

JETAA INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Nagoya & Kobe, Japan

June 10th to 14th, 2005

Matthew Gillam

Background

The first “International Conference” for the JET Alumni Association was held in 1995 in New York. The original conference format centered around the North American chapters, with several representatives from overseas initially invited as observers. This was the case through the following conferences in San Francisco, Montreal, and Atlanta. However, by the fifth conference, held in Los Angeles in 1999, there had developed a strong consensus to make the conference truly “international” by also holding it in places outside North America and including representatives from all countries with viable chapters as full participants in an independent, self-governing organization with its own bylaws. The 2000 conference, held in Tokyo, along the lines of the 1999 conference with all international chapters participating as full voting members, was the first of these new conferences. Each of the 43 chapters then recognized was invited to send two delegates. There were ultimately 84 delegates, with only Germany and Alaska sending one each. Brazil and Russia each sent two observers. From the 2001 conference in London, England, JETAAi began wrestling with the issue of scaling down and rethinking its annual conference, and its entire organizational structure, because of the increasingly severe fiscal situation in Japan and indications that funding and support could no longer be maintained at the levels enjoyed up to that point. Besides the fundamental issues of JET Program recruiting and alumni support, chapters at the regional and international levels began focusing more heavily on issues of communication, effective organization, and coordinated action. The Vancouver conference in 2002 was devoted to these issues, and members worked on ideas and proposals through 2003, when there was no conference, in preparation for the 2004 conference in New York. This was held in February, breaking with the tradition of holding the International Conference in November or December, as had been done up until then. In New York it was officially decided to try to hold an “International Conference” (with both country and chapter reps) once every five years, probably in Japan, and an “International Meeting” (with only country reps) in each of the intervening years, at some venue around the world. The last of these annual international meetings, or the first one on the “five year plan”, was set for Japan for the following year. The first of the ‘international meetings’ was held in Portland, Oregon, in November of 2004, devoted to discussion of changes that would need to be made to the JETAAi bylaws and to how members communicate and work together, given the new reality of no more full, annual conferences after the Aichi / Kobe conference for 2005. The JETAAi executive officers and sub-committee members put together a package of proposed bylaw amendments, and the three man team chosen to create a new communication / information system known as CMS, or Content Management System, also worked to put together a solid proposal to present to the alumni and the Japanese government at the Aichi / Kobe conference.

2005 Conference, Part One - Nagoya

The last annual International Conference for the JET Alumni Association was held in Japan from Friday, June 10th, to Tuesday, June 14th, 2005. It was unique in that it was held in two parts in two different cities over five days. The first part was held in Nagoya, in conjunction with the Aichi Expo. The second part was held in Kobe, in conjunction with memorials marking the tenth anniversary of the Great Hanshin / Awaji Earthquake.

Day I & II: Friday & Saturday

The JETAA Far East Conference was scheduled to overlap with the International Conference. It started on Thursday and ran through Friday, capped off by a reception hosted by CLAIR on Friday evening. For the International Conference itself, the JETAAi executive officers held a closed preliminary meeting on Friday to prepare for the conference, and then held a meeting with all of the country reps on Saturday morning to brief them on the plans for the conference and to discuss the goals and duties of the Executive Committee and its members in working with the assembled chapter reps over the coming days. Representatives from Gaimusho and CLAIR sat in, too. Topics discussed included: The conference schedule and country rep roles and responsibilities; a job description for the JETAAi Webmaster position, working under the Secretary; associate membership of developing chapters; limiting direct voting rights to country reps on behalf of their chapters;

and the need to rethink and redefine the roles and responsibilities, and perhaps even the titles, of the Secretary and Treasurer positions.

After this came committee reports. Brendon Lutwyche gave a report on the activities of the Small Chapter Committee. He discussed four points: 1) Work is ongoing in establishing a website; 2) The status of the Northern Ireland chapter was settled, and they are now officially a full chapter independent of Great Britain; 3) South Africa submitted a formal request for recognition as a full chapter, and efforts were continuing to bring in Singapore, too; 4) A proposal that bylaw changes be made to allow for some sort of formation and official recognition of chapters in countries that cannot and may never meet the 20 member minimum rule. Portugal, which no longer participates in the Program, and Thailand, which does not participate but has many alumni living there, were mentioned as two examples.

Michael Barrett and Liz Aveling reported on the Big Picture Committee, but mainly just said they had found the topic too vague and nebulous to permit productive contemplation.

The Promotion Committee was headed by J.F. Mannina, who was unable to attend due to a knee injury. Again, this is a big topic, and while he reportedly wrote a mission statement, no real, substantial progress was made. There was some talk of combining the Big Picture and PR committees in the future.

Finally, Paul Donovan and Scott Norman briefed everyone on their work on the CMS, discussing its structure, safeguards, and potential advantages to JET alumni, MOFA and CLAIR.

Most conference attendees spent Saturday afternoon at the Aichi Expo, and then rushed back in the evening to attend the reception hosted by Aichi Prefecture, Gaimusho, Soumusho, and CLAIR. Governor Kanda, of Aichi Prefecture, and several high ranking officials from Tokyo attended, along with local alumni and CIRs currently working around Nagoya.

Day III: Sunday

Sunday was the first time that all of the executive officers, country reps and chapter reps met together. The session opened with greetings and remarks by Brenda McDonald, the outgoing JETAAi Executive Chair, whose duties included chairing this year's conference. Then Mr. Tsuyoshi Yamamoto, from Gaimusho, emphasized their continuing support for JETAA as one element in their efforts to strengthen international ties and promote Japan and its culture around the world. However, he also brought up Japan's difficult financial situation, and the constraints this places on their ability to fund the chapters. He announced that the funding for CMS promised in Portland was still available and that they hoped to have at least some elements of the system up and running this year. He then talked about how the Emperor discussed the JET Program with the presidents of Ireland and Brazil during his visits with them, which surprised everyone because Gaimusho had not briefed him at all on the subject beforehand, and he said that Prime Minister Koizumi also always talks about JET in his meetings with the leaders of India and Brazil. Finally, he mentioned the increasing incidence of crime, violence and drugs among JETs, and asked for everyone's help in finding good, reliable people for the program. He mentioned that the Japanese government is looking into the possibility of providing more Japanese language training before new JETs leave for Japan, and they are working on inviting new countries to participate, like Trinidad & Tobago and, in the future, India.

Mr. Shigeru Kawana, from CLAIR Tokyo, then welcomed the participants, expressing CLAIR's hope that the growing pool of alumni will be able to strengthen Japan's international ties even while the Program itself is shrinking somewhat due to fiscal constraints, declining birthrates in Japan, and municipal amalgamations. He also praised the regional conferences as one good way to strengthen ties among chapters, and announced that Grant-in-aid funding for conferences will now be paid out at a constant local currency rate rather than a constant yen rate, to avoid host chapters being burdened with shortfalls due to differences in exchange rates between the time they apply for and the time they receive the money from Tokyo. He then said that there would have to be a reevaluation of funding for chapters in the near future, given the fiscal situation in Japan,

and asked alumni to think about how to find sponsorship and alternate sources of funding to become more self-sufficient. He said that the child of a former JET is now going on the Program, and he looks forward to this cycle continuing and growing. Finally, he said there are no specific plans for a 20th anniversary celebration next year, but that the alumni may be asked for ideas and support should such celebrations be held.

After Mr. Kawana, Steve Shipley spoke briefly about the GiA conference funding change, solicited chapter reports and information for the upcoming issue of JET Streams, and said he will be sending out about 18,000 emails to alumni requesting that they confirm and update their information, since the current CLAIR database is probably only about 30% accurate.

The rest of the morning was taken up by a brief overview of the history of JETAAi, given by Liz Aveling, and a small group breakout session for delegates to create lists of five expectations concerning country rep roles and responsibilities. The five basic areas that seemed to come up the most where people wanted to see their country reps active include: 1) Communication, information sharing, conducting elections; 2) Supporting chapters and their members, and representing them in the international organization; 3) Conducting some sort of “pre-conference conference”, to disseminate information to chapters and discuss issues with them in order to decide how to vote at international meetings; 4) Deciding on and accomplishing a national project for each year, such as a PR or marketing strategy, website development, or organizational improvement; 5) Developing a system of overlapping terms, succession strategies, and other innovations to promote effective and responsible leadership among chapter, national, and international officers. There was broad agreement about these responsibilities, although there were also many concerns that they might entail too much work for the people who volunteer to serve as country reps. People were also reminded that it is just as important for the chapter reps to fulfill their duties and support the country reps, rather than just sit back and demand that they perform on their own.

In the afternoon, Steven Nishida spoke about the Japan Association of Language Teachers (JALT) and recommended them as one possible model for handling the organizational issues that JETAA is faced with.

Then Brendon Lutwyche talked about his work on small chapters. After asking for chapter activity reports to post online in order to illustrate best practices, he answered questions on things like why there is a 20 member minimum requirement for chapters.

Cecille, from France, and Eon Yong Lee, from South Korea, then gave short presentations on the photo exhibits the European and Far East regions have each (separately) decided to do.

Michael and Liz led a discussion on ‘big picture’ issues, mainly concerning what type of organization JETAAi should be and what kinds of goals its members should work toward as a group. Discussion generally centered around projects and activities to ease returning JETs transition to life outside Japan, to make them more employable, and to raise JETAA’s profile by branding and doing volunteer community work.

Jeff and Cecille then talked about promotion and branding, and Jeff showed everyone a mockup of a tri-fold flier he’d put together on the flight over to Japan. It would give a concise introduction to the JET Program and JETAA around the world, and could be customized and used by individual chapters to be handed out to organizations and potential supporters or employers targeted by those chapters. Warren proposed asking Prime Minister Koizumi for an official letter praising the Program and its alumni. This could then serve as a cover letter for chapters seeking support or cooperation from companies and other groups. Ali asked whether Grant-in-aid could be used to cover the printing costs for these, and responsibility for moving the project forward was given to the PR & Fundraising / Big Picture committee.

The remainder of the afternoon was given over to Paul and Scott, who gave a PowerPoint presentation on CMS, and answered questions on it. Paul gave a brief history of the project, Scott talked about its functions and abilities and its superiority over the current database maintained by CLAIR, and they both gave a rough

timeline for its expected development over the coming year or so. Most questions concerned either details of how chapters would transfer their websites to the new system and what, if any, effect that would have on their cost and the content of their sites (especially those with advertising, like the UK), or they concerned security and access to various parts of the system.

During the wrap-up housekeeping session for the day, Ali listed four proposals regarding associate member status for the delegates to consider. These are that associate members could: 1) Have access to the JETAA & JETAAi names and logos; 2) Participate in regional conferences when appropriate; 3) Seek support and advice on establishing chapters; 4) Have access to websites for various information.

2005 Conference, Part Two - Kobe

Day IV: Monday

Monday morning was given over to transporting everyone from Nagoya to Kobe. Two buses were used, and the delegates were divided up by country and region so that they could hold meetings during the ride to discuss the issues they would be voting on in Kobe.

During the first afternoon session, country reps gave brief reports on some of the more interesting or unusual activities of their various chapters. Dahlia talked about Canada's recent conference, their standardization of country rep election procedures, and their project to update their website. Brendon said Queensland and Canberra now have NPO status, making them eligible for government funding. Queensland also received \$2,000 from the Brisbane City Council, and will host the Australasia Conference this year. This was the first conference that Northern Ireland has participated in, and Barbara Gill thanked the UK chapters for helping them get on their feet, saying the chapter had grown from two members to about 50 and is hoping to publicize their existence by hosting the European photo exhibit. Quynh Luong said Scotland is also just getting on its feet as an independent chapter, and members were dividing up responsibility for putting on various events. Liz explained how the UK is now down to three chapters, and has established a national chair and chapter chairs who coordinate activities. Local events, like annual general meetings, are funded through Grant-in-aid, and national level events through embassy funding. They are planning to separate England into bands or zones, so that alumni will have more accessible chapters closer to where they live and can hopefully participate in more events. As it is now, there is a huge London chapter, with about 2,000 members, that is really not conveniently accessible to most alumni. Shawn Aarons described how Jamaica held a shakuhachi and koto concert, and is working to create networks and linkages with Japan related groups. They are also trying to teach grade school children about Japan, since most Jamaicans think of China when they think about Asia. He said that he was asked why no Japanese come to Jamaica even though Jamaicans go to Japan. Alexei (my notes say Sergei) described the difficulty of conducting activities in Russia, given the geographical distances involved and the small number of alumni. They hosted the Far East Conference last year, and are thinking about creating a website this year. He also mentioned an idea for a "Trans-Siberian Caravan", which would provide information to returning JETs on taking the Trans-Siberian Railroad across Russia to return home to either Europe or the Americas. Eon Yong Lee described how the Korean chapter produces a handbook and diary with contact and other information for businesses, new JETs and alumni, and Japan-related organizations. They provide translation and interpretation services, with 10 percent of the profits going to the chapter. They are also involved in charity work and are planning to participate in Japan / Korea Friendship Year activities. Cecille said that France has become a NPO and has two vice-chairs. They collect membership dues, and they don't accept Grant-in-aid, but do charge CLAIR a fee for providing translation services. Cristina said that the Brazil chapter is participating in 100th anniversary celebrations for Japanese immigration to Brazil, and is also working on education related issues concerning Brazilian children in Japan. For the US, Jeff gave an overview of the San Francisco conference and the projects for a national logo, website, and calendar. He also explained the photo contest sponsored by JNTO, looking for pictures showing Japanese influence in the States and in alumni's lives after JET. Michael talked about the Kintetsu Essay Contest, and Warren talked about his plans to create a national handbook for chapter officers, and his efforts to create a *happi* coat for publicity and fundraising. Finally, Brendon gave the report from South Africa, the newest chapter, talking about their activities supporting new and returning JETs, providing homestays for Japanese people visiting South Africa,

and conducting school visits.

During the afternoon there was also a meeting between the representatives of Gaimusho and the two members of the CMS Team who were present at the conference, Paul Donovan and Scott Norman. The JETAAi executive officers and representatives of CLAIR also sat in, and the meeting was conducted by Brenda, acting as Executive Chair. This meeting was not officially part of the conference schedule. Over about one hour of discussion, with some disagreement but ultimately general consensus on what has happened concerning this matter so far, it was decided that the three members of the CMS Team should decide among themselves who would be the point man who will communicate directly with Mr. Shouichi Ueda of Gaimusho. Mr. Ueda expressed a desire to work through Paul Reid, as they had done so far, but Paul Donovan and Scott felt that arrangement had not worked well, communications had been poor, and it would be more efficient to talk directly with the person doing most of the real work – Paul Donovan. There is also concern about the cost involved in transferring money between countries, since this is very expensive and having Paul Reid receive the money from Japan and then send it again to Canada would double the fees involved. In either case, Gaimusho was also going to appoint a person in its consulate in Perth or Vancouver, depending on where the center of activity ended up being, who would also be included in communications. Much of these decisions hinge on where the server for the system will be located and who will own it. It was decided that one of the two chapters will sign the lease for the server, on behalf of all chapters. However, an organization must be a legal entity to lease or own a server, and it was reportedly determined that Vancouver is a legal entity but Perth is not. This makes it most likely that the Vancouver chapter will be chosen as the legal owner of the CMS network and Paul Donovan would become the person responsible for receiving and disbursing funds from the Japanese government. [Note: As of June 22, Paul Reid was still listed as the Project Manager.] At this point, there had been no discussion with anyone in the Vancouver chapter about all this, so it was agreed that must also be done as soon as possible. Paul Donovan had reportedly prepared a written agreement already, and it was agreed that this would be slightly modified to reflect the conclusions of this discussion, and that the CMS development process (Phase 1) would be broken down into three or four sub-stages. Gaimusho will then pay out money to the team as each of these sub-stages is completed. Once Stage 1 is complete, hopefully by next March, then the parties will enter into a similar agreement for Phase 2 and Phase 3. Ongoing maintenance will also become necessary after Phase 1. Mr. Ueda said they hoped to have a signed, approved contract in place within a month of this meeting, and they would like to have a cost estimate for Phase 2 work by this December. Gaimusho has budgeted \$20,000 for Phase 1, and Paul Donovan is estimating \$7,000 a year for leasing a server. He said Vancouver would probably be willing to cooperate, but would need a funding commitment for this expense. CLAIR stated its willingness to contribute 50 percent of Phase 2 & 3 funding. It is not clear how funding will be handled or where it will be channeled through. Chapters will be able to transfer their individual websites to this server, and probably be hosted there for free or at low cost, although this is not confirmed, yet. Finally, the participants all discussed what fields and capabilities they would like to see in the new system, with Gaimusho requesting a field listing the university from which JET participants graduated and CLAIR requesting the ability to post JET Streams, questionnaires, and other resources online. It appears that it will be necessary for all alumni to access the CMS themselves and enter their own information and to consent to its inclusion in the system and its sharing with whatever parties they agree to. Steve said he would have to check and see whether it would be legally permissible to transfer data from the current JET System into the CMS – although, since this information is probably only 30 or 40 percent accurate, at best, (according to Steve) it might arguably be best to start fresh anyway.

In summary: Gaimusho will sign a contract with the CMS Team, headed by Paul Donovan or Paul Reid, to fund the development of the system in sub-stages over the next ten months. The goal is to have the website and other components up and running by fall and the member database component ready by next March for returning JETs to enter their information into directly. The Vancouver chapter will probably legally own the CMS network itself, and be the legal holder of the lease for the system server. There are three main phases involved in the development and refinement of the system. Gaimusho has allocated \$20,000 for the first phase, and Gaimusho and CLAIR will split the costs of the other phases. The annual server lease is estimated to cost about \$7,000, but will probably allow chapters to have their individual websites hosted for free or at reduced

cost.

Day V: Tuesday

The final day of the conference ended up being devoted to the Parliamentary Session, which ran far overtime. Votes were held, after discussion, on several items. The results are:

1. A job description for the Webmaster position was approved. It is a voluntary, non-voting position, working under the Secretary.
2. A status of Associate Membership was approved. (See previous list of rights conferred.)
3. A bylaw amendment was approved that Country Reps alone shall have the right to vote on international meeting and conference venues.
4. A bylaw amendment was approved that Country Reps alone shall have the right to vote on future bylaw amendments. This proposal included a sunset provision added during the conference stipulating that the change will stand for three years, after which it must be reviewed to make sure that chapters feel their interests are being adequately represented and they are not adversely affected by having surrendered their voting rights. Then, two thirds of country reps and two thirds of chapter reps must vote to retain the system, or find an alternative. It is not clear, but if things go smoothly after three years the country and chapter reps can conduct an online vote, perhaps, or a teleconference vote during an International Meeting and decide if they will make the change permanent, or at least retain it for a set period of time. If things do not go smoothly, all voting may be stopped until an acceptable alternative is worked out. This situation could conceivably last at least two years, until everyone meets face to face at the next expected International Conference, by which time it would be hoped they could arrive at some workable solution (voting via CMS, etc.).

Finally, the new executive officers were elected. They are:

Chair – Peter de Valda

Vice-chair – Alison Bond

Secretary – Cindy Pitkin

Treasurer – Michael Barrett

Sub-committees over the next year are:

1. CMS Team
2. Small Chapter
3. Big Picture / PR & Fundraising

The last conference event, after the formal session was called to a close, was a cooperative art workshop, where the conference participants (alumni and government representatives) were split into teams with students from Fukiai High School and members of the Memorial Volunteer Western Japan Chapter (earthquake survivors) to create collages celebrating international exchange and understanding. The alumni, being old pros at this kind of activity, worked well with their lively group of students and volunteers, creating some very impressive collages, which were then displayed in the city for everyone to enjoy.