



U.S.-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange (CULCON)
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**INFORMATION ACCESS AND SHARING
 IN THE DIGITAL AGE WORKING GROUP
 INTERIM REPORT**

Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Expanding Access and Sharing of Digitized Resources	2
3. Expanding Japan Studies/Study of the United States	3
4. Challenges, Opportunities, Areas of Further Interest and Preliminary Recommendations for Action	4
5. Next Steps	5
6. Appendices	6
A. Membership of the CULCON Information Access and Sharing in the Digital Age Working Group	6
B. Membership of CULCON	7

1. Introduction

The U.S.-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange (CULCON) is a binational advisory panel that serves to elevate and strengthen the vital cultural and educational foundations of the U.S.-Japan relationship, and to strengthen connections between U.S. and Japan leadership in those fields. It works to ensure that the best new ideas for cultural, educational and intellectual activity and exchange are implemented as operational programs.

CULCON organizes working groups, whose members, consisting of CULCON members and private sector and government officials with related expertise, focus on specific impediments to exchange and/or best practices; and offer recommendations to stakeholders to address common challenges.

CULCON established the Information Access and Sharing in the Digital Age Working Group (IAS WG) in October 2022. The IAS WG brought together participants from both the U.S. and Japan, with a focus on enhancing access to fact-based, balanced, and affordable resources to foster mutual understanding and knowledge exchange. The Working Group's overarching mission and goal was to explore ways for U.S. and Japanese citizens to learn about each other's cultures, societies, and challenges. The Working Group emphasized two broad themes: expanding Japan Studies and Study of the United States and expanding access and sharing of digital resources. CULCON agreed the IAS WG should meet twice before submitting an interim report to CULCON 30 in October, 2023.

The IAS WG met twice virtually on the following dates:

- Meeting #1: February 28 19:30 ET/March 1 9:30 JT
- Meeting #2: July 12 20:00 ET/ July 13 9:00 JT

The participants engaged in-depth discussion about various aspects of expanding access and sharing of digital resources, and expanding Japan Studies and Study of the U.S., including best practices, challenges, opportunities, and areas of future interest. Following is a summary of the main topics of discussion from both meetings. It is important to note some of these topics overlap and could be discussed under either theme.

2. Expanding Access and Sharing of Digitized Resources

- A. **Addressing Equity and Accessibility of Resources:** The discussions surrounding the expansion of access and sharing digital resources underscored the importance of addressing barriers. These barriers include the cost of digitization and the dominance of proprietary databases. The Working Group applauded the National Diet Library's efforts in digitizing pre-modern materials, which could open access to historical Japanese texts for American researchers, fostering cross-cultural collaboration and promoting equitable access to valuable resources. However, the group also stressed the need for broader global reach and collaboration in digitization.
- B. **Balancing Information Access and Privacy:** The Working Group acknowledged the delicate balance between sharing information and maintaining privacy and security, particularly in the context of digital innovation and cybersecurity. While promoting digital resources for cross-border collaboration, ensuring individuals' data privacy and preventing cyber threats becomes paramount.

- C. **Navigating the Digital Transformation with Responsibility:** The Working Group engaged in discussions about the potential of technology, such as digital twins¹ and AI, in bridging language barriers and making resources more accessible. The group also underscored the importance of the ethical and responsible use of such technologies. Digital twin technology could be employed to virtually simulate historical sites, offering U.S. and Japanese students immersive experiences, but the technology needs to be used responsibly, respecting cultural sensitivities.
- D. **Promoting Education and Networking Initiatives:** The Working Group emphasized the importance of training students in technology, media literacy, and responsible information use. Additionally, the group highlighted the role of networking initiatives and collaborations between universities in promoting understanding and exchange. Establishing international student exchange programs, where U.S. and Japanese students collaborate on research projects involving technology's impact on society, could lead to enhanced cross-cultural understanding and academic development.

3. Expanding Japan Studies and Study of the United States

- A. **Enhancing Student Engagement and Employment Opportunities:** The Working Group explored strategies to enhance student engagement and make Japan Studies and Study of the U.S. more appealing. This included providing clear pathways to employment, engaging students earlier in their academic journeys, and involving diverse voices. Encouraging U.S. students to engage with Japan Studies early in their academic journeys through targeted programs like the Japan U.S.-Friendship Commission Summer Institute can lead to lasting interest and potential career opportunities in cross-cultural fields. The Working Group emphasized the importance of in-person exchange as providing a more impactful experience.
- B. **Diverse Entry Points and Themes:** Working Group members recognized the potential of various topics to attract students to Japan Studies and Study of the U.S. These included everyday interests like food, climate change, disaster recovery, and social issues. The Working Group identified special area studies, such as environmental sustainability and technology's societal impacts, as potential entry points as well. The WG members acknowledged the value of shared concerns, such as global order and security. For example, a student interested in environmental sustainability might be drawn to Japan Studies through studying Japan's commitment to addressing climate change with limited resources, fostering a cross-cultural understanding of environmental challenges.
- C. **Embracing an Interdisciplinary Approach:** The Working Group members collectively emphasized the value of interdisciplinary studies. The members discussed collaborative efforts between different fields and countries as crucial for fostering a comprehensive understanding of complex global challenges. For example, collaborative research between Japanese historians and American sociologists could provide insights into societal responses to disaster recovery, bridging disciplines to offer a comprehensive understanding of the topic.
- D. **Adopting a Transnational and Regional Perspective:** The Working Group emphasized the importance of transnational research and adopting a wider regional perspective. The discussions underscored the significance of fostering regional collaboration that includes Japan and the United States. For example, there is growing interest in the Indo-Pacific as a

¹ A digital twin is a virtual representation of an object or system that spans its lifecycle, is updated from real-time data, and uses simulation, machine learning and reasoning to help decision-making (IBM.com)

new regional construct. Diplomatically and economically, these regional interconnections now offer the opportunity to put Japan and the United States in the broader context of regionalism. Similarly, this exploration of the interconnectedness of economies and societies, whether in the Indo-Pacific or beyond, could lead to increased interest in Japan and the United States as students recognize the relevance of understanding multiple countries' roles in the global context.

- E. **Promoting Cultural Understanding and Eliminating Stereotypes:** The Working Group recognized the need to address stereotypes and misconceptions about both American and Japanese cultures. The discussions emphasized the role of education in dismantling such biases and fostering understanding. The Working Group grappled with the issue of misinformation and disinformation and assessing the accuracy of resources.
- F. **Fostering Collaboration and Global Innovation:** The Working Group acknowledged the value of collaborative efforts between the U.S. and Japan in promoting innovation and shared democratic values in the Indo-Pacific region. Collaborative research projects between American and Japanese scholars, supported by programs like the JFIPP Research Fellowship, could yield innovative solutions to shared challenges, such as cybersecurity threats in our respective countries. The U.S.-Japan Digital Innovation Hub was also highlighted as a notable program.

4. Challenges, Opportunities, Areas of Further Interest and Preliminary Recommendations for Action

The Working Group's discussions on a diverse range of themes, from interdisciplinary studies and digital transformation to equity and cultural understanding, highlighted the complexity of the undertaking. Collaborative efforts and innovative approaches emerged as essential tools for promoting knowledge exchange, cultural appreciation, and shared values in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. The Working Group has identified specific topics and issues that warrant further consideration and exploration. Additionally, the Working Group has formulated initial action recommendations to submit in its Final Report to CULCON 31. In CULCON 31's Joint Statement, it would make final recommendations to federal/central governments and other stakeholders.

1. **Balancing In-Person Exchange, Rural Study, and Digital Age:**
 - Recognize the compatibility of in-person exchanges, rural study, and digital methods for comparative data collection.
 - Highlight the importance of immersing oneself in the country of interest rather than solely relying on digital research.
2. **Addressing Information Access Challenges and Digitization:**
 - Tackle challenges posed by corporate barriers to information in proprietary databases. As a preliminary recommendation, the Working Group suggests convening a symposium or round table discussion to address challenges surrounding information access and digitization.
 - Collaborate to digitize materials and remove barriers to information availability.
3. **Strengthening Databases and Resource Sharing:**
 - Emphasize the need to strengthen existing databases and share resources.

4. Address funding requirements to support database enhancement and resource sharing initiatives.
 - The Working Group's preliminary recommendations include reaching out to both the public and private sectors to seek financial support for the digitalization of resources aimed at promoting Japan Studies and Studies of the United States.
 - The specific funding target and scope will be subject to further discussion, taking into account the requirements, available resources, and the progress made in securing cooperation from relevant universities and academic institutions.
5. "Understanding Study of the United States and Japan Studies Globally:
 - Explore differing interpretations of Study of the United States and Japan Studies across countries.
 - Highlight shared values of democracy and freedom, contributing to the promotion of these concepts more broadly.
6. Leveraging Digital Technology for New Methodologies:
 - Recognize the potential of digital technology for innovative research methodologies.
 - Explore possibilities such as cross-national and cross-temporal analysis facilitated by digital tools.
7. Indo-Pacific Region's Import and Impact on Interest in Japan as part of the Indo-Pacific
 - Note the growing interest in Japan due to the increased focus on the Indo-Pacific Region.
 - Identify opportunities for collaboration with Japanese universities arising from this heightened interest.
 - Address challenges of transnational research, especially related to data access and economic security.
8. Promoting Student Exchanges and Collaboration:
 - Highlight the significance of student exchanges, including initiatives like the JUSFC Summer Institute.
 - The Working Group has identified as a preliminary recommendation calling for public and private sectors to develop greater diversity of in-person exchange programs for undergraduate students who are engaged in Study of the United States and Japan Studies
9. Promote Fact-Based, Balanced, and Affordable Sources
 - Ensure access to fact-based and balanced sources, as well as more types of work beyond access to combat mis/dis-information in areas of common interest.

5. Next Steps

The Working Group members recommended that CULCON extend its term of service for the next two years, or until CULCON 31. The Working Group will plan to meet at least twice more, calling upon additional expertise, where necessary, to expand the discussion of each theme. By the time of CULCON 31, the Working Group will provide a Final Report, which will include recommendations to both governments, academic institutions, and other stakeholders.

6. Appendices

Membership of CULCON Information Access and Sharing Working Group (alphabetical)

Japan CULCON Member:

- ❖ TAKAHASHI Yuko, President, Tsuda University (Japan WG Chair)

U.S. CULCON Members:

- ❖ Trevor A. Dawes, Vice Provost for Libraries and Museums and May Morris University Librarian, University of Delaware (U.S. WG Chair)
- ❖ M. Diana Helweg Newton, Director of the Tower Scholars Program and Senior Fellow, John Goodwin Tower Center for Political Studies, Southern Methodist University (SMU)
- ❖ Samuel Morse, Howard and Martha Mitchel Professor, History of Art and Asian Languages and Civilizations, Amherst College

Japan-WG Members/Resource Persons:

- ❖ MAESHIMA Kazuhiro, Professor, Sophia University
- ❖ SAKURAI Tetsuya, Professor, University of Tsukuba; U.S.-Japan Digital Innovation Hub
- ❖ Kristopher Tate, President, General Development Officer and CEO, ConnectFree Corporation
- ❖ HARA Hideki, Director of Japan Studies, The Japan Foundation
- ❖ KITAHARA Sachiko, Assistant Director, Cultural Affairs and Overseas Public Relations Division, Minister's Secretariat, MOFA
- ❖ YANAI Eri, International Affairs Division, MEXT

U.S. WG Members/Resource Persons:

- ❖ Heather Joseph, Executive Director, SPARC
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