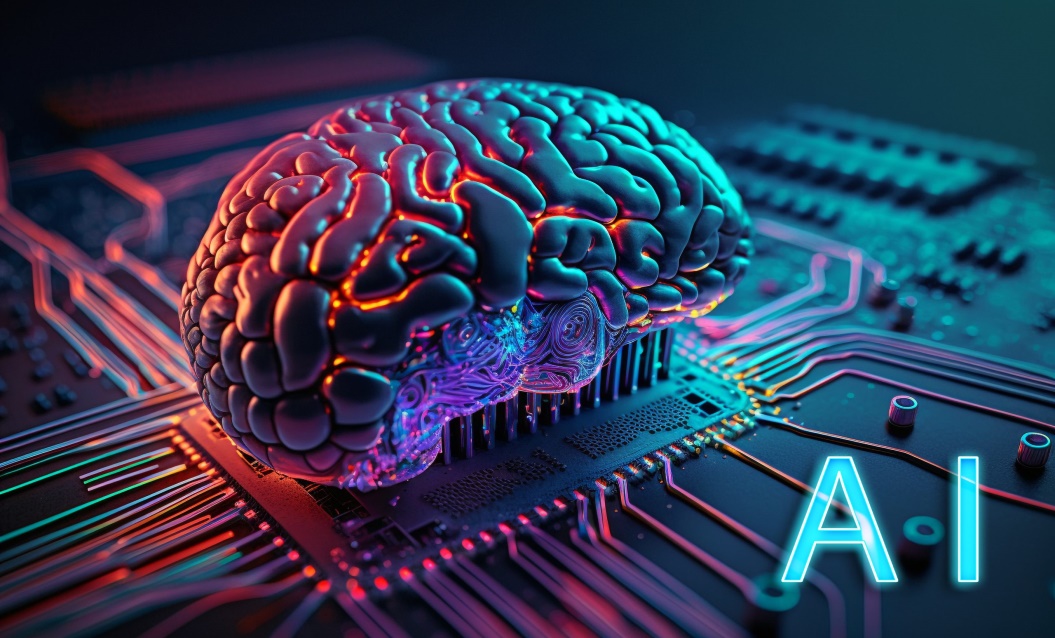
NATIONAL AI DAY

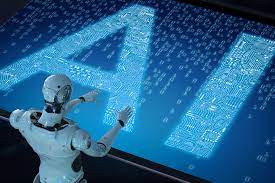
This National ‘Ai’ Day, celebrated on April 26, you’ll get to learn about the meaning behind this Chinese and Japanese word. ‘Ai’ means ‘adoration,’ ‘affection,’ or ‘love.’ The word is used almost exclusively as a female name in Japan, but boys are sometimes given it in Chinese too. Notable figures such as Ai Wei Wei, Ai Sugiyama, and Ai Otsuka share this name, and dozens of videogames, cartoons and fantasy characters with the name appear across Japanese and Chinese media. It’s pronounced similar to the word ‘eye’ in both cultures, but the kanji (Japanese) inscriptions differ from the hanzi (Chinese) characters.

**HISTORY OF NATIONAL AI DAY**

Ai Wei Wei is a Chinese activist and artist known in the East and West for his creative works. Because he is known for being politically outspoken and the divisive nature of his art, Wei Wei is persecuted by repressive government authorities. In 2005 he began using social media as a tool for social commentary. In 2009 his blog website was shut down. He moved to Twitter and continued online journaling from there, much to the dismay of the Chinese government. This led to Wei Wei’s house arrest in 2010 and subsequent arrest in 2011 at Beijing airport. He was then jailed for unspecified crimes but got released after serving three months in prison. Ai Wei Wei now lives in exile in Portugal and remains a critic of the Chinese Communist Party.

Japanese tennis star Ai Sugiyama held the record for male and female players in 62 consecutive Grand Slam main-draw appearances until 2015 when Roger Federer surpassed her. Sugiyama began playing tennis at 17, debuting at Wimbledon against world number 30 Gigi Fernandez. Throughout her nearly 20-year career, she rose to the world number one ranking in the WTA, winning the U.S. Open in 1999 and 2000, the French Open in 2003, and Wimbledon in 2003. She retired in 2009 after the Pan-Pacific Open and now teaches aspiring tennis players in Japan.

Ai Otsuka is a Japanese singer-songwriter famous for her song “Sakuranbo,” released in 2003. The 39-year-old musician was a child prodigy who began playing the piano at age four and writing songs in her teens. Trained as nursery teachers, Otsuka and her former classmate Mami Nishida started to record and upload music online in the early 2000s, sending demo tapes to studios with little success. In 2003 the popularity of “Sakuranbo” got Otsuka signed to Avex Trax, one of Japan’s biggest record labels. In 2004 she released her debut album “Love Punch,” which peaked at number three on Japanese music charts and sold nearly 200,000 copies in its first week.



**NATIONAL AI DAY TIMELINE**

**2003**

**The U.S. Open**

Ai Sugiyama beats Italy’s Francesca Schiavone to win the women’s U.S. Open.

**2004**

**The Album Tops the Charts**

Ai Otsuka’s second album, “Love Jam,” peaks at number one on the Oricon weekly j-pop charts

**2005**

**The Blogger on Government Policies**

Ai Wei Wei begins using the internet platform to write about his views on Chinese government policies.

**2009**

**The Tennis Professional Retires**

After nearly two decades as a professional, Ai Sugiyama retires from competitive ten

Weekly J-Pop chart



**NATIONAL AI DAY ACTIVITIES**

1. **View some of Ai Wei Wei’s art**

Ai Wei Wei’s art forms range from sculptures to photos to murals. Take a look at some of his most famous works and get a feel for the messages he was trying to send.

1. **Read Ai Qing’s poetry**

Ai Qing, Wei Wei’s father, was regarded as one of China’s finest poets. Read his works on National ‘Ai’ Day.

1. **Paint some ‘kanji’**

Learn how to paint the name ‘Ai’ in Japanese. Not only will you create a piece of art, but, in one stroke, you’ll give tribute to the name too.

**5 FAST FACTS ABOUT ‘AI’**

1. **What’s in a name?**

Chinese activist and artist Ai Wei Wei has an asteroid named after him.

1. **A master of blackjack**

Ai Wei Wei is considered a professional blackjack player.

1. **Appearing on TV**

Ai Sugiyama has played herself in several Japanese TV series, including “Sawako no Asa,” “SmapxSmap,” and “The Masahiko Katsuya Show.”

1. **A family of artists**

Ai Xuan, the son of Ai Qing and half-brother of Ai Wei Wei, is known for his hyperrealistic oil paintings and is a member of the China Arts Association.

1. **The young composer**

Ai Otsuka composed her first song at 15.

**WHY WE LOVE NATIONAL AI DAY**

1. **Short and sweet**

Ai is a short and sweet name. It’s easy to remember and even easier to spell.

1. **Cultural fluidity**

Not often do names work so seamlessly across different cultures, down to the same connotations. But ‘Ai’ is embraced by both the Japanese and Chinese.

1. **It means love**

‘Ai’ means ‘love.’ The name embodies the spirit of affection.



**NATIONAL AI DAY DATES**

| **Year** | **Date** | **Day** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 2024 | April 26 | Friday |
| 2025 | April 26 | Saturday |
| 2026 | April 26 | Sunday |
| 2027 | April 26 | Monday |
| 2028 | April 26 | Wednesday |