Lost in Translation: Engaging Student Employees to Surface Japanese Language Maps for a Broader Audience

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Introduction

In this paper, our team of library and student collaborators will discuss an ongoing project aimed at assessing, increasing the visibility of, and activating a sizable collection of Japanese language maps at The Ohio State University. We will provide a brief overview of the Japanese Studies and Japanese map collections at Ohio State, along with the rationale for why we chose to focus our efforts on Japanese language maps. We will discuss ways we engaged with the expertise and interests of student employees to make progress on this project, which was only possible with their essential contributions. Finally, we will highlight ways we intentionally aligned this project with our organization's focus areas and values, including providing opportunities for educationally purposeful student employment and advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice through collections.

Japanese Studies Collections at Ohio State

With over 150,000 physical volumes and a wide variety of other resources housed across multiple library locations, the Japanese Studies (JS) Collection at The Ohio State University ranks among the top collections in North America and is third in size among participating libraries in the Big Ten Academic Alliance (BTAA) after the University of Chicago and the University of Michigan (Ni et al. 2023, 39). The JS collection was established in the 1890s to support research and teaching for our nation's first school of Ceramic Engineering. Acquisitions in the early twentieth century included, most notably, works on ceramics, art history, history, and current

affairs, as well as a set of imperial maps charting the development of railroads in (former) Japanese colonial holdings in Manchuria and Taiwan in the 1930s.

Following World War II, Ohio State's East Asian Collections began to attract systematic library support, especially with the growth of the Chinese and Japanese linguistics programs in the 1960s and the establishment of the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures (DEALL) in 1970. Japanese business investment in Ohio brought added financial support to the collections, and in the 1980s and 1990s, a world-class collection of manga (Japanese comics) with many historical examples of Japanese cartoon art was inaugurated to complement the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum holdings. Additionally, the JS collections include company histories (*shashi*), reflecting the large number of Japanese businesses operating in the state of Ohio, and Japan-related resources have been added to the Rare Books & Manuscripts Library (RBML). Notable among these are the papers of Japanese-American poet Toyo Suyemoto (who was unconstitutionally incarcerated at the Topaz War Relocation Center during World War II), and the archival collections of Thomas Gregory Song and the Song Family, elite ethnic Koreans who lived and worked in Japan-occupied Dairen (present-day Dalian) during and before the Pacific War.

The Japanese Studies Map Collection

The Ohio State University Libraries has extensive map holdings, including 2,828 cataloged Japanese language maps and an unknown number that remain uncataloged. These are not only the largest holdings of non-English language maps in the University Libraries, but they also rank among the most extensive collections of Japanese language cartographic materials in North America (Ni et al., 2023, 42). One of the most prized holdings is the *Zōho kaisei Edo kiriezu* (□□□□□□□□□□, or *Enlarged and revised sectional maps of Edo*), held in the RBML. This distinctive set of 30 sectional woodblock prints from publisher Owariya Seishichi (□□□□□) provides aerial views of the main districts of Edo (present-day Tokyo) in the form of fold-out, or "pocket" maps depicting landmarks such as the Shogun's castle, the lands of feudal lords, and important temples and shrines (Figure 1). Rendered in visually striking colors, the prints also depict family crests and oversized sea vessels in the harbor and thus document a fascinating perspective on the political capital of Japan during the final decades of the Tokugawa era (1603-1868) (see also Waley 2016).



Figure 1. View of “Tsukiji Hatchōbori Nihonbashi minami no ezu,” one of roughly three dozen fold-out maps in the series (Owariya Seishichi. *Tsukiji Hatchōbori Nihonbashi minami no ezu*. Zōho kaisei Edo kiriezu. Edo: Owariya Seishichi, ca. 1850.).

Given the Libraries’ strengths in cartoon and comic art, it may come as no surprise that various humorous and pictorial maps, including manga pieces that date back to the late nineteenth century, are also among the library’s distinctive holdings. A noteworthy pre-war example is the series *Manga ryokō Nihon zenzu* (□□□□□□□□, or the *Manga Tour of all of Japan*) created by renowned artists Nakamura Baisen (□□□□), Yokoyama Kei (□□□), and Inoue Seiji (□□□□) around 1920. Held in the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum, this colorful series of lithograph prints features 13 whimsical broadside maps highlighting famous sites, local goods and products, and national train lines. Map Number 7 in the series, for example, shows the Hokuriku Region in northwestern Honshu with captivating views of national railroad lines

weaving through the Japanese Alps, along the Sea of Japan, and in the Noto Peninsula. Spiritual pilgrims, alpine hikers, and downhill skiers, among others, are found engaging in local pastimes amidst regional delicacies such as octopus, crab, and sea urchin (Figure 2).



Figure 2. View of local pastimes and delicacies in “Map No. 7: Hokurikudō,” from the series Manga ryokō Nihon zenzu (Nakamura Baisen (□□□□), Yokoyama Kei (□□□), and Inoue Seiji (□□□□). *Map No. 7: Hokurikudō*. Manga ryokō Nihon zenzu. Japan, ca. 1920.).

Speaking to the rich legacy of the Geological Sciences at Ohio State, another strength of the JS map collection is its numerous holdings of scientific maps, including seismic and earthquake hazard maps, held at the Orton Memorial Library of Geology. Such technical resources make up roughly one-third (34%) of the total Japanese maps collection at Ohio State, with much of the remaining two-thirds (64%) comprised mainly of regional, military, and tourist maps, among others, and held in the Gardner Family Map Room in Thompson Library. An interesting example of cartographic materials depicting Japan’s highly volcanic terrain is the *Geologic Map of Mt. Fuji* and the *Geological Map of Fuji Volcano*, published by the Geological Survey of Japan in 1968 and 2016, respectively (Figures 3 and 4). The product of more advanced methods and technology, the 2016 edition of this map shows a greater variation of volcanic layers (strata).



Figure 3. Detail view of geological mapping (1:50,000) of the stratovolcano of Mount Fuji published in 1968 (Tsuya, Hiromichi. Fuji kazan chishitsuzu. First Edition. Tokyo: Geological Survey of Japan, 1968.).



Figure 4. Detail view of a 2016 geological mapping (1:50,000) of the same volcano based on more advanced methods and technology (Takada, Akira, Takahiro Yamamoto, Yoshihiro Ishizuka, and Shun Nakano. Fuji kazan chishitsuzu. Second Edition. Tsukuba, Ibaraki: Geological Survey of Japan, 2016.).

The Japanese Studies Collection at Ohio State has a notable history, and the large map collection is one of its strengths. Much of what we presently know about these maps was motivated by Ohio State's involvement in another project associated with the Big Ten Academic Alliance Geospatial Information Network (BTAA-GIN), one that served as a major inspiration for our team to join forces and take a closer look at the university's Japanese language maps collection.

Project Rationale: Why Japanese Maps?

The Ohio State University Libraries contributes to the Big Ten Academic Alliance Geoportal, a platform facilitating discovery and access to scanned maps, aerial imagery, and open geospatial data from member institutions and various types of organizations in the states comprising the BTAA region. In 2021, a diverse collections working group was tasked with examining current BTAA Geoportal collections and suggested ways that diversity could be more purposefully considered in future collection development. Two of the authors of the present article (Dotson and Sadvari) were active members of this working group (Sadvari et al. 2021).

One of the characteristics examined by the group was language, which we viewed as a starting point for approaching intersecting aspects of collection diversity, such as spatial coverage and creator identity (e.g., a non-English language map created by an individual or organization local to the area of interest). Of the approximately 1.7 million cataloged maps across BTAA-GIN institutions, it was unsurprisingly found that 85% are in English. A more surprising result was that Japanese was the largest non-European language represented across BTAA-GIN institutions (Figure 5), with two institutions having particularly sizable collections (the University of Minnesota and The Ohio State University).

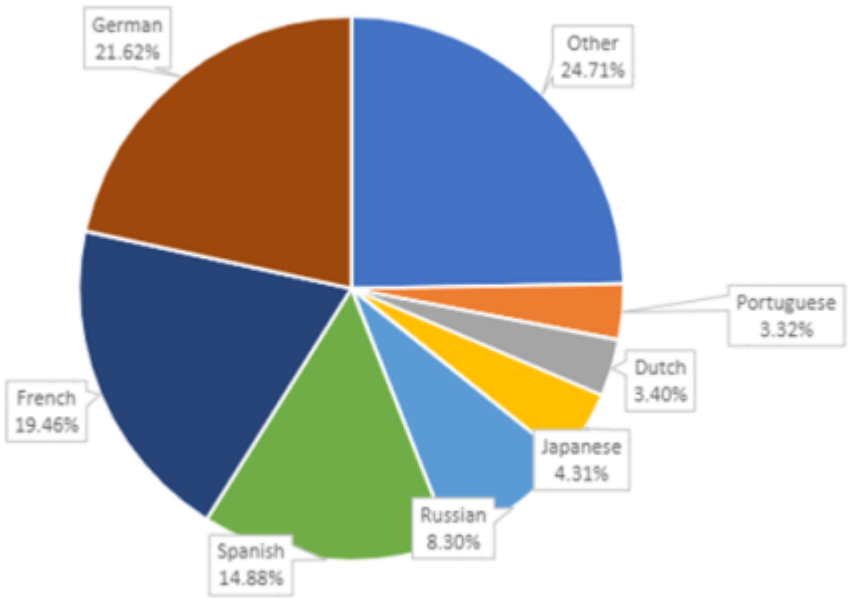


Figure 5. Among 157,775 non-English maps at libraries contributing to the BTAA

Geoportal (as of December 2021), the most predominant languages include German (21.62%), French (19.46%), Spanish (14.88%), Russian (8.30%), Japanese (4.31%), Dutch (3.40%), and Portuguese (3.32%). The remaining 24.71% of maps represent other languages.

Locally, at Ohio State, Japanese is the second most common language after English for cataloged print maps, surpassing European languages like German, Spanish, and French (Figure 6). The vast majority (84%) of our Japanese language maps were published in the latter half of the twentieth century, after World War II. The second largest category of map holdings (15%) is pre-war maps, among which the largest sub-grouping (roughly 260 maps) consists of Japanese imperial maps produced at the height of Japan's colonial expansion in the 1930s and 1940s (Figure 7). Note that the numbers in the figures below may differ slightly because additional maps have been cataloged since we began this project in the summer of 2022.

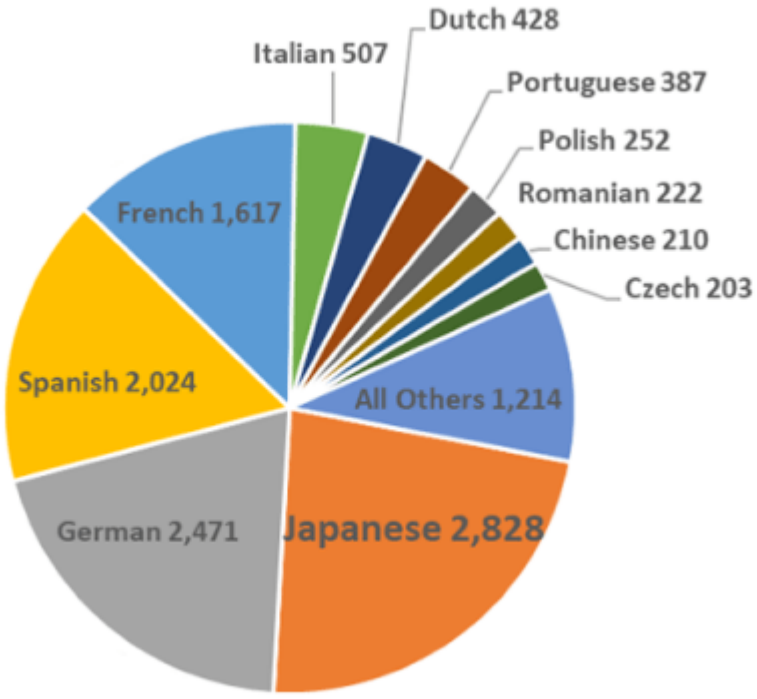


Figure 6. Among 12,363 non-English language maps at Ohio State (as of May 2023), the most predominant languages represented are Japanese (2,828), German (2,471), Spanish (2,024), and French (1,617).

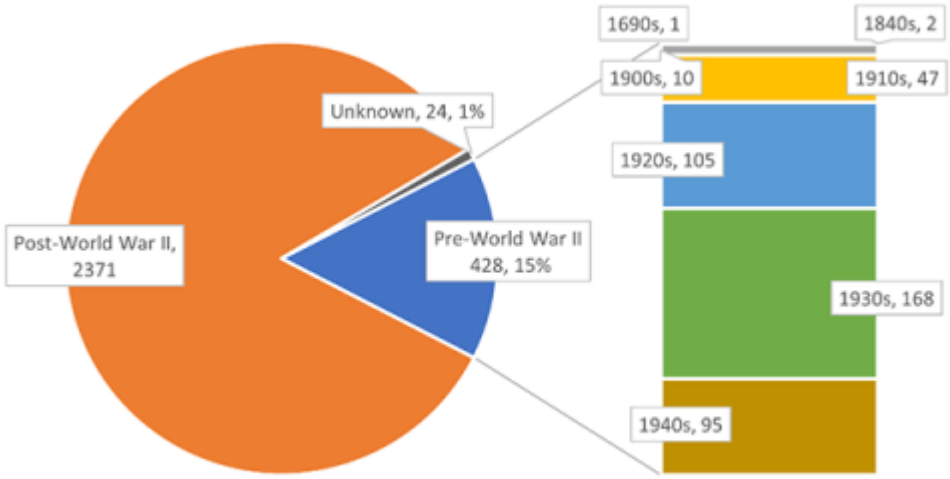


Figure 7. Of the Japanese language maps at Ohio State, 428 (15%) were published before or during World War II, 2,371 (84%) were published after World War II, and 24 (1%) are of unknown publication date. The subset of Pre-World War II maps primarily spans the early 1900s through the mid-1940s.

The diverse collections working group also noted that projects focused on non-English language maps present natural opportunities for collaborating with area studies colleagues to identify shared objectives in support of collection development and digitization, research, and teaching and learning. The remainder of this paper details aspects of such a collaboration. Our initial team consisted of the Japanese Studies Librarian (Davis), the Head of Orton Memorial Library of Geology & Gardner Family Map Room (Dotson), and the Geospatial Information Librarian (Sadvari).

We recognized that the sizeable collection of Japanese maps held at Ohio State could be of interest for a variety of mutually beneficial reasons, including increasing the visibility and usage of non-Western cultural heritage materials, potential map digitization projects for our local digital collections and the BTAA Geoportal, physical and digital exhibit opportunities, and supporting research and curricular integration. We also realized that the project would present some unique cataloging and metadata challenges and that we would need to recruit members to our team with advanced Japanese language skills to increase our capacities for undertaking this work.

Engaging Student Employees

Our initial team of librarians applied for and received a $1,500 grant through our Libraries Faculty DEIA (diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility) Research Grants program. We also secured matching funds from our respective library divisions – Special Collections and Area Studies (Davis) and Research and Education (Dotson and Sadvari) – for a total available budget of approximately $4,500 to support the project. With these funds, we created and recruited for a new student employee position (Japanese Maps Collection Student Assistant), and we hired two students with advanced Japanese language skills during the summer 2022 term. One of these students continued to work on the project during the autumn 2022 and spring 2023 terms.

The two Japanese Maps Collection Student Assistants (Seitz and Goto) have been vital contributors to this project. At the outset, they focused on organizing data for the project by compiling information from the catalog records of maps across disparate library locations into a single spreadsheet and helping us to understand aspects of the collection by creating visualizations of maps by library location and temporal coverage. With this information in hand, the students began work to help enhance the discoverability of the maps by producing English translations for more than 2,800 map titles and to increase awareness of the collection by writing blog posts about particularly interesting maps they researched through their work.

Once this work was complete, the students focused their attention on a subset of roughly 430 maps that span periods from before and during World War II (1842-1945). We identified these as the most likely candidates for future digitization, and students focused on creating spatial coverage metadata in the form of place names using the GeoNames controlled vocabulary and bounding boxes using the Klokan Bounding Box tool. In carrying out this work, students drew heavily on their language expertise as they navigated linguistic challenges in the form of historical Japanese characters that are no longer part of the government standardized lexicon and geographic challenges arising from historical name changes and revised boundaries and administrative divisions.

Beyond this project, other authors have noted the linguistic challenges that sizable collections of Japanese maps can present to U.S. academic libraries, as well as the contributions that students can make in helping to assess, describe, and process such collections (Sweetkind-Singer and March 2020). Our team also viewed this

challenge as an opportunity to align our project with one of our organization's strategic focus areas: educationally purposeful student employment. We recruited students with advanced Japanese language skills, who then could apply their skills to the new context of assessing historical map collections. Along the way, the students noted that they gained familiarity with spatial metadata practices and deepened their knowledge of Japanese and broader East Asian history, geography, and cultural themes through this project. In addition to their day-to-day work, the students also gained exposure to scholarly communications opportunities by contributing as co-presenters on this project at the WAML 2022 virtual conference (Davis et al. 2022) and now as co-authors on this paper.

Thinking Back and Looking Ahead

From the outset, we recognized that this project provided us with an opportunity to intentionally align our goals with our organization's mission and values. For example, by providing educationally purposeful employment, we engaged a critical focus area in our library's strategic directions: to equip students for lifelong success. In addition, we worked to enact one of our university's shared values in pursuit of inclusion and equity. At the library, one of the ways in which we have endeavored to advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice has been to examine our existing collections with an eye toward highlighting the multiple perspectives represented therein (The Ohio State University Libraries 2020). In framing the present project, we considered the Japanese map collection as an untapped – and largely "hidden" – resource for promoting engagement with non-Western foreign language holdings. We also recognized the important insights the collection might offer on the social, political, economic, environmental, and geographic circumstances of Japan and East Asia (Kobayashi 2012; Wigen 2012; Wigen, Fumiko, and Karacas 2016). Our assessment of this collection serves as an essential starting point for facilitating broader access to and promoting teaching and learning about global content.

Our work with Japanese maps remains an ongoing project, and progress to date has focused on assessing the collection, enhancing descriptive (through title translations) and spatial coverage metadata, and raising awareness of these materials. We would not be where we are currently without the contributions of our student employee collaborators. As we move forward, we will dive deeper into the information they have provided about these maps, investigate the feasibility of a digitization proposal, identify opportunities for future curricular integrations, and



explore ways to highlight these collections through cultural programming and library outreach activities such as exhibits. We hope our approach and outcomes will serve as inspiration for similar collaborations between area studies and map/geospatial library resource specialists. Engaging the language skills of student employees can also serve as a meaningful model for surfacing culturally diverse perspectives in library map collections.

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