TRANSCREATION: INTERSECTIONS OF CULTURE AND COMMERCE IN JAPANESE TRANSLATION AND LOCALIZATION

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B.A. in Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, College of William and Mary, 2014

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

The Dietrich School of Arts & Sciences in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

University of Pittsburgh

2016

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

DIETRICH SCHOOL OF ARTS & SCIENCES

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April 8, 2016

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This study looks at text-heavy examples of translated Japanese popular media, such as recent video games and manga (Japanese comics) to explore the recent evolution of Japanese-English translation and localization methods. While acknowledging localization's existence as a facet of the larger concept of translation itself, the work examines "translation" and "localization" as if they were two ends of a spectrum; through this contrast, the unique techniques and goals of each method as seen in translated media can be more effectively highlighted. After establishing these working definitions, they can then be applied as a rubric to media examples to determine which "translative" or "localizing" techniques were employed in the translation process. The media examples chosen as case studies for this examination were selected on the merits of their specific interplays of "translative" and "localizing" factors, such as cultural authenticity versus commercial palatability, the values of unofficial translation versus official localization, and the impact of globalization on what is or is not "translatable." Ultimately, the goal of this project is not only to shed light on the varied motivations and methods of translating Japanese media, but to potentially provide a frame of reference for new efforts in bringing Japanese media to English-speaking shores: once these techniques have been clarified, they can be synthesized in novel ways to create more effective translations – or localizations – in the future.

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1.0   INTRODUCTION

As time marches forward, the phenomenon of globalization—the "process of interaction and integration among the people, companies, and governments of different nations"—has increasingly solidified itself as an undeniable force in modern life (globalization101.org). People are being connected in countless ways without even realizing it: in the course of a single day, someone in France may drive to an Ethiopian restaurant in a German car, where they discuss the contents of a British television show using a Korean cell phone. Despite this, many people's first thoughts upon hearing the word "globalization" turn towards mass exports of Western culture. Of course, with restaurants like McDonald's having expanded into "over 36,000 locations in over 100 countries" and the English language now being spoken by 339 million people worldwide, such thoughts certainly have some justification (about.mcdonalds.com, ethnologue.com). However, one of the most intriguing effects of globalization has been one imported into English-speaking countries instead of one exported from them: the appeal of Japanese culture. At the forefront of this charge is Japanese popular media, such as video games, anime, and *manga* (Japanese comic books). In the past twenty years alone, these media have experienced an exponential surge in popularity. For example, in 1996, *Pokémon*, the first ambassador for many an English-speaking child into Japanese popular culture, had only just been released in Japan; it would be another two years before most Americans had ever heard of Pikachu (pokemon.co.jp, pokemon.com). Nowadays, Crunchyroll, a website where users can

watch anime or read *manga* online, often shortly after its release in Japan, noted that as of October 2015 it had over ten million registered users worldwide (animenewsnetwork.com). Even mainstream bookstores like Barnes and Noble now carry enough *manga* to divide it into categories as specific as "Contemporary Romance Manga," "Historical Fantasy Manga," and "Romantic Fantasy Manga" (barnesandnoble.com).

But this explosion of popularity alone is not what makes this phenomenon particularly intriguing. Rather, it is the bridge between the consumers and these products—that is, translation—that is truly unique. As one would expect, Japanese popular media has been translated before being released to the general English-speaking public, whether via textual translation, dubbing, subtitling, or a combination of these methods. In some cases, the content of the media was edited further in order to ensure it was "linguistically and culturally appropriate for a particular local market"; this process is known as localization (O'Hagan 212). However, thanks to the currents of globalization and high-speed communication enabled by the internet, these translations and localizations of Japanese popular media landed in a perfect storm of sorts. Fans of Japanese media are often producing their own unofficial translations at the same time as distributors are selling official localizations, and the advent of social media sites has enabled much closer communication between the creators or localizers of a product and the consumers of that product, which can in turn affect future localizations. The boundaries ordinarily found in translation, such as the boundary between consumer and producer, and the boundary between translation and localization as they are perceived by these consumers and producers, are beginning to blur together in ways not seen in literary translation. With regards to Japanese popular media, the question is no longer about the task of the translator, but the translators: here, translation is becoming a participatory effort.

However, to illustrate the key essence of this new form of translation, it is useful to refer to Venuti's famed concept of the invisibility of the translator. As he describes it, it is the desire for an "illusion of transparency" in a translated work, an assumption that a good translation "reflects the foreign writer's personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text" (Venuti 1). In other words, it is the idea that a reader judges a translation on how easily it is read, and how natural it appears, ignorant of the effort necessary to create such a level of readability in the first place. But the form of translation or localization found within the sphere of Japanese translated popular media is almost the opposite. Clarity within a translated text may still be valued, but the translator behind the text is far from invisible. The same communicative pathways that bore the currents of globalization enabled fans of Japanese popular media to more easily discover and share information about Japanese language and culture, creating a consumer base that is considerably conscious of the fact that what they consume is foreign. Furthermore, websites such as Legends of Localization specifically track and note the differences between the Japanese versions of games and their English localizations, while many localization teams now offer insight into the choices they made during the process for curious consumers to find online (legendsoflocalization.com, siliconera.com). In other words, as translations and localizations of Japanese popular media transform into a group effort, they also begin shifting towards a philosophy of a visible translator (or translators) as the norm.

The concept of such a new and evolving form of media, as well as the equally new and evolving field of translation of this media, is a fascinating one, and for this reason it is the central point of focus for the questions this thesis will ask: how does this new area of translation view the concepts of translation and localization? Are there certain advantages or disadvantages to these concepts? Does the group effort method provide any unique benefits to a translation or

localization? How do different translated or localized works illustrate the visibility of the translator? And finally, can the answers to these questions be implemented in such a way that future translations or localizations of Japanese popular media can use them in the process?

To find these answers, first, the concepts of translation and localization will be explored, both as they are traditionally viewed and as they are viewed by those within the sphere of Japanese popular media. Then, four case studies—the PlayStation Portable game *Danganronpa*, the Game Boy Advance game *Mother 3*, the *Weekly Shōnen Jump manga* title *Medaka Box*, and the Nintendo 3DS game *Yo-Kai Watch*—each one chosen for its relation to Japanese translation or localization, will be examined to illustrate the previously explored concepts in a different way. Hopefully, the end result will not only elucidate the importance of this up-and-coming field in translation, but provide examples of this theory in action that can then be practically applied for future translation or localization projects in this area.

2.0   DEFINING TRANSLATION AND LOCALIZATION

2.1   GENERAL DEFINITIONS

As mentioned above, it is necessary to construct working definitions for translation and localization within the sphere of Japanese popular media; without them, no basis will exist by which the case studies can be properly examined. To do so, translation and localization must be defined twice: first, as the concepts are most commonly viewed, and second, as they are understood by the consumers and creators of Japanese popular media. Both definitions are equally important for this thesis. Knowledge of translation is, of course, integral for any form of translation theory, and here it also serves as a comparison point to illustrate just how the working definitions have changed from their original ones. Meanwhile, the creation of working definitions is especially important in an area where the perception of the consumer is as valuable a form of input as the perception of the creator. In other words, the working definitions will break new ground, but also require the basis of preexisting axioms.

2.1.1   Translation

The first to be examined is that from which all three of the other definitions will take root: translation. To define translation is a deceptively daunting task. Merriam-Webster simply deems

it "an act, process, or instance of rendering from one language into another," which is certainly correct (merriam-webster.com). But after pondering this short phrase, a question may arise: is it really so simple to render text from one language into another? After all, the continued existence of human translators suggests that merely matching each word or phrase with its equivalent in a desired language, as a machine translator would, is not enough to be considered rendering the text in a new language. Or, perhaps, it is not that word-for-word matching is not translation, but instead an unsuccessful type of translation, since the text has been changed even if it may be incomprehensible. This becomes easier to understand when considering that the message words convey may not always be the sum of their parts, as instances of sarcasm or idioms illustrate. What this implies, then, is that a successful type of translation takes the message of a text, not necessarily the text itself, and presents it in another language. It also suggests that the goal of a translation is communication, to accurately convey the meaning of a text between languages.

Of course, the mention of meaning adds yet another layer of complexity to translation. For some texts, there is very little room to argue upon meaning, such as the "STOP" on a stop sign, or the name "hydrochloric acid" in a chemistry book. Where the idea of meaning truly becomes a topic of contention is the field of literary translation. Works of literature rarely have a single meaning or interpretation, it is often unclear which portions of the text are considered to contribute to the overall message of a work, and even if an author held a particular intent while writing a piece, there is no obligation for readers to hold that interpretation above any others. In other words, determining what meaning should be conveyed, if such a thing exists in the first place, is exceedingly difficult. It is no surprise, then, that much of translation theory concerns itself with literary translation. For example, Walter Benjamin's well-known essay, "The Task of the Translator," posits that "fidelity in the translation of individual words can almost never fully

reproduce the meaning they have in the original," but that a translator should "liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work" (Benjamin 79, 80-1). This suggests, interestingly enough, that there is a degree of devotion to the text that is considered useful for conveying the message of a literary work. Or, to view it from a different perspective, part of a literary work's message could exist within the foreignness endemic to its original text, and as such should be preserved. In considering this process, Benjamin highlights the clash at the heart of translation as a whole: the struggle between devotion to text and clarity in the target language, between ease of accessibility and preservation of the foreign, and how to best employ these concepts and most effectively convey the message of a work, whatever the translator may deem it to be.

2.1.2   Localization

In many ways, then, the definition of localization is not all too far from that of translation in practice. Simply put, it is "the process of adapting a product or content to a specific locale or market," which includes practices such as "adapting graphics to target markets" or "modifying content to suit the tastes and consumption habits of other markets" (gala-global.org). Notably, this definition does not exclude translation itself; changing the text of a novel from Japanese to English, for example, can easily be interpreted as adapting the novel for a specific English-speaking locale. In fact, where text is concerned, there is little to no difference between a localization and a translation; even changes made to the text for cultural reasons can be justified as the type of changes a translator would make to a translation to more easily convey a message to the target audience. Where localization primarily differs from translation is in its reach. Translation ends with text; localization takes the concept and applies it everywhere else. For

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example, a localized video game not only requires the translation of any text appearing within the game, but also "extra technical processes such as extraction and reintegration of text fragments" to ensure that text appears properly (O'Hagan 212). Even with this difference in scale, however, the general definition of localization is still very much connected to translation. The goal of adaptation to a new locale or market suggests that localization has more of a commercial connotation attached to it than translation does, but the process of localization is essentially an expanded version of translation.

2.2   WORKING DEFINITIONS

While these more general definitions of translation and localization are quite similar, the working definitions of translation and localization with regards to Japanese popular media are considerably different from one another, despite originating from connected concepts. This is a result of the blurred boundaries between consumers and creators, leading to a combination of the general definitions of translation and localization and the perceived effects of translation and localization on translated Japanese products. In turn, this blurring of even the definition of translation itself has two major effects. The first is a change in the status between translation and localization; here, they are closer to being opposite ends of a spectrum rather than localization simply existing as a subset of translation as a whole. The second is a change in the form the working definitions take; as they are shaped by perception, they appear more like images or ideals, leading a translated work to be judged based on how well it fits into one of these images.

2.2.1 Translation as Ideal

For example, the working definition of translation within Japanese popular media falls in line with "foreignizing translation," in which an effort is made to preserve some notion that a work's text was originally of another language (Venuti 20). This image of translation is associated with a desire to convey what a consumer considers the "true meaning" of a work, which usually implies a more direct translation of the original text. This drive for supposedly correct communication can also manifest in the retention of Japanese cultural aspects in English versions of text, such as honorifics (the formal *-san*, the diminuitive *-chan,* etc.) or the upperclassman-underclassman relationships in school settings (using *senpai* "upperclassman" and *kōhai* "underclassman"). Additionally, this image of translation is more closely linked to fans and consumers than it is to official distributors; the latter group is known for the localizations it publishes, and unofficial translations headed by groups of fans are certainly not uncommon. In fact, fan translations are often an area in which the values of this working definition are put into action, as Figure 1 shows.

Figure 1: Excerpt from Yakitate!! Japan scanlation

Figure 1 is a page from the *manga Yakitate!! Japan* (Freshly Baked!! Japan), exhibiting a particular form of fan translation known as scanlation (mangahere.co). As the name implies, scanlation is "the process of scanning, translating, and editing foreign comics to modify the work into another language," and because its target audience is usually preexisting fans of Japanese popular culture, it is common to find instances of the aforementioned Japanese cultural references (insidescanlation.com). The *Yakitate!!* scanlation excerpt provides three such examples on a single page. The sound effect *ba,* illustrating the bird flying away, has been left in its original Japanese; the honorific *-yan* (similar to *-san*) has similarly been retained in the English dialogue; finally, a footnote with the Japanese translation for "parrot" has been provided to explain the wordplay that utilizes it (playing *inko* "parrot" off the previous page's reference to Inca). But while it may appear unpolished at first glance, this scanlation excerpt is actually an example of a successful translation according to the working definition. The retention of these cultural aspects can be seen as devotion to the original Japanese text. Even the explanation of the Japanese pun follows this image: though the ideal situation, a matching English joke, could not be created, at least it became possible for readers to understand exactly how the wordplay worked in the original text. Finally, the scanlation also hints at the type of freedom afforded to the translation side of the working definition spectrum. Because the type of work that would be considered a successful translation under this ideal is so often fanmade, issues of polish, deadlines, and mass appeal do not tend to burden these translations. In other words, translation in the sphere of Japanese popular media is free to convey the foreignness—and in turn, what many consumers interpret as the "true meaning"—of a work in as much detail as a translator desires.

2.2.2   Localization as Ideal

If the working definition for translation paints a picture of a process undertaken for the love of a text, with painstaking effort to ensure the resulting product is as close to the so-called original meaning of that text as possible, the working definition for localization can be said to be the opposite. As the goal of localization is to adapt a work and achieve a better reception of that work in the process, its image is one of modification and practicality rather than the devotion encountered in the image of translation. It focuses on the creation of a new text over a purely dedicated reproduction of the original, a type of translation process O'Hagan deems "functionalist" (O'Hagan 212). In a sense, it is the step forward to translation's step back. However, the image of localization is not always viewed in a favorable light; for example, consumers who subscribe to the approach suggested by the working definition of translation may find fault with the ideal of localization. To them, the changes made to Japanese media as it undergoes localization obscure the message of the work at worst and are unnecessary additions at best. This attitude is not simply a relic of the days before globalization took hold, either. Complaints as recent as October 2015—in that specific case, over Nintendo of America's choice to include references to an internet meme in the dialogue of the Nintendo 3DS title *The Legend of Zelda: Tri Force Heroes*—can be heard decrying localization choices seen as detrimental (nintendolife.com).

But even as localizers make decisions that reinforce an exclusively negative view of the working definition for localization, the concept itself is evolving. For example, one of the ways in which the creator-consumer line is blurring is that localizers themselves, such as the game company Capcom's Janet Hsu, are opening up about the localization process, and revealing new ways of thinking about localization by doing so. In her article describing localization for the

Nintendo DS series of *Ace Attorney* games, Hsu considered one of her goals "to convey the same emotional experience that a Japanese player has while playing Gyakuten Saiban [the Japanese name of the series] to a Western player playing Ace Attorney" (capcom-unity.com). Not only can this "emotional accuracy" act as an acceptable reason for the modification inherent in localization, but it can also illustrate to consumers that localization, despite its assumed end goal of profit, can be motivated by the love for a work just as much as a translation can be. With this in mind, the driving force behind the working definition of localization is likely accessibility. However, this is not the type of textual accessibility found in the working definition of translation; rather, it utilizes the freedom of localizers to shape a work as they see fit. When localization delivers a message, it may not be as "true" in meaning as one delivered with the ideals of translation in mind, but it does so knowing that it will reach everyone it wants to.

In conclusion, though both working definitions are associated with different motivations, and both are received differently, it is intriguing to notice that both translation and localization are beginning to shift towards a single goal of accuracy from different angles. It also raises a notable point regarding the field of translation and localization in Japanese popular media: if, even within concepts as different as the working definitions, there are areas where boundaries of accuracy and foreignness begin to blur, then the case studies, which each boast their own narrative in addition to their balancing act of these two definitions, should highlight the existence of a visible translator even more powerfully.

3.0 CASE STUDIES

3.1 DANGANRONPA

To begin the exploration of these case studies, it seems apt to lead with a title whose clash of values of translation and localization can be more easily pinpointed before progressing to more complex narrative struggles. However, simplicity for simplicity's sake would merely obscure some of the subtleties that will also appear throughout the different case studies. Luckily, there is an option that both covers many of these proverbial bases and takes a relatively straightforward approach on the matter, which comes in an unlikely package: a 2010 PlayStation Portable title known as *Danganronpa*.

This game, whose mouthful of a title comes from *dangan* "bullet" and *ronpa,* roughly "winning an argument," is a mystery game released by the company Spike Chunsoft near the end of November 2010 (lparchive.org/Dangan-Ronpa). In it, the player takes on the role of a student admitted via lottery to a high school of almost supernaturally gifted students, who soon find themselves trapped within the school building by a vindictive teddy bear-like creature named Monokuma (from *monokurōmu* "monochrome" and *kuma* "bear"). The catch is that the students do have the chance to escape, but only if they murder another student and successfully avoid being discovered as the culprit in a "class trial" (danganronpa.us). It then becomes the player's

job to solve the mystery of each inevitable murder, while also working towards discovering the true mastermind behind the game's major events.

As is common for mystery games, *Danganronpa* requires precise wording in order to preserve the nature of clues in addition to the usual hurdles of translation. The game is also textually heavy; it is not just a mystery game but one in the style of a "visual novel," a type of game that "[consists] of just reading a story as the text scrolls along the screen" (1up.com). Even the fast-paced "class trial" segments involve literally shooting down the arguments of the non-player characters with "Evidence Bullets" as they appear in midair (lparchive.org/Dangan-Ronpa/Update%2021). However, it is not merely the type of translation or localization necessary for *Danganronpa* that makes it a unique case study—it is the *number* of English-language versions of the game that makes it worth digging for evidence. In fact, three different editions, two fan translations and one official localization exist, all three of which have experienced their own share of the spotlight. Additionally, each translation has influenced those which follow it in some form: the popularity of the first garnered increased exposure for the second, and positive fan reception of both the first and the second led to strict expectations of the third. As a result, even if each translation is rather clear in the direction it takes on its own, the overall shift that takes place between each one can illustrate the broad variety of technique and motivation among different translators and localizers. In fact, this variety is so far-reaching, that even a shared source material can produce rather different results.

3.1.1 Orenronen and the "Let's Play"

The first of these translations, and arguably, the most important of the three, was a fan translation starting from early November 2011 and coming to a close just over a year later in late December

2012. On the forums of SomethingAwful.com, a user named "orenronen" took it upon himself to play *Danganronpa*, meticulously capturing screenshot images and dialogue as new instances appeared. He then uploaded these screenshots alongside the requisite lines of translated dialogue, over the course of a year, to the SomethingAwful.com forums for other users to read (lparchive.org/Dangan-Ronpa). This process of posting commentary alongside screenshots or videos of one's playthrough of a video game is known as a "Let's Play," and is fairly common on the SomethingAwful.com forums from which Orenronen originated (lparchive.org/history). What makes Orenronen's Let's Play different from the majority, however, is that all of the dialogue and text posted from the game had been translated from Japanese into English by Orenronen himself, allowing other forum users to experience the story of *Danganronpa* without any knowledge of Japanese required (lparchive.org/Dangan-Ronpa). Additionally impressive is that Orenronen translated the majority of a video game from Japanese into English despite "neither Japanese nor English [being his] native language" (lparchive.org/Dangan-Ronpa). Normally, users who wished to create a "Let's Play" forum thread of their own would record videos of themselves playing a game of their choice and commenting as they did so, but Orenronen had a few additional hurdles that likely influenced his decision to translate and upload the game as he did. First, and most obviously, *Danganronpa* was Japanese; even if Orenronen had chosen to upload ordinary videos and translate them in real time, it would likely leave little time to add any commentary of his own. Second, as mentioned before, the game was particularly text-heavy and story-based, meaning there would be little to no points of visual interest in the majority of any videos recorded. However, brief subtitled videos of the fast-paced "class trials" were uploaded alongside the textual translation, for those who wanted to see the game mechanic in action (lparchive.org/Dangan-Ronpa/Update%2021). Finally, unlike the vast majority of

games chosen for "Let's Plays," *Danganronpa* was virtually unknown among English-speaking fans of Japanese popular media at the time Orenronen began his project, and as such, he lacked any real reference for English speakers to use. In fact, one of the main reasons the game was even translated was that Orenronen "[doubted] it [would] ever be localized for the west" but that it would be "a shame [if] people [couldn't] see it" (lparchive.org/Dangan-Ronpa). It may be, then, that part of the reason for choosing the transcription route would be to ensure that nothing would be lost or obscured as it could be in a video. Additionally, the text-based format would lead to greater ease in editing and correcting mistakes.

The translation itself obviously falls along the lines of the working definition for translation. The writing style very much has the feeling of a "straight translation," with many lines that are short or concise—a likely holdover from translating each line or paragraph as it appears in game. For example, the first few lines of the main character's self-introduction illustrate this almost rapid-fire quality: "My appearance, as you can see, is just your regular average high school student./Inside, I'm just the same.../My personality, my skills, my school record... /There is absolutely nothing special about them" (lparchive.org/Dangan-Ronpa/Update%2001). But while the straightforward dialogue alone resonates with the working definition of translation, Orenronen's effort truly shines in its dedication to provide as much information about *Danganronpa* as possible. This is primarily achieved through bouts of side commentary that appear when it becomes necessary to explain new topics. Some examples include an explanation on honorifics, "the cause of many flamewars" (and a mention that "they're useful and can't really be successfully removed in this type of work"), brief background information on the voice actors portraying the characters (for example, "Sayaka Maizono is played by Makiko Ohmoto. She's the voice of Nintendo's Kirby, which is all you should really

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know"), and descriptions of the game's background music (in fact, the explanation that Masafumi Takafuda composed the game's soundtrack actually appears before any of the translated dialogue) (lparchive.org/Dangan-Ronpa/Update%2001). No matter what the situation, if a newly introduced element seems even the slightest bit unfamiliar, chances are high that an explanatory chunk of commentary will be there to fill readers in. As a result, certain foreign terms can remain in the text as they were originally presented even if a reader would not understand them at first glance. An example of this would be the term "herbivore man," explained as a man who is "meek and shy and prefers to stay home and mess with his hobbies rather than doing manly things like going after girls" (lparchive.org/Dangan-Ronpa/Update%2026). In this case, a reader can now also hazard an educated guess on the origin of the term. This inadvertent education is one of the positive side effects of a work striving to be a translation in the field of Japanese popular media.

At this point, it has been all but established that Orenronen's "Let's Play" is an example of a successful translation, combining straightforward yet readable dialogue with more than enough side information to explain the finer details of *Danganronpa,* but there is one final point that elevates his translation further: the format of the "Let's Play" itself. As noted above, the *Danganronpa* "Let's Play" was unusual in that its primary focus was the translation of the game; ordinary "Let's Plays" derive their entertainment factor from commentary on the game being featured. By selecting a format where side commentary was not only welcome, but expected, Orenronen was able to provide as much information on the game as he desired without creating a jarring experience for readers. This goes beyond the image of translation as merely being free to present information on a translated work, and hints at the possibility of readability for even the most information-loaded works.

In any case, these qualities in Orenronen's translation did not go unnoticed. Though virtually nonexistent among English-speaking fans of Japanese popular media when the "Let's Play" began, *Danganronpa* began to pick up steam as the "Let's Play" progressed. In fact, the original SomethingAwful.com thread "generated over 800 pages of replies, making the thread one of the largest LP threads on the website" (knowyourmeme.com) It may not be too extreme a claim, then, to suggest that this translation is the primary reason English-speaking fans of *Danganronpa* existed in any sizable quantity.

3.1.2 Project Zetsubou

The second translation of *Danganronpa* to be released, this project took a step beyond textual translation alone to connect consumers more directly to the game. Created by a group of fan translators and programmers under the name "Project Zetsubou" (from *zetsubō* "despair," a common word in the game), this translation is not simply text-based. In its completed form, this fan translation is a patch program that can be applied to a Japanese copy of the game, legal or otherwise, that will cause the game's text to be displayed in English instead. Essentially, it is a translation of a game that still allows for the game itself to be played. Though Project Zetsubou started their translation efforts in November 2011—roughly the same time as Orenronen began his own—it notably was *not* inspired by the "Let's Play." In fact, Zetsubou's FAQ page explicitly declares that "[they] didn't even stumble onto it until [they] were over 50% done with [their] translation" (danganronpa.wordpress.com/faq). Instead, the Project's first foray into translating material from the series started as early as January, the coincidental timing of their November translations being simply that (danganronpa.wordpress.com/about-us). Even so, by the time Project Zetsubou released its translation patch for *Danganronpa* in June 2013,

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Orenronen's own translation had been completed for nearly half a year (danganronpa.wordpress.com). If it came to the point that Project Zetsubou felt the need to address the "Let's Play" on its own website, it is not out of the realm of possibility that they found themselves with considerably more of a potential audience thanks to Orenronen's own translation spreading knowledge about *Danganronpa* to many English speakers for the first time.

Zetsubou's translation, much like its predecessor, came about from the desire of people wanting to share an enjoyable game with those who otherwise could not; unlike its predecessor, it went about doing so with a philosophy somewhere in between the working definitions of translation and localization. While the primary goal was "to capture the *spirit* of the game," and "to change as little as possible" in the transition from Japanese to English, a considerably translation-aligned hope, Project Zetsubou also desired "to make [the game] as accessible as possible"—in other words, to localize it to some degree (danganronpa.wordpress.com/faq). One example of this mixture of goals is the translation choice for character titles—each character is known as a *chō kōkōkyū no* _____, literally "Super High School-Level _____." Project Zetsubou chose to translate this as "Super Duper High School _____," based partially on English used within the Japanese version of the game, while also employing some creative flair in the descriptors; *yakyū senshu* ("baseball player") became "All Star," *gyanburā* ("gambler") became "High Roller," and so on (danganronpa.wordpress.com/dr1/tl-notes/general). However, fan reception to the titles in particular was somewhat lukewarm, considering them "unnecessary backflips of forced ~creativity~" or "kind of corny" (danganronpa.wordpress.com). The majority of localizing changes made to the game, though, are simply attempts to make the characters' dialogue smoother and more natural for English readers, a point that Orenronen's more straightforward translation occasionally struggled with.

In essence, this places Project Zetsubou somewhere in the middle of the spectrum. Its motivation, both for its creation and for its translation choices, fall more in line with the "doing it for love" desires of communication and authenticity, while the amount of modification made to both the text and to the game software itself suggest localizing techniques had a sizable role to play in the completion of the project (not to mention the goal of increased accessibility). As the blurring of boundaries, be it between translation and localization or between consumers and creators, is a key tenet of the field of translation of Japanese popular media, it is only natural that certain approaches would draw from both the ideals of translation and localization. It also foretells of more than just an increased fan capacity to learn Japanese—full-fledged translation and programming efforts like Project Zetsubou's are evidence of fans' growing abilities to create translated media with nearly professional levels of polish.

3.1.3   *Danganronpa: Trigger Happy Havoc*

The third and final version of *Danganronpa*, and the only official localization of the three English incarnations, is not particularly novel in terms of its translation or localization in comparison to its fan-created forerunners. However, the process behind its creation is unique, granting a small glimpse into the types of choices that go into an official localization as well as the strategies only available to someone in a commercial position. Released in February 2014 for the PlayStation Vita under the moniker *Danganronpa: Trigger Happy Havoc* by NIS America, the game sported many common hallmarks of a localization—dialogue made to sound more naturally English, some cultural references changed or removed, and so on (danganronpa.us). From a superficial level, many of the choices taken resemble those of Project Zetsubou in their general goals. Even their motivation, "attempting to convey the spirit and tone of the story while

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still making it accessible for potential fans regardless of how familiar or unfamiliar they may be with the game" is quite similar, even if NIS America has the additional incentive of making a profit off that accessibility (siliconera.com).

NIS America has one advantage that Orenronen and Project Zetsubou lack: direct access to Spike Chunsoft, the original creators of the game, for consultation. This is not necessarily a groundbreaking concept for official localizations, but it illustrates that tactics from the localization side of the spectrum can be just as useful and applicable as those on the translative side. For example, the ability to have a game designer alter textual, graphical, or audio elements can add layers of immersion to a localization that translation alone, no matter how accessible, can accomplish. This privilege, conveniently enough, can also be used to make choices associated with the desire in translation for so-called "true meaning", even within the scope of a localization; after all, few consumers of Japanese popular media would argue that input from the writers of an original text could detract from that "true meaning." In fact, this is one way in which the evolving image of localization takes action: assuming part of the desire of official localizers is still to convey the original message in some form, they must employ some of the seemingly "authentic" choices usually afforded to the translative side of the spectrum.

The primary reason *Danganronpa* was chosen as a case study was its potential to illustrate a variety of methods and choices within translation and localization of Japanese popular media, and by revealing Orenronen's more standard translation, NIS America's more standard localization, and Project Zetsubou's hybrid approach, the game certainly proved fruitful for study. The differences between these three translated works also emphasize the influence of globalization in the process of translation and localization; official channels such as NIS

America's distribution can be matched or even surpassed by consumer networks, as Orenronen's "Let's Play" suggests.

Finally, the question of the narrative of *Danganronpa* comes into play. The methods of translation or localization for the three different incarnations of the game suggest a shift towards a "visible translator," in that their creators make the existence of the translating process taking place quite noticeable. But what can *Danganronpa* itself contribute to the evolving field of Japanese popular media translation? The answer lies in the game's unique design concept, "psycho pop-art" (lparchive.org/Dangan-Ronpa/Update%20145). It describes the juxtaposition of flashy and stylish elements alongside the dark and gruesome murder mystery plot; though it serves to dial back these darker elements, it also creates a completely over-the-top atmosphere that barely gives players enough time to let the experience sink in. The most extreme example of this tour de force is the portrayal of the game's mastermind during the climactic final "class trial": the one behind all of the suffering the characters have experienced up to this point in the game is revealed to be Junko Enoshima, a fairly nonthreatening if not stylishly dressed teenage girl (lparchive.org/Dangan-Ronpa/Update%20137). But in another whiplash, Junko's true "super high school-level" talent is shown to be *despair,* and she quickly makes good on such a strange and imposing status by cycling through several different personalities as the main characters speak to her (lparchive.org/Dangan-Ronpa/Update%20138). The entire display, a mixture of comedy, high-speed dialogue, and vague dread is difficult to take in all at once—and yet it is emblematic of the game's unique personality. It is this "psycho pop-art" personality that brings the visibility of the translator to the forefront, as the preservation of such an atmosphere manifests itself as a certain foreignness within translations of *Danganronpa.* In other words, a

good translation or localization of *Danganronpa* should take consumers out of their comfort zone because the game itself is already trying to do just that.

3.2   MOTHER 3

In the previous section, the concept of boundary dissolution—specifically between consumer and creator—and its impact was briefly touched upon. Here, it will be expanded upon to cover the additional blurring of translative and localizing values within a work. Coincidentally enough, one of the most ideal projects to use as a case study for this purpose is also one of the most famous fan translations—or rather, fan *localizations*—in recent years: the translation and localization of *Mother 3.*

3.2.1   History of the Fan Localization Project

Released in Japan (and, as of this year, *only* Japan) in April 2006 for the Nintendo Game Boy Advance, *Mother 3* can most aptly be summarized with the single word "quirky." It is a role-playing game in which Lucas, a psychic boy, must go on a quest to discover seven artifacts and save the world, encountering just as many humorous oddities as deceptively emotional moments. Yet while the story and gameplay has received generally positive critical attention, it may not seem particularly deserving of an in-depth fan-made localization. Looking into the game's history, however, may shed some light on the process—after all, if it is *Mother 3,* would there not at least be a *Mother 2* to precede it?

As a matter of fact, there was. Unsurprisingly, *Mother 3* was a sequel to a *Mother 2*—a very long-awaited sequel, as *Mother 2* was released on the Super Nintendo nearly eleven years earlier. Unlike its sequel (and in fact, its prequel), it was released to English-speaking markets, under the name *EarthBound* to avoid confusion. Much like *Mother 3, EarthBound* was also a quirky role-playing game in which Ness, a psychic boy, went on a quest to save the world, and it too balanced its absurdity with surprisingly heartfelt moments. Though it sold a pitiful 140,000 copies in its initial 1995 foray in North America, *EarthBound* eventually became a cult classic with its own cadre of diehard fans (shacknews.com). Since then, the appearance of Ness as a playable character in Nintendo's popular *Super Smash Bros.* series, word-of-mouth recommendations through fan websites like Starmen.net, and most recently, the March 2016 rerelease of the Super Nintendo title on the Virtual Console service have led more players to rediscover *EarthBound* over the years, garnering it more positive critical acclaim, which it continues to boast of to this day (shacknews.com, kotaku.com). What this meant was that by the time *Mother 3* was released in 2006, nearly eleven years after *Mother 2*, the event was recognized worldwide, with many English-speaking fans just as excited as those in Japan, if not more so. *EarthBound* maniacs and casual gaming fans alike feverishly anticipated the chance to experience this new chapter in the *Mother* saga for themselves. However, hope soon turned to disappointment once a "Nintendo localization employee in an interview…admitted that he knew nothing about Mother 3 besides the name, and didn't expect NoA to touch the game anytime soon," cementing that Nintendo of America had no plans of releasing an official localization of the game in the near future (starmen.net/devotion).

In response, a group of dedicated individuals gathered from the *EarthBound* fan website Starmen.net, led by fan translator and well-known user "Mato," announced in November 2006

their plans to create a full translation and localization of *Mother 3* on their own. A fan-led effort of this scale all but guaranteed a wide range of motivations for the project; some wanted to "get a dialogue going about the legitimacy of fan translations," while others wanted to convey the "beautifully crafted" and "inordinate amount of text" within the game (Starmen.net). Mainly, though, it was the thought that "EarthBound's fans have earned the right to play the game they've waited so long for" that drove the project forward, eventually leading it to completion in October 2008 and the gratitude of many a "Starman" (Starmen.net).

As impressive as such an undertaking was, and as popular the *Earthbound/Mother* series had become, it did not seem as though the *Mother 3* project reached its levels of notoriety on these strengths alone. After all, the effort of the Starmen group was famous enough to earn its own Wikipedia page, an especially rare instance for an unofficial fan translation (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mother_3_fan_translation). What—or rather, *who* truly set the *Mother 3* project apart from other such work was its head translator, the aforementioned "Mato." In addition to his publicity within the *EarthBound* fan community, he had made quite a name for himself as Clyde Mandelin, a professional translator with plenty of prior experience and owner of Legends of Localization, a website tracking the changes video games underwent in the localization process (legendsoflocalization.com). Not only did this mean the project had a strong backbone in Mandelin, but his fervent interest in the localization process meant a fair chunk of his own progress was documented on his website.

3.2.2   Examination of the Fan Localization

Intriguingly enough, despite the majority of documentation on Starmen.net referring to the project as a fan translation, Mandelin's own reports dub it an "unofficial localization"

(legendsoflocalization.com/mother-3). This could suggest several different interpretations; perhaps Mandelin considered adaptations from the Japanese text a key function of the project, or maybe the translation work was done with a goal of general accessibility in mind. While he never exactly states exactly why he considers it as such—the majority of his discussion on the choices he made in the game's first chapter could easily be considered translative choices from a looser perspective—if there is anyone with enough knowledge on the subject to determine the qualifications of a "fan localization," it would be Mandelin.

The documented changes made to the game for its localization certainly give off the sense of those in a professional one; not only do they flow very naturally in English, they rarely, if ever, feel like unnecessary add-ons, and Mandelin's explanations behind the choices he and his team made in the process are often well-justified. For example, the text within the game often exhibits what Mandelin calls "purposely weird spelling or purposely incorrect grammar" when displaying characters' dialogue, such as "How long're you gonna sleep?!" rather than "How long are you going to sleep?!" (legendsoflocalization.com/mother-3) Although such casual speech may not be as "weird" or "incorrect" as Mandelin insists, the motivation for using it is probably similar to most reasons for using casual language in a translation or localization: it is the best approximate for the Japanese text it was translated from. Sure enough, Mandelin notes that it was an attempt to emulate the Japanese used in the original version of the game, which was much more casual-sounding than "'proper Japanese' you learn in the classroom" (legendsoflocalization.com/mother-3).

Notably, or perhaps justifiably for a "fan localization," the style of localization methods present throughout *Mother 3* blurs the border between translative and localizing values quite closely. In this sense, it is reminiscent of the hybrid approach of Project Zetsubou's translation

from section 3.1.2. The sense of devotion to the original work is palpable, and a great deal of effort is put into preserving its message as closely as possible. However, *Mother 3* goes further beyond, thanks to a translator with official localization experience standing at the helm. Mandelin's more refined senses on the matter enable him to cleverly change the text just enough to feel natural without becoming too forced. This balancing act of translative and localizing techniques also adds to the localized "feeling" of the translation in unintentional ways: in his attempts to localize the text into more casual-sounding English, Mandelin found himself inadvertently reusing uncommon figures of speech that had appeared in the 1995 localization of *EarthBound*, such as "scoot up" and "rubberneck" (legendsoflocalization.com).

This also provides some of the most powerful evidence for this work's unique status as a "fan localization." While one of the project's goals was to be a fan translated work held to the standard of writing of a professional localization, it was also attempting to remain faithful to the *Mother* series in both its original Japanese text *and* that of its localization, *EarthBound*. It is actively trying to present a player with a portrayal of the game closest to its so-called "true meaning", an action aligned with the working definition for translation, but as viewed through the same lens of quirkiness and style that a player may have encountered in *EarthBound*, itself a localization. For a concept that appears rather simple at first glance, this "fan localization" is quite impressive in how it blends the desire for polish in localization with the dedication to a text in translation; the fact that some of this dedication is directed at a localization itself results in a novel type of work.

As a matter of fact, this also illustrates the concept *Mother 3* brings to the field of Japanese popular translation and localization: the potential extremes and evolutions in translated works, borne from blurring the boundaries of consumers and creators and ideals of translation

and localization in multiple directions at once. At the same time, it highlights the almost organic nature by which new types of popular Japanese translations and localizations can be formed successfully. The mishmash of consumer, creator, translation, and localization, through its own chaos, led to a clean, orderly, and high-quality product, suggesting there are limitless ways to blur different boundaries and achieve exciting new results in Japanese popular translation and localization.

Finally, to touch briefly upon the narrative of *Mother 3* and its impact on translation and localization, it shares much of its overall feeling with its prequel *EarthBound*. Those who played the game and were drawn to the particular style in which the localization embellishes its worldview will likely feel a sense of familiarity upon playing *Mother 3,* making any visibility of a translator curiously a result of the prequel's localization. Of course, the sheer exposure of the *Mother 3* fan localization may also bring visibility to the translator, though the narrative behind the project's creation may not be the type that is desired here.

3.3   MEDAKA BOX

With both *Danganronpa*'s bevy of examples of different translative and localizing values and the concept of blending those values into unique factors as introduced by *Mother 3* discussed, one may feel confident in their ability to determine the ideal working definition to follow and the correct values to employ when translating Japanese popular media. However, this leaves one important area uncovered: the methods to employ when common strategies and values fail. What is the plan of attack for works deemed untranslatable? What is the best approach to take when

ordinary translation or localization ultimately does more harm than good? For "what if" situations like these and more, there is the third case study: *Medaka Box.*

Penned by Nisio Isin (*Nishio Ishin*, a pen name stylized to highlight the palindrome) and illustrated by Akira Akatsuki, *Medaka Box* was a manga serialized in the magazine *Weekly Shōnen Jump* from May 2009 to April 2013 (nisioisin-anime.com). Its original plot was fairly standard among *shōnen manga* (lit. "boy comics," a term to describe manga aimed at a mainly teenage male demographic), in which the titular Medaka Kurokami joins her high school's student council and with them encounters school hijinks and over-the-top battles. An English-language version of the series does exist, but only in the form of scanlations as introduced in section 2.2.1. Curiously, *Medaka Box* has never been officially localized into English as of April 2016.

However, the author of this *manga,* Nisio Isin, may partially be to blame for the dearth of its localization. More so than for his efforts in creating *manga,* Nisio is well known for writing a number of popular serialized novels, the most famous of which is *Bakemonogatari* (a mix of *bakemono* "ghost" or "monster" and *monogatari* "story"). As one might expect from an author with a palindrome for a pen name and a novel titled with a portmanteau word, a common theme in Nisio's works is the heavy use of wordplay. *Medaka Box* is no different in this regard: it is a pun on *meyasubako* ("suggestion box"), as the *yasu* can mean "cheap" in comparison to *daka* meaning "expensive."

But it is not as though Japanese wordplay will always invalidate the possibility of localizing a work. For example, the baking-themed manga *Yakitate!! Japan* ("Freshly Baked!! Japan") mentioned in section 2.2.1 is filled with just as many baked goods as it is puns, many of which also rely on visual humor. Despite the relatively small amount of breathing room for

creative liberty such jokes provide, the entirety of *Yakitate!!* has been localized into English, including the puns; some may be quite forced, but the amount of creativity employed to avoid plastering pages with translator's notes is nothing short of impressive. One example of this, the officially localized edition's version of the page displayed in Figure 1, can be seen in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Localized Yakitate!! Japan excerpt

Incidentally, "spink" refers to a "chaffinch," "a small European bird"; while a parrot does not quite fit this definition, it is not too far off the mark (merriam-webster.com). In any case, the word "spink" was probably chosen more for its ability to replicate the *inko-inka* pun in English than it was for bird classification, but it still demonstrates that some localizations can find ways to bring Japanese wordplay into English without an assortment of editor's notes attached. What, then, makes *Medaka Box* in particular such a battle for localizers?

The reason is in the type of wordplay *Medaka Box* utilizes. While the puns in *Yakitate!!* may be accompanied by images that limit the number of ways to translate them, a localizer can at least take solace in the fact that puns exist in English. Modifications that capture the same style of humor can be included without issue even if the actual words differ. On the other hand, *Medaka Box*'s wordplay tends to utilize functions of the Japanese language that lack any close English equivalents. For example, a character whose special ability revolves around the use of *kanji* appears as an opponent. By rearranging the individual parts of *kanji* as she pleases, she can subsequently change the physical properties of things around her, as if swapping out pieces of a puzzle to get a different picture. For example, by throwing a handful of small rocks at an opponent, she inflicts much more severe wounds than throwing rocks of that size ordinarily would—because when "rocks" (石) meet "skin" (皮), it "tears" (破). Later instances become even more egregious: the final battle of the story arc where the *kanji*-wielder appears is a modified version of *shiritori,* a Japanese word game where each player must say a word that starts with the syllable the previously spoken word ended in (http://www.sljfaq.org/afaq/shiritori.html). This modified *shiritori* also comes with the caveat of only being able to use each syllable once, but winning upon using all of them over the course of the game. However, the truly surprising moment is how Medaka achieves victory: she gets her

opponent to avoid using the syllables *u, sa,* and *n* by leading the conversation in such a way that nobody else in the room uses those three syllables in their own speech (http://www.mangahere.co/manga/medaka_box/v14/c158/). The end result is that those syllables would be used to form the word *kōsan* ("surrender"), a word that probably comes to mind when considering how such an exchange could even be localized.

These unique characteristics place *Medaka Box* squarely as a translation on the spectrum. Not only would it be an insurmountable task to convey a story like the *shiritori* incident without using Japanese, but it can be argued that the Japanese wordplay is such an integral part of *Medaka Box* that editing it would defeat the purpose of trying to bring the *manga* into English in the first place. *Medaka Box* also highlights the concept of a visible translator more strongly than the other case studies: it shows that for some works as deeply rooted in Japanese, the appearance of a visible translator is all but inevitable. However, the fact that *Medaka Box* was translated into English at all suggests that even extreme works have a place to thrive within the sphere of Japanese popular translation.

3.4   YO-KAI WATCH

While the previously presented case studies showcased different ways in which the blurred boundaries within Japanese popular translation can bring about a variety of unique and successful forms of translations and localizations, their impact was largely limited to preexisting consumers and creators of Japanese popular media. *Danganronpa* and *Medaka Box* give off an animesque vibe, and *Mother 3* was a sequel to a cult classic. This final case study may be

emblematic of localization efforts not only because of how it blurs the boundaries between translation and localization, but because it also crosses boundaries, boldly aiming for a much wider audience. After taking Japan by storm, this series is posed to invade the hearts of American children as once did Pokémon twenty years before: *Yo-Kai Watch*.

3.4.1 Description of the Franchise

To those unfamiliar with the series, *Yo-Kai Watch*, or *Yōkai Watch* in Japan, is a Nintendo 3DS role-playing game published by the company Level-5 and released in Japan during July 2013 (youkai-watch.jp/yw). Claims that the game may become the next Pokémon are not entirely unfounded; its focus on befriending and battling various *yōkai*, a word referring to a number of different supernatural entities found in Japanese folklore and whose closest English equivalent is akin to "apparition," has echoes of the similar *Pokémon* formula of exploring, battling, and capturing a wide variety of quasi-superpowered monsters.

And just like *Pokémon*, the game became a hit among Japanese children almost instantly, fueling its growth into a full-blown franchise. In addition to two sequels to the original role-playing game, *Yo-Kai Watch* now has an anime series, at least two different *manga* aimed at young boys and young girls respectively, additional 3DS spinoff games, and a vast empire comprised of any and every sort of merchandising opportunity imaginable—from more obvious ideas like a toy version of the titular Watch to more surprising items such as breakfast cereal, a rather rare sight in Japan. Of special note among this merchandise is the "Yo-Kai Medal," based on the in-game object that serves as proof of having befriended a *yōkai* and allowing its use in battle. Resembling small plastic coins, there is a Medal for each *yōkai*, complete with its likeness emblazoned on the coin. In other words, it is the ubiquitous collectible toy that all such

franchises require, the Yo-Kai Poké Ball of sorts. However, a type of barcode known as QR codes on the back of the Medals that interact with both the *Yo-Kai Watch* series of 3DS games and Japan-exclusive arcade machines when scanned mean that they serve somewhat more of a purpose than merely being cute trinkets.

Hoping to achieve some of the same success overseas, Nintendo and Level-5 finally put into action their plans to localize *Yo-Kai Watch* as a franchise; on October 5, 2015, an English dub of the *Yo-Kai Watch* anime began broadcast in the United States, while the game itself followed suit with a release on November 6. A bevy of toys and other merchandise, including the aforementioned Yo-Kai Medals, went on sale starting roughly a month later. Whether the franchise will reach the same heights outside of Japan is still unclear—after all, the series is based in several aspects peculiar to Japanese culture—but, at the very least, it appears to be working in some shape or form, if the visible advertisements and merchandise in stores such as Target and Toys "R" Us are anything to go by.

3.4.2   A New Localization Approach

That said, just what is it that makes *Yo-Kai Watch* an interesting topic of study within the field of translation and localization? The series is certainly popular—and in fact, that popularity is partially a reason for the uniqueness of this case—but how does it fit within the view of a clash of translation values? The answer is twofold. The first is that the localization of the game forges a balance between the varied Japanese cultural notes that make up *Yo-Kai Watch*'s image and the types of modifications necessary for non-Japanese to play and understand the game itself. To place it on the spectrum between the working definitions of translation and localization, it falls slightly towards the translation side, but more or less in the middle—hence the earlier claims of

it boasting of a more "synchronized" approach to translation and localization techniques. The second, however, has less to do with the localization of the game itself and more with the impact of outside cultural factors like globalization; in short, *Yo-Kai Watch*'s existence, current levels of success, and the style of its localization being accepted in America and abroad, seem to speak to the potential of more "Japanese-feeling" works finding an audience amongst the general public.

There are several examples within the localization of the series that illustrate its image as a localization that can retain many cultural (translative) features, the first of which stares the player in the face from the moment they choose to buy the game or any other product—the title itself. Rather than use a loose English equivalent like "spirit," "ghost," "monster," and so on, the title very insistently refers to the creatures within as "Yo-Kai." Of course, there are probably more than just motivations of authenticity for keeping this name; since the word *yōkai* is uncommon within the modern English lexicon, retaining that name, even as "Yo-Kai," would lead to the term most commonly being associated with this series while still "feeling Japanese enough" for people to find it novel. An obvious point of comparison might be with *Pokémon*, whose English name is easy to recognize and but has more of a Japanese feeling to it, despite simply being a shortening of the English phrase "pocket monster." Regardless of the exact motivation for keeping the term, it would not be outlandish to think that retaining the Japanese image of the series, or even bringing it to the forefront as a potential sales point, was one of the major concerns throughout the localization process. In fact, whether intentional or not, the goal of turning "Yo-kai" into a brand conveniently lines up with how "real" *yōkai* are perceived in folklore. When questioned about the nature of these characters, the CEO of Level-5 insisted that "Yo-Kai aren't ghosts or creatures or monsters" but "original beings"; in short, "Yo-kai are Yo-Kai" (venturebeat.com). This not only aids in the quest to make "Yo-Kai" a household name, but

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it also illustrates an important point about "real" *yōkai:* it is a concept unique to Japan, with connotations similar to the concepts of "spirits" or "monsters" but with no true English equivalent that captures the same nuances. However, leaving the term in "Japanese" does have its benefits—for example, children who play the game or watch the television series may eventually learn about *yōkai* in folklore and more easily make the connection between the characters they grew up with and their real-life cultural counterparts. In other words, even if *yōkai* is an untranslatable term, it also has the potential to be localizable at the same time.

With this in mind, it is not difficult to imagine the approach taken for the localization of the game series itself; that is, *Yo-Kai Watch* makes no real efforts to hide the deliberate and rooted "Japaneseness" of its origins. Or, perhaps more fittingly, the localization team did not feel that any sort of obscuring was necessary. This is not to say that the only change made to the game series on its trip overseas was a translation from Japanese to English—after all, the game was still localized. The pun-based names of many Yo-Kai were (obviously) changed to include English wordplay instead of Japanese, some lines of dialogue were edited to account for differences in culture and humor, as is often the case with localized games, and the more obvious hints of the game being set in Japan were swapped to hint at an American setting instead, now chronicling the adventures of "Nate" in the Everytown, USA of "Springdale" rather than "Keita's" daily life in "Sakura New Town." In an interesting move on the part of the localizers, however, certain gameplay terms were "jazzed up" in a probable attempt to create the types of words more commonly seen in these types of franchises: *hissatsuwaza*, a fairly common word for "special attack," became "Soultimate." Similarly, *toritsuku* ("to possess, to haunt"), the term chosen to describe both a Yo-Kai's in-battle status attacks and the act of a Yo-Kai "haunting" or otherwise affecting someone, has become "Inspirit," an obscure word meaning "to encourage or

enliven," likely chosen for including the word "spirit" (http://yokaiwatch.wikia.com). The word "Yo-Kai" alone may be a word that is catchy and easy to remember, but these other terms help build a further brand identity; strengthening the idea of a world for Yo-Kai in the minds of children.

However, alongside these changes come many intact aspects of Japanese culture, many of which are apparent to even those without much knowledge of Japan itself. The game's title may be the first sign of this, but the aspect that most immediately and increasingly betrays its foreign origins is the game's graphics. This is not to say that the game is displayed in a resolution that is somehow immediately noticeable as Japanese. Instead, it is the visual aspects of "Springdale," how the game's setting and characters are portrayed, that make this most apparent. The town and the areas surrounding it are a distinct replica of the building arrangement and architecture of many a Japanese city. Though certain signs and billboards once emblazoned with Japanese have been translated into English, and every area in the game has been given an English name, it becomes increasingly obvious that this is either not the American town it claims to be, or a very strange one. The most egregious giveaway comes in the form of a plot-relevant Shinto shrine and a nearby tree wrapped with a *shimenawa*, a type of rope also used in Shinto to mark sacred objects and places; referred to respectively as a "shrine" and a "sacred tree," the game makes no effort to point out how strange these places might be in an average American town. Is it possible that trying to create and implement graphics of a more localized equivalent, such as a graveyard or church, was simply too difficult or otherwise not worth the effort? It is certain that changing text alone would reduce the workload of creating *Yo-Kai Watch*, but there is enough evidence within the rest of the localization to suggest there was a stronger motivation

at play: not only did the team feel it was unnecessary to hide the Japaneseness of the series, but they decided to deliberately leave in these aspects of foreign flavor as a marketing point.

Many of the localized names of the Yo-Kai themselves point toward this theory. While some are merely English versions of the puns within the Japanese names—an example would be *Murikabe* (combining *muri,* "useless/meaningless" with *nurikabe*, a traditional *yōkai* that appears as a wall) becoming Noway (playing on "no way" meaning both "impossible" and "no path")—a number of Yo-Kai have either retained their original Japanese (and Japanese-*sounding*) names or some connection to Japanese terms. This is not always unexpected; Jibanyan (from *jibakurei* "earthbound spirit" and *nyan* "meow") and Komasan (from *komainu*, a mythological sort of "guard dog" and the honorific -*san*) likely kept their Japanese names on the basis of being mascots and Level-5's desire to make them universally recognizable, rather than a burning desire to keep their Japaneseness. However, plenty of names had Japanese aspects without necessarily holding main character status—Mochismo (*Chikaramochi*, from *chikaramochi,* "strongman," and the food mochi) might truly signal mochi's entrance into American common knowledge. More surprising still are those that reference traditional *yōkai* in their wordplay without much background information within the game: Leadoni (*Michibiki,* from *michibiki,* "guidance," and *ki,* "ogre" or "*oni*") is pronounced in-game with an Italian accent like "macaroni," but the game does mention the concept of an *oni* briefly. The game is even a little tongue-in-cheek about its situation, if Sushiyama (*Yamato,* a traditional name for Japan), "a Yo-kai who desperately wants to be Japanese" and who "sleeps on a futon and eats only sushi" is anything to go by.

From a localization standpoint, this puts *Yo-Kai Watch* in a peculiar spot. Many of the individual aspects of the game have been left relatively untouched, which would lead one to believe the game is closer to a translation at first glance than a "true" localization—and yet, the

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amount of information that was just barely changed, or even emphasized to stand out as more Japanese, feels like the kind of calculated adaptational changes one would associate with a more heavily modified localization. It is this strange balance of transformation and authenticity, of looking forward *and* backward, that makes *Yo-Kai Watch* such a unique example of translation and localization.

3.4.3   *Yo-Kai Watch* and Globalization

However, there is more to *Yo-Kai Watch* than its style of localization. Its existence in this day and age also highlights how globalization affects the translation and localization of Japanese popular media. Furthermore, the relative success of a franchise like this one, that is both very Japanese and targeted at a general demographic, makes it an exceedingly fitting example with which to more easily expose the forms globalization takes. To put it another way, if *Yo-Kai Watch* is to be a major milestone of sorts for both this thesis and for Japanese-English localized media, it will undoubtedly have some part to play within the greater scheme of cultural elements affecting translation and localization. One way to illustrate this concept is to imagine the series as taking on two different roles—as both an "effect" and a "cause," being affected by and affecting this outside sphere.

As an "effect," *Yo-Kai Watch* highlights the impact of globalization on the viability and available choices when translating or localizing Japanese media for English-speaking audiences; twenty years ago, characters like the Yo-Kai would likely not even be considered as a localizable option due to the general unfamiliarity with Japanese culture compared to today. Alternatively, it could be localized as it is now, but marketed to a much smaller niche demographic. Another possibility, if the team decided in favor of mass appeal, could be a game rife with modifications

like the infamous "jelly donuts" (actually *onigiri,* rice balls) from early dubs of the Pokémon anime (youtube.com/watch?v=vWgxH2KG4ts). One of the major reasons *Yo-Kai Watch* in its current localized form is even feasible is thanks to globalization, as well as the acceleration of media that has powered the spread of globalization itself. People have been able to learn about Japan and simultaneously share their newfound knowledge of Japanese language and culture much more quickly; this, alongside the increased facility of companies to release Japanese products to foreign audiences, has led to a greater level of average knowledge of Japanese culture in English-speaking countries, to say nothing of the more diehard fans of these products. It would not be far off to claim that even the previous case studies of this thesis, albeit indirectly, have served as a scant few of the thousands of stepping stones for a marketing concept like *Yo-Kai Watch* to stand tall.

Of course, this is only half of the story—if *Yo-Kai Watch* is an "effect" in how it illustrates the progress of globalization, it is also a "cause" in what it forebodes for future localization efforts. It is a metaphorical green light for the importing and translation of Japanese media that was once thought impossible for English-speaking audiences to accept, as well as a general raising of the bar for the level of Japaneseness that can be retained in more easily localized works. In this sense, it brings to mind the Pokémon phenomenon at its peak fervor in the late 1990s; although Pokémon has never quite been overtly Japanese in its presentation, and has increasingly portrayed itself as taking place in an alternate world, it is still very much recognizable as a Japanese property, and was especially so within its first few years. It too raised the bar for general knowledge of "Japan," and often acted as a gateway series for broader interest in Japanese pop culture. Eventually, it took the approach of "glocalization," the addition of local elements to a foreign work to increase the ease of adaptation, as it became clear that Pokémon

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was evolving from a Japanese franchise to a truly global one (credoreference.com). Now, happenings like kimono-wearing characters making appearances in a setting modeled after Paris, France are nothing new.

But what brings *Yo-Kai Watch* one step beyond is that, in a sense, its localization is the exact opposite of glocalization (or, perhaps, an extreme version of the concept): it is all but unapologetic about its Japanese origins under the transparent guise of its "American" setting, and appears to wield its comparative hyper-Japaneseness as a selling point. It is either expecting a new level of familiarity with Japanese culture from its demographic, or is presenting this bevy of new concepts to heighten the sense of foreignness and draw customers through this novelty. In either case, it is pushing the boundaries on what levels of foreignness people will accept in translated media—especially as it is a video game, whose target audience tends to be much broader than that of more "predictably Japanese" anime or *manga*. Amusingly enough, this approach can also be seen as a harbinger of a stronger "reverse flow" of globalized products; here, it is a product being sold to the West with the sense that its culture is what makes it worth looking into. Or, perhaps, *Yo-Kai Watch* is just the most recent example of a process that has been steadily making its way into the English speaking sphere and is about to enter new heights.

In essence, *Yo-Kai Watch* is a deceptively important milestone in regards to both translative and localizing values and the outside factors that can affect which values to stand by; in this respect, what it tells us directly is just as important as what it does not. Nowadays, thanks to the increasing levels of communication and knowledge between cultures, one can strive for greater authenticity and a sense of foreignness in a localization without alienating huge portions of an audience nor eliminating localized aspects entirely. This newfound freedom does not simply have to be limited to making translations or localizations more Japanese, however.

Rather, the success of *Yo-Kai Watch*'s particular blend of translative devotion to culture and localizing to allow people to more easily access that culture should be taken as but one possible implementation of both sides of the spectrum. Ultimately, it is this sense of freedom that shines forth most strongly from the localization of *Yo-Kai Watch*, and hopefully that is something future translators and localizers can take into account.

4.0   CONCLUDING REMARKS

Each of these four case studies has helped to showcase a unique aspect of the burgeoning field of translation in Japanese popular media. *Danganronpa*'s three translations revealed straightforward instances of the working definitions of translation and localization in action, but also that several possible interpretations and styles of translation can arise from one single piece of source material. *Mother 3*'s fan localization illustrates the potential of blurred boundaries when translating or localizing Japanese popular media: for example, enough consumers can together take on the role of a creator by themselves, and translation's approach of devotion to a text can be applied to a translated one for fascinating results. The scanlations of *Medaka Box* serve as a reminder of the foreign nature of Japanese media, and that not all works are meant to be able to be localized easily. Finally, *Yo-Kai Watch* synthesizes the ideals of translation and localization to show how adaptation of culture does not necessarily entail its erasure. It also highlights how globalization and its spread have finally made such a strategy of adaptation viable for a large-scale audience.

Judging from the studies' results, it appears that using the spectrum of the working definitions for translation and localization can be a fairly useful rubric by which to examine other works of Japanese popular media. However, since narrative rarely had an impact on where a work fell on the spectrum, it may be preferable to apply the rubric to material that has already been translated and to better understand the motivations that went into the translated work in the

process. Alternatively, because the spectrum itself is simple but the concepts represented on it can evolve and rearrange in a multitude of ways, consulting the working definitions of translation or localization and progressing from there may be a helpful tool for individuals looking to hammer out a translation or localization style of their own.

Ultimately, the greater significance of this study is twofold. First, the establishment of a new way of looking at and participating in translation, even for a field as specific as Japanese popular culture, is important in pushing the area forward; additionally, it is a modern area of translation, and so deserves to be considered in ways translation theory of the past may not have touched upon. The second point regards the potential improvement of translation and localization of Japanese popular media; if there was any underlying connection between the topics discussed in the case studies, it was the blurring of boundaries, whether it be between the working definitions of translation and localization, one's identity as a consumer or creator, or even something as simple as the individual versus the group. Rather than a loss of identity, however, this way of thinking about translation and localization fosters internal communication, and the creation of an area that almost pulses with life itself. Looking ahead, it seems that Japanese popular culture will certainly benefit from the idea of a visible translator; if nothing else, here, everyone has the opportunity to play the part themselves.

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