



# WINTER, 2009: BREEZE ISSUE #37

A FREE E-NEWSLETTER FOR FRIENDS OF JAPAN & TEACHERS OF JAPANESE

## ISSUES CONFRONTING JAPANESE-LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

*By Yasuhiko Tosaku, University of California, San Diego*

### 1. Introduction

There is no need to mention that we, as Japanese teachers, must constantly improve our knowledge and ability to use Japanese, our pedagogy and knowledge of language evaluation, and the ability to use that evaluation knowledge. However, along with the knowledge and skills to teach our particular academic subject, it is also necessary to constantly grasp the political and social changes surrounding our occupation and respond to them. This paper reviews the issues confronting Japanese-language education today in the United States.

### 2. Standards-based Education

The concept of education based on standards, where high goals are set and education strives to achieve them, was first advocated in the 1980s as a method to improve education in the United States; by the late 1980s, the federal government and states had joined in a collaborative effort to realize the concept. The Goals 2000 legislation, the driving force behind governmental efforts, makes specific mention of foreign languages, and with a grant from the Department of Education, standards were published in 1996 for foreign languages in general and in 1999 for Japanese in particular. The No Child Left Behind legislation, which reflects education policies under the Bush administration, promoted education based on standards and carried it forward at public schools through linkage with grant allocation; budget distributions were also conditioned on implementation of standards-based education at the state, school-district and public-school levels. Under such circumstances, it is important for teachers to acquire knowledge and the ability to implement education methods based on standards, and Japanese teachers are no exception. The No Child Left Behind legislation holds states, school districts and public schools accountable for meeting standards and assessing results. While various opposing opinions on this measure have been expressed, as long as the system has the force of law, effectively and efficiently teaching in accordance with standards, improving students' abilities and delivering results through evaluation are important issues for teachers, and could also affect our job security. A number of educational activities have been conducted so that teachers can learn about the standards and how to implement them in class with Japanese-language education.

The College Board's Advanced Placement Japanese Language and Culture Program began in 2006, and in 2007 the first Advanced Placement Japanese Language and Culture Test was conducted. This program is based on the above-discussed concept of standards, and success of the program depends on teachers having sufficient knowledge of standards. It is not an exaggeration to say that increasing the number of Japanese teachers who can carry out standards-based education is essential for the future development of the Advanced Placement Japanese Language and Culture Program. As suggested by the revised Advanced Placement Japanese Language and Culture Test scheduled to be implemented in 2013 or 2014, which further emphasizes the idea of standards, the need for teacher training activities on standards is believed to continue in the future.

The National Board for Professional Teacher Standards (NBPTS) is a program that recognizes excellent teachers and is conducted annually by a non-profit organization in Virginia. A past attempt to recognize Japanese teachers failed to recruit a sufficient number of applicants to evaluate testing credibility, and today there is still no recognition of Japanese teachers. However, evaluation standards and methods are currently under review so that a single test can evaluate teachers of any language instead of having language-specific tests. It might take at least three years, but at some point the evaluation system will extend to Japanese teachers. Increasing the number of teachers recognized as excellent educators through this evaluation program will raise the quality of Japanese-language education and also strengthen its foundation in the United States. Since this program is also based on standards, not only knowledge of standards themselves but the ability to implement standards in class is necessary to pass the test. Training on standards will be increasingly important, in part to produce teachers who participate in the program and pass the test.

### 3. Articulation

The collapse of the bubble economy in Japan put an end to the Japanese-language boom that started in the 1980s, which saw a steady increase in the numbers of students, institutions teaching Japanese and teachers at the elementary, secondary and advanced education levels. In the United States, the Japanese language saw a shift in treatment from a foreign language with few study opportunities to inclusion in the group of foreign languages with frequent study opportunities, which includes Spanish, French, German and Italian. While the number of students leveled off after the collapse of Japan's economy, the position of Japanese as a language with frequent study opportunities has not changed. Moreover, the quality of Japanese teachers is on a par with that of other language teachers, and the quality of students in Japanese classes has improved compared to what it was in the 1980s. Nevertheless, a review of students of the Japanese language shows that the majority continue to be at the beginning level, and the number of students who start learning Japanese in the United States and reach an advanced level is very limited today. When discussing the quality of foreign-language education, the language abilities of students who complete individual levels can be used as a criterion, yet when considering a foreign-language education from a broader perspective, the proportion of advanced students can be a useful guide. In the case of Japanese-language education, the latter criterion reveals a number of issues.

One of the reasons is the lack of established articulation between individual levels of Japanese-language education. Although it has become less common, in the past students who had studied Japanese for four years in senior high school were usually placed in the first semester of first-year Japanese in university. Despite significant differences in the nature of Japanese-language education between the elementary and secondary levels, where Japanese is seen as enrichment education, and the advanced level, where the aim is to acquire skills, a placement method that cancels out four years of study is a major waste in terms of both time and money, and lowers students' motivation to study Japanese. In fact, it is common to see such students drop Japanese classes at university long as perpetual beginners -- who repeat beginning-level studies at senior high school and e

after entering university, and thus end up with beginner's skills -- make up the majority, it is extremely difficult to raise the quality of Japanese-language education as a whole.

The U.S. federal government provides grants to various programs to produce advanced users in security-related languages such as Chinese, Korean and Arabic. Japanese is unfortunately not included among the targets. The current position of Japanese could be threatened if a large number of advanced users in these languages is produced. Therefore, it is time for the Japanese-language education circle in the United States to consider producing a greater number of advanced students.

For English-speakers, it is not necessarily easy to reach an advanced level in all four Japanese skills. It would take years. To achieve this goal, the current system of producing perpetual beginners should be revised and a pipeline established that takes into consideration the education needs of the elementary, secondary and advanced levels. For this to occur, Japanese-language teachers and administrators at elementary, secondary and advanced education institutions need to closely communicate, discuss methods to achieve goals and carry them out. This is a formidable task to realize nationwide at the beginning; it is first necessary for teachers in each region to gather, discuss and establish articulation within the region. In addition, in order to have advanced-level Japanese ability at the time of graduation from a university, Japanese-language education needs to begin in elementary education, and more should be done in kindergarten and primary school. Moreover, it is important to start the education process from this level while keeping in mind that the goal is to reach an advanced level by the time of completing university. Increasing the number of students who take the abovementioned Advanced Placement Japanese Language and Culture Program in senior high school and putting a smooth system in place for continuing study of Japanese by immediately enrolling students in intermediate-level classes upon entering university are also believed to be major forces that can create advanced students. For this purpose as well, university-level Japanese teachers must acquire more knowledge of standards.

The key resources for generating advanced-level Japanese ability are students of Japanese as a heritage language, who have steadily increased in number over the past decade. The profile of these students has changed significantly in the past 20 years, with students having gone from being third-generation or fourth-generation Japanese Americans to those referred to as the "new first generation," and a large number of these new heritage Japanese students are joining programs at universities. How universities respond to this new type of student and how articulation is established between heritage Japanese-language schools and universities will form the approach to further improving the abilities of heritage Japanese-language students and to increasing the number of Americans with advanced Japanese skills. In addition, these heritage Japanese-language students constitute a large potential group of examinees of the abovementioned Advanced Placement Japanese Language and Culture Program Test, and they can play an important role in developing the program. For this to become a reality, it is also necessary to consider articulation between heritage Japanese-language education and the Japanese-language education offered at senior high schools and universities.

#### **4. Teacher Issues**

The lack of Japanese-language teachers at public schools from the late 1980s to 1990s appears to have been resolved by the growing interest in training to become teachers and the leveling off of the dramatic increase of Japanese students. However, the lack of Japanese-language teachers with teaching certificates is still an issue. A number of schools are canceling Japanese classes because they cannot find people to replace instructors who began to teach Japanese in the 1980s or those who moved to other states. To solve this problem, it is necessary to train many teachers certified in the Japanese language. In reality, however, the number of universities that can issue Japanese

language teaching certificates, not to mention the number of departments of education or education graduate schools specializing in cultivating Japanese-language teachers, is still limited. Another reason for not meeting the demand for Japanese-language teachers is the tendency for Japanese individuals educated at universities in Japan to be at a disadvantage when trying to obtain a Japanese-language teaching certificate. Improvement of the system is needed, such as acceptance by U.S. universities of credits earned while obtaining a teaching certificate in Japan or requiring those whose native language is Japanese to take Japanese-language classes.

When limited to teachers who have earned a certificate in the Japanese language at a department of education or an education graduate school, the number of those who teach class today after having learned Japanese-language pedagogy from specialists of Japanese-language pedagogy is very limited. Because many prospective foreign-language teachers who enter departments of education want to teach Spanish or French, there are many specialists in these languages at these departments. Due to these circumstances, pedagogy classes do not take Japanese characteristics into account or teaching practice is supervised by a specialist in a different language. In the U.S. education circle completely dominated by Spanish and French languages, it is not simple to resolve this issue, yet creative solutions are needed to enable those who intend to teach Japanese in the future to take Japanese-language pedagogy classes in university. Recently, the Alliance of Associations of Teachers of Japanese (AATJ) started an online training program for Japanese-language teachers, called the Japanese Online Instructional Network for Teachers (JOINT). Individuals who have taken this program can earn credits at the university or graduate school level. If university and graduate school students who aim to become Japanese-language teachers also enter a program like JOINT and acquire specialized knowledge and skills, their abilities as Japanese-language teachers would further improve.

The amount of grants for Japanese-language teacher training has declined dramatically compared to the amount available in the 1990s. Against the background of the growing need for teacher training due to implementation of standards and the Advanced Placement Japanese Language and Culture Program, highly cost-effective training must continue. In the U.S., with its vast distances, travel expenses account for most of the cost of training sessions lasting several days or longer. Thus, Internet participation from home or school, as in the case of the abovementioned JOINT, will be increasingly important in coming days.

##### **5. Popularization Activities for Japanese-language Education**

Today in the U.S., many Japanese-language students are interested in anime and the pop culture of Japan. Although anime and pop culture work in our favor to maintain the number of students, we cannot continue to rely solely on them. Just as the number of students of Japanese for business purposes in the 1980s and 1990s declined when the bubble economy burst, the profile and number of students easily change with the times.

In the past several years in the U.S., interest has been rising in the Chinese language as China grows in importance in the global economy. The number of Chinese-language students and programs is surging, and is also backed by capital investment in Chinese-language education by the Chinese government. While Japanese-language education is believed to be of a much higher quality than Chinese-language education--it will likely take years for Chinese-language education to reach the same level--an increasing number of programs have switched to Chinese from Japanese despite the long effort and investment put into Japanese-language education, which have allowed it to reach the current level. Facing this reality, the Japanese-language education circle in the U.S. should further popularize Japanese-language programs by making the point of the overall high quality of Japanese language education and the role it has played. Not only is the Japanese language not a target

government grant policy related to security, as previously discussed, but today the Democrats, which are said to be pro-China, have come to power in the administration and in Congress, and it is fair to say that the Japanese language faces severe headwinds. In these circumstances, there is a pressing urgency for Japanese-language teachers and the Japanese-language education circle to do everything possible to popularize Japanese-language education. For Japanese-language teachers, popularization activities start with their own classes, and they must be conducted at all levels, including in schools, students' homes, communities, school districts and state governments. To raise the visibility of Japanese-language education, moving beyond the wall of the Japanese-language education circle is the key. Demonstrating the presence of Japanese-language education at local or state foreign-language education associations and education associations as well as at state departments of education and government is also needed. While teachers are busy teaching and generally have little time to participate in popularization activities by going further afield, they should be aware that they might lose their jobs without taking action. It is also necessary for Japanese-language teachers' associations to spread know-how on conducting popularization activities among Japanese-language teachers.

In order to increase the number of Japanese-language students, it is necessary to consider the meaning of studying Japanese for American students, communicate the appeal of Japanese-language study and obtain new students. As discussed previously, the number of students increased in the 1980s and 1990s due to Japan's economic development, and currently students interested in anime, games and pop culture support Japanese-language education. What will support Japanese-language education after anime and pop culture? Will it be Japan's environmental protection or robot technology, which is said to be the best in the world? How can the point be made in popularization activities that there is meaning for Americans to study the Japanese language, and how will we attract students? To achieve these goals, individual teachers need to think about why they currently teach Japanese in the U.S. and what their classroom teaching means to American children, the country itself, U.S.-Japan relationships and also to the world. Only with such an ethos can education and popularization activities be effective.

**【Note】** This paper is based on a lecture given at a Japanese-language education leadership workshop held June 27-28, 2008, in Washington D.C.; some additions to the original script were made.

## 2008 ACTFL CONFERENCE

*By: Thomas Lin*



The Japan Foundation, Los Angeles participated in the 2008 ACTFL Conference, which was held at the Walt Disney World Swan Disney Resort in Orlando Florida . This was the second year we had attended the conference and we focused our efforts on advocating Japanese-language education in the Japanese Pavilion. We designed a variety of goods such as posters, and stickers based on the popular anime/drama based Japanese instructional series “ Erin 's Challenge! I Can Speak Japanese.” To advertise the activities and services of the Japan Foundation in general, we also passed out flyers and advertising leaflets explaining our services and activities relating to Japanese-language education. The response we received was overwhelming as our giveaways disappeared from our booth very quickly.

We were very proud of all the vendors in the Japanese Pavilion as the unity expressed by our members along with our national and local affiliates reflects the strength of the Japanese-language teaching community. One of the members from the Pacific Northwest Conference for Languages, who was also a past participant in the Japan Foundation's Teacher Training Program, Ms. Sandy Garcia of Forest Grove High School in Oregon , was a finalist for the 2009 Teacher of the Year Award. We are very proud of her achievements and dedication to teaching not only the Japanese language but having a new perspective of the world.

Next year, the ACTFL Conference will be held in our back yard city of San Diego and we will be planning a strong showing for the Japanese Pavilion. Southern California is one of the strongest regions for Japanese-language education and we will be there to represent the teaching community. We are hoping for a large turnout of Japanese-language educators from Southern California as well as around the country and we look forward to seeing you in November.

## 2008 JLPT UPDATE

*By: Thomas Lin*



On Sunday December 7th, 2008, the Japan Foundation, Los Angeles conducted its annual Japanese Language Proficiency test at nine locations across the United States . This year, we added Fayetteville , Arkansas as a new test site to supplement increasing number of test takers in the Southern region of the United States . The Japan Foundation, Los Angeles was in charge of hosting the test here in our hometown and this year we had the highest number of registered test takers out of all the test sites in the United States . This is the third year we have used the USC campus as the test venue and due to the large number of registered test takers, we separated the levels into two buildings. Levels 1 and 4 were administered in Von KleinSmid Center and levels 2 and 3 were administered in Taper Hall.

In the United States , we had 3688 registered test this year, which is the most we have ever had in the history of the JLPT. This number represents a 22% increase compared to last year and represents the steady increase in the number of individuals interested in finding out their level of proficiency in the Japanese language.

Once the test was over, all the answer sheets were delivered to our headquarters in Japan to be graded. The process is very laborious and time consuming because all the answer sheets from all the test sites around the world must be collected and graded before scores can be released. This is to make sure that everyone receives their official score at the same time. We should be receiving official score reports in late February, which will be viewable online through your profile on My Account. A hard copy of your score report and a certificate (if you pass) will also be sent out by regular mail.

For information on the 2009 test, please check back in July for more information. We will be releasing more information then including any new test sites and registration timeline.

## **NEW LIBRARY ACQUISITIONS-MOVIES**

*By: Thomas Lin*



The Nihongo Library at the Japan Foundation's Los Angeles office is always receiving new print and multi-media materials. Below is a small list of new DVDs and Japanese-Language textbooks that we have added to our collection.

### Japanese Textbooks

1. **MangAsia** [textbook]: This book uses manga from Asia to tell stories about the world. Instructors can use the images provided as a means to teach through storytelling. Images come from many countries such as India , Indonesia , Thailand , Korean, China , Japan , Philippines , and Malaysia . The book also contains a CD ROM that can only be used in our library.
2. **わくわく児童劇シナリオ** [textbook]: This textbook is designed for younger students of Japanese and includes various activities for skits and other thought provoking activities.
3. **Japanese through Real Activities** [textbook]: This book explores the practical use of Japanese through various real world activities. Readers are introduced to various cultural activities that are introduced to facilitate the teaching of Japanese. Activities based on real life experiences are also provided such as speaking with a host family, making a phone call, and visiting a company. The book also contains a CD ROM that can only be used in our library.

### Anime DVDs

#### 1. Bleach Uncut Season1 Box Set (Standard Edition)

Episodes 1 - 20 now available in one box set!

For as long as he can remember, Ichigo Kurosaki has been able to see ghosts. But when he meets Rukia, a Soul Reaper who battles evil spirits known as Hollows, he finds his life is changed forever. Now, with a newfound wealth of spiritual energy, Ichigo discovers his true calling: to protect the living and the dead from evil. And when he vows to defend Rukia from the ruthless justice of the Soul Society, he and his friends must cross over and do battle in the spirit world...

#### 2. Mobile Suit Gundam 08th MS Team DVD Complete Collection

Anime's most popular and enduring series continues with MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM: THE 8TH MS TEAM. In the midst of the One Year War between the Federation and the Zeons, Shiro Amada has been placed in charge of a squadron of prototype Gundam suits used for ground combat. As the squadron has a series of deadly encounters with the Zeons, they come to learn that the terrain and their malfunctioning can be just as dangerous as their enemies. But little do they realize that the greatest threat may come from a betrayal within, as their leader Shiro has fallen in love with Ai Sahalin, an enemy pilot. THE 8TH MS TEAM is a grittier, more realistic GUNDAM series that



concentrates on the harsh conditions of battle, reminiscent of a war film rather than the STAR WARS style action of the other entries. This COLLECTORS EDITION BOX SET contains all twelve episodes collected on five discs.

### 3. The Prince of Tennis Box Set, Vol. 1

When 12-year-old tennis prodigy Ryoma Echizen, the hero of the *shonen* (boys') sports series *The Prince of Tennis* (2001), enters Seinan Academy Middle School, the tennis coach, the members of the team, and the kids in his class are all intrigued. Many of the early episodes follow a formula: an arrogant bully challenges "the kid" to a match and Ryoma beats the shorts off him. Ryoma's response to these challenges is an intense glare; he rarely talks to his rivals--or anyone else. He hurts the well-intentioned Sakuno because he repeatedly fails to remember her. While a self-contained stoicism characterizes many anime heroes, Ryoma is a difficult character to know or like. Things become more interesting when his icy facade cracks, enabling him to forge an alliance with teammate Takeshi Momoshiro in a doubles match. Ryoma also has a difficult relationship with his father Nanjiro, a former tennis pro once known as "the Samurai." A goofy monk who spends his time reading girlie magazines and playing with his cat, Nanjiro refers to Ryoma as "that cocky, rotten boy of mine." Director Takayuki Hamana uses split-screen, multiple images, negative color, and manga-style drawings to enliven the inevitably repetitious scenes of tennis games. Based on the long-running manga by Takeshi Konomi, *The Prince of Tennis* scored a big hit in Japan: the broadcast series ran for 178 episodes and spun off two OAVs and two features, so this 13-episode set is only the beginning. (Unrated, suitable for ages 10 and older: minor violence, minor risqué humor) --*Charles Solomon*

## WELCOME MS. OTA



Please help us in welcoming Ms. Maiko Ota who has been working for us as an intern since September, 2008. She was given a special project to document and create a loan system so the Japan Foundation, Los Angeles can easily loan out cultural items including Japanese World Heritage Artwork Panels, Japanese toys, and goods used in the Japan in a suitcase program to teach young American students about the language and culture of Japan. She also helped out during special events organization by the Japan Foundation, Los Angeles such as the Japanese Language Proficiency Test and the 2009 Noh performance.

Ms. Ota is currently a student majoring in Asian American Studies with an interest in the history of Japanese immigrants. She chose this major because of her interest in and sympathy towards the early struggles of immigrants from her home country of Japan . Working at the Japan Foundation, Los Angeles has given her the opportunity to study and connect with the Nikkei community here in Los Angeles .


Her internship will be ending in the next few weeks and we wish her the best of luck in her future endeavors.


## 2009 JLPT INFORMATION


*By: Thomas Lin*

There have been many inquiries in regards to whether or not the JLPT will be offered twice a year here in the United States in 2009. The answer is NO; however, the organizers of the test have decided to administer the Level 1 and 2 tests in only four Asian countries including Japan , China , South Korea , and Taiwan on July 5th, 2009. These four countries were chosen to accommodate their rapidly increasing number of test takers that overshadow other countries by significant amounts. In 2007, there were over 60,000 registered test takers in Taiwan , over 100,000 registered test takers in Japan and Korea , and over 250,000 test takers in China , not including Hong Kong . In comparison, the United States had slightly over 3,000 registered test takers. Currently, there are no plans to administer the test twice a year in other countries where the JLPT is offered; however, if there are any updates, they will be announced on our website.

<a href="#">Past Issues (2020)</a>	▼
<a href="#">Past Issues (2019)</a>	▼
<a href="#">Past Issues (2018)</a>	▼
<a href="#">Past Issues (2017)</a>	▼
<a href="#">Past Issues (2016)</a>	▼
<a href="#">Past Issues (2015)</a>	▼
<a href="#">Past Issues (2014)</a>	▼
<a href="#">Past Issues (2013)</a>	▼
<a href="#">Past Issues (2012)</a>	

Past Issues (2011) 

Past Issues (2010) 

Past Issues (2009) 

Breeze #39

Breeze #38

Breeze #37

Breeze Past Issues

Breeze Issues #1-#36 (PDF)

[Headquarters](#)

[New York Office](#)

[Center for Global Partnership](#)

[Volunteer](#)

[ボランティア募集](#)

[Japan Related Links](#)

[Job Openings \(Updated\)](#)

5700 Wilshire blvd, Suite 100

Los Angeles, CA 90036

P. 323.761.7510

---

Annual Report

© 2019 The Japan Foundation, Los Angeles

Web Design.