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Hiroaki Aihara and James Raymo on the
Princeton University–University of Tokyo
strategic partnership

By Pooja Makhijani, Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies

Princenton University established a strategic partnership with University of Tokyo in 2013. In 2018, Princeton signed a five-year renewal of the partnership to further support collaborative research and teaching and boost interdisciplinary scholarship, and in 2020, appointed James Raymo, Henry Wendt III '55 Professor of East Asian Studies and professor of sociology as director. "One of the reasons that I came to Princeton was because of the partnership," he says. "I do research on Japan. My closest colleagues are all in Japan. This is an opportunity to build something in an area that I don't just do research in. It's something that means a lot to me professionally and personally."

The ongoing pandemic has both strengthened the partnership and tested its mettle. Raymo and his University of Tokyo counterpart, Executive Vice President Hiroaki Aihara, hope to now expand the partnership through their leadership. "I think we may have a chance to build something physical, an institution," Aihara says.

Princeton International spoke with Aihara and Raymo about their ambitious plans, engaging graduate and undergraduate students, and the importance of international teaching and learning.

What have been the highlights of institutional and personal collaboration so far?

JR: A highlight for me is research that the partnership has supported. The range of disciplines represented is phenomenal — 27 different collaborative projects involving researchers and students, with about \$2.5 million of support combined from both universities. There are not many places where there's that much investment in a specific partnership or collaborative relationship.

HA: Princeton University's "University of Tokyo Days" [a celebration of the partnership] are highlights for me. In 2014, Junichi Hamada, former president of the University Tokyo, visited Princeton. We met with [Princeton President Christopher L.] Eisgruber. The Princeton contingent visited Tokyo in 2016. This year, we had an online event. It was a success to me and to many people.

How do you think that these two institutions complement each other?

HA: We started this strategic partnership with Princeton because we share the same vision and we have been long time research collaborators. We both have faculty who work together on fundamental things — mathematics, physics, the humanities, including East Asian studies. Tokyo's entire Strategic Partnerships Project was created because of Princeton, our first partner.

JR: These are two absolutely top notch institutions packed with fantastically interesting and motivated researchers. The University of Tokyo is a place that emphasizes training and nurturing the next generation. That shared commitment to training, in addition to the shared love of the research, really makes a natural partnership.

How are you poised to expand this partnership through your joint leadership?

HA: We have this longstanding partnership — the exchange of researchers, the exchange of ideas and the exchange of students. We can connect with each other virtually anytime we want. My ambition is to create an actual [center] at Princeton or the University of Tokyo or even both. We're going to get over the pandemic one way or another. Now is the time to have something physical, some kind of real collaborative organization.



James Raymo, Henry Wendt III '55 Professor of East Asian Studies and professor of sociology.



Hiroaki Aihara, executive vice president, University of Tokyo.

JR: I 100% share that ambition. There are challenges. Not just the time difference, language difference, distance and all of that, but also the logistical hurdles of establishing some kind of joint collaborative center as opposed to supporting collaborative research projects on an individual and arguably *ad hoc* basis. It would also be great if there was an [online] platform or some kind of broader forum for regular interaction. If there were a platform where we could share research and training

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on a meaningful and broad basis, it would complement the physical research entities that Hiro is talking about. If you had those two together — the concrete institutional setting, and the more intangible sort of human, intellectual commitment — you've got something really special.

How do you hope to develop opportunities for students, both undergraduate and graduate students, to engage internationally?

HA: The exchange of the graduate students is already happening all the time through our research collaborations. We have several [undergraduate] students who go to Princeton and vice versa every

year [through study abroad and the exchange program]. The students who have the experience of visiting Princeton have come back saying that that experience changed their way of thinking, changed their life. We would like to push this program further and enlarge it.

JR: There's the Global Seminar in Tokyo and that's great. But it is taught on an irregular basis, so it would be nice if there was some more formalized mechanism for more equal exchange. We could do something using our newfound comfort with online communication to offer a course simultaneously at the University of Tokyo and at Princeton for students at both institutions. This could be a class in which one or more faculty at the University of Tokyo are teaching and one or more here are teaching. And it would be synchronous. It's not the same as being together, but these are the kinds of international experiences that can change students' lives.

Why is international collaboration and learning important?

HA: We have to have global diversity in order [for our] university to make progress. Princeton is more internationalized. At the University of Tokyo, most of the students are Japanese or at least speak Japanese, and most of the faculty is Japanese. We'd like to diversify the constituents of the university. [This] uniformity tends to limit the way you think, and limit the way you educate, the way you learn. That's not the way to make the university great. With research, if you just assemble people from the same background and let them do the research, that's not going to get you too far. Strategic partnerships help us to do [all of this].

JR: One thing that's pretty clear [from the experience of the pandemic] is that it's hard to think about any kind of question we care about that's limited to a particular place. It's made us realize that you never know what's going to happen next week or next year. In the absence of the kinds of strong ties that we can build in good times, when worst case scenarios like the pandemic happen, you just sort of close the doors and you're in a really bad situation. But having built strong cross-institutional connections, we can continue them just as we have [this last year and a half] on Zoom.

A Look Back

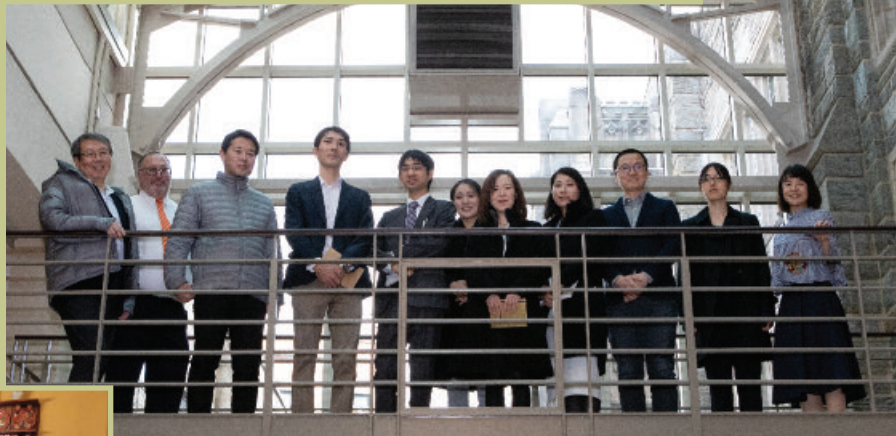
The Princeton University and the University of Tokyo strategic partnership is one of the pillars of Princeton's internationalization strategy. Here are some highlights from this long-standing transnational research and teaching collaboration.



PHOTO: Denise Applewhite, Office of Communications

Princeton University Provost Deborah Prentice (center) and Associate Provost Aly Kassam-Remtulla (fifth from left) stand in East Pyne Courtyard with a delegation from the University of Tokyo. The delegation, led by Executive Vice President and Professor of History Masashi Haneda (sixth from right), visited campus in December 2018 to mark the renewal of a strategic partnership between Princeton University and the University of Tokyo.

PHOTO: Denise Applewhite, Office of Communications



University of Tokyo representatives visit the Louis A. Simpson International Building.

PHOTO: Masashi Haneda, University of Tokyo

In 2018, Princeton University hosted "University of Tokyo Day" to welcome a delegation of administrators and faculty to New Jersey.

