

# Manga 3.11: The Tsunami, the Japanese Publishing Industry, Suzuki Miso's Reportage, and the One Piece Lifeboat

BY [Ryan Holmberg](#) Aug 31, 2011

Since July, the number of manga authors making work about the March 11th earthquake and tsunami has increased noticeably. There seems to be a new book every week or so on related topics, and numerous spot treatments in periodicals. Short diaristic accounts are most typical, narrating the day of the disaster, trips north to be part of the relief efforts, or warm remembrances of a pre-disaster Tohoku (Northeast Japan). In most cases the artists have donated writing fees to charity or have written for charities directly. Prominent artists have participated in charity book signings. Original artwork has been sold at fund-raisers. Major and minor artists alike have visited schools, community centers, and refugee camps to conduct volunteer manga drawing classes for displaced schoolchildren.

The publishing industry in general has donated generously. On March 22, for example, various industry organizations came together to form the Earthquake Response Center (Daishinsai shuppan taisaku honbu). Its initial purpose was to organize information about disrupted distribution and supply channels for those in the industry. Its main public contribution has been the Book Donation Project, through which hundreds of thousands of volumes have been collected and delivered to heavier hit communities. Another group of some 350 publishers, distributors, and retailers were hoping to deliver more than 100,000 donated books and magazines to Tohoku children by "Reading Day" on April 23. Amongst them were *Doraemon*, *Kamen Rider*, and two hundred other titles for a total of 20,000 volumes from Shōgakukan. Kōdansha, at the request of the Ministry of Culture and Science, donated 30,000 volumes of children's books, young adult material, and comics at the end of March. As for manga specifically, in May Tezuka Productions and Takarazuka City (site of the Tezuka Osamu Memorial Museum) together donated ten sets of 87 volumes of the author's work, including *Phoenix* and *Black Jack*, to cities in Iwate and Fukushima Prefectures. In June, Aoyama Gōshō, author of the popular *Detective Conan*, began a manga donation drive through newspapers and the internet, collecting more than two-thousand books in just over a month. Half of them were given to refugee centers in his home prefecture of Miyagi, and the other half to the Meiji University-run "Manga Terakoya," a free comics reading space in Urayasu, an area of reclaimed land on the north side of Tokyo Bay badly damaged by the earthquake. Famed gekiga author Saitō Takao, whose studio is in Tokyo but who lives in Iwate Prefecture, donated 5 million yen to IBC Iwate Broadcasting's charity fund. At 80 yen to the dollar, that's roughly 63,000 USD.



Weekly Shōnen Jump, no. 15 (March 14, 2011), cover. One of the Jump issues made available for free online by Shūeisha after March 11th.



Weekly Shōnen Jump, no. 16 (March 19, 2011), cover. One of the Jump issues made available for free online by Shūeisha after March 11th.

The manga industry, like the publishing industry in general, now appears as a community that “makes a difference.” This public image boost is certainly merited, having raised both money and spirits for the victims of March 11. Yet sometimes I think the press has been a little overgenerous. For example, in the weeks immediately following the quake, many of the top comics magazines – including *Shōnen Jump*, *Shōnen Magazine*, *Young Magazine*, *Morning*, and *Shōnen Sunday* – could be read for free on the web and in some cases on cell phones. Shūeisha was first with *Jump*. Kōdansha made available six comics titles. Shōgakukan nine. A number of non-comics publishers did the same. This was most immediately an answer to the difficulty of distributing printed matter because of road damage, track damage, and fuel shortages. However, the press has consistently framed particularly manga publishers’ decision to go digital as an act of selfless giving to displaced and distraught Tohoku youth. Indeed, the Shūeisha site for *Shōnen Jump*, which reportedly had one million hits on the magazine’s release date alone, did receive messages of thanks from readers in afflicted areas. However, if you don’t have a home you probably don’t have internet, and cell phone distribution implies a target of teens, young adults, and older. Given the concentration of the Japanese population, most of those million-plus readers were presumably in Tokyo or further down the archipelago. Tellingly, the big three (Shūeisha, Kōdansha, and Shōgakukan) all pulled their free online content at the end of April, which is to say once transportation networks to Tohoku’s main

cities became reliable again, and once the larger book and magazine retailers in the area reopened – which is to say, once the market was operating well enough to absorb the print-runs of magazines.

Given the economic troubles caused by March 11, it is hard to believe that the short experiment with free web content was not motivated primarily by self-interest. Publishing after all is a business, and the big houses are all corporations. This business, like many others, was hit hard by the earthquake and tsunami. Major paper and ink producers were incapacitated by the tsunami. Publisher and distributor warehouses suffered heavy losses of stock from the earthquake. Infrastructural damages slowed or blocked deliveries. Some 787 retailers were reportedly damaged or destroyed, leading to over three billion yen (38 million USD) in lost books and magazines. Total industry damages, including stock losses at distributor warehouses and projected retail outlet repair costs, are approximated at 5 billion yen (62.5 million USD). Sadly, the public school system, just before the new school year (which begins in April), lost 504,399 textbooks worth 250 million yen (3.1 million USD).

All of this is salt in an open wound. Things have leveled out recently, but since the mid 1990s the Japanese publishing industry has been contracting a few percentage points per year. For certain segments of the market, that rate increased after March 11. One top publisher reported that sales in Tohoku and 23 wards of Tokyo dropped 15% in the month following the earthquake. In and around Tokyo, electricity cuts, shorter business hours, reduced train and bus schedules, and fear of leaving the house are said to have been some of the reasons for the slackening of consumption in general. In publishing, most severely affected have been magazines, the market of which has shrunk by almost 7% over the past year. The total print-run of manga periodicals dropped 13.3% over the same period. Compare this with a contraction of 7.3% over the course of 2010. As an industry that depends on magazines for both revenue and publicity, this does not bode well for Japanese comics. It's not clear yet to what extent the earthquake and tsunami themselves are to blame for these numbers, but combined with the losses on March 11, it has made business very difficult, especially for smaller publishers. Most of the large houses rebounded quickly, but many smaller ones remain in danger.

The Japanese publishing industry itself does not claim a significant portion of the national economy. Grossing 1800 billion yen (22.5 billion USD) in 2010, it is less than half of one percent of GDP. The comics market is about 400 billion yen (5 billion USD), not quite one fourth of publishing. However, if one considers how books and comics provide “content” for entertainment industries (movies, animation, video game, et cetera) the publishing industry's role in the economy is much greater than book and magazine sales suggest. Such a more widely defined “manga industry” underlies approximately 3000 billion yen (37.5 billion USD) of entertainment product. Needless to say, its impact on culture and society is profound. That said, one would think the publishing industry's trials since March 11 would be prominent news. But there're not. There were a few newspaper articles in late March and early April about the immediate damages. For developments since, one has to dig in trade publications. Information specifically on comics is even more rare. The public has been reminded many times over how manga is helping Tohoku, but there is almost no one writing about how the industry itself has suffered and changed. Of course, it will probably be a year before the dust settles and a full picture can be had. Still, enough time has passed since the first blows for at least a sketch.

Suzuki Miso (b. 1963) has attempted just that in his “The Day Japan and I Shook.” This self-described “reportage comic,” covering the after-effects of the earthquake and tsunami, recently began serialization in *Comic Ryū*, a teen-young adult, otaku-inflected monthly published by Tokuma Shoten. Due to financial troubles, however, the magazine was forced to cease after its August issue (published June 18). So while the first chapter of Suzuki's serial appeared in print, for the time being the continuation can only be read [online](#). It will reappear in print when *Comic Ryū*

resumes publication in December. Like many other authors treating 3.11, Suzuki is donating all income from the serial to charity.

As I said, “The Day Japan and I Shook” describes itself as a “reportage comic,” a genre that the artist has been working in since covering the first Nintendo boom in the mid 1980s. It is to treat the after-effects of the March 11th earthquake and tsunami, but as a “life-sized catastrophe.” This is how Suzuki’s fictional persona describes the project in chapter one. The situation is not funny, he ruminates, so there’s no room for gags. A direct take, on the other hand, would be too heavy. “Scenes of the tsunami swallowing up cars and houses crisscross my mind. With so many people having lost their homes, their families, their land, living in refugee camps and in fear of radiation, what kind of manga should one draw? Is it the time to even be drawing manga?” The answer, urged upon him by his editor, who accompanies him like a wise uncle throughout the manga, is to turn away from the ultra-spectacular (like the boats beached on building tops) and toward the small, the “life-sized,” starting with Suzuki’s own experiences. “The big losses alone,” the editor explains, “do not make up the recent disaster.”



Suzuki Miso, "The Day Japan and I Shook," Comic Ryū (August 2011) (published June 18, 2011).

So the first chapter begins undramatically but personally with Urayasu, an area of reclaimed land on the north side of Tokyo Bay. It is best known as the site of Disneyland, but there are also large residential tracts in the area. On the day of the quake, Suzuki’s daughter was at Disneyland, one of 70,000 guests that day, and one of 20,000 stuck there until trains and buses began running again the following morning. If Disney needed a public image boost, it gets one here. The park’s handling of the situation was shipshape, and its hospitality five-star. The stranded guests that day were treated

to hot meals and all-you-can-eat sweets. It was also one of the structurally soundest places in Urayasu one could be. The residential areas of Urayasu suffered significant structural damage. House foundations sank. Plumbing in high-rises did not function for over a month. The pavement cracked and the ground liquefied, as it did in some of the reclaimed areas of Kobe after the 1995 earthquake. All of this Suzuki illustrates through computer-processed photographs. Meanwhile, at Disneyland, sand pylons driven deep into the ground to support the many heavy structures above ensured against precisely the sort of rupturing that happened elsewhere in Urayasu. Only the park's parking lot suffered liquefaction. Suzuki does not take on the obvious political question here: what is the story behind a land development policy that has higher construction standards for a commercial entertainment district than its neighboring residential ones? Instead, in the many comic asides of the manga, he dolls himself up like Mickey (looking more like Sonic) and exclaims “*Dizunii sugae*” – “Disney’s awesome!”



Suzuki Miso, "The Day Japan and I Shook," Comic Ryū (August 2011) (published June 18, 2011).

Having been brought up to suspect all things Disney, I have a knee jerk reaction to such sweeping praise. Yet the park seems to have deserved it. The details Suzuki provides are just the beginning. Japanese television reported extensively on the park's handling of the situation, with the host of one show going as far as recommending Disney as a model the government should emulate before the next disaster. Apparently, there is a crisis training session going on somewhere in the park 180 days out of the year. In addition to guiding visitors to safety, employees are instructed to use whatever objects are on hand to help, protect, and comfort visitors in cases of emergency. This means using



both things designated as emergency supplies, as well as whatever can be found on store shelves or in food stalls. Because of the nature of the place, the details of this can be funny. For example, large stuffed animals were handed out for people to use to protect their heads. Japanese television showed images of people running wearing teddy bears as helmets. Amongst the foodstuffs handed out were “gyoza dogs” and “Mickey manju.” But the commitment to safety and comfort was real. Employees voluntarily cleared store shelves to keep people warm and fed. At night, the park dipped into the emergency food supplies it always holds in reserve: enough water-reconstitutable *daizu hijiki gohan* packs (rice mixed with soy beans and seaweed) to feed 50,000 people for three to four days. Gloves, masks, and silver and gold glitter capes were handed out to those forced to spend the night. Cardboard boxes were broken down and handed out as bedding. Buildings were opened up to get as many people as possible out of the near-freezing cold. A large number were relocated to Disney Sea next door. Because the pavement of the public route linking the two parks had cracked and liquefied, people were instead shuttled via the rear staging areas, otherwise strictly off-limits to visitors in order to preserve the fiction of the magic kingdom. This detail, the sacrifice of sacrifices, also appears in Suzuki’s comic.

Suzuki’s writing on Disney and Urayasu is a timid beginning to a promising project. Generally less informative than what one can find online, and making no effort to draw back the curtain, it is certainly no work of investigative reporting. It even gets a basic fact wrong: 20,000 park visitors spent the night, not the day’s entire 70,000. What bothers me most I think is Suzuki’s lack of skepticism. Of course, Disney did exactly what it should have done. But I cannot help but suspect some corporate self-interest at play. And the rigorous training and clockwork execution echo Disney’s notoriously totalitarian work environment. One thing repeated on Japanese television was surprise that such high degrees of professionalism and initiative were maintained despite the fact that ninety percent of the park’s employees are part-time employees. (A book from 2010 about how Disney works so well with this structure went into a second edition after March 11.) Labor issues aside, these aren’t company drones. Should Disney really get all the credit for behaving “awesomely,” or shouldn’t some be passed to individual initiative? I realize these questions digress from the matter of the earthquake itself. I raise them to note Suzuki’s tendency to not challenge the word of industry and the media. This also comes out in his coverage of manga publishing.

A better piece of “comics journalism” comes in the second chapter of “The Day Japan and I Shook,” posted online at the end of July. Subtitled “The Day the Publishing Industry and I Shook,” it is a valuable introduction to the topic of Japanese publishing since March 11. It certainly taught me a number of things, and inspired me to write the present essay. Unfortunately Suzuki’s description of things is not always thorough, his information not always exact, and his picture not always clear, at least to an industry outsider like myself. Availability of information can only be partly to blame. What follows is a summary of his reporting heavily fortified with some of my own research and thoughts. This is not meant to be a complete or final analysis of the impact of 3.11 on book, magazine, and comics publishing; just a first pass at making sense of the situation.



Suzuki Miso, "The Day Japan and I Shook," *Comic Ryū* online (July 29, 2011).

Suzuki first visits the offices of Tokuma Shoten, the publisher of *Comic Ryū*. He asks about the damage to publishers, whose warehouses are typically located just outside of Tokyo proper, in Saitama Prefecture to the north, or Chiba Prefecture to the east, sometimes also on soft reclaimed land. No damage of note at Tokuma. Other warehouses, however, were not so fortunate. At one, pallets of hundreds of thousands of books were toppled and scrambled. At another, the sprinkler system was set off. One wishes here, like elsewhere, that Suzuki were more specific with details, fleshing out interviews with his own research. The pallet anecdote probably refers to the 4 million books that fell during the earthquake at the distribution center of an unnamed "large publisher," according to the *Asahi Daily*, jamming the machinery of its automated warehouse. The sprinklers were mistakenly set off at a number of publisher warehouses, distribution centers, and major bookstores. *Shinbunka*, a publishing industry trade paper, reported the loss of some 120,000 volumes by falling and sprinkler at (one of Japan's largest distributors) Nippon Shuppan Hanbai's distribution center in Ōji, northern Tokyo. Suzuki's companion jokes that water damage might not necessarily be a bad thing – if the victims are old non-sellers eating up storage space and company money as taxable assets (since stock destroyed by accidents is treated differently under tax law). Water is never so discriminate, however, and as Suzuki's friend points out, for security's sake ironically, newer stock tends to be placed closer to the sprinkler systems.



Suzuki Miso, "The Day Japan and I Shook," Comic Ryū online (July 29, 2011).



Ishimaki Plant, Nippon Paper Group (March 24, 2011).

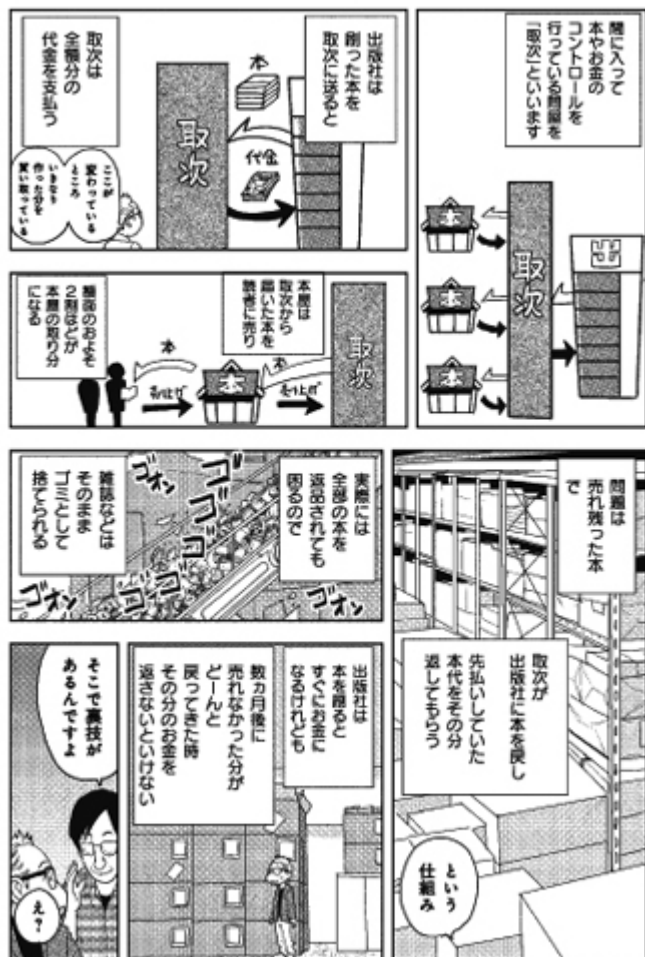


The next topic Suzuki treats is paper. Beginning in June, a number of publishers had difficulty printing books for lack of it. Nippon Paper Group's plant in Ishimaki (Miyagi Prefecture), one of Japan's largest, was gutted by the tsunami, its multi-ton reams strewn about "like rolls of toilet paper." Suzuki mentions video of the Ishimaki plant on [Youtube](#), but the photographs on this [Ishimaki City](#) site are nice and crisp. Though Suzuki's reporting stops with the bare fact of destruction, not only was almost the entire stock of paper lost at Ishimaki, but debris rendered the plant's machinery useless. The train cars and tracks linking the plant to the rest of Japan were also wiped out. Nippon Paper Group's factory in Iwanuma (Miyagi Prefecture) and Mitsubishi Paper's main factory in Hachinohe (Aomori Prefecture) were also forced to stop because of tsunami-related damages. As reported by the Sankei Daily News, in 2010 these three factories accounted for 18.7% of book and magazine paper, and 13.8% of newsprint. Already in early April, losses in total paper production for the year due to the earthquake and tsunami were 1.5 million tons out of 8 million for general printing paper, and 500,000 tons out of 3.5 million for newsprint. Shortages of bleaching chemicals have also created problems. The Nippon Paper Group's website hopes for the reopening of its Ishimaki factory in mid September, but that's hard to imagine from the photographs. The Mitsubishi facility in Hachinohe had resumed partial operation by the end of May, but as of the end of July was still only operating at 55% of pre-earthquake capacity. It was aiming at 90% by the end of summer. In the meantime, imports from overseas have made up some of the difference, but page cuts have been common, as have cancelled publications.

Fortunately, both paper producers and publishers keep large amounts of paper stored in their warehouses near Tokyo. Larger publishers typically have on hand one or two months' worth. Unfortunately, even these stores became inaccessible or unusable after the earthquake. Suzuki reports on poor road conditions, specifically the liquefaction of roads, presumably in the reclaimed areas of Chiba. Lack of fuel was also an issue. A number of sources reported the damage of stored paper, again by falling and sprinklers. Magazines requiring higher grade paper for printing photographs were in the tightest bind, often forced to use alternative stock. As for manga, one of Suzuki's interviewees from Tokuma explains that the industry got by repurposing journal (senmonshi) paper for magazine use. What still remained an issue at the time Suzuki wrote his piece was printing ink (I don't know if this is still the case). Manga might be drawn in only black, but they are printed in purples, pinks, greens, and blues, the "color" pages and covers aside. Suzuki does not go into the details, but according to newspaper reports the main problem was not the destruction of ink stocks, but rather the plants making the base ingredients. A DIC factory in Kashima (Ibaragi Prefecture), responsible for producing organic pigments, was damaged by the tsunami, but appears to have fully resumed production in May. A Maruzen Petrochemical plant in Chiba Prefecture caught fire after the earthquake, eliminating (potentially for a whole year) the only domestic producer of DIB, a chemical necessary for creating ink resins. Suzuki asks his interviewees why not just print in black? The publishers respond to him as if he's an idiot: shojo magazines especially would never sell with a reduced palette. Considering this chemical wonderland, one wonders what biohazards preceded Fukushima's radioactivity into the Pacific Ocean.

The destruction of actual books and magazines, however, was the publishing industry's biggest blow. This segment is Suzuki's strongest, combining hard facts with useful diagrams of how the industry functions in Japan. He opens by citing a May report from the Japan Publication Wholesalers Association (Nihon shuppan toritsugi kyōkai). It details the following losses just for distributors: 440 million yen (5.5 million USD) in warehoused books, 960 million yen (12 million USD) in uncollectible receivables (unsold stock deposited at retailers on consignment), and 1.7 billion yen (21.3 million USD) in accounts receivable (books sold but not yet paid for). Suzuki does not explain what all this industry jargon really means, and I imagine it would be unclear to the mainly teen and young adult readership of *Comic Ryū*. Adding other costs like building repairs and reconstruction, the losses for distributors alone totaled 3.8 billion yen (47.5 million USD). Most of

these losses stem from earthquake and tsunami damage at 787, 104 of which were destroyed either entirely or partially. You might be imagining inundated bookstores and toppled shelving units, photographs of which exist online. But an equally representative image would be a wrecked convenience store, the largest mover of magazines in Japan, comics included. Total industry damages, as stated earlier, are approximated at 5 billion yen (62.5 million USD).



Suzuki Miso, "The Day Japan and I Shook," Comic Ryū online (July 29, 2011).

As Suzuki points out, the question is who will cover these losses. The answer is not obvious because the Japanese book and magazine trade operates almost wholly on consignment. Suzuki explains the fix through a series of helpful diagrams. In Japan, distributors (who double as wholesalers in certain cases) buy the entire print-runs of books and magazines from publishers outright, with the right to refund if they do not sell within a given timeframe. This provides publishers with enough capital for the next publication, but it also creates a situation where the more a publisher does not sell the more they are compelled to print, in order to cover expenses from the previous loss and keep things running. Retailers meanwhile only pay for what they sell, and only after they sell it. Thus the large loss above in accounts receivable. Weekly magazines can typically be returned within forty days. Monthlies within sixty. Other sorts of publications vary on both the type and the publisher. Suzuki says that comics are not returnable, but I don't think is true. What booksellers in Tokyo have told me is that only very few manga are unreturnable, like those with dated inserts. Some publishers even allow returns up to six months after delivery. What happens afterwards also depends on product and publisher. Books typically end up stocked at publisher warehouses. Sometimes they are recirculated, sometimes with new covers. Sometimes they are pulped, which is what happens to almost all returned magazines. Publicized print-runs,

therefore, are typically not a reliable gauge of a book or magazine's true popularity in Japan. Overall industry return rates average around one-third, and about 8% of this eventually gets pulped.

The tsunami, by destroying unsold bookstore stock as well as books at distributors both on their way to retailers and on their way back to publishers, has created a serious problem for this state of perpetual inflation. Suzuki's companion describes the situation as "shoplifting by the gods." He doesn't expand, but I assume the idea is simply that, as retailers are not liable for books lost to theft, so now they are not liable for the books lost to natural disaster, so therefore presumably distributors are forced to foot the bill for books they typically would be able to return to publishers. As a result, one imagines, the distributors are not financially able to buy publishers' next run of books and magazines. Suzuki reports towards the end of the chapter that a deal will probably be reached before the end of the year detailing how publishers and distributors will share the losses. He asks, "Will publishing be able to survive this tide?" The answer, of course, is yes. One reason big publishers rebounded as quickly as they did after March 11 is precisely because manga is not just part of the publishing industry. It is also an integral part of a wider and much bigger entertainment industry that might get many of its ideas from stories first appearing in print, but does not rely solely on book and magazine sales for revenue or market penetration. Presumably those publishers without such transmedia properties, whose business is literally water soluble, will end up suffering the most from March 11.



Suzuki Miso, "The Day Japan and I Shook," Comic Ryū online (July 29, 2011).

Suzuki starts to explore this question when he turns to e-publishing. But humor here gets the better of serious analysis. Suzuki dresses himself up like Ken from *Fist of the North Star*, changes the

scenery to that comic's post-apocalyptic wasteland, and is visited by a prophet in robes bearing an iPhone. The prophet declares a future free from ink, paper, bookstores, distributors, and the labor of distribution. "The seed of electricity will rescue publishing," he promises. Presumably, Suzuki is referring here to e-publishing's potential as an alternative to Japan's inflationary consignment system, as well as to how digital asserted itself as a stopgap after March 11. According to the Japan Magazine Publishers Association, 234 different magazines had to postpone their release date in the weeks immediately following the earthquake. Sixteen magazines were cancelled outright. As stated earlier, a number of magazines decided to temporarily make their content accessible for free online. However, Suzuki answers the question of motivation somewhat contradictorily. The economic dimension, on the one hand, is stated more frankly here than it has been in the press. In response to Suzuki's dreaming of an e-comic future, his editors explain that the real reason *Comic Ryū* and "The Day Japan and I Shook" has been made available online is because Tokuma expects to make back costs by selling the serial as a printed book. The thinking reflects the common sense about manga magazines. As scholar Nakano Haruyuki has written, "magazines are tools to create books": feeding authors, keeping production regular, maintaining a regular relation between editors and artists, making artists and characters a regular part of a reader's life, and publicizing lesser known artists and titles. The post-earthquake decision to go digital was likely informed by some or all of the above. The desire to further popularize digital platforms, quickly rising in Japan and dominated by comics, was certainly also a factor.

Yet, as with Disney, here too Suzuki plays mouthpiece to the voice of corporate benevolence. Against Suzuki's vision of an e-future, Tokuma's editors explain how hard they worked after March 11 to ensure readers got their beloved manga. They ran about to secure gas and transport. They made deals on ink and paper. They slept at printers to make sure deadlines were met. The passage ends with a group of children delighted to finally get their hands on *Shōnen Jump* (as well as *Comic Ryū*), all thanks to the sweat and sacrifice of the manga industry. Even though Suzuki touches on it later, no mention is made at this point of why such hard work was necessary given the material and financial situation after the earthquake and tsunami. One is left to discover the contradiction for him or herself. Instead, he ends his thoughts on e-publishing with the following naiveté: "Here I thought that everything would go digital after the earthquake, but on the contrary people rediscovered print by passing books around." No doubt, book and magazine donations made life in Tohoku's refugee camps more tolerable. But I doubt print was given new life in the process. What fans want is "content." The envelope is simply a matter of necessity and convenience.

Let me close with a couple of related stories from the press. On March 26, the Asahi Daily News reported about how children and teens in Tohoku were starved and desperate for the newest issues of manga magazines. Small children, it was said, went home crying after not being able to buy *Korokoro Comic*. The most coveted magazine was of course *Shōnen Jump*, whose weekly per-print-run of 3.5 million is tops in the industry. It's lead title, Oda Eiichirō's pirate adventure *One Piece*, is also industry tops. And more, it is Japan's all-time best-selling book. Its most recent volume (no. 63, released August 4) had a record first printing of 3.9 million. The previous high was 3.8 million, held by its own vols. 61 and 62, the latter released on May 4, the first since the earthquake. Apparently, paper could be had by those publishers able to sell it. According to the Asahi article, fans searched Tohoku high and wide to read the newest chapter of *One Piece* in the March 19 issue of *Jump*. To find a copy, one man drove from Sendai to Yamagata (over an hour by car when roads are clear and fuel plentiful), bringing it back to Sendai, and lending it to a bookstore owner, who posted on his shop window a sign saying "Read it here!! *Shōnen Jump* March 19th issue, no. 16. One copy available." Word spread quickly. Kids biked in from over 10 kilometers. More than 100 kids came to read that single issue.



Oda Eiichirō, *One Piece Strong Words*, volume 2 (April 2011), cover.

On April 3, the *Asahi* ran another article about *One Piece* in relation to Tohoku. This one was written by Sasaki Toshinao, a fairly well-known media and technology writer. It's an appraisal of *One Piece Strong Words*, a collection of inspirational scenes from the manga. The book is divided into five sections: "Leaving Home," "Fighting Spirit," "Readiness," "Wisdom," and "Parting." Sasaki cites a few scenes. For example, "If I don't fight side by side with these guys with all my strength, I have no right to ride the same ship as them!!! I have no right to laugh with them!!!" And, "May your ship never get lost at sea!!! May you never lose your way to this island even in a storm!!! I will wait for you until the bell tolls!!! May we meet again!!! My friend!!!" Imagine a screaming mouth for every three exclamation points. "In the atmosphere following the earthquake," Sasaki writes, "the words collected here truly are strong. What we have learned in a time of peace does not come in very handy in times of never-before-experienced crisis. Thus, people feel beaten and powerless. It is at such times that these sorts of frank words strike directly to the heart." He continues, "Looking back, strong words used to be the butt of jokes during the bubble era, when an hedonistic, dried-out individualism came to maturity with a mass consumer culture. "Friendship" and "solidarity" only came to be taken seriously at the turn of the century, when middle class communities disappeared, and life became difficult. Solidarity between persons has become earnestly sought after once again, and during '00s was often expressed as longing for lost ties. Perhaps *One Piece*, which began serialization in *Shōnen Jump* in 1997, has served as a medium for those sentiments." And finally, "During the recent disaster, such solidarity continues to be revived. In these times, the words of this book will surely reach many, and take on new meanings." This is the kind of free publicity that only multi-decade multi-million weekly print-runs and multi-media multi-billion dollar properties can buy.



At the time of the Asahi article, volume one of *Strong Words* had gone through three printings and 330,000 copies. Volume two was released in late April with a first run of 300,000. This volume too was covered in the mainstream press. “In the severe conditions following the earthquake,” writes top business paper the Sankei News, trying to account for the book’s popularity, “it would seem that people are looking for ‘strong words’ to keep them going.” Are these writers really so naïve? First, this book would have sold well regardless. Themes of friendship, hard work, and success have been wildly profitable for *Jump* manga since the late ’60s. Second, as with online *Jump*’s readers, I find it hard to believe that the majority of people who bought *Strong Words* were victims of March 11. That is not to say the book is unrelated to the post-tsunami moment. Its sections are as follows: “Freedom,” “Love,” “Bonds,” “Evil,” and “Parting Words.” The third, “bonds” or “kizuna,” smacks of post-tsunami pep slogans, visible everywhere on billboards, in train cars, on television, urging the country to support their brethren in Tohoku. The political resonances here are I think telling. The conservative Liberal Democratic Party has adopted the same “kizuna” as its own post-3.11 party slogan, as opposed to the explicit anti-nuclear platform of the Communist Party and groups on the left. The sentiments in *Strong Words*, like *Jump* and *One Piece* in general, might have imparted some fighting spirit to those displaced by the tsunami. The web might have enabled them to get there quickly, when inspiration and comfort was most needed. But this call to national unity is essentially a conservative palliative to what is (especially once the Fukushima meltdown is figured in) a politically explosive situation.

Let’s credit Shūeisha only for what it really deserves: business acumen. One of the biggest boosts to Japanese publishing after March 11 were sales of books and magazine covering the earthquake, the tsunami, the Fukushima meltdown, and related topics. Publishers have made a bundle particularly on tsunami-related photobooks. If manga has suffered since March 11 and is looking for a way to recover, perhaps it could learn a lesson here: the disaster in Tohoku is a commercial opportunity. Whoever edited *Strong Words* vol. 2 at Shūeisha probably recognized this, as presumably did those who pushed for free web access after the earthquake – a move that received a suspiciously large amount of news publicity. Tokuma also knows this, keeping “The Day Japan and I Shook” going while *Comic Ryū* is recuperating. The publishers reviving post-Three Mile Island manga, post-Chernobyl manga, and works treating the prehistory of the Fukushima problem – they all know it too. Saitō Takao also knows it, because his post-earthquake *Survival* (1976-78) has been getting lots of web coverage and increasing shelf space in bookstores. Hopefully smaller publishers will follow suit. It could be to everyone’s benefit. They could use the sales and publicity. We could use better artistic responses to the disaster.

*Diesen Artikel finden Sie auch online unter <http://www.tcj.com/manga-3-11-the-tsunami-the-japanese-publishing-industry-suzuki-miso%E2%80%99s-reportage-and-the-one-piece-lifeboat/>*