

Expanding the Role of Non-Experts in Minna de Honkoku

*Yasuyuki Kano^{1,2}

1. Earthquake Research Institute, The University of Tokyo, 2. Collaborative Research Organization for Historical Materials on Earthquakes and Volcanoes, The University of Tokyo

In Japan, almost all the documents are written in kuzushiji (old-style Japanese cursive script), a writing style used before ~1900. Because the style of writing is different from modern Japanese, transcription is necessary to use the historical documents as data for earthquake research. Minna de Honkoku began in 2017 as an online citizen science project to transcribe earthquake-related historical materials from the Earthquake Research Institute Library of the University of Tokyo. The workspace of Minna de Honkoku consists of a viewer of a document image and a vertical (Japanese-style) editor for transcription. Users can input transcribed text while viewing its image. The platform incorporates features to motivate participants, including interaction and learning among users through editing and commenting, and gamification elements such as rankings. In August 2025, the system was updated to allow users to register their own collections of materials and create transcription projects. This expands the role of non-experts in citizen science. Annotation features and AI-assisted transcription were also enhanced. As of February 2026, more than 7,000 people were registered for the project, with the total number of characters transcribed at about 56 million. Of the 7,200 documents targeted for transcription, transcription has been completed for 3,400 items. The text generated by Minna de Honkoku can be used for various academic research fields including seismology and can be used to enhance citizens' disaster awareness. The paired kuzushiji characters and text data generated by Minna de Honkoku are being utilized as training data for AI.

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