

# Translation Studies: Shifts in Domestication and Foreignisation in Translating Japanese Manga and Anime (Part Three)

Matthew Watson

---

Abstract: Manga has been a popular written media in Japan for generations and there are now thousands of manga series covering just about anything you can imagine. Manga has always been behind anime in popularity and release in the West. However, after many ups and downs, the manga industry in the west has stayed on as a popular entertainment medium.

**Key Words:** [Manga] [Censorship] [Onomatopoeia]

(Received September 25 2018)

## Manga

This chapter will seek to examine manga and how it is translated and localised into English. It will look at of the evolution and translation techniques of both scanlations and official versions in regards to censorship, layout, language styles, sound effects, cultural markers and overall levels of domestication and foreignisation. Then look at how the English translation of manga has changed over the years and what has caused it.

### Beginnings

The origins of Manga are still debated amongst scholars, with some saying it can trace its roots all the way back to the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries with woodblock prints and the painted scrolls of artist monk Toba Sojo, while others believing that manga emerged after WW2 influenced by U.S occupational forces bringing comic books and Disney style cartoons into Japan.<sup>1</sup> Either way, the manga industry continued to expand and grow throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is now one of the major entertainment forms across all ages in Japan with thousands of manga series across almost every conceivable genre. Manga is also separated

---

\* Kagoshima Immaculate Heart College, English Department, 4-22-1 Toso, Kagoshima-shi 890-8525, Japan

across age and audience categories, with **Kodomo** **manga** for children with simple stories that often contain morals and social values like Doraemon. **Shonen manga** is aimed primary at young men with a focus of action and adventure like Dragon Ball and One Piece, and **Seinen manga** which is aimed at older males with stories containing more violence, sex and darker themes such as Berserk and Ghost in the Shell. **Shojo Manga** is aimed at younger female audiences with a focus on drama, emotions and romance like Sailor Moon and Vampire Knight, whereas **Josei Manga** is for older women with a lot more mature content with less idealistic overtones such as Nodame Cantabile and Nana<sup>2</sup>. The manga industry in Japan brings in billions of yen each year and has spread throughout the world being translated and localised into several different languages.

## Into the West

The introduction and growth of licensed manga in the West has been a slow process, with only a limited number of official English releases through the 1980s and 90s. The boom era of licensed manga in the West began in the 2000s with several large bookstore chains stocking large amounts of localised manga. The overseas manga industry was also hugely affected by the introduction and popularity of anime. The success of shows like Naruto, Bleach and One Piece led to manga sales skyrocketing and revenue into hundreds of millions of dollars by the end of the 2000s.<sup>3</sup> However from 2010 the golden era was over and manga sales took a sharp decline, with some attribute this to over saturation, excessive pricing, the collapse of the Borders bookstore chain, who was a major supplier of English manga, and also the effect of piracy/scanlations.<sup>4</sup> Now the manga industry in the west is much smaller than it once was, with only a few publishers continuing to release new series and also several Japanese companies, such as Kodansha, now utilise digital media to provide same day global releases of both Japanese and English versions of their new manga.<sup>5</sup> Of course through all the ups and down of licensed manga in the west, scanlations have continued to thrive and have a direct impact on how manga is translated into English.

## Official vs. Scanlation

As previously mentioned there are thousands of manga series across almost every conceivable genre, from fantastical tales of pirates, ninjas and science fiction epics to much more everyday stories about school, music and even cooking. Translating and localising all these different stories in English has always been a problem for both official and unofficial translators, since even in a manga with giant robots, aliens or magic there will always be some sort of tie to Japanese culture, social norms, nuisances and sound effects. The limited space within a manga can also be an issue as there may not be enough room for an

adequate English translation leading to loss information. Official translations have mostly been on the far end of the domestication scale due to influence and pressure from publishers and society. They have approached manga translation from the point of view of their own Western culture and in doing so would often remove a lot of Japanese context to the story. Scanlations on the other hand have always favoured a much more foreignisation approach, often leaving little in the way of guidance for those new to the world of Japanese manga.<sup>6</sup>

## **Censorship and Editing**

Early official manga translations contain many elements of domestication and were heavily criticized by fans for having a negative effect on the story. Differences between Western and Japanese values and social beliefs, led to censorship and removal of content deemed unfit for the target audience, primarily children. Censorship involved excessive violence, blood, nudity, sexual themes, religion, drugs and alcohol. However, scanlation translators have never been tied down with these social issues or demands from a publisher and so have never removed or changed any visual aspects in their manga translations.

## **Flipping**

Many of the manga published in these early days were also 'flipped'. In an original manga from Japan the story flows from right to left, however this is different from western styles so publishers of these early English versions decided to reverse or flip the artwork and layout to left-to-right so foreign audiences would not be confused. However, this often led to visual and story problems, for example the story might say that a character is doing something with their left hand but due to flipping its turns into the right hand.<sup>7</sup>

Flipping however was relatively short lived due to criticism from fans and even the original Japanese creators themselves, such as Akira Toriyama the creator of Dragon Ball.

Today the original right-to-left format is standard across translated manga, with often small added arrows or instructions at the beginning of the stories to indicate the proper way to read it. Predictably scanlations have never been flipped and rarely have any reading instructions.

## **Use of Language**

Of course, manga being a written media, domestication and foreignization can mostly be seen in the different techniques each group use in language translation. The overall style and type of English used between the official and scanlation versions show a large gap between domestication and foreignisation. When it comes to dealing with Japanese cultural

specific things like historical figures, jokes, wordplay, dialects and expressions, scanlations leave these relatively untouched, with some extra background information added in the border, even though it can result in difficulties understanding and grammatically incorrect English. Scanlators use foreignisation to adhere to their own and many fans' belief that the Japanese essence of the stories should be preserved. This practice leads to scanlations becoming a sort of cultural intermediary, teaching their readers about the Japanese language and culture.<sup>i</sup> Official translations with their domestication approach on the other hand have often removed these aspects, replacing them with something completely different which adheres to their own cultural equivalents, which in most cases is from American culture. This coupled with the fact that early on manga in the west was seen as something for children, led to a lot of official translated manga using a very American style of English with words that were 'in' or 'cool' at the time. Clear examples of this can be seen in some of the earliest localised manga such as the before mentioned Akira Toriyama's Dragon Ball. Released in English in the early 2000s it has Americanised dialogue such as "Hey Bro wuzzup", "Nyah Nyah, foey on youey", "Aloha" and "OO, this is too dang freaky". While this domestication translation approach may have been simply done for the benefit of their target audience of mostly American youths, it can also be viewed as a part of Lawrence Venuti's English hegemony. Discussing the English translation of an Italian movie Venuti states,

'The translation of the new preface, furthermore, was directed to an American audience. The language generally adhered to current English usage while cultivating a strain of colloquialism that would be immediately intelligible to a broad segment of American readers, if not simply recognized as an American dialect of English.<sup>8</sup>

The same can easily be said about the translation of manga in the 2000s. Highly Americanised translations of manga were being produced that not only deviated from the original creator's vision but were also difficult to read for anyone that is not from the United States.

## Leave It or Translate It?

Some areas of manga translation that also reflect domestication and foreignisation include Japanese honorific suffixes. These are used for addressing people such as -san, -chan and -kun and can be readily seen in almost every manga. Honorifics are used to indicate social status or levels of politeness, but can also contribute certain characteristics to the person they are referring to as well. Since the English language does not contain something equivalent, translating honorifics can be very difficult. Early official translations often chose simply to omit these rather than translating them or perhaps replacing them with a simple Miss, Mr. or Master.<sup>9</sup> Indeed a literal translation of honorifics would seem out of

place within an English translation, however omitting them can also have effect on how the reader experiences the story as nuances relating to character relationships will be lost.<sup>10</sup> Scanlations however choose to leave these honorifics un-translated simply putting them in their romaji form, with brief explanations being added in the borders.<sup>11</sup>

Here is a comparison between the Japanese, official and scanlation usage of a few honorifics in the very first issue of the popular manga Naruto

Japanese	Scanlation	Official
火影様	Hokage-Sama	Lord Hokage
イルカ先生	Iruka-sensei	Master Iruka
サスケくん	Sasuke-kun	Sasuke

A similar approach is taken to the translation of martial arts attacks, fighting techniques, weapons or magic.<sup>12</sup> Official translations have them replaced and often renamed into English while scanlations leave them in romaji form with a more detailed description in the borders.

From Naruto vol. 1

Japanese	Scanlation	Official
影分身の術	Kage bunshin no Jutsu	Art of the Doppelganger
変化の術	Henge no Jutsu	The art of Transformation
火遁豪火球の術	Katon, Gokyakyuu no Jutsu	Fire style, Fireball Technique
土遁心中斬首の術	Doton, Shinjuu Zanshu no Jutsu	Earth style, Groundhog Technique Decapitation

The translation of pictorial elements that is text within the cells such as on signs, billboards, books or clothing is also done differently between scanlations and official releases. Scanlations leave them unchanged in their Japanese form while official translators go in and change them.

## Onomatopoeia

The final aspect of manga translation that relates to domestication and foreignisation is the issue of sound effects and onomatopoeia. As anyone who has studied the language or just simply read a manga knows, there is a huge amount onomatopoeia words in the Japanese language and can be often heard in the spoken form or seen across many written media. In manga the sound effects are written in the background in order to increase excitement, action, emotion and the reader's immersion. Due to the fact that English and Japanese often

use different words for the same sound and also that Japanese onomatopoeia words can contain subtle nuances their translation in manga can be a difficult task. Looking at official translations and scanlations, it is apparent that there are several different approaches to the translation of sound effects. These approaches vary from person to person, company to company and have differing levels of both foreignisation and domestication.

The majority of scanlations simply leave the sound effects as they are, untranslated in katakana, with only the dialogue and story translated into English. This approach is often seen as the most authentic Japanese manga experience and has the highest level of foreignisation amongst translated manga on the market, leading to its popularity among so called 'manga purists'<sup>13</sup>. However, this 'authentic experience' idea can also be used as a cover to the fact that it is much easier just to leave it as is, and since fan demand means scanlations need to be done as soon as possible, it is much faster to simply ignore the onomatopoeia words.

The next approach sees the original katakana erased and the English equivalent inserted, leading to a much more domesticated version of manga, a lot closer to American style comic books, again a possible reflection of the before mentioned American English hegemony.

Viz Media, one of the biggest publishers of manga in the West, translates manga sound effects in this fashion, however there are many detractors of this style who point to several flaws in this approach. On the technical side of things, it can be problematic due to the fact that the katakana letters can be stretched and contracted to fit with the scene and background, whereas this is much harder to do with English letters, leading to the image being unbalanced or obscured.<sup>14</sup> The second flaw is in the difference between Japanese and English onomatopoeia leading to subtle nuances, implications and feelings being lost in translation. This mainly occurs in sound effects that relate to Japanese social rules, etiquette and culture, which is either lacking in the English equivalent sound or has no real equivalent at all. Due to the comparatively limited onomatopoeia word amount in English, the translated sound effect can often lack power and impact, leaving the reader feeling that something is missing. However, since the sound effect cannot be erased the closest possible English sound is inserted, and while the many readers will fail to notice these differences, those with prior knowledge or Japanese language ability are often put off by this change, with some even believing it distorts and degrades the author's original vision.<sup>15</sup>

A third onomatopoeia translation approach sits somewhere between the previous two and bridges the foreignisation and domestication gap. This style can be divided into a couple of groups, often depending on the company or group's overall way of translating. The first of these is having the original Japanese left the way it is and simply having English translated sound effects written outside the main panel in the border or as footnotes. Another feature of this method is that the English translation is often dropped after a few occurrences<sup>16</sup>.

The other approach has both the original katakana and the English translation together on the page, with the English usually under or beside the katakana and is often smaller as not to hinder the reader.<sup>17</sup> This is an amalgamation of the above, with the original katakana and the equivalent English onomatopoeia word together. This style attempts to provide the before mentioned 'authentic experience' whilst making it easier for the average reader to understand.

The companies who practice this way of translating manga also do not limit themselves to only using Western comic book style sound effects, such as Viz Media. They often use non-onomatopoeic English words to better describe a sound, set a more natural tone and help combat information loss.

These are the 3 main ways of translating Japanese onomatopoeia words used in manga into English. The individual translator, company and scanlation group has their own preferences and the foreignisation and domestication level of each style varies greatly. The readers too have preferences, and these affect the way translators and companies approach manga.

## Change and the Future

It is clear to see that western publishers have followed a domestication approach when it comes to manga translation. However due to the effects of scanlations and the demands of fans, there has been a shift in how they localise manga. Over the years' fans of manga in the West have voiced their complaints about censorship, editing and slow releases with many choosing to turn to scanlations. To counter this problem many companies have moved away from their strong domestication tendencies, adopting a more foreignisation approach in line with that of scanlation groups.<sup>18</sup> With the previously mentioned method of leaving in the original Japanese sound effects with the English next to it is becoming an increasing popular translation method among Western publishers. Publishers now are also much quicker in releasing English translations, utilising digital distribution to get their product on the market around the same time as the scanlators do. Japanese companies like Japanese Kodansha Ltd, are also beginning to offer same-day global release of their manga titles both in Japanese and English.<sup>19</sup> Kodansha has even begun to release bilingual editions which have both Japanese text in the margins, and the translated English in the main panels. These bilingual editions may be useful for those study Japanese or English and are a good example of a more foreignisation slanted official manga translation. Even Viz Media, who were responsible for the before mentioned very domesticated translations of *Dragon Ball* and *Naruto*, have adopted a much more balanced approach to their translations. Their new releases now cut down on the over Americanisation of the language and even now give the name of a new place or attack in Japanese romaji first then followed by the English translation. Due to

popular fan demand republishing of manga in new uncut forms by these companies has also led to new popularity of older series. Western publishers have also begun to release manga with added notes and glossaries at the beginning or end that contain explanations on such things as honorifics and other background information. The main pages then have the honorifics in romaji form much like a scanlation, this new approach allows for less editing of the main pages and the preservation of the original Japanese flavour.

Through all of these examples a clear shift in the levels of domestication and foreignisation within manga translation in the West becomes apparent. English versions of manga are now much closer to the original Japanese and the creator's vision and message. Scanlations have both prompted anime and forced Western companies to change the way they translate. Manga's increasing popularity not only provides readers with entertainment across multiple genres but also introduces and teaches them about many aspects of Japanese culture and society. Manga remains as one of the driving forces behind the immense popularity of Japanese popular culture throughout the world.

- 1 K. M. Cha, The Historic Roots of Manga April 8<sup>th</sup> 2008 <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/new-titles/adult-announcements/article/7050-the-historical-roots-of-manga.html> (accessed 18th Oct 2014)
- 2 R. Eisenbeis, How to Identify the Basic Types of Anime and Manga 2014 <http://kotaku.com/how-to-identify-the-basic-types-of-anime-and-manga-1538285518> (accessed 22nd Oct 2014)
- 3 B. Alverson, Manga 2013: A Smaller, More Sustainable Market, April 5<sup>th</sup> 2013 <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/booknews/comics/article/56693-manga-2013-a-smaller-more-sustainable-market.html> (accessed Oct 21st 2014)
- 4 R. Kelts, New markets may save Japan's manga exports September 26 2014, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2014/09/26/general/new-markets-may-save-japans-manga-exports/> (accessed 19<sup>th</sup> Oct 2014)
- 5 T. Osaki, Kodansha manga to get same-day global release: The Japan Times, Wednesday October 30, 2013 pg 1
- 6 T. Johnson-Woods, Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives: Bloomsbury Academic; Reprint edition 2010 pg 222
- 7 G. Poitras, Anime Essentials: Every Thing a Fan Needs to Know, Stone Bridge Press 2000, pg 69
- 8 H. -K Lee. Cultural consumers as 'new cultural intermediaries': manga scanlators. Arts Marketing: An International Journal, 2(2), 231-143
- 9 L.Venuti, The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference: Routledge 1998 pg141
- 10 R. E. Brenner, Understanding Manga and Anime: Libraries Unlimited 2007, pg 72



- 11 Ibid 71
- 12 T. Johnson-Woods, *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*: Bloomsbury Academic; Reprint edition 2010 pg 227
- 13 Ibid
- 14 R. E. Brenner, *Understanding Manga and Anime: Libraries Unlimited 2007*, pg 50
- 15 Sound Effects (Onomatopoeia) in *Manga 2010*, <http://www.starkeith.net/coredump/2010/12/31/sound-effects-in-manga/> (accessed 12<sup>th</sup> Dec 2014)
- 16 R.E.Brenner, *Understanding Manga and Anime: Libraries Unlimited 2007*, pg 50
- 17 Sound Effects (Onomatopoeia) in *Manga 2010*, <http://www.starkeith.net/coredump/2010/12/31/sound-effects-in-manga/> (accessed 12<sup>th</sup> Dec 2014)
- 18 R. E. Brenner, *Understanding Manga and Anime: Libraries Unlimited 2007*, pg 50
- 19 T. Johnson-Woods, *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*: Bloomsbury Academic; Reprint edition 2010 pg 227
- 20 T. Osaki., *Kodansha manga to get same-day global release: The Japan Times*, Wednesday October 30, 2013 pg 1

## Bibliography

- G. Poitras, *Anime Essentials: Every Thing a Fan Needs to Know*, Stone Bridge Press 2000
- H. -K Lee. Cultural consumers as 'new cultural intermediaries': manga scanlators. *Arts Marketing: An International Journal*, 2(2)
- L. Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference*: Routledge 1998
- R. E. Brenner, *Understanding Manga and Anime: Libraries Unlimited 2007*
- T. Johnson-Woods, *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*: Bloomsbury Academic; Reprint edition 2010.
- T. Osaki., *Kodansha manga to get same-day global release: The Japan Times*, Wednesday October 30, 2013

## Internet Resources

- B. Alverson, *Manga 2013: A Smaller, More Sustainable Market*, April 5<sup>th</sup> 2013
- <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/booknews/comics/article/56693-manga-2013-a-smaller-more-sustainable-market.html> (accessed Oct 21st 2014)
- K. M. Cha, *The Historic Roots of Manga* April 8<sup>th</sup> 2008 <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/new-titles/adult-announcements/article/7050-the-historical-roots-of-manga.html> (accessed 18th Oct 2014)
- R. Eisenbeis, *How to Identify the Basic Types of Anime and Manga 2014* <http://kotaku.com/how-to-identify-the-basic-types-of-anime-and-manga-1538285518> (accessed 22nd Oct 2014)

-R. Kelts, New markets may save Japan's manga exports September 26 2014, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2014/09/26/general/new-markets-may-save-japans-manga-exports/> (accessed 19<sup>th</sup> Oct 2014)

-Sound Effects (Onomatopoeia) in Manga 2010, <http://www.starkeith.net/coredump/2010/12/31/sound-effects-in-manga/> (accessed 12<sup>th</sup> Dec 2014)