

Super Secret Tales from the Slammer

(*Gokunaibanashi*)

Written by Narushima RYŪHOKU

Translated by Matthew Fraleigh

Winner of the University of Chicago William F. Sibley Memorial Translation Prize, 2011

Introduction

Narushima Ryūhoku's "Super Secret Tales from the Slammer" takes us inside the world of two institutions emblematic of the new Meiji polity: the daily newspaper and the modern prison.

The proliferation of daily newspapers in the 1870s and the emergence of a populace transformed by reading them marked a new era; as historian James Huffman has observed, "no single institution did more to create a modern citizenry than the Meiji newspaper press."¹ Yet as Ryūhoku's essay clearly shows, the birth of the modern press in Japan was far from painless. The Meiji government had initially looked to the newspaper as a convenient tool for disseminating information to the public and thereby furthering its agenda of "civilization and enlightenment;" to that end, it sponsored newspaper reading rooms, underwrote distribution to rural areas, and cultivated close connections with newspaper editors. But by 1874, as some newspapers began to adopt a more independent and assertive stance, the cozy relationship they had enjoyed with government authorities turned adversarial. The following summer saw the passage of two sweeping laws that sharply curtailed the freedom of the press, making it virtually impossible to criticize government policy.²

Faced with uncertainty over where the boundaries of acceptable discourse now lay, some newspaper writers began to test the limits in the following months, and Narushima Ryūhoku of the *Chōya shinbun* was among the most daring. Some journalists challenged the new restrictions by advancing arguments directly, but as we can see in this piece, Ryūhoku often chose instead to couch his points in satire, present them as parables, or adorn them with recondite allusions. He drew on these and other techniques in a series of articles leading up to the one that finally proved too provocative for the authorities to overlook: an essay he wrote with another journalist, Suehiro Tetchō, who had recently joined the *Chōya*.³

¹ *Creating a Public: People and Press in Meiji Japan* (Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P, 1997), p. 1.

² For discussion of the early Meiji press and the impact of these laws upon it, see Kyu Hyun Kim's *The Age of Visions and Arguments: Parliamentarism and the National Public Sphere in Early Meiji Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007), esp. pp. 86–98, 260–266; Jay Rubin's *Injurious to Public Morals: Writers and the Meiji State* (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1984), pp. 21–22, 32–37; and James Huffman's *Creating a Public*, esp. ch. 4.

³ The provocative essay was published anonymously, but it seems both men had a hand in its composition. Prior to joining the *Chōya shinbun*, Suehiro Tetchō (or Shigeyasu as Ryūhoku refers to him in the piece translated here) edited the *Akebono shinbun*. Just one month after the promulgation of the press laws, Suehiro became the first journalist to be punished for violating them. Ryūhoku's first scrape with the laws came shortly

In December 1875, they published an ostensibly retrospective essay concerning two men named Inoue Saburō and Ozaki Kowashi: Tokugawa-era officials who had supposedly stifled free speech a decade earlier. The problem was that Inoue Kowashi (1843–95) and Ozaki Saburō (1842–1919), two Meiji officials who had been instrumental in designing the new press laws, were not particularly amused by this thinly veiled fiction, and the two journalists were ultimately fined and imprisoned.

Ryūhoku began serializing “Super Secret Tales from the Slammer” just a few days after he was released from four months of incarceration. It attracted a remarkably large audience for its time; a daily circulation of 10,000 was rare for any Japanese newspaper in the 1870s, but Ryūhoku’s newspaper obtained 18,000 subscribers in 1876, a striking success attributed to Ryūhoku’s writings.⁴ This text demonstrates the determination of Ryūhoku and other journalists to find ways to continue writing in spite of the risks they faced. The frame through which readers encounter the piece translated here—that it is a written transcription by the newspaper’s editor of Ryūhoku’s oral account of his experience—may be seen as a resourceful adaptation to the restricted publishing climate. While it may have had some basis in reality, this frame also enabled both men to dodge responsibility for the essay’s contents: an effect likewise achieved by Ryūhoku’s occasional facetiousness or poses of uncertainty in the piece, and by the editorial incursions that work to distance the newspaper from the account’s criticisms.

In addition to what it shows us about early Meiji journalists’ struggles to establish newspapers as a public forum for debate, the piece also offers us a first-hand glimpse of life within the Kajibashi jail, the first to be constructed in Japan on the basis of Western models. There were of course penal detention facilities in Japan prior to the Meiji period, but as Daniel Botsman has shown in his careful comparison of Edo and Meiji prisons, the idea that incarceration itself would constitute the punishment of offenders was relatively new, and this first facility was also noteworthy for its attempt to achieve a new degree of surveillance and disciplinary regulation over the lives of its inmates.⁵ As his descriptions of the facility’s structure as well as the behavior of its guards shows, Ryūhoku was well aware of the aims that shaped the new facility and he had in fact seen some of the models on which it was based during his 1872–73 world tour.⁶ While praising some of the reforms, Ryūhoku was not shy about suggesting others: arguing as he did elsewhere for an eclectic approach to reform that took full account of Japanese environmental and cultural factors rather than simply importing Western models as-is. Yet even in proposing the most mundane policy recommendations, he did so with a distinctive literary flourish. As this essay shows, Ryūhoku’s four months in prison had robbed him neither of his sense of humor nor his interest in engaging in public debate.

thereafter when he wrote a piece in praise of Suehiro.

⁴ Huffman, *Creating a Public*, p. 87.

⁵ *Punishment and Power in the Making of Modern Japan* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005), esp. chapters 5–7.

⁶ My annotated translation of Ryūhoku’s travel diary appears in *New Chronicles of Yanagibashi and Diary of a Journey to the West: Narushima Ryūhoku Reports from Home and Abroad* (Ithaca: Cornell East Asia Series, 2010); see also Maeda Ai, “Ryūhoku in Paris,” trans. Matthew Fraleigh, in James Fujii, ed., *Text and the City: Essays on Japanese Modernity* (Durham: Duke UP, 2004), pp. 275–294.

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The editor says: “What does this word *gokunai* mean? Does it refer to so-called ‘strictly (*goku*) hush-hush (*nainai*)’ remarks? It does not. It means simply stories about ‘prison’ (*goku*) from the ‘inside’ (*nai*). The former director of our newspaper company was confined to prison for one hundred twenty days. Beginning yesterday, he has been telling me from his sickbed about what he personally saw, heard, and experienced during that time. I have written down what he said in order to disseminate it to our readers throughout the realm. My meager intent is but to reward virtue and chastise vice. Moreover, it seems that there is still an endless succession of men employed in our line of work who commit errors, run afoul of the law, and are plunged into the same circumstances. And thus with the idea that this account may somehow serve as a little compass for those individuals, we have decided to publish it bit by bit here, paying no heed to the yawns of our readers. Nevertheless, as one who was nurtured under the tutelage of our newspaper company’s former director, I share his wild rashness. Now is a very busy time, and I have been writing down what he says just as soon as I hear it. Certainly there must be many things that I have misheard or mistakenly recorded. Moreover, our former director merely spoke these words. It is I who have written them down and made them public. I request that the sort of penal responsibility typically borne by those who actually write down their words not be applied to him.¹

¹ The text was originally serialized in Tokyo’s *Chōya shinbun* newspaper in ten installments that appeared in consecutive issues from 14 June 1876 to 24 June 1876; this is the text I have used. “Gokunaibanashi” was subsequently reprinted as part of the posthumous anthology *Ryūhoku ikō* (Tokyo: Hakubunkan, 1892), II: 200–232. The latter reprint is virtually identical to the original version, but in addition to a few typographical mistakes in the reprint, there are some important differences between the two versions. First, the later anthology lacks this opening editorial comment, an additional editorial interjection that comes at the head of the original fifth installment, and the editorial comment that closes the piece. Second, some of the left-hand

Under heaven, there is no place less auspicious than the jailhouse, and there is no person less joyful than the prisoner. This is something that even women and children know well. Nevertheless, the state of affairs within a prison is certainly not something that a person living within human society at large could ever surmise. What I am about to tell you now is neither the venting of a sore loser nor the ostentation of one who affects brave indifference: I make no pretensions to being a Confucian “gentleman” or “worthy.” I have no particular desire to play the goody-goody, offering words of flattery to ingratiate myself with government officials. Nor for that matter shall I adopt the mode of those stalwarts who “clench their arms and grate their teeth:” working myself into a pointless fit of indignation to spew abusive words. It is just that I intend to tell something here that is consistently frank, unvarnished, and truthful. I was in prison for four full months. Between the first part and the second part of this period, circumstances changed dramatically. In other words, if we were to compare it to *Yi jing* hexagrams, the beginning was “obstruction” and the ending was “smooth going.”² Or to put it in terms of shrine auguries, the start was “misfortune” and the finish was “fortune.” This is why my anger is slight and my delight abundant. But on the other hand, I wonder if this will instead be something profoundly lamentable for you as the newspaper’s editor, for I am actually rather lacking in material to tell you. Just suppose that the reverse were true and that in each and every circumstance, my “misfortune” was great and my “obstructions” numerous. Then even one such as I would be able to win the readers’ applause for you by delivering one tremendous screed of vitriol and vituperation. What a pity, what a pity!

As Mr. Sawada wrote in the newspaper back in February, I offered my second oral testimony at the courthouse on the twelfth of February. At the time, I was speculating to myself: wondering in my mind about how seriously my crime would be judged. Moreover I was able to realize what makes Heaven’s will unfathomable. (High Heaven does its

glosses have been removed in the anthology version or relocated to the right side of characters. Third, in the original, Ryūhoku makes references to what he explained “in an earlier installment” but these are sometimes changed in the anthology to refer to what he explained “above.” The parenthetical phrases appearing in the translation are also in the original; I use square brackets [] to indicate occasional interpolations of explanatory information that does not appear in the original; all footnotes are the translator’s.

² The *Yi jing* (Book of Changes) is a canonical Confucian text that still enjoyed much popularity as a divination manual in Ryūhoku’s time. Central to the work is extensive commentary upon the meaning of sixty-four hexagrams. The two to which Ryūhoku refers are number 12, *pi* “obstruction,” and number 11, *tai* “peace;” the first of these indicates that “the great depart, and the petty arrive” whereas the second means that “the petty depart, and the great arrive.” See Richard John Lynn’s translation, *The Classic of Changes* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), pp. 205–215.

business—and about it we cannot speak.)³ Readers, I suspect that there are some among you who saw the coverage in February and were perplexed. Why did Ryūhoku expend so many words to defend himself at great length to Judge Okada, only to then submit to the charges without offering so much as a single word of explanation when it came time to be interrogated instead by Judge Kamata? This can certainly be called a legitimate question: one that lingers not only in the minds of my readers, but in fact very much perplexes even my fellow newspaper staff members. It is not the case that I fancy jail sentences and monetary fines to the same degree that I like broiled eel or beef stew. Nevertheless, there is after all a reason that I ended up suddenly bowing my stubborn head and offering not a single word in my defense. On the evening of the first of February, a mysterious prophetic vision came to me in a dream. What was it that I dreamt? Yamato Takeru appeared in my dream astride the horse Red Hare at the summit of the Cape of Good Hope in the Arctic Sea and said unto me: “In a previous life, you took the horn of the lion that dwells on Mt. Ōe and fashioned a halberd with which you pierced the eyeball of the jellyfish that floats in Lake Biwa; in retribution for this, you will now be confined in prison where you will endure several months of anguished reading. Any excuses or explanations that you might offer in your defense will be to no avail. You will simply prolong the ordeal of your detainment, eventually being handed over to the Higher Court and then to the Supreme Court, until ultimately you have nowhere else to go. If you think that these are false words, then why don’t you try having a look into Mr. Newton’s three laws of divination?”⁴ No sooner had he said this than I awoke with a start. Because of the indelible impression that this inspired dream had left upon my mind, as well as the tenderness of Mr. Kamata’s admonition, I elected to offer no further defense and instead to submit to the charges. On the morning of the thirteenth of February, as a blizzard blew snow incessantly, I was brought along with Mr. Suehiro to the Great Courthouse. Two men who looked like students came in after me and stood alongside each other. I thought to myself that they must also be newspaper reporters and wondered what sort of wild words they had let fly in order to receive the same

³ Many of Ryūhoku’s readers would have recognized an allusion here to a passage in the *Shi jing* (Book of Songs; Mao #235), which Arthur Waley translates “High Heaven does its business / Without sound, without smell” 上天之載、無聲無臭; see *The Book of Songs* (New York: Grove, 1987), pp. 250–51.

⁴ The prophetic dream draws on a variety of absurdly (or perhaps surreally) juxtaposed elements. Yamato Takeru (lit. “the Japanese brave”) is a figure from the earliest strata of Japanese mythology and the story of his eastward journey to extend Yamato influence is told in the early eighth-century *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters). Here, however, the cultural hero appears astride the horse “Red Hare,” a famous steed belonging to Lü Bu, a general from second century China. Mt. Ōe is the name of a mountain on the outskirts of Kyoto that served as the home base for demonic brigand Shuten Dōji. Of course, Ryūhoku is aware that the Cape of Good Hope is quite far indeed from the Arctic Sea and that Isaac Newton had nothing to do with the eclectic divination theories concerning the “three realms” (past, present, future) espoused by Tang dynasty astrologer Yuan Tiangang.

punishment as I. But then I realized that these two were none other than the lawyers—actually, that’s not correct: they were the representatives—of Inoue and Ozaki, the two legal officials who were the plaintiffs in my trial, and I felt my head sink down, burrowing into my chest.⁵ When I looked up, I discovered that Kamata and Tatsumi, the two men who had presided over my case until yesterday, were nowhere to be seen.⁶ Instead judges whose honorable visages I had never once had occasion to gaze up at were seated there beside each other. (The judicial officers have changed three times. But don’t they say that the deity tells the truth the third time?)⁷ With that, I began to quiver and tremble all the more, intoning the celebratory “Banzai music” along with the *nenbutsu* prayer for divine intervention mixed in for good measure. And then as the judge suddenly raised his voice and pronounced the words “I hereby deliver the sentence,” I was ordered along with Suehiro to serve a combined total of one year in prison and to pay a fine of two hundred fifty yen. (The blessings of Heaven are surpassingly magnanimous.) After this, we were sent to the cell in which we had formerly been detained. But this time we were not bound at the waist by rope. Moreover, since the blizzard was fierce, we were lent straw raincoats and sedge hats. Once we reached the prison, we were submitted to an inspection of our clothing just as we had been at the time of our detainment. The jail clerk said to us: “My, you certainly have resigned yourself and made your preparations well. There is nothing that we need to remove from you: not even a button from your undershirts or a clasp from your *tabi* socks.” I responded by saying, “But aren’t you, Sir, the very one who explained it all to me the other day when I was detained? Thus, my humble purpose now is simply to spare you the effort.” They all laughed. The jail officer then suddenly led me to cell number 22 in the northeast block, put me in, and locked the door. There was one other prisoner in the cell, but he was not from the same profession as I. Mr. Suehiro was put in cell number 24. The northeast block is for prisoners only. Prisoners are, in comparison to detainees, treated in a slightly more generous manner. The difference might be compared to that between officials who are appointed by the emperor and those appointed by the prime minister. Yet it seems that the difference is not as great as that which exists between the latter and officials appointed at the local level.

In discussing the state of affairs within the prison, one must first explain its position. The construction of this prison was completed at the end of last year. Its structure, modeled for the most part on the prisons of the West, is shaped like a cross. There is an upstairs level and a downstairs level, and the whole is divided into eight blocks. Each block comprises ten

⁵ At the time Ryūhoku wrote this piece, the role of lawyers (*daigennin* 代言人) was limited to civil cases.

⁶ Kamata Kagesuke 鎌田景弼 (1842–1888) and Tatsumi Naofumi 立見尚文 (1845–1907).

⁷ Rather like “The third time is the charm,” this phrase means that auguries are reliable the third time around.

cells, which means that all told there are eighty cells. For the upper level and the lower level alike, there is a guard officer who is situated at the center and is thus able to keep watch over all four directions. When I was placed in cell 22, Mr. Yokose of the Shūshisha was in the cell directly across from me. Mr. Komatsubara and Mr. Yamawaki of the same company, as well as Mr. Katō of the Saifūsha, all lived separately on the same block. There were no more than just a few other inmates scattered among us. Each cell was barren, leaving one with nothing but his shadow for consolation. Reporters from the various companies have one after another been caught in the law's net and landed here. There is scarcely a single cell that does not hold a newspaper reporter. For this reason, more than one reporter must occupy the same cell. It was this that ultimately led the world of the prison to be transformed. The list of those who likewise tasted the rare flavor of the prison at around the same time as I did are listed below.⁸

Imprisonment	Three years	<i>Saifū</i>	Katō Kurō [1830–1890]
Imprisonment	Two and a half years	<i>Saifū</i>	Motoki Sadao
Imprisonment	Two years	<i>Hyōron</i>	Komatsubara Eitarō [1852–1919]
Imprisonment	One and a half years	<i>Hōchi</i>	Oka Keikō [1846–1927]
Imprisonment	One year	<i>Hyōron</i>	Yamawaki Takashi [b. 1857]
Imprisonment	One year	<i>Hyōron</i>	Nakajima Tomio
Imprisonment	One year	<i>Chōya</i>	Sawada Chokuon [1834–1896]
Imprisonment	Ten months	<i>Saifū</i>	Yano Toshio [d. 1884]
Imprisonment	Eight months	<i>Chōya</i>	Suehiro Shigeyasu [1849–1896]
Imprisonment	Six months	<i>Saifū</i>	Sugita Teiichi [1851–1929]
Imprisonment	Four months	<i>Hyōron</i>	Azuma Seishichi
Imprisonment	Four months	<i>Hyōron</i>	Torii Seikō
Imprisonment	Three months	<i>Hyōron</i>	Yokose Fumihiko
Imprisonment	Three months	<i>Hyōron</i>	Mitsugi Kiyoshige
Imprisonment	Three months	<i>Hyōron</i>	Shibata Katsufumi
Imprisonment	Three months	<i>Nippō</i>	Hokiyama Kageo [1829–1884]
Imprisonment	Three months	<i>Saifū</i> (letter)	Miyamoto Chimaki
Imprisonment	Three months	<i>Chōya</i> (letter)	Nishikawa Tsūtetsu [1856–1929]
Imprisonment	Two months	<i>Hōchi</i>	Minoura Katsundo [1854–1929]
Imprisonment	Two months	<i>Saifū</i>	Nakajima Yasuo
Imprisonment	Two months	<i>Hyōron</i>	Okamoto Seiichirō
Imprisonment	Two months	<i>Hyōron</i>	Nakajima Katsuyoshi [1858–1932]
Imprisonment	Two months	<i>Hyōron</i>	Takaha Mitsunori [d. 1882]
Imprisonment	Two months	<i>Hyōron</i>	Watanabe Noriyuki
Imprisonment	Two months	<i>Hyōron</i>	Komatsu Masatane
Imprisonment	Two months	<i>Hōchi</i> (letter)	Ueki Emori [1857–1892]
Imprisonment	One month	<i>Hyōron</i>	Tanaka Naoya
Imprisonment	One month	<i>Hyōron</i>	Ishida Tomohiko

All together, there were twenty-eight men. About half of them have already been released from prison. (Those men who remain incarcerated are all in good health. Their family

⁸ Brief biographies concerning most of the individuals listed can be found in Miyatake Gaikotsu and Nishida Taketoshi, *Meiji shinbun zasshi kankeisha retsuden* (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobō, 1985).

members and friends ought to take some solace.) There were sometimes transfers between cells, but those with whom I shared the same room at one time or another were the following five men: Okamoto, Miyamoto, Azuma, Shibata, and Ueki. Ever since the Newspaper Ordinance was promulgated in June of last year, many reporters have become entangled in the webs of the law's prohibitions, but we might say that their number reached its peak around this time. (I am not sure if congratulations or condolences are in order; should I face the various newspaper companies and lament it, or rather face the government and celebrate it?)

At the time I was first put in jail, those employed as guard officers within the prison had not yet been replaced by police patrolmen. (I understand that they came under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Police Agency.) As for the former jail officials, their reproofs and reprimands were the height of strictness and severity. Most of them wore *hakama* trousers and straw sandals woven with hemp thread.⁹ They would pitter-patter down the corridor on patrol, their giant eyes open wide like a gray hawk's as they glowered and peered into the interiors of our cells. If they found even a trivial departure from the regulations, then we would receive a scolding just the same as if we were thieves. The regulations, moreover, were extremely strict. (It is my hypothesis that what I refer to as "regulations" here are not in fact what should really be properly called regulations for inmates. But I will have more to say about that later, so please wait until then.) For this reason, there was not a single man among the inmates of my profession who did not at some point meet with such punishment. Even a timid and overcautious man such as myself was still made to endure these scoldings on more than one occasion. Nor was I free from the experience of being punished for trumped-up charges. One day as I sat facing the wall and muttering to myself, the prison officer suddenly reproached me, saying "You there! Why are you talking to your neighboring cell?" Or one day as I leaned against the barred door chanting poems, I was again scolded with "You there! Why are you talking to the cell in front of you?" Or when I shook out my robes and crushed the lice between my fingers, again came the voice, "You there! Why don't you sit properly?" Or when I got up to wipe away the dust on the wall, again came the voice, "You there! Why are you walking around without permission?" The worst came when one night, a man in the same cell as I suffered from a stomachache. (It was not to the extent that he needed to ask for a medical officer to come and give him an emergency examination.) I asked the man about his suffering, and just as he was about to reply to me, suddenly came the voice from outside our cell, saying, "You there! Why have you turned your lamp on to chat?" It would have been a nuisance to offer any explanation,

⁹ Hakama are skirt-like trousers.

and so I responded with the three words, “Sorry, my mistake.” But “Heaven’s cycle goes on turning”¹⁰ (Maybe this expression sounds excessively grandiose, but I mean it from the point of view of one imprisoned) and a change occurred once the police officers took over the task of guarding us. Perhaps it was because the Police Agency officers had issued a warning. Perhaps it was because the government’s laws had advanced toward enlightenment. The regulations inside the prison remained strict, it is true, but we were delivered from the indignation that filled our minds and the anguish that struck our guts: excused from a certain kind of agony that is not easily described in words. (Which is not to say that there aren’t still one or two things that I would like to see reformed.) In any event, this is why I wrote in an earlier installment that the beginning was “obstruction” and the ending was “smooth going;” the start was “misfortune” and the finish was “fortune.” If we had been left for any length of time in the hands of those guards with their hakama and straw sandals, then the doctor’s clinic would have gone through thousands more spoonfuls of medicine and our life expectancies would all have been curtailed to some degree. O, how fearsome! We called the period before this revolution by the Police Agency the “Age of Hakama.” In what follows, I intend to explain in detail the differences in conditions before and after this revolution.

Long long ago, there was a man called the Marquis of Jiang who attained the position of regent over the four-hundred-odd provinces of China. Not only was he able to singlehandedly prevent the relatives of his lord’s widow from snatching away his lord’s patrimony, but he also commanded a military force of a million troops as though they were his own hands and feet. It is recorded that the Marquis of Jiang also once encountered a prison warden and trembled before him, scared just as though he had seen a ghost. I’d always thought this was simply a literary embellishment by Jiang’s biographer, but now I am surprised to find it rings true.¹¹ When I was first thrown into prison (during the so-called

¹⁰ The phrase would have been familiar to many of Ryūhoku’s readers from its occurrence in Zhu Xi’s preface to the “Great Learning,” one of the “Four Books” given special importance in Neo-Confucianism.

¹¹ The “Marquis of Jiang” is the general and statesman Zhou Bo (d. 169 BCE), whose string of successes on the battlefield contributed to the founding of the Han Dynasty. After the death of its first Emperor, Han Gaozu, followed by Empress Lü, Zhou Bo forestalled the Lü clan’s attempt to seize power at court and also ensured the placement of Emperor Wen on the throne (presumably this is why Ryūhoku calls him “regent”). Though Zhou Bo was one of the early Han’s most trusted officials, his overly cautious decision to wear armor in the presence of a visiting inspector prompted accusations of treasonous intent. Zhou Bo was promptly incarcerated, but a prison warden’s timely advice enabled Zhou Bo to realize how he could demonstrate that the charges against him were groundless. Ryūhoku refers specifically here to the words that Zhou Bo is recorded as uttering upon his release from prison: “I myself was once the commander of an army of a million men, but I never realized what a powerful person a prison warden is!”; see Burton Watson’s translation of Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty I* (New York: Columbia UP, 1993), p. 374.

“Age of Hakama”), there was no question that the prison warden was powerful. Even the jail workers who earn only five yen a month were, from my perspective, so high in status that the difference between them and me might be compared to that between Yoshitsune and the Ezo.¹² What made me afraid of them? It was because they had control over whether I would live or die. Nevertheless, the so-called jail workers are also human beings. Some are good, others are evil; some are talented, others are foolish. How could they all be men with the disposition of demons or Rakshasas?¹³ Nevertheless, from the perspective of us inmates, it was quite difficult to view them as typical human beings. This is why I compared the loftiness of their status to that of imperially appointed officials. Every day they provided us with food, they gave us water, and they dispensed medicine: in a hundred other respects, there was nothing coming to us that did not pass through their hands. Especially horrible was when it came time to go to the place where we cleaned the chamber pots. (In prison, we called these “latrines.” The acts of urination and defecation were called “stuffing.” According to the etymological theory propounded in the prison, the term “stuffing” derives from the sense of stuffing something up and then expelling its contents. Perhaps it is so.) One prison guard would come and bind two or three of us together with a rope. It was no different from the way in which a vegetable vendor might bundle together some *daikon* radishes. Sometimes we would encounter bad luck and it would be an especially stern guard who carried out this task; he would bind the rope cruelly tight and haul us off with petty spitefulness. What it did to us emotionally was truly beyond words. (I ask that all of you try to understand how we felt.) A verdict had already been decided in each and every one of our cases. Why would we bother to try to escape? So long as we had not yet completed our full sentences, even had someone ordered us to “Get out!” we would not want to get out without good reason. What, then, was the purpose in making our bondage so severe? Moreover, we had committed our crimes against the government. We had never once committed crimes against the jail workers. And yet the humiliation to which we were subjected was so extreme. Even a man such as I, a simpleton indifferent to pain and suffering, began to harbor some slight feelings of discontent in my heart. It even reached the point that in my mind I secretly thought: “Just wait, old man. When the inmates in this prison decline in number and you find yourself unable to obtain food and clothing, even if

¹² The military exploits of the medieval general Minamoto no Yoshitsune, his rift with his brother Yoritomo, and his consequent death at the latter’s command, are the subject of a large number of literary works in multiple genres from the medieval period onward. Ryūhoku refers here to the host of later narratives that rewrite Yoshitsune’s demise: imagining that he did not perish but instead escaped north to the island now called Hokkaido, where he became a leader and eventually a deity embraced by the Ezo people.

¹³ Rakshasas (Jpn. *Rasetsu*) are demonic figures originally from Hindu lore that are often associated with destruction and deception. They also appear in Buddhist depictions of Hell as fearsome guards who torment the dead.

you came to the newspaper office eagerly seeking work as a telegraph clerk or a delivery man, I would certainly lodge a final appeal with the accounting department to have you driven away.” (When I think about this now, it really makes me laugh.) When we went to clean the chamber pots after the revolution, however, the ropes that had bound us together at the waist were dispensed with. The jail workers also were much improved in their treatment. This is another specific instance of the sudden shift from “obstruction” to “smooth going.” During the “Age of Hakama,” while the cruel severity of the jail workers was as I have discussed, it was not the case that they were all like this. Their hearts differed one from the next in the same way that their faces did. If you surveyed their appearances, you would find that just as there were some handsome fellows, there were also some very ugly men. One had a face like a monkey and another had a face like a fox; one had a head shaped like a gourd and another had a head shaped like a bottle. Their myriad and manifold forms and manifestations were in our eyes uniformly demonic, and yet there were some whose hearts were gently benevolent and warmly charitable: men who showed us remarkable consideration. There were some whose aspirations made them indignant at social injustice and gave them a brave resolve: men who secretly shared our laments. Among them was one unaffected man who bore malice toward none. A simpleton, he would come every day to dispense medicine. At each cell, he would shout out, “Any for liquid medicine? Any for tablet medicine? Oh, some for Narushima, then? And some for Suehiro.” One day, Mitsugi Kiyoshige greeted him and asked, “Is there anything under the name Mitsugi in the medicines you are distributing?” He replied in a loud voice, “There is nothing by that name” and left. This was the sort of thing that made the man extraordinary.¹⁴ What one had to be most careful about was that sometimes he would show a truly heroic decisiveness in offering instructions for how to take the medicines: mixing up whether it was to be applied externally or ingested orally. (Among the men in my cell was one who vomited after drinking down a medicine that should have been applied externally. Although I will not record his name here, I shall never forget how he refused us, pleading that we not inform the medical officer—his foolishness quite unwonted given his typical vitality.) Those members of my profession who in future find themselves mistakenly thrown into prison ought to make a point of peeking out from behind the bars to have a

¹⁴ The humor of this passage is somewhat obscure to me. Clearly the guard is unable to read, and he seems to rely on the inmates to identify themselves. Perhaps in order to cover up his illiteracy he claims that there is no medicine for Mitsugi when in fact he cannot reliably read the names to make sure. It is also true that Mitsugi is an unusual name, and so it is also possible that the guard has misunderstood Mitsugi to be the name of a specific medicine rather than the name of the inmate. Alternatively, the guard may misunderstand Mitsugi as the homophonous word *mitsugi* meaning “tribute” or “gift;” it is worth noting that in the early modern period, some Korean and Chinese medicines were referred to as *mitsugi-mono*.

good look at what is written on the medicine bottle; only after having done so should they make use of the medicine. It is certainly not right for them to vomit and then blame the jail worker for being carelessly hasty. If the jail worker could actually read the written characters and make sense of matters, if he was someone who never made mistakes, then surely he would not remain long in the post of a jail worker charged with babysitting us inmates.

From antiquity down to the present, the extremity of despotic tyranny imposed by Jie during the Xia Dynasty and Zhou during the Yin Dynasty has never been surpassed. (Though there were some quite fearsome men among the emperors of Rome, for example.) Even during the time of King Zhou, King Wen was not only able to read while he was imprisoned, but he was even permitted to write.¹⁵ How much more then must we expect in the present day, the ninth year of Emperor Meiji's reign in our Great Japan? Thus, even a man held captive cannot be prohibited from reading. It is surely not questionable in the slightest that we prisoners would be able to read as we wished. (It is still not permitted for brushes and ink to be provided to us within the prison. For this reason, I had no recourse but to give up the idea of writing anything. No sooner had I composed works of poetry and prose in my mind than I would forget them. This was a matter of profound regret. It is my opinion that we cannot reject the possibility that a literary man who is confined for as long as one or two years might write something worthwhile. Moreover, since the criminal guilt of a prison inmate has already been decided, what possible harm can come from letting him amuse himself with brush and ink? Needless to say, there are strict measures in place to prevent him from secretly exchanging communication with those inside or outside. I hope that the senior administrators of the prison establish an appropriate system to allow for the distribution of brush and ink. This is one of the conditions that I would like to see revised.) At the time I entered the prison, there were no books in any of the cells. (Though Mr. Katō had already been there for nearly a month by then.) I am fond of reading the prose of Liu Zongyuan and I also possess a copy of Liu Zongyuan's prose that was my late father's. It is printed on thin Japanese paper, the whole collection bound together into three volumes, and I always take it with me when I go traveling.¹⁶ On the day that my sentence was handed down, I had the volume in my breast pocket when I set out. The official who inspected my clothing would not return the book along with my sash and loincloth. I said to the official, "I understand that reading is permitted in the prison. If in the future I ask for this book, I

¹⁵ Ryūhoku refers here to the tyrant Zhou's imprisonment of King Wen of Zhou (1152–1056 BCE), during which time the latter is said to have written the commentaries on hexagrams that became the *Book of Changes*.

¹⁶ Liu Zongyuan (773–819) was a celebrated prose stylist and statesman (though his career was interrupted when he was exiled). Among his well-known works is a series of travel essays.

hope that you will give it to me without delay.” The official said, “Agreed.” Later I asked the guard officer to bring me the copy of Liu’s prose that I had carried with me. He again responded “Agreed. Let me go inquire about it straightaway.” After this, several days passed with no word. I asked about it from time to time. One officer came and said, “As for the book of Liu’s prose, I cannot hand it over to you.” I was greatly perplexed and so I then asked, “Well if that is the case, then what sort of books am I permitted to read?” The officer replied: “There are four books that have already been approved: *The Zuo Tradition*, *The Sayings and Deeds of Famous Vassals*, *An Unofficial History of Japan*, and I forgot the other one.”¹⁷ I said, “In that case, I’d like to request a copy of *The Zuo Tradition* from my home.” The official said, “That is not permitted. It is the established practice that when an inmate requests a book to be brought to him, the price must first be paid by the inmate’s household, and then the order is filled by Suwaraya: the bookstore that is our official purveyor.” (Who would have thought that the profits of Suwaraya would increase in proportion to the number of newspaper reporters confined in prison? The reporter’s bane turns out to be the bookseller’s boon. One can only laugh.) I said, “Whatever—it’s all fine by me, I only ask that you hurry.” The officer again said, “Agreed.” This third “Agreed” augured well, for the third time is the charm, and sure enough when noon came on the twenty-third of February, the fifteen books of the *Zuo Tradition* were deposited in my cell. It was at this moment that the anguish I had experienced in my gloomy confinement was first washed away. Being able to look back and seek companionship with the ancients was the greatest joy I had experienced since entering prison. Just a few days before this happened, the man in the cell directly across from mine, Yokose, received a copy of the *Records of the Grand Historian* from a friend of his. (This book was apparently not certified by Suwaraya, which makes it truly a great stroke of luck to receive.) Yokose’s face was flooded with obvious joy as he immediately took it in hand, and read it out in triumphant high spirits. I had been starved for something to read for days by this point, and when I heard his voice it was so seductive that my covetousness grew, like a widower finding a beautiful woman right before his eyes. Mr. Yokose savored his solitary pleasure, not lending a volume to me that I might share in it. The angry resentment I felt as a result was unbearable. It is prohibited to share food and drink between the various cells—to say nothing of books! That he did not lend me the book is not on account of his stinginess. Rather it was the custom during the “Age of Hakama.” After the revolution had come, we were permitted to trade the books that each cell had

¹⁷ The texts mentioned are all historical and biographical works written in literary Chinese; the *Zuo Tradition* (*Zuo zhuan*) is an early narrative of the Spring and Autumn Period and is one of the Thirteen Classics; *The Sayings and Deeds of Famous Vassals* (*Mingchen yanxinglu*) is a biography of eminent Song officials compiled by Neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi; and *An Unofficial History of Japan* (*Nihon gaishi*) is a popular account of Japan’s history during the period of warrior rule written by Sinologue Rai San’yō (1781–1832)

finished reading for something new to read. And the one who petitioned the Department of Prisons to allow this was the very same Mr. Yokose. The fact that today the prison has no shortage of books is entirely the fruit of his labor; that his petition was approved is due to the warm-hearted charity and benevolence of the Chief of the Department of Prisons. I do not, of course, know the Chief. Everyone says that he is a short-statured man who has a fine set of whiskers. They also say that his surname is Kokuzawa. From time to time, I catch sight of a man of short stature with fine whiskers and I think it must be him. The Chief was attentive to a myriad of things and made it so that no one complained of unjust treatment or felt overwhelmed with exasperation. In particular, when it came to matters of learning and literature, it seemed that he was particularly considerate. Among the patrolling guards was one named Kawada (who wore four stripes); he had a clear sense of principle. A man named Shimizu (who wore three stripes) was a close second. In addition to these two, there were many other people who watched over us with care and treated us with propriety, but I was regrettably unable to learn their individual names. What I am telling you today is certainly not sycophantic palaver that I just let spill forth from my mouth. If people suspect that my words are but my opinion alone, then they ought to consult with the twenty-eight other members of my same profession who were in prison with me. However, the patrolmen working in the prison changed several times and I do not know how many there were in total. It has been said that their great number was not totally devoid of those to whom we might reverentially offer up the recently popular phrase “wise and worthy.” But I cannot vouch for whether they were actually this way or not.

The editor says: “We have been filling up the Miscellany section of the paper day after day with the uninteresting reports of circumstances within the prison, which makes me extremely red-faced before our readers. Nevertheless, the truth of life in the prison is a matter of utmost urgency to newspaper reporters and so I would like to beg your indulgence for a few days more. Moreover, Ryūhoku’s body is still weak and he has not yet made a full recovery. For four or five days now he has been unable to come to work and help out with the newspaper. For this reason, I have been compelled to recount his disgusting stories, but I’ve just about had enough. I might also add that Mr. Miura of the *Hōchi shinbun* has wielded his talented brush to record in detail the circumstances within the prison. It will be on sale soon, and I would ask that if there should be any person with the intention to go to prison that he purchase it. Along with what Ryūhoku has said it will be a useful point of reference.

“Food and sex are the great human desires”¹⁸ and neither sage nor worthy can always live up to what he proclaims, to say nothing of a common man. Even in the case of restrained and docile prisoners such as us, it was extremely difficult to entirely suppress these two desires. Nevertheless, while in prison, a man concentrates all of his thoughts on his own safety and survival. What time does he have to be stirred by desire for the sexual affairs of men and women? When he happens to see the wrinkled countenance of a laundrywoman, he just thinks of his old wife far away; when he catches a glimpse of the grimy face of a female inmate, he simply mistakes her for the first-rate beauty of a brothel. And that is all. This is because the focus of his desire has reached its nadir. But appetite for food is another matter. The pleasures available within the jail are limited to reading and eating. (Reading to excess is not objectionable, but food must be consumed in moderation. If consumed to excess there will certainly be great harm.) The three daily meals that were provided by the authorities gradually improved after the “Age of Hakama.” At present, I would say their quality is at approximately the level of the food at a lower-rank private academy. What’s more, there were items left as care packages by friends and relatives. (The most splendid present to receive was beef or eggs. The theory articulated by Komatsu Matsutane of the Shūshisha company in his “Memorial on the Complete Achievement of Intention,” is valid.) Back in the “Age of Hakama,” the regulations governing care packages were strict in the extreme. They would find fault with just a single mistaken character or phrase on the request form, and there was a rule that prohibited care packages being brought from more than two houses in a single day. It is said that because of this, there were several times when someone would transport a care package a great distance only to then pointlessly have to take it all the way back. The worst was that whenever a woman would arrive at the prison and ask for a care package to be delivered, they would go out of their way to ask her age and come very close to teasing her to amuse themselves. (I heard this from the family of a certain man from the Saifūsha. But I imagine that his wife simply misunderstood what they had said.) After the revolution, the guard officers achieved the proper balance of tolerance and strictness, and never again was a trifling flaw used as the basis to spoil the warm intentions of relatives and friends. Moreover, it is said that they no longer kept the person who came to present the care package waiting for long. As for books, they now allowed them to be given to the recipient once inspected, whether they were volumes from his own library or presents from others. This is one of the things I had in mind earlier when I wrote that “the start was ‘misfortune’ and the finish was ‘fortune.’”

¹⁸ The phrasing closely approximates a line in the Confucian classic, *The Book of Rites*.

It has been customary in both ancient times and in the present day that literary men often suffer from diseases and ailments. How much more is this true when they are confined to a jailhouse where they are rarely allowed to breathe fresh air; when dirty garments cover their bodies; when they are buried in filth and a stench assaults their nostrils? We inmates have fallen into this realm because we committed crimes. It is of course unavoidable that we should have to bear some discomfort. Nevertheless, I am shocked that we should therefore have our health harmed and our life expectancy shortened. I believe that according to the laws of the government, what is being punished is only the person's crime; there is certainly no reason for his health to be harmed or his life to be shortened. As proof of this, I would like to suggest that one consider the fact that the post of medical officer has been established in the prison in order that sick inmates might be examined and that medicines might be distributed to them daily. The medical officer attended to the infirm inmates with great care; his attitude was absolutely not the proverbial "perfunctory discharge of duty." And yet while medicines can be used to treat ailments once they have arisen, they cannot prevent them from arising. There were numerous people living in each cell (Typically a single cell held more than five people. During the summer, when the number of people occupying a cell exceeds four, everyone's suffering becomes quite unbearable.) The air was hardly fresh and pure. One's blood did not circulate properly. These became the root cause of illness. The prison house today is certainly handsome, that is true, but it was surely not a structure originally built for the prisoners. (There is much evidence of this, and I will have occasion to discuss it by and by.) My personal hope is the following. The occupational duty of the officials is to protect the people, not simply to defer to the wishes of the authorities. Now the season is heading into the height of summer. I would like to ask that they move quickly to establish a method whereby the threats to the health of the inmates and the curtailing of their life spans might be remedied. Some say that the medical officer has made an assessment of the prisoners' health and vitality, reporting to the senior officials that "There is absolutely nothing to worry about." But this is absolutely not the case. How do I know this? During the more than one hundred days that I was in prison, I never once saw the medical officer come to my cell. There were times that he came to another cell to make an examination, but even then he never stayed in the cell any longer than ten minutes. Even supposing that he was a brilliant physician like Bian Que, how could he possibly make an accurate assessment of the fluctuations of hot and cold that occur in the cell each day and night, the cycles of dry and damp that depend on whether the skies are sunny or rainy? This is why those like me who have actual experience there have no choice but to blather on about it. That being the case, I believe that there are two methods by which this situation might be remedied: either a separate prison could be maintained, or regulations could be

formulated by which prisoners could be confined to their homes. In any case, when it comes to the question of which method should be implemented, this is a matter into which a newspaper reporter such as myself does not dare poke his nose. The only appeal I wish to make properly to the officials is simply this and nothing else: there is no reason for prisoners to argue vociferously about how they suffer in both mind and spirit. But there is ample reason for them to request reform, refusing to meekly resign themselves to the endangerment of their health and the foreshortening of their lives.

Aside from reading books and eating and drinking, there are three pleasures to be had within the prison. The first is exercise. The second is bathing. And the third is cleaning the chamber pots. Now then, the chamber pot is something that is the height of filthiness. Why is it that one handles it with even more care and reverence than he would use in carrying a fine piece of jade? It is for fear that he will overturn its contents. (It is fortunate that even those men who have been found guilty of advancing arguments to overturn the state have never once overturned the chamber pots.) But can there be a man who enjoys reverently handling something filthy, who likes to deferentially clean an unsanitary vessel? What does it mean to place this act among the pleasures of prison? When several men (as many as seven or eight) live together in a cramped room that measures nine feet square, with one person breathing in what another person exhales, the air inside the room turns into one great poisonous atmosphere. Even if one periodically gets up and tries to breathe in fresh air at the barred window, it is located high up and the air flow is far away. For this reason, a man enjoys the two occasions during the day when he can lift up the chamber pot and venture out of doors to take in the pure and refreshing air. This is why he puts aside the matter of its filthiness. Needless to say, his joy is even greater in the case of exercise, where there is no filth involved and he can just take pleasure in being among the green trees and red flowers. At the time I entered the prison, there was an exercise ground, but no exercise took place there. It was only at the end of February that the “Hakama-Wearing Masters” ordered us to take our first exercise. While they did not completely discontinue the practice thereafter, they only allowed us out to exercise two or three times per month. This was insufficient to make us consider it a great and efficacious tonic for our bodies. Nevertheless, after the revolution, they significantly increased the frequency of our exercise, and what’s more they established a new exercise ground within the prison’s four walls, allowing us to exercise there frequently. Yet because the detainees exercised too, and also because the weather was sometimes inclement, when you count the number of days we actually exercised in a month, it was perhaps fourteen or fifteen. The old exercise ground was wide and the new exercise ground was extremely cramped and small. Moreover, it was bordered by a fence, leaving an area just five or six beam-spans long [about 30 ft] by one or two

beam-spans wide [about 9 ft]. I think that they had several aims in opening the new grounds. First of all, they were worried that the large size of the old grounds necessitated a large number of officials to provide security. They also wished to make the procedures simple and allow us the pleasure of exercising frequently. And finally, they wished to stop thieves and robbers from gathering up roof tiles and rocks and also to prevent inmates from seeing each other's faces and talking to one another. This is of course a fine agenda, but that being said, the only thing in the minds of us prisoners was the preservation of our health. How could we plot escape? How could we devise malicious schemes? What are roof tiles and rocks to us? Even if we did meet with the various other members of our profession, we would simply be glad in our hearts to find each other safe and sound. Even if we did talk to each other, our conversation would not extend beyond a few topics such as: "What books have you been reading lately?" or "I composed a few poor poems last night" or "I wonder how business is at the such-and-such newspaper?" or "How many months is the sentence of that newly arrived reporter?" Even if there were something in our conversation that verged into impropriety, it would be no more than idle talk confined to comments like "Lately I often think about my wife" or "Your jail sentence is almost complete; you'll soon be having a good time drinking to your heart's content at such-and-such tavern." We would certainly not be communicating about our secret plots to smash the jailhouse and kill the guards. On the off chance that our conversation did concern external matters, you could find nothing beyond urging the delivery of care packages with beef and eggs. For this reason, we privately reached the conclusion that the labors of the guards could be reduced if we were all sent out to exercise in the old grounds once every day, weather permitting; it would be sufficient for us to be guarded by just one patrolman and one jail officer who could together prevent any mishap. That carrying out a proposal like this would certainly not lead to an unexpected upheaval is something that we are fully able to guarantee. If this were implemented, then the health of the inmates would be improved to some degree. When it comes to bathing, the procedures are very fine. However, ever since the days designated for rest changed from being those with ones and sixes in them to Sundays, the number of bathing days has actually decreased in comparison to the "Age of Hakama." This is something that all of the inmates plaintively lament: especially since the weather is already becoming hot and humid now. It is loathsome in the extreme for a man to have grime and oil cover his body, to wear dirty and stinky clothes. I would like to respectfully entreat the officials of the prison administration to further increase the number of days designated for bathing during the peak heat of summer. To do so would be a humanitarian practice that would prevent the outbreak of disease in the inmates.

In addition to the three pleasures mentioned above, there is also the matter of getting one's hair cut. I hear that the prisoners' hair is cut once every three months. I had my unkempt hair and whiskers cut in the middle of April and felt immensely refreshed. Moreover, I was able to taste a rare delight that the other prisoners had never known. Let me tell you about it. When I was in jail the prisoners numbered more than thirty. However, not a single one endured the so-called "iron manacles." However, I alone had manacles placed upon my hands. What curious treatment! On the second day of haircutting, the jail officer called my name first off. I went out to the exercise ground. The peach blossoms were in full bloom. They had set up a little chair with the flowers behind it. The barber came and stood behind. The quality of his technique was somewhere between one *shu* and five *sen* for each head.¹⁹ Just then, a jail worker came up and suddenly slapped a set of manacles on my hands. I think it must have been because there were razors and the like right at my side, and they were trying to prevent anything unexpected from happening. Once my haircut was over, I returned back to my cell and after a while questioned my cell-mates about this. All of them said that not a single one of them had been confined in manacles. In fact, they had never even seen what a pair looked like before. I found this most perplexing, and when I went to find out what the situation was in each of the other cells, it seemed that there was not even one man who had savored this exquisite pleasure. My doubts grew all the more firm and I sighed with indignation, "We are all the same—prisoners, each and every one us—some have even committed crimes more serious than I. Why should it be that I alone am put in manacles? What's more, it is through my words that I have committed my crime. I could not dare to object if you gagged my mouth or pulled out my tongue, but what crime have my hands committed that you are compelled to bind them? Suddenly a voice came from the neighboring cell: "Is it not the case that your brush is employed by your hand?" Not wishing to lose the argument, I replied, "I use my brush with my right hand. What crime does my left hand have?" A loud voice came again, "Your left hand can be considered an accomplice. A sentence of four months in prison and a fine of one hundred yen!" I had no more words to offer in opposition. (I subsequently heard that the prison guard had just the other day used the manacles on a detainee and mistakenly extended their use even to me.)

Though the jail is a formidably frightening place, it is not the case that poisonous snakes and malicious scorpions dwell there. The only thing one has to fear is lice. However, lice can be apprehended and then executed. Compared to lice, what are several hundred times more fearsome are mosquitoes. Mosquitoes have wings and can fly. They cannot be

¹⁹ Perhaps suggesting the ways in which the barber and the haircuts he provides are transitional, Ryūhoku uses two different systems of currency here: the Edo period *shu* and the new *sen* (defined as one hundredth of a yen, the currency introduced in the early 1870s). One *shu* would be equivalent to about 6.25 *sen*.

apprehended; they can only be defended against. This is why human beings have developed mosquito netting but not lice netting. When I was in prison, the heat of summer was still not so intense, and yet the thunderous din of mosquitoes was already erupting inside our cells. Because of this, I was tormented every night and sometimes found it impossible to sleep. One night, at the time of the second watch [around 9-10 pm], I smashed with my palm a mosquito that had alighted on my forehead. It just so happened that a patrol guard was passing by at the time, and he asked me, "Have the mosquitoes come out already?" I responded, "It seems that way." "Mosquitoes are a real nuisance," added the guard. I asked him, "Can't we string up mosquito netting even during the hot months of summer?" He said, "Such a practice has not been established." I said, "I only have a few more days left, but those who are going to be in prison for a long time will truly be unable to endure the torment. I would like to kindly request that the matter be considered." After that, the assaults of the mosquitoes grew more intense by the day, but I was able to bear it by thinking that for me it would only last a short while. And now, as we are vexed by mosquitoes during dinnertime at my home on the Sumida, I wonder how the men sleeping at night in jail cells suffer. I hear that before the new prison was built, the inmates were able to string up mosquito netting. But it was decided that if thieves and scoundrels had the shielding of mosquito netting at night, it would be difficult for the patrolling guards to see through with just the light from their candles—and who could guess what sort of evil deeds they might be doing in there? This is the reason that once the new prison was constructed, from the very beginning it was deemed unsuitable for inmates to set up mosquito netting. The guilt of people such as us newspaper reporters has already been determined. Putting aside the remote possibility that we are attacked by dementia, why on earth would we do something that incurs for us further punishment? Even if we erected a thousand, or even ten thousand, folding screens inside our cells, it is certain that we would never take any action that would run afoul of the patrolling guards. And yet, no different from thieves and scoundrels, we have our flesh and blood sucked away by hordes of mosquitoes for weeks on end during the summer months. All through the night it continues, completely exhausting us. We must in the end endure the torment of an insufferable itchiness once the mange has erupted all over our bodies. Is this not punishment on false charges?! Long ago, Nie Zheng and Jing Ke cast their own lives aside in order to stab the sovereigns of other states.²⁰ This is why the Grand Historian, Sima Qian, wrote his "Biographies of the Stabbers," and ever since then there have been more than a few who have followed in the footsteps of these

²⁰ The deeds of Nie Zheng, Jing Ke, and other famed retainers of Chinese antiquity who undertook missions of assassination are recounted in the "Cikezhuan" 刺客傳 ("Biographies of the Assassin-Retainers"), Chapter 86 of Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian*; see Burton Watson's translation in John Minford and S. M. Lau, eds., *Classical Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia UP, 2000), I: 337–351.

assassins. Thus even powerful officials and aristocrats quake in fear of being stabbed in the dark, and in order to prevent such assassination, they construct reinforced barriers and high walls, adding further protection by employing guards and patrolmen. We must recognize the depth of their vigilance. Now then, these mosquitoes are also the “stabbers” of us prisoners, but whereas those other assassins stab in secret, these assassins stab right out in the open.²¹ Whereas those other stabbers come only at a particular time, these stabbers come every night. How can you not permit us to erect a sheet of mosquito netting that can serve as our “reinforced barriers and high walls”? Especially since we will certainly not require any public funds for these mosquito nets! If the prison officials would only sound the note of virtue, then our relatives and friends would beat a path to the door of the jailhouse in order to present the nets. It is my earnest hope that the officials who are charged with the care of the inmates would speedily implement appropriate measures.

There is one more thing that I have been fretting excessively over, and I would like to respectfully convey it to all of you. Recently, whether in the halls of government or in the private sphere, there is nothing that does not take the West as its standard and model. This is true not just in the world of academia, the military system, and the various technical and artistic pursuits. It has reached the point that in everything from clothing styles to food and drink, no matter if they are talking about bean paste or human waste, everyone is clamoring about “Western” this and “Western” that! I suspect that in legal circles, there are some scholars who have advanced a type of argument that in fact confuses bean paste with human waste: that one can find no precedent in Western prisons for the installation of mosquito nets. True, but the reason for this after all is that the cities of the various Western metropolises have neither filthy gutters nor debris piled up in their streets and gardens; there are, moreover, few trees in their cities. Whence would the rumbling thunder of mosquitoes arise? The people may have mosquito nets, but they are not a necessity as they are in our Imperial Nation of Japan. Why should we even ask whether the inmates in their countries have them or not? This is something where the situation will inevitably be different East and West. Moreover, as for things being different in their particulars, we should not focus solely on conditions in the Western countries tens of thousands of miles away. When we ponder conditions within our imperial nation, we see that some prisoners may be confined to the jail while others are confined to their homes. Those in their homes sleep peacefully under mosquito netting while those who are in the prison are shaken by the thunderous din of mosquitoes. Can these situations be considered alike? This is why I have

²¹ Ryūhoku plays on the fact that the terms *ci* 刺 in Chinese, and *sasu* 刺す in Japanese, have a range of meanings that includes not just “to stab,” but also “to penetrate,” and here, for a mosquito “to bite.”

here expressed these perhaps groundless fears of mine, intending to derail the arguments of those masters of human waste among the legal scholars. Of course, when it comes to the pure scholars of bean paste, surely they did not need to wait for these words of mine to realize the difference.

In a civil case one has a lawyer, but in a criminal case, one does not. Even among defendants who are never at a loss for words, such as newspaper reporters, they inevitably show a wide range of abilities in responding to the court's interrogation. The plan for the disposition of the case is, after all, prepared by our wise and worthy government, and because it is made on the basis of the laws that our wise and worthy officials have chosen to apply, it is inconceivable that there would be even the slightest error in it. I can guarantee the veracity of this statement with complete certainty. Yet even among this same group of prisoners, some receive a short sentence of one month while others receive a lengthy sentence of three years. I have read their writings and I have heard them speak, but when it comes to cases where one person's sentence may be twice the length of another's, or perhaps ten times the length of another's, someone such as myself who is unenlightened about the law cannot hope to understand even a little. O, think of the man who is sentenced to prison for as many as three years, or fined as much as three hundred yen! This is not something that a sickly man or an impoverished student can endure, to say nothing of the man's aging wife and young kids whose worldly livelihood he protects. His crime is certainly to be condemned, but he too is to be pitied. That being said, I wonder if there really is nothing we can do.

I hear that among the prisoners there are several who, finding it impossible to resign themselves to accepting the punishment that has been meted out to them, have lodged appeals with the Supreme Court. Although I do not know the details, I did often overhear the talk of men in various cells who would occasionally press the patrolling guards for answers about the status of their appeals. They would say things like "I request that I be summoned speedily before the Supreme Court." Or "What has become of my appeal? Several months have passed and yet I hear nothing." This was none of my business, and so even though their words were audible, I only heard them dimly and gave little thought to them. Yet when I saw how the appellants frequently pressed their appeals, it seemed to me that there must be times when the court makes a postponement because it is completely consumed with its important business. When I first entered prison, an official said to me, "If you are dissatisfied with your punishment, you need to appeal to the Supreme Court within three days." I immediately replied that there was nothing I wished to appeal. Just suppose for the sake of argument that I had wasted my time making an appeal. I would have

encountered a court completely consumed by its important business, and things would have dragged on to the present day when my sentence is complete and I have been released. What point would there have been in making an appeal? On the contrary, perhaps having obtained my freedom I would lose it again on account of the appeal—if I were sentenced to be remanded to the local magisterial authorities, for example. That would certainly be an unexpected nuisance! I do not know if my imprisoned colleagues who made their appeals in fact encountered courts completely consumed by important business. Or perhaps there were some extenuating circumstances. Or maybe I just misheard it all. But Mr. Komatsubara of the *Hyōron* and Mr. Hokiya of the *Nippō* did in fact make appeals. And I imagine that there are others too. But I had best not record their names here.

A man such as our company's Mr. Sawada is the epitome of moderation and restraint. Unlike me, he is certainly not the sort to invite trouble by amusing himself with words. Why did he commit such a grave crime for which he was sentenced to one year—three hundred sixty days—of prison? When I came to the prison, I was disconsolate over this, unmindful of the tears streaming down my face. I respectfully warn the newspaper reporters of the world that they have to be exceedingly cautious in selecting letters that others have written and submitted to the paper. That someone as restrained as Mr. Sawada can be brought before the court shows that even if one argues one's case at length, it will be difficult to mount a successful defense—especially in the case of a man moderate and reticent by nature, one who timidly trembles in the face of the court's authority.

Once a man has affixed his seal to his oral testimony and been sent to prison, it is certain beyond all doubt that there cannot have been any mistake in the work of the wise and enlightened judges. What possible need is there then to mount an appeal, wasting the government's paper, depleting its stores of ink, and futilely troubling a new judge? The convicted man ought to simply chant poems in dolorous winds and intone songs beneath cold moonlight; whether he is regretting his transgression or lamenting the wrong done to him, he is free to do as he pleases in his mind. But there is just one pitiable fact: no brushes and inkstones are present in the cells. Even if every day and night his chanting and singing enable him to create several splendid poems and works of prose, once the night has passed, they will all be flushed away without a trace along with the chamber pot's contents. Imprisoned literary men often produce good poetry and prose. Their cell-mates are able to hear it at close hand. Sometimes when I heard the sound of chatter and conversation escaping from various cells, I could also make out snatches of Chinese poetry and prose if I pricked up my ears. I will record here one or two of those that left the deepest impression on my mind.

故園何日賦刀頭
節近禁烟泣楚囚
東郭一樽誰代我
落花風裏灑松楸

When will come the day that I sing of my return home?
The season nears the Cold Foods Festival, making the prisoner weep.
In the eastern outskirts waits a cask of ale, but who takes my place?
Blossoms fall in the wind, scattering upon my parents' graves.²²

人定陰房風欲腥
鴝鵒叫雨夜冥々
瞥然來照幽窗外
一點流螢似鬼青

All are settled now in their dark cells, the breeze blows rank;
A pygmy owl hoots in the rain, night dim and dark.
Suddenly a shine comes outside my dark window:
The flowing light of a single firefly, like a pale ghost.

— Yano Toshio

九十春風半已過
花香月影夜如何
世間一刻千金夜
却是囚人暗淚多

Ninety days of spring breezes, already half gone now;
What are they like, these nights of blossom scent and moon shadow?
People talk of nights when “each moment is worth a thousand in gold;”
But for one imprisoned, dark tears are abundant.²³

— Sawada Chokuon

身如擒虎鐵欄圍
陰雨其濛何日歸
法網雖嚴難縛夢
吟魂夜々自由飛

My body like a captured tiger, surrounded by iron bars;
Misty and dark is the hazy rain; when will my return come?
Strict though the Law's nets may be, they cannot bind dreams;
Night after night my poetic spirit flies free.

— Katō Kurō

浩歌杖劍獨辭家
期叩金門乘駟車
今日獄窓空伏枕
恍然有夢到桑麻

Singing hearty songs, sword for a staff, I left home alone;
I hoped to knock at golden gates, ride in a coach-and-four.
But today by my prison window, I vainly lie on my pillow;
Rapt in dreams, I arrive at mulberry and hemp fields.

— Suehiro Shigeyasu

Among the prisoners who share my occupation, there are no more than two or three who do not compose poetry. Thus, if one edited these poems, there would be enough to fill out a few volumes. My memory is poor, and I have even forgotten the majority of my own

²² The Cold Foods Festival (C. *Hanshijie*) takes place as winter ends and spring begins and traditionally involves a three-day prohibition on the use of fire to cook food: a practice said to derive from an episode during the Spring and Autumn Period in which a man named Jie Zhitui went into hiding in the hills, refusing to obey Duke Wen of Jin's order to come out; the Duke set fire to the hills, intending to drive Jie Zhitui out, but Jie Zhitui clutched a tree and perished in the flames, causing the Duke to feel remorse and institute the commemorative practice. I might note that Yano uses an unusual term in the first line of his poem; more literally he says “When will come the day that I can write a poem on the head of my sword?” The term *daotou*, meaning the head of one's sword, metonymically indicates the ring (*huan* 環) that decorates it, which in turn is homophonous with the word meaning “to return” (*huan* 還).

²³ Sawada alludes to “Spring Night Poem” by Su Dongpo (1036–1101), which contains the line “On a spring night, each moment is worth a thousand in gold.”

poems—to say nothing of those composed by others. But in some future year, once my fellow newspaper reporters have all been released from prison, we might gather together in the same room, sharing, amid the red glow of lamps and the verdant shine of sake, stories of our misery in jail. If such an opportunity should arise, then presumptuous though it may be of me to propose, I would like to serve as the chief editor so that I might disseminate these volumes of poetry to the world. I do not know if my esteemed counterparts in the various newspaper companies would permit me to do this or not.

“Within the prison, there are no regulations for prisoners.” If the prison guards heard these words of mine, I have no doubt that they would immediately shout a retort: “What kind of wildly irresponsible talk is this?! How can there be no regulations for prisoners within the prison?!” I would reply to them, “You prison guards are no doubt thoroughly familiar with the regulations. But we do not know them.” The prison guard would thunder back, “Have you never looked upon the admonition that is posted on the wall of your cell?! These are the regulations that you must obey!” I of course do have a pair of eyes. And I have a mind too. How can I be incapable of reading and understanding the text that is posted right in front of my face? Nevertheless, I make my statement because I believe that this admonition constitutes the regulations for the detainees, and is not something established for us prisoners. Why do I believe this? Before I was ordered into prison, I met with the calamity of being a detainee. And when I fell into this predicament, I thoroughly mastered the regulations for detainees. The notice posted on those walls bore not the slightest discrepancy from the admonition posted in my prison cell. Now then, surely there is no need for me to belabor the point that imprisonment and detainment are different. Do the authorities not already impose distinct treatment for each? The utensils we use for eating and drinking are different; the place where we bathe is different; the frequency with which we exercise is different. In these and a hundred other respects, there is no point wherein this distinction does not obtain. Moreover, the words of a certain prison officer still linger in my ear even now: he kindly explained to us that there is a distinction between those whose cases have already been decided and those who are awaiting a decision. On the basis of this, the fact that prisoners and detainees are not subject to the same regulations is obvious beyond the shadow of a doubt. Still more is this clear if we look at the fact that there are vast discrepancies separating the text of the admonition presently posted on the walls of the cells and the actual treatment that is meted out to us (even if it is out of the charitable benevolence of the officials.) This is the reason why I simply refuse to regard the notice posted on the walls as a list of regulations pertaining to us prisoners. And thus I declare: within the prison, there are no regulations for prisoners.

Some may ask why regulations for detainees are posted in the cells of the prisoners. I have made my own conjecture about that. As I explained earlier, the newly constructed jail was from the first intended for detainees and was not built for prisoners. Given that its very construction was for detainees, then surely there can be no argument about the notices on its walls. This spring, for some reason the system of domiciliary confinement was abandoned. After that, they lacked another place in which to confine people, and so they abruptly took some of the detention cells and made them into cells to house prisoners. Thus, lacking the time to change the old sign on the wall, they provisionally treated it as the regulations for us prisoners, picking eclectically from its clauses in order to control us. I have faintly heard that recently the guard officers have almost finished creating a set of regulations for treating the prisoners and that they have consulted over each. But I have not yet been able to have a look at them. And thus I declare: within the prison, there are no regulations for prisoners.

The penal officers of our government are already aware that there is a difference between those who have already been found guilty of a crime and those whose cases are still pending. And they are surely also aware that we prisoners are not plotting to smash the jailhouse and make our escape. And they must also know that all we newspaper reporters seek to do while confined is devote ourselves to reading, discussion, and writing. Further, they surely know that we sickly literary types think foremost of preserving our lives and seeking our health. If all of these things are true, then let an appropriate place of confinement be speedily established; let the regulations be revised so that we are spared the odious insult of having thieves and scoundrels as our neighbors! This is what we lament to the heavens. Granted, we are people who have run afoul of the law. But surely it cannot be that we have simply forgotten about our crimes and are brazenly seeking a life of idle leisure within the jail walls.

Already ten days have passed since I began my account of prison conditions. Now, I am preparing to shut my mouth and hold my tongue, bringing this piece to a close. I imagine that some in the general public might well say, "True, there are some harsh aspects of prison life that are difficult to imagine. And yet, contrary to my expectations, according to what Ryūhoku has stated, it's really not all that miserable. It rather seems still insufficient to discipline and punish offenders." Alas, those who hold such a view simply have not grasped my true intent. It is true, after all, that we are violators of the government's law. Even if we were subject to unspeakable suffering in prison, even if our lives came to an end while we remained in fetters, even if our bones were pecked at by the beaks of birds and crows, on what grounds could we express even a single word of grievance? For this reason, we have reached the point where we do not dare to regard as "suffering" the sort of things that the

general public has in mind by the term. Just imagine taking a man who is free to breathe under sunny blue skies and confining him to the dark cell of a prison for just a day or even less. We are confident that his indignant spirit would strike the heavens and his angry screams would roll like thunder; of this we have no doubt. Ah, the misery of life in prison is surely no easy thing to describe in full! On cold nights when we lack even the fire of a single star, the chill brings not just gooseflesh and hands cracked like a tortoise's shell, but is enough to freeze even our vital organs! At those times, all we desire is a bowl half full of hot water, but we cannot obtain it, to say nothing of a bottle of unfiltered sake. It is not surprising, of course, that we cannot pour sake for each other or smoke tobacco. But even when we wish to drink a refreshing ladle of water, it is muddy and turbid and will hardly go down our throats. Or still more on cloudy and rainy days when the wind blows cold; our clothing becomes damp and the lice run rampant. The vile stench of the chamber pots and spittoons fills the room. At these times, though we might wish to escape somewhere else for only a minute, a wooden cage blocks us in front and iron bars line the window behind us. If we wish to get up and wander around, there are so many individuals within each cell that our knees brush against each other and our legs intertwine: where can a bit of open space be sought? To say nothing of the days when the scorching sun beats down through our windows and hot dust pervades the room. Rivulets of sweat drench our bodies, making them run with grime and oil, staining our clothes and dripping on our mats. Is it even thinkable that out in the human realm, someone has put down a chair in the cool shaded verdure of a tree and is cheerfully enjoying a cup of Sparrow's Tongue Tea? Is it imaginable that in this same world, someone has taken a red-skirted geisha as his companion on a painted pleasure boat and is now quietly raising his wine cup? Nor is that all. When the weather changes quickly, my chronic illness suddenly flares up. My diaphragm feels constricted and my gut gets weak. My mood suffers and my nerves ache. At such moments, the only thing one hopes for is to receive the help of medicine to preserve one's life. Given that I am naturally weak by disposition and I always have some sort of stomach ailment, I requested the help of the doctor. The only thing I could eat for the more than one hundred days of my time in prison was rice porridge. That my illness did not become critical can only be attributed to Heaven's beneficence. My cell-mate Shibata Katsufumi suffered from fever while he was in prison. He was laid out in exhaustion for several days. Each day and night he would vomit interminably. His tormented agony was extreme, but fortunately he completed his sentence term and was released from prison, though still sick. I hear that even now he has still not fully recovered. During the time before he was released, the question arose of whether he shouldn't be transferred to the infirmary. However, there was still not a proper infirmary within the prison. They had just blocked off a regular cell, called

it the infirmary, and had sick inmates lie down there. Yet if he were transferred to that cell, he might have to sleep among detainees. Moreover, there was concern that his caregivers there might be detained petty criminals, and so he ultimately decided to forego the transfer. Ah! Rather than sleeping alongside thieves and dying from care administered by pickpockets, it would be preferable to perish at the hands of one's fellow journalists. Once one has become a prison inmate, there is no greater fear than illness. It is not simply that one's own anguish is unbearable, but also that one may even bring pain and injury to one's cellmates. Is this not a terrible calamity? I imagine that the present government is not the government of the past. Surely it cannot be indifferent to an inmate who has fallen ill in prison, stricken like an old pig or a sick duck within a filthy wooden stockade, who might lose his precious life in the blink of an eye. For this reason I firmly believe that the officials ought to prepare anew a prison where good policies for the care of sick inmates are established. I do not know what sort of thoughts the gentlemen of the realm have in response to what I have written here. Having completed my account, I find myself dejectedly feeling almost as though I am still confined within the prison. Ah!

The editor says: "Ryūhoku still has many tales to tell, but we fear that our readers have grown weary and so we have made an abridgement and recorded these. If we hear additional tales that might serve as a warning to people in society at large, we will gather them together and use them in the future to fill up empty space. But with this, the tenth installment, we will lay down our brush. In addition, apparently Ryūhoku has almost completely recovered from his sickness, and starting tomorrow he will at long last return to work. And so, we now slam the door on the inauspicious *Super Secret Tales from the Slammer*."