

Kōtoku Shūsui and Japanese Linguistic Imperialism

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Here I outline how the movement that aimed at establishing a national written language in the Meiji period (1868-1912) in Japan was actually supported by the celebrated anarchist, Kōtoku Shūsui (1871-1911). Kōtoku was one of the first to introduce anarchist thought in Japan and an influential journalist during the early days of the Japanese Left. That is followed by a translation of Kōtoku's essay that argues for the need to reform writing and establish a new national language. It is hoped that light will be shed on the politics surrounding written language in Japan, and how and why the early Japanese Left failed to confront this form of imperialism.

1. Introduction

Kōtoku Shūsui was one of the most famous and respected early socialists. He is often remembered today for his critique of imperialism. His first major book was entitled *Imperialism: Monster of the Twentieth Century* (1901).¹ It is a lesser known fact that over the course of his life he also helped to pioneer a new, colloquial form of writing, and lent significant support to the movement to establish it as the standard written language of Japan. It eventually gained acceptance as the National Language (*kokugo*). Like any national, standard “print-language,” it supported the growth of national consciousness, the idea that all Japanese were part of one

community and one culture, and consequently, supported the establishment of Japan as a nation-state.ⁱⁱ As I will explain below, although Kōtoku was one of the first to advocate anarcho-syndicalism and he paid for those beliefs with his life, he actually ended up lending indirect support to nation-statism and imperialism through his support for colloquial writing.

Over the course of decades of aggression and empire-building by the Japanese government, beginning with the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) and ending at the conclusion of the Pacific War, the artificially constructed notion of the “National Language” (*kokugo*) served Japan’s imperialistic policies, and was also part of what could arguably be termed the “domestic colonization” of communities within Japan, such as those of the Ryūkyū Islands.ⁱⁱⁱ Surprisingly, Kōtoku did not resist this movement to establish one national, standard written language, even after he began to advocate anarcho-syndicalism.

The movement that aimed to establish a standard written language for the Nation of Japan was referred to as the “movement to unify the spoken and written language” (*genbun itchi undō*). Many people in Japan in the late 19th century who were familiar with Western languages had felt that there was a serious disjunction between the spoken and written languages of Japan. While Western countries, such as England and France at the end of the nineteenth century already had a standard written language based on a standard spoken language, educated people in Japan at that time generally wrote in some form of literary Chinese (*kanbun*) or literary Japanese. These classical languages were completely different from the spoken language. And as a consequence, Japanese children had to study very intensely for many years before they could learn to read and write. To complicate the situation further, there was great spoken linguistic diversity throughout the archipelago. For

example, one Japanese scholar found eleven different ways that people asked the question, “When did you come to Edo?” during the Edo Period (1603-1868) that varied according to class, gender, etc.^{iv}

Aiming to bring the written language more in line with the spoken language, reduce the burden of Chinese characters, and overcome the communication barriers that regional dialect diversity naturally created, Japanese literati, intellectuals, and others began experimenting with various types of colloquial or vernacular writing in the mid-Meiji period. After years of experimentation, in approximately the late Meiji period, one form, one based on the spoken dialect of the Yamanote area of Tokyo (the privileged dialect of Tokyo) had gained ascendance as the dominant style of colloquial writing. This was the style that Kōtoku Shūsui helped pioneer and promote.

2. The Problem of Illiteracy and Movements to Simplify Writing

Any discussion of Kōtoku’s support for this movement to “unify the spoken language with the written language” cannot be understood without mentioning the problem of widespread illiteracy at that time. (Hereafter, for the sake of brevity, I will employ the Japanese term, the “*genbun itchi*” movement). Learning to read and write the various languages and styles current in the late 19th century and become fully literate must have been a truly daunting task for a child then. At minimum, a child would need to learn to read and write in two non-spoken, classical languages, one native and the other foreign, as well as in *genbun itchi*, the colloquial written language of Tokyo. This was long before the advent of radio broadcasts, so a large percentage of the population was probably not yet fluent, or even familiar with Tokyo Japanese. Children who lived in regions

far from the capital would have had to learn many new words. And to complicate matters, a great deal of Western vocabulary, especially in new scientific and technological fields, was being adopted into the Japanese language and knowledge of that was also often presupposed.

In the Meiji period, the period when Kōtoku was advocating language change, standard written language for most purposes had been literary Chinese, and as a result, knowledge of many thousands of Chinese characters continued to be necessary for reading books, newspapers, legal documents, etc. Literary Chinese in Japan occupied a position similar to that of Latin in European countries. Being able to read and write literary Chinese had long been a rare skill possessed only by a tiny percentage of the population. The number of fully literate people probably increased greatly during the Meiji period, but according to Hirai Masao, a historian of written language change in Japan, the vast majority of the population had been illiterate or only semi-literate up until that era, and the difficulty of Chinese had long contributed to the monopolization of knowledge by elite, male intellectuals.^v Hirai explains that during the Edo period the lower classes tended to write in native Japanese phonetic orthography (*kana bun*), a system of writing based on the sound of the words not unlike the Roman alphabet, while people of the ruling class tended to use a mix of literary Chinese and Japanese (*wakan majiri bun*).^{vi} In other words, the world of writing in Japan had long been divided along class lines—phonetic writing (i.e., letters or characters with sound only) for the working class and Chinese for the ruling class. People used the native Japanese orthography because it was useful for everyday life, and did not require mastery of thousands of Chinese characters. Up until the end of the 19th century, only boys from the upper samurai class and from wealthy merchant

families had been able to receive training in written Chinese, and as one would expect, it had always been far more difficult for girls to acquire these skills.^{vii}

This single point that Hirai makes about the legacy of Chinese—that the difficulty of literary Chinese and Chinese characters had allowed a small, male elite to monopolize knowledge over many centuries—helps to answer many questions about why written language reform progressed the way it did in modern Japan. This point also shows that the issue of the style reforms of Meiji (i.e., the switch from classical vocabulary and grammar to the colloquial) on the one hand, and orthographic reform (i.e., reducing the number of Chinese characters in use) on the other, cannot be treated separately. This is because of the long-running tension created by the stigmatization of spoken language in writing as opposed to privileged Chinese writing. The former was native, sound-based, easy-to-learn, and looked down on as vulgar. The latter was from a foreign country, meaning-and-sound-based, difficult-to-learn, and universally viewed as elegant. Whether the written language was simplified by switching to a script employing exclusively phonetic characters such as the native *kana* or the Roman alphabet, or it was simplified by using a “style” of language or a dialect that many people were familiar with such as the Tokyo dialect, both simplifications moved in the direction of practicality and vulgarity, away from the aristocratic tradition.

Conservatives naturally hoped to retain as much of the classical writing traditions as possible, radicals aimed for complete rationalization and thorough simplification, while liberals tried to find some middle ground between these two poles. In other words, liberals aimed for a written language that would not greatly hinder the building of a modern, nation-state

but also not bring about a complete end to this aristocratic writing culture.^{viii} This inability to let go of the elite cultural inheritance of classical writing was part of the problem in Hirai Masao's view. He describes the emotional attachment to the elite writing tradition as a "fetish" and argues that one of the main obstacles to rationalizing the written language in Japan was a fetishistic attitude toward language and writing.^{ix} (The other obstacle in his view was the incomplete democratization of the Meiji period).

Masao Miyoshi makes a similar observation about elegance (*ga*), writing, "Traditionally, the *kanbun-tai* [literary Chinese style] and *gabun-tai* [literary Japanese style] both have belonged to the aristocracy and have reflected the learned and graceful culture of the few who cling to the ancient manners on which their social distinction so largely depends."^x This quote is part of his outline of the *genbun itchi* movement as it relates to the emergence of the modern novel in Japan, but he explains that just as the "Edo novel, like any other novel tradition, shows time after time the characteristic middle-class hankering after the grace and charm of the aristocracy," the urge among liberals to retain much of the classical language even when aiming for an easy-to-learn written language shows a similar "hankering."^{xi}

When the power-holders of Japan in the Meiji period committed the nation to industrialization, many who were knowledgeable about conditions in the West believed that Japan's writing system had to change and that a significant increase in the number of literate people was necessary. Chinese characters had certainly contributed to a stratification of society in China, similar to the stratification of society in Japan noted by Hirai. After China's defeat in the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-95), calls for strengthening native culture over Chinese culture, such as reducing the number of Chinese

characters or using the Japanese language in writing, became stronger. Many people believed that some nations were “fit” for a modern world and others for extinction, in a Social Darwinist sense. After the War, classical and traditional Chinese culture became associated with the pre-modern, the feudal, and the outdated.

Whether having roots in the classical liberalism of John Stuart Mill or Adam Smith, from Herbert Spencer’s *Social Statics* (popular in Meiji Japan), or from Marxism, socialists usually aimed for an egalitarian society.^{xii} In China, for example, Mao Ze Dong (1893-1976), like many other Chinese communists, once expressed his belief that Chinese characters would need to be abolished in order to create an egalitarian society, saying, “The writing system of China must be changed to the Roman alphabet. Nevertheless, this is not something we can do now or soon.”^{xiii} Using Romanized Chinese as the main script for the Chinese language was probably considered a worthy reform by many communists of his generation. In Kōtoku’s day in Japan, too, among those who wished to make Japan a more egalitarian society, there were people who advocated Romanization and others who advocated the native phonetic script *kana*. Although Kōtoku did not advocate Romanization or *kana*, he and his friend, Sakai Toshihiko (1871-1933), also a pioneering socialist, lent their support to the *genbun itchi* movement.^{xiv}

To what extent people agreed with simplification of the written language or with the retention of traditional written language largely depended on how serious they perceived the problem of illiteracy to be. Estimates of literacy rates in Meiji Japan vary widely, ranging from 6 percent to nearly everyone.^{xv} Much seems to depend on the definition of literacy used. Some definitions are based on the ability to read and write at the level

of intellectuals, some on the ability to read newspapers and participate in public life, and others on school attendance, sometimes with only a few years of elementary school qualifying as literate. Some studies indicate that the number of highly literate people in the late Edo Period or early Meiji constituted a small percentage of the population.^{xvi} Others in English scholarship, however, state that roughly 40 percent of the male population was literate.^{xvii} Whether the percentage of illiterate and semi-literate was 94 percent or 60 percent in late Tokugawa and early Meiji society, it must have still been a major problem at the time that Kōtoku was proposing language reform, roughly two decades later. Many people surely did not have access to written information and had not received the kind of education that would have enabled them to “make their voices heard” in the world of public written communications, such as newspapers, books, and letters to the editor. This would have been an obstacle for Kōtoku and others who were trying to democratize society.

People who advocated the kind of radical reform necessary to bring literacy to people of all walks of life crossed a broad spectrum of far-sighted thinkers, including educator and political theorist Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901), philosopher Nishi Amane (1829-97), scholar of Chinese Learning Nanbu Yoshikazu (1840-1917), journalist Nakae Chōmin (1847-1901), minister of education Mori Arinori (1847-89), statesman Saionji Kinmochi (1849-1940), Tokyo Imperial University professor Basil Hall Chamberlain (1850-1935), botanist Yatabe Ryōkichi (1851-99), historian and economist Taguchi Ukichi (1855-1905), mathematician and educator Kikuchi Dairoku (1855-1917), physicist Tanakadate Aikitsu (1856-1952), prime minister Hara Takashi (1856-1921), judo founding-father Kanō Jigorō (1860-1938), educator and statesman Nitobe Inazō (1862-1933),

and novelist Yamamoto Yūzō (1887-1974).^{xviii} For many of them, a hope for increased literacy among both adults and children were behind the promotion of script reform. They may have had ulterior motives such as a desire for increased profits (e.g., from newspaper and book sales) alongside spreading their political ideas, too. Nonetheless, whatever their motives may have been, that so many respected thinkers in so many fields advocated simplification of the script supports the view that illiteracy was widely perceived as a major social problem.

New newspapers were being founded, such as the *Eiri jiyū shinbun* (The Freedom Newspaper with Pictures), a paper designed to bring Freedom Party ideas, including arguments in favor of democracy, to “shopkeepers and workers.” Between 1884 and 1886 the Freedom Party experimented with using a conversational style (*danwatai*) in the editorials of the “small newspapers” that they operated.^{xix} In 1885 the *Yomiuri* was the second largest paper and *Jiyū no tomoshibi*, a politically liberal newspaper, was the third largest. These were easy-to-read papers that catered to the working people of Tokyo.^{xx} A brief look at the changes in writing styles in newspapers during the 1880s indicates that the trend in mass publications was toward greater and greater simplicity of language, with either fewer and fewer Chinese characters or more and more reading aids to help readers with the pronunciation of Chinese characters (*furigana*). By 1901 when Kōtoku advocated reform, the trend would have been clear.

3. Linguistic Imperialism in Japan

In this climate of reform, however, Kōtoku’s *Imperialism* and his essay on reform of the written language—both published in the same year 1901—did not question the imperialistic tendencies of the genbun itchi

movement or the policies of the Japanese government with respect to language. On the question of language, one could say that he supported the position of the liberals. Through government policies and other coercive means, the standard language of Japan that the liberals supported was imposed on the people of Japan's colonies as well as on people living in peripheral regions within Japan—areas that could be considered “domestic colonies.” Beginning with Taiwan after the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-95), people in many of Japan's colonies were forced to learn Japanese and to communicate in that language instead of their own.^{xxi} Communication in their own language was soon forbidden. Similar policies were carried out within Japan, in Okinawa and Northeastern Japan. The same language that was forced on non-Japanese children in the colonies was also coercively taught in various regions throughout the archipelago of Japan. Children who spoke Ryukyuan dialects and Tōhoku dialects (in Northeastern Japan), just to mention two examples of non-Tokyo Japanese, were punished for speaking in their native tongue but rewarded for learning the dialect of Tokyo. Students who spoke in a Ryukyuan dialect in schools in Okinawa, e.g., were forced to wear a “dialect card” attached to a necklace with words written on it shaming the student for speaking in their native language (*hōgen fuda*). Japan annexed Okinawa in 1872, so by 1901 suppression of Ryukyuan dialects must have begun. As a socialist, Kōtoku should have rejected such imperialistic policies, but, in fact, when one reads what he wrote on the question of language reform, one finds him supporting the genbun itchi movement and recommending one standard national language, using the dialect of the metropole. His friend, Sakai Toshihiko (1871-1933), also a pioneering socialist in Japan, enthusiastically supported the genbun itchi movement.^{xxii} Sakai went as far as

to suggest, “If one were asked in the first year of the 20th century, ‘What is the most important reform project that Japanese society actually has a chance of accomplishing?’ one would have to answer that, ‘more than anything else, it is genbun itchi.’”^{xxiii}

Let us begin with a sketch of the general significance of linguistic imperialism, followed by a discussion of Kōtoku’s particular contribution to Japan’s linguistic imperialism. The essay that Kōtoku wrote on the reform of the Japanese written language was entitled “Genbun Itchi and Newspapers.” It was published in 1901, the year that his book on imperialism and his article “I Am a Socialist” were published.^{xxiv} It was around that year that Japan had reached the point where, according to the historian Marius Jansen, it had become a full-fledged empire.^{xxv} Japan had successfully waged an imperialist war against China, the first Sino-Japanese War (mentioned above), through which Japan stole valuable resources to build its steel and iron industry. Japan exploited China just as Western empires did. That War led to China losing its grip on Korea, gave Japan greater influence there, and allowed Japan to start colonizing Taiwan. As Kōtoku admitted in so many words in his book *Imperialism* (mentioned above), nationalism had liberated the individual from the bonds of feudalism.^{xxvi} He must have felt content that the long-hoped-for, strong, modern nation-state had been built and the goals of the Meiji period slogan, “enrich the nation and strengthen the military” (*fukoku kyōhei*), had been achieved. These were goals that many had understandably hoped for since the rich nation and strong military would make it possible for Japan to escape colonization and enslavement by the Western powers. Nevertheless, Kōtoku aimed to caution, in Notehelfer’s words, that “nationalism in its new aggressive form could well return the individual to a new form of slavery.”^{xxvii} Kōtoku insightfully suggested that “what leads to the rise and popularity

of imperialism is not scientific knowledge, but superstition.”^{xxviii} Kōtoku warned about the dangers of the new jingoistic patriotism and aggressive nationalism. Unfortunately, his warnings went unheeded, and only 3 years later, Japan’s empire expanded through the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). Such are some examples of the valuable insights in Kōtoku’s work, a critique of imperialism from a moral standpoint.

New research by Robert Thomas Tierney sheds much light on Kōtoku’s view of the problem of imperialism. His book *Monster of the Twentieth Century: Kōtoku Shūsui and Japan’s First Anti-Imperialist Movement* (2015) holds up Kōtoku’s *Imperialism* as an early, valuable, and influential critique of imperialism and therefore, an important moment in intellectual history, but also convincingly argues that it deserves attention even today, as it contains valuable insights for people contending and resisting imperialistic policies around the globe.^{xxix} He writes that Kōtoku’s “most enduring legacy was his leadership role in the movement to oppose imperialism and his status as a forerunner of the modern Japanese pacifist movement.”^{xxx} He explains that *Imperialism* was one of the first general studies of imperialism to be published anywhere, and notes that it came out one year before J.A. Hobson’s *Imperialism: A Study* (1902) and more than a decade before Vladimir Lenin’s *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916).^{xxxi} It took over a century before Tierney’s translation appeared in English, but as he emphasizes, *Imperialism* was so influential in East Asia that a Chinese translation was published only one year after it appeared in Japanese. That means that its contents were available almost immediately to intellectuals throughout East Asia.

4. Kōtoku Shūsui and Genbun Itchi

Yet Kōtoku was a strong supporter of the genbun itchi movement. He believed that if newspapers with mass readerships would employ genbun itchi and discontinue the use of classical styles, the number of people who could read and understand newspaper articles would greatly increase and Japanese society would change in various positive ways. As a socialist, one necessary change for him was making Japan more democratic. It is no mistake that it was with his friend Sakai Toshihiko (1870-1933) that Kōtoku prepared the first translation of *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848).^{xxxii} Sakai was also one of the most famous early socialists, a journalist, and a strong supporter of genbun itchi. Historians have written relatively little about their writings on genbun itchi, but as I argue below about Kōtoku, their views on this movement were consistent with their goals for social change, and are worthy of study.^{xxxiii} Many Japanese people in the late 19th century believed that the country's written language needed to become more accessible to people with limited years of schooling, that among the benefits of adopting a colloquial style in writing would be the democratization and modernization of Japan, and people with such goals tended to be in favor of language reform movements such as the genbun itchi movement and the movement to limit the number of Chinese characters in common use. In that sense, it is not surprising that these famous figures of the early Left in Japan, Kōtoku and Sakai, would support reforming language along the lines of the genbun itchi movement.

While he appears to have written only one essay specifically advocating the style, one could argue that Kōtoku was a “pioneer of genbun itchi” in several important ways, including at least the following five. (I list them in

chronological order—the order in which he began to engage in each kind of support for genbun itchi).

1. He may have been the first famous essayist to write an editorial in the genbun itchi style, and was surely one of the first.^{xxxiv} He began using a genbun itchi style in his editorials at a time when almost everyone wrote editorials in a classical style. Kōtoku's first editorial written in the genbun itchi style appeared in *Marumaru chinbun* in July 1897.

2. He began experimenting with the genbun itchi style in his diary beginning on August 26, 1899. This is a very early date for colloquial diary writing.

3. He supported an organization that promoted genbun itchi, among other ways through a journal entitled *Shinbun* (“New Writing”). He was a founding member of the organization. It was founded in April 1901.^{xxxv}

4. He promoted the style in an essay that appeared on May 28, 1901. (This essay is translated in full below).

5. He wrote letters in the style from at least as early as December 1904.

5. Kōtoku Shūsui's Support for an Imperialistic Genbun Itchi Manifesto

Kōtoku, and apparently Sakai also, were members of the Society for the Unification of Speech and Writing (Genbun Itchi Kai), which published a journal entitled *Shinbun* (“New Writing,” mentioned in point three above). At the time there

was at least one other organization with the same name (Genbun Itchi Kai). This other organization had ties to the central government and was more politically conservative. To distinguish the two, I refer to Kōtoku's group as "the *Shinbun* Society."

A passage entitled "Manifesto for this Journal" that graced the first issue of *Shinbun* states that one of the goals of the *Shinbun* Society was to improve the language and literature of the Nation. Another was to conduct research on the genbun itchi style and disseminate it throughout Japan quickly. Kōtoku, who wrote the one article in favor of genbun itchi published in *Shinbun*, was one of the founding members. In his *Genbun itchi futsū bun* (1901), Sakai quotes a petition that the *Shinbun* Society submitted to the government in the early stages of the Society's formation, entitled "A Petition Concerning the Implementation of the Unification of Speech and Writing" (Genbun itchi no jikkō ni tsuite no seigan).^{xxxvi} Also a sort of manifesto, its first paragraph reads:

We believe that in order to make the National Language independent, to disseminate it, and to develop it, speech and writing must be unified. This is the best way to establish the unity of the state, to assist in the expansion of our national power, and to hasten the progress of our national destiny. Beginning about 300 years ago the various European nations unified each of their written and spoken languages, gradually stopped writing in Latin, and made their national languages flourish by making plans to make them independent, disseminate them, and develop them. It is because they made such plans that their countries now enjoy civilization and

enlightenment, and rich nations and strong militaries have been established. In contrast to this, in spite of the fact that the Koreans, the Jurchen people, the Khitan people, the Manchurians, the Mongolians, and others like them had their own particular national languages and national writing, they did not plan the independence, dissemination, and development of their national languages; they abandoned their national writing in favor of the writing of foreign countries; and they did not investigate methods of unifying their spoken and written languages. These are some of the main reasons why their national destinies were twisted, their national power shrunk, and their states withered and died. When one considers this, one realizes that not unifying the spoken and written languages has much to do with the rise and fall of, and the fate of, a nation. In our country the languages are difficult and hard to select, there are a great number of characters, and the writing and pronunciation have many variations, so the language is difficult to use. There are various different writing styles. It is difficult to master them all and there are no set dictionaries or grammar books, so Westerners are right when they say that the difficulty of our Nation's spoken and written languages is unparalleled. Furthermore, our Nation's children must learn this written and spoken language that is unparalleled. They must master literary Chinese, and learn languages such as English, German, or French in

order to receive an education. That is to say, the students of our Nation carry an incomparably heavy burden in the world in terms of learning spoken and written languages. Our children and students spend more than half their school life in this useless way, leaving them without the time to acquire other important knowledge and using up their energy. We not only believe that hampering the growth of children and students hurts them individually but also that there is nothing less economical for the Nation of Japan, standing [now] in the arena of global competition. This is why our Nation's speech and writing must be unified at this time, our spoken and written languages must be made easier to learn, and the energy of our children and students must be poured into the acquisition of necessary and profitable knowledge. From this point of view, one can understand that this is one of the urgent tasks we face today.

In the paragraph in which Sakai evaluates this passage he explains that it is not an example of excellent *genbun itchi* writing, but that there is great merit in how the *Shinbun* Society has assumed leadership and submitted this petition to the government. In order to show its merits and the gist of it to his readers he could “not bear to exclude it” from the examples in his book *Genbun itchi futsū bun*.^{xxxvii} He does not critique any of this passage. Kōtoku wrote the preface to *Genbun itchi futsū bun*.

Sakai's inclusion of this passage in his book and Kōtoku's membership in the organization that produced this passage indicates that both of them enthusiastically supported

the nation-wide adoption of genbun itchi as a national writing standard. In Kōtoku's essay below, he writes, "If the newspapers completely adopt genbun itchi the style will spread throughout society and soon the time will come when the writing of the entire country will be unified." This is not the kind of statement that one who is in favor of cultural diversity and opposed to cultural imperialism would make. Also, one can infer from their silence in not even questioning the imperialistic tendencies in the genbun itchi movement, that on some level, Sakai and Kōtoku were consciously in support of the expansion of Japan's national power vis-a-vis other nations, and viewed genbun itchi as one way to bring about such expansion.

6. Conclusion

The above discussion provides only a sampling of the kind of rhetoric that Kōtoku employed in promoting the "genbun itchi" style, which was only one of the multiple colloquial styles available in Meiji; and only a hint of the historical context of imperialism under which Kōtoku labored and which he opposed more forcefully than anyone, and of the class inequality then that was evidenced by what one could term this "two-class system" of written language—the phonetic script and the colloquial for the working class (stigmatized as "vulgar") and literary/classical styles for the upper class (privileged as "elegant"). Tierney's aforementioned recent book *Monster of the Twentieth Century* (2015) has eloquently and thoroughly delineated the full historical context that is missing here, and reading that book allows one to appreciate Kōtoku's bold and very effective attack on the imperialism of his specific time and place. Thus one cannot claim that Kōtoku did not challenge imperialism; if any

intellectual in Meiji did, that was Kōtoku. Nevertheless, considering the nationalistic tone of support for genbun itchi that Kōtoku teamed up with in *Shinbun*; noting the fact that he and Sakai are perfectly silent about the victims of standardization (“domestic linguistic imperialism”) in Japan and of the imposition of the Japanese language on the inhabitants of Taiwan, citing the difficulty of the genbun itchi style compared to other colloquial styles at the time such as “conversational styles” (*danwa tai*) and the availability of phonetic scripts most prominent of which were the Roman alphabet and *kana*; and witnessing the elitist tone with which he looks down on easy-to-read styles and praises elite styles of writing, one cannot help but notice the lack of any concern with what is sometimes termed today “linguistic imperialism.” In a sense, I am only repeating Tierney when he writes, “Like his counterparts in the United States and Europe,” Shusui “condemned imperialism primarily because it had perverse domestic consequences and jeopardized world peace,” but Kōtoku “omitted practically any reference to the effects of imperialism on the colonized.”^{xxxviii} It would be naïve to expect to find a human rights perspective of the language rights of indigenous peoples in the kind of “introductory” socialist discourse that Kōtoku provided in 1901, but that even he was silent about this problem and actively supported the genbun itchi movement may explain why the Meiji state so quickly and easily was able to implement language-based nationalistic and imperialistic policies in places like Okinawa and Northeastern Japan as well as in its colonies.

7. Translation of Kōtoku Shūsui's Statement on Genbun Itchi: "Genbun Itchi and Newspapers"^{xxxix}

It is our fervent wish that all the newspapers in Japan adopt the genbun itchi writing style. At the very least, we want the feature page [*sanmen kiji*], i.e., the section in which it is possible for journalists to write in a "flexible" fashion, to be written in genbun itchi whenever possible.^{xi} This is both the hope of genbun itchi advocates as well as the hope of the readers of the feature pages. There is no reason why newspaper companies should not immediately take this first step even if they only consider their own goals and profits.

The number of readers would surely double or triple if all newspaper articles were written in a genbun itchi style and even readers without training in classical and elegant styles were able to read them. Journalists would have a far greater impact on society—it would be two or three times greater than the impact they now have—and newspaper companies would enjoy far greater profits. Even those who are fully trained in reading classical styles and who can appreciate their elegance would spend less mental energy and less time reading newspapers. They would spend half, or even less than half, what they currently spend. As a consequence, readers would be able to go beyond simply reading the titles of articles. This is a fact proven by our day-to-day experience. In this sense, it is surely true that millions of newspaper readers hope for a switch to the genbun itchi style. Little by little, newspapers are being prompted by their readers to expand the genbun itchi sections in their pages.^{xli}

The fact that the storytelling transcriptions in newspapers have become so popular over the last several years is clear proof of this. There are various reasons why such transcriptions have become more popular than novels. One is that the

dramatization of such transcriptions is better than that of mediocre novels. Another is that many readers have vulgar tastes, and even while they may be capable of enjoying the mysteriousness of the dramatic and severe changes that are found in storytelling transcriptions, they are not able to appreciate the exquisiteness of certain writing styles or understand the ideals of the authors. Also, the payment for the manuscripts of storytelling transcriptions is less than that for novels. But the biggest reason of all is that the transcriptions are written in a genbun itchi style and there is not so much suffering involved in reading them.

Of course, we are not saying that the genbun itchi styles found in such transcriptions are the ideal. There are indeed points where the style must be greatly reformed and corrected, but it must be admitted that being able to write “hanashi kawarimashite” (“and so...” [to change the topic]), and not have to write “kanwa kyūdai” is a great step forward.^{xliii}

I do not know if today’s novelists have considered this, but this new tendency—genbun itchi writing becoming so common in newspaper novels—is cause for celebration. If this trend continues, litterateurs and novelists will improve their writing styles through practice, bringing those styles to a mature level, and skill and taste in the way the genbun itchi style is used will make a powerful and positive impact on professional-storytelling audiences. Meanwhile, I believe, the embarrassing practice of newspapers playing the role of branch theaters for storytellers will soon come to an end since the stories will be used up one by one.

If it is the mission of the newspapers to, above all, report the facts of the present to the masses and educate them, then the style they select must be one through which the greatest number of people can be easily moved. It is not impossible to express

the facts of the present and approximate the truths of the present in classical styles, but it takes a rare writing talent to do so, and even when a piece is written with such excellent talent there are few people who are able to appreciate such exquisite taste.

In a word, it is the difference between Ishikawa Masamochi's (1753-1830) *Hokuri jūni toki* (All Hours of the "Northern Village," the Yoshiwara Pleasure Quarter) and Santō Kyōden's *sharebon*.^{xliii} Ishikawa's skill in portraying modern public life through a style that is full of classical grace truly deserves generous praise, but one gets the feeling that one is looking at flowers through bamboo blinds or is talking to a foreigner through an interpreter when one reads his works, so he cannot evoke the readers' feelings of identification to the extent that Kyōden can. This is not due to any faults of Ishikawa himself but is due to the faults of the written language he uses.

Nara and Heian period love should be expressed in thirty-one syllables, Christian agape should be expressed in the "modern style" (*shintaiishi*), and Fukagawa and Yoshiwara affairs should be sung about in the *hauta* style.^{xliv} If Christian hymns were sung in 31 syllables, it would be like a Christian priest wearing the pre-modern clothing of a Japanese aristocrat. Each period has its own style and if one does not use the colloquial style of the period it is difficult to persuade the people.

This is why most of the writings of ancient times that scholars like to canonize are written in the vulgar language of the day. The Book of Songs (the *Shi jing*) is a compilation of provincial songs, the Analects is full of the vulgar language spoken by the people from the State of Lu, and in the Mencius there are many vulgar words that originate from the State of Zou where Mencius was born.^{xlv} If you are only going to write something for your own pleasure or show what you have written to a few intellectuals, then any kind of style is fine, but if you want to

inform and teach millions of people you have to use the most effective style, i.e., the colloquial style of the period.

There have been few periods in history when there have been as many writing styles in use as there are today, and when writing has been so confusing. At present one must be fluent in many styles just to read one page of the newspaper: one must know literary Chinese, literary Japanese, the “Western-language translation style” (*yōbun chokuyaku tai*), and the “elegant-vulgar mixed style” (*gazoku setchū*). Is this not troublesome?

It is cause for celebration that newspapers today cannot escape the genbun itchi style and that all of them are rushing to take advantage of it. We hope that the newspapers will take the lead and adopt genbun itchi as quickly as possible rather than waiting to be forced to adopt colloquial styles later. Once we adopt genbun itchi, one-month projects will be completed in a day and one-year projects in a month, and the progress of our literary establishment (*bundan*) will be amazing. If the newspapers completely adopt genbun itchi the style will spread throughout society and soon the time will come when the writing of the entire country will be unified.

All sections of the newspaper do not need to be changed to the genbun itchi style all at once, but as I explained above, every article in the miscellaneous news section (*zappō*) on the feature page (*sanmen kiji*) should be completely written in genbun itchi. In fact, even the first and second pages, i.e., the “rigid” pages could be written in this style.^{xlvi} It is clear that at least a small portion of the rigid pages in all newspapers today is already actually being written in genbun itchi. The only problem with suddenly switching to the genbun itchi style on the rigid pages is that readers would probably be a little confused. This is because the rigid style that has been used up until now is completely different from spoken Japanese. Such a change

would be so strange for the readers that the readers might not take such writing seriously and misinterpret what they read. If journalists switch to a genbun itchi style that is too elegant, [well-educated readers] will complain that the style is not effective for ordinary readers. Regardless whether this criticism is valid or not, we should gradually clarify which expressions are too elegant for ordinary readers.

There is a necessary order of events for everything. The rigid styles should be slightly simplified and immediately brought a little closer to the vulgar language. Such would be an appropriate pace of change. The complete conversion to genbun itchi can be done later. As for the flexible pages (*sanmen kiji*), these are already very close to a colloquial style. One can see that some of the remarkable genbun itchi styles that have appeared on the feature page are superior to the old, particularly monotonous writing styles of famous writers like Ryūtei Tanehiko (1783-1842) and Kanagaki Robun (1829-1894). So why not immediately adopt genbun itchi in all articles on the feature page? There are some beautiful genbun itchi writing styles in use today, styles that are beautiful even for journalists. Mr. Ishida of the *Asahi shinbun* newspaper and Mr. Hori of the *Chuo shinbun* newspaper have demonstrated wonderful writing skills in the miscellaneous news sections of those papers. We always admire and love how they write, but in order to inform the many, move the many, and teach the many it is necessary to think a little about how to do that. It is especially clear that their styles cannot be used for articles written for the general public.

I tried using genbun itchi in editorials for the *Yorozu chōhō* between August 1898 and the spring of 1899 even though these sections have always been written in the rigid style. I did not have immediate success, however, and postponed writing in

genbun itchi in those sections because of my lack of ability and because of the problems I mentioned above. Later the *Yomiuri shinbun* newspaper used genbun itchi in editorials and the *Shin Nippon* newspaper changed all its columns to that style. We did not view these as complete successes, but it is clear that we have reached a point in time when we must switch to genbun itchi. For these reasons, we hope that all the newspapers will take the first step of having every article on feature pages written in the style, and later gradually switch to it in all other sections.

Many thanks to Stephen Brivati for help with editing an earlier, longer version of this paper.

ⁱ A new, excellent English translation by Robert Thomas Tierney has been recently published in his book, *Monster of the Twentieth Century: Kōtoku Shūsui and Japan's First Anti-Imperialist Movement* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015). There also exists a French translation, *Kōtoku Shūsui, L'impérialisme, le spectre du vingtième siècle*, trans. Christine Levy (Paris: CNRS, 2008). For the original text in the difficult, literary Chinese-Japanese blend (*kanbun kundoku* style), there is *Teikokushugi: Nijūseiki no kaibutsu*, ed. Yamaizumi Susumu, Iwanami Bunko (Iwanami Shoten, 2004). In 2010 a translation into colloquial Japanese became available, too: *Teikokushugi: Nijūseiki no kaibutsu*, trans. Endō Toshikuni (Michitani). All books in Japanese listed here were published in Tokyo unless otherwise noted.

ⁱⁱ I borrow this term “print-language” from Benedict R. O’G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. and extended ed. (London: Verso, 1991) chapters 2 and 3. This book by Anderson demonstrates how national languages make possible the “imagined” community of the nation-state.

ⁱⁱⁱ For more on the nationalism and imperialism of the movement for a national written language, see Lee Yeounsuk, *The Ideology of Kokugo: Nationalizing Language in Modern Japan*, trans. Maki Hirano Hubbard (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2010).

^{iv} See Mizuhara Akito, *Edogo, Tōkyōgo, hyōjungo*, (Kōdansha, 1994) 20-21.

^v Hirai Masao, *Kokugo kokujū mondai no rekishi* [The History of the National

Language and National Script Issue] (Sangensha, 1998) 102.

^{vi} Hirai, *Kokugo kokuji mondai no rekishi* 102.

^{vii} Hirai, *Kokugo kokuji mondai no rekishi* 98-99.

^{viii} For a history of the debate between the liberals and conservatives, see one of Nanette Twine's works, such as *Language and the Modern State: The Reform of Written Japanese* (London: Routledge, 1991). For a history of the more radical proposals, see Yasuda Toshiaki, *Kanji haishi no shisōshi* (Heibonsha, 2016).

^{ix} Hirai, *Kokugo kokuji mondai no rekishi* 159.

^x Masao Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence: The Modern Japanese Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974) 10-11.

^{xi} Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence: The Modern Japanese Novel* 11.

^{xii} Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics: Or, the Conditions Essential To Human Happiness Specified, And the First Of Them Developed* (New York: D. Appleton, 1865).

^{xiii} Zhou You Guang, *Kanji kaikaku gairon* (An Introduction to the Reform of Chinese Characters, *Hanzi gaige gailun* is the original Chinese title), trans. Kitta Hirokuni (Nihon no Rōmaji Sha, 1985) 507. The third edition of this book was published in Beijing in 1979 by Wenzhi gaige chubanshe.

^{xiv} Umemori Naoyuki, "20 seiki no shōen yori ojiisan e: Sakai Toshihiko ni okeru 'genbun itchi,' 'katei,' 'shakaishugi,'" *Shoki shakaishugi kenkyū* 10 (1997). Sakai's works on genbun itchi include Sakai Kosen (Toshihiko), *Genbun itchi futsū bun* (Naigai Shuppan Kyōkai, 1901), Sakai Kosen (Toshihiko), "Genbun itchi no tegami," *Shinbun* 1.3 (1901), and Sakai Kosen (Toshihiko), "Genbun itchi jigyo to shōsetsuka," *Shinbun* 1.4 (1901).

^{xv} Unger refers to a literacy study conducted in 1948 in which the number of people deemed to have sufficient literacy totaled 6.2 percent of those tested. Assuming that the number of literate people did not decrease between the Meiji period and 1948, one could conclude that approximately 6 percent of the population was literate in Meiji. It could have been even less. See J. Marshall Unger, *Literacy and Script Reform in Occupation Japan: Reading Between the Lines* (New York: Oxford UP, 1996) 36-37. According to Huffman, "When you reached the third Meiji decade [...] a high level of school attendance. Nearly all of the population had entered the literate class." James L. Huffman, *Creating a Public: People and Press in Meiji Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997) 172.

^{xvi} See the following sources: Jiri V. Neustupny, "Literacy and Minorities: Divergent Perceptions," *Linguistic Minorities and Literacy: Language Policy Issues in Developing Countries*, ed. Florian Coulmas, Trends in Linguistics (Berlin: Mouton, 1984); Umesao Tadao and Ogawa Ryō, *Kotoba no hikaku*

bunmeigaku (Fukutake Shoten, 1990); Richard Torrance, “Literacy and Modern Literature in the Izumo Region, 1880-1930,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 22.2 (Summer 1996); Tokugawa Munemasa, “Nihonjin no riterashii: Meiji 14 nen no ‘Shikiji chō’ kara,” *Kokugogaku* 158 (Sept. 30, 1989); Yamamoto Taketoshi, *Kindai Nihon no shinbun dokushasō* (Hōsei Daigaku Shuppankyoku, 1981).

^{xvii} Jansen follows Dore in claiming 40 percent literacy among boys in late Tokugawa. Marius B. Jansen, “Japan in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *The Cambridge History of Japan*, ed. Marius B. Jansen, vol. 5 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1989) 67.

^{xviii} Unger, *Literacy and Script Reform in Occupation Japan: Reading Between the Lines* 5-6. Nakae Chōmin, “Ichinen yūhan,” *Nakae Chōmin, Ōsugi Sakae, Kawakami Hajime shū*, Gendai Nihon bungaku zenshū (Chikuma Shobō, 1957) 12. Shiga Kazukiyo, “Genbun itchi undō to Meiji no kyōiku ni okeru futatsu no taishōtekina shisō no sugata ni tsuite: kakikotoba to hanashikotoba no aida no gyappu yori,” *Yokohama kokuritsu daigaku kiyō* (Dec. 10, 1986) 119. The Teikoku Kyōiku Kai, of which the Genbun Itchi Kai was a part, also filed a “Petition for National Language, Letters, and Descriptive Method Improvement” (Kokuji kokugo kokubun no kairyō ni kansuru seiganshō) with the Upper House, Lower House, the Cabinet, and each Ministry, in 1900 in which they requested that written Chinese characters be either decreased or abandoned. See Norikazu Shioda, *Nihon no gengo seisaku no kenkyū* (Kuroshio Shuppan, 1973) 45. On Fukuzawa’s proposal, see Fukuzawa Yukichi, *Gakumon no susume*, Iwanami bunko (Iwanami Shoten, 1996) 12; or see Pascal Griolet, *La modernization du Japon et la réforme de son écriture*, Bibliothèque Japonaise (Paris: Publications orientalistes de France, 1985) 78.

^{xix} Yamamoto Masahide, *Kindai buntai hassei no shiteki kenkyū* (Iwanami Shoten, 1965) 459.

^{xx} Huffman, *Creating a Public: People and Press in Meiji Japan* 142.

^{xxi} Miyawaki Hiroyuki, “Colonial Language Policies and their Effects” (2002) <http://www.linguapax.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/CMPL2002_T1_MHiroyuki.pdf>.

^{xxii} See Umemori Naoyuki’s article, “20 seiki no shōen yori ojiisan e: Sakai Toshihiko ni okeru ‘genbun itchi,’ ‘katei,’ ‘shakaishugi,’” *Shoki shakaishugi kenkyū* 10 (1997). And see Sakai’s works on genbun itchi mentioned above.

^{xxiii} Sakai Toshihiko, *Sakai Toshihiko Zenshū*, ed. Kawakuchi Takehiko, vol. 1 (Kyoto: Hōritsu Bunka Sha, 1971) 497.

^{xxiv} “I Am a Socialist” (Ware wa shakaishugisha nari) was published on April 9, 1901 in the *Yorozu Chōhō*.

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- xxv Marius B. Jansen, *Changing Japanese Attitudes Toward Modernization* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1965) 77.
- xxvi F. G. Notehelfer, *Kōtoku Shūsui, Portrait of a Japanese Radical* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge UP, 1971) 84. For some valuable discussion of Shūsui's *Imperialism* see pages 82 to 87.
- xxvii Notehelfer, *Kōtoku Shūsui, Portrait of a Japanese Radical* 84.
- xxviii Notehelfer, *Kōtoku Shūsui, Portrait of a Japanese Radical* 82.
- xxix See Tierney's Epilogue in *Monster of the Twentieth Century: Kōtoku Shūsui and Japan's First Anti-Imperialist Movement* 209-18.
- xxx Tierney, *Monster of the Twentieth Century: Kōtoku Shūsui and Japan's First Anti-Imperialist Movement* 2.
- xxxi Tierney, *Monster of the Twentieth Century: Kōtoku Shūsui and Japan's First Anti-Imperialist Movement* 1.
- xxxii Written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, also often referred to as *The Communist Manifesto*. Shūsui and Sakai's translation appeared on November 11, 1904 in Volume 53 of *Heimin Shinbun*.
- xxxiii Umemori Naoyuki has made a similar argument about Sakai Toshihiko. See Umemori Naoyuki, "20 seiki no shōnen yori ojiisan e: Sakai Toshihiko ni okeru 'genbun itchi,' 'katei,' 'shakaishugi,'" *Shoki shakaishugi kenkyū* 10 (1997). Socialism, women's rights, and the unification of speech and writing were concerns for both Sakai and Shūsui at the turn of the century.
- xxxiv Yamamoto Masahide, *Genbun itchi no rekishiron kō* (Ōfūsha, 1971) 226-53. Yamamoto covers points one, two, four, and five in detail.
- xxxv "Honkai no bunji hojoin," *Shinbun* 1.1: 5-8.
- xxxvi Sakai Kosen (Toshihiko), *Genbun itchi futsū bun* (Naigai Shuppan Kyōkai, 1901) 118-23.
- xxxvii Sakai, *Genbun itchi futsū bun* 123.
- xxxviii Tierney, *Monster of the Twentieth Century: Kōtoku Shūsui and Japan's First Anti-Imperialist Movement* 50.
- xxxix "Genbun Itchi and Newspapers" (Genbun itchi to shinbun shi, May 28, 1901).
- xl The *sanmen kiji* section in newspapers consisted of human-interest stories about social problems, especially sensational or scandalous topics, and was typically the easiest section of the newspaper to read.
- xli He also made this point—that the millions wanted genbun itchi to be widely adopted—in the preface he wrote for Sakai's *Genbun itchi futsū bun*.
- xlii "Kanwa kyūdai" is a compound of four Chinese characters that is rare today.
- xliii Ishikawa Masamochi was an author of *kibyōshi*, *yomihon*, and comic poetry, as well as a scholar of National Learning (*kokugaku*). *Kibyōshi* were

a genre of picture books with appended writing that arose during the 18th century. *Yomihon* were a type of novel that appeared in the Edo Period (1603-1868) that told stories about ghosts, demons, fairy princesses, and heroic warriors, of which Santō Kyōden (1761-1816) and Takizawa Bakin's (1767-1848) works are representative. Influenced by National Learning, Ishikawa wrote some stories in literary Japanese (*gabun*). He tended to reject the popular, commoner-oriented cultural tendencies of comic poetry of the 1780s and, showing off his appreciation of high culture, he rejected *haikai* (a genre of poetry meant for commoners) and emphasized the need for wit and humor. *Sharebon* were another popular prose genre, which also arose during the 18th century. *Hokuri jūni toki* is also pronounced as *Hokuri jūni ji* and *Yoshiwara jūni ji*. Ishikawa Masamochi, *Hokuri jūni toki*. (The publisher, date of publication, and city of publication are unknown). The phrase "Northern Village" in the title of this story was a euphemism for the red-light district of Yoshiwara.

^{xliv} The Nara period spans from 710 to 784 and the Heian period from 794 to 1185. *Shintaishi* were a genre of poetry written in colloquial Japanese in the Meiji period (1868-1912). They were "new" in the sense that they were placed in opposition to literary Chinese poetry in Japan (*Kanshi*). *A hauta* is a traditional Japanese ballad sung to the accompaniment of the samisen.

^{xlv} Lu was an ancient state in China during the Spring and Autumn Period (770-446 BCE).

^{xlvi} By the "rigid" pages, he is referring in particular to the first and second pages of the newspapers of the day. These sections covered news about serious topics such as politics and business, and the writing style used in such sections were the most traditional, conservative, and difficult-to-change. Hence, the term "rigid" for the first and second-page articles versus the term "flexible" for the third page articles.