Feature:
Why Photographs Now?

A New Appreciation of Photographs as Resources for Learning Language and Culture

When teachers present material about culture in Japanese-language classes in elementary and secondary schools overseas, the topic their students invariably show the greatest interest in is the daily life and culture of their peers. No doubt teachers often find themselves thinking how much richer the discussion in their classes would be if they had access to photographs showing the lives of Japanese students as they really are.

While images of beautiful landscapes and famous cultural monuments are readily available, it is not easy to obtain photographs that show the true expressions and actual activities of contemporary young people. Even harder is to find such materials available free of charge for use in creating teaching materials, and for the majority of Japanese-language teachers working outside Japan, even finding such photographs can be an arduous task.

Our feature in this issue considers what kind of photographs are most desired in elementary and secondary school Japanese-language classes abroad and takes another look at the offering of photographs using the powerful new tools of digital technology via the Internet. We take a fresh look at the essential appeal of photographs and the useful role they can play in foreign language education at the elementary and secondary level.

Photographs in Linguistic and Cultural Studies Today
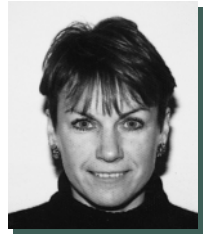
Sue Burnham

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A teacher recently asked her beginner Japanese class which of the photographs in their textbook they liked best. A boy in the back row shot up his hand and answered immediately: "The one that shows Masaru looking into his fridge." The teacher was a little surprised by this response and asked her student why. "Because that's what I do when I get home from school, too. I go straight to the fridge!"

Without knowing it, this student was expressing one of the essential characteristics of contemporary cultural depiction. Modern educational photographs aim to show the familiar, the everyday reality of people going about their ordinary lives. And, especially in the early stages of a course, the current trend is to emphasize cultural similarities, rather than stress the exotic elements of a culture. Showing students the familiar leads more readily to acceptance of the unfamiliar.

Culture and the Changing Role of Photographs

In the not-so-distant past, the role of educational photographs was to illustrate background cultural material. The key word here is "background." The essential component in any unit of learning was the language, usually understood as the grammar of the language. "Culture" provided a (hopefully) colorful backdrop for language study and some relief from the unrelenting grammatical grind. Photographs tended to be of famous monuments or scenic icons (for example, the Golden Pavilion, Mt. Fuji), preferably without any people showing in the frame.

This approach to photography went hand in hand with an understanding of what was meant by "culture." In terms of content, it focused on historical and geographical facts and in terms of emphasis it concentrated on the exotic. At worst, it encouraged the "fish-bowl" approach, with the students peering out at the people of the target culture as if they were from a different planet.

These days, we are happy to see, language educators have rescued culture from the background and placed it very prominently in the foreground. Many teachers and course writers deliberately blur the line between language and culture, insisting that you can only learn one as you learn the other. Language devoid of meaningful cultural content is unauthentic. For maximum authenticity, explanations of the target culture are best expressed in the target language.

For Authentic Cultural Experience

The most popular modern textbooks now use photographs as an essential tool of language education. Photo stories based on the lives of real-life characters bring the learner irresistibly into the target culture. They depict characters of their own age at home, at school, out shopping with their friends, engaged in club activities, enjoying school trips—doing whatever they do in their normal lives. There is no attempt to glorify or mythologize the target culture. The more down-to earth the photographs the better! Contemporary taste has moved away from the posed and the formal. Modern-day students enjoy photos that are informal and natural. That way they feel they are being exposed to an authentic cultural experience.

The Students' Point of View

Is there still an important role for photographs of temples and festivals? Of course there is! But these photographs are much more successful with students when they are given a human dimension. By all means, include a photo of the castle at Osaka, but why not show it from the point of view of Japanese students on a school trip there. Take the camera into their midst. Let students in other countries feel what it must be like to be on that trip. By all means show the pageantry, color and excitement of a festival at Nikko. But the photos the students will like best are the ones showing a man in warrior costume bottle-feeding his baby son, or the teenagers taking a break from the festivities to buy *okonomiyaki.*

The skillful educational photographer will keep an eye not only on the cultural reality but also on the students who will use the results. It is a good idea to try to see things from their point of view. Where possible introduce some animation, some humor into the image. Rather than a stiff, formal portrait of the *maiko*, why not show them giggling over their new pictures from the Print Club machine.

A Visual Environment for Learning

Photographs provide an invaluable visual environment for language study. Students are constantly presented with images of life in the target culture. They drool over close-ups of food in a restaurant window, they choose which film to see from a number of cinema posters, they learn to tell the time from clocks in public places around Tokyo, they practice their hiragana by reading photos of train station names, they interpret signs and find their way around the cities they see depicted in front of them.

Photographs thus become the raw material for speaking, listening, reading, and writing activities. The main advantage of this pictorial approach to language work is that students concentrate on the content of what they are

saying rather than focus on grammatical forms. This leads to a more spontaneous and natural discourse with students, helping to keep their motivation at a high level.

Increasing Demand and the Web

Language teachers and students have reached an unprecedented level of pictorial literacy, and many are expecting to make further use of photographs as an important resource. The efforts of many Japanese-language educators in establishing new photo data banks on the World Wide Web are very much in line with this trend in language education. Some teachers will access these valuable new sites to take advantage of the range of quality images they offer for use in their classes. Others will confidently direct their students to these sites and encourage them to incorporate the photographs into their assignments.

Many of the images and photos in these sites combine a high level of technical quality with the human (and humorous) dimension which will guarantee their appeal for young language learners. The keyword in contemporary linguistic and cultural studies is "authenticity," and for most young people this means the familiarity of everyday reality.

Volumes 1 and 2 of Sue Burnham's Japanese language textbook, *Ima!* (Melbourne: CIS Heinemann Publishing,1998, 2000.)

What the Japanese Teachers Say

With a wide variety of visual teaching materials already available, including picture cards, videos, and photograph panels, why are Japanese-language teachers at the elementary and secondary levels using photographs as well? Here we point out some of the advantages of using photographs and quote some of the reactions of working teachers to the pictures of elementary and secondary students in Japan introduced in TJF publications and on its Web site.

😀 Communication That Can't Be Achieved in Words

Photographs transmit information without using words. Foreign language teaching often deals with material things and phenomena that are unfamiliar to the students, and the classroom is the place where the vocabulary of the unfamiliar is explained and learned, so it is often more effective to show a picture of something than to try to explain it in words.

I consider a photograph an effective instructional tool for the following reasons: 1. The imprint on the viewer of a visual still image is emotionally much stronger than a printed description. There is a saying, "A picture is worth a thousand words." 2. Thus it leads to active discussions about the cultural differences of products, practices and perspectives. Ritsu Shimizu, Shaler Area High School, U.S.A.

😀 Visual Stimulus Heightens Incentive to Learn

Students' spontaneous impulse to express themselves can often be brought out by using visual stimuli. The visual images in photographs can give them the vicarious sense of being in the photograph, and even looking at things and situations they have never seen or experienced before can elicit in them the impulse to ask questions, talk about how it compares with what is familiar to them, and write about it.

Photographs are certainly providing a broader stimulus for the work and encouraging the students to use what they have learned in a new situation. Mary Grace Browning, County Upper School, U.K.

😀 Vicarious Experience Supports Meaningful Learning

The vicarious experience of encounter through photographs that is essential to true learning about language and culture, gives study meaning and insight in the real world. Especially in the case of pictures showing their age-mates with lively expressions and in real-life situations, students find it easy to respond with affinity and empathy.

The students were excited to see the photos and anxious to use them to converse in Japanese as well as converse on topics of Japanese culture. Although they have few opportunities to meet Japanese, after using the photographs showing the life of a Japanese elementary school boy, they began to study Japanese more eagerly, feeling that they had made a friend of him. Looking at his photograph eating his school lunch, some students even started pretending to eat, as if they were the boy himself. I found that situations like this provided the natural context for teaching vocabulary, like "taberu." Lynn Sessler Schmaling, Clovis Grove Elementary School, U.S.A.

😀 Antidote to Stereotypes

By transmitting information through visual images, rather than words, photographs often appeal by their confirmation of stereotypes and preconceived ideas. One useful classroom activity is to use that aspect of photographs in reverse in order to get students to question their stereotypes.

We use photographs to break some of the assumptions and stereotypes that our American students have about Japanese high school students. In the class discussion portion of the class the most common comments were that Japanese students are really more diverse than we thought and that Japanese students really do have many similarities to us. Richard Kania, Franklin High School, U.S.A.

Using Photographs in Teaching Foreign Languages

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I would like to suggest two rationales for using pictures in the classroom based on the principles of cognitive linguistics, and some tips for using them to best advantage. I do not question the value of videotape recordings, DVD media or Internet access in the classroom, but I believe we should ask ourselves whether we have made optimal use of traditional teaching resources. Still pictures can have greater appeal than moving images, in which scenes are constantly changing.

Advantages/Significance of Photographs

The first rationale for using photographs is based on our own experience. No one can deny that learners get bored if they are provided only with grammatical rules and basic vocabulary. A classroom comes alive quickly when you show a photograph, because students can think and reflect about the picture. However poorly a picture is taken, it is the output of real life. By looking at it, learners are reminded of something they themselves experienced. For example, when they see a picture of a Japanese family in a tatami room, they may think of their own living room. They may compare the families, the topics they talk about there, and the appearance of the rooms. They will want, consequently, to express themselves. Such pictures serve to draw their attention to the lesson at hand. Their experience is mobilized, in other words, for the teaching situation.

Some enthusiastic teachers prefer videotapes to photographs, stating that they find animation more attractive than still pictures. Certainly, a video sequence makes a deep impression, say, for example, of Yamada-san meeting a visitor from New York at Narita airport. But since the story is complete in itself, it deprives learners of the opportunity to tell their own stories. Once they see that the video story has nothing to do with themselves, they can easily lose interest. In addition, though the airport scene may last for less than a minute, it consists of thousands of still pictures, which contain information too copious for either the teacher or the students to follow. It is not only a matter of quantity. To cite the words of cognitive linguists, "the perceived whole" is more than the composite of parts. So you have to press the pause button on the video deck whenever you want to explain something in the film. The second rationale for using still pictures, as this illustrates, is that it is a medium that makes it easier to focus students' attention.

There are other advantages to using still pictures. They are easy to apply to various uses, arrange, and store. You need no electronic equipment or advanced technical know-how. Best of all, they are not subject to unforeseeable breakdowns, or technical faults or freezes.

Practical Suggestions for Using Still Pictures

Pictures, no matter how excellent, cannot take the place of the main textbook in teaching language, but they can be very useful at every stage of teaching and for every method adopted. We should, nevertheless, keep some tips in mind for utilizing them to optimal effect. Showing pictures is a valuable (and sometimes the only) opportunity to gain the full attention of students. Without gaining their attention, one would achieve little more than a "picture parade" (displaying an array of cultural information), and when the show is over, nothing would remain in their minds. The trick is to withhold the best or most memorable scenes for last. You can learn from the "coming soon" technique used by Hollywood film previews to excite your viewers.

First you need to ascertain your students' understanding of the pictures to be shown. For example, when you show a scene of the Japanese New Year's holidays, you should ask them some questions about Shōgatsu and make sure that all the students share the same amount of information. Another good idea is to compare the New Year's holidays in Japan and a special holiday in their country. At this stage, it is not always necessary to use the target language (i.e., Japanese) in the discussion.

Then you show the picture. You can ask questions about things visible in the picture. This allows your students to review related words and study some new ones. They can also try to describe something or someone in the picture. After that, they will be able to discuss things that are invisible in the picture. In addition to describing something, they can explain what they don't know, talk about how to use the things shown, or imagine conversations among the people in the picture. You will soon see that the picture triggers students' positive involvement in communication in the target language.

When it comes time for them to express themselves, they will have many things to talk about prompted by what they saw in the picture. In the case of the New Year's holidays, some may want to talk about their own holidays, such as Thanksgiving. Others may speak about their experiences in Japan. Learners' interests lie not only in intriguing things in a distant country, but also in someone and something in the same classroom. Without understanding a person sitting close to you, how can you understand a foreign culture? Learners need to accept and understand each other, and they can achieve that target through one still picture that you, the *sensei*, shows them. The photographer has captured the scene that you are holding up; it is your turn, in the classroom, to make sure that it has an impact on your students.

TJF Photo Data Bank Opens Soon

Over the last several years, TJF has supported the electronic compilation of teaching materials for the Japanese language and culture classroom by making available texts, images and sound clips. Serving increasing needs for photographic resources for such purposes, as of May 30, 2001, TJF will open a new feature of its Web site, the "TJF Photo Data Bank." This database brings together a wealth of photographs of the daily lives of Japanese young people of elementary school as well as junior and senior high school age. The photographs include both those taken by high school students themselves and by TJF. The data bank starts with 1,000 photographs and will gradually be expanded.

These photographs are available free of copyright charges as long as they are used for educational purposes, such as for teaching Japanese, for teaching international understanding, or for other non-profit purposes. (For use of the photographs in textbooks and other published material, express permission of the Japan Forum is required.)

Those wishing to access and download the photographs should obtain an ID number by registering as a member of the TJF network. In order to protect the authorship and reputation of the photographers and the privacy of the persons photographed, TJF will check the address and affiliation of each user.

All the photographs are posted on the site as thumbnails (small-size sample images) and can be searched by category of photograph. Lists of candidate photographs can also be selected by inputting a keyword for topic or purpose.

Those searching for photographs to introduce Japan often think at first that there are many available on the Internet. When they come to actually identifying those they can use in class, however, they realize how limited the supply really is: some are too small to be shown in class, or the details may be out of focus; some are products of artistic photography and therefore do not show real, practical content; many are not available for use at affordable costs, and still others show only landscapes with few signs of people's lives.

In language education photographs are used for various purposes, but the TJF Photo Data Bank, designed to support Japanese-language education in elementary, junior high and senior high schools overseas, collects photographs that capture the interest of young people—i.e., pictures that introduce individual Japanese students and show what they are actually doing in their daily lives—while taking into consideration their potential for use in foreign-language and cultural understanding education.

Few Web sites are created for educational uses today, and busy teachers can waste valuable time searching the Web in vain for photographs usable in their classes. Hoping to receive ample feedback on this database from Japanese-language teachers, we will constantly strive to improve the content of the TJF Photo Data Bank to conform to their needs, thus saving them time searching far and wide on the Web.
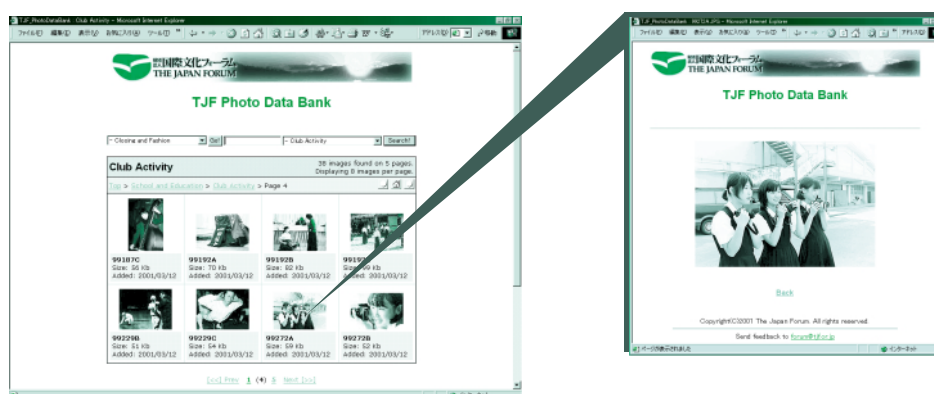

TJF Photo Data Bank: Thumbnail Display
This image shows a tentative display.
The design and categories are subject to change.

Photograph Resource "Deai"

The Japan Forum is in the process of compiling "Deai," a Japanese-language teaching resource based on photographs of Japanese high school students. Aimed to give the study of Japanese language and the process of learning about another culture more immediacy and meaning, it offers the experience of vicarious encounter with the Japanese students in the photographs. The core of the Deai resource is a profile of seven high school students from different parts of Japan and sets of photograph panels capturing a day in the life of each student. These materials are accompanied by a printed teacher's manual and CD-ROMs. We hope students will better enjoy and benefit from their study of Japanese language and culture by seeing the lives of their peers in Japan and getting to know them through these photographs.

Use Picture Resource Database for Japanese-language Instruction
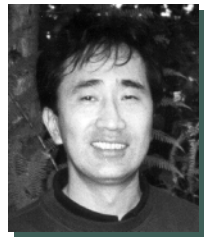
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Due to the rapid growth of the Internet, it is now easy to find pictures on the World Wide Web. Aside from the matter of the quantity and quality of pictures available on line, however, use is often restricted by copyright. Teachers are not free to download, use, or modify them, even for educational purposes. To remedy this situation, various picture-resource collections have been developed with educational purposes in mind. A list of such resources can be seen at http://www.sla.purdue.edu/fll/JapanProj/Resources/AVresources.html. The pictures available are typically taken by Japanese language instructors and posted on the Internet. The process of expanding such resources has become much easier since digital cameras are now readily available.

New Search Functions

As the number of pictures increases, it becomes increasingly desirable that they be organized in a database format equipped with a search function so that a large number of pictures need not be displayed simultaneously on the screen. For example, when the Royalty-free Photo Gallery for Japanese Language Instruction (Purdue University) was merged with Ujie Ken'ichi's collection compiled at Washington and Lee University, the total number of photographs exceeded 700. This led us to implement a database of the pictures with three search options. The URL of the newly developed collection is at http://tell.fll.purdue.edu/jphotos.

The first two search options are keywords in English and keywords in Japanese. Words such as "food," "traffic," "store" are examples of English keywords and "　　," "　　," "　　" are examples of Japanese keywords. The last search option looks for the particular Japanese character or characters that appear in the photographs. For example, if one searches for "　," photographs that contain words such as "　　," "　　　" will be displayed. Since you can look for any letter or character, you can create a game in which students look for particular characters in different pictures.

Collaboration for an Expanding Collection

As mentioned earlier, digital cameras have made it easy to increase the size of the photo collection. We are planning to ask our Japanese colleagues and friends to take pictures and contribute to the collection. We would like them to focus on certain themes or topics when they take pictures so that duplication can be avoided. It is conceivable that submitted photographs may depict negative images of Japan that most cultural photograph collections may omit. However, since these, too, represent real aspects of Japanese culture, they may be included in the database. It is up to individual instructors whether or not to use them in their teaching.

Pictures to be shown on the Web do not have to be created with very high resolution. We have used about 800 x 600 pixels for our collection. This degree of resolution helps to keep the size of files manageable, yet pictures will print with reasonable quality on paper or on transparencies. It is, however, a good idea to create separate thumbnails to reduce loading time.

In future, we would like to include sound and video files to make the database truly multimedia. For example, if you conduct a search for the word "*potapota*," the database will produce a short video segment of water dripping from a faucet.

The Internet has changed the general public, which is traditionally the receiver of information, into a transmitter of information; hence, it has created a large number of potential transmitters. The bottom-up development of such a database seems to be more natural, therefore, than top-down development. Many people can create their own small but good photo collections in particular areas. Selecting good resources and connecting/merging them is relatively easy. This type of development is also interesting because the results are unpredictable. We suggest that you yourself develop a collection of photographic resources.

http://tell.fll.purdue.edu/jphotos

Finding Photographs on the Web: Daily Life in Japan

Daily life at school

Musashino Joshi Gakuin Junior & Senior High School
http://www.musashinojoshi-cyukou.ed.jp/
Offers a virtual visit to the school, featuring aerial photographs and an illustration map commanding a full view of the school, and panoramas of scenes around the campus.

Gifu University Fuzoku Junior High School
http://www.fuzoku.gifu-u.ac.jp/chu/gyouji/gyouji.asp
Photos introducing school events such as the commencement ceremony.

Kids Web Japan: Welcome to Our School
http://www.jinjapan.org/kidsweb/school.html
Introducing classes, special events, a typical day at school, etc., with a variety of photos.

Scenes of contemporary Japan

JLTAV: Paula Henning's Japanese Photo Album
http://jltav.org.au/photoindex.htm
Photos of Japanese elementary and secondary schools taken by a high school teacher in Australia. Teachers may use the photos free of charge in their classes with due acknowledgement to the source.

Schauwecker's Guide to Japan
http://www.japan-guide.com/a/albume.html
The "Japan Today" section offers various street scenes in everyday life in Japan with explanatory captions.

Roger & Marilyn's Photo Tour of Tokyo, Japan
http://www.artisandevelopers.com/web/tokyo/
Contains photographs taken during a seven-day trip to Tokyo including, maps, images, sound, and personal observations. For school project use, contact the web master. Permission may be granted for one-time non-commercial use of the pictures.