A JOURNAL BY SISSA MEDIALAB

REVIEW

Building science communication capacity and community in Asia: lessons from the first PCST Symposium in Japan

Reviewed Conference

PCST Tokyo Symposium 2025 / 7th Japan Scicom Forum Conference
Strategic Development of Science Communication in Asia
Tokyo, Japan, 11–13 November 2025

Reviewed by
Qinlin Wu

Abstract

The PCST Symposium 2025, held in Tokyo from 11–13 November, marked the first PCST-related event hosted in Japan. The symposium explored the strategic development of science communication in Asia, focusing on education and training, as well as public engagement. Navigating challenges such as linguistic diversity, limited professional development, and underrepresentation in Western discourse, Asian science communicators are harnessing new platforms and networks to expand local engagement and international impact through culturally rooted narratives.

Keywords

Dewesternising science communication; Professionalism, professional development and training in science communication; Science communication and social justice

Received: 22nd January 2026
Accepted: 2nd February 2026
Published: 19th March 2026

1 ▪ Overview

The PCST Symposium 2025 was held in Tokyo from 11 to 13 November, marking the first PCST-related event hosted in Japan. Co-organised by the Japan Scicom Forum (JSF) and hosted at the Earth Life Science Institute (ELSI) during peak autumn foliage, the symposium brought together approximately 120 researchers and practitioners. Attendees came in roughly equal proportions from Japan, other Asian countries, and non-Asian regions, reflecting strong geographic diversity.

Under the theme "Strategic Development of Science Communication in Asia", discussions centred on two interrelated issues: education and training, and public engagement. The former addressed the development of a professional workforce, while the latter explored how to better connect with local communities with diverse needs.

While education and training opportunities are well established in Western contexts, they remain limited and unevenly distributed across Asia, raising concerns about local capacity and structural inequalities [Massarani et al., 2023]. Many Asian researchers report low confidence in public engagement and demand for skills development [Mizumachi et al., 2011; Ho et al., 2020; Tran Dong Thai et al., 2023]. In a pre-symposium online discussion, Euan McKay (Nagoya University) noted the lack of recognition of science communication as a professional field in Japan, a challenge echoed across much of Asia. In response, the symposium explored professionalisation pathways through both formal and informal education, including AI integration, practice-led training, and programme designs tailored to diverse regional contexts.

Public engagement in Asia was also critically explored. While deficit-model approaches persist, they are increasingly challenged by the rise of multimedia platforms and evolving societal expectations [Jia & Liu, 2014; Yan, 2025; Yutainten et al., 2025]. Participants shared practices from museums, research institutions, and government settings. Discussions also included how new media are reshaping knowledge production and circulation, and how locally grounded, co-creative practices can enhance science's social impact while challenging Western-centric communication models.

2 ▪ Symposium highlights

The symposium prioritised experience sharing and exchange, bringing together diverse colleagues to discuss both shared challenges and context-specific priorities in Asia. Alongside keynotes and panels, contributed talks and working groups allowed scholars and practitioners to exchange research findings and best practices.

In the keynote, Sujatha Raman (Australian National University) suggested that asking why the deficit model persists may not be the most appropriate question in Asian and African contexts. Instead, she encouraged the creation of new stories, which she called "cultured science" (Figure 1). Beyond process-oriented concepts such as dialogue and co-creation, content-driven narratives rooted in local histories and intertwined with culture can also be important. Such narratives can help construct shared meanings for addressing complex global challenges.

At the panel discussion *Past, Present, and Future of Science Communication*, panellists based in Japan, China, and South Korea reflected on shared challenges, including limited

Figure 1. Professor Kei Kano (Shiga University) joined the keynote, presenting a science communication case study on history, culture, and sustainability. Scientists introduced *kakishibu*, a traditional Japanese material made from fermented persimmon juice, demonstrating its water resistance while noting its limitations. Through this approach, the audience understood this thousand-year-old coating not only as cultural heritage, but also as a sustainable, eco-friendly material for modern use.

Figure 2. A scene from the panel on the past, present, and future of science communication. Experts from Japan, China, and South Korea highlighted several shared regional challenges, including limited professionalisation, language barriers, and the global underrepresentation of Asian science.

professionalisation, linguistic barriers, and the underrepresentation of Asian science globally (Figure 2). They also noted emerging opportunities: Professor Sook-kyoung Cho (Korea Institute of Energy Technology) described the rise of science YouTubers in South Korea, enabling timely and interactive public dialogue; Associate Professor Dongjing Kang (Shanghai Jiao Tong University) noted the increasing participation of women in STEM in China, observing that historically marginalised groups are now engaging more broadly with science. The panel stressed the need to integrate diverse knowledge systems and community participation into regionally grounded practices, rather than simply adopting Western models.

Figure 3. During the working group discussions, participants engaged in intensive collaboration over three 90-minute sessions, aiming to draft a white paper on the topic. They began by brainstorming challenges and best practices from their own work, writing ideas on colourful sticky notes. These were then discussed and reflected upon in depth.

Many locally embedded engagement cases were presented. Takahide Kato (Miraikan, Tokyo) introduced a project that positioned the museum as a platform linking research with public perspectives and expectations, illustrating how co-creation can shape futures. Lucky Brian Dlamini (South African Institute for Aquatic Biodiversity) demonstrated how African art and music can be integrated into engagement to build community connections and support biodiversity conservation. Seiko Ishihara-Shineha (Jissen Women's University) shared how game design can engage students with limited interest in science. These cases offer models of engagement that build capacity, promote inclusion, and advance social justice across diverse cultural settings.

An interesting attempt was the working group discussions (Figure 3). Across three 90-minute sessions, participants worked intensively on specific topics and collaboratively drafted white papers. One group on *Culturally Responsive Engagement* examined barriers related to language, exclusion, and epistemic injustice. Diverse perspectives enriched the discussions, offering space to reconsider how science communication approaches might be adapted to local contexts and cultural norms. Through collective reflection, the group emphasised that respectful and inclusive engagement requires not only recognising diverse identities but also embracing emotion, human interaction, and humility.

English as a lingua franca [Mauranen et al., 2010] remained a recurring theme throughout the symposium. While English enables cross-border dialogue, it also risks marginalising non-English speakers and obscuring issues best expressed in local languages. Its dominance in science and science communication [Swales, 1990] shapes discourse, ways of thinking, culture, and feeling [Harré, 2012]. This tension between connectivity and marginalisation demands further examination in Asian contexts.

One persistent challenge raised in the concluding panel was the prioritisation of outputs over outcomes in evaluation, pressuring communicators to meet numerical targets at the expense of strategic reflection on how activities generate meaningful public engagement, behavioural

change, or shifts in awareness. Feeding lived experience and practice back into evaluation criteria may help science communication generate greater social impact.

3 ▪ Reflections and looking ahead

Participants noted that while the working group format enabled rich and in-depth exchange, unclear frameworks and definitions of key concepts consumed valuable time. Establishing shared understandings in advance could improve efficiency and better support the goal of producing concrete outputs.

Time pressure was felt throughout the symposium. For instance, fourteen talks were condensed into a two-hour session, leaving little room for the Q&A, where follow-up interactions often lead to new ideas.

One observation was that in Japan and likely elsewhere in Asia, science communicators working primarily in English and those using local languages often operate in separate networks, shaped by different audiences and resources. This raises the question: could more frequent cross-network exchange of ideas and resources help resolve long-standing challenges, support multicultural futures locally, and amplify Asian voices globally?

PCST continues to foster a more cohesive Asian science communication community by providing spaces for exchange [PCST Network, 2025a], and the organisers intend to foster sustained collaboration and develop actionable pathways for the region [PCST Network, 2025b]. Positioned between the 2024 Suzhou symposium and the forthcoming 2027 Shanghai conference, the Tokyo meeting contributed culturally grounded perspectives that invite further reflection on how science communication in Asia might evolve both regionally and globally.

Notes

PCST Symposium Japan / JSF2025 website: https://www.japansci.com/conference/jsf25.

References

Harré, R. (2012). Methods of research: cultural/discursive psychologies. In R. Harré & F. Moghaddam (Eds.), *Psychology for the third millennium: integrating cultural and neuroscience perspectives* (pp. 22–36). SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446288542.n2

Ho, S. S., Looi, J., Leung, Y. W., & Goh, T. J. (2020). Public engagement by researchers of different disciplines in Singapore: a qualitative comparison of macro- and meso-level concerns. *Public Understanding of Science*, *29*(2), 211–229. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963662519888761

Jia, H., & Liu, L. (2014). Unbalanced progress: the hard road from science popularisation to public engagement with science in China. *Public Understanding of Science*, *23*(1), 32–37. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963662513476404

Massarani, L., Bray, H., Joubert, M., Ridgway, A., Roche, J., Smyth, F., Stevenson, E., van Dam, F., & de Abreu, W. V. (2023). The distribution of science communication teaching around the globe. *JCOM*, *22*(06), A05. https://doi.org/10.22323/2.22060205

Mauranen, A., Hynninen, N., & Ranta, E. (2010). English as an academic lingua franca: the ELFA project. *English for Specific Purposes*, *29*(3), 183–190. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esp.2009.10.001

Mizumachi, E., Matsuda, K., Kano, K., Kawakami, M., & Kato, K. (2011). Scientists' attitudes toward a dialogue with the public: a study using "science cafes". *JCOM*, *10*(04), A02. https://doi.org/10.22323/2.10040202

PCST Network. (2025a). "PCST and Asia" forum strengthens regional collaboration in science communication. https://www.pcst.network/pcst-and-asia-forum-strengthens-regional-collaboration-in-science-communication/

PCST Network. (2025b). PCST Japan Symposium 2025 — collective inquiry for a changing region. https://www.pcst.network/pcst-japan-symposium-2025-collective-inquiry-for-a-changing-region/

Swales, J. M. (1990). *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge University Press.

Tran Dong Thai, H., Van Thuy Qui, H., Vu Duy, T., Fisher, J., & Chambers, M. (2023). A study on biomedical researchers' perspectives on public engagement in Southeast Asia. *Wellcome Open Research*, *8*, 202. https://doi.org/10.12688/wellcomeopenres.19040.2

Yan, J. (2025). Science communication in the era of intelligent media — public cognition and opinion guidance: a review of the Peking University Panel Session at the MHM 2025. *The Journal of Medicine, Humanity and Media*, *3*(3), 146–155. https://doi.org/10.62787/mhm.v3i3.231

Yutainten, Kuswarno, E., Wahyudin, U., & Mirawati, I. (2025). Reframing government science communication in the digital era: a multi-model study of BRIN (Indonesia). *Publications*, *13*(3), 45. https://doi.org/10.3390/publications13030045

About the author

Qinlin Wu is a science communicator at Kyushu University, Japan, working to drive social change with integrative knowledge. She holds a BA from Tongji University, China, and an MSc from Imperial College London, UK. Her professional practice focuses on expanding the societal impact of science by integrating social sciences, humanities, and the arts, while developing strategies for community outreach and international engagement. Her current research interests include the interplay between science communication research and practice, cross-cultural communication, crisis and risk communication, and public engagement in ornithology.

wu.qinlin.545@m.kyushu-u.ac.jp @sherrin570

How to cite

Wu, Q. (2026). 'Building science communication capacity and community in Asia: lessons from the first PCST Symposium in Japan'. *JCOM* 25(01), R01. https://doi.org/10.22323/3781202602020858l0.

ISSN 1824-2049. Published by SISSA Medialab. jcom.sissa.it