



Japan and Mexico In Pictures

By Martha Mendez



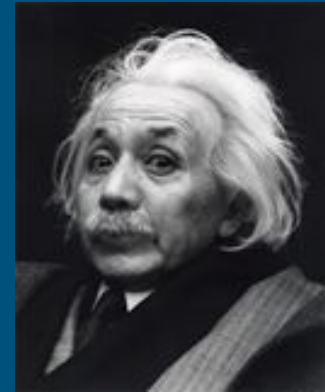
The Soul of a Picture

William Shakespeare said, “The eyes are the window to your soul.” This metaphor is one that sounds true to many people for it can involve vulnerability and end up exposing one’s most precious memories or secrets. But the eye of a camera can expose even more through the image it creates. It exposes reality but also **opens** a whole realm of meaning while eliciting many emotions. Have you ever looked at an old picture and found yourself instantly travelling back to that particular experience? You cannot help but either feel angry or sad or start crying or feel something fantastic and smile or laugh out loud. **Pictures have the power to connect us to history, the future and with each other.** To demonstrate the importance of such connections, I have chosen some photos to analyze, circa 1950s, depicting Japanese people and some depicting Mexican people.

History is a characteristic automatically cemented to a picture; it is amazing how a photograph has the power to provoke all kinds of emotions. The photos to the right (top-from left: Pablo Picasso and Frida Kahlo; bottom from left: Ernesto “Che” Guevara and Albert Einstein) first make us want to recognize who the people are. Even though the people are no longer alive, their image stirs our emotions. It does not matter that all these images were character-portrayed by a Japanese artist, Yasumasa Morimura. Yet we still naturally resort to that connection to history because of what these individuals did or how they influenced history.



Who am I?



History of Photography

Apollo 15: July 1979

Influencing history is substantially more interesting if there are pictures to attest to the experience. For example, an article by CTV News reported that the camera, the Hasselblad Lunar Module Pilot, was not only the camera used to take pictures during the 1971 Apollo 15 mission but is also the only one brought back from the moon. This shows that the use of photography is important as is its history. The first photograph taken was of a rooftop and was processed in 1825 as a heliograph by Nicephore Niepce. His process took him eight hours. It was until 1833 that Louis Daguerre, a French painter and physicist, joined Niepce shortening the process to half an hour. The process he invented in 1838, after Niepce had died, is known as “daguerreotype.”



Photography in Japan was slowly introduced in the country. While ruled by the Tokugawa shogun during the Pre-Meiji Period (1646-1867), the country was isolated from the rest of the world. The only contact to the outside world was a business in Nagasaki. A Dutch trading post allowed for the exposure of technology in photography. After the restriction was discontinued, many people moved to Japan including photographers who taught others the trade. Photography in México was a very important link between the emperor and society. In 1864 Francois Aubert became the official photographer for Emperor Maximilian, his wife and his court. Aubert made record of the colonization of the French in Mexico and legitimize the Emperor’s reign throughout México to “generate popular acceptance and authority.” (Duncan 27)

Emperor
Ferdinand Maximilian
and Carlota





Japanese Photography

These pictures are from *The Gail Project* gallery. They were taken in 1952 and served to document American military occupation while in Okinawa. These pictures are not only beautiful because they are in black and white but because they depict Japanese people in their simplest way of life. For example, the women (top left) are caring for their children whether they are home or at the local market. They strive to get the day's food items to feed their family. In a sense, they are multi-tasking as evidenced by the woman with the basket on her head and the other carrying their child on their back. We see this as well in the bottom left picture. Simplicity follows with their bare feet or simple strapless shoes. Poverty is abundant throughout these pictures.



Because the pictures are black and white, they expose detail more sharply. Our eye cannot miss the kids' big happy smiles and all the detailed shadowing on the right side of the bridge where the barefooted woman is crossing. Furthermore, one can isolate the stripes of the fence and every crooked line of the pile of rocks behind the kids with the dog. The picture of the small boat (bottom right) and the men speaks volumes of the unity they perform to accomplish the day's work. One can imagine them talking to each other guiding the large pole onto a school of fish. They possible may be singing a song.

The Bracero Program

War can not only cause annihilation of big cities but it can also be the cause to unite countries. When the United States entered into World War II, it caused a shortage of labor throughout the country – particularly in agriculture. To alleviate this deficiency, in 1942, an agreement between the United States and Mexico, called the Bracero Program was created. While the agreement included fair policy such as equal pay and fair working conditions, and provisions like transportation and a decent place to live in during the working seasons, the Mexican workers were left to pay for their own health insurance and food. But they could not afford these expenses for they were not paid the fair wages that were agreed. The top right picture reflects the crowded and poor living conditions the laborers endured like sleeping on soft canvas sheets for beds and limited space to sleep. The bottom left photo depicts the hope towards a better life as the men depart on a long journey to a new unknown country.

The Bracero Program was also structured to control illegal immigration but the program failed miserably because while only farm work experienced individuals qualified, many inexperienced Mexicans crossed illegally to have an opportunity to earn higher pay. Unfortunately, higher earning to get out of poverty was, and still is, the greatest incentive to continue crossing illegally and making immigration one of the most controversial issues in the United States. The top left photograph is of people atop a train called “The Train of Death” or “La Bestia” in Spanish. The train departs from a station across from Guatemala in Arriaga, Chiapas. This long journey is no safer than the desert for these men, women and children are not strapped and are vulnerable to elements like muggings, gang rapes, murderers and kidnappings.

La Bestia/The Death Train



Mexican Photography

The Bracero Program



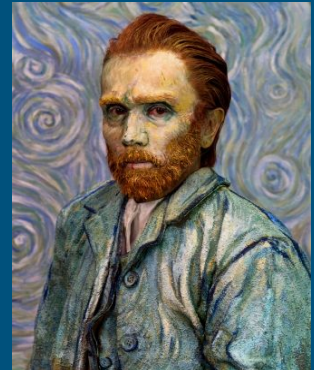
Conclusion

Japanese and Mexican pictures illustrated were taken around the 1950s depicting life after or during World War II. Pictures have carried its history for decades framing the significant loss of so many lives. Photos have connected us to history but have also mattered in the reconstruction of both nations. This connection helps us to learn from the past to enable the belief, and the building, of a brighter future. The Japanese and Mexican photographs displayed indicate the great connection between these ethnicities because of the similarities such as their struggle with poverty; they simply survive in whatever their environment provides. One can see they love their children very much and while the ocean is the means of daily survival for the Japanese, the Mexican's ocean is an agricultural field. Pictures do have the power to connect us to history, the future and with each other.

Yasumasa Morimura



a conceptual photographer and filmmaker who transforms into many characters using costumes and makeup.



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Thank You!

Suggestions welcomed

Gracias!

ありがとうございました

