

Conference Report and Intelligence Briefing

The 16th Asian Conference on Arts & Humanities (ACAH2025)
The 15th Asian Conference on Cultural Studies (ACCS2025)
The 16th Asian Conference on the Social Sciences (ACSS2025)

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Published by The International Academic Forum (IAFOR)

2025-VI

ISSN: 2759-4939

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Executive Summary

IAFOR held its 2025 Spring Conference Series from May 11 to 16 in Tokyo, Japan. This conference series brought together 586 delegates representing 343 institutions from 52 countries to The [16th Asian Conference on Arts and Humanities \(ACAH2025\)](#), [The 15th Asian Conference on Cultural Studies \(ACCS2025\)](#), and [The 16th Asian Conference on Social Sciences \(ACSS2025\)](#). The conference served as a platform for person-to-person diplomacy, with plenary programmes addressing how a 'culture of peace' and a sense of 'global citizenship' can be cultivated in an increasingly interconnected and simultaneously more polarised world. The keynote presentations at the conference covered a range of [IAFOR's Conference Themes for 2025-2029](#), with a primary focus on global challenges, the role of education and communication in addressing them, and various approaches to fostering peace and understanding in an increasingly complex global situation.

In the conference's opening keynote presentation '[Swimming Together: World-Making with Everyday Practices](#),' [Dr Rebecca Olive](#), Vice-Chancellor Senior Research Fellow in the Centre for Urban Research at [RMIT University](#), Australia, showed how culturally common everyday practices, such as swimming, can be powerful tools to foster meaningful human-ecological relationships and activate a sense of 'planetary care'. It challenges the enduring ideology of human exceptionalism over nature, which often guides policies and decision-making, and critiques what Dr Olive describes as 'capitalist sorcery' and 'colonial infrastructures of the heart' that alienate individuals from each other and the environment. The presentation suggested that experiences of vulnerability while immersed in the ocean can lead to a re-situation of humans within their ecological environment, encouraging a shift from an extractive mindset to one of reciprocity and care for the natural world.

The following panel discussion '[Peace Education in Times of Conflict](#)' addressed the significant challenges peace education currently faces amidst rising global conflicts, nationalism, and military build-up. [Professor Kiichi Fujiwara](#), a renowned political scientist at [Juntendo University](#), Japan and Professor Emeritus of the University of Tokyo, Japan, highlighted how war memory can be constructed and used in divisive ways, often focusing on 'our victims' while neglecting others, as seen in the contrasting Hiroshima, Yasukuni, and Nanjing discourse within Japan. [Professor Marie Lall](#) of [University College London](#), United Kingdom and [Keio University](#), Japan, shared a key point that education often functions as a state-used political tool to build cohesive national identities, which, perhaps unintentionally, can create antagonistic 'self and other' mindsets, hindering global interests and cooperation. The panel also touched upon the difficulty of achieving global cooperation on critical issues such as climate change due to key players prioritising national interests, as delivered by [Professor Jun Arima](#) of the [University of Tokyo](#), Japan and President of IAFOR.

The subsequent keynote presentation '[Turning the Faucet to Full: Expanding the Use of Bormann's Symbolic Convergence Theory \(SCT\) in Asian Humanities, Social Science, and Cultural Studies Research](#)' by [Professor Thomas G. Endres](#) of the [University of Northern Colorado](#), United States, introduced Ernest Bormann's Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) as a humanistic framework for scholars across various disciplines to assess and interpret symbolic narratives within communities. As a professor of communication and popular culture, he explained through SCT on how individuals make sense of a confusing world by sharing

dramatised narratives, which create a common 'symbolic reality' or 'rhetorical vision' for their adherents. The presentation detailed the theory's history, its key terminologies such as fantasy themes, dramatist personae, plot lines, scenes, sanctioning agents, fantasy types, and symbolic cues, and demonstrated how SCT can be applied to understand competing narratives and collective meanings, citing numerous examples from Asia-Pacific research.

How refugees and their futures are impacted by recent geopolitical conflicts was presented in the interview session titled '[Harnessing Technology and Artificial Intelligence for Displaced Population Empowerment](#).' This interview session featured Ms Suzan Hussein, a Syrian refugee who is now a PhD candidate at [Waseda University](#), Japan, and [Ms Fan Li](#) of [Stanford Social Innovation Review](#), China. The main narrative focused on the positive application of technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to empower forcibly displaced populations. It highlighted initiatives like Robo Co-op, a Japan-based NGO which provides digital upskilling and paid tech work opportunities to displaced youth, integrating them into the global digital economy. The presentation emphasised a 'whole of society approach' involving governments, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), private sectors, and NGOs to create new 'complementary pathways' for refugees beyond traditional solutions, focusing on education and employment pipelines.

On the first anniversary of [The Forum](#), we revisited the thematic discussion on Global Citizenship, focusing on the topic of '[Global Citizenship: Cultivating a Culture of Peace](#).' This open discussion session builds on the conference's plenary programme and explores how to cultivate a 'culture of peace' that transcends borders and ideologies. The Forum's narrative at ACAH/ACCS/ACSS2025 emphasised the importance of education, systems, and societal practices in shaping future global leaders and citizens. [Professor Umberto Ansaldi](#) of [VinUniversity](#), Vietnam, served as the respondent for the Forum alongside moderator Mr Apipol Sae-Tung of IAFOR, and together invited participants to discuss approaches, obstacles to, and opportunities for peace education in different settings. The Forum also asked the fundamental question of whether competition and conflict are inherent to human nature or if collaboration and peace are truly possible, recognising the ever-present tension between national interests and global challenges. While significant challenges exist and persist, collective commitment to work towards peace through education and shared understanding and values is more important than ever.



1. Introduction

Against a global backdrop of rising temperatures, decreasing biodiversity, escalating conflicts, and increased nationalism, the conference convened to explore one of the most pressing questions of our time: how can we cultivate a 'culture of peace' and a sense of 'global citizenship' in a world that is simultaneously more interconnected and polarised? This Conference Report and Intelligence Briefing summarises the ACAH/ACCS/ACSS2025 plenary programme, which brought together more than 580 international delegates from more than 50 countries to discuss the roots of modern divisions and how to foster a more just and collaborative global society. As [Dr Joseph Haldane](#), Chairman and CEO of IAFOR, noted in the conference's welcome address, the sessions were underpinned by an understanding of academic conferences as a vital form of 'person-to-person diplomacy,' particularly in an era where officials in international relations may be strained.

Dr Joseph Haldane, Chairman & CEO of IAFOR, delivered the Welcome Address




The discussions were structured around the [IAFOR Conference Themes for 2025-2029](#): Technology and Artificial Intelligence, Humanity and Human Intelligence, Global Citizenship and Education for Peace, and Leadership. This report weaves together the plenary sessions, which interrogated these themes from an interdisciplinary perspective. The keynote presentations explored how our ethical relationship with the planet can be reshaped through everyday embodied practices; the complex role that national memory and state-controlled education play in fuelling conflict; the methodological tools available for deconstructing societal narratives; and the innovative use of artificial intelligence to empower vulnerable populations. The programme concluded with an interactive, open format Forum discussion, where delegates shared their perspectives on these core issues, offering their own insights on the challenges and possibilities of building a more peaceful world.

2. Reorienting the Self: Finding Ecological Connection in Everyday Practices

The conference's first keynote, '[Swimming Together: World-Making with Everyday Practices](#),' was delivered by [Dr Rebecca Olive](#), Vice-Chancellor's Senior Research Fellow in the Centre for Urban Research at [RMIT University](#), Australia. Dr Olive opened the conference by framing its core challenge: in a world beset by rising temperatures, declining biodiversity, and escalating conflicts, we are dominated by an 'enduring ideology of human exceptionalism over nature.' This ideology, she argued, is a form of 'capitalist sorcery,' a term borrowed from Pignarre and Stengers, which spins magic spells to turn 'all things people, minerals, animals, and water into resources for our benefit.' These spells are so effective that they have become deeply embedded 'infrastructures of the heart,' alienating us from our environment and from each other. Drawing on ecofeminist and posthumanist theories, Dr Olive's presentation explored how this dominant worldview can be challenged not through abstract theory alone, but through direct, embodied, and everyday practices involving the environment.

Using recreational ocean swimming as a case study, Dr Olive presented the activity as an unexpected way to activate more ecological ethics of planetary care, or an ethical responsibility towards the Earth and its ecosystems. When a person swims, they leave the solid ground of their land-based element and become immersed in an environment where they are not in control. This immersion leads to a profound sense of interconnectedness with and vulnerability towards the environment. Dr Olive noted that swimmers often have encounters with ocean species while in the water, but they also come into direct contact with the negative impacts of human activities. While swimming, humans are forced to confront pollution, chemicals, and plastic

 Watch on YouTube

Rebecca Olive, Vice-Chancellor's Senior Research Fellow in the Centre for Urban Research at RMIT University, presents "Swimming Together: World-Making with Everyday Practices"



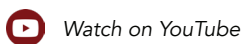
oils, among others, all of which are absorbed into bodies while swimming, just as we excrete them in return. This experience shatters the illusion that we are separate from our environment. Instead, it reveals that we are porous, permeable parts of a complex ecology. This feeling of vulnerability is central to swimming's power as a 'counter-spell' to capitalist sorcery, Dr Olive argued. She pressed that while some encounters are delightful, others are consequential, reminding us that we, too, are part of a food chain. Dr Olive shared her own transformative experience while swimming across a bay, where she was suddenly struck by the realisation of the sense of vulnerability and helplessness the activity can impose. This feeling of vulnerability did not push her away from the ocean; on the contrary, she explained that on 'that day, I realised that my fear of the ocean was not as strong as my willingness to be a part of it.'

By re-situating the human within the ecological system, we challenge the ideology of supremacy that has allowed humans to 'exploit nature with less constraint.' This disruption is particularly critical for those living in relative comfort, who can often afford to remain insulated from the worst effects of environmental degradation. In conclusion, Dr Olive positioned these everyday practices not as a panacea, but as an essential process. They are a way to cultivate the sensory and emotional grounding needed to truly grapple with the question of how to live well together on a shared and vulnerable planet.





From right to left: Professor Jun Arima, Professor Marie Lall, and Professor Kiichi Fujiwara



3. The Paradox of Peace Education: Navigating Memory, Mindset, and National Interest

The second plenary session confronted the challenges of fostering peace in a world marked by rising nationalism and military conflict via a panel discussion titled '[Peace Education in Times of Conflict](#).' The panel, moderated by [Professor Umberto Ansaldo](#) of [VinUniversity](#), Vietnam, brought together three distinguished speakers to address the topic from the perspectives of memory, mindset, and vision. The panellists were [Professor Kiichi Fujiwara](#), a renowned political scientist from [Juntendo University](#), Japan; [Professor Marie Lall](#), an expert in education and South Asian studies from [University College London](#), United Kingdom and [Keio University](#), Japan; and [Professor Jun Arima](#) of the [University of Tokyo](#), Japan and President of IAFOR, who is a seasoned climate negotiator for the Japanese government.

3.1. Memory and the Challenge of National Narratives

Professor Fujiwara opened the discussion by examining the role of memory, arguing that peace education is fundamentally complicated by the existence of competing and often irreconcilable national war narratives. Using post-war Japan as a case study, he outlined how the collective memory of the Second World War is not a single story but a battleground of conflicting discourses. As the dominant narrative within Japan, the Hiroshima discourse centres on Japanese civilians as the primary victims of the war and focuses on the universal threat of nuclear annihilation. This narrative was not immediately central to post-war identity, but became prominent in the 1950s after the US nuclear testing at Bikini Atoll and the subsequent release of the film [Godzilla](#) in 1954, which tapped into this widespread nuclear fear. While its warning against a future nuclear holocaust has universal appeal, its significant limitation is that by centering Japanese civilians as the primary victims, it often neglects the immense suffering of non-Japanese victims of Japanese military aggression across Asia. This selective focus creates a paradoxical situation where a universal message of peace is built upon a nationally-focused and incomplete historical foundation.



Clockwise from left: Professor Umberto Ansaldi, Professor Professor Kiichi Fujiwara, Professor Marie Lall

This victim-centric memory is challenged by two other powerful narratives that create a complex and fractured historical landscape. The first is the Nanjing discourse, which is more prevalent outside Japan, particularly in China, and focuses on the atrocities and massacres committed by the Japanese army, framing Japan as the primary aggressor. The second is the domestic and conservative Yasukuni discourse, which honours Japanese soldiers as heroes who made sacrifices for the nation, often running directly counter to narratives of Japanese culpability and victimhood. Professor Fujiwara argued that this clash of victim, aggressor, and national hero narratives is the fundamental obstacle to peace education in the region. He stressed that as long as memory remains confined within these national borders, where each side focuses only on 'our victim,' a shared understanding is impossible. Therefore, the most critical task for educators, he concluded, is to find ways to help students cross these borders of memory to build a more holistic and shared history of the past, because 'unless we can cross this national border, we cannot really discuss about peace education as it should be.'

3.2. Mindset and Education as a Political Tool

Professor Lall followed with a provocative analysis of mindset, contending that formal education, far from being a natural vehicle for peace, often functions as a state-used political tool, designed to build a cohesive national identity. She explained that the process of creating a unified national identity inevitably creates an 'us versus them' dynamic by defining the nation against an internal or external 'other'. Using her research in Myanmar, she illustrated how the state's promotion of a singular 'Burma and Buddhists' identity has actively marginalised over a hundred other ethnic nationalities, directly contributing to more than seven decades of violent

internal conflict. Similarly, in Pakistan, the national identity was officially narrowed to a specific form of Sunni Islam in the late 1970s, which not only created deep internal sectarian divisions but also institutionalised an adversarial 'enemy' narrative against neighbouring India. This pattern, she noted, is also visible in modern India, where the rise of Hindu nationalism has reshaped education to promote a Hindu-centric identity, thereby increasing tensions with both internal minorities and external neighbours.

Having diagnosed this problem, Professor Lall proposed a powerful antidote: shifting the educational focus from the content of national narratives to the process of critical thinking. Since state narratives are often biased, she argued that the most valuable skill an educator can impart is the ability for students to question and evaluate the information they are presented with, rather than passively accepting it. This skill is more crucial than ever in the modern era, where social media algorithms create echo chambers that 'feed you back the information within your own bubble, within your own belief system.' The classroom, therefore, represents one of the few remaining spaces where individuals can be exposed to ideas outside of their self-reinforcing bubbles. She acknowledged the difficulty of this task, especially in under-resourced countries where large class sizes and high-stakes exams force teachers to rely on rote learning just to help students pass, and 'to put critical thinking on the back burner.' Despite these challenges, she concluded that the ultimate goal for any educator committed to peace is to equip students with this lifelong skill of critical inquiry as the only sustainable defence against divisive propaganda.

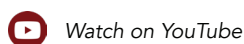
3.3. Vision and the Obstacles to Global Collaboration

Offering a perspective on 'vision,' Professor Arima drew stark parallels between the impasses in peace processes and his extensive experience in international climate negotiations. He positioned both peace and climate change as quintessential global challenges that can only be solved through concerted international collaboration, as their impacts respect no national borders. However, he detailed how this necessary collaboration is consistently undermined by a fundamental conflict in global vision, driven by differing national priorities. Using the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a metric, he showed that developed nations like Sweden and Japan can afford to rank climate action as a top priority. In contrast, major developing and emitting nations like China and India rank it much lower, 15th and 9th, respectively, prioritising more immediate domestic needs such as economic growth, poverty eradication, and healthcare. This misalignment means that countries are simply not on the same page when it comes to tackling global issues, preventing the formation of a unified global strategy.

Beyond the conflict of priorities between nations, Professor Arima identified the unwillingness at the domestic level to bear the necessary costs for meaningful change as another obstacle. He provided evidence from a Japanese trade union survey, which found that more than half of respondents do not accept shouldering the increased cost for tackling climate change. This public resistance creates immense political pressure, as seen in the recent electoral losses for Green parties in Europe, making it extremely difficult for democratic governments to implement unpopular but necessary policies. He noted how governments are engaging in 'completely schizophrenic actions,' such as Japan's policy of publicly committing to carbon neutrality while simultaneously providing massive subsidies for gasoline. For Professor Arima, this paints a realistic, if pessimistic, vision for the future, suggesting that progress on global issues like peace will likely be slow and constantly hampered by the powerful forces of domestic politics and national self-interest.



Professor Thomas G. Endres from the University of Northern Colorado, presented 'Turning the Faucet to Full: Expanding the Use of Bormann's Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) in Asian Humanities, Social Science, and Cultural Studies Research



Watch on YouTube

4. Deconstructing Our Shared Stories: A Method for Analysing Competing Realities

A powerful methodological framework for understanding the very narratives of conflict and community that defined the conference's thematic narrative is the Social Convergence Theory (SCT). [Professor Thomas G. Endres](#) from the [University of Northern Colorado](#), United States, gave a keynote presentation titled '[Turning the Faucet to Full: Expanding the Use of Bormann's Symbolic Convergence Theory \(SCT\) in Asian Humanities, Social Science, and Cultural Studies Research](#).' Beginning with the simple premise that 'humans are storytellers,' Professor Endres argued that for academic work to have impact, it must be grounded in a solid theoretical framework that provides 'weight and credence to external reviewers who now see our work as theoretically grounded and valid.' He introduced SCT as one such tool, explaining that while a small stream of research using the theory has emerged from the Asia-Pacific region over the last two decades, his aim was to 'turn the faucet to full' by demonstrating its broad applicability.

Professor Endres explained that SCT is a humanistic framework that assumes that individuals share dramatic narratives that create a common symbolic reality called a rhetorical vision for their adherents, in order to make sense of this confusing and chaotic world. The goal for a researcher using SCT is to analyse the content of these shared stories to understand how a group's consciousness is formed. This analysis involves a 'fantasy theme' analysis, which deconstructs narratives into their core components:

1. **Dramatist Personae:** The characters who populate the story, including identifiable heroes (protagonists) and villains (antagonists).
2. **Plotlines:** The action of the narrative, or what the characters are doing.
3. **Scene:** The setting or social backdrop where the story takes place.
4. **Sanctioning Agent:** A crucial but often overlooked element, this is the underlying authority or motive that legitimises the narrative, such as a higher power, a historical mandate, or an appeal to common sense.

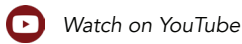
Throughout his presentation, Professor Endres provided examples of SCT's application in recent Asian-Pacific research, with one such example demonstrating its versatility in analysing the competing rhetorical visions surrounding China's global image. China's domestic online forums construct a narrative of China as a powerful, yet civilised nation, while overseas forums often frame China through a lens of 'negative Orientalism.' SCT has also been used to understand the creation of rhetorical communities in pop culture, such as the global fandom for the Korean boy band [BTS](#), who refer to themselves as the 'BTS Army' and use specific inside jokes and 'symbolic cues' to foster a sense of belonging.

The framework is also suited for analysing stories of trauma and social justice. Professor Endres highlighted a study on the survivors of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, where shared storytelling in small groups became a therapeutic tool for memorialising loved ones and the past, clarifying conflicting emotions, reappraising reality and life values, and rebuilding community. In another example, he detailed a study of Filipino 'comfort women,' where SCT was used to analyse their oral histories, identifying the Japanese imperial government as the villain and identifying their sanctioning agent in the belief that sharing their stories was essential so that the 'youth of today know the truth so that it doesn't happen again.' Professor Endres positioned SCT as more than just an academic exercise, but a vital tool for deconstructing the very 'us versus them' narratives that fuel division, offering a structured method for understanding the stories that bind us together and tear societies apart.



5. From Displacement to Digital Work: Forging New Pathways with Technology and AI

An interview session titled '[Harnessing Technology and Artificial Intelligence for Displaced Population Empowerment](#),' featured Ms Suzan Hussein, a Syrian PhD candidate at [Waseda University](#) and a representative of the social enterprise Robo Co-op, in conversation with [Ms Fan Li](#) of the [Stanford Social Innovation Review](#), China. The interview offered a powerful and practical case study in social innovation, framing its work at the intersection of two major global trends: the record-breaking number of over 122 million forcibly displaced people worldwide and the projected global shortfall of 87 million digital workers by 2030.



Ms Hussein began by clarifying that traditional 'durable solutions' for refugees, such as repatriation, local integration, and resettlement, are often insufficient to meet the scale and complexity of the current crisis. In response, a new framework of 'complementary pathways' has emerged, offering legal, safe, and dignified avenues for displaced people to move to a third country through channels like education, family reunification, and, most pertinent to this discussion, labour mobility. Robo Co-op is a pioneering example of this labour mobility pathway: it is a Japanese social enterprise that provides intensive digital skills and AI training to refugees and other displaced individuals, connecting their talent directly with the needs of the global economy. This model reframes a humanitarian crisis as a human capital opportunity, built on a sustainable and collaborative framework. After completing a three-to-six-month training programme, participants are empowered to become trainers for the next cohort. As Ms Hussein explained, 'they will become the trainers themselves, and they train other groups,' creating a scalable, peer-to-peer system of empowerment. This initiative requires a 'whole of society approach,' bringing

Ms Suzan Hussein (left), and Ms Fan Li (right)





Ms Suzan Husseini (left), and Ms Fan Li (right)

together governments that provide legal visas, private sector partners who offer training and employment opportunities, and NGOs that provide on-the-ground support. The success of this model was highlighted through two recent cases where individuals from Myanmar and Syria were trained and successfully relocated to Japan for work in the tech sector.

Despite these successes, Ms Husseini emphasised that significant challenges remain. For refugees resettling in a new country like Japan, the two largest obstacles are often the language barrier and securing a stable legal status that allows them to work and live with dignity. The interview highlighted the human-centric philosophy driving the work, where participants are not forced into a career path, but a choice they made within their own capabilities. Ms Husseini concluded the session by reiterating the humanity of displaced persons, and reminded the audience that 'refugees are not numbers, they're human. They have skills. I myself [am] a person of refugee background. So when I'm talking here, I talk as a human.' She ended by invoking the core principle of refugee advocacy: 'nothing about us without us,' making a case for solutions that are not just for, but also by and with, the communities they aim to serve.



6. The Forum: The Possibility for Peace

The final plenary session was The Forum discussion titled '[Global Citizenship: Cultivating a Culture of Peace](#).' Shifting from formal presentations to an interactive, open discussion, The Forum discussion was moderated by Mr Apipol Sae-Tung of IAFOR, Japan and responded to by [Professor Umberto Ansaldi](#) of [VinUniversity](#), Vietnam. The Forum was designed to synthesise the conference's core themes by inviting delegates to directly grapple with the practical and philosophical questions of building a more peaceful world. The session turned the audience into active participants, using a series of questions to explore the roles of education, competition, and human nature in the pursuit of peace.


The session opened with the direct question, 'Are you teaching or applying some form of peace education in your classroom?'. The responses from the audience were varied, with the live poll showing a near-even split between delegates who did, did not, or were unsure about the definition of peace education. Those who did so provided diverse and practical examples of peace education in action.

“ I do teach about peace education, specifically about critical peace education. Critical peace education thinks about positive ideas for peace to uphold equity, fairness, and justice for all.

- A delegate from Finland

“ I'm a native New Zealander. I work with our tribal organisation, which is looking at the reclamation of our language and the revitalisation of our cultural practices. I focused on education and peace, reconnecting our children back to nature. [If they] disrespect the different aspects of nature, soon they will disrespect humans as well.

- A delegate from New Zealand

 Watch on YouTube

On the other hand, delegates who did not feel they were applying peace education often cited the personal and global challenges that made such work feel difficult or even impossible.

“ I answered ‘no’ because the second I chose to do a PhD, I knew that I’m going to face an unpeaceful life. It’s going to be three to four years of pain and sorrow. The current situation, as well, with the wars and conflicts that are happening in the world, it’s very hard to be hopeful. There are human rights violations in the world, and we cannot do anything about it. How shameful we are.

- A delegate from Germany

Professor Ansaldo suggested that whether we are aware of it or not, peace education is already at work, both in terms of theory and epistemology. The most important part of peace education is in how teachers apply the peace education framework in their practices:

“ It’s not just about history or culture or languages. It’s also about how we teach chemistry, physics, everything. Everything that we learn has applications both in constructive positive and destructive negative. [To bring] peace education in practice is to teach the students how they can think about applying the knowledge they acquired for peaceful means.



6.1. The Role of Universities in Peace Education

Continuing the conversation, the delegates were asked: 'Are universities today in a good position to engage in peace education, or is it too late by the time students join them?' The live poll results were again almost evenly split, reflecting a deep ambivalence that played out in the subsequent discussion. The pessimistic viewpoint was that by the time students reach university, their core values and worldviews have already been solidified by years of primary and secondary education, as well as their social environments. This argument suggested that universities are often too late to counteract the formative experiences of students who have been raised in environments of violence or who have already internalised nationalist educational narratives.

“ *[When students] go to school, they have to go through metal bars, and the old school is like a, like a prison... I don't think those children come to university [and are able] to learn about peace, because the only thing they know is violence.*

- A delegate from South Africa

Conversely, other delegates argued that the university is the ideal, and perhaps the first, opportunity for this work. It is contended that higher education is a critical space where students, especially those from homogeneous backgrounds, encounter true diversity of thought, culture, and belief for the first time. This initial exposure makes the university a powerful environment for introducing concepts of global citizenship and fostering the skills required for cross-cultural dialogue and understanding.

“ *My students come from a monolingual and monocultural background... this is their first encounter with diversity... and this is what teaches them to accept diversity, to learn about other cultures and to respect them. So I do not think it's too late.*

- A delegate from Vietnam

“ *It's never too late to engage, and not necessarily if you have a formal classroom. Just engage [the students] with the community and talk to them about what peace is.*

- A delegate from Romania

Professor Umberto Ansaldi
served as respondent for The
Forum session





6.2. Competition versus Collaboration

The Forum then explored the systemic tension between two fundamental modes of human interaction, asking: 'To make the world a more peaceful place, fewer competitions or more potlucks?' The 'potluck' was offered as a metaphor for a collaborative community where everyone contributes and shares. The discussion revealed a complex view where, although collaboration was the aspirational choice, many delegates acknowledged the reality and even necessity of competition. This debate centred on whether competition is an inherent part of human nature that must be managed, or an outdated survival instinct that should be replaced by collaboration in a modern, interconnected world. The delegates who argued for a balance often stressed that successful collaboration requires responsibility and cultural awareness.

“ *I am in the middle of a new culture. [In a potluck,] you may bring [food that has] this entire identity with you, but you also need to consider the beliefs, traditions of the people that you will be offering your ideals to. It's fun to share, but it's smarter to ask first.*

- A Filipino delegate working in Taiwan

Other delegates contended that competition is not only natural but can be a positive force. It can be a healthy driver for personal excellence and, especially in the realm of sports, a source of national pride and a safe outlet for human instincts. Another pragmatic view suggested that collaboration can be a strategic tool for competition, citing the example of nations forming alliances to defend themselves in a conflict.

“ *If it's an academic or sports competition, then I'm all for it. I think that no matter how much we are all for peace, we need a little bit of spice. Sports competitions are a great relief for all the drive for achievement. I would say both [competition and collaboration], but we need some kind of balance.*

- A delegate from Taiwan



IAFOR's Apipol Sae-Tung (left)
moderated The Forum session

“ What we need to teach our students is how to collaborate so that we can, in fact, compete. It is human nature to want to compete. If we look at what’s happening in Ukraine, for example, Ukraine is having to collaborate in order to compete against Russia...Competition is, I think, with us forever. It’s how we make a framework that we can collaborate, so that we can compete effectively, and win.

- A delegate from New Zealand

Professor Ansaldo offered a strong counterpoint to these views, arguing that while competition has evolutionary roots, our obsession with it is counterproductive in a world that has sufficient, albeit poorly distributed, resources for all. He argued that systems like university rankings wrongly incentivise a competitive mindset over the collaborative spirit needed to solve global problems.

6.3. The Possibility of Peace

a The final and most fundamental question posed to the forum was, ‘Is peace at all possible, or is conflict part of human DNA?’ This philosophical question elicited the most divided responses, revealing a mix of profound pessimism and determined hope. The pessimistic view, shared by several delegates, holds that human history is defined by an unbreakable cycle of war, followed by a brief peace where the hard-won lessons are forgotten by subsequent generations, leading inevitably back to violent conflict. This sense of despair was heightened by the modern reality of being able to witness atrocities unfold in real-time on television and social media, while feeling powerless to intervene.

“ I think we can create systems of peace, but unfortunately, for a limited time. You have two, three generations after, they forget, and they do the whole thing all over again.

- A delegate from Japan

Others countered this pessimism by reframing the goal. This more hopeful perspective argued that while conflict, in the sense of disagreement, friction, and competing interests, may indeed be an inherent part of human DNA, violent conflict is not. The true aim of peace education, therefore, is not the impossible task of eliminating all conflict, but the achievable goal of building systems for 'peaceful conflict,' where disagreements are managed through dialogue, justice, and mutual respect. This requires actively working to dismantle the factors that lead to violence.

“ We must look at the factors that interrupt peace education to know it and to tackle them, for example, mistrust of the others, peace agreements, treaties, demonisation and dehumanisation of the others... The other thing is the conflict of values. We ought to understand the universal human value, and not to be driven to nationalism and other things that drive us away from peace.
- A delegate from Thailand

“ I want to answer yes for both. I think peace and conflict is part of human DNA, but I believe in peaceful conflict. So I see peace and conflict as something that coexists and is eternal. The important thing is no violent conflict. There's a possible peaceful world in terms of no violent conflict, but conflict will be with us forever.
- A delegate from Japan

The Forum concluded on this note of dynamic tension. While no simple consensus was reached, the vigorous debate itself served as a model for the very type of 'peaceful conflict' that many delegates saw as the most realistic and hopeful path forward.





A delegate poses for a photo with keynote speaker Professor Rebecca Olive (left) and IAFOR Vice-President Emeritus Professor Dexter Da Silva (right)

7. Conclusion

In a world facing escalating conflicts and social polarisation, the conference addressed the urgent challenge of how to cultivate a culture of peace and global citizenship. The plenary programme diagnosed the roots of modern division, identifying an enduring ideology of human exceptionalism over nature and nationalist education systems as key drivers of conflict. The competing war memories, where nations adhere to their own narratives of victimhood or heroism, together with state-driven education that creates an 'us versus them' dynamic by promoting a single national identity, have made it difficult to achieve a shared understanding.

Against this backdrop, the presentations offered perspectives for change. One approach focused on reorienting the self through embodied practices, for example, using swimming to foster a sense of vulnerability and ecological connection that can act as a 'counter-spell' to destructive ideologies. Another powerful pathway involved social innovation, such as the initiative that harnesses AI and technology to empower displaced populations, turning a humanitarian challenge into an economic opportunity. The conference also introduced Symbolic Convergence Theory as a framework to deconstruct the elements of heroes, villains, settings, and plotlines that shape the competing narratives that fuel division.

The Forum discussions crystallised the core discussions of the conference on the debate between competition and collaboration. It is here where the conference's person-to-person diplomacy took place, bringing together scholars from diverse backgrounds to engage in respectful debate: a potent force for building the shared understanding necessary for a more collaborative global society. While some delegates argued that competition is a natural human drive, a strong counter-argument was made that our modern world requires a fundamental shift toward collaborative systems to solve global challenges like climate change and conflict. While no simple answer emerged, the consensus pointed toward a determined pursuit of 'peaceful conflict,' where disagreements are managed through dialogue and mutual respect, not violence.

This dialogue sparked during the ACAH/ACCS/ACSS2025 continued to develop at [The Paris Conference on Education \(PCE2025\)](#) and [The Paris Conference on Arts & Humanities \(PCAH2025\)](#). The Paris conference further addressed the challenges around interdisciplinarity we have witnessed at this Tokyo conference, from the need for peace education to the role of technology and the deconstruction of divisive narratives. These ongoing conversations reflect our mission of international, intercultural, and interdisciplinary discussion; our conference programmes are carefully curated around this mission and our conference themes, contributing to the dissemination of academic knowledge, everyday knowledge, and public policy that address the complex task of building a more just and peaceful world.





A delegate poses for a photo with Ms Emiko Miyashita (left) and Ms Kyoko Uchimura (right) of the Haiku International Association

8. Networking and Cultural Programme

IAFOR Conferences include a Networking and Cultural Programme, with venue-specific events designed to provide spaces where participants can gather, connect, and make new contacts within the IAFOR network. Conference Networking and Cultural Events are held in professional and social settings within and outside the conference venue. The inclusion of such events at a joint conference such as ACAH/ACCS/ACSS2025 is integral to IAFOR's mission of fostering international, intercultural, and interdisciplinary collaborations, as they provide spaces where attendees from various areas of research can meet and mingle outside of their respective disciplines.

Information Session

A new addition to the IAFOR pre-conference programme is the Information Session, which provides conference guidance for delegates old and new. Led by IAFOR's Academic Operations Manager Melina Neophytou and Marketing Manager Matthew Chima, the Information Session prepares delegates to present, publish, and participate in the event, including presentation tips and information regarding publishing opportunities with IAFOR. This session also offers a chance to explore opportunities for deeper engagement before the plenaries, whether through networking with fellow delegates or getting involved more with IAFOR.

Haiku Workshop

The Tuesday plenary programme featured the cultural event 'What is Haiku?', an interactive haiku workshop led by Ms Emiko Miyashita and Ms Kyoko Uchimura, practising members of the [Haiku International Association](https://www.iafor.org). Delegates were able to learn about the traditions and global practise of haiku, a type of short form poetry originating from Japan. With Miyashita-sensei and Uchimura-sensei's guidance and encouragement, delegates developed their own haiku poetry and presented their work on the IAFOR stage during the workshop.



Pre-Conference Cultural Event: Kimono Dressing Demonstration

A Kimono Dressing Demonstration was included in the pre-conference programme, led by local kimono instructor Satoko Yamada, a specialist in traditional kimono dressing. Delegates who attended the free demonstration were given an in-depth overview of the history and traditions of Japanese kimono through Yamada-sensei's expert instruction. Yamada-sensei explained the rules and intricacies of kimono dressing, particularly the gala style for both men and women, with the aid of live models. The event included a Q&A session for audience members to pose questions and engage with Yamada-sensei as she demonstrated each step. IAFOR is humbled to have made connections with locally-renowned instructors who are happy in turn to share their craft with us, as their contributions support us in creating a well-rounded programme.

Welcome Reception

The Welcome Reception followed the pre-conference programme at [The Public Red Akasaka](#), a gastropub located a few minutes' walk from the conference venue. An IAFOR conference staple, the Welcome Reception is always free for delegates to attend, and provides a relaxed networking space where delegates can become better acquainted with each other. Participants were able to reconvene with colleagues they met during the pre-conference workshops and meet new faces at the event. Creating such spaces for delegates to network and form long-lasting connections within our conference programme is essential to our conference planning.

Conference Dinner

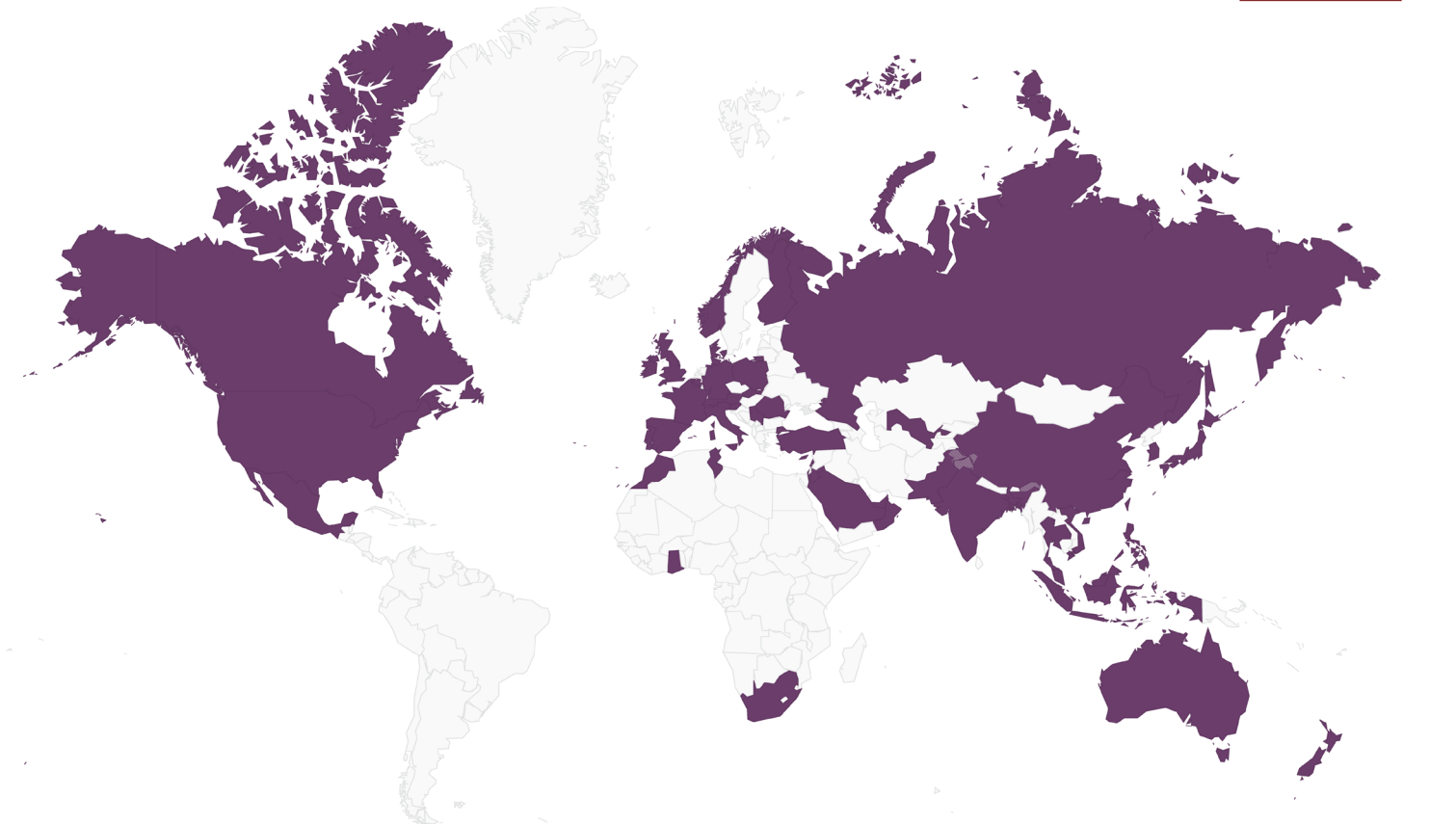
The Conference Dinner provides an exclusive event within the conference programme where plenary speakers, IAFOR Executives, and VIP guests can partake in more in-depth conversations with the participants. IAFOR Conference Dinners are always held at spectacular venues, offering high-quality dining, unique cultural experiences, and a welcoming platform for attendees to connect.

The Conference Dinner for our Tokyo Conference Programme was once again hosted at [Shunju Tameikesanno](#), a stylish Japanese izakaya restaurant with spectacular views of Tokyo's metropolitan skyline. The event has proven to be popular, with tickets consistently selling out. Shunju Tameikesanno's seasonally-inspired course menu specialises in incorporating seasonal produce and modern flavours into traditional Japanese dishes, making each dining experience unique.





Key Statistics



international intercultural interdisciplinary

One of the greatest strengths of IAFOR's international conferences is their international and intercultural diversity.

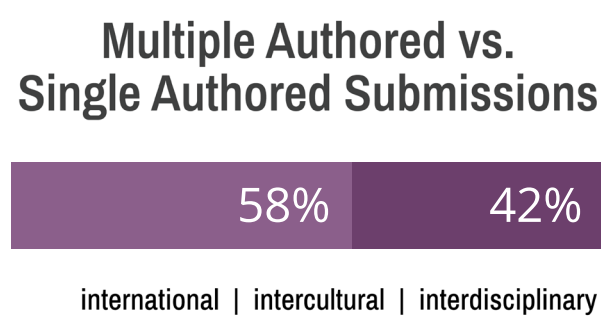
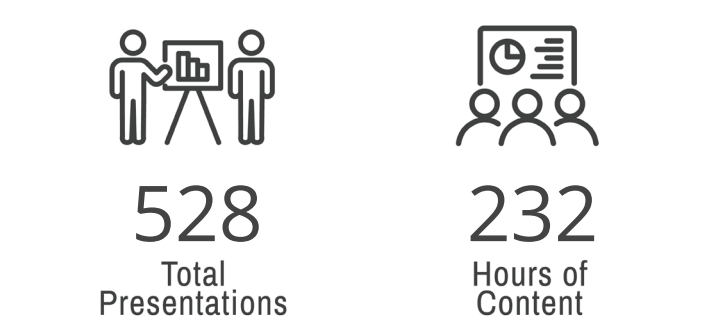
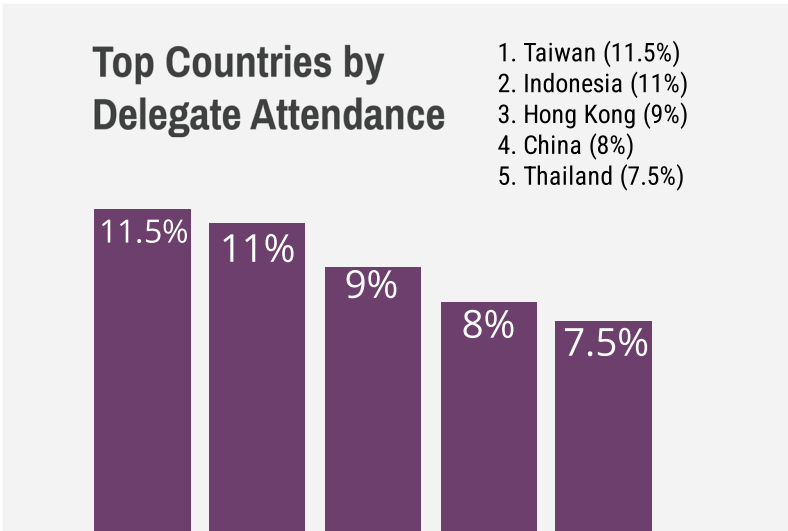
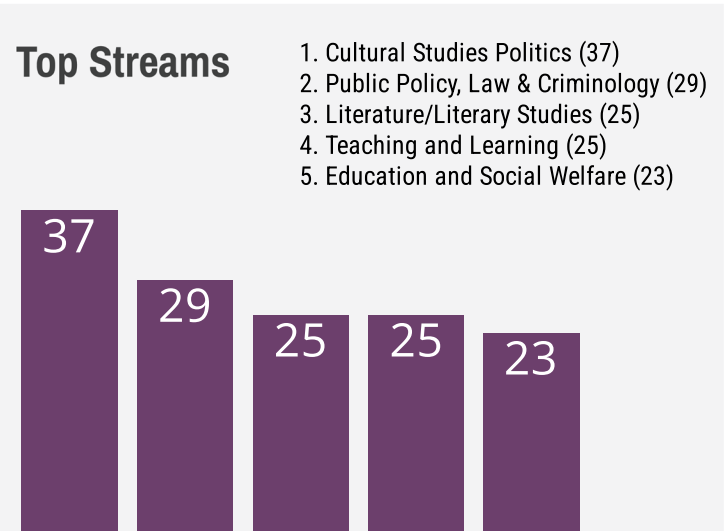
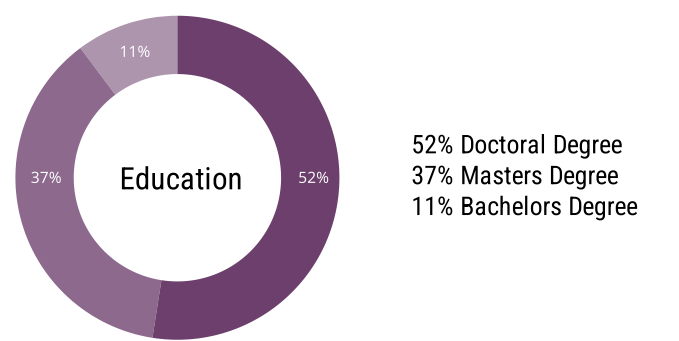
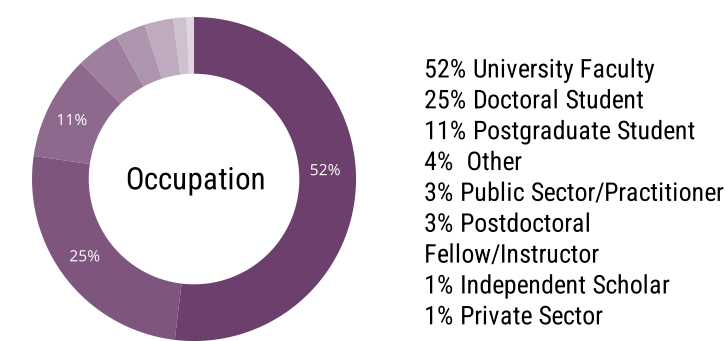
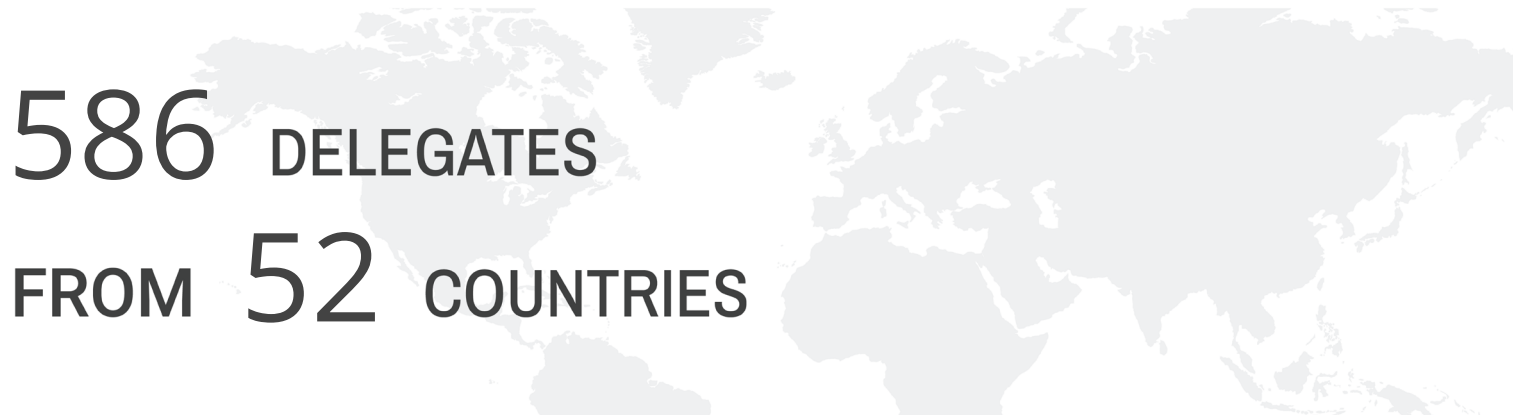
ACAH/ACCS/ACSS2025 has attracted 586 delegates from 52 countries

Taiwan	66	Australia	7	Cyprus	2	Mexico	1
Indonesia	63	Saudi Arabia	7	Germany	2	Morocco	1
Hong Kong	54	South Africa	7	Italy	2	Norway	1
China	47	New Zealand	6	Portugal	2	Romania	1
Thailand	43	Poland	6	Slovakia	2	Serbia	1
United States	41	Switzerland	5	Turkey	2	Slovenia	1
Philippines	37	Finland	4	Austria	1	Tunisia	1
Japan	35	Russia	4	Belgium	1		
India	28	Vietnam	4	Brunei	1		
United Kingdom	22	Israel	3	Denmark	1		
Malaysia	15	Pakistan	3	France	1		
Canada	12	Spain	3	Ghana	1		
Singapore	10	United Arab Emirates	3	Ireland	1		
South Korea	10	Uzbekistan	3	Jordan	1		
Oman	8	Bangladesh	2	Lebanon	1		
						Total Attendees	586
						Total Onsite Presentations	385
						Total Online Presentations	143
						Total Countries	52

ACAH/ACCS/ACSS2025

Key Statistics

Date of Creation: June 13, 2025



ACAH/ACCS/ACSS2025 Conference Survey Results

international
intercultural
interdisciplinary

iafor

Date of Creation: June 23, 2025

Your feedback plays a vital role in shaping the future of IAFOR conferences. Guided by the Japanese principle of 'kaizen' – a commitment to continuous, incremental improvement – we strive to enhance the delegate experience. The data presented in this report was collected from 107 respondents out of 586 delegates within 30 days of the conclusion of the event.



Recommendation

84%

of delegates would recommend the IAFOR event to a friend or a colleague



Returnees

64%

of delegates have attended an IAFOR conference before

Pre-Conference Communication & Support Rating

Overall Pre-Conference Support

5.0



Registration Process

5.0



Submission & Review System

5.0



Conference Satisfaction

89%

of delegates are satisfied or content with the event

"This was a brilliantly organised conference. I was struck by the genuine appreciation shown to every participant. The keynotes were inspiring and set a warm, thoughtful tone from the start."

Conference Experience Rating

Overall Conference Experience

4.0



Hospitality & Ambience

4.0



Overall Networking Experience

4.0



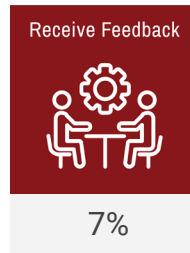
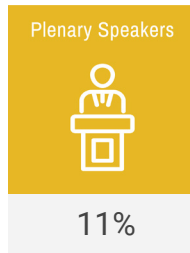
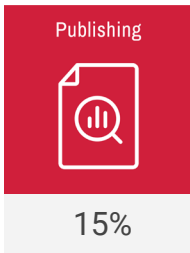
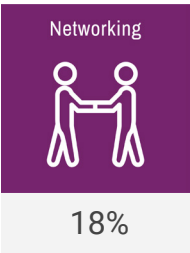
Welcome Reception

5.0



Delegates' Motivation for Attending

*Percentage based on 294 marked options from 107 responses



Academic Quality Rating

Plenary Sessions & Featured Presentations

4.0



Parallel Presentations

4.0



Contents of the Conference

4.0



international | intercultural | interdisciplinary

The post-conference survey sent to ACAH/ACCS/ACSS2025 attendees included the questions below

Before the conference (Q1-Q5): Evaluating submission, registration, and communication processes	
Q1	Please rate your experience with the submission and review system.
Q2	Please rate the quality of the information provided on the website.
Q3	Please rate the quality of the information provided in the emails you received.
Q4	Please rate the registration process.
Q5	How would you rate the overall pre-conference support you received?
Academic Quality (Q6-Q8): Assessing plenary sessions, parallel presentations, and content relevance	
Q6	Please rate the quality of the plenary sessions and featured presentations.
Q7	Please rate the quality of the conference parallel presentations.
Q8	Please rate the overall content of the conference (academic quality, relevance, diversity).
Conference Experience (Q9-Q13): Measuring hospitality, networking opportunities, and overall satisfaction	
Q9	Please rate the conference hospitality and ambience.
Q10	Please rate the opportunities to connect with fellow participants during the conference.
Q11	Please rate your overall networking experience at the conference.
Q12	Please rate your overall conference experience.
Q13	Considering your complete experience at our conference, how likely would you be to recommend us to a friend or a colleague?

We have received 107 responses out of 586 delegates. Below is an overview of the results.

Overall Score by Attendee Types

Questions		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13
Scales		(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-10)
Overall (n=107)	Avg./5	4.45	4.42	4.45	4.47	4.43	4.25	4.08	4.22	4.30	4.07	4.03	4.30	8.37
	Avg.%	88.97	88.41	88.97	89.35	88.60	85.05	81.68	84.49	85.98	81.50	80.56	85.98	83.74
	Median	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	9.00
Onsite (n=73)	Avg./5	4.44	4.38	4.44	4.49	4.41	4.25	4.08	4.21	4.33	4.19	4.19	4.32	8.25
	Avg.%	88.77	87.67	88.77	89.86	88.22	84.93	81.64	84.11	86.58	83.84	83.84	86.30	82.47
	Median	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	9.00
Online (n=28)	Avg./5	4.46	4.46	4.43	4.43	4.50	4.21	4.00	4.21	4.14	3.64	3.46	4.18	8.54
	Avg.%	89.29	89.29	88.57	88.57	90.00	84.29	80.00	84.29	82.86	72.86	69.29	83.57	85.36
	Median	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.50	4.00	9.50
Hybrid (n=6)	Avg./5	4.50	4.67	4.67	4.33	4.33	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.67	4.67	4.67	4.67	9.17
	Avg.%	89.29	89.29	88.57	88.57	90.00	84.29	80.00	84.29	82.86	72.86	69.29	83.57	85.36
	Median	4.50	5.00	5.00	5.00	4.50	5.00	4.50	4.50	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	10.00

Data as of June 16, 2025, 10:00 JST

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Total	Total
(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-10)	70	%
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4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	3	3	4	6	53	75.71
4	5	4	3	3	4	4	4	5	4	3	3	6	52	74.29

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Total	Total
(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-5)	(1-10)	70	%
4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	3	3	4	7	51	72.86
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4	4	3	4	4	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	8	51	72.86
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3	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	3	2	2	3	3	31	44.29
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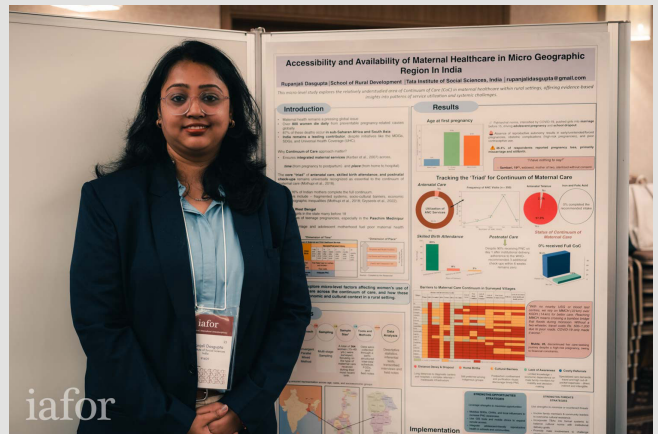
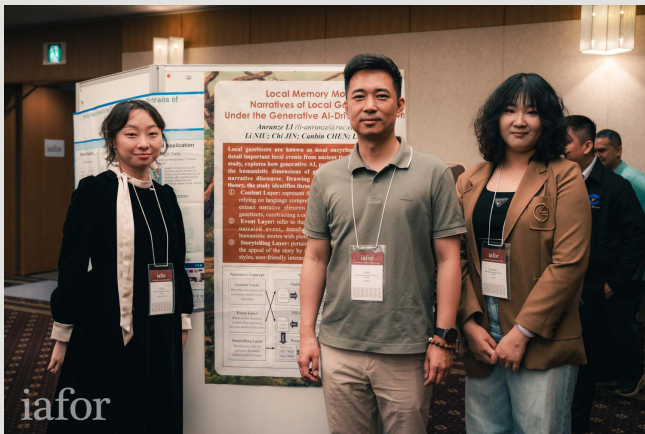
Data as of June 16, 2025, 10:00 JST

www.iafor.



Conference Photographs









Appendix I. Affiliations by Region

Africa

Ghana

Koforidua Technical University

Morocco

Abdelmalek Essaâdi University

South Africa

Central University of Technology
The University of South Africa
University of the Western Cape

Tunisia

The University of Carthage

Asia

Bangladesh

BRAC University
East West University

Brunei

Universiti Brunei Darussalam

China

Beijing Film Academy
Beijing Foreign Studies University
Beijing Jiaotong University
Beijing Normal-Hong Kong Baptist University
Chongqing University
City University of Hong Kong
City University of Macau
Communication University of China
Dalian Minzu University
Duke Kunshan University
Guangdong University of Petrochemical Technology
Henan Academy of Social Sciences
Hong Kong Palace Museum
Nanfeng College Guangzhou
Nankai University
Renmin University of China
Shanghai Jiao Tong University
Sichuan University
Sun Yat-sen University
Tsinghua University
University of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
Wenzhou Business College
Wenzhou-Kean University
Wuhan University
Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University

Hong Kong

Gratia Christian College
Hong Kong Baptist University
Hong Kong Chu Hai College
Hong Kong Shue Yan University
Lingnan University
Saint Francis University
The Chinese University of Hong Kong
The City University of Hong Kong
The Education University of Hong Kong
The Hong Kong Metropolitan University
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
The University of Hong Kong

India

Alliance University
Banaras Hindu University
Central University of Punjab
FLAME University
Indian Institute of Management Sirmaur
Indian Institute of Science, Education and Research Pune
Indian Institute of Technology
Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar
Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati
Jamia Millia Islamia
Jawaharlal Nehru University
National Institute of Technical Teachers' Training and Research
National Institute of Technology Calicut
North Eastern Hill University
Novotech
Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada University
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Australia

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Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
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Western Sydney University

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Haeata Community Campus
Te Rūnanga nui o Ngāti Porou (Ngāti Porou Tribal Leadership Entity)
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The University of Otago
The University of Waikato
Unitec Institute of Technology

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2025-VI

ISSN: 2759-4939