mediAzioni 46 (2025)
ISSN 1974-4382

JAPANESE NARRATIVES FOR CHILDREN IN ITALY: TRANSLATION'S CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

MARIA ELENA TISI
UNIVERSITY OF BOLOGNA

mariaelena.tisi@unibo.it

Citation: Tisi, Maria Elena (2025) "Japanese Narratives for Children in Italy: Translation's Challenges and Perspectives", *mediAzioni* 46: A101-A114, https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/19959, ISSN 1974-4382.

Abstract: Recently scholars interested in translation of children's books have remarkably increased but relatively little systematic research has been conducted on Japanese works, particularly studies focused on translation from Japanese into Italian which are almost non-existent. Indeed, children's literature in Japan was fortunate to see a great number of translations from foreign countries which made a considerable contribution to the development of modern and contemporary children's literature. However, Japanese works for young people translated into Western languages are still very few - and this is the first reason of the lack of studies in this field - despite the growing popularity of Japanese literature overseas and the success of children's literature in the publishing market all over the world. My contribution aims to highlight some peculiarities of the translation into Italian from Japanese in the field of children's fiction, like coping with the writing system, the massive use of onomatopoeias, and some cultural aspects, especially in the use of realia as well as offer an overview of the current situation of Japanese narrative for children in Italy.

Keywords: children's literature; Japanese children's literature; translating children's literature; translation strategy; Japanese-Italian translations.

1. Introduction

In 2006 Jan Van Coillie (2006: vi) wrote that "The unprecedented boom of translated children's books over the last few decades and the remarkable rise in the quality of these translations […] were accompanied by a significant growth in scholarly interest". Ten years later Lathey (2016: 8) stated that "The last thirty years have seen an enormous increase in the amount of scholarly and critical writing devoted specifically to the translation of text for children".

Unfortunately, even if we can find several studies focused on translation of literary works from Japan, most of these are related to books for adults.

Apart from the essay "Eight Ways to Say You: The Challenges of Translation" by translator Cathy Hirano (1996), who wrote about her experience of translating Young Adult novels from Japanese into English and a few articles focused on names (Sung *et al.* 2016; Sato 2016), onomatopoeia (Nicolae 2012), and the balancing act "between cultural reinterpretation and exotic representation of the original text" (Adachi 2004), criticism and comments on translating Japanese children's literature[1] are mostly confined to interviews (Dikengil 2009; Dikengil Lindberg *et al.* 2016; Fairweather-Vega 2019; McGuinne 2021; Simeon 2021; Iwabuchi 2022; Nathanael 2022) and blogs.[2] Piacentini (2023a: 1) defines these virtual spaces of expression as epitextual spaces, "where (children's literature) translators have a chance to make their voices heard […] [and] which can profitably contribute to *Translation Studies*, notably in the sense of a process-oriented approach in children's literature translation". However, in the case of translations from Japanese into Italian, even these voices are practically non-existent.

My study would like to contribute to this still largely unexplored area and is focused on Japanese narratives for children translated into Italian.

The first part explores some peculiarities of translating Japanese children's novels into Western languages, with practical examples from translations of well-known works by Kazumi Yumoto (1959-), Tomiko Inui (1924-2002) or Eiko Kadono (1935-), and Natsumaru Abe (1960-). Recurring difficulties when translating Japanese literary works, such as lack of clarity, the different order of sentences, repetition of words and sentence patterns, male and female speech patterns, honorific expressions, etc. or thematic challenges and content issues will not be discussed here.[3] In this paper I intend to highlight the challenges of coping with the writing system, onomatopoeia, and some cultural aspects, especially in the use of realia.

In the second part, I would like to give an overview of translated Japanese narratives for children in Italy. While the market for translated Japanese books for adults is dramatically increasing, there has been no corresponding rise in the

[1] The term "children's literature" is commonly used to encompass a very broad territory ranging from manga and picturebooks to novels for young adults.
[2] Among these a prominent position is occupied by SCBWI, Japan Translation Group, which is composed of the most famous translators of children's books from Japanese into English (Cf. https://ihatov.wordpress.com/), and Avery Fischer Udagawa's blog (Cf. https://www.averyfischerudagawa.com/writing/)
[3] Japanese translation as a subject has been discussed in Wakabayashi (1991; 1992), Keene (1992), Grassi (2016), Pastore (2017).

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/19959

translation of children's literature and Japanese books for young readers are scarcely translated. Moreover, Italian scholars of Japanese studies have not devoted attention to this topic.

I would like to hypothesize some of the reasons for the lack of interest in this field and underline recent changes in the trends of editorial marketing.

2. Specific characteristics of translating Japanese children's literature

Translating children's books from Japanese into Italian or other Western languages entails the same challenges of translating this genre from any other language. First of all, it is necessary to manage cultural markers, such as names and toponyms (Yamazaki 2002; Adachi 2004; Sato 2016; Sung *et al.* 2016), aspects of ordinary social life (Paruolo 2010; McGuinness 2021), intertextual references (Lathey 2016), taboos (Adachi 2004), unexpected feelings, and reactions to events (Keene 1992; Adachi 2004), while finding a balance between domestication and foreignization.[4] Then, attention must be paid to stylistic and linguistic issues: avoiding repetition (Keene 1992; Čermáková 2018) and maintaining read-aloud qualities (Lathey 2016), such as rhythm, sound (Kantor 2020; Di Mella as cited in Piacentini 2023b), and wordplay (Lathey 2009). Finally, it is important to keep the dual address to both adults and children in mind, (Nikolajeva *et al.* 2000; Lathey 2016). In addition to this list of challenges, there are specific difficulties when translating from Japanese, a language sometimes described as inaccessible and untranslatable. As Cathy Hirano states:

> translating between languages that, like Japanese and English, are very different from each other requires fairly strenuous cultural and mental gymnastics […] Whereas in English we stress clarity, in Japanese subtlety is preferred. The Japanese writer dances around his theme, implying rather than directly stating what he wants to say, leaving it up to readers to discern that for themselves. He or she appeals to the reader's emotions rather than to the intellect and tries to create a rapport rather than to convince (Hirano 1999: 1-2).

Thus, it is beyond question that translation from Japanese presents several challenges that the translator has to cope with. My research focuses on three particular aspects related to narrative in children's books, which I have faced both in my experience as a translator into Italian or simply as a reader: the writing system, onomatopoeia, and the use of realia.

First of all, it is important to understand that reading a text in Japanese is a visual experience. The Japanese writing system consists of a combination of *kanji*, adopted from Chinese characters, to convey meaning, and two syllabaries with 46 signs, *hiragana*, and *katakana*, most commonly used for grammatical elements and for foreign words and names respectively, both of which may also be used to write any word. This means that a simple Japanese sentence contains

[4] In studies of the translation of children's literature we generally find arguments for one of two theoretical approaches: one is in favor of a source-oriented, conservative strategy (Klingberg school) and the other is for replacement, target-oriented strategy (Oittinen school) (Paruolo 2010: 51-52).

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/19959

a mixture of *kanji*, *hiragana* and *katakana* and the choice of one over another in a narrative text depends on various factors including the audience's age, but, above all, the discretion of the author, who can use them to convey something beyond the literal meaning of words, something that the translator needs to convey to foreign readers too.

In Japan, a schoolchild in first-grade learns to write in *hiragana* and then in *katakana*, but usually knows only a few *kanji*, which are then gradually learned every year little by little, so choosing which of the three writing systems to use is particularly clear-cut in children's literature. For example, if we have a sentence written entirely in *hiragana* we can easily presume that it has been written by a child, or narrated by a child, if it appears in a dialogue. For example, in *Popura no aki* (*The Letters*, 1997) by Kazumi Yumoto, the protagonist of the story is a young girl, who writes letters to her deceased father. These letters are written entirely in *hiragana*. A cursory look at the text is enough to understand they have been written by a child without the need to add childish words or expressions because if the same sentences were written by an adult, then *kanji* characters would have been used instead of *hiragana*. To retain the childlike essence of the letters in translation, something childlike has to be added or another solution could be to use a child-like font, but this kind of choice depends on publishers and the translator can only accept their decision. For example, in the translations of *Popura no aki* into English, French and Italian, italics have been used for the child's letters, but the same letter type has been used also for an adult's letters, so the childlike aspect of the young girl's letters is diluted. It is even more difficult to transmit the subtle difference between words such as *meisha* (optician), which appears in the same novel written in *hiragana* when the speaker is the young girl, or in *kanji*, when the speaker is an adult.

The same examples of the visual use of *katakana* appear in Tomiko Inui's *Kokage no ie no kobitotachi* (*The Secret of the Blue Glass*, 1959), the first work of Japanese fantasy for young readers. It is a long narrative about Little People from England living in Japan with a Japanese family, from the middle of the nineteenth century until the end of World War II. One of the members of the Japanese family is a boy called Tatsuo. Tatsuo's name is written in *kanji* and above the *kanji* are *furigana*, or little *hiragana* signs, which are used to show how to read an unknown *kanji*. Such reading aids in *hiragana* can appear quite often in Japanese children's literature. In the original publication of this book we also find Tatsuo's name written in *katakana*. This happens whenever the English teacher of the boy calls him so that a Japanese reader can immediately sense the foreign flavor of her speech. To convey this sense of foreignness, the translator can insert a phrase like "with her English accent" but if repeated too often, it risks becoming too heavy-handed, and consequently we lose a little of the flavor of the original text. This same "exotic" flavor appears in some messages written in *katakana* by one of the members of the little British family but is not conveyed as effectively in the published translation into French, English and Italian. In fact, even where the publisher decides to underline handwritten text using italics, it is not enough to convey the original flavor of foreignness and the allusive reference to a telegram because katakana is also the syllabary used for this kind of communication.

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/19959

For discussion of visual use of *kanji*, I will focus on *Tonneru no mori 1945* (The Tunnel Through the Woods 1945, 2015) a kind of fictionalized autobiography by Eiko Kadono, winner of the 2018 Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing. The protagonist is Iko, a 9-year-old girl, who is evacuated from Tokyo to the countryside with her stepmother and half-brother to escape the bombings at the end of World War II. This is the first time they spend time together because Iko lived with her grandmother ever since her mother's death. The story is related in the first person by Iko and, when she talks about herself, father, grandmother, little brother or classmates, the names are written in *katakana:* Ikoイコ, Seizōセイゾウ, Takaタカ, Hiroshiヒロシ, Noboruノボル, Kazukoカズコ. For her stepmother, Mitsuko, however, two *kanji* appear 光子 with *furigana* 光子, which explains how to read the name, appearing above the kanji text. Even without reading Iko's words to express her feelings, the use of these two *kanji* suggests to readers that there is a great distance between these two female characters forced to live together. It can be assumed that for a translator such nuance of meaning would be an insurmountable challenge.[5]

Secondly, I will briefly touch on onomatopoeia, a challenging point for every kind of translation, which becomes even more complex in the case of Japanese.

In fact, the Japanese language has a variety of onomatopoeia and mimetic expressions that rarely have equivalents in European languages; in the *Japanese Onomatopoeia Dictionary* 4500 words are listed (Ozumi 2009: 69). They have a cohesive function within the sentence, do not have any childish connotations and are used at every level of the language.

Eiko Kadono in her acceptance speech of the 2018 Hans Christian Andersen Award explained why onomatopoeia is intimately connected with Japanese culture:

> In a Japanese house […] the doors and windows slide, and when you wake up each morning and open them all, the inside of the house becomes one with the outside. […] Because of this, in my country the songs of birds and the sounds of wind, rain, and human life are ever-present, and people have listened to sounds and used their imagination to get information. In the midst of this, many onomatopoeic phrases have come into the world. Onomatopoeia has no restrictive rules, and it lets us express exactly what we feel (Kadono 2018).

Needless to say, the thousands of instances of onomatopoeia are a major difficulty faced by translators from the Japanese language.[6] Yet, as expressions of Japanese feelings, they cannot be overlooked.

As well as imitating human and animal voices or real sounds, onomatopoeia is used to describe every kind of sensory expression, visual and tactile, and even for showing states which do not produce sounds. A perfect example is the case of *shiiin* to express the 'sound' of silence.

[5] This novel has not been translated yet.

[6] For more information on translating Japanese onomatopoeia and mimetic words cf. Flyxe (2002), Inose (2008), Ozumi (2009), Sato (2017); and in relation to children's literature, particularly Kenji Miyazawa, cf. Nicolae (2012).

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/19959

In manga, onomatopoeic expressions have a particular space on the page so they should either be translated or at least appear in their original language,[7] but for narrative texts the approach is different. In adult literature several ways of translating Japanese onomatopoeia have been identified, including omission, even if this involves a loss of meaning.[8]

When no equivalent is found in the target language the translator has to search for a combination of various words, while trying to avoid an extensive explanation, because as Seidensticker argues: "Explanation has the effect of slowing down the pace of the translation. In other words, it interrupts the rhythm. And rhythm is a particularly important part of a work of literature" (Carpenter 2016: 124). Furthermore, the translator runs the risk of giving a personal interpretation about something that intentionally lets the imagination run free. According to Laura Cangemi (2016), a well-known translator of children's books, "if something is added, the text is amputated of its multiplicity of meanings".

Using onomatopoeia has no restrictions in children's books but it is not always easy to translate even if corresponding expressions are available. Sometimes this is because their translations are uncommon words in the target language and the risk of non-comprehension, especially for young readers, is high. For example, in the Italian translation of the aforementioned *Kokage no ie no kobitotachi* (*I segreti della casa sotto l'albero*, trans. by M.E. Tisi, 2017) to convey the voice of a pigeon the appropriate verb "grugare" (cooing) has not been chosen because its use is rare in Italian, and most likely it would not have been understood by the audience, so the customary Italian word for this bird's voice, "gru gru", instead was chosen.

Another impediment to the widespread use of onomatopoeia in the translation of children's books from Japan is the risk of making the literary text too similar to manga. Manga are a great artistic product, but not all Japanese works have to be similar to manga to appeal to the audience. On the contrary, too many similarities might keep people who dislike manga away from other forms of Japanese narrative.

Trying to understand the right balance in the use of known or unknown and innovative words, or explanatory additions will be the best way to proceed during the process of translating. This applies not only to onomatopoeia, but also to most cultural references to that appear in or emerge from the text, particularly where realia, or culture specific items, are used. Especially in the case of an unfamiliar culture, the issue of whether to use realia or find alternative solutions through explanations or replacing unknown items with more familiar elements is another widely discussed topic by Translation Studies scholars.

The translator has to assume the child reader's level of comprehension of a certain culture and has to figure out their prior knowledge of daily life in that culture, taking into account that nowadays even small children have access to images of almost everything through the Internet (Cangemi as cited in Paruolo

[7] Recently in some manga we can even find the onomatopoeia outside the speech balloons written in original Japanese characters instead of in translation or in transcriptions.
[8] Flyxe (2002) presents six methods and Inose (2007) nine. Both list omission as one strategy. For a list of specific studies on this topic, cf. Sato (2017).

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/19959

2010: 65). In the case of Japan, to assume which explanations the audience may need through reading experiences in translation is not so simple.

The increasing popularity of Japanese culture, instead of aiding translators, creates new doubts for them about whether some cultural references need to be explained or if some realia can be used because the situation is constantly evolving, with the result that words which needed to be translated or explained two or three years ago are now more widely known, for example *tsunami*, *ramen*, or *emoji*.

In fact, even if Japan is geographically distant from Italy, and its culture is very unique, it cannot be equated with countries like China or Thailand, whose cultures are little known to most Italians and knowledge of which has remained unchanged over time. Sometimes Japan can seem closer and better known than other European countries. It is therefore very difficult to assess to what extent young readers in Italy are aware of certain aspects of Japanese culture, quite apart from manga readers who are visually aware of all kinds of daily life objects.[9]

In the translation of adult literature from Japanese, recent trends demonstrate a tendency to keep the original words, even in editions without a glossary or footnotes. Also, as highlighted by Cangemi (2022), leaving unknown words in the translated text is acceptable, as children enjoy reading them even if they do not understand the meaning because they can enjoy the magic of the unknown word's sound.

This is similar to Mélaouah who argues that:

> the reading experience, for whoever it is, requires a little effort, from which one comes out enriched. This is as true for an adult as for a child. It becomes interesting to allow a young reader to establish a dialogue with the text, to which they also contribute with their curiosity, even with the things they do not understand, and will discover in the development of the text (Piacentini 2023b: 5).[10]

However, sometimes an explanation is required and, according to Adachi, (2004: 46) "interpolation is a useful means of giving supplementary information" about something which can be easily misunderstood by target readers. A relevant example appears in one of the three short stories in the collection *Nakenai sakanatachi* (The Fish don't cry, 1995), by Natsumaru Abe, focused on young boys involved in fishing adventures.

When one of the protagonists states that impatience is the virtue of a good fisherman, readers might think this is a misprint unless an explanatory phrase such as "because it makes him always look for other ways to fish while he is waiting for the fish that bites" is added.

The challenge is to try to make readers comprehend and experience what readers of the source text feel as much as possible, and be aware that the text originates from a different culture.

[9] In Italy, the Japanese phenomenon can only be compared to the increasing widespread knowledge of Korea in recent years.
[10] Quotation here is my translation.

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/19959

3. Japanese children's narratives in Italy

Among the various advantages in reading children's books from foreign countries is the improvement of national literature, as testified by Beuchat and Valdivieso (1992: 210) or O'Sullivan (2012: 3:05), who said that "translation has played a key role in the history and development of the children's literature of every country and language area, that enriches the target literature and it introduces children to foreign cultures".

We can find direct evidence of this, looking at the crucial role played in Japan by Western works in the development of modern children's literature around the end of nineteenth century and contemporary children's books after World War II.

As Judy Wakabayashi (2008: 227) pointed out

> translated children's literature […] paved the way for the production of the first original works of modern Japanese children's literature. The ideas and values introduced through this medium played a formative role in shaping future generations of adults and socializing them in new ways (Wakabayashi 2008: 227).

In the 1950s, translated children's books had a significant impact on conveying new trends in Japanese contemporary children's works in which happy endings or full-length stories started to appear, describing the real circumstances of children's lives in ordinary prose and simple words in contrast to earlier works which favored poetic and figurative language for describing imaginary landscapes.

Cathy Hirano, the translator into English of the 2014 Hans Christian Andersen Award winner Nahoko Uehashi (1962-) and many other well-known Japanese children's books authors, wrote: "Japanese children are very fortunate to get such a wide exposure to different cultures through translations" because foreign books "are windows onto other ways of thinking and experiencing the world and, at the same time, a glimpse into our common humanity" (Hirano 2006: 9).

Despite this enviable situation Japanese works seem to be struggling to cross the boundaries of their country and consequently even studies in this field are still few in number or, in the case of Italy, almost non-existent.

When we look back at the beginning of translations into Italian of Japanese narratives around the second half of the nineteenth century, one of the first works we find is *Il Taketori Monogatari ossia La fiaba del nonno tagliabambù* (*Taketori Monogatari, the Fairy Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*),[11] a type of novel with fairytale elements, translated by Antelmo Severini (1828-1909), and the *chirimenbon*[12] *Favola giapponese Momotarō* (Japanese Fairy Tale Momotarō,

[11] *Taketori monogatari* (Tenth century) is considered the first monogatari and the oldest Japanese folktale in written form. It tells the story of Princess Kaguya who was born from a bamboo tree.
[12] *Chirimenbon* are a collection of Japanese fairy tales translated into several European languages such as English, French, Spanish and also Italian, and published by Takejirō Hasegawa (1853-1938) at the end of the nineteenth century. They are printed from woodcuts on crêpe paper with illustrations in color by Japanese artists (Matsumura and Tisi 2024).

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/19959

1898)[13] by Salvatore Fioravanti Chimenz (1876-?), the first translation into Italian published in Japan.

Unfortunately, subsequent translation of children's books from Japan did not live up to this brilliant beginning. This contrasts with the situation for translation of Japanese literature for adults. In the first part of the twentieth century, even if Japanese literary works for adults were considered a niche product and the market was not flourishing because of a lack of translators, mistrustful publishers, and the custom of translating via another language instead of directly from Japanese (Maurizi 2018), the most famous novelists' works were translated. According to Boscaro (2000: 12), who wrote a history of one hundred years of translation in Italy, the 1980s and 1990s witnessed a renewal of interest in Japan which is quantified in a sudden flourishing of translations from the original texts by trained and competent translators. This favorable trend improved further in the twenty-first century when the market for books for adults greatly increased all over the world, includingin Italy where translations from Japanese have been growing exponentially (Maurizi 2018). Despite this positive trend, during the twentieth century we find only rare examples of translations of Japanese narratives for children that sporadically appear in some academic journals or collections of short stories in editions for adults by Jōji Tsubota (1890-1982), a collection by Kenji Miyazawa (1896-1933), two short stories by Mimei Ogawa (1882-1961) and a story by Akiyuki Nosaka (1930-2015), or re-tellings of the same folktales.

Even the great boom of fantasy literature in the 1990s that also involved Japan, where a a rich indigenous production developed – including notable works like those by Nahoko Uehashi – did not influence the trend in translations from Japan. In fact, only the first book of her best-selling *Moribito series* (1996-2007),[14] *Seirei no Moribito* (*Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit*, 1996), was translated into Italian by Luca Tarenzi in 2009, and only recently *Kōkun* (*La ragazza venuta da Occidente. Kōkun. La Dea dei profumi*, trans. by L. Capponcelli, 2024), and *Kemono no sōja* (*Erin the Best Player*, trans. by R. Lo Cascio, 2025) have been translated. Moreover, Nahoko Uehashi's books remain an isolated case; other well-known writers, for example Noriko Ogiwara (1959-), Shō Tatsumiya (1954-), Yōko Tomiyasu (1959-) are still ignored.

This trend does not show any signs of improvement at the beginning of the twenty-first century. A slight interest in Japanese children's books was stimulated by the success of anime movies, but it was limited to the translation of the original books on which the films were based without involving any engagement with further publications by the authors. Direct evidence of this trend is the publication of the first book of the *Majo no takkyūbin* (*Kiki's Delivery Service*,1985) series (1985-2009), the source of inspiration for the eponymous movie by Hayao Miyazaki, but there is a total lack of interest in the author Eiko Kadono,[15] or in *Kiri no mukō no fushigina machi* (*Mysterious Town Beyond the Fog*, 1975) by Sachiko Kashiwaba (1953-) which inspired Sen to *Chihiro no*

[13] Momotarō is the best-known folktale in Japan and tells the story of a boy born from a peach.
[14] The *Moribito series* (1996-2007) consists of ten books plus several sequels or spin-offs.
[15] In 2018 Eiko Kadono received the Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing by IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People).

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/19959

kamikakushi (*Spirited Away*, 2001). Otherwise, there are only a few translations of a variety of genres, such as *Chiisai Momochan* (*Little Momo-chan*, 1964) by Matsutani Miyoko (1926-2015), a classic for small children, and *Madogiwa no Tottochan* (*Totto-chan, the Little Girl at the Window*, 1981), a type of autobiographical story written by Kuroyanagi Tetsuko (1930-), a very famous television personality. This is a situation that reflects a lack of planning on the part of publishing houses and is probably due more to poor knowledge rather than a lack of interest.

If the publication of translated books is due to the combination of different elements such as editors, scouting and readers as Maurizi (2018) has argued, in my opinion the weak link in the chain is predominantly the second element. The reduced number of experts in the field of Japanese children's literature who promote books to Italian publishing houses and encourage them to purchase the rights not just of picturebooks favored by their strong visual impact, is a crucial missing item. In addition, the dominant role of manga and anime tends to overshadow the rest of Japanese production for children, even if sometimes this literary production is the very source of these famous works.

In a survey conducted between 2009 and 2018 (Testa 2018-19: 24), it appears that even if more than two thousand translated novels or short stories have been published in Italy, less than a tenth are children's books and most of these are picturebooks, albeit a wonderful artistic product but not the focus of my research.[16] The only relevant improvement in children's publications is confined to the world of manga.[17]

This situation has started to change somewhat and a recent boost, can be attributed to the success of Young Adult narratives. This has pushed publishing houses to extend their scope beyond well-known countries, and has resulted in the introduction of Japanese culture into many different aspects of Italian life. Moreover, the pandemic period and its restrictions forced many people, and especially young people, to explore the wider world through the internet. In some ways pushed people to look at different cultures and literature, stimulating an interest in them and in the case of Japan, not just in manga but in other genres too. As an example, at the 2023 Bologna Children's Book Fair publishing houses showed a remarkable interest in Japanese children's books; several new translated books were on display and the clear intention to publish future translations was announced which indicates hopeful signs for the ultimate discovery of Japanese children's literature.

4. Concluding remarks

In the first part of this article, I considered some of the peculiarities which characterize the translation of Japanese children's narrative into western languages including Italian, particularly in terms of the writing system, the

[16] According to Jacobson (2017)'s research from 2002 until 2017, 123 children's books from Japan were published in the United States and more than 90% are picturebooks.
[17] As evidence of the increasing success, suffice it to say that Star Comics, a publishing house specialized in manga, is the third publisher for sales after Mondadori and Einaudi (Melati 2022: 18).

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/19959

frequent use of onomatopoeia and the use of realia related to the development of knowledge of Japanese culture in the target language country.

These challenges are not insurmountable obstacles to translating Japanese works into Italian, but through the overview of children's literature from Japan in Italy, described in the second part of this article, it has become clear that apart from manga which are exponentially increasing and picturebooks, that are not the object of this study, narrative books for children have difficulty in gaining a foothold in the world of Italian publishing.

In my opinion, reasons for this significant delay include the lack of scouting due to the limited number of experts in this field and the remarkable success of the manga market that tends to obscure all other genres for children coming from Japan, contributing to the lack of interest by those who dislike manga.

Despite this, the most recent trends show that Japanese books for children have finally started to make their way abroad and into Italy.

Mistrustful publishing houses will find useful supports to develop new translation projects in *Lifelong Favorites-Selections from the Bookshelves of Young Readers in Japan* (2023) in partnership with the Japanese Board on Books for Young People (JBBY), where the Japan Foundation has added 59 Japanese children's books to its list of books recommended for translation into other languages. Clearly, projects like this one can contribute to filling the gaps and also provide another point of view on knowledge of the Japanese culture.

REFERENCES

Abe, N. (1995) *Nakenai sakanatachi*, Tokyo: Bronze shinsha. It transl. by M.E. Tisi (2019) *I pesci non piangono*, Roma: Atmosphere, 2019.

Adachi, R. (2004) "From 'Natsu no Niwa' to 'The Friends': The Balancing Act Involved in Translating Children's Books", *Eibeibunka: Studies in English Language*, Literature and Culture 34: 35-50.

Beuchat, C. and C. Valdivieso (1992) "Translation of children's literature: Intercultural communication", *Bookbird* 30(1): 9-14.

Boscaro, A. (2000) *Narrativa giapponese: cent'anni di traduzioni*, Venezia: Cafoscarina.

Cangemi, L. (2016) "Personaggi e traduzioni a confronto", *Laboratorio italiano* (Castasegna, 29 October 2016).

----- (2022) "Tradurre i libri per bambini" Interview to Laura Cangemi, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pVggJW4ole4 (visited 05/06/2023).

Carpenter, J.W. (2016) "'The Idea and Practice of Translation': An Annotated Transcription of Edward Seidensticker's Talk at Doshisha University", *Asphodel* 51: 120-148, file:///C:/Users/utente/Desktop/AN00000289-20160726-120.pdf (visited 25/10/2019).

Čermáková, A. (2018) "Translating Children's Literature: Some Insights from Corpus Stylistics", *Ilha Do Desterro: A Journal of English Language, Literatures in English and Cultural Studies*, 71(2): 117-133.

Coillie, J.V. and W.P. Verschueren (ed) (2006) *Children's literature in translation: challenges and strategies*, Manchester; Kinderhook: St. Jerome.

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/19959

Dikengil, M. (2009) “Young Adult Fantasy in Translation: An Interview with Cathy Hirano”, *SWET Newsletter* 122 (May 2009): 3-12. Also available online at https://swet.jp/articles/article/young_adult_fantasy_in_translation/_C30 (visited 15/01/2025).

Dikengil Lindberg, M., A.O. Smith and A. Fischer Udagawa (2016) “Guest Interview & Giveaway: Translator Cathy Hirano (Pre AFCC 2016 Con)”, *Cynsations* https://cynthialeitichsmith.com/2016/05/guest-interview-giveaway-translator/ (visited 15/04/2024).

Fairweather-Vega, S. (2019) “An interview with Avery Fischer Udagawa International Translator Coordinator of the Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI)”, *Source*, 78 Spring: 7-13.

Flyxe, M. (2002) “Translation of Japanese onomatopoeia into Swedish with focus on lexicalization”, Africa&Asia 2: 54-73.

Grassi, E. (2016) “L’arte di tradurre. Intervista a Giorgio Amitrano”, *Oblique Studio*: 1-7, http://www.oblique.it/images/interviste/amitrano_intervista_set16.pdf (visited 11/10/2019).

Hirano, C. (1999) “Eight Ways to Say You: The Challenges of Translation”, *The Horn Book Magazine* 75(1), 34-41,https://www.hbook.com/?detailStory＝eight-ways-say-challenges-translation (visited 10/11/2016).

----- (2006) “Children’s Book Translation: An Interview with Cathy Hirano by Avery Udagawa”, *Carp Tales The SCBWI Tokyo* Newsletter Fall: 7-9.

Inose, H. (2008) “Translating Japanese onomatopoeia and mimetic Words”, in A. Pym and A. Perekrestenko (eds) *Translation Research Projects* 1, Terragona: Intercultural Studies Group, 97-116.

Inui, T. (1959) *Kokage no ie no kobitotachi*, Tokyo: Chuo koronsha. Fr transl. by Noriyasu Nakamura (1971) *Le secret du verre bleu*, Paris: Fernand Nathan. Engl transl. by G. Tapley Takemori (2015) *The Secret of the Blue Glass*, London: Pushkin Children’s Books. It transl. by M.E. Tisi (2017) *I segreti della casa sotto l’albero*, Roma: Atmosphere.

Iwabuchi, D. (2022) “Bruno Navasky”, *Full Stop – Review. Interview. Marginalia*. (April 19) https://www.full-stop.net/2022/04/19/interviews/deborah-iwabuchi/bruno-navasky/ (visited 25/05/2024)

Jacobson, D. (2017) “Survey of Translations of Children’s and YA Literature from Chinese, Japanese and Korean”, *12th IBBY Regional Conference Radical Change Beyond Borders: The. Transforming Power of Children’s Literature in a Digital Age*, University of Washington Seattle (Washington, 20-22 October 2017), 1-4, https://chinesebooksforyoungreaders.files.wordpress.com/2017/10/jacobson-survey-of-translations-2017.pdf (visited 10/05/2021).

Kadono, E. (2015) *Tonneru no mori 1945*, Tokyo: Kadokawa.

----- (2018) “Acceptance speech”, *36th IBBY International Congress* (Athens, 31 August 2018),

https://www.ibby.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Eiko_Kadono_final.pdf (visited 10/08/2020).

Kantor, E. (2020) “Building Bridges: The Art of Children’s Book Translation”, *Publishers Weekly*, (17 September 2020), https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-industry-news/article/84362-building-bridges-the-art-of-children-s-book-translation.html (visited 02/12/2023).

Keene, D. (1992) “Translation and Comparative Literature. Introduction”, in C.N. Moore and L. Lower (eds) *Translation East and West: Cross-Cultural Approach*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii, xiii-xxv.

Lathey, G. (ed) (2006) *The translation of children’s literature: a reader*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

---- (2009) “Children’s literature”, in M. Baker and G. Saldanha (eds) *Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, London and New York: Routledge, 31-34.

---- (2016) *Translating children’s literature*, London & New York: Routledge.

McGuinness, N. (2021) “#WorldKidLit Weekend: A Conversation with Avery Fischer Udagawa, Translator of Award-winning Japanese Children’s Author Sachiko Kashiwaba”, *Global Literature in Libraries Initiative*, June 26, https://glli- us.org/2021/06/26/worldkidlit-wednesday-a-conversation-with-avery-fischer-udagawa-translator-of-award-winning-japanese-childrens-author-sachiko-kashiwaba/ (visited 26/05/2024)

Matsumura, Y. and M.E. Tisi (2024) “Itariago chirimenbon ni tsuite”, *Shirayuri Joshi Daigaku Jidō bunka sentā Kenkyū ronbunshū*, XXVII, Shirayuri Joshi Daigaku Jidō bunka sentā: 153-168.

Maurizi, A. (2018) “Il Giappone tradotto: la letteratura dagli anni ‘70 ad oggi”, *I mille volti del Giappone tra storia e immaginario*, Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca (Milan, 15 November 2018), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jr-k47L6-gQ (visited 07/06/2023).

Melati, P. (2022) “La morale della tavola”, *Il Venerdì di Repubblica* 1767, 16-22.

Nathanael, T. (2022) “An Interview with Translator Takami Nieda”, *ChLA Global Committee* (September 6) https://childlitassn.wixsite.com/intlcommittee/single-post/interview-with-translator-takemi-nieda (visited 12/03/24)

Nicolae R. (2012) “Musicality and onomatopoeia use in Myazawa Kenji’s short stories”, *Challenges in Translation: Space, Culture and Linguistic Identity* 13: 112-127.

O’Sullivan, E. (2012) “Why Translate Children’s Books?”, *2012 IBBY Congress* (London, 23 to 26 August 2012), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zTH5dagKUg (visited 02/04/2023).

Ozumi, A. (2009) “Onomatopee giapponesi. Strategie di traduzione nel romanzo e nei manga”, *Manga Academica* 2: 69-91.

Paruolo, E. (2010) “Translating Food in Children’s Literature”, *Testi e Linguaggi* 4: 49-69.

Pastore, A. (2017) “Un lessico non tanto famigliare Tradurre dal giapponese all’epoca della globalizzazione”, *Tradurre pratiche teorie strumenti* 12: 1-8,

https://rivistatradurre.it/un-lessico-non-tanto-famigliare/ (visited 10/06/2019).

Piacentini, M. (2023a) “Epitesto e traduzione per l’infanzia e l’adolescenza”, *inTRAlinea* Special Issue: Tradurre per l’infanzia e l’adolescenza, https://www.intralinea.org/specials/article/2620 (visited 24/08/2023).

----- (2023b) “Tradurre per l’infanzia e l’adolescenza: editori, editor e traduttori a confronto”, *inTRAlinea* Special Issue: Tradurre per l’infanzia e l’adolescenza, https://www.intralinea.org/specials/article/2612 (visited 24/08/2023).

Sato, E. (2016) “Proper Names in Translational Contests”, *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 6(1): 1-10.

----- (2017) “Translanguaging in Translation: Evidence from Japanese Mimetics”, *International Journal of Linguistics and Communication* 5(1): 11-26.

Simeon, L. (2021) “A Japanese Author, Her Translator, a New Classic”, *Kirkus Review* https://www.kirkusreviews.com/news-and-features/articles/temple-alley-summer-sachiko-kashiwaba-interview/ (visited 18/01/2025).

Sung, S., S. Park and K. Kim (2016) “Why not Japanese names? Reader response to character name translation”, *Neohelicon*, June 43: 213-231.

Testa, E. (2018/2019) *Il Giappone sullo scaffale. La narrativa giapponese nell’editoria italiana.* Master’s Thesis, Venezia: Università Ca’ Foscari.

The Japan Foundation (ed) (2023) *Lifelong Favorites-Selections from the Bookshelves of Young Readers in Japan*, https://www.worthsharing.jpf.go.jp/en/lifelong-favorites/ (visited 20/05/2024).

Wakabayashi, J. (1991) “Translation Between Unrelated Languages and Cultures, as Illustrated by Japanese-English Translation”, *Meta* 36(2-3): 414-423.

----- (1992) “Some Characteristics of Japanese Style and the Implications for Japanese-English Translation”, *The Interpreters’ Newsletter* n. 1 Special Issue: 60-68.

------ (2008) “Foreign Bones, Japanese Flesh: Introducing the Genre of Children’s Literature through Translations”, *Japanese Language and Literature* 42(1): 227–255.

Yamazaki, A. (2002) “Why Change Names? On the Translation of Children’s Books”, *Children’s Literature in Education,* 33(1): 53-62.

Yumoto, K. (1997) *Popura no aki*, Tokyo: Shinko bunko. Engl transl. by C. Hirano (2002) *The Letters*, New York: Ferrar Straus Giroux. Fr transl. by R. Nakamura and R. de Ceccatty (2004) *L’automne de Chiaki*, Paris: Seuil. It transl. by M.E. Tisi (2018) *Lettere d’autunno*, Roma: Atmosphere.

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/19959