

# News and Narrative in the Early Meiji Period: Kanagaki Robun's *Saga denshinroku*

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## Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between early Japanese newspaper war reporting and the written mode of jitsuroku in the first decade of the Meiji period. Kanagaki Robun's *Saga denshinroku* is introduced as a case study, as it is both one of the first Meiji "war jitsuroku" and a founding influence on what was to become a popular genre. In his author's introduction to *Saga denshinroku*, Kanagaki Robun attempts to rhetorically distance the work from popular conceptions of jitsuroku and of gesaku fiction as a whole, situating it instead as a contribution to "public history." However, the text itself draws strongly on the format and written style of the gesaku genre of the yomihon. Comparison of the rhetoric and the style of the author's introduction with passages from *Saga denshinroku* itself illuminates the complexities and the contradictions of ideologies of history, fiction, and "the news" in the early Meiji period.

## Introduction and Background

As is well established, newspapers are a distinctly modern medium in Japan,<sup>(1)</sup> first arriving in the last years of the Edo period after the forced opening of the country by American warships, then (after a brief period of prohibition during and after the Meiji Restoration) quickly spreading when officially sanctioned by the new Meiji government.<sup>(2)</sup> In Japanese media studies, some attention has already been paid to the roles that early Meiji war reporting had to play as a symbol and an engine of modernity, driving newspaper readership, spurring changes in journalistic practice and written style, and promoting a sense of identification with the new Meiji government along with a more fundamental awareness of Japan as a unified, modern nation-state.<sup>(3)</sup>

While on the one hand the modernity of newspapers and newspaper war reporting has been emphasized, on the other hand Okitsu Kaname and Yanagida Izumi have pointed out the thorough mixing and interrelationship of the early Meiji news media with the popular fiction (gesaku) industry, surviving from its heyday in the Edo period but struggling to maintain financial stability and cultural relevance in the age of "civilization and enlightenment." For example, gesaku authors like Jōno Arindō (条野有人) and Kanagaki Robun (仮名垣魯文) worked in newspaper reporting from very early on: Arindō was involved with the founding of *Tokyo nichichi shinbun* in 1872, while Robun worked at *Yokohama mainichi shinbun* in 1873-74.<sup>(4)</sup> More recently, scholars have further explored this intermixing, outlining the ways that preexisting popular entertainment forms like kabuki, woodblock-printed illus-

(1) A great number of studies on the newspaper in Japan have been produced from a great number of perspectives. To limit the discussion to works which primarily work to establish a broad-based history of newspapers in their very early years (that is, bakumatsu and early Meiji), see 興津要『新聞雑誌発生事情』、角川書店、1983年；鈴木秀三郎『本邦新聞の起源』、ペリかん社、1987年；and 秋山勇造『明治のジャーナリズム精神—幕末・明治の新聞事情』、五月書房、2002年。

In English, the primary history of newspapers in Japan is James L. Huffman, *Creating a Public: People and Press in Meiji Japan*, University of Hawai'i Press, 1997.

(2) Newspapers were officially permitted by the new Meiji government in 1869 with the promulgation of the Law on Newspaper Printing (新聞紙印行条例), which required government approval to open a newspaper.

(3) See e.g. 黄民基『唯今戦争始め候。明治十年のスクープ合戦』、洋泉社、2006年；小森陽一『日本語の近代』、岩波書店、2000年、pp. 49-52；or 土屋礼子(編著)『近代日本メディア人物誌、創始者・経営者編』、ミネルヴァ書房、2009年、especially pp. 25-26.

tration (nishiki-e / 錦絵), and jitsuroku (実録, adaptations of real-life events into unified written narratives<sup>(5)</sup>) took up, spread, and adapted reports of war in order to entertain audiences while participating in the modern discourse of the news.<sup>(6)</sup>

Perhaps the most comprehensive synthesis of these viewpoints has been proposed by Ariyama Teruo, who has begun publishing a series of articles that attempt to outline a unified “media-informational world” (メディア情報世界) of the Seinan War (February-August 1877). This world consists not only of primary newspaper reporting on the conflict, but also of a massive body of secondary and tertiary works (in popular formats like ukiyo-e, kōdan, kabuki, jitsuroku, etc., as noted above) that drew – and occasionally embellished – upon this primary stream.<sup>(7)</sup> While Ariyama’s scope and thoroughness is impressive, his approach also serves to highlight a shared tendency in much of the research to date: the Seinan War is often taken up as the exemplar of early Meiji news reporting to the exclusion of the preceding years.

There is good reason to take up the Seinan War in detail, of course. This war is the largest scale conflict since the revolutionary Boshin War (1868-1869), and it serves to cement the internal authority and the organizational and military power of the new Meiji government. In the specific context of media studies, journalism, and literature, the Seinan War is heavily reported upon, with a wide variety of newspaper reports and secondary adaptations available for analysis. It is also the first time in the history of Japanese news media that reporters are dispatched to the scene of events to procure more accurate information – first to Kyoto, where the Dajōkan established its administrative headquarters for the campaign, then eventually to the battlefield in Kyushu – thus making the war a landmark for modern dispatched and embedded journalistic practices.<sup>(8)</sup> In other words, from the perspective of contemporary media studies, the Seinan War media environment is one that appears a convenient half-step away, in which the early-but-recognizably-modern practices and conceptions of newspaper-based reporting exist side-by-side with a flurry of attempts to turn preexisting “premodern” entertainment forms to the more “civilized” work of news reporting.

Nonetheless, this intense focus on the Seinan War has the unfortunate side-effect of naturalizing the state of Japanese media as of 1877, de-emphasizing the considerable changes that were constantly taking place in early Meiji and obscuring trends that began to build in the years before all-out war. With that in mind, I seek to supplement this relatively deep understanding of the 1877 Seinan War media environment with an investigation into the state of war reporting earlier in the Meiji period. By more fully establishing this historical context, it becomes easier to understand what was fundamentally novel about Seinan War reporting and news. As a counterpoint to reporting of the Seinan War, I will examine news about the series of shizoku rebellions that took place in the mid-1870s.<sup>(9)</sup> Even over these few short years, the media landscape shifted considerably.

In the case of these mid-1870s rebellions, the basic framework for information flow that Ariyama establishes for the Seinan War period is still valid: newspaper reporting was the primary source of publicly-available informa-

(4) 興津要「幕末開化期文学研究」and 柳田泉「明治新政府文芸政策の一端」, both collected in 『明治開化期文学集 (一)』、筑摩書房、1966年。(Hereafter Okitsu/ Yanagida 1966)

(5) Jitsuroku evolved as a written genre from the medieval era through the Edo period. These stories were based on actual events – often tales of scandal, revenge killings, etc. – and in the Edo period, they were illicitly circulated in manuscript form in order to evade the censorship of the Tokugawa bakufu. See e.g. P. F. Kornicki, “The Enmeiin Affair of 1803: The Spread of Information in the Tokugawa Period,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 42, no. 2 (Dec. 1982), pp. 503-533; 高橋恵一『実録研究一筋を通す文学』、誠文堂出版、2002年; or 菊地庸介『近世実録の研究—成長と展開—』、汲古書院、2008年。

(6) 埋忠美沙「西南戦争における報道メディアとしての歌舞伎一日清戦争と対比して」『演劇学論集』62 (2016年); 生住昌大「西南戦争と錦絵：報道言説の展開と明治一〇年代の出版界」『日本近代文学』90 (2014年); 土屋礼子「明治初期のニュース冊子にみる絵と報道」『ことばと社会』4 (2000年) (hereafter Tsuchiya 2000).

(7) 有山輝雄「西南戦争におけるメディア情報世界の形成・序」日本大学法学部新聞学研究所紀要『ジャーナリズム&メディア』12 (2019年2月) and 「西南戦争におけるメディア空間の形成 (二)」, a paper presented at a meeting of the メディア史研究会 on April 30, 2019 (hereafter Ariyama 2019b).

(8) 渡邊桂子「西南戦争報道における京阪地方への記者派遣—『東京日日新聞』福地源一郎を中心に—」『早稲田大学大学院文学研究科紀要』第4分冊61 (2016), pp. 3-17.

(9) Most notable among these are the Saga Rebellion (佐賀の乱, February-April 1874) and the Shinpūren, Akizuki, and Hagi Rebellions (神風連の乱・秋月の乱・萩の乱, all in October 1876 – hereafter referred to in a group as the “October rebellions of 1876”).

tion about these short conflicts (other than rumor, hearsay, and other forms of oral communication, which obviously have left little historical record to draw upon). However, the accuracy and the quantity of newspaper reporting in these years pale in comparison to that produced during the Seinan War. As pointed out by Yamada Shunji, even in 1876, just a few months before the Seinan War, reports of the short-lived October rebellions in newspaper editorials and miscellany (*zappō* / 雑報) columns only rarely managed to produce a coherent narrative out of the disparate reports and rumors coming from western Japan. Instead, news of these conflicts appeared as scattered, disconnected *zappō* items. Readerly demand for comprehensive accounts of these events was filled by the written genre of *jitsuroku*. Generally written by former *gesaku* authors, these “war *jitsuroku*” collected and ordered newspaper reports into a unified, cohesive story.<sup>(10)</sup> In other words, there is a case to be made that for much of the nascent Japanese public in early Meiji, the “definitive” versions of *shizoku* rebellions and general unrest were not delivered by the newspaper, but rather gleaned from the secondary works like *jitsuroku* that provided order and narrative clarity to the uncertainty and disarray of contemporary newspaper reporting.

To be clear, the Meiji *jitsuroku* did not originate in 1876. As Yamada also points out, the early Meiji period saw the production of a series of “history *jitsuroku*” (歴史実録) beginning in December 1873 with the publication of the first volume of *Fukugo yumemonogatari* (『復古夢物語』), written by Matsumura Harusuke (松村春輔) and followed by similar works in subsequent years.<sup>(11)</sup> History *jitsuroku* combine official government proclamations, newspaper reports, and gossip and rumor to create modern histories of Japan (from the arrival of Commodore Perry's battle-ships to the recent present) in a familiar *gesaku* form, adopting the language and published format of popular Edo period fictional genres.<sup>(12)</sup> This new Meiji *jitsuroku* form was quickly adapted to the purpose of war reporting. Tsuchiya Reiko identifies three pioneering examples of such works from 1874. The first two are short works about the Taiwan Expedition (台湾出兵). In addition to these, Tsuchiya notes Kanagaki Robun's *Saga denshinroku* (『佐賀電信録』), published in November 1874 and narrating the events of the preceding February's Saga Rebellion, as a particular standout.<sup>(13)</sup>

Having established the foregoing as background, in the rest of this essay I take up Robun's *Saga denshinroku* as a case study of the state of “the news” in the Meiji period before the Seinan War. Through close reading of the text itself, I argue that *Saga denshinroku* is not only one of the first examples of Meiji war *jitsuroku*, but that it is both emblematic of and influential in the conception and the practice of war reporting in the following years, whether in subsequent *jitsuroku* – which were plentiful<sup>(14)</sup> – or in newspapers. This is due to the fact that like the rest of “the news” in early Meiji, *Saga denshinroku* takes shape at the nexus of three intertwined – but not necessarily entirely unified – motivations: 1) to articulate and to spread government-approved ideology, 2) to collect and archive accurate information of use to society, and 3) to attract readers, sell copies, and produce a viable commercial product. The key to pursuing all three of these motivations simultaneously was the adoption and the adaptation of existing written forms to transform disparate reports, rumors, and tidbits into a unified, comprehensible story. In *Saga denshinroku*, each of these motivations is on display in the author's introduction, where Robun also forcefully articulates his own ideological stance, attempting (if not entirely successfully) to disavow any association between *Saga denshinroku* and the literary and cultural context it draws upon. In the mismatches and the disconnects between Robun's professed ideology and his written practice as manifested in the main text, we can gain a more complete understanding of the sociocultural environment and the practice of “the news” in early Meiji, especially before the Seinan War.

To date, *Saga denshinroku* has received very little scholarly attention.<sup>(15)</sup> As a result, in an attempt to introduce

(10) 山田俊治『大衆新聞がつくる明治の「日本」』、日本放送出版協会、2002年、pp. 189-195.

(11) Most notable among these works is *Kinsei kibun* (『近世紀聞』), co-authored by Jōno Arindō and Somezaki Nobufusa (染崎延房, also known as Tamenaga Shunsui II) and published in 12 volumes from 1874-1882. Ibid., p. 190.

(12) For example, Okitsu Kaname judges history *jitsuroku* *Kinsei kibun* (see note 11 above) to adopt the format and style of the *yomihon* (読本), a written genre popularized by the work of Kyōkutei Bakin in the late Edo period. Okitsu/Yanagida 1966, p. 439.

(13) Tsuchiya 2000, p. 122.

(14) In the years following the publication of *Saga denshinroku*, Tsuchiya identifies at least 16 *jitsuroku* written on the *shizoku* rebellions of October 1876, and then at least 87 such works published about the Seinan War. Tsuchiya 2000, pp. 123, 128-129.

this work to English scholarship, I have included extensive transcriptions and translations from the text in this paper. While the quotations may run the risk of outweighing the analysis I provide along with them, it is my hope that they help to provide a sense of the original work's textuality in all its complexity.

### *Saga denshinroku* and Meiji Ideology

For Robun, the creation of *Saga denshinroku* was just one part of a larger attempt to contribute to the new Meiji discourse of enlightenment. In 1872, he and Jōno Arindō were named as cultural leaders (教導職) by the newly-formed Ministry of Doctrine (教部省) in the Meiji bureaucracy, charged to help instruct the Japanese populace in the government-approved ways of “civilization and enlightenment.” To this end, in July 1872 Robun and Arindō presented a sworn statement to the government detailing their resolution to change their ways and instruct the ignorant.<sup>(16)</sup> As a result, Robun's publishing activities changed almost overnight. In place of his farcical, entertaining early Meiji fictional works like *Seiyōdōchū hizakurige* (『西洋道中膝栗毛』, begun in 1870) or *Aguranabe* (『安愚楽鍋』, 1871-1872), Robun began instead to author works aimed at practical societal value, such as a government-authorized geography textbook ((*Kubigaki eiri*) *Sekai miyakoji* / 『(首書絵入) 世界都路』, July 1872), a translated volume detailing Western culinary practices (*Seiyō ryōri tsū* / 『西洋料理通』, fall 1872), and an illustrated guide to the Ministry of Doctrine's Three Principles in verse (*Sansoku oshie no chikamichi* / 『三則教の捷徑』, July 1873). In this same period, Robun began his work as a reporter at the *Yokohama mainichi shinbun*.<sup>(17)</sup>

Thus, in one sense, the publishing of *Saga denshinroku* in 1874 is a natural extension of the kind of writing that Robun had been doing in the years since his turn toward participating in enlightenment discourse. In another sense, however, the work is an attempt at something new. As outlined earlier, *Saga denshinroku* is counted among the earliest Meiji-period attempts to adapt the loose Edo genre of jitsuroku to new ends, and it is perhaps *the* first to turn its scope to narrating an extremely recent conflict.<sup>(18)</sup> This attempt at breaking new ground may be one of the contributing factors to the nature of Robun's introduction to his text, which forcefully lays out Robun's vision for the goals of his work and makes his case for its societal worth. Because this introduction establishes Robun's ideological framework and also lays out a roadmap for approaching *Saga denshinroku*, I will translate it at some length:

#### *Saga denshinroku*, Introduction

○ To explain how this work is able to summarize the facts of this affair: I have in recent years been living in Yokohama, and due my lengthy involvement with the newspaper company there, I obtained quite the collection of documents. From the outbreak of the fracas in Saga prefecture to the triumphant return of the government army, reporters at the newspaper copied down and made reports of public notices, telegrams, and letters received from readers all over. These were published in issue after issue of the *Mainichi* paper, which made it possible to know the entire circumstances and the ultimate outcome of the affair. Because there was no avoiding the occasional misinterpretation or baseless rumor, in cases where records were scarce, I compared my

(15) Even in Japanese, the work is most often counted in passing among Robun's other “enlightenment”-style writings as an example of reportage or journalism. To the best of my knowledge, the most extensive attention the work has received to date is in the Ph.D. dissertation of Charles Woolley, *Adjusting to the Times: Kanagaki Robun, Gesaku Rhetoric, and the Production of Early Meiji Literature* (Columbia University, 2016). A portion of the dissertation's fourth chapter reads *Saga denshinroku* within the context of Robun's turn toward government service and newspaper writing. See pp. 213-223.

(16) The Ministry of Doctrine in particular is the source of many of the four-kanji compounds that have come to define the early Meiji period. As guidance to its appointed teachers, the ministry promulgated Three Principles of Instruction (三条の教憲) along with a set of 11 Supplementary Themes (十一兼題) and one of 17 Supplementary Themes (十七兼題) to serve as guidelines for organizing teaching on spiritual and secular matters, respectively. Among the 17 Supplementary Themes are long-standing phrases like “a wealthy country and a strong military” (富国強兵 / fukoku kyōhei) and “civilization and enlightenment” (文明開化 / bunmei kaika). The Ministry of Doctrine was disbanded in 1877 and its responsibilities were folded into the Ministry of the Interior (内務省). Okitsu/Yanagida 1966, pp. 409-411.

(17) *ibid.* pp. 420, 423-424.

(18) The Saga Rebellion took place between February and April 1874; *Saga denshinroku* saw publication in November of the same year, and Robun's introduction to the text is dated June 15th.

account to each of the various other newspapers, and also sought out written reports and the like which came from the scene of the action, selecting only those which were guaranteed to be true, to which no doubt could be admitted. Upon completion of this stringent selection and putting the events in their proper order, the final text amounted to several pages. However, as I could not avoid redundancy with the newspaper, I merely stashed them away in my desk. One day, a great friend of mine came calling; he looked over this discarded work and prevailed upon me to make it public. From the beginning, I had been mistaken, and I can deny my friend's request all the less now, for these records' publication will increase the world's knowledge, even if only a little, and may also serve to soothe my own regret.

(...)

○ As previously mentioned, this work is a kind of duplication. That said, newspapers are like morning glories, a sight for a single moment — one day's publication is outdated tomorrow. Thus, it is most rare to go through issue after issue and edit them together for posterity. The paper used is often of Western make and easily torn; they are not produced in the same way as our historical documents or today's serious treatises. Because of this, not fearing being mocked for redundancy, I take it upon myself to edit together these accounts, and in so doing, provide for another viewing.

○ Everything recorded in this work is certifiably accurate. It is not to be regarded like the *Taiheiki*, one of those recitations which gradually turns into the tales of the Buddha, volume by volume mixing in fanciful tales and misguided explanations. It contributes an addendum to our public history, and in comparison to fanciful, invented tales of military exploits, it truly deserves to be called a “true record” (*jitsuroku*). All the more, then, it is a work worthy of the world, not one to be ashamed of. Alas that my brushwork is so clumsy!

#### 佐賀電信録小引

○此書事実の概略を得る者ハ僕近年横港に寄寓し、久しく新聞会社編漢の末机に列するを以て、佐賀鼎鼎沸の初より官軍凱旋の終り迄、臨時公聞・電報及び四方寄来の投書、社中報者の手記に到り毎日聞紙に掲載する者号を次で其顛末結局を知るを要す。其中、偶々謬説誤聞なきにあらねば、少録の際、各種の新聞紙に照対し、或ハ実地を経て、確乎たる条件決して疑ひを容ざる信書等を選び、順序拔萃する所、数葉に充てり。然れ共、新聞重複の名を遁れざるを以て徒に机下に束閣せしを。一日盟友某草扉を敲くの際、之を机辺に被閱して、刊行流布の拳を勧む。元来僕が拙撰、世に知る処今更に固辞せざるハ聊か世利を益し、且後戒の針棒たらんを思へバなり。

(中略)

○前条陳るが如く、此書重複に属す。といえども、新聞紙の如き槿花一朝の観に似て、当日の刷行明日は陳腐に触るれば、号を追って楮数を編綴し、之を後世に収むる者最稀となり。其刷紙の如きの多くハ洋製にして、破裂に易く、我史籍の製と同日の論にあらず。茲を以て敢て重累の譏りを懼れず、編集して以て一看に備ふ。

○此書記録する所各事確証あり。彼の太平記の如き、往々浮屠氏の編述になり、卷々空談妄説を混交せる者と一束して看做すべからず。公然歴史の一尾に付すとも、虚飾作文の軍書に比すれば実に実録と唱するも、更に又世界に恥ざる可し。惜ひ哉、僕が筆頭の鈍なるを。<sup>(19)</sup>

One characteristic of this introduction is Robun's attention to the place of the newspaper in society, along with his careful argument to justify this work's “duplication” of the newspaper's role. Robun identifies one of the fundamental attractions of the newspaper as its novelty, the production of new stories and new information day after day. As a

(19) *Saga denshinroku*, vol. 1, pp. 5-8. Translation is my own. All text from *Saga denshinroku* quoted in this essay is based on one of the copies held in the Special Collections of Waseda University, call number ㇿ 05 06376 1-2. This copy has been digitized and can be accessed through the library's digital archive: [http://archive.wul.waseda.ac.jp/kosho/ri05/ri05\\_06376/](http://archive.wul.waseda.ac.jp/kosho/ri05/ri05_06376/). All page number references to *Saga denshinroku* in this essay refer to the pages of the PDF files available in this digital archive. Although *Saga denshinroku* provides full reading glosses for every kanji compound it uses, my own transcription omits many of these, only providing furigana in cases of unusual characters or readings. In addition, I have added punctuation in order to facilitate ease of reading and make my own interpretations of the original text clearer.

result of this emphasis on novelty, however, newspapers are also ephemeral: not only does the information they convey quickly become outdated (陣腐に触る), but newsprint itself is fragile and disposable.

Robun positions his own text as a corrective measure to this state of affairs. By doing what others do not and collecting together the reports of various newspapers into a definitive version of the events of the Saga Rebellion, *Saga denshinroku* simultaneously duplicates the social role of the newspaper and transcends it, contributing an “addendum to public history” (公然歴史の一尾). In this ideological stance, we can see *Saga denshinroku*’s continuity with the history *jitsuroku* of the early Meiji period. More broadly, Robun aligns himself and his text with a discourse of “national history” growing since the late Edo period, envisioning a holistic, continuous Japanese nation that stretches from the present back into antiquity, united by the supposedly unbroken line of imperial succession back to the age of the gods.<sup>(20)</sup>

This equation of “public history” with “national history” is more strongly articulated in the main text. For example, Robun opens the main text of his narrative of the Saga Rebellion with the following passage:

Laozi writes that the most complicated things in existence arise from simple things, and great affairs arise from the insignificant. Since the founding of glorious Japan by the EMPEROR JINMU, the imperial rule (*kokutai*) has maintained a single, unbroken line, unchanging through the ages. However, once political power landed in the hands of the warrior families, the most revered imperial throne was a title in name only. Ah! in this time the sun’s radiance was hidden by trailing clouds, and the court nobles could do naught but sigh as they gazed at the heavens. But recently the reign of the Meiji emperor was recognized. Throughout the land, those yearning to serve the emperor roused themselves and gathered under the imperial banner; they proclaimed their noble cause and mended their ways, and at a single stroke restored imperial rule. The myriad systems of governance were revolutionized; the feudal lands were abolished and prefectures and counties were established. Overseas, relationships with each country were made amiable. Within our country, military forces for the land and sea were arranged; schools were established in abundance; the laws were revised; railroads, telegraphs, steamships, and all manner of technologies were nurtured, and there were none who did not work diligently for the emperor’s benefit.

老子曰：天下の難事ハ必ず易きより作り、天下の大事ハ必ず細きより作ると。抑我大日本の帝業 神武天皇草創以降、連綿として一系を断ず、万世不拔の国体なるを、政権一度武家に帰せしより至尊の王位も有名無実有名無実に属し、太陽靄雲あいうんの為に光輝こうようを覆はれ、月卿雲客天を仰ひで嘆息の他なかりしが時なる哉。去る明治改元の歳次、全国勤王の有志等振ふて、錦旗の本に蟻集し、大義を唱へ、名分を正し、一挙にして王政に復し、万機ばんきの制度旧格を一新し、封候を廃し、郡県を興し、外も各国と交際を親くし、内も海陸の軍備を整へ、学校を盛んにし、法律を改典し、鉄道電信航海術百般の技芸わざ挙って、功を奏せざるなき。<sup>(21)</sup>

The tale begins not with the start of the unrest in Saga, but with a holistic history of Japan from antiquity to the present. Perhaps the clearest aspect of Robun’s historiography here is his thorough adherence to Meiji doctrine and the elite modes of discourse of the day. The imperial line’s sovereignty is positioned as the primary and unchanging thread that unites the events of generations, with hundreds of years of shogunal authority dismissed at a stroke. All trace of present-day social and political unrest, displeasure, or criticism is effaced, from the unequal treaties signed with foreign powers to the bitter fighting in the wake of the Meiji Restoration. And receiving praise are not only the emperor, but also the ruling government of the Meiji period, which is commended for the results that have been brought about in international affairs, law, education, technology, and the like. Simultaneously, this brief history draws upon the elite written tradition of early Meiji, one that stretches back to the Edo period’s neo-Confucian order. The first line frames the discussion with a suitable allusion to the Chinese classics,<sup>(22)</sup> while the *kanbun kundoku*

<sup>(20)</sup> Harry Harootunian, “Late Tokugawa Culture and Thought.” *Cambridge History of Japan, Volume 5*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007 [1989], pp. 168-258. See especially pp. 178-182.

<sup>(21)</sup> *Saga denshinroku*, vol. 1, pp. 8-9.

style and overall tenor of the passage would not be out of place in the editorial column of one of the day's newspapers. In short, this passage bears little in common with the Robun texts which have managed to become part of the literary canon. There is no hint of the playfulness and vernacular-inflected written style of his well-known gesaku; instead, the careful control of style and of content is apparent. Judging from this passage, then, Robun indeed seems to be as serious as he professed to be in his 1872 statement to the Meiji government, committed to indoctrinating the ignorant in the ways of "civilization and enlightenment." However, this clarity of purpose and style is not maintained throughout the entirety of *Saga denshinroku*. Just as the discourse and the values of the early Meiji era's "modern" enlightenment were informed and influenced by the lingering remnants of the Edo period's neo-Confucian hegemony, Robun's own written practice could not be cut off from his authorial upbringing in the world of gesaku.

### "A True Record": Fact, Fiction, and Narrative Modes

Let us return to the author's introduction for a moment. What is perhaps even more notable than Robun's attention to the strengths and weaknesses of the newspaper format is the effort that he spends insisting upon the truth and the accuracy of his text. He emphasizes the exhaustive research behind its compilation and admits no possibility of inaccuracy or authorial intervention. This insistence on accuracy and truth became a calling card of war jitsuroku in the following years, particularly in the flood of works about the Seinan War.<sup>(23)</sup>

In the introduction's final paragraph, Robun takes pains to point out that even though it is a narrative of war, *Saga denshinroku* bears no comparison at all to an apocryphal, barely-historical work like the *Taiheiki*. This characterization of the *Taiheiki* – one of the most famous of the medieval military chronicles, an account of the wars in the Northern and Southern Courts period (ca. 1336-1392) – is one firmly based in the historical context of *Saga denshinroku*'s day as well as Robun's own written background. Although the events chronicled in the *Taiheiki* are based in fact, the text is an accumulation of multiple authors' additions and elaborations over a number of years, and on top of that the work's setting and characters were gradually adapted and elaborated upon in countless popular plays, stories, and recitations over the intervening centuries. Tsuchiya Reiko goes so far as to suggest that with the term "Taiheiki," Robun is referring not directly to the medieval text, but rather to contemporary kōdan entertainments (sometimes called "Taiheiki-mono" / 太平記物), which belonged decidedly to the same realm of vulgar popular entertainment as gesaku and kabuki.<sup>(24)</sup>

As part of this emphasis on the accuracy and truth of *Saga denshinroku*, Robun's suggestion that his work is a "true record" – or "truly fit to be called a jitsuroku" – is also noteworthy. This is perhaps the first time that the author of what is now referred to as a "Meiji jitsuroku" uses the term himself.<sup>(25)</sup> However, by invoking the term via a simultaneous denigration of the *Taiheiki*, it is clear that Robun's "jitsuroku" is not intended to establish continuity with the preexisting form. Rather, Robun draws a line between his own work and the written tradition that it draws upon, rejecting the historical-cultural associations of the term jitsuroku in favor of the literal meaning of the characters that comprise it. What's more, in his denigration of "fanciful, invented tales," Robun appears to reject the whole project of fiction, resolutely turning his back on his own background in gesaku writing.

This argument for factual accuracy and separation from the gesaku tradition is made every bit as clearly and as forcefully as Robun's argument for his text's value as an archive of the newspaper and as "public history." However, it stands much more ambivalently in its relation to the work as a whole. In fact, as a printed volume, *Saga denshinroku* adopts the format of the Edo period yomihon. It is woodblock printed in two volumes in the hanshibon (半紙本) format (that is, approximately 24 cm x 16 cm), and the main text is organized into discrete chapters (kai / 回) with each chapter supplemented with a two-page illustration. This is a far cry from the eminently modern newspapers of 1874, commonly printed in movable type on imported newsprint. *Saga denshinroku* – like subsequent war

<sup>(22)</sup> The quote draws on a well-known passage from chapter 63 of the Dao De Jing: 圖難於其易、爲大於其細。天下難事必作於易、天下大事必作於細。是以聖人終不爲大、故能成其大。

<sup>(23)</sup> Ariyama 2019b, p. 7.

<sup>(24)</sup> Tsuchiya 2000, p. 122.

<sup>(25)</sup> Author's introductions to the "history jitsuroku" introduced earlier (e.g. *Fukugo yumemonogatari*, *Kinsei kibun*) generally do make a case for each text's worth as a historical account and basis in fact, but Robun's use of the specific term "jitsuroku" appears novel.

jitsuroku and like Edo period gesaku – is a medium for looking at and reading aloud as much as or more than it is a text made for silent, individual consumption.<sup>(26)</sup>

More importantly, this ambivalent relationship to gesaku form and practice eventually moves further than the book’s format, extending into the text itself. The great majority of the main text of *Saga denshinroku* can be traced back to the pages of the newspapers of 1874 – Robun uses key phrases or entire passages from zappō items, selecting, ordering, adapting, and weaving together the original newspaper reports to create a singular story. As a result, the style of much of the text is similar to that of contemporary newspapers. As we saw earlier, for example, Robun’s narrative begins with a historical summary of Japan from antiquity to the present in a controlled kanbun kundoku style very reminiscent of contemporary newspaper editorials. However, as the story of the Saga Rebellion unfolds, the narrative slowly begins to pick up momentum, and that careful style begins to shift and change. The first volume of the work collects reports of the main battles of the short-lived Saga Rebellion. In the second volume, however, the focus of the narrative shifts considerably, and the story begins to follow Etō Shinpei, leader of the rebellion, and his compatriots as they flee in the wake of their military defeat, attempting to evade government forces long enough to request aid from fellow shizoku.

While unfortunately there is not enough room in the present essay to detail all of the permutations of *Saga denshinroku*’s style, I offer the following passage from the second volume as an example of how far the written style of this work eventually manages to shift from its kanbun kundoku opening.

On this day, Nakajima Teizō, having lost sight of [Kushiya] Yasuke and [Yamanaka] Ichirō and traveling alone, approached the town of Shita-Matsumaru in Ehime prefecture. As he approached, a patrolman standing by the side of the road quickly noticed him. Thinking how suspicious someone with a wide bamboo hat covering his face and a loose cloak hiding his features was, the patrolman followed after and approached him. Asked to state his identity, Teizō was alarmed; nonetheless, keeping fear from showing on his face, he gave a false name. When he made to leave, however, the patrolman blocked his path, saying, “This is all rather suspicious, so for the time being you need to come to the police station,” and tried to place him under arrest. Teizō, thinking that this must be the end, made no reply and ran off headlong. “I won’t let you get away!” cried the patrolman, and running like the wind, he quickly caught up to Teizō. As the patrolman drew his sword and attacked, Teizō likewise drew, replying “Have at you!” The battle raged to and fro, back and forth, each combatant giving their all in the wild fray.

中嶋鼎蔵は弥助一郎を看失ひ独行して、此日愛媛県下松丸町にさしかかるに、路傍に停止一個の邏卒疾くも之に眼を配り、笥籠に面部を覆ひ鳶帔に形容を纏ひし風体如何にも曲者と踪跡を踏み追蒐来たり。其姓名を質問せしかば、鼎蔵驚怖の思ひを抱けど、臆する気色を面貌に顕せず偽名を告げて去らんとするに、邏卒行途に立塞がり、「不審の件々あるにより兎も角も警視出張所まで来る可し」と強て勾引なさんとするに、鼎蔵今は是までなりと回答一言にも及ばずして驀地に馳出すを、「遁まじ」と彼邏卒疾風の如く追迫し、帯たる一刀抜よりはやく撃て、蒐るに鼎蔵も「心得たり」と抜合せ、一上一下虚々実々一往一来奮撃突戦。<sup>(27)</sup>

The difference in style and approach from the text’s historical introduction is immediately apparent. In contrast to the broad, abstract discourse of the opening passage, this scene is tense and dramatic. The action is focused on specific characters and their interactions, and includes both directly quoted dialogue and access to the interior thoughts and emotional responses of its characters. On the level of language, the style here hews close to that of an oral recitation, emphasizing the action and drama of the unfolding action with continuative forms and phrases, and also regularly supplying vernacular rather than Sino-Japanese readings for its kanji compounds. For example, the compound 停止 is glossed as the vernacular *tatazumu* rather than *teishi*, and 形容 is likewise glossed as *katachi* rather

<sup>(26)</sup> 前田愛「音読から黙読へ」『近代読者の成立』、岩波書店、2001年 [1973年]; Ariyama 2019b, p. 7.

<sup>(27)</sup> *Saga denshinroku*, vol. 2, pp. 23-24.

than *keiyō*. In other words, in spite of Robun's denigration of jitsuroku and rejection of his gesaku past in his introduction, passages like this one have as much in common with the yomihon format adopted by *Saga denshinroku* as they do with the Meiji newspaper.

To date, I have been unable to locate the item or items that this passage is based on in contemporary newspapers. This stands in stark contrast to much of the rest of *Saga denshinroku*. That said, we cannot immediately conclude that Robun invented this scene wholesale, nor even necessarily that he is the main influence on its written style; is just as likely that my inability to locate a newspaper original of this scene reflects the limits of my own capability for plumbing the archives as it does a genuine absence. Even if no such newspaper article exists, there is also the possibility that Robun's own investigations and access to letters or secondhand accounts may have turned up a non-newspaper source that was adapted into this scene. More fundamentally, though, as discussed in this essay's introduction, the early Meiji period saw a number of gesaku authors employed as writers for newspapers. As a result, the newspapers of 1874 employ a wide variety of textual and narrative styles, and it is plausible that even something as apparently fictional as the above passage might appear in similar form in a contemporary newspaper's miscellany column.<sup>[28]</sup>

As a result, rather than getting too caught up in questions of factuality or the existence of a newspaper source for this passage, what is more important for our purposes here is the disjunction between Robun's ideological framing in his introduction and the form that his narrative eventually takes. Regardless of Robun's stated disavowal of the world of gesaku, the newspapers of his day were still a new and unmapped medium, shaped by the disparate social and cultural backgrounds of the variety of writers they employed, publishing rumor and hearsay alongside grand statements of ideals for the civilization of Japan. In that sense, *Saga denshinroku* fits right in to the established newspaper mode of its day, and the use of newspapers as the primary source for the text means that any "rejection" of gesaku could only go so far. Also key is the disconnect between Robun's strict rejection of fiction and falseness and his decision to adopt the format of the illustrated yomihon. We might read this as an attempt to redirect the yomihon genre away from its Edo period roots, trying to put the established form and approach to new socially-acceptable uses. But in adapting the variety and confusion of newspaper reports into a unified narrative, the yomihon format combined with Robun's own talents as a storyteller, honed over years of practice, and eventually lead to the production of a dramatic, exciting story with intense narrative interest, propelled by scenes like the swordfight above.

It is this narrative interest and entertainment value that appear to have been *Saga denshinroku*'s lasting impression in its day. The work was apparently a brisk seller, and as shizoku unrest increased in coming years, it quickly spawned imitators.<sup>[29]</sup> I already outlined how the number of published war jitsuroku rapidly increased up through the Seinan War (see footnote 14), but there were also more direct copies. In December 1876, for example, Aoyama Kaoru (青山薫), an author based in Osaka, released a jitsuroku on the topic of that year's October rebellions titled *Hi-Chō denshinroku* (『肥長電信録』). As the title implies, this text is an unabashed copy of *Saga denshinroku*, adopting the earlier work's printed format, layout, and even similar brushwork for its text. It is important to remember that works like *Saga denshinroku* were not just contributions to the Meiji discourse of civilization and enlightenment – they were also commercial products geared to make money. Robun's work did not just advocate for a specific ideological position. It also proved that there was a market for true stories of war adapted from publicly available sources.

With this popularity in mind, as well as the clear turn toward vernacular style apparent in the swordfight scene translated above, the tone of Robun's introduction to *Saga denshinroku* may bear one final reevaluation. Just how unquestioningly we can take its bombastic rhetoric? Perhaps one of the only consistent characteristics between the

[28] This is particularly true for the specific historical context in which *Saga denshinroku* was composed, as it predates the well-known split of the newspaper industry into "large" and "small" newspapers (where small papers drew more explicitly on vernacular language and the written tradition of gesaku, often employing former gesaku authors who left the large papers). The *Yomiuri shinbun*, the first small paper, did not debut until November 1874, the same month that *Saga denshinroku* was published.

[29] Robun notes as much in his author's note to *Seinan chinseiroku* (『西南鎮靜録』, 1876-77), his follow-up to *Saga denshinroku*, covering the events of the October rebellions of 1876.

multiple forms of writing that are referred to under the label of “gesaku” is the self-deprecating ironic or satirical mode that they share, adopting elite forms of discourse in order to poke fun and to entertain.<sup>(30)</sup> To be sure, Robun’s own introduction to *Saga denshinroku* ends on its own humorous note as the author takes a self-deprecating jab at the messiness of his own handwriting. In that vein, might we not read Robun’s introduction as simply in line with the gesaku tradition, adopting the privileged rhetoric of his day in a high-minded, pompous introduction only to overturn it with an entertaining, accessible main text?

As the quotes from the main text so far have made clear, there is no question that there are elements of both “serious” and “playful” writing within *Saga denshinroku*. However, getting too invested into the issue of irony runs the risk of focusing too much on the ultimately unknowable question of what the author “really” had in mind while writing. Rather, it seems more productive to consider this ambivalence instead as a multivalence, a fundamental aspect of the work that derives from its own sociohistorical circumstances. The relationship between “vulgar” (*zoku* / 俗) gesaku writing and elite, elegant (*ga* / 雅), privileged forms – whether *kangaku* and *kokugaku* scholarship of the Edo period or the knowledge and ideologies of “Western enlightenment” introduced in the Meiji period – was always an uncertain and fraught one, and it became increasingly so as the Edo period neared its end. In these years, gesaku was a particularly abject written form, low in both social prestige and in financial return. Against that background, the move by the Ministry of Doctrine to appoint “cultural leaders” in 1872 was a clear opportunity for gesaku authors to more respectably participate in the elite cultural discourses of the day. As a designated cultural leader, Robun’s express charge was to use gesaku to enlighten the great unenlightened masses. From that perspective, it may not even be entirely meaningful to distinguish between *Saga denshinroku*’s “gesaku”-derived (and thus at least partially ironic) elements and its “enlightenment”-influenced (and thus presumably sincere) elements. Rather, the Tokyo publishing world in the seventh year of Meiji was a point in space and time where it appeared theoretically possible to participate in elite enlightenment discourse precisely *by* producing gesaku. The practice of attempting to do so, however, led Robun to simultaneously attempt to ideologically divorce his work from the low-prestige written tradition of gesaku while simultaneously drawing upon and working in that same mode.

In sum, Kanagaki Robun’s *Saga denshinroku* is a landmark work which stands at the crest of a great wave of popular collections and adaptations of “true stories” of news and war in the first decade of the Meiji period.<sup>(31)</sup> As one of the first examples of the war *jitsuroku* genre, *Saga denshinroku* set the mold for the works to come, influencing subsequent expectations of what the format was and could be. The text is also unique within its genre for the argumentation of its author’s introduction, which positions the work firmly within the realm of modern enlightened thought by disavowing any relationship with the gesaku written tradition. Nonetheless, gesaku practices of writing and publishing structure the work and give it its form, and they were integral to its popularity and influence. The paradoxes and the disjunctions between the ideological framework of the author’s introduction and the narrative practices of the main text are perhaps more valuable than the harmonies, for they help outline the contours of this vexed, thoroughly hybrid form and its historical sociocultural context.

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<sup>(30)</sup> Charles Woolley points out that the self-deprecating irony that pervades such highfalutin’ gesaku introductions inevitably contains an element of seriousness, however. Satire serves not only to jibe at privileged rhetorical forms, but also to appropriate those same forms in order to elevate the author. Woolley 2016, pp. 128-151.

<sup>(31)</sup> As Tsuchiya Reiko aptly points out, the Meiji war *jitsuroku* was just one of a whole flurry of attempts to adapt Edo period popular media forms to the new era and to the news industry, many of which began to appear right around this same time. We have already seen the example of the history *jitsuroku*. For another, *nishiki-e shinbun* (woodblock-printed broadsheets which illustrated and adapted the text of newspaper articles) also begin to appear in 1873-74. Tsuchiya 2000, pp. 120-121.