



Japanese students get taste of Oklahoma

By Judy Gibbs Robinson
Staff Writer

NORMAN — Three dozen Japanese college students are getting a taste of Oklahoma this week during a first-ever trip to America's heartland for a 72-year-old cultural exchange program.

The Japan-America Student Conference, founded in 1934, usually meets in cities and campuses on the East and West coasts, Executive Director Regina McGarvey said.

"The students actually came to me at the end of last year's conference in Japan and said, 'We want to learn about the 'red state' phenomenon, and we want to visit a mega church,'" McGarvey said.

The four-day stay at the University of Oklahoma also may open eyes among the 36 American students traveling and studying with the same number of Japanese students.

"I've been looking forward to this for a year," said Sheehan Scarborough of Harvard University. "I've only been to the East Coast and the West Coast and I knew America is more than that."

American Indian debut

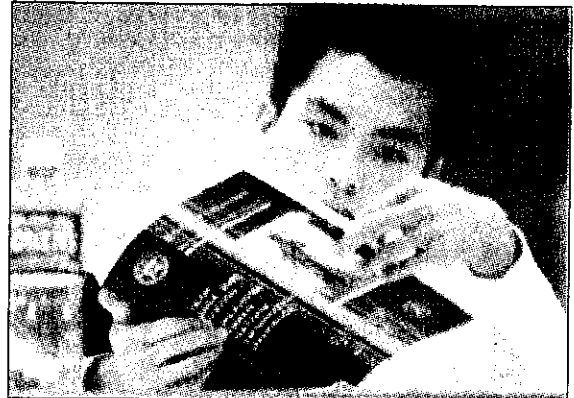
Every year, 72 students — half Japanese and half American — are chosen to travel together in one country or the other while studying and discussing global problems of their choosing.

The University of Oklahoma agreed to host the students for one of the conference's three weeks. They already have visited Cornell University, New York City and Washington. Their last stop will be San Francisco.

ternational issues they have chosen.

The conference ends with presentations on what they've learned.

"We fill their head with more knowledge than they can handle," McGarvey said. "But the real lasting thing that happens ... they become really, really good friends."



BY JACONNA AGUIRRE, THE OKLAHOMAN

Loc Van, a student at Cornell University, looks over a American Indian publication during Wednesday's session of the Japan-America Student Conference at the University of Oklahoma.

Students arrived on three flights Tuesday night and attended a welcome reception. They spent much of Wednesday learning about contemporary American Indian issues from a who's-who of Oklahoma tribal, academic and cultural leaders.

The session was an eye-opener for Marie Kanke of Keio University.

"The only thing I know about the Native American is a movie about the western United States," Kanke said. "I was really impressed that they have tradition but also begin to integrate," she said.

American students also had plenty to learn, said Jason Knudson of Occidental College.

"People in this conference are from all around the United States, so a lot of people don't know that much about Native American culture," he said.

Global ties sought

Japan also has indigenous people, and one goal of the Oklahoma stop is to allow students to make connections between the groups.

"We're hoping students can draw comparisons between issues in the U.S. and Japan and apply it in a global context," said Ken-Cheng Hsiang of Washington and Lee University, the Oklahoma site coordinator.

Today, the students plan to visit the American Indian Exposition in Anadarko. Friday, they will see the Oklahoma City National Memorial, the National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism and the state Capitol.

Between excursions, the students work in teams studying and discussing in-