

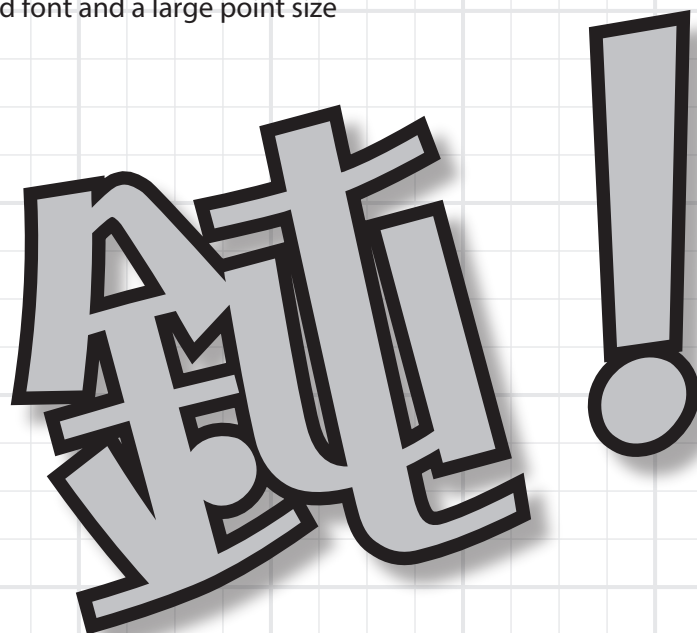
Kanji Sound Effects in Manga

Manga (Japanese cartoons) are rich in sound effects. The Japanese have taken the art of onomatopoeia to such lengths that their manga represent the sounds of remorse (*acha*), a tongue hanging out (*biron*), and internal or external warmth (*hoka hoka*). This puts manga light-years ahead of American comics with their rudimentary sounds of *Pow! Boom! Zap!*

Japanese sound effects are usually rendered in katakana. But what happens when you represent them in kanji, as Katsuya Terada has done in his graphic novel *The Monkey King*?

Take *Don!* (ドン!), the sound of punching someone hard. In katakana, a bold font and a large point size

turn up the perceived volume. But if you replace ドン with 鈍 (also pronounced *DON*), it could create even more of an impact. Readers skilled at reading both kanji and manga will absorb the yomi *DON*, disregard the meaning (dull, slow, stupid), and take the twelve, intricate strokes as a sign of something big. And good readers will absorb all this information without consciously noticing the kanji. Whereas the character would send most kanji students scurrying to the dictionary, fluent readers won't be in the least confused by the irrelevant meaning of this subliminal symbol.



This bean-jam-filled wafer is called a *monaka* (最中: extreme + middle, which somehow means “the shape of the moon floating on a pond during the harvest festival”). The *monaka* in the picture is supposed to resemble a *hanko*, or personal name stamp. (See page 139 for a picture of a *hanko*.) The kanji in the left-hand column are 福富, Fukutomi, which must be the name of the manufacturer. The characters in the right-hand column are less clear. They appear to be 菓匠, which could break down as “cake” + “craftsman.” If so, then one could interpret all the kanji as “Fukutomi Cakeworks.” Or one could just enjoy the cookie along with some tea, accepting that it’s probably not all that essential to know what the cookie says!

