

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.

