“The Nursery of Meiji Literature”: *Eisai shinshi* (Genius magazine) and Children as Authors

The groundbreaking children’s magazine *Eisai shinshi* (1877-1901), in addition to extolling *risshin shusse* (“rising in the world”), served an important function as a *tōsho zasshi* (contributory magazine), an aspect often overlooked by later scholarship. Composed almost entirely of its young readers’ contributions, *Eisai shinshi* was a “nursery” for a generation of Japanese writers, poets, and intellectuals. Being published in the magazine was an honor and a requirement of sorts for the young aspiring author of the period; it follows that what was accepted for publication reflected in some way the contemporary desiderata of superior content and style.

Contributory magazines and columns were a significant presence in the fin-de-siecle publishing world, and not only in Japan. Those directed toward children, for example the well-known *Harper’s Young People*, actively sought to create a community amongst their readers by offering both the possibility for publication as well as helpful editorial suggestions. This paper will examine the Meiji period discourse surrounding the child as author, particularly in reference to literary and poetic composition. Even though magazines like *Eisai shinshi* were heavily mediated by adult editors, I will argue that their encouragement of children’s writing reveals a culture of readership linked closely with authorship, and thus a sense that children, too, could achieve self-expression through mastery of language. In other words, while contributory magazines groomed future authors according to adult standards, they also offered an important space where children could experiment with finding their own individual voice.