on October 7, 2022. Ashley Drenth, Parent Liason of Kalamazoo County Great Start Collaborative, and SJC shared some resources for early childhood support and answer questions in English with Japanese translations. (5 families participated.)

- ◆ Consul General Yusuke Shindo visited WMU to have a special talk on “Japan: People, Society, Tradition and its Relations with the US” on October 4, 2022. The consul Shindo talked about Japanese seasons, food, culture and history, then emphasized the importance of the strong economic relations between the Japan and US. The program was held at Sangren Hall, Room 1920. (79 people participated.)



- ◆ Virtual Japanese Culture Presentations Anime/Manga on February 24, 2023 collaborated with Mayville State University, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Western Carolina University. 5 college students, 1 adult and 1 professor presented following topics: “A look at the anime "My Hero Academia" and its inspirations from American comic books”, “Rock and Roll and Bocchi The Rock”, “Ping Pong the animation”, “Neon Genesis Evangelion”, “Professor Otaku: STEAM and Anime”, “Anime and amazing soundtracks”, “The Awesomeness of Spy X Family” and “Professor Otaku: STEAM and Anime” (30 people registered.)
- ◆ Virtual Japanese Girls’ Day Celebration on March 3, 2023 collaborated with Michigan 4-H, Western Carolina University, West Liberty University, Mayville State University, Central Oklahoma University and Delta State University. (21 families registered.)

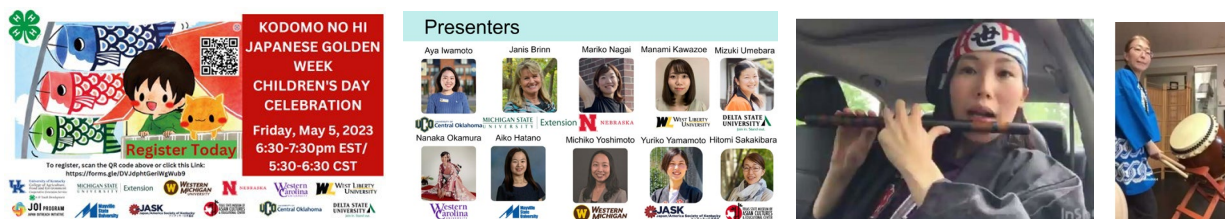
**HINAMATSURI
JAPANESE
GIRL'S DAY
CELEBRATION!**

Friday, March 3, 2023
**6:30-7:30pm EST/
5:30-6:30 CST**

Presenters

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| Aya Iwamoto Central Oklahoma | Mizuki Umebara Delta State University | Manami Kawazoe West Liberty University | Yuriko Yamamoto JASK |
| Nanaka Okamura Western Carolina | Aiko Hatano Delta State University | Hitomi Sakakibara Texas State Museum of Asian Cultures | Michiko Yoshimoto Western Michigan University |

- ◆ Virtual Japanese Golden Week Celebration on May 5, 2023 collaborated with States’ 4-H, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Western Carolina University, West Liberty University, Mayville State University, Japan America Society Kentucky, Texas State Museum of Asian Cultures, Central Oklahoma and Delta State University. (41 families registered.)



- ◆ Night of Rakugo with Katsura Sunshine at Kalamazoo College's Dalton Theatre on April 20, 2023. Katsura Sunshine who is a Canadian traditional Japanese Rakugo storyteller performed Rakugo in English. (Approximately 300 people participated.)



- ◆ Joint Woodblock Print Exhibition of Mr. Yoshisuke Funasaka and Ms. Mary Brodbeck at Kalamazoo Book Arts Center from May 12 to July 28, 2023. (675 people visited.) Mr. Funasaka visited Kalamazoo for having Baren-making workshop for 3 days (12 people registered.) and visiting Kalamazoo Central High School, Galesburg-Augusta High School and Vicksburg High School for his demonstrations. (Approximately 60 high school students attended.) Michigan State University Extension supported us to coordinate the school visits. Ms. Brodbeck and Mr. Funasaka had a presentation/demonstration at Kalamazoo Institute of Arts on May 16. (55 people participated.) Those programs were supported by the Japan Foundation New York and Arts Council of Greater Kalamazoo.



- ◆ Cultural Festival at Moorsbridge Elementary School on Friday, June 2, 2023. SJC had a booth of Origami and Japanese characters drawing with some WMU students including WMU's football team members and some local volunteers. (Approximately 500 people participated.)



- ◆ JAFAX (Annual Japanese visual culture convention) at DeVos Place in Grand Rapids on Sunday, June 11, 2023. SJC provided 4 panels with some WMU Japan Club 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.)



- ◆ Sushi-Making Workshop at Kalamazoo Institute of Arts on July 20, 2023. Some WMU Japan Club students helped the event. Participants made Nigiri-zushi of tuna, Kappa-maki and Takuwan-maki. (30 tickets sold out.)



- ◆ Regional Outreach: Below is a list of organizations that Yoshimoto provided lessons and presentations.

- Humphrey Products, Battle Creek Saturday Japanese School, Kalamazoo Central High School's Multicultural-International Club and King-Westwood Elementary School.

FUTURE PLANS & NEEDS:

- ◆ Outreach to Japanese businesses: We need to continue to develop stronger ties with the local business community.
- ◆ Support for the Japan outreach programs: SJC started facing higher demands after the Covid pandemic was over. These include hosting language conversation tables in-person after office hours, answering questions about Japanese learning opportunities for younger students and adults, creating a Japan Club in Kalamazoo area for local families, and resuming the Japanese language and culture summer camp at WMU. These outreach programs are vital for our community and WMU's reputation in Japanese studies.