

“Walk in U.S., Talk on Japan”

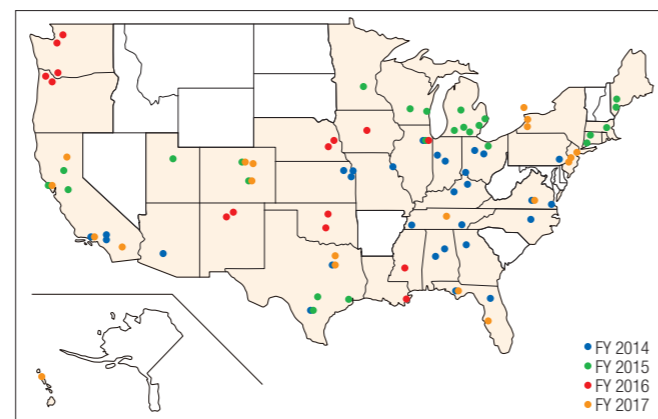


Liu visited Norfolk, Richmond, Nashville, Clarksville, and Honolulu in January 2018 as part of a delegation led by former ambassador to the U.S. Ichiro Fujisaki. The group visited six universities and two high schools, spoke with two governors, and interacted with many other government officials and business people during a week-long trip to the U.S.

From its beginning in 2014, participants in the “Walk in U.S., Talk on Japan” program have highlighted Japan’s attractiveness and appeal to audiences in cities across the United States. The program is rooted in the belief that exchanges between Japanese people and a broad and diverse range of Americans—focused on regional cities where there are fewer opportunities to know and appreciate Japan—can nurture the Japan-U.S. friendship at a grassroots level.

In “Walk in U.S., Talk on Japan,” former Japanese ambassadors or other public figures lead delegations of three or four selected members, and visit local areas throughout the U.S. for grassroots interactions. In meetings with university and high school students, government officials, business people, and others, these delegates share their own stories about Japan as well as what is currently going on in Japanese society.

So far, 69 people from various backgrounds and ranging in age from 18 to 82 have participated in the program. Each of the 20 delegations sent out thus far has “walked and talked” for about one week in what is now a cumulative total of 79 U.S. cities in 35 different states. Meetings with



Total: 20 delegations to 79 cities in 35 states in the U.S. (and 2 cities in Canada)

local students and business people begin with a speech by the delegation leader, followed by speeches of members. The events then continue with lively discussions and a Q&A session with the audience about various topics, ranging from pop culture to national security to the economy.

Dr. Xiaoyan Liu, born in Shanghai, was the first non-Japanese participant in the “Walk in U.S., Talk on Japan”



Members take turns sharing their experience of Japan, following a speech by the head of the delegation. Liu was given the honor of speaking first.



This grassroots exchange program has deepened understanding between Japan and the U.S. on both the national and individual level. “Walk in U.S., Talk on Japan” wants to see the friendly relationships initiated in the course of the program continue into the future.

program. After coming to Japan as a student in 2000, she earned a Master of Public Policy degree from the University of Tokyo in 2007. She worked at the Development Bank of Japan’s Research Department, and then went to the United States for further study, receiving a master’s degree in East Asian Studies from Washington University in St. Louis. Liu went on to earn a PhD in Chinese Studies at Heidelberg University in Germany, after which she moved back to Japan, and she has been working as a researcher in Tokyo since 2015.

Liu explains her motivation for joining “Walk in U.S., Talk on Japan.” “I was neither born nor raised in Japan; however, I love this country. I feel that many people overseas have little knowledge about Japan or misunderstand the country and its culture. I applied to this program because I wanted to share what I know of Japan’s attractiveness to people in the U.S., especially those who are not familiar with Japan.”

Liu’s ability to talk both passionately and frankly about her positive experience of Japan and her time spent studying in the U.S. made her a natural choice to become a member of this bridge-building program.

Addressing audiences in Norfolk, Richmond, Nashville, Clarksville and Honolulu, Liu spoke on “Realizing Your Japanese Dream, As I Did.” Contrary to the widespread image of Japan, Liu has found Japan anything but inward-looking. “The Japanese warmly welcome exchange students, and provide well-organized support through a system that includes health insurance and possible



Dr. Xiaoyan Liu

Researcher at Meiji Institute for Global Affairs, Meiji University (MIGA). Born in Shanghai, China and majored in Japanese at Tongji University. Received a Master of Public Policy from the University of Tokyo in 2007 and worked for the Development Bank of Japan’s Research Department. Earned a master’s degree in East Asian Studies at Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri in 2011 and a PhD in Chinese Studies at Heidelberg University in Germany. She has been working at MIGA since 2015.

scholarships.” Students are allowed to work for up to 28 hours per week, enabling them to meet practical needs while engaging with the society. Liu believes that those committed to studying in Japan can find their dreams become reality. She smiles, “Japanese people are quite modest, right? They are too modest to talk about their own merits. I feel that since I am a foreigner, and because I have experience living outside of Japan, I can objectively share with Americans the positive aspects of Japan.”

Liu commends Japanese hospitality, saying, “Many foreigners are coming to Japan today, and wherever they go, Japanese are doing their best to please them, even, to give a small example, using hand gestures to help overcome language barriers. Japanese exhibit a spirit of tolerance and kindness toward foreigners and that always reminds me of my favorite Japanese proverb, ‘*Nasake wa hito no tame narazu* (Kindness does not go unrewarded).’”

Liu encourages other foreigners to follow her path by participating in “Walk in U.S., Talk on Japan.” Non-Japanese often have an important perspective on Japan’s positive qualities that audiences find fresh and enlightening. As Liu experienced, foreigners in Japan can play a vital role in building bridges, opening channels of communication, and fostering friendships between Japan and the U.S., and with other countries of the world as well.

For more information about “Walk in U.S., Talk on Japan,” please visit:
<https://www.japan.go.jp/walkinus/index.html>