

Humor out of Place: Laughing Counterpublics and Transnational Satire in Nineteenth Century Japan

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DPhil Thesis

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Abstract

In the historiography of Japan, the *bakumatsu* years have been positioned as a period of particular turmoil and unrest that witnessed an explosion in humorous and satirical cultural production. What has been described as an Edo popular culture of play arising from the expansion of urban centers, developed social imaginations and forms of knowledge, which subverted the official Tokugawa order. Japan's mid-nineteenth century opening to the West and the establishment of the new Meiji government, which embarked on a serious mission of modern nation-state building, are said to have extinguished these popular critical energies and closed this cultural space of play. The Meiji state and influential intellectuals rendered humorous cultural production as an evil custom of the past as it elicited a laughter that was out of place with official ideologies of civilization and enlightenment.

Shifting the locus of attention to foreground popular sources such as the work of writers of playful literature, artists and cartoonists, satirical newspapers, and an active audience for these cultural productions, this dissertation discloses the surprising abundance of laughter and networks of people who adaptively laughed out of place in the second half of nineteenth century Japan. In particular, I illuminate the emergence of a distinct intellectual and cultural space of a 'laughing counterpublic,' which became a world-articulating project that was in tension with and undermined the Meiji state's national public building and imperial subject formation. Delineating how transnational encounters of satirical cultures on the non-state level reconfigured the laughing counterpublic and forged a practice of laughing at imperializing and hierarchizing discourses of Western civilizational progress across an imagined East-West divide, this thesis contributes to understandings of the meanings of Japan's opening beyond narratives of Western modernity or binary oppositional notions of anti-modernity and nativist reactionism.

Approximately 68,000 words

For my parents, grandparents and all those who came before.

For my loved ones, friends and all those who have believed in me.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the many individuals, groups and institutions that have generously supported me throughout the course of this dissertation.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Sho Konishi, for being an inspiring researcher, dedicated educator, and for always going above and beyond.

Thanks to my undergraduate supervisors at International Christian University, Professors William Steele and Richard Wilson for setting me off on this journey, as well as the countless other faculty and staff members at ICU for helping me to have a university experience that gave me a lifelong passion for research and a commitment to higher education.

I have been lucky enough to find an academic home at the University of Oxford, and especially at the Nissan Institute of Japanese Studies and Pembroke College. I am grateful to Professors Linda Flores, Roger Goodman and Takehiko Kariya who have given up their time to support my development in numerous ways. I would also like to thank Jane Baker who has been there through the ups and downs and everything in-between. The Oxford Japanese History Workshop has been an important scholarly community and source of inspiration, which constantly encourages me to aim higher. I would also like to express my appreciation to all of the assessors who have provided valuable feedback at various stages of this dissertation.

Extra special thanks go to my Japanese tutor Aya Ohmachi who has helped with reading and interpreting primary source texts. Indeed, I am grateful to my Japanese instructors at Oxford, Kaori Nishizawa and Junko Hagiwara, and the numerous Japanese teachers I have had along the way in London, at ICU, and at the Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies.

As part of my research and professional development as a DPhil student, the time I spent in Japan was invaluable. I would like to express my deep gratitude to Professors Kiyoshi Tamai (Keio University) and Masue Kato (Rikkyo University) for hosting me and always providing me with so many excellent opportunities, and to Dr Christian Polak for sharing sources from his private collection.

Additional thanks to Dr Yoichi Funabashi and Professors Barak Kushner and Reginald Jackson for their mentorship. To those who I haven't mentioned here, I will be sure to extend my thanks directly.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the diverse range of internal and external bodies that have funded my research and professional development at various stages: Pembroke College, Oxford; St Antony's College, Oxford; Nissan Institute of Japanese Studies, Oxford; Faculty of History, Oxford; Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, Oxford; Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation; The Japan Foundation; Tanaka Memorial Foundation; Toyota-Shi Trevelyan Trust.

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Introduction: The Loss of Laughter?

In a 1948 essay titled *Warai no sōshitsu (The Loss of Laughter)*, the Japanese literary critic Nakamura Mitsuo lamented what he considered to be a momentous shift that occurred in the Meiji period, which would render the Edo popular cultures of humor, play and satire that were critical of those in power, as relics of an uncivilized past. What he described as the ‘enlightenment phenomenon’ initiated by Japan’s opening to the West, which emphasized realism and practical or useful knowledge, would ultimately lead to the disappearance of what were regarded as frivolous forms of humor – the ‘loss of laughter.’¹ Member of the elite *Meiropusha* intellectual society to promote ‘civilization and enlightenment,’ Nakamura Masanao’s musings on laughter are characteristic of the Meiji era drive to suppress the people’s laughter. In *Saikoku risshi hen*, Nakamura’s best-selling Japanese translation of Samuel Smiles’ *Self Help* (1859) published in 1871, he liberally adapts a passage from Smiles’ original text to suit his own purposes of condemning *haikan shōsetsu* (popular or vulgar literature) and the laughter it generates. In a subsection that he names, ‘The Harm of *haikan shōsetsu*,’ a title not found in the original text,² Nakamura writes:

‘*Shōsetsu* drives people to laughter, forcing them to deviate from their aims in life. Nothing else defiles knowledge as much as it does...there are those who turn people and everything of the world into objects of laughter, producing *gibun* [*giga* (playful literature and playful images)] solely to desecrate the divine and infect society. It is extremely lamentable.’³

To be sure, historians have identified individuals such as the *gesaku* playful literature writer, Mantei Ōga (1818-1890), who stubbornly continued to publish works that incorporated

¹ Howard Hibbett, *The Chrysanthemum and the Fish: Japanese Humor Since the Age of the Shoguns* (New York: Kodansha International, 2002), 188.

² Atsuko Ueda, *Concealment of Politics, Politics of Concealment: The Production of “Literature” in Meiji Japan* (California: Stanford University Press, 2007), 40.

³ Masanao Nakamura, *Saikoku risshi hen* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1981), 429. Translation from Ueda, *Concealment of Politics, Politics of Concealment*, 40.

the vulgar and distasteful humor of the Edo period and resisted the embrace of Western civilization. Such individuals writing in the ‘old style’ soon became vilified and disenfranchised within the new age as representatives of the ‘evil customs of the past,’ to borrow of a phrase from the *Gokajō no goseimon* (Charter Oath) of 1868.⁴ What W. Puck Brecher describes as a process of recasting those that didn’t adhere to Meiji enlightenment principles as ‘arbiters of a failed past,’ whose playful lifestyles and professions were anti-modern and frankly, useless. For Brecher, the *haibokusha* (losers) were not just the literal regions and individuals that were defeated in the *Boshin* civil war as allies of the Tokugawa Shogunate. The marginalized writers and artists of humorous works also became ‘useless losers’ of history.⁵ In the Meiji era, laughing was for losers. It is perhaps, then, not surprising that in 1894 the British writer and long-term resident of Japan, Lafcadio Hearn, observed that children were encouraged to smile but not to laugh.⁶

In this thesis, I disclose the abundance of laughter and laughing people in nineteenth century Japan. Uncovering interconnected networks of writers, artists and an active audience that engaged in subversive forms of humor and adaptively generated laughter from the late Tokugawa era years of internal troubles and external threats (*naiyū gaikan*) to the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution in 1889, this thesis problematizes the dominant historical narrative of a loss of laughter in the Meiji period as a result of Japan’s opening to the West and enlightenment discourses of Western modernity. This is significant, I argue, because revealing this laughter challenges the embedded historiographical assumptions, which led to the obscuring of this mid-late nineteenth century popular cultural phenomenon. In particular, what is observed as a sudden loss or defeat of laughter in the Meiji period forms part of a narrative of modern Japanese history that locates a sharp Edo-Meiji break. Although scholars have

⁴ W Puck Brecher, “Useless Losers: Marginality and Modernization in Early Meiji Japan,” *The European Legacy* vol. 17, no. 6 (2012): 809.

⁵ Brecher, “Useless Losers,” 803-807.

⁶ Hibbett, *The Chrysanthemum and the Fish*, 170.

acknowledged a culture of play during the Edo period that was subversive towards the Tokugawa order, it is imagined that from 1868 the success of the Meiji government's project of modern nation-state building and a 'new modality of power,' in the form of a biopolitics, which targeted human interiority to nurture national subjects that would spontaneously embody the 'progressive ethos of a civilized nation,' ultimately rendered such laughing cultures obsolete.⁷

Indeed, subversive humor was no laughing matter for the Meiji state and influential intellectuals. Identifying how the Meiji discourse of *bunmei kaika* (civilization and enlightenment) was produced, defined and legitimized in opposition to practices deemed to be uncivilized or 'foolishness,' Richard Reitan delineates how this same playful and satirical literary genre of *gesaku* that brings people to laughter, was cast as an antithetical other to 'civilization' and thus became a target of increased censorship, suppression and reform.⁸ In order for the 'semi-civilized' Japan to catch up with the more civilized West, which was believed to be further along in a temporal progression of modernity,⁹ the Meiji state and prominent enlightenment intellectuals such as Fukuzawa Yukichi agreed that it was necessary for the foolish masses to be educated and disciplined according to new enlightenment principles due to the correlation between the strength of the individual spirit and the nation's progress.¹⁰ Laughter and the Edo urban popular culture of play, it was considered, would detract from the Meiji program of modern subject formation and civilizational progress due to its fundamentally deleterious nature as useless nonsense. To be sure, Fukuzawa, for example, did acknowledge the occasional benefits of humor for didactic purposes in alignment with the goals of enlightenment. His 1892 publication *Kaikō shōwa*, was a collection of *kokkeidan*

⁷ Katsuya Hirano, *The Politics of Dialogic Imagination: Power and Popular Culture in Early Modern Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 214.

⁸ Richard M. Reitan, *Making a Moral Society: Ethics and the State in Meiji Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), 2.

⁹ See for example Fukuzawa Yukichi's *Bunmeiron no gairyaku (An Outline of Civilization, 1875)*.

¹⁰ Hirano, *The Politics of Dialogic Imagination*, 227-228.

(jokes and amusing stories) that he preferred to call ‘pleasantries,’ which he sourced from Western texts and had previously included in his *Jiji Shinpō* newspaper founded in 1882. In the preface to this ‘book of pleasantries,’ Fukuzawa asserts that while ‘the only purpose of education is to encourage the development of intellect and virtue,’ there are many paths to achieving this goal, and a timely amusing story that ‘through making people laugh can open them to a realization of the nature of life and the condition of the world is an efficient shortcut for instruction.’¹¹ While acknowledging that laughter can be expedient for educational purposes, elsewhere in the essay *Nihon danshi ron* (*On Japanese Manhood*) first published as an editorial series in the *Jiji Shinpō* between January 13-24, 1888, Fukuzawa makes sure to clarify that the type of humor he is recommending is by no means the vulgar (*hirō*) and crude (*shimogakari*) jokes that he claims can be found in ‘70-80%’ of Japanese literature. By contrast, he boldly declares that in the West ‘you will find no such indecent humor,’ and concludes by saying that it would be unforgivable if the Japanese people exposed this shameful culture to the world.¹² For Fukuzawa, certain tasteful forms of laughter and humor were not just a means to enlightenment but also a sign of a civilized nation. As Donna Goldstein contends, ‘taste’ in relation to the aesthetics of humor is never a neutral concept and plays key a role in boundary formation to demarcate those who are insiders and outsiders. Goldstein writes, ‘Through laughter – one’s own as well as that of others – one’s naturalized and proper “place” within the social structure is outlined and reinforced, as well as contested.’¹³ Discouraging laughter in ‘bad taste’ and only encouraging laughter that fit within the constructed boundaries of civilization and enlightenment, then, was also a project in attempting to stop people from ‘laughing out of place.’¹⁴

¹¹ Yukichi Fukuzawa, *Fukuzawa yukichi no kaikō shōwa* (Tokyo: Fuzambo, 1986), 3.

¹² Heiyō Nagashima, “Kaigai Jōku no Nihon ni Okeru Juyō,” *Waraigaku Kenkyū* 9 (2002): 35.

¹³ Donna M Goldstein, *Laughter Out of Place: Race, Class, Violence, and Sexuality in a Rio Shantytown* (California: University of California Press, 2003), 10, 271.

¹⁴ Identifying an abundance of laughter among impoverished communities of women she was researching in the *favelas* of Rio in Brazil; Goldstein introduces the idea of humor as group or class defining. She notes that there

Building on this notion of ‘laughter out of place,’ this thesis takes as its sources popular parody literature, satirical woodblock prints and humor-interest newspapers and magazines, but in particular probes how these functioned to generate laughter, what was being laughed at, or who was laughing with whom, in order to identify a laughter-inducing humor that was ‘out of place’ with the dominant ideology. In other words, this dissertation foregrounds laughter as its theoretical and methodological approach. In so doing, I disclose how the late Tokugawa era popular cultural space of subversive humor did not just abruptly close, but rather adapted new modes of critical engagement during the Meiji period in order to reopen the very meanings of enlightenment. Laughter was not simply co-opted and cleansed by the state for nation building. Or in the words of George Wilson:

‘The *bakumatsu* years had witnessed the release of great energies that did not simply dissipate when the symbolic authority of the Japanese imperial house was invoked as a means of unifying the country.’¹⁵

Moreover, I argue that we cannot narrowly understand this phenomenon of subversive laughter as simply a last gasp cathartic release of tension that eventually dissipates, which helps to cope with the transformations of a new age. The ‘escape valve’ understanding of humor that ultimately reinforces the status quo.¹⁶ Nor should we solely rely on explanations that focus on a nativist reaction to cast these historical actors as anti-modern traditionalists.¹⁷ Put another

was a type of popular humor among her informants, which was considered by the official or dominant culture as inappropriate or ‘out of place.’ She notes that the women appeared to be constantly laughing at times that would be considered in ‘bad taste,’ as an attempt to explain this phenomenon. This concept of ‘laughter out of place’ is apropos for considering the abundance of laughter in late nineteenth century Japan. See Goldstein, *Laughter Out of Place*, 12, 37.

¹⁵ George M Wilson, *Patriots and Redeemers in Japan: Motives in the Meiji Restoration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 78.

¹⁶ Goldstein, *Laughter Out of Place*, 6.

¹⁷ For instance, Steele identifies: ‘In writing the history of modern Japan, historians often exaggerate the narrative of change, highlighting the process of Westernization and industrialization. Recent scholarship has given special attention to voices of opposition, nostalgia, conservation, and antimodernity. In addition to the heroic story of Japan’s modernization, it is equally possible to construct narratives emphasizing the role of tradition or even antimodernity in modern Japan...Sada Kaiseki and other critics of Westernization sought to maintain established ways of doing things; they were defenders of tradition.’ In M William Steele, ‘Casting

way, the opening of Japan to the West and notions of progress produced these ‘losers;’ a narrative which reifies a West versus East, modern versus anti-modern binary. To be sure, Sho Konishi has identified that *kaikoku* or the ‘opening of Japan’ has somewhat ironically become a ‘closed’ study as historians have rarely challenged the idea of *kaikoku* as an opening to Western civilizational progress.¹⁸ Examining non-state level transnational encounters beyond the imagined East-West divide, Konishi ‘reopens’ the meanings of *kaikoku* to demonstrate that at the very same time Japan opened its borders to Western modernity, Japan also opened to alternative and competing visions of progress. Extending this approach, this thesis proposes fresh analyses by interrogating transnational encounters of Anglo-Japanese satirical cultures and transnational private connections forged through exchanges of humor. This gains further significance as it challenges the existing historiography of the development of political satirical cartoons in Meiji Japan, which understands this practice as emanating from an opening to a unidirectional West to East flow of knowledge in the form of a Victorian culture of ‘punch’ magazines that looked upon Japan through imperial eyes. The story goes that the modernizing Japanese would internalize these imperial visions through colonial mimicry and eventually inflict it upon the Asian continent through mockery in satirical cartoons as war propaganda. Accordingly, those who didn’t follow this Western imperial model are understood as the so-called ‘anti-modernists’ and are rendered scattered peripheral figures. This thesis contributes to a reopening of the meanings of the opening by disclosing the surprising connectivity of those who learnt to laugh together across an East-West divide against the very imperializing and hierarchizing discourses of Western civilizational progress, which were supposed to define

Shadows on Japan’s Enlightenment: Sada Kaiseki’s Attack on Lamps” *Asian Cultural Studies* 16 Special Issue: Parody in Japanese Culture (2007): 57, 70.

¹⁸ See Sho Konishi, “Reopening the ‘Opening of Japan’: A Russian-Japanese Revolutionary Encounter and Vision of Anarchist Progress,” *The American Historical Review* Vol.112, no.1, (February 2007): 101-130; and Sho Konishi, *Anarchist Modernity: Cooperatism and Japanese-Russian Intellectual Relations in Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

their contact with each other and the world. In other words, this dissertation illuminates a transnational reconfiguration, which generated a laughing out of place together.

I contend that to laugh out of place was to also be actively engaged in a world-making project, a carving out of a distinct cultural space or ‘place.’ Laughter, then, was not merely subversive; it was equally generative. Laughter became a peculiar alternative mode of stranger relationality that was created through the circulation of humorous texts, images and styles of communication. This constituted what can be articulated as the emergence of a ‘laughing counterpublic’ in the second half of nineteenth century Japan. I draw this notion of a ‘counterpublic’ from Michael Warner’s influential study on how publics are constructed and different types of publics. Writing on counterpublics, Warner explains:

‘...some publics are defined by their tension with a larger public. Their participants are marked off from persons or citizens in general. Discussion within such a public is understood to contravene the rules obtaining in the world at large, being structured by alternative dispositions or protocols, making different assumptions about what can be said or what goes without saying. This kind of public is, in effect, a counterpublic: it maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status.’¹⁹

Through producing humorous works that were in tension with and transgressed the rules or imagined borderlines of the dominant civilization and enlightenment discourses – a laughter out of place as it were – the writers and artists I examine were also inviting an audience to similarly laugh out of place and become marked off by their participation in a ‘parallel discursive arena’ based on oppositional forms of laughter.²⁰ Distinguished from what Warner describes as ‘ordinary people’ who are ‘presumed not to want to be mistaken for the kind of person who would participate in this kind of talk or be present in this kind of scene.’²¹ Indeed,

¹⁹ Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 56.

²⁰ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” *Social Text*, no. 25/26 (1990): 67.

²¹ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 120.

the so-called ‘useless loser’ writers and artists are likewise no longer simply scattered individuals on the peripheries of society clinging onto outdated Edo literary/visual cultures to put up a final resistance to the forces of modernization before extinction. I suggest that these historical actors are better understood as part of a diffuse, and at times interlocking network of circulation that sought to realize their alternative world-making project through addressing the participants of a laughing counterpublic while constantly seeking to further expand its circulatory space. ‘Run it up the flagpole and see who salutes. Put on a show and see who shows up,’ as Warner puts it.²² Or perhaps we can say, see who laughs.

I posit the emergence of a laughing counterpublic as an alternative form of subjectivity and relationality, which took shape in direct contrasting parodical dialogue with the Meiji government’s project of modern nation-state building and the formation of national subjects. It became a way of participating in what Mikhail Bakhtin would describe as a ‘second world and a second life outside of officialdom,’ a carnivalesque life ‘organized on the basis of laughter.’²³ To date, scholars have only ever considered the role of humor as expressed in political satirical cartoons and illustrated newspapers in nineteenth century Japan through a teleological lens of the ‘birth of the newspaper,’ or the modernization of the media. These are understood as key contributors to the creation of the public sphere in which people can exercise political agency as citizens of the state, and the formation of an imagined community of the nation.²⁴ The laughing counterpublic, however, was a phenomenon, which resisted and existed outside of the territorializing project of nation building and accordingly cannot be comprehended through such state-centered historical narratives. Disclosing this feature of mid-

²² Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 114.

²³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984), 6, 8.

²⁴ See for instance: James L. Huffman, *Creating a Public: People and Press in Meiji Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1997), 2; Peter Duus, “Presidential Address: Weapons of the Weak, Weapons of the Strong – The Development of the Japanese Political Cartoon,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60, no. 4 (November 2001): 981-995; Kyu Hyun Kim, *The Age of Visions and Arguments: Parliamentarianism and the National Public Sphere in Early Meiji Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007).

late nineteenth century cultural and intellectual life in Japan, challenges assumptions of the swift and resounding success of the Meiji state and ideologues in carrying out the formation of modern national subjects through the operation of power on human interiority. Rather, I delineate how laughter became leveraged as a tool or ‘weapon of the weak,’ to transform the interior space into a site of contestation.²⁵

Centering on the works of the prominent writer of Edo playful literature, Kanagaki Robun, and his network of close collaborators such as the artist Kawanabe Kyōsai, Chapter 1 illuminates how Robun produced humorous texts that would encourage a reading audience to laugh out of place with the dominant order. The chapter begins by introducing how Robun and Kyōsai were key players in starting the boom in the circulation of *namazu-e* (catfish prints), which soon became outlawed by the Tokugawa Shogunate for offering comical unofficial interpretations of the 1855 Great Ansei Earthquake. Although Robun has been held up as the representative example of a ‘modernizer’ who reformed to reject the ‘backwards’ Edo style of humorous writing and submitted his brush to the services of the state as a national evangelist of enlightenment after the new Meiji government came into power, I introduce how Robun in fact adapted to the shifting socio-political context and though professing to serve the state, he undermined its national public building campaign by continuing to call the laughing counterpublic into being by speaking to a discerning audience. This dissertation intentionally begins by introducing the catfish print phenomenon of 1855 and outlines its earlier roots in the Edo era culture of subversive play as a methodological intervention in order to disrupt existing historical narratives that use the opening of Japan to the West as the departure point to discuss satire in the late nineteenth century Japan as arising from a West to East flow of imperial knowledge.

²⁵ James C Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

It is from Chapter 2, that I proceed to probe the transnational encounter of satirical cultures in nineteenth century Japan through reexamining the life and work of the British artist Charles Wirgman who produced the *Japan Punch* whilst a long-term resident in the Yokohama foreign settlement. I reveal the unexpected story of how Wirgman became immersed in the already existing late Tokugawa era culture of play. Despite originally being allowed to come Japan on a journalist's assignment to depict its exoticness for a Victorian audience back home, he turned away from this imperial gaze and reversed his critical eyes to satirize the West. Disidentifying with the imperial hierarchies that were to characterize treaty port life, Wirgman participated in the type of art salons that were frequented by the likes of Japanese satirists such as Robun and Kyōsai in the Edo entertainment districts. It was within these spaces that participants could engage in a non-hierarchical imagination and transnational exchange of satirical cultures where they laughed together at discourses of civilization across an East-West divide. Extending from this, the third chapter looks at Robun and Kyōsai's attempt at producing a Japanese 'punch' magazine to demonstrate how these transnational encounters of satirical cultures reconfigured how they imagined the role and nature of the laughing counterpublic. I argue that *ponchi* (punch) was articulated as a non-state level exhibition space occurring transnationally where official ideologies could be put on display and ridiculed. Embedded within this de-territorialized articulation of *ponchi* was a disassociation with the state's vision for empire building. It was anticipated that there would be a large audience for these punch pictures manifested in print, and that the circulation of the magazine would widen the reach of the laughing counterpublic. This was later achieved, I show in Chapter 4, with the release of two weekly satirical newspapers by the Dan Dan Sha Company, which rapidly expanded the membership and scale of the laughing counterpublic through encouraging and publishing humorous submissions from readers as a central feature. These newspapers, which functioned as interactive mediums, were an instant hit and gained a combined annual circulation of over

200,000 copies. Their reach was extensive, transcending the localized networks of circulation and spaces of aesthetic exchange that had developed around the urban centers and popular entertainment districts of Edo. Just as the Meiji emperor was ‘restored’ and released to venture out beyond the new Tokyo capital as an itinerant to demarcate the physical borders of the nation and unify the people under his august body, I explain how the Dan Dan Sha newspapers parodied the imperial movement by rolling around to capture people into its alternate competing body of the laughing people. The newspapers developed their own mode of communication, which privileged laughter and wordplay to make others laugh. This was consciously circulated as a way of both avoiding government censorship, and perhaps more significantly, to loosen the control of minds and disrupt the state’s targeting of human interiority. In the Conclusion, I revisit the prominent and infamous criminal incident where Miyatake Gaikotsu published a cartoon of a skeleton emperor promulgating the Meiji Constitution. I propose that this parody constitution of humor was important, not simply as a lampoon of the imperial system, but as a way of fictionally setting up what can be described as an emperor of laughter who embodied the laughing counterpublic’s alternative lifeworld.

1. Kanagaki Robun as an Evangelist of the Laughing Counterpublic

In the 7th month of 1872, the 52nd edition of the *Shinbun Zasshi* printed what was considered a landmark letter written by former *gesaku* writers Kanagaki Robun (Nozaki Bunzō, 1829-1894) and Sansantei Arindo (Jono Denpei, 1832-1902). The letter, known as the *chosakudō kakiage* (著作道書き上げ), announced that as representatives of their field, they humbly pledge to reform the profession so that in future it aligns with the Three Doctrines (*Sanjō no kyosōku*) recently issued by the *Kyōbushō* (Ministry of Religion and Education) in the same year.¹ Scholars have underscored this moment as a key turning point, which demonstrates a ‘conversion’ of the *gesaku* writers led by Kanagaki Robun, who agreed to comply with the new Meiji government directives and participate in enlightenment by turning away from ‘outdated’ and harmful Edo era literary practices.² More broadly, the *chosakudō* ‘pledge’ has become a representative example of the ‘loss of laughter’ narrative situated across a sharp Edo-Meiji divide and its concomitant historiographical assumptions of a modernization discourse. This chapter, however, challenges this narrative by illuminating how Kanagaki Robun, alongside a close collaborative network of writers and artists such as Kawanabe Kyōsai, did not in fact suddenly stop laughing, but rather leveraged and recalibrated existing modes of satirical communication to laugh at and undermine the seriousness of the Meiji civilization and enlightenment project.

The chapter begins by introducing Robun and Kyōsai as prominent figures in generating oppositional laughter during the *bakumatsu* years through their role in making

¹ See for example: Atsuko Ueda, *Concealment of Politics, Politics of Concealment: The Production of “Literature” in Meiji Japan* (California: Stanford University Press, 2007), 31; See essays by Izumi Yanagida and Kaname Okitsu in *Meiji bungaku zenshū 1: meiji kaikaki bungaku (1)* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1989); comments by Kaname Okitsu in *Meiji kaikaki bungakushū* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1970), 13-20; and Tatsuya Ōmoto, “The Activities of Novelists in the Early Meiji-era – A Study of ‘National Literature’ in Japan as a ‘Nation State,’” *CAMPANA*, no. 19 (2012): 95-106.

² See Tōru Sasaki’s article on Robun’s ‘conversion’ (転身) in Tōru Sasaki, “Iwayuru ‘chosakudō kakiage’ wo megutte: robun no tenshin,” *Nihon Bungaku* 56, no. 10 (2007): 26-35. Also see Kaname Okitsu’s comments on *gesaku* writers’ ‘conversion’ (転向) in *Meiji kaikaki bungakushū* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1970), 13-20.

catfish prints ‘go viral’ as an unofficial popular media source that satirized events surrounding the 1855 Ansei Great Earthquake. This is contextualized within a much longer Tokugawa era ‘culture of play’ within which these individuals were nurtured, by way of establishing the humorous and satirical ways of relating, seeing and knowing that emerged around the Edo urban centers and entertainment districts, which were inherently subversive to the official Tokugawa order. It was this very culture of play that the new Meiji government and elite influential intellectuals deemed disruptive and deleterious to cultivating a civilized and enlightened populous. Accordingly, steps were promptly made to suppress, reform or co-opt these practices and the key individuals involved in their production and spread. Moving on to reevaluate Robun’s alleged Meiji era conversion experience, I demonstrate how all the while professing to serve as an earnest evangelist for the government, Robun adjusted to the new context to continue to produce humor that was out of place with the official order. I suggest that he conversely acted as an evangelist of subversive laughter and engaged in encouraging others to participate in a laughter out of place. Foregrounding the work of Kanagaki Robun to trace the emergence of a laughing counterpublic that traverses the late Tokugawa and early Meiji years, reveals a cultural phenomenon that cannot be neatly separated and understood according to scholarly discourses of a neat Edo-Meiji divide. As such, the very organization of this chapter itself, which begins at a key turning point as defined by the cultural life and activities of the laughing counterpublic, as opposed to centering an 1868 historical break and ensuing directives initiated by the Meiji government, becomes a part of the methodology to disclose this phenomenon.

Laughing at the End of the World

On the night of the second day of the tenth month of 1855, an up and coming but still marginally popular 27-year-old *gesaku* writer, Nozaki Bunzō (professionally known as Kanagaki Robun), asked his wife Yoshi to deliver a manuscript he had just completed that day to *Itoya Shōbei*, a *jihon donya* bookshop that sold cheap illustrated books and prints. While his wife was running errands, Robun was home wrapped up in a futon reading, when suddenly at 10pm an estimated 6.9-7.1 magnitude earthquake suddenly shook Edo. Their house couldn't withstand the strength of the earthquake, but Robun was luckily rescued by his wife who discovered him trapped and unharmed under a collapsed staircase.³ The pair, like many other Edo urbanites on that cold winter night, were forced to sleep outside and no doubt anxiously contemplate the next steps of rebuilding their lives and livelihood, all the while huddling together for an extra glimpse of warmth and hope. What is now known as the Ansei Great Earthquake, would in fact become the event that not only 'shook up' Japan in the words of Gregory Smits,⁴ but would also shake up Robun's fortunes and propel his career as a popular writer. Early the following morning, a *hanmoto* publisher of woodblock prints visited Robun and requested that he quickly draft up a commentary on the earthquake in the form of a *kawaraban* news broadsheet.⁵ It just so happened that the artist Kawanabe Kyōsai was passing by and then joined Robun in producing what is considered to be the first of the explosively popular *namazu-e* (鯰絵) or catfish print genre, which historians now consider as key sources in understanding how ordinary Edoites responded to and interpreted the earthquake, and more broadly the final years of the Tokugawa Shogunate. Smits writes that in the weeks following

³ Kaname Okitsu, *Kanagaki Robun: bunmeikaika no gesakusha* (Yokohama: Yūrindō, 1993), 25-26.

⁴ Gregory Smits, "Shaking Up Japan: Edo Society and the 1855 Catfish Picture Prints," *Journal of Social History* (Summer 2006): 1045-1078.

⁵ Takehiko Noguchi, *Ansei edo jishin: saigai to seiji kenryoku* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shinsho, 1997), 207-208; Itoko Kitahara, *Jishin no shakaishi* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2013), 221-123; Okitsu, *Kanagaki Robun*, 25-26.

the initial earthquake, over ‘400 varieties of earthquake-related prints’ were circulating on the market,⁶ the majority of which depicted catfish due to the association with the folk legend that a giant catfish lives under the earth and its movements are the cause of earthquakes, which are typically kept under control by the Kashima *daimyōjin* deity who stills the catfish using his sword or *kaname ishi* rock.⁷ Robun and Kyōsai’s first catfish print *Oinamazu* 老なまづ (Figure 1) was a parody and play on words of the well-known kabuki song *Tokiwa no Oimatsu* 常磐の老松. This *kawaraban*, with text written by Robun and illustrations provided by Kyōsai, was so successful that the publisher sold a few thousand copies, and in the following days Robun received several orders from other publishers to produce even more catfish and earthquake themed prints. According to Robun’s disciple Nozaki Sabun (1858-1935), Robun worked for 5-6 days on 40-50 different pieces that all became bestsellers, although due to the anonymous nature of the *namazu-e* prints we can only speculate as to what can be attributed to Robun.⁸ We do know that *Oinamazu* would be the first of many Robun-Kyōsai writer-artist collaborations, and that the genre of catfish prints, which the duo played a key role in pioneering, would too ‘shake up’ Japan.

⁶ Smits, “Shaking Up Japan,” 1045.

⁷ Cornelius Ouwehand, *Namazu-e and Their Themes: An interpretative approach to some aspects of Japanese folk religion* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964), 6.

⁸ Noboru Miyata and Mamoru Takada, *Namazu-e: shinai to nihon bunka* (Tokyo: Ribun Shuppan, 1995), 38-39, 333.



Figure 1: *Oinamazu*. By Kanagaki Robun and Kawanabe Kyōsai, 1855.

(National Diet Library Digital Collection)

Scholars have discussed the significance of the explosive popularity of *namazu-e* in the immediate aftermath of the Ansei earthquake by pointing to the frequently recurring themes that can be found in the prints.⁹ The *namazu-e* provided satirical social and political commentary on the reasons for the earthquake and the subsequent impact it had on the lives of common people. Many of the prints humorously celebrated the economic gains that the ordinary construction workers could expect due to the high demand for jobs related to the rebuilding of destroyed properties. These newly-prosperous laborers were also variously illustrated physically and verbally protecting catfish from angry accusative crowds or are shown spending money in the temporary brothels that were established in Edo due to the

⁹ See for instance: Ouwehand, *Namazu-e and Their Themes*.

widespread damage in the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters.¹⁰ Contrasting the earthquake winners with the losers, the prints simultaneously lampooned the loss of wealth suffered by the rich merchants and *daimyo* lords. Anthropomorphized catfish were depicted as medicine peddlers and doctors literally forcing the wealthy to cough up their coins, and in doing so curing the ills of society through a redistribution of wealth. The preponderance of *namazu-e* dealing with themes of wealth redistribution, a meting out of justice, and a reordering of society, speaks to the Ansei earthquake's symbolic role in the eyes of the common people as an event that wasn't simply a random natural occurrence, but one that was ordained and had *yonaoshi* implications.¹¹ *Yonaoshi* refers to a millenarian-like belief in a 'world renewal' or 'world rectification' that George Wilson has shown was especially prolific during the closing years of the Tokugawa Shogunate as expressed through the emergence of new religious movements, folk practices or *ee ja nai ka* dance frenzies and pilgrimages.¹² Smits writes that the residents of Edo viewed the Ansei earthquake within a larger sequence of events, especially from the 1830s, that included crop failures triggering famines, natural disasters, epidemics and the arrival of commodore Matthew Perry and the infamous *kurofune* (black ships) to the shores of Japan.¹³ These *naiyū gaikan* or 'troubles from within and without,' were perceived by the people as a sign of heavenly displeasure at the incompetence and corruption of the Tokugawa regime and the wealthy beneficiaries of the system. The giant catfish of the catfish prints, then, was seen as a *yonaoshi* god figure with powers to end the old world and order of things, as well as to usher in a new one.¹⁴ To be sure, this too wasn't simply a random outburst of energy, but rather it was writers and artists such as Robun and Kyōsai who, with an intimate knowledge of

¹⁰ See for instance: Smits, "Shaking Up Japan;" and Gregory Smits, "The Ansei Edo Earthquake and Catfish Prints," *Meiji at 150 Visual Essays*, accessed October 27, 2022.

¹¹ Smits, "Shaking Up Japan," 1046.

¹² See George M. Wilson, *Patriots and Redeemers in Japan: Motives in the Meiji Restoration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹³ Smits, "Shaking Up Japan," 1046.

¹⁴ See Takashi Miura, "Renewing the World: The Rise of Yonaoshi Gods in Japan" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2015)

Edo urban popular culture and the perspectives of ordinary people, tapped into a broader sentiment of distrust of official government approved narratives or *seishi*, and fed the people's demand for what Itoko Kitahara has described as a *shakai teki shinjitsu* or 'social truth' that matched their lived realities and felt experiences.¹⁵ Therefore, it was the producers of the *namazu-e* and the circulation of these prints that conferred upon the mythical catfish its *yonaoshi* power and meaning. That these popular prints and other forms of playful literature were not preoccupied with objective accounts was of little concern. As Gerald Groemer explains using the example of *kawaraban*, the Edo audiences preferred their news delivered in a 'more imaginative mode.' He continues:

'Kawaraban hermeneutics could rely on a complex system of signs, symbols, analogies, correspondences, and metaphors that existed in the context of everyday life and effortlessly crossed the fluid borders of science, magic, astrology, folk belief, political/moral ideology, literature, poetry, and religion. This context of interpretation allowed explicators with sufficient insight and imagination to apprehend cryptic messages of Heaven, and to endow the seemingly accidental with a meaning and causal necessity that spoke directly to the concerns of reader or listener.'¹⁶

The writers and artists of *namazu-e* were in other words able to tap into alternative sources of popular knowledge and 'social truth' that allowed them to become prophets and messengers who could interpret the multiple cosmic signs of the times and narrate them within the context of the current state of the world. These 'alternative narratives'¹⁷ of the Ansei earthquake that imagined a world renewal or exposed the instabilities in the Tokugawa Shogunate and its constructed world order, naturally conflicted with the interests of the government. It is not surprising then that the Tokugawa *bakufu* wanted to stop the circulation

¹⁵ Kitahara, *Jishin no shakaishi*, 198.

¹⁶ Gerald Groemer, "Singing The News: Yomiuri in Japan During the Edo and Meiji Periods," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* vol. 54, no. 1 (June 1994): 244-245.

¹⁷ For examinations of commoner perspectives during the *bakumatsu* years see: M William Steele, *Alternative Narratives in Modern Japanese History* (Oxon: Routledge, 2003); M William Steele, "Apocalypse Now: An Alternate View of the Bakumatsu Years," *Meiji at 150 Visual Essays*, accessed October 27, 2022.

of the *namazu-e* prints and the ‘heretical’ alternative interpretations that they were spreading. Indeed, throughout the Edo period there were already elaborate laws, successive edicts and systems of censorship in place that attempted to prohibit the depiction of current news events.¹⁸ The overwhelming majority of *namazu-e* were anonymous despite the necessity of indicating their provenance, and they were classed as unregistered or *mukaibutsu*, referring to their status as not following the official channels of publication. Around a month after the earthquake the authorities began to act in an attempt to halt the spread of *namazu-e* through intimidation, confiscating and destroying printing blocks or arresting publishers and sellers (as they couldn’t trace the original authors).¹⁹ Yet, the anonymity of the prints, and ultimately the explosive popularity and rapid speed of their circulation meant that the *bakufu* could do little to stop the phenomenon – another sign of a waning Tokugawa Shogunate in the mid 1800s.

Within this context, most historians have understood the significance of *namazu-e* through the lens of a declining Tokugawa Shogunate and the emergence of the modern nation-state and public sphere in Japan. In particular, *kawaraban* and other cheap popular publications have been considered as pre-modern precursors to newspapers and a mass media.²⁰ Further highlighting the political significance of *namazu-e*, Smits argues that these prints (and indeed their spread) expressed the broadening consciousness of a Japanese national identity, territory and deities – a ‘proto-nationalism’ at the popular level in Edo. He continues that many of the *namazu-e* themes preempted the incoming Meiji government’s mission of fostering a unified Japanese identity. For example, some *namazu-e* pictured the sun goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami, from whom it is claimed that the imperial family descended, as a messianic savior for the people. An emergent consciousness that would be co-opted by the new Meiji government to assert their *ishin* as ‘restoration’ legitimacy, and engage in a nation building project centered

¹⁸ Sarah E. Thompson and H D Harootunian, *Undercurrents in the Floating World: Censorship and Japanese Prints* (New York: Asia Society Galleries, 1991), 34; Miyata and Takada, *Namazu-e*, 91.

¹⁹ Kitahara, *Jishin no shakaishi*, 163-168.

²⁰ Groemer, “Singing The News,” 234.

on the symbol of the sovereign and divine emperor. In other words, the *namazu-e* phenomenon is primarily understood in terms of its role during the turbulent *bakumatsu* years in laying the foundations of, to use Benedict Anderson's term, an 'imagined community,'²¹ which contributed to the speed and success of the transition from the Tokugawa *bakufu* to the Meiji imperial rule and formation of the modern nation-state.²² What Wilson would perhaps describe as a scholarly tendency towards a 'smooth transition' narrative when analyzing the Meiji *ishin*, which variously points to the readiness or docility of the Japanese people as explanations.²³ Of course within this narrative, with the new Meiji government apparently answering the people's calls for a 'world renewal' there was no longer any need for the critical and satirical spirit that accompanied the *namazu-e*. The people laughed at the end of the old world, and then, a sudden loss of laughter. Comical *kawaraban* were replaced with 'serious' newspapers and reporting.²⁴ The people too could now become serious in their pursuit of civilization and enlightenment.

Yet, what is overlooked within these narratives that emphasize the modernization of the media and a burgeoning national public consciousness, is the very significance of the act of laughing and generating laughter. Irrespective of the frequent issuing of edicts and reforms that sought to prohibit the publishing of images and texts that were crude, discussed current events or criticized the Tokugawa Shogunate, writers and artists found innovative ways of evading censorship through methods of concealment that were centered on playfulness, humor and parody. There was an ever-expanding market and popular demand for literature and art that was playful as demonstrated by the numerous categories that emerged such as, *sharebon* (books of wit and fashion); *kokkeibon* (humorous stories); *kibyōshi* (yellow-covered story

²¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016).

²² See Smits, "Shaking Up Japan," 1046, 1055, 1068-1069.

²³ Wilson, *Patriots and Redeemers in Japan*, 77.

²⁴ Groemer, "Singing The News," 261.

books) and many others.²⁵ As Harry Harootunian notes, the purpose of many of these playful written and visual texts was to ‘penetrate the hole’ or *ana no ugachi* and go beyond the surface of things to reveal the true nature that lies underneath, often unveiling a ‘different conception of society that invariably ran counter to the expectations of the Tokugawa authorities.’²⁶ In the words of Eiko Ikegami, ‘artists and writers of Tokugawa Japan found laughter an effective tool of cultural subversion.’²⁷ Writing at length on the significance of laughter, Mikhail Bakhtin too acknowledged laughter’s ability to punch holes and open up new possibilities:

‘Laughter has the remarkable power of making an object come up close, of drawing it into a zone of crude contact where one can finger it familiarly on all sides, turn it upside down, inside out, peer at it from above or below, break open its external shell, look into its center, doubt it, take it apart, dismember it, lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it.’²⁸

As discussed above, this revealing of alternative realities was exactly what the *namazu-e* set out to do, and the people were thirsty for this knowledge that only laughter could offer them. Much like the widespread skepticism towards ‘mainstream media’ sources in today’s society, Tokugawa-approved official explanations of the Ansei earthquake and the surrounding events could no longer satiate a readership who had cultivated new ways of interpreting, feeling and knowing. The ‘serious’ in tone was met with distrust. Referring to Henri Bergson’s analysis of laughter, Katsuya Hirano explains that whereas the Tokugawa authorities tried to suppress texts that elicit laughter as these were considered as defiling morals, undermining conformity to conventions and a cause of disorder, the laughter of Edo popular culture ridiculed these very

²⁵ Ueda, *Concealment of Politics, Politics of Concealment*, 35-36; James L Huffman, *Creating a Public: People and Press in Meiji Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1997), 22-23.

²⁶ Thompson and Harootunian, *Undercurrents in the Floating World*, 27.

²⁷ Eiko Ikegami, *Bonds of Civility: Aesthetic Networks and the Political Origins of Japanese Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 318.

²⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), 23.

calls to rigidity and a lack of pliability that characterized the Tokugawa order.²⁹ Perhaps we can reverse the formula to say of Edo popular culture that the absence of laughter was an indication that the *ana* (hole) had not yet been penetrated and so the true nature of things was still concealed and out of reach. I laugh, therefore I am; the epistemological function of laughter.

Engendering laughter, then, wasn't simply about circumventing rules or escapism, but expressed something much more fundamental – an alternative conception and way of being in the world. Making an important intervention into our understanding of late Tokugawa culture and thought, Harootunian articulated the emergence of a 'culture of play,' which at its core was a 'search for new and different forms of knowledge' and how to implement them.³⁰ The rising urban classes, a developing leisure industry owing in part to the increasing wealth of merchants and an expansion of consumers, as well as the proliferation of entertainment districts around the cities of Edo, Osaka and Kyoto, meant that the fabric of a growing number of people's lives (originating in and swelling out from the urban centers) started to revolve around play and pleasure activities.³¹ In particular, Harootunian argues that the late Tokugawa culture of play 'seemed to converge upon the body, making public what hitherto had remained private.'³² Building on Harootunian's analysis, Katsuya Hirano contrasts this Edo urban culture that privileged the body at play with the official discourse of the Tokugawa *bakufu*, which constructed a moral and socio-economic order that 'sought to confine the body to the function of productive labor serving the operation of the rice economy.' The body at play and pleasure was designated as 'idle,' 'immoral,' and wholly unproductive.³³ The urban centers witnessed a proliferation of these types who lived on the very edges of the Tokugawa order, and as Hirano notes, their 'unproductive' activities and entertainment spaces started to become magnetic

²⁹ Hirano, *The Politics of Dialogic Imagination*, 136-137.

³⁰ H D Harootunian, "Late Tokugawa culture and thought," in *The Emergence of Meiji Japan*, ed. Marius B. Jansen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 56.

³¹ Thompson and Harootunian, *Undercurrents in the Floating World*, 3.

³² Harootunian, "Late Tokugawa culture and thought," 58.

³³ Hirano, *The Politics of Dialogic Imagination*, 4, 209-210.

centers that drove economic life. People developed new professions to earn a living that were centered on play and the body. He writes:

‘Storytellers, street musicians, jugglers, dancers, mimes, puppeteers, food vendors, barbers, diviners, itinerant shamans, souvenir peddlers, and teahouse girls gathered and entertained large crowds of people of all social statuses with “bizarre,” “obscure,” and “vulgar” spectacles.’³⁴

Hiraga Gennai’s (1728-1780) satirical text on the ‘fartist’ of Edo’s Ryōgoku district is perhaps the most well-known example of someone who lived outside of the Tokugawa moral order and relied on entertaining crowds with only the body’s superfluous excess.³⁵ The image of large crowds gathered in urban centers and marketplaces – the masses of bodies gathered on the Nihonbashi bridge – the ‘social surplus’ in the words of Harootunian, is an important one, as it demonstrates a blurring of the fixed boundaries and social identities that characterized the Tokugawa class system. Play became a ‘form of subjectivity that existed outside the “four classes”’.³⁶ Everyday social and economic life was being transformed in these urban spaces where a peasant would brush past an entertainer or a low-ranking samurai would be pushed up against a merchant in a theatre or brothel, literally dissolving and blurring the boundaries between the rulers and the ruled, high and low. Bakhtin writes of such carnivalesque crowds in the following way:

‘The carnivalesque crowd in the marketplace or in the streets is not merely a crowd. It is the people as a whole, but organized *in their own way*, the way of the people. It is outside of and contrary to the existing forms of the coercive socioeconomic and political organization, which is suspended for the time of the festivity.’³⁷

³⁴ Katsuya Hirano, “Politics and Poetics of the Body in Early Modern Japan,” *Modern Intellectual History* 8, 3 (2011): 514.

³⁵ Referring to Hiraga Gennai’s *Hōhiron*, 放屁論, (On Farting) published circa 1771-1774. For an English translation see Hiraga Gennai, “On Farting,” translated by William F Sibley, in *Readings in Tokugawa Thought*, ed. Tetsuo Najita (Chicago: University of Chicago the Center for East Asian Studies, 1998), 167-174. For a closer discussion see Hirano, “Politics and Poetics of the Body.”

³⁶ Harootunian, “Late Tokugawa culture and thought,” 57.

³⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984), 255.

Similarly, identifying an expansion and remapping of the communicative networks, as well as a flow of aesthetic knowledge through these networks during the Tokugawa era, Ikegami articulates a ‘network revolution,’ which saw individuals form new fluid associations and dynamic social ties that existed beyond the Tokugawa-defined rigid political order. For example, participating in cultural or artistic circles enabled people to decouple from their fixed identities within the feudal hierarchical system of *shinōkōshō* (士農工商) and embody new transformed identities and build new relations.³⁸ The culture of play, in other words, was also a moving out of one’s ‘place.’ The Tokugawa authorities tried to discipline the body away from unproductive consumption and excess through sumptuary laws and spatially confining the market of corporeal pleasure and play to limited ‘free space’ entertainment districts on the outskirts of the major cities, a ‘strategy of containment’ in the words of Hirano.³⁹ Yet, the subversion of official Tokugawa discourses of productive labor based on social hierarchies, which became the fabric of everyday life through play, found further expression and representation through woodblock illustrations, comical literary forms and theatrical performances. The *ukiyo* or ‘floating world’ – a term that has come to exemplify the urban centers and their districts of play and pleasure – was repositioned to the ‘foreground of represented experience.’⁴⁰ As mentioned above, double voicing strategies through humor, parody and satire in literature and woodblock illustrations became a way of penetrating the surface to defamiliarize the dominant Tokugawa ideology and reveal a counter discourse of the body at play in everyday life. The act of laughing was an alternative way of being and knowing in late Tokugawa Japan where people ‘related to the world through their orifices rather than

³⁸ Ikegami, *Bonds of Civility*, 10-13.

³⁹ Hirano, *The Politics of Dialogic Imagination*, 210.

⁴⁰ Harootunian, “Late Tokugawa culture and thought,” 62; Thompson and Harootunian, *Undercurrents in the Floating World*, 28.

through public duties demanded by fixed social status and disciplined intention.’⁴¹ The locus of truth was shifted onto laughing bodies.

It is no surprise then that already in the Edo period laughter was met with much disdain by the ruling classes. In 1816, the scholar Buyō Inshi condemned *gesaku* writers for bringing people to laughter through ridiculing official historical narratives and mixing them with vulgar stories or by making the ‘old and good customs and the eternal virtues of loyalty and filial piety into objects of comic mockery, thus encouraging depravity and spreading confusion among the ordinary people.’⁴² As similarly expressed by the character of an ‘old Cranky’ samurai in Hiraga’s *Hōhiron*, the explosions of farts from the fartist entertainer, and bursts of laughter from the crowd, were all ‘exceedingly distasteful’ and not to be ‘aired in public.’ The samurai continues his assertion that the authorities, ‘graciously permitted theatrical performances and public speeches in general only as an instrument for pacifying the people, and for elucidating the proper relations between lord and retainer, father and son, elder and younger.’⁴³ The role of play in official life, then, was solely to remind people of their duties and positions within the existing order. It wasn’t forward looking or transgressive in the sense of transporting people to a ‘second life’ that is outside of officialdom. Rather it looked back to the past and sought to reify it in the present. This is why, according to Bakhtin, ‘the tone of the official feast was monolithically serious and why the element of laughter was alien to it,’ for it was laughter that could suspend the existing hierarchies and structures.⁴⁴ However, for the people of late Tokugawa Japan who increasingly found that their needs were not being met by the existing systems and ‘natural order’ of things, they approached the ‘seriousness’⁴⁵ of official discourse and duties with suspicion – the ‘hole’ needed to be penetrated through laughter to repeat the

⁴¹ Harootunian, “Late Tokugawa culture and thought,” 61.

⁴² Quoted in Hirano, *The Politics of Dialogic Imagination*, 105.

⁴³ Gennai, “On Farting,” 170.

⁴⁴ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 9.

⁴⁵ Bakhtin writes, ‘for men, as we have seen were suspicious of seriousness and were accustomed to relate sincere and free truth to laughter.’ In Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 100.

ana no ugachi term we previously visited. There was a ‘will to knowledge,’ and of the ‘proper kind’ that could offer ‘relief’ and solutions to their problems, which the Tokugawa order was no longer sufficient in providing to the people.⁴⁶ They needed to feel it, and get to that place of knowledge and understanding through the physical act of laughing and relating with others through laughter. Groemer describes how, for example, the *yomiuri* sellers of *kawaraban* sought to stir the emotions of the audience through lively concerts or performances, which enhanced the credibility of the texts or prints they were advertising.⁴⁷ Ikegami further elucidates a close connection between print and oral culture during the Tokugawa era, noting a practice of reading out loud that became a physical experience through vocalization and even a theatrical performance. As people engaged in reading these playful works aloud it ‘would carry the reader’s mind to the floating world, temporarily decoupling the reader from the feudal political order.’⁴⁸ Laughing bodies would be raptured ‘out of place’ to that site of knowledge of the ‘proper kind’ that is outside, on the flip-side and under the surface of official Tokugawa life. Indeed, as Emily Groszos Ooms has discussed in relation to *kamigakari* spirit possessions, which became a consistent feature of late nineteenth century *shinshūkyō* (new religions) in Japan, physical entrancements leading to an ‘altered state of consciousness’ away from everyday life, became privileged sites of knowledge that had more authority than the prevailing ideologies. Experiences of physical sensations and bodily convulsions were a sign of a gap in reality that provided access to revelations of truth.⁴⁹ For readers/orators of playful texts, the ‘will to knowledge’ was expressed through the desire to depart for the floating world through performances that generated laughter.

⁴⁶ Harootunian, “Late Tokugawa culture and thought,” 66.

⁴⁷ Groemer, “Singing The News,” 248.

⁴⁸ Ikegami, *Bonds of Civility*, 315.

⁴⁹ Emily Groszos Ooms, *Women and Millenarian Protest in Meiji Japan: Deguchi Nao and Ōmotokyo* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 5-19.

Robun and Kyōsai's *Oinamazu* catfish print, the first of the genre, functioned to carry its audience to the floating world through its allusions and stylistic form. Parodying a popular kabuki song as a means to give an account of the damage caused by the earthquake, as can be seen in the top half of the print, reinforces the performative element of the print. This was meant to be read aloud and perhaps even sung in a group. The lower half of the print depicts a geisha playing a *shamisen* next to an amusing illustration of an acrobatic entertainer imitating a catfish. In the remaining blank space surrounding the images, is a guide to the *karitaku* establishments set up to temporarily replace the Yoshiwara red-light district that was heavily damaged by the earthquake. The print mixes a comical retelling of the current crisis from an ordinary person's perspective with pieces of knowledge that would be useful to their intended audience. In a tone that was distinctly humorous and centered on the second life of the floating world, the print provided the practical 'relief' knowledge and interpretation that the Tokugawa *bakufu*, in its seriousness, could not offer the people. Another catfish print that has been attributed to Robun is *Ame ni ha komarimasu nojuku – shibaraku no sotone* (雨にハ困ります 野じゅくしばらくのそとね) (Figure 2).⁵⁰ The text parodies the kabuki play *shibaraku* (暫), which is classed as one of the *kabuki jūhachiban*, or the 'Eighteen Great Kabuki Plays.' The famous speech from the play 'Wait a minute!', known as *shibaraku no tsurane*, was recast as *shibaraku no sotone* (sleeping outside for a minute) to express the situation that many Edoites found themselves in during the aftermath of the earthquake where they had to spend several days and nights outside. The print affirmed and centered the people's shared lived experiences of the earthquake and presented it in an entertaining format with popular culture references they would be familiar with.

At the same time, these prints were participatory, not only in terms of the performative element as urged by the use of famous kabuki song lyrics or other verses, but also in terms of

⁵⁰ Kitahara, *Jishin no shakaishi*, 123-125; Miyata and Takada, *Namazu-e*, 333-334.

the reader/viewer/listener's role in decoding the meaning of these prints. It was up to the reader to fill in the gaps, make connections between the various popular references, wordplay, puns, visual allusions and current events and then recombine these numerous components to give their interpretation of the print.⁵¹ Playful literature and prints during the Tokugawa era had already disseminated a shared language of images, symbols, signs and idioms that would make the deciphering of these prints a possibility.⁵² The Tokugawa culture of *hanjimonō* (判じ物) in *ukiyo-e* prints that encrypted meaning through the use of images and characters requiring the reader to decode the puzzle or *etoki*, was by no means a solo activity but a communal one. It found its height of enjoyment when engaged in as a group where people could attempt to unlock the meaning and participate in the hilarity together.⁵³ These satirical prints didn't just encourage a ridiculing or 'laughing at,' they brought people into contact – both physically and imagined – to 'laugh together.' In the words of Bergson, 'Our laughter is always the laughter of a group.' He explains that how despite appearing as spontaneous, laughter suggests a 'secret freemasonry, or even complicity, with other laughers, real or imaginary,' while the same amusement might not translate to those outside of the laughing group who cannot or will not participate.⁵⁴ It was the affective experience of laughter that tied people together as a new form of stranger relationality that broke with the Tokugawa order's determined social categories – they no longer know or feel themselves as they were, but have become new selves.⁵⁵ Miyata has defined the *namazu-e* phenomenon in terms of an 'anonymous information network,' to describe how the prints were published anonymously and rapidly circulated among the Edo

⁵¹ Groemer, "Singing The News," 256.

⁵² Ikegami, *Bonds of Civility*, 318.

⁵³ Miyata and Takada, *Namazu-e*, 91.

⁵⁴ Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913), 6.

⁵⁵ In an essay on 'Affective Communities,' Veronica Zink introduces Durkheim's notion of effervescence to articulate affects as 'passing transmitters of communal relations' that 'enable the transcendence of one's socially determined, enclosed individuality by breaking with one's ordinary identity.' In Jan Slaby and Christian von Scheve eds., *Affective Societies: Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 295.

urban population despite the *bakufu*'s attempts to halt their spread and publishing routes.⁵⁶ According to Kitahara, it wasn't only the content of information that infuriated the *bakufu*, but their main vexation was the anonymity, and that the prints didn't follow the authorized publishing channels.⁵⁷ In other words, it wasn't simply the information flowing through the networks, it was the rise of these alternative 'unofficial' networks themselves that were problematic. The laughter that accompanied and fueled an ever-increasing demand for the circulation of playful prints and literature in *bakumatsu* Japan became the affective adhesive that underpinned the logic of these networks and connectivity.

Consumers of these texts and images would laugh 'out of place,' both in terms of being out of sync with the Tokugawa order's official discourses that were not to be ridiculed, as well as in the sense of inhabiting a new body and subjectivity outside of the feudal hierarchical structure, which allowed people to imagine and experience totally new forms of stranger relationality. Late Tokugawa Edo witnessed the emergence of what I describe as a 'laughing counterpublic' that was distinct from authority and critical in its relation to power.⁵⁸ As Michael Warner has elaborated on how publics are 'constituted through mere attention,' the satirical and humorous prints serve to solicit people's attention and crave for the viewer to recognize the joke and (in)appropriately respond with laughter. Attention to the joke – getting it – operates as the 'sorting category by which members and nonmembers are discriminated.' It is then in the 'active uptake,' the laughing, that belonging is achieved as they participate in transgressing the rules of the official world to engage in an alternative protocol.⁵⁹ Warner asserts that such counterpublics frequently remain obscured from view or misrecognized as their modes of address – bringing that public to life, as it were – do not conform to the dominant model of the bourgeois public sphere as outlined by Jürgen Habermas that privileges the

⁵⁶ Miyata and Takada, *Namazu-e*, 22.

⁵⁷ Kitahara, *Jishin no shakaishi*, 164, 168.

⁵⁸ Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 56.

⁵⁹ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 87-89.

‘people’s public use of their reason’ in terms of a rational-critical debate. Considering the late Tokugawa boom in often anonymous satirical prints intended to bring people to laughter, it was those other facets of discourse, the ‘embodied sociability, affect and play’ that had a more defining role than rational-critical dialogue.⁶⁰ The cacophony of laughter in *bakumatsu* Japan is perhaps better understood as a symphony, because the laughing orchestra were, as Bakhtin writes of the carnival crowd, ‘aware of being a member of a continually growing and renewed people.’⁶¹

Laughing out of place, together, therefore, doesn’t comfortably fit within modernization narratives that reduce the phenomenon to yet another example of proto-nationalism that laid the psychological foundations of an imagined community, which were built upon by the Meiji government to construct the modern nation-state.⁶² In other words, what has been considered as a momentary release of laughter to express squelched desires that would naturally dissipate as soon as the new Meiji government stepped in to provide the *yonaoshi* ‘relief’ that the common people were clamoring for as voiced in *namazu-e*. Rather, the laughing counterpublic itself was an emergent articulation of an alternative vision of truth, belonging, and a world renewal project – its own altered ‘state.’ As we shall see through reexamining the early Meiji work of Robun and a close network of playful artists and writers who were already operating to generate this discursive space during the late Tokugawa era, the laughing counterpublic did not simply stop laughing as a result of censure and discipline, or to become integrated into the Meiji state’s vision of a Japanese modern national public through a new body politics.⁶³ These artists and writers continued to bring the laughing counterpublic to life through attention and constantly clamored for new members to get in on the joke that invited

⁶⁰ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 51, 114-115, 122.

⁶¹ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 92.

⁶² See Smits, “Shaking Up Japan.”

⁶³ See Hirano, *The Politics of Dialogic Imagination*, Ch 5; Thompson and Harootunian, *Undercurrents in the Floating World*, 28.

people to another state. Just as the *bakumatsu* laughing counterpublic was defined by its tension with the dominant Tokugawa order, their conventions of laughter in the Meiji period remained outside of the rigid boundaries of state-centered civilization and enlightenment discourses. This laughing counterpublic blurs historical narratives that posit a distinct Edo-Meiji divide, which center on a throwing off of ‘backwards’ and ‘anti-modern’ Edo practices, while focusing on the ‘nation-building that brought Japan into the modern world.’⁶⁴ I would suggest, then, that the emergence of a laughing counterpublic in the late Tokugawa era was less of an ‘outro’ laughter at the end of one world, and more a rising crescendo to usher in a new world constituted on laughter. As Ooms puts it in her analysis of the teachings of Deguchi Nao and *Ōmotokyo*’s teleology, for some, the Meiji *ishin* just wasn’t a significant ‘turning point’ at all.⁶⁵

Civilized Laughter?

Most scholars of Japanese literature, however, do consider the Meiji *ishin* as a key turning point when it comes to the Edo culture of play. The swift actions of the government to enact educational reforms, enhanced surveillance of entertainment industries, and support for the modernization of the media during the early Meiji years were the perfect storm of policies, which would render the subversive laughter of the Tokugawa era obsolete.⁶⁶ Historians have rarely questioned this narrative, which posits a distinctly sharp break between the two periods – an abundance of laughter at the end of the old world suddenly turning into a loss of laughter in the ‘modern’ world. A central moment around which this narrative revolves is the aforementioned *chosakudō kakiage* pledge written by Robun and Arindo who apparently

⁶⁴ Steele, *Alternative Narratives*, 1.

⁶⁵ Ooms, *Women and Millenarian Protest in Meiji Japan*, 98.

⁶⁶ See Yanagida and Okitsu in *Meiji bungaku zenshū 1*; and Okitsu in *Meiji kaikaki bungakushū*. Also discussed in Tomohisa Mikawa, “Meiji shoki no gesaku no dōkō (I): kanagaki robun, jōno denpei ni yoru kyōbushō he no jōshinsho wo meguru kōsatsu,” *Ningen Shakai Kankyō Kenkyū* 24, 9 (2012): 142.

submitted the letter to the *Kyōbushō* (Ministry of Religion and Education) in 1872 committing to reform their style of writing to align with the principles outlined in the *Sanjō no kyōsoku* (Three Doctrines) issued in the 4th month of the same year.⁶⁷ The *Daikyōin* or the Great Teaching Institute was established in the 3rd month of 1872 as part of a broader Great Promulgation Campaign (*Daikyō senbu*) to educate the masses in the way of the Meiji state-authorized doctrine and state-centered religion. The teachings of the *Sanjō no kyōsoku* were: ‘(1) respect for the gods, love of country; (2) making clear the principles of Heaven and the Way of Man; (3) reverence for the emperor and obedience to the will of the court.’⁶⁸ Robun and Arindo’s letter, a version of which found its way into the *Shinbun Zasshi* newspaper in 1872.7, opens by stating that, ‘owing to the recent issuing of the edicts [Three Doctrines] it is incumbent upon us to speak on the condition of our literary profession.’ They continue their address with a frank statement to set out the original purpose of *gesaku* literature. ‘To begin with, the work of *gesaku* writing places falsehoods at its center whilst reality is secondary. It borrows historical events and names, or substitutes the bones and steals the body of official histories’ (抑戯作ノ儀ハ虚ヲ主トシ実ヲ客トシ或ハ事跡名籍を佞用シ或ハ正史ヲ換骨奪体シ). They subsequently provide an extensive genealogy of *gesaku* literature, tracing it back to the 14th century Chinese writer Luo Guanzhong and the classics of Japanese literature such as the tales of *Genji* and *Sagoromo*, through to the Edo period’s Hiraga Gennai who was the first to use the term *gesaku*, and later Edo writers such as Jippensha Ikku among others who were actually able to make a living off *gesaku*. Yet they lament that in recent years many of the writers have been lost to the world, whether through death or moving onto other professions, as *gesaku* is no longer lucrative in this new age. The pair claim that aside from themselves,

⁶⁷ Described as a turning point in John Pierre Mertz, *Novel Japan: Spaces of Nationhood in Early Meiji Narrative, 1870-88* (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2003), 81. Also see Wells who writes that in the wake of the pronouncement, ‘the *gesaku* writers were quick to follow the government’s instructions,’ in Marguerite Wells, *Japanese Humour* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), 48.

⁶⁸ Helen Hardacre, *Shinto and the State, 1868-1988* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 42-43.

there are only a few *gesaku* writers left. ‘As can be seen, as the days and months go by, *haishi* [unofficial or vulgar literature] is increasingly becoming despised for its falsehoods.’ They recognized that *gesaku*, which uses allusions and symbols to talk about other times and spaces causes confusion among the uneducated and could lead them astray. The letter concludes with a recommitment to reforming their industry as agreed upon by the remaining *gesaku* writers, and from henceforth they would ‘write according to the principles outlined in the Three Doctrines.’⁶⁹

Seeing no reason to doubt the earnestness of the pledge, Japanese literary scholars Yanagida Izumi and Okitsu Kaname summarize its significance as evidence that the writers would shift to relegate *kyo* (fantasy/falsehood) to a secondary concern and conversely elevate *jitsu* (reality/truth) to the center of their work (実を主にし、虚を客にするというやり方).⁷⁰ In other words, turning the practice of *gesaku* writing on its head. The story goes that Robun was increasingly enthusiastic about the Meiji enlightenment project as can be seen in his earlier attempts to mimic Fukuzawa Yukichi in explorations of conditions in the West, and following the pledge, Robun officially offered up his services to become an enlightenment educator himself as a member of the national evangelist (*kyōdōshoku*) corps and writer of educational textbooks. To be sure, identifying the satirical nature of Robun’s parodies of the enlightenment-minded *Fukuzawa-bon* (Fukuzawa books) genre, scholars have suggested that Okitsu’s framing of Robun as a staunch enlightener (*kaikakushugisha*),⁷¹ is perhaps misplaced as works such as *Ushiya zōdan aguranabe* (*Sitting Cross-Legged at the Beef Pot*, 1871-1872) and *Kyūrizukai* (*On Using Cucumbers*, 1872) are less mimicry and more mockery of Fukuzawa’s *Nikushoku no setsu* (*A Theory on Meat Eating*, 1870) and *Kyūrizukai* (*Illustrated Explanations of Scientific Principles*, 1868) respectively. Reitan, Steele and Mertz have all re-asserted the

⁶⁹ *Meiji bungaku zenshū* 1, 410.

⁷⁰ Mikawa, “Meiji shoki no gesaku no dōkō (I),” 142.

⁷¹ Okitsu, *Kanagaki Robun*, 71.

significance of Robun's *Fukuzawa-bon* parodies and noted the similarities with those written by the *gesaku* writer Mantei Ōga who, like Robun, also frequently drafted in the artist Kawanabe Kyōsai to illustrate his *Fukuzawa-bon* parodies. Ōga for example published *Tōsei rikō musume* (*An Intelligent Woman of Our Time*, 1873), which took a cultural relativist perspective in praising the traditional beauty standards of Japanese women with shaved eyebrows in response to Fukuzawa's *Katawa musume* (*The Disfigured Daughter*, 1872) that advised women to follow Western beauty standards. Ōga also imagined a head on debate with Fukuzawa in his *Gakumon suzume* (*Sparrows of Learning*, 1875), which introduces an argument between the Western and Eastern 'sparrows of learning' about the future progress of Japanese society, and is a parody of the Meiji era-defining *Gakumon no susume* (*An Encouragement of Learning*, 1872-1876).⁷² However, even these significant reappraisals serve to reify the Meiji era as a turning point leading to a 'loss of laughter' narrative as the destiny of *gesaku* writers would ultimately be to convert like Robun⁷³ or become an irrelevant relic of the past like Ōga. An article about the fate of the *gesaku* industry in the *Chōya Shinbun* of 25 February 1875 made this explicit. Whereas the first half of the article extols the wise career decisions of Robun and Arindo who 'threw away their brushes to make friends with the present times' and who both now write for respected newspapers, the latter section heartily condemns the one remaining rogue *gesaku* writer, Mantei Ōga, who stubbornly clings to old ways and produces foolish works. The writer concludes the vitriolic article by emphatically stating that Ōga's writing is 'useless and harmful' (無用有害) and accordingly enjoins elders of the world

⁷² For further discussion of Mantei Ōga's *Gakumon Suzume* see: M William Steele, "Meiji Twitterings: A Parody of Fukuzawa's An Encouragement of Learning," *Asian Cultural Studies* 18 Special Issue: Parody in Japanese Culture Part II (2010): 55-77; M William Steele, "The Unconventional Origins of Modern Japan: Mantei Ōga vs. Fukuzawa Yukichi," in *Values, Identity, and Equality in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Japan*, ed. Peter Nosco, James E Ketelaar and Yasunori Kojima (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Reitan, *Making a Moral Society*; Mertz, *Novel Japan*.

⁷³ Reitan asserts, 'The pledge marks an important turning point in Robun's career.' In Reitan, *Making a Moral Society*, 81.

never to instruct children with these books.⁷⁴ It would indeed seem that there was no longer an audience eager to engage in laughter.

Recent scholarship has begun to question the very sincerity of Robun and Arindo's pledge to reform the practice of *gesaku* writing. Sasaki Tōru notes that there is in fact no evidence for the letter that appeared in the *Shinbun Zasshi* had ever been submitted to the government, nor can we trust the claim that the government required them to submit such a letter. He further argues that the so-called pledge is vague in its language as to exactly what actionable reforms the *gesaku* writers intended to undertake, and that it may even be slyly mimicking comparable letters published around the same time. For example, representatives from the *kōdankai* oral storytelling profession submitted their pledge, known as the *kengen no ryaku*, to the *Kyōbushō*, which found its way into the *Nichiyō Shinbun* No. 34, 1872.7, the same month as the *chosakudō kakiage*. Moving in the opposite direction, a stern letter of instruction from the *Kyōbushō* sent to Buddhist temples commanding them to reform in line with the Three Doctrines appeared in the same *Shinbun Zasshi* newspaper No. 50, 1872.6, just a month prior to the *chosakudō kakiage*. Conducting a close comparison of the aforementioned statements, Sasaki identifies that the *chosakudō kakiage* seems to follow a similar pattern to these other letters in its initial tracing of the history of the profession and commenting on the decline in recent years before an instruction or enthusiastic commitment to reform.⁷⁵ Yet, at the same time the *chosakudō kakiage* also displays some crucial differences, much like a parody would; 'repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity,' in the words of Linda Hutcheon.⁷⁶ In particular, the *gesaku* writers curiously conclude their pledge by asserting that 'while we are vulgar and lowly, we are naturally different from the writers of the

⁷⁴ *Meiji bungaku zenshū* 1, 446.

⁷⁵ Sasaki, "Robun no tenshin."

⁷⁶ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 6.

kabuki theatre,'⁷⁷ perhaps as a way of slyly suggesting that they are unlike the kabuki playwrights whose work has become heavily regulated and already adheres to the principles of the Great Promulgation Campaign.⁷⁸ While we can only speculate as to their true intentions with such statements that appear out of place against the ostensible original purpose of a serious letter to commit to following the government's Three Doctrines, it does however create what Chelsea Foxwell has argued is Robun and Arindo's way of generating an 'unreliable narration that undermines newspapers' association with truth, enlightenment, and a submissive populace.'⁷⁹ She further posits that the news *nishiki-e* (錦絵) of the mid 1870s, a genre of color woodblock prints revived from the Edo period, often functioned in a similar way of, on the one hand being complicit in its 'enlightened' newspaper format, while simultaneously subverting Meiji civilization and enlightenment discourses by 'destabilizing the boundaries between fact and fiction, virtue and vice.'⁸⁰ In particular, Foxwell suggests that a sophisticated text-image interplay and use of familiar signs and symbols from Edo-era satirical works served as a way of speaking to a savvy audience who would knowingly pick up these cultural cues to discern a deeper meaning beyond the surface; in contrast to existing scholarly understandings of *nishiki-e* as crude newspapers for the uneducated.⁸¹

Indeed, we cannot reductively understand the early Meiji activities of *gesaku* writers as evidence that they obsequiously followed the government's orders to civilize their laughter and join in the enlightenment project to create a new national subject and public through the modernized practice of newspaper writing. On the contrary, I argue that all the while claiming to have been born again as serious enlightenment evangelists, by continuously and adaptively generating laughter that sits uncomfortably 'out of place' and in tension with the state-centered

⁷⁷ *Meiji bungaku zenshū 1*, 410.

⁷⁸ Sasaki, "Robun no tenshin," 30.

⁷⁹ Chelsea Foxwell, "The Art of Reframing the News: Early Meiji Shinbun Nishiki-e in Context." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* vol. 78, no. 1, (June 2018): 76.

⁸⁰ Foxwell, "The Art of Reframing the News," 52.

⁸¹ Foxwell, "The Art of Reframing the News."

narratives of *bunmei kaika*, *gesaku* writers such as Robun were in fact engaging in constantly calling a laughing counterpublic into being across the Edo-Meiji divide. In other words, Robun's laughter out of place not only undermined the gravity of the Meiji government's enlightenment mission, it also compelled readers who would catch the joke to 'step out of place,' as it were, and participate in an alternative socio-cultural space of a laughing counterpublic.

Evangelist of Laughter

In the first year of Meiji, the new government's stance towards *shinbunshi* (newspapers) remained similar to the Tokugawa Shogunate in that they were prohibited, as it was believed that newspapers would 'confuse the minds of the people.'⁸² Yet as early as the second year of Meiji, the government permitted the publication of newspapers as they saw their utility in promoting an enlightened public as well as considered the presence of newspapers themselves as a sign of a civilized nation – just like in the West that had developed a lively newspaper culture. An early example of this shift can be witnessed in a correspondence sent from the Meiji central government's *Dajōkan daishi* to the municipal government in Kyoto in 1871.7, which communicates that *shinbunshi* are useful for enlightening the people.

'Newspapers must be for the purpose of cultivating people's intellect. This is to release people's spirits from their stubbornness and guide them in the way of enlightenment. Whether of internal or external affairs, they must write of truth, condense knowledge, that which is far bring close, and broaden the horizons of readers, in the case that the country is in need to provide that which is useful. They are to promote stronger ties with foreign countries, and it is not permitted to write irreverent information about other countries, or to ignorantly exaggerate information about them. Writing words without basis and pointing out the wrong of others, writing ominous, ghoulish, fishy and suspicious things and deceiving people through rumors, or drafts received that are anonymous should not be published. Newspapers

⁸² Mikawa, "Meiji shoki no gesaku no dōkō (I)," 153.

should would warn people of that which they should be careful of and write of new inventions and of other beneficial things to the world. Random discussions, jokes and especially concerning that which brings people to laughter are permitted provided they are not harmful. However, words that incite people to immorality are not. Even if various novel and strange things have a basis, it must be outlined where the source came from. If later it is discovered that something isn't true then it must be noted in a later edition. Write in an easy-to-understand way and don't use strange characters. When publishing newspapers, it should be so that the information spreads widely and don't pursue a quick profit through sensational news. Selecting articles for a newspaper should be considered as like producing a *seishi* [official histories]. Things that easily stimulate the imagination and superstitions should be avoided. In another sense it should be like writing *haikan* [vulgar literature] otherwise it will be too difficult and the common people reading and listening won't be able to understand. Writing a newspaper should be made so that the reader does not lose interest. However, making 無 [nothing] into 有 [something] and 虛 [falsehoods/fantasy] into 実 [truths] and stirring people's feelings and confusing the eyes of the masses through made up ideas is prohibited.⁸³

This statement is particularly useful for discerning the government's emerging attitude towards the type of form newspapers were allowed to take. While they should be interesting to keep the attention of the common people, they should distance themselves from fantastical and frivolous writing, which as we have already seen, was associated with *gesaku* literature and popular broadsheets. Humor and bringing people to laughter were only permitted within certain boundaries that one would expect the central government would be in charge of defining what is and isn't 'harmful' in regards to laughter. Referring to the above correspondence, Foxwell highlights the use of words related to an audience of readers and especially the term *kokka* (nation), as evidence of the Meiji government's view of a 'well-informed active populace as the concern and asset of the nation.'⁸⁴ It is evident then that the Meiji government considered newspapers as playing a key role in producing a collective ethos and enlightened national public. Moreover, we can begin to identify that they were increasingly becoming interested in the potential for a reformed and appropriate form of entertainment in stirring the emotions of the ignorant masses so that they would be inclined to bend their minds and lives according to

⁸³ Mikawa, "Meiji shoki no gesaku no dōkō (I)," 153.

⁸⁴ Foxwell, "The Art of Reframing the News," 69.

the state's civilization and enlightenment project. Indeed, the aforementioned Three Doctrines issued by the *Kyōbushō* in 1872.4 and the subsequent pledges (apparently) sent to and from the *Kyōbushō* in communication with the popular entertainment industries further confirms that the powerful affective nature of entertainments were of both concern and interest. Hirano has described this process as a 'new body politics' for imperial subject formation in the Meiji era where 'human desire, which the Tokugawa powers had viewed entirely negatively, was now said to be a positive force for propelling individuals toward success – and, ultimately, the nation toward progress.'⁸⁵

In order to spread the Three Doctrines, on 1872.4.25 the *Kyōbushō* established an evangelist corps separated into 14 ranks of *kyōdōshoku* itinerant preachers who would proselytize at temples and shrines across the nation. Yutaka Tanigawa introduces extremely detailed recordings of early examples of these events that were organized under the auspices of the Tokyo municipal government in the 5th month of 1872 at locations including the Kanda Myōjin, Kotohira and Shinmei shrines and the Tentokuji and Zōjōji temples. The records display the location, names of the preachers, content that they spoke about, their clothing on the day, the approximate number of attendees, and any fluctuation in number during the event, how easy it is to understand and finally an overall evaluation. Tanigawa notes the special attention given to the performative element of the preaching – the use of easy-to-understand words or 'when possible the inclusion of laughter to avoid tedium' (折ニハ笑ヲ含ミ退屈セサルヤウ). The records of the Shinmei Shrine event even mentions how tedious it was (大ニ退屈), so much so that some of the audience left to listen to the (what was supposedly the more engaging) preaching at the Kotohira Shrine.⁸⁶ Such was the emphasis given to drafting in

⁸⁵ Hirano, *The Politics of Dialogic Imagination*, 202.

⁸⁶ Yutaka Tanigawa introduces records found in documents related to Viscount Mishima Michitsune (三島通庸 関係文書) who was appointed as 教部省大丞 *daijō* (4th in rank) in 1872.11.25. In Yutaka Tanigawa, "Kyōbushō kyōka seisaku no tenkai to zassetsu: kyōiku to shūkyō no bunri wo chūshin toshite," *Shirin* 83, 6 (2000): 47-48.

charismatic speakers who could pull in crowds and relate to the common people, that the *Kyōbushō* recruited religious leaders, priests, storytellers, *rakugo* performers, actors, writers and other entertainers to become *kyōdōshoku* evangelists. An appropriate form of laughter that could appeal to and cheerfully draw the masses towards the principles of the Three Doctrines was welcomed. It was because of this very same reason of ‘understanding the sentiments of the common people’ (*kajō*), that the popular *gesaku* writer Robun would be in demand with governmental organizations wanting his services to proselytize as a national enlightenment educator. For example, Okitsu notes that Robun worked for the Kanagawa Prefectural government on the invite of the chief (*kenrei*) Ōe Taku.⁸⁷ Tanigawa writes that during Robun’s posting at the Kanagawa Prefectural government, the high ranking *Kyōbushō* minister (*daijō*) Mishima Michitsune made a request for Robun to offer his services to the *Kyōbushō* for a week in 1873.2.⁸⁸ Yet what is striking, is that all the while variously pledging to commit to reform and even taking up official *kyōdōshoku* roles, Robun adaptatively found ways to undermine and ridicule these very same discourses of civilization and enlightenment as championed by the state and elite intellectuals, belying his apparent change of heart and his own participation in the movement. Whereas his government employers were eager for Robun to contribute his expertise as an entertainer to align the masses with the intentions of the Meiji state and form a national enlightened public, Robun leveraged his new persona to engender laughter that was out of place and call others to join in on the joke where they too could decide whether they wanted to move out of sync with the state-sanctioned *bunmei kaika*. Indeed, by lampooning his own work as an enlightenment educator and constantly calling into question the seriousness of the principles he was teaching through inappropriate and comical narrative glitches (that were ‘out of place’), Robun destabilized the boundaries between the humorous, fantastical and

⁸⁷ Okitsu, *Kanagaki Robun*, 132.

⁸⁸ Tanigawa, “*Kyōbushō kyōka seisaku no tenkai to zassetsu*,” 49.

ultimately ‘useless’ old-world of *gesaku* and the new modern world of civilization that the Meiji state was attempting to construct. During a key moment when the Meiji government attempted to make a clean break from a perceived backwards Edo period, as hinted towards in the Charter Oath of 1868, it was laughter that blurred these temporal borders and hierarchies of modern and anti-modern, civilized and uncivilized. The type of oppositional and subversive laughter that Robun was advocating, albeit through disguised means, was located outside of the fixed bounds of entertainment preaching for enlightenment purposes. To be sure, its concealed, parodical and hidden in plain sight nature became part of the appeal as it encouraged an active uptake from the audience/reader to consider what is or isn’t a joke and foolishness – or maybe it all is?

In the 6th month of 1872, Robun published the first two chapters of the book, *Taiyō shinwa: Tako nyūdō uo sekkyō* (*New Stories from the Ocean: The Octopus Priest’s Fishy Sermon*), what was originally planned as a three-part series as suggested by the chapter breakdown and titles on the opening page. The text is accompanied with several illustrations by Robun’s long-time collaborator, Kawanabe Kyōsai. The book, which in the familiar *gesaku* style, playfully uses fantasy, myth and folklore to parody the real-life arrival of civilization and enlightenment to the shores of Japan in the Meiji era. In particular, as suggested by the title, which humorously refers to the assumed likeness of the shaved head of a Buddhist monk with the bald head of an octopus, and the sermon that this priestly creature will be delivering to a crowd of fish, this text is a timely commentary of the Great Promulgation Campaign and especially the Three Doctrines issued just two months prior that was beginning to be preached across the nation through temples and shrines by *kyōdōshoku* evangelists. We can speculate that this text would have been written at around the exact same time as Robun and Arindo’s *chosakudō kakiage* letter was submitted to the *Kyōbushō*, which appeared in the *Shinbun Zasshi* in the following month. For this reason, to date, scholars have considered this book as an

example of Robun's 'conversion' and commitment (in line with the pledge letter) to promote *bunmei kaika*.⁸⁹ Perhaps because of this assumption, the text has hitherto received little attention, especially in English, beyond a few passing remarks. This is particularly striking if we compare it to how well-known Robun's texts such as, *Seiyō dōchū hizakurige* (*Shank's Mare Around the West*, 1870), *Aguranabe*, *Kyūrizukai*, *Takahashi oden yasha monogatari* (*Takahashi Oden: Tale of the Demon Woman*, 1879) to name a few, have become in examinations of modern Japan.

Tako nyūdō is an allegory of the opening of Japan and the post-restoration Meiji government's mission to promote *bunmei kaika* among the masses. The tale is set in the mythical world of the underwater Dragon Palace, made famous for its appearance in the Japanese fairytale with the protagonist Urashima Tarō, who is directly mentioned in *Tako nyūdō*. The Dragon King learns of the reforms that the human world has already been engaged in to bring about civilization and enlightenment, and consequently demands that his underwater kingdom follows this very same path to bring about what is humorously described as *kaika* (海化) or 'sea-vilization.' The preface has a quote in the classical *kanbun* style of writing that is described as a 'playful comment written under the influence of alcohol' by one Keishū Mibu who we can speculate was involved in the publication, a pre-publication reader of the book or even Robun himself under an alias:

'So, the Dragon King established a city in the sea named the Dragon Palace and its prosperity continued unabated. That Saruwakachō, there was the male role Urasahima, the female role Otohime, the blowfish, the huge tortoise, and with this the actors' dramatization chiefly functioned as a mirage appearing to the heavens, earth and people like a playhouse.'⁹⁰

⁸⁹ See for instance: Mertz, *Novel Japan*, 81; Okitsu, *Kanagaki Robun*, 123; *Meiji bungaku zenshū 1*, 437; Ōmoto, "The Activities of Novelists in the Early Meiji-era," 97.

⁹⁰ *Meiji bungaku zenshū 1*, 177.

This opening comment from the perspective of a reader or perhaps a listener of the book provides an important roadmap for what lies ahead as to how readers should interpret the text. The commenter makes sudden switches between the real world and fantasy. We begin in the fictional world of the Dragon Palace but are instantaneously transported to Asakusa's Saruwakachō entertainment district where it is almost as if characters from the tale of Urashima Tarō are vividly appearing before their eyes like a performance in the theatre. Saruwakachō was created as a theatre district on the edges of Edo during the late Tokugawa era as a result of the Tempō reforms in 1842 that pushed the theatre culture to the physical and ideological margins of society. Much like the Yoshiwara red light district, the theatre district of Saruwakachō was considered as a 'dangerous area' full of vices (*akusho*). The allegorical world of the Dragon Palace and Saruwakachō are brought into the same temporal and spatial zone through this rhetorical device. The drunken comment that is scattered and seemingly frivolous is at once intended to be disarming to not arouse suspicion from the authorities, and also a nod to a savvy readership who want to tap into an altered state that provides new ways of seeing and feeling. Through becoming intoxicated with the spirit of laughter they are taken out of place to the *ukiyo* where they can see the world they inhabit anew and pierce the surface of things. It is a 'hidden transcript'⁹¹ in plain sight, where only those willing to laugh out of place are presented with the 'mirage' vision of what lies behind veil. It is as though through reading this text, the reader can look up from the book and out onto the bustling crowd in Saruwakachō and observe the fictional characters and *yōkai* creatures that live among them in this playground

⁹¹ I take the notion of 'hidden transcript' from Scott who describes the term as follows: 'If subordinate discourse in the presence of the dominant is a public transcript, I shall use the term hidden transcript to characterize discourse that takes place "offstage," beyond direct observation by powerholders. The hidden transcript is thus derivative in the sense that it consists of those offstage speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or deflect what appears in the public transcript... What is certainly the case, however, is that the hidden transcript is produced for a different audience and under different constraints of power than the public transcript.' In James C Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 4-5. My specific use and application of 'hidden transcript,' then, refers to the 'offstage' practices that masquerade as 'public transcript' and so can occur 'onstage,' while retaining its offstage character and audience.

that is at once early Meiji Tokyo and the Dragon Palace – that is, for those who dare to see this apparition.

That this book serves to open up an alternative way of seeing is reasserted in the author's introduction where Robun explicitly refers to the *ana no ugachi* way of seeing.

'I, Robun, the humble author of this tale, will go deeper than the dip in the inkstone that is like the seashore, in order to explore the depths of the bottom of the ocean in order to write about the world of the Dragon Palace. To instruct the shuffling crabs when I open my mouth a mirage appears on the paper and as I take up my brush countless fish scales begin dancing in the pond of my ink. The Octopus Priest is skilled in deciphering between the good and bad, punching holes into the surface of the world better than the pursuit of wisdom in former times. This lighthearted humorous satire in *kana* in the form of a sermon, I will deliver with feeling and will share a small message.'⁹²

As we will see later again in the *hanrei*⁹³ prefatory note to the text, Robun takes on a self-depreciating tone to introduce his book and emphasizes its light-heartedness and fantastical elements. Belying his commitment to break away from the *gesaku* style of writing that privileges *kyo* (fantasy/falsehoods), Robun sticks firmly to its narrative conventions and rather suggests that it is through this method of comical allegory that deeper truths can be ascertained. Again, savvy readers of the text would be familiar with such *gesaku* introductions that feign humility and profess that the following writing is mere nonsense and shouldn't be paid attention to. Yet, it is precisely through continuous repetition of the text's uselessness that the writer intends to pique the interest of readers who know better than to merely scratch the surface of things. Indeed, Robun uses sophisticated wordplay and allusions to popular folklore that would preclude the uneducated and illiterate from understanding, despite his assertion in the *hanrei* that the text is written in a vulgar way to be easily comprehensible for women and children in

⁹² *Meiji bungaku zenshū 1*, 177.

⁹³ Woolley describes *hanrei* as a paratextual prefatory note by the author used in *gesaku* to contextualize and map out the text for the reader. In Charles Woolley, "Adjusting to the Times: Kanagaki Robun, *Gesaku* Rhetoric, and the Production of Early Meiji Literature" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2016), 128-129.

the fields (文章の卑俗きハ田童野婦に解讀易からんを要とすればなり).⁹⁴ If in myth, the Dragon Palace is imagined to be situated within the depths of the ocean, Robun playfully uses this imagery to write that he will go to the bottom of the ocean of knowledge to instruct the crabs who are literally scratching the surface on the shore. He further explicates this point of penetrating shallow and surface level wisdom through double entendre created by a skillful interplay between the *kana* script to be read out aloud and the *kanji*: 都て江湖上の穴を穿つ^{すべよのなかあなうが}
 や曾て河伯の窮理も下如^{かつかつばきうりしかず}. On the one hand this sentence that includes a bouncy alliteration – ‘*katsute kappa no kyūri*’ – could humorously conjure up images (and the sound) of the *kappa* mythical water sprite using their snack of choice, the cucumber, to punch holes (*ana wo ugatsu*) into the surface of the sea, while on the other it is a continuation of the introductory statement’s intention to prepare the reader to grasp the text’s double meanings.

Most significantly, Robun transforms himself into the *umibōzu* Octopus Sea Priest, a *yōkai* creature that he declares can discern between the good or bad and is able to impart that deep wisdom below the surface of things via the humorous sermon he will deliver. Legend has it that the Octopus Priest lives in the ocean and occasionally pops up, sometimes to the peril of ships out at sea. The Octopus Priest is most commonly depicted as giant and black in appearance. Perhaps, beyond staying consistent with the nautical-theme, Robun also intentionally chose the Octopus Priest in order to allude to the infamous *kurofunne* black ships that had suddenly appeared on the shores to open up Japan in the previous decade. As the figure of the *kuronyūdō* or Black Sea Priest (a popular alternative name for the Octopus Priest), Robun is ‘reopening the opening of Japan’⁹⁵ to provide an alternative narrative based on laughter. The

⁹⁴ *Meiji bungaku zenshū 1*, 177.

⁹⁵ I take this idea of ‘reopening the opening’ from Konishi, who argues that in the historiography of modern Japan the ‘opening’ or *kaikoku* has been mainly understood in terms of opening the nation to the West and accompanying ideas of civilizational progress, which causes the meanings of *kaikoku* to be ‘closed.’ Examining non-state level transnational connections beyond the imagined East-West divide, Konishi ‘reopens’ the meaning of the ‘opening.’ See Sho Konishi, “Reopening the ‘Opening of Japan’: A Russian-Japanese Revolutionary

Octopus Priest's function as a religious teacher delivering a sermon was undoubtedly suggestive of the *kyōdōshoku* evangelists who were tasked with preaching at temples and shrines. Yet through his writing, Robun parodies the very role of the *kyōdōshoku* to create a parallel universe of reality where the audience can sit at the feet and dialogue with the mythical Octopus Priest to reopen the meanings attached to Japan's opening to discourses of civilization and enlightenment. Robun destabilizes and reconstitutes the role of the *kyōdōshoku* evangelist to engage in a disguised continuation of the late Edo popular culture of subversive laughter that creates the people's interpretation of major political events in opposition to those in power – whether it be the Tokugawa Shogunate or the Meiji government. Robun affirms that central to providing this anti-sermon was delivering the message in a manner that was out of sync with the Meiji state's guidelines for cultivating an enlightened public. Contrasting counterpublics with the normative 'discourse pragmatics' and 'lifeworlds' of dominant publics Warner argues,

'...they might not be organized by the hierarchy of faculties that elevates rational-critical reflection as the self-image of humanity...A queer public might be one that throws shade, prances, disses, acts up, carries on, longs, fantasizes, throws fits, mourns, "reads:" To take such attributions of public agency seriously, however, we would need to inhabit a culture with a different language ideology, a different social imaginary.'⁹⁶

If Warner's queer counterpublic is one that throws shade, then the 'queer' or 'out of place' protocols of the laughing counterpublic that traversed late Edo and early Meiji Japan were punching holes, laughing, feeling, floating, playing, dancing, dramatization, intoxication, seeing visions of mirages and the supernatural. Indeed, the 'mirage' that Robun is skilled in generating with his brush is not just of a vivid allegorical tale. In combination with Kyōsai's

Encounter and Vision of Anarchist Progress," *The American Historical Review* Vol.112, no.1, (February 2007): 101-130. I argue that during this very time period of *kaikoku*, Robun as a satirical writer was engaging in a form of 'reopening the opening,' through laughter that challenged the 'closed' dominant meanings of *kaikoku* allowing for alternative and divergent meanings to emerge.

⁹⁶ Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," 122-124.

wavy illustration of the Octopus Priest preaching a sermon to a public of fish people (Figure 2), the zany mirage that appears is a looking-glass that urges the reader/viewer to encounter an altered image of the self as a member of the laughing counterpublic – in other words the mirage acts to lead the audience to that ‘out of place’ floating world positionality where the revelation of true knowledge is through laughter. The Octopus Priest then is both creating and preaching to a congregation of the laughing counterpublic.



Figure 2: The Octopus Priest's Fishy Sermon. *Tako nyūdō uo sekkyō*, 1872.

(Bibliographic and Image Database of Japanese Modern Times, National Institute of Japanese Literature)

Full text of *Tako nyūdō uo sekkyō* translated by the author:⁹⁷

Chapter 1

At the bottom of the great earth's eastern ocean exists the Dragon Palace. A long time ago the fourth-generation earth god and heavenly descendent, Hikohohodemi no Mikoto, dived into the sea in search of a fish hook. He entered the Dragon Palace and married the Dragon King's daughter Toyotama-hime and they gave birth to a child Ugayafukiaezu no Mikoto. Since the divine grandson was now in-laws with

⁹⁷ This text has yet to be translated into English and so the author has included the full translation for analysis.

her father the Dragon King he was bestowed with the title of the Dragon God and named the plane of the deep blue sea, the “floating continent.” This is written in the *Kojiki* as the so-called creation of the world and the floating lands are like the fish that float on top of the water. For these reasons, from generation to generation, the Dragon King deeply respected the customs of the land of the gods, and that scaly world [of the Dragon Palace] models its laws and regulations on the imperial land in order to establish the fish laws and fish regulations. After much time had passed, in the generation of the 27th emperor and heavenly decedent, at the Tsutsu River in Yoza district of the Tango no Kuni province, the fisherman Urashima of Mizue, or some name like that, was spirited away to the Dragon Palace. Now the Dragon King had always adored the Japanese people so much so that his daughter, the Oto-hime married Urashima and they would live under the sea for around 300 years without feeling the sea breeze above. The Dragon King dearly loved Urashima like the flaming pearl under his chin, but as expected Urashima was not able to forget his home and there came a time when he strongly appealed to the Dragon king to let him return. Although deeply lamenting this, the Dragon King bestowed Urashima with a box full of treasures as a parting gift and sent him on his way. Sometime after, a young man from Awazu, Tawara Tōda would be invited to the Dragon Palace and on parting would also be presented with countless treasures. These are known as proofs that the Dragon King respected the imperial land. Anyway, around the middle of the Ryōkoku Bridge or Azuma Bridge there was a person engaged in the merit building act of releasing turtles and eels into the water⁹⁸ and they returned home to the world of the Dragon Palace and communicated news of the many happenings of the floating world above. Hard of hearing, the Dragon King lent in to listen and brought all of the scaly inhabitants together, then like a fiery explosion, without breath, and wiping his fiercely sweaty draconic face, he proclaimed: “You lot! Have you not heard?! Currently, on all of the six continents of the human world each country is competing to do away with their old and outdated customs and revive their culture, study natural principles, reform their laws, make new their inventions and hope to reach the frontiers of civilization and enlightenment. I hear they are engaged in bringing harmony between the rulers and the people to protect their countries, expand their intelligence, spread knowledge – all is in the midst of progress! To begin with, our world in the depths of the ocean is independent and far away from the human world, humanity and marine life were distinct and so we hitherto maintained a neutral position when observing afar [from in the sea]⁹⁹ the civilizing human world and we thought it not a disturbance. But wait! The bottom of the ocean borders with the Hellish territory and the only thing separating the two is a mountain range of swords. In that godless realm, King Enma is the ruler of the kingdom that he named the Yomi no Kuni and this realm is located within the south of the Kongō mountains in the terrestrial world, what we now call the Great Earth. Enma commands 134 worlds, 18 officials and 1,000,000 subjects. A long time ago when Enma was once King

⁹⁸ The practice of releasing turtles (*hanashi game*, 放し亀) and eel (*hanashi unagi* 放し鰻) was made popular during the Edo period. Turtles live long and eel are long and so they regularly appear in Japanese folk and mythical tales as auspicious creatures. One could purchase a live turtle or eel at a shrine or temple and release them from a bridge into the water as their natural habitat as a good (religious) act. Sellers would often use the fairytale of Urashima Tarō, which tells the story of Urashima being rewarded for rescuing a turtle, and the turtle carried Urashima on its back in a return journey to the Dragon Palace. It is evident that Robun is merging this real-world practice of releasing turtles with the fairytale’s underwater journey.

⁹⁹ 高海.

of the Bisha kingdom he was constantly battling Idashi Shōyō and could not gain victory, and so he made a vow and became King of Hell. He gradually expanded his territory and I even heard that he secretly possesses a detached enclave on the earth. And so, on the surface they seek amity but who knows what motives of gradual encroachment they hold in their hearts. Notably, in the south is the Pacific Ocean and in the west is the Atlantic Ocean, and the Dragon Kings at the bottom of each of these great oceans have early known of the civilization of the human world, and in each of these draconic realms they have reached the time of reforming old customs and promoting sea-vilization.¹⁰⁰ If it is only our world that rests idly and isolated in the ocean then surely it won't be before long that our territory will be annexed at the borders. I once thought that my heavenly assigned duty was merely to summon the clouds and call down the rain, I gave myself the name of Dragon god, at times I would step out in front of the palace between the waves and delight in a seasonal game of *kai-awase*. At other times at the back of the palace I would climb the mirage and view a seahorse riding performance, or bored of the taste of fish meat I desired to eat mermaid, which is hard to obtain – this life of luxury had no end. More recently, I would command the kappa to take out the *shirikodama* from humans swimming in the water and make it into a nutritious *tsukudani* dish. There is no limit to the regret I feel for my former sins of idle self-indulgence. And because of this, the scaly underlings that imitate their master surely want to steal my eyes, name it dragon eye meat, and eat them for food.¹⁰¹ Hearing the news from the surface that the eels and turtles spoke of on their recent return from the human world, my eyes opened to remorse and I intend to wash clean my body of evil in the flowing river of Isuzu, learn the governmental system of joint rule of emperor and the people, and urgently return to a politics of Dragon-Fish friendship. Because of this you lot cannot just float in the waters seeking after bait and then getting caught in the fishboat's net and while having your jaws hooked be pattering about in the fisher's basket, this is not becoming. From now on, the fish world should promote sea-vilization and be mindful to become like the giant Kun fish that rises up into the sky and transforms into the giant Peng bird and spread your wings to fill the sky!" This he spoke with great exertion showing on his dragonly face. All of the fish shrunk their fins, lowered their tails and fearing the grill they departed.

Chapter 2

And so it was, in the dragon palace each of the fish ministers followed the orders of the Dragon King and promptly established a consultative assembly for the major reform of the sea realm, and each of them were to share their opinions without reservation and to consult and put their hearts together in cooperation to release a proclamation to promote the spread of the knowledge of the fishy citizens, but the fish government officials steeped in old customs, partook in empty debates¹⁰² and going round in circles they made no progress. Waiting for the clock to reach four, they would leave and on their way, ride the waves on a fish powered shrimp rikshaw¹⁰³ modelled after those newfangled popular human powered ones, and

¹⁰⁰ かい か
海化.

¹⁰¹ Within this context, the meaning of stealing eyes is to do bad things away from sight and it is also implied that the stealing of the dragon eyes refers to the taking away of power from those in power.

¹⁰² みづかけろん
水掛論.

¹⁰³ ぎよりき くるまゑび
魚力の車鰻.

alight at the sea gate of the Shin Yo-sea-wara¹⁰⁴ and enter. The fishy town’s courtesan teahouses and the *shirkodama* establishments had their names written in squid ink on lanterns. Upon seeing the dwelling of the Kappa’s wife, her face like a cucumber – spots or dimples we cannot tell – she quickly notices and calls out, “Sea-zuki sama, Sea-wara sama,¹⁰⁵ welcome to you both! Please make your way up to the second floor.” At which point a young female fry guides them and swiftly provides the hospitality of tea and snacks. Hiding her overbite Madame Kappa gave a warm smile and said “Sea-zuki sama, Sea-wara sama, have you a reservation with the courtesan that you were with last night? From yesterday evening Miss Sayori¹⁰⁶ was praying repeatedly for your return...Oi you lot, go to the Okoze and Susaki rooms and tidy up Salamander san and Dolphin san’s party, and while you are at it, at the geisha call-office call for Miss Koi.”¹⁰⁷ While Madame Kappa coordinated everything without missing a spot, there was a party going on among friends introduced by Miss Koi and Miss Trout where the Octopus was eating their own legs and the fish were pouring drinks and having a merry time. “Good evening” greeted the whale geisha,¹⁰⁸ and with the sound of the shamisen strings she livened the party, drums with the sounds of the waves – ting, clap, boom boom – the pushy Goosefish jester finding where the commotion was coming from quickly clattered his way up the stairs to the second floor. “I’ve found you! I’ve found you! Greetings sirs. While I am peeved that you didn’t let this old Goosefish know, I’ll leave that matter for later, but first let us partake of a drink of sake and some fishy snacks,”¹⁰⁹ rambled on the Goosefish with his old fashioned jokes, pounding his bulging stomach and grabbing a geisha’s snatch of the day.¹¹⁰ There was a sudden burst of laughter and it had reached the time when the rookie sealion courtesan entered and summoned her clients, to which many footsteps followed and got caught up in the wave – those generous fish officials of the Dragon Palace who spend their days discussing falsehoods¹¹¹ and go to the famous brothels with hanging images and comment on the new [female] clams¹¹² and gather to have a banquet of merriment where they drink the koi carp “soup” from the Daishichi sake brewery. This they do without fail, every day they spend in merriment and vanity. The impatient Dragon King is becoming infuriated while the First Minister Whale is worried. Today, finally all of the fish officials gathered together at the same time and formed an orderly scaley line next to each other. Front and center was the First Minister

¹⁰⁴ しんうなぼら かいもん 新海原の海門 is a play on the Shin Yoshiwara pleasure district.

¹⁰⁵ すゞき 鱸さま is a play on Sea bass which is pronounced *suzuki*. さばら 鮭さま is a play on the word for Japanese Spanish Mackerel 鯖 (*sawara*) to create the common name Sawara, although the author likely used the wrong kanji as 鮭 is usually read as *iwana* meaning a type of trout.

¹⁰⁶ A play on the female name Sayori and the fish *sayori* さより 鱈.

¹⁰⁷ けんばん こい 見番で鯉をかけて ‘call for the Koi carp’ plays on the phrase ‘to call’ (*koe wo kakete*) and ‘carp’ (*koi*).

¹⁰⁸ げいしや 鯨舎 is a play on the *on-yomi* reading for whale (*gei*) to create geisha.

¹⁰⁹ ますさけ いたゞき鱒鮓 is a play on names of fish and *itadakimasu* (a pre-meal thanks) for drinks and snacks.

¹¹⁰ A euphemism for having sex. The Goosefish pounds his rather suggestively ‘bulging’ stomach (ふくれ はら 肥満た腹) like he is making rice cakes (*mochitsuki*, もちつ 餅搗き – which itself is a euphemism for the penetrative act of sexual intercourse) and this is placed alongside the grabbing (抱へ a word which again has sexual connotations) of the stomach of a mullet (い な へ そ 小鰐臍), which is crudely used to refer to female vulva due to its appearance.

¹¹¹ むじつ 無實.

¹¹² かい か はまぐり 貝化の蛤 playing on the word *kaika* (開化) for enlightenment and shellfish referring to the clams.

Whale who scanned the line with his narrow eyes. He opened his mouth, which is like a ship riding fierce waves and calmly exclaimed: “Alright, as all of you already know, the Dragon palace has initiated a wave of sea world reforms and is pursuing sea-vilization and enlightenment that is intended to wash away the old customs of the fish citizens. It pleased the Dragon King to give an imperial order to the fish ministers, and while we are but lowly scaley ones, because of the generations of the Dragon Palace lineage, if at this time, alongside the sharks, you do not the great work and are indecisive, these sins will be placed onto my body. This aged and weakened whale’s body will be ripped apart by dragon claws. My back will be broken and oil will be squeezed out, and with irony, I will be shamed as a whale by being boiled in a pot of miso soup in the same way as the puny pond loaches. This is not a regrettable life, but to witness in front of our eyes the decline of this Dragon Palace that was raised up alongside the earth, and to not act and let the days pass; now that would be regrettable. Now that being the case, each one of you, from this point onwards, band together as one and stir up the Dragon Palace spirit¹¹³ and with all of your energies devote oneself to the benefit of the sea world!” The sweat coming out from his whole body shot up into the sky, more than water from the blowhole on his back, and it sprayed on all sides all over the fish officials that were present, soaking their fins and tails. At that moment Dr Sea Bream fixed the collars of his fins and stepped forward to speak: “The First Minister Whale has just given an earnest message on devotion to the enrichment of the sea world for which we are humbly grateful. If it is not too presumptuous for a humble servant to speak, but it would be remiss if I did not share that which is worthy of celebration, therefore, as I am familiar with a small part of the grand principles of the world, I have been appointed to participate in fulfilling the imperial work and have been given the job of a learned expert. I feel the pride in my bones and I am deeply grateful, thus the work of the sea realm must be accomplished and so it is not the time to be silent, one by one proposals will be decided upon and offered up.” Dr Sea Bream’s words were presented in a highfalutin manner that is hard to comprehend while his fins stood to attention.

In the end, did the learned Sea Bream raise up any points for discussion with the fish officials I wonder? That is for the common people to discern...

The ‘fishy sermon’ begins with an introduction to the mythical realm of the undersea Dragon Palace, drawing from the *Kojiki* and folklore in order to highlight the numerous legends that include the Dragon Palace that the readers would instantly be familiar with such as Urashima Tarō and the genesis story of the ‘floating’ islands of the Japanese archipelago. On the one hand Robun seems to be earnest in starting to recount the details of these myths, and yet suddenly in a lighthearted manner switches to a different story or reveals that the

¹¹³ 龍宮だましひ a play on *yamato damashii* (Japanese spirit).

specificities aren't so important. For example, when introducing the story of Urashima Tarō, in passing he notes 'or some name like that,' a nod to the fact that the tale of Urashima has been told many a time and the protagonist goes by many a name. The lightheartedness with which he treats retelling popular myth is to suggest to the reader that the real significance lies in the allegorical function of these myths to speak to a present-day time and space. This directly contradicts his concurrent pledge to the government that he would reform the *gesaku* style of writing away from *kyo* (fantasy), due to its propensity to cause confusion among the readership. On the contrary, as we will see, Robun continues to use the very same approach that the Meiji government condemns as antithetical to enlightenment in order to critique the Meiji government and its enlightenment ideology.

The space-time of the Dragon Palace that appears in front of the reader as what was described in the introduction as a 'mirage,' is simply an illusory allegorical realm (that sits at a safe distance) to discuss the latest iteration of the creation of Japan – that is the opening of Japan, *ishin* and the new Meiji government's *bunmei kaika* mission. Robun first makes explicit the links by noting how the 'scaly world [of the Dragon Palace] models its laws and regulations on the imperial land.' Robun also suddenly shifts away from the Dragon Palace to two famous bridges in Tokyo, where it is almost as though he is writing down what he can see in front of him – the 'mirage' – the scene of someone engaged in releasing a turtle and eel into the sea, which was a common practice during the Edo period where someone could purchase a creature to release back into the wild as a way to gain good fortune and build merit. Yet Robun doesn't let the reader settle in downtown Tokyo, but once again through a time-space slippage takes them to the floating world on the back of a turtle, the same way Urashima Tarō was transported to the Dragon Palace. The turtle and eel that were thrown off the bridge, we find out, were in fact citizens of the Dragon Palace realm, and after swimming back they quickly reported to the Dragon King the changes that they had seen were sweeping the land above. Figuratively and

even literally floating between present-day Tokyo and the Dragon Palace (the floating continent above and the fantasy *ukiyo* at the bottom of the sea) serves as a humorous way to reinforce the allegorical connection.

Upon hearing of the news of the civilization and enlightenment going on in the human world, the Dragon King laments that the Dragon Palace has been sitting idly and isolated in the ocean while others are steaming ahead with progress. In particular, the Dragon King seems concerned that the demon King of Hell Enma who commands a great force, or that other realms, which have already become civilized, will annex the territory of the Dragon Palace. The Dragon King observes that the King of Hell ‘secretly possesses a detached enclave’ (飛地), and so is weary that Enma (and others) are enlarging their territory through deceitful means of showing a face of friendship but in actuality have ulterior expansionist motives. Most revealing about this statement is that Robun seems to be intentionally using the word ‘amity’ (親睦), which is the same language used within the text of the *Treaty of Amity and Commerce between Japan and the United States* of 1858, which opened up treaty ports to trade and set up a system of extraterritoriality. Robun is perhaps in passing subtly expressing a suspicion towards the Western treaty countries that on the one hand use the language of friendship and on the other the force of gunboat diplomacy to expand their imperial interests. Yet, the matter of foreign involvement is not the main subject of Robun’s critique or ridicule. He is far more interested in dissecting the anatomy of the Japanese leaders’ response to the opening or *kaikoku*.

The Dragon King’s lamentations of the Dragon Palace’s backwater status in the hierarchy of progress also stems from the King’s own acknowledgement that he became bloated with the luxuries that status afforded him. Here Robun comically parodies a mix of traditional Japanese entertainments such as the shell matching game of *kai-awase* and more new-fangled pleasures introduced from the West such as meat eating and refashions these for the sea world where ‘bored of the taste of fish meat’ his palate became accustomed to the taste

of mermaid. Yet, it is because of this that his subjects want to steal his eyes and eat them for dragon meat (朕が眼を盗み). Robun's skillful play on words here suggest that the true meaning of this phrase is that the Dragon King's subjects are plotting to 'steal away' from his sight to remove him from power. Is this passage then a commentary on the excesses of the Tokugawa *bakufu* and its eventual decline, in part as a result of the Satsuma and Chōshū domains 'stealing away' the eyes of the Shogunate to form an alliance and restore imperial rule? Indeed, following this, the Dragon King uses language characteristic of the post-*ishin* Charter Oath of 1868 to proclaim that the Dragon Palace will discontinue evil outdated customs of the past by ridding his body of these sins (一身の弊害), seek out knowledge from the human world to pursue sea-vilization (海化), establish a consultative assembly where opinions can be shared, and reform the system of rule so that the high and low (or in this case the Dragon and Fish) are united to carry out the objectives of government (龍魚交遊の政事).

After speedily bringing the reader up to speed with the events surrounding *ishin* in chapter 1 of the text, chapter 2 focuses in on how the Meiji government is trying to promote civilization and enlightenment. The text introduces fish government officials (魚官員) who have been tasked with releasing a proclamation to spread knowledge and create an enlightened public of fish citizens (魚民) by way of referring to the government's recent introduction of mass indoctrination campaigns such as the Three Doctrines. Yet, what becomes apparent is that although the fish officials are supposed to be engaged in a serious work of apparent urgent importance, instead they waste away their days making no 'progress.' The passage continues in an intoxicating manner and takes the reader on a ride to the 'Shin Yo-sea-wara' (新海原) pleasure quarters modelled on the Shin Yoshiwara red-light district, but it is not the so-called 'useless losers' of society, it is the fish officials who are there every day 'without fail.' Robun

writes that these ‘fish officials’ are too steeped in the evil customs of the past, suggesting that they are no different from how the common people perceived the late Tokugawa government. In this way, the text continuously blurs the Edo and Meiji temporal divide. The allegorical realm of the Dragon Palace, as well as the Dragon King serves to simultaneously represent both Tokugawa and Meiji Japan, and Robun intentionally blurs the distinctions between the two when ‘reopening’ the opening of Japan in this book. He exposes that this is the same world of corrupt officials and elites that *gesaku* had always been involved in exposing through satire. Even the fact that Robun uses a platter of sea creatures to represent the different actors within this parodical tale, harkens back to the role that the catfish played in the *namazu-e* genre. Robun continues to utilize methods of parody, obfuscation, symbolism, wordplay and text-image interplay drawn directly from Edo popular culture, by way of engaging with an audience that would already be familiar with the references or techniques of concealment, and so could actively participate in trying to read in-between the lines. This time however, Robun is claiming to be leaving the world of *gesaku* behind and even working to support the state’s education for enlightenment, all the while undermining it through satire.

Within this context, and more broadly the Meiji era government and elite intellectuals’ disdain for what was considered Edo cultures of play that bring people to laughter and useless for enlightenment (or even antithetical to it); it is of particular interest that Robun selects language that seems to directly engage with the matter of what is useful or useless, and what is civilized or uncivilized. Where the practice of *gesaku* writing is being condemned for its falsehoods, hilarity, and uselessness, Robun turns the world upside down within this tale to demonstrate that it is in fact the so-called serious fish officials and ministers who are useless. In other words, the mechanism of parodical reversal to talk about the human world as if it is under the sea, and vice versa, also functions to flip the moral compass so that it is the common people that get to determine the standards of what is good or evil, rather than the state. Robun

writes that it is the fish officials who are the ones bursting into laughter, spending their day discussing falsehoods (無實^{むじつ}), and are ultimately engaged in *mizukakeron* (水掛論), a term that describes a pointless discussion. It is the government officials who are transformed into the ‘useless losers’ within this alternative narrative of the opening of Japan.

There are vivid and intricate descriptions of the daily activities of the fish officials in the red-light district. They are presented as regular patrons of the brothels and seem to have become experts of the hedonistic pleasures on offer, both old and new. This expertise in navigating the *mizushōbai* (fleshpots) in ‘Shin Yo-sea-wara’ is directly and intentionally contrasted with the repeated fatuous and empty *mizukakeron* discussions to promote sea-vilization. In the final scene of the book, all of the fish officials are gathered together to listen to a speech from the First Minister Whale (鯨大臣). From the description the scene is evidently a solemn and serious affair. In a rousing and fiercely delivered speech the First Minister Whale reminds the officials of the great work that they must undertake and variously makes vague appeals to imperial orders, the generational lineage of the Dragon Palace and ‘Dragon Palace spirit’ (*ryūgū damashii*), a comical play on the term for Japanese spirit ‘*yamato damashii*.’ In the midst of this intense speech on ‘sea-vilization,’ the First Minister Whale’s sweat sprays over all of the officials soaking them with its excretion, an occurrence which is likened to an explosion coming out of a whale’s blowhole on its backside. The First Minister Whale’s speech on enlightenment is literally made into a *mizukakeron* (empty discussion) as it splashes onto the officials. Further, that Robun likened this eruption to a discharge that emits from the backside of a whale, was an elaborate way of conjuring up an image of a fart. Readers would no doubt identify this intentional link that again draws from Edo satirical literary culture, exploding out into laughter themselves at the skillful wordplay, while simultaneously recognizing that the true meaning below the surface of the text is to expose that the state-centered discourse of civilization and enlightenment is foolishness. Following the First

Minister Whale's speech, the learned Dr Sea Bream who we are made to understand serves in a consultant role for the government as an expert, similarly makes some ambiguous and what the narrator describes as convoluted statements about the importance of the great work of sea-vilization. The book closes with a brief afterword in the form of a rhetorical question, which poses whether or not Dr Sea Bream offered up anything useful to the conversations on sea-vilization. Robun offers no conclusion and rather empowers the reader and the common people to (re)evaluate the opening of Japan and meanings of civilization and enlightenment. While the fish officials are making an 'orderly scaley line' to promote civilization and bring the people into alignment with their enlightenment campaign, the rude and sudden jolt of whale farts that would stimulate a laughter out of place serves to undermine the legitimacy of the government's nation building mission and jolt those who get the joke into tension with the official discourse. Through the persona of the storytelling Octopus Priest, Robun conceals his transformation from a public evangelist into an evangelist for the laughing counterpublic.

The Octopus Priest's sermon also operates as an apologia for laughter at a time when the Meiji government was trying to eliminate the laughter of the people as uncivilized and useless. On the contrary, through this text, Robun attempts to demonstrate that it is in fact the serious proponents of enlightenment who are useless and it is only through laughing that one can arrive at wisdom. Thus, the people can become truly enlightened as judges and members of a laughing counterpublic. By this reckoning laughter is not antithetical to civilization or progress but it is the very means to achieving it through 'laughing at (sea)civilization.' Bakhtin's statement on the function of laughter is particularly useful here for articulating this perspective:

'Laughter has a deep philosophical meaning, it is one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole...it is a peculiar point of view relative to the world; the world is seen anew, no less

(and perhaps more) profoundly than when seen from the serious standpoint...Certain essential aspects of the world are accessible only to laughter.’¹¹⁴

To be sure, Robun himself communicates the philosophical value of laughter, albeit in an elaborately disguised manner, within the *hanrei* preface to *Tako nyūdō*. Again, the function and format of the *hanrei* would have been all too familiar to a savvy readership of *gesaku* literature. On the one hand the *hanrei* was a way for writers to avoid censorship from the authorities by overly downplaying the importance of their work and even their writing skills – the book is so useless and just a bit of fun so can be ignored. Yet knowing eyes would instantly perceive that the author doth protest too much and that there is a concealed message to unlock.

Mikawa has shown how Robun follows this pattern of declaring the insignificance of his writing in other texts such as *Kyūrizukai* and the *kusazōshi* (picture book), *Yamato gana seiyō bunko* (*A Library of the West in Japanese*, 1872.1).¹¹⁵ In the introduction to *Kyūrizukai* for example, Robun writes that whereas ‘Fukuzawa-sensei’ produced a practical and beneficial (實学有益) study, in comparison, Robun’s homonymous comic ‘translation’ of Fukuzawa’s book is useless (無用), ‘just like a *kappa*’s fart that makes a resounding noise underwater, but when it rises to the surface becomes a bubble and disappears.’ He continues, ‘although this text is homonymous with the original work, there is nothing that can be learned from it, it’s not even fit for guiding kids, and therefore it is merely the teachings of a *kappa*, one could also call it the skin of a sponge gourd.’ The humorous and titillating implication in this exaggeratedly modest opening appeal is that his porous *hechima* gourd is nothing like the great ‘Fukuzawa-sensei’s *kyūri*.’¹¹⁶ It is for the reader to decide whether Robun is referring to Fukuzawa’s study of natural law or his, well, ‘cucumber.’ In the *hanrei* to *Tako nyūdō* Robun takes a slightly

¹¹⁴ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 66.

¹¹⁵ Mikawa, “Meiji shoki no gesaku no dōkō (II),” 132.

¹¹⁶ *Meiji bungaku zenshū* 1, 166.

different approach of affirming that the text is useless and lowly, but can also be useful, especially in guiding the educated:

‘I am the writer of this piece. Despite its appearance as an insignificant *gesaku*, according to how people carefully read it they can gain an insight into enlightenment. The reason why the text is written in vulgar language is so that it is comprehensible for the women and children in the fields. Writing a 無用の書 [useless text] to supply something that will be 有用 [useful] is my purpose. Out of these superfluous words will naturally arise a subtle message. Discerning eyes that do not throw away the vulgar parts of this *haishi* will become even more familiar with enlightenment.’¹¹⁷

While Mikawa considers this shift as part of a broader turn towards compliance with the Meiji government’s education (and entertainment) for enlightenment project, it is perhaps better understood as a strategy of concealment to adapt to the new circumstances that demand such works be useful for *bunmei kaika*, while still delivering a subversive message to an audience who would already know that *hanrei* prefaces are double voiced. At first glance, *Tako nyūdō* indeed appears as just ‘superfluous words’ that are useless but may give some surface level or rudimentary understanding of the opening of Japan and *bunmei kaika*. Yet, upon reading the book, the true meaning of the *hanrei* becomes lucid. Depending on how you ‘carefully read’ and those with ‘discerning eyes’ will be able to gain a deeper critical understanding of enlightenment that exists outside of state-centered narratives; only accessible through laughter.

Although apparently following completely different trajectories during the Meiji period as suggested by the pro-enlightenment newspapers that praised the ‘reformist’ Robun and condemned the ‘loser’ Mantei Ōga, they in fact held a lot more in common than just being tied together by Kawanabe Kyōsai, their mutual collaborator. They can be linked by their ideological commitment to laughter. In *Gakumon suzume*, a parody of Fukuzawa’s thesis on education for enlightenment set up as a debate between sparrow birds of learning, Ōga’s

¹¹⁷ *Meiji bungaku zenshū* 1, 177.

Eastern sparrow chirps back at the Western sparrow representing Fukuzawa, to defend the practice of writing satirical and humorous texts:

‘They may be crazy poems, but with just a just a few characters they critique the usefulness of various enterprises and have the ability to inquire deeply into people’s secret thoughts, warning of the choice between good and bad. Just one verse is often able move a person in the direction of either wisdom or folly.’¹¹⁸

Robun and Ōga cannot be separated into the modern Meiji evangelist of enlightenment and anti-modern Edo nativist as defined by the Meiji state’s constructed discourse of civilization and enlightenment, as their oppositional laughter both transcended these bifurcating categories, and sought to destabilize its very foundations. Robun and Ōga were the good and bad cop of a laughing counterpublic that blurs and undermines the significance of an Edo-Meiji temporal divide. Whereas Ōga dropped the formalities of humility and was more explicit with his satirical critiques and condemned the Meiji elite intellectual class as useless, Robun opted to disparage his own writing as useless. But as we can see in Robun’s underwater ‘floating world’ of *Tako nyūdō*, it was the government officials and appointed educators who were farting. All the while professing to have reformed, through ostensibly mocking himself Robun was lampooning the whole Great Promulgation Campaign and winked at his audience to get in on the joke, go under the surface, peel back the official layer of laws and conventions, and form their own judgements of civilization and enlightenment. Satirizing the Meiji state’s national public building project, *Tako nyūdō* was a sermon to call people out of place to an altered subjectivity of the laughing counterpublic.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in and translated by M William Steele, “The Unconventional Origins of Modern Japan,” 254.

Writer of Serious Things

While working as a *kyōdōshoku* evangelist for the *Kyōbushō* in 1873.2, Robun completed a draft of *Sansoku oshie no chikamichi* (Shortcuts to the Three Doctrines), which was later published in 1873.7. As suggested by the title and further explained in the preface, the text was intended as a basic introduction to the Three Doctrines, which could be spread widely as a form of engaging education that could be used for the ‘salvation of the ignorant masses,’ and especially read by those who may not have the time or access to attend the local shrine/temple sermons. We can also imagine that Robun would have utilized this text himself during any sermons he delivered at designated venues. This is certainly what the Meiji government desired of entertainers – to use their reformed pen to produce interesting textbooks for civilization as *kyōdōshoku* national evangelists, and Robun seemingly obliged.

Within the prefatory text, Robun again appeals to the validity of his writing as based on his personal conversion experience of being fortunate enough to have ‘heard the Three Doctrines a few times’ and so remembers the content and will share them in a simple way with readers. Robun signs the preface, declaring himself as a ‘*mono no hon kaki*’ or a ‘writer of serious things,’ which again contrasts with his previous self-deprecating introductions that emphasize the insignificance and uselessness of his work. On the contrary, this text highlights its weightiness.¹¹⁹ Yet, belying the seriousness of the Three Doctrines, *Sansoku oshie no chikamichi* is distinctly light in tone. While the *Kyōbushō* officials may have been convinced that the lightness was a necessary means to make the Three Doctrines more accessible to the uneducated masses and elevate their lowly minds upwards, the excessive playfulness through puns, using the 57575 rhythmic format of comic songs and an all-around irreverence with which Robun explains the importance of respecting the gods, country and the imperial court,

¹¹⁹ Kanagaki, *Sansoku oshie no chikamichi* (Tokyo: National Institute of Japanese Literature, 2007), 3-5.

rather, functions to bring that which is high and heavenly down towards earth. For example, when explaining the first principle of revering the gods and patriotism, he plays on the word *kami* referring to different types of paper, in order to communicate how all who are born in the land of the gods (*kami no okuni*) are descendants of gods (*kami*), yet the emperor is like the descendent of a precious paper and the common people are from lesser disposable papers; but all are *kami* nonetheless.¹²⁰ He then goes to make an analogy with commerce to praise those who take care of the products that they have and suggest that they will be blessed by the gods with profit. On the other hand, he condemns those who don't respect their customers, sell improper items and instead of using metal currency they use 'paper issued by the government' (太政官民部ペイプル) or 'Mitsui notes' (三ツ井の札) and flee to the red-light district and throw the money around there.¹²¹ He continues that these same people who 'waste the paper' (かみを^{そまつ}糞末にするがなる) selling it more than the height of 'Suruga's Mt Fuji' (するがなる富士) and then go off to Ise and spend it on enjoyments without returning home, will be punished by the Grand Shrine at Ise. In characteristic fashion, Robun uses multiple layers of word play to link the end of the sentence where he discusses the wasting of paper with the next phrase that introduces Mt Fuji in the Suruga province '*kami wo somatsu ni suruganaru fuji.*' Was this simply Robun having some fun while speaking to the so-called 'ignorant masses' or was he also speaking to a more sophisticated reader? Within this whole passage on showing respect for the gods, Robun is punning on the word *kami* to variously and simultaneously discuss the gods and paper. He further includes '*peipuru*' (paper) in *katakana* as a foreign word and '*satsu*' (notes) to add to this stack of paper references. It is after this that Robun writes that there are some who 'waste the paper' by throwing it around in the brothels, and he intentionally uses the *kana* script for *kami* (かみ) here so that the reader can question whether he is referring

¹²⁰ Kanagaki, *Sansoku*, 9-10.

¹²¹ Kanagaki, *Sansoku*, 10, 16.

to a waste of paper or in fact a desecration of the *kami* gods. Accordingly, the reader may also question who Robun is in fact referring to in his denunciation of those who waste money in the red-light district. If the reader also happened to be familiar with Robun's *Tako nyūdō* then perhaps they would assume that it was the officials who were throwing away the 'paper issued by the government' and disrespecting the gods. To be sure, we can also say that Robun was also 'throwing paper around' within this whole passage, through constantly oscillating between different types of *kami*. Indeed, Robun rendered the weighty matter of the Meiji government's directive to respect the gods and country into something that was as light as paper. This mirrors laughter's ability, in the words of Bakhtin, to triumph 'over the fear inspired by the mystery of the world and by power' and 'bring down to earth, turn their subject into flesh.'¹²²

Just like in *Tako nyūdō* when the preaching of the Three Doctrines by the sea ministers and officials was made laughable due to it being presented as bloviation from a whale's blowhole, in the role of a *kyōdōshoku* evangelist, Robun himself is able to recreate in the real world an empty 'serious' text that undermines the gravity of the Meiji government's civilization and enlightenment educational campaign. We know that some who attended Robun's sermons were left feeling suspicious of his messages. Robun's disciple Nozaki Sabun recalls a story of when Robun was spreading educational sermons to crowds as an itinerant preacher under the auspices of the Kanagawa Prefectural government, and one day when Robun was staying at a local lodge he overheard two men in the bath discussing amongst themselves how weird his name was, before remembering that he is a famous *gesaku* writer. The two men then expressed their grievances at the fact that a *gesaku* writer is a public educator (そんな戯作をする人が教育の説論も可笑しい話だ) and that they wouldn't dare let their sons be exposed to his work as they would be corrupted.¹²³ Whilst these listeners may have

¹²² Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 91, 20.

¹²³ Sabun Nozaki, *Watashi no mita meiji bundan 1*, (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2007) 137-138.

‘got’ some of the jokes, they certainly didn’t want to be mistaken as someone who would laugh out of place with Robun in this manner. They understood the function of laughter in forming boundaries between groups of insiders and outsiders.¹²⁴

While Robun delivered a satirical sermon on ‘enlightenment’ as the Octopus Priest to a scaly crowd in *Tako nyūdō* as depicted in the illustration by Kyōsai introduced above (Figure 2), in *Sansoku oshie no chikamichi*, Robun was similarly visually transformed into a priest delivering a ‘serious’ sermon on the Three Doctrines at a shrine to a crowd of people by the artist Sekitei. Beyond the obvious overlap in content of the two texts, the two illustrations display a strong similarity that seems to intentionally bind these two books together. While Kyōsai’s image of the Octopus Priest at work has a wavy border and blue in its color palette to reveal that the scene is being carried out at the bottom of the ocean to fish people, Sekitei’s serious equivalent image is accordingly straight in its borders. Placed against each other in this way, or ‘read’ together; as suggested within the introductions of *Tako nyūdō*, the Octopus Priest’s sermon is the wavy mirage that appears before discerning eyes who want to ‘*ana no ugachi,*’ and go beyond the surface to unveil alternative narratives of enlightenment filtered through the lens of laughter. Just as Robun and others such as Ōga engaged in an intertextual dialogue with the *Fukuzawa-bon* genre through playful parodies of Fukuzawa’s explorations into enlightenment principles, Robun produced humorous parodies of his own serious work. Or rather we could say that his serious works were parodies of his satirical writing. In other words, it was this constant interplay and blurring of the borders between what is serious and what is nonsense that was destabilizing. Which of Robun’s sermons on enlightenment is serious and which is all a joke – maybe they are both serious or maybe they are both ridiculous after all? A civilized world without laughter that the Meiji government was attempting to construct, is transformed into a space of laughter, where its customs, rules and discourses can be laughed

¹²⁴ Goldstein, *Laughter Out of Place*, 10.

at. The whole world becomes subject to laughter with no exceptions, even ‘he who is laughing also belongs to it.’¹²⁵ To rephrase Bakhtin, Robun’s serious and nonsense parodies of civilization and enlightenment builds up its own world of laughter versus the official world, its own shrines/temples versus the official religions, its own state versus the official state.¹²⁶

Robun’s ‘laughter’ didn’t simply function to satirize the government’s national enlightenment campaign. It also worked to generate a laughing counterpublic who inhabited an alternative cultural space and subjectivity, and operated by a different ‘queer’ set of protocols that were out of place with the dominant ideology. This is where the true subversiveness of laughter lies; in the undermining and disruption of the official public building project. Adapting the playful cues and symbols that made up the world of Edo urban popular culture for the challenges of the new Meiji era, Robun was able to communicate with a shrewd audience below the surface of his writing; a reading in-between the lines, spaces, illustrations and books. From first-hand experiences during the *bakumatsu* years, Robun was well aware that there was still an audience of people thirsty to consume laughing material, which would give them a window into an unofficial conception of the world. Equally, the shifting political context demanded a recalibration in approach in order to protect the subversive character of their laughter and entice others into its cultural space. Whether at the feet of Robun’s Octopus Priest or in the presence of the preacher of ‘shortcuts’ at the shrine, laughing along with Robun would generate a ‘mirage’ where members of the laughing counterpublic would begin to recognize themselves among this crowd.

¹²⁵ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 12.

¹²⁶ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 88.



Figure 3: A Sermon on the Three Doctrines at a Shrine. *Sansoku oshie no chikamichi*, 1873.

(National Diet Library Digital Collection)

The first chapter of this dissertation intentionally began by uncovering the space of the laughing counterpublic and its emergence from the Edo urban cultures of play as a structural methodological intervention. This methodological shift disrupts prevailing scholarly narratives of satire in Japan, which use the opening of Japan to the West as the narrational departure point to posit a loss of a ‘backwards’ subversive Edo-style laughter and an opening to ‘punch’ as a modern Western civilized form of political satire that contributes to enlightenment and nation building. Therefore, it is only from Chapter 2 that I begin to consider how the British artist, Charles Wirgman, entered into the crowd of this already existing cultural space of subversive laughter; an exposure, which led him to produce the *Japan Punch* magazine in a very different manner from punches rooted in a Victorian imperial culture that spread to colonial and semi-colonial societies during the nineteenth century. In reversing the narrational direction and flow of knowledge to show how Wirgman joined in the laughing counterpublic outlined in Chapter 1, I argue that the opening of Japan did not only mean an opening up to notions of Western

civilizational progress or an imperial gaze through Western state actors and individual visitors who understood their role or personhood as civilizing agents. Japan also opened its borders to transnational encounters and mutual exchanges of satirical cultures. I will explore how transnational encounters of subversive laughter further served to reconfigure the laughing counterpublic into a cultural space that mocked hierarchizing discourses of civilization, and where alternative non-imperial visions of relationality could be articulated and performed.

2. Laughing at Civilization: The *Japan Punch* and an Extra-extraterritorial Reopening of East-West Encounters

Departing in the spring of 1872, the British artist and long-term resident of Japan, Charles Wirgman (1832-1891), embarked on a shank's mare along the Tōkaidō to make his way to the Exhibition of Arts and Manufactures in Kyoto. During his travels through the interior of Japan, Wirgman produced a curious illustrated travel book about Japanese cuisine. Unusual not as yet another example of Victorian travel literature written by a European in the 'Orient,' but rather peculiar in the author's treatment and engagement with the locals and local cultural practices. *Artistic and Gastronomic Travels in Japan, from Yedo to Kiyoto by the Tokaido* (1872), documented Wirgman's journey, interactions and the various foods he ate along the way. Wirgman especially took pride in the fact that he was 'determined to try every delicacy' and asserted that unlike the typical expat took 'no European provisions.' He only ate in the 'Japanese style' and used his 'chopsticks with grace.'¹ This was not out of character. On the road with Sir Ernest Satow in 1867, the diplomat notes at the roadside inns, locals would be astonished that Wirgman could go without beef, Western utensils and that he would gorge on Japanese dishes such as rice, fish and sake.²

In contrast, most Western visitors to Japan in the nineteenth century would make a point of their distaste towards Japanese food and their belief in its inadequacy as a broader reflection and evidence of Japan's backwardness. For example, food at the diplomatic banquets prepared for Perry's crew in the mid 1850s by their Japanese hosts was met with disappointment for being 'too fishy.'³ Perhaps most famously, the British writer, Isabella Bird, who travelled

¹ Charles Wirgman, "Gastronomic Travels in Japan from Yedo to Kiyoto by the Tokaido," in *The West's Encounter with Japanese Civilization, 1800-1940*, vol. 10, ed. Catharina Bloomberg (Richmond: Japan Library, 2000), 2, 7.

² Sir Ernest Satow, *A Diplomat in Japan: An Inner History of the Critical Years in the Evolution of Japan* (Vermont and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, Inc., 1983), 206-211.

³ Barak Kushner, *Slurp! A Social and Culinary History of Ramen: Japan's Favorite Noodle Soup* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 95.

extensively around Japan, wrote in her book, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, an extended diatribe on the ‘food question’ claiming that all have suffered at the hands of the ‘fishy and vegetable abominations known as “Japanese food.”’ Bird proceeds to recommend to future travelers that they be sure to heed her advice and bring a supply of ‘Liebig’s extract of meat,’ a dark thick syrup-like paste commonly used to make beef teas and believed in the nineteenth century to hold nutritious value as a meat substitute.⁴ American and European writing on Japan during the *ishin* years and subsequent Meiji period tended to view Japan through ‘imperial eyes,’⁵ measuring the nation against Western visions of civilization underpinned by assumed hierarchies of peoples, cultures, customs and technological development.⁶ Wirgman’s gastronomic travels and indeed his broader personal and intellectual encounters with the opening of Japan demonstrates another ‘unbeaten track,’ to the extent that it reveals an alternative path of individuals that chose new affinities and alignments by becoming ‘western “non-players” in the drama of imperialism.’⁷

To be sure, it was towards the Western practice of beef eating and its symbolic associations with notions of civilization and modernity that Wirgman reversed and redirected his critique. Whereas the English language treaty port press such as the *Japan Weekly Mail (JWM)* (1870-1917) frequently championed the idea of diet reform within Japan, which would introduce the ‘stronger and more grateful odour of beef,’ by way of invigorating the physical and intellectual capacities of the Japanese people to be fit to participate in Western notions of modern progress,⁸ in his sole-authored satirical journal, the *Japan Punch* (1862-1887) of April

⁴ Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan: An Account of Travels in the Interior Including Visits to the Aborigines of Yezo and the Shrine of Nikko* (Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1973), 19.

⁵ To repurpose the title of the book: Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

⁶ For an assessment of American and European writing on Japan during the Meiji period see for instance: Sho Konishi, “Reopening the ‘Opening of Japan’: A Russian-Japanese Revolutionary Encounter and Vision of Anarchist Progress,” *The American Historical Review* vol. 112, no. 1 (February 2007): 104-105.

⁷ Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought and the Politics of Friendship* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2006), 1.

⁸ Japan Weekly Mail. *The Japan Weekly Mail, A Political, Commercial, and Literary Journal: Reprint Series vol. 1-5* (Tokyo: Yokohama Archives of History, 2005), vol. 2, 490-491.

1874, Wirgman turned this discourse on its head by reframing the British diet of ‘beef steak and roast beef’ as ‘the most primitive dishes forsooth’⁹ – the antithesis of progress. Or as Leela Gandhi puts it in an essay on the links between vegetarian movements and anti-colonial resistance, ‘the ideological tactic by means of which the discourse equating beef with imperial virility is hoist with its own petard, such that colonialism is rediagnosed precisely as the lamentable affliction of kreophagous virility.’¹⁰ However, to date, scholars have solely interpreted the *Japan Punch*’s comical representations of a parroting Japan attempting to catch up with the West’s vigor through, for instance, beef eating, as evidence that Wirgman’s commentary was representative of the Victorian imperial gaze that cast Japan to the temporal position of backwardness.¹¹ Citing the caricatures in the *Japan Punch*, historians have even characterized Wirgman as a cultural chauvinist who was one of Japan’s ‘harsh critics.’¹² Yet, Wirgman’s satirical expressions of ambivalence towards Western discourses of civilization found within the pages of the *Japan Punch*, have hitherto been disregarded as indecipherable in-jokes that are lost on present-day readers,¹³ or simply perceived as nonsensical,¹⁴ precisely because they are unintelligible to an imagined West-East divide and paradigm of civilizational progress. The satirical humor of the *Japan Punch*, however, produced laughter out of place as it destabilized, disturbed and blurred the ‘rigid cultural boundaries between West and non-West, colonizer and colonized.’¹⁵ Wirgman laughed out of place and repositioned himself to much more closely align with the oppositional laughter, which emanated from the collaborative network of Japanese satirical writers and artists introduced in Chapter 1 who similarly targeted

⁹ Charles Wirgman, *The Japan Punch, 1862-1887, vol. 1-10* (Tokyo: Yūshōdō Shoten, 1975), vol. 4, 92.

¹⁰ Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 84.

¹¹ See for example the caricature, “Portrait of a Foolish Bird,” (Nov. 1872) that depicts a parrot named ‘young Japan’ eating beef and drinking beer. In Wirgman, *The Japan Punch*, vol. 3, 250.

¹² Julia Meech-Pekarik, *The World of Meiji Print: Impressions of a New Civilization* (New York: Weatherhill, 1986), 179.

¹³ Christian Polak and Hugh Cortazzi eds., *Georges Bigot and Japan 1882-1899: Satirist, Illustrator and Artist Extraordinaire* (Kent: Renaissance Books, 2018), 38

¹⁴ For instance, *The Japan Weekly Mail* argued that the *Japan Punch* was harmless because the author didn’t know how to use satire in a powerful way. *Japan Weekly Mail, The Japan Weekly Mail*, vol. 2, 534.

¹⁵ Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 2.

the symbolic function of beef by way of critiquing broader discourses of civilization. Kanagaki Robun lampooned the idea of beef eating for progress in the comical vignette, *Aguranabe* (*Sitting Cross-Legged at the Beef Pot*, 1871), through a tongue-in-cheek suggestion that ‘you won’t get civilized if you don’t eat meat!’¹⁶ Kawanabe Kyōsai’s print the *Enlightenment of Fudō myō ō* (1874), which he signed *namanabe gyūsai* (fresh beef hotpot) as a play on his name, follows a similar theme by depicting the ‘immovable’ Buddhist deity sitting crossed-leg at the beef pot reading the enlightenment magazine *Shinbun Zasshi* and ironically being moved to accept the new practice of beef eating for civilization and enlightenment after the emperor officially lifted the ban on beef in the 12th month of 1871.¹⁷ Mantei Ōga was perhaps most outspoken with his suspicions of indiscriminately accepting Westernization as the definition of progress, and very frankly wrote, ‘Shit from the West does not suddenly become miso (bean paste) when it travels to the East.’¹⁸ Elsewhere Ōga combined with Kyōsai as the illustrator for *Ōdontaku shinbun kidan* (1872-73), an allegory of progress through heaven and hell to lampoon civilization and enlightenment. In the Hungry Ghost realm of hell a cow is pictured butchering a child set on a table next to a barrel filled with children waiting for the chop, and a sign that reads ‘human meat bargain bucket, kiddie skewers’ (人肉大安売 子供の雀焼), by way of revealing the horror some expressed at cows going from helpmeet to, well...meat.¹⁹

This chapter introduces how Charles Wirgman used the *Japan Punch* to create what can be described as an ‘extra extra-territorial’ space that could humorously reimagine the East-West encounter during the late nineteenth century. It was extra-extra territorial in the sense that Wirgman produced humor that was out of place with the prevailing attitudes and interpretations

¹⁶ John Pierre Mertz, *Novel Japan: Spaces of Nationhood in Early Meiji Narrative, 1870-88* (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 2003), 1.

¹⁷ Timothy Clark, *Demon of Painting: The Art of Kawanabe Kyōsai* (London: British Museum Press, 1993), 126.

¹⁸ M William Steele, “Meiji Twitterings: A Parody of Fukuzawa’s An Encouragement of Learning,” *Asian Cultural Studies* 18 Special Issue: Parody in Japanese Culture Part II (2010): 55-77.

¹⁹ Tōru Haga and Isao Shimizu, eds., *Kindai manga I: bakumatsu ishinki no manga* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 198), 90.

that positioned Western nations, cultures and its peoples as a civilizing presence within Japan, which characterized the extra-territorial treaty port culture. The *Japan Punch* not only questioned the direction of Japan's rapid march towards modernity, but also reversed the subject of ridicule to ultimately challenge notions of Western modern temporality. In direct conversation with the project of 'opening' Japan, the *Japan Punch* utilized parody to engage in a process of 'reopening' Great Britain. I argue that this represents a totally different type of transnational encounter during this period of opening. Whereas, as one Western resident wrote, 'the foreigners laughed long and loud at the Japanese, but as few of them moved in Japanese circles they could not hear the Japanese laughing at them,' Wirgman turned away from an imperial gaze and joined in with Japanese people to laugh at Western civilization discourse.²⁰ Wirgman became immersed in the local satirical culture and the symbols and themes circulating through the laughing counterpublic of mid-nineteenth century Japan. He participated in local art salons and playful gatherings around the Edo urban areas attended by the very same network of prominent Japanese satirists such as Kanagaki Robun and Kawanabe Kyōsai introduced in Chapter 1. It was these private West-East transnational encounters of 'punch' and 'punching holes' (*ana wo ugatsu*) satirical cultures, where the participants blurred those very West-East boundaries as they learnt to laugh together. In particular, I suggest that it was in these alternative contact zones of physical interactions and mutual exchanges that they began to laugh together at the very imperial hierarchies, which were supposed to characterize their personal encounters. In other words, these art salons too became extra-extra territorial spaces as they disrupted and destabilized the imperial taxonomies of civilization discourse. Birthed through laughter, these spaces, then, were also significant in that they were themselves engaged in 'reopening the opening of Japan' and its meanings beyond an initiation of Western modern progress and its internal Manichean logic of a West vs East, modern vs anti-modern,

²⁰ Quoted in Meech-Pekarik, *The World of Meiji Print*, 199.

civilized vs uncivilized, colonizer vs colonized divide. The transnational encounters of satirical cultures and extra-extra territorial cultural space that developed, helped to further shape the character of the laughing counterpublic in nineteenth century Japan.

Imperial Punches?

In June 1861, during his first year in Japan, Wirgman departed from Nagasaki after receiving special permission to join an overland journey to Edo as a member of the British Minister to Japan, Sir Rutherford Alcock's suite. Alcock determined that as the artist and special correspondent for the *Illustrated London News (ILN)*, Wirgman's participation in the trip would be an excellent opportunity to make Japan better known to the British public.²¹ Wirgman's role as an observer-artist-reporter, alongside his genial and at times eccentric personality, afforded him these rare opportunities to explore the interior of *bakumatsu* Japan in an official capacity. On arrival to Edo, the party was promptly welcomed by a now infamous 5 July 1861 nighttime bloody attack on the British legation recently opened at Tōzen-ji, by Japanese *rōnin* samurai assassins from Mito seeking to rid Japan of foreigners as part of the *sonnō jōi* (revere the emperor, expel the barbarians) movement. Providing a combination of sketches and reports, Wirgman would feed these eyewitness stories of events in Japan back to London where they would play a significant role in shaping the way readers and policy makers in Britain viewed Japan at a time when the *ILN* was at the height of its popularity and influence.²² According to Terry Bennett, for many Victorian readers of the *ILN*, Japan became

²¹ Sir Rutherford Alcock, *The Capital of the Tycoon: A Narrative of a Three Years Residence in Japan*, vol. II, (Boston: Elibron, 2005): 67-68.

²² The paper reached its peak circulation in 1863. For example, the *ILN* outdid its competitors by selling 310,000 copies of the issue that covered the marriage of the Prince of Wales. See Terry Bennett, comp., *Japan and the London Illustrated News: Complete Record of Reported Events 1853-1899* (Kent: Global Oriental, 2006), ix-x; Richard Scully and Andrekos Varnava write, 'cartoons were a key means by which British readers encountered and engaged with issues of empire and imperialism.' In Richard Scully and Andrekos Varnava eds., *Comic Empires: Imperialism in cartoons, caricature and satirical art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 3.

a ‘Wirgmanian fairytale land of cherry-blossoms and geishas.’²³ Reporting for an audience back home and potentially having to adhere to editorial directives to make the articles more ‘readable,’²⁴ Wirgman’s contributions to the *ILN* appear to follow the pattern of Victorian writing on Japan in the late 1800s.²⁵ Indeed, Wirgman himself wrote that he was specifically tasked by the *ILN* with illustrating ‘picturesque’ and ‘characteristic’ scenes from Japan.²⁶ Kathryn Rose Lynass argues that Victorian writing on the Oriental ‘Other’ of Japan was also an inward-looking pursuit that revealed more about how the British understood ‘Self’ and Empire. ‘Similarities were praised as imitative of a higher culture of modern progress, whereas differences were dismissed as backwards or barbaric.’²⁷ For example, writing from Yokohama for the *ILN* in November 1873, Wirgman lauded the achievements of Japan’s rapid modernization and opening to the West. ‘It would be difficult to find in the history of any country a parallel to the recent revolution in Japan. The most radical changes have been made, and the wonderful transformation still goes on.’²⁸ He observed political systems being reformed, Western technologies being adopted, and Chinese characters making way for the Roman alphabet. His accompanying illustrations of life in Yokohama depicted Japanese men of the day wearing Western attire that made them racially indistinguishable from the more ‘civilized’ Europeans.²⁹ Wirgman’s sketches for the *ILN* have therefore been categorized as a stock of early images that helped to reify a Western colonial gaze, because as Sumathi

²³ Bennett, *Japan and the Illustrated London News*, xiii.

²⁴ See for example Wirgman’s contemporary, John Blackwood, the editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, who gave instructions to his contributing writers on how to discuss Japan. In a letter of 30 November 1858, Blackwood had instructed Captain Osborn in his accounts of Japan that they should be ‘pleasant.’ Osborn’s letters show that he followed this advice and purposely avoided certain subjects. Quoted in Toshio Yokoyama, *Japan in the Victorian Mind: A Study of Stereotyped Images of a Nation 1850-80* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1987), 27.

²⁵ Yokoyama’s landmark study identified dominant tropes of Japanese ‘singularity,’ ‘remoteness,’ and Japan as a ‘fairyland’ or ‘elf-land.’ See Yokoyama, *Japan in the Victorian Mind*.

²⁶ “Life in Japan,” 10 August 1861. In Bennett, *Japan and the Illustrated London News*, 76.

²⁷ Kathryn Rose Lynass, “Leading British Periodicals on East Asia: 1870-1911,” (PhD diss., Arizona State University, 2002) 12.

²⁸ “Changes in Japan,” 8 November 1873. In Bennett, *Japan and the Illustrated London News*, 209-211.

²⁹ “Changes in Japan,” 8 November 1873. In Bennett, *Japan and the Illustrated London News*, 209-211.

Ramaswamy argues, modern empire-building was also a project of ‘image-making, image consuming, and image collecting’ – an ‘Imperial Optic’ theory of colonial power.³⁰ To date, scholars have viewed the *Japan Punch* through this lens and have accordingly interpreted its historical significance as contributing to this collection of Victorian pictures of Japan through imperial eyes. That Wirgman pivoted his career away from his role as correspondent for the *ILN* to primarily speak through his self-created satirical voice of ‘Mr Punch’ has rarely been interrogated. The *Japan Punch*’s humorous yet highly critical engagement with Western civilization discourses through caricatures and comical vignettes has thus remained hidden. Ultimately, the *Japan Punch* is understood as an extension of the global spread of *Punch*-style publications rooted in Victorian British imperial culture, which were transmitted to colonial and semi-colonial societies during the age of high imperialism.

Notwithstanding the legacy of methodological tendencies within historical research that has tended to use visual culture, especially cartoons, primarily as resources to illustrate books in line with already formulated arguments rather than using the visual materials as historical documents themselves to answer wider questions,³¹ historians are beginning to embrace a ‘pictorial turn’ that affirms the role of images ‘as objects of knowledge in and of themselves, as world-making and world-disclosing, rather than merely world-mirroring.’³² As an extension of this approach to tackle the ‘intertwined histories of “empire” and “vision” in modernity,’³³ historians have begun to reappraise the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century phenomenon of the global spread of ‘punches’ and humor magazines as a mode of expression within the context of imperialism.³⁴ The British *Punch* or *London Charivari* (1842-2002) –

³⁰ Martin Jay and Sumathi Ramaswamy eds., *Empires of Vision: A Reader* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 2.

³¹ Thomas Milton Kemnitz, “The Cartoon as a Historical Source,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* vol. 4, no. 1, *The Historian and the Arts* (Summer 1973): 81.

³² Jay and Ramaswamy eds., *Empires of Vision*, 12.

³³ Jay and Ramaswamy eds., *Empires of Vision*, 1.

³⁴ See for instance: Hans Harder and Barbara Mittler eds., *Asian Punches: A Transcultural Affair* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2013); Richard Scully and Andrekos Varnava eds., *Comic Empires*.

although an imitation itself of the French satirical journal *Charivari* – has been framed as the origin of the cultural imagination of modern political satire that spawned ‘younger cousins’³⁵ in the colonies and semi-colonial societies. Hans Harder estimates that newspapers and periodicals, which took the name *Punch* or referred to the *Punch* as a main inspiration, could reach a three-digit number.³⁶ *Punch* served as a template or ‘label for a genre of politically interested satirical magazines’ that ‘included ample illustrations.’³⁷ *Punch* the elder’s socio-political imaginary was centered on the metropolitan culture of Victorian London, and the colonial versions appropriated, mimicked or internalized its modes and representations.³⁸ Ritu Khanduri notes that this framing situates the *Punch* inside the structures of empire in relation to the colonies, attributing primacy to the former.³⁹ Indeed, the *Punch* from December 1857 understood its international role at the time within a similar narrative of modernity:

‘There is an imitation of *Punch* regularly published at Turin. There is to be a *Punch*, also, in St. Petersburg...As the world grows more civilized, we shall next hear of *Punch* appearing, as second Pasquin at Rome, or at Naples, perhaps; and who knows but we may yet see a *Punch* in Paris.’⁴⁰

The *Punch*’s role as a reflection of the British Empire and disseminator of imperial ideology at the center of its own ‘informal’ empire has emerged as one of the dominant conceptual frameworks to understand its global diffusion.⁴¹ Emanating both from the center

³⁵ Barbara Mittler, “Epilogue: Ten Thousand Pucks and Punches – Satirical Themes and Variations Seen Transculturally,” in Harder and Mittler eds., *Asian Punches*, 427, 439.

³⁶ Hans Harder, “Prologue: Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Asian Punch Versions and Related Satirical Journals,” in Harder and Mittler eds., *Asian Punches*, 2.

³⁷ Mittler, “Epilogue,” in Harder and Mittler eds., *Asian Punches*, 439.

³⁸ Miller argues that the *Punch* was aimed at a metropolitan and middle-class audience to the exclusion of provincial England. Henry Miller, “The Problem with *Punch*,” *Historical Research*, vol. 82, no. 216 (May 2009).

³⁹ ‘This history of *Punch* has consistently been cast within a socio-political framework of British domestic politics, with the colonies figuring in the analysis as representation of popular attitudes and reception of the colonial others.’ In Ritu G Khanduri, “Vernacular Punches: Cartoons and Politics in Colonial India,” *History and Anthropology* vol. 20, no. 4 (2009): 462.

⁴⁰ “Progress of Civilization,” *Punch*, 5 December 1857. Quoted in Khanduri, “Vernacular Punches,” 462.

⁴¹ Richard Scully, “A Comic Empire: The Global Expansion of *Punch* as a Model Publication, 1841-1936,” *International Journal of Comic Art* (Fall 2013): 8.

and peripheries of empire, the various manifestations of *Punch* created a ‘global satirical visual imaginaire.’⁴² The symbols and representations of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ that developed within the ‘contact zone’ of copresence and yet asymmetrical cultural encounters between the colonizer and colonized, therefore, become a shared visual language.⁴³

Historians have extended this framework to Japan, arguing that Japanese punches embraced ‘racist iconography’ and imperial hierarchies, a practice that was in direct conversation with, and influenced by the *Japan Punch* and its successor, the satirical magazine *Tôbaé* produced by the French artist Georges F. Bigot (1860-1927). Through its representations, the *Japan Punch* is understood as reinforcing colonial perspectives.⁴⁴ This has further implications when analyzed in the context of the formation of the Japanese nation state and international relations. By the end of the nineteenth century, political cartoons had become an instrument of state power for war propaganda.⁴⁵ Satire was used as a tool of cultural violence against the likes of China, Korea and Russia, while simultaneously positioning Japan as a civilized nation within a Western imperial order.⁴⁶ Within this narrative, the cartoons of the *Japan Punch* transplanted a Western ‘imperialist gaze’ onto Japan through its pictorial expressions, which were internalized and reproduced by the Japanese to legitimize and reify their colonialist engagement in imperial international relations on the Asian continent.⁴⁷ Laughter is determined not to be a subversive play in a Bakhtinian sense of the carnivalesque that challenges authority.⁴⁸ Kobena Mercer uses the example of blackface minstrelsy to point out that within the context of racial hierarchies, laughter is often a device used by the strong to

⁴² Barbara Mittler, “Epilogue,” in Harder and Mittler eds., *Asian Punches*, 444.

⁴³ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 4, 7.

⁴⁴ See Orna Shaughnessy’s chapter, “Early Meiji Manga: The Political Cartoons of Kanagaki Robun and Kawanabe Kyōsai,” in Nissim Otmazgin and Rebecca Suter eds., *Rewriting History in Manga: Stories for the Nation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 64-66.

⁴⁵ See Sonja Hotwagner, “‘Punch’s Heirs’ Between the (Battle) Lines: Satirical Journalism in the Age of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905,” in Harder and Mittler eds., *Asian Punches*.

⁴⁶ Jung-Sun N Han, “Empire of Comic Visions: Japanese Cartoon Journalism and its Pictorial Statements on Korea, 1876-1910,” *Japanese Studies*, 26:3, (2006): 285.

⁴⁷ Han, “Empire of Comic Visions,” 301.

⁴⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984).

mark out and ridicule the weaker ‘Other’.⁴⁹ Taking an equally cynical view, in his book *On Human Nature* (1650), Thomas Hobbes defined laughter in similar terms. ‘Laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from a sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly.’⁵⁰ This is what historian Peter Gay describes as the view of humor and laughter as essentially ‘an act of aggression.’⁵¹ To date, scholarship on the satire of the *Japan Punch* has been through this lens, which considers the magazine’s role in transmitting the stylistic and visual vocabulary of an inherently aggressive Western imperial cartoon culture as a key aspect of its historical significance.

To be sure, Punches did not exist merely as an instrument of imperialism to ‘uphold the order of the day’⁵² but were frequently reversed to serve as ‘weapons of the weak’⁵³ and comic tools of anti-colonial resistance.⁵⁴ In particular, focusing scholarly attention beyond iconography, or what Khanduri calls ‘the mapping of its cartoons as representations and a site of discourse of racial ideology,’ has been a key methodological shift in reappraising the global role of punch.⁵⁵ Scholarship in this area has mainly centered on the vernacular punches of India that criticized and exposed colonial rule, often with the purpose of fostering a nationalist resistance to imperialism.⁵⁶ Scholars have discovered similar trends in other areas such as Egypt, where the *Cairo Punch* sardonically critiqued Britain’s presence and the roots of

⁴⁹ Kobena Mercer, “Carnavalesque and Grotesque: What Bakhtin’s Laughter Tells Us about Art and Culture,” in Angela Rosenthal, David Bindman and Adrian W B Randolph eds., *No Laughing Matter: Visual Humor in Ideas of Race, Nationality, and Ethnicity* (New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 2016), 8-9.

⁵⁰ Matthew Hodgart, *Satire: Origins and Principles* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 109.

⁵¹ Peter Gay, “The Bite of Wit,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* vol. 135, no. 3 (Sept. 1991): 327.

⁵² Susanne Reichl and Mark Stein eds., *Cheeky Fictions: Laughter and the Postcolonial*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 10.

⁵³ James C Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); James C Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

⁵⁴ Scully, “A Comic Empire,” 9-10; Scully and Varnava eds., *Comic Empires*, 13.

⁵⁵ Khanduri, “Vernacular Punches,” 481.

⁵⁶ See for instance: Mushirul Hasan, *Wit and Humour in Colonial North India* (New Delhi: Niyogi Books, 2009); Khanduri, “Vernacular Punches;” and “Part II *Punch* in South Asia,” in Harder and Mittler eds., *Asian Punches*.

imperialism.⁵⁷ Many of these ‘divergent’ offshoot punches recycled the very same images from the British *Punch* but gave the cartoons radically new meanings to recast them as weapons to undermine imperial values.⁵⁸ As Ramaswamy suggests by repurposing Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s postcolonial question ‘can the subaltern speak?’, the empire doesn’t just speak and write back, the empire can ‘look back in unexpected ways’ to express that ‘which is unsayable and ineffable – that which words have failed.’⁵⁹ In taking our examinations beyond the war of serious words, to probe humorous images and the (serious) function of laughter we can identify the visual and the affective as significant sites of struggle ‘where new accounts of empire...emerge that depart from – even challenge – the more familiar narrative line(s).’⁶⁰ Similarly, writing on the importance of methodological approaches that center on popular visual and performance cultures to generate alternative narratives in modern Japanese history, Steele contends that we can also highlight the ‘voices of opposition, nostalgia, conservation, and antimodernity. In addition to the heroic story of Japan’s modernization, it is equally possible to construct narratives emphasizing the role of tradition or even antimodernity in modern Japan.’⁶¹ Yet, as pointed out by Reichl and Stein, the ‘laughing back paradigm,’ which follows the postcolonial idea of ‘writing back’ often unintentionally reinscribes the centrality of the colonizer in contrast to the peripheral status of the colonized, while simultaneously reinforcing binary asymmetrical power dynamics. Moreover, they argue that it ignores the

⁵⁷ Marilyn Booth, “What’s in a Name? Branding Punch in Cairo, 1908,” in Harder and Mittler eds., *Asian Punches*, 290.

⁵⁸ Partha Mitter, “Punch and Indian Cartoons: The Reception of a Transnational Phenomenon,” in Harder and Mittler eds., *Asian Punches*, 56-62.

⁵⁹ Jay and Ramaswamy eds., *Empires of Vision*, 2-3, 6. Sumathi Ramaswamy poses the questions: ‘Does the empire not only speak and write back but also look back in unexpected ways, and at whom and with what effect? Does subaltern seeing extend imperial ways of looking even in the course of countering it, does it produce an alternative emancipatory vision, or is it a haphazard mix of both?’ In Jay and Ramaswamy eds., *Empires of Vision*, 3. Also see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Oxon: Routledge, 2013); and Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).

⁶⁰ Martin Jay and Sumathi Ramaswamy eds., *Empires of Vision*, 3.

⁶¹ M. William Steele, “Casting Shadows on Japan’s Enlightenment: Sada Kaiseki’s Attack on Lamps,” *Asian Cultural Studies* 16 Special Issue: Parody in Japanese Culture (2007): 70.

multidimensional, sometimes contradictory meanings, uses and outcomes of laughter and humor:

‘...laughter is not always used as weapon; it can perform a conciliatory function, constitute an intellectual stimulus, express linguistic finesse, or imply a slightly nostalgic notion...even if subversiveness is detected in laughter, its targets are varied so that it can be directed at colonisers or colonised; it can be self-deprecating or stereotyping; it might be read as an empowering move or a resigned comment on a status quo; it might trigger Medusa’s triumphant laughter or merely elicit a tired smile. But it will always raise the complex question “Who laughs at whom?”’⁶²

Re-examining the *Japan Punch*, this chapter demonstrates that expressions of satirical resistance to imperial values did not only originate in vernacular nationalism or anti-modern traditionalist/nativist counter-urges, but that expressions of ambivalence can be found in the very publications previously thought to be the chief purveyors of Western civilization discourse. As a periodical produced by a British resident in Japan, it complicates reductive attempts to view the West’s encounter with the East as monolithic. It is especially significant to reappraise the role of the *Japan Punch* publication as it has traditionally served as the departure point for Western modernization narratives that position Charles Wirgman as an early pioneer in the development of Japanese manga and the father/art teacher of the modern political cartoon in Japan.⁶³ In other words, *kaikoku*, or Japan’s opening, prompted native artists to engage in modernizing the Japanese media by learning from the West as part of the nation’s wider ‘civilization and enlightenment’ project – a unidirectional flow of knowledge from West to East – or “‘influence studies” that have documented the West’s impact on Japan,’ in the words of Sho Konishi.⁶⁴ To date, the foreign treaty port press in Japan has never been used to

⁶² Reichl and Stein eds., *Cheeky Fictions*, 12.

⁶³ See for example: Isao Shimizu, *Nihon kindai manga no tanjō* (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 2001), 2; Isao Shimizu, *Manga no rekishi* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho, 1991), 29; Meech-Pekarik, *The World of the Meiji Print*, 181; Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Cultural History, *Wāguman ga mita umi: nada no tōzai wo musunda gaka* (Kanagawa: Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Cultural History, 2011), 121.

⁶⁴ Sho Konishi, *Anarchist Modernity: Cooperatism and Japanese-Russian Intellectual Relations in Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 13.

challenge this narrative. However, as Ramaswamy urges, we would do well to complicate our conception of cultural flows to consider their disorderliness:

‘a messy business of mutual entanglements and imbrications, of collisions and compromises, and of desiring-while-disavowing and disavowing-while-desiring. Europe or its technologies no longer appear as the sole motor of modern visual culture; by the same token, the colonies can no longer be cast as either passive recipients of the white man’s magic or massive resisters of formations and influences fanning out from Europe.’⁶⁵

After all, it was Wirgman who arrived to a *bakumatsu* Japan that was already abundant with subversive laughter, as we saw in the previous chapter. It is then apropos to ask, how was *his* vision transformed by *ishin* Japan or through encounters with this cultural space?

‘Half-cracked’

The 29 July 1858 signing of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce between the United States and Japan paved the way for similar commercial agreements with Great Britain, Russia, France and the Netherlands. The treaty provided for the opening of additional ports to trade including Kanagawa (later relocated to Yokohama), Nagasaki and Hakodate from July 1859, and later, Niigata (January 1860) and Hyōgo (Kobe) (January 1863).⁶⁶ Wirgman would reside in the Yokohama treaty port until his death in 1891. Prior to settling in Japan, he had already gained a taste of treaty port life in China, spending time there from 1857 where he fulfilled a similar artist-correspondent role for the *ILN*. The treaty ports bore striking similarities with European colonies in Asia. James Hoare writes that the architecture, streets, naval presence,

⁶⁵ Jay and Ramaswamy eds., *Empires of Vision*, 4.

⁶⁶ See James E Hoare eds., *Culture, Power and Politics in Treaty-Port Japan, 1854-1899: Key Papers, Press and Contemporary Writings*, vol. 2 (Folkstone: Renaissance Books, 2018), 154; and Hugh Cortazzi, *Victorians in Japan: In and Around the Treaty Ports* (London: Athlone Press, 1987), xii, 54.

foreign courts and foreign press helped to foster this colonial illusion.⁶⁷ To be sure, it was the semi-colonial arrangement of extraterritoriality that would allow Wirgman to publish the *Japan Punch* away from Japanese censorship laws. In 1861, the year of Wirgman's arrival to Japan, the mostly male foreign population in Yokohama was 126, 55 of whom were British. This climbed to around 1,200 in the 1870s and 5,000 by the mid 1880s, with the Chinese becoming the largest foreign population at over half of the total.⁶⁸ Britons continued to dominate the Western population. Some 8,000 Japanese were living in Yokohama during the 1860s and this number doubled a decade later.⁶⁹ There was also a large floating population. An average of 10,000 seamen passed through each year on British ships, with up to 3,000 of them residing at any one time.⁷⁰ The spatial layout of the treaty port reflected nineteenth century notions of racial and imperial hierarchies. Despite fanciful *Yokohama-e* woodblock prints that depicted international parties merging different cultures and nationalities,⁷¹ daily realities were characterized by tensions and divisions. Foreigners walked around armed with guns to protect themselves from attacks that were common in the 1860s, and visitors observed that a 'great gulf existed between the two communities.'⁷² Western residents lived separately from the local Japanese, whilst the Chinese were regularly snubbed by all and rendered an invisible foreign majority.

The Yokohama foreign settlement was characteristic of Mary Louise Pratt's 'contact zone;' 'Social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination.'⁷³ Westerners viewed

⁶⁷ James E Hoare, *Japan's Treaty Ports and Foreign Settlements: The Uninvited Guests 1858-1899* (Folkestone: Japan Library, 1994), 14.

⁶⁸ Hoare, *Japan's Treaty Ports and Foreign Settlements*, 21-23.

⁶⁹ See Todd S Munson, *The Periodical Press in Treaty-Port Japan: Conflicting Reports from Yokohama, 1861-1870* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

⁷⁰ Hoare, *Japan's Treaty Ports and Foreign Settlements*, 21.

⁷¹ John W Dower, "Yokohama Boomtown, Foreigners in Treaty-Port Japan (1859-1872)," *MIT Visualizing Cultures* (2008), accessed October 27, 2022.

⁷² Hoare, *Japan's Treaty Ports and Foreign Settlements*, 28.

⁷³ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 4.

themselves and the physical insertion of the treaty ports as a necessary interruption into a Japan that had closed itself off to modern ideas of global commerce and civilization through *sakoku* policies. Their very presence and contact would initiate a West to East flow of civilization and progress. It was this same chauvinistic attitude that meant social contact was rare. The Western residents largely resisted learning the language or attempts to engage in native customs beyond exoticism. Japanese food was particularly abhorrent and the demand for imported foreign goods was high. To enthusiastically participate in Japanese culture would be to admit that Japan and its people were equal with the West.⁷⁴ To be sure, there were numerous instances of Western residents and tourists crossing boundaries to ‘go native’ through popular practices such as being photographed in the local costume to obtain souvenirs that would authenticate their encounter with the Orient. Yet, such examples of transcultural traffic rarely departed from entrenched views of a West-East hierarchical divide and were ultimately dependent on the ‘consumption practices of colonialism.’⁷⁵

Wirgman, however, was not the typical ‘expat’ that attempted to recreate a micro version of British life in the Far East. He was a well-known and popular figure within the settlement but was considered to be unconventional by his friends, while acquaintances believed him to be ‘half-cracked’ due to the nonsense he spoke.⁷⁶ Wirgman diverted from the norm by tailoring his life to Japanese standards. Already with near native level fluency in French and German he quickly became fluent in Japanese and could converse like a local being able to distinguish between Satsuma and Chōshū dialects.⁷⁷ The patron of the *Japan Punch*, Rudolph Lindau, also confirmed that Wirgman was able to make himself understood in

⁷⁴ Hoare, *Japan's Treaty Ports and Foreign Settlements*, 26-30.

⁷⁵ See for instance Christine M E Guth, “Charles Longfellow and Okakura Kakuzō: Cultural Cross-Dressing in the Colonial Context,” *positions* 8:3 (Winter 2000): 605-636.

⁷⁶ In a diary entry from 21 December 1881, Alice Mary Rea wrote that Wirgman ‘talked a great deal of nonsense and seemed half cracked.’ Quoted in Bennett, *Japan and the Illustrated London News*, xii-xiii.

⁷⁷ Akio Shigetomi, *Wāguman to sono shūhen: yokohama wo aishita ponchie no ganso* (Tokyo: Horupu Shuppan, 1987), 16.

Chinese.⁷⁸ Despite personally experiencing attacks he travelled around unarmed. He learnt how to play the *shamisen* and chose to wear Japanese clothing over Western attire. Satow wrote of Wirgman in his diary, Charles' 'costume consisting of wide blue cotton trousers, a loose yellow pongee jacket, no collar, and a conical hat of grey felt, gave rise to a grave discussion as to whether he was really an European, or only a Chinaman after all.'⁷⁹ Wirgman's most intimate connection to Japan was his marriage to Ozawa Kane in 1863 with whom he had a child, Ichirō. Akio Shigetomi notes that in 1866 three Japanese artists went to knock on Wirgman's gate and found that he had re-written his name in Japanese characters as 惑満 (*Wakuman*).⁸⁰ He had befriended many local artists and took on apprentices such as the painter Goseda Yoshimatsu and Oka Jōki, the latter of whom was a railway engineer and also as a writer of playful works under the guidance of Kanagaki Robun.⁸¹ Wirgman went above and beyond acculturation and demonstrated a profound transformation from long-term sojourner to local. Although as a British citizen he would always remain distinct from the 'natives,' he occupied an ambiguous interstitial position that straddled the bifurcating categories of colonizer vs colonized.⁸² Wirgman's intentional border crossing to a state of liminality follows what Gandhi articulates as small but significant 'defiant flights from the fetters of belonging toward the unknown destination of radical alterity,' which was present in Victorian radical and utopian urges.⁸³ If as according to Gandhi, an imperial belonging is based on strict observance to 'exclusionary structures of instrumental binary reason' where 'us' is separated from 'them,' then Wirgman's

⁷⁸ John Clark, *Japanese Exchanges in Art, 1850s to 1930s with Britain, Continental Europe, and the USA: Papers and Research Materials* (Sydney: Power Publications, 2001), 82.

⁷⁹ Satow, *A Diplomat in Japan*, 211.

⁸⁰ Shigetomi, *Wāguman to sono shūhen*, 16.

⁸¹ In the Yokohama Mainichi Shinbun of 22 February 1875, Oka Jōki wrote 'I studied alongside Yoshimatsu as an apprentice of Wakuman.' The name Oka Jōki (岡丈紀) was a pseudonym and play on the word for steam locomotive (陸蒸気). Quoted in Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Cultural History, *Wāguman ga mita umi*, 171.

⁸² David Odo, *Unknown Japan: Reconsidering 19th-century Photographs* (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 2008), 59.

⁸³ Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 7.

cultural and ideological departures posed a challenge to this orderliness.⁸⁴ Although originally sent to Japan as a special correspondent for the *ILN*, Wirgman would eventually opt to focus his energies on the *Japan Punch* and other entrepreneurial ventures. It was in the space of the satirical *Japan Punch* magazine that Wirgman could best blur the boundaries of imperial habitation. Wirgman's 'Mr Punch,' who can be found on the front cover of the *Japan Punch* wearing a kimono (see Figure 4), embodies this in-betweenness. Perhaps, as some in the expat community described him to be, he was 'half-cracked' after all. Yet, I would suggest this half-cracked status takes on a totally new meaning. To the Western expats in the treaty ports, Wirgman was unintelligible precisely because he did not fit into the accepted hierarchical categories. For Wirgman, to be 'half-cracked' was to choose a life and positionality that were out of place from either side of an imperial divide.

Writing on the *Muniandi* 'Ceylon Punch' (1869-1872), which was illustrated by a Ceylonese Dutchman, J.L.K. Van Dort (1831-98) as well as other anonymous illustrators, Kanchanakesi Warnapala demonstrates that the magazine directly and implicitly mocked the civilizing mission of the British and colonial rule in Sri Lanka. Warnapala suggests that it was perhaps the in-between positioning of some of the magazine's contributors as neither fully colonizer or colonized, which generated its ambivalent attitude towards empire.⁸⁵ Extending the significance of the unsettled liminal positionality occupied by long-term residents who engaged in local life, I argue that it was from a similar vantage point that Wirgman encountered late nineteenth century Japan and reopened the meanings of Japan's opening to the West and discourses of civilization – not through imperial eyes, but through a 'half-cracked' vision.

⁸⁴ Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 7.

⁸⁵ Kanchanakesi Warnapala, "Caricaturing colonial rule in Sri Lanka: An analysis of *Muniandi*, the *Ceylon Punch*," *Early Popular Visual Culture* vol. 10, no. 3 (2012): 235-236.



Figure 4: Mr Punch on the front cover. *Japan Punch*, 1867.

The Opening of Great Britain

On the 5th and 6th September 1864, Wirgman found himself aboard the battleship HMS Euryalus during the Shimonoseki Campaign, which was launched in response to Chōshū domain *sonnō jōi* attacks on Western naval vessels in the Shimonoseki Straits. His sketches depicting the allied warships opening fire, and subsequently capturing the batteries at Shimonoseki after a land offensive, were published in the *ILN* later that year.⁸⁶ Wirgman was no stranger to gunboat diplomacy by Western imperial powers and regularly found himself in the train of the British military as a reporter for the *ILN*. Between 1857 and 1861, Wirgman was mainly with the British forces in or near Canton, Hong Kong and Beijing to record events

⁸⁶ "Illustrations of the War in Japan," 19 November 1864. In Bennett, *Japan and the Illustrated London News*, 145-148.

during the Second Opium War.⁸⁷ This was during an era when British foreign policy was being ideologically driven by then Prime Minister and Victorian statesman, Lord Palmerston, who famously remarked that ‘diplomats and protocols are very good things, but there are no better peace-keepers than well appointed three-deckers.’⁸⁸ An 1863 *ILN* editorial anticipating a ‘War with Japan’ along the lines of Britain’s actions in China remarked, ‘If a sarcastic enemy of this country were asked to define what was meant by the advancement of civilization by England, he would probably reply the opening of new markets for trade at the point of bayonet.’⁸⁹ Wirgman’s experiences in China would serve him well in Japan as he continued to report on the movements of the British in an official capacity, especially during the years leading up to the restoration of the Emperor. Yet in January 1868, reflecting on what he had witnessed first-hand over the previous decade, Wirgman himself transformed into that ‘sarcastic enemy’ and narrated a parodical account of the story of ‘the advancement of civilization’ based on the West’s imperial encounters with China and Japan in the *Japan Punch*. The account is a radical departure from the reportage undertaken in his semi-official capacity as a correspondent of British military interests and movements in East Asia. If as a member of the British reporting press, Wirgman was supposed to be a part of the imperial project as a contributing illustrator/narrator, by contrast, Wirgman’s writing in the *Japan Punch* displays a reverse conversion where he turns to critique the very mission he was meant to be championing. In this alternative narrative of the nineteenth century West-East encounter, Wirgman inverts reality so that it would be the East that opens up the West to civilization through gunboat diplomacy:

‘Once upon a time there was a Countrie called England. Which countrie for many yeares had governed itselfe. When lo and beholde from ye Far Easte there did come war junkes of ye Chineses, ye Chiefe of

⁸⁷ Sketches from this period of Wirgman’s life before arriving to Japan can be found in: Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Cultural History, *Wāguman ga mita umi*, 17-60. Biographical information available in: Clark, *Japanese Exchanges in Art*, 11-12.

⁸⁸ Denis Judd, *Palmerston* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 57.

⁸⁹ “War with Japan,” 4 July 1863. In Bennett, *Japan and the Illustrated London News*, 104.

which junkes did say unto ye Englanders...we are peaceful men yet after us come Wongdoodles and roaringe Lions who will utterly destroy ye like they have destroyed ye Turkestanes. We have come to shave you. Therefore give unto us a favoured nation Treattee and ye shall live. Yea ye Englanders did quake and fear [illegible] not being used to Buncome did verily believe ye wordes of ye Chiefe of ye Chineses and did grant unto him hys treatie. for ye Junkes of ye Chineses had many big gunnes which gunnes are used by Eastern Nations as moral persuaders. When ye Chinese chief did perceive ye successe of hys little gainse he did greatly rejoyce within hymselfe and did cause his men to partake of ye taile of ye cocke a drink of ye Chineses. Now ye Barbarians of “ying” and of “fa” hearyng of this and having finished their quarrelle with ye Turkestanes did come over in their Junkes and did fynde ye Englanders prepared with Treaties ye poor devylles having been done in their Eyes. Much imitation rejoycinge tooke place and soon after there did arrive godlike men called me no shita and with them also traders who are cast up by ye waves of ye Oceane and sometime called Scum...Now these Chineses Japaneses Far Es and other nations did all of them comeunto Englande but the me no shita’s being proud and haughty did bully ye poor Englanders and cause them to spend ye monies they had and the moneys they had not and ye Barons of England did fighte ye treaty government of England and did cause it to collapse and another government did take the place of ye former...so mote it be- From ye anciente Chronicles of Englande.’⁹⁰

In Mr Punch’s ‘historical’ account, Edo Japan was reimagined as ‘England,’ a country that was forced to open by ‘Chinese’ warships, a reference to the United States and Commodore Matthew C. Perry’s black ships of 1853-4. He mentions how gunboat diplomacy is a common tactic of ‘moral’ persuasion used by Western countries, in this case referred to as ‘Eastern Nations.’ A fearful ‘England’ was persuaded to make unequal treaties that it extended to other foreign powers. The ‘godlike men’ of diplomats and traders that followed, contributed to the financial decline of the existing ‘Treaty Government of England’ (*Tokugawa Bakufu*) that was simultaneously overthrown by *daimyo* described as ‘Barons of England.’ This retelling of a world upside down plays with the East-West hierarchically ordered divide. The ‘Eastern Nations’ were momentarily elevated to positions of power in relation to a weakened and credulous England in the story. Through the imagery of ‘Eastern Nations,’ Mr Punch illustrates the belligerence of Western imperial expansion and the arrogant behavior of foreign diplomats. He slips in Romanized Chinese characters naming Britain as ‘ying’ (英) and France as ‘fa’ (法)

⁹⁰ Wirgman, *The Japan Punch*, vol. 2, 90-91.

to characterize these countries as ‘barbarians.’ Commenting on the didactic nature of satire, Matthew Hodgart remarks that the satirist avoids objective and realistic depictions of the evils they intend to expose. Effective satire offers a ‘travesty of the situation, which at once directs our attention to actuality and permits an escape from it...a fantastic vision of the world transformed.’⁹¹ Reopening the opening of Japan through parodical inversion creates a distinct quasi-fictional space where Wirgman’s largely expat audience were encouraged to picture themselves in the position of the colonized and reverse the target of scrutiny to question European imperialism.

Most of the treaty port press and Victorian travel literature, however, used their colonial extraterritorial privileges to champion the arrival of civilization to Japan.⁹² For example, *The Japan Weekly Mail (JWM)*, a weekly review of Japanese politics, commerce and culture, was often preoccupied with instructing the new Meiji government on how to advance its national project of ‘civilization and enlightenment.’ The newspaper was aware that the Japanese government was self-conscious of how the country was depicted in the foreign press, and commented on developments in Japan keeping in mind that, ‘it is quite possible these remarks will be translated into Japanese.’⁹³ The newspaper was ultimately confident that it could influence the direction of Japan’s progress and saw this as part its purpose as noted in an editorial from 25 November 1871:

‘The ardour with which the Japanese are throwing themselves into the arms of western civilization not only demands full recognition, but suggests some matters for remark from time to time which we shall be very pleased if we can successfully impress upon them.’⁹⁴

⁹¹ Hodgart, *Satire: Origins and Principles*, 12.

⁹² Munson writes of the foreign press in Yokohama that ‘unfettered by legal barriers, these newspapers espoused the tenets of ‘civilization and enlightenment.’ Munson, *The Periodical Press in Treaty-Port Japan*, 3.

⁹³ Japan Weekly Mail. *The Japan Weekly Mail*, vol. 3, 70.

⁹⁴ Japan Weekly Mail. *The Japan Weekly Mail*, vol. 4, 657.

The *JWM* constructed a West-East, Occidental-Oriental dichotomy that critiqued Eastern knowledge, customs and civilization as backwards in relation to a spatially and temporally modern Europe. While remaining skeptical of Japan's attempts to imitate the external material aspects of Western civilization, the newspaper ran editorials that urged Japan to learn the internal spiritual qualities of European civilization: 'it's the mind that wants dressing; the body will take care of itself in this respect.'⁹⁵ David Wittner describes an 'internalist' view of civilization that shaped the discourse on Japan's enlightenment mission.⁹⁶ This view asserts that in order for Japan to truly master the so-called 'external' trappings of civilization such as the technology, institutions and garb of modernity, it would ultimately have to abandon primitive Eastern superstitions and ingest the West. Beyond the issue of diet reform introduced at the start of this chapter, which the *JWM* naturally saw fit to opine on, the pervasive internalist view of civilization extended to questions of internal spirituality and religious conversion.

Reversing the ban on Christianity, the unequal treaties of 1858 permitted Europeans and Americans to practice their religion inside the treaty ports. Western remonstrations against the persecution of Christian converts in Japan eventually led the new Meiji government to rescind its prohibition policy. On 24 February 1873 there was an official order to remove notice boards that prohibited Christianity, and a month later on 14 March 1873 Christian exiles were released. While the Meiji government saw this move towards religious freedom as a way to convince the Western powers that Japan was deserving of obtaining an equal treaty, European and American missionaries viewed their newfound freedom to evangelize as divine providence.⁹⁷ Winburn Thomas estimates that between 1859-1882, around eighteen British and

⁹⁵ 'The Future Progress of Japan,' 25 June 1870. In Japan Weekly Mail, *The Japan Weekly Mail*, vol. 1, 286-288.

⁹⁶ David G. Wittner, *Technology and the Culture of Progress in Meiji Japan* (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), 126.

⁹⁷ Yoshiya Abe, "From Prohibition to Toleration: Japanese Government Views regarding Christianity, 1854-73," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* vol. 5, no. 2/3 (June- Sept. 1978): 107-138.

American Protestant missionary organizations had already been established in Japan.⁹⁸ These Christian missionaries primarily preached a prosperity gospel that equated Christianity, as the religion of the West, with the successful development of Western civilization. In his study of Meiji Christianity, Irwin Scheiner noted, ‘Christianization assumed the character of Westernization, and Westernization implied the necessity of conversion to Christianity.’⁹⁹ Opining on Christianity’s manifest destiny the *JWM* spoke in teleological terms of the spread of the gospel to Japan as the spiritual driving force of modernization:

‘They are learning our language, studying our literature and institutions, absorbing our ideas, visiting our countries...Is it to be supposed that they can escape from the effects of a religion so completely interwoven with the texture of our daily life, our laws our literature and our art as Christianity is?...what possibility is there that in the transition from a lower to a higher form of intellectual life the Japanese will not embrace in some form or another a higher phase of faith? All nations have done before them. Why should they alone prove exceptions to a law which is a law of nature?’¹⁰⁰

The *Japan Punch* of December 1873, however, satirized this accepted notion of Christianity as the vital source and reflection of progress by aligning its holiday with supposedly primitive Japanese religious customs:

‘Christmas day is a Pagan festival connected with Sun worship as at about this period the Sun which has hitherto been waning as shown by the days getting shorter is born again as it were and from that date the days begin to lengthen that be to say the sun grows. It is then the Birthday of the Sun. Evergreens and Christmas trees are remnants of tree and serpent worship and very pagan. The Japanese decorate their streets and houses with evergreens at the New Year, they are also Pagans.’¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Winburn T Thomas, *Protestant Beginnings in Japan: The First Three Decades, 1859-1889* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1959), 76-79.

⁹⁹ Irwin Scheiner, *Christian Converts and Social Protest in Meiji Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 14.

¹⁰⁰ “The Christian Question.” In Japan Weekly Mail, *The Japan Weekly Mail*, vol. 3, 128-129.

¹⁰¹ Wirgman, *The Japan Punch*, vol. 4, 42.

For Wirgman, Christianity was not a ‘higher phase of faith’ that functioned as a vehicle towards enlightenment or an inevitable outgrowth of civilization. Rather, Christianity was placed in the same temporality as Japanese religion so that they are both as civilized or as ‘pagan’ as each other. In the June 1881 *Japan Punch*, Wirgman further explored and disrupted spiritual asymmetrical power relations. Again, employing his favored technique of parodical inversion, the West became East and East became West. He pictured Japanese missionaries representing numerous denominations opening up the very center of the British Empire in order to proselytize the ‘heathen’ English:

‘A fancy fair was held in Kensington Gardens on aid of the Japanese mission schools and for the propagation of the 8000 different creeds of the Japanese. So many creeds being taught to the unhappy inhabitants of Great Britain must tend to utterly bewilder them and reduce them to a state of hopeless despair in endeavouring to understand that which their teacher themselves cannot possibly understand. Each perverter of the truth insists that he alone is right and all the other heretics...no nothing can be done to stop the invasion except the good sense of the people who will argue that as the people of Japan never act according to their own creed what is the use of sending over a lot of beings to teach them what the Japanese don’t appear to believe in themselves for with the exception of a visit to a temple on holy days to show off their swell clothes...there appears to be no difference in any way whatever between the heathen English and the 8000 creeded Japanese, they fight on holy days...sometimes they whistle on the first day of the week which is considered in Japan a worse crime than getting tight on sake...and are in no respect better than the English.’¹⁰²

Mr Punch turns reality upside down to position the English as passive natives that are confused by the conflicting messages of a foreign religion that Japanese ‘teachers’ are attempting to spread in Britain through an ‘invasion’. While this story ridicules the hypocrisy of Western Christian missionaries and their claim to a higher universal morality that legitimizes the need to evangelize the ‘heathens,’ it also reimagines a world where the British are transformed into the uncivilized. They are made like the Japanese and vice versa, so that there is ‘no difference

¹⁰² Wirgman, *The Japan Punch*, vol. 8, 72.

in any way' between them. Indeed, beyond disrupting the ties between Christianity and modernity, such parodies also function to destabilize allochronic discourses that place a spatial and temporal gulf between Britain and Japan. The West is not plotted onto a linear timeline where it is situated in the present while the East is mapped out into the past as its antithesis. Robert Stam's commentary on the writing of Frantz Fanon is apropos here. 'The colonizer and the colonized are contemporaneous and coeval...he insists in *The Wretched of the Earth* that "we do not want to catch up with anyone."¹⁰³ Or to repurpose this assertion; for Wirgman, Japan does not need to catch up.

Whilst Victorian commentators engaged in a practice of seeing and judging Japan's level of progress from an assumed position of power, Wirgman crafted humorous stories that played with West-East asymmetries and reversed the satirical gaze to ridicule European conceptions of modernity that were being repeated in Japan. The *Japan Punch*'s humorous parodies of civilization served to dislocate a fixed West-East temporal order and imagined an extra-extraterritorial horizontal terrain where Britain and Japan were both as 'civilized' or as 'uncivilized' as each other. Following Bakhtin's observation that laughter has a 'remarkable power' of opening up,¹⁰⁴ Wirgman laughed at the very idea of civilization to render it 'ridiculous' and the 'butt of a joke.'¹⁰⁵ (Re)opening Great Britain through laughter, then, was also about critically reopening the meanings of civilization.

In a parody business prospectus for a gas company to be set up in Yokohama, the January 1867 *Japan Punch* gives a lengthy criticism of the harmful side effects of civilization and queries why the Japanese are only eager to imitate what Mr Punch considers the negative and ridiculous aspects of the West:

¹⁰³ Robert Stam "Fanon, Algeria, and the Cinema: The Politics of Identification," in Jay and Ramaswamy eds., *Empires of Vision*, 504.

¹⁰⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), 23.

¹⁰⁵ Danilyn Rutherford, *Laughing at Leviathan: Sovereignty and Audience in West Papua* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 39.

‘Prospectus of an association to be called the Yokohama Gas Company, for igniting the foreign and native towns and the shipping of Yokohama with brilliant conflagrations. Down in the marsh primeval, beneath the great Fusi-yama far from the busy hum of men and their civilization. A spot unshaken as yet by the thundering throb of the railroad...The old cry ‘civilization’ long since used up (which sensible men know the price of) this she took for her motto, and published a foolish prospectus proving beyond all doubt that if we only would risk it by spending a hundred thousand of hard earned Mexican dollars it would be exceedingly easy to set up a gas manufacture; thereby increasing the danger we daily are under of burning. Also polluting forever the fresh blowing air of the ocean, drinking instead with our lungs gas and mephitic vapours. Vapours health destroying, vapours productive of headache, vapours from which we fled to the valleys of great Fusi-yama feeding on pure sweet air that gives fresh go to our systems. Wearied of city life with its stench and civilization. All is, alas! changed now. The once unsophisticated natives imitate all our faults, but forget to copy our good points; swallow-tail coats, long boots and everything else that absurd is. These they affect and for these they pay exorbitant prices...All that once was unique and original in this country fast to fast disappears. The whizzing of steam and of cogwheels hammers beating machines out of hand and intractable metal now are heard over the marsh at the foot of the great Fusi-yama where once the only crane was the sacred crane of the country. Soon shall the hideous noise of huge and dragon like engines hiss along the Tokaido twist Yedo and Yokohama. Soon shall the prices of silk and also the latest quotations fly in a second’s time from one end of Japan to the other.’¹⁰⁶

Through this story of changes taking place in Japan, Wirgman was able to attach new meanings to the idea of ‘civilization’ beyond its more positive associations that only speak to the supposed superiority of Western technological advancements. Civilization in the *Japan Punch* was far from enlightening; it became a destructive force with deleterious side effects. In another comical vignette from January 1867, Mr Punch again calls for the establishment of a new company. This firm would have a monopoly on trade by importing the most advanced products and services from Europe for the Japanese government – even longer boots and the finest coats directly from Savile Row:

‘Wellington, Napoleon, Nelson, G. Washington, and other great generals being dead could not come. We regret this very much. We have ordered a fleet of 8,000 ironclads and fortified balloons [*sic*] are on their way out. We have also written for 300,000,000,000 stand of arms and 90,000,000 guns of 6,000

¹⁰⁶ Wirgman, *The Japan Punch*, vol. 2, 3-4.

tbs each. We have written to Dents for watches, we have a specimen one at our office. Million of tons of machinery are on the way out with the calico printers clerk in charge. Steam engines, railroads and telegraph wires are already here. In fact we have written for some many things that the Gorogiu have promised us to fill in the sea between this and Korea to make room for storage. We are sorry that they will have to use up Fusi-yama and the Hakone mountains, but in the interest of civilization the beautiful must give way to the useful and besides it would not do to have mountains as they would be in the way of railroads. There was some talk of making Japan a two storied country by building over it but the people underneath protested objecting that without the sun they could not raise their vegetables.’¹⁰⁷

Late nineteenth century Japan’s embrace of Western material culture was considered fundamental to achieving civilization. The warships, machinery and railroads became industrial artifacts that were infused with the ideology of progress each with their own symbolic attachment.¹⁰⁸ Mr Punch satirizes how civilization was represented by human’s ability to gain control over the natural environment. To destroy natural ‘obstacles’ that impeded the march towards civilization was an inevitable part of modern progress. Building up the nation’s arsenal for international war was apparently another prerequisite for progress, but the *Japan Punch* sardonically reframed this discourse so that expansionary wars became associated with being uncivilized. Quoting from John Corry’s satirical work, ‘The English Metropolis or London in 1820,’ the December 1873 *Japan Punch* sarcastically comments on the good progress of ‘civilization’ that Britain has made as evidenced by the fact that musical parties are disgraceful to a ‘warlike people like the English.’¹⁰⁹ In another piece from April 1884 that dealt with British imperialism, Mr Punch sardonically praises the English for their civility and efficiency in being able to make it back home from slaughtering humans in time for tea:

‘The Englishman fights very well. He goes to Afghanistan in the morning kills plenty of Afghans but must be back to early breakfast. He goes to Tel el Kebir kills the regenerators of Egypt but must be back to tiffin. He goes to the Sudan kills thousands of men but must be back to dinner. O yes! John Bull, very

¹⁰⁷ Wirgman, *The Japan Punch*, vol. 2, 7-8.

¹⁰⁸ Wittner, *Technology and the Culture of Progress in Meiji Japan*, 6-7, 126-127.

¹⁰⁹ Wirgman, *The Japan Punch*, vol. 4, 41.

fine fellah, but it's a pity he has to slaughter so many fellah creatures simply to give him an appetite for his meals.'¹¹⁰

It was through these playful musings and distortions of contemporary realities that the *Japan Punch* deconstructed and reconstructed the West vs. East, civilized vs. uncivilized binary. In the *Japan Punch*'s world reimagined, Japan was not catching up to the West. On the contrary, in a reversal of Western modern temporality, Japan's desire to become what Mr Punch called 'full blown red haired hatchet dog faced Western barbarians,' was initiating a process of devolution where Japan would become the 'land of the setting sun.'¹¹¹ The May 1872 *Japan Punch* expressed this sentiment:

'Your servant has heard that man is descended from a tadpole. What could be more in accordance with the laws of retrogression than that man should return to his original state.'¹¹²

The *Japan Punch* did sarcastically express its willingness to 'support' this civilization and enlightenment mission in Japan, but it would come at a price. Satirizing the English language treaty port press that would laud Japan's progress when the nation successfully emulated aspects of Western civilization – ultimately as evidence of the West's own superiority – the *Japan Punch* propositioned to offer its pages to the Japanese government in return for bribe payments. The *Japan Punch* humorously claimed that if the Japanese government offered a bribe, then the magazine would give a positive account of Japan's 1874 punitive 'Formosan expedition.'¹¹³ An 'unbribed account' that criticizes Japan's invasion as a ruthless attempt to destroy the 'Bootans' (Paiwan people of Taiwan) could be rewritten into a 'bribed' version that

¹¹⁰ Wirgman, *The Japan Punch*, vol. 9, 189.

¹¹¹ From the July 1885 edition. Wirgman, *The Japan Punch*, vol. 10, 77.

¹¹² Wirgman, *The Japan Punch*, vol. 3, p. 200.

¹¹³ Referring to the Japanese colonization and invasion of the indigenous territories of Taiwan, which was launched as a punitive expedition in response to the massacre of dozens of people from the Ryūkyū Kingdom. For further discussion see: Robert Eskildsen, *Transforming Empire in Japan and East Asia: The Taiwan Expedition and the Birth of Japanese Imperialism* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

locates Japan as the shining light of civilization in the East, while its regional neighbors are still mired in primitive darkness:

‘The chivalrous and warlike Japanese (\$100) have with noble disinterestedness sent forth a powerful fleet and multitudinous army to avenge the massacre of and subsequent eating of some remote dependents of this powerful Empire (\$300)...We wish this noble and highly gifted race every success not only in this, but in all, its undertakings and may its heroes return covered with glory and loaded with Bootans (\$500). For the Chinese we have ever expressed the utmost contempt (\$100). A nation that believes in Fung-Shuy must be thousands of centuries behind one that believes in nothing. Japan is the Guiding Star of the East – the Sun which dazzles all nations – to her all eyes are upturned – from her proceeds light! Her wonderful progress her rapid strides in civilisation have never been equalled in the world’s history.’¹¹⁴

He identified demonstrations of Japan’s ‘warlike’ nature making its way to the Asian continent as a key marker of the achievement of progress. As with his other veiled criticisms of the warlike behavior of Western nations, and especially his native Britain, Mr Punch’s intention was not to uphold warlikeness as a quality of a civilized nation. Rather, by satirizing the notion of associating imperial expansion with civilization, he attempted to destabilize this apparently natural connection and thus redefined the civilized as uncivilized. Mr Punch’s sardonic praise of Japan’s unparalleled advancements towards becoming a ‘civilized’ nation was reminiscent of his contributions to the *ILN* that similarly commended a rising modern Japan. But in the satirical world of Mr Punch, Japan was catching down with the West.

In a study of early editions of the *Punch* of London, Jane Goodall notes that the magazine practiced a form of ‘reverse ethnology’ that highlighted Britain’s follies. By laughing at British customs and using bizarre stories of Brits going overseas to spread civilisation to savages through training in ‘politeness’ or ‘intellectual advancement,’ the magazine blurred the boundaries between ‘civilisation’ and ‘barbarism.’ Goodall notes that in its third issue the

¹¹⁴ Wirgman, *The Japan Punch*, vol. 4, p. 125.

Punch made an inquiry into the very meanings of civilisation. ‘Two questions present themselves – the one, what is civilisation? – the other, have we such a superabundance of that commodity among us, that we should think about exporting it?’¹¹⁵ Similarly, in an examination on the representation of Japan in the London *Punch* magazine between 1852-1893, Amy Matthewson argues Japan was variously cast as a ‘satirical other’ to become a ‘distorted mirror image to British notions of polite society and respectability.’¹¹⁶ In a book on Victorian writing on Japan, Toshio Yokoyama uses the same analogy to articulate how the ‘Other’ of Japan was sometimes manipulated by writers to discuss the ‘Self.’ In the words of Yokoyama, Japan became a ‘distorting mirror in which either a better or worse self-image would appear in an exaggerated form.’¹¹⁷ Although, as Matthewson points out, the London *Punch* occasionally used the trope of Japan as an ‘Oriental Observer’ as a tool to put English life on display and raise questions about Britain’s claim to civilization, the magazine ultimately supported Britain’s imperialist agenda and reinscribed the Japanese as the racially different and laughable primitive ‘Other.’¹¹⁸ Indeed, to have a vibrant public sphere driven by a satirical press was considered part and parcel of Victorian Britain’s claim to civilization. To be sure, the use of the Orient, or in the words of Edward Said, as an ‘underground self’ and ‘contrasting image, idea, personality, experience,’ was as much a part of Orientalism as representing the ‘Other.’ Orientalist discourse, after all, ‘has less to do with the Orient than it does with “our” world.’¹¹⁹

While Wirgman may certainly have been influenced by and repurposed the satirical techniques employed within the *Punch*, Wirgman’s own expression of ‘reversing’ to laugh at Britain and notions of civilization are markedly distinct as the *Japan Punch* did not simply

¹¹⁵ *Punch*, vol. I, (Jan. – Dec. 1841), 27. Quoted in Jane Goodall, “Reverse Ethnology in *Punch*,” *Popular Entertainment Studies* vol. 2, issue 1, (2011): 13-14.

¹¹⁶ Amy Matthewson, “Satirising imperial anxiety in Victorian Britain: Representing Japan in *Punch* Magazine, 1852-1893,” *Contemporary Japan* 33:2 (2021): 205.

¹¹⁷ Yokoyama, *Japan in the Victorian Mind*, 65, 174-175.

¹¹⁸ Matthewson, “Satirising imperial anxiety in Victorian Britain.”

¹¹⁹ Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 2-3, 12.

reaffirm the superiority of the West in contrast to a backwards and racially inferior East, but rather fundamentally challenged these hierarchies. Furthermore, Wirgman did not just conjure up a fictitious ‘Oriental Observer,’ or deploy Japan as a useful ‘Other’ with the aim of sharpening British sensibilities; all the while keeping a distance from the ‘Other.’ Rather, Wirgman moved out of his assigned place to join in with the ‘Other’ to laugh together, even becoming ‘Other’ himself. It was from this ‘out of place’ transnational relationality that new visions of belonging could be imagined and laughed into existence.

Undoing by Laughter

Despite living in the socially segregated and hierarchical ‘contact zone’ of the Yokohama treaty port, Wirgman was one of the few foreign residents during the late Edo early Meiji periods to form close friendships and professional associations with the local Japanese and other non-Euro-Americans. Not only did he fulfil the perhaps commonly expected role of a ‘foreign expert’ and teach Western art to several Japanese students, more curiously, as we will see in the following section, Wirgman was very much open to exchange.¹²⁰ Indeed, it would be his proficiency in Japanese, artistic skills and satirical humor that would form the basis and tone of his informal exchanges. Through these experiences and personal connections Wirgman was able to develop an alternative perception of the Japanese and Chinese people he had encountered during his time in the ‘Orient’ that challenged a West-East racial hierarchy. Wirgman expressed this ‘half-cracked’ vision of racial equality in the August 1865 edition of the *Japan Punch* where he humorously diverged from nineteenth century social Darwinist notions of race that privileged Western civilisation as a reflection of and evidence for a superior European intellect. Satirizing the nineteenth century pseudo-scientific and highly racialized

¹²⁰ See Shigetomi, *Wāguman to sono shūhen*, 190-217.

practice of phrenology, which measures the physical attributes of human skulls to determine the intellectual or spiritual capacity of different people groups, the *Japan Punch* conducted its own ‘scientific’ observation that compared East to West (Figure 5):

‘The European places the seat of intellect in the brain. The Chinese in the stomach. Here are two fish, one with a head verging on perfection the other with abdomen leaving nothing to be desired. Which fish possess most mind?’¹²¹

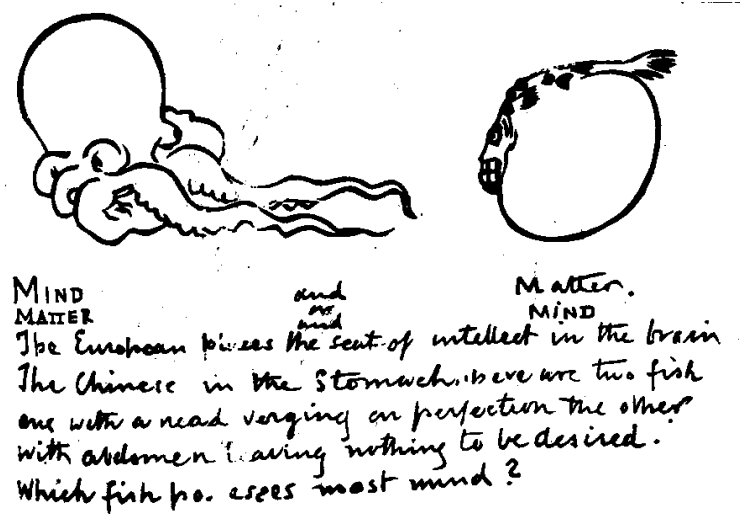


Figure 5: Which fish possesses most mind? *Japan Punch*, August 1865.

Combined with a textual explanation and probing question, the equally ridiculous caricatures of a ‘European’ octopus and ‘Chinese’ blowfish are bestowed with an even quantity of mind. That Wirgman intentionally chose to use these specific sea creatures, which were commonly utilized by Japanese writers and artists as part of a *mitate-e* technique which used puns and playful symbols as codes to both conceal and reveal the subject, suggests his working familiarity with and exposure to late Edo satirical culture.¹²² Notably, the *Japan Punch* contrasted with other contemporaneous English language satirical publications in East Asia

¹²¹ Wirgman, *The Japan Punch*, vol. 1, 73.

¹²² Shimizu, *Manga no rekishi*, 57-58.

such as the *China Punch* (1867-1868, 1872-1876) in Hong Kong and the *Shanghai Puck* (1871-1872) that treated the British and Chinese as different species and mocked the inferior native culture.¹²³ Further, as noted above, emphasizing ‘racial difference’ between the West and the East was a key feature of the *London Punch*. Whereas other ‘imperial’ punches within and outside of East Asia tended to stress colonial asymmetries, the *Japan Punch* reimagined an East-West relationship of symmetry.¹²⁴

Just over a year later in the January 1867 issue of the *Japan Punch*, Wirgman comically applied a mathematical rule of triangles to disrupt the imagined position of superiority that Western fashion held in relation to traditional Japanese clothing (Figure 6).¹²⁵ In his essay on nineteenth century Japanese woodblock prints from the ‘Yokohama Boomtown,’ John Dower notes that while the Japanese artists fantastically depicted ‘Western beauties’ and elegantly dressed Caucasian women with corsets and full-skirted crinoline gowns, in Western eyes, the natives were ‘archaically costumed.’¹²⁶ Mr Punch, however, asserts the proportionality of the respective cultural attire and closes with the Latin phrase, ‘quod erat demonstrandum’ (that which was to be demonstrated), to indicate that his ‘mathematical’ proof is complete. Mr Punch goes further by posing the rhetorical question, ‘which is absurd?’ If from the perspective of modern civilisation it was the kimono that should give way to Western fashion, then this satirical equation argues that both cultures are as sophisticated or absurd as each other.

¹²³ For example, see: Christopher G Rea, “He’ll Roast All Subjects That May Need the Roasting”: Puck and Mr Punch in Nineteenth-Century China,” in Harder and Mittler eds., *Asian Punches*; and Wendy Siuyi Wong, “Manhua: The Evolution of Hong Kong Cartoons and Comics,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 35, no. 4 (2002): 29.

¹²⁴ I-Wei Wu, “Participating in Global Affairs: The Chinese Cartoon Monthly *Shanghai Puck*,” in Harder and Mittler eds., *Asian Punches*, 379.

¹²⁵ Wirgman, *The Japan Punch*, vol. 2, 11.

¹²⁶ John W Dower, “Yokohama Boomtown.”



Figure 6: Which is Absurd? *Japan Punch*, January 1867.

These rhetorical statements and use of visual parallels that challenged European racial and cultural supremacy were a recurring theme in the *Japan Punch*. In a later September 1885 edition, he contrasted European and Japanese dance and again asked the reader to consider which of the two are more ‘dignified, eh?’¹²⁷ The humorous visual comparison points to equivalency rather than a Eurocentric statement of Japanese cultural inferiority (Figure 7).



Figure 7: European and Japanese Ballet. *Japan Punch*, September 1885.

¹²⁷ Wirgman, *The Japan Punch*, vol. 10, 107.

This type of content for the *Japan Punch* was very different from what he was originally assigned to do by a British media publication, which was what allowed him to be in Japan in the first place. The fact that he began to produce such satirical content that incorporated local thematic interests and precedents in terms of symbols to laugh at hierarchies of civilization was perhaps not so much groundbreaking in its newness, but rather reconfirms the presence of an existing culture of the laughing counterpublic and his unlikely immersion in it. What is striking is how he was able to manage these contradictory roles as well as his turning away from providing articles and illustrations for a Victorian public at home to focus on cultivating a local audience with countercultural content. This suggests that from his personal interactions in Japan he knew that such a cultural space of a laughing counterpublic existed and that he could become a part of further extending it. Indeed, although it was primarily an English language publication, the *Japan Punch* wasn't exclusively read by expats; it found an audience among local Japanese who eagerly translated it and sought to unlock its meanings. For example, the 6th edition of the *Nihon Shinbun* from 1865.10.13, noted that 'when publishing this newspaper, we heard that the "Japan Punch" has very interesting articles and so we intend to share those from time to time.' The following year in the 26th edition from 1866.3.2, the same newspaper included a more detailed commentary of the *Japan Punch* and a full Japanese translation/explanation of one its satirical pieces. The commentary concludes that 'we should not make light of pictures like these.'¹²⁸ Likewise, the 2nd edition of the *Eko Shinbun* from 1868.5.28, introduced the *Japan Punch* and gave an explanation of one its satirical illustrations in Japanese. Interestingly, the writer for the *Eko Shinbun* downplayed the 'Britishness' of the humorous form and didn't see it as a new insertion into the existing landscape, but rather placed the *Japan Punch* within a narrative of continuity from the Edo urban culture of play. 'Among

¹²⁸ Source can be found in Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Cultural History, *Wāguman ga mita umi*, 169.

Western newspapers there is one known as “Punch” that is in the style of *tobae*, which humorously presents sets of pictures, and in them are hidden meanings, just like the *hanjimonō* of Japan.’¹²⁹ The *Yokohama Mainichi Shinbun* of 11 September 1875 offered up a similar view. ‘Wirgman is a well-known oil painter both in and out of Japan...his works are humorous and witty, and his Japanese is fluent. His main job is from time-to-time publishing... Punch which is like our (Japanese) *tobae* or in the brush style of Nichōsei.’¹³⁰ As will be explored further in the next chapter it was this perceived similarity and transnational resonance of satirical cultures that gave birth to the neologism of *ponchi-e* or ‘punch pictures’ in late nineteenth century Japan.

Wirgman would have been well aware of his growing fame. As recorded in a diary of granular detail by Sir Ernest Satow, while travelling on the road, Wirgman was so well known that he was regularly approached by Japanese locals eager to acquire a sketch to take home or to sell.¹³¹ He was also frequently invited to attend and participate in artistic social gatherings known as *shogakai*. The *shogakai* (書画会) or ‘calligraphy and painting gatherings,’ which were popularized during the Edo period, took the form of salons and banquets where a host would rent out a venue, choose a date and an entrance fee, and invite popular artists or other creative types to perform or display their works to the public. These were oftentimes held at homes, temples or famous *ryōtei* restaurants around the bustling Sumida River and Kanda River areas and in particular entertainment districts such as Ryōgoku.¹³² The *shogakai* became firmly rooted in the Edo culture of playfulness that stimulated the formation of associational networks and belonging that were outside of the Tokugawa era’s fixed categories of identification.¹³³ There were *shogakai* where the participating artists would simply display

¹²⁹ Source can be found in Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Cultural History, *Wāguman ga mita umi*, 170.

¹³⁰ Source can be found in Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Cultural History, *Wāguman ga mita umi*, 172.

¹³¹ Satow, *A Diplomat in Japan*, 212-216.

¹³² See Andrew Markus, “Shogakai: Celebrity Banquets of The Late Edo Period,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* vol. 53, no. 1 (June 1993): 135-167; Kawanabe Kyōsai Memorial Museum, *Youte sōrō: kawanabe kyōsai to bakumatsu meiji no shogakai* (Kyoto: Shibunkaku Shuppan, 2008).

¹³³ Eiko Ikegami, *Bonds of Civility: Aesthetic Networks and the Political Origins of Japanese Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 192-193.

their work in the form of an art exhibition known as a *shogatenrankai* (書画展観会), while there were also events where the artists would perform or improvise on the spot (*sokuza*, 即座) in front of the attendees, known as *sekisho* (席書) or *sekiga* (席画). The attendees would often pay the artists a small fee or buy them a food/drink coupon available at the venue in exchange for a requested illustration or script that the artist would draw on a fan or pieces of paper or cloth.¹³⁴ These would be rather lively affairs with plenty of sake flowing throughout the proceedings. In one of Kanagaki Robun's comical fictional vignettes from *Aguranabe*, he introduces the story of a 'half-baked literary person' who is sat at the beef pot discussing his experiences at the *shogakai*. The story notes 'the pungent aroma of sake' that surrounds the protagonist and ponders whether this 'represents the aftermath of a gathering at the Nakamura or Manpachirō' restaurants. Using language that appears more like a humble brag, the protagonist himself complains of all the 'celebrity' attention he received at a *shogakai*. 'Oh, please, sensei...and when you are finished with that, might I trouble you...? – fans to the left of me, fans to the right – a veritable barrage poised for the attack.' He eventually retired to the beef shop away from what he describes as 'that madhouse of a Nakamura' *shogakai*.¹³⁵ The Nakamura in Ryōgoku, which Robun uses as the archetypical *shogakai* setting is exactly the same 'madhouse' that the 'half-cracked' Wirgman – a rather fitting appellation within this context – would join as a participant. The *Yomiuri Shinbun* of 11 September 1876, for example, reported that a member of their team attended the *shogakai* held at the Nakamura the previous day commenting that the British artist 'Wakuman' had submitted 3 pieces and that the painting of a catfish in a barrel by Takahashi Yuichi (another of Wirgman's students), among others, were particularly noteworthy.¹³⁶ *Shogakai* at the Nakamura were also

¹³⁴ Robert Campbell, "Tenpōki zengo no shogakai," *Kinsei Bungei* 47 (1987): 47-72.

¹³⁵ Translation taken from Markus, "Shogakai," 152-153.

¹³⁶ Source can be found in Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Cultural History, *Wāguman ga mita umi*, 172.

frequented by the satirical artist Kawanabe Kyōsai as recorded in his diaries.¹³⁷ Wirgman too wrote about one of his visits to a *shogakai* for the *ILN* in 27 January 1866:

‘I being a foreign artist at Yokohama, am always invited, but I know no rest from the moment of my appearance till it is too dark to see; I am surrounded by people who want something painted on their fans or on paper, and I generally oblige them by making caricatures of any odd-looking person in the room, or of drunken sailors, or, best of all, of English women in gigantic and impossible crinolines of gorgeous glowing colours, much to the delight of all parties.’¹³⁸

Wirgman’s experiences at the *shogakai* likely closely resembled that of Robun’s protagonist from *Aguranabe* who was constantly receiving requests to perform their craft. Although we don’t have surviving examples of the caricatures Wirgman produced at the *shogakai* for the entertainment of the attendees, we can look to the *Japan Punch* for examples of how he represented ‘drunken sailors’ and English women adorned in ‘impossible crinolines.’ In particular, Wirgman would juxtapose the intrusion of Western peoples and practices with ideas of civilization and enlightenment entering in Japan. The *Japan Punch* frequently lampooned the floating population of drunken foreign sailors and their uncivilized behavior in the Yokohama treaty port. For example, in the September 1865 *Japan Punch* he caricatured European sailors dangerously riding on horseback, knocking over Japanese locals and literally trampling on ‘old Nipon’ to make way for Western civilization.¹³⁹ Likewise, later that year in the December 1865 edition Wirgman once again humorously exposed the realities of how he perceived the West was actually opening Japan to ‘enlightenment’:

‘Facing the town is the bay covered with the moral persuade of western civilisation and the harbingers of western commerce in the shape of numerous empty bottles floating about.’¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ See Kawanabe Kyosai Memorial Museum, *Youte sōrō*, 134; Clark, *Japanese Exchanges in Art*, 19-20.

¹³⁸ “A Social Meeting of Japanese Artists,” 27 January 1866. Bennett, *Japan and the Illustrated London News*, 165.

¹³⁹ Wirgman, *The Japan Punch*, vol. 1, 92.

¹⁴⁰ Wirgman, *The Japan Punch*, vol. 1, 139.

At another *shogakai* event, as advertised by the *Kanayomi Shinbun* of 11 August 1876, this time held in the grounds of the Fudō temple in Yanokurachō, Nihonbashi, the newspaper notice expressed that it would be especially interesting to view ‘Uakuman’s’ sketches of foreign gunboats at war during the nighttime being set alight.¹⁴¹ Perhaps here too Wirgman did not shy away from sharing the *Japan Punch*’s satirical gaze in his treatment of Western gunboat diplomacy and bring this critical engagement over to the *shogakai* spaces. What we do know is that Wirgman chose to join in with the *shogakai* crowd to laugh at Western civilization. By contrast, Victorian British representations of Japan during this period tended to emphasize the ‘greatness’ of Britain and the insurmountable gap between themselves and a backwards Japan. Britain was a fountain out of which flowed civilization through Western technologies and even the very bodies of Europeans would be able to channel this energy. Great Britain, and by extension Britons, were the very model of civilization. Writing on the position of a British governor and diplomat, the journalist Henry Reeve opined in the *Edinburgh Review*:

‘The governor goes out to a young and half-civilized country, invested with a dignity of an ancient sovereignty and a great power...He takes with him the education of our universities, the polish of our manners, the experience of our public offices of government, the eloquence of our political assemblies...and conspicuously supplies precisely that in which a young people, struggling with the powers of nature, intent on material gain, and separated by oceans from the civilization of Europe, is necessarily most deficient.’¹⁴²

Accordingly, the treaty port foreign press frowned upon writing and images that mocked the British. In the *Japan Herald*, an English publication contemporary to the *Japan Punch*, Albert W. Hansard wrote that Wirgman’s caricatures were not only ‘silly’ but even

¹⁴¹ Source can be found in Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Cultural History, *Wāguman ga mita umi*, 172.

¹⁴² “Letters and Journals of Lord Elgin,” *Edinburgh. Rev.*, vol. cxxxvii (1873), 39. Quoted in Yokoyama, *Japan in the Victorian Mind*, 144-145.

‘dangerous’ as they belittled Yokohama’s foreign community. He was especially concerned that ‘these things may reach those quarters where impressions derogatory of the respectability of the community have been dwelt upon,’ and that such negative representations could potentially be used as proofs against the respectability of members of the Yokohama foreign community. ‘These things are not done by one of us...but by a stranger – a sojourner amongst us.’¹⁴³ The fact that Wirgman brought these very same satirical representations of the Western expat community from the pages of the *Japan Punch* into the quarters of the *shogakai* would have been seen as an abomination for transgressing the unwritten codes and borders of the contact zone, deserving of, in the words of Hansard ‘punishment of no gentle character.’¹⁴⁴

To be sure, for Japanese participants of the *shogakai* to engage in anything that even took the appearance of satirizing the Euro-American foreign community would be met with swift punishment. For example, on 1870.10.6 during a now infamous *shogakai* held at a restaurant within the grounds of the Shinobazu Benzaiten Temple in Ueno, the artist Kawanabe Kyōsai was arrested for the crime of ‘mocking a distinguished person’ in a satirical caricature he drew while apparently paralytically drunk.¹⁴⁵ The story goes that the *shogakai* was organized by one of Kyōsai’s drinking buddies, Kikakudō Ujaku, and the two had been knocking back cups of sake from the early in the morning so by the time the other participants arrived Kyōsai could hardly sit down properly. Yet, when Kyōsai grabbed his brush and started performing with great vigor to match his drunken state the crowd became even more excitable. During the event he heard an anecdote of an encounter that had happened recently in Ōji between a foreigner and a Japanese person where the foreigner was said to have been impolite and even rude. Hearing the story and characteristically improvising on the spot, Kyōsai declared to the crowd that he would make them laugh and proceeded to paint caricatures of

¹⁴³ Quoted in Munson, *The Periodical Press in Treaty-Port Japan*, 94-95.

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in Munson, *The Periodical Press in Treaty-Port Japan*, 95.

¹⁴⁵ Koto Sadamura, “Kawanabe Kyōsai’s Arrest and Its Relation to Shunga: The Impact of the Incident on the Historical Evaluation of the Artist,” *Bunkashigen* vol. 13 (2015): 163.

two people putting on the shoes of a person from the ‘island of long-legged people’ and a person from the ‘island of long-armed people’ who was plucking out the nostril hairs of the Buddha.¹⁴⁶ Seeing these images that were familiar satirical representations of foreigners, the crowd would have erupted in laughter, but a government official who was present at the scene took umbrage at the nature of the caricatures and arrested Kyōsai who was then detained in a temporary crowded prison. During his subsequent interrogation, which happened some days or weeks after according to different sources, Kyōsai confessed that he was rather drunk and the story of the encounter with the foreigner that he heard at the party angered him because whether a distinguished person or not, they shouldn’t get too big for their boots.¹⁴⁷ While the accounts vary (such as the veracity as to whether or not he suffered a punishment of 50 lashes) and have perhaps been embellished by Kyōsai himself or other hearsay, ultimately these drawings and the mocking laughter they elicited were perceived to be dangerous by the authorities.¹⁴⁸

In the book *Publics and Counterpublics*, Michael Warner introduces the peculiar story of a ‘Club of She-Romps’ that was shared in the *Spectator* no. 217 in a somewhat disparaging way as the She-Romps were representative of a scene on the margins of the *Spectator*’s own assumed role as the normative voice of the general public. The all-female members of the She-Romps gathered weekly at night in a hired venue to, ‘throw off all that Modesty and Reservedness with which our Sex are obliged to disguise themselves in publick Places.’ Within these rented spaces, which are importantly according to Warner ‘significantly public, though also secluded from open view,’ they can engage in a carnivalesque play of unrigging the

¹⁴⁶ Account taken from Sadamura, “Kawanabe Kyōsai’s Arrest.” The original account and accompanying sketches of the scenes can be found in Kawanabe Kyōsai’s autobiographical illustrated diary *Kyōsai Gadan* (暁齋画談, 1887), accessible via: “Kyōsai Gadan,” Waseda University Library, accessed October 29, 2022. An additional account can be found in *Kawanabe Kyōsai Oden* (河鍋暁齋翁伝, circa 1897-1899) written by Kyōsai’s biographer Iijima Kyoshin.

¹⁴⁷ Sadamura, “Kawanabe Kyōsai’s Arrest and Its Relation to Shunga,” 163-165.

¹⁴⁸ Brenda G. Jordon, “Potentially Disruptive: Censorship and the Painter Kawanabe Kyōsai,” in *Inexorable Modernity: Japan’s Grappling with Modernity in the Arts*, ed. Hiroshi Nara (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007), 27-31.

garments associated with womanhood such as aprons and petticoats, become unrestrained and rude in an ‘unpublic’ manner, and once a month they would ‘Demolish a Prude’ where they would ‘get some queer formal Creature in among us, and unrig her in an instant.’ The *Spectator* article goes on to mention that the She-Romps ‘died with laughing’ when observing the previous month’s Prude. The equally carnivalesque *shogakai* bear a likeness to the She-Romps in that the participants gather together in a ‘quasi-public physicality’ and their stranger sociability rests on alternative norms that are at friction with the norms that constitute the dominant public. It is, as Warner puts it, ‘intimacy out of place.’¹⁴⁹ While the Club of She-Romps assemble and demolish dominant gender norms and find a new relationality based on a counterimage of the public, the mid-late nineteenth century *shogakai* could be transformed into extra-extraterritorial zones where through an intimacy based on satirical artistic performances and laughter, its participants could also ‘demolish the Prude’ of civilization and enlightenment.

Yet, as we have seen already in the responses to Wirgman and Kyōsai’s caricatures, to laugh at civilization triggers ‘officialdom’s fears of appearing as ridiculous,’ in the words of Danilyn Rutherford. In the book, *Laughing at Leviathan*, Rutherford posits that while colonialism is often criticized as exploitative, it is rarely called ‘ridiculous’ or made the ‘butt of a joke.’¹⁵⁰ It is George Orwell’s critique of the British Empire in his short story *Shooting an Elephant* (1936) that Rutherford turns to for inspiration on the unexpected ties between laughter and imperialism.¹⁵¹ Orwell’s story describes a British police officer in Burma who is called upon by the locals to take out his rifle and execute a domesticated elephant that had apparently turned violent. Although the officer did not want to kill the elephant, surrounded by a sea of locals and fearful of their judgement or ‘looking like a fool,’ he regrettably proceeded to shoot the elephant. Orwell claims that this incident reveals the ‘real nature of imperialism,

¹⁴⁹ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 109-110.

¹⁵⁰ Rutherford, *Laughing at Leviathan*, 39-41.

¹⁵¹ Rutherford, *Laughing at Leviathan*, 6-10.

the real motives for which despotic governments act.’¹⁵² It was the fear of the sublime being ridiculed and brought down to earth. After all, as Alexander Herzen writes:

‘Only equals may laugh. If inferiors are permitted to laugh in front of their superiors, and if they cannot suppress their hilarity, this would mean farewell to respect. To make men smile at the god Apis is to deprive him of his sacred rank and to transform him into a common bull.’¹⁵³

To not ‘impress the natives’ or to act contrary to what they expect of him would be to risk mockery. ‘The crowd would laugh at me. And my whole life, every white man’s life in the East, is one long struggle not to be laughed at,’ the narrator concludes.¹⁵⁴ Expressing a similar sentiment, Bakhtin comments, ‘that which is important and essential cannot be comical. Neither can history and the persons representing it – kings, generals, heroes – be shown in a comic aspect.’¹⁵⁵ Quoting from John Furnivall’s study *The Fashioning of Leviathan* (1939), which explores the beginnings of British colonialism in Burma, Rutherford highlights how Furnivall perceived the ‘Leviathan’ of the colonial state and European imperialism as ‘ridiculous.’ ‘A god must feel secure in his divinity to let himself be laughed at, and Leviathan is not sufficiently at home in heaven to allow it.’¹⁵⁶ If the ‘Leviathan’ imperialist enterprise sets up and reifies hierarchical spatiotemporal boundaries and constantly maps out orderly taxonomies of nations, cultures, race and civilization, then it was through a nonimperial satirical vision in the *Japan Punch* and through private transnational encounters at spaces such as the *shogakai* that Wirgman could laugh at ‘Leviathan’ to destabilize and reorder these fixed structures – an ‘undoing by laughter.’¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² George Orwell, “Shooting an Elephant,” *Orwell Foundation*, accessed October 27, 2022,

¹⁵³ Quoted in Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 92.

¹⁵⁴ Orwell, “Shooting an Elephant.”

¹⁵⁵ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 66-67.

¹⁵⁶ Rutherford, *Laughing at Leviathan*, 39.

¹⁵⁷ Jay and Ramaswamy eds., *Empires of Vision*, 36.

This was not simply a discursive undoing, but also found expression in an embodied practice of joining in to laugh together and generate knowledge across the ‘color line’ and East-West binary with Japanese satirical artists, writers and other participants at the *shogakai*. To use the words from Gandhi’s study on Victorians in the metropole who refused the imperatives of empire, Wirgman too departed from the ‘self-confirming orderliness of imperial habitation’ and found solidarity with the outsiders, the other; an ‘exile to the chaos of a world without taxonomy, variously in the company of...misfits...the wretched, as it were, of the earth.’¹⁵⁸ The familiar asymmetries and norms of international encounters in the extraterritorial contact zones of the treaty ports, negotiated and renegotiated to further state interests, did not comfortably operate in the de-territorialized oftentimes transnational zones of the *shogakai* parties. These were extra-extraterritorial spaces,¹⁵⁹ if you will, where affective bonds forged through subversive laughter generated a strange ‘intimacy out of place.’¹⁶⁰

In an article from 19 April 1877, the *Kanayomi*, (formerly known as the *Kanayomi Shinbun*) a newspaper founded and edited by Kanagaki Robun, advertised an upcoming *shogakai* event commenting that Wirgman would be in attendance, and that more generally the *shogakai* were popular among Japanese, Chinese and Westerners alike.¹⁶¹ Wirgman too wrote that these would be diverse spaces of transcultural encounters, noting that there would be several Chinese invited for their superior handwriting, *yakumins* (a misrendering of *yakunin* referring to government officials) having a go with their brushes, and all who are proficient in

¹⁵⁸ Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 7.

¹⁵⁹ Bakhtin writes of the carnivalesque marketplace that it ‘was the center of all that was unofficial; it enjoyed a certain extraterritoriality in a world of official order and official ideology, it always remained “with the people”.’ Quote taken from: Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 154. I use this idea of extraterritoriality and contrast it with the state-prescribed extraterritoriality of treaty ports, which would be the contact zone defined by international relations based on colonial asymmetries. I am attempting to describe an extra-extraterritorial non-state transnational space of contact, which destabilizes the official order and creates a cultural space for new relationalities.

¹⁶⁰ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 111.

¹⁶¹ Source can be found in Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Cultural History, *Wāguman ga mita umi*, 172.

art regardless of status or position would be invited such as women, seniors and children.¹⁶² He continues that there was plenty of feeding and drinking, and as we know already from Kyōsai's exploits, the *shogakai* would often be noisy, crowded and intoxicating events with participants high off the bottomless sake.¹⁶³ Wirgman comments that within the rented venues, the intellectual and artistic exchanges would happen on the floor, sat or knelt on 'red European blankets,' which participants would bring with them.¹⁶⁴ Physically assembling in these extra-extraterritorial rooms would be leveling; a horizontal terrain where racial and colonial hierarchies would be blurred, transgressed and reimagined. Transnational *shogakai* events lavish in food, alcohol, entertaining performances and uncontrollable laughter, were Bakhtinian carnivalesque feasts, a 'temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order...the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions...the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal.'¹⁶⁵

Just as they satirized official discourses of civilization or the governments and people associated with promoting and representing these ideas, they would equally make fun of other participants at the *shogakai*, 'any odd-looking person in the room' wrote Wirgman, and even turn the satirical gaze inwards to laugh at themselves.¹⁶⁶ The *Yokohama Mainichi Shinbun* of 11 September 1875 observed that Wirgman's *Japan Punch* would ridicule all, whether 'self or others' (我彼自他).¹⁶⁷ Kyōsai, for example, too felt comfortable to caricature Wirgman's Mr Punch character in the triptych, 'Famous Mirror: Spirit of Japan' (*Meikyō yamato damashii*, 名

¹⁶² "A Social Meeting of Japanese Artists," 27 January 1866. Bennett, *Japan and the Illustrated London News*, 165.

¹⁶³ Satow said of a visit to Nakamura on 29 March 1872 that it was a noisy event with around 600 people many of whom were made excitable by sake. Sir Ernest Satow, *A Diplomat in Japan Part II: The Diaries of Ernest Satow, 1870-1883* (North Carolina: Lulu Press Inc., 2009), 56.

¹⁶⁴ "A Social Meeting of Japanese Artists," 27 January 1866. Bennett, *Japan and the Illustrated London News*, 165.

¹⁶⁵ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 10.

¹⁶⁶ "A Social Meeting of Japanese Artists," 27 January 1866. Bennett, *Japan and the Illustrated London News*, 165.

¹⁶⁷ Source can be found in Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Cultural History, *Wāguman ga mita umi*, 172.

鏡倭魂, 1874). The print depicts a mirror crafted by two famous swordsmiths, which possesses the mysterious power of being able to reflect the state of early Meiji Japan. Shining out of this mirror of modernity are demons, *yōkai* monsters, an anthropomorphized rooster dressed in Western attire, a large-nosed drunkard on horseback who is perhaps one of those drunken sailors, and among them dressed in a kimono with a brush at his side is Mr Punch. Everyone, including the satirists themselves are made to inhabit this world of laughter and are subjected to ridicule. Laughter is the leveler, and much like the performative act of ‘romping’ of the Club of She-Romps, to laugh is their oppositional ideology and world transforming project. In other words, this was not just a laughing at civilization. Rather, to laugh was the very basis of reimagining civilization and participants could practice an alternative form of belonging and relationality beyond the East-West binary through transnational laughter. What Werner Sollors would describe as developing a ‘sense of we-ness in laughing with others,’ because ‘laughter itself is an ethnicizing phenomenon.’¹⁶⁸ Laughter is what makes them part of the same tribe and ‘neither place of birth nor geographical location constitute the sole condition for membership in a community of laughter.’¹⁶⁹ They didn’t see the ‘color line,’ part and parcel of imperial race science that came to characterize Japan’s opening to the West, as something that was at all settled. It was within these de-territorializing extra extra-territorial spaces of laughter that they could resist the spatial and temporal borders of the contact zone, and renegotiate or ‘reopen’ the assumptions of East-West transnational encounters.

This chapter disclosed how the once artist-correspondent, Charles Wirgman, turned away from his original assignment of producing content for a Victorian British public, which cast an imperial gaze on Japan and its people. He ‘reverse converted’ to produce content that better reflected the lifeworld of the local artistic spaces and transnational encounters of satirical

¹⁶⁸ Quoted in Reichl and Mark Stein eds., *Cheeky Fictions*, 31.

¹⁶⁹ Reichl and Mark Stein eds., *Cheeky Fictions*, 14.

cultures, which subverted Western civilization discourses. Vice versa, the non-imperial and anti-hierarchical satirical print culture could be performed and practiced in these local gatherings where participants would laugh together. The print and embodied spaces were constantly reinforcing and giving life to each other in a symbiotic relationship. What I have described as the emergence of an extra extra-territorial cultural space, impacted the character of the laughing counterpublic through a transnational reimagination, which regarded laughter as an alternative footing for relating with and opening to the world. The next chapter will explore how based on these transnational encounters of satirical cultures, Kanagaki Robun and Kawanabe Kyōsai attempted to produce their own form of punch publication, which represented and articulated their vision for the development and purpose of the laughing counterpublic.

3. The Great Exhibition of Curios: Imagining a Transnational Punch Culture

In June of 1874, the longtime writer and artist duo, Kanagaki Robun and Kawanabe Kyōsai, once again came together to collaborate on a new humor project in the form of a satirical magazine named the *E-shinbun Nipponchi* (*Nipponchi*), which translates as the ‘Illustrated Newspaper Japan Punch.’ In the first edition of the *Nipponchi* opposite the writer Robun’s introduction to the *raison d’être* of the magazine, is a curious caricature of a man holding a large brush who we can assume is Kyōsai or Robun, or perhaps a merged representation of the both them (Figure 8). We do know that the artist was Kyōsai, and the exaggeratedly animated image is characteristic of his ‘crazy pictures’ style. Like the ‘half-cracked’ picture of Charles Wirgman’s Mr Punch introduced in the previous chapter, which depicted the British author with a *chonmage* topknot and in Japanese garb, *Nipponchi*’s personified figure is of a Japanese man who appears to similarly display an inbetween positionality.¹ While glaring at the reader with his tongue sticking out in a joking yet provocative manner, the caricature of Kyōsai/Robun is wearing what looks to be a Japanese kimono with a western-style top hat. On his left foot is a wooden Japanese *geta* and on his right a black shoe. The caricature of Mr Nipponchi that straddles both East and West seems to be directly in playful visual dialogue with the *Japan Punch*’s Mr Punch, which is further confirmed by Robun’s accompanying introductory text on the opposite page that attributes Wirgman’s ‘punch’ magazine as an inspiration.² Embodied in the magazine’s name, a play on Japan (*Nippon*) and punch (*ponchi*), and its character that blends East and West in its

¹ I discuss this idea of a ‘half-cracked’ subjectivity in relation to Charles Wirgman in Chapter 2. Where the term was originally used as a slur against him by the Victorian expat community and travelers to Japan to describe his craziness and apparently incompressible embrace of Japanese culture, I repurpose this term to articulate Wirgman’s embodied inbetweenness that reflects his life and positionality outside of hierarchical categories and the imperial divide between East and West.

² Kokugakuin daigaku kanagaki robun kenkyūkai, *Bakumatsu kaikaki bungaku shiryōshū: kanagaki robun 2* (Tokyo: Kokugakuin daigaku, 2010), 87.

appearance, the *Nipponchi* represents a West-East transnational encounter of ‘punch’ and ‘punching holes’ (*ana wo ugatsu*) satirical cultures in nineteenth century Japan.

In this chapter, I reconsider the historical significance of the *Nipponchi* magazine as an articulation of the laughing counterpublic and an attempted expansion of its membership through a circulation of *ponchi-e* or ‘punch pictures.’ The *Nipponchi* reflected and emerged from the transnational encounters of satirical cultures that were occurring in the localized spaces and aesthetic networks of exchange such as the art salons discussed in Chapter 2 and through firsthand exposure to Wirgman’s *Japan Punch* publication. In particular, this chapter discloses that the act of creating, sharing and viewing *ponchi-e* was imagined as an ‘exhibition of curios,’ considered to be part of a wider transnational culture of satirical production where laughter was a tool in the hands of the people to poke holes in official ideology and discourses of civilization by putting them on ‘display.’ *Ponchi-e* as an ‘exhibition of curios’ was in direct parodical dialogue with and counter to the practice of ‘great exhibitions’ during the second half of the nineteenth century, which were fairs to showcase and celebrate the industrial and cultural achievements of nations, categorized in a way that defined and established hierarchies of civilization. In comparison to the state-centered imperial spectacle of great international exhibitions, the exhibition of curios was imagined as occurring on an unofficial level among ordinary people outside of the purview and interests of the state or state-state international relations. Just like the art salons where people would physically gather, observe ridiculous sketches or poems, and laugh together at civilization, the *Nipponchi* articulated its display of *ponchi-e* as this satirical cultural space manifested in print media. The imagination of an unofficial exhibition of curios as a parody of state-authorized great exhibitions follows what Mikhail Bakhtin has observed as laughter’s ability to ‘build its own world versus the official world, its own church versus the official church, its own state versus the official state.’³

³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984), 88.



Figure 8: Tamatebako Treasure Box. *E-shinbun Nipponchi*, 1874.

Nipponchi wasn't the first time the word 'ponchi' was used in Japanese. Published in the Yokohama treaty port, the *Kōko Shinbun* from 1868 is the earliest known reference to *ponchi*, which describes it as a type of comical picture from the West.⁴ However, *Nipponchi* is particularly significant as it represents the first attempt at an articulation and implementation of what a vernacular punch might look and sound like, and it was soon followed by a boom in other *ponchi* newspapers and magazines in Meiji Japan. Despite running for just three issues (only the first two have been discovered), scholars have considered it a major publication in the history of manga and Japanese political cartoons.⁵ Most scholarship has viewed the emergence of *ponchi-e* in Japan as an extension of the unidirectional flow of knowledge from West to East initiated by Japan's mid-nineteenth century 'opening.' Within this narrative,

⁴ Peter Duus, "Presidential Address: Weapons of the Weak, Weapons of the Strong – The Development of the Japanese Political Cartoon," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60, no. 4 (November 2001): 968-969.

⁵ Kokugakuin daigaku, *Bakumatsu kaikaki bungaku shiryoshū: kanagaki robun* 2, 86.

punch becomes yet another expression of the process of modernization that was completed in Europe and then exported to the East. Writing on this dynamic of the ‘stage of modernity,’ Timothy Mitchell argues that the association of modernity with the time and space of the West has meant that, speaking of the non-West, ‘The destiny of those regions has been to mimic, never quite successfully, the history already performed by the West.’⁶ That the likes of Robun after an apparent publicly declared departure from the ‘backwards’ literary style of Edo *gesaku*, then started to appropriate the term *ponchi* to name the *Nipponchi* magazine, a veritable translation of the West, seems to further confirm this teleological narrative of the modernization of the media in Japan.⁷ Indeed, numerous other publications using the neologism *ponchi* appeared in late nineteenth century Japan.⁸ In this mimicry of the West, scholars have argued that punches in Japan embraced the ‘racist iconography’ of the punch as an imperial form.⁹ Through such repetition of the visual language that originated in the Victorian *Punch* of the metropole, in addition to adapting their own indigenous visual references to fit the imperial language of Western modernity, Barbara Mittler posits that the punches in the colonial and semi-colonial peripheries became a part of a ‘global *imaginaire*’ that circulated a common visual code.¹⁰

Historian of Japan, Peter Duus has made important interventions into our understanding of the development of political cartoons in Japan. He complicates narratives of a simple

⁶ Timothy Mitchell, “The Stage of Modernity,” in Timothy Mitchell eds., *Questions of Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 1.

⁷ For further discussion see Sho Konishi, *Anarchist Modernity: Cooperatism and Japanese-Russian Intellectual Relations in Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 15: ‘The tendency to see the West as the sole source of knowledge in modern Japan has led to countless “influence studies” that have documented the West’s impact on Japan... These one-sided influence studies have largely neglected the multidirectional nature of transnational intellectual phenomena.’

⁸ For examples, see Isao Shimizu and Noriko Inomata, *Nihon no mangabon 300 nen: Tobae hon kara komikkubon made* (Tokyo: Minerva Shobo, 2019), 68.

⁹ See Orna Shaughnessy’s chapter, “Early Meiji Manga: The Political Cartoons of Kanagaki Robun and Kawanabe Kyōsai,” in Nissim Otmazgin and Rebecca Suter eds., *Rewriting History in Manga: Stories for the Nation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 64.

¹⁰ Barbara Mittler, “Ten Thousand *Pucks* and *Punches*: Satirical Themes and Variations Seen Transculturally,” in Hans Harder and Barbara Mittler eds., *Asian Punches: A Transcultural Affair* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2013), 424.

transmission of British models to trace the indigenous genealogy of the modern Japanese cartoon in his examinations of Japanese punches:

‘Like so many cultural products in Meiji Japan, from fiction through music to painting and architecture, the political cartoon emerged from a mingling of influences, indigenous and exogenous, typical of colonial or semi-colonial societies seeking to catch up with the “civilised countries”.’¹¹

However, Duus concedes that the foreign embrace of the name ‘punch’ can be likened to a ‘brand name’ that ‘underlines the immense “soft power” of nineteenth century British imperialism, its ability to colonise culture as well as territory.’¹² While such assessments importantly go beyond a simple West to East flow of knowledge to acknowledge indigenous forms and hybrid blends, as Sho Konishi has argued, this shift towards studies of ‘multiple modernities in the non-West have qualified as such by the indigenous development or reconfiguration of major modern elements already defined by the West and its historical experience.’¹³ Locating non-West punches within the ‘global *imaginaire*,’ according to Mittler, brings the center and the peripheries closer.¹⁴ Indeed, in bringing them ‘closer’ together, *ponchi-e* in Japan is brought into the singular historical time and space of Western modernity, or in the words of Mitchell, ‘recaptures histories happening overseas and returns them to the historical home of the West.’¹⁵ Whether *ponchi-e* are considered as simply a reproduction of the British model or thought of as a ‘product of cultural hybridisation,’ in either reckoning, the

¹¹ Duus, “Punch Pictures,” in Harder and Mittler eds., *Asian Punches*, 309. On page 335, Duus similarly concludes his discussion of ‘punch pictures’ in nineteenth century Japan by describing them in terms of ‘cultural hybridization.’ He writes, ‘In their pursuit of “enlightenment” the new Meiji intelligentsia felt compelled to “civilize” the way they painted pictures, composed music, wrote fiction, designed houses, and sculpted statues. Sometimes this meant simply reproducing what they found in the West, but at other times it produced what students of Meiji architecture called a *setchū* (eclectic) style.’

¹² Duus, “Punch Pictures,” in Harder and Mittler eds., *Asian Punches*, 334.

¹³ Konishi, *Anarchist Modernity*, 9. Also see page 8: ‘While existing explorations of an “alternative Japanese modernity” have attempted to examine how Japanese reconfigured and retranslated Western modernity into “indigenous” or “Japanese” national forms as historical difference, the modernity of the “West” nonetheless has remained for historians the source that defined the terms of modernity in Japan.’

¹⁴ Mittler, “Ten Thousand *Pucks* and *Punches*,” in Harder and Mittler eds., *Asian Punches*, 424.

¹⁵ Mitchell, “The Stage of Modernity,” in Mitchell eds., *Questions of Modernity*, 12.

emergence of *ponchi-e* represents an idea and pursuit of cultural progress based on the space and temporality of Western modernity.¹⁶ However, in its articulation of the role of *ponchi-e*, the *Nipponchi* conceived of a very different cultural space, which did not seek to catch up within a historical time of Western modernity or participate in an imagined global community of imperial punches. In revisiting the *Nipponchi*, this chapter, then, also posits a new way of understanding *ponchi-e* as an example of cultural hybridization and reconsiders its position within the history of manga.

Opening the Box of Curios

The *Nipponchi* first introduces us to the concept of the magazine as a box of curios in the aforementioned Mr Nipponchi caricature of the authors (Figure 8). Interestingly, the image appears to be maritime-themed. There is a *sazae* sea snail, a flounder, a puffer fish and an octopus. The octopus' limbs are drawn in a manner so that they seamlessly merge into waves from the sea. Mr Nipponchi has one foot on the octopus head while the other rides the waves. He is clutching onto a yet-to-be-opened box in his left hand with what looks like a squid design on top and indecipherable characters on the side visible to the viewer. At first glance then, the sea creatures and this non-descript box seem misplaced and simply a part of Kyōsai's crazy eccentricity. However, on closer inspection, taken together, these visual symbols link the caricature of Mr Nipponchi to the fairytale figure of Urashima Tarō. After being taken to the underwater Dragon Palace as a reward for saving a turtle, the fisherman Urashima Tarō was gifted with a *tamatebako* or treasure box and was told that upon his return home above land that he should never open this box. The tale goes that Urashima eventually did open what turned out to be somewhat of a Pandora's box, as upon unsealing the container a white smoke

¹⁶ Duus, "Punch Pictures," in Harder and Mittler eds., *Asian Punches*, 334-335.

appeared and Urashima suddenly transformed from a young man into an elderly man, suggestive of the many years of his youth that he had unknowingly spent at the Dragon Palace that were locked up within the magical *tamatebako*. The last line of Robun's accompanying caption to the illustration, 'the tip of the brush opens up enlightenment,' suggests that the character of Mr Nipponchi has this *tamatebako* in hand ready to open up its 'enlightening' content to the reader.¹⁷ In other words, the *Nipponchi* magazine itself is this box that, like the fisherman Urashima Tarō, Robun and Kyōsai have brought up from below the surface, which they will unleash.

As we also explored in Chapter 1, the *hanrei* introductory statements to Robun's *Taiyō shinwa: Tako nyūdō uo sekkyō* (*New Stories from the Ocean: The Octopus Priest's Fishy Sermon*, 1872.6), which was also illustrated by Kyōsai, discussed how the author will use his brush to punch holes into the depths to write about the allegorical Dragon Palace beneath the ocean, from which the discerning Octopus Priest will be able to deliver a sermon to the reader on civilization. The image of Mr Nipponchi standing on the waves surrounded by sea creatures holding a brush and treasure box, then, serve as visual symbols and cues that call to mind these same subversive humorous texts that offered an unofficial counter narrative to the evangelism mission of the Meiji government intended to cultivate an enlightened national public. That Mr Nipponchi is standing on what we can perhaps call the 'foundations' of an octopus and waves, directly links to the *Tako nyūdō* illustration of the Octopus Priest who was preaching a counter sermon from the floating world to an audience. In this way, the *Nipponchi* introduces itself as being built upon this alternative way of seeing that derives from punching holes into the surface of things to reveal what lies beneath. It is only by recovering and reopening texts such as the *Tako nyūdō* – which has hitherto been absent from the historiography precisely because it does not neatly fit within narratives that locate a sharp Edo-Meiji break as determined by an apparent

¹⁷ Kokugakuin daigaku, *Bakumatsu kaikaki bungaku shiryōshū: kanagaki robun 2*, 87.

sudden ‘conversion’ of writers, artists and entertainers to the state-led mission of promoting an enlightened citizenry – that we can begin to detect these broader links and continuities. What is most striking about the *Nipponchi* is that Robun and Kyōsai do not explicitly tie it to *gesaku* writing (although the connections are evidently implied), but rather re-imagine its form, purpose, and indeed its name, as part of an emergent transnational culture of ‘*ponchi*.’

This dissertation has already introduced the popularity of art and literary circles, which from the Tokugawa era produced the ‘formation of a common spatial/cognitive sphere for aesthetic socialization among the participants,’ or put differently new forms of subjectivity and relationality, what historian Eiko Ikegami terms ‘aesthetic networks.’¹⁸ These local spaces of aesthetic exchange continued to play a significant role into the Meiji era and it was through participation in these venues that the *Nipponchi* authors could encounter the laughing counterpublic as a transnational phenomenon. As discussed in Chapter 2, author of the *Japan Punch*, Wirgman, was a regular participant of *shogakai* art salons where affective bonds based on subversive laughter could be formed in a way that transcended the imperial hierarchies and asymmetries typically characteristic of ‘contact zones.’ A critical engagement, which was nurtured and negotiated in the physical spaces of art gatherings, found its way into, and helped shape the subversive and critical discourse of the *Japan Punch* that ‘laughed at civilization.’ Equally it was the punch style humorous pictures that Wirgman was crafting and sharing in the local art gatherings that contributed to this feedback loop interactivity between the physical spaces and the magazine. For Robun and Kyōsai this ‘intertextual’ dialogue was consciously observed and became an intentional activity. The carnivalesque world and spaces of the art gatherings that they were participants of found expression in the printed form of *ponchi-e*, which reflected these transnational encounters. In an article from 6 October 1877, Robun used

¹⁸ Eiko Ikegami, *Bonds of Civility: Aesthetic Networks and the Political Origins of Japanese Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 4.

his latest magazine of which he was the founder and editor, *Kanayomi Shinbun* (1875-1879), to reflect back on the establishment and purpose of the *Nipponchi* and connects this to a broader articulation of *ponchi-e*:¹⁹

‘Pleasurable Viewing Exhibition Continuing from the Other Day

If those that learn from the past to draw insights for the present are teachers of the way, then those, who in searching for old garments gain new clothes, are the ones at the morning markets in Tomizawa. In recent times the leisure activity of choice for those with a refined sense of taste is bringing items out to proudly display in front of a crowd of spectators, which is called an “exhibition of curios.” These activities are based on the exhibitions and fairs organized by officials of late; however, their origins are more so in imitation of the former *kaichō* practice of publicly exhibiting sacred objects from shrines and temples, and it is made fashionable through ridiculous sacred treasures. Putting this into pictures and attaching metaphoric words, and then using this to portion out satirical poetic justice is known in Europe as “*Punch*.” At present, there is an Englishman residing in Yokohama, Mr “Wirgman,” who is publishing this. In time, following the lead of this person, Robun created a magazine of curiosities titled “*Nipponchi*,” which lasted for 2 or 3 editions. At the time, it was so strange that it didn’t continue, but since people have become more accustomed to newspapers and novelty, now there is the “*Odoke-e Marumaru Chinbun*” and Naniwa also has an illustrated magazine. One cannot but say²⁰ that the intention to learn from the past to acquire new knowledge for the present, superior insight through crazy verse, and displaying for pleasurable viewing exhibitions, is the work that they are engaged in.²¹

The article introduces the latest craze of people gathering to publicly exhibit and view curios that was apparently taking place in locations such as the Tomizawa area of the bustling downtown Nihonbashi district famous for Edo-era *ukiyo-e* depictions of its crowds upon the main bridge. Opening with the words of Confucius on learning from the past,²² the article implies that this ‘exhibition of curios’ is a route to gaining wisdom and enlightenment. To be

¹⁹ For reference on Robun as writer of this article in the *Kanayomi Shinbun* see Kokugakuin daigaku, *Bakumatsu kaikaki bungaku shiryoshū: kanagaki robun* 2, 85.

²⁰ 岩猿を絵図. Robun uses a kana-kanji word play to create a double meaning. The kanji reads as ‘an illustration of a monkey,’ which in combination with the kana いわざる, hints towards one of the so-called three wise monkeys that ‘speaks no evil.’ Within the context of a discussion of the *Marumaru Chinbun*, this takes on further significance as a reference to the front cover of the *Marumaru Chinbun* newspaper, which has three suited men parodying the three wise monkeys that see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil.

²¹ Article can be found in Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Cultural History, *Wāguman ga mita umi: nada no tōzai wo musunda gaka* (Kanagawa: Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Cultural History, 2011), 172.

²² 故きを温ねて新しきを知るは道の道たる者.

sure, the thrust of the article then shifts away from these local public exhibitions as it begins to liken this activity to the nature and objectives of punch magazines. In other words, punch becomes the very ‘exhibition of curios’ materialized and reproduced as a magazine that people can, in like manner, pleurably view in its eliciting of laughter. Robun identifies the public exhibition of curios gathering, as a type of *kaichō* (開帳). Meaning the ‘opening of a curtain,’ *kaichō* was a practice during the Edo period where temples would occasionally (often according to a defined schedule), exhibit their religious relics in order to attract people to the temple grounds with the hope of financial donations in mind. Nam-lin Hur writes that *kaichō* events were not purely pious in character, and to increase their attraction frequently blended entertainments to draw larger crowds, what Hur calls a ‘union of prayer and play.’²³ The exhibition of curios, Robun writes, is similar to these events yet is especially peculiar as its participants are unearthing ‘ridiculous sacred treasures’ (飛んだ靈宝) to publicly display. This provides an important hint and explanation as to the meaning of Mr Nipponchi holding a *tamate* box of treasures in the illustration opposite the magazine’s preface. This was a veritable box of curios or ‘ridiculous sacred treasures,’ which Mr Nipponchi in the guise of Urashima Tarō, recovered from the depths of the ocean from the temple-equivalent space of the mythical Dragon Palace. Bringing up the box of curios to the surface to exhibit publicly in the printed format of a punch magazine is the lifting of the veil that mimics the temple *kaichō* events. Punch pictures are too involved in a ‘prayer and play’ of sorts in its ability to combine satirical humor with didactic poetic justice.

The newspaper piece also remarks that the exhibition of curios mirrors the fairs and expositions organized by government officials of late. However, Robun makes a point of intentional contrast by reverting to say that although it is like the official exhibitions, it is

²³ Nam-lin Hur, *Prayer and Play in Late Tokugawa Japan: Asakusa Sensōji and Edo Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000), 80-82.

something distinct from this practice and in actuality finds its roots elsewhere in *kaichō*. The second half of the nineteenth century became known as ‘the age of exhibitions,’ which were international expositions designed to showcase the industrial and cultural achievements of nations.²⁴ The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations (Great Exhibition) held at the purpose-built Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, London in 1851 is considered the quintessential example of a nineteenth century international exhibition. Interrogating its objectives, layout and the wealth of coverage surrounding the event, scholarship on the Great Exhibition has pointed to its symbolic role in locating Britain (and Western nations in close proximity) at the apex of a linear historical timeline of modernization. It became a physical manifestation of an imperial certainty that the empire and the wider world was part of a planetary system that orbited around the sun of Britain.²⁵ For example, this idea was represented in art by the prominent British caricaturist and illustrator, George Cruikshank, who drew ‘All the World Going to See the Exhibition’ (1851), depicting the Crystal Palace sat on top of the globe while crowds from all around the world, as indicated through stereotypes, cultural dress and familiar landmarks, can be seen making their way up to the London metropole.²⁶ During the Meiji period, at home there was a wave of enthusiasm for exhibitions and trade fairs to produce items for export in response to the popularity of Japanese arts and crafts in Europe known by the French term, Japonisme. Abroad, the Meiji government was conscious of leveraging the potential of international exhibitions to serve as a platform to transcend the image of an exotic proto-industrial Japan and assert the nation’s equal status as a modern would-be empire.²⁷ In other words, these exhibitions were elevated to the status of

²⁴ An article in the *Illustrated Weekly News* of 12 October 1861 declared ‘This is the age of exhibitions,’ in its opening sentence. *Illustrated Weekly News*, “Exhibition of Dogs,” British Newspaper Archive, British Library, accessed November 28, 2022, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>.

²⁵ Jeffrey A Auerbach and Peter H Hoffenberg eds., *Britain, the Empire, and the World at the Great Exhibition of 1851* (Hampshire and Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), xi.

²⁶ Angus Lockyer, “Japan and International Exhibitions, 1862-1910,” in *Commerce and Culture at the 1910 Japan-British Exhibition: Centenary Perspectives*, edited by Ayako Hotta-Lister and Ian Nish (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 27-28.

²⁷ Lockyer, “Japan and International Exhibitions,” 30.

arenas for cultural diplomacy and considered as tools for soft power in the international relations of nation-states. Indeed, scholars have sought to go beyond a conception of international exhibitions as uncontested spaces of Western hegemony and have demonstrated that they were additionally ‘sites of cultural contact and conflict marked by mutuality, negotiation, and even ambivalence.’²⁸ Accordingly, historians have identified that the age of exhibitions can also be characterized by a strong ‘counter-exhibitionary tradition,’ where participating nations would attempt to counteract the organizers’ totalizing vision for the events and utilize their presence to serve their own nationalist agendas or other interests.²⁹ In this understanding, ‘counter,’ then, does not depart from an imperialist ideology and operates firmly within a nation-state centered framework of international relations. Indeed, as Mitchell posits, the very idea of ‘the international’ was popularized through the phenomenon of the great international exhibitions of the late nineteenth century; international becoming a ‘new word that evoked the global order of imperialism that the exhibition was intended to represent.’³⁰ Thus, we could suggest that the counter-urges to contest the exhibition space too played a hand in reifying the idea of ‘the international.’

By contrast, the late nineteenth century articulation of *ponchi-e* in Japan reveals those who were not interested in participating in the international imperialistic model of so-called ‘great exhibitions,’ but who instead imagined a display and cultural exchange on different grounds. The laughing counterpublic, constantly generated through spaces such as playful aesthetic gatherings and humorous publications, was imagined to be simultaneously occurring in Europe known as a culture of ‘punch,’ which was brought into a state of co-presence through Wirgman’s *Japan Punch*. The laughing counterpublic, then, can be re-imagined and experienced as part of a wider transnational phenomenon. In particular, articulated as an

²⁸ Auerbach and Hoffenberg, *Britain, the Empire*, xii.

²⁹ Auerbach and Hoffenberg, *Britain, the Empire*, xiii.

³⁰ Mitchell, “The Stage of Modernity,” in Mitchell eds., *Questions of Modernity*, 4.

exhibition of curios, it was decoupled and de-territorialized from the nation-state, or what David Featherstone would perhaps consider a ‘counter network’ of dissent towards dominant forms of globalization that was ‘not bounded.’³¹ *Ponchi-e* as an exhibition of curios is a ‘counter exhibition’ not in that it represents a vying for position within the imperial order reflected within the great international exhibitions, but it is ‘counter’ as it operates as a parodical replica on the non-state level, which ridicules and subverts the former’s display of civilization and the temporality of Western modernity.

Officially Rejected

At the very top of the front cover of the *Nipponchi* magazine is an illustration of a rising sun lifted up by the hands of caricatures of the artist and writer duo, Kyōsai and Robun (Figure 9). Imprinted in the center of the sun, as a way to literally highlight its message, are the characters, ‘officially rejected’ (*kanji*, 官辞). Within the neat circle of the sun the characters appear as a stamp of disapproval that the pair are proudly holding up. ‘Officially rejected’ is an intentional parody of the word *kankyo* (官許) or ‘officially approved,’ which was a new term introduced at the start of the Meiji era as part of numerous iterations of publishing laws related to books and then newspapers, which stipulated that permission for publication must come from the government and not publishing guilds as was the former process.³² This was to ensure that the content of publications would align with the Meiji state’s project of modern nation building, the advancement of which required nurturing a civilized and enlightened populace. Moreover, the government was conscious of material that they considered displayed

³¹ David Featherstone, *Resistance, Space and Political Identities: The Making of Counter-Global Networks* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 2-5.

³² For a detailed discussion on early Meiji censorship of books and newspapers see Peter Kornicki, *The Book in Japan: A Cultural History from the Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), 358-362.

(or perhaps we could also say exhibited) Japan and its populace as backwards or uncivilized, especially to a foreign audience. However, the *Nipponchi*'s stamp of official rejection points to the magazine's disregard for government edicts calling for publications to enlighten the general public according to the dictates of state ideology, belying Robun's own formerly stated commitment to reform written in the *chosakudō* pledge of 1872 as introduced in Chapter 1. It also anticipated and appealed to an audience who would be thirsty to consume such transgressive content that lies 'rejected' outside of the state's purview.

The front cover of the magazine additionally shows Kyōsai on the left with his characteristic buckteeth and artist brushes in hand, and Robun on the right with a book and brush. They are both perched on top of Mt Fuji that is shrouded in clouds that extends as a wavy border around the page – a gateway to the 'floating world'-like technique we have already seen in other of Kyōsai's illustrations for humorous satirical texts authored by Robun. *Nipponchi*'s front cover is another example of an inter-visual dialogue with the front cover of the *Japan Punch*, which pictures a caricature of a kimono-clad Wirgman as Mr Punch with Mt Fuji in the center of a rising sun (see Chapter 2, Figure 4). The authors confirm the *Nipponchi*'s links and transnational encounter with *Japan Punch* in the preface to each of the issues, which outlines the magazine's inspirations and objectives:³³

'The intent of this illustrated newspaper is to take the spirit of the ancient Greek fables of "Aesop," use the stylistic appearance of Toba Sōjō's playful pictures, and imitating the "Punch"³⁴ authored by the Englishman Mr "Wirgman"³⁵ currently residing here, we have given it the title Nipponchi and in line with the name, it deals mainly with domestic issues. The writing is crude and the pictures are quick sketches. Notwithstanding the fact that it is exceedingly ridiculous and humorous, the authors intend that in the midst of jaw-breaking laughter, readers can acquire enlightenment.³⁶ Rendering distant by drawing lines around the earth to make it hell, and bringing close like the Southern picture calendars, it engages

³³ Kokugakuin daigaku, *Bakumatsu kaikaki bungaku shiryōshū: kanagaki robun 2*, 87. Translated by the author.

³⁴ Written as ポンチ (ponchi).

³⁵ Written as ワクマン (wakuman).

³⁶ 妙悟を解頤の中に獲せしむる.

in a give and take of praise and censure spreading it widely. To the readers, when looking upon the vessel's crudeness with disdain, be sure not to miss out on the sweetness of what is inside.'



Figure 9: Front cover of the *Nipponchi*. *E-shinbun Nipponchi*, 1874.

Nevertheless, the citing of Wirgman's *Japan Punch* and the fables of Aesop in the preface to the *Nipponchi* has meant that the magazine has primarily been understood in terms of an emulation of the West. Scholars have pointed to the authors additionally referring to the 12th century priest and artist known as Toba Sōjō, by way of arguing that the magazine is a 'modernized' Toba picture book – East becomes West.³⁷ The *Nipponchi* authors themselves speak of the mixedness of the magazine and so we can certainly consider it in terms of hybridity. Yet, the question is how do we then understand this hybridity? As outlined above, historians of modern Japan who underscore hybridization as a cultural phenomenon, frequently conceptualize hybridity as a strategy to blend indigenous practices with Western ones in order

³⁷ Toba Sōjō produced humorous satirical pictures of anthropomorphized animals and birds known as *chōjū giga* (鳥獸戯画) and drawing from this style, comic pictures known as *Toba-e-hon* (Toba picture books) became popularized again during the Edo period. See Duus, "Punch Pictures," in Harder and Mittler eds., *Asian Punches*, 312-313, 319.

to catch up with the West and modernize (as already defined by the West). The *Nipponchi*, then, in a teleological sense is incomplete and becomes a semi-civilized step forward in the development towards the modern political cartoon in Japan. Alternatively, hybridity has been considered through the lens of *wakon yōsai* (Japanese spirit, Western techniques), which re-emphasizes Japanese tradition and selectively incorporates technologies from the West as a reactionary strategy to overcome modernity. We can say that the *ponchi* in *Nipponchi*, then, simply becomes a stylistic technique in order to recenter ‘Nippon.’ However, the *Nipponchi*’s hybridity cannot be easily reduced to fit within the binary opposing categories of West vs East and modern vs anti-modern. Rather, the *Nipponchi* expresses a distinct manifestation of hybridity. The authors downplay the work as comical nonsense while simultaneously asserting that it is through the ‘jaw-breaking laughter’ the magazine elicits, that the readers will indeed be able to acquire a form of enlightenment. In other words, this cultural hybridization centered on a transnational encounter of satirical humor and laughter, is articulated as leading to an alternative ‘officially rejected’ enlightenment that is beyond the dominant or ‘officially approved’ temporal order of Western modernity.

In its content, the *Nipponchi* covered topical issues of the early Meiji era.³⁸ If the officially approved ‘great exhibitions’ were showcasing the nation’s achievements and civilizational progress, the officially rejected *Nipponchi* as an exhibition of curios, aimed to provide an alternate lens to unveil how it is ridiculous or laughable. The magazine is visual rather than text heavy, and each cartoon includes a brief comment as well as text in parentheses next to the main characters involved in the scene to indicate speech. From the second issue onwards, at the end of the magazine, they included a brief explanatory line for each cartoon to further elucidate its interpretation. One can imagine each of the pages as an exhibit space,

³⁸ For introductions to the *Nipponchi* see Peter Duus, “Japan’s First Modern Manga Magazine,” *Impressions*, no. 21 (1999): 30-41; Tōru Haga and Isao Shimizu eds., *Kindai manga I: bakumatsu ishinki no manga* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1986), 72-86.

which displays the curio of a *ponchi-e* with an accompanying caption as if turning the page is a walk through an exhibition.

In a sketch and short dialogue on the *shinbutsu bunri* separation between Shinto and Buddhism, the author suggests that on the ‘surface’ people are paying lip service to the ‘Shinto of our (Japanese) country’ as being of greater value, while at the same time hiding their true feelings, and in any case, they write, ‘whether revering the *kami* or Buddha, every person should act according to their own tastes’ and convictions.³⁹ Such a statement coming from Robun who had just a year prior in 1873 published the ‘*Shortcut to the Three Doctrines*,’ with the apparent aim of supporting the 1872 Great Promulgation Campaign to foster national subjects through discourses of reverence to the emperor as divine descendent and the system of shrines, would have raised eyebrows and further undermines his sincerity in the public evangelist role. Perhaps most disruptive, is that this humorous *ponchi-e* makes plain the state’s biopolitics and attempted intervention into the hearts and minds of the people, but also asserts that interiority can be made into a site of contestation and uncontrolled. The enlightenment through laughter that the *Nipponchi* offers does not accord with the Meiji state civilization and enlightenment discourse. Rather, it suggests that people can embody the practice of parodical writing themselves by an outward display that projects a surface meaning, while concealing the true intention in the interior space.

There is not much by way of a clearly articulated or consistent political stance as it relates to governance or the state within the magazine, as we may expect due to the emphasis on being ‘officially rejected.’ However, as Duus interestingly contends in passing, ‘its tone was decidedly anti-colonial.’⁴⁰ This assessment is grounded in the *Nipponchi*’s treatment of foreign policy concerns of its time, particularly in regards to Japan’s ambitions for territorial expansion

³⁹ Kokugakuin daigaku, *Bakumatsu kaikaki bungaku shiryoshū: kanagaki robun 2*, 90.

⁴⁰ Duus, “Japan’s First Modern Manga,” 39.

in Asia. For example, the second illustrated piece in the first issue depicted three men around a table at a meal (Figure 10).⁴¹ The host is a Chinese person who is serving a ‘big bowl of rice’ (大きなわん), referring to Taiwan, to a Japanese man with a sword at his side to emphasize the militaristic intent, who is greedily scoffing up the whole of the big bowl (Taiwan). The Chinese man with a wooden rice serving container and rice paddle at his side, looks flummoxed as he holds out a stretched hand and empty plate towards the Japanese man and says, ‘Laying the tray down to serve you is also with the intention that I will be eating, but if you eat everything up then this just won’t do!’ The Japanese man complains that, ‘The bowl is big but inside there isn’t much so it gives the feeling that one hasn’t eaten much. With this one cannot get as full as an elephant.’ In the background behind an image of gunboats is a long-nosed top hat-wearing Western foreigner peering over the picture who asserts that, ‘When the table has been set it is good to eat all you want. If there is anything left over then leave it to me!’ The cartoon is a commentary on the scramble for Taiwan with avatars representing the various international players involved. The *Nipponchi* authors don’t take any one side, rather they invite the reader/viewer to see the matter of the big bowl of Taiwan from various different perspectives through this illustration/text combination. Through laughing at the scene and at all of the characters involved, the reader may too question whether this big bowl of Taiwan should even be eaten by these apparently greedy fellows. The narrator’s caption to the scene reads, ‘It is said that those who eat a great feast are those that are doing great things. When hungry eat a lot, and learn a lot, and for the country exert all efforts sparring nothing.’ By making this episode into a comical dialogue between a feast of gluttons the authors are able to parody and reframe the Meiji era discourse of *fukoku kyōhei* (rich country, strong army) and its moralistic claims upon the individual to dedicate their mind, body and everyday life in

⁴¹ Kokugakuin daigaku, *Bakumatsu kaikaki bungaku shiryoshū: kanagaki robun 2*, 89.

service of the state as national subjects. More broadly it enables the reader/viewer to critically engage with what they introduce as the zero-sum and imperial nature of international relations.



Figure 10: The Scramble for a Big Bowl of Taiwan. *E-shinbun Nipponchi*, 1874.

In the penultimate cartoon of the same first issue, the authors introduce another dialogue of international relations.⁴² This time, it is in the form of the strategy board game *go* (Figure 11). A diminutive Japanese man is pictured making his move while an oversized Western foreigner is seated on the other side of the table pondering his next move. Flying above the table is a two-headed large bird with an outstretched claw ready to swoop in and grab all of the board. The Japanese player retorts to the ‘haughty’ foreigner man that the squares he is demarcating is his territory and that the foreigner should keep his hands away. The foreigner confidently declares that this is a battle between black and white on the many spaces and that those with strategy tend to win. The caption to the image states that in today’s world one does

⁴² Kokugakuin daigaku, *Bakumatsu kaikaki bungaku shiryoshū: kanagaki robun* 2, 93.

not have the luxury of focusing on just a few spaces but must have a 360 vision of the field. It continues that one can go out into other spaces and take someone else's field but warns that when doing so, your pieces will be put in danger. This game of international relations urges caution towards imperial ambition and overreach.



Figure 11: A Game of International Relations. *E-shinbun Nipponchi*, 1874.

Scholarship on the development of the press in modern Japan has identified that by the 1880s the Japanese press became more nationalistic and assertive of Japan's international role as a civilizer in Asia through military strength. A decade later at the cusp of the First Sino-Japanese War this would rapidly reach a fever pitch. So much so, that when assessing this period, historians have frequently noted the enthusiastic excitement amongst the Japanese population for nationalistic war reportage and intimate that there was no antiwar mood.⁴³ It is

⁴³ James L Huffman, *Creating a Public: People and Press in Meiji Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 200-205. Also see Sakai's discussion on the historiography of the Japanese media during the Meiji era in Yu Sakai, "Survive to be critical: The Wartime Graphic as a 'masquerading' media in the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-1905," *War in History* vol. 28, issue 4 (2021): 797-824.

understood that expanding from the 1870s, the Japanese media played a key role in instilling in the masses a sense of a unified nation of *kokumin* and a popular nationalistic sentiment that would lay the groundwork in ‘preparing the people for war’ towards the end of the century.⁴⁴ The *Nipponchi*, however, did not offer its pages to the mission of ‘enlightening’ the masses to understand their role as national subjects to serve the state. Furthermore, satirically looking askance at the imperial hunger games of international relations that the Meiji government and prominent intellectuals were eager to thrust themselves into as players to raise Japan’s international stature on an imagined world stage through an aggressive posture in Asia, the magazine neither sought to build the affective foundations of Japanese imperial sentiment. Like the *Japan Punch* explored in Chapter 2, the *Nipponchi* diverts from the familiar format and tone of imperial punches. They understood ‘enlightenment’ through the lens of laughter, rather than official discourses prescribed by the nation-state. Crafting the *Nipponchi* after the pattern and in ‘imitation’ of Charles Wirgman’s *Japan Punch*, as explicitly stated by the authors in the preface, then, takes on a fundamentally new meaning and significance. In other words, the *Nipponchi* authors imagined that they were entering into a transnational dialogue with a distinct type of non-imperial punch culture and a subversive satirical engagement that they considered Wirgman was also a participant of. Indeed, we know that both Robun and Kyōsai were very familiar with various domestic and international newspapers and magazine publication, and so would have been able to compare and determine how they wanted to position their own work.⁴⁵ Robun in particular was apparently closely connected with Wirgman and wanted to align himself with interesting personal conversations had with Wirgman. For instance, in the *hanrei* preface to his *kusazōshi*⁴⁶ book series *Yamato gana seiyō bunko* (*Western Book Collection in*

⁴⁴ Huffman, *Creating a Public*, 200.

⁴⁵ Kyōsai kept a scrapbook of sketches and newspaper clippings, which included publications such as the *Illustrated London News*. See Kusumi Kawanabe, “Kyōsai shūshū ‘seiyō irasuto gashū’ to kyōsai no dezainten,” *Kyōsai* 98, (March 2009): 342-345.

⁴⁶ A type of *gesaku* and an illustrated literature printed on woodblock.

Japanese Script, around 1872.1), which in its first edition introduced a fantastical account of the life of Napoleon I, Robun wrote that his close friend Tesshū Kawajōki⁴⁷ spent a whole night talking with Wirgman and then related Wirgman's stories to Robun, upon which the book is based.⁴⁸ For the authors of the *Nipponchi* it seems that testifying their association with the type of work Wirgman was engaged in was of particular significance.

The *Nipponchi* authors were also highly conscious of the visual and stylistic approach to the magazine. After introducing their multiple inspirations, within the preface the authors curiously mention that they will engage in 'Rendering distant by drawing lines around the earth to make it hell, and bringing close like the Southern picture calendars.'⁴⁹ Within *gesaku* literature, hell would often be used as an allegorical realm to speak of the real world or a political situation from a safe distance to avoid censure. Beyond censorship, it was believed to be a useful literary device to uncover the true nature of things that a plain commentary cannot sufficiently offer. Conversely, *nanbu goyomi* or Southern picture calendars were a type of picture-based calendar in the Edo period that were made as a tool for the illiterate to bring useful information such as the dates, agricultural seasons etc. 'close,' through accessible images and symbols that they could comprehend and decipher. In this way, the authors sought to explain and emphasize that through illustrations and cartoons the *Nipponchi* would visually draw the real world of Meiji Japan into a distant fantasy and in doing so they could draw the real world closer for the masses to gain a new 'officially rejected' understanding of enlightenment. Just a year before the *Nipponchi*'s release, on 22 February 1873, an article said to be a letter to the editor appeared in the *Yokohama Mainichi Shinbun* discussing the role of humor in society in a manner curiously similar to the self-depreciating *hanrei* prefaces Robun

⁴⁷ A pseudonym used by Kawahara Eikichi. At other times he wrote under the name Oka Jōki. See Chapter 1 for a brief introduction to him as a disciple of both Charles Wirgman and Kanagaki Robun.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Tomohisa Mikawa, "Meiji shoki no gesaku no dōkō (II): jitsu' to iu kachikan wo megutte," *Ningen Shakai Kankyō Kenkyū* 25, 3 (2013): 132.

⁴⁹ Kokugakuin daigaku, *Bakumatsu kaikaki bungaku shiryoshū: kanagaki robun* 2, 87.

had previously written, and using language that seems to mirror Robun's 1872 *chosakudō kakiage* statement on *gesaku* reform. Perhaps most telling is that this letter appeared around the time that Robun joined the *Yokohama Mainichi Shinbun* as a writer. Whilst we cannot be certain that this letter was written by Robun himself, we do know that this wouldn't be the first time Robun has playfully interacted with the newspaper and placed himself into the text through another. For example, in his *Ushiya zōdan aguranabe* (*Sitting Cross-Legged at the Beef Pot*, 1871-1872), Robun introduced a character who loved reading newspapers because they can help to enlighten people, but then refers to an 'erroneous' article in the *Yokohama Mainichi Shinbun* that is about a man named Kanagaki Robun having urinated in public.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the submitted letter about the uses of humor that appeared in the *Yokohama Mainichi Shinbun* is revealing. One would assume that the anonymous writer of the letter was familiar with the Meiji writings of Fukuzawa Yukichi and Nakamura Masanao who warned of the deleterious harms of *haikan shōsetsu* (popular or vulgar literature) and positioned it as antithetical to enlightenment, as the passage begins by offering an apologist's defense of humorous and playful literature. He writes that despite being ignorant, he is well read in vulgar literatures and it is in fact through these very texts that he acquired a knowledge of political affairs.⁵¹

'I like conversations and inclining my ear to much chatter. In my free time I participate in discussions about the past at group gatherings. I listen to common talk, humor, gossip and jokes, and when I hear these things about 80-90% is rubbish...but on the matter of jokes it is what you keep and what you throw away that determines its usefulness.'

⁵⁰ Richard M Reitan, *Making a Moral Society: Ethics and the State in Meiji Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), 19.

⁵¹ Original letter found in Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Cultural History, *Wāguman ga mita umi*, 171.

Later on in the letter, the writer hones in on the importance of *'ponchi'* as a style of newspaper that can be found in Western countries.

'It reveals both public and private life without respect for status, rich or poor; it says whatever it feels, funny things, satire, irony. It makes rough crazy sketches its center whilst brief captions are secondary, and reader/viewers will be brought to side-splitting laughter.⁵² At present, residing in Yokohama is a British person named 'Wirgman,' and he is publishing this type of magazine here. Newspaper writers must read these types of works and use them as an exemplary model.'

What is interesting about this statement of praise for the punch style is that the anonymous writer appears to be reworking Robun's *chosakudō kakiage* statement that claimed *gesaku* was once structured in a way that places falsehoods at the center and reality secondary position, but in the new enlightenment era in line with government directives, would swap its mechanics. This writer uses the very same language and framing that Robun used to describe *gesaku*'s aim, but in this description of punches, 'falsehoods at the center' is replaced with rough crazy sketches, and 'reality as secondary' is substituted with 'brief captions' (草筆の狂画を主とし略文を客とし). Was Robun the anonymous writer that published the letter as an article during his time at the *Yokohama Mainichi Shinbun*? Or was he simply a recipient and addressee of this letter as a writer affiliated with newspaper? While we can only speculate as to the identity of the anonymous writer, it would be just a year later that Robun alongside Kyōsai would embark on the *Nipponchi*, which incorporates this understanding of *ponchi* as being rough drawings first and supplementary comments second. Indeed, paired with the *Nipponchi*'s prefatory mission statement, this dynamic takes on further significance as it ascribes the visual element with another layer of meaning. 'Drawing lines around the earth to make it hell,' the rough cartoons, then, were seen to fulfil the same central function as conjuring up imaginary

⁵² 看官をして抱腹絶倒をせしむ。

‘fantasy/falsehood’ spaces in *gesaku* literature through storytelling. The secondary or subordinate ‘reality’ became the written comments that would bring the distant visuals closer to the reader for decoding. In other words, what was perceived as operating in ‘punch pictures,’ in particular as it was received and interpreted through the specific interlocuter of Wirgman, was a dynamic that mimicked what writers of *gesaku* such as Robun were already engaged in through literary devices. ‘Imitating’ the punch was not a linear catch-up model pursuit of Western modernity. The existing *gesaku* apparatus that brought people to a certain type of jaw breaking laughter was reflected within the inner workings of the punch cartoons as they understood it primarily through the locally produced *Japan Punch*. By imagining themselves as participants and co-creators of a transnational cultural space of subversive humor, punch is brought into a shared temporality that is neither East or West.

As Robun himself admits in the *Kanayomi Shinbun* discussion on exhibitions, the *Nipponchi* only lasted for a few issues. Some scholars have taken this as evidence that the magazine, although important in the history of modern manga, was ultimately behind the spirit of the Meiji times as the people were engaged in the national project of civilization and enlightenment and no longer interested in this form of anti-modern humorous production.⁵³ In this way, the *Nipponchi* becomes situated within the ‘loser’ narrative of modernity and its meaning is as an ephemeral relic of the backwards past. However, Robun had already challenged this assumption within the same piece by suggesting that he was convinced that there was indeed an audience of people who wanted to engage in this type of subversive laughter. He concludes that it was only when more people had become ‘accustomed to newspapers and novelty’ that *ponchi-e* could really take off in the manner of its named successor publication, the *Odoke-e Marumaru Chinbun* (1877-1907), to be explored in the next

⁵³ See for example Haga and Shimizu eds., *Kindai manga I*, 73; Shaughnessy, “Early Meiji Manga,” in Otmazgin and Suter eds., *Rewriting History in Manga*, 61.

chapter. To be sure, the *Nipponchi*'s significance is not tied to its longevity or lack thereof, but can be found in its articulation of the existence of a popular cultural space of the laughing counterpublic, which was occurring in localized spaces around the Edo entertainments districts and was imagined as a transnational phenomenon. It was the transnational encounter and reimagination of their activity as punch pictures, which emboldened the founders of the *Nipponchi* in their attempt at widening the reach of the laughing counterpublic as well as further shaping the tone of their engagement as decidedly non-imperial, ridiculing the notion of political cartoons as a medium to hierarchically rank nations and civilizations.

During the latter years of his career, the influential cartoonist Kitazawa Rakuten (1876-1955) who became the editor-in-chief of the *Tokyo Puck* (1905-1923) satirical illustrated newspaper, published a number of essays reflecting on the late nineteenth century and turn of the century history of manga in Japan. For him, *ponchi* was something to be resisted through the differentiated medium of 'manga.'⁵⁴ He named the likes of the *Marumaru Chinbun* as part of a backwards culture of 'punch' that was not suitable for a mature enlightened society, and so conversely looked to 'manga' in the West as a model to learn from.⁵⁵ For Rakuten, the main purpose of manga was to be used as a tool to serve the nation and disabuse 'mistaken perceptions of Japan held by the world's powerful nations.'⁵⁶ If, as Rakuten posits, manga's role is to participate in a visual great international exhibition, then the *Nipponchi*'s articulation of *ponchi* and its like-minded successors that pursued a similar engagement, were imagined as something very separate and distinct from this history of 'manga.' Focusing in on the work of the *Marumaru Chinbun* considered as part of this *ponchi* historical trajectory, the next chapter

⁵⁴ For instance, see Duus, "Japan's First Modern Manga Magazine."

⁵⁵ In an essay from 1928 Rakuten wrote, 'I no longer said ponchi. I said manga, manga. Who said it first, I do not know. With my manga, I wanted to go against ponchi.' Later in 1936 he wrote that he wanted to 'wipe out punch.' Quoted in Ronald Stewart, "Manga as Schism: Kitazawa Rakuten's Resistance to 'Old-Fashioned' Japan," in *Manga's Cultural Crossroads*, edited by Jaqueline Berndt and Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 35.

⁵⁶ Stewart, "Manga as Schism," 33-34.

demonstrates how the publication was able to rapidly expand the laughing counterpublic beyond the localized spaces and networks of Edo aesthetic gatherings, and tap into a wider audience across the country that the *Nipponchi* had already anticipated was in existence. In functioning as an interactive medium, the *Marumaru Chinbun* fulfilled this imagination of an exhibition of curios of people coming together and sharing ridiculous things to laugh at, often directly playing on this idea in its layout and content. The audience didn't want to just passively view and laugh, they wanted to participate in the act of displaying in the exhibition and generating laughter.

4. Rolling Around: *Maru Maru* and the Body of the Laughing People

The Tale of the Dumpling Ball

A long time ago before the present age, the No.1 handsome man in Japan, Ariwara no Narihara, grew tired of viewing the flowers of (Kyoto's) Saga and Muro, and desirous to gaze at the spring of the East, he journeyed down to Sumida River, which runs through the middle of Musashi no Kuni and Shimofusa no Kuni. This was the age without rikshaws or horse and carriages and so he walked barefoot. Looking around, there was not the willow trees of Yanagi Bridge nor could he see the cherry blossoms of Mukōjima for the (Edo) area was still a wilderness of weeds. Puzzled by his surroundings and drifting along, he hoped that there would be a beef restaurant where he could eat lunch, but needless to say there was not such an establishment in existence, neither were there food stands on a main street. At that moment, out of exceeding embarrassment he composed a poem, which went something like this: "What should I eat to get my fill? *Miyakodori* bird, tell me whether or not they have the food which I love." Just after reciting this, from among the bushes appeared a pheasant who chirped, "Let me take you to a good place." Once they walked a certain distance to the west, they came across a shop that made a variety of beautiful dumpling balls. The Lieutenant General (Ariwara no Narihira) was delighted and before he knew it, he quickly devoured 330 dumpling balls one after the other, that it broke the joint of his jaw. And so, he named that place Kichijō after the pheasant, and as a reward he blessed this place and declared that after 1000 years this wilderness shall become the Eastern capital and the city's inhabitants shall eat jaw-breaking dumplings. And it is because of this, that in our day this came to pass as the capital of Tokyo in the Meiji era. Indeed, based on this legend we established our office in the very same location and accordingly called it the Maru Maru Sha/Dan Dan Sha Company. We have patrons from all over and as the days go by our company grows more prosperous for which we are exceedingly grateful. In light of this, we will continue to make improvements, and as ever, we will break our readers' jaws.¹

Launched by the Dan Dan Sha Company (團團社)² as a sister paper to its main Saturday publication the *Odoke-e Marumaru Chinbun* (1877-1907), the opening pages of the first edition of the weekly Wednesday satirical newspaper *Kibi Dango* (1878-1883)³ included this strange 'Tale of the Dumpling Ball' (團子物語, 9 October 1878) to explain the founding of the Dan Dan Sha Company. The comical vignette parodies scenes from the well-known, 'Journey to the East' (東下り, *Azuma kudari*) found in the Tales of Ise, which follows the story

¹ Dan Dan Sha, *Kibi Dango*, vol. 1-10 (Tokyo: Kashiwa Shobo, 2003), vol. 1, 4-5.

² Can also be read as Maru Maru Sha.

³ The magazine lasted for 235 editions. The *Marumaru Chinbun* was subject to frequent suppression and so the Dan Dan Sha decided to release the *Kibi Dango* alongside the *Marumaru Chinbun* so that they could continue their activities and serve their subscribers with as with as little disruption as possible.

of the Heian era courtier-poet, Ariwara no Narihira's travels from the Heian capital in Kyoto to what is now known as the Kantō region of Japan. The 'Tale of the Dumpling Ball,' explains that Ariwara no Narihira, an imperial descendent of Emperor Kanmu who relocated the capital to Kyoto in 794, arrived from Kyoto, and after enjoying many dumpling balls declared that Tokyo would become the future capital. Concealed through multiple layers of historical and cultural references, this is a parody of the Meiji restoration and the emperor's move from Kyoto to Edo to establish Tokyo as the capital. Yet this is a different emperor. The hint comes at the start of the story when the imperial figure of Ariwara no Narihira is described as the 'number 1 handsome man in Japan' (日本第一美男, *Nihon daiichi bidan*), which is a word play on the refrain 'the number 1 magazine in Japan, *Kibi Dango*' (日本一誌驥尾團子, *Nihon ichi shi kibi dango*),⁴ which can be found littered throughout the newspaper as well as serving as the slogan on its front cover. Through a literary ironic contrast between Ariwara no Narihira's striking beauty that becomes deformed upon scoffing up several dumpling balls that break his jaw, the writer not only induces laughter through conjuring up an image of a humorous caricature, but also reveals that laughter is the very message of this parody. As has been detailed in previous chapters, 'jaw breaking' is frequently used by satirical writers as a way to express explosive and uncontrollable laughter. Not only does this alternative 'emperor' figure embrace laughing himself, but he also proclaims that the Meiji era would be characterized by the spread of *dango* dumpling balls, which upon consuming, will make people burst into laughter. This is an alternative 'laughing emperor.'

Upon reciting a parodical version of a *waka* poem found in the Ise Tales which references the *miyakodori* bird, Ariwara no Narihira instead encounters a pheasant, which creates a sudden narrative shift and suggests that he is equally the figure of Momotarō.

⁴ This is itself a play on the original popular phrase, '*Nihon ichi kibi dango*,' meaning the tastiest *dango* in Japan.

Momotarō is Japanese folktale that tells the story of a boy born out of a giant peach who conquers the invading *oni* demons by penetrating their lair on demon island with the help of a dog, monkey and pheasant he befriends along the way in exchange for gifts of *kibi dango* dumpling balls. The protagonist is described later in the vignette as the ‘Lieutenant General,’ which alludes to this duality, as it represents both Ariwara no Narihira’s official status and Momotarō’s role as a leader of a small army. This reading is confirmed by the accompanying image depicting a carnivalesque celebration of the ‘Launch of Japan’s Number 1 Newspaper, *Kibi Dango*’ (Figure 12). A larger-than-life Momotarō is pictured on a stage with a bucket full of dumpling balls that he is throwing out to a packed crowd of people made up of men, women and non-Japanese who variously have their arms, hats and pieces of clothing raised in the air trying to catch the falling ‘jaw-breaking’ dumplings. Alongside Momotarō on stage are two *oni* demons, the dog, pheasant and monkey from the folktale, as well as a long-nosed man in a suit and top hat pointing towards Momotarō who closely resembles the figure of Mr Punch from the *Marumaru Chinbun*’s first edition who similarly addresses a large diverse crowd from a stage in the form of a lecture (Figure 13). The parent company, Dan Dan Sha (團團社) and primary newspaper nicknamed the *Maruchin* (團珍), are indicating towards the birth of the ‘child’ *dango* (團子). The character used for *Kibi* neither refers to the millet grain once used to make the dumplings, nor does it refer to dumplings from the former Kibi province. *Kibi* rendered as 驥尾, bestows the additional meaning of ‘follow the leader’ dumplings, just like the story of Momotarō who gained his band of animal followers through handing out the treats.



Figure 12: Launch of Japan's Number 1 Newspaper, *Kibi Dango*. *Kibi Dango*, 9 October 1878.

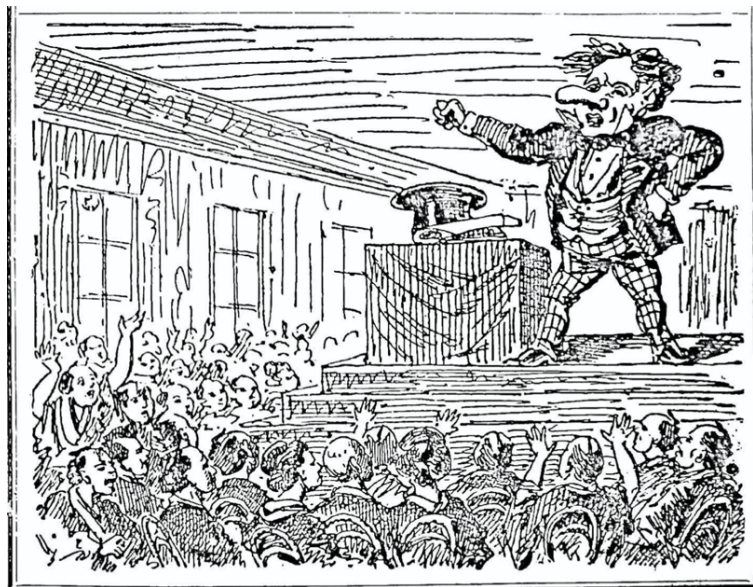


Figure 13: *Marumaru Chinbun*'s Mr Punch. *Marumaru Chinbun*, 14 March 1877.

The *Kibi Dango*'s alternative restoration story of the Meiji emperor's trip eastward, and the accompanying illustration of Momotarō distributing millet dumplings to a crowd, also serve as parodical allusions to the official festivals that were decreed to commemorate the emperor's arrival to the new eastern capital. William Steele writes that from his Tokyo Castle residence, the emperor successfully curried favor with the Edo commoners by ordering for a two-day

holiday and the distribution of *sake* throughout the city in the eleventh month of 1868. 2,563 barrels of imperial *sake* were transported from the castle to the wards and carried around on platforms like *mikoshi* shrine floats. It became a veritable festival of elaborate decorations, music, dancing and rice pounded into *mochi* cakes. Woodblock prints recording such events depict grateful crowds of people knelt in front of images of a radiant emperor as they partake in a holy communion of imperial rice wine and rice cakes.⁵ These festivals in the capital were just the beginning of state-led imperial pageantry in the Meiji era. During the first two decades of the Meiji period there were numerous imperial excursions outside of the capital to bring the body of the emperor down from above the clouds and closer to the people.⁶ Takashi Fujitani argues that these imperial progresses or tours (*junkō* or *gyōkō*) were inseparable from the idea of transferring the capital (*sentō*). The progresses were ‘above all a ritual of spatial integration wherein the emperor’s movements across the land and to the nation’s borders signified the spatial coherence of the national territory around the central symbol of the monarch.’⁷ The emperor was reconceived as a ‘peripatetic mode;’ the august body of the emperor in motion would begin to delineate and unify the land and people into the body of the nation.⁸ The opening pages of the *Kibi Dango* similarly expressed this notion of what Carol Gluck notes as the presentation of the emperor’s ‘manifest ubiquity.’⁹ In its words of greetings to the readers, ‘*Kibi Dango* Speech to Sing One’s Own Praises,’ the author writes, ‘Ladies and gentlemen, perhaps it is because our company’s Tokyo humorous illustrated newspaper of curiosities is named *Marumaru* (circle circle) that, in a roly-poly manner, it has already rolled around the whole of Japan.’¹⁰ Through its publication arms, the *Marumaru Chinbun* and *Kibi Dango*

⁵ M William Steele, *Alternative Narratives in Modern Japanese History* (Oxon: Routledge, 2003), 83-85.

⁶ Carol Gluck, *Japan’s Modern Myths: Ideology in Late Meiji Period* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985), 74.

⁷ Takashi Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* (California: University of California Press, 1996), 42, 52.

⁸ Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy*, 44.

⁹ Gluck, *Japan’s Modern Myths*, 76.

¹⁰ Dan Dan Sha, *Kibi Dango*, vol. 1, 4.

satirical newspapers, the Dan Dan Sha Company that resides in Tokyo, set itself up as the *other* peripatetic emperor, which rolls around within and beyond the capital spreading laughter.

This chapter argues that at the very same time as the Meiji state was engaged in a program of nation and national subject formation around the figure of the emperor as the national body incarnate, the Dan Dan Sha Company sought to articulate and create an alternative body of the laughing people. Dan Dan Sha's satirical newspapers became a lively social network as readers were converted into contributors and co-creators of laughter through a culture of foregrounding submissions (投書, *tōsho*). This created a much larger space of circulation for the emergent laughing counterpublic in late nineteenth century Japan. Whereas in preceding chapters we considered how a laughing counterpublic was carved out in more localized spaces around the Edo and Yokohama areas through gatherings, or was imagined as having a wider appeal and articulated as part of a transnational punch 'exhibition of curios' phenomenon, this chapter will demonstrate how the Dan Dan Sha newspapers as platforms to showcase reader contributions, achieved a rapid expansion of the laughing counterpublic beyond the capital reaching annual circulation numbers of over 200,000 copies. Functioning as a counterpublic, this was also a world-making project, as participation in this space of circulation signaled a commitment towards imagining and performing a different form of sociability, belonging and identification based on oppositional laughter that was in tension with and transcended the state's nation body (*kokutai*) building.¹¹ Indeed, the new Meiji leaders believed that beyond institutional and structural transformations, the development of a modern nation-state and citizenry demanded the spiritual cultivation and penetration of hearts and minds so that the common people would spontaneously participate in realizing national objectives.¹² Katsuya Hirano puts it, 'there was one common ideological premise on which the

¹¹ Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 121-122. See for commentary on counterpublics as world-making projects.

¹² See Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths*, 3, 22-23; Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy*, 19-20.

Meiji state and leading intellectuals envisioned and carried out the formation of a new subject: human interiority was where power could and should effect an individual's fundamental transformation into a desirable national-capitalist subject.'¹³ In particular, as will be demonstrated, humor and playful 'rolling' (㊦㊦㊦㊦) or 'round talk' that parody the circle (○) *fuseji* marks that were used by censors to edit out words deemed inappropriate (the Dan Dan Sha Company and newspapers also take their 'round' or 團 *maru* name from this censor mark),¹⁴ were considered as tools of resistance to counter interpellation and Meiji state ideology by making human interiority as a site of contestation through laughter and the cognitive labor of generating laughter.

Newspapers for Public Opinion?

The *Marumaru Chinbun* is a rare case of a Meiji satirical newspaper that has received scholarly attention. Yet, to date, the newspaper's role as a space of circulation giving life to a laughing counterpublic beyond the nation-state has been hidden, precisely because it has been solely understood as a key contributor to late nineteenth century Japan's modern nation-state building and national subject formation. In particular, historians have taken interest in the *Marumaru Chinbun* due to its satirical commentary and illustrations of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement (*jiyū minken undō*), which refers to a broad range of political activities and organizations across two decades from the 1870s until the promulgation of the Imperial Constitution of 1889, that variously petitioned and fought for civil rights, liberties and a popularly elected assembly. The *Marumaru Chinbun* is considered to have been born out of

¹³ Katsuya Hirano, *The Politics of Dialogic Imagination: Power and Popular Culture in Early Modern Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 223.

¹⁴ See *maegaki* (preface) in Ai Maeda and Isao Shimizu, eds., *Kindai manga II: jiyūminkenki no manga* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1985); and Peter Duus, "'Punch Pictures': Localising Punch in Meiji Japan," in Hans Harder and Barbara Mittler eds., *Asian Punches: A Transcultural Affair* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2013), 332.

the movement for popular rights and its significance is found in its role as one of the ‘small newspaper’ publication arms of the movement to facilitate its growth and spread its political discourse.¹⁵ The *Marumaru Chinbun* as a satirical publication is visible and considered historically significant in this sense because it is deemed to have been engaged in a rational-critical discourse vis-à-vis the state, or in the words of Michael Warner, ‘they enter the temporality of politics.’¹⁶

Historians have considered Jürgen Habermas’ notion of the ‘public sphere’ as apropos in identifying a rational-critical political discourse that was directed at the Meiji state and have used this to challenge narratives that posit a smooth transition across the Edo-Meiji divide owing to an omnipotent and all-encompassing state that received little opposition or could omnisciently anticipate and deliver the people’s wishes. The public sphere as a form of social life emerged through the rise of open forums of debate such as print media, lectures and political meetings where ideas could be discussed and ‘public opinion’ formed. Fluctuating between support and suppression, the new Meiji government was ambivalent towards the idea of public deliberation. In his important study of the public sphere in early Meiji Japan, Kyu Hyun Kim convincingly argues that it wasn’t a question of the ‘winning’ state or a ‘losing’ Freedom and People’s Rights Movement as such, but rather it was the interaction and struggle between the state and civil society through the public sphere that shaped the contours of Japan’s political system.¹⁷ In other words, within this framing, the critical discourse emerging from the

¹⁵ For instance, Peter Duus writes, ‘The political cartoon did not achieve its full potential as a vehicle for the expression of political opinion (or political critique) until the emergence of an elite opposition to the government,’ in Peter Duus, “Presidential Address: Weapons of the Weak, Weapons of the Strong – The Development of the Japanese Political Cartoon,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60, no. 4 (November 2001): 976. Also see Yulia Mikhailova, “Intellectuals, Cartoons, and Nationalism During the Russo-Japanese War,” in Mark W MacWilliams, eds., *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime* (New York: M.E. Sharp, 2008); Maeda and Shimizu, eds., *Kindai manga II: jiyūminkenki no manga*. ‘Small newspapers’ (*koshinbun*) were considered low-brow tabloid papers for the masses as opposed to ‘large newspapers’ (*ōshinbun*), which were serious politics-heavy newspapers for officials and intellectuals.

¹⁶ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 129.

¹⁷ Kyu Hyun Kim, *The Age of Visions and Arguments: Parliamentarianism and the National Public Sphere in Early Meiji Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007), 7, 9-10, 258.

public sphere is less a disidentification with the state's national subject formation project, and more a radical identification with this mission and a desire to be involved in defining its terms. Kim articulates this as the 'national public sphere' of early Meiji Japan that helped to establish Japan as a modern nation-state and produced a sense of belonging to a nation:

'By discussing and debating the ultimate political question, that is, what the Japanese political system should be like, and by participating in various political and cultural activities with parliamentary themes, such as public lecture meetings, production and consumption of newspapers and journals, and, of course, party activism, Japanese people from divergent class and regional backgrounds came to see themselves as members of a shared imaginary space.'¹⁸

Similarly, speaking more directly about the role performed by political satirical illustrated newspapers, Peter Duus uses Foucauldian language to describe these publications as agents of 'democratic surveillance,' which in the end meant that they 'belonged to a same political community as the officials he lampooned – the newly constituted nation.' Albeit acting as critical eyes, they were ultimately sympathetic allies in the Meiji nation building-project and 'contributed to the construction of a national imaginary.'¹⁹ To be sure, underlying these perceptions of the core significance of Meiji satirical newspapers being found in their contributions to creating a sense of nation, is Benedict Anderson's 'imagined communities,' which identifies the role of the rise of print capitalism and the act of newspaper consumption, for example, in producing a sense of simultaneity and belonging to a national community. As an extension of this, the satirical humor found in these newspapers (and the laughter it generates) is seen as functioning to delineate and entrench distinctions between 'Self' and 'Other,' across national lines. Put another way, the primary significance of Meiji satirical newspapers is that they 'served to naturalize the idea of the Japanese nation.'²⁰

¹⁸ Kim, *The Age of Visions and Arguments*, 9-10.

¹⁹ Duus, "Presidential Address," 981, 989.

²⁰ Duus, "Presidential Address," 984.

In particular, though an important approach, a methodological tendency that limits analyses to interpretations of the visual representations in political cartoons found in Meiji satirical newspapers such as the *Marumaru Chinbun*, has served to define the terms of its import. In other words, that caricatures described as ‘punch pictures’ were used to engage in political satirical critique, and that these caricatures are understood to have visually traced the contours of imperial taxonomies, is a narrative that is rooted in a Western modernization discourse and teleology, which centers a West to East flow of knowledge and technologies in the form of ‘punch’ illustrated satirical newspapers, which contributed to the emergence of the ‘national public sphere’ in Japan and the rise of the modern-nation state. In line with the methodological shift suggested by this dissertation, i.e., a foregrounding of ‘laughter,’ this chapter will interrogate how the *Marumaru Chinbun* and *Kibi Dango* newspapers were primarily concerned with constructing a body of the laughing people, and in doing so formed networks of laughter by cultivating an active participatory readership through encouraging a variety of contributions from readers in the form of crazy verse, satirical poems, letters and songs. I reveal that this body of the laughing people was a laughing counterpublic in the sense that the belonging that was imagined and nurtured through laughter, was out of place with, and resistant towards the dominant state ideology of the national body imaginary. As Warner notes, counterpublics often do not privilege rational-critical discourse and frequently elevate other forms of affective sociability.²¹ Accordingly, I demonstrate that the primary purpose and significance of these newspapers was not to create a public debate about the future progress and state of the nation. That is not to say that some of the writers, cartoonist or reader-contributors may not have had this in mind. Rather, what I am arguing is that what is most interesting and meaningful is how members of the laughing counterpublic communicated through these newspapers as social network platforms in seemingly nonsensical ways to make

²¹ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 123-124.

others laugh and to mutually sharpen each other's skills in producing satirical humor, in order to counter the state's targeting of human interiority as a site for national subject formation. Put simply, laughing and generating laughter was the goal as opposed to a coordinated political aim of civil rights activism. Equally, it was on this very basis of laughing communication through which members imagined and performed their sense of belonging and not the nation body symbolized in the figure of the Meiji emperor. Indeed, they imagined following and being represented by an alternative laughing leader, which symbolized the body of the laughing counterpublic. It was additionally because of this different form of belonging, that the laughing counterpublic could be imagined in a dynamic 'rolling' manner that could infinitely expand out to incorporate all people into *its* laughing body, extending beyond and in tension with the Meiji state's national body ideology. In this reckoning, Self and Other was not defined by national identity, imperial hierarchies and other forms of modern belonging, but was based on whether one laughs or not.

Sowing Seeds of Laughter

The Dan Dan Sha Company was founded by Nomura Fumio (1836-1891) who has been described as beginning his career as somewhat of a typical scholar of Western learning (*yōgakusha*) of the late Tokugawa era.²² Originally from the Hiroshima domain, in 1855 he joined Ogata Kōan's *Tekijuku* school where he was exposed to Dutch studies and other Western sciences. Nomura was a fellow student of the future influential enlightenment intellectual and founder of Keio University, Fukuzawa Yukichi. As already introduced in Chapter 1, Fukuzawa was an outspoken critic of playful literature and so-called 'useless' laughter and so the two

²² For biographical information of Nomura Fumio and details of the founding of the Dan Dan Sha Company see *kaisetsu* (commentary) in Dan Dan Sha, *Marumaru Chinbun*, vol. 1-24 (Tokyo: Honpo Shoseki, 1981-1982), vol. 1, i-xxv; and Itaru Kimoto, *Marumaru chinbun kibi dango ga yuku* (Tokyo: Hakusuisha, 1999), 39-56.

former colleagues would go on to take very different career trajectories. In 1864 Nomura was dispatched by his domain to Nagasaki, assigned with the task of servicing a steamship and learning English. A year later, after forming a connection with the Scottish merchant, Thomas B. Glover, Nomura disobeyed the Tokugawa ban on overseas travel and smuggled his way to Glover's hometown where he spent the next few years of his life before returning to Japan via trips to London and Paris. Returning to a post-*ishin* Japan and absolved of his crime, the decision to leave Japan in fact became a prescient one as he soon found various positions as an expert of Western learning. Based on his lived experience in Europe, and as if in parallel to Fukuzawa Yukichi's *Seiyō jijō* (*Conditions in the West*, 1866), Nomura Fumio published his own *Seiyō bunkenroku* (*A Record of Observations in the West*, 1869), within which he commented on the important role newspapers played in Britain. It is apparent that Nomura drew inspiration from the *Punch* of London and in certain articles within the *Marumaru Chinbun* that include English translations even translates *Dandan shi* (Mr Dan Dan) as Mr Punch. Yet, at the same time, the opening 'Speech' in the first edition of the *Marumaru Chinbun*, assures us that the newspaper 'is not simply a copy of the other Western humorous punch' publications. Rather, it is bringing to the surface the 'abundance of comical and playful words already in our country.'²³ In other words, the *Marumaru Chinbun* wasn't coming up with anything new per se, but was tapping into an already existing culture of satirical laughter in Japan and providing a platform to release these energies. Nomura would abandon his promising career as a Meiji government official and enlightenment intellectual to become, in today's parlance, a social media entrepreneur, working under relentless government scrutiny. Despite a tongue-in-cheek obligatory statement ostensibly praising the 'graces of the new age of civilization' where the 'government permits'²⁴ the free public expression of these satirical

²³ Dan Dan Sha, *Marumaru Chinbun*, vol. 1, 2.

²⁴ 官許ゆるし is a play on government permission and the official stamp of approval for publications.

works in comparison to the past age where this was done with much difficulty, the opening ‘Speech’ subtly hints towards the fact that the Dan Dan Sha was operating under strict government oversight:

‘The writers are writing in a frivolously playful way (but really, they are putting in a lot of effort), and we of course know that there will be (governing) eyes²⁵ on this magazine with disdain, but we aren’t concerned about the birds of prey coming from above, we will receive all of it. Regardless of this, our main purpose is to make this humorous, so to our readers please await and rate each edition of this publication with this in mind.’²⁶

Indeed, this venture was a collaborative effort. Nomura built a network of writers and artists, many of whom were practitioners in the art of *gesaku* playful literature. For example, Fusō Kan (1841-1894), a *gesaku* writer and collaborator-friend of Kanagaki Robun, and Baitei Kinga (1821-1893) who had worked with the likes of Kawanabe Kyōsai and Mantei Ōga. The artist, Honda Kinkichirō (1850-1921) who was also a Hiroshima native and long-time student of Nomura became the first cartoonist who was later joined by the *ukiyo-e* artist Kobayashi Kiyochika (1847-1915) who famously released his own *Kiyochika ponchi* (Kiyochika Punch) series of *nishiki-e* woodblock prints in 1881. The French satirical artist Georges F. Bigot (1860-1927) was another to join their ranks as a contributing cartoonist. It is not my intention to add to the excellent and extensive body of biographical literature that has explored the lives and works of these individuals.²⁷ What is pertinent for this chapter, however, and is a subject of study that remains largely unexplored, is the Dan Dan Sha’s cultivation of an active audience

²⁵ けんぶつしゅう
看官衆 is a play on viewing and government oversight.

²⁶ Dan Dan Sha, *Marumaru Chinbun*, vol. 1, 2.

²⁷ See for example: Henry D Smith II, *Kiyochika: Artist of Meiji Japan* (California: Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1988); Hélène Cornevin and Isao Shimizu eds., *Georges Bigot: Il y a cent ans, un Artiste Français au Japon* (Japan: Réunion des Musées Japonais, Yomiuri Shinbunsha, 1987); Isao Shimizu and Kōichi Yumoto, eds., *Meiji manyōshū* (Tokyo: Bungei Shunju, 1989); Isao Shimizu, eds., *Images de L'ère Meiji – Le Monde de Georges Bigot, un Artiste Français au Japon* (Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 2002); Christian Polak and Hugh Cortazzi, eds., *Georges Bigot and Japan 1882-1899: Satirist, Illustrator and Artist Extraordinaire* (Kent: Renaissance Books, 2018); Kimoto, *Marumaru chinbun kibi dango ga yuku*; Maeda and Shimizu, eds., *Kindai manga II: jiyūminkenki no manga*; Dan Dan Sha, *Marumaru Chinbun*, vol. 1, i-xxv.

who are transformed into co-creators of the newspapers and laughing counterpublic space of circulation as reader-writers. Kim observes that *tōsho* or contributions to newspapers in the form of letters to the editor and op-eds played an important role in Meiji cultural life and made newspapers into an ‘interactive medium’ or a marketplace of ideas to formulate ‘public opinion’ that can be brought up to act upon the state.²⁸ Yet, what is most interesting and distinct about the interactive nature of the Dan Dan Sha’s publications is their lack of emphasis on encouraging rational-critical discourse, and conversely, the encouragement of learning to laugh and make others laugh. Public discussions of political issues and generating ‘public opinion’ were in this sense subordinate to the primary *raison d’être* of sharing and spreading laughter.

This is often referred to within the newspapers as ‘seeds of laughter’ (お笑い種, *owaraigusa* or 笑の種, *warai no tane*), meaning a catalyst that engenders laughter. For example, the opening ‘Speech’ in the *Marumaru Chinbun*, summarizes the purpose of the paper in the following way:

‘In short, on the surface they are easy and quick to understand short *senryū* poems, while on the inside we have slipped in a strong flavor, and so if it is a bit salty please do not discard it, for it has the two effects of awakening you from sleepiness to rid you of dullness, and a seed of laughter that rewards good and punishes evil.’²⁹

It is also used within the specific context of ‘planting’ or ‘sowing’ seeds of laughter, meaning the act of finding something and crafting a joke to make others laugh. This aligns with the symbolic meaning the newspapers attach to growing one’s nose into a long one that can sniff out seeds of laughter which discern between the good and the evil. The Dan Dan Sha’s ‘Mr Punch’ character, for example, is pictured as having a long *Tengu*-like nose (see Figure 12 and Figure 13), and the three men dressed in Western suits on the front cover of the *Marumaru*

²⁸ Kim, *The Age of Visions and Arguments*, 95.

²⁹ Dan Dan Sha, *Marumaru Chinbun*, vol. 1, 2.

Chinbun are parodying the three wise monkeys that see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil, by gesturing that they in fact do see, hear and sniff out all evil, and use their brush to record it in a humorous way as further suggested by the horse (*ba*) and deer (*ka*) figures at the top of the page, which play on the word for foolish (*baka*) (Figure 14). Not only do the writers and artists for the Dan Dan Sha sniff out and sow these seeds of laughter, but they cultivate a readership that are similarly adept at finding seeds of satirical laughter to make other readers laugh through wit. The *Kibi Dango*'s opening 'Speech to Sing One's Own Praises,' even goes as far as claiming that the readers are doing all the hard labor in spreading laughter through an abundance of submissions, to the point that there isn't much left for the staff do.

'We have received a mountain of humor and a sea of wit in the form of submissions from everyone and so we need not dig up the seeds of laughter that we had sown in the fields.'³⁰

The passage continues by reiterating and celebrating the wealth of contributions they receive from the readers and urging them to continue to do so despite the apparent lack of available space in the newspapers to publish all of the received submissions.

'Beyond this newspaper's capacity, we are receiving contributions in the form of *kyōka*, *senryū*, and *dodoitsu*, and we will print them according to what is going on in the world at the time. Subsequently, we have received so many submissions on a number of themes...that we have run out of space within our newspaper and cannot make room for any more seats as it were, and so we will gradually post these submissions as we go.'³¹

³⁰ Dan Dan Sha, *Kibi Dango*, vol. 1, 4.

³¹ Dan Dan Sha, *Kibi Dango*, vol. 1, 4.



Figure 14: Front cover of the *Marumaru Chinbun* first edition. *Marumaru Chinbun*, 14 March 1877.

The format of both the *Marumaru Chinbun* and *Kibi Dango* were designed to encourage submissions from readers, and the newspapers essentially functioned as media platforms. Aside from satirical editorials and comical vignettes, large portions of the newspapers were dedicated to posting miscellaneous letters and commentaries as well as regular sections for submissions of *kyōka*, *senryū*, and *dodoitsu*, which are forms of humorous poetry that were popular in the Edo urban culture of play. The newspapers would frequently set a specific theme for the poems to follow, or a topic to cover, after which they would post a collection of these poems in an upcoming edition. For example, in the new year edition of the *Kibi Dango* from 4 January 1882, the instructed format for the ‘Fart Hundred Poem Sequence’ (放屁百首, *hōhi hyakushu*) was to craft a new year’s greeting poem that included a word play on the character for fart (屁).³²

³² Dan Dan Sha, *Kibi Dango*, vol. 8, 12.

Elsewhere in the *Kibi Dango* from 12 February 1879, contributors were required to submit poems that centered on the subject of ‘glasses,’ to which many of the submissions cited the two circles of *Marumaru* (○○) as their ‘lens’ on the world or that which ‘reveals’ the world to them.³³ Underneath the collection was a sketch of a pair of glasses with round frames, another humorous reference to the *Marumaru* circular worldview. This evidently popular theme was repeated again a month later in the 19 March 1879 edition.³⁴ They further enticed readers to submit by creating competitions and publishing rankings to rate regular contributors according to their skills in producing humorous satirical content that induces laughter. They frequently displayed these rankings in the form of a *banzuke*, which originally refers to a table used to rank sumo wrestlers participating in a tournament, but also became popular in Edo Japan’s urban culture as the format was appropriated as a playful way to rank anything from goods and foods to hot springs.³⁵ The *Marumaru Chinbun* from 23 January 1884, for example, included a *banzuke* table titled, ‘*Marumaru tōshoka hanakurabe*’ (團團投書家鼻競) to rank the ‘noses of contributors.’³⁶ Parodying the *banzuke* layout, the table is divided into East (right) and West (left), and reading from right to left in descending order is the highest ranked *ōzeki* (大関) followed by the ranks of *sekiwake* (関脇), *komusubi* (小結), and *maegashira* (前頭). Underneath each rank is written the number of accumulated points for submissions and the contributor’s penname (Figure 15). One can imagine that receiving acknowledgement of one’s skills as a ‘long-nosed’ contributor that has planted many seeds of laughter in this way would have been greatly prized by the reader-writers. To be sure, as suggested by one reader in a published letter in the 22 February 1879 *Marumaru Chinbun*, to even just have one’s

³³ Dan Dan Sha, *Kibi Dango*, vol. 2, 176.

³⁴ Dan Dan Sha, *Kibi Dango*, vol. 2, 189.

³⁵ Kim, *The Age of Visions and Arguments*, 31.

³⁶ Dan Dan Sha, *Marumaru Chinbun*, vol. 13, 124-125.

celebrate the Dan Dan Sha Company' (*Marumaru sha iwai mariuta*), praises the Dan Dan Sha newspapers for their work in sowing seeds of laughter and expresses the desires of readers to become co-laborers and propagators of laughter. At the same time, the contributor romantically articulates the ups and downs of emotions that one experiences as a reader attempting to have one's submission accepted to the newspapers:

‘One – The humor that makes one laugh. *Marumaru Chinbun* and *Kibi Dango*.

Two – The two magazines are eternal. Released like water and earth.

Three – The more you read it the more you will laugh. It is designed to include articles, crazy poems, songs and pictures.

Four – While knowing that there is no more blank space available. Sending in ideas to the submissions box.

Five – Swooping in with crows' beaks. The seeds that have been planted will be gathered up.

Six – Forcing a wordplay even when it isn't there. Making puns popular around the world.

Seven – Whether Buddhism or Christianity. If you play with it, everything can become a seed of laughter.

Eight – Fruitless effort. Writing a submission for it to be rejected.

Nine – Another year of sending in a stinky submission. Though it blocks up space, let it be printed.

Ten – The 140th edition. May it continue to thrive!³⁸

To further emphasize the function of the newspapers as interactive mediums, blank space on the pages were discussed in terms of being an exhibition or shop space, or a theatre. Contributors would be eager to display their curios (*chinbutsu*) or wares in the form of submitted poems and other written pieces to a crowd of viewers. For example, in the 12 November 1879 *Kibi Dango*, the *gesaku* writer Mantei Ōga announced the opening of his ‘crazy words’ (狂語, *kyōgo*) store. He introduces the opening of his ‘store’ in the form of a journey through a shopping street with different sellers (屋) lined up on either side:

‘To the right of me is a pun store (地口屋, *jiguchiya*), to the left a double entendres dealership (語路屋, *goroya*), in front a seller of comical vignettes (一口咄屋, *hitokuchibanashiya*). In amongst all of these

³⁸ Dan Dan Sha, *Kibi Dango*, vol. 6, 15.

shops that have a wide floor space and are flourishing, I will be attempting to open up a small crazy words business.³⁹

The text is accompanied by an illustration of a shopfront that is constructed with beams of brushes and a larger beam to the right confirming that this is ‘leased space’ (借地) within the *Kibi Dango* (Figure 16). Both of the newspapers also had series that played on the idea of exhibitions of curios, and in particular, parodying the concept of ‘Great Exhibitions.’ Intended to bring the term for ‘World Fairs’ (万国博覧会, *bankoku hakurankai*) to mind through a paradoxical contrast, the *Marumaru Chimbun* ran a multi-edition series titled the ‘Exhibit from the Inner House Fair’ (内告宅覧会出品, *naikokutaku hakurankai shuppin*), which featured illustrations and caricatures alongside a short satirical text that would lampoon the times or a prominent individual.⁴⁰ Built on a similar idea of a political satirical picture with an explanatory text or caption, the *Kibi Dango* had a multi-edition series called the ‘Display from the Exhibition of Laughter’ (笑覧会出品, *shōrankai shuppin*). This series would particularly focus on exhibiting ‘curios.’ For example, in the piece from 23 February 1881, the display included Momotarō’s battle flag, snake scales and a fern leaf (Figure 17). The accompanying text humorously jumps from one ridiculous story to the next explaining how it was during the reign of emperor Momozono, and that everyone is familiar with the tale of Momotarō, even Christopher Columbus, to the extent that he made the journey to the Americas after reading how Momotarō went to the demon island. The scattered story continues that Momotarō as the founder of the people’s rights has gathered followers, and this idea of people’s rights is being made known through many newspapers. However, the real mystery behind why Momotarō is brandishing this war flag with a tofu cube at the top and dumpling underneath, is because on the surface the people’s rights activists are serious squares, but upon encountering women they

³⁹ Dan Dan Sha, *Kibi Dango*, vol. 3, 316.

⁴⁰ See for example, Dan Dan Sha, *Marumaru Chimbun*, vol. 1, 28.

become light and fluffy. Moreover, like a round dumpling, they can easily roll over to the side of government officials.⁴¹ Momotarō is again invoked as a well-known leader type, yet in this retelling, the folktale hero is utilized to satirize the leaders of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement who are painted as those who can be easily swayed by the allurements of power and position. It is worth noting here that scholarship on modern Japanese history has often only considered how the folktale of Momotarō was appropriated by the state and introduced into elementary school textbooks as part of a centralized national education system during the Meiji period. The story of Momotarō as a hero who protects his homeland from foreign demons by venturing out to the overseas demon island, subduing them, and being rewarded with treasures as the spoils of war, became conflated with the Japanese nation and was invoked as an effective 'pedagogical tool' to shape young minds in line with nationalist and imperialist agendas.⁴² What John Dower termed the 'Momotarō Paradigm' in his study of propaganda during the Pacific War, which speaks to the folktale hero as the embodiment of the Japanese noble Self who makes imperial advances to liberate the Asian Other or fights off the Other of the demonic Western enemy, was an idea already present at the turn of the 20th century.⁴³ Departing from a state-centered lens, Sho Konishi has demonstrated that as early as the Russo-Japanese War, anarchists such as Kōtoku Shūsui were mocking the fairytale of Momotarō because of its role in creating an imperialistic and nationalistic consciousness in young minds.⁴⁴ Yet, the Dan Dan Sha's recurring invocations of Momotarō reveal that already in the early Meiji era, at the very same time as the state was seeking to tie the folktale of Momotarō to the notion of a national identity and destiny, the meaning of Momotarō was far from fixed, nor was it the sole

⁴¹ Dan Dan Sha, *Kibi Dango*, vol. 6, 126.

⁴² Robert Tierney, "Nanyō no Momotarō – minwa, shokuminchiseisaku, parodii," *Juncture* 6 (2015): 24-41.

⁴³ See John W Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 251-57; Nahoko Kahara explores the construction of the 'Momotarō paradigm' from the Meiji period in Nahoko Kahara, "Mukashi banashi no shujinkō kara kokka no shōchō he: Momotarō paradaimu no keisei," *Bulletin, Faculty of Music, Tokyo Geijutsu Daigaku* 36 (2010): 51-72.

⁴⁴ Sho Konishi, *Anarchist Modernity: Cooperatism and Japanese-Russian Intellectual Relations in Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 158, 332.

possession of the state. The leader type of Momotarō and the fictional world he inhabited could be endlessly played with and manipulated by the ordinary satirist for often competing purposes of lampooning the government, its accomplices, or imagining their own laughing leader who gathers followers as a parody of the imperial system.



Figure 16: Mantei Ōga's crazy words dealership. *Kibi Dango*, 12 November 1879.

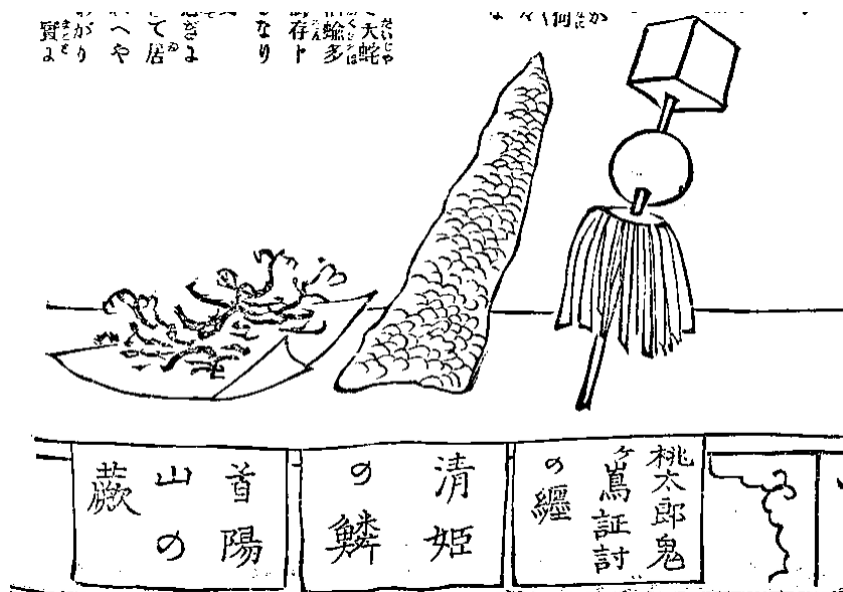


Figure 17: Display from the Exhibition of Laughter. *Kibi Dango*, 23 February 1881.

Another notable series that plays on the idea of exhibiting, is the ‘Pictures of a Hundred Deformities’ (百不具の圖) found in the *Kibi Dango*. In the manner of a circus’ human oddities show, the newspaper displayed bodies with deformities or in distorted positions such as, ‘the fellow without a backbone;’ ‘the two tongued;’ ‘the one who is crooked;’ ‘the person with many mouths’ etc., as a form of political satire to lampoon events of the day.⁴⁵ The act of finding and ‘exhibiting curios,’ was exactly how Kanagaki Robun envisioned the role of *ponchi-e* (punch pictures) for his own short-lived magazine, the *E-shinbun Nipponchi*, and as outlined in Chapter 3, he later praised the *Marumaru Chinbun* as eventually fulfilling this mission. Whereas the *Nipponchi* only ‘displayed’ content produced by Robun and Kyōsai to share satirical humor which reflected the localized spaces that they were participants of such as the *shogakai* art salons, the Dan Dan Sha newspapers opened up and extended their ‘exhibition’ space to readers so that they could become co-curators of the exhibition of laughter, and thus enlarging the laughing counterpublic.

The Dan Dan Sha newspapers intentionally showcased and celebrated the fact that they were cultivating an expansive and ever-growing body of laughing people. They joked that it is the ‘roundness’ of their name that enabled the papers to roll around Japan so quickly.⁴⁶ As evidence of this, alongside the name of the contributor, the *Marumaru Chinbun* and *Kibi Dango* frequently indicated where the submissions were sent in from. For instance, the 20 November 1878 *Kibi Dango*’s ‘celebratory *kyōka*’ section included poems in praise of the *Kibi Dango* sent in from nearby Tokyo and beyond, stretching out across Japan to regions and cities such as Shinshū, Mito, Ise, Osaka, Kyoto, Hiroshima and Nagasaki.⁴⁷ To be sure, this practice of printing the origin of the submission was distinct from that of other more serious ‘public opinion’ newspapers at the time, which in attempting to protect their reputations as credible

⁴⁵ See Dan Dan Sha, *Kibi Dango*, vol. 2, 25, 42, 73, 218.

⁴⁶ Dan Dan Sha, *Kibi Dango*, vol. 1, 4.

⁴⁷ Dan Dan Sha, *Kibi Dango*, vol. 1, 52-53.

media publications announced that submissions without proper names or addresses wouldn't be printed, nor should contributors submit rumors or 'baseless untruths.'⁴⁸ The Dan Dan Sha company didn't mind comical pseudonyms, obscenities or gossip. By contrast, an example of their 'rules for rejecting submissions,' was printed in the 4 November 1882 *Marumaru Chinbun*:

'Possessing the 笑權 [laughing authority] of the Dan Dan Sha, I establish the following rules pursuant to rejecting submissions. Dan Dan Sha will reject the following three types of submissions:

1. Plagiarized, 2. Repeats, 3. Mediocre.'⁴⁹

Accordingly, the Dan Dan Sha Company was primarily concerned with whether or not the submissions demonstrated originality and wit. The extent to which the newspapers had spread across Japan and their intention to engage with audiences beyond Japan can also be seen in the list of 'agents,' printed on the last page of the *Marumaru Chinbun*. The 'agents' refers to a list of names and addresses of local sellers from where one can purchase the paper. Again, the list transcends Tokyo and includes addresses from areas such as Yokohama, Shizuoka, Yamanashi, Nagano, Nagoya, Kyoto, Osaka, Niigata, Shikoku, Kochi and Kumamoto. This page also included a message written in English addressed to 'Foreign Gentlemen' noting that any 'Editorial or Business communications may be sent to the office in Tokio, the Capital of Japan,' suggesting that they had, and were seeking to further cultivate a non-Japanese readership.⁵⁰ Indeed, the print circulation numbers more than reflected this spread. In 1877, the first year of its release, the weekly Saturday paper, *Marumaru Chinbun*, sold a total of 149,902 copies. This rapidly grew to 259,986 copies in 1880, its highest circulation year. The data also reveals that in both of these years over 400 'foreigners' bought the newspaper. Notably, the numbers of

⁴⁸ See Kim, *The Age of Visions and Arguments*, 96, for examples of the *Nisshin Shinjishi* and *Tokyo Nichi Nichi Shinbun*'s public requests to would-be contributors.

⁴⁹ Dan Dan Sha, *Marumaru Chinbun*, vol. 9, 556.

⁵⁰ Dan Dan Sha, *Marumaru Chinbun*, vol. 1, 304.

copies sold in regions outside of Tokyo were consistently higher than the number sold within the capital. For example, in 1881, 92,410 copies were sold in the capital in comparison to 141,649 outside. The circulation numbers of the Wednesday weekly *Kibi Dango*, display a similar trend towards larger sales numbers in the provinces. For example, in 1880 of a total of 87,055 copies sold, 31,850 were within Tokyo and 55,103 were without, with the remaining 102 indicated as being purchased by non-Japanese. Therefore, at its height in 1881, the Dan Dan Sha Company had a total circulation number of over 347,000 across both of its newspapers.⁵¹ That the newspapers were priced at and widely advertised as being an affordable 5 *sen* ensured its accessibility to the masses. While these figures are already staggering, this available data based on distribution is perhaps only the tip of the iceberg. In real-terms there was likely a much larger reach because of common practices of oral reading in groups, lending, sharing and local print copying for redistribution. To be sure, the broader context of technological innovations in printing such as the moveable metal type, printing press, lithography, zinc plates and photo engraving, as well as the development of the transportation and postal infrastructures were essential to enabling its mass circulation.⁵² Frequent humble brags about the newspapers' circulation and intentionally showcasing that they have a growing audience of reader-contributors from increasingly far and wide, created the feeling that one was a part of a dynamic and expanding body of laughers – a partaking in the Dan Dan Sha's eucharist; an (un)holy communion of 'jaw-breaking' dumpling balls.

The body of the laughing people was imagined as transcending the borders of nation. The 'round' newspapers were discussed in terms of rolling around Japan, but also sowing seeds to generate a laughing readership beyond. Contributors expressed their desire to make all types of people from across the world laugh and celebrated that the '*Maruchin*'s tales have echoed

⁵¹ See table of print circulation in Dan Dan Sha, *Marumaru Chinbun*, vol. 1, iv-v.

⁵² Kinki Ito, "Manga in Japanese History," in MacWilliams, eds., *Japanese Visual Culture*, 31-32.

to the West.’⁵³ To date, however, scholarship on global manifestations of ‘punch’ and on satirical illustrated newspapers in nineteenth century Japan, has overwhelmingly considered the format in a visual representational sense of contributing to the construction and reification of national, cultural and racial borders. In particular, there is an ocular-centric emphasis on visual representations of the racialized body that demarcates a West-East and civilized-uncivilized imperial hierarchical divide. Yet, as this dissertation has sought to do, if we shift our emphasis to laughter and the act of laughing, we find a transnational imagination and practice that disrupts these bifurcations. From its inception, the Dan Dan Sha Company intended to attract a non-Japanese readership and incorporate them into their body of laughing people. The first edition of the *Marumaru Chinbun*, for example, included the first of a regular ‘English-Japanese Dialogue’ series, which would feature a mix of satirical vignettes, humorous takes on events of the day and general jokes. The format of the ‘dialogue,’ was an English text alongside a Japanese translation or vice-versa, and was advertised as promoting language exchange. The *Marumaru Chinbun* also regularly included English captions alongside the Japanese text to provide bilingual explanations for its satirical illustrations and caricatures. The nature of these bilingual dialogues and English-Japanese annotated illustrations are also particularly worth noting. Characteristic of the critical engagement with dominant Meiji era discourses of civilization, which we have already seen expressed within localized laughing counterpublic spaces such as the art salons where Japanese and non-Japanese would gather to share ‘punch pictures’ and laugh at civilization, the *Marumaru Chinbun* elevated such dialogues into print through satirizing civilization as Western modernity. For example, the 17 August 1878 *Marumaru Chinbun* featured an annotated illustration that depicted Japanese men dressed in Western style suits representing the Meiji government officials and elites, getting paralytically drunk on the ‘wine and sperits [*sic*], imported directly from Europe,’ that is being

⁵³ Dan Dan Sha, *Marumaru Chinbun*, vol. 4, 153; vol. 6, 322.

hurriedly poured for them by three foreigners who are eager to take advantage of the drunkards (Figure 18). The bottles of ‘Western liquor’ (洋酒) on display included intoxicants such as Western sciences (究理酒), Christianity (耶蘇酒), civilization (怪化酒), cunning diplomacy (狡猾酒), law (法律酒), and commerce (商法酒).⁵⁴ Elsewhere, the 5 June 1886 *Marumaru Chinbun* featured a bilingual short joke story titled, ‘Nonsense,’ that points out the hypocrisy of a slave-owning minister. It follows an interaction in Massachusetts between a ‘negro slave’ named Coffee and his ‘massa’ a clergyman of high esteem named Mr Cogswell. One Sabbath day when Mr Cogswell was preaching in the church, Coffee noticed that several gentlemen were taking notes of the sermon and so he thought he would do the same. Mr Cogswell was astonished that his beloved slave had taken notes and upon asking to see them Coffee produced a sheet of paper with ink messily scribbled all over it. The minister proclaimed that it is all ‘nonsense,’ to which Coffee replied, ‘Well, Massa...I thought so all de time you was preaching.’⁵⁵ What is most striking about much of the newspaper’s bilingual content such as the pieces introduced here, which sought to reach both a Japanese and non-Japanese audience, is the intent towards satirizing and subverting Western conceptions of civilization and its associated hierarchies of peoples and so-called progress. In other words, far from setting up a hierarchical divide between the civilized and uncivilized, the *Marumaru Chinbun*’s satire encouraged laughter to dismantle such borders.

⁵⁴ Dan Dan Sha, *Marumaru Chinbun*, vol. 3, 297.

⁵⁵ Dan Dan Sha, *Marumaru Chinbun*, vol. 17, 336.



Figure 18: Drunk on the wine of civilization. *Marumaru Chinbun*, 17 August 1878.

Beyond a readership cultivated by the Dan Dan Sha, which included a number of non-Japanese readers, this critical engagement would reach a wider foreign audience through the work of the French artist and long-term resident in Japan, Georges Bigot. Like Charles Wirgman, Bigot learnt to speak fluent Japanese and adopted a Japanese name (美好, *Bigō*) and lifestyle, integrating with the locals rather than choosing a life segregating himself to the Western expat community. Bigot arrived to Yokohama in January of 1882 and found work at the military college in Ichigaya as an instructor in watercolor and drawing to officers, which he would do for the next two years. A key turning point in his life came in March 1884 when he became a teacher of French at the *Futsugakujuku* French language school founded by the seminal liberal political thinker and author of *A Discourse by Three Drunkards on Government* (1887), Nakae Chōmin (1847-1901).⁵⁶ It was around this time that he was invited to become a contributing artist for the *Marumaru Chinbun*, which was announced in the 7 March 1885 edition, as part of an article titled, ‘On the Reform of Crazy Pictures.’ The newspaper had

⁵⁶ For further biographical detail of Georges Bigot’s life in Japan see, Polak and Cortazzi, eds., *Georges Bigot and Japan 1882-1899*.

apparently recently experienced some governmental pushback that caused panic and brought a ‘rainstorm of tears’ to the eyes of the Dan Dan Sha editors, and hailing from the home of punch, Bigot was invited to support this ‘reform’ effort through contributing crazy pictures.⁵⁷ And so began Bigot’s collaborative relationship with the Dan Dan Sha Company.

While it is often assumed that the Frenchman Bigot was the teacher of Western knowledge to the Japanese, in fact, what is more interesting and significant is the flow of knowledge in the opposite direction and the influence that this experience had on Bigot’s work and intellectual engagement. In 1887 Bigot launched the *Tôbaé: Journal Satirique* (1887-1889), a bi-monthly magazine, which would run for 69 issues. The name *Tôbaé* is a reference to the 12th century priest and artist, Toba Sōjō, and the style of satirical *toba-e* (Toba pictures), suggesting that Bigot became immersed in the Japanese culture of humor. Bigot also sketched an image of his *Tôbaé* Pierrot character bidding farewell to Wirgman’s Mr Punch, by way of acknowledging a passing over of the baton to follow in Wirgman’s footsteps (Figure 19). Where *Tôbaé* innovated in line with the model demonstrated by the *Marumaru Chinbun*, was in its use of bilingual French and Japanese captions as annotations to the journal, written in collaboration with Nakae Chōmin and students at the *Futsugakujuku*. The fact that the magazine satirized the Meiji government’s campaign to imitate Western civilization and had Japanese translations, which allowed it to reach a Japanese audience, meant that it was closely watched by the government with officials calling for the magazine to be censored. Christian Polak explains that in the end Bigot opted to self-censor through removing Japanese subtitles from the 36th edition.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Dan Dan Sha, *Marumaru Chinbun*, vol. 15, 182-183.

⁵⁸ Polak and Cortazzi, eds., *Georges Bigot and Japan 1882-1899*, 18.

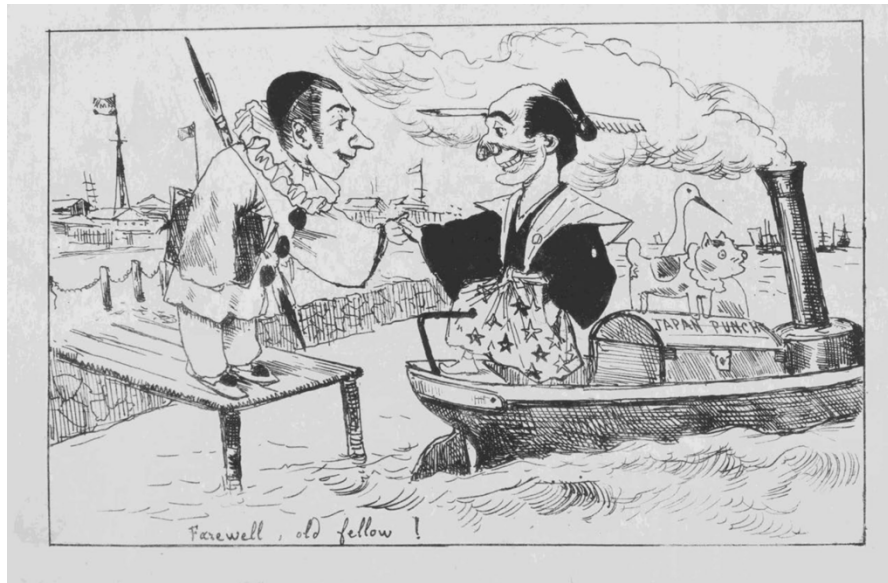


Figure 19: *Tôbaé* and the *Japan Punch*. *Tôbaé*, 15 April 1887.

(Digital Collections of Keio University Libraries)

Articulating its intellectual and stylistic lineage in terms of Wirgman's *Japan Punch* as well as an engagement with the Edo urban satirical culture, or put another way, its emergence from the critical space that opened up in the mid-late nineteenth century Japan through a transnational encounter of 'punch pictures,' Bigot's *Tôbaé* represented the potential for a further transnational expansion of the laughing counterpublic through its French-Japanese bilingual content that lampooned civilization discourses. Its subversion of civilization discourses was not simply in content but also resides in the process of production, which disrupts existing dominant narratives of unidirectional artistic flows of knowledge from West to East. It was Bigot who was influenced by and collaborated as equals beyond the color line with his Japanese interlocutors in a way that involved him in taking up their cause in circulating a counterculture of satirical laughter. Whereas, to date, Bigot's satirical pictures have been understood as constructing an East-West color line distinction through visual caricatures of Japanese government officials and elites' bodies as primates 'aping' the West – a practice that it is said that the Japanese artists would repeat – in fact it is better to say that this transnational

encounter saw Bigot became a participant in the local critical satirical culture, which in laughing together at the civilization and enlightenment campaigns led by state officials and elite intellectuals, was erecting borders between the body of the laughing people and a non-laughing public who seriously engaged in modern nation-state building.

In Praise of Round Talk

〇〇と〇く出来たる驥尾団子 地きゅう一ばん〇で広〇

‘The rolled up and made round *Kibi Dango*. The roundest in the globe and spreads around.’⁵⁹

As a counterpublic with ‘a different language ideology, a different social imaginary,’ the body of the laughing people in late nineteenth century Japan was organized and distinguished by its mode of interaction and stranger relationality that privileged what I term as ‘round talk.’⁶⁰ To be sure, the pages of the Dan Dan Sha newspapers did feature staff and readership content that offered up a rational-critical discourse by way of commenting on political and social events of the day, which remains an important aspect of its historical significance. It is for this reason that scholars have primarily understood the Dan Dan Sha publications as an example of popular interest *koshinbun* (small newspapers) that contributed to the public sphere and the formation of public opinion as part of the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement. As already suggested, the nature of the commentary would largely be critical of power and state-led civilization discourses. The Dan Dan Sha newspapers provided an oppositional ‘alternative media’ platform to express dangerous anti-government views or suspicions towards Westernization and enlightenment discourses such as this one submitted by a reader to a poetry section of the 6 November 1878 *Kibi Dango*: ‘In the so-called enlightened

⁵⁹ Dan Dan Sha, *Kibi Dango*, vol. 1, 38.

⁶⁰ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 122-124.

West they separate the world map by color.’⁶¹ However, what was prized above all was not the ‘public opinion’ itself, but the articulation of their ‘different language ideology;’ the performative call and response ritual of ‘sowing seeds of laughter’ and having one’s ‘jaw broken’ or ‘side-split’ with laughter. Accordingly, much of the dialogue in the form of submitted stories and poems did not take the form of rational critical-discourse or overt political statements, but rather appeared in the form of ostensibly inconsequential or nonsense joke-telling or submissions in praise of the Dan Dan Sha newspapers and their ‘roundness’ or ‘tastiness.’ A series of submitted *kyōka*, *senryū*, and *dodoitsu* poems in the 6 November 1878 *Kibi Dango* under the theme, ‘After seeing the *Kibi Dango* roll out from *Maruchin*...,’ were dedicated to lauding the round shape and superior flavor of dumpling balls:

‘No.1 newspaper *Kibi Dango* over flowers. Add some flavor with sweet bean paste ideas and sell it.’
 ‘The famous *Kibi Dango*, Japan’s No.1 newspaper. It’s so tasty that I have 1, 2, 3, 4.’
 ‘Roll up! Japan’s No.1 newspaper *Kibi Dango*. Serving up a plate of dumpling balls and boasts.’
 ‘Wednesday, the day the *Kibi Dango* is kneaded. It always feels like such a long time away.’
 ‘The *Kibi Dango*, kneaded with humor and sweetness. It can soften the heart of demons.’
 ‘Japan’s No. 1 newspaper has humor and sweetness. It breaks one’s jaw with laughter and makes the demons surrender.’
 ‘Don’t say next year, I want my jaw to break with laughter. Reading the beloved *Kibi Dango*.’
 ‘Each time I buy the *Kibi Dango* I split my sides with laughter.’
 ‘Round-san. Congratulations on giving birth to a lovely child.’
 ‘The *Kibi Dango* is rolling around Japan.’
 ‘One delicious dumpling ball is 5 *sen*.’
 ‘*Kibi Dango* imitating its parent in the habit of shaking off the cats and catfish.’
 ‘*Kibi Dango* gives off an energy that makes square hearts round.’
 ‘Rolled up with word play, kneaded with lightness, having substance; the *Kibi Dango*.’⁶²

Similar conversations were a regular occurrence in the *Marumaru Chinbun*. One reader wrote, ‘The world needs to be round...The things in the world are humorous. Rather than being a

⁶¹ Dan Dan Sha, *Kibi Dango*, vol. 1, 46.

⁶² Dan Dan Sha, *Kibi Dango*, vol. 1, 37-38.

square, look at things roundly with a smile.’⁶³ There were even discussions about the positive effects that reading the *Marumaru Chinbun* can have on one’s love life in the form of ‘Instructions on how to become attractive to women.’ The answer was simple, ‘Through reading the *Marumaru Chinbun*, firstly a man will become handsome, secondly he will become more skillful, and thirdly he will appear more intelligent.’ A round outlook on life will make all types of people fall in love with you, ‘light skinned or dark skinned, young or old.’⁶⁴ This ‘round talk,’ a constant exchange that is characterized by articles and submissions in praise of the roundness of the newspapers and the positive impact that roundness will have on your life and on society, was about affirming and reaffirming the existence of the laughing counterpublic and the ‘lifeworld of its circulation... through the pragmatics of its speech genres, idioms, stylistic markers, address, temporality.’⁶⁵ A performative address to a public in search for validation that there were strangers within and beyond one’s locale speaking the same way and laughing out of place together. It is a ‘poetic world making’ in the words of Warner, because:

‘Public discourse says not only “Let a public exist” but “Let it have this character, speak this way, see the world in this way... It then goes in search of confirmation that such a public exists, with greater or lesser success – success being further attempts to cite, circulate, and realize the world understanding it articulates.’”⁶⁶

It was the first edition of the *Marumaru Chinbun* that presented an outline of a ‘Theory of *Marumaru*’ to set out to its readers the newspaper’s origin and mission in terms of the centrality of its ‘roundness:’

‘Everything in the world is round. Indeed, everything that happens in the globe and under the celestial sphere will be so. The moon, sun and stars are all round. That which is protruding from human bodies

⁶³ Dan Dan Sha, *Marumaru Chinbun*, vol. 1, 29.

⁶⁴ Dan Dan Sha, *Marumaru Chinbun*, vol. 1, 196.

⁶⁵ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 114.

⁶⁶ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 114.

are also round. There are round testicles and breasts are round too, and this is the origin of humanity. Whether it be the sacred mirror placed in front of the gods of the land of the gods, the *Taiji* circle of Confucianism or Zen's *Ensō* circle, they are all round in shape. Bullets, gongs and taiko drums are round. The most prestigious acting stage name from all around is DANjūrō, the storyteller of wars of the recent age of enlightenment is HakuEN, and the storyteller of old tales is ENchō, they are all named round. In the present age, the popular face is one that is plump and round, young boys like round beans from India, Osan's favorite sweet potato is round upon opening. Anyway, putting all this aside, above all, our country's flag's *Hinomaru* red circle is to show admiration to the Meiji emperor, and lest we forget his mercies from day to day we named our newspaper *Marumaru*. Our *Maru* refers not the ○ symbol and certainly not about circumventing censorship. Our *Marumaru* refers to a round egg that is a newcomer peering out into the world and is about to raise its voice and spread its wings. It will become a giant Peng bird that can fly all around with ease, and all that is heard and seen will be written down and made round. This *Marumaru* editorial to celebrate its launch has made its brush and eyes round to dig a round whole to dig up this *Marumaru* origin story.⁶⁷

The *Marumaru Chinbun*'s inaugural editorial figuratively winks at the audience with its tongue-in-cheek claim that the newspaper derives its name from a will to honoring the Meiji emperor and a serving up of a daily 'maru' offering in remembrance of his mercies, and apparently has nothing to do with the *fuseji* (○) censorship mark. This claim of deep devotion to the sacred imperial and national cause as represented by the *Hinomaru* flag, is further undermined by the fact it is placed alongside the grotesque material body that is equally round in its sexual and reproductive parts, what Bakhtin would describe as laughter at the 'bodily lower stratum,' which degrades all that is high and spiritual.⁶⁸ To be sure, perceptive readers would be able to identify that the *Marumaru Chinbun* was indeed named after the ○ censorship mark, with the front cover of the newspaper also designed after this circular symbol (Figure 14). As demonstrated within this editorial on the theory of roundness, the newspaper promotes 'round talk' through extensive word play on different ways of saying or writing 'round' or 'circle,' imagery that refers to round things, and incorporating the ○ censorship mark at every

⁶⁷ Dan Dan Sha, *Marumaru Chinbun*, vol. 1, 3.

⁶⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984), 19-20, 368.

possible opportunity in their speech to wittily play around with it. Round talk is also characterized by speaking in roundabout ways to literally circumvent censorship as well as a constant rolling motion (*korokoro, korogaru*), where the writer quickly ‘rolls’ from one subject to the next or goes around in circles seemingly uttering nonsense, an alternative type of ‘circular reasoning’ if you will, to play with the eyes of the censors and make them dizzy from not knowing where to look or what to pay careful attention to. In this way, the Dan Dan Sha newspapers nurtured a ‘round talk’ way of reading and writing that would generate laughter because of its wittiness, slyness and ridiculousness, which the readership would then learn to reproduce and further cultivate through their contributions.

Round talk to sow seeds of laughter was not only constitutive in articulating the lifeworld and contours of the laughing counterpublic, it was also considered to be instructive and fulfilling an essential role in guarding human interiority, making it into site of contestation to resist the Meiji state’s attempts at enlightened national subject formation. In the *Marumaru Chinbun* article, ‘A Paean to *Marumaru*’ written in *kanbun*, the mission of the newspaper is expressed as producing wit and humor through roundness to help the masses grasp the ‘true meaning of civilization’ because ‘whether wise or foolish, all laugh alike. Good things come to those who laugh.’⁶⁹ To be sure, this was not an encouragement of learning civilization and enlightenment through reformed ‘useful’ entertainment as recommended by elite intellectuals such as Fukuzawa Yukichi and strictly enforced by the Meiji state through directives and censorship of the popular arts. Laughter was promoted as leading to a different, oppositional form of ‘enlightenment’ that was in tension with the state’s modern national subject formation. Not in the sense of offering up to the state an alternative rational-critical political discourse to engage in a debate, what would be described as ‘public opinion’ or part of a political movement; but in its resistance towards human interiority becoming a target of state

⁶⁹ Dan Dan Sha, *Marumaru Chinbun*, vol. 1, 29.

intervention to transform hearts and minds into moldable civilized national subjects. Indeed, as discussed in an editorial from the 13 July 1878 *Marumaru Chinbun*, the content within the newspaper is after all useless nonsense (無用ノ書) read by equally useless people (無用ノ人), and so, it is not useful as a guide for achieving civilization and enlightenment according to state ideology.⁷⁰ On the contrary, as the article notes, it makes rulers ‘sweat’ and the government is spending a fortune in money and effort to build a ‘great wall’ across the country to stop the viral spread of the *Marumaru* and its humorous round talk, but ironically, it is the government’s efforts that are rendered ‘useless’ as the *Marumaru*’s fame continues to roll around whenever it is published with more and more copies being sold. Through a comical and intentionally crude parodical contrast, the editorial articulates the ‘useful rolled up within the useless, the true meaning/flavor within the meaningless/flavorless’ (有用ヲ無用ノ中ニ餡ミ眞味ヲ無味ノ間ニ含む), which the Dan Dan Sha newspapers serve up to their audience. The passage begins by describing the various humorous articles, illustrations and submitted content to the *Marumaru Chinbun* as a futile pursuit that is likened to trying to grab clouds, punch a ghost, grab the testicles of a female, thin like water, gaseous like a fart, and nothing more than a kid’s snack. It is therefore logical that the reader of such things is also ‘useless.’ Yet it is while excitedly waiting for Saturday to come around, i.e., the release date of the next edition of the *Marumaru Chinbun*, that the ‘useless’ protagonist decided that they wanted to become ‘useful.’ The writer describes a road to Damascus awakening where one’s eyes are washed and revitalized: ‘a light shined upon my vision and I was able to deeply consider great things.’ To be sure, the protagonist does not experience what can be described as a conversion or reform to rid themselves of the ‘useless’ material. Rather they double down on the ‘usefulness that emerges from within the useless.’ Using witty and sophisticated word play the writer reverses

⁷⁰ Dan Dan Sha, *Marumaru Chinbun*, vol. 3, 178-179.

the formula introduced at the start of the text. The *Marumaru Chinbun* content that was empty like the wind allowed one to understand the evils within the ‘winds’ of culture (風俗ノ弊習); grabbing a cloud allowed one to see the holes in those who reside above the clouds and satirize this (雲上ノ穴ヲ掴マヘテ之ヲ諷揄シ); once a gaseous fart it now possesses the fragrance of an orchid and the flavor of eight delicacies (八珍); it is no more a mere child’s snack and no longer has the stench of excrement. The author concludes that it depends on how one utilizes things that determines its usefulness. If you ‘fart into your hand and cup it, it is smelly, but if one sniffs out of it that which can be used for fertilizer, then it is no longer a fart.’ In this satirical treatise on the usefulness of uselessness, the text not only critically engages with the Meiji state’s condemnation and suppression of ‘useless’ play, it asserts that it is this very fluffy ‘uselessness’ (that the government is trying to stop the spread of through a ‘great firewall’ of sorts), which plants seeds of laughter, that can open up the interior space of people’s hearts and minds to awaken them from a stupor to poke holes in official ideology and discern for themselves matters of great weight. Within this reckoning, ‘enlightenment’ is not an interiorized sense of oneself as a subject awakened to the duties of the nation in its advancement of civilization and the will to become a ‘useful person’ to carry it out. Rather, this ‘useless’ enlightenment is useful for the liberation of human interiority. Moreover, it wasn’t simply the act of reading and laughing as a response to a stimulus that could help to free the interior space. It was also by being transformed into a participator and a doer as a contributor of humor to sow seeds of laughter through which one’s mind could become unbound.

This intention of freeing minds through round talk that generates laughter was similarly articulated in the 6 November 1878 *Kibi Dango*, in the article ‘Congratulatory Address for the Founding of the *Kibi Dango*’ (驥尾團語開業祝詞).⁷¹ The title’s ‘*Dango*’ does not use the

⁷¹ Dan Dan Sha, *Kibi Dango*, vol. 1, 36.

character for dumpling, but instead, using the same reading, is rendered as ‘round words’ (團語) giving the title an additional meaning of ‘follow the leader round words.’ Appropriating language used to formally describe imperial descendants, the ‘leader’ is introduced as none other than ‘the one called *Odoke Marumaru*, descended from the no money Tenmu emperor that suffers in poverty from generation to generation and descendant of the god that spreads falsehoods’ (貧乏始終苦代錢無天皇ノ後裔嘘言突前守ノ末孫ニテ於東京團々子ト云ヘル者). The article continues to explain that upon searching for a suitable place to set up business, the Dan Dan Sha Company landed upon Kijichō in Kanda because they wanted to follow in the footsteps of Yajirō and Kita, the protagonists from the popular Edo period travel story-cum-genre *Tōkaidō hizakurige* (*Shank’s Mare along the Eastern Road*, 1802-22) by the comic writer Jippensha Ikku (1765-1831), that later gained a new iteration in the form of Kanagaki Robun’s *Seiyōdōchū hizakurige* (*Shank’s Mare Around the West*, 1870). It was from this home base that they desired to ‘roll around’ (回國, *kaikoku*) the country ‘splitting sides’ with laughter and so the *Maruchin* was launched. It was so popular that it quickly ‘rolled throughout the land breaking jaws with laughter.’ As a result of this, multiple prefectures were making complaint reports to the government about the newspaper because people were laughing so much that it ‘tore umbilical cords’ (臍ノ釣糸絶切リタル) striking many down with a ‘sudden sickness’ (俄病人多キ). Interestingly the ‘umbilical cords’ that were torn are described using the word for a ‘fishing line’ (釣糸), suggesting that this hysterical laughter is in fact emancipating people from being reeled in by wires of control. If the state was advancing a project of nation building and national subject formation under the symbol of the Meiji emperor, it was discordant laughter that was seen as making people ‘sick’ and turning people away from possessing a salubrious mind that would enable them to live useful lives worthy of citizens of an emerging modern civilized nation. To laugh was to laugh out of place and become

a follower of a different emperor. That is why, says the article using an additional word play on the name *Kibi Dango* (奇備ノ團語, *kibi no dango*), the newspaper was launched; to roll around and spread these *kibi no dango* or ‘strange round words.’ Again reminiscent of Momotarō, the Dan Dan Sha would gather its followers by distributing its round dumpling balls, which break jaws with laughter:

‘Kneading and making round with the tip of the brush. Please give me one *Kibi Dango* and I will follow. To the pheasant and to the beasts they hand out their round words.’

Historians of modern Japan have conceded that there were newspapers such as the Dan Dan Sha publications that satirized government policy, yet simultaneously posit that the writers and reading audience were ultimately unquestioning in their loyalty to the project of nation-building symbolized in the body of the emperor.⁷² Consequently, the existing historiographical assumption of an untouchable Meiji emperor and imperial institution has precluded the discovery of this extensive cultural space, which could imagine and self-generate an alternative body of the laughing people that is anchored in its form of address as its basis of relationality. Indeed, it was only through this satirical space and its roundabout forms of expression, that the sanctified and secure position of the emperor could be habitually destabilized. To be sure, there were satirists who directly lampooned the emperor. The Conclusion will examine an incident that was considered a direct defamation of the imperial institution. In doing so, I will reevaluate the significance of the episode as an outgrowth of the laughing counterpublic and an explicit attempt at representing a competing vision of belonging in contradiction to the nation-state embodied in the emperor.

⁷² Duus, “Presidential Address,” 980-981.

Conclusion: The Emperor of Laughter

Soon after the consecrated ceremony for the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution on 11 February 1889, the 28 February 1889 edition of the magazine *Tonchi Kyōkai Zasshi* (頓智協会雑誌, *Journal of the Society for Wit*, 1887-1889), published by the satirical journalist and writer Miyatake Gaikotsu (1867-1955), featured an infamous parody constitution announced as the ‘Artistic Speech on the Promulgation of the Sharpening Constitution’ (研法発布嚙語) and detailed as the ‘Constitution of Japan’s Sharpening of Wit’ (大日本頓智研法), alongside a cartoon by the artist Adachi Ginkō (1870-1908) depicting this alternative ceremony.¹ This would promptly become the last edition of the magazine as just a few days later on 4 March 1889, the publisher/editor Miyatake, artist Adachi, and the printer Tokuyama Hōshū were respectively sentenced to 3 years, 1 year and 10 months imprisonment; 100 yen, 50 yen and 30 yen fines; and 1 year, 8 months and 6 months of surveillance for the serious crimes of lèse-majesté and disturbing the peace.² What particularly riled government officials and was written down in the formal charges, was the satirical cartoon of the ceremony that replaced the sacred body of the Meiji emperor upon the throne handing the constitution to Prime Minister Kuroda Kiyotaka in the imperial palace, with a skeleton or *gaikotsu* in Japanese, which plays on the reading of Miyatake’s penname, ‘Gaikotsu’ (外骨) (Figure 20).

In typical parodical fashion, the content of the ‘Artistic Speech’ and articles of the ‘Constitution of Wit’ closely mimicked the language of the Meiji Constitution with carefully selected differences.³ The excessively elevated and inaccessible language of the original was brought down to earth. The ‘great men’ of the Meiji state, the ministers of the government who

¹ Gaikotsu Miyatake, *Tonchi Kyōkai Zasshi* (Tokyo: Yumani Shobo, 1993), vol. 5, 447-449.

² Heiyō Nagashima, “Kaigai jōku no nihon ni okeru juyō,” *Waraigaku Kenkyū* 9 (2002): 8-10.

³ An English translation of the Meiji Constitution can be found here: “The Constitution of the Empire of Japan,” National Diet Library, Japan, accessed April 16, 2023.

countersigned the original Constitution were intentionally replaced by the pennames of commoners (*heimin*) who were all simply rendered as ‘members’ (會員) of the ‘Society for Wit’ with no distinguished titles or rank and only their place of origin. The first article of the ‘Constitution of Wit’ similarly emphasizes the lowliness of those involved, ‘The Great Society of Wit shall be supervised by Gaikotsu, a commoner (平民) from the Sanuki Province.’ Within the ‘Artistic Speech,’ the Society’s Constitution is promulgated not ‘in virtue of the supreme power We inherit from Our Imperial Ancestors’ as stated in the original document, but merely ‘in virtue of ideas that come to me by chance.’ The ‘nation’ (国家) is replaced with ‘Society’ (協會) or ‘wit’ (頓智), and ‘subjects’ (臣民) become ‘Society members’ (會員).

Excerpt from the original ‘Imperial Speech’:

‘That this brilliant achievement embellishes the annals of Our country, is due to the glorious virtues of Our Sacred Imperial Ancestors, and to the loyalty and bravery of Our subjects, their love of their country and their public spirit.’

Excerpt from the parody ‘Artistic Speech’:

‘That the benefits of this brilliant wit will remain, is due to the virtues of our characteristic wit, and to the discerning intelligence of the Society members, their love of the Society and their efforts.’

As is reiterated in the parody preamble to the ‘Constitution of Wit,’ in contrast to the stated aims of the Meiji Constitution to develop the ‘moral and intellectual faculties’ of the nation’s ‘beloved subjects’ (懿徳良能ヲ發達セシメム) and ‘maintain the prosperity of the State’ (国家ノ進運ヲ扶持セム) the Society’s focus was elsewhere, and centered on developing their members’ faculties for wisdom (善智良能ヲ發達セシムル) to promote the prosperity of wit (頓知ノ進運ヲ扶持セシムル).

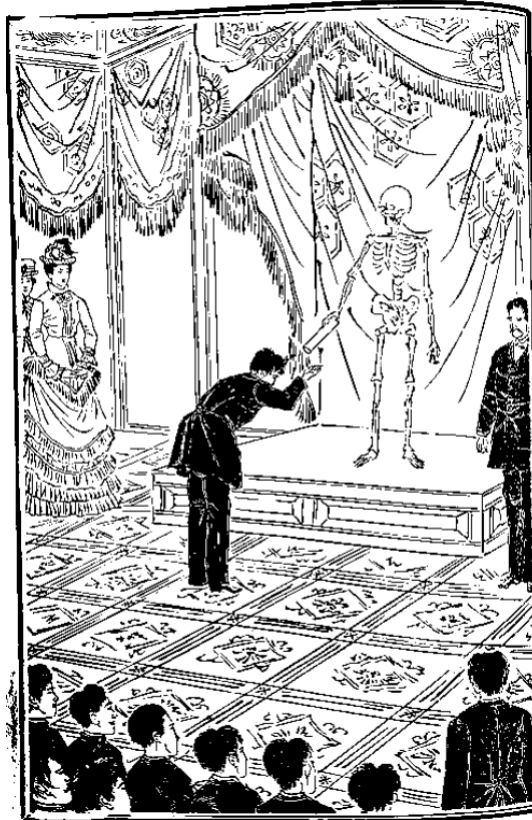


Figure 20: The Constitution of Japan's Sharpening of Wit. *Tonchi Kyōkai Zasshi*, 28 February 1889.

To date, scholars have commented on the magazine's satirical cartoon and constitution as merely an interesting but isolated example of *lèse-majesté* and a rare lampoon of the imperial institution, which was quickly punished and disciplined.⁴ It is only through illuminating the existence of a laughing counterpublic in nineteenth century Japan that we can identify the wider significance of this parody piece for Meiji intellectual and cultural life as an outgrowth of, and articulation of the body of the laughing people that follow a different 'emperor,' which was 'out of place' and in tension with the state's project of nation-building and national subject formation symbolized in the body of the legitimized 'restored' emperor. Miyatake's foregrounding of not just the biting, but also the binding qualities of humor and laughter to

⁴ See for instance Nagashima, "Kaigai jōku;" Julia Meech-Pekarik, *The World of Meiji Print: Impressions of a New Civilization* (New York: Weatherhill, 1986), 185; Takashi Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* (California: University of California Press, 1996), 198; Peter Duus, "Presidential Address: Weapons of the Weak, Weapons of the Strong – The Development of the Japanese Political Cartoon," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60, no. 4 (November 2001): 981.

generate an in group out of place is not surprising, as he was deeply influenced by and developed his chops as a reader-contributor to the Dan Dan Sha newspapers. He recalls that in the year 1880 when he was just 13 years old, while attending *Eigijuku*, a Sinology (*kangaku*) private school in the Sanuki Province, he borrowed a few copies of the *Kibi Dango* which one of his friends at the school owned, and this would become a key turning point in his life. Reading the *Kibi Dango* was an exhilarating experience for his young developing mind and it gave him a passion for newspapers, which he read extensively becoming a subscriber to over 23 publications. Even more exciting was the thrill of seeing his submissions printed in the newspapers. As early as 15 years old he was submitting jokes to the Dan Dan Sha newspapers under the penname Dekoboko Teihyōu (凸凹亭瓢). What he describes as an ‘obsession’ led him to start his own publication in 1886 at the age of 19.⁵ Miyatake was trained in ‘round talk’ and a constituent of the body of the laughing people. Miyatake was extending the laughing counterpublic through publishing his own series of magazines centered on humor and wit. This is made explicit in the ‘Rules of the Society of Wit’ published in the 25 July 1888 edition of the *Tonchi Kyōkai Zasshi*. ‘Article 1’ of the Society ‘Rules’ states:

‘The core mission of this Society is to cultivate and give training in wit that can be adapted according to the relevant circumstances, and in order to do this we will widely gather like-minded people through organizing occasional events and fortnightly publishing a magazine under the name, *Tonchi Kyōkai Zasshi*.’⁶

The magazine itself featured extended essays such as ‘The Theory of Laughter’ (笑ノ説) in the 25 August 1888 issue, which presents arguments as to why people laugh, the different types of spontaneous or forced laughter, how to generate laughter, in what situations it might be wise

⁵ For a detailed discussion of Miyatake Gaikotsu as a contributor to the Dan Dan Sha newspapers see Itaru Kimoto, *Marumaru chinbun kibi dango ga yuku* (Tokyo: Hakusuisha, 1999), 113-120.

⁶ Miyatake, *Tonchi Kyōkai Zasshi*, vol. 5, 67.

to manipulate laughter, and points of caution when using the ‘tool’ (器具) of laughter because you don’t want to be used by it. This lesson in laughter concludes by mentioning that according to one psychologist, laughing at the follies and failings of others is an ‘important weapon of war’ (重要ノ戦具ナリ) and this is because ‘the laughter of the people is a terrifying thing and more powerful than the might of gods or the law of humans.’ The message of the piece is for Society members to sufficiently cultivate virtue and wisdom so that they can confidently wield satirical laughter in the world.⁷

The Society was envisioned as being open to all. ‘Article 2’ of the ‘Rules’ stipulates:

‘For those who wish to become members, as long as you agree to the core mission of the Society, the Society welcomes anyone regardless of country, wealth, status, gender or age.’⁸

To join in on the laughter, and agree to participate in sowing seeds of laughter to make others do the same, was the only requirement for membership. The opening page of the first edition from 1 April 1887 similarly visually portrayed a bustling crowd of members made up of all types of people gathering at the hallowed gates of the Society of Wit. It was a broad church. There were women and men, old and young; and as indicated through dress, hairstyles and headwear, there were Japanese of different occupations and status, Westerners, Chinese and Koreans (Figure 21).

⁷ Miyatake, *Tonchi Kyōkai Zasshi*, vol. 5, 106-108.

⁸ Miyatake, *Tonchi Kyōkai Zasshi*, vol. 5, 67.

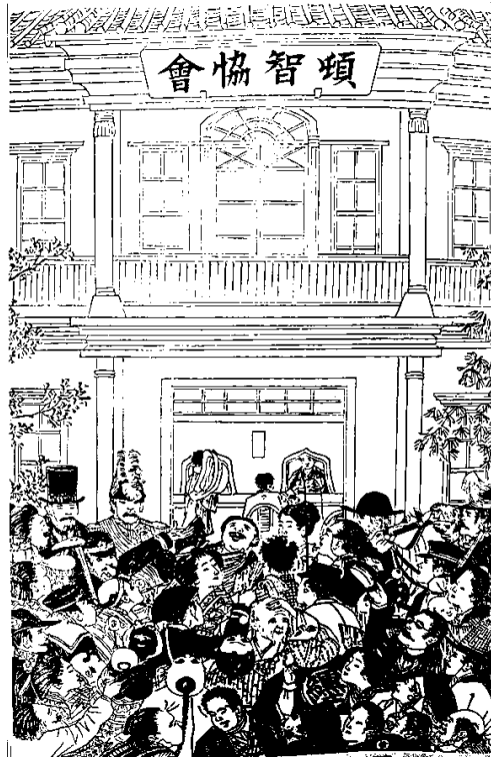


Figure 21: A crowd at the Society of Wit. *Tonchi Kyōkai Zasshi*, 1 April 1887.

Historians have only ever posited political satire in Meiji Japan as a key nation-builder, which mobilized ‘a sense of national community’ and generated a popular imperialist gaze in everyday life that distinguished between the Japanese (civilizing) Self and the foreign, especially (less-civilized) Asian Other; an ‘Empire of Comic Visions’ in the words of Jung-Sun N. Han.⁹ Sharing laughter, however, possessed the potential of offering up a new sense of identification and non-imperial belonging beyond the nation-state. Indeed, the emergence and spread of the laughing counterpublic of early Meiji Japan disclosed in this dissertation was often in direct parodical dialogue with the state’s nation-building project, as in the case of Miyatake and Adachi’s parody constitution promulgated by a skeleton emperor. This skeleton emperor, then, does not simply make sense as a comical allusion to the ‘Gaikotsu’ penname of

⁹ See Duus, “Presidential Address,” 981-983; Jung-Sun N Han, “Empire of Comic Visions: Japanese Cartoon Journalism and its Pictorial Statements on Korea, 1876-1910,” *Japanese Studies*, 26:3, (2006): 283-302; John W Dower, “Throwing Off Asia I-III,” *MIT Visualizing Cultures* (2008), accessed March 26, 2023.

the editor. It was a fictional ceremony to set up a different emperor in whom is represented, not the nation body, but the body of the laughing people. Embodied within this anatomy is an articulation of the internal logic of the laughing counterpublic, which is de-divinizing and de-hierarchizing. Unlike sanctioned depictions of a sacred and ‘civilized’ Meiji emperor, the bare bones of the skeletal emperor is stripped of distinguishing markers of nation, race, gender, age or status. Laughter becomes its own science that can dissect the taxonomizing imperial science and civilization discourse of Western modernity. This represents what can be described as a nascent articulation of a competing vision of modern belonging that began to materialize out of the cultural space of the laughing counterpublic.

The parody constitution’s centering of commoners (*heimin*) and an imagined alternate *heimin* sensibility by virtue of its intentional contrast with the hierarchizing imperial institution and state apparatus, also gains further significance as a potential latent manifestation or an intellectual phenomenon akin to what Sho Konishi has identified as an articulation of *heimin* as ‘the people,’ as part of a Nonwar Movement during the Russo-Japanese war period. *Heimin* language and imagery, which appeared in organs of the Nonwar Movement such as the *Heimin Shinbun*, represented an ‘invention of “the people” without the state,’ referring to an active disassociation from *kokumin* ideology of people as subjects of the nation-state and beneficiaries of the war effort.¹⁰ It was a competing vision of human progress based on a ‘reconceptualization of “international society” as a sphere of individual exchanges and transnational social networks” of nonterritorialized *heimin* people.’¹¹ It is worth noting that the anarchist writer and co-founder of the *Heimin Shinbun*, Kōtoku Shūsui, was during his youth, yet another avid reader of the *Marumaru Chinbun* and submitted contributions under the

¹⁰ Sho Konishi, *Anarchist Modernity: Cooperatism and Japanese-Russian Intellectual Relations in Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 142-208.

¹¹ Konishi, *Anarchist Modernity*, 145.

penname Iroha-an.¹² Future studies could probe the existence of any such meaningful connections between the cultural and intellectual life of the laughing counterpublic and this later conception of *heiminism*.

By tracing the history of networks of laughter and satirical humor in nineteenth century Japan, beginning in 1855 with the Ansei Earthquake, an event that drew popular attention to the internal and external turmoil of late Tokugawa and *ishin* Japan, through the early Meiji period of Japan's opening to 'civilization and enlightenment' and modern nation-state building symbolized in the body of the restored emperor, up until the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution in 1889, I have revealed the emergence and expansion of what can be described as a 'laughing counterpublic,' which developed patterns of speech, organization and sociability that continuously resisted and was 'out of place' with the dominant order. Demonstrating how this counterpublic adapted to find new ways to laugh across the imagined Edo-Meiji divide, this thesis challenges the existing scholarship on modern Japanese history, which foregrounds the 'success' of the Meiji state in censoring, suppressing and co-opting playful satirical cultures that were considered as uncivilized, outdated and useless for its project of nation building and modern subject formation – a 'loss of laughter' narrative. While scholarly attention has centered on the power of the Meiji state and intellectuals to impact upon the interior space of the hearts and minds of the people to mold the individual into a national subject, this study has disclosed how laughter was consciously leveraged as a weapon, not just of critique, but also to make interiority into a site of contestation to resist state control. This blurring of existing scholarly narratives that position a neat break between Edo and Meiji Japan as exemplified by a sudden disappearance of oppositional playful laughter to be replaced with a serious enlightenment mission, has wider implications for the historiography as it challenges the very

¹² F G Notehelfer, *Kōtoku Shūsui: Portrait of a Japanese Radical* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 12; Robert Thomas Tierney, *Monster of the Twentieth Century Kōtoku Shūsui and Japan's First Anti-Imperialist Movement* (California: University of California Press, 2015), 4.

politics of knowledge embedded in an imagined sharp 1868 historical divide between a ‘closed’ backward Edo and ‘opened’ modern Meiji Japan. Indeed, an Edo-Meiji divide and a dichotomizing analytical framework of ‘change and continuity,’ cannot be neatly applied to understanding laughter and satire during this period and has further functioned to prevent detection of this laughing counterpublic in nineteenth century Japan. Illuminating these networks of laughter that formed around embodied and discursive spaces of satirical circulation centered on playful resistance of the dominant order, which could dynamically recalibrate to function according to different socio-political contexts, suggests a new ‘trans-opening’ conceptualization of this time-period in order to unearth and understand other such cultural and intellectual phenomena that cannot be simply comprehended through existing ‘Edo’ and ‘Meiji’ historical periodizations and associated assumptions.¹³

In the historiography on modern Japan, the ‘opening’ has come to mean the departure point for Japan opening up to catch up with the modernity of the West and an embrace of its discourses of civilizational development. However, using the theoretical framework of ‘reopening the opening,’ I have demonstrated how the ‘opening’ was also characterized by transnational encounters of popular satirical ‘punch’ cultures shared among non-state actors such as artists, writers and journalists in the contact zone of treaty port Yokohama, through which participants engaged in a non-imperial mutual exchange and learnt to laugh together at these very civilizational discourses that would seek to create a hierarchical order of people and cultures. At the same time as the new Meiji government embarked on a mission of modern nation-state building and national subject formation; enabled by technological advancements

¹³ In suggesting a ‘trans-opening’ conceptualization, I draw inspiration from the recent ‘transwar approach’ of analyzing the history of Asia across a continuum from the 1920s to the 1960s, which methodologically attempts to go beyond a framework of a pre/post war disconnect or inherited scholarly assumptions that ‘1945 marked a historical divide across which “change and continuity” could be traced,’ as posited in the edited volume, Reto Hoffman and Max Ward, eds., *Transwar Asia: Ideology, Practices, and Institutions, 1920-1960* (London: Bloomsbury Academic: 2022). Especially see Reto Hofmann and Max Ward’s “Introduction: The Long Transwar in Asia.” The above quotation is taken from page 3 of the introduction.

in printing and recalibrated through transnational encounters and the shifting political circumstances, the once localized spaces of satirical laughter became more widespread and moved from place to place incorporating people into its body of laughers. In contrast to the dominant national public, which through its engagement and negotiations with the state helped to construct the national body symbolized in the figure of the emperor, the laughing counterpublic practiced an alternative oppositional form of modern belonging based on a laughing mode of connectivity. Embedded within articulations of the laughing counterpublic was a critique of dominating hierarchal orders and imperial taxonomies. From subversions of the Tokugawa order during the *bakumatsu* years, to shifts towards resisting notions of hierarchies of nations, cultures and peoples, which were part and parcel of Meiji era civilization discourses and nation building; a non-hierarchical imagination of laughter and laughing people served as the connecting internal logic of the laughing counterpublic. Recovering this aspect of mid-late nineteenth century cultural life in Japan, which was nurtured through transnational encounters, therefore, further challenges and reopens the ‘opening’ of Japan beyond existing historiographical assumptions of a Western modernity paradigm.

Although beyond the time-period and scope of this study, the laughing counterpublic and its playful modes of address and non-imperial relationality introduced within this thesis, further promises a theoretical and methodological approach for reevaluating the significance of satire towards the turn of the century during Japan’s imperialist wars and colonial expansionism. The current scholarship posits that satire, especially presented in the form of illustrated news media, was willingly and forcibly co-opted by the state for military reportage purposes to promote nationalism and imperialism – a laughing at the racialized and less-civilized Other for glorification of Self as having ranked among the civilized nations of the West. Historians have already begun to question this framework that uses visual culture to ‘trace out “war fever” and nationalism,’ and have instead revealed the presence of a

‘masquerading media’ and other camouflaged forms of communication to circumvent wartime censorship and offer up a critical cultural space ambivalent towards the state and war.¹⁴ The laughing counterpublic of nineteenth century Japan potentially further opens up ways of identifying such forms of disguised communication, how they developed or adapted, and in doing so, may reveal other ways in which ordinary Japanese people at the turn of the century encountered the world beyond state-centered imperialism and colonialism.

¹⁴ Yu Sakai, “Survive to be critical: The Wartime Graphic as a ‘masquerading’ media in the Russo-Japanese War, 1904-1905,” *War in History* vol. 28, issue 4 (2021): 797-824.

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