



Annual Activities Report 2024-2025

October 20, 2025

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

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Ying Zeng reports to Dr. Max Rosemary, Associate Vice President, 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.

Soga Japan Center Activities in AY 2024-2025

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 2024-2025.

FUND RAISING: In AY 2024-2025, the total amount of the endowment spending bucket available to SJC was \$15,095.09. In addition, SJC received a total of \$5,250 donations in honor of Dr. Michitoshi Soga, SJC's namesake who passed away in 2013. SJC also raised additional \$1,250.

OUTREACH EVENTS AND PROGRAMS:

- ◆ SJC launched a new lecture series in Fall 2024. The first presenter was Dr. Diane Riggs from the department of World Religions and Cultures. Her talk, titled "Sewing the Buddhist Robe: Innovation and Inclusion," was held at 2 p.m. on Thursday, October 24, in person at 1720 Sangren Hall and online via Zoom. The second presenter was Dr. Rika Saito from the department of World Languages and Literatures. Her talk, titled "How I Met? How I Thought?: My Research on Waka Yamada, Modern Japanese Feminist," was held at 1 p.m. on Tuesday, March 11 at 3025 Brown Hall.

Sewing the Buddhist Robe: Innovation and Inclusion

Special talk by Dr. Diane Riggs
2-3pm (EDT), Thursday, October 24
1720 Sangren Hall and Zoom

Free Registration
<https://www.wmich.edu/sjc/lecture-registration>



5000 Zen Buddhist practitioners in the U.S. and in Europe sew the Buddhist robe or robe in preparation for the final of creating Buddhist garments. But how people in Western Zen Centers know the origin of this traditional practice, the challenge, and meditation practice of sewing the robe has become a matter of the first full-length study of Japanese Buddhist robe-making. Dr. Riggs will discuss how the practice began with the teaching of Zen Chō (1718-1894) and illustrate how it functioned in contemporary Buddhist life.

Diane E. Riggs is a Master Faculty Specialist of Department of World Religions and Cultures at Western Michigan University. She received her Ph.D. from the Asian Languages and Cultures department at UCLA in 2005.

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Western Michigan University
Department of World Religions and Cultures

How I met? How I thought?: My Research on Waka Yamada, Modern Japanese Feminist

Special talk by Dr. Rika Saito
1-1:50pm, Tuesday, March 11
Room 3025 Brown Hall

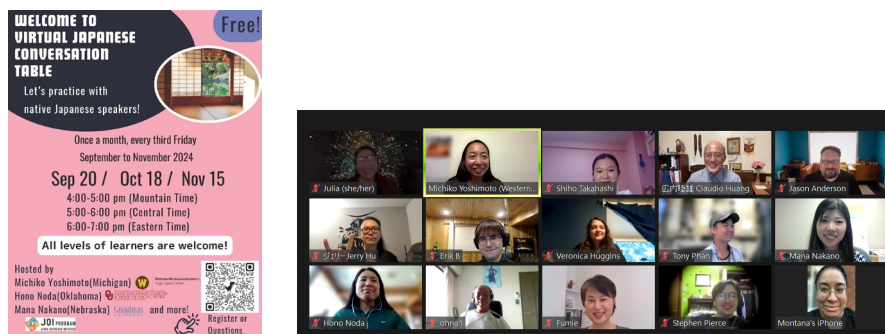


As an other part of the world during the early 20th century, Japan also produced a number of influential female writers, novelists, and poets. Waka Yamada, a Japanese writer, was one of them. Her works have been translated into English and have been widely read in Japan and abroad. Dr. Saito will discuss her research on Waka Yamada and her role in the Japanese feminist movement.

Rika Saito is a Master Faculty Specialist of Department of World Languages and Literatures at Western Michigan University. She received her Ph.D. from the Department of World Languages and Literatures at Western Michigan University in 2010.

Western Michigan University
Department of World Languages and Literatures

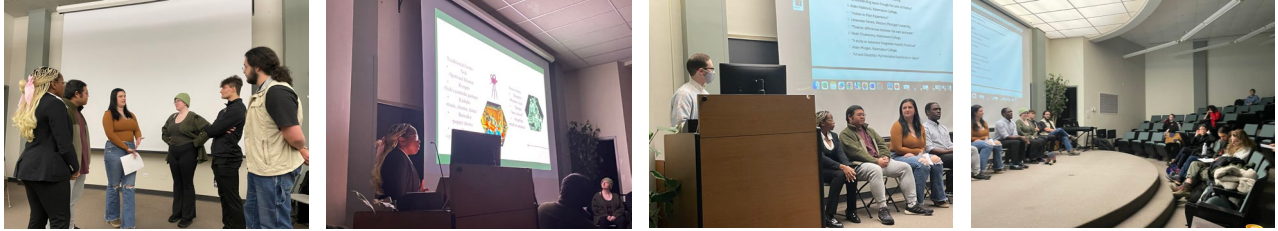
- ◆ The Virtual Japanese Conversation Table collaborated with Japan Outreach Initiative (JOI) coordinators from the University of Oklahoma and Creighton University in Nebraska during Fall 2024, Spring, and Summer 2025. (46 people registered in the fall and 25 people registered in the spring/summer.) This program was made possible through the warm support by volunteers from the Kalamazoo area, other states and Japan- including Shibaura Kogyo University and Kalamazoo-Kai.



- ◆ The Japan Foundation Film series took place in December 2024. “Samurai Cat” was screened on December 3, and “Bento Harassment” was screened on December 5 in Room 2028 of Brown Hall.



- ◆ Japanese Culture Presentations on February 23, 2025, was held in collaboration with Kalamazoo College’s Japanese Program. Three WMU students and four Kalamazoo College students presented on the following topics: "Japanese Horror Genre" “Japanese Language in J-pop Culture (One Piece),” “Japanese History” “Hidden In Plain Experience,” “Theatre: differences between the east and west,” “A study on Japanese Integrated Healthy Practices,” and “Art and Disability; My Internship Experience in Japan."



- ◆ The Soga Japan Center was invited to present “Sprit of Japan” at Paw Paw District Library on March 13, 2025. Participants enjoyed learning about Japanese culture and trying Japanese Calligraphy.



- ◆ Stryker invited some several organizations, including SJC, to host information tables on May 20 to celebrate of Asian & Pacific American Heritage Month. Two college students supported the table and participated in a tour of Stryker Medical’s building.



- ◆ SJC was invited to host a table at the Cultural Festival of Moorsbridge Elementary School on Friday, June 27, 2025. Students and families enjoyed receiving a pin as a prize after practicing Japanese greetings.



- ◆ JAFAX (Annual Japanese visual culture convention) was held at DeVos Place in Grand Rapids on Sunday, June 29, 2025. SJC hosted four panels with a Japan Club student from WMU. The following programs were offered: “Presentation: Japanese daily life with some Anime/Manga scenes,” “Japanese 101: Language lesson for beginners,” “Japanese Conversation Table,” and “Japanese Calligraphy Workshop.”



- ◆ Regional Outreach: Below is a list of organizations that Yoshimoto provided lessons and presentations in 2024-2025.
 - Humphrey Products, Battle Creek Saturday Japanese School, Kalamazoo Central High School’s Multicultural-International Club, King-Westwood Elementary School and Kalamazoo College.

FUTURE PLANS & NEEDS:

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