**JP-NET: Building a Global Virtual Community for Japanese Specialists**

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Computer networks are transforming the way we live - the way we educate ourselves, carry out business transactions, and govern ourselves. Information service tools like e-mail, ftp, gopher and the World Wide Web (WWW) are making it possible to provide services and information to a world-wide audience. At MIT we are building the JP-NET information service, the first such service to provide an on-line infrastructure for an entire field, that of Japanese Language and Culture education.

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1. **Introduction**

For the past two years, the Japanese program at MIT has been developing and importing a series of computerized instructional materials delivered on Athena, MIT's distributed computing system, to be used by the MIT Japanese language students outside of class.

The applications currently available include:

- course syllabi and daily assignments
- grammar notes and exercises
- reading and writing exercises
- kanji drills
- on-line Japanese-English/English-Japanese dictionary
- Japanese word-processing tools

The availability of these applications, although still in the development stage, has already contributed significantly to the implementation of MIT's demanding communicative-oriented curriculum and also to the overall program management.

Though the locally developed applications have so far only been used at MIT, all the software is being written to be completely data-file driven so that it can be easily customized to a particular course and curriculum.

2. **Building a Global Community**

MIT has recently received funding from Canon Information Systems, Canon Business Machines and from the Consortium for Language Teaching and Learning to expand the local MIT system to one that is global. This new service, JP-NET, will address the needs of Japanese language and culture specialists around the world. We will provide JP-NET information via as many networked delivery technologies (ftp, gopher, WWW, e-mail, etc.) and in as many formats as possible so as to reach the widest audience we can.

The design of the language component will be based on the work already done on Athena. We will have textbook-independent materials for teaching Japanese including:

- vocabulary information
- kanji drills
- grammar notes
- reading materials
- listening activities
- ideas for communicative activities

We hope to establish collaborative relationships with colleagues at other institutions to develop these and other components of JP-NET. The important point to stress is that JP-NET is for the entire field, not just for MIT. The more material that we can put on JP-NET, the more useful it will be for the field at large.
As a part of the service to the field, JP-NET will contain information about a variety of Japanese language programs, including their staff information, course description, and course syllabi.

Along with language learning materials, there will be a cultural component to JP-NET as well - we will create a large textual and photographic database about Japanese culture. Partnerships with specialists in cultural elements, such as kimono design and history, are being established; these partners will contribute cultural material to JP-NET.

Another component of JP-NET will be the establishment of a series of mailing lists for various interest groups to communicate with each other, for example, secondary school teachers around the world. With such mailing lists we can also make available job postings, information about fellowships, etc. As part of this component, the present mailing list, Japanese Teachers and Instructional Technology (JTT-T-L@PSUVM.PSU.EDU), will be incorporated into JP-NET.

In addition, there will be a component of JP-NET in which lectures about Japanese language and culture will be offered on-line. These lectures will be given by experts in the field, and anyone participating in JP-NET may sign up for a lecture. The lectures are non-credit, but what will be offered will in many cases be based on actual courses being taught by the experts at their institutions.

We are also working with Japanese library specialists, who are digitizing bibliographic information on their holdings, and who will make this information available through JP-NET and other services.

All JP-NET participation will be free (or, where cost for duplication, etc., is involved, only the cost of such service will be charged). All material will retain the copyright of the author, but must be freely distributable.

Technical development for JP-NET will include standardization of software for easy input/output of alphabetic/non-alphabetic character combinations, and browsers to search through large databases that store information in both alphabetic and native Japanese orthography. We will also be developing software and tools to allow users to effectively search and download JP-NET information, regardless of their computer type or connectivity.

3. How to access JP-NET

Our first method of delivery of information will be via the World Wide Web. In keeping with our goal of reaching as wide an audience as possible, however, we will be setting up as many other alternative delivery mechanisms as possible, including Gopher, ftp, and special tools for users with only email connectivity to the Net.

Our WWW site can be reached at the URL:

http://www-japan.mit.edu

If you do not currently have direct access to the Net, or do not know how to use the Web, send email to:

jpnetsmit.edu

for more information.

4. How to contribute to JP-NET

We welcome contributions and suggestions. Since exactly how you contribute to JP-NET will depend on what type of computer you use and how you are connected to the Net, you should get in touch with us directly to begin the process.

5. References

