

The Kakehashi Project and my subsequent travel to Japan, provided me with a different perspective on Japan and even my home country. Starting with my studies for Japan bowl I was able to encounter customs, buildings, and traditions that were foreign to my own. This was critical in my Japanese studies because it forced me to learn important real-world content like pop culture that is not taught in a classroom setting. Furthermore, these studies along with the Kakehashi project allowed me to better identify the similarities and differences between Japanese and American cultures. However, the perspective afforded to me by the Kakehashi Project and Japan Bowl also allowed me to see the strength and importance of the US-Japan relationship.

Noriyuki Shikata commented on this relationship when he mentioned nine senior Japanese cabinet officials are Alumni of US government programs or have studied in the US as students. As an American I find it incredible that so many senior officials have close ties to the US since their youth. I now understand this is reflective of the US and Japan's strong relations. However, it is hard for me to imagine the same number of senior US government officials being the alumni of Japanese government programs or having studied in Japan. This only goes to show how important it is for American students to study Japanese from a young age.

Another striking realization I had while on my trip to Japan was the difference between what the US and Japan value. In the American suburbs the sidewalks are small and cars hold the priority whereas in Japan the sidewalks are spacious. Furthermore, Noriyuki Shikata mentioned cars did not have the priority in government policies. I feel this reflects how the US prioritizes individuality and personal privacy (the privacy of a car), while Japan prioritizes the welfare of the public. Additionally, coming on this trip I came with the impression that Japanese cities, especially Tokyo, were endless urban sprawls void of any nature or trees. However, I found nothing could be farther from the truth as Japanese cities had a large amount of urban parks and planted trees. I was especially impressed by the Kanazawa Castle Park located in the middle of the city. Kanazawa Castle and the Kenroku-en's close proximity to the urban center of the city shows the long history of Japan and the numerous castle towns throughout the country.

Lastly, I was impressed by the hospitality of the Japanese people. Store and hotel attendees were always helpful and in cheerful moods. They were willing to do whatever it takes to accommodate the guests which ensured a very enjoyable stay. However, I was most impressed by the friendliness of the people outside of the large urban centers. In the country I was able to have conversations with complete strangers who are not too busy to talk. I think this too is similar to America, where folks in the countryside are not on guard against strangers and are much more friendly and homely to them. The Kakehashi project succeeded in increasing my interest in Japan and my impressions of it. I now hope to study abroad there in college and possibly orient my career so that it might someday include work in Japan. I know I will continue to study the Japanese language and improve my speaking skill in preparation for my eventual return.

