



TJF News

A Day in the Life

としこ
年越し

Toshikoshi

Crossing Years



Ōsōji

The Way We Are Japan Through the Lens of My Camera



Nine students from Franklin
High School in Wisconsin



Platform Shoes

TJF News

Deai: Seven Japanese High School Students and Their Daily Lives

Building on the success of earlier projects such as "A Day with Kentarō" and "The Way We Are," the Japan Forum is developing a new, more ambitious set of teaching materials called the *Deai* project, which will consist of in-depth profiles introducing the lives of seven different Japanese high school students. The project promotes learning about Japan's language, culture, and society through indirect encounter with the lives of people.

The theme of this project is contemporary Japan and its young people, presented in photographs of individual high school students (10th through 12th grade) with related Japanese-language text, with accompanying Japanese-language cassette tapes containing information on the individual students, their school life, family, and local community with supplementary notes on Japanese culture and society. The Japanese text will be communication-oriented and will be compiled in accordance with the content and syllabuses set forth in the National

Standards and other Japanese curriculum guidelines designed for Japanese-language classes at the secondary education level in English-speaking countries. The project plans to produce 1) one set of photo sheets for each of the seven Japanese high school students, accompanying teachers' manual, and cassette tape; 2) a CD-ROM containing all the photo sheets with related Japanese-language as well as cultural texts and supplementary photographs from the photo database to be developed by TJF; and 3) a Japanese-language textbook utilizing the photographs and texts of the seven students.

The seven students will be selected to reflect the variety and characteristics of Japanese high schools to which they belong, personal factors (sex, age, family background, etc.), and represent the local diversity of Japanese society so that the project will display the variety of Japanese high school students and their environment as much as possible.

Third Contest on Ideas and Examples of How to Teach Culture in Japanese-language Class, Interim Report

In alternate years since 1995, the Japan Forum has held its contest inviting teachers of Japanese in elementary and secondary schools to share their ideas and experience in improving intercultural understanding in Japanese-language classrooms. For this year's Third Contest, 33 entries were received from nine countries (Australia, Canada, China, Germany, Korea, New Zealand, Thailand, United Kingdom, and United States). Of the 33 entries, 14 are lesson plans for elementary school use and 19 are for secondary school classes. In terms of numbers, there

were fewer entries in the contest this time compared to the Second Contest, but the entries for the first time from Germany, Korea and Thailand are a welcome sign of broader participation in the contest. All the entries are of high quality, displaying many intriguing innovations.

After the first screening to be held in December and the final screening in February, the winners will be determined for the first-prize in the elementary and secondary education divisions. The winners will be announced in the next issue of the *TJF Newsletter*.

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Editor in Chief
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Editing and Translation
Center for Intercultural Communication

ISSN 1342-4238

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

A Day in the Life

としこし
年越し

Toshikoshi Crossing Years

The two main events in the annual calendar of Japanese tradition are Obon お盆, in August, and the period from the last days of the year, called Kure 暮れ, through the few days of the New Year, called Shōgatsu 正月. Both are occasions when it is customary to pay back debts or return things borrowed, give gifts to people with whom one has special ties or indebtedness, gather with family

members living far away, and generally to settle whatever affairs have been pending in one way or other. The expression "Bon-Kure-Shōgatsu," then, stands for the particular rituals and customs that are observed for these occasions as well as this tradition of closure of the old and readiness/celebration of the new. "A Day in the Life" featured Obon in No. 13 and *nengajō* in No. 12 of *The Japan Forum Newsletter*. How do Japanese spend Kure, the final days of the year?

The end of the year is an extremely busy time for everyone. Grown-ups are intent on tidying up unfinished business, organizing cluttered offices, and finishing off uncompleted projects. It is the occasion for the once-a-year thorough cleaning of homes, and for shopping and preparation for the celebrations of the New Year. Children, too, get involved in the activity, and are expected to help with cleaning and errands.

In this issue, we look at how busy people become with preparations for the end of the year, the tension of trying to get everything done in order to be ready for the traditional observances, and the excited anticipation of the coming New Year, Japan's *toshikoshi* season.



Winter Vacation Begins: Back Home from Work and School

As the end of the year approaches, workplaces and schools enter a flurry of activity. Executives and sales representatives of many companies pay final respects of the year to clients and business partners, offering gifts of calendars or datebooks for the coming year. Offices are cleaned and desks completely tidied. The end of the year is all more hectic because it is the deadline for completing projects and contracts and for the closing of accounts. On top of that, December is the season for *bōnenkai* 忘年会, "forget-the-year" parties at which workmates, classmates, and friends gather to recall the ups-and-downs of the past year and cement ties. Government offices officially close (*shigoto-osame* 仕事納め) on December 28th, but companies and other workplaces go on vacation on different dates.

In public schools in Japan, cleaning of classrooms and corridors is routinely done by the students. Extra time is set aside for the year-end "big cleaning" (*ōsōji* 大掃除) prior to winter vacation, when the floors are scrubbed with extra care, the blackboards are washed, and windows shined. Vacuum cleaners are used in homes, but at school, all the cleaning is done with broom and dustpan and mops made from used towels (*zōkin* 雑巾).

On the last day of school, the students gather in their classrooms and wait for their report cards to be handed out. Once that tense moment is over, they can look forward to the holiday. There are differences from one prefecture to another, but this year, winter vacation will extend in most cases from December 25 to January 10.



"Hey, you guys! Get back to work!"



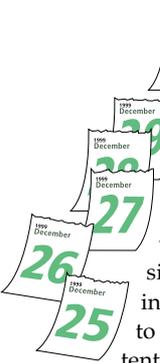
Mopping the floors with *zōkin*.



"Yay! Vacation starts tomorrow!"

30 Year-end/New Year Preparations

Ōsōji



For the household, "year-end cleaning" is a regular and major event, for tradition dictates that a house should be made immaculate in preparation for greeting the New Year. So widely established is this custom that sales of cleaning supplies and television commercials for cleaning equipment invariably increase during these busy weeks. Special care is taken to clean parts of the house not ordinarily given much attention throughout the year, such as ceilings, ventilation fans, woodwork, and corners behind furniture. In some families, the chores are divided up among family members and the furniture is moved out to wipe the walls and floors; windows are washed and shined, the paper on the *shōji* panels is changed, and the family car is washed. When the cleaning is done and house has been tidied, the entranceway to the house is scrubbed and sprinkled with water, and special New Year's festoons are set

out in the entrance hall and main rooms elsewhere in the house, and even attached to the car. *Ōsōji* is naturally the best way to get rid of the dust and dirt that has accumulated over the past year, but is also a helpful occasion to take account of those things left undone and organize one's affairs. That process makes it easier to get a fresh start in the New Year.

Writing *nengajō* 年賀状

Most people write *nengajō* New Year's cards to send to their friends, acquaintances, workmates and relatives to express gratitude, good wishes, and hopes for continued friendship and goodwill during the New Year. *Nengajō* can be posted anytime, but are delivered all at once, on the morning of January 1. Cards posted by December 24th are assured of delivery on New Year's morning, but many people end up writing most of their *nengajō* after their vacation begins. (See *The Japan Forum Newsletter*, No. 12)



Father: "Look here, I found the book I was looking for. Hey, remember this?"
 Mother: "Now, Dad, you mustn't start reading those books! We've got to get the cleaning done!"



"Whew! It's cold. But it sure is nice to have clean windows again!"



Shopping and Cooking

The year end also brings a greater-than-usual flurry of shopping. Extra cleaning supplies are always needed for *ōsōji*, and stocks must be laid up of *o-mochi* and ingredients of special New Year's dishes. In many cases the only shops open for the first three days of the New Year will be convenience stores, so it is necessary to buy anything needed for those days beforehand. Shops and department stores are intensely crowded at this time of year.

The foods traditionally eaten at New Year's, called *o-sechi ryōri* お節料理, are prepared in the last days of the year. Made with strong seasonings so that they will keep for several days over the holidays, *o-sechi ryōri* also give housewives a brief respite from their labors. New Year's foods vary from one part of the country to another, but generally include *yasai no nimono* (stewed vegetables), *kuromame* (sweet boiled black beans), *kazunoko* (salted herring roe), *tai* (sea bream), and *ebi* (shrimp), all attractively arranged in square lacquered boxes called *jūbako*. Almost all *o-sechi* foods are chosen for the association of their names with certain meanings, virtues or fortunes to be sought. The name of the fish *tai* overlaps with the word *medetai*, "auspicious," "propitious," "joyous," etc. and since its pink color, too, is close to the lucky color red, it is grilled and served whole with the festive dishes for the occasion. In recent years, younger people are increasingly uninterested in preserving the *o-sechi* traditions.



"No nibbling on the New Year's food! Come on! Why don't you help us instead!"

For the three days of New Year's it is traditional to replace boiled rice (*gohan*) with grilled *o-mochi* rice cakes and *miso-shiru* with a soup made of *o-mochi* and vegetables boiled in clear stock, *zōni* 雑煮, to fill out meals centering around the traditional foods served in the *jūbako*. *O-mochi* can be purchased in stores, but especially in the country, households often make a supply of their own to last the holidays.

31 December

31 *Ōmisoka* 大晦日 "New Year's Eve"

Toshikoshi soba 年越しそば "Year-crossing soba"

Soba, or buckwheat noodles, customarily eaten on New Year's Eve, are called "year-crossing *soba*." There are various theories about the origin of this custom, but essentially it is associated with the prayer for a happy and prosperous New Year. Every household has a different custom: some boil and serve *soba* at home, others take time out of their busy preparations to go out to eat at a nearby *soba* shop, and still others order delivery of prepared *soba* from a local shop. New Year's Eve is the *soba* shop's busiest time of year.



Brother: "Why do we eat soba at New Year's?"
Mother: "They say so it's you'll live long like a noodle!"

Traditional Television Programs

The main feature of New Year's Eve television viewing is the *Kōhaku Uta Gassen* ("Red vs White Singing Battle"), broadcast from 8:00 to 11:45 at night on the public channel, NHK (Japan National Broadcasting). It is a long-running program that celebrates its fiftieth anniversary with the end of 1999. Nowadays it is broadcast by satellite, too, making it possible for Japanese and people of Japanese descent or background living overseas to enjoy the nostalgia and atmosphere of New Year's Eve in their own tradition.

The songfest takes the form of a competition between two teams of popular female (the Red team) and male (the White team) singers. They take turns performing hit tunes and a panel of judges, along with votes from the audience, decides the winner. In recent years, a variety of other attractive year-end television programs has been broadcast, so the viewer ratings for the *Kōhaku Uta Gassen* has declined to about 60 percent, but it is a favorite program for thinking back over the passing year and celebrating its close.



Big sister: "This song was a great hit, wasn't it."
Brother: "I always fall asleep halfway through. This year I want to see it all the way to the end!"



Father: "This year is finally over."
 Mother: "I hope we all keep our health next year too."
 Big sister: "I'm going to be a junior high school student next year."



Kodansha Publishers

Joya no kane 除夜の鐘

Joya means New Year's eve, and *joya no kane* is the 108 tolls of the bell at Buddhist temples starting before 12:00 midnight on the last night of the year. It is believed that with each tolling of the bell one of the 108 evil passions from which humans suffer—greed, anger, hatred, etc.—is driven away. Each ringing of the bell takes away some of the impurity and ugliness of the passing year, cleansing us in readiness for the New Year. When the *joya no kane* begins to toll, the atmosphere of New Year's Eve changes completely, from bustle and excitement to quietude and solemnity. The mood in which people greet the New Year is quite different from the extravagant celebrations with toasts and firecrackers that are common in Western countries.

As the temples begin to ring out the old year, many people set out to pay their first visit of the year to temples and shrines, *hatsumode* 初詣. Some people go to famous places to see the first dawn of the New Year, *hatsu hinode* 初日の出. Temples and shrines all over the country are filled with people and trains run throughout the night to serve *hatsumode* travelers.

Many people go back to spend New Year's with their parents, often to parents and grandparent's houses in the countryside. In recent years, it has become popular to escape the hectic year-end season by planning family trips overseas. Ways of spending the holiday have greatly diversified, with young people making it the occasion for year-end/New Year's parties or skiing trips with their friends. For families with a high-school senior who is cramming for the university entrance examinations that take place from mid-January to late February, however, New Year's is usually celebrated in very quiet style.

With best wishes to all readers
 for A Happy New Year
 The Japan Forum

2000
 January 1



Illustrations: Asayama Yuki

The Way We Are

Japan Through the Lens of My Camera

どれにしようか
迷っちゃうよ。



Nine students from Franklin High School in Wisconsin and their Japanese-language teacher, Mr. Richard Kania, visited Japan during their summer vacation. The group toured Tokyo and Hiroshima and had homestays in Gunma prefecture and Chigasaki, Kanagawa prefecture.

In hopes of capturing "How Japan Looks to High School Students Visiting for the First Time," TJF gave disposable cameras to the students and asked them to snap pictures of whatever they found curious or interesting. What is the Japan that they discovered? We would like to share with you their fresh sense of surprise and wonder expressed in these photographs and comments. How do they strike you?

Vending Machines

I have never seen so many soda machines in one place. On practically every street corner a person can find a soda machine. There aren't nearly as many in America.

Jennifer Friedewald



"I can't decide what to choose?"



Restaurant Entré Samples

I have never seen plastic food in the front of stores before.

Brett Koveck

"They look just like the real thing!"



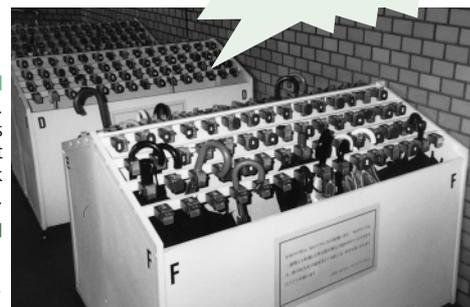
ほんもの
本物そっくりだね。

Umbrella Stand

I have never seen an umbrella rack before. I thought that this one in particular was interesting because it had locks on them. Almost every store that I went into had some kind of rack or bag to put your umbrella in.

Jennifer Friedewald

"Look, the umbrella stand has locks!"



かさ
傘立に鍵が
かかるんだってさ。

Notes on the photographs

■ Vending Machines

According to a 1998 study conducted by the Japan Vending Machine Manufacturers Association, there are roughly 5.5 million vending machines selling beverages, food, and cigarettes, and tickets of various kinds throughout Japan and accounting for an annual average of ¥6.9 trillion yen in merchandise. Drink vending machines like these can be found nearly everywhere in the city.

■ Restaurant Entré Samples

In the front windows of many restaurants and dining places, samples of the fare that is served can often be found in strikingly realistic imitations, most of them made from wax or chloroethylene. Since these samples reproduce the exact meals served in the shop, each item is made by hand and their production is quite expensive. Customers find these samples useful, since they show at a glance the kinds of dishes served.

■ Umbrella Stand

In places where many people gather there is invariably an umbrella stand like this one. At hotels, restaurants, and public facilities, the umbrella

stands are usually equipped with locks. In the case of supermarkets and department stores, a rack is set up providing plastic sleeves for wet umbrellas, so that customers can take their umbrellas with them.

■ Platform Shoes

In the summer of 1999, platform shoes like these were extremely popular with high school girls and young women around their twenties. Their appeal, it is said, comes from the fact that the added height makes girls' legs look longer and slenderer.

■ Cell Phones

According to a survey by the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, there were 52 million subscribers mobile telephone or PHS services in Japan as of the end of September 1999, that means 43 percent of the population of Japan, at least as far as figures are concerned.

The proportion of high school students who own cell phones has also increased, and among young people they are considered an indispensable tool for chatting with and keeping in touch with friends. There has been considerable public protest of the disturbance caused when cell phone

users carry on conversations in a loud voice in crowded trains.

■ Yukata in a Show Window

In subway stations and concourses near the large department stores, large show windows like the one in the photograph are quite common. The *yukata*, or cotton kimono, was originally a kind of bathrobe worn while in the bath or after coming out of the bath, but during the Edo period (1603-1867), it came to be used as everyday wear by the common people during the heat of summer. Usually made of light-weight cotton, it was designed for comfort in Japan's hot, very humid summers. Among the amenities Japanese inns and hotels provide guests are use of cotton kimono free of charge. In recent years, it has become fashionable for young women to wear *yukata* of various colors and patterns when they go out to enjoy summer festivals or fireworks events.

■ Bicycle Parking in Front of a Station

For many Japanese, especially city dwellers, the bicycle is a convenience indispensable to daily life, for commuting to work or school, doing the grocery shopping or errands in the neighborhood. Large numbers of bicycles parked near stations



えー、変なの。
なにこれ？

"Look at all these crazy sandals?"

Platform Shoes

I have never seen shoes this tall. Many people call them "stacks," and that is exactly what they are. I didn't think that anyone could walk in them, and I was right. We saw many girls falling onto the ground while trying to walk in these dangerous shoes.

Jennifer Friedewald



あっ、モシモン。

"Hello. Hello?"

Cell Phones

Almost everyone in Japan uses these cell phones. In America, usually only adults have them.

Missy Miller



じてんしゃ
自転車がいっぱいだ！

Bicycle Parking in Front of a Station

Many bicycles show how popular this type of transportation is in Japan. It reminded me of a parking lot, but in America, it would be full of cars.

Missy Miller

"There are bicycles all over the place!"



ゆかた
この浴衣、
とてもきれいだね。

Yukata in a Show Window

It is nice to see that traditional clothing is still a popular thing in today's society in Japan. The colors of the fabric are vibrant and gorgeous. I also thought that it was interesting to see them in the middle of a subway station.

Jennifer Friedewald

"Look at these beautiful cotton kimono!"



へえ、このトイレ
しり あら
お尻が洗えるぞ。

Western-style Toilet

This toilet is more American-like but it has controls on the side for spraying and drying. I thought it was very useful and cool.

Japanese-style Toilet

It is very different compared to American style toilets. (I did try it and it was interesting!)

Missy Miller

"Wow. This toilet will clean your bottom."



どっち向いて
すわ
座るの？

"Which way are you supposed to face?"

like this is quite a common sight. One problem such communities struggle with when adequate parking areas are not available is that people simply leave their bicycles along the roadsides, blocking traffic and inconveniencing residents.

■ **Western-style toilet**

Today the Western-style sit-down toilet is the most widespread, and various amenities have been devised to enhance their convenience. Washable cloth toilet-seat covers that save you from having to sit down on a cold seat are used in many homes. The photograph shows a toilet-seat commonly known as the "Washlet," which is equipped with functions that emit a spray of water and then warm air for drying after use of the toilet.

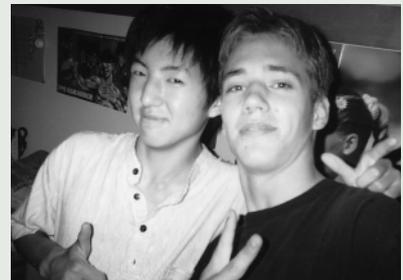
■ **Japanese-style toilet**

This is a Japanese-style toilet, used by squatting over it. Some people wonder which way they should face, but the end with the curved hood is the front. Squatting down is hard for some, especially elderly people, so Western-style toilets have come into widespread use, but in the case of public toilets, this style is often preferred from a sanitation point of view, because it is not necessary to touch the toilet during use.

The Things I Couldn't Photograph

Joe Farrell

This is me and Koichi, the son of the people who hosted me for a night in Chigasaki. He and I had a lot of similar interests and got along very well. What I love best about Japan are not buildings, or statues, or objects. They can't be seen. They are attitudes, ideals, mindsets. They are kindness and respect. I can't take a picture of how much I love the fact that young people can walk home or take the trains at night without worrying that they will be harassed or victimized as happens too often in America. I love how people are courteous and respectful to each other. It is the ideas, and not the sights, of Japan that make it feel like home to me. It is a very beautiful country, but that only adds to the experience.



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, as well as by 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 twenty-first 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-language instruction in Japanese high school. We are planning to expand our programs 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 its site on the World Wide Web.

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The Japan Forum welcomes comments and suggestions concerning "language and culture," foreign-language education, and cultural understanding—the main areas of TJF endeavor—by mail, fax, or e-mail.



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