

Project Johannis de Rijke

The thematic project *Johannis de Rijke* was launched on December 6, 2023, with an opening ceremony at Zorgvlied Cemetery in Amstelveen. The year 2024 was dedicated to preparation, and no major projects were implemented during that period. Fortunately, momentum has been regained, allowing planned projects for 2025–2026 to move forward. As a result, the program has been adjusted.

The main objective of the project is to engage and inspire more young people, as well as Japanese and Dutch experts and researchers, to explore and contribute to the heritage and lessons of Johannis de Rijke.

Johannis de Rijke

Johannis de Rijke was born on December 5, 1842, in Colijnsplaat on Noord-Beveland, in the province of Zeeland, and passed away on January 20, 1913. He is buried at Zorgvlied Cemetery in Amstelveen.

He can be regarded as the spiritual father of modern 19th-century water management in Japan. For more than thirty years, he worked as an engineer and later as a vice-minister in Japan. He tamed Japanese rivers through innovative hydraulic engineering works and advised the Japanese Emperor on matters of water safety.

As one of the most prominent historical “water masters” and a leading figure among the group known as the “Dutch Watermen in Japan,” he continues to inspire young people and water experts worldwide. His knowledge and life story remain highly relevant in addressing current and future water challenges.

During this special project period, Stichting Blauwe Lijn will highlight his life, legacy, and personality through a range of collaborative initiatives with partners and the De Rijke family.

Timeline

The project began on December 6, 2023 (initially as a thematic year, later expanded into a multi-year program) and will run through 2026. The official launch took place at Zorgvlied Cemetery in Amstelveen.

Partners

This project is carried out in close collaboration with Peer de Rijke (great-grandson of Johannis de Rijke) and key partners, including TU Delft, Zeeuws Archief, Watersnoodmuseum, Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences, HZ University of Applied Sciences, the Embassy of Japan in the Netherlands, Rijkswaterstaat, and the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management.

Special thanks go to Johan Sturm of the Johannis de Rijke Foundation. His dedication and expertise made it possible to initiate the project in 2023 with the opening event in Amstelveen.

Current Status

To date, eight projects have been completed and nine are currently in development. The aim is to involve as many experts, young people, students, and researchers as possible in the water history and future of Japan and the Southwestern Delta.

Primary school students in Zeeland, Brabant, and surrounding regions are actively engaged in learning about regional water challenges through the educational program *New Water Masters*, where they are introduced to Johannis de Rijke and other historical water engineers.

Students and researchers from Dutch and Japanese universities and universities of applied sciences are encouraged to collaborate on water-related challenges in the Southwestern Delta (Netherlands) and comparable delta regions in Japan, such as the Kiso Delta and the Tone River basin. This is achieved through joint research on shared knowledge questions relevant to both countries.

Through this work, the project contributes to research programs such as the Dutch Delta Programme (Southwestern Delta) and ongoing research initiatives in Japanese delta regions

Knowledge Development and Outreach

In addition to youth engagement, the project focuses on collecting, preserving, and reusing historical documents by Johannis de Rijke. His story is shared through various formats, including podcasts, articles, presentations, and field excursions.

We actively map and support ongoing projects in which Dutch and Japanese researchers and students address water challenges in different landscapes. This is facilitated through our “Blue Helpline,” where experts affiliated with Stichting Blauwe Lijn provide knowledge and guidance.

Final Output

The ultimate goal is to integrate the results of educational and research projects into an inspiration book titled:

“New Water Masters of Japan and the Netherlands”

This publication will be released in both Dutch and Japanese. It will combine:

- the historical narrative of Johannis de Rijke and Dutch water engineers in Japan
- visual material such as maps and project documentation
- insights and results from contemporary Dutch–Japanese collaborations on water challenges

Overview of Activities and Projects

Completed Activities

- Launch of the Year of Johannis de Rijke at Zorgvlied Cemetery (Amstelveen)
- Presentation during the first anniversary event of Stichting Blauwe Lijn (January 17, 2024)
- Essay in *Zeeland* magazine: “Zeeuwse watermanager Johannis de Rijke nog altijd voorbeeldig voor Nederland” by Johan Sturm
- Essay in *The Weekly Anthropocene* by journalist Sam Matey
- TV recording by Japanese broadcaster TBS during the Hollandsche IJssel field trip and visit to Colijnsplaat
- Collection and archiving of historical documents in collaboration with the Digital Tresor and Zeeuws Archief
- Public engagement events in Noord-Beveland, including the Cultural Fair and PeeRock festival
- Lecture by Prof. Dr. Demura (Gifu University, Japan) at Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences
- Translation of Demura’s scientific article
- Podcast series on Johannis de Rijke
- Field excursion *Waterrijke Zeeland*

Ongoing Activities

- Inventory of Dutch–Japanese knowledge projects related to water challenges
- International research and education program: “*New Water Men and Women of Japan and the Netherlands*” (focused on the Kiso Delta and Southwestern Delta)
- Development of the Blue Dutch–Japanese Helpline for academic support

- Creation of the inspiration book *New Water Masters of Japan and the Netherlands*