

RARE EPHEMERA FROM BOTH SIDES: A DIGITAL COLLECTIONS AND CURATION CASE STUDY OF RUSSIA (THE SOVIET UNION) AND ASIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a Digital Collections and Curation case study involving several very rare items that the University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Special Collections has recently acquired. These items are in the process of being converted into open access digital collections to enhance access for scholars worldwide. The unifying theme of these materials is rare ephemera representing various stages of Russian-Asian relations.

This paper focuses on the process of acquiring these very rare items, the partnership between subject specialist bibliographers and special collections librarians in curating these collections, collaboration with faculty in determining the potential research value and use cases for the materials, the physical and digital processing of such rare and fragile materials, the research involved in determining the historical context of the items, metadata creation in multiple languages, digital infrastructure, and the preservation of the physical originals.

One of these collections consists of over 60 original Russian propaganda news placards from the Russo-Japanese War era as well a set of propagandistic chromolithographs of battle scenes of the Russo-Japanese War. In addition, we have recently acquired an original Russian colored print in the *lubok* (лубок) style also from the Russo-Japanese War period.

A second collection is a very rare complete run of an illustrated Ottoman Turkish magazine about the Russo-Japanese War. This magazine demonstrates the great interest among the Turkish people of the time in the Russo-Japanese War and its outcome.

A third collection comprises a scrapbook of photographs documenting an anti-Soviet exhibition held in Japan circa 1940. As far as we have been able to determine, it is the sole remaining historical record of an exhibition called «赤色ロシヤを発く 展覧会» (Akairo roshiya o abaku tenrankai = Debunking of Red Russia). This exhibition gives unique insight into the state of Japanese-Soviet relations as reflected in Japanese popular culture in the period immediately before World War II.

A fourth item acquired and made available Open Access by UW-Madison Libraries' Digital Collections Center is a digital surrogate of an 18th century Kazakh dictionary lexicon for which the original unique manuscript is held by the Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books (Отдел рукописей и редких книг) of the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg, Russia. This dictionary lexicon was compiled during the period of

gradual expansion of Russian influence in the northeastern Kazakh steppe in the late 18th Century.

Development and Curation of a Special Collections/Rare Books Topical Collection

It is critical to develop a partnership between subject specialist bibliographers and special collections librarians. It is likewise important to receive authorization to do so from library management, together with consent to acquire rare or unique items during foreign buying trips. For example, many of the items in the Special Collections/Rare Books Topical Collection of the University of Wisconsin – Madison (UW-Madison) were acquired by a UW-Madison bibliographer during a buying trip to Tokyo, Japan. It is also crucial to constantly monitor antiquarian vendor websites and their catalogs, and to maintain the ability to react quickly and acquire items with usually only a single copy. Developing a cohesive and clear collection theme or policy to govern the acquisitions of materials for this collection is also significant.

Planning

For the planning phase, collaboration with faculty in determining the potential research value and use cases of the materials is important.

It is also imperative to establish a plan for preservation and conservation of the original materials and have a process in place to help decide issues such as whether or not materials are candidates for digitization, or if access will be limited to campus users or digital products will be made open access. Part of this discussion should include the copyright status of materials.

Developing a workflow

The initial processing of physical originals should be conducted using the established Rare Books procedures. After which there should be an evaluation by the Digital Collection specialists for viability of the material to be digitized, with specific considerations such as brittleness, binding, reflectivity, and other matters that would affect the quality of digital surrogates.

In addition, developing a Metadata schema and a process for cataloging the materials to Rare Books standards are to be prepared. Finally, research into the historical context of the materials needs to be planned for and undertaken.

Collection Overview

The current collection consists of over 60 original Russian patriotic placards from the Russo-Japanese War era as well as a set of propagandistic chromolithographs of battle scenes of the Russo-Japanese War.

A recently acquired original Russian colored print in the lubok (лубок) style (also from the Russo-Japanese War period) has been added to the collection.

The collection also has a very rare complete run of an illustrated Ottoman Turkish magazine about the Russo-Japanese War. This magazine demonstrates the great interest

among the Turkish people of the time in the Russo-Japanese War and its outcome.

A scrapbook of photographs documenting an anti-Soviet exhibition held in Japan circa 1938 called the Debunking of Red Russia is another highlight of the collection. This exhibition gives unique insight to the state of Japanese-Soviet relations in the period immediately before World War II.

Another significant item is an open access digital surrogate of an 18th century Kazakh dictionary lexicon for which the original unique manuscript is held by the Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books (Отдел рукописей и редких книг) of the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg, Russia. This dictionary lexicon was compiled during the period of gradual expansion of Russian influence in the northeastern Kazakh steppe in the late 18th Century.

Other notable acquisitions include a Japanese satirical poster (also from the Russo-Japanese War period) depicting General Kuropatkin entitled “Thoughts of a General”, and one of the patriotic chromolithographs showing General Kuropatkin bestowing medals on wounded Russian soldiers.

Publicity

Collection curation does not end with acquisitions and cataloging processes, but continues with publicizing the collection.

As noted earlier, it is important to liaison with on-campus faculty, not only to alert them to use cases for the materials, but also for research, teaching, and outreach purposes. Another way to publicize the collection is to create publicly accessible videos highlighting the materials.

Kaltura Collection Video

Russo-Japanese Relations

In recent years, the University of Wisconsin – Madison Special Collections Department in collaboration with the library’s Japanese Studies and East European Studies Bibliographers have embarked on a project to collect and curate a collection of rare books and ephemera related to the history of the relationship between Russia and Japan. The goal of collecting these materials is not only to support research by scholars but also to enrich the classroom learning experiences for our faculty and students. These rare materials allow students to examine for themselves primary source materials that date from the times of the events that they are studying in their classrooms. Such personal contact with artifacts can make historical events more real to them.

The collection includes placards, chromolithographs, an Ottoman Turkish magazine about the Russo-Japanese War, a British *Dogger Bank Incident* memorial card, and a photo album from pre-World War II. A unifying theme of these materials is rare ephemera representing various stages of Russian-Asian relations.

One facet of the collection consists of over 60 original Russian patriotic placards from the Russo-Japanese War era.

These placards include topical items such as a poem in memory of the death of Admiral Makarov, as well as many other patriotic themes.

In addition to the placards we have a set of propagandistic chromolithographs of the Russo-Japanese War such as General Kuropatkin awarding medals to soldiers... events and personalities of the war, as well as images of the Portsmouth Peace Conference that ended the war.

In addition, we have acquired a rare example of a satirical lithograph in the *lubok* style produced during the Russo-Japanese war. It shows caricatures of American and British financiers walking away from a crying Japan, with warships on fire in the background. A notation on the print indicates that the Russian censor approved it on April 16, 1904. In historical retrospect this is ironic since a little over a year later in May 1905 at the Battle of Tsushima it would be Russian warships on fire not Japanese.

From the Japanese side we have a similar style lithograph, titled “Russian General’s inner thoughts [Rosho no fukuchu] featuring General Aleksei Kuropatkin and falling from his shoulder is Viceroy of the Russian Far East Admiral Evgenii Alekseyev.

Another artifact related to the ill-fated Russian Second Pacific Squadron’s voyage to face the Japanese is this memorial card in memory of the British fishing boats that were mistakenly fired upon by the Russian fleet while passing the Dogger Bank area in the North Sea in October 1904.

Another facet of the collection is a very rare complete run of an illustrated Ottoman Turkish magazine about the Russo-Japanese War. This magazine demonstrates the great interest among the Ottoman Turkish people of that time in the Russo-Japanese War and its outcome. Having fought a series of largely unsuccessful wars with the Russians over several centuries, the Ottoman government and people were intrigued by this conflict between Russia and an emerging Asiatic power.

Another part of the collection illustrates a later period of conflict between the Soviet Union and Japan. This item comprises a scrapbook of photographs documenting an anti-Soviet National Policy Exhibition [国策展覧] held in Japan circa late 1938. As far as we have been able to determine, it is the sole remaining historical record of an exhibition called «赤色ロシヤを突く展覧会» (Akairo roshiya o abaku tenrankai = Debunking of Red Russia). This exhibition gives unique insight into the state of Japanese-Soviet relations as reflected in Japanese popular culture in the period immediately before World War II.

One of the posters depicts the defection to Japan of NKVD officer Genrikh Lyushkov in June 1938.

Another poster shows a caricature of Stalin involving himself in *Comintern* activities in France and Spain. “The rampant Popular Front is converting France to red and turning the streets of Spain to rubble.”

And Stalinist policies as a threat to the working class: “Working class” crushed by the Stakhanovite Movement”.

Another poster shows that Soviet bombers are potentially within range of the Japanese islands. “Soviet super heavy bomber performance”.

As well as many others depicting the Soviets and Stalin, in particular, as a threat to Japan and the world.

As well as the need to fight back against Soviet Communism. Such as this poster which asks “What is anti-Communism?”

This collection continues to actively grow as we have been acquiring additional materials as the opportunity arises.

In addition to holding the original artifacts in our Special Collections vault to be viewed in person upon request, the materials have been digitized by our Digital Collections Center, so digital surrogates can be available to an audience of scholars and students worldwide.