

# The Japan Forum Newsletter

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## Meeting People Really Makes a Difference



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# Meeting People Really Makes a Difference

*In order to learn how to really communicate in another language and to understand the culture that forms the background to the language, nothing is more useful and effective than meeting the people who speak that language and direct experience in the environment where they live. Not all students of a foreign language, however, can enjoy the luxury of first-hand experience in the country where it is spoken. It is up to teachers to devise means for vicarious cultural encounter that will help students cultivate a deeper understanding of culture and a better appreciation of the language they are studying. This issue introduces two Japanese-language teachers and what they are doing to give their students this experience of encounter from afar. Their accounts also show how they have used photographs and profiles of individuals to give students the opportunity for a kind of vicarious encounter. (The texts below were prepared by TJF based on presentations given at the TJF-sponsored session, "How Can Culture Be Taught in the Foreign-language Classroom?" during the annual meeting of the American Council on Teaching of Foreign Languages in Chicago, November 1998.)*

## Encounter in Education: Path to the Profiles Project

**Cyrus Rolbin**

My involvement in the project to compile profiles of Japanese individuals as a means of introducing society and culture to students of Japanese language overseas began during my experience teaching English under the Japan English Teaching (JET) program a few years ago.

As a college student in New York state, I had become concerned about how schools were finding it increasingly difficult to guide students in areas such as moral development. At a time when the divorce rate is high in the United States and many young people don't have parents who can guide them in making tough decisions or dealing with crises, some values may need to be learned as part of the education system and encouraged by it. For example, sometimes we need to make our personal concerns secondary and think about helping our friends or colleagues first. I had been impressed by Mahatma Gandhi's rule that intellectual life shouldn't be separated from the nitty-gritty of daily life, and by what I had heard of the practice in Japanese public schools of having the students keep their own school clean. I wanted to go and see a society where that idea was being put into practice.

Employed as a part-time teacher in a number of schools in a place called Kurume in Kyushu, I did indeed see students cleaning their schools and I got to know a lot of my students and learned a bit about the teaching of English in Japan. When I asked other teachers about the

"moral education" system, however, their response was "Well, we don't really like it much." I didn't get the information about philosophy of education that I had hoped to obtain. Thinking I had come to the wrong place, I went to Tokyo during my vacation and interviewed a professor at Rikkyo University and officials at the Ministry of Education, and finally I got the answers I thought I had been looking for.

### ►► Connections on the Ground Level

What I learned in Tokyo satisfied my intellectual curiosity, but after my teaching experience in Kurume, I realized that there was a big gap between what the scholars and the officials said and what was really happening in the schools. I had not gone to the wrong place after all. I had come to Japan with my liberal-arts mentality and my Western assumptions, and suddenly I began to feel that I was floating above everybody and not really living. I decided to abandon my lofty academic mission for the time being and I did a home stay. I made it my mission for the next year to make friends. I did make many good friends.

I found that it was extremely interesting talking to the mothers of school children and other people who were connected on the ground level to life, to practical values, to dealing with society and the education system. I realized



that the formal, generalized traditions and customs of a people are one thing, but the far more diverse, individualistic way people actually live is often much closer to reality. Japanese eat rice. Yes, this is true, but when you get to know, you learn that they also eat bread, pasta, potatoes. Beyond the stereotype there is a rainbow of variety.

There were a number of ways I learned from my experience in Japan that I am now trying to pass on to my students. First, I realized that it is an extremely multifaceted place. I admit that I had had a rather uniform image of Japan in my mind before I went to live there and I learned, from meeting all kinds of people, that homogeneity of race or ethnicity don't have anything to do with diversity of personality and lifestyle. Obviously, all Japanese are not the same.

Second, some aspects of Japanese people's lives are distinctively Japanese. Americans have a tendency to think that their values are universal and that the world is all just one big, happy place. They assume that they can just express themselves the way they are accustomed to expressing themselves and they'll be able to establish a good rapport with anyone anywhere. That can be a very problematic approach at times. We need to learn the norms and manners of whatever culture we visit.

But, third, some aspects of Japanese lives are universal as are those of any people. So you cannot just adopt some kind of formula for communicating with a Japanese person, like bowing to the proper degree and saying "Sō desu ka" at the right times, and expect to automatically make friends. You have to remember that you are dealing with other human beings, like yourself.

## ▶▶ Bringing Encounter Into the Classroom

In realizing these three things, *encounter* is extremely important. Those of us who have had a chance to go to Japan—or to other countries—know both the joys and the agonies of learning culture and establishing understanding through personal experience, and we have grown from it. It would be great if all students could have such encounters, but that's not realistic for everyone. I began to think I could bring such encounters to my students in other forms. This led me to the project to write profiles of Japanese of my acquaintances. My approach to teaching has been to create classes in the image of my own personal experience in Japan. Even if my students couldn't meet the people I'd met personally, they could, through reading, get a sense of having met them.

The interviews turned out to be far more intriguing and

thought-provoking than I had imagined. The friends and others to whom I was introduced to compile these profiles shared with me fascinating stories of their lives and went into their particular circumstances and perspectives in much depth. I also believed that I could make these stories more vivid for my students by showing them pictures of the subjects of my profiles.

And here is where my project and the TJF High School Students Photo Contest project came together. TJF arranged for me to interview Hino Takashi (see photos on p. 6), the subject of one of the top prize-winning entries in the contest. Hino told me how far he had come from being a poor student in junior high school. He related how he had really disliked *kokugo* (Japanese), math, and computer science. He got into a high school where graduation is based on number of credits and the curriculum is not rigidly set. In the face of the freedom he encountered at that high school, he realized his responsibility to educate himself and ultimately ended up taking—*kokugo*, math, and computer science. Once the importance of being able to use language effectively dawned upon him, he began to study hard, and he has developed quite a passion for mystery novels and wants to write one himself.

Takashi's story, like that of many of the other people I interviewed, illustrates how some aspects of their lives are inimitably Japanese and others are just human. Students can therefore read such profiles as something germane to their own existence; not stories of mysterious figures in exotic lands far away. They may very well have American friends who had experiences very much like Takashi's.

For those of us who are high school teachers, helping students to set themselves on a solid course in life—to know how to make moral and intellectual decisions—is part of our work. In teaching about Japan, I believe we can show some of the lessons to be learned from life and thereby prepare our students for adult life. It will go a long way if they can learn to avoid stereotypes and recognize both the cultural and the universal dimensions of human responses and personalities. The variety of human life is an educational treasure house. By striving to make the content of education more concrete and personal—more alive with living, breathing human beings—we can make our teaching more effective. 🍀



## Beyond Language and Culture: Teaching Japanese

*Tsuda Kazuo*

In the twenty-five years prior to 1995, the number of students studying Japanese language at secondary schools in the United States rose from almost zero to more than 40,000. Not all of these students, however, intend to become Japanese-language specialists, and, in addition to improving their language proficiency, we must keep in mind the broader educational aim of foreign-language educations which is to enhance students' understanding of culture. The problem is how to link these two goals in practice. Another challenge lies in determining what aspects of culture should be taught. The landmarks and traditions of so-called "big culture" and the intimate and personal minutiae of "small culture" are both very important, and how to teach them concurrently remains one of the key challenges for foreign-language educators.

The U.S. National Standards for foreign-language education, issued in 1996, sets forth the objectives of foreign-language education in terms of the "five c's": communication, culture, connection, comparison, and community. Culture is identified as a key issue: "Study of another language and culture enhances one's personal education in many ways. The study of another language enables students to understand a different culture on its own terms." How to apply this principle in daily classroom activities, however, is no simple matter.

In Japanese-language education, furthermore, before addressing these problems of language acquisition and cultural understanding we must consider the more important issue of individual education for each student. We are, first and foremost, teachers, educators. In order to cultivate each student's overall level of understanding and learning, we must keep in mind the broad guidelines for curricula and learning experiences under which we are operating. So far, Japanese-language education has not confronted the need for teaching at the secondary-school level to focus on the individual student's personal growth and level of understanding. We must address this need now by ensuring students' growth and understanding by stages at the individual level (from practical to mechanical tasks), utilizing the broad guidelines for curricula and learning experiences (e.g., the U.S. National Standards). How to teach personal growth is a major issue, especially in the Japanese language field.

### ►► The Textbook as One Approach: *Kisetsu*

With these goals in mind, I and a number of high-school Japanese-language teaching colleagues have begun work on a new textbook entitled *Kisetsu*. This is an ambitious textbook designed not only for learning Japanese but also for developing the various skills students' require to develop well-rounded personalities, such as conducting surveys, making inquiries, drawing comparisons, observing, imagining, analyzing, thinking critically, and expressing themselves.

*Kisetsu* focuses on specific themes for each school year-level and is organized so that students acquire the target skills in stages. The themes for first-year students, for example, are "Encounter and Environment." In Unit 1, under the theme of "Encounter," students "meet" someone from a different cultural background, gaining an understanding of that person as they gradually gather information about him or her. In Unit 2, on "Environment," they learn about cities in Japan and the cities or towns they themselves live in, with each student eventually making a presentation to the class about his or her own town. Through each of these processes, students are given opportunities to improve their skills of investigation, comparison, analysis, expression and so on, while learning the simple Japanese sentence constructions to be mastered at the first-year level: *masu / mashita*, *arimasu / arimashita* and *imasu / imashita*. Naturally, the example sentences provided at this stage will be very different from those conventionally used. Clichéd examples such as "Toire wa doko ni arimasu ka" ("Where is the toilet?") are pointless. Instead, by using such model sentences as "Jibun no machi ni wa, hakujin ga X% imasu, Ajiakei no hito ga X% imasu" ("In my town, X% of the people are white and X% are of Asian descent"), the text allows students not only to study Japanese but also to link what they learn to social studies.

### ►► Using Photographs

Visits to Japan give students studying Japanese at junior and senior high schools valuable experience through direct contact with Japanese people and culture. But not all



students can enjoy such firsthand encounter. This is where photographs can play an effective role as a kind of “virtual” substitute for actually meeting the students. In particular, photographs of people can be used in practical activities designed to cultivate students’ capacity for understanding others and talking about themselves, which is one of the ultimate aims of the first volume of *Kisetsu*. Photographs may be used at many stages of the learning process in keeping with the broad guidelines for curricula and learning experiences (the National Standards, Learning Scenarios, etc.). Let’s look at a couple of examples of classroom activities using photographs.

### ▶▶ Self-introduction

Using photographs from “the TJF Daily Lives of Japanese High School Students Photo Contest” is one way for American high school students to “meet” their counterparts in Japan. Because the photos were taken by the Japanese students themselves, they provide a student’s-eye view that makes it easier for American high school students to relate to the people portrayed. While gaining a better understanding of high school students in Japan, American students can use these photos as a basis for comparison with and discussion about their own lifestyle. This creates a meaningful context in which they can learn the sentence constructions and vocabulary needed for such discussion. Using photographs showing club activities in Japan, for instance, students could practice verb usage while talking about their own club activities, using sentences like “barēbōru o shimasu” (“I play volleyball”) and “basuketobōru o shimasu” (“I play basketball”). With photographs about food, they can practice sentence patterns such as “X ga suki desu” (I like X) and so on. Another effective

approach would be to have students take photographs depicting their own daily lives and use them as a basis for class presentations.

### ▶▶ Personal History

After viewing photographs of Tsuda Umeko and other famous people, students could practice constructions such as “. . . shimashita” as they study simple biographies of the people portrayed. In this way, students learn about history while improving their Japanese. They can also do a project whereby, based on photographs and background information of a high school student their own age, each student compiles an imaginary personal history as if he or she were the person in the photograph.



**Tsuda Umeko**  
1864-1929; well-known educator  
and founder of Tsuda College

Photo: Tsuda College

Through interdisciplinary, project-oriented Japanese-language studies, pursued in stages in accordance with broad educational guidelines (the National Standards, Learning Scenarios, etc.), and through interaction both with people from different cultural backgrounds and with the students’ own environment, *Kisetsu* aims at fostering high school students’ overall personal development. It is hoped that, through this text, regular classroom Japanese-language study can be pursued in conjunction with activities that enhance cultural understanding, so that students can develop a range of skills, including cultural literacy.

#### *Kisetsu*

This is a four-volume textbook for American school students from ninth through the twelfth grades. Volume 1 is currently at the production stage. In accordance with the latest U.S. curriculum guidelines, the text is based on topics, tasks and interdisciplinary projects rather than on the conventional approach of grammar-accumulation, and includes many practical activities, drills and role-playing exercises. The ultimate aim of the text is to give students conversational skills for practical communication. The textbook includes many full-color photographs and illustrations, as well as comic-type drawings. ☺



Photo: Kumagai Noriko

# Lesson Plan Using Photographs: “The Way We Are” Collection

In searching for a good way to use the photographs that appeared in *The Way We Are—Japanese High School Students’ Daily Lives* as teaching materials, TJF worked with two Japanese-language teachers, Arakawa Yōhei (Japanese-language lecturer, the Japan Foundation, Japanese Language Institute) and Yabe Mayumi (Japanese-language teacher, YMCA College of English), to compile sample lesson plans. We hope you will find it useful. Perhaps it will help you think of other, original ways of putting these photographs to use in your classroom. If you come up with good original ideas that your students find enjoyable and rewarding, we would like to encourage you to pass them along. Write us a letter or send e-mail to [forum@tjf.or.jp](mailto:forum@tjf.or.jp). TJF looks forward to hearing from you!



Hino Takashi, in *The Way We Are*

## Preparations

1. Sets of A3-sized (297 x 420 mm) photo panels. The photos are selected from the TJF’s photo contest entries and each set consists of 5 photos showing one high school student’s daily life. The more sets you can show, the easier it will be to illustrate the diversity among Japanese high school students.

The photos used in this lesson have been chosen especially because of ways they contrast with the traditional materials used in Japanese-language education. Instead of idealized images of supposedly typical high school students, they are snapshots taken by the students themselves showing the actual daily lives of individual students. This class focuses on sets of photographs that show the daily routine of individual students.

2. Explanatory text in Japanese and in English about the high school students given with the photo panels (from *The Way We Are*).
3. Worksheet  
A sheet may be prepared to explain relevant vocabulary. You may also give the photos to one or more students in advance and have them prepare the explanations.

## Objectives

### Cultural aspects

1. Replace stereotyped images with a variety of real images showing how individual students actually live. At the same time, in order to avoid creating new stereotypes, be sure to provide ample explanation reminding them that each set of photos reflects the perspective of the individual high school student who took the photographs.
2. Persuade students to reconsider their ideas not only about Japan but also about their own country and themselves as well.
3. Encourage students to seek a deeper understanding of the lifestyle of someone of their own generation who happens to live in Japan. Avoid generalizations and stress that the photographs provide glimpses of specific individuals’ daily routines and the society they inhabit.
4. Encourage students to consider the differences and similarities with their own lifestyles, to imagine how they might feel in a similar situation, and think about the topic in new ways.
5. Encourage students to appreciate the wealth of visual information contained in the photographs and utilize that information to elicit verbal communication in Japanese.

## Grammatical structures

～と思います / 思う  
たぶん・きっと  
～かもしれません / かもしれない  
～でしょうか・～でしょう・～ないでしょう  
～らしい・～みたい・～よう  
(adj.) そうだ  
～ているところです / とこだ  
AよりBのほうが～

## Procedure

1. Confirm existing images asking questions

At the beginning, have the students talk about whatever images they have about high school students in Japan and discuss any stereotypes they may hold.

Some possible questions:

どんな服を着ていると思いますか。なぜですか。  
(What kind of clothes do you think Japanese high school students wear? Why?)  
どんな学校だと思いますか。  
(What kind of schools do you think they attend?)  
なにを食べていると思いますか。  
(What kinds of food do you think they eat?)  
なにが好きだと思いますか。  
(What kinds of things and activities do you think they like?)  
しょうらいのゆめはなんですか。  
(What kinds of hopes for the future do you think they have?)

If any of the students have Japanese pen pals or have hosted Japanese student in their homes, have them talk about their impressions.

日本人の友だちがいますか。日本人の高校生に会ったことがありますか。  
(Do you have any friends who are Japanese high school students? Have you ever met a Japanese high school student?)  
その友だちについて話してください。  
(Tell us about your Japanese friend.)  
(その友だちは 学校でどんなことをしていますか。  
(What do they do [what does your friend do] at school?)  
好きなもの、好きなことはなんですか。  
(What kinds of things and activities does he/she like best?)

2. Having confirmed the students’ existing images and taken note of those that may be based on unreliable information, present one of the sets of photo panels and ask some questions about

the student portrayed there in Japanese, using grammatical forms the students have already studied. Here are some possibilities:

Yes/no questions, such as この人は男の子ですか (Is this person a boy?) and この人は 人ですか (Is this person a (adjective indicating nationality) person?).

Choice questions, such as この人は中学生ですか、高校生ですか (Is this person a junior high student or a high school student?)

Questions about what's in the pictures, such as なにをしていますか (What is he doing?), なにを着ていますか (What is he wearing?), or どこですか (Where is he?).

Secondary-level Japanese-language textbooks usually have illustrations and the like, but few feature photographs. These photographs will probably be your students' first glimpse of what high school life in Japan is really like. As their imaginations are being stimulated and as they give their answers in Japanese, the students may truly have their eyes opened. In this way, stereotypes can be broken down and the gap between images and reality can be bridged.

### 3. Present basic information

Once you have finished with preliminary questions, you may provide the students with some basic information. Use written explanations from *The Way We Are*, in English or Japanese, as your reference source. In presenting explanations, either Japanese or the students' native language may be used, but it is important to make clear that the photographs show real Japanese high school students. Through this input and interaction, students can obtain reliable information about the Japanese students featured in the photographs.

### 4. Group exercise

a. Divide the class into several groups and give each group one set of photographs. Have each group discuss what they see in their photos—what the subject is doing and when, where he/she is, how he/she probably feels, and so on—and then have them prepare a summary of the points made in their discussion for presentation to the rest of the class.

#### Worksheet

1. このしゃしんは、たかしくんが、\_\_\_\_\_しているところです。

(1) たかしくんのよこにいる人はだれでしょうか。

(2) 二人はどんなことを話していると思いますか。

2. たかしくんは どんなぶくを 着ていますか。それは せいふくですか。

3. みなさんの学校の教室と、このしゃしんの教室とくらべて、どうですか。にていますか。ちがいますか。

4. たかしくんは、どんなかおをしていますか。つまらなそうですか。たのしそうですか。たかしくんは、今、どんな気持ちだと思いますか。どんなことを かんがえていると思いますか。

b. Distribute the worksheets that go with each photograph and have each group discuss their photos by addressing the questions on the worksheet. (See the attached sample worksheet.)

c. The worksheets could also include explanatory text in Japanese regarding the photographs (from *The Way We Are*), to be employed as resources for reading comprehension exercises.

d. Each group makes a presentation before the

rest of the class, using the written summaries.

### 5. General discussion

Depending on the ability level of the students taking part, you might steer them toward a discussion of something more abstract, such as the apparent attitudes or feelings of the people in the photos. In doing so, it is important to encourage students to identify points of comparison between what they see in the photographs and their own daily lives. One purpose of the lesson is enable students to get beyond superficial differences and see that these Japanese students are ordinary people with their own ambitions, hopes for the future, and occasional frustrations, and, above all, that they are leading average lives. If your students understand that, then the lesson can go beyond a mere one-way flow of information and help them to share something deeper.

さんをどう思いますか。

(What do you think of --?)

さんについて、ほかにどんなことを知りたいですか。

(Are there other things you'd like to know about --?)

さんに聞いてみたいことはありますか。

(Is there anything you'd like to ask --?)

自分と さんと似ているところはなんですか。ちがうところはなんですか。  
(What similarities are there between him/her and you? What differences are there?)

### 6. Further expansion

a. In order to simulate a situation of actual communication between your students and their counterparts in Japan, have your students write letters to the Japanese high school students in the photos (if not to be actually sent then as a writing exercise). To provide the students with reference resources for use in writing letters, show them Data on the Subjects of the Photographs (*The Way We Are*, p. 61, either the Japanese or the English version) and Glossary (*The Way We Are*, pp. 62 to 63, in English, or a translation of the English into simple Japanese). In their letters, the students can pose questions related to the information presented in these sources.

Writing a message to the photographer via the TJF website bulletin board will also be interesting! (See page 14.)

b. A look at one day (speaking, writing, performing)

Taking advantage of the fact that the photographs are sequential, you can have them arranged in order to represent a day in the life of a Japanese high school student and have the students describe or write about this or act out the role of a Japanese high school student in class. You might have your students invent backgrounds for the people in the photographs, including such details as names, family situations, hobbies, and the like, or imaginary accounts of conversations that might be taking place in the scenes pictured. This can provide an ideal opportunity to learn to distinguish between certainty and educated guessing based on available information.

Another possibility is to elicit suitable captions or titles for the photos. You could also have your students describe their own daily routines in Japanese. Depending on the students' ability level, you can have them either produce a series of simple sentences to describe the actions and activities in the pictures or encourage them to use linking forms, such as verb-て, verb-てから, verb-たあとで to describe sequences of actions.



#### *The Way We Are*

210 x 297 mm / 64 pages / color / published by the Japan Forum in November 1998 / In English and Japanese

*The Way We Are* is a bilingual collection of photographs of contemporary Japanese high school students as seen by their peers, selected from among 1,110 photographs of 222 high school students throughout Japan, entered to the 1998 TJF photo contest on the theme of the daily lives of Japanese high school students. The photographs are accompanied by messages in Japanese with *furigana* with English translations and information about the subject of the photographs. "Data on the Subjects of the Photographs" and a "Glossary" are appended at the back of the book. Those interested in obtaining a copy, please contact TJF.



# The Way We Are

## On the Way Home from School

📷:Photographer



えいが  
また映画  
みにいかないか？

あいだ  
この間みた『インディペンデンス  
デイ』さあ、よかったよな。

Winding down after a hard practice session of his judo club, Masayuki (right) begins to relax, leaving school with a friend. "Hey, you know, wasn't *Independence Day* great!" "Yeh! Let's go to another movie one of these days, okay?"

📷 Hirosaka Toshihiko/Hyogo prefecture

Kotone is happiest when she's eating her *o-bentō* or chattering with her friends. After school she keeps in touch with her boyfriend by beeper. "Finally. He's sent a message. Wonder where he's waiting for me?"

📷 Saitō Rika/Fukuoka prefecture



のんびり飲んでる  
場合じゃないよなあ。  
早く帰<sup>かえ</sup>らなくちゃ。



Commuting to school by subway is no lark. Daisuke grabs a bit of relief at a station kiosk. The rain has lifted. Final exams are about to begin. "No time to waste getting a drink! Gotta get home!"

📷 Katsunuma Naoko/Chiba prefecture

ひえー、  
こんなに高いの!!



Kiyoharu's hobby is tennis, but his favorite sport is basketball. On his way home he stops at a bookstore to peruse the magazines and finds a set of sportswear he'd really like to have, but "Wow! Look at that price!"

📷 Masuhara Hiroyasu/Chiba prefecture





うわー、さむーい!  
すべらないように  
気をつけなくちゃ。

Yumiko, peddling home in the snow.  
A member of the gymnastics club, it's a cold ride even for the always-energetic Yumiko. Your hands get so frigid you can't wiggle your fingers. And the street is all icy too. "Whew! It's cold!" she shivers, "I have to balance carefully so I don't slip."

📷 Ishikawa Takako/Iwate prefecture

あ、やっと  
メッセージがきた。  
どこで待ってるのかなあ。



ねえ、ねえ、  
このシール  
かわいいじゃない!  
ふたり  
二人でとろう。

はい、  
チーズ!

Taking a picture with a friend at the local "Puri-Kura" (print club) machine that prints the photo on the spot as duplicate seals. "There, that one's cute, let's take a shot together." Hiroko decides on one of the choice of decorative frames, "Okay, now say 'cheese'."

📷 Shindō Miki/Kanagawa prefecture

For these seniors, entrance examinations to university are not far away. Here they are heading for their extra classes at preparatory school (*yobikō*). They pore over their textbooks even on the train, sharing information about what may appear on the exams. "Here, this kind of problem comes up on tests all the time," says one, and his friend checks it out, confirming his observation.

📷 Kobayashi Ai/Kyoto prefecture



なんだい  
この問題、テストに  
よく出るんだよな。

どれどれ?  
あ、これか。

チョー  
おいしーい!  
し・あ・わ・せ



Miharu's favorite snack is actually ice cream, but today she's at McDonald's with a friend and delighted with the toy that comes with the Big Mac. "Ah! It's delicious! This is happiness!"

📷 Kaiho Madoka/Chiba prefecture

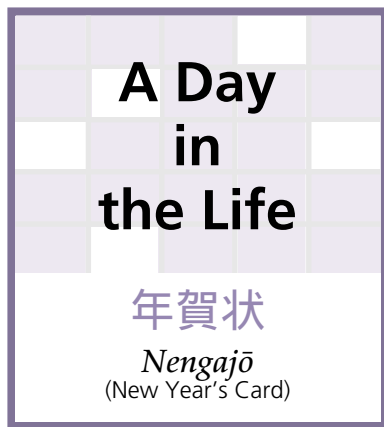
こんど しゅうまつ  
今度の週末あいてる?  
よかったら、いっしょに  
山にいかない?



い  
行く、行く。

Lingering on the way home from school. Students at a school for the hearing-impaired converse in sign language. "Say, are you free this weekend? Why don't we go hiking?" She quickly takes him up on the idea.

📷 Oda Masashi/Tottori prefecture



Every culture has its important annual events. Of the numerous festivals and ceremonial events that punctuate Japan's calendar, perhaps the one to which people are most deeply attached is *Shōgatsu*, celebrating the beginning of the New Year. School and most workplaces have a holiday that lasts for as much as a week between year-end and the first few days of the New Year, and people spend these days each in their own preferred and accustomed way. Each part of the country has local traditions and customs for celebrating *Shōgatsu*, but the one custom that people, young and old, man or woman, in every part of the country feel is indispensable is the sending of New Year's cards called *nengajō*. In this issue we introduce this greeting-card custom that is so widely and deeply established as part of Japanese life. Unlike greeting cards sent in Western countries, these cards are customarily delivered on the morning of January 1, and the post office mobilizes thousands of extra personnel to accomplish this task.

### Greeting Card Messages

As the year-end approaches, everyone from primary school children to their grandparents busy themselves with the task of writing their *nengajō* early enough to make sure they will be posted on time. And they look forward to seeing the cards that arrive from friends and relatives. *Nengajō* are also exchanged among business associates. *Nengajō* bring formal greetings for New Year's and messages wishing the receiver happiness and health. They are intended to express a sense of sharing in bringing in the new year and of hope

and celebration, turning over a new leaf as they look forward to the months ahead. In addition, they carry expressions of gratitude for favors received in the preceding year and of hopes for continued close relations in the year ahead.

Exchange of *nengajō* is both a way of keeping up with acquaintances one is normally out of touch with and of cementing ties with friends, colleagues, and others who have helped one another in various ways. Thus, even the modest postcard plays a big role in lubricating human relations in Japanese society. While most *nengajō* today are either printed or produced on word processors, if they include messages written by hand with pen or brush, they can more effectively communicate genuine feeling and warmth.

### How *Nengajō* Began

The custom of writing *nengajō* goes back to the Heian period (794-1185), and when the modern postal service set up by the Meiji government began to print postcards in 1873 (Meiji 6), postcards began to be sent as New Year's greetings. Sending *nengajō* became even more widespread in 1906 (Meiji 39) when the post office started to print specially designated *nengajō*. In 1949 (Shōwa 24) the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications started its *o-toshidama-tsuki nenga hagaki*, a *nengajō* postcard imprinted with numbers in a national lottery, the stakes named after the gifts of money often given to children at New Year's (see *The Japan Forum Newsletter* 10, p. 11), and the sending of *nengajō* became a nationwide practice. Today, national-lottery numbered postcards including a 3-yen donation to various public benefits have been added, and 4.325 billion *o-toshidama-tsuki nenga* postcards were printed in 1998 for delivery at New Year's 1999. Statistics show that each household sends an average of 100 *nengajō* to relatives and friends. People also send *nengajō* at their workplaces as greetings to clients, regular customers, and business associates.

It was once the custom for people to pay formal visits directly at the homes of relatives, friends, and neighbors to present their greetings and wishes for the New Year. From the end of World War II, however, this practice rapidly went out of fashion, and the sending of *nengajō* came along as a widely favored substitute. People still make a point of visiting their parents and grandparents. Sometimes company employees go to the homes of their superiors and students present themselves at their professor's homes even today.

### Japanese expressions often used in *nengajō*

#### Set New Year's greetings

あけましておめでとうございます (*Akemashite omedetō gozaimasu.*)

\*あけまして (*Akemashite*) derives from 明ける (*akeru*); to dawn, open, begin, as in "one year ends and the new year begins"

\*おめでとう (*omedetō*); expresses congratulations, used when people celebrate something

\*ございます Adding *gozaimasu* makes the expression of congratulations more polite.

謹賀新年 (*Kinga shinnen*)

\*謹 meaning reverence, respectfulness

\*賀 meaning celebration, joy

\*新年 New Year

迎春 (*Geishun*)

\*迎 for greeting or welcoming

\*春 for spring

The New Year comes in winter, but in the ancient calendar, it was considered "spring."

#### Additional messages

Thank you for your kindness and help during the past year

\*旧年中は 大変お世話になり ありがとう ございました  
*Kyūnenchū wa taihen o-sewa ni nari, arigatō gozaimashita.*

\*昨年はいろいろお世話になりました

*Sakunen wa iroiro o-sewa ni narimashita*

I look forward to your continued good will in the coming year

\*本年も どうぞ よろしく お願い申し上げます

*Honnen mo dōzo yoroshiku onegai mōshiagemasu.*

\*今年もよろしく!

*Kotoshi mo yoroshiku!*

\*今年もなかよくしてね / なかよくしような / いっしょにあそぼうね! (often used by children)  
*Kotoshi mo nakayoku shite ne./nakayoku shiyō na./ isshoni asobō ne.*

Wishing you good health/happiness, etc.

\*みなさまの ご健康を お祈り申し上げます。

*Minasama no go-kenkō o o-inori mōshiagemasu.*

\*今年もよい年になりますように!

*Kotoshi mo yoi toshi ni narimasu yō ni.*

# Nengajō Miscellany

Address: prefecture, county/  
city/ward, township/town/  
district/village name,  
house number (in this order)

Postal code

Prepaid postcards are  
ordinarily ¥50. Prepaid lottery  
postcards with a printed  
picture are 5 yen extra,  
2 yen to cover design  
and production costs  
and 3 yen as a donation to  
various public benefits.

年賀 (*nenga*) mark

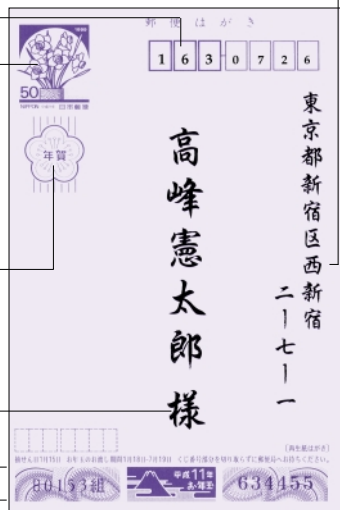
Postcards with this  
mark are delivered on  
or after January 1.

様 (*sama*) is added to names  
(title corresponding to Mr.,  
Mrs., Miss, or Ms.).

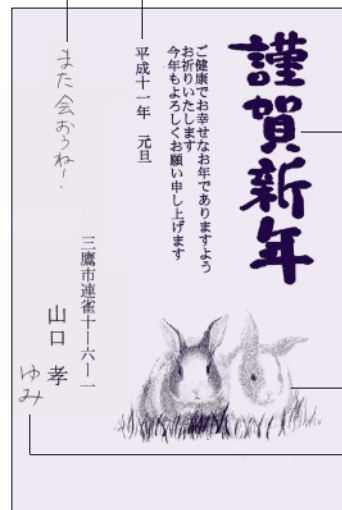
This 様 must be added to the  
name of the addressee  
of any postal item.

Address and name of sender  
should be written in smaller  
letters than that of addressee.  
If the address and name of  
sender appear on the other  
side of the card, it may be  
omitted on the front.

New Year's gift lottery number



**A** Address side



**B** Message side Commonly used style

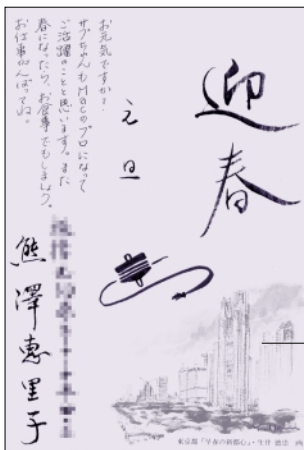
Handwritten

平成十一年(Heisei 11): In addition to the Gregorian calendar, Japanese people use the *gengō* system of dates, numbering the years from the beginning of the reign of the current emperor. The present emperor came to the throne in 1989 and the reign name is Heisei, so year 1999 is the 11th year of Heisei.

元旦 (*gantān*) means the morning of January 1. 旦. This kanji, written with the character for "sun" above a straight line, expresses the image of the sun rising over the horizon. Instead of using the date the card is written, the cards are dated Heisei 11, *gantān* (January 1, 1999.)

謹賀新年 *Kinga shinnen*  
(Happy New Year)  
See *nengajō* expressions

When children use their parent's *nengajō*, as in this example, they write their name next to their parent's name.



**C** Card with calligraphy

This is an old-style greeting, written with a brush in *sumi* ink.

The *nengajō* with public-benefits contribution have pictures or drawings printed on them. This one shows the skyline of Tokyo's Shinjuku area where TJF is located.



**D** Card with photos

Many families send New Year's cards printed with a family picture, as in this example. Local photograph shops make these cards to order. Here the names of all the family members printed below.



**E** Original-design *nengajō*

Many people enjoy designing their own *nengajō* with original drawings, stamps, or block-printed decorations. Recently more people are printing their own *nengajō* using computers or word processors. Happy New Year: Greetings in English are used quite commonly.

1. *Eto (jikkā jūnishi)*: 1999 is the Year of the Rabbit. The ancient Chinese system of the calendar, based on cycles of sixty years, was introduced to Japan in the sixth century. The calendar was created by combining ordered sets of symbols called *jikkā* ("10 stems") and *jūnishi* ("12 branches") The *jūnishi* set consists of animals (Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, Boar, in that order). This system continues to be used in Japan today to express the year.

Daily conversation often includes comments about the animal of the year in which one was born.

2. *Kagamimochi*

Prosperous-looking large rice cakes (as big as a *kagami* or circular mirror of the ancient type) are stacked as an offering to the gods at New Year's.

3. *Kadomatsu*

Pine is the symbol of longevity and bamboo a symbol of prosperity because pine is evergreen and bamboo grows quickly. Decorations made of pine and bamboo are placed inside and outside houses and businesses at New Year's.



# A Nengajō Calendar (1998-1999)

Illustration: Asayama Yuki



**1998**

**Nov. 2 (Mon.)**

Lottery-numbered *nenga* postcards put on sale (3,633,400,000 printed).

**Nov. 13 (Fri.)**

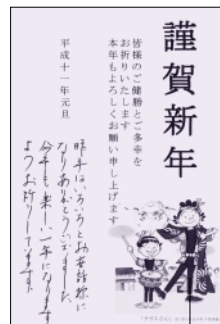
Public-benefit and lottery-numbered *nenga* postcards put on sale (5,816,000,000 printed).

**Nov. 16 (Mon.)**

Additional printing of 10 million donation and lottery-numbered *nenga* postcard featuring *Sazae-san*, the cartoon character popular among Japanese of all ages.

**Nov. 27 (Fri.)**

Additional printing for the Tokyo area of 1 million more *Sazae-san* postcards, which had proved very popular.



Sazae-san

**Dec. 15 (Mon.)**

First day for posting *nengajō*. A ceremony was held of the "first postcard sent" and special *nengajō* receptacles were set up in post offices to facilitate the sorting process. Senders separate their *nengajō* into local city, local prefecture or metropolis, and other prefectures, and bundle them with rubber bands before posting. Handled separately from ordinary mail, *nengajō* are sorted and then kept at the local post office until Jan. 1. The post office encourages every one to post their *nengajō* by December 24 so that they can be delivered on time to any part of the country.

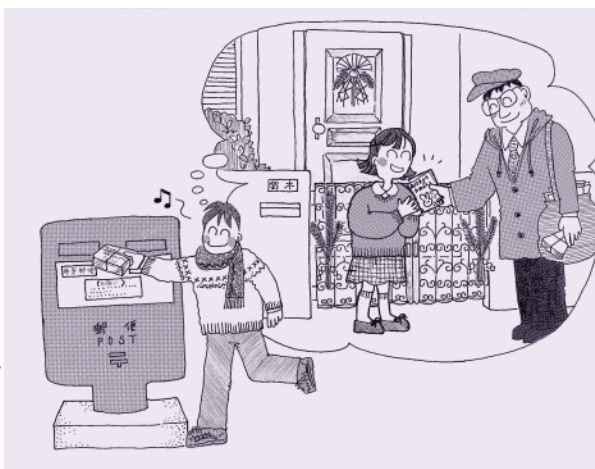


Illustration: Asayama Yuki



**1999**

**Jan. 1 (Fri.) at 8:00**

A ceremony was held at the Shinjuku main post office, in the presence of the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, launching the delivery of New Year's mail. At a signal, postmen across the country leave their local post offices to begin delivery of *nengajō*. Every year, the post office hires numerous student part-timers to help sort and deliver New Year's mail in the attempt to meet the Jan. 1 morning deadline. (*Nengajō* are delivered as priority mail until Jan. 8.)

**Jan. 15 (Fri.)**

Announcement of lottery prize-winning numbers

Winners may claim their prizes between January 18 (Mon.) and July 19 (Tues.). Every year, the prize-winning numbers in the national *nengajō* lottery are published in the evening news and announced on television on the evening of January 15th. This year, the top prizes include digital video cameras, televisions, and washing machines; second prizes include health meters and pedometers, six small packets from a choice of one hundred types of local products including apples from Aomori, green tea from Shizuoka, etc., digital cameras, electronic system date books, mini-disc players, sets of *futon*, and other items; third prize includes one small packet from a choice of the local products mentioned above, and fourth prize consists of commemorative postage stamps printed with the *eto* animal of the year.

Photo: Asahi Shimbun



When you receive a *nengajō* from someone who you did not mail one to, you can send a return *nengajō* until Jan. 7. Postcards sent after that date fall into a different category known as "kanchū mimai," or winter greetings.



Photo: Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications

# Translation Pathfinders: Invitation to Adventure

Half of language-learning is translation, the other half is acquiring a grasp of culture, and TJF programs are devoted to supporting efforts to bridge the gaps between culture and language. The people who really love language and cannot resist the adventure of inter-cultural encounter are often translators, interpreters, and language teachers. We can learn a lot from the insights and experience of these people who labor in the trenches between different languages and cultures. Lynne Riggs, of the Center for Intercultural Communication, has been working in Japan as an editor and professional translator since 1976.

**Lynne E. Riggs** (Translator, Center for Intercultural Communication)

The translator sits down at the computer, Japanese manuscript at hand, a pile of dictionaries beyond, and a blank page. Here in this space, two languages converge. The world of Japanese rises up from the manuscript page. In the mind's eye images take form, as they do for the Japanese reader, bringing the words alive in their intended context.

And then the eye focuses on the blank page. One English word, then another, extend across the screen, rebuilding elements of meaning in a different world, the world of English. There, the images that floated around the characters of the original are absent. The landscape of understanding is empty save for what the translator sets down there. Your words, like footprints on a snowy field, cut the pathway that others will follow.

Translation is an adventure you write yourself over the terrain of language and culture. You'll slog through the turgid swamps of abstraction. You'll wade through the murk of ambiguity and euphemism. You'll walk the tight-rope of distinctions you never heard of in your own language. There will be cul-de-sacs in the pursuit of meaning that no lexicographer has pathbroken for you. Like the knights of old or the Nintendo players of now, you embark on this journey with only your wits and your curiosity to protect you (from doing a bad job).

In the American television fantasy, "The Secret World of Alex Mack" a girl exposed to an experimental chemical finds she can liquidate herself at will and slither away across the lawn, then materialize herself again on the other side of a fence. This is an apt image for translation: to be able to liquidate the expressions, images, and information of the original and then materialize them again, hopefully with the same content, in a different place. Too bad we don't have such a chemical for translation!

A working translator, like Alex Mack, doesn't really know why she can pull the trick off, but unlike Alex, it's not the work of an ill-conceived chemical, but of unreplaceable human intuition and accumulated knowledge. In the respected

tradition of wilderness guides, craftsmen, and adventurers, you are trained by teachers other professions don't know. There are tricks of the trade, pathfinders' rules, that will keep you from getting bogged down, from going astray, and from leading others astray. Here is a handful to start with.

## Beware of word-for-word translation

If the landscape of a translation is filled with the replicated scenery of the original, you know you are in safe territory. But all too often, the prospect is cluttered with the litter of deconstructed, piecemeal text—the words and phrases—scattered helter-skelter across the now-English terrain, with little of the order or adhesive that held together their Japanese antecedents. Even translating machines can do that.

## Don't translate the words, translate the meaning

Many Japanese expressions pack a lot of meaning into a brief utterance—"Gokurōsama!" "Yoroshiku!" You think it would be nice to just adopt them into English, but the translator can't cut corners. It helps to back away from the words themselves and render the meaning into English as it would be expressed in English: *Gokurōsama* loses something in a simple "Thank you!" but that is the culture it ended up in; hopefully it will be said with heartfelt feeling. *Yoroshiku* can mean anything from "It's a pleasure to meet you," to "I'm counting on you to take care of the rest." Everything is determined by context.

## Improve the trail as you go along, but don't twist it

The translation has to get through to the reader; there is no point rendering it in words that make no sense. In poetry, the evocative and abstract want to be rendered with the evocative and abstract, but for non-fiction text, ambiguity and abbreviation put you on perilous ground. Cultures are crammed with associations and folklore, the translator can pass to

the English reader bits of the native speaker's crib sheet. Overdoing explanation, however, can ruin the effect.

## Use dictionaries only as reference

Dictionaries don't have all the answers. Treasure, but don't overrate them. Use them to refresh your memory, confirm your conjectures, expand your vocabulary. Sometimes it helps to look up the word that is the opposite of the one you are translating. Meaning emerges in context; it doesn't come out of the dictionary.

## Translation is a form of creative writing

Feet planted firmly in the soil of what the original author wrote, you are the author of the translation. Marshall your best writing talents to speak for the author effectively and correctly in English.

### Some basic tools of translation (from bottom up):

*Kokugo daijiten*. Shōgakukan. This large dictionary is strong on historical and cultural terms.

*Kōjien*. Iwanami Shoten. The basic household dictionary. 5th edition. Also available on CD-ROM.

*Kenkyūsha's New Japanese-English Dictionary*. Kenkyūsha. Rather outdated, but the standard J-E dictionary. Can be replaced with some CD-ROM dictionaries if you prefer.

*Japan: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*. Kōdansha. The handier, more colorful version of Kōdansha's 9-volume *Encyclopedia of Japan*.

*The New Nelson: Japanese-English Character Dictionary*. Tuttle, 1997. Basic tool for efficient reading of text with kanji, giving English meanings along with the readings.

*Japan Style Sheet, the SWET Guide for Writers, Editors and Translators*. Stone Bridge Press, 1998. Handy source of advice on style questions, with useful appendices.

*Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. Just an example. You should never be far from your English dictionary.

At left are some of the books translated by the author.





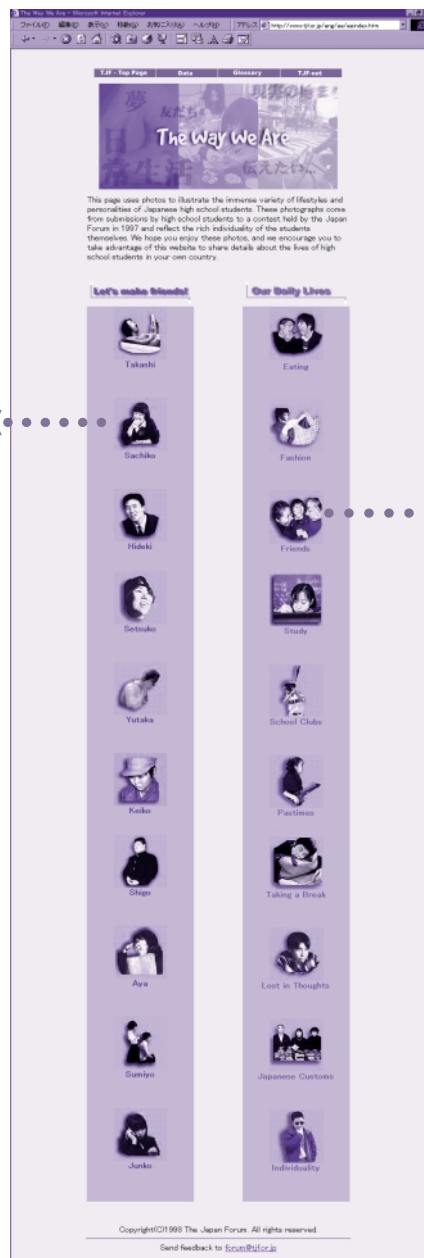
## TJF Home Page What's New?

## TJF High School Photo Contest Photos Displayed on Our Website

At our "Let's Make Friends" link, you will find sets of 5 photographs each of 10 Japanese high school students, taken by their peers, all showing the immense individuality of high school students in this country. Brief profiles and captions accompany the photographs. As you click from one photograph to another, you can get a real feel for how they live and what they think about.



The photographers who entered the contest also sent in messages they hope will reach high school students in other countries. Through the "Message Board" you can share what you thought about the photographs and ask questions about them. We hope you will not hesitate to participate. TJF's website is thus a venue for encounter with high school students in Japan.



<http://www.tjf.or.jp/eng/ee/eeindex.htm>



At the "Our Daily Lives" link, we collected a number of outstanding snapshots of high school students under 10 themes including "eating," "fashion," "friends," "study," and "taking a break." At the end of the page, there is space for you to attach your own photograph. If you have pictures on the topic "Our Daily Lives" that you would be willing to post on our website, please send them as attached JPEG or EPS files to [forum@tjf.or.jp](mailto:forum@tjf.or.jp). Images taken on a digital camera are preferable, but we will also accept hard copies of photographs (mailed to TJF in Tokyo). Please include a caption giving the name or names of the people in the picture and a brief explanation. Don't forget to mention what country you live in.



# TJF News

## Review

From August 1998  
to January 1999

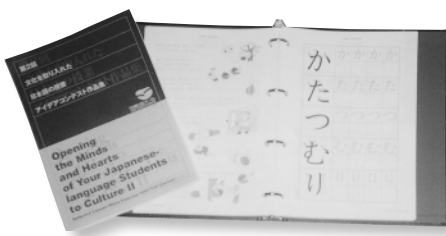
### Third Lesson Plan Idea Contest: Applicants Invited

Japanese-language teachers at elementary and secondary schools in countries other than Japan are invited to participate in TJF's Third Lesson Plan Contest: Ideas and Examples of How to Teach Culture in Japanese-language Class. Outstanding lesson plans will be selected for commendation and information about them will be made available to other Japanese-language teachers via TJF publications and the TJF home page.

Candidate lesson plans should be designed for the elementary and secondary school level and be aimed to increase students' global awareness and intercultural understanding by incorporating topics mainly from daily life and human relations in Japan.

In the second contest, forty-six entries received mainly from North America and Oceania were the products of teachers' enthusiastic efforts to promote cultural understanding through Japanese-language education. Of these, two were selected for the grand prize, and eight as outstanding lesson plans.

In March 1999, two grand prize winners in the second contest will visit Japan. During their stay, they will participate in TJF-sponsored seminars on foreign-language education and cultural understanding and give a model lesson based on their contest entry lesson plan. Twenty lesson plans, including the prize-winning entries, were compiled and published in a booklet entitled, *Opening the Minds and Hearts of Your Japanese-Language Students—Selected Lesson Plans from the 1997 TJF Contest in November 1998*.



### Third Lesson Plan Contest Applicants Invited

**Grand Prize:**  
Ten-day visit to Japan

**Other prizes:**  
Gifts of books and other teaching materials on Japanese language and culture

**Deadline for entries:**  
September 30, 1999

Requests for application forms should be directed to the Idea Contest, the Japan Forum  
(Tel: + 81-3-5322-5211/  
Fax: + 81-3-5322-5215/  
e-mail: forum@tjf.or.jp)  
Booklet on Selected Lesson Plans:  
For sale. Contact TJF Tokyo office or liaison in USA/Australia.

### Toward Closer Ties for Japanese and American Elementary Schools

TJF U.S. Representative Itoh Yukio reports on one of TJF's programs aimed at encouraging intercultural understanding among young people. In 1998, TJF helped form special friendship ties between four Japanese and four American schools. Ogo Elementary School in Ogo, Gunma Prefecture and Clovis Grove Elementary School in Menasha, Wisconsin, Okamoto Elementary School in Minami Ashigara, Kanagawa Prefecture and Pinecrest Elementary School in Greenwood, South Carolina, Tomisato Minami Junior High School and Minami Elementary School in Tomisato, Chiba Prefecture and Lakeside Middle School and Rangeline Elementary School in Mequon, Wisconsin, entered into an agreement for friendship and interchange.

In contrast to the more commonly known "sister school relationships," the "friendship ties" are free from the formalities of bureaucratic control. We began our dialogues on forming close ties with school superintendents, principals, and teachers in both Japan and the United States, but we soon realized that involvement of municipal officials would be unavoidable if the program utilized the "sister-school relationship" term. We therefore changed the name to "friendship school," which left the principals and teachers free to decide and proceed on forming ties on their own initiative without being burdened by unnecessary red tape.

To support these efforts, we sought out help from individuals or organizations (PTA or volunteer groups) who would willingly lend their assistance to the principal, teachers or students in facilitating the program. For the eight schools, we

were very fortunate to find appropriate people locally for this purpose.

Once the overall arrangements had been made and an ample supply of volunteer support had been assured, we encouraged school officials to implement the following:

#### 1. Video Penpal Project

The two schools would prepare a minimum of two video tapes recording messages from the students to be exchanged.

#### 2. School Event Report Exchange

The two schools would put together photographs, video records, and various materials relating to their school festivals or other special events to send to their counterpart school.

#### 3. Artwork and Class Project Exchange

Exchange of examples of artwork and results of special class projects done at all grade levels.

#### 4. Language and Culture Exchange

At the request of the counterpart school, each school would to the best of its ability prepare materials to help enhance study of its language and culture.

The eight schools are already working together, and we hope their relationships will mature into truly close ties of friendship and mutual understanding.

For 1999, we will continue to support the forming of this type of "Friendship School Relationship" between elementary schools in Japan and the United States. If your school would like assistance of this kind, we invite you to contact Takashima Nobukazu or Itoh Yukio of the Japan Forum via e-mail: forum@tjf.or.jp or fax (from the U.S.): 011-81-3-5322-5215. We will do our best to find your school a suitable partner school in Japan.

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The TJF Newsletter follows the practice of placing the Japanese surname first.

## What Is the Japan Forum?

### Quest for Common Understanding

The Japan Forum (TJF) is a private, independent, nonprofit foundation established in Japan in 1987 funded initially through a major grant from Kodansha Ltd., Publishers, and donations from five other Japanese publishing related firms, and other organizations. TJF continues to rely on donations, in addition to investment income, business revenues, and membership fees, for the funding of its operations. The main objective of TJF is to promote cultural exchange and mutual understanding among people of different cultures. Language lies at the heart of every culture. Those who inhabit the global community of the 21st century will need to develop new skills to traverse the boundaries between cultures—boundaries essentially defined by language differences. In recognition of the central importance of language skills in facilitating communication and mutual understanding among people around the world, TJF conducts a variety of activities centered around its two essential concerns: language and culture. In all these efforts, TJF honors the individual peculiarities of respective cultures and embraces their underlying commonalities, in order to illuminate both the individuality and the universality of every culture.

To date, these efforts have focused primarily on Japanese language education in elementary and secondary schools in the Asian-Pacific region and Chinese- and Korean-languages instruction in Japanese high schools and we are planning to expand our program to include information on the teaching of other Asian languages in Japan.

TJF also works to disseminate vital information related to language and culture through its publishing activities and book donation program, and now through the use of the Internet as well.

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