

ESSAYS

An On-line Anthology of Japanese Literature The Japanese Text Initiative at the University of Virginia Electronic Text Center

By Kendon Stubbs

The Japanese Text Initiative, or JTI, is an ongoing collaborative electronic text project between the libraries of the University of Virginia and the University of Pittsburgh, with participation by scholars in the U.S. and Japan. The JTI provides World Wide Web access to the masterpieces of Japanese literature in Japanese, and, where possible, in English translations. Begun in 1995, the JTI is part of the texts of the University of Virginia Library's Electronic Text Center. The Center currently has some 51,000 texts on-line at <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu>, in English, French, German, Latin, Japanese, Chinese, and other languages. The Japanese portion of the E-Text Center is at <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/japanese>. The University of Virginia Library provides staffing and other resources for the JTI. Other support comes from contributors at the University of Pittsburgh, Queens College of the City University of New York, and other colleges and universities, as well as from grants from the Toshiba International Foundation and other foundations.

CONTENT OF THE JAPANESE TEXT INITIATIVE

As of July, 2001, the JTI has about ninety texts on the Web, ranging from the great eighth century poetry compilation *Man'yōshū* (*The Anthology of Ten Thousand Leaves*) to twentieth-century novels like Dazai's *Shayō* (*The Setting Sun*). The initial selection of titles for the JTI was based on the "Twenty Classical Works" and "Thirty Modern Works" that comprise the canon of Thomas Rimer's *A Reader's Guide to Japanese Literature*.¹ Additions to the Rimer fifty include such works as Kabuki plays, the imperial poetry anthologies of the *Hachidaishō* (*Collections of Eight Reigns*, tenth to thirteenth centuries), and Yosano Akiko's *Midaregami* (*Tangled Hair*), 1901. The JTI coordinators and advisors choose from the traditional canon as described, for example, in Donald Keene's history of Japanese literature.² Every title is represented by a Japanese text and, where possible, English translations. (Most of the translations of Japanese literature read nowadays were published in the last fifty years, and many of them are subject to copyright restrictions that unfortunately do not permit their use in the JTI.)

Highlights of the JTI collection include the following:

- three versions of *Genji monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*, eleventh century) in parallel frames: the original Japanese, a modern Japanese translation, and a Romanized version
- thirteen Noh plays (fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) with English translations by Ezra Pound, Arthur Waley, Royall Tyler, and others, allowing comparison of different translations of the same plays
- a popular site for *Hyakunin isshu* (*100 Poems by 100 Poets*, thirteenth century), again with parallel Japanese, transliterated text, and English, and with an on-line version of the poem card game traditionally played in Japan at the New Year
- detailed guides to Kabuki and Bunraku (puppet) plays (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), as well as introductions to poetry anthologies, Noh plays, and other texts

STUDY AND RESEARCH TOOLS

In addition to providing the primary sources of literary texts, the JTI offers some tools to encourage study:

- The 51,000 texts of the E-Text Center share a common search interface that allows searching for any word in any of the texts, or in the case of Japanese, for any *kanji* or *kana* (Japanese characters). For example, looking up the *kanji* for *haru* (spring), one finds that there are 3,666 instances of that *kanji* in the current texts. The search interface also permits "proximity searching": *a* near *b* in the texts. As an example, an Internet discussion list was recently discussing the frequent references in literature to wiping away tears with the sleeve of a kimono. Were silk sleeves really used to catch tears? A search for the *kanji* for *sode* (sleeves) near *namida* (tears) turns up 144 examples of tears and sleeves, from eight in the poetry of Saigyō to one in Mori Ōgai's *Gan* (*Wild Geese*).
- One of the most-used tools of the JTI is an on-line Japanese-English dictionary. The JTI is a mirror site for Jim Breen's dictionary of modern Japanese, with entries for 70,000 common words plus large databases of names, places, scientific words, etc.
- To facilitate use of the dictionary, the JTI developed a Japanese-English Dictionary Portal. This lets users go to any Japanese Web site (including the JTI texts), highlight any character or characters in the site, and automatically bring up the definitions from the dictionary.

USERS AND USAGE

During the month of May, 2001, 22,000 people made 51,000 visits to the JTI site, and looked at 229,000 Web pages. Usage of the site is growing rapidly. In the half-year from November, 2000 to May, 2001 the number of visits increased by 58 percent, and the number of pages accessed increased by 128 percent. Approximately 47 percent of the usage of the JTI in May was from U.S.



Screen capture of the home page of the Electronic Text Center Web site.

addresses; 23 percent from Japan; and the remaining 30 percent from 85 other countries or unidentified sites. After Japan, the heaviest usage was from Canada, Australia, Italy, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Austria. At the lower end of the scale of usage were countries like Nepal, Croatia, Samoa, Trinidad, and Sri Lanka.

The most-used pages were the dictionary and its portal, *Hyakunin issyu*, Noh plays, *Genji*, *Man'yōshū*, and others. The JTI is one of the top sites listed in Internet search engines such as Yahoo, Google, and Altavista for terms like “Japanese literature” or “Japanese text.” The most frequent search keywords in Yahoo, Google, and the others that led people to the JTI site also included “noh,” “poems,” and “Japanese poems.” Among other Internet searches were “what are noh plays” and “where can I find Japan-

ese poems” on Ask Jeeves; “Japanese *kanji* characters” on Altavista; “*chushingura*” on Google; “noh drama” and “*yugao* chapter” on Northern Light; and “flower poems” and “medieval plays” on Yahoo.

The JTI receives e-mail from users around the world, mostly, but not always, about Japanese literature. The following are some recent typical contacts:

A retired French physics professor writes that he has moved to Provence and can't easily travel to Paris for Japanese books, and so he is using the on-line texts to study classical Japanese as a retirement occupation.

The author of a recent book on poetry for middle-school students refers in the book to the JTI's discussion of translations of *Hyakunin issyu*.³

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An artist in western Australia would like to reproduce several JTI poems in Japanese characters in her paintings.

A teacher-training seminar in Fukui Prefecture, Japan, will use the on-line texts as a teaching resource in elementary and high schools.

A professor in Germany asks permission to quote from the on-line text of *Ise monogatari* (*Tales of Ise*) in a monograph.

Someone in Miami writes, "I have just finished reading the 100 poems in the anthology website. How wonderful! I have absolutely no knowledge of the Japanese language—a pity, I know—but it was a pleasure to read the poems all the same. I've recommended the website to a few friends, two who know a little Japanese, others who, like me, just enjoy literature."

The last message in particular illustrates one of the most interesting facets of use of the JTI: the democratization of resources on the Web originally intended for scholars and students. Sachie Noguchi has studied the usage and users of the JTI as an example of foreign-language humanities texts on the World Wide Web. In a dissertation recently accepted at the University of Pittsburgh, she surveys electronic texts in the humanities and reports on her detailed survey of users of the JTI, including who they are and why they use the JTI texts. One of her chief findings is that usage of the JTI illustrates that the Web has been acting as an agent or vehicle for the popularization of scholarly information.⁴

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Already underway, the major project for 2001, continuing into future years, will be an on-line multimedia encyclopedia of haiku poetry based on the *Nyōmon Saijiki*, published by the Haiku Bun-

gakukan (Museum of Haiku Literature) in Tokyo. The *Saijiki* is being translated into English by William Higginson, author of *Haiku World*, *The Haiku Handbook*, and other books about haiku. The initial translation will include explanations of the 3,000 most important terms in Japanese haiku, with 400–500 haiku illustrating how the terms are used.

The JTI will continue to add texts, including medieval diaries, works of Saikaku, Bashō's travel diaries, and others. The collaborative project will also take advantage of the capabilities of the Web by adding sound files, for example, of readings of the poems of *Hyakunin isshu*. As with the other texts of the Electronic Text Center, the Japanese texts will be made available in new e-book formats, such as Microsoft Reader format. As always, the JTI will seek copyright-free English translations of classical Japanese literature to add to the Web site. Users of the site are invited to contact the JTI to collaborate on making translations available.

NOTES

1. J. Thomas Rimer, *A Reader's Guide to Japanese Literature* (New York: Kodansha, 1988; second edition, 1999).
2. Donald Keene, *Seeds in the Heart* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993); *World Within Walls* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976); *Dawn to the West* (New York: Henry Holt, 1984, two volumes).
3. Mary Elizabeth, *Painless Poetry* (Hauppauge, New York: Barron's Educational Series, 2001), pages 275-8.
4. Sachie Noguchi, *Assessing Users and Uses of Electronic Text: In Case of the Japanese Text Initiative, Japanese Classics Electronic Text on the World Wide Web* (Unpublished dissertation, University of Pittsburgh School of Information Sciences, 2001).

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