

The 8th Asia Future Conference Report

The 8th Asia Future Conference took place at Tohoku Gakuin University's Itsutsubashi Campus in Sendai from August 25th (Tuesday) to 29th (Saturday), 2026. The overall theme was "Space and Distance: Crossing, Closing, Creating," and there were 328 registered participants from 27 countries. The COVID-19 pandemic made the phrase 'social distancing' familiar to people around the world, yet despite the call for 'distance,' the term itself crossed cultural and geographical boundaries. Distance exists both physically and psychologically: while it separates us, it can also reveal what connects us. From diverse perspectives, we reconsidered the interdisciplinary roles and functions of space and distance, examined how they are used to maintain or challenge particular power dynamics, and discussed how the concepts can or should be employed.

Starting at 9am on the 26th (Wednesday), five AFC Forums (28 papers), four Roundtable sessions (16 papers), and 182 research paper presentations in 48 parallel sessions were held in classrooms on the 6th and 7th floors of the Lecture Building at Tohoku Gakuin University. These sessions fostered wide-ranging international and interdisciplinary discussions addressing issues across diverse fields.

● AFC Forums

- 1) [The Potential for Dialogue in the National Histories of Japan, China and Korea: "Emotions in National Histories: Japan, China, Korea" \(Japanese/Chinese/Korean simultaneous interpretation\)](#)
- 2) [Asian Cultural Dialogues: "On the Margins" \(English\)](#)
- 3) [Smart and Kind Machines for a Better Life: "AI and the Future of Human Happiness" \(English\)](#)
- 4) ["The Future of Renewable Energy in Tohoku Region of Japan" \(Japanese/English simultaneous interpretation\)](#)
- 5) ["Asian Art Networks through the Lens of 'Mobility' of People and Objects" \(Japanese\)](#)

● Round Tables

- 1) ["Diversity and Change from a Cross-disciplinary Perspective on History, Culture, and Language" \(Japanese\)](#)
- 2) ["Exploring Local-to-Local Across Border Schemes \(LLABS\)" \(English\)](#)



- 3) Islamic Culture and Japan: 1) [“Japan in the Lives and Futures of Young People from Muslim Cultural Backgrounds”](#); 2) [“The Translation of Japanese Literature in the Contemporary Middle East”](#) (Japanese)
- 4) [“Gazing at Displaced Works of Art”](#) (Japanese)

The opening ceremony took place at 4pm in Oshikawa Memorial Hall at Tohoku Gakuin University. Conference Chair Yasushi Akashi first delivered the opening declaration by video. This was followed by opening remarks from Naoki Atsumi, Executive Director of the Atsumi International Foundation, the organizer of the conference, and welcome remarks from Haruki Onishi, President of Tohoku Gakuin University, the co-host. To close, Sendai Mayor Kazuko Kori offered congratulatory remarks.

Hiroshi Naito, President of Tama Art University and an architect who was deeply involved in reconstruction efforts following the Great East Japan Earthquake, delivered the keynote speech entitled “Space and Distance.” He discussed the possibilities for architecture and the arts during a period of major social and cultural transformation driven by AI, and emphasized the role of art universities as sensors of change as well as the potential of new technologies to deepen mutual understanding between people and to close the space and distance between cultures with different underlying foundations. In the dialogue with participants that followed, he thoughtfully responded to a wide range of questions from the audience.

A welcome reception was then held in the courtyard of the campus, where participants enjoyed a performance by the Date Busho-tai samurai troupe and local Sendai cuisine. After the hour-long reception, participants chose between two restaurants to go to, and celebrated reuniting again at the AFC after two years.

⇒ [Program for the 8th Asia Future Conference](#)

The Asia Future Conference strives towards an international and interdisciplinary approach. Parallel sessions are grouped around topics such as “peace,” “environment,” and “innovation,” encouraging lively, multifaceted discussions that differ from those of conventional academic conferences.



Based on recommendations from the two chairs of each session, 48 Best Presentation Awards were selected.

⇒ [List of Best Presentation Award recipients](#)

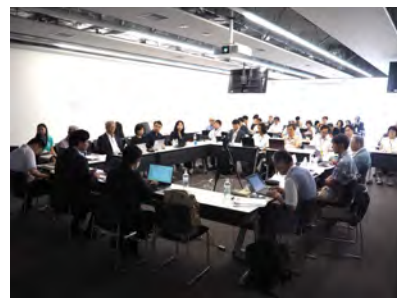
The Best Papers were selected in advance by the Academic Committee. A total of 141 papers, for which abstracts had been submitted online by September 20, 2025 and full papers by March 31, 2026, were divided into 13 groups and reviewed by a total of 46 reviewers. Six reviewers assessed each group according to the following criteria: (1) relevance to the conference theme, “Space and Distance”; (2) clear structure and readability; (3) clarity and persuasiveness of the argument; (4) originality in the approach to the issue; (5) international scope; and (6) interdisciplinarity. Each reviewer recommended two papers from the 9–10 papers in each group, and the 20 highest-ranked papers based on the aggregated results were selected as Best Papers.

⇒ [List of Best Papers](#)

The closing party took place at the Sendai Kokusai Hotel from 6.30pm on the 27th (Thursday). Hosted by two Atsumi fellows, the event included the Awards Ceremonies. The 20 recipients of the Best Paper Award received their awards from Executive Director Atsumi, while the 48 recipients of the Best Presentation Award were congratulated by President Onishi.

Finally, the venue for the 9th Asia Future Conference was announced. Wawan Mas’udi, Dean of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at Universitas Gadjah Mada in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, the host of the next conference, gave an invitation speech, followed by a video introducing the university. The celebration concluded on a lively note as participants joined in an Indonesian dance.

On the 28th (Friday), participants joined study tours focused on post-disaster reconstruction in Fukushima, Ishinomaki, and Rikuzentakata, a sightseeing tour of Matsushima, or a walking tour of Sendai. Student volunteers helped from planning the tours to accompanying and guiding participants on the day.



The 8th Asia Future Conference, “Space and Distance,” was organized by the Atsumi International Foundation Sekiguchi Global Research Association (SGRA), co-hosted by the Faculty of International Studies, Tohoku Gakuin University, supported by grants from the Sendai Tourism, Convention and International Association and the Takahashi Industrial and Economic Research Foundation, and sponsored by companies in Sendai. This year marked the fourth year since the establishment of Tohoku Gakuin University’s Faculty of International Studies, and more than 60 students from the faculty volunteered at the conference, making it an international event that the first cohort of students could experience before graduation. Kajima Corporation’s Tohoku Branch also supported fundraising from local companies and provided guest support.

⇒ [List of organizers, supporters and sponsors](#)

For the operation of the conference, Atsumi fellows formed the core of the Organizing Committee and Academic Committee and handled a wide range of responsibilities, from planning the forums and maintaining the website to selecting award recipients and photography. The AFC8 Organizing Committee of Tohoku Gakuin University’s Faculty of International Studies also worked together with the Tohoku and Niigata Team of H.I.S.’s Inbound Travel Sales Division to develop a variety of creative events that reflected the character of Sendai.

Thanks to the approximately 400 participants, all those who supported the conference, and the many volunteers who assisted in so many ways, we were able to hold the 8th Asia Future Conference successfully in a warm and lively atmosphere. We sincerely thank everyone who helped make the conference possible.

The Asia Future Conference aims to provide a venue for examining the many issues arising from globalization from diverse perspectives and across every dimension of society—not only through developments in science and technology and business analysis, but also through the environment, politics, education, the arts, and culture. With the support and cooperation of institutions that share these aims, the conference brings together SGRA members, researchers who studied in Japan and now teach at universities and other institutions around the world,



their students, and young and mid-career researchers interested in Japan, providing opportunities to exchange and present knowledge, information, ideas, and culture.

The 9th Asia Future Conference, “Social Transformation: Towards an Inclusive and Sustainable World,” will take place in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, from August 24th (Thursday) to 28th (Monday), 2028, and will be co-hosted by the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada. We look forward to your continued support and cooperation and, above all, your participation.

[Photos from the 8th Asia Future Conference \(highlights\)](#)

[Feedback for the 8th Asia Future Conference](#)

[The 8th Asia Future Conference Report \(with photos/in Japanese\)](#)

[The 8th Asia Future Conference Report \(English\)](#)

[Information about the 9th Asia Future Conference \(Yogyakarta, Indonesia\)](#)

Text: Junko Imanishi
SGRA Chief Representative, Asia Future Conference Organizing
Committee Chair