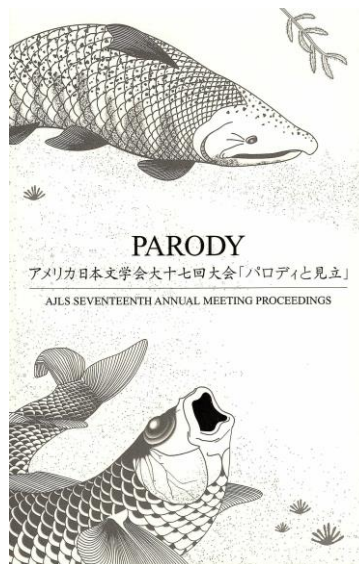


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**“THE FIRE GUARD AND THE HIRED BARD:
NARUSHIMA RYŪHOKU’S PARODIC JOURNALISM”**

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Shortly after the Meiji government had imposed a new set of draconian press laws in the summer of 1875, Narushima Ryūhoku, president of the *Chōya shinbun*, published an essay in response called “Ranteiki ni gisu.” It begins:

In the year 1875, the eighth year of Meiji, at the end of the sixth month, I met with the promulgation of the Newspaper Ordinance. The purpose was to reform the old laws. Various terms of incarceration were determined, monetary fines prescribed in detail. There were also slander and libel, instigation and agitation; and using aliases and pseudonyms too – each of these prohibited. They took this and made a fixed law that would stand for perpetuity, and the gist of it was disseminated widely. True, it did not have the sternness of decapitation or hanging, but a look and a perusal of the law served well enough to make me terrified.¹

As these opening sentences suggest, the piece could stand on its own as an evocative account of the sense of personal dread journalists felt as they struggled to make sense of the new laws. But to the well-educated members of Ryūhoku’s audience, the essay would have been enjoyable for another reason.

They would have recognized it as a cleverly constructed parody of “Preface to the ‘Orchid Pavilion Poems’” by Wang Xizhi (321–79), a well-known meditation on transience, writing, and remembrance, which begins:

In the year 353, the ninth year of Yonghe, at the beginning of the last month of spring, we met at the Orchid Pavilion on the northern slope of Kuaiji. The purpose was to carry out purification ceremonies. Various men of worth came there,

¹ The text originally appeared as “Ranteiki ni gishite, Uchida kun ni kotau” 擬蘭亭記答内田君 in the editorial column of the 5 August 1875 *Chōya shinbun*. It was reprinted as “Ranteiki ni gisu” 擬蘭亭記 in *Ryūhoku zenshū* 柳北全集, p. 87 and *Ryūhoku ikō* 柳北遺稿 I: 232–33.

young and old alike all gathered. There were mighty mountains and towering ridges, lush forests and tall bamboo; and a clear stream with swirling eddies – these casting back a sparkling light upon both shores. We took this and made a winding channel in which to float our wine-cups, and around it everyone took their appointed seats. True, we did not have the harps and flutes of a great feast, but a cup of wine and a song served well enough to free our deep feelings.²

The syntax of Ryūhoku's text mirrors Wang Xizhi's famous preface so closely that when read aloud in *kundoku*, their rhythms would have been nearly identical; to compare the first few lines:

明治八年、歳乙亥ニ在リ。六月ノ末、新聞條例ノ發行ニ會フ。
舊律ヲ改ル也。禁獄駈ト定マリ、罰金細カニ記セリ。

Meiji hachinen, toshi itsugai ni ari. Rokugatsu no sue, Shinbun jōrei no hakkō ni au. Kyūritsu o aratamaru nari. Kingoku shikato sadamari, bakkin komakani kiseri. (Ryūhoku)

永和九年、歳癸丑ニ在リ。暮春ノ初、會稽山陰ノ蘭亭ニ會ス。
禊事ヲ脩ムル也。羣賢畢ク至リ、少長咸ナ集フ。

Eiwa kyūnen, toshi kichū ni ari. Boshun no hajime, Kaikei san'in no Rantei ni kaisu. Keiji o osamuru nari. Gunken kotogotoku itari, shōchō mina tsudou. (Wang Xizhi)

Inversely proportional to the proximity of the structure and sound of the two texts was the amusing irreconcilability of their contents: a dissonance to which contemporary readers would have been keenly attuned. Wang Xizhi's "Preface to the 'Orchid Pavilion Poems'" is probably the most famous work of Chinese calligraphy. Its depiction of a group of literati gathered together to compose poems, float wine-cups down a stream, and enjoy the wonders of their natural surroundings conveyed a consummately refined atmosphere and became something of

² The translation of "Preface to the 'Orchid Pavilion Poems'" 蘭亭集序 by Wang Xizhi that appears here is derived from Owen 1996, pp. 283–84. In order to make the correspondences between the parody and the original more evident, I have adapted Owen's translation considerably.

a paradigmatic model for literary gatherings in future generations.³ Ryūhoku's parody transforms this elegant scene free of worldly concerns into a grimly drawn realm that is in fact defined by such secular constraints as the dictates of law and the threat of state punishment.⁴

Ryūhoku sustained his tight parodic mimicry of Wang Xizhi for the remainder of the column. While Wang Xizhi went on to speak of how he and his friends “delighted” in the “immensity of the universe” and “nature’s infinite variety,” Ryūhoku’s narrator wrote instead of his “terror” and desperation at the “imperiousness of the officials” and his newspaper “staff’s bitter consternation:”

After that moment, my energy was sapped and my spirits dashed; a cold shiver ran through my guts. Above me, I looked on the imperiousness of the officials; then, lowering my eyes, I saw my staff’s bitter consternation. I thus cast my brush aside and tore up the paper, and this was enough to let me understand the pain of our Newspaper’s Publisher. This was truly lamentable. During this time that people spend living together in the human realm, some survive by taking money from the state, enjoying themselves in places of wealth; others follow their fancies and engage in arduous labor in the newspaper enterprise. They have a million different forms; the high and the low man are unlike; but still, when one gives himself up to his desires and savors a sustained moment of fulfillment, he is cheerfully self-content and has scarcely a thought of the penalties coming on. Then, even having reached the point where he has written all he can, the brush moves in accordance with his thoughts, and farce inevitably follows. In the flick of the brush, the things that one knows suddenly become novel theories. Yet of course it is not that he does this to please his readers. Even more his arguments, which are stored up within him, so how can he worry about

³ This famous gathering at Orchid Pavilion inspired parodic reference in various other Japanese media, including *bunjin* paintings and even kimono design. See, for example, the print by Kikugawa Eizan (1787–1867), no. 12 in Swinton 1995, pp. 144–45.

⁴ The weightiness of the four sequential binomes used to describe the scene’s topography and vegetation (*sūzan* 崇山, *shunrei* 峻嶺, *morin* 茂林, *shūchiku* 脩竹), for example, would have given the natural scene an extra layer of formidable majesty and auspicious grandeur. In Ryūhoku’s parody, these metamorphose into four equally formidable though decidedly more ominous binomes of newly codified legal jargon (*zanki* 讒毀, *hibō* 誹謗, *kyōsa* 教唆, and *senki* 煽起).

them coming to an end? The people of the world say, "The newspaper is a splendid thing." How can it not be amusing?

Secular concerns may not have impinged upon the world of Wang Xizhi's preface, but it was nevertheless undercut by the author's keen awareness of mortality. The satisfaction of a chance encounter with a like-minded person might allow a temporary release in which one "has scarcely a thought of old age coming on," Wang wrote, but ultimately one had to recognize the supreme importance of life and death. Ryūhoku's concerns, however, lay not in such ultimate questions, but in more immediate worries such as whether or not he would be punished for following his aspirations into the newspaper business. In Ryūhoku's formulation, it was as an individual caught up in the pleasures of writing, rather than through social interaction, that he was distracted from these anxieties. Since writing was, in a certain sense, also the source of Ryūhoku's anxieties, it was an ironic observation, one made even more surprising by the fact that the relief it provided was much more long-lasting. At the outset, Ryūhoku's timid terror contrasted with Wang Xizhi's carefree mirth, but the two make opposite journeys in the course of their meditations. Whereas Wang Xizhi comes to the "painful" realization that "Life and death are the greatest concerns," Ryūhoku is instead amused to discover the splendor of the newspaper.

In the final section of his preface, Wang Xizhi explains how an awareness of the congruity between his own feelings and those of past generations of writers and rememberers has motivated him to compose a commemorative text. Ryūhoku's parody ends with a similar justification of writing, but one that is motivated by the experience of reading the editorials of his contemporaries on the staffs of various newspapers:

Each time I examine the editorials propounded by the various papers, it is as though they have all proceeded from the same mouth. Never have I read them without thumping my stomach with satisfied joy, nor am I able to tell others about this. But this I have learned: fondness for oppressive systems is an outmoded way; suppressing speech is an old custom. People laugh at me just as I laugh at them – there is the delightfulness. For this reason, I have spewed this swagger, and recorded my thoughts. Though my talents are poor and my learning shallow, what I have said is true in principle. And those who read this will also be moved by what is in these words.

Whereas Wang Xizhi is led to a renewed awareness that “the belief that life and death are the same is a grand deception,” Ryūhoku is led to the more humble realization that stifling free speech and limiting the freedom of the press are “outmoded... old customs.” This intricately crafted criticism of the government’s new laws seems to have hovered just below the threshold necessary to bring down its wrath upon him, and Ryūhoku was able to avoid punishment for the time being.

A parody such as this one appealed to contemporary readers first of all as a stylistic tour de force: a magnificent display of learning and show of skill in adapting a familiar text to an improbable new context. In addition, it illustrates a lighter side of Japan’s *kanshibun* tradition and reminds us just how eagerly the early Meiji audience devoured texts premised on familiarity with the canon of literature in Chinese. But as this piece suggests, Ryūhoku’s parodies also merit our attention because he used them as opportunities to think through and carve out his role as a journalist, a project that he approached by distinguishing this new status from earlier analogues. In using the Wang Xizhi text as the basis for his parody, Ryūhoku was on the one hand implicitly framing the “journalist” as a modern counterpart to the traditional literatus, while on the other hand humorously and self-mockingly pointing out the ways in which the journalist operated under conditions far removed from those that had favored his illustrious antecedents.

The situation was further complicated for Ryūhoku, however, since in many cases the personae and analogues that he invoked in his parodies were in fact positions that he had once embodied or might be assumed to have embodied: a factor that gave his early parodies an especially personal urgency. Indeed, part of Ryūhoku’s significance as a pioneer of early Meiji journalism was his contribution toward fleshing out this role: establishing the newspaper as an independent public forum and defining a space for himself as an engaged yet critical commentator. In this paper, I examine how Ryūhoku used parody to fashion this distinct new position of journalist: an identity that once defined would in turn itself soon become the object of his own relentless self-parody.

When Ryūhoku was invited to lead the *Chōya shinbun* in the summer of 1874, he was already well-known to his early Meiji readership in numerous guises. The eighth in a line of *okujusha*, or official Confucian tutors to the Tokugawa shoguns, Ryūhoku had first attained prominence as the successor to a distinguished scholarly family. Ryūhoku’s service to the Tokugawa went beyond mere academic instruction, however, for in the final days of the Edo period, he was appointed commander for the shogun’s new cavalry unit. Alongside these

roles of eminent Confucian scholar and dutiful military vassal, Ryūhoku had also established himself as a well-known *kanshi* poet and had furthermore cultivated a reputation as a suave connoisseur of the capital city's nightlife. Though written (and to some extent circulated) years before his newspaper debut, the first and second installments of his *New Chronicles of Yanagibashi* had only been published earlier that year. These texts soon became best-sellers and showed their author to be not only a careful observer of changing mores but a skilled humorist. Moreover, the second installment in particular positioned Ryūhoku as a trenchant critic of the sort of shallow or superficial Westernization that characterized the period of *bunmei kaika* or "civilization and enlightenment."⁵

This prior proliferation of authorial images meant that when the first issues of *Chōya shinbun* appeared in September of 1874, the paper's readers might have held any of several presumptions about Ryūhoku and the place he would occupy in the new post-Restoration society: that he could best be understood as an old-guard Confucian scholar, for example, or an antiquarian devotee of Edo customs, a traditional literatus, an opponent of Westernization, a loyal Tokugawa vassal, an urban sophisticate, etc. As president of the *Chōya shinbun*, Ryūhoku would situate himself with a new identity, indicated by his early use of the moniker "Shinbunshi" 新聞子 or "newspaper man." Yet while this new appellation shared the same pronunciation as *shinbunshi* 新聞紙, the neologism for describing the newspaper medium as a whole, its precise referential content was still inchoate.

Ryūhoku's assumption of the headship of the *Chōya shinbun* in 1874 marked his formal entry into the world of journalism, but his interest in newspaper publishing was longstanding. In the immediate aftermath of the Meiji Restoration, for example, he had produced the handwritten *Tōkyō chinbun* ("Strange news from Tokyo"), a newsletter that he sent occasionally to his brother-in-law, informing him of the economic difficulties that former shogunal vassals faced, and occasionally poking fun at the extravagant behavior of the new government's officials. Likewise, in 1871, when he completed the manuscript for his second installment of *New Chronicles of Yanagibashi*, he drew an analogy between his account of the Yanagibashi pleasure quarters and "the newspapers printed in the various countries of the West." Ryūhoku visited these various Western countries in 1872–73, and perhaps the most

⁵ Selections from my translations of both installments appear in Jones (forthcoming).

important result of the experience was to make his incipient interest in newspapers and other modern print media more concrete. Reading through his travelogue *Diary of a Journey to the West*, one notices the numerous visits he made to newspaper offices, bookstores, and printing shops.⁶ Indeed, Ryūhoku seems to have been identifying himself as a “publiciste” even before his return to Japan—as a membership roster in a French academic society published shortly after his return suggests.

Once he had finally realized his ambition to run a newspaper, Ryūhoku’s great accomplishment was the creation and development of the *Chōya shinbun*’s *zatsuroku* or “miscellany” column and his authorship of the short essays that appeared in it several times a week. Both contemporary readers and later scholars have identified Ryūhoku’s *zatsuroku* columns as the single most important factor behind the early success of the *Chōya shinbun*. These *zatsuroku* columns—well over one thousand in number—provided Ryūhoku with a forum to address a truly staggering array of topics, from the mundane (how the streets of the Ginza might best be kept free of snow) to the arcane (whether the character 嘶 could properly be used not just for the whinny of a horse but for the cry of a goose).⁷

But behind the occasional frivolousness, Ryūhoku also addressed larger questions in these columns, the majority of which feature analysis of current events both domestic and foreign, commentaries on recent social and cultural phenomena, and periodic satirical jabs at the policies of the Meiji oligarchy. Inasmuch as they constituted a forum for multifarious forms of critique, the *zatsuroku* columns also gave Ryūhoku a chance to showcase his talents as a parodist.

One of his first such columns appeared on October 18, 1874, about three weeks after the *Chōya shinbun* had been launched. “Lament of the Loincloth” begins by introducing readers to “Fundoshi sensei,” the suicidally morose undergarment of the piece’s title who is particularly distraught to have recently discovered that he may be cast off amid the whirlwind of cultural changes in early Meiji:

Late at night, Master Loincloth crawled out from under his futon, and beneath the faint lamplight, stretched and crunched and heaved a great sigh to himself, saying “Alas, it has been said since antiquity that the vicissitudes of the world are manifold,

⁶ For a translation of Ryūhoku’s overseas travelogue, see Fraleigh 2009.

⁷ As detailed in the *zatsuroku* column appearing in the 19 November 1875 *Chōya shinbun*, the character 嘶 is, in fact, an acceptable description of a goose’s cry.

with mulberry fields transforming into seas and deep valleys turning into mountains, but who would have thought the changes would be so momentous! The shogun has become a daimyo; the daimyo have become nobility; the *hatamoto* have become rickshaw-men; and the domain samurai have become potato farmers. The malign winds of the West have blown across our nation, becoming telegraphs, steam engines, elementary schools, bricks, cropped hairstyles, straight sleeve garments, newspapers, beef-bowls, the Keiō Academy, the Representative Assembly, postage stamps, and stock certificates. I had been watching this strange and marvelous procession with absent-minded amusement, like a raccoon dog tapping its belly. Who could have imagined that these things I had viewed until now as other people's affairs would end up becoming a disaster that came crashing down even upon my very person? In the past, there was no one – aside from callow youths and loafers – who did not enlist my services. But these days, with the Western winds raging harder and harder, the loquacious pundits of the world have begun to say that any state employing me is barbarous, and it seems that increasingly this idea has gained hold. Just this morning, while at the bath I heard my master say to his wife, "According to the officials in my ministry, there are no places among the various nations of the West that employ Loincloths. I think I am going to give that Master Loincloth the boot straightaway." As soon as I heard this, my mind was made up. I would strangle myself from a roof-beam or throw myself down a well. Rather than bearing this shame, it would be preferable to cut an X into my belly and die!" Wriggling and writhing, he gave a miserable sigh.

At the outset of the piece, the Loincloth notes that he has watched with dismay as those who held high positions under the Tokugawa shogun have all been brought low by the regime's collapse. Given Ryūhoku's own status as a former shogunal vassal, many readers would at first tend to identify the loincloth with the author, seeing it as an exponent of the grief shared by dispossessed former Tokugawa officials, many of whom like Ryūhoku became the founding figures of early Meiji journalism. Indeed, the initial content and even some of the phrases used in this essay recall passages from Ryūhoku's own earlier works.⁸ Yet soon we discover

⁸ Ryūhoku's preface to the second volume of *New Chronicles of Yanagibashi*, for

that “newspapers” are in fact one of the cultural institutions and artifacts that the aggrieved loincloth scorns contemptuously as having been blown into Japan by the “malign winds of the West,” thereby introducing a gap between Ryūhoku’s emergent construction of himself as “newspaper man” and the position of the embittered loincloth. Deprived of a place in the new world order, the Loincloth’s hardened resolve to commit suicide recalls the integrity of the idealized samurai vassal, another figure that readers might well have associated with Ryūhoku, but which is here painted in absurdly comic terms.

In the remainder of the essay, a new twist is introduced by the appearance of Master Loincloth’s humble interlocutor: a louse, who invokes another figure with whom Ryūhoku might easily be identified:

Just then, an old louse quietly crawled out from Master Loincloth’s body, smiled, and said “Master, how your words resemble those of an old Confucian scholar! You always go into reclusion, stubbornly clinging to the old notion of ‘withdrawing and concealing’ yourself, and what’s more you know nothing of the world. While you might chance to glimpse the sun when it is time to do the laundry, otherwise you do not venture beyond the back door or the vicinity of the outhouse. As a result, you see nothing of the flourishing in the city out front and perceive none of the enlightenment of the world. You are content simply to lap the dregs from the ancients’ scrotums and cling to tight-assed narrow views. Having met with this upheaval, you have lost your station, but it’s entirely too late now for you to become indignant about it. That being said, perhaps you could make a complete transformation of your intentions; I suggest you entrust yourself to those washerwomen and make a clean purge of all your old mustiness. Even if you cannot return to your old occupation, how hard could it be for you to become a bellyband for a maid in a tenement house? How can you be so cavalier about destroying your six-foot body?” Master Loincloth shook his head and said bitterly “No, no... What dignity would I have left if I were to bow and scrape to the Dutchmen, drawing close to their foul artifacts of enlightenment and seeping up their odors?” The old louse then suddenly smiled and burst out into

example, also makes use of the idiom of “the azure sea transforms into a mulberry field” 滄海桑田: “After the Tokugawa clan went to the West, it has not been unusual for daimyo compounds, with their vermilion gates and white plaster walls, to be transformed into mulberry and tea fields.”

song: "If the water from the tap is clean, you can use it to wash away your dirt; if the water from the tap is cloudy, you can use it to wash away your oil." So saying, he crawled away under the futon.⁹

Many of Ryūhoku's contemporaries would have known that Ryūhoku had himself lost his position as a Confucian scholar and had in fact briefly declared his intent to go into seclusion in the immediate aftermath of the Restoration. In the image of the loincloth, we thus have overlapping figures of the loyal vassal, the stouthearted samurai, the Confucian scholar, and the principled recluse: caricatures of positions that Ryūhoku occupied in the past and against which the journalist Ryūhoku, through the unlikely intervention of the louse, articulates a new position of resourceful adaptation and social engagement. Just as the louse emerges from the loincloth's body, so too does Ryūhoku effect in this column an extrication from the carapace of these overlapping former identities.

At the end of the piece, as the disgruntled loincloth remains unconvinced by the louse's suggestions of how he might make a go of life in Meiji, the louse is left to conclude with a final bit of admonition in the form of a song. The louse's song parodies a famous scene associated with the figure of Qu Yuan (c. 343–278 BCE), a Chinese paragon of the banished yet righteous vassal. One of the most well-known sequences in the *Chu ci* (Songs of the South) is the encounter between Qu Yuan's persona, "the sober old man," and a fisherman:

漁父莞爾而笑、鼓枻而去、乃歌曰：「滄浪之水清兮 可以濯吾纓
滄浪之水濁兮 可以濯吾足」

The fisherman, with a faint smile, struck his paddle in the water and made off. And as he went he sang:

"When the Cang-lang's waters are clear,
I can wash my hat-strings in them;
When the Cang-lang's waters are muddy,
I can wash my feet in them."¹⁰

⁹ The column was entitled "Fundoshi no shūtan" 犢鼻褌の愁嘆, and appeared in the 18 October 1874 *Chōya shinbun*. I imagine that the louse's suggestion that the loincloth seek the aid of the washerwomen would have brought the story of Han Xin to the mind of many contemporary readers.

¹⁰ Hawkes 1985, pp. 206–07.

As this exchange shows, the fisherman's parting words to the Qu Yuan figure suggest two alternatives for a righteous man who encounters political setbacks. If the Way is being upheld and the Canglang stream is clear, one should wash his capstrings and serve at court; if the Way has fallen and the stream is muddy, he should wash his feet and go into reclusion. Ryūhoku's parody adheres closely to the form and rhythm of the original while transplanting it to a humorously local, urban, contemporary, and earthy context. Unlike the original, however, the louse's song presents the loincloth with no real alternative. In this day and age, the louse seems to be saying, one must make the best of the situation: complete withdrawal from the world is not feasible. If we take a step further and apply this bit of advice to Ryūhoku's situation, it seems that becoming a journalist was Ryūhoku's means of making the best of the situation in which he found himself under the Meiji regime.

In China and Japan as well, there was a long tradition of invoking Qu Yuan and the *Chu ci* in times of duress, and not surprisingly his figure surfaces in the works of many of Ryūhoku's contemporaries. Ryūhoku's friend and former colleague Kurimoto Joun, for example, wrote this quatrain in the wake of the Restoration, likening his own position as a "vassal from a deposed regime" to that of Qu Yuan:

門巷蕭條夜色悲 The city streets outside the gate lie still this
cheerless night;

鴞鵂聲在月前枝 A horned owl's cry from a branch bathed in
moonlight.

誰憐孤帳寒檠下 Who will pity him, alone in his curtained room
beneath the cold lamp,

白髮遺臣讀楚辭 The white-haired vassal from a deposed regime
who reads the *Chu ci*?¹¹

As former high shogunal officials, both Ryūhoku and Joun qualified as *ishin* or "vassals from a deposed regime," but as the homely dialogue between the louse and the loincloth suggests, such an identity was one from which Ryūhoku now sought to explicitly distance himself. If, as the louse asserted with his sendup of Qu Yuan's fisherman, principled

¹¹ Kanda 1983, p. 23.

disengagement in the manner of reclusive figures of yore was not a viable option for the loincloth, it was clearly not practicable for someone aiming to be a journalist.

Less than a month after he published "The Lament of the Loincloth," Ryūhoku made this point in the similarly titled essay "The Lament of the Newspaper Man." In this dialogue, the "Shinbunshi" of the title tells his interlocutor at length his frustration in attempting to satisfy all of the conflicting expectations of his varied readership. Midway through, the "Newspaper Man" emotes:

I have already sold myself into slavery, and even if I were to make myself the embodiment of purity, make my conduct noble, and make my arguments just and proper, I would certainly be presented with the verdict of "Boring!" from my readers. And so even supposing that I might content myself in becoming the Bo Yi of the newspaper world, sure I might be able to avoid eating the "grain of Zhou," but what would I do about the fact that the company owner's rice pot would be empty!?¹²

The allusion here is to Bo Yi, who along with his brother Shu Qi, was a vassal of the Yin who believed it dishonorable to accept a grain stipend from the new Zhou Dynasty. The two fled to Mt. Shouyang to literally starve themselves to death eating fiddlehead ferns. As in the earlier "Lament of the Loincloth," Ryūhoku invokes an extreme exemplar of fidelity to principles only to humorously undercut it as impractical in light of present circumstances.

Yet there is an additional level of humor in this second piece since the "newspaper man" is himself the explicit object of parody. Reversing the roles of the loincloth-louse dialogue, the newspaper man's interlocutor politely listens to his lament but then chides him for his somewhat precious petulance, reminding him that for all his ostensible preoccupation with selling newspapers, he is certainly not doing a good job of entertaining his readers in this column. The self-importance that the "newspaper man" has unwittingly revealed is skewered in the column's conclusion, in which he shakes his sleeves and cries, "Those who understand me will do so through the newspaper. Those who condemn me will also do so because of the newspaper!"

¹² "Shinbunshi no tan" 新聞子ノ嘆 appeared in the 15 November 1874 *Chōya shinbun*.

This line would have been recognizable to many in Ryūhoku's audience as an allusion to a passage in the *Mencius*, in which Confucius explains the significance of his editing of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*:

世衰道微，邪說暴行有作。臣弑其君者有之，子弑其父者有之。孔子懼，作《春秋》。《春秋》，天子之事也。是故孔子曰：『知我者，其惟《春秋》乎！罪我者，其惟《春秋》乎！』

When the world declined and the Way fell into obscurity, heresies and violence again rose. There were instances of regicides and parricides. Confucius was apprehensive and composed the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. Strictly speaking, this is the Emperor's prerogative. That is why Confucius said, "Those who understand me will do so through the *Spring and Autumn Annals*; those who condemn me will also do so because of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*."¹³

Confronted with a disordered world, Confucius is said to have given up his immediate hopes of official service; but rather than going into reclusion, he began editing the *Chunqiu*, one of China's first histories. The parallel drawn between the new-fangled newspaper and one of the Five Classics, as well as the "Newspaper Man"'s comparison of himself to Confucius is scandalous, but when we recall the context of this parodied line from *Mencius*, we also appreciate how Ryūhoku's journalistic activities served as his own strategic recourse in troubled times.

In this way, Ryūhoku's *zatsuroku* columns used parodies of earlier texts to establish the contours of the new position he had adopted as a newspaper man, distinguishing the figure of the journalist from its canonical predecessors and also from Ryūhoku's own erstwhile personae. Yet no sooner had Ryūhoku conjured the figure of the journalist than he made it the target of his own self-mockery and parody. Ryūhoku had marshaled a lofty pantheon of figures to give the "newspaper man" a clearly defined public image, but only to undercut it with his insistence on the distinctly humble nature of the journalist's occupation.

I would like to close with a column Ryūhoku wrote in 1878, when he was compelled to resign his position to take responsibility for the newspaper's decision to print statements written by the assassins of Ōkubo Toshimichi. Predictably, Ryūhoku had fun even in the face of the forced demotion, announcing that he was pleased to be rid of "this

¹³ Lau 1970, p. 114. The passage is *Mencius* IIIB.9.

troublesome post” of *Chōya shinbun* president and that he would henceforth embrace a new role as the paper’s *hinoban*, or “Fire Guard.” His duties as *hinoban* would be to insure that no conflagrations broke out on the paper’s premises. In Ryūhoku’s account, his maid ran off at once to spread the news of Ryūhoku’s new sinecure as Fire Guard, but since she was an Edokko, it came out: “The master has today been appointed the Hired Bard [*shinoban*].” Hearing this, one of Ryūhoku’s students said, “That is fitting...I will compose a congratulatory ode for him right now!”¹⁴

During his tenure as the company’s president, Ryūhoku used parody to give serious substance to the role of journalist, making himself one of its leading exemplars. But as this last bit of self-mocking silliness suggests, Ryūhoku never lost his sense of humor, and as a consequence he never lost his audience. Even in his new and ostensibly superfluous role as “Fire Guard” or “Hired Bard,” Ryūhoku’s columns continued uninterrupted until his death in 1884, helping the *Chōya shinbun* to reclaim its title as the top-selling *ōshinbun*, a popularity in which Ryūhoku and his parodic columns played no small part.

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¹⁴ “Hi no ban no kai” 火之番ノ解 (A treatise on the Fire-Guard) appeared in the 1 June 1878 *Chōya shinbun* (rpt. *Ryūhoku zenshū* 111–12; *Ryūhoku ikō* 2: 85–87).

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