

MIZUKI REIMAGINED

Japanese-to-English Manga for the Young North American Reader

by

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B.A., University of British Columbia, 2014

*Project submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of*

**Master of Publishing**

**In the Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology**

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Simon Fraser University

Fall 2016

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# A P P R O V A L

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## A B S T R A C T

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With growing interest in visual literacy from parents, librarians, and educators, the North American kids manga industry is booming, and more and more publishers are trying their hand at Japanese-to-English manga translations to meet the growing demand. But such projects pose unique publishing challenges that are influenced by manga's history, readers' expectations, the receptivity of the North American book market, and a publisher's mandate. This report examines the process of bringing Japanese manga to a North American audience through a case study of one publisher, Drawn & Quarterly, and its translation of Shigeru Mizuki's Kitaro series. Throughout, this report emphasizes the translation and production challenges involved, and also offers historical and cultural information about manga publishing, Drawn & Quarterly, Mizuki, and the growing educational market for kids' comics in North America.

## DEDICATION

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To everyone who kept me laughing.

## A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

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I was lucky to have the support of many incredible people throughout my degree. I'd like to extend my heartfelt thanks to:

Jade, Marcela, and Tracy, for your patience, wisdom, and good humour.

To Mauve, Hannah, and Marcela again (you deserve thanks twice), for reading this thing—multiple times!—and providing such expert criticism.

To Peggy, Tom, Julia, Allison, Sruti, Ann, Courtney, and, of course, the one-and-only Tubby, for being such amazing hosts.

To the wonderful instructors at SFU, for teaching me the ropes, talking me through the not-so-fun times, and putting up with some very bad puns along the way.

To Mike and Carol, Sirish and Lara, Katie and Michelle, and Zoe G., for introducing me to the strange and fascinating world of publishing.

And thank you, Jo-Anne, for helping me out in any state, no matter how scattered.

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## 1 . I N T R O D U C T I O N

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What does it take to bring a Japanese manga series to a North American audience? And how does a publisher's translation and production strategy contribute to the publishing process, public reception, and ultimate success of the series? Montreal-based graphic novel publisher Drawn & Quarterly (D+Q) faced both of these questions in the summer of 2016, as it prepared to publish volumes II and III of its seven-volume Kitaro series. The series was a translation project that aimed to bring a number of best-selling Japanese manga stories by acclaimed artist Shigeru Mizuki to English-speaking young readers. With reviews from the first volume (*The Birth of Kitaro*, May 2016) just out, and production for the second (*Kitaro Meets Nurarihyon*, October 2016) in full swing, much of my summer internship with D+Q included working on the series. This report will outline and analyze the process of bringing this Japanese classic to a North American audience, with emphasis on the translation and production challenges involved. It will also offer some historical and cultural context about manga publishing, D+Q, Shigeru Mizuki, and the growing educational market for kids' comics in North America.

## 2 . T H E R I S E O F M A N G A

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*“Two major developments have changed the comics market in the United States over the past fifteen years: the huge and still expanding popularity of manga and the spread of graphic novels into American bookstores”* (Couch, 2010, p. 212).

### 2.1 MANGA DEFINED

What is manga? The Japanese word translates roughly to “whimsical” (Wilmot, 2008, p. 7) or “irresponsible pictures” (Brienza, 2009b, p. 102), but finding a suitable definition is difficult, because manga can come in all shapes and sizes. It is published as single-panel cartoons, syndicated comic strips, and hefty tomes; can be light and funny or violent and action-packed; and may appeal to readers of all genders, ages, occupations, and social classes (Ito & Crutcher, 2014). But for the purpose of this report, *manga* can be defined as

a form of comic art originating in Japan that uses frames, illustrations, and text balloons to depict a story.

Unlike many North American comics, manga's protagonists are usually everyday people, not superheroes. That said, graphic novels and manga do share many characteristics. For example, as with all comic art, enjoying manga requires some interpretive activity; readers have to "read between the lines" to infer the passing of time and to understand the flow of the narrative. For this and other reasons, graphic novels and manga are not always treated as separate categories within the library and publishing communities.<sup>1</sup> Thus, although this report's primary focus is manga, it will draw from research about graphic novels and comics in cases where the current literature on the subject is limited.

## 2.2 MANGA IN JAPAN

Manga's origins extend to a long tradition of visual storytelling in Japan, reaching back as far as the eleventh century, according to some scholars (e.g. Ito & Crutcher, 2014). The form was heavily influenced by the urban art and literature that became popular during the Edo period (1603 to 1876), when many artists started to experiment with traditional techniques such as woodblock printing to depict nontraditional topics like city life and everyday citizens. These prints of *ukiyo-e* (the "floating world") are often cited as "the beginning of comic art in Japan" (Couch, 2010, p. 210). But what we recognize as manga today began much later, with woodblock printer Hokusai Katsushika in the early- to mid-nineteenth century. At a loss for how to describe his illustrated narratives, Katsushika called them "manga"—the first documented use of the word (Brienza, 2009b).

Manga came into its own during the massive economic and social changes that overtook Japan following the Second World War (Davisson, 2016c). During the 1950s, weekly and monthly magazines had started to circulate short, serialized manga stories. These magazines initially served a narrow, specialized market, but their readership eventually grew and diversified as the manga movement gained momentum. Many artists began experimenting with visual stories that, although intended for children, were attractive to

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the Vancouver Public Library shelves manga and graphic novels together (D. Dunbar & B. Walls, personal communication, September 13, 2016), and BookNet Canada's annual sales reports classify manga as "Graphic Novels".

adults as well—the first “all-ages” manga (Couch, 2010, p. 211). The most popular of these serialized stories were then collected and reprinted as stand-alone, single-author books called *tankōbon*. Tankōbon were typically about 200 pages long and could either be sold or rented from shops called *kashi-hon*. The rental system thrived because it offered citizens light, affordable entertainment at a time when distractions were sorely needed but money was difficult to come by. To stay in business, these stores relied on repeat customers; hence, they tended to favour series manga over stand-alone titles, in the hopes of keeping readers coming back for more.

Although early manga publishing was heavily influenced by the economic strain of the postwar years, many of its defining features remain true in twenty-first-century Japan. Series manga, for example, are still among the most popular titles, while stand-alone titles are less common. Likewise, the magazine-first, book-second system remains the predominant publishing model (Sell, 2011; Couch, 2010), and the form’s “all-ages” appeal is just as strong as ever (Ito & Crutcher, 2014; Rampant, 2010; Brienza, 2009a).

### 2.3 EARLY MANGA IN NORTH AMERICA

Domestic manga sales in Japan began to stagnate in the 1990s, and many Japanese publishers instead turned to the American market for profit. As more and more Japanese comics were imported and translated into English, a new comics sub-industry started to take form.

The first decades of North American manga publishing were not lucrative, however. Early English-language manga was a niche business, and books were translated, distributed, and read almost exclusively by fans (Sell, 2011; Rampant, 2010). The little trade manga that was published was usually sold in specialty comics shops, and—as with most comics at the time—was predominantly edited, sold, and read by white adult men (Brienza, 2009a). Early manga were also produced in much the same way as early comics, with individual stories first sold separately as 32-page pamphlets or “floppies” of various sizes, and then only later, if they had been successful, published as part of larger anthologies or collections (Brienza, 2009a; Sell, 2001).

Initially, extra pains were taken to make these titles more accessible to Western readers. US publisher Dark Horse Comics, for example, primarily imported Japanese manga

they considered “culturally odourless” and hence a “safer bet” for the North American market (Rampart, 2010, p. 222). Translations that did incorporate foreign content tended to substitute it with Western equivalents, for example, by changing Japanese names of characters to English ones. In terms of production, early manga also tended to favour North American, rather than Japanese, standards. For example, in Japan, manga is read from right-to-left, starting from what North American readers would consider the “back” of the book. To avoid estranging English readers, most early manga publishers “flipped” their books, reversing the order of the pages, the panels, or both in order to fit Western standards. Under the same logic, Japanese sound effects, which play a key role in many manga, were often removed or “muted” and then replaced with English translations.

Both of these “domesticization” practices (Rampart, 2010) were laborious and time consuming. Taken together, they slowed down early North American manga publishing considerably, especially compared to the break-neck speed with which the Japanese manga industry was releasing titles. If a series in Japan was published over four years, the English version might take as long as nine—or in some special cases twenty—to complete (Brienza, 2009b). This, in conjunction with the niche nature of the comics and manga industry, made it very difficult for manga to achieve mainstream success in North America. New readers who *did* break into the insular manga scene would often lose interest in a series when they learned of the long delay before the release of the next volume.

## 2.4 A NEW ERA IN NORTH AMERICAN MANGA

Virtually everything about North American manga—the way it was translated, produced, marketed, sold, and read—changed in 2002, when US manga publisher Tokyopop launched its iconic “100% Authentic Manga” campaign (Brienza, 2009b). Whereas previously, most publishers aimed to minimize cultural differences, this campaign capitalized on them. For their 100% Authentic titles, Tokyopop chose to maintain the initial right-to-left reading direction, didn’t translate the original sound effects, and kept foreign names as they were. Consequently, Tokyopop was able to release new titles more quickly (about one series volume per month, much closer to Japanese standards) and less expensively than other publishers. Other aspects of the campaign were less authentic; for example, neither the 5 × 7.5 inch trim size or the \$9.99 price point reflected publishing customs in Japan,

where manga come in various sizes, and cost about as much as a cup of coffee (Bouissou, Pellitteri & Dolle-Weinkauff, 2010). However, these elements, especially in conjunction with the other signature features of the Authentic titles, made Tokyopop's books stand out. The campaign was a raging success, and Tokyopop quickly rose to the position of top US manga publisher. Eager to tap into what seemed to be a growing trend, other manga publishers started to follow suit. But because they were unable to discern which exact factor had led to Tokyopop's success—the format, the price, or the decision to maintain the Japanese elements—most publishers simply replicated all aspects of the campaign. From 2003 onward, unflipped manga became more popular, as did the 5 × 7.5 inch trim size and \$9.99 price point.

With these new, easily identifiable production norms, manga gained recognition and, ultimately, success with mainstream readers. Chain stores such as Borders and Waldenbooks (now defunct) started displaying 5 × 7.5 inch comic books together in a separate Manga category—likely because their similar size made them easier to shelve together. This practical storage choice helped solidify the production standards set forth by Tokyopop in 2002. By 2008, 92% of the manga books nominated by the American Library Association for the Best Graphic Novels of the year were about 5 × 7.5 inches in size, and almost half of them were priced at \$9.99 US (Brienza, 2009b, p. 16). A quick look at Amazon.com's [Best Sellers in the Manga Category](#) suggests that this still holds true in 2016; excluding ebooks and anthologies, the vast majority of these titles are listed at about \$10 US, not including discounts (as of September 2, 2016).

North American manga had become a clearly identifiable form, defined by rigid production and pricing specifications, and the outcome was astounding. Between 2002 and 2007, US manga sales grew from \$60 million to \$210 million—an amazing 350% in just five years (Brienza, 2009a). Even large name book publishers started to jump on the manga bandwagon; in 2007, Tor Books teamed up with Seven Seas to form the manga imprint Tor/Seven Seas ([Tor Books](#), 2007), and in 2008, Hachette Book Group launched its own graphic novel and manga imprint, Yen Press (“[Company History: Hachette Book Group](#)”, n.d.). Although the manga boom has slowed somewhat since 2002, the category remains a growing sector of the North American publishing industry. In 2014, for example, US sales were up by 7% ([MacDonald](#), 2015), and in 2015, they increased by 13% in the first eight months of the year alone, according to news site ICV2 (via [Sevakis](#), 2016). In fact, manga

has been doing better than the rest of the book market, which showed only slight increases in the same time period (2.4% in 2014 and 2.8% in 2015; [Milliot](#), 2016). Importantly, this growth has occurred across the board, not just in niche comic shops; libraries, online sales, and even mass market retailers such as Target and Walmart have seen sales boosts. [Justin Sevakis](#) states: “Barnes and Noble has nearly doubled its graphic novel shelf space in at least some stores, Walmart has grown its selection of manga at about half of its stores, and Best Buy has started carrying them again as well” (2016). Manga is no longer a niche genre enjoyed by a select few; over the past decade, it has become a mainstream success and an integral component of the North American book market.

## 2.5 MANGA AND VISUAL LITERACY

Much of the North American manga industry’s newfound success can be attributed to the diversification of its readership. One of the most notable areas of growth in recent years has been women and children. In 2014 alone, retailers such as Comixology reported the number of new female manga customers doubling from the previous year, while the number of kids manga readers increased by 35% in the same time frame ([MacDonald](#), 2015). Children’s sales now make up a full 15% of graphic novel sales, representing the fastest-growing segment of the industry ([Alverson](#), 2016). The growing popularity of graphic novels and manga among children may be due in part to a larger trend in libraries’ and educators’ support of these books as literacy tools. “Children’s graphic novels continue to grow heartily everywhere,” explains Terry Nantier, founder of kids graphic novel publisher Papercutz, “librarians have emerged as devout champions, seeing how graphic novels encourage children to read” ([Reid & MacDonald](#), 2015). Eva Volin, supervising children’s librarian at the Alameda Free Library, agrees: “In the past ten years, graphic novels have found a level of respect among librarians ... Graphic novels are now widely recognized as being wonderful tools for both reluctant and advanced readers” ([Reid & MacDonald](#), 2015).

The relationship between comics and manga and visual literacy is still a developing field, and much of the scholarly writing on the subject so far has been based on case studies or personal experiences. However, the findings do suggest that books with graphic elements help young readers build their visual interpretation skills. For example, [Schwarz](#) (2006) argues that reading graphic novels involves analyzing visual elements (such as panel layout,

lettering style, and perspective) in addition to the “usual literary elements” (p. 59) of non-graphic books (such as plot and character) and hence builds additional skills. She stresses that visual literacy skills are becoming more important as our daily activities become increasingly multi-media-based; indeed, today being able to “read” websites, Youtube videos, and magazines may be more useful than being able to read straight text.

Ito & Crutcher (2014) offer a similar view. They suggest that while enjoying literature requires us to “read between the lines” in order to infer deeper meaning, manga asks us to “read between the frames” (p. 45) to understand the flow of the narrative and the passing of time. In fact, in Japan manga is often used as an educational tool; both children and adults read “educational and informational” or “textbook” manga to help learn difficult concepts. According to librarians Denise Dunbar and Bronwen Walls, who work in the Selections Department at Vancouver’s Public Library, some North American libraries are following suit and investing in more non-fiction manga (personal communication, September 13, 2016). Manga’s educational potential is impressive; reading it engages both hemispheres of the brain, and has been found to lead to improved information retention (Ito & Crutcher, 2014, p. 45).

Furthermore, because enjoying manga often involves understanding different characters’ perspectives, some scholars believe it may help young people build social skills and foster empathy (e.g. Ito & Crutcher, 2014). Finally, many librarians have started recommending manga and graphic novels to reluctant young readers as a way to get them interested in books (D. Dunbar & B. Walls, personal communication, September 13, 2016). Teachers and librarians increasingly recognize the potential of graphic novels and manga to engage readers of different learning styles, reading abilities, and interests (Bishop, 2013).

The combined effect of this and other research has led to a greater respect for comics “as art and as literature” among librarians (Volin, via [Reid & MacDonald](#), 2015) and educators (Griffith, 2010), as well as greater willingness from library selection departments to purchase them for their collections (D. Dunbar & B. Walls, personal communication, September 13, 2016). And as the demand for graphic books increases, so too does publishers’ interest in them. This has led to what Bishop (2013) calls an “explosion of publications” (p. 57) in the children’s/YA graphic novel sector. The reaction from publishers has been so strong that, as of January 2017, the Book Industry Study Group plans to

expand the available BISAC codes and subject headings in the kids' graphic novel category to accommodate the newfound diversity in titles ([Alverson](#), 2016).

## 3 . H I S T O R Y O F T H E K I T A R O P R O J E C T

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### 3.1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF DRAWN & QUARTERLY

*“[T]he story of Drawn & Quarterly has always been the story of its artists and the singular visions that they create”* (Rogers & Heer, 2015, p. 57).

In some ways, D+Q's history resembles manga's own; like manga, the company rose from humble beginnings to make its mark on North American book publishing. Today the company boasts a “backlist of hundreds of groundbreaking comics” (Rogers & Heer, 2015, p. 17), celebrates international acclaim for its award-winning titles, and is recognized throughout the industry for its “dedication to high production values, editorial integrity, and artistic autonomy” ([“A Brief History of Drawn & Quarterly”](#), n.d.). But like manga, it too started out small, attracting only a niche group of dedicated fans. The company was founded in 1989 in Montreal by Chris Oliveros, a comics aficionado with a vision to publish “quality comic strips” (Rogers & Heer, 2015, p. 17) of literary and artistic merit. It began as a one-man operation—and would remain that way for many years. While underground comics had enjoyed a “Golden Age” in the 60s and 70s, the industry was becoming more commercially-oriented, making the 80s a difficult time to start a literary comics company. Comic books favoured superhero action, newspaper strips “family humour,” and few venues existed for artists to create comics that pushed the medium forward. Few companies were willing to publish comics as art, rather than pure consumer products. The odds were against Oliveros' vision, and against D+Q.

But Oliveros was steadfast in his aspirations. In the summer of 1989, he launched *Drawn & Quarterly*, an alternative comics magazine that was published four times per year. It was through the magazine that Oliveros recruited now-legendary artists such as Joe Matt and Seth, both of whom would remain with the company when it later moved into comic book publishing. With subsequent issues, the magazine finessed its aesthetic and broadened its roster to include international authors. *Drawn & Quarterly* soon gained a reputation for its

high production values and attention to design—both qualities that remain central to the company’s mandate to this day.

With the success of the magazine, Oliveros started exploring single-authored works. In October 1990, D+Q published its first book, Julie Doucet’s *Dirty Plotte*, quickly followed by the release of Seth’s *Palookaville I* in April 1991. Although early titles such as these were largely autobiographical, in the years that followed, D+Q would expand its list to include an eclectic mix of fiction, history, children’s books, and more.

D+Q was growing during the 90s, but because the graphic novel was still an emerging format, few bookstores knew how to display and market them properly. Oliveros realized that to achieve real financial stability, the company would need to expand its market; it was time to break out of the “pocket universe” (Rogers & Heer, 2015, p. 27) of comics publishing and enter the wider book market. Design started to play an even larger role in D+Q’s publishing strategy. By emphasizing the book-like qualities of its titles, the company was able to gain a more mainstream, literary-minded readership than other comics publishers of the day. Its position within the book market only grew stronger when publicist Peggy Burns convinced Oliveros to switch to the literary distributor Farrar, Straus and Giroux in 2004. This move was successful, and in the years that followed, “the books that hit big for D+Q were conceived first and foremost as books, front to back” (p. 42-43).

Comics publishing was changing, and D+Q was right at the forefront of that change. The turn of the twentieth century marked the “beginning of a transformation in the public perception and mainstream marketability of comics” (Rogers & Heer, 2015, p. 29) and the true emergence of the graphic novel form. As more and more readers became interested in boundary-pushing comics, so too did book stores and, of course, other publishers. Oliveros’ love of “quality comic strips” was no longer a quirky passion; it had become a cultural phenomenon.

In following years, D+Q would continue to push boundaries and explore new genres. In 2005, it published Yoshihiro Tatsumi’s *A Drifting Life*, its first ever Japanese manga translation and the beginning of what would become a key focus of D+Q’s publishing strategy. As Senior Editor Tracy Hurren explains, it would have been “crazy not to” start translating works by Japanese authors, Japan being one of the two largest markets for comics (personal communication, August 23, 2016). During the next decade, the company would translate

several “key authors from the vast world of Japanese cartooning” (Rogers & Heer, 2015, p. 49), including Tadao Tsuge and, of course, Shigeru Mizuki.

This year, D+Q celebrates its twenty-seventh year. It now occupies a spacious office in Montreal’s Mile-Ex neighbourhood, and also runs a successful bookstore. But although the company has grown and evolved almost beyond recognition, Oliveros’ founding vision still rings true. To this day, D+Q continues to champion boundary-pushing content, expert design, high production values, and loyalty to the artistic vision of its authors. Indeed, looking back at nearly three decades of publishing, “perhaps the only constant across D+Q’s titles [is] the company’s continued dedication to contemporary, literate, visually distinctive cartooning—and so to its authors’ unique voices, too” (Rogers & Heer, 2015, p. 44).

### 3.2 DRAWN & QUARTERLY AND SHIGERU MIZUKI

*“It is impossible to imagine Japan without Mizuki’s influence. It is everywhere”* (Z. Davisson, personal communication, August 2, 2016).

D+Q has been translating comics from almost the very beginning, and is no stranger to manga translation either. Starting with Tatsumi’s *A Drifting Life* (2008)<sup>2</sup>, the company has built strong connections with Japan and developed in-house production systems specific to the format. Given the continued wealth of quality comics coming out of Japan, as well as manga’s growing popularity in North America, D+Q was keen to publish more. The legendary Shigeru Mizuki was the obvious choice.

Born Shigeru Mura in Osaka in 1922, Mizuki was raised in the rural Japanese fishing village of Sakaiminato. Growing up, he spent much of his time in the care of an elderly woman he called NonNonBa, who entertained him with local ghost stories and other ancient Japanese legends. Through these stories, he fell in love with the magical world of *yokai*—the ghosts, spirits, and other mythical phenomena that would eventually inspire much of his adult work, including his most famous creation: Kitaro (Davisson, 2016a & 2016b).

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2 With *A Drifting Life*, D+Q did not follow “100% Authentic Manga” style (i.e. right-to-left reading order, \$9.99 price point, 5 × 7.5 inch trim size; see Wilmot (2008) for a full overview of the production process); however, the project required the company to develop solutions for manga-related challenges such as translating sound effects and fitting text into narrow speech bubbles.

Mizuki's Kitaro was inspired by the tradition of *kamishibai* ("storycard" or "paper theatre"), a form of Japanese entertainment that was popular during the early Showa period (1920s).

Kamishibai artists would create paintings of stories and characters, which travelling storytellers would then bring to life. One such story was "Kitaro of the Graveyard," an adaptation of an old yokai legend by Masami Ito and Kei Tatsumi. By the time Mizuki was introduced to the work, kamishibai was on the wane, all but replaced by the TV, radio, and manga magazines of the 1950s. But Mizuki fell in love with the story's spunky and adventurous protagonist and soon started working on his own adaptation—the series that would eventually become known as *Gegege no Kitaro*. In this bestselling manga, a brave yokai boy called Kitaro fights slews of strange villains, always saving the day with a signature mix of humour, horror, and action-packed fun.

Today, Mizuki is a national celebrity in Japan; in his hometown of Sakaiminato, visitors can ride a local train line named after his yokai characters, admire the numerous bronze yokai statues that line Mizuki Road, or pick up a variety of Mizuki- and yokai-themed trinkets at local stores. But in North America, he has remained relatively unknown—at least until five years ago, when D+Q published *Onwards Towards Our Noble Deaths* (2011), Mizuki's first book to be translated into English (Schodt, 2015, p. 725). Since then, D+Q has published a number of his works, winning him accolades, media attention, and—for the first time ever—a North American readership.

In 2013, D+Q published *Kitaro*, an extensive story collection of more than 400 pages translated by Jocelyne Allen. But although the book received excellent reviews, it was aimed at a relatively mature audience. D+Q saw the stories as also having the potential to resonate with younger readers, and decided to release a second Kitaro collection three years later that would have greater crossover appeal. This new collection would be translated by award-winning translator and yokai scholar Zack Davisson, and would be published as a seven-volume series—with one volume released every four months starting May 2016. If the series was a success, it would reach kids as well as adults, strengthening D+Q's position within the children's market.

### 4.1 PUBLISHING CHALLENGES

*“Mizuki is not a horror writer, not a kid’s writer, not a war writer, not an autobiographical writer, not a comedy writer, not a folklore writer ... And that makes him hard to sell”*

(Z. Davisson, personal communication, August, 2, 2016).

Publishing Kitaro was complicated by several factors, including the differing expectations of multiple target audiences, the serial nature of the project, D+Q’s relatively limited experience with children’s book marketing, and the eccentricity of the stories themselves.

D+Q saw the series as having multiple potential audiences, which was both a publishing strength and a challenge. As noted earlier, a primary goal was to reach young readers—the very people, Davisson believes, Mizuki wrote the stories for ([Dueben](#), 2016). But at the same time, D+Q hoped the series would be a hit with adults as well. Indeed, Kitaro exemplifies the kind of “all-ages” manga that was popularized in postwar Japan; although originally intended for boys, the series “quickly became a cultural landmark for young and old alike” (“[Kitaro by Shigeru Mizuki](#)”, 2013) when it was picked up by *Shonen* magazine. Like in Japan, Hurren believes the books have the potential to enthrall everyone from toilet-humour-loving kids to steadfast Mizuki fans to casual graphic novel readers—in other words, “anyone who’s interested in a goofy adventure story, which is a lot of adults” (personal communication, August 23, 2016). Satisfying both adults and children, including manga fanatics as well as newcomers, would affect many aspects of the publishing process, but especially publicity. “We definitely want[ed] ... manga fans to know that these books exist[.]” Hurren explains, “But ... we [weren’t] going to ignore our regular comics media and our literary media” (personal communication, August 23, 2016). The publicity campaign would thus “cast wide, in a very targeted way” to reach each target audience.

Another consideration that factored into this “cast wide” strategy was that Kitaro is a series, not a stand-alone title. Hurren explains that, in general, later volumes in series tend to do worse than earlier ones. To ensure that Kitaro would sell well right through to its seventh volume, Hurren wanted to give the debut volumes an extra push. “We knew we needed to start out super strong with this series ... so that hopefully it could remain

strong throughout the whole run,” she explains. She notes that this publicity strategy was also heavily influenced by production choices such as size and paper stock. D+Q planned to make the Kitaro books small and lightweight, and print them in Canada on inexpensive paper. Thus, unlike with larger, heavier books, for which a “cast wide” publicity strategy just doesn’t make financial sense, it would be possible to order and ship a large number of review copies to diverse media outlets at a relatively low cost. For the first volume, *The Birth of Kitaro*, D+Q thus sent review copies to an expansive list, including: library media, such as *School Library Journal*; manga fan sites, such as *Otaku News*; industry publications, such as *Publishers Weekly*; parenting blogs, such as *Playing by the Book*; and pop culture outlets, such as *Pop Matters*. The pitch list for subsequent books in the series would cover similarly broad ground.

A third publishing challenge arose from the fact that publishing Kitaro would require outreach to the children’s market. Kids book marketing differs substantially from adult marketing, as marketers must appeal to a dual audience of children and their guardians—parents, educators, and librarians (K. Boersma, personal communication, January 5, 2016). Furthermore, because the publications that review children’s books are often distinct from those that review adult titles, kids book publicity requires developing new pitch lists and media contacts. Although D+Q had published children’s titles before embarking on the Kitaro project, they hadn’t been a key focus, Hurren explains, and the company was still learning to navigate the unique challenges of the children’s market. But with recent growth, more time, staff, and resources could be dedicated to that endeavour. “We are looking to ramp things up in 2017,” she says, “We’ll be increasing the number of kids books we publish each year and making that more of an official effort” (T. Hurren, personal communication, August 23, 2016). If it succeeded, Kitaro would play a key role in better establishing the company with young readers. D+Q’s prospects looked good in the summer of 2016. So far, its titles had sold well in the library market, and the Kitaro books would likely do the same. Hurren was confident that “these books [would be] great for libraries and great for kids” and that librarians would recognize Mizuki’s name, as well as D+Q’s. To further boost kids sales, the company planned to release supplemental materials with each volume—in the form of fun, Kitaro-themed games and activities that would get teachers, parents, and, of course, young readers, excited about the series.

A final challenge to address was how to make the series accessible and appealing to diverse readers without diminishing its authenticity. As discussed, the stories were heavily influenced by Mizuki's love of yokai folklore, and hence include references to many legends and mythical creatures that might be unfamiliar to North American readers. Furthermore, they incorporate an eclectic mix of humour, horror, and action—something typical of Mizuki's work, but potentially jarring for readers unfamiliar with his style. During translation and production, D+Q would thus need to balance its goals of making the series accessible and appealing to readers with its dedication to preserving artistic integrity. "We're not really interested in stepping in and making big editorial decisions," Hurren explains, "Our publishing mandate is to find artists who have a singular vision and promote those artists" (personal communication, August 23, 2016). Mizuki's artistic intentions for the series would thus be considered paramount to all other considerations, and would influence how the books were translated, produced, and, ultimately, received.

## 4.2 TRANSLATION

*"The interaction and interdependence of image and text create difficulties for translators that differ greatly from purely linguistic translation ... and yet translating manga is also very different from translating audiovisual media"* (Sell, 2011, p. 93).

Translating Kitaro was complicated by several factors. First of all, as with any graphic novel, the text of each story has both linguistic and visual dimensions; a translation hence needed to work within the context of the narrative itself, while also fitting within the surrounding imagery. As Davisson explains, one particularly challenging conflict between text and image arises from speech balloons—or rather, from their limited size and shape. Because "they already exist on the page ... whatever you write needs to fit into that space. That means making adjustments; you can fit a lot more into the physical space in Japanese than you can in English" (personal communication, August 2, 2016). As Wilmot (2008) observes in his report of an earlier manga translation undertaken by D+Q, it is not always clear whether translated text will work visually at the initial stages of the editorial process; instead, problems often arise at the design stage, when the English text is finally placed into the working document. Wilmot describes the process of manga translation as "a dynamic editorial structure that relie[s] entirely on visual acumen and the physical needs of a text"

(p. 45-46). Whereas the publishing process for most text-only books can be divided into clear stages—first the translation, followed by several rounds of edits, then the layout and design of the book—this is not the case for manga translations like the Kitaro books.

A second challenge of translating Kitaro arose from the unique characteristics that differentiate manga from other books and comics. The frequent use of onomatopoeia, for example, can raise translation issues. Sound effects are plentiful in Japanese manga, and tend to be difficult—if not impossible—to translate into English. For example, it is not uncommon for these “sound” effects to “express a present state or condition rather than an occurring sound ... [such as] a change or movement, ... an ongoing situation, ... [or] something entirely soundless” (Sell, 2011, p. 98). *Kitaro Meets Nurarihyon*, for example, includes sound effects such as “grab,” “squeeze,” (p. 30) and “blink blink” (p. 31), which might strike North American readers as strange if they are unfamiliar with this manga convention. Wilmot (2008) notes similar challenges in his report, such as finding an appropriate English translation for the sound of cicadas—a noise most Japanese readers recognize but not all North American ones do.

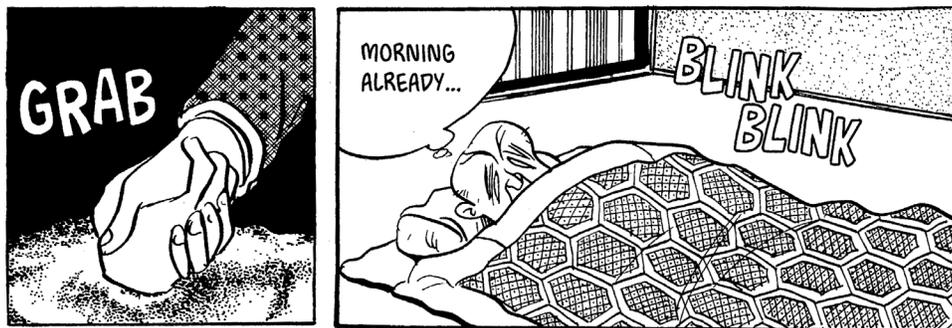


FIGURE 1: Examples of Onomatopoeia in *Kitaro Meets Nurarihyon*

Another manga convention that played into Kitaro’s translation was the use of complex, winding plot lines that “ma[k]e little sense but [are] fun to read” (Davisson, 2016c). Because Japanese manga arose out of a rental-based publishing system, stories were designed to “keep kids reading ... [and] had to go on and on without ever finishing” (Davisson, 2016c). Twisted plots such as this feature heavily in the Kitaro stories, in which European vampires face off against ancient Japanese yokai, and characters change from good to evil with the turn of a page. As with the sound effects, it was important that the

translation incorporated these elements in a way that remained true to the original work without estranging readers who were unaccustomed to the manga writing style.

With all of these elements, Davisson says that he emphasized accessibility in his translation. Especially because children were a key audience, he was careful to ensure that the text was easy to understand and flowed naturally, as if originally written in English. But at the same time, he says he “tried to stay true to Shigeru Mizuki and how he wrote” (personal communication, August 2, 2016), rather than trying to make the text fit North American expectations. This aligns with D+Q’s mandate to honour the singular vision of its authors, as well as Davisson’s own beliefs as a translator. However, it may have had the added bonus of making the series more appealing to the manga community. Because avid manga readers are often already familiar with the Japanese versions of their favourite comics by the time they are released in English, they tend to favour translations that closely resemble the original; indeed, this craving for authenticity may be one reason Tokyopop’s “100% Authentic” campaign was so successful.

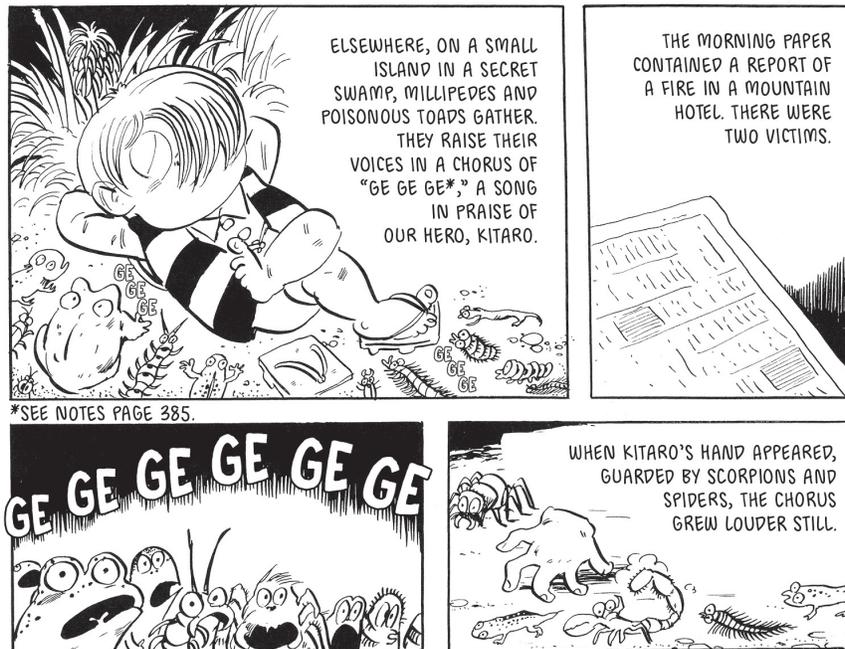
A third translation challenge for the series lay within cultural differences between Japanese and North American readers. Because so much of the stories’ content was based on traditional folklore, some background in Japanese history and culture was essential for fully understanding the narrative. As Rampart (2010) explains, however, there is no simple solution for dealing with this kind of culture-specific content. One approach, which was popular with early North American manga publishers (but is unpopular with contemporary manga fans), is to “domesticize” content “by adding language and cultural concepts of the target culture” (p. 222-223). Other publishers have used a “foreignizing” translation strategy, in which cultural difference are maintained but often explained, for example, by using a footnote. Foreignization has the advantage of remaining true to the author’s original voice, style, and intentions, but also has two potential drawbacks: “first, if it is explained through a footnote, the reader is interrupted from the story; second, the reader could simply not understand the cultural equivalence” (p. 224).

Which strategy to use—and to what extent—depends on the nature of the work and its intended audience(s). This is particularly clear when comparing the earlier collection of Kitaro stories published by D+Q, *Kitaro* (2013), which had not been specifically targeted at children, with its newer “kid-friendly” series. Take for example, the treatment of the sound

effect “Ge ge ge” that appears at the end of each story after Kitaro has successfully saved the day. Seasoned Kitaro fans will know that this victory song comes from Mizuki’s own childhood nickname “Gege” and was later adopted in the title of the popular animated television series *Ge ge no Kitaro* (Mizuki, 2013). Other readers, however, may find this sound effect confusing. In the 2013 *Kitaro*, D+Q resolved this issue with a footnote directing the reader to the “Notes” section at the back of the book for more information, but in the kid-friendly collection, it addressed the issue differently. Instead of using notes, D+Q instead included an introductory “History of Kitaro” at the beginning of each book that provides the reader with this and other useful information, as well as a supplementary “Yokai Files” section at the end of each book that explains what yokai are and gives a brief overview of each character featured in the stories.<sup>3</sup> Finally, in any moments in the text that may still have caused confusion, Davisson “added a few phrases here and there, like writing ‘Emma-O, the King of Hell’ when the Japanese version would just say ‘Emma-O’” (personal communication, August 2, 2016). These minimal additions made the text more accessible while still retaining as much of the work’s authenticity as possible.

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3 Both “History of Kitaro” and the “Yokai Files” are written by Davisson and paired with a selection of fun illustrations from the book.



## NOTES

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**8** Article: Three more dead. The strange illness spreading through Tokyo is very similar to an outbreak in Paris, France.

**20** *Gomoku* (also known as *GoBang* or *Five-In-A-Row*) is a game played with black and white stones on a Go board. The object of the game is to get an unbroken row of five stones in any direction.

**22** The “ge ge ge” of the song and of Kitaro’s Japanese title *Ge Ge Ge no Kitaro* comes from Shigeru Mizuki’s own childhood nickname. As a boy, he was unable to pronounce his given name, and ended up calling himself “Gegeru”. The name stuck and was generally shortened to “Gege”. *Kitaro* was originally called *Kitaro of the Graveyard* with the “ge ge ge” only appearing in the song in praise of Kitaro, but when the manga was turned into an animated TV series in 1968, sponsors thought “Graveyard” was too scary for a kids show, so the program became *Ge Ge Ge no Kitaro*. The title of the manga was changed to *Ge Ge Ge no Kitaro* to match in November 1967 while the show was in production.

FIGURE 2: Treatment of “Ge ge ge” in *Kitaro* (2013):  
within panel (above) and on notes page (below)

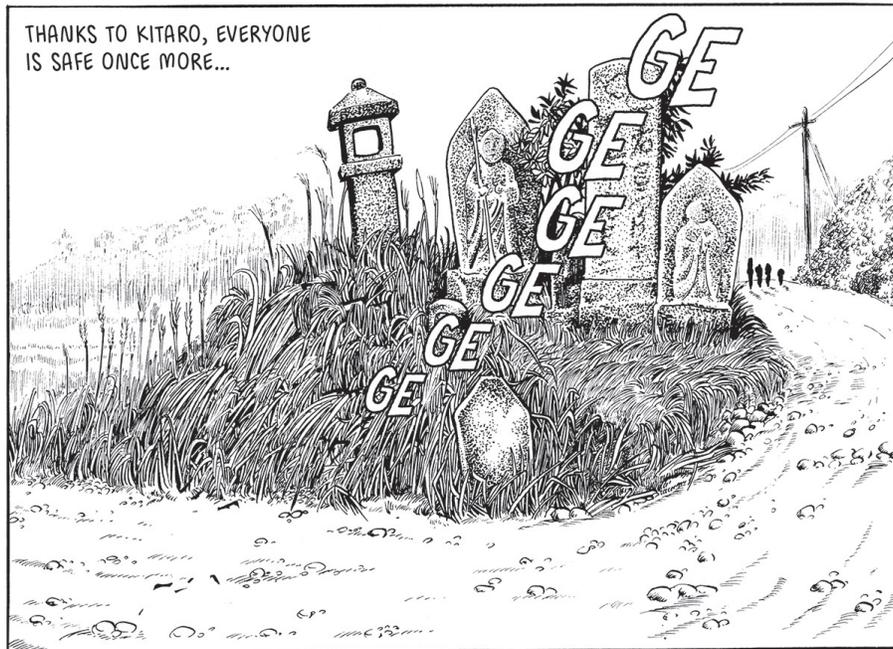


FIGURE 3: Treatment of “Ge ge ge” in *Kitaro Meets Nurarihyon* (2016)

This translation strategy is particularly apt for several reasons. The bonus material “provides depth and background to the stories” (Davisson, via [Dueben](#), 2016), allowing keen readers to deepen their understanding if desired, but “also reflects Mizuki himself, and how his books are published in Japan.” Mizuki’s Japanese books often incorporate essays about yokai history or monster profiles, and doing the same in English seemed appropriate. But not using endnotes may also have been more practical, because there was no guarantee that readers—especially younger ones—would read them, even if D+Q had included them. And as Hurren aptly puts it, endnotes “just seemed so silly” for a funny, action-packed series like *Kitaro*. “The idea of explaining things in the back didn’t make sense,” she says, “Rather than being a 100% faithful to the original, it made more sense to make it accessible” (personal communication, August 23, 2016).

Finally, by not using footnotes, the kid-friendly books may offer a more immersive reading experience than their 2013 predecessor; readers can plow through the stories quickly and effortlessly—which is exactly, Davisson explains, what Mizuki intended. He says the *Kitaro* stories were “written at a time when people read them and threw them away” ([Dueben](#), 2016);

they were supposed to be light, disposable entertainment. Thus, this strategy served a dual purpose of appealing to kids while still respecting the integrity of the author's original work, successfully balancing authenticity and accessibility.

### 4.3 PRODUCTION

*“While the manga polysystem is comparable with that of comics and graphic novels, they are still very different in format and style ... This in turn gives unique qualities to the translated texts caused by the strategies used in order to make them accessible to the target culture” (Sell, 2011, p. 96).*

Due to the visual nature of the medium, manga translations do not just require changes to the text itself. As with any Japanese-to-English manga, Kitaro's translation would also require making design-related decisions in four key areas: publishing format, onomatopoeia, reading direction, and text orientation (Sell, 2011). As with the translation of the text, the strategies D+Q chose to use in each of these areas was influenced by the nature of the stories themselves and the company's goals for the series. And each of these elements, in turn, would eventually contribute to Kitaro's final positioning and ultimate success.

#### 4.3.1 Publishing Format

As previously discussed, format has a huge influence on which books are and aren't perceived as manga by booksellers and readers. Most manga sold in North America today look quite similar, at least in terms of size and form, and to sell the Kitaro series in the manga market, D+Q would need to mimic these elements. “We wanted it to be something that would be shelved in the manga section in comics shops,” Hurren explains, “so we wanted it to be specifically aligned with that standard format” (personal communication, August 23, 2016). She explains that while manga fans are especially influenced by book format, other audiences are more flexible in their purchase decisions. Whereas manga readers might hesitate to pick up a larger, more expensive book than what they're used to, she believes that D+Q's “trade paperback fans are still going to buy [Kitaro] in the smaller format.” For this reason, each volume would follow the standard manga format: 5 × 7.5 inches in size and about 200 pages long, with a fun, vibrant cover.

In addition “to mak[ing] it more suitable to that specific manga market, [where you see a lot of] bright colours and action,” the colourful cover design also made the books more cohesive, by applying “a very clear series design, and something that worked across several volumes” (T. Hurren, personal communication, August 23, 2016). For D+Q, this format deviated from past Mizuki titles, which are mostly large, hefty tomes with sombre covers.

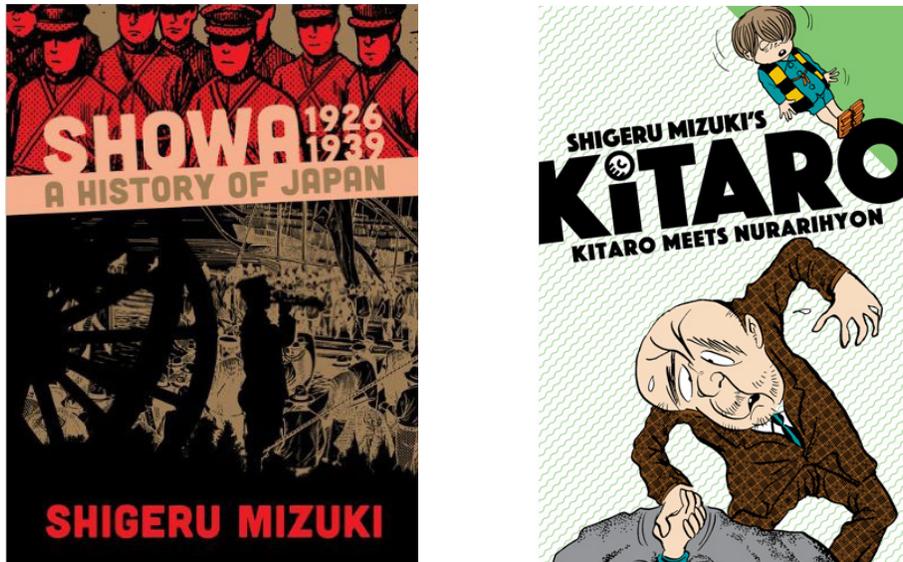


FIGURE 4: Mizuki’s *Showa* (2013), left, versus *Kitaro Meets Nurarihyon* (2016), right

Both Hurren and Davisson believed this smaller format would also serve the primary audience of children well. Whereas D+Q’s previous *Kitaro* collection, (*Kitaro*, 2013) had been large (6.4 × 8.7 inches), thick (432 pages), and somewhat pricey (\$24.95 CAN/US), the new *Kitaro* books would be smaller and less expensive (\$14.95 CAN/\$12.95 US), making them more accessible for young readers and more affordable for their parents. “Those big books are awesome, and well-suited to important, ponderous tomes like *Hitler* and *Showa* (both previous D+Q titles by Mizuki),” Davisson explained in an interview with *The Comics Journal* (Dueben, 2016), “But I’ve heard several parents tell me *Kitaro* was too big for their kids to hold.” The smaller format, he said, would fit easily into small hands and backpacks.

### 4.3.2 Onomatopoeia

The second production question to consider was how to treat onomatopoeia. As discussed previously, the frequent and unusual use of onomatopoeia in manga can create translation difficulties. They present a design challenge too, because publishers must decide how to visually display those translations. Again, this involves balancing the author’s intentions and artistic style with readers’ needs for accessibility.

In manga, onomatopoeia usually take the form of sound effects, large, dynamic words like “Pow” and “Wham” that supplement the main text. These sound effects are often integrated with the artwork itself and are hence “literally both image and text” (Sell, 2011, p. 99). Most manga publishers use one of two approaches: they either add sound effect translations as footnotes, leaving the original artwork untouched, or they remove the original sound effects altogether and replace them with new, translated ones.



FIGURE 5: A sample page from *Kitaro Meets Nurarihyon*: original Japanese sound effects (left) versus D+Q’s translation (right)

Each strategy has its advantages and disadvantages. One argument in favour of footnotes is that a sound effect’s size, shape, and placement can often carry meaning not included in the word itself. Thus, removing and replacing Japanese sound effects with English ones can potentially result in a loss or change in meaning. For example, larger sound effects might indicate louder sounds, while more dynamic ones might indicate the presence of movement. Furthermore, because sound effects reflect an artist’s unique style and add to the overall look and feel of a book, many publishers choose to leave them in to preserve authenticity. However, footnote translations have the disadvantage of making a text less accessible to readers. Especially for those who are new to manga, footnotes can present an additional

barrier to taking a chance on the form. Furthermore, pausing to read each footnote can be disruptive, making for a less smooth overall reading experience. Usually, publishers opt to use this method in cases where functionality is prioritized over aesthetics (Sell, 2011).

So far, there is no clear consensus around which method is preferable; instead, the choice to use one or the other “is inevitably decided by the publishing company and often comes down to the company philosophy as well as the target audience and underlying purpose of the individual translation” (Sell, 2011, p. 99). For Kitaro, it made sense to incorporate sound effect translations into the artwork itself, as this would make the stories easier, quicker, and more enjoyable for kids to read.

#### 4.3.3 Reading Direction

Another manga translation-specific design challenge for the series was reading direction. As discussed, in Japan, comics read from right to left, in what North American readers would call a “backward” direction. Publishers translating Japanese books into English hence need to decide whether to maintain the original page layout and reading direction or to “flip” them so they read like “typical” English-language comics.

Again, there are advantages and disadvantages to both options. Maintaining the original reading order more clearly identifies a book as manga, appealing to the “insider” mentality of the manga fan base by paying homage to Japanese publishing traditions, and is also less labour-intensive to execute. On the other hand, it can be confusing to non-manga readers. Thus, leaving manga unflipped often requires “educating” readers by including a “warning sign on the back cover or the last page” (Sell, 2011, p. 102) or an illustration explaining the panel and speech balloon reading order.

As a rule, D+Q prefers to flip its titles. With all its Japanese translations, one of the company’s key goals is always “to break out of ... the manga market and bring [the books] to a wider literary audience” (T. Hurren, personal communication, August 23, 2016). Again, accessibility is a main consideration, as atypical reading order can be a barrier to entry for many readers. Although comics are becoming more mainstream, it can still be a challenge to convince readers to take a chance on a graphic novel or manga. “There’s already a slight barrier,” Hurren says, “we don’t want to throw another thing onto that.”

With Kitaro, however, D+Q chose not to flip the books. Although the company cares about making its books as accessible as possible, its primary concern remains with its artists. If an artist does not want their book flipped, D+Q respects that decision above all else. This was the case with Mizuki. “No one is better at making a comic in their own style than the person who makes that comic,” Hurren says of the decision, “Mizuki didn’t really want anything flipped. So we didn’t flip it.” Instead, each volume of the Kitaro series includes a page at the back of the book explaining reading direction for first-time manga readers.

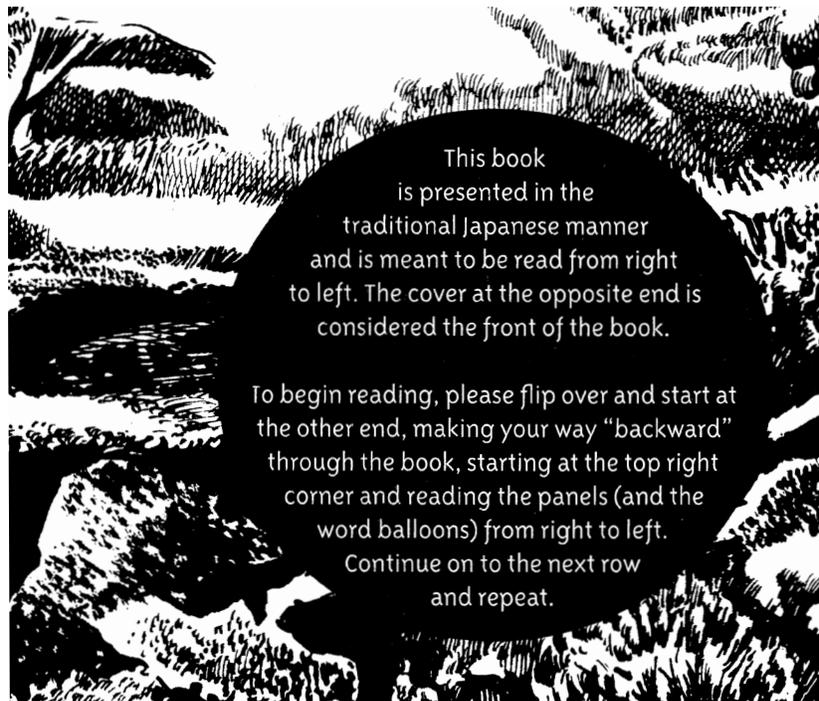


FIGURE 6: Reading direction explanation, from *Kitaro Meets Nurarihyon*

#### 4.3.4 Text Orientation

The final major consideration to factor into a manga translation’s format is text orientation. As touched on in the previous section, visual differences between the English and Japanese written language can affect translation decisions, for example, by requiring translators to reduce text to accommodate narrow speech bubbles. But there are also production considerations related to such issues. In some cases, there is no choice but to widen a speech balloon to make room for lengthy text. Doing so can change the visual aesthetic of

the artwork, however, and so, in general, D+Q avoids this strategy as much as possible. To accommodate lengthy texts, the company prefers to adjust kerning or hyphenate words, and only alter the original art as a last resort.

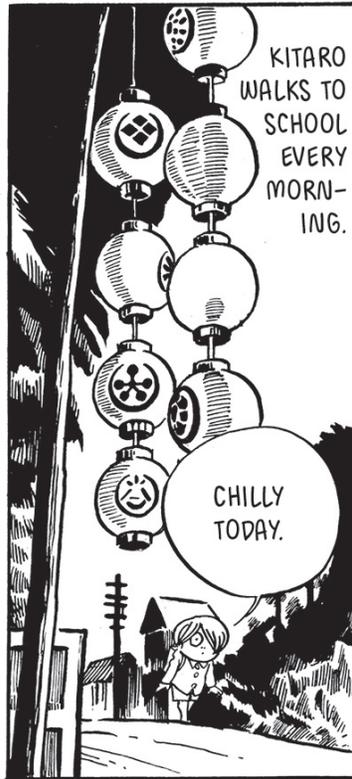


FIGURE 7: A difficult text placement, from *Kitaro Meets Nurarihyon*: To fit the translation within the narrow text box, D+Q hyphenated the word “morning.”

#### 4.3.5 Straightening and Cleaning Images

With a design strategy in place, we were ready to start production. D+Q receives original art files in a variety of forms, depending on their source, the artist’s working style, and the nature of the project. For *Kitaro*, D+Q received high resolution scans from Mizuki’s Japanese publisher, Mizuki Productions. Because these files had already been prepared for print in Japan, they were already relatively clean and easy to work with; after some minor touch ups, all D+Q had to do was remove the Japanese text and sound effects and replace them with the English translations Davisson had provided.



FIGURE 8: One of the original files received from Mizuki Productions

Because the images D+Q received were scanned, they were often misaligned and hence needed to be straightened before taking further steps. To do so, we created a Photoshop Action<sup>4</sup> that applied guides to all of the images. These guides, which were placed in exactly the same position for each image, allowed us to straighten all of the images and resize them so that the final layout of the book would look uniform. Although we used an Action to apply the guides, we had to straighten and resize each image manually. This involved rotating images, increasing or decreasing their size, and realigning single panels that were very skewed or angled. However, because of the hand-drawn nature of the images, it was

4 For production tasks that are repeated many times within a single project, D+Q often uses Photoshop Actions. Actions automate tasks by replicating them across many files; the user performs the action once, records it, and then applies that action to an entire “batch” of images. Because they can be run in the background with little supervision, actions save time and effort, enabling staff to continue working on other projects simultaneously.

acceptable to maintain some roughness in the layout. Unless panels were very obviously misaligned, we opted to keep the pages as they were, with the aim of staying as true to the original artwork as possible.

The next step was to “mute” (or hide) the Japanese text on each page. Again, this was done manually, using Photoshop’s lasso and pencil tools. Sound effects and other elements that were integrated with the artwork were left untouched, however; muting these elements involved a more labour-intensive process that would be done later, on a separate layer.

Once the Japanese text was removed, we used an Action to add that additional layer. This “patch” layer would lie above the background layer, allowing us to make more complex changes to the files without having to worry about destroying the original artwork. In the same Action, we added a white border to each patch layer, surrounding the artwork itself; this border would cover any dirt or other marks that may have entered the image during the scanning process. Finally, the files were clean, properly formatted, and ready for the most labour-intensive task: replacing the sound effects.

#### *4.3.6 Editing Sound Effects*

Our task was twofold: first, mute each Japanese sound effect, and then replace it with its English translation. Again, each of these steps was done on a separate layer and not directly on the artwork itself, ensuring that they could be corrected or undone later, if needed.

As discussed earlier, muting sound effects can be difficult because image and text are often closely intertwined. A sound effect might cover up a large portion of a panel and leave a large, unnatural-looking empty patch on the image when removed. Unfortunately, due to differences in the shape of Japanese and English characters, an English sound effect will never occupy the same exact space as the one it’s replacing, even if it’s placed in a similar position. Thus, to make our edits look natural, we needed to fill in these empty spaces with other content, drawn in the same style as the original artwork. In more extreme cases, the original sound effect might cover a portion of a character’s face or body, requiring us to redraw part of the character ourselves (e.g. “Pop,” p. 48). This process was time-

consuming and labour-intensive, but could not be rushed; it was important to D+Q that “patching” be done well, with great respect for the original artwork.



FIGURE 9: A panel in which sound effect and image were closely intertwined, requiring extensive patching: original Japanese (left) versus English translation (right)

On a separate layer, we next added Davison’s sound effect translations. We constructed each effect using a special font prepared by D+Q artist Kevin Huizenga,<sup>5</sup> trying to mimic the size, shape, and placement of the original effects as much as possible. Of course, because Japanese and English differ greatly in shape and structure, replicating these elements exactly was not always feasible. For example, in many cases the original Japanese effects had been stacked vertically, filling a tall and narrow portion of the panel that wouldn’t comfortably fit the (horizontal) English translation. In these instances, we used a different shape and placement, but aimed to make it look equally as dynamic as, and convey a similar message to, the original. For example, this was the case with the placement of “Pop” (see Figure 9, above), as well as “Smack” (p. 48; see Figure 10, below).

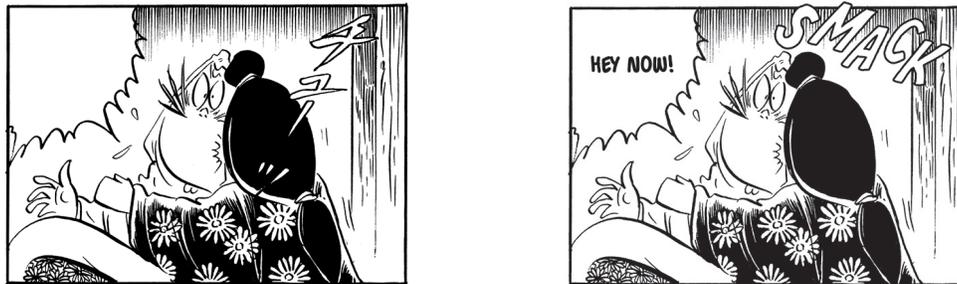


FIGURE 10: A Japanese sound effect (left) for which the English translation (right) had to be placed differently than the original

<sup>5</sup> Huizenga’s font had been used in some of D+Q’s previous Mizuki titles, such as *NonNonBa* (2012) and the first (2013) Kitaro collection, and was hence already a part of Mizuki’s North American brand.

#### 4.3.7 Layout

Once all the Japanese text had been removed and the new sound effects were in place, we were ready to move to the next stage: laying out the book in InDesign. This step was made more difficult due to the right-to-left reading order of the stories, but because D+Q had already published the first volume of the series, we were able to reference those files when designing the layout of the second, which simplified the process.

To lay out the book, we first set the page size and margins to match those of *Kitaro I*, then started placing in the images, one per page, starting from what North American readers would call the back of the book. (We left a few blank pages at the beginning and ending of the book as placeholders for auxiliary content that would arrive later.) It was crucial that each image be placed in the exact same position and at the same relative size as the others; to ensure uniformity, we used InDesign master pages.

After the images had been placed, it was time to input the text. We copied text from Davisson's translation document into the now blank speech bubbles. As with the sound effects, finding a natural-looking fit for the translated text was often challenging. For example, in many cases, speech bubbles that had left Japanese text with ample space were not wide enough to comfortably accommodate their English translations. These problems were resolved by either hyphenating words, adjusting kerning or line breaks, and, if all else failed, adjusting the size or shape of the balloon using Photoshop.

Once the text had been placed, we began inputting page numbers. Whereas with left-to-right books, this process can be automated using InDesign, this is not possible for a right-to-left manga. Instead, each page number had to be input manually. Next, we added the auxiliary content, which included a Table of Contents; A History of Kitaro, written by Zack Davisson; the Notes section; the "Yokai Files"; and a page at the back of the book instructing readers on how to read right-to-left manga. With these elements in place, and after some final rounds of proofreading, *Kitaro Meets Nurarihyon* was ready to send to print.

#### 4.4 OUTCOMES

“It’s packaged well and with a lot of care, and is accessible to kids while giving adults background and cultural context. There’s no doubt that [The] Birth of Kitaro is a great entry point into Kitaro’s yokai filled world” ([Manjorin](#), 2016).

Did D+Q succeed in bringing some of Mizuki’s most famous work to North America? And were the translation and production strategies outlined above the best—or most appropriate way—to achieve that goal? Although it is too soon to comment on the success of the second volume, *Kitaro Meets Nurarihyon*, it is possible to discuss the first, *The Birth of Kitaro*. Hurren says that, so far, the book has been well-received. Indeed, just three months after it was published, the book had already sold some 3 000 copies (Naturale, A., personal communication, August 29, 2016) and was within the top 500 bestselling books in [Amazon.com’s Action & Adventure Manga](#) category (as of September 10, 2016).

In terms of publicity, *The Birth of Kitaro* continues to garner media attention—and, so far, has been received in more or less the way D+Q intended. Many reviewers have commented on the books’ accessibility, something the company stressed while translating and designing it. For example, manga blog *Experiments in Manga* notes that “readers picking up *The Birth of Kitaro* may not be as familiar with Japan’s mysterious monsters and phenomena, but the volume is still very approachable and accessible” ([Brown](#), 2016).

Many reviewers describe the book as an excellent introduction to Mizuki, as well as to manga more generally. For example, *Anime News Network* describes the book as “not only a great introduction to the works of Shigeru Mizuki ... but also a neat way to bring less commercialized manga to younger readers” ([Silverman](#), 2016). Similarly, a [Playing by the Book](#) reviewer writes, “[*The Birth of Kitaro* has] got a really helpful and well pitched introduction to Japanese supernatural phenomena (yokai), helping readers from other cultures find their feet and get their bearings. There’s also a brief biography of Mizuki, and—where western readers would turn to start a graphic novel—a clear explanation about the direction of reading in this book” (2016). At the same time, existing manga fans or Mizuki aficionados seem to enjoy the book too. Anime and manga blog [Reverse Thieves](#) writes that “*The Birth of Kitaro* [presents] a great opportunity for American manga fans who want to know more about manga’s history” (2016), while a [Fangoria](#) reviewer describes it as “a

fantastically eerie read for both fans of Japanese folklore and readers who just want to read a creepy little tale about a weird boy and his eyeball father” (Fedotov, 2016). D+Q’s efforts to minimize barriers to entry without estranging existing fans seem to have paid off.

Finally, the reviews suggest that Kitaro’s all-ages appeal is equally strong in North America as in Japan, just as Hurren and Davisson had hoped. [JETwit.com](http://JETwit.com) writes that “Kitaro’s hijinks can be enjoyed in a format and price point friendly to all ages” (Perez Jr., 2016), while *Experiments in Manga* calls the book an “excellent all-ages manga, suitable for younger readers who enjoy a bit of a scare and supernatural excitement while still being entertaining and appealing for adults” (Brown, 2016). Mizuki’s strange little one-eyed protagonist promises to continue to thrill readers young and old.

## 5 . C O N C L U S I O N

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In conclusion, bringing a Japanese manga series to a North American audience is a complex process requiring unique translation and production strategies that are influenced by manga’s history, expectations of the target reader(s), the receptivity of the North American book market, and a publisher’s mandate. As outlined in this report, today’s manga was heavily influenced by a long tradition of visual storytelling in Japan, and especially by the social, cultural, and economic changes that occurred during the Edo and postwar periods. These historical factors helped define what modern manga would eventually become, by introducing publishing norms such as serial-first publication, twisted story structure, and all ages appeal. Many of these norms still hold true for today’s manga—both in Japan, and in North America, where the form is growing more popular.

A key factor that contributed to the development of such a thriving North American manga industry was Tokypop’s “100% Authentic” campaign in 2002, which introduced an easily identifiable manga format defined by clear editorial, production, and promotion standards. It also created a publishing trend of emphasizing, rather than “domesticizing” Japanese content, resulting in a tension between accessibility and authenticity that remains a challenge for many Japanese-to-English manga publishers today. Publishers who wish to publish Japanese-to-English manga translations must hence learn to balance those two goals to avoid alienating readers—especially when those readers are kids or teens.

A second factor that has contributed to manga's growth in the West is recent research connecting the form with improved visual literacy and other educational benefits. These findings have led to increasing interest from parents, teachers, and librarians. As a result, kids and teen manga sales are booming, and publishers have taken notice. More publishers are releasing kid-friendly manga than ever before, often with limited experience in the area.

This report followed one publisher as it embarked on that journey. Although D+Q has some experience with translations, manga, and children's books, Shigeru Mizuki's Kitaro series was the company's first project that combined all three, and hence presented unique opportunities and challenges. If successful, it would better establish the company within the children's market, while still gaining sales from manga and other graphic novel readers. At the same time, failure was a real possibility; the project was complicated by several factors, including the differing expectations of Kitaro's potential audiences, the fact that the books would be published in series, D+Q's relatively limited experience with children's book marketing, and the many translation- and production-related challenges that occur with Japanese-to-English manga translations. To overcome these challenges and publish the series successfully, D+Q had to achieve balance between two of its core values: fulfilling readers' needs and supporting its artists. The strong sales and positive publicity of the first volume of the series (*The Birth of Kitaro*) suggest that, so far, D+Q's strategy is working well.

What is the significance of this success for North American publishing? As demand for high quality children's manga continues to grow, more and more publishers are trying their hand at manga translations. Many of these publishers may have never published manga, or even graphic novels before, and may be inexperienced with visual translations. Others may have never published for children before, and may not be aware of the unique accessibility demands of this audience. These publishers will face similar translation and production challenges as D+Q did—challenges that, in many cases, they may be unprepared to surmount. Those who plan to add manga to their lists will hence need to identify and understand the form's many idiosyncrasies and the challenges they pose in order to succeed, as D+Q did. They will need to understand the differing expectations of the manga and kids' book markets, and apply publishing strategies accordingly. Understanding the historical context and educational opportunities for the form can help inform those strategies, and ensure that a given book reaches the largest readership possible. This report provides insight into that context while also showcasing the application of those strategies through

a practical, real-world example. The translation and production choices made by D+Q for the Kitaro series and outlined in this report can thus be seen as a case study for aspiring kids' manga publishers and a guide to executing similar projects. D+Q's experiences with the Kitaro series demonstrate that bringing a fascinating Japanese manga to young, North American readers is a difficult—but ultimately rewarding—feat.

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