



Panel Discussion; Q&A Session  
Thursday - March 21, 2019

**Mamiko Kim:** We are ready to begin. So if you could please take your seats, it would be greatly appreciated. Ladies and gentlemen, we would now like to begin the second portion of our seminar. We'll be having a panel discussion, followed by audience Q&A. During the Q&A session, please raise your hand and a staff member will provide a microphone so that you may introduce yourself and ask your question. Thank you for your patience.

To moderate our panel discussion today, we have invited Ms. Abigail Friedman, Founder and CEO of The Wisteria Group, Officer of the Board of Trustees of the Japan-America Society of Washington, D.C., and a *haiku* poet. As a U.S. diplomat, Ms. Friedman has served around the world including eight years in Japan. She's an awarded *haiku* poet having written several books on the matter and has been a judge at the annual Golden Triangle Haiku contest for the past three years. In addition, she served as interim president of the Japan-America Society of Washington, D.C. in 2018. We are very lucky to have her insight today to moderate this panel. Please join me in welcoming Ms. Friedman and our panelists.

**Abigail Friedman:** Well, thank you all. I'm happy that we all have those excellent cookies in our bellies, and coffee, and tea. Let me just start by introducing our panel. They will each have presentations and then I will ask a couple of questions and open it up to the audience.

So, first let me introduce, I think many of you here know Takehiro Shimada who is Minister with the Embassy of Japan. He was appointed Minister for Communications and Cultural Affairs in August of 2017. So, this is the second time around that you are in the U.S., at



the Embassy. Prior to being in Washington, you were Director of the Japanese Policy Planning Division on the abduction issue which is a serious continuing issue. So, thank you for your work on that area. And Shimada-san joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1991, where he worked on International Peace Cooperation, China and Mongolia affairs, and a variety of foreign policy issues. Thank you for today.

Next, we have Laura Abbot, a dear friend, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of the U.S.-Japan Council's D.C. office. Until January 2017, Laura was also the Senior adviser at the State Department and the Office of Global Partnerships. Prior to that, she served in the U.S.-Japan Council at the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo as Executive Director of the TOMODACHI Initiative, which I understand you will be talking to us a little bit about later today. And Laura also has extensive experience in Japan. She moved to Japan just six weeks before the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 when she was a CFR Hitachi fellow. Among your many previous accomplishments, you were also on the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations as a professional staff member.

We then have a movie star, which is kind of unusual for Washington, D.C. Shin Koyamada, actor and producer, CEO of Shinca Group. Also, Chairman of a wonderful NGO, Koyamada International Foundation. And you're also on the Board of Directors of Sister Cities International. Koyamada-san was born in Japan and moved to the U.S. for the first time in 2000. He became best known to global audiences after his co-starring debut role in the Warner Bros. blockbuster Tom Cruise film *The Last Samurai*, which many of us I think have seen. I certainly did. It's great.

He became the first Japanese to star in a Disney Channel worldwide hit TV movie *Wendy Wu: Homecoming Warrior* in 2006 which was one of the highest viewed Disney Channel movies in the U.S. Since then Mr. Koyamada has appeared in many award-winning American movies and TV shows. In 2005 Shin cofounded Shinca Entertainment, an American producer of motion picture films, shows, comic books, and video games headquartered in LA. And as I mentioned before, Shin is very well known for his philanthropic causes through the Koyamada International Foundation, also known as KIF, a nonprofit that inspires youth and women to achieve their dreams and offers aid for natural disasters.

And lastly, way down at the end, with a lot of exciting things to share with us today is Aaron Wodin-Schwartz. Aaron is Vice President in Public Policy and Public Affairs of Brand USA. Aaron joined Brand USA in November 2011 where he served as Deputy Director for Strategic Outreach until October 2012. Then he was Director for Public Policy from October 2012 until becoming Vice President in January of 2017. During his tenure with Brand USA, he has successfully established a variety of programs with federal partners that highlight unique aspects of the U.S. such as our culinary experiences and federal land and waters.

Aaron was inducted into the Destination Marketing Association International “30 Under 30” Class of 2014. He was also with the Department of Commerce prior to his work at Brand USA. He was Presidential Management Fellow at the Department of Commerce. And he served as Policy Advisor to the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Service Industries where, among other things, he worked on implementing the Travel Promotion Act.

So, we’ve got a great panel here and I think we should just turn right to their presentations. Would you like to start Shimada-san?

**Takehiro Shimada:** Thank you, Abigail-san. Good afternoon everyone. My name is Takehiro Shimada. I'm the Minister in charge of Public Relations. One of my important responsibility, our team is helping to advance Japan's public diplomacy in the United States. We strive to deepen an understanding of Japanese culture, foreign policy, and the body of Japan as the closest ally of United States. This also entails promoting U.S.-Japan shared values, democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights and so on, and most importantly facilitating the friendship between Japan and the United States.

From this perspective, tourism is based on tourism for Japan in pursuing our goals of public diplomacy. For example, the National Cherry Blossom Festival we kicked off during an opening ceremony this Saturday in Washington. This is the biggest festival to celebrate U.S.-Japan friendship in the United States. The festival attracts 1.5 million visitors from across the States and the world every year, as you may know. So, this is the biggest opportunity for the Embassy of Japan to remind the American people of the importance of our friendship.

As you see on the screen, the Embassy of Japan is promoting the festivities under the banner of "Little Flower, Big Story" celebrating Japan-U.S. friendship and gift of the cherry trees this year. As most of you may know, the cherry trees will soon join in Washington, originally a gift from the mayor of Tokyo to Washington in 1912. These trees have witnessed the history of friendship between Japan and the United States for almost 100 years. So, these little flowers on the cherry trees can tell you a lot of stories about our friendship.

At the same time, I believe that there are lots of individual stories and anecdotes that the people of the United States and Japan can remember as their own memories of friendship or love by enjoying the cherry blossom over the years. Our team hopes that the American-

Japanese and the tourists from the world to come and enjoy the beautiful cherry blossoms. They would create their own stories of friendship based on the long history of U.S.-Japan relationship.

As a diplomat, I have visited more than 50 countries. I have lived in four countries through my career of about 30 years. I find that in order for us to understand people with different background and culture, it is best to visit and experience countries or places in person. Yes, to see is to believe - just like the ambassador mentioned at his speech. That is why tourism plays a significant role in public diplomacy efforts.

In Japan's case, the rich topographical variety of islands in the country with many beautiful mountains, rivers, lakes, coastline, together with the clearly defined four seasons, sightseers never get bored. Japan can also attract you with many historical sites and places to experience cutting edge technologies. And of course, you will enjoy delicious food with very reasonable price. You might get addicted to Japan.

Another good example of Japan's appeal is the JET Programme, the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme. Every year the Japanese government recruits about 5,500 university graduates from all over the world to visit Japan to work mainly as Assistant English Teachers in Japan. And from the U.S., about 1,000 graduate students visit Japan as a JET. Now there are a total of 34,000 American people who have worked as JET in the past 33 years. Luckily enough most of the American JETs come back to the United States with a very positive image of Japan and the Japanese people. And even in this town I frequently come across JET alumni whenever I visit my counterparts in the government, private businesses, and media think tanks and

others. Thanks to them we are always encouraged to realize that we are surrounded and supported by American who share our common values.

Whatever piques your interest in Japan or Japanese culture, I hope that more and more Americans visit Japan and the Japanese visit the United States to deepen our friendship and pass through bonds to the future generations. As you may know, Japan will host the Tokyo Olympic Games next year. I hope that the Americans, especially the younger generation, would come to visit Tokyo and maybe create another story to tell of the new chapter of the friendship of their own. Thank you very much.

**Abigail Friedman:** Thank you. Laura.

**Laura Abbot:** Thank you. Good afternoon everyone. Okay, I hope I have better luck. Thank you, Abigail, and thank you Shimada-san.

So, I am Laura Abbot and work for the U.S.-Japan Council. The U.S.-Japan Council is extremely focused on the importance of people-to-people connections between the United States and Japan. As Master Sugiyama mentioned, I think the strength of the relationship is really founded on these personal connections. So, I'd like to just talk briefly about some of the work we do to bring Japanese to the United States and Americans to Japan.

We're focused on developing and connecting diverse leaders to create a strong U.S.-Japan relationship. We're bringing people together from across sectors, backgrounds, and generations because we feel that this is the underpinning for a stronger relationship between our two countries, for the strength of that relationship but also because the U.S.-Japan relationship matters for the Asia Pacific region as well.



We are investing in the next generation through a number of different programs.

Perhaps the most well-known is the TOMODACHI Initiative. So, I'd like to just show you a short video on the TOMODACHI Initiative. Let's hope that the technology works here.

[Start of the video clip] [Music]

**Laura Abbot:** The TOMODACHI Initiative develops the leaders of tomorrow. On March 11, 2011 the Great East Japan Earthquake struck the beautiful towns and villages of the Tōhoku region of Japan. We wanted to support young people in Tōhoku, so we launched the TOMODACHI Initiative. The TOMODACHI Initiative is a public-private partnership between the U.S.-Japan Council, the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo with strong support from the government of Japan. Thanks to the generous support and partnership of many Japanese and American companies, we've been able to have a profound impact on the lives of many young people in Tōhoku and beyond.

Today our programs connect young people from across Japan, from Hokkaido to Okinawa, to young people from across the United States. Since inception, the TOMODACHI Initiative has provided life-changing experiences for over 7,000 young people and counting. We're creating a community of internationally-minded young leaders we call the TOMODACHI generation.

Female Voice: [Speaks in Japanese]

[End of video clip]

**Laura Abbot:** We can cut that there. Thanks. Thank you. Actually, since that video, we now have about 800 more participants. So we're now at around 7,800 young people. We're bringing them through short-term exchanges, through study abroad programs, and through

programs focused on particular areas of expertise such as STEM education or women's leadership and empowerment. So, we hope too that you may have an opportunity to interact with some of these young people in the future, if you haven't already. I always find it, I'm saying to Abigail, the most inspiring part of my job is getting to meet the young people and hearing about their own inspiration to remain involved in each other's countries in the future.

Another aspect of our work is a study abroad program called the Watanabe Study Abroad Program. This scholarship provides opportunities for Japanese and Americans to study for one year in each other's country, in the undergraduate or graduate program. This is the third year that we've been doing this through a very generous grant from someone whose life was transformed by a study abroad experience and wanted to provide that experience to others.

Another aspect of tourism that we work with through the U.S.-Japan Council is connecting Japanese Americans with their roots in Japan. The flagship program that is being supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for many years is the Japanese American Leadership Delegation. We've now had 217 Japanese American leaders that we've brought to Japan through this program. I think the ripple effects are many. For many participants, it's been a catalyst for them to reconnect with Japan and bring their families in the future.

Another aspect that we work on is bringing Asian Americans state-elected officials to Japan. I think as many of you in the room are aware there's a continuing conversation about history in this country. The history issues we feel are important to bring people up to speed with the current situation in Japan and particularly bring Asian American elected officials to Japan to see what it's like now and have them fall in love with the country, which is always

what happens when people go to Japan, and bring some of those ideas and fondness for Japan back to the work that they are doing in the regions across the United States.

Another aspect of our work is our annual conference. I think many in the room may have attended past conferences. But I think this is another way in which we can promote travel to each other's countries. So, we bring around 750 attendees a year to our conferences. In this coming one this fall, anyone who's interested, please keep an eye on our website and sign up to come. It will be in Los Angeles. But we do alternate in Japan and the United States and bring a great number of interesting speakers together.

Also, I'd like to just mention lastly that we think there's important connections to be made at the regional and prefectural levels. We may run a Governors' Circle that brings together governors from prefectures in Japan to the United States. They'll be convening and gathering in the Silicon Valley later this year.

We've also done regional economic summits in Hawaii and in Texas in trying to connect Japanese businesses with local regions in the United States and recognize that it's not just about Tokyo and Washington or Tokyo and New York but there are lots of places around the country that matter. We want to promote tourism and travel and economic relationships in those areas too. So, with that, I look forward to the conversation on the panel. Thank you.

**Abigail Friedman:** Great. Thank you so much. And thank you for the great work that your organization is doing to help young people in both our countries. Shin-san, your turn.

**Shin Koyamada:** Hello everyone. How are you? I hope you're having fun. We have a camera, so I feel like I'm filming a scene or something. I'm kind of shy in front of a camera, but I'd do my best.

My name is Shin Koyamada. I'm based in Los Angeles. I am originally from Okayama, Japan. I moved to the United States in 2000, about 19 years ago, growing up 18 years in Japan and 19 years in the United States. So, I'm kind of like a hybrid person in the United States. I'm happy to be here and meeting new people.

After being in the movie, in the *Last Samurai* and the *Wendy Wu: Homecoming Warrior* on Disney Channel, I've been on the Disney Channel, I have my own movie. I grew up with this Disney Channel kids. And I was very involved with charity causes throughout the United States. That's one of the things that Hollywood people do, get involved with the charities very deeply as a part of American culture. So, I was introduced to that. I was travelling in different places - Texas, Washington, D.C., and everywhere in California.

In 2008 my wife, Nia Lyte - a TED Talk-er, TEDx Talk speaker and she's from Colombia but she's American - we founded our foundation called Koyamada International Foundation, simply KIF, in 2008 in Los Angeles. Oh. So we founded it in 2008. We have six major programs. I'm going to try to rush this. We have a Global Youth Empowerment Program, Girls & Women Empowerment Program. We have People-to-People Relationships, Natural Disaster Relief, and 1000 Ways to Give, and Sustainable Development.

In Global Youth Empowerment, we organize lecture events at the different universities. In Girls & Women Empowerment event, we do a lot of women-focused lecture events throughout Japan and elsewhere. In People-to-People, we team up with the embassies and consulates and do a lot of cross-cultural and educational event in the regions of Japan. In Natural Disaster Relief, we do a fundraising and gather relief goods and send that out to the affected areas. For example, we did one in 2011 at the Great East Tōhoku earthquake. 1000

Ways to Give is a homeless program and promote extreme poverty around the world.

Sustainable Development, which you know as SDGs, which was started by the United Nations in 2015. We team up with a lot of organizations to promote SDGs, sustainable development goals.

Our mission, we're working on shortening the mission. But our mission is to improve quality of people's life by empowering global youth and women to reach their full potential and, by providing humanitarian aid, to promote global peace and sustainable development. So this is one of the programs we did in Japan in 2013 and '14. It's called Japan-U.S. Discovery Tour which Shimada-san was a big help for helping me, helping us out to organize this event in Tokyo. He was based in Tokyo. Oh, by the way, he's the one who recommended me to this event. So, thank you Shimada-san for the opportunity.

Because I was in the Disney Channel, I became friends with a lot of Disney actors like Dylan and Cole Sprouse. We toured throughout Japan ten cities. We reached to about 3,000 Japanese high school and undergrad students. It was very successful. We did a talk show cross-culture event. We even visited U.S. bases in different places in Japan.

This is another program. It's one of the programs, a Global Youth Program. We send different speakers to different national and private universities in Japan to share our speaker's experience internationally to inspire, to pursue their dreams, and cultivate their global mindset.

This is Kindai University. The picture one before was at the Kansai University. This is Kindai. We've done it in Okayama University and Ritsumeikan University. We've done Okayama University and Okinawa International University. So, this is another thing that we



teamed up with our U.S. Embassies and consulates. We did many, many lecture events targeting youth.

And this is high school. This is two, three weeks ago. I had a meet and greet with Foreign Minister Kono-san. I also had the privilege of meeting the prime minister and his wife.

In KIF, we team up with the -- we have a global partner, with the Sister Cities International in which I was elected as the first time Japanese to be on the National Board of Directors in which Norman Mineta has been a very big help. Thank you for your dedication. JCI, Junior Chamber International, is another organization that we became a global partner. Our thing is to team up with global organizations to outreach bigger and bigger around the world.

Lastly, this is next week, on March 27, San Antonio. We have a Japan-Texas Leadership Symposium. This is a program that Sister Cities International and KIF and the city of San Antonio are organizing in San Antonio. This is a one-day event. This is actually sold out. I was going to invite all of you to come to this event. This is a free event - free food, free networking. If you're interested and still coming to this event in San Antonio next Wednesday, please follow-up with me. Probably, I can help you out. Thank you for the opportunity. Thank you.

**Abigail Friedman:** Over to you.

**Aaron Wodin-Schwartz:** Thank you very much, and thank you everybody for being here today. My name is Aaron Wodin-Schwartz. As I was introduced, I'm with Brand USA - the destination marketing organization for the United States, very similar in many ways to JNTO.

I want to congratulate President Seinoon that great presentation. I really want to go to Japan now, very inspired now. Although now I'm concerned about competing head-to-head in Australia, we got to up our game.

So just a fair warning, I've probably prepared too many slides. So, I'm going to kind of skip over a couple and fly through. But what I really want to do today is to give a little bit of an overview first of all who Brand USA is, how we approach our job of inspiring the world to come visit the United States, and then in particular what our outlook is for Japan, some of our activities in Japan. And then I look forward to following up with the discussion on the panel.

First of all, Brand USA is a public-private partnership. We are created by the Travel Promotion Act in March 2010. It's the first time that the United States has had a nationally-coordinated marketing effort for tourism to the United States. For a long time I think the idea was that we didn't need that. People heard of us. They know where we are in the map. But we saw a steep decline in our arrivals in the decade after 9/11. We really realized that we needed a nationally-coordinated campaign both for the country and to help all 50 states, five territories, and the District of Columbia be able to compete on level footing with our competition around the world like Japan.

So, you see our mission here is simply to increase incremental visitations, spend, and market share for the USA as a destination, and Japan is one of our key markets. I will just note that we launched our first campaign in 2012 and Japan was among the three markets that we launched that in, along with Canada and the UK. It's a market that continues to be a top market for us, a very important market for us. We really, really look forward to welcoming more and more Japanese here.

This is a little bit of the travel trends. You can see that, like many countries, there was a huge dip in the decade after 9/11. I'm happy to note that that of course has stabilized. Visitation is fairly steady right now from Japan, visitation and spend. So, you can see the latest figures in which we have -- at least here we have figures since 2017. Just about 3.6 million arrivals from Japan and a little over \$16 billion in spend. That actually ranks fourth overall in the world for the United States, and so it's a really critical market, and number two overseas if you exclude Mexico and Canada. So really, really important for us and obviously creating jobs all over this country and communities large and small.

I'm going to, like I mentioned, skip over a couple of these things. But I do want to talk briefly about, similar to the JNTO presentation, a little bit of how we go about marketing the USA. We do have of course our direct-to-consumer marketing efforts. And I'm going to show a little video clip in just a minute. But I encourage folks to go to [visittheusa.com](http://visittheusa.com) or [gousa.jp](http://gousa.jp). Or if you're on your smartphones now, you can look at the GoUSA TV app and see some of our great video content.

So, a lot of what we do is around consumer-driven marketing. Originally, we had a really nice high-quality 60-second TV spot that we shared around the world, and it was great. Now what we've really done is started to target our messaging very specifically to each market.

So, in Japan, for example, we work with major influencers that have a great online following and take them on road trips, and culinary journeys, and national parks adventures all over the United States. That's been a really effective way to communicate in an authentic manner toward our target audiences around the world that sort of gets beyond the advertising.



Another big part of what we do is to work with the travel trade which are the tour operators and travel agents and the sort of distribution channels for our travel product. That is especially important in Japan which is a market that still has a relatively high use of brick-and-mortar operations. And so, we do a lot of work of course with our friends at JATA, the associations of travel agents. And we have a team on the ground in Japan that really puts together these opportunities with travel writers, travel agents, product managers at the big tour operator companies, and is able to really create new and interesting products so that not only are we welcoming more Japanese to this country but also inviting them to explore more areas of the country beyond some of the traditional gateways. Really getting them out to, through and beyond the gateways.

Finally, we work collaboratively with all of our city and state partners around this country to create platforms and programs to allow them to tell their stories. So, we'll partner with Travel Oregon, for example, in Japan so that they're able to attend the big trade shows and have their digital marketing through the gousa.jp platform. It's a good way for a lot of those partners that wouldn't otherwise be able to invite Japanese to visit their states and cities to be able to do so.

So, I want to just show you a very brief -- this is sort of a 30-second sizzle spot that we might show on social media in Japan. It's just one small example. And I again invite you to check out our website for more. I'm not sure if that video is going to play or not. Well, it's an amazing video. Trust me.

[Start of video clip] [Music]

Male Voice: Austin is the city of creation. It is a fantastic environment to make new things. [Music]

[End of video clip]

**Aaron Wodin-Schwartz:** So that is an example of the type of content we've created for Austin, Texas. The point here is a lot of what we're doing now is really trying to inspire people through authentic local voices or through trusted voices from our target markets. The key to success for us has been really showing that authentic flavor of a place, as you can see in that video, which is a mashup of much of a few different video products that we have as well as then working with those key influencers that people know and trust.

This is a slide that just shows some of our travel trade engagement. Again, this is how we get itineraries and product in the hands of travel agents so that when we inspire our friends in Japan to want to come explore Kansas City, that there's a product available for them to activate against that desire. So, I'm happy to talk a lot more about that as we get into the discussion here. And thank you all for your time.

**Abigail Friedman:** Great. Thank you very much. We're going to have a little *haiku* interlude here. Because it's rare that I'm introduced in a professional setting as a *haiku* poet, so I didn't want to pass up the opportunity. Also today is the first day of spring. In Japan all of these events are marked with poetry and excellent food that matches the season. So, here's a poem by *haiku* master Kuroda Momoko. I'll read it in English. She wrote it in Japanese. And the *haiku* is: Rosy pink Fuji greets the heavens first day of spring - *Bara iro no Fuji risshun no ten ni kana*. There we have it.

Also, before we go into some of the more serious questions about how to expand our exchanges between the U.S. and Japan, I thought I would start by asking each panelist what your first experience -- if you're Japanese, what your first experience was in the U.S. or vice versa if you're American. And then also what made you come back. So, let's start with you Shimada-san.

**Takehiro Shimada:** Thank you, Abigail-san. My first encounter with the United States is almost about 30 years ago, when I was I think a high school or university student. At the time my father used to work for the consulate general office as a medical attaché. There was no direct flight from Tokyo to Rio de Janeiro so I had to change my planes. And LA was my first destination to change the airplane. You know, we took airplane.

I still remember that when I just arrived in LA I found a picture of President Ronald Reagan - Welcome to the United States. I was a great fan of baseball, so United States is kind of the country of dream for myself. I still vividly remember that the picture of President Ronald Reagan, it was almost shining. I caught the impression that, wow, I just arrived in the United States - the country of baseball, the country of freedom, and the country of the leadership of the world. So that is my first encounter of the United States.

**Abigail Friedman:** Great. Thank you. How about you, Laura?

**Laura Abbot:** Thanks. So, I just was debating with myself do I tell it like kind of a more honest story or -- so I'm going for a very personal story. I was dating this guy. We'd only been dating about three months and things had been going very well. We're getting pretty serious. And he said to me, so what do you think about Japan? And I said, well, what do you mean what do I think about Japan? I've transited through Narita but never really spent any time there.

And he said, well, I'm supposed to move there in four months and I really like to continue this relationship going. So, would you consider moving to Japan?

So that was my first consideration quite honestly. He was in the military and was going to be heading there with his work. So, I had to think about the relationship and about the country too because I was working in international relations but not with Japan at the time. So, I actually applied for a fellowship through the Council on Foreign Relations in Hitachi to try to find a way for it to work for me professionally, to move to Japan and receive the fellowship. And we moved to Japan. We were engaged, actually, and moved to Japan.

And six weeks after arriving there was the Great East Japan Earthquake. I was in the 25th floor of an apartment building in Roppongi. The building shook and I was scared to death, and I thought this was the end. Then when it wasn't the end for me but it was tragically for so many people, I wanted to do whatever I could to help.

Because I had this fellowship for the year, I had actually applied for the fellowship to study about study abroad exchanges. At the time there had been a big downward trend of Japanese studying in the United States. It was about half of what it had been ten years before, and that had been a big priority for people to try to change that. So, I wanted to study that and work on that. But then after the earthquake, I said, well, no one's really caring about study abroad right now. I want to do something to help.

I had the opportunity to go up to the Tōhoku region and worked with a group called All Hands Volunteers and do hands-on disaster relief work. I also had the opportunity, I worked with the Embassy. Having worked in government before, I said, can I help? I showed up on

their door and they said just start answering the phones for some companies that are calling us saying what can we do. American companies.

Ambassador Roos at the time pretty quickly said, you know, we need to harness the energy of these corporations to do something more impactful and more creative than just giving them the number to the Red Cross or other organizations. That was really the genesis of the TOMODACHI Initiative. So lucky or unlucky I happened to be right there at the time and had the opportunity to work closely with the Ambassador in creating this longer-term public-private partnership harnessing, again, the energy of the private sector to do something more to help with the longer-term recovery of the Tōhoku region. So, I became the Founding Executive Director and stayed in Japan for the next four-and-a-half years.

Then, when I moved back to the States at the end of my husband's military tour, we both moved back. I've stayed engaged with Japan professionally ever since then, and so it was just sort of serendipity but here I am. I never expected to be working with Japan, but I love the country and love the people and really have dedicated my professional career since 2011 and my life to U.S.-Japan relations since then.

**Abigail Friedman:** It's a wonderful story. Thank you. Shin-san, yeah?

**Shin Koyamada:** My American influence, my dad loves American movies. He is a government employee working at the city hall in Okayama. He comes back home with three, four American movies every day. We had only one TV and he said you better watch while I watch, I'm not going to let you watch your anime. Okay. So, I grew up watching American movies since I was probably at junior high. Before graduating from junior high, my mind was already made up pursuing my American dream - to become an actor in Hollywood. So, I told

my parents can I go to America, I don't want to go to high school in Japan. My parents said, no, you have to at least please graduate from high school. So, I finished my high school.

American movie has been my influence and without my dad -- thanks to my dad I'm here in the United States. I moved to the United States in 2000, June 11th, and I was a college student. I came here with a student visa. I had no friends. No place to live. No English. No money. I didn't have a place to stay in Los Angeles, but I knew that I was going to make it happen. And I told my parents before I came to the United States I'm not going back to Japan unless I achieve my dream. So, I was only 18 and I found my place and enrolled in a college, Los Angeles City College. I took my acting class in 2001, 2002, 2003. Boom, I got my first debut in *The Last Samurai*.

Nobody knew who I was of course. That was my first movie. I thought it was a student film. But when I showed up on the set, I was like, wow, Tom is here. Well, we had dinner. Ken Watanabe is here. Hiroyuki is here. Wow, this is amazing. And I was in the cast number three, so I was one of the least in the movie. I had a great time working in the set for eight months. U.S., Japan, and New Zealand for six months. Then I was on Disney Channel. I grew up with the Disney Channel. I can talk about this all day long but I'm going to pass it on. Thank you.

**Abigail Friedman:** I'm so glad I asked these questions. They're fascinating stories. Aaron.

**Aaron Wodin-Schwartz:** Well, we'll see about that, a tough act to follow. I'm also going to talk about movies. I grew up in a really rural area. We didn't generally have TV service. What we had was like six movies that we watched over and over and over again. One of them was *Mr. Baseball*. I don't know if people are familiar with that film, from Tom Selleck from the

'90s. A washed-up MLB player goes to Japan and goes through all the trials and travails and ultimately integrates Japanese culture into his personality and who he is. And vice versa for his Japanese host. I just thought it was fascinating.

I didn't know how accurate it was or how respectful it was or anything, although I think it holds up. You guys correct me if I'm wrong. I didn't know much about Japan of course, but what I could understand from that movie was that it's a very deep and interesting ancient culture that I wanted to know more about. But of course, I was a kid and didn't do much about it.

Fast forward to probably 2006. That was between college and grad school and I was in New York City. We're talking about it earlier. I ended up dating a Japanese American girl and learned a lot more about the culture. I hung out with her family in Claremont, California and it was a really interesting immersion experience. But unfortunately, I never made it to Japan until many years later.

My first and only trip still to Japan was through Brand USA. We were doing the Japanese premiere of our first 3D IMAX movie, *National Parks Adventure*. If you haven't seen it, go see it. And that was amazing. We got to of course do our whole film event. We had the Japanese actors and TV hosts and so on and so forth come out. But it's just hanging out and walking around the city of Tokyo, and visiting some friends in Yokohama was amazing.

Of course, there was one night where some colleagues and I and one of the stars of the film, we sort of went out to have street food. We went to a bar and the next thing we know it's 3:00 in the morning. We said why don't we stay up and go to the fish market. So, we snuck in

the fish market at 5:00 in the morning and had one of those epic -- we got kicked out three times actually. I got to see a little bit but apparently you need tickets in advance.

So that was my first and still only experience in Japan, but I'm inspired to go back to see more and see more of the country, skiing up north in Hokkaido and going to Kyoto. And I'd love to see Okinawa. So, it's still an amazing country, a culture that fascinates me and much more to learn.

**Abigail Friedman:** Great. Thank you so much. What I found really ties everything together with all of these different stories is the age at which your memories of being exposed to Japan or the U.S. We are all very young, and that seems to me to be the key. People have talked about that, sort of youth and the U.S.-Japan exchange relationships.

So, I'd like to key off of that and ask you. I think I'll start with Laura. What are some of the challenges to engage in youth, if there are any, in each of our countries to get excited about the other country? What would be some of your ideas of how to overcome those challenges?

**Laura Abbot:** Thanks, Abigail. I think there's been narratives certainly when I first moved to Japan of particularly Japanese young people saying I'm not that interested in studying abroad - in the United States. There are so many great opportunities for me here in Japan or elsewhere in Asia. It's closer by. It's sort of easier to get to. The U.S. is very expensive from an educational point of view. So, there are certain barriers, entry and out. I think in terms of study abroad exchanges, the cost of education in the United States is a big deterrent.

I think another impediment that hurts both way exchange is the school year calendar which doesn't line up. So, it's hard for people to just say I'm going to take a year abroad or a

semester abroad. And even the summer holidays abroad, it doesn't line up. And so, I know there have been some efforts already on the Japanese side to adjust the school year calendar.

Another element that we hear often from the university-age students who are considering studying abroad in the United States from the Japan side is resistance or concern about the recruiting cycle here in Japan which is quite rigid. So, if you want to get a good job at a Japanese company, you need to be in the school and graduate with your years of university done in Japan. It's not seen as prestigious to study abroad and have that on your transcript if you want to go on to some of the big Japanese corporations. And you need to be there for the recruitment cycle. So, I think potentially changing that recruitment cycle or loosening it up a little bit would also help.

For the Americans wanting to go to Japan, I think the culture is really enticing. People love Japanese food and it's very cool. I saw other videos earlier about the skiing and things. I think there's an element of cool in Japan. That really is cool that people get excited about.

But I think the language is a huge issue for people to be able to study abroad or work abroad effectively. So, it's a challenge on both ways. We need to improve English language learning in Japan from a much younger age, I think. Then there's just not a lot of Japanese language programs in the United States. And still I think to study and work in Japan, there just aren't very many options if you don't speak Japanese.

**Abigail Friedman:** It's interesting. One of the things that the Japan-America Society of Washington, D.C. initiated was a fast course for people who are thinking of going to Japan, who are already planning to go as tourists. Just do a five-day course keyed off of tourism brochures

to make it more accessible. Because I think you're absolutely right; the language seems monumental. But you don't need to have a lot to be able to just land on the ground.

**Laura Abbot:** I'll just add one more thing, which is we've seen -- I think this sort of get them young is the best advice. We've seen short-term exchanges, which are for a couple of weeks for high school students, can have a profound impact in the future of their decisions to want to study abroad in university or work abroad in the future. It's not as scary to go away for a week or two.

**Abigail Friedman:** Shimada-san, does what Laura said resonate with your experience at the Embassy? What are some of the things that the Embassy is trying to do to expand exchanges?

**Takehiro Shimada:** Thank you, Abigail-san. In terms of the Japanese language, it is true that it is definitely the kind of impediment for the American kids to -- not only with Japan, even also the study abroad in Japan. So, from that perspective, we are always extending our support to the Japanese language education in the United States. For example, one of the challenges that Japan is facing is that even though actually the number of Japanese learners are increasing, but the challenge is that the number of the teachers are decreasing.

The reason is that in order for the Japanese teachers to stay in the States, maybe you need the appropriate visas. And also in order for the Japanese teachers to teach Japanese, in especially the local school or public school, you have to get a license in each state.

So that is the most difficult part for the Japanese government, to maintain the number of Japanese teachers here. In order to do so, we always make efforts to work on each local government or in the city levels, country levels, even the state level to allow the Japanese to

stay in the United States as a teacher. At the same time, in order to overcome such difficulties, we are now studying the possibility to encourage for example the Young Americans, like the JET [indiscernible]. If they are eager to come back to the United States to become the Japanese teacher, maybe Japanese government should have opportunity to train them. Extend their basic training course to become the Japanese teacher when they are in Japan. So that is the endeavor we are just seeking for.

**Abigail Friedman:** Excellent initiatives. I'm going to change it up a little and ask Shin-san. I saw in your bio you're from Okayama, which is not Tokyo or Kyoto. And one of the things that we've talked about earlier today is the need to encourage people to visit the regions outside of the big cities. Having come from Okayama - which is not a small city by the way. It's a big city. But it's probably not the first city that comes to mind for an American. What are some of the things that you would see would be helpful to attract people to go to the regions of Japan?

**Shin Koyamada:** Speaking of Okayama, next year we will host a Japan-United States Sister Cities summit in my hometown of Okayama for the first time ever in history. So, Norman Mineta-san, you're welcome. Please come to our summit.

**Male Voice:** San Jose?

**Shin Koyamada:** Yes. San Jose is a sister city with Okayama for 50 -- no, 60. 1957, so 67. So, it's been a long time- third older sister city. So, I will let you know more details. It's going to be in October next year. It's not officially announced yet but it's going to happen.

To answer your question, I had an opportunity to travel in 2012. I got a call from the State Department and the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo, and the consulates, to do a speech in Tokyo,

Osaka, Fukuoka, Okayama, and Okinawa to share my story in the United States. Coming from a small city -- well, considerably a small city compared to Tokyo. There are about 700,000 people in the city of Okayama. The government of Japan said the youth are very conservative of going out and studying abroad in the United States and other places. I was wondering why. And I had an opportunity to talk to these high school students one on one. Every lecture I had about 300 Japanese students. And it was surprising how much they're willing to study in the United States but it was the society that kind of suppress.

Also, it was an image of the United States that they see on television. I told them I've been in the United States for a long time. I've never been in a dangerous situation. All you see in television is not what is happening in the United States. It was a very fascinating experience. These students are willing to take a risk in coming to the United States, and now they have their parents. I realized that there are so many students in the regions of Japan that are willing to go outside but parents, schools, teachers, friends -- I was in the same situation when I was in high school. Why are you going to the United States? You're not going to achieve your dream - Hollywood. You're in Okayama. You don't speak even in English.

Why are you going to the United States? To achieve my American dream. When somebody, if your parents -- if your kids are willing to take a risk and plan their lives to pursue their dreams, I totally encourage you to encourage your own kids. That's why we host the Japan-America Discovery Tour. We took Hollywood celebrities to regions of Japan to see what is really happening outside of Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, Fukuoka - in the smaller cities. And we took Hollywood celebrities in ten different cities throughout Japan, from Miyagi all the way to Okinawa.

And speaking of tourism, they have about 20-30 million followers on Twitter and Instagram. I have a quarter of a million followers too. But for visiting these places, they were assigned to tweet, engage in the social network and to talk about what you have experienced, what you see, what you really think. And these followers around the world are really listening to these role models. And the role model in Japan is a very important thing.

So through our foundation, KIF, we send different speakers who have different international background to talk about -- to share their stories. So, they could be their role models, an opportunity to think globally and take the opportunity to study abroad, hopefully in the United States. I had a wonderful experience in the United States. So that's my approach - social network. Not only working in the big cities but do your projects in the regions of Japan and they will support and appreciate what you do. Thank you.

Abigail Friedman: Thank you. I think --

**Male Voice:** [Inaudible]

**Abigail Friedman:** My exposure to Japan? You know, we love talking about ourselves. I was a little like Laura. I did not really have Japan on the screen. But my husband had grown up -- his father was in the Navy and he watched films on Navy bases all across America. They were always showing these Samurai films, so he fell in love with Japan because of the Samurai films he watched as a kid. So, he got a job offer in Japan, in Hiroshima, and I thought why not. And that's how I ended up in Japan. The irony is my husband went on to do many different things unrelated to Japan and I like a Roomba vacuum cleaner just kept going straight on the Japan front.

And for me, the language also was something that was key. In fact, one of my language teachers from the State Department is here today in the audience. And when I first started learning Japanese, I asked how long it would take. Then the State Department they said ten years. I thought, well, you don't understand. I'm really smart; I could do this like maybe in two. When I hit the ten-year mark, I realized that they were right. But the language for me is what allowed me to get exposure to Japanese *haiku*. It allowed me to get exposure to people.

I remember going to a region closer to the -- I'm forgetting the towns but it was inland and it was a region facing Korea. And I met all of these older people there who talked about their trade relationship that they used to have in the old days with the North Korea. Those kinds of insights you can't get if you don't make an effort to learn the language. Because these were quite old people, this was something in their youth. But I had a sense of the layers of Japanese history. And as a diplomat, that was so important to understanding the complexity of Japan. So, thank you for asking.

Let's see. I think at this point we should open it up to the audience's questions. Thank you for starting it off, Secretary Mineta. I have to say that because of the light, it's hard for me to see in that area. So, if you raise your hand, if someone could come over and just let me know. And there's someone with a microphone. I see a hand over here, so we'll start here. Thank you.

**Male Voice:** I think Japan is missing out on a big opportunity. What you might call niche tourism is really highly specialized tours. I'm thinking railroads, folk art, anime, manga, expos - my favorite - woodblock prints, high-tech projects, breweries, Shinto faith. Each of those could be specialization tours. They have yet to appear, as best I can tell, in the Japanese scene.

I also have to tell Japan a big secret. There's some confusion about your nature tours because there are tens of thousands of Americans who will not go to Japan and will not return to Japan because of the marine mammal slaughter. And I think at some point Japan has to stand up and say we're losing more money to conscientious objection tourists in the U.S., Australia and Europe than we're gaining from visitation [sounds like] slaughter. I mean isn't that an issue that JNTO should be looking at seriously and counseling the government at large?

**Abigail Friedman:** That's a great point. None of us on this panel are with JNTO, but I think that message was heard. Maybe afterward they will be able to have a conversation with you. Thank you. Other questions? Okay. Well, we can go on talking. Okay, yes?

**Female Voice:** Thank you. Just as a point of reference, what's the difference between Japan Tourism Agency and Japan National Tourism Organization - JNTO? Is one government and the other private sector? And if we want to contact somebody about some of these types of ideas of putting together thematic trips, which is the right organization to direct such an inquiry?

**Abigail Friedman:** I would assume the JNTO. Did I get the answer right? So again afterward -- we have at the front table here representatives from that organization. They would be able to help. So thank you. And I apologize again for not being able to answer the question myself, but I don't have that answer. Yes?

**Satoshi Seino:** [Speaks in Japanese]

**Interpreter:** Thank you very much. I'm Seino from JNTO. I will first answer the easier question that has to do -- no. It's the second question. Japan, the Tourism Agency is the part of government so that their activities are rather restricted and then it doesn't have much

flexibility. That's the reason why we created JNTO. JNTO is not completely the private sector organization. We have some restrictions, but we have more flexibility. Japan Tourist Agency secures funding for us, and then we can use those funding for activities. So, we have a little bit more flexibility than other government organizations.

Then if you have some idea about tours, please approach us. If you have the specific plans, there are JNTO offices in New York and Los Angeles in the United States. Then there are some people from those offices, in the meeting rooms, so please approach them and you can contact them later.

And then the first question. I think it's a very tough question. That has to do with culture. There are a lot of diverse opinions about the slaughtering of marine mammals. Some people say that they should be banned, but other people say that they should continue. It's a tradition. So how to make adjustment? Then the opinions are very much divided, so it's very difficult to find a solution to that very easily. We really should start having the most serious discussion as to what to do with this.

**Abigail Friedman:** It's time now. So, I want to thank everyone for your patience and for all of the interesting discussions we've had today. And I will turn this back to Mamiko [phonetic]. Great. And let's all thank the panel one more time.

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