

News

Exchange students treated to ceremony tradition

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Morning Star Staff

Thousands of kilometres from their homeland, a group of exchange students at Okanagan College got a chance to feel like they were on native soil.

Okanagan College held a coming-of-age ceremony recently for international students from Japan's Tachibana University. This rite of passage is a major event in the lives of young people in Japan. It welcomes into the adult community all those who turn 20 during the calendar

year.

A parade of colours flowed as the students, most of them female, entered the room. Camera flashes popping from the 40 or so in attendance, the students shone in their ornate yukatas – like summer kimonos – each one including a uniquely tied sash.

In Japan, young people wear silk kimonos, which are even fancier, for their ceremonies. Student leader Eri Takada said Okanagan College's event might not be quite the same as

in Japan, but she and her fellow exchange students were happy to be in the show.

"We have a special ceremony today. It's a very precious thing for us."

It eased her pangs of homesickness from seeing photos from her friend's ceremony in Japan from the day before.

"My friend had a big ceremony yesterday and my mom sent me pictures; it was so beautiful. I wanted to be there."

Okanagan College has maintained an exchange

program with Tachibana, which is in Kyoto, for the last 20 years.

"They were missing their ceremony in Japan so we decided to do it here," said manager of student support for international education Donna McGrath. "It's a huge deal for them. Basically they have this huge ceremony and the

mayor welcomes them into the adult community."

The ceremony continued the tradition McGrath started about eight years ago.

With Vernon Mayor Wayne Lippert tied up in meetings, Okanagan College regional dean John Lent performed the welcoming address, the

second time he had done so.

"I'm thrilled for you and so glad we can do this. I know you wish you could have been at home for this; I hope this will be your second home."

After being welcomed officially as adults, the students, 12 in all, performed a traditional song and shared goodies

with their guests.

The first couple of years Okanagan College performed the ceremony, they pleasantly surprised their Japanese guests because they weren't expecting to be honoured.

"They do know now," said McGrath. "That's why they bring their yukatas with them."



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Eri Takada, left, Chinami Hashizumi and Hitomi Miura, wearing traditional yukata outfits, line up to be welcomed as adults at their coming-of-age ceremony at Okanagan College.