

Next Generation Partnership: WA Project 2.0

Launch of the Japan Foundation's Partnership to Co-create a Brighter Future of Asia

The Japan Foundation (JF) will conduct two-way exchange programs with ASEAN and other Asian countries over a ten-year period from 2024 to strengthen mutual relationships and develop new platform for partnership and co-creation.

Since 2013, JF has conducted a series of exchange programs titled “WA Project: Toward Interactive Asia through Fusion and Harmony.” The word *wa*, used in the project name, refers to a quintessentially Japanese concept of harmony, circulation and a circle—a concept that perfectly encapsulates the cooperative nature of these ventures.

The “Partnership to Co-create a Future with the Next Generation: WA Project 2.0” will build on the people-to-people connections developed in the previous exchange programs, while emphasizing respect for cultural values and fostering mutual understanding. The project will expand the existing circle of trust and friendship by promoting opportunities for exchange and collaboration among participants. We strongly believe that these efforts will further the development of a multicultural society, even to the point of creating a new form of culture for the next generation. We look for this partnership to strengthen the networks of people and build trust in Asia.

Two programs serve as the pillars of the “Partnership to Co-create a Future with the Next Generation: WA Project 2.0”: NIHONGO Partners and the Two-Way Intellectual and Cultural Exchange. More details about these ventures will be available soon on websites dedicated to the project. Check out the promotional video on the JF's YouTube channel. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=doXHtn9PSFA>

NIHONGO Partners



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Although enthusiasm for learning the Japanese language is on the rise throughout Asia, many Japanese-language students in the region never get the opportunity to interact personally with Japanese people, which limits their learning to textbooks. The mission of the NIHONGO Partners program is to share practical Japanese and authentic Japanese culture through native speakers serving as partners for Japanese-language teachers in Asia, acting as teaching assistants and sharing Japanese culture with students. We also encourage these NIHONGO Partners to deepen their understanding of the local culture and language at their destination, becoming a bridge between Japan and other countries in Asia and contributing to the further development of a global society. To date,

we have dispatched more than 3,000 NIHONGO Partners to twelve countries and regions, and we intend to further develop this program over the next ten years.

We invite Japanese-language teachers from the NIHONGO Partners' host schools to Japan for training in Japanese-language teaching methods. We also invite students to Japan from universities where NIHONGO Partners (including interns) are currently dispatched or could be dispatched in the future. This initiative aims to improve students' overall competency and communication skills in Japanese. Our goal is to use such activities to deepen mutual awareness and understanding of the society and culture of both Japan and the partner countries.

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Two-Way Intellectual and Cultural Exchange

Our goal is to create opportunities for collaboration founded on mutual understanding in order to cultivate strong bonds among the people of different countries and to nurture the next generation as a bridge to the world.

Project example: ASEAN-Japan Youth Forum: Take Actions for Social Change 2024

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The ASEAN-Japan Youth Forum 2024 invites undergraduate students of diverse backgrounds to collaborate in a program with a theme of good health and well-being. This program fosters unity and mutual understanding by serving as a platform for participants to exchange ideas and devise practical solutions for pressing social issues—with the vision of co-creating a peaceful and better world by 2050. Participants form teams that set their own agenda, and through an online program and field trips to Indonesia and Japan, they create an action plan together for making the world a better place. The program is expected to create long-lasting connections between young people in Japan and those in ASEAN countries and to have a positive impact on society. In December, participating university students will embark on a field trip and hold discussions in Indonesia in their first face-to-face meeting.

Project Example: Asian Object Theater

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Khao Niew Theater Group (Laos) and Deaf Puppet Theater Hitomi (Japan) are professional puppet theaters in which deaf people and hearing people work together. For this project, they were joined by choreographer and director Momoko Shiraga (Momonga Complex, Japan), who creates new spaces by applying flexible ideas and configurations. Together, these creators coproduced a new form of international theater using puppets, objects, and the human body. Since 2018, these theater companies have been holding joint workshops, combining their creative backgrounds to expand the possibilities of creative expression. This project explores new frontiers in art

through collaboration, revealing the spiritual animistic culture of Laos as something universal that has lain dormant in contemporary society until now. A performance as part of this project will take place in December 2024 at KAAT Kanagawa Arts Theatre.

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