



Takarabako

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Feature

Japan Through the Eyes of High School Students from Around the World



This issue is a special 16-page issue featuring the "Focus on Japan 2007" program conducted in August 2007.

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TJF Twentieth Anniversary

In June 2007, the Japan Forum (TJF) celebrated its twentieth anniversary. A history of the two decades of the organization was published and a reception commemorating the anniversary was held in March 2008.

With "language and culture" as our main themes, TJF has conducted numerous programs—particularly in the past decade—that support Japanese language education at elementary and secondary schools overseas, primarily in East Asia (China and South Korea) and English-speaking countries (North America, Oceania, the United Kingdom) as well as programs supporting Chinese and Korean language education and cross-cultural understanding at Japanese schools. Other programs

link language education in Japan and other countries. It is our hope that students will gain an interest in and learn each other's "language and culture," interact with each other, further their understanding of others and themselves through individual dialogue, and get a sense of their connection to each other.

TJF activities of the past 20 years have been supported by many people dedicated to promoting education and cultural exchange both in and outside Japan. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of these people for their generous cooperation. TJF will continue to improve the depth and breadth of its programs, and look forward to continued support and encouragement as we pursue these endeavors.

Access This Page!

"TJF Photo Data Bank": More photos uploaded!

"TJF Photo Data Bank (Japan version)" ☞ http://www.tjf.or.jp/photodatabank_j/

"TJF Photo Data Bank (China version)" ☞ http://www.tjf.or.jp/photodatabank_c/

Since 2001, photo resources have been made available on the TJF website free of charge for the purpose of Japanese language education (foreign language education) and cultural understanding. The photo captions are provided in Japanese and English. Currently, the site includes 3,482 photos related to Japanese life and culture and 1,940 photos related to Chinese life and culture. As of December 2007, there were 6,579 people registered to use this resource (both Japanese and Chinese photo data banks combined), of which 715 were people who joined in the year 2007.

With the Japan-related photos, for the upcoming spring season, we have prepared a rich array of photos related to the Dolls' Festival (*hinamatsuri*) and the cherry blossom viewing (*hanami*) season. Please continue to use this resource, as we upload new photos every month this year. For details on photo use, visit our website.

If you would like to suggest that photos on a particular theme be added to the data-bank, please contact us at databank@tjf.or.jp with your suggestion.



Hinamatsuri



Hanami



Koinobori



Okonomiyaki



Senbazuru



Haha no hi

Precious Encounters

Miyagi Team

Alice (Tokyo, Japan), **Bo Ram** (Seoul, South Korea),
Kyung Ju (Seoul, South Korea), **Sao** (Hiroshima, Japan)

Our visit to Miyagi (Shiogama and the islands along the coast) showed us how good it is to meet all kinds of different people. People love to be around other people, and without the connections we have with others, we wouldn't survive. The community of the islands is like one big family. Everyone was kind to people from outside including us, and it really made us feel happy.

Thinking of all the kindnesses we received, we decided that "people are good after all," and that "meeting new people is important and something to be thankful for." In Korea, people say that if you meet someone three times by coincidence your destinies are somehow linked. We, too, will treasure the encounters we had on this trip and hope that one day we will be able to visit everyone again.



Bo Ram, Sao, Kyung Ju, Alice (from left)

We have a tendency to judge people by appearances and the environments in which they were raised, but this has been a great opportunity to rethink that.

Our team was made up of Japanese and Koreans. We all had various prejudices before we met. These prejudices originated in problems between our two countries and the people we'd met before. While working on this project, in the process of selecting photos, for example, we talked a lot about the differences in our values and ways of thinking, and the various ways our interpretations of the same thing differed as a result of our cultures. We greatly improved our understanding of each other. Moreover, as we looked at the problems between our two countries, we became aware of how important it is to learn and accept historical fact.

Through our photo shoot in Miyagi and exchange between our Japanese and Korean team members, we realized the importance of being considerate of each other's feelings.



This girl, born and raised in Shiogama, practices *kagura* (Shinto dance and music). This was the winsome expression she had when taking a break from her arduous practice of *hayashi* flute and dance.



Left: We visited the head of the local elders' association at his home. It was delightful to see him scrunch up his face with joy when he talked about his granddaughter, Kirari. He now lives in this 90-year-old house by himself.



Left: The postman helps the island stay connected to the other islands, and people in touch with other people. He looks just like the main character in the manga, *Bonobono*. Under the setting sun, he gave us a huge grin.



Early in the morning, this old lady starts selling tuna and other fish from the fish market. The way she and her daughter Keiko talked to me about their family and personal lives made me feel as if we'd always known each other. (Alice)

Project report: Strong Bond Founded on Candor and Discussion

Shiogama, Miyagi, a port city with a long history, flourished in the past from salt production. The Miyagi team took photos in the central part of the city and on Katsurajima and Nonojima, two of the four Urato islands just offshore from the city. The islands are part of an area known as Matsushima, considered one of the three most scenic spots in Japan. The participants of the other teams were jealous that this team was heading north, where they thought it would be cooler than the rest of Japan in midsummer, but the Miyagi team photo shoots took them out into heat of over 30 degrees Celsius.

Since Sao and Alice are members of photography clubs, they were quick with their shoots and interviews. But for Bo Ram and Kyung Ju everything was new, and they were bewildered and hesitant. Every night the four talked about how to approach strangers and ask them in Japanese for permission to photograph, and about how to take good photographs, and gradually they began to gain confidence. They had so much to talk about—about each other's countries and ways of thinking, their boyfriends and dreams for the future—they were reluctant even to go to sleep!

At one point during the photo essay production process Kyung Ju disagreed with the other three on which of two photos of a *kamaboko* shop owner and his wife should be included. The other three were as surprised by Kyung Ju's strong will about the selection as was Kyung Ju by their willingness to listen to what she had to say. Ultimately Kyung Ju's selection was not upheld, but the matter did help the team members learn to mutually trust each other. They learned to be honest and not harbor resentment, and they ended up forging strong bonds.

For a detailed record of the photographing and interchange, see the following site:
<http://www.tjf.or.jp/focusonjapan/en/record/miyagi/index.html>



Alice leads the group in the interview. Bo Ram and Kyung Ju wondered why the shop is closed so early in the day, but they still found it hard to speak up.

At the Shiogama Nakaoroshi whole-sale market, we see a number of shops with posters of Korean celebrities! One woman brings out a magazine of Korean stars and gets all fired up talking about the stories.



Bo Ram and Kyung Ju strike up a conversation with an old woman at a nearby farm on an island. The two are surprised to learn that by leaving harvested green onions on the field, by fall they become soft and sweet.

Kyung Ju and the other three members disagree during the photo selection process. "I can't quite express it in words, but this one feels right," says Kyung Ju. Then the others try to help her express her thoughts verbally by asking questions like, "What do you like about it?" and "Is it the way the subject is looking?"



With the Miyagi Team, Looking Back

The four team members clicked as soon as they met, but they hadn't expected to bond before the program began. Sao and Alice had some apprehensions based on negative interactions they'd previously had with Koreans. Bo Ram and Kyung Ju applied to the program out of their love for Japan, but as their friends in Korea did not have positive impressions of Japan, they were worried about how they would get along with Japanese. The four chose "encounters with people" as their theme.

Their final presentation was a delightful piece of work that exuded the joy of meeting each other and the people of Shiogama, and the richness and kindness of those they encountered. Looking back, perhaps the team could have captured more of the unique flavor of the place, or further pursued the passion behind their message and photos, but everyone really did a great job in the amount of time they had.

Finding themselves in unfamiliar surroundings, some members at times felt unwell and experienced physical and psychological discomfort. They worked together closely, however, and, supported by the generosity and kindness of the people of Shiogama they met, they were able to complete a splendid project. We greatly appreciate people in Shiogama.

(Mori Ryosuke, TJF staff Miyagi team guide)

You can find the completed work at the following site:
<http://www.tjf.or.jp/focusonjapan/en/work/miyagi/index.html>

Living in Tokyo: Big City, Small Tales

Tokyo Team

Midoring (Osaka, Japan), **Xiajun** (Shanghai, China),
Xiaoyuan (Inner Mongolia, China), **Yabi-chan** (Okinawa, Japan)

We took photos of people in Tokyo under the theme, “Living in Tokyo.” Tokyo is a huge city, but everyone has their own lives, with both troubles and happy times. Each person may seem tiny in the context of this big city, but we wanted to focus on these ordinary people and convey their lively stories.



Tokyo is a city of many different people, from men and women with their own businesses who have been there for generations, to businessmen who have just recently moved there, to individuals pursuing particular dreams. There are areas like Shinjuku filled with skyscrapers, and there are old parts of town with lots of trees, old houses, and old shops. There are young people who are into *kosupure* (cosplay or costume play, a subculture in

which people dress up as characters from manga, anime, etc.), who are into flashy clothes, and who perform on the streets, while there also are young people who appear as though they have been abandoned by the city itself.

We took a picture with a spirited group of Spanish tourists before Hachiko, the dog statue in front of Shibuya railway station. We were surprised to see so many foreigners everywhere we went. In Tokyo, one’s worldview opens up, with so many opportunities to meet not only people from other countries but from other parts of Japan.

Just like Tokyo Tower transmits broadcasting signals in various directions, Tokyo sends culture out to the rest of the world. Some people we met in Tokyo’s Harajuku district told us that Tokyo is a hub of fashion trends and information.

Tokyo had many things we had imagined it would have, and many things we did not think it would have.



Xiajun, Midoring, Xiaoyuan, Yabi-chan (from left)

Project report:

Yao! Bu yao! (Keep/Don’t keep)

The team chose for their photo shoots the young people’s meccas of Shibuya, Yoyogi Park and vicinity, and Harajuku, as well as the old districts of Tokyo in Nezu and Yanaka, cradle of *otaku* culture Akihabara, and white-collar business district Nishi-shinjuku. In order to communicate the team’s theme, “living in Tokyo,” members asked subjects questions about their work, the dreams they had in coming to Tokyo, and what the city of Tokyo meant to them. Although they worried at first that people in Tokyo might be cold and distant, everyone approached kindly opened up to the Japanese and Chinese students’ friendliness and sincerity.

Photographing every day in the blistering heat, the two Chinese students visiting Japan for the first time found they tired very quickly. The two Japanese students kept close to them and watched over them. As time passed, the Chinese participants became more assertive and began taking more and more photos.

During the latter part of the program when the team was choosing photos for their photo essay, everyone would yell, “Yao (need/keep)!” or “Bu yao (don’t need/leave out)!” in Chinese to express their opinion about each photo. When they disagreed, they argued passionately for the photos they wanted and thought would best communicate the team’s message.

For a detailed record of the photographing and interchange, see the following site:
<http://www.tjf.or.jp/focusonjapan/en/record/tokyo/index.html>



In front of Yoyogi Park, street performers everywhere.



The team encounters a cute little kid on the train.



The team spends all the morning of August 9th deciding on the order the photos to be presented.



Everyone works late into the night . . .



A back street in Nishi-shinjuku, an area full of corporate offices. High-rise buildings went up in the former school district, so the sign was changed from *tsugakuro* (school route) to *tsuro* (passageway).

A “red girl” visiting from Yamagata. The Harajuku district attracts youth with idiosyncratic tastes in fashion.



Busy, busy, busy, but sleeeeepy.

This old man has been running his soba noodle shop for years. He said he likes his job because he enjoys meeting people of different generations.



With the Tokyo Team, Looking Back

Tears in the eyes of members of the Tokyo team showed the strong bonds they had forged as they reflected on their activities on the day of the presentation. But their team dynamics weren’t so great from the outset.

The two Chinese participants with an interest in Japan who have been studying Japanese had barely had any experience taking photographs; their initial reaction to the hectic schedule was, “We’ve come all the way to Tokyo but all we do is work on our project from morning till night. We want to see more of Tokyo!” On the other hand, the two Japanese participants, who were active members of their high school photography clubs, declared, “We want to take photos like crazy and stay up late choosing photos for our presentation.” The objectives and pace of the two pairs were out of sync.

But as the group devoted their evenings at the hotel talking openly about their feelings, they came to a compromise.

Towards the end of the program, each participant was able to assert her ideas on which photos should remain in the final presentation. The members of the team became closer and closer as they frankly expressed what was on their minds, at times getting upset when their views were rejected.

(Muronaka Naomi, TJF staff Tokyo team guide)

You can find the completed work at the following site:
<http://www.tjf.or.jp/focusonjapan/en/work/tokyo/index.html>

Osaka is Hot, Hot, Hot! “Mottainai” Not to Know Its Wonders

Osaka Team

Hiromi (Tokyo, Japan), **Paul** (Nebraska, U.S.),
Polly (Winslow, U.K.), **Shinji** (Gifu, Japan)

What struck us the most in Osaka was the energy and approachableness of the people. Everyone kindly welcomed us photographers, telling Paul and Polly about things Japanese and wishing us luck on our “Focus on Japan 2007” project. We were impressed by how quick on the up-take these people are, who would strike various poses in front of the camera without us even asking them to!



Such congeniality is not something you can find often in the United States or the United Kingdom, or even elsewhere in Japan, for that matter. People in Osaka are very friendly, enough to make us think that they have a special culture of their own that especially values interpersonal ties.



Polly, Shinji, Paul, Hiromi (from left)

Osaka may seem like a big cosmopolitan city, but you’ll find Shinto shrines tucked into corners among the high-rises, and ducks so unafraid of people that they do not fly away when approached; there is a great balance of nature and wildlife, the old and the new. Some of the young people may look a bit scary or flashy, but they can be seen munching on *takoyaki* balls, a traditional Osaka snack made of a pancake dough stuffed with octopus bits, and they were happy to respond to our requests to take photos, reassuring us that they pass down the exuberant character and culture traditional to Osaka.

The secret of the distinctiveness of Osaka culture, where the individuality of cheerful old folks and spirited middle-aged men (*otchan*) and women (*obachan*) flourishes, is its firm root in the local community.



I met this man at a shrine, and asked him lots of questions about Japan. He was doing *uchimizu* (sprinkling water) to settle the dust and make the air cooler for the visitors. People don’t do that in the U.S. This photo gives you a sense of the consideration people have for each other in Japan. (Paul)

When this man saw me (this American tourist), he stopped his work and struck a pose. The woman called him out on it. How funny! (Paul)



Seeing this homeless man hauling this cardboard-covered load in the heat made me sad, but at the same time, I thought he must be pretty strong.



A man we met at Hozenji, a Buddhist temple. Picking up a pair of toy glasses off the ground, he posed nonchalantly for the camera—a great example of an Osaka man, with a sense of humor and a performer’s spirit that would put even a comedian to shame.

Project report: Discussion, Sometimes Surprise, and Finally Fulfillment!

Having established that three photos related to high schools out of a total of 25 in the photo essay was too many, the team decided to choose two from the following three: the gymnastics club, a tennis scene, and a shoe locker. The gymnastics club was a shoo-in as it represents Seifu Gakuen Senior High School, but team members had trouble deciding between the tennis photo and the shoe locker. Paul, who plays tennis himself, was all for the tennis shot: “His form is flawless. You can see the passion with which he’s trying to achieve something, the way he’s reaching towards the ball,” he said.



Shinji himself, who had taken the shot of the shoe locker, and Hiromi thought that it was just an ordinary scene with no particular significance. Polly, however, wanted to keep the photo because it reminded the viewer that Japanese really do take their shoes off indoors and hinted at how students are actively participating in club activities during summer vacation. The two Japanese members remarked that the shoes were probably on top of the shoe locker because the wearers were too lazy to put them away in the boxes, whereas Polly interpreted the scene as evidence of the students’ eagerness to get to practice without a moment to lose. Hiromi and Shinji were amused by the difference in interpretations.

In the end, Paul conceded. Though Polly appeared somewhat apologetic, the shoe locker photo made the final cut.

For a detailed record of the photographing and interchange, see the following site:
<http://www.tjf.or.jp/focusonjapan/en/record/osaka/index.html>



The gymnastics team at Seifu Gakuen Senior High School. There were lots of students practicing really hard. I was struck by the passion displayed by young people here. (Polly)



People really do take off their shoes indoors in Japan! I didn’t believe it! From the shoes thrown on top—not placed inside—the shoe locker, I guess some people were rushing to judo practice. They’re practicing even though it’s summer vacation! Amazing! (Polly)



“It’s gotta be this one!” Printing out the first choice photos of all the team members, they moved on to narrowing down the photos to 25.

With the Osaka Team, Looking Back

The Osaka team was comprised of Paul, who is passionate but plays it cool, Hiromi, who is a leader with a go-getter personality, Polly, who is sensitive and considerate of everyone, and Shinji, who looks at things from a unique perspective. Even when team members were shooting in the same place, they all came up with very different photos. Who could have known that individuality would come shining through so much in the pictures they took? It is because these four very different people made up the team that they had an experience none of them would have had on their own, and that they created a final product that none could have achieved alone.

Taking pictures for the first time in a new place, a new culture, and with new people was no doubt difficult both physically and emotionally, perhaps enough to want to give up. But the team kept going until the end without trying to evade the task. I would like to express my deepest respect and heartfelt gratitude to the team for their outstanding effort.

(Harashima Yoko, TJF staff Osaka team guide)

Finding the Richness

Hiroshima Team

Daniel C. (Upper Hutt, NZ), **Emily** (Rockhampton, Australia), **Kosuke** (Osaka, Japan), **Sawako** (Tokyo, Japan)



Kosuke, Emily, Sawako, Daniel (from left)

Before we departed for Hiroshima, we decided to take the approach of going out and shooting whatever we could find, making “finder” our theme. From over 5,000 photos that we ultimately took, we selected 25 under the title, “Finding the Richness.”



We had a tight schedule from day one that was tough at times, but we were able to have a fun and meaningful trip. Along with members of the photography club of Shobara Kakuchi Senior High School, we laughed together and encouraged each other.

In the city of Hiroshima, we took pictures of places like the Peace Memorial Park, capturing the appeals of atomic bomb survivors and the faces of activists. We were warmly welcomed by our

host families in Shobara. We visited artisans who showed us how traditional skills and new technologies coexist. We also visited Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines. Finally, in Onomichi, an old port city, we wandered through alleys so small they aren’t marked on maps, and took shots of people’s lives, dogs, and cats.

We met many people and had many new experiences. For example, Emily felt her dark image of Hiroshima as a destroyed city evaporate, Daniel savored the kind and gentle atmosphere of the countryside, Sawako relished the area’s lush landscape and vast skies, and Kosuke was struck by people’s sincerity.

“Finding the Richness” is what brings together all that the four of us felt and thought about. By “rich,” we are not referring to economic or material wealth, but rather people’s warmth and nature’s abundance, the coexistence of the past and present. This is the richness we found through our camera viewfinders.

Project report:

Gratitude for People’s Kindness

“Everything around me burned char-black, and the river was filled with victims.” “I had intense pain on my head, so I went to the hospital, where they removed many pieces of shattered glass from my scalp.” Such were the shocking stories we heard on August 6 in the Peace Memorial Park from survivors of the atomic bomb. What left the greatest impression on the four team members was the serene expressions the elderly men and women who spoke to them had, and the smiles on their faces at the end.

“Richness,” the theme the team ultimately chose for their project, was perhaps the “kindness” that the team received from the many people they encountered on their trip. Their joy and gratitude for the kindness of others come through vividly in their photo essay.

The photo shoots went smoothly. The final photo selection process took much longer than expected, and it was only in the *shinkansen* on the way back to Tokyo that the team began thinking about the project theme and composition. The time was very limited and they could not really discuss things in depth. Many problems went unresolved, like whether the four members had had a chance to fully express their thoughts, and whether they were able to give their presentation in their own words.

Although the five days of shooting were undoubtedly rough both physically and mentally, no one gave up. The team was a truly impressive group, always engaging in their photo shoots.

For a detailed record of the photographing and interchange, see the following site:
<http://www.tjf.or.jp/focusonjapan/en/record/hiroshima/index.html>



Kosuke listens earnestly to an old woman talking about her experience of the atomic bomb.

Daniel, who visited a *hanko* (signature seal) shop and watched a *hanko* being carved both by hand and with a laser machine, was impressed to discover that the skills of artisans and the most cutting-edge technology are both being used in pursuing a traditional Japanese craft.



The team takes a break on the veranda with bottles of soda.

Everyone starts to look exhausted, but the photo selection process continues late into the night.



An artisan who makes umbrellas from old kimono and yukata. It is his hope that memories of the deceased will continue to live on in people’s lives, by taking keepsakes out of closets and recycling them into something used in everyday life.

This smiling woman was a special advisor to the photography club at Shobara Kakuchi Senior High School. Warm and friendly to all, she knew how to give everyone a good time. Emily’s homesickness was cured by her cute and cheerful smile, and being with her filled all of us with new energy.



You can find the completed work at the following site:
<http://www.tjf.or.jp/focusonjapan/en/work/hiroshima/index.html>



Children playing at a day care center in Shobara, surrounded by mountains.

At Peace Memorial Park, both young and old pray for the atomic bomb victims. One day, all those who experienced the bomb will have passed away. The horror of the bomb, however, will always be remembered.



With the Hiroshima Team, Looking Back

Having a camera in hand created opportunities for conversation and exchange of smiles. As the team experienced more and more of these interactions, the burden of their task began to seem lighter and they began truly enjoying themselves. I realized that taking photos is not just a matter of technique; the personality of the photographer, a congenial smile, and an air that helps the subject relax and open up are also important.

Each team member photographed about 200 to 250 photos per day. The necessity to go through that many photos every day and select the good ones helped them improve their skills rapidly. The digital camera is a splendid tool for cultivating an observant and discriminating eye because it makes it possible to view photographs immediately and exchange ideas about them as a group. The effectiveness of this kind of learning experience, I am convinced, is something that could be used beneficially in all sorts of educational environments.

(Fujikake Toshiya, TJF staff Hiroshima team guide)

Comments from Participants



Alice

Gained renewed interest in Japan

I like to visit foreign countries, but I didn't have much interest in my country, Japan. Through the program, though, I experienced how, when you can speak the language of the place you visit, you can quickly establish a rapport with the people you meet and feel you want to see them again soon. That is something you can experience only in your own country, and it helped me gain a renewed interest in Japan.



Bo Ram

Learned how to interact with people

I wish that I could have been more outgoing, though I did try my best. I'm not used to expressing my own opinions and engaging in discussion, so it was a bit hard for me. It was a stimulating and fun experience helping each other, furthering our understanding, and growing close.

The biggest change I experienced from the program was in my self-confidence. I like people, but I was never good at talking to others and communicating my own thoughts, so doing the interviewing was hard. During the program, which felt both long and short, my biggest achievement was learning how to muster courage to do something and how to interact with people.



Kyung Ju

Image of Japanese changed

When I first met Alice and Sao, I was surprised that they seemed to be wearing a lot of makeup. I was intimidated because in Korea, those who wear makeup have the image of being girls who play around. I was relieved after spending time with them, though, to find out that they were just ordinary high school students.

I was under the impression that Japanese people "charge for everything," "say one thing with a smile but think something else," and are "unsympathetic." But people were very kind to me, like when I bought a "lucky cat" figurine (*maneki-neko*) as a gift and the shop atten-

dant gave me a detailed explanation about it, or when the people at the inn on Katsurajima took care of me when I was feeling unwell and came to see us off at the harbor. My image of Japanese has changed.

I gained much more than just a visit to Japan this summer. I came to understand much better how I had lived my life until now and how I will live my life from now on, thanks to the talks we team members had every night. I realized what a narrow outlook I had had until then.

My dream now is to become friends not only with Japanese but people from all over the world, and to learn about their countries. I would also like to meet people who have a negative impression of Japan and let them know my thoughts.



Sao

Hope to be more open to differences

Once, in an attempt to befriend a Korean student, I sent an e-mail, but the reply I got was: "I don't want to be your friend because I don't like Japanese people." Since then, I hadn't had a very good impression of South Korea. After meeting Kyung Ju and Bo Ram, I learned that not all Koreans think the same way, and that we have just failed to understand each other. Japanese tend to exclude people who speak other languages or come from different cultures. I hope that in the future, we can change our way of thinking and learn to be more open to such differences.



Midoring

Ashamed to be annoyed

Since Yabi-chan and I are both in photography clubs at school and are comfortable with cameras, we were quick to start shooting photos. But the two Chinese participants on our team lagged behind and shot very few photos, often stopping to buy drinks and taking breaks. I started to feel kind of annoyed.

But that evening, I was surprised when the two participants told us through a staff mem-



Xiajun

Not leaving problems left unresolved

The most memorable part of the trip were our talks late into the night in the hotel. At first, all four of us went out on the shoots together, but we two from China felt kind of left out. So we sat down and talked about it and explained what we thought and wanted to do. After that, we decided that we would work in pairs, the Japanese students and the two Chinese students. I realized that collaborative projects work well when everyone communicates their ideas and talks them through, instead of leaving problems left unresolved.



Xiaoyuan

Choosing photos most interesting

Selecting just 25 from the many photos we had was a really hard task. We often had differences in opinion. Once, Midoring and I disagreed with Xiajun and Yabi-chan over photos of the same subject with slightly different backgrounds. We had a fierce argument that seemed to last forever, but neither pair relented. Finally, we asked several TJF staff members who didn't know the details of our discussion to choose a photo objectively. They chose the one Midoring and I had been pushing for! I was so happy, I clapped.



Yabi-chan

Discovered a different face of Tokyo

I didn't think that the boonies could exist right in Tokyo, but in the *shitamachi* area, time still moves very slowly. It had a great atmosphere, and it made me feel as though I'd discovered a very human face to the city.

A "school zone" sign we saw in the center of the city left a strong impression on me. Schools in the area have been closed, because the area is no longer a good place to raise children. It made me sad, too, to think about things that used to exist but no longer do. The program awakened my interest in looking outside Okinawa.



Hiromi

The project expanded my outlook

I was able to look beyond national boundaries to encounter people's sensibilities and individual differences, and through evaluations of each other's work, have been able to expand my outlook. These are things I never could have learned in my studies for entrance exams, and has contributed greatly to improving the person I am.



Paul

Want to go back to Osaka again

In Osaka, the *otchan* and *obachan* always greeted me with warm smiles and the city was very accommodating to our photography project. Whether talking to kids about Yu-Gi-Oh cards, speaking with the priest at the temple by the bridge, or encouraging the gymnasts with their English (which they were very good at), I felt a connection with the Osakans that makes me want to go back to Osaka again!

This project showed that with hard work comes great reward. Lately, at school, I have been working very hard so I can go to a college that has a Japanese study abroad program.

Participants' comments translated and edited for this publication.



Polly

I became more confident

I was awestruck by Osaka's beauty, both in its exciting metropolitan lights and billboards and also in its areas of green, and particularly in the shrines we visited. To have such contrast and diversity within a city really surprised me, but it seems to be the norm in Japan! However, even more than the scenery, the Osakans themselves were absolutely wonderful to be around. I never could have expected to feel so welcome among the native people. In England, our impression of Japanese people is that they are stoic and unemotional, and I honestly could not have been proven more wrong by the Osakans.

I definitely think I have changed, and even the adults on the trip noticed. I think I became more confident and self-assured, which probably comes from taking photos of people and actively making friends with them. The way my language skills improved have really helped me in school and again have built up my self-confidence and my willingness to take risks.



Shinji

Photographs mirror one's heart

Until I participated in the program, I believed that all photos taken of the same place would turn out the same. In reality, the same place, seen from different angles, looks completely different. Photographs mirror what is in one's heart. I hope to continue taking photos from now on.



Daniel

Opened my eyes to the wider world

The most thought-provoking event would have to have been Peace Day in Hiroshima. As for the Peace Day, the thing that stayed with me the most was how devoted to peace many people still are years afterwards. We have ANZAC Day here in New Zealand to remember the war dead, but it's just not quite to the same emotional scale.

This event has certainly opened my eyes to

the wider world. There is no way that I will be able to simply stay in New Zealand after seeing how interesting Japan is.



Emily

My life style changed

The most memorable and thought-provoking time I felt was when we left the big city of Hiroshima and traveled to a country town in the mountains called Shobara. The little country town had more appeal and friendly people. There we got to understand and feel what Japan is really like.

I just enjoyed the Japanese people and their way of living. It has a lot more order and purpose than the lifestyle you would find in Australia. My lifestyle has changed also. I now find myself taking shoes off before even going inside my house, I say *itadakimasu* and *gochiso-sama deshita* at meals, and I don't get tired of rice.



Kosuke

Toward my future dream

I've gained self-confidence through the encounters with my team members and the other people we became close to during the program, and have grown to think more positively about my future. I don't really have a dream for my future yet, but this experience made me want to try various kinds of things and eventually find my own dream and work hard to fulfill it.



Sawako

Disagreement made our product great

The members of our team all came from various backgrounds, having seen and experienced different things, so I was a bit baffled by the range of ideas and opinions. But the issue was not about responding to every single difference, but about accepting them, so it wasn't that hard. We certainly had our disagreements when we were preparing for our presentation, but I think that's what made our final product such a great one.

Comments from Staff



Tokyo team support member

Yuika (Wako High School Photography Club)

If I had tried to express "Tokyo" in 25 photos, I probably would have filled them with Shibuya, Harajuku, Shimokitazawa, Shinjuku, and Roppongi. That's because I was under the impression that people from outside see Tokyo as a clamorous place of incessant change and activity.

But that's just a one-sided, Tokyo-resident perspective. The "mélange of Tokyo" is obvious, but I realized that it is the "quiet, back-streets Tokyo" that people who are not residents of the city seem to want to project.



Osaka team photographer

Yoshizato Hiroko (Graduate of Osaka City Kogei High School)

I was glad that the four members of our team grew increasingly close through photography. Feelings that are hard to convey in words are easier when we use photos. By looking at your preferences in photos, others begin to understand who you are and you start to learn more about them. It reaffirmed for me the power of photography.

The four Osaka team members grew from the program. They realized it is much harder to create a final product as a group than it is by yourself. But it is that much more satisfying at the end.

It wasn't all fun and games; there were times when the photos didn't turn out well, and the selection process took a really long time. But I think that experiencing firsthand that photography (as with anything, really) isn't all peaches and cream is what it means to truly enjoy photography. That means the four team members were having a really good time!

From some of the photos from the team's final product, it is evident that the team was lacking in technique, but all of the photos have spirit and are in a direct relationship with their subjects. I think this is because the four team members who took them were having a good time taking the photographs.



Hiroshima team interpreter

Itoh Natsumi (University student)

Having participated in "Focus on Japan 2007," I think that all the members of our team were motivated to learn each other's languages. At first, they only spoke through the interpreter, but as time passed, they learned how to say certain things in each other's languages and tried to communicate directly by also using body language.

I think what jump-started this communication were the talks the team had every night about photography. As participants shared what they felt as they shot photos or why they liked certain pictures, they felt a growing desire to express themselves

and to understand each other. This seemed to allow everyone to become more sensitive to each other's languages.



Osaka team host school

Hanabata Masayuki (Advisor, Osaka City Kogei High School Photography Research Club)

When we met in Tokyo on the first day of the program, the expressions of the participating high school students mingled almost every human emotion—eagerness, anticipation, anxiety, and nervousness. Catching glimpses of their personalities and the inner selves they hid deep down behind their outer facades, I was worried whether the students would be able to fully capture a sense of Osaka in their photos, and whether their work would become superficial as they tried hard to make things look "good."

From day one in Osaka, the team approached local men and women and took photos of them. Although some were operating a digital single-lens reflex camera for the first time, I was deeply impressed by their enthusiasm, pointing their cameras at everything they encountered and trying to discover their very own Osaka. As an educator, I felt extremely fortunate to see students completely absorbed in the effort to communicate with the people they were photographing and to observe their seriousness in listening to the advice I offered.

The students who participated in this program, in which each student encountered—on his or her own terms—different people and the ways they live, are a truly lucky bunch.



Project advisor

Ke Yue (Representative of the "Tokyo Shiten" Internet Broadcasting Site)

I was deeply moved by the photo essays. I have been in Japan for 13 years, but I have never seen such lively panoply of expressions among Japanese.

It was truly wonderful that the high school students who participated in the program were able to capture such diverse faces of Japanese people, and that they were able to engage in international exchange through the process of creating their final works. Since students from around the world with different cultural backgrounds gathered together for this program, it is only natural that differences in opinion should emerge. What is important in such a situation is to first learn about each other. That is the first step. I hope the participants take what they experienced back to their own countries and pass on to their friends what they gained in the nine days of the program. I also hope that the students will look to their experience in Japan for hints in keeping a diverse world inside their hearts, and for living rich lives as members of our international society.

Toward Future Projects

The final photo essays produced by the four teams are posted on the TJF website (<http://www.tjf.or.jp/focusonjapan/en/work/index.html>) in four languages (Japanese, English, Chinese, Korean). In addition to the photo essays, visitors can glimpse what went on behind the scenes in the nine days of the program in a section entitled "Project Report," and in the "Participants" section are participants' comments about the program and some of the photos that didn't make it into the final selection. Since ultimately only 16 high school students participated in the program, we tried to make it possible for many high school students both within Japan and without to get a full picture of what the program entailed through these sites.

"Focus on Japan 2007" had features that allowed us to achieve results that had not been possible previously through the "Lives of Japanese High School Students: Photo and Message Contest." One was that it provided a situation in which high school students from Japan and other parts of the world could actually meet and interact with each other. Another was that it did not take the form of a contest. It was our hope that in a context in which participants were not forced to compete with one another, they would gain, feel, and learn various lessons through working together on their joint projects.

On the other hand, however, there are problems that have yet to be resolved. For example, we need to do more to make sure that the selected participants are fully aware of what the program entails. How and how much advice should the photography club advisors and staff give to participants in producing their photo essays? How should we address the gap between students who have experience with cameras in photography clubs and those for whom the program is their first time taking photos? These are some of the issues that require further study and improvement.

Hereafter, we hope to employ such tools as the TJF's newly opened site "Tsunagaaru" (<http://www.tsunagaaru.com/>) to promote communication and interaction among young people worldwide and introduce the students' achievements to the rest of the world.



"Tsunagaaru" website

"Focus on Japan 2007" website

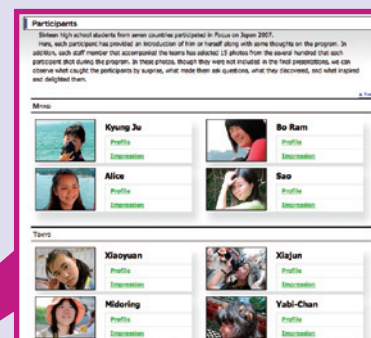
http://www.tjf.or.jp/focusonjapan/index_e.html



Project Report



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Participants



Photo Essays