



## Community Profile

### Vannak Loek Cambodian Dentistry Student

VANNAK LOEUK IS a 20-year-old Cambodian student who will be spending two weeks at Kobe Shoin Women's University this month.

Loeuk's visit takes place courtesy of the Kobe Shoin Japan-Cambodia Project, established in 2002. The project raises money through concerts, parties, and cookie sales and uses it to promote cultural exchange between Cambodian and Japanese students and to fund educational programmes amongst the poor in Cambodia. Every year, it pays for a young, female Cambodian student to spend two weeks at the university, raising interest in her country and culture and getting to know Japanese students and culture. The visitors are selected every year through an essay competition, this year on the subject, "Is there a place for educated women in Cambodian society today?"



In her essay, Loeuk argues convincingly that women should be relieved of the expectations of Cambodian society (and especially men) that they should restrict themselves to domestic concerns, as approved by Khmer culture, because "with education, they have the ability and capacity to participate in developing Cambodia like the men."

Loeuk has lived all her life in Phnom Penh and currently attends not one but two of its universities: She studies dentistry at the University of Health Science and is doing an English degree in the evenings at the Royal University of Phnom Penh. She describes Phnom Penh as a divided city, one of which until recently she had only seen the safe and comfortable side, living among "well-educated people with a good living standard." However, part-time work as an NGO translator has brought her into touch with the city's seamier side- "slum areas with poor and uneducated people." She sees corruption as the biggest challenge facing Cambodia, but loves "the way that people help each other."

Loeuk looks forward to getting to know Japanese people and trying Japanese food, learning about the educational system, visiting libraries and bookshops and taking part in Christmas celebrations. If it snows this December, the first snowman you see will be hers.

INGRID KEITH