Japan Trending

*Ten Japanese Concepts'
Journey to the West*

Overview

This visual 'scrollytelling' essay will tell the story of Japan's rise as a soft power through 10 Japanese concepts' journey into the English language and Western culture. Visualizations will utilize data from the Oxford English Dictionary, The New York Times and Google Trends.

Understanding the problem

Japan and Asia as a whole exert a growing influence on the US not only in the realms of trade and security, but increasingly in the cultural sphere. However, understanding of this process remains poor.

Target audience

Content creators, marketers and policymakers.

Project objective

This project seeks to raise awareness of the process whereby Japanese culture influences the American marketplace of ideas by visualizing the migration of Japanese words into the American linguistic space. Understanding this process will enable better targeting of content and policymaking at a time when Americans are increasingly influenced by Asia, and the US can no longer expect to be the world's dominant power.

Ten Words

Ten Japanese loanwords from different semantic categories that have impacted English speakers will be carefully chosen from the Oxford English Dictionary. The words should reflect ways in which Japan is currently influencing the American marketplace of ideas.

Visualization 1: Asian Languages in the OED

The top ten Asian languages are represented by over 2000 words in the OED, including some 500 Japanese words. **Aim –** to show how Japanese and other Asian languages made their mark on Oxford English Dictionary, the English language's dictionary of record.

Visualization 2: Japanese loanwords in the OED by first citation and frequency

A timeline will contextualize the ten words amid all Japanese loanwords in the OED, visualizing them by first citation and usage frequency. **Aim** – to visualize the rising presence of Japanese concepts in the English language over five centuries of the OED.

Visualization 3: Japanese Loanwords by Semantic Category

A visualization showing the relative scale of semantic categories of Japanese words in the OED, and where the ten words fall in these categories. **Aim** – to show which categories (e.g. culture, business, weaponry etc.) influenced English speakers enough for the OED to include them in its corpus, and how our ten words place semantically.

Visualization 4

A chart showing the frequency by year of our ten Japanese words in the New York Times, and in what section of the paper they appeared. **Aim** – to show how these terms have permeated the US's newspaper of record. Our hypothesis is that Japanese concepts appear increasingly not only in political and business articles, but in the Times' arts section.

Visualization 5

An animated world map showing relative search interest over time of our ten Japanese words, utilizing Google Trends. **Aim** – to show how these terms have diffused worldwide. Our hypothesis is that Japanese words tend to appear first in nearby Asian countries like Singapore before spreading to the West.

Visualization 6

An animated map of the USA showing relative search interest over time of our ten Japanese words, utilizing Google Trends. **Aim** – to show how Japanese concepts have diffused across the USA over time. Our hypothesis is that Japanese terms appear first in states with large Japanese-American populations or states that trade a lot with Japan, but we're prepared to be surprised!

Visualization 7

An animated map of the USA showing relative search interest over time of two Japanese words representing traditional (e.g. 'samurai') and contemporary (e.g. 'anime') views of Japan, utilizing Google Trends. **Aim** – to show how older views of Japan have been displaced by modern 'Cool Japan' views of Japan as the country grows into an influential soft power.

Conclusion

Our hope is that, by visualizing Japan's rise as a soft power, we develop approaches that can be applied to other countries and cultures. This will enable content developers to understand which trends may be coming to their markets, and policymakers to better comprehend the world's changing soft power balance.