

Japanese student

Contrasts in culture from dress to discipline

By Jo Griffiths

"Rough and practical" were the words an international student used to describe the way we dress at Capitol Campus.

Growing up in a culture where school uniforms are still worn, Japanese student Kazuko Eizuru was pleasantly surprised with the casual dress of American students.

"When I first came here, everyone was wearing jeans," said Eizuru, a graduate student in the American Studies program here since last September. "Students don't dress up, although the older people do dress neatly."

Quick to point out the steady influence of Western clothing in Japan, Eizuru said dress was the least significant of the many differences the Japanese women noted when contrasting life in Japan and the U.S.

Among the others were the cheerfulness of the area's people, and the English language itself. According to Eizuru, Japanese children begin studying English at age 12, but emphasis is placed on reading and writing the language rather than speaking it.

"Not even those teaching English in Japan have the opportunity to listen to the native, spoken language," she said, explaining that prior to coming to Capitol she had taught the language in a private school in Japan. "Local dialects are difficult because they differ so much from the standard form."

When Eizuru first arrived in this area, she had trouble understanding speech patterns because of what she termed a "linking concept." It seemed, to her ear, that words merely ran together in one long stream when her instructors and others spoke.

To adjust, she took some undergraduate courses and discovered what to her was a refreshing difference between the two countries' classrooms. Japanese students, she said,

spend their classroom time listening to lectures and taking lots of notes (10 to 15 pages per hour is not unusual). American students spend more time interacting with their professors.

"There's so much discussion in my classes here, so much more academic freedom," said Eizuru. "Not only does one have the opportunity to learn from one's instructor, but from fellow students as well."

A reason for the relaxed classroom atmosphere could be the informal interpersonal relationships between people of all ages, Eizuru says she has observed at Capitol Campus.

"The Japanese people have specific, formal ways of addressing others according to age, sex, and position," she said. "It's nice to watch people of all ages discussing one another freely."

Of particular interest to Eizuru was the freedom of American women. Educated in what she termed a democratic manner, she sees American women as "spoiled" by contrast.

"Japanese women are very strong because they have learned to be disciplined," she noted. "Women here seem to have a frailty which could cause problems for them when on their own."

"Appearances here are more equal than in Japan," Eizuru pointed out, "but while American men seem to be trying to support women, I'm not sure that's true in a fundamental sense."

Her thoughts may surface in the thesis she is currently working on which compares Japanese and American women. Information for the paper will come from a survey of female high school students in both countries.

"We Japanese are also influenced by the American dream tradition," she stated, "and while the people here seem so cheerful and carefree, they do have problems, too."

Still, Eizuru plans to incor-



Photograph by Joe Hart

porate a number of her experiences here into her life in Japan. Included will be the academic freedoms experienced at Capitol Campus, something she wishes to introduce to her students when she resumes her teaching career there.

Another will be what she calls "communication."

"Americans speak so freely to one another. There is so much discussion here, so much communication. Expressing with words is nice, and good. I'm going to try not to forget that kind of thing."

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