



The Digitization of Japanese Translations of the *Rvf* in the Oregon Petrarch Open Book

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Abstract: The article discusses the benefits of having translations of Petrarch available in Japanese, and describes a project to digitize portions of a Japanese translation of the *Canzoniere*. Conversion from printed Japanese to HTML posed several interesting challenges.

I contributed to the Petrarch Project being developed at the University of Oregon in 2007 when I participated in a MA course in romance languages. As contribution to the project I decided to digitize selected Japanese translations of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. In the following brief notes I will explore the challenges I faced during this process and the benefits that others may receive from these translations and the Petrarch Project. First, it may be helpful to give some general background on the study of Petrarch and Italian literature in Japan.

While there are many Japanese scholars studying Petrarch and Italian literature in general, such studies in Japan do not match the same degree and depth as those conducted in Europe and the Americas. I had never studied Italian literature before coming to the US and had only taken a few courses on Italian language diction for singing at a music college in Tokyo. So when I decided to double-major in French and Italian for my undergraduate degree at the University of Oregon, I had only a very basic knowledge of European literature. Consequently, the more in-depth study of Italian literature I encountered in the university's master's program was quite challenging for me, but also very exciting.

While studying Italian literature at the University of Oregon, I discovered that there were very few sources on Italian literature available in Japanese, likely because many Japanese scholars of Italian do not work in English. Their articles are normally written in Italian or Japanese and are seldom made available online. The limited number of articles offered online are generally accessible only to students who belong to the same university as the author.¹

For me it was very helpful to have some materials written in my own language in order to better understand the historical background of Italian culture and to obtain biographical information on Italian authors. However, it always takes time to order books from Japan and often I could not order the books I needed far enough in advance to use them in my courses. In those cases, I had to depend on whatever digital sources were available online, and these were very limited. It was very clear to me that for majoring in romance languages at an American university, it is essential to be able to read and think in English or Italian.

Yet it is unquestionable that one can read faster and understand with much greater ease in one's mother tongue. I remember wishing that I could have 48 hours for every 24 hours

my colleagues had so that I could keep up with them and better understand the materials we were studying. When I decided to take a course on Petrarch offered by Professor Massimo Lollini, I was fortunate to have purchased in advance the entire collection of *Canzoniere* translated into Japanese. While initially intended for my own understanding, this purchase later made it possible for me to participate in the digitization of the Japanese translation of *Canzoniere*.

Compared to translations in other languages, the Japanese translation had certain limitations for digitization. Most translations in other languages could be digitized without too much trouble since there are several versions available and many are old enough to eliminate copyright issues. However, studies on Petrarch and Italian literature in Japan in general are considerably behind those in other countries. In fact, there is only one Japanese translation of the *Canzoniere*, published in 1992, that is available in print. Obtaining timely permission from the owner of the translation copyright was not feasible, and “fair use” of a copyrighted work in the US generally allows copying of only a portion of the work. Consequently, I could only select a small portion of the poems to digitize in order to circumvent the complexities of copyright issues. This was the first challenge I encountered. In total, I selected thirty-four poems (thirty-one sonnets and three canzoni) for digitization.

Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* was translated into Japanese by Kiyoshi Ikeda and published by the University of Nagoya Press in 1992. Ikeda is one of the authorities on Petrarch study in Japan and was also the first ever to translate Petrarch’s *Trionfi* into Japanese. Since Ikeda’s version is the only published Japanese translation of *Il Canzoniere*, it is sold at the considerable price of nearly 140 dollars. It is interesting to compare this price with Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, which has been translated into Japanese by several scholars and can be purchased for less than 30 dollars in the paperback version.

For the Petrarch Project, I selected the first and last pieces of the *Canzoniere*, as well as some of my personal favorites in the Italian original and a few others that I felt were well translated into Japanese. I also selected some of the more significant sonnets that were a focus of Professor Lollini’s course, such as sonnet 198 in which the poet attempts to praise the beauty of his beloved Laura while lamenting his incapacity to do so, and sonnet 269 in which the poet laments the death of Laura and a valuable friend, and sonnet 310 that reveals Petrarch’s sense of hopelessness at the loss of his beloved despite the arrival of a beautiful spring.

There are four things that come to mind when I reflect on the process of digitizing the Japanese translation. First digitizing a Japanese translation is very time consuming and requires a great amount of effort to ensure that the character combinations are precise. As those familiar with the Japanese language know, there are three types of notation, or scripts, in the Japanese writing system—katakana, hiragana, and kanji—all of which are used in combination. Using the same combinations of scripts chosen by the translator is important and requires careful orthographic checking. This process would have been much more challenging ten years ago when it would have been necessary to use a Japanese computer

with a special keyboard and Japanese word processing software to input the translation for this type of project.

Second, while word choice is always an elaborate process when translating into any language, it is even more challenging when translating from Italian to Japanese, which has no lexical cognates with Italian, particularly when translating rhyming poetry. Moreover, the translator must decide whether to use an archaic Japanese speaking style and lexicon that are quite different from modern Japanese. Ikeda's translation maintains a certain lofty tone of archaic Japanese intermixed with modern Japanese that is easy enough for contemporary readers to understand.

Third, on the Oregon Petrarch Open Book Web site—and this is one of the greatest features of the Web site—you can compare the Italian original line-by-line with the translation, juxtaposing them side-by-side. Most translations available on the Petrarch Project Web site maintain a similar grammatical structure to the original, as in the order of subject, verb, and object, with each line of the translated version corresponding closely to the Italian. However, the Japanese translation does not function in the same way, since most sentences follow a structural order of subject, object, and verb. Therefore, although the Japanese translation faithfully maintains the number of lines in each sonnet—two quatrains and two tercets for a total of fourteen lines—each line does not necessarily correspond precisely to the same line in the Italian original.

Lastly, one linguistic characteristic of Japanese is that any single Japanese character may be pronounced in several different ways depending on how it is used in combination with other characters. Since this can be quite confusing, even for native Japanese speakers, a syllabic script called *furigana* is often provided in small print above the ideographic kanji characters to aid in their pronunciation. In some cases, the *furigana* may be purposely changed from the usual pronunciation of the corresponding kanji combination to add nuance to the meaning. Ikeda used *furigana* frequently in his translation, often with a nonstandard pronunciation and sometimes to approximate the pronunciation of the corresponding Italian word, such as *amore*, *lauro*, or *Laura*. These *furigana* provide a small yet important nuance, but were challenging to include due to the lack of a “ruby” (i.e., *furigana*) tag in HTML that would allow for their placement above the corresponding kanji characters. For this reason, I decided to add the *furigana* pronunciations in parentheses immediately after the kanji combinations. However, because of the limited space available in each line, I provided *furigana* only for those words that the translator intended to be pronounced as the Italian. For example, the Japanese word for *lauro* (laurel), which appears frequently in *Canzoniere*, is pronounced *gekkēju* and written as 月桂樹 in kanji. Here, Ikeda used the kanji to communicate the meaning of the word, i.e., a specific type of tree, but also added the *furigana* ラウロ in katakana so that Japanese readers could recognize that the Italian word has a pronunciation similar to *Laura*, the poet's beloved.

When participating in this course, I worked on digitizing the Japanese translations primarily to enhance my own understanding of Petrarch's works, without fully appreciating the great future potential of the Petrarch Project Web site. After contributing the Japanese

translations, though, I became convinced that the Web site could provide a new approach for Japanese scholars studying Petrarch's poetry, allowing them to participate in the project and to share their own research. While the Japanese translation makes up only a small part of the project, it is a beginning. I hope that it will attract many other Japanese students interested in Petrarch and, by allowing easy comparison of translations in multiple languages, free them from the limitation of studying only in Italian and Japanese.

It would be ideal to get permission from the author to digitize the rest of the translation and even add the extensive footnotes, which, while long, are necessary for Japanese students of Italian literature. However, even if this should not prove possible, the Web site's potential to attract more Japanese students and scholars of Italian literature could lead to fruitful exchange between Eastern and Western cultures. Also, seeing other students' contributions to the project besides translations, such as the digitization of commentaries by Alessandro Velutello, summaries of Petrarch's poems, and adaptations of his poetry in art and music, gives me hope that these sources will eventually be translated into other languages, making them more accessible to people studying Petrarch around the world.

As the poet states in sonnet 146 of *Canzoniere*, Petrarch's dream was that someday his poems would be read on four continents. Thanks to globalization and technology, the world can now appreciate his poems anywhere, anytime, and in almost any language. The Petrarch Project has certainly gone a long way in helping make his dream come true.

¹ Accessibility to articles online has improved since the time of this writing.

Works Cited

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