

Feature:

The Way We Really Are: Portraits of Ourselves

Highlights of the Daily Lives of Japanese High School Students Photo Contest



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米 Kome (Rice)

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The Way We Are: Japanese High School Life in Photographs

During fiscal 1997, the Japan Forum conducted a photo contest on the theme of the daily lives of Japanese high school students as a special event commemorating the first ten years since its founding. Its aim was to collect photographs of Japanese high school life, taken by and of the students themselves. In response, TJF received 222 entries, all sets of 5 photographs taken by young amateur photographers of their classmates, for a total of 1,110 photographs.

The well-established way of promoting understanding of culture in Japanese-language classes overseas is through explanations of *origami*, *ikebana*, tea ceremony, kabuki, and other exotic aspects of Japanese culture in the narrow, traditional sense. TJF believes, however, that elementary, junior-high, and senior-high school students may be more interested in aspects of culture that are a familiar, immediate part of daily life in Japan, in other words, in the real lives of their peers in Japan today. We also believe that the first step in moving beyond stereotypes and monolithic images is to show young people overseas how the faces of their Japanese peers are as individual and alive as their own. For Japanese high school students as well, the process of thinking what kind of message to relay to their peers overseas proved an opportunity to look at themselves in a totally new light. In this issue we introduce a digest of the messages and profiles attached to the 222 entries and two of the entries in the contest. The winning entries are posted on the TJF website (<http://www.tjf.or.jp>) and work is in progress on a published album of selected entrants in the contest.

| Favorite singers and music

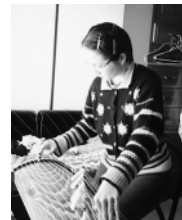
Favorite Japanese music

GLAY/L'Arc ~ en ~
Ciel/LUNASEA/スピッツ/
Mr. Children/ウルフルズ
あむるなみえ
/Speed/安室奈美恵/B'z/
Judy and Mary/Chara/
Every Little Thing/
かわむらりゆういち
UA/河村隆一/
T.M. Revolution/
Dreams come true

Favorite foreign music

The Beatles/Oasis/
Mariah Carey/Slava/
Boys II Men/Chick Corea/
AEROSMITH/
Gloria Estephan/
Beach Boys/
H.O.T. (South Korea)/
African and Irish folk
music/digital rock/
Indian music/
classical music/
country music

TJF's survey of the students who served as the models in the photo contest revealed their surprisingly diverse tastes in music. Favorite singers and songs included not only popular Japanese soloists and groups, but an astounding variety, transcending national boundaries and languages, that included everything from Mariah Carey and the Beatles to classical music, African folk music, and Asian pops. High school students are frequent visitors to local CD shops that are well stocked with music from all over the world. From that diverse supply, they freely pick and choose the style and type of music that suits their personal tastes. There is a great deal of music whose appeal is shared by young people in farflung parts of the globe.



This music is a very intimate part of young people's daily lives. They copy favorite songs onto cassettes for the Walkmans they carry everywhere, they belt out ballads with their friends in *karaoke* sessions that are an important venue of peer communication. They teach themselves to play the guitar. They take lessons in piano or even traditional instruments like the *koto*, or form rock bands with their friends, developing a serious and enthusiastic interest in music.

The list of Japanese singers and groups the students chose as their favorites, among which katakana and letters from the English alphabet stand out as much as traditional-style names, makes a study in eclectic naming.

| Favorite foods

Music is not the only aspect of Japanese culture that is rapidly being internationalized and globalized. Eating in Japan today includes ingredients and cuisines from all over the world. High school students enjoy not only Korean-style grilled meat and kimchee from Japan's closest neighbor, but Chinese, Italian, French,

Mexican, and African food. The top favorite foods of the high school students surveyed—*rāmen*, *gyōza*, curried rice, spaghetti, and hamburgers—all originated in other countries, but nobody thinks of them as foreign. They are already a familiar part of home cooking in Japan. For ravenous high school students, for whom

Japanese-language teachers who would like to obtain copies of these photographs, please see the box on page 14.

three meals a day is not enough, *rāmen* and *soba* restaurants are as familiar and frequently visited as McDonald's, Denny's, and Mister Donut.

Sashimi, sushi, and *sukiyaki*, traditional dishes for which Japan is well known overseas, are still firm favorites of high school students. As the number of mothers who work outside the home has increased, the amount of time put into cooking and housekeeping has been decreasing, and consumption of instant and fast foods as well as use of frozen and other

pre-prepared foods has increased. Yet it's also impressive that mom's cooking hasn't been forgotten either: the top of the list of favorite foods include home-prepared *bentō*, *miso-shiru*, and egg roll. The entries in this contest featured many photographs that showed students eating their lunches together, lunches that are *bentō* prepared by their mothers. Lunch time is one part of school life that students enjoy most, and the old-fashioned *bentō* is alive and appreciated.

Favorite foods

カレーライス(curried rice)/
ラーメン(*rāmen*)/ぎょうざ
(*gyōza* [chao-ze])/
はるまき(*harumaki*)/
パスタ(pasta)/ピザ(pizza)/
ハンバーグ(hamburger
steak)/タコス(tacos)/
やきにく(grilled beef
[Korean-style])/
すし(sushi)/すきやき
(*sukiyaki*)/さしみ(*sashimi*)/
たこやき(*takoyaki*)/
おやこどん(*oyakodon*)/
おにぎり(*onigiri*)/
たまごやき(*tamagoyaki*)/
ごはんとおしる(*gohan* and
miso-shiru)/チョコレート
(chocolate)



Favorite phrases

Human relations, where to go to college, what kind of career to pursue—high school students have a lot to worry about and anguish over. The slogans and phrases they choose as their favorites reflect their struggle to guide and discipline themselves.



Favorite phrases

初志貫徹 (Accomplish your original intention)/ 勇猛果敢
(Be brave and resolute)/ 千紫万紅 (Flowers in profusion
in full bloom)/ 有言実行 (Practice what you preach)/
大器晩成 (Great talent matures late)/ 他人に優しく自分に厳しく
(Be gentle to others and strict with yourself)/
為せば成る為さねば成らぬ何事も (If you but make up your
mind, you can do anything.)/ 少年よ大志を抱け(Boys! Be
ambitious!)/ 継続は力なり (Persistence is strength)/
一期一会 (Every encounter is to be treasured)/
柔能く剛を制す (Softness overcomes hardness)/
マイペース (My pace)/ Dreams come true /
Love and peace/ Excelsior/ Where there is a will,
there is a way/ Weeds never die



Dreams for the future

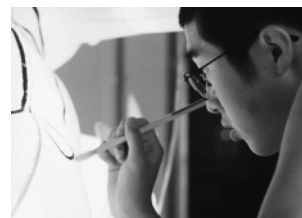
The students were divided into two types, those who put down specific careers they wanted to pursue—teacher, caregiver or welfare worker, baker, interior coordinator, photographer—and those who would only hazard a vague guess at what the future might bring. Among those who gave specific occupations, many were eager to develop interests and activities they were currently pursuing into jobs for the future, hoping to find work in a field that would suit their own aptitudes and personality. Those with vaguer images of the future were more idealistic or shaped by wishful thinking: get married and

raise a happy family, work in caregiving for the disabled and elderly, be of use to society such as working with medical care in developing countries, pursue a life full of encounters with people from all over the world, improve myself as a human being, live a life suited to my own personality, and so forth.

Japan's school system does demand a great deal of conformity of high school students, and some say it is difficult for them to discover themselves and pursue dreams of their own. We hope these students will courageously pursue their own potential.

Occupation or pursuit of the future

mass media-related
work/ nursing or welfare
care/ space research/
interior coordinator/
soccer player/
computer programmer/
jidaigeki (samurai swash-
buckler drama) actor of
major roles/
teacher to popularize judo
mastered as a university
student/ marry for love
and raise a happy family/
a fulfilling career and live a
full life/ marry my
boyfriend and open a
soba restaurant



Portraits of an Individual

Photographer: Nakanishi Yūsuke

Tokyo Metropolitan Shinjuku Yamabuki High School

Our high school is unusual even in Japan in that it allows students to freely create their own curriculums, requiring a certain number of credits to advance and graduate. Whatever you decide to do, you decide yourself; no one forces us to study this or that. You design your own course of study and study on your own responsibility. The students in most high schools in Japan are between 15 and 18 years old, but there are quite a few here who are older than that. Many of the students here have been through various difficult experiences in life that have given them more maturity than many other teenagers.

These photographs show my close friend, Hino Takashi, just as he is. Whatever stereotypical image you may have of Japanese high school students, I hope you will notice that he is no stereotype: his expressions are as diverse and intense as anyone's, seen anywhere. In each photo, I think you can see a different dimension of human nature: curiosity, absorption, determination, feeling, and the natural impulses of unguarded moments. Each expression captures the fine qualities of Takashi's character.

1. At work

Takashi works the 10-hour night shift at a 24-hour gasoline station, 10:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. 3 days a week. He earns 1,000 yen an hour. He attends classes from 1:00 to 7:00 p.m. before going to work. At our school, most students have to supply their tuition and spending money themselves, so almost all our friends have jobs.

2. Cooking

A school friend comes to stay over so Takashi makes his specialty, fried rice. The secret is the whipped egg he tosses in at the end, mixing it thoroughly with the rice. Still, he lives with his family, so he only cooks when he gets the urge.

3. In the bath

When Takashi takes a bath, he soaks for no less than 40 minutes, and more often up to 2 hours. People tease him for spending so much time in the bath, but he says nothing is more calming and comfortable than reading his favorite mysteries and manga while soaking in the tub.

4. On stage

For a performing arts festival being put on by the evening-school students, Takashi took the part of a former boxer who has gone blind. But Takashi says he wants to become a mystery writer, not an actor.

5. Studying English conversation

Chatting with the English-conversation teacher during a break in class. At our school, English classes are taught by a Japanese teacher working together with a native-speaker teacher. There are about 40 students to a class, but fewer in some cases.



Hino Takashi

Age: 18

Clubs: Theater Club, Broadcasting Club

Hobbies: Reading, word play

Special skills: Glib talk, talking big

Country wants to visit: China

Favorite phrase: "I decide on my own."

Self-appraisal: Rather selfish and opportunistic; always trying to calculate, even a little, what's in it for me.

Dream for the future: To make "something" that only I can make. And to live at a relaxed pace.

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Our Beloved “Dancing Judoist”

Photographer: Yamazaki Hideyuki

Chiba Prefectural Keiyō Technical High School

Our school is a technical high school. In addition to regular courses, we study technical skills such as manufacturing things using various kinds of machinery. Not many girls want to go to vocational school, and there are only two girls in my class. Keiko is one of those two precious girls.

Keiko is good at everything. A member of the judo club, where she can throw a guy twice her size, she also manipulates machinery skillfully and practices jazz dancing in her spare time. She is cheerful, kind to others, and of strong character. It's not surprising that she's practically the idol of our class.

I picked the days Keiko had shop practice, athletics, and after-school club meetings to photograph her, focusing on her school-related activities rather than on her daily life. I decided on the theme “judo” because I happened to watch a judo tournament on television and realized that judo is one aspect of Japan that gets lots of international attention at the Olympics and other international events.

Japanese high schools are not as stiff and academic as you might think. We have lots of effervescent, versatile, and fun-loving people like Keiko.

1. On the way into school

Arriving at school in the morning, the girls wear their uniforms with personal flair. They can choose between red and green neck ribbons, and Keiko likes the school's uniform, which she thinks is quite stylish.

2. Working in the shop

About 40 percent of Keiko's classes are technical-skills-related. In classes working with machinery, the girls practice right along with the boys.

3. Judo practice

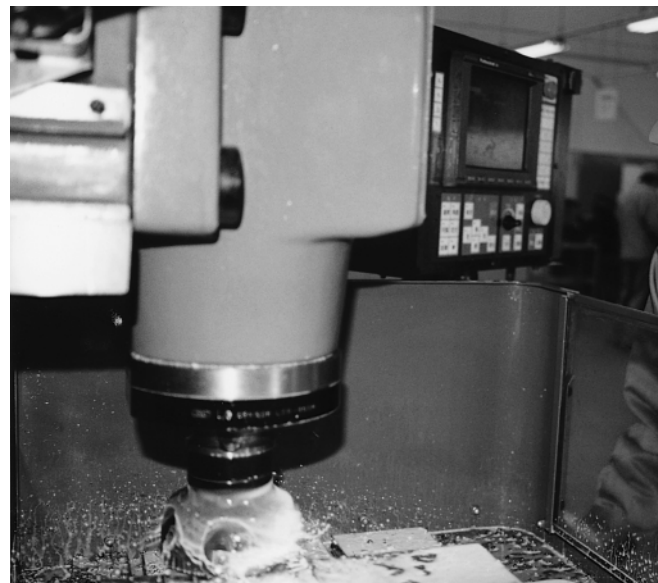
Keiko may be the only girl in the club, but she can throw a male opponent as skillfully as anyone. Extracurricular clubs in Japan's high schools are quite active, with many members who go to school for practice even on holidays and during summer vacation. Keiko's club practices six days a week.

4. Lunchtime

Enjoying lunch with a friend. Like most students, Keiko brings a packed lunch, or *bentō*, everyday. She's especially fond of *tamagoyaki* (rolled egg), *onigiri* with *umeboshi*, soybean hamburgers, and steamed meat buns (*nikuman*) for lunch.

5. Dance

Keiko loves to dance and belongs to an informal jazz dance group. In this photo, the girls are working on choreography on the theme “cheering the baseball team” for the upcoming dance contest. Just before the contest, the entrants practice about four times a week.



Yoda Keiko

Age: 17

Club affiliation: Judo club and jazz dance group

Hobbies: Drawing/sketching

Special skills: [Judo] back throw

Country wants to visit: Easter Island

Favorite word: "Emotions"

Self-appraisal: Hate to lose, especially to guys. Am a "dancing judoist" who likes to spend her days laughing and happy.

Dream for the future: To drink champagne while watching the sunrise against the backdrop of great moai statues on Easter Island.

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