

“Walk in U. S., Talk on Japan”

A Program to Promote People-to-People Diplomacy in the United States Japanese Women Stand Up

The goal of “Walk in U.S., Talk on Japan” was to increase awareness about Japan in the U.S. and to develop U.S.—Japan relations through people-to-people diplomacy. To achieve these aims, the program asked for the support of Japanese citizens. Its participants travelled to many cities in the U.S. and talked about Japan’s many attractions, including its culture. They spoke to members of the U.S.—Japan Council, university students, and organizations with a connection to Japan. They also met with members of the community and talked about U.S.—Japan topics and themes.

Most recently, 15 participants, between 18 and 82 years old, travelled with former high-ranking Japanese diplomats to 9 states 16 cities such as Philadelphia, Columbus, Richmond, Kansas City and many others.

One of them was 82 year old Ms. Ryoko Yoshioka. A calligraphy artist and former schoolteacher, she lived in New York and Bangkok and has been teaching Japanese to non-Japanese women in Japan. When she visited the Johnson County Community College, Overland Park, Kansas, Ms. Yoshioka talked about the important position of women in Japan. She said the traditional image of Japanese women was that of smart, quiet, and patient homemakers. Modern Japanese women, she continued, are working in increasing numbers instead of staying at home.

Another participant in the program was Ms. Yukiko Nakamura, a company CEO. Ms. Nakamura spoke about Japan’s recovery after the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. She also talked about Japanese women in business.

Japan has less than 10 percent of women who are CEOs, Ms. Nakamura said, and the number of Japanese women who have become business owners is less than that. To this end, she talked about the challenges Japanese women face to reach the top levels of a company. Some of them, she said, were due to social reasons. Others were due to lack of confidence in women. To empower these women, she said, they should participate in internationalization by, for example, training in the U.S.

Having lived and worked in the U.S., Ms. Nakamura said that an ability to communicate globally is an important skill for Japanese women who want to be CEOs. To do this, they have to know the feelings and thoughts of their audience. These skills will also help when developing international collaborations. Ms. Nakamura’s participation in the program inspired her to work with people in Indiana and establish an NPO. One of the organization’s main goals will be to support the aspirations of Japanese children with ADHD and other learning difficulties. The NPO will develop its programs via cultural and educational exchanges with partners in the U.S.

Another leading voice in the program was an I.T. expert, Ms. Tomoko Yamane. Raised in the U.S. and Japan, Ms. Yamane spoke about her experience of culture shock when she first entered the Japanese workplace. As an MBA candidate, she was inspired by her experience of working in Japan to start empowerment seminars for Japanese women.

Ms. Miyake Tokuro was another participant in the program. A Kyogen actress, she amazed her audiences with tales of Kyogen – a “comedic” theater which has a 600 year old history. Ms. Tokuro’s performances impressed audiences of all age group from the U.S.

“Walk in U.S., Talk on Japan” did not just change perceptions about Japanese women in society. The program also made people-to-people collaborations stronger and promoted future international activities and diplomacy between the U.S. and Japan.

Ms. Yoshioka’s inspiring speech is presented on the next page.



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1. Ms. Nakamura giving a talk on female entrepreneurs in Japan at Xavier University, Sisters Center, Banquet Room. 2. Ms. Miyake giving a talk on Kyogen (and a live performance) at the North Carolina Japan Center. 3. Ms. Yamane giving a talk on what can be achieved after experiencing both Japan and the U.S., at the North Carolina Japan Center. 4. Ms. Yoshioka giving a talk on her life and the increasing participation of Japanese women in society at Johnson County Community College, Overland Park.

The Spirit of Aizu in the United States

The Voice of a Participant in the “Walk in U.S., Talk on Japan” Program



Ryoko Yoshioka

Ms. Ryoko Yoshioka is an 82-year-old calligraphy artist and a former English teacher of middle and high school from the town of Aizu, Fukushima, who used to live in both New York and Bangkok. She now provides Japanese-language education and support to overseas students and women in Japan.

My son recommended that I participate in the “Walk in U.S., Talk on Japan” program. I applied only two days before the deadline and was delighted to be accepted. I was deeply moved by my experience. I learned the value of democracy, of having a positive attitude toward minorities, and the importance of volunteering. I met many people who really love Japan! This was especially true in Kansas City, MO, which is a sister city of Kurashiki in Japan.

I really admired what was said by Tsuda Umeko, the founder of Tsuda College, one of Japan’s oldest women’s universities. She believed that women should take on challenges in life. I am an alumna of Tsuda College, and my passion for taking on challenges was one of the reasons I decided to participate in this program.

In my hometown of Aizu in Fukushima Prefecture, we have an old saying that my mother taught me when I was a child, which reflects the Aizu spirit. It goes: “If people ask you, you must go as far as Echigo (now Niigata Prefecture) to help with growing rice.” Basically, it means that if you are asked, you must travel even the distance from Boston to New York to help others. My going to the United States was like going to Echigo, although the United States is much farther away! I would be happy if Americans could someday visit and learn more about Japan and the spirit of Aizu.

I believe that this kind of people-to-people diplomacy is really important. We can become friends with people from other countries at an individual level and learn about each other’s cultures. I really hope that Japanese can enjoy the benefits of participating in programs like this one.

My message for young women today is that we may find ourselves in work situations that are not ideal. But we must always do our best in each situation and strive to overcome all difficulties. Only then will a flower blossom in our lives!



	<p>The Spirit of Aizu in the United States</p>	<p>The Spirit of Aizu in the United States Walk in U.S., Talk on Japan http://youtu.be/GwaYlQLdc98</p>
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- *Women's participation going forward* -

Please allow me to share my personal story. I hope it will help you understand the importance of the “participation of women” in Japan.

From 1960 to 1962, I lived in New York with my family. At the same time, one of my friends used to say that Japanese ladies are elegant, modest, patient, and that they always stayed at home for the housework. I think this is the image some of you may still have about Japanese women today.

Though in some respects these comments may still be true, nowadays young women in Japan are very active, positive, and willing to work outside of the home. At the same time, the working population is decreasing. Therefore, I feel there are now more chances and greater opportunities for women in Japan.

“Womenomics” is currently a popular expression in Japan.

Prime Minister Abe shot three policy arrows to make Japan strong again and to support the growth of the economy. He often says advancement of women's role in the workforce is indispensable for his Growth Strategy.

Therefore, in achieving Japan's economic recovery, the needs and potential contributions of working women are expected to play a strong role.

Some women who once retired from work for various reasons are now returning to work. Some of them are flourishing as leaders or executives of big businesses. However, the majority still stay at home because they feel uneasy, and know it is difficult to go out working with their small children at home, or with elderly parents to look after.

I know that the government is helping to improve the working environment for women, but I still feel there is more work to be done. If the environment surrounding mothers develops extensively, particularly in terms of childcare facilities, women will be able to return to their former positions. I am sure that they will become a great force to advance the country's economic growth.

What's more, if men are more involved at home, women will be more able to work full-time, or start a business, or even go to school again to advance their careers. If their husband is able to help to take care of their sick child, or prepare dinner for kids, she can seek career opportunities and participate more to enhance the economy. I truly think that “Womenomics” is not only a women's issue, but a men's issue too.

I feel that the situation for women in Japan is beginning to change. However, progress is still needed to balance men and women in the workplace.

I am very pleased, finally, to say thank you to the United States and American people for the education given to Ms. Umeko Tsuda about 150 years ago. Ms. Tsuda went on to establish Tsuda College, where I graduated from, in order to provide higher education for women.

She was struck by, and greatly admired, the position of women in American society. She and her friends devoted themselves to encouraging and educating Japanese women, with earnestness and diligence.

Under the Constitution promulgated after World War II, the Japanese have been enjoying the benefits of democracy with fundamental human rights given to women, such as voting rights, and equality of employment and education.

Once again, “Womenomics” will be a key factor for Japanese women to fulfill the fruits of their education.



Based on her experiences as a graduate of Tsuda College and a former expat in the U.S. in the 1960s, Ms. Yoshioka talked about the active participation of women and education in Japan. At the same time, she also discussed the importance of people-to-people exchange between Japan and the U.S.