On February 25, the international symposium entitled "Trade, Strategic Diplomacy, and Immigration: Fostering Trilateral Cooperation between Industry, Government, and Academia in Japan, Mexico, and the United States" was held at Waseda University. In 2024, Japan, Mexico, and the United States held important elections to choose their leaders. They now face complex policy challenges in trade, security, and immigration. This symposium aims to foster a "knowledge creation network" across industries and generations, promoting academic, policy, and social insights through dialogue among the three countries. With prominent speakers and approximately 100 participants, the symposium served to identify current challenges and confirmed the importance of strengthening cooperation among Japan, Mexico, and the United States.
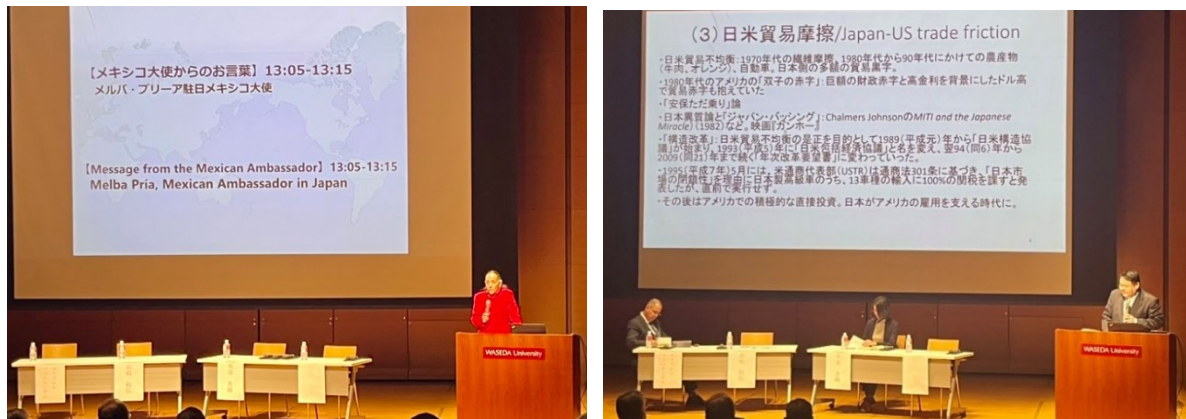
After opening remarks by Kate Elwood, Dean of International Affairs, Waseda University, the symposium began with an introductory message from Melba Pría, Ambassador of Mexico to Japan, who emphasized that Japan, Mexico, and the United States have longstanding ties and that dialogue and frank discussion will help further strengthen our cooperation in addressing global challenges. The Ambassador also mentioned that this year marks the 20th anniversary of the Economic Partnership Agreement between Mexico and Japan, from which both countries have benefited greatly.

The first panel on politics and diplomacy discussed current geopolitical issues under the new Sheinbaum and Trump administrations and potential consequences for Mexico, Japan, and the US. Kaori Baba (Hokkaido University) analyzed Sheinbaum's security policies, noting that despite her high approval ratings, public safety remains the biggest domestic challenge. As Trump threatens 25% tariffs on Mexican goods and labels six Mexican cartels as terrorist organizations, the Morena government has enacted constitutional reforms aligned with Sheinbaum's strategy—tackling root causes, strengthening the National Guard, centralizing intelligence, and improving coordination. However, limited funds and the blurred line between national and public security may hinder results. Kazuhiro Maejima (Sophia University) described the U.S. as a "blurred picture" for Japan due to its ambivalent history and trade tensions under Trump. He argued that Trump's diplomacy, often seen as erratic, follows a clear deal-making logic, which Japan should consider in future negotiations. Rafael Fernández de Castro (University of California San Diego) examined Trump's escalating pressure on Mexico—mass deportations, USMCA re-negotiation, tariffs, and military threats. He highlighted Mexico's strategic handling of Trump and stressed the need for stronger Japan-Mexico ties amid growing uncertainty.

The second panel on trade examined the US-Mexico-Japan economic relationship, especially Japan's investment in Mexico and Trump's new trade policies. This panel was moderated by Kensuke Teshima (Doshisha University). Naoko Uchiyama (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies) highlighted Mexico's role as a major automobile producer, the Japanese investment boom after 2012 and the new challenges posed by USMCA regulations, semiconductor shortages, and preference for US firms. After the pandemic, Japanese investment dropped significantly. Further, Chinese Foreign Direct Investment is sure to increase in Mexico due to the US-China trade war. Kiyotaka Morita (Japan Business Association: Keidanren) analyzed Economic Partnership Agreements between Japan, Mexico, and the US. Because of Trump's tariff threats and the 2026 USCMA revision, Japan and Mexico must deepen their collaboration ties. Juan Carlos Baker (Ansley; Universidad Panamericana) discussed Mexico's position in the global stage and argued that it has a new power and special influence on its erratic northern neighbor. He also asserted that Japan and Mexico should work together to face these challenges, maintain open trade, and counter protectionist efforts by adopting a strategic but principled approach.

The third panel on international cooperation and migration discussed regional trends to address migration flows in Latin America and Mexico in particular. Manubu Ohara (Japan International Cooperation Agency: JICA) talked about the support JICA gives to the region to develop both employment opportunities for refugees and support for the reception and integration of migrants and refugees in Mexico. He also stressed the importance of expanding the Mexico-Japan partnership to develop more programs like these. Taro Seriu (Inter-American Development Bank: IDB) noted the importance of Japan's role in this institution and highlighted certain developments in the Latin American region such as Venezuelan displacement, irregular migration, and economic pressures. Andrew Selee (Migration Policy Institute) examined Mexico's historic role as a transit and, more recently, a destination country for migrants. Recognizing the complex influence migration has on economic stability and international cooperation, then, he suggested that, against current US aggressive immigration policy, Mexico has special leverage in negotiations with its neighbor because of the negative economic consequences such policy could entail.

In the student panel, Somada Yuuka (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies) shared her experience in Mexico, highlighting disparities between malls and "mercados." She discussed the informal economy and proposed measures to reduce stagnation, instability, and poverty in Latin America. Yuna Watanabe (Waseda University) explored history, gender, and language in borderland identities, using Gloria Anzaldúa's theory to analyze economic and cultural tensions at the Mexico-US border. Taro Matsuzaki (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies) examined Mexico's railway projects, from Porfirio Díaz's era to López Obrador's Mayan railway, designed for tourism but criticized for environmental damage. He argued for prioritizing passenger rail development over large-scale tourism projects. Sebastián Canseco Ibarra (Waseda University) analyzed Mexico-Japan diplomatic ties, using 1848 US occupation lithographs to highlight the US's historical influence on both nations. He argued that their relationship has long been mediated by the US and urged deeper cooperation amid today's political uncertainties.

The summary panel reviewed some prospects for business, government, and academic collaboration between Japan, Mexico, and the United States. Yasushiro Nakayama (Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry) discussed Japan-Mexico economic relations. While Mexico previously faced a tough business environment, Sheinbaum's "Plan México" aims to boost domestic manufacturing, benefiting Japanese businesses. He emphasized the importance of long-term commitments to foster new collaboration opportunities. Shinichi Sato (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) emphasized the historical and strategic ties between Japan, Mexico, and the US, advocating for continued collaboration in trade and academia. Nobuaki Hamaguchi (Kobe University; Japan Society of Social Science on Latin America) stressed the role of academic societies in fostering dialogue, supporting junior researchers, and navigating uncertainties, particularly in trade agreements like TPP and USMCA. Rafael Fernández de Castro warned that, with the second rise of Donald Trump, the "Pax Americana" is coming to an end. Amid a global wave of authoritarianism, migration and economic instability, he held a pessimistic outlook and foresaw heightened geopolitical tensions.

The symposium ended with a closing remark by Masato Shizume, Dean of the Faculty of Political Science and Economics, Waseda University. He emphasized that the symposium had demonstrated the importance of dialogue in a world of increasing uncertainty, and that such efforts would be necessary in the future. He also stated that Waseda University will continue to be committed to building cooperative relationships in the Asia-Pacific region.

(Report/Photo: Ana Elena Pascoe Rodrígeuz, Editing: Yuriko Takahashi)