



**The United States-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange (CULCON)
CULCON31
Okinawa, Japan
JOINT STATEMENT**

Preface

The United States-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange (CULCON) was established in 1961 to help Americans and Japanese learn about each other and build partnerships outside of government that would sustain our strategic cooperation. Since its establishment, the U.S.-Japan relationship has faced and overcome various challenges with expert leadership and careful coordination across sectors at all levels of society.

The last six decades have culminated in what President Donald J. Trump and Prime Minister TAKAICHI Sanae announced as a new Golden Age for the U.S.-Japan Alliance, helping both countries to strengthen economic security, promote economic growth, and thereby continuously lead to global prosperity.

CULCON remains as critical as ever to the binational partnership, which stands on a foundation of people-to-people relationships across all sectors. These are renewed and strengthened through exchange experiences, of students, professionals, community representatives, academics, and government officials, forming the building blocks of meaningful engagement. CULCON serves a critical role as convener of these public and private sector leaders and experts; CULCON Panels identify policy recommendations from a broad perspective, through shared values and ideals, with an aim to continue sustaining and developing the Alliance in pursuit of security and prosperity.

The United States and Japan have had key opportunities in the past years to celebrate their partnership, one built on commitments to democratic values, and that showcases

leadership in shaping a more interconnected and prosperous world by advancing peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. Perhaps most significant was the World Expo 2025 hosted in Osaka, Japan, which contributed to the flourishing of the Japanese tourism industry. Record numbers of visitors were recorded at the U.S. Pavilion, which recognized what will soon be the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Since the last CULCON Plenary in 2023, CULCON has led various initiatives to strengthen U.S.-Japan people-to-people connections that center respect and coordination. Initiatives included a CULCON Symposium in partnership with the Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art (NMAA) that featured expert panels on the global impact of Japanese creative industries, subnational diplomacy, and expanded access to digital resources between the U.S. and Japan. The 2025 symposium welcomed an esteemed delegation of representatives from the Japanese and U.S. governments, and was open to the wider U.S.-Japan community in Washington, D.C.

CULCON continued to explore and facilitate regional connections by convening leadership meetings in various localities in Japan and the United States, engaging stakeholders in business, civil society, education, and government. Japan and the United States are the largest foreign investors in each other's country. Japanese companies have established a strong presence in the U.S., creating jobs and contributing to local economies in such fields as automobile, electric and electronic machineries, and trading and retail business. American companies have invested in



industries such as technology, healthcare, consumer goods, finance, and insurance within the Japanese market. These investments have led to the transfer of knowledge, technology, and management practices, fostering economic growth, innovation, and security.

In Japan, CULCON meeting participants learned about the significance of binational youth exchange and agricultural collaboration with U.S. scientific industries for revitalizing rural communities; in the United States, they learned about the deep commitment of Japanese companies to local U.S. communities, contributing to stability and development. In both Japan and the U.S., CULCON meeting participants learned that in regions with deep U.S.-Japan cross-sectoral economic ties, universities play a key role in facilitating business connections as well as training the next generation of U.S.-Japan human capital.

It is with such discovery and momentum that CULCON convened in February 2026 its members and partners from the government, business, academia and other sectors of Japan and the United States for CULCON31 in Okinawa, Japan. They came together to continue the work of strengthening the U.S.-Japan binational partnership.

The site of Okinawa was conducive to this work as an embodiment of subnational diplomacy between the U.S. and Japan. Panelists learned from local representatives and leaders about Okinawa's rich culture and its history as a hub of trade and exchange. Panelists also learned about current community engagement related to the U.S.-Japan security alliance, higher education, and advanced research in the region, including partnerships that promote international cooperation and people-to-people exchange.

The 31st Plenary Session was co-chaired by His Excellency SASAE Kenichiro, Former Ambassador of Japan to the United States, and Mr. Charles D. Lake II, Chairman and Representative Director of Aflac Life

Insurance Japan, and President of Aflac International.

The Panels received congratulatory messages from the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Japan expressing support for CULCON's continued work. The leaders noted that Japan and the United States share deep connections, and the two nations have been able to learn from one another, build trust, and form lasting relationships that reinforce the strength of the U.S.-Japan Alliance. They recognized that CULCON has played an important role in strengthening that bond by promoting educational opportunities, deepening cultural understanding, and fostering personal ties between their two nations.

Summary of Discussions

Since CULCON30, when the Panels announced Interim Reports, the two binational working groups, **(1) Information Access and Sharing in the Digital Age Working Group**, **(2) Subnational Diplomacy/Local & Regional Exchange Working Group** have grappled with various issues within their larger missions. They formulated recommendations that summarize the fruits of their efforts.

The Final Reports will be submitted to leadership of the United States and Japanese governments, with plans to distribute to leadership of relevant sectors.

1. Information Access and Sharing in the Digital Age Working Group (IAS WG)

CULCON brought together information experts from both the U.S. and Japan to strategize how best to enhance access to fact-based, balanced, and affordable resources so that U.S. and Japanese citizens can learn about each other's cultures, societies, and challenges. Members of the IAS Working Group emphasized the benefits and impact of expanding Japan Studies and study of the United States in efforts to expand access and sharing of digital research materials.



On behalf of CULCON, WG members identified the following topics and issues, and crafted recommendations to address them.

A. Support digitization efforts leading to more access to Japan & U.S. collections

CULCON recognizes the importance of supporting teaching and research on the United States and Japan in each other's countries by making more accessible historical and cultural resources. Individual interest in Japan and the U.S. is sustained through access to rich and credible digital information, attracting new generations of students to advanced study through the fields of Japan Studies and American Studies.

Digitizing materials is one way to address access challenges to physical materials that may be siloed in institutions or stored in collections at great distances. These materials are the foundation upon which those in the United States study Japan and those in Japan study the United States.

CULCON recognizes that digitization is laborious and costly, and has devised recommendations to address this; CULCON also recognizes that the work of expanding access to materials does not end at digitizing.

CULCON recommends supporting the human labor of digitization work. This work includes scanning and creating metadata. This work must be sustained through private and public investments in digital collections as well as promotion and appropriate application of assistive technology. CULCON also acknowledges barriers around licensing and recommends increased awareness and integration of innovative methods for expanded discoverability. Lastly, CULCON recommends equal prioritization of digitizing textual and non-textual materials for richer digital resource collections.

In steps already taken for enhanced access to digital resources for U.S./Japan specialization, CULCON commends the National Diet Library's (NDL) efforts to digitize materials,

and supports ongoing collaboration to expand the number of U.S. and overseas libraries subscribing to the Digitized Contents Transmission Service. CULCON also encourages further exploration of ways to provide NDL digitized materials directly to researchers living abroad.

Progress has been made in productive feedback sessions involving librarians, researchers, and representatives of the North American Coordinating Council on Japanese Library Resources (NCC), MOFA/MEXT, the Japan CULCON Secretariat, and NDL leadership. However, overseas researchers continue to face challenges in accessing out-of-print or otherwise difficult to obtain resources that only the NDL can provide. CULCON encourages continued efforts in 2026 to address challenges through stakeholder coordination.

B. Promote sustainable models and networks for resource sharing, consortia, and increasingly open digital collections

Digitized content is often promoted as access expansive. However, once materials are digitized, institutions must address issues of licensing and copyright that can be barriers to wider discovery and use. There is thus a need to strengthen resource-sharing networks that can best leverage limited human resources and funding. There is also an increased need for collective representation and leadership for resource-sharing institutions. Collective representation from and for "digital collections champions" can more efficiently identify and communicate needs, and coordinate action for greater information access and sharing.

CULCON recommends education and research institutions in the U.S. and Japan, and information communities more generally, consider Open Access (OA) and its associated practices. Rather than being locked behind subscription paywalls, OA materials can be read, downloaded, shared, and reused by anyone, often under permissive licenses like Creative Commons. This advances global



scholarship, accelerates innovation, and supports the principle that research, especially that which is publicly funded, is a public good that should be accessible to all. OA also provides meaningful benefits to data holders and copyright owners by increasing the visibility and impact of their works, reducing administrative burdens related to permissions, and enabling new value-added services and business models.

CULCON also recommends serious consideration of various consortia models for adaptation. Consortia agreements allow institutions to formalize systems for resource sharing, including collaborative purchasing. They also allow libraries, archives, museums, and other resource-sharing institutions to collectively negotiate and advocate for their needs.

C. Promote educational training for new technology use and implementation in the fields of Japan Studies and American Studies

With the proliferation and development of new technologies, there is a growing need for educational programs at scale that address individual understanding of technology applicability. CULCON recognizes that within the fields of Japan Studies and American Studies, as more individuals may be inclined to utilize translation technologies and Large Language Models (LLMs) as well as AI assistance, there is ample demand for expert coordination and direction on ethical and appropriate technology use. Educators and students alike need practical training that starts in the classroom and expands out to real life application.

CULCON recommends that the relevant stakeholders including government agencies and professional associations as well as educational institutions and expert educators foster digital literacy education/training, and academic institutions initiate exchanges between Japanese and U.S. professionals and researchers to collaborate on

digital literacy by studying the delicate balance between digital innovation and privacy. CULCON also recommends the aforementioned stakeholders to seriously consider incorporating binational data collection surveys for feedback on joint educational and training needs and preferences for how to address them.

CULCON promotes a bottom-up approach to technology-implementation, one that is based in cross-sectoral, interdisciplinary dialogue with researchers from the Humanities and Social Sciences.

CULCON recommends the empowerment of educators, supporting staff, and students of Japan Studies and American Studies through appropriate and ethical use of digital and AI technologies. This involves sustained interdisciplinary reflection on needs, and the development of application frameworks and training programs.

2. Subnational Diplomacy/Local & Regional Exchange Working Group (SND WG)

The U.S. and Japan Panels emphasized the role of subnational diplomacy in people-to-people exchange, which is one of the key pillars of the U.S.-Japan partnership. These interactions create the vital thread binding the two nations, strengthening as foundation all aspects of the bilateral relationship. It requires continuous efforts of concerned parties of both the U.S. and Japan.

The Working Group identified the following topics and issues, and crafted recommendations in priority action plans and calls-to-action. Priority action plans are focused on the immediately operational and include suggestions for implementing actors; calls-to-action are aimed at mobilizing potential stakeholders to strategize and execute.

A. Enhancing the ecosystem that promotes subnational diplomacy



To enhance subnational diplomacy initiatives, it is critical to support the organizational ecosystem that sustains and advances long-standing U.S.-Japan relationships at the regional and local level. CULCON acknowledges that there are various challenges to overcome in the mission to strengthen the ecosystem, and, as an entity, is dedicated to coordinating with peers to maintain vitality and foster new initiatives.

CULCON recommends public and private investment in U.S.-Japan related organizations, and consideration of establishing funding sources for local and regional initiatives.

CULCON recommends the convening of leadership summits of U.S.-Japan related organizations to foster coordination and enhance information exchange on relevant activities for greater collaboration and impact.

B. Strategic collaboration for engaged human capital

The U.S.-Japan relationship has a longstanding history of mutual exchange tended by individuals with skills in language and expertise in culture. It is necessary to continue to invest in practical training for these individuals. Engaged and capable human capital will ensure multisectoral partnerships that undergird mutually beneficial growth and development that build out from the local and regional levels.

CULCON recommends fostering and mobilizing ready pools of human talent. This includes facilitating public-private partnerships to establish dedicated funds for practical training; sustaining regional and inter-regional networks between institutions of higher education and businesses to create professional opportunities; and establishing business-to-business coordination for communicating skill needs and employment strategies. In particular, local businesses are encouraged to establish internships or training programs for youth including students and alumni of U.S.-Japan exchange programs.

C. Leveraging interest in each other's countries to develop future leaders

By collaborating with educational institutions, local communities, and cultural exchange organizations, stakeholders can build from a place of mutual interest between Japan and the United States toward the development of future leaders. Cultivating individual interest in each other's country at a young age is especially important, as it shapes future paths and develops into global perspectives.

This goes beyond sparking intellectual curiosity. It is necessary to foster human resources that are the “on-the-ground contributors” of the wider U.S.-Japan network by fostering richer educational exchanges and unique learning initiatives for students and teachers.

CULCON recommends engaging relevant stakeholders in Japan to expand middle school level exchanges between Japan and the United States, in addition to the existing programs for high school and university students. Middle school exchanges are particularly effective in fostering life-changing experiences and cultivating early interest in global affairs.

CULCON recommends investing and strengthening initiatives to enable young people to deepen their understanding of the other country's language, history, and society, and connect that knowledge to future careers and community engagement. This includes supporting language and cultural immersion programs in K-12, and establishing endowments to hire and retain scholars/researchers of Japan Studies at universities in the United States. The latter is particularly important for ensuring long-term, sustainable support for and development of youth-in-training.

Future Plans

The Panels deliberated on the importance and longevity of the U.S.-Japan partnership. They considered the two countries' enduring friendship and solid Alliance, and the critical



role they jointly play in ensuring peace, security, economic prosperity and geopolitical stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

The Panels then considered a new focus for their attention and resources and agreed to convene two new binational task forces to continue building on the foundation featured in the plenary discussions.

Task Force on Monitoring Digitization and Digital Resource Sharing for Japan Studies and American Studies

- Focus on enhanced binational access to digital collections.
- Collaborate with organizations such as the Resource Sharing Committee of the North American Coordinating Council on Japanese Library Resources (NCC) to monitor the National Diet Library (NDL)'s Digitized Contents Transmission Services for Libraries (DCTL) and Digitized Contents Transmission Service for Individuals (DCTI).

Task Force on Advancing Next Steps for Local and Regional Diplomacy

- Build on proven and innovative educational and cultural exchange models between Japan and the United States to advance shared interests.
 - Examples of excellent models that reinforce the longstanding bilateral partnership include university/public and private research and development/local government collaborative initiatives; civil society organizations like America-Japan/Japan-America societies; sister-city and sister-state partnerships; alumni networks like the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme alumni associations; regional summits and symposia.
- Develop strategies to engage with stakeholders in regional hubs with high-growth potential, strengthening multi- and cross-sectoral U.S.-Japan connections.

- Examples of engagement that bring excellence and innovation include mobilizing U.S.-Japan program alumni in key sectors to strengthen current exchange programs and create professional opportunities; and leveraging the experience and expertise of students/scholars in relevant fields including teaching respective languages (English and Japanese) and culture, and STEM, to advance areas strategic to the U.S.-Japan partnership.

The two task forces were charged with presenting interim progress as appropriate to both Panels, with goals to formalize recommendation reports. The Panels agreed to re-convene in the United States in 2028 for the next plenary session CULCON32.

In view of the rapidly changing international order as well as demographic shifts of each respective country, the United States and Japan must continue to invest in their enduring relationship and confront new realities together. This is why CULCON's work for strengthening the U.S.-Japan partnership, and cultivating and sustaining the stewards of the Alliance continues to be of utmost importance.

For more information on U.S. CULCON, please see <http://culcon.jusfc.gov> or contact Caitlin Adkins at culcon@jusfc.gov. For more information about Japan CULCON, please see www.jpf.go.jp/culcon or contact MUNAKATA Nanako at Nanako_Munakata@jpf.go.jp.