

**WIAS**Waseda Institute for Advanced Study
早稲田大学 高等研究所

Call for Papers and Fieldwork Participants

Unfamiliar Neighbours: Empowering Minority Heritage in East Asian Port Cities (Tokyo–Yokohama)

Venue: Tokyo and Yokohama | 16–18 January 2026

Conference Overview

Unfamiliar Neighbours: Empowering Minority Heritage in East Asian Port Cities re-centres the experiences of communities often placed at the margins—by ethnicity, religion, language, gender, class, or citizenship—within the cultural heritage of Asia’s port cities. Rather than treating heritage as a static inheritance curated by states or expert institutions, this conference foregrounds heritage-making as a living, negotiated practice. It asks how minorities create, safeguard, and reinterpret places, rituals, archives, and memories in ways that sustain pluralism, activate local agency, and re-connect port cities across the maritime world. Port cities such as Tokyo–Yokohama, Nagasaki, and Hirado have long been sites of encounter and improvisation. Guilds, clan associations, temple and church networks, burial societies, and trading houses stitched together dense cross-border relationships that both complemented and confounded imperial and national projects. Our recent collaborative research highlights how these ‘unfamiliar neighbours’ have acted as cultural brokers: foreign temples doubling as diplomatic nodes; cemeteries and ancestral halls of foreigners anchoring migrant belonging; religious sites of the ‘others’ negotiating visibility under alternating regimes of tolerance and surveillance. By tracing these practices, we move beyond extractive or celebratory heritage toward what we term participatory diversity—a pluralistic society formed not by intellectual dialogue but engagement in daily life. The conference deliberately pairs academic debate with site-based inquiry.

The field visit in Yokohama allows participants to first encounter and reflect on heritage as it is lived, negotiated, and mobilized on the ground. This shared experiential lens will inform and animate the next day’s panels at Waseda University, which set out conceptual and methodological frames—heritage as practice; minority governance beyond Western-centric DEI templates; archives-in-motion and ‘portable’ heritages; and the ethics of research with vulnerable or politically sensitive groups. By moving from observation to theorization, the program creates a dynamic dialogue between empirical engagement and analytical framing.

The hybrid conference will be conducted from 16th to 18th January, including online and onsite sections, together with a field visit to Yokohama Chinatown and Cemetery. Interested parties from academia, heritage practitioners, community leaders, and those engaged in policy-related work are warmly invited to apply as speakers or participants. A parallel conference and field visit workshop will also be held on 24th to 28th January in Nagasaki and Hirado. Interested participants should apply separately.

Themes

Main themes of the conference are, but not limited to, the following:

1-21-1 Nishiwaseda, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 169-0051, JAPAN <https://www.waseda.jp/inst/wias/>
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- Rituals and Intangible Heritage: religious festivals, ancestral rites, and intangible cultural practices.
- Transnational Networks and Maritime Exchange: minorities as cultural brokers in trade and migration.
- Pluralism and Participatory Diversity: Asian models of coexistence beyond Western-centric paradigms.
- Governance, Policy, and Heritage-Making: interactions between NGOs, governments, and UNESCO frameworks.
- Gender, Religion, and Identity: women and interfaith actors shaping resilience and community belonging.

Programme

- 16 Jan – Online Conference
- 17 Jan – Yokohama Field Daytrip: Guandi Temple, Tianhou Temple, and Chinese Cemetery (host: Yokohama Chinese Association)
- 18 Jan – Waseda Conference (Waseda, Tokyo)

Publication Opportunities

Selected submissions will be considered for an edited conference proceeding. Subject to external support, additional outputs may include multilingual heritage booklets, policy briefs, and digital resources co-produced with local communities.

Submission Guidelines

- Abstract: 250–300 words, plus 3–5 keywords
- Language: English
- Submit to: hungtakwai@aoni.waseda.jp
- Application form: <https://forms.gle/WPbbdsHEfyNE8Dsd9>
- Deadlines:
- Abstracts due: 7th November 2025
- Decisions: 14th November 2025
- Full papers for publication review (optional): 1st March 2026

Contact

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