

# ***Nihon ryōiki*: Its “Letters”, and their Relevance for the History of Literature**

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**Abstract** Compiled in the early ninth century, *Nihon ryōiki* is a collection of accounts involving karmic retribution and miracles. The compilation was intended to guide readers on the Buddhist path. Much of the phraseology in *Nihon ryōiki* was quoted from or influenced by texts from the Chinese Buddhist canon or non-Buddhist Chinese classics. The text overall reveals a metadiscourse that associates certain personages with a saintly lineage, embodying the ideal form of the human being. However, this metadiscourse was not always faithfully recreated in subsequent writings that drew upon the text. This paper dwells on the classification of books like the *Nihon ryōiki*, which are today known as *setsuwa* anthologies. From an intertextual perspective, the study reexamines the relation between *Nihon ryōiki* and other texts, and discusses its historical significance. In light of this discussion, this article attempts to reevaluate the nature of ancient texts written in Chinese characters and the study thereof.

**Keywords** *Nihon ryōiki*. Inner scriptures. Outer writings. Text. Book indexes. Intertextuality.

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## 1 Introduction: *Nihon ryōiki*

Ancient literature teems with mystery and mystique, and this is the case of the source discussed in this article, the *Nihonkoku genpō zen'aku ryōiki* 日本国現報善悪靈異記 (Miraculous Stories of the Reward of Good and Evil from the Country of Japan), commonly known (and henceforth referred to) as *Nihon ryōiki* 日本靈異記. *Nihon ryōiki* contains untapped insights that warrant detailed study from multiple angles. Such studies could reveal, for example, the relation between the text and other Sinosphere texts (ancient East Asian texts written in Chinese characters), the nature of Japanese lexicography of that time, religious and historical perspectives reflected in the text, and its reflections about nationhood and myth. Although *Nihon ryōiki* has been extensively studied,<sup>1</sup> an intertextual approach – the theme of this volume – promises to unlock further insights and poses some intriguing, even if challenging, questions. Having personally researched *Nihon ryōiki* over the years, I use this article to re-examine my findings through an intertextual lens. In this way, I aim to clarify the value of intertextuality and cast fresh light on *Nihon ryōiki*'s idiosyncrasies.

The *Nihon ryōiki* was compiled in the early ninth century by Kyōkai 景戒 (also read Keikai, dates unknown), a *shamon* 沙門 (Buddhist monk) of Yakushi-ji. It consists of three volumes with a total of 116 folktales known as *setsuwa* 説話, which are arranged mostly in chronological order. Kyōkai selected them from the oral legends he had heard, rather than creating the tales himself (*Nihon ryōiki*, vol. 3, epilogue). The question of textualising and editing these oral traditions is relevant to the issues of intertextuality.

How is *Nihon ryōiki* generally defined today? One Japanese dictionary defines it as, “[t]he oldest collection of Buddhist *setsuwa* in Japan” (Izumoji 1984). Another dictionary gives a similar definition: “[t]he first collection of *setsuwa* in Japan” (Ikegami 1990). Such definitions are consistent with Kyōkai's claims in the preface. Specifically, he stated that, whereas China had texts such as the *Record of Invisible Works of Karmic Retribution* (Ch. *Mingbaoji*, Jp. *Myōhōki* 冥報記) – that is, texts containing accounts of karmic retribution for good and evil to guide people to in the Buddhist faith –, Japan had no such texts; hence, *Nihon ryōiki* was to be the first of such texts in Japan.

If we inquire into the matter, we find that the inner, or Buddhist, writings and the outer, or non-Buddhist, writings were first transmitted to Japan in two groups. Both of them came from the country of Paekche, the latter in the reign of Emperor Homuda [Ōjin,

<sup>1</sup> A pioneering study of the *Nihon ryōiki* in English is Nakamura 1973.

r. 270-312], who resided at the Toyoakira Palace in Karushima, and the former in the reign of Emperor Kinmei [r. 539-571], who resided at the Kanazashi Palace in Shikishima. However, it was customary for those who studied the non-Buddhist writings to denigrate the Buddhist Law, while those who read the Buddhist writings made light of the other works. But they are ignorant and foolish, embracing fatuous beliefs and disbelieving in the consequences of evil or good action. People of true wisdom regard both types of writing with seriousness and have faith in and are fearful of karmic causation. [...] If the disposition of good and evil were not known, how could we straighten these tangles and make clear the right and wrong of them? And how, without evoking karmic causation, could we mend evil hearts and advance the path of goodness? Long ago in the land of China, the *Myōhōki* was compiled; and during the great Tang dynasty, the *Hannyagenki* was written. But why should we respect only these records of foreign countries and not credit the miraculous stories that occur in our own land? Since these events occurred here and I saw them with my own eyes, I cannot let them go unrecorded. After pondering them for a long time, I can no longer remain silent. Therefore, I have written down what I have chanced to hear, entitling it *Nihonkoku genpō zen'aku ryōiki* [Miraculous Stories of the Reward of Good and Evil from the Country of Japan], compiling it in these three volumes and handing it down to future times. (*Nihon ryōiki*, vol. 1, preface)<sup>2</sup>

As discussed later, the Chinese Buddhist canon was not the only inspiration behind the *Nihon ryōiki*. Moreover, Kyōkai never envisaged the work as a *setsuwa* anthology, as there was no such genre or literary category as ‘setsuwa’ or ‘setsuwa anthology’ in Japan at the time. In the preface, Kyōkai refers to the *Myōhōki* – the aforementioned *Record of Invisible Works of Karmic Retribution* – and to the *Hannyagenki* 般若驗記, the latter being the abbreviated title of the *Collection of Recorded Miracles Concerning the Diamond Sutra* (Ch. *Jingang bore jing jiyān jī*, Jp. *Kongō hannya-kyō shūgenki* 金剛般若經集驗記). We can infer that Kyōkai modelled his work after these references to specific Chinese texts. However, we must also note that China at the time categorised the *Record of Invisible Works of Karmic Retribution* as a history book, listing it under the heading “History: Sundry Books” (*Shilu zazhuan lei* 史錄雜傳類) in the Bibliographic Treatises (*Jingji zhi* 經籍志) of the *Old Book of Tang* (Ch. *Jiu Tangshu*, Jp. *Kutōjo* 旧唐書).<sup>3</sup> Given the fact that the *Nihon ryōiki*'s title uses the same character

<sup>2</sup> All quotations in the English translation follow Watson, Shirane 2013. For the original, see Nakada 1995.

<sup>3</sup> I was unable to determine how the *Hannyagenki* was classified in China.

(*ji* 記 ‘record’) that appears in the title *Record of Invisible Works of Karmic Retribution*, and also because *Nihon ryōiki* displays an underlying historical consciousness by chronologically arranging its tales, it is evident that the compilation of the *Nihon ryōiki* was shaped by such Chinese historical literature and was not, therefore, based only on discourse in Japan. Thus, to unpack the contents of *Nihon ryōiki*, we must consider how it reflects other literature in China and elsewhere in East Asia.

Kyōkai considered many sources apart from the *Record of Invisible Works of Karmic Retribution*. In the preface, Kyōkai states that Buddhist writings (Ch. *neijing*, Jp. *naikyō* 内經, lit. ‘inner scriptures’) and non-Buddhist writings (Ch. *waishu*, Jp. *gesho* 外書, lit. ‘outer writings’) came from China to Japan via the Korean kingdom of Paekche. Inner scriptures refer to the Chinese Buddhist canon, while outer writings refer to non-Buddhist Chinese classics, such as Confucian classics. Kyōkai states that both sets of writings came to Japan and were studied there, and argues that those with ‘true wisdom’ (*shinchi* 深智) gained a sense of reverence and a deep understanding of the non-Buddhist as well as the Buddhist literary traditions. This reverence is reflected in the *Nihon ryōiki* itself, though its *setsuwa* pertain to incidents of karmic retribution, good and evil deeds, and miraculous wonders that occurred in *Japan*, the text nonetheless incorporates the inner scriptures and outer writings from China.

The *Nihon ryōiki* predated the hiragana lettering system and was therefore written entirely in Chinese characters. An analysis of its textual characteristics suggests that Kyōkai adopted the phraseology used in Chinese texts to showcase Japan’s progress in the path of Buddhism. Kyōkai referred to texts from a number of Chinese literary traditions for this phraseology. The texts included those from the Chinese Buddhist canon, such as the *Lotus Sutra* (Ch. *Fahua jing*, Jp. *Hokekyō* 法華經); those from the Confucian canon, such as *Mao’s Book of Songs* (Ch. *Maoshi*, Jp. *Mōshi* 毛詩; also known as the *Book of Songs*, Ch. *Shijing*, Jp. *Shikyō* 詩經); and those included in the *Selections of Refined Literature* (Ch. *Wenxuan*, Jp. *Monzen* 文選). Accordingly, this article explores *Nihon ryōiki* to identify the literary sources that inspired the text and the influence of these sources in shaping the textual content and overall structure of the compilation. It also aims to determine how *Nihon ryōiki* resonated with later generations, and its contextualisation and classification by scholars of Japanese literary history. As it touches upon the disciplines of religion, history, and literature, *Nihon ryōiki* offers valuable subject matter for an intertextual analysis that provides insights into the realities of premodern Japan and the East Asian cultural sphere, where Chinese characters prevailed as *lingua franca*.

## 2 The Textual Structure of *Nihon ryōiki*: Inner Scriptures and Outer Writings

### 2.1 Drawing from the Inner Scriptures: The *Lotus Sutra*

Section 2 explores the pre-existing textual elements in *Nihon ryōiki* and their incorporation. This subsection focuses on the inner scriptures – the Chinese Buddhist canon. *Nihon ryōiki* contains numerous *setsuwa* concerning Buddhist scriptures, and they are laced with scriptural references. The *Lotus Sutra* is the most quoted Buddhist text in *Nihon ryōiki* (Kōno 2016). An example of this is shown in vol. 1, *setsuwa* 19, titled “On Ridiculing a Reciter of the *Lotus Sutra* and Getting a Twisted Mouth as an Immediate Penalty”. The tale goes as follows. Once upon a time, a self-ordained (*jido* 自度) monk was playing *go* 碁 when a mendicant (*kossha* 乞者) came begging for alms while reciting the *Lotus Sutra*. The novice laughed at the mendicant and started mimicking his recitation with a twisted mouth. The monk then started losing every game of *go*. Later, his mouth became stuck in its contorted position and no medicines in the land could cure him of the affliction. After recounting this tale, the *setsuwa* provides a quotation from the *Lotus Sutra*: “If anyone disparages or laughs at that person, then in existence after existence he will have teeth that are missing or spaced far apart, ugly lips, a flat nose, hands and feet that are gnarled or deformed, and eyes that are squinty” (若有輕咲之者、当世牙齒疎欠、醜唇平鼻手脚繚戾眼目角眇). Next to this quotation is the phrase “This is what it means”, or, “As it is written, so shall it be done” (其斯謂之矣), implying that the sutra’s warning would indeed occur. The *setsuwa* concludes by saying that it would be better to be possessed by demons than to badmouth the devotees of the *Lotus Sutra*.

This *setsuwa* is a simple tale of karmic retribution: a character who scoffs at the *Lotus Sutra* receives the same comeuppance warned of by the sutra. Many of the *setsuwa* in *Nihon ryōiki* have a similar pattern: they recount a miraculous event and then cite Buddhist scripture to explain the morality of the story – the reason the event occurred and an exhortation to readers. *Kyōkai* advocated the Buddhist faith to the readers by relating incidents in Japan to Buddhist teaching.

Two other *setsuwa* in *Nihon ryōiki* also involve people who are punished with a contorted mouth for speaking ill of a devotee of the *Lotus Sutra*. In all three cases, the *setsuwa* expresses the contortion using the character pair 喎斜 (Jp. *kasha*, Ch. *waixie*):

- *Nihon ryōiki*, vol. 1, *setsuwa* 19: “On Ridiculing a Reciter of the *Lotus Sutra* and Getting a Twisted Mouth as an Immediate Penalty” (皆詆法花經品之人而現口喎斜得惡報緣)

- *Nihon ryōiki*, vol. 2, *setsuwa* 18: “On Speaking Ill of a Monk Reciting the *Lotus Sutra* and Gaining the Immediate Penalty of an Evil Death” (皆読法花経僧而現口喎斜得悪死報縁)
- *Nihon ryōiki*, vol. 3, *setsuwa* 20: “On Speaking Ill of a Woman Copying the *Lotus Sutra* and Immediately Getting a Twisted Mouth” (誹奉写法花経女人過失以現口喎斜縁)

This character pair 喎斜 appears in the *Lotus Sutra* as part of the following phrase in Chapter 18 (“The Merits of Joyful Acceptance”): “Their lips will not be drooping, pursed or twisted; and their lips will never have cankers, scabs, be cracked, misshapen” (脣不下垂、亦不褰縮、不龕洪、不瘡胗、亦不缺壞、亦不喎斜) (Kubo, Yuyama 1993, 260; Takakusu 1925, 47a). However, it rarely appears in other Chinese literary sources. Here, we can identify an important textual characteristic: whereas Kyōkai could have chosen Chinese characters such as *qu* 曲 or *wai* 歪 to express ‘twisted’ or ‘contorted’, for the *setsuwa* concerning the *Lotus Sutra*, he repeatedly used a word that is particular to the sutra.

The following is another *setsuwa* that reveals a link between the *Nihon ryōiki* and the *Lotus Sutra*.

#### “On Taking a Fox as a Wife and Producing a Child”

This took place long ago in the reign of Emperor Kinmei (Emperor Amekuni-oshihiraki-hironiwa no mikoto, who resided at the Kanazashi Palace in Shikishima). A man of the Ōno district of Mino province set out on his horse in search of a good wife. At that time in a broad field, he came upon an attractive woman, who responded to him. He winked at her and asked, “Where are you going, pretty miss?” She answered, “I am looking for a good husband”. “Will you be my wife?” he then asked. She replied, “I will”. So he took her home, and they married and lived together.

After a time, she became pregnant and gave birth to a boy. At the same time, on the fifteenth day of the Twelfth Month, their dog gave birth to a puppy. The puppy constantly barked at the wife and threatened to bite her. She became so frightened that she asked her husband to kill the puppy, but in spite of her request, he would not do so.

Around the Second or Third Month, when the annual quota of rice was being hulled, the wife went to where the female servants were pounding rice to give them some refreshment. The puppy ran after her, trying to bite her. Startled and frightened, she changed into a fox and jumped on top of a hedge. (*Nihon ryōiki*, vol. 1, *setsuwa* 2)

This *setsuwa* has no Buddhist elements in its narrative. However, in its textual structure, Kyōkai uses the four-character compound *gai-sai gōbei* 睚眦嗥吠 to describe the dog’s action of ‘glaring and barking’ at the shapeshifting fox (睚眦 ‘glare’, 嗥吠 ‘bark’). This obtuse compound was derived from a phrase in the *Lotus Sutra*. The phrase appears in Chapter 3 (“A Parable”) during a passage in which ravenous foxes and dogs fight over carcasses.

There were foxes, wolves and vermin  
 Devouring, trampling and gnawing on corpses,  
 Scattering bones and flesh about;  
 And a pack of dogs,  
 Forcing each other out of the way,  
 Rushed to the spot -  
 Frightened and exhausted from hunger,  
 They were searching everywhere for food,  
 Fighting among themselves, snatching at food,  
 Biting, snarling and barking at each other.

狐狼野干、咀嚼踐蹋。齧齧死屍、骨肉狼藉。  
 由是群狗、競來搏撮。飢羸惴惶、处处求食。  
 鬪諍 [齒+查] 掣、睚眦嗥吠。

(Kubo, Yuyama 1993, 70; Takakusu 1925, 13c-14a)

The above passage uses the four-character compound 睚眦嗥吠 to describe the action of canines ‘snarling and barking’ at each other (睚眦 ‘snarl’, 嗥吠 ‘bark’). In the first of these two character pairs (睚眦), the intended meaning of ‘snarling’ is ideographically evident from the use of the ‘mouth’ (口) radical in 睚 and the ‘teeth’ (齒) radical in 眦. As Nakamura Munehiko argues, in the *Nihon ryōiki*, the first character pair (睚眦) replaces the mouth and teeth radicals with the ‘eye’ (目) radical, thereby changing the meaning from ‘snarl’ to ‘glare’ (Nakamura 1985). This ocular rendering can also be found in Chinese literary sources, including in the biography of Fan Ju 范雎 in the “Ranked Biographies” (*Liezhuan* 列傳) of the *Records of the Grand Historian* (Ch. *Shiji*, Jp. *Shiki* 史記).<sup>4</sup> Here, Kyōkai’s choice of this particular four-character compound and ocular rendering for the first character pair is unclear. However, it is clear that the characters originated in the *Lotus Sutra* and that Kyōkai therefore was referring to this sutra.

The *Nihon ryōiki* contains another story of a dog barking and the barking action is again represented by the character pair 嗥吠.

<sup>4</sup> *Records of the Grand Historian*, Ranked Biographies, Biography of Fan Ju: 一飯之德必償、睚眦之怨必報 (Sima 1982).

### On Killing Living Creatures and Suffering Revenge, Being Reborn as a Fox and a Dog, Hating Each Other, and Incurring a Penalty

[...] Yōgō continued to chant the formula, whereupon the sufferer, possessed, said, “I am a fox, [...]” [...] The spirit answered, “He killed me in his previous life, and so I am taking revenge on him. If he eventually dies, he will be reborn as a dog and will kill me”. Hearing this, Yōgō, surprised, tried to instruct him, but he would not cease and finally the patient died.

A year later, one of Yōgō’s disciples lay sick in the same room where the man had died. At that time, a visitor tied up his dog at the master’s room and came to see him. The dog barked and tried to break free from his leash. [...] As soon as he was freed, he ran into the room where the sick disciple lay and came out with a fox in his mouth. Although the master tried to stop him, he would not stop but chewed the fox to death. (*Nihon ryōiki*, vol. 3, *setsuwa* 2)

To summarise, the story goes as follows. The spirit of a fox who was slain by a man took revenge on its killer by possessing him. The possessed man was eventually killed by the fox and reborn as a dog. The fox then took possession of another man. The dog started barking at this fox-possessed man and then gnawed the fox to death. In this *setsuwa*, the action of the dog barking at the fox-possessed man is represented by the character pair 嗥吠, the same character pair in the previously discussed *setsuwa*. The action of gnawing the fox to death is represented by the character 齧. This obscure character appears in the previously cited passage from Chapter 3 of the *Lotus Sutra*. It is clear from these connections that this part of the *Nihon ryōiki* was influenced orthographically and phraseologically by the *Lotus Sutra*.

In both these stories that involve a fox and a dog (vol. 1, *setsuwa* 2, and vol. 3, *setsuwa* 2), the narrative is unrelated to the *Lotus Sutra*. However, the textual structure features character compounds that are indelibly associated with the sutra, such that readers who are familiar with the sutra can make the connection between the texts. We have no way of telling how deliberate the use of these words was, or the extent to which readers recognised the overlaps. Even if the overlaps are considered unintentional, their occurrence could be considered an intertextual phenomenon.

## 2.2 Drawing from the Outer Writings: *Mao’s Book of Songs, Selections of Refined Literature*

This subsection focuses on the outer writings – Chinese classics outside of the Buddhist canon. In the tale “On a Deaf Man Whose Hearing Was Restored Immediately, Owing to His Faith in a Mahayama



Sutra” (*Nihon ryōiki*, vol. 1, *setsuwa* 8), the story goes as follows. For many years, a man suffered from a severe illness that had left him deaf and with blotches all over his body. After summoning a monk and devoting himself to the sutras, he was healed of the sickness. The anecdote concludes with the following message: “So we know that tales of a mysterious correspondence are not false” (是知、感応之道、諒不虛矣). The *setsuwa*’s use of the *chuan* 遄 character is of interest as it appears in the protagonist’s statement during his affliction: “Rather than living a long life and being hated by others, it is better to do good now and quickly die!” (長生為人所厭、不如行善遄死) (Kōno 2013). The 遄 character gives the meaning of ‘soon’ or ‘quickly’. This character is rare and seldom used today, and is barely featured in ancient Japanese literature. Despite its rarity, the character appears as many as six times in *Nihon ryōiki* (in *setsuwa* 6 and 8 of vol. 1; in *setsuwa* 19, 20, and 21 of vol. 2; and in the preface to vol. 3). One possible source for this character is the Confucian classic called *Mao’s Book of Songs*. Here, the character appears in one of the Odes of Yong Feng, titled “Behold the Rat”:

Behold the rat; he has a body | A man with no propriety  
A man with no propriety | Oh, why doesn’t he quickly die?

相鼠有体、人而無礼。  
人而無礼、胡不遄死。  
(*Mōshi*, vol. 3; Hoshino 1975, 11)

The stanza claims that the rat has a body, and then mentions a man without propriety. The final line suggests that such a man should “quickly die” (遄死). In other words, it means that a man without a meaningful purpose in life should die sooner than later, which is consistent with the context in which *Nihon ryōiki* uses the phrase. Given this contextual overlap and that the 遄 character is rarely used, it is likely that the above phrase inspired this part of *Nihon ryōiki*.

Although *Nihon ryōiki* was written in Chinese characters, it sometimes deviates from formal Chinese syntax, as it was written by a Japanese person. In this respect, the text is an example of *washū kanbun* 和習漢文, ‘Japanistic Chinese literature’, a Japanese term for Chinese literature with some Japanese linguistic features. However, no such deviations are found in the key sentence of *setsuwa* 8 (“Rather than living a long life and being hated by others, it is better to do good now and quickly die!” 長生為人所厭、不如行善遄死). In incorporating the “quickly die” (遄死) phrase, Kyōkai takes great care to make the wording consistent with Chinese syntax and grammar. In this way, he achieves elegant writing from a Chinese literary perspective, particularly in terms of the passive voice (人所厭 ‘being hated by others’) and the typical Chinese construction ‘*a* 不如 *b*’ (‘rather than *a*, *b*’).

In the preface to volume 2, Kyōkai expresses shame for his inelegant and disorderly writing: “I string out my lines of characters, but alas, they do not flower (連居字不華). [...] I write, yet cannot get my phrases into order (編造文乱句)”. Contrarily, this admission indicates Kyōkai’s strong regard for the elegance of Chinese phraseology. Thus, it is likely that classic Chinese phraseology was deliberately incorporated out of a desire to create elegant and orderly Chinese writing.

Still, we should avoid leaping to the conclusion that Kyōkai sourced the “quickly die” phrase directly from *Mao’s Book of Songs*, as the phrase was quoted in the *Records of the Grand Historian* (in the Biography of Shang Yang 商君) and in the *Collection of Discussions on Buddhist Teaching Past and Present* (Ch. *Ji gujin fodaō lunheng*, Jp. *Shū kokon butsudō ronkō* 集古今仏道論衡) compiled by Daoxuan 道宣. Either source could have inspired Kyōkai’s phrase. This issue illustrates an important point that, when exploring Chinese literature, we must be mindful of the cross-pollination and complex blending of the texts in ways that span the literary categories of Buddhism and Confucianism.

A similar example of reuse of a phrase from the outer writings appears in the story titled “On a Man Who Vowed to Copy the Lotus Sutra and was Saved from a Pit Devoid of Sunlight by the Power of His Vow” (*Nihon ryōiki*, vol. 3, *setsuwa* 13). The tale goes as follows. A man was working in an iron mine when the mine entrance suddenly caved in. The man wanted to copy the *Lotus Sutra*, and his failure to complete this filled him with regret. Inside the sealed mine, the man prayed that he would copy the sutra if he were saved. The pit then opened a little, letting in a ray of sunlight. Eventually, the man was rescued unharmed. The *setsuwa* concludes with the following message: “This took place owing to the divine power of the Lotus Sutra and the favour (Jp. *hiki* 彙員) of Kannon. There can be no doubt about it!” (是乃法花經神力、觀音彙員、更莫疑之矣). Of interest here is the character pair 彙員. In modern-day Japanese, the character pair 彙員 is pronounced *hiiki* and typically means ‘to favour someone’ (to treat someone better than you treat others). However, this usage differs from the original usage as the usage has changed in Japan. Originally, 彙員 was pronounced *hiki*, not *hiiki*, and it meant ‘to exert force’. Searching Chinese classics for examples of this word revealed that it occurs in a passage from Yang Zheng’s 張衡 “Western Metropolis Rhapsody” (西京賦), included in the *Selections of Refined Literature*.

The first capital of the Han dynasty | Lay on the banks of the Wei River | The Qin had dwelled to the north | This place was named Xianyang.

To the left lies the double rises of Yao and Han | And the Taolin Fortress | Both of which are connected by the two Hua peaks.

The Great Spirit, exerting its force | Reached up high with its hands and stretched out its legs | Thereby allowing the winding river to flow.

漢氏初都、在渭之涘、秦里其朔、寔為咸陽。左有崤函重險、桃林之塞、綴以二華。巨靈勳履、高掌遠蹠、以流河曲。  
(Obi 1974, 120)

According to this, at the place where the two Hua peaks (*Taihua shan* 太華山 ‘Great Flower Mountain’ and *Shaohua shan* 少華山 ‘Small Flower Mountain’) meet, the Great Spirit (a river deity) had exerted its force to cleave the mountain into two, creating a channel for the river to flow through. Here, the word *hiki* 勳履 is used to describe the divine force that moved mountains. This word is used in *setsuwa* 13 of *Nihon ryōiki* in the context of creating a small opening in a collapsed mine. Additionally, the force is exerted by the all-compassionate Kannon (Avalokiteśvara), as opposed to a gigantic spirit. Importantly, this use of the word in *Nihon ryōiki* marks the first instance of the word’s usage in Japan, according to Shōgakukan’s *Nihon kokugo daijiten* 日本国語大辞典 (second edition), a contemporary Japanese dictionary.

The *Selections of Refined Literature* was an anthology compiled by Crown Prince Zhaoming 昭明太子 of the Liang Dynasty. It has been studied extensively in China and Japan as a literary text. The works included in the anthology are obtuse and replete with rhetorical devices, and have an elaborate textual structure. The fact that *Nihon ryōiki* reflected such writing intriguingly illustrates how a monk from the Nara and early Heian period consulted not only the Buddhist canon but also the non-Buddhist Chinese classics in his literary career.

### 3 How was *Nihon ryōiki* Read?

#### 3.1 *Nihon ryōiki*’s Metadiscourse and the Ideal it Presents

So far, we have seen how *Nihon ryōiki* incorporated textual elements from existing literature, including the Chinese Buddhist canon and non-Buddhist Chinese classics. The next question to consider is whether readers at the time, when they read the expressions derived from the *Lotus Sutra*, *Mao’s Book of Songs*, or the *Selections of Refined Literature*, resonated with the milieu and ideals these texts represented. Also, leaving aside these connections, how did readers of the time understand and respond to these fantastical and far-fetched stories in the first place?

*Nihon ryōiki* was the first book in Japan to compile Japanese tales of karmic retribution, good and evil deeds, and supernatural phenomena, and then lace them with Buddhist instruction. Given this infor-

mation, one imagines that readers at the time would have regarded *Nihon ryōiki* as a groundbreaking text, the likes of which had never been seen. However, it had some features to accustom readers to a text that was entirely new to Japan.

The first feature is that the 116 *setsuwa* follow certain formulas and patterns (Kōno 2020, 79-80). For example, take the first *setsuwa* I discussed, *setsuwa* 19 in volume 1. After recounting an incident about someone receiving karmic retribution for mocking a devotee of the *Lotus Sutra*, the *setsuwa* quotes the relevant scripture from the *Lotus Sutra* and then concludes with the words, “This is what it means” (其斯謂之矣), implying that the scriptural warning is not an idle threat. As many as 38 other *setsuwa* recount an incident, provide a scriptural justification for the incident, and end with the same stock phrase, “This is what it means”.<sup>5</sup> The *setsuwa* about the sick man getting healed through Buddhist devotion (vol. 1, *setsuwa* 8) concludes with the following sentence: “So we know that tales of a mysterious correspondence are not false” (是知、感応之道、諒不虛矣). As this example illustrates, a frequently occurring pattern in *Nihon ryōiki* is to give words of commentary prefaced with the adverbial “thus, forsooth, we know” (rendered as 是知, or as 誠知 in some cases). This pattern occurs in 62 *setsuwa* (the majority of *setsuwa* in *Nihon ryōiki*).<sup>6</sup> *Nihon ryōiki* evokes in readers a sense of familiarity, the feeling that they read this before in the very same book, by frequently reiterating the same moral message. In other words, reiteration creates an intra-textual effect.

*Nihon ryōiki* had another feature designed to make the text resonate with readers of the time. It presented the history of Japanese Buddhism by weaving anecdotes about famous historical personages such as Prince Shōtoku 聖徳太子 and Gyōgi 行基. Furthermore, it created a collective memory that resonated with people of the time and was imprinted in their memory (Kōno 2018). This point will be explained further.

The preface to volume 1 of the text states that those with *shinchi* 深智 (true wisdom) studied the inner scriptures and outer writings reverently and believed in karmic cause and effect. Thus, *Nihon ryōiki* inherently highlights the importance of *chi* 智, ‘wisdom’.

In *setsuwa* 7 of volume 2, we read of a monk described as “second to none in knowledge” (智惠第一) and named Chikō 智光, ‘wisdom-light’.

<sup>5</sup> In volume 1, the phrase occurs in *setsuwa* 11, 13, 18, 19, 20, 27, 29, and 30. In volume 2, it occurs in *setsuwa* 2, 5, 7, 9, 10, 13, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24, 30, 31, 32, 38, 39, 41, and 42. In volume 3, it occurs in *setsuwa* 2, 4, 14, 17, 18, 20, 23, 24, 27, 34, and 39.

<sup>6</sup> In volume 1, the pattern occurs in *setsuwa* 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 13, 18, 20, 22, 28, 29, 32, and 33. In volume 2, it occurs in *setsuwa* 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 20, 21, 22, 27, 28, 31, 32, 36, 37, 38, 40, and 41. In volume 3, it occurs in *setsuwa* 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 22, 26, 28, 29, 30, 32, 34, 38, and 39.

In the story, Chikō descends into hell because he envied the monk Gyōgi.

On a Wise Man Who, Out of Envy, Abused an Incarnated Sage and, as an Immediate Penalty, Visited the Palace of King Yama and Underwent Suffering in Hell

Shaku Chikō [...] was innately intelligent and ranked first in knowledge. He wrote commentaries on the Urabon-kyō, Daihannyakyō, Hannya Shin-gyō [Heart Sutra], and other works, and lectured on Buddhist teachings to many students.

There was at this time a monk named Gyōgi. [...] He gave up lay life, freed himself from desire, and spread the Law, converting the deluded masses. He was highly intelligent and seemed to be guided by inborn knowledge.[...] Dharma Master Chikō, envious at heart, spoke ill of him, saying, “I am the wise one; Gyōgi is a mere novice! Why does the emperor ignore my wisdom and put faith only in this novice?” [...] As they went forward, they came to an extremely hot pillar of iron.

“Embrace it!” commanded the messengers. When Chikō embraced the pillar, all his flesh melted away, and he was left with nothing but bare bones. [...] Again they started northward, and they came to a copper pillar that was much hotter than the one before. [...] “Embrace it!” commanded the messengers, and he did so, and all his flesh was melted away. [...] As he faced the burning heat, he asked, “What place is this?” “This is the Avichi Hell, which is here to burn you up!” [...] The two men at the gate said, “The reason that you were called here was that you spoke ill of Bodhisattva Gyōgi of the country of Ashihara. [...] Go back now as quickly as you can!” [...] From this time on, the Venerable Chikō put his faith in Bodhisattva Gyōgi, realising clearly that he was a sage. (*Nihon ryōiki*, vol. 2, *setsuwa* 7)

Chikō was a real historical character, an eminent monk who wrote a number of commentaries on Buddhist scriptures.<sup>7</sup> Gyōgi was also an eminent monk, and he features as a character in seven *setsuwa*. Among the characters in *Nihon ryōiki*, Gyōgi appears the most frequently, which suggests his importance. Although Chikō is comparatively less important, he was still considered a venerable scholar-monk, so it is rather shocking to read of his damnation. In the *setsuwa* 7, Chikō subsequently repents his envy and finds faith in Gyōgi, declaring the latter to be a ‘sage’ (*seijin* 聖人). This episode gives the

<sup>7</sup> These commentaries include *Jōmyō genron ryakujuetsu* 浄名玄論略述 (Abbreviated Comments on the Profound Treatise on the *Vimalakirti Sutra*) and *Hannya shingyō jut-sugi* 般若心經述義 (Observations on the Meaning of the *Heart Sutra*).

impression that a saint represents the ideal form of human beings and is superior to a wise person. In what respect, then, did Gyōgi exceed Chikō? The answer lies in the opening lines of the *setsuwa*, which introduce Gyōgi.

Gyōgi is described as a devoted and compassionate soul, who “spread the Law, converting the deluded masses” (弘法化迷), and who possessed “inborn knowledge” (生知). *Nihon ryōiki* also describes Prince Shōtoku, who was also a real-life person, in such glowing terms. The relevant passage in volume 1, *setsuwa* 4, describes him as “born by nature so wise” (生知). It also states that the prince was named Shōtoku (lit. ‘sacred virtue’) because he “spread the Way and brought profit to the nation” (弘法利物). Thus, according to *Nihon ryōiki*, to qualify as a sage – the ideal form of a human being – one must have ‘innate’ (生) ‘intelligence’ (知) and spread the Dharma to guide the people. In other words, one must combine ‘wisdom’ (智) with ‘good deeds’ (行). By using similar language to describe the historical personages of Prince Shōtoku and Gyōgi, both of whom would have likely occupied a prominent place in popular memory during that time, *Nihon ryōiki* links the two characters together as if they belong to a singular saintly lineage.

The incidents in the final *setsuwa* of volume 3, the latest episode chronologically, and thus the most recent episode at the time, are the most interesting. The *setsuwa* is titled “On a Monk Who Excelled in Both Wisdom and Practice and Who Was Reborn as a Prince”.

(1) Meditation Master Shaku Zenjū’s secular name was Ato muraji, [...] After he was ordained, he worked very diligently, studying the doctrine and excelling in both wisdom and practice. [...] He worked to spread knowledge of the Law and guide others, [...] the Most Reverend Zenjū lived two lives, first as Zenjū and then as a prince. [...]

(2) [...] His name was Bodhisattva Jakusen. The people of the time, both clergy and laypersons, praised him with the name bodhisattva because of the purity of his conduct. [...] Meditation Master Jakusen realized that he was about to die. He therefore put his written records in order and transmitted them to his disciples, saying, “Twenty-eight years after my death, I will be reborn as a prince with the name of Kamino. You may know that the prince is I, Jakusen!” [...] a prince named Kamino was born to the emperor. This is the present Emperor Kamino [Saga, r. 809-823], [...] Therefore, we know that he is surely a sage. (*Nihon ryōiki*, vol. 3, *setsuwa* 39)

This *setsuwa* recounts two reincarnation episodes. The first episode (1) concerns a monk named Zenjū, who excelled in wisdom (智) and practice (行) and spread knowledge of the Law and guide others

(弘法導人). Zenjū was reborn as a ‘prince’ or ‘human ruler’ (人王), Emperor Kanmu. The second episode (2) concerns Jakusen, a man whose pious actions were renowned. Jakusen was reborn as Prince Kamino, who was the son of Emperor Kanmu and who by the time of the *setsuwa* had himself become the emperor under the title Emperor Saga, the ‘sage’ or ‘saintly ruler’ (*seikun* 聖君). In this way, the *setsuwa* claims that the reigning emperor of the time embodied the ideal form of man, in that he has the blood of a saint, one who excels in wisdom and good deeds. In summary, *Nihon ryōiki* uses common phraseology to link the histories of Buddhist saints like Prince Shōtoku and Gyōgi, who were presumably commonly known at the time. It then portrays the reigning emperor as the rightful heir of this saintly lineage and lauds his reign as the fulfilment of a Buddhist ideal: a nation governed by a saintly emperor. In this way, *Nihon ryōiki* was, if nothing else, a politically charged text.

So far, we have seen that *Nihon ryōiki* has several intertextual layers; while primarily narrating Japanese episodes of karmic retribution and miracles, it incorporates textual elements from the Chinese Buddhist canon and Chinese classics, as well as elements from Japanese history and the worldview of the time. However, such an evaluation is based on the impressions of a twenty-first century reader; it is hard to determine how well this evaluation matches the intentions of the author of *Nihon ryōiki* intended the text to be, or its reception by contemporary readers.

However, we can get some idea of how *Nihon ryōiki* was read. The text survived intact throughout the medieval period, early modern period, and until today. Accordingly, the next section discusses how the text was read by subsequent generations and the position it occupies in Japanese literary history.

### 3.2 How *Nihon ryōiki* Was Reproduced in Heian-Era Texts

During the Heian era (794-1185), content from *Nihon ryōiki* was quoted and preserved in texts such as *Sanbōe* 三宝絵 (The Three Jewels, a collection of Buddhist *setsuwa* selected by Minamoto no Tamenori 源為憲 in 984) and *Fusō ryakki* 扶桑略記 (a historical text compiled by Kōen 皇円 some time after 1094).

In the case of *Sanbōe*, for example, the scholar Minamoto no Tamenori intended the text to serve as an introduction to Buddhism for Princess Sonshi 尊子, who was also a priestess. To that end, he drew primarily from *Nihon ryōiki*. Kōnoshi Takamitsu’s analysis of the text provides valuable insights (Kōnoshi 1973). According to him, for the first four *setsuwa* in *Sanbōe*, Tamenori selected four Buddhist role models from *Nihon ryōiki*: 1. Shōtoku Taishi 聖德太子 (Prince Shōtoku), 2. E no Ubasoku 役行者 (En no Gyōja), 3. Gyōgi Bosatsu



行基菩薩 (Bodhisattva Gyōgi), and 4. The ‘Lump’ nun of Higo Province 肥後国シムラ尼 (Shishimura, nun of Higo Province). This illustrates that there were other characters besides Prince Shōtoku and Gyōgi who were hailed as sages in *Nihon ryōiki*, one of them being En no Gyōja. In volume 1, *setsuwa* 28, of the text, En no Gyōja is described as a ‘Japanese sage’ (我 国 聖 人). The other was the nun of Higo Province, named the ‘Lump’ nun of Higo Province in *Sanbōe* (in *Nihon ryōiki*, she is named Saru Hijiri [Monkey Sahe]). In volume 3, *setsuwa* 19, of the text, the nun is described as “she had the understanding of sage” (聖化). Thus, the first four tales in *Sanbōe* indicate that the readership upheld the tradition of reversing the saintly lineage hailed in *Nihon ryōiki*. However, the *Sanbōe* effectively ignores the final *setsuwa* of *Nihon ryōiki*, the tale of Emperor Saga, which was part of current affairs during the compilation of *Nihon ryōiki*. Insofar as Tamenori, in his compilation of the *Sanbōe*, represents *Nihon ryōiki*’s readership, we can say that the readership made no attempt to faithfully recreate the original context of *Nihon ryōiki*; instead, the readership omitted some aspects and adapted the content to suit its own context.

Another textual idiosyncrasy of *Nihon ryōiki* was that it borrowed expressions from other texts and their stock narrative formulae. These features were frequently altered or omitted in the texts quoted from *Nihon ryōiki*. One example is *Nihon ryōiki*’s story of a sick man who heals after reciting Buddhist scripture (vol. 1, *setsuwa* 8). *Sanbōe* quotes this story, but it alters the part where the original had borrowed the ‘quickly die’ (湊死) phrase from *Mao’s Book of Songs* (“Rather than living a long life and being hated by others, it is better to do good now and quickly die!” 長生為人所厭、不如行善湊死). In *Sanbōe* version (vol. 2, *setsuwa* 5), this part is expressed as follows:

Then he realized, “[...] Rather than live a long life in which I shall be despised, I should quickly generate merit and die”.

- ナガイキシテ人ニニクマレムヨリハ、シカジ、功德ヲツクリテハヤクシナムニハ、ト思テ…… (manuscript held in Tōkyō National Museum, previously in Tōji Kanchi-in 東寺観智院旧蔵本)
- しかじ くどくをつくりてとくしなむにはと思て (Sekido-bon version 関戸本)
- 不如行功德早死 (Maeda manuscript 前田家蔵本) (Kamens 1988, 206; Koizumi, Takahashi 1980, 152-3)

The adverbial ‘quickly’ (湊) from *Mao’s Book of Songs*, likely to be read in Japanese as *sumiyaka ni* 湊やかに, is replaced in *Sanbōe* with the character 早, read as either *hayaku* ハヤク or *toku* とく. In 1007 Minamoto had produced an anthology of contemporary idioms, titled *Sezoku genbun* 世俗諺文 (Popular Idioms). The anthology includes the very expression from *Mao’s Book of Songs* 毛詩 that had inspired the



“quickly die” phrase in *Nihon ryōiki*: “A man with no propriety | Oh, why doesn’t he quickly die?” (人而無礼、胡不遄死). It also explicitly cites the *Book of Songs* as the source of the idiom.

人而無礼、胡不遄死。

毛詩云、相鼠有体、人而無礼。人而無礼、胡不遄死。注云、遄、速。

(Tenri Central Library 2017, 86)

As the above entry proves, Tamenori was familiar with *Mao’s Book of Songs*, the alleged source of this idiom. However, when referencing the idiom in *Sanbōe*, he avoids using the 遄 character that appears in the original formulation. Given the peculiarity of this character, he probably replaced it with the more familiar word 早 for the benefit of his readership, Princess Sonshi.

A similar alteration was made to *Nihon ryōiki*’s cave-in episode (vol. 3, *setsuwa* 32). Both *Sanbōe* and *Fusō ryakki* quote this story, but neither use the character pair *hiki* 鼻肩 discussed earlier.

[...] this was made possible through the power of his faith in the *Lotus Sutra*.

- ……是法華經ノ願力也 (manuscript held in Tōkyō National Museum, previously in Tōji Kanchi-in)
- ……これ法花経の願のちからなり (Sekido-bon version)
- ……是法花経力也 (Maeda manuscript)

(*Sanbōe*, vol. 2, *setsuwa* 17; Kamens 1988, 233; Koizumi, Takahashi 1980, 198-9)

……是乃経王威力、観音靈験矣。

(*Fusō ryakki*, Empress Genmei; Kuroita 1965, 81)

*Nihon ryōiki* attributes the man’s deliverance to “the divine power of the Lotus Sutra and the favor [Jp. *hiki* 鼻肩] of Kannon”. However, *Sanbōe* (Kanchi-in manuscript) omits the latter part, attributing the deliverance simply to “the power of his faith in the *Lotus Sutra*” (是法華経ノ願力也). Likewise, *Fusō ryakki* quotes this *setsuwa* from *Nihon ryōiki*, but avoids the word *hiki* in favour of alternative wording.

This article has cited only a few examples, but they illustrate a broad trend where later generations of readers ignored or altered some of the most idiosyncratic elements of *Nihon ryōiki*, such as the way it interwove the inner scriptures and outer writings and the way it constructed a Chinese elaborate text. Thus, later generations who read and transmitted *Nihon ryōiki* added their own new forms to the text.

#### 4 How *Nihon ryōiki* Was Reproduced in Medieval and Early Modern Texts: Book Indexes, Kariya Ekisai

This section examines *Nihon ryōiki*'s prominence during the medieval and early modern period. For this, we can briefly look at the classification of the text by book indexes of the time and by Kariya Ekisai 狩谷棧齋 (1775-1835).

- *Honchō shojaku mokuroku* 本朝書籍目録 (compiled 1277-1294?):  
*shinji* 神事 / *teiki* 帝紀 / *kōji* 公事 / *seiyō* 政要 / *shizoku* 氏族 / *chiri* 地理 / *ruijū* 類聚 / *jirui* 字類 / *shika* 詩家 / *zasshō* 雜抄 / *waka* 和歌 / *wakan* 和漢 / *kangen* 管絃 / *isho* 醫書 / *inyō* 陰陽 / *hitobitoden* 人々伝 / *kan'i* 官位 / *zatsuzatsu* 雑々 / *zasshō* 雜抄 / *kana* 仮名 (Wada 1936)

\* In this index, a three-volume version of *Nihon ryōiki* (日本靈異記三卷) was listed under the category *zasshō* 雜抄.

- Fujiwara no Sadamoto 藤原貞幹, *Kokuchō shomoku* 国朝書目 (published 1791):

*seishi* 正史 / *hennen* 編年 / *zasshi* 雜史 / *gyosensho* 御撰書 / *hinamiki* 日記記 / *seiji* 政事 / *reigi* 禮儀 / *kan'i* 官位 / *shizoku* 氏族 / *jinden* 人伝 / *tenmon* 天文 / *chiri* 地理 / *densya* 殿舎 / *fusetsu* 鋪設 / *ifuku* 衣服 / *inshoku* 飲食 / *kankai* 勸誡 / *kojitsu* 故実 / *ruijū* 類聚 / *jisho* 字書 / *rinchi* 臨池 / *gazu* 画図 / *kangen* 管絃 / *iyaku* 医薬 / *yōsen* 鷹鷲 / *kemari* 蹴鞠 / *kunkō* 薰香 / *jingi-jō* 神祇上 / *jingi-ge* 神祇下 / *butsuji* 仏事 / *bussetsukyūbun* 仏刹旧文 / *zassho* 雜書 / *bunshū* 文集 / *shishū* 詩集 / *shibunbesshū* 詩文別集 / *shibunzassho* 史文雜書 / *waka* 和歌 / *renga* 連歌 / *monogatari* 物語 (Masamune 1979)

\* In this index, a single-volume version of *Nihon ryōiki* (日本靈異記一卷) was listed under the category *zassho* 雜書.

- Ozaki Masayoshi 尾崎雅嘉, *Gunsho ichiran* 群書一覽 (published 1802):

*kokushi-rui* 国史類 / *shinsho-rui* 神書類 / *zasshi-rui* 雜史類 / *kiroku-rui* 記錄類 / *yūsoku-rui* 有識類 / *shizoku-rui* 氏族類 / *jisho-rui* 字書類 / *ōrai-rui* 往来類 / *hōjō-rui* 法帖類 / *monogatari-rui* 物語類 / *sōshi-rui* 草子類 / *nikki-rui* 日記類 / *wabun-rui* 和文類 / *kikō-rui* 記行類 / *senjū-rui* 撰集類 / *shisen-rui* 私撰類 / *kashū-rui* 家集類 / *uta'awase-rui* 歌合類 / *hyakushu-rui* 百首類 / *senshu-rui* 千首類 / *ruidai-rui* 類題類 / *wakazatsu-rui* 和歌雜類 / *senka-rui* 撰歌類 / *kagaku-rui* 歌学類 / *shibun-rui* 詩文類 / *isho-rui* 醫書類 / *kyōkun-rui* 教訓類 / *shakusho-rui* 積書類 / *kangen-rui* 管絃類 / *chiri-rui* 地理類 / *meisho-rui* 名所類 / *zuihitsu-rui* 隨筆類 / *zassho-rui* 雜書類 / *gunshoruijū* 群書類從 (Kan 1984)

\* In this index, a transcript of a three-volume version of *Nihon ryōiki* (日本靈異記 写本 三卷 沙門景戒) was listed under the category *shakusho-rui* 積書類.

- Hanawa Hokiichi 塙保己一, *Gunsho ruijū* 群書類従 (1819 edition):

*jingibu* 神祇部 / *teiōbu* 帝王部 / *buninbu* 補任部 / *keifubu* 系譜部 / *denbu* 伝部 / *kanshokubu* 官職部 / *ritsuryōbu* 律令部 / *kujibu* 公事部 / *shōzokubu* 装束部 / *bunpitsubu* 文筆部 / *shōsokubu* 消息部 / *wakabu* 和歌部 / *rengabu* 連歌部 / *monogatariibu* 物語部 / *nikkiibu* 日記部 / *kikōbu* 紀行部 / *kangenbu* 管絃部 / *kemariibu* 蹴鞠部 / *takabu* 鷹部 / *yūgibu* 遊戯部 / *inshokubu* 飲食部 / *kassenbu* 合戦部 / *bukebu* 武家部 / *shakkebu* 積家部 / *zatsubu* 雑部

\* In this collection of old Japanese books, Kariya Ekisai’s annotated version of the *Nihon ryōiki* (校本日本靈異記) was included under the category *zatsubu* 雑部.

In *Honchō shōjaku mokuroku*, a book index compiled in the late thirteenth-century, *Nihon ryōiki* is listed under the category *zasshō* 雜抄, ‘miscellaneous excerpts’. *Kokuchō shomoku*, published in 1791, categorises the text as a *zassho* 雜書, ‘miscellaneous book’. Moving to the nineteenth century, *Gunsho ichiran* includes the text under a slightly different category, *shakusho-rui* 積書類 or ‘exegetical books’. However, *Gunsho ruijū*, a collection of old Japanese books, returns to the earlier trend by including the text under the *zatsubu* 雑部 ‘miscellaneous’ section. Thus, *Nihon ryōiki* did not have a stable classification persisting across the medieval and early modern periods. We should also note that *setsuwa* remained absent as a literary category during these periods.

Of interest here is a study of *Nihon ryōiki* undertaken by Kariya Ekisai. Ekisai was a leading bibliographer of Chinese classics in the late Edo period (1603-1867); technically, he practised ‘evidential scholarship’ (Jp. *kōshō-gaku*, Ch. *kaozheng-xue* 考証学), a form of textual criticism that sought to identify the meaning of ancient texts. Ekisai studied *Nihon ryōiki* and produced an annotated version of the text, titled *Kōhon Nihon ryōiki* 校本日本靈異記. This version was included in *Gunsho ruijū*.

#### Kariya Ekisai, *Kōhon Nihon ryōiki*, epilogue (1816)

此書立言雖出浮屠氏而文辭古樸可喜。又間有下糾史之謬及證明他書、則古書之最善者也。……又參以『扶桑略記』、『法華驗記』、『今昔物語』諸書補正譌脫。(Masamune 1978)

In this epilogue, he states that his interest lies less in the text’s literary qualities or its *setsuwa*, and more in its value as a resource for

evidential scholarship, one that can help ‘rectify erroneous histories’ (糾史之謬) and ‘corroborate other literary sources’ (証明他書). Ekisai also states that, in analysing and annotating *Nihon ryōiki*, he referred to sources such as *Fusō ryakki*, *Hokke genki* 法華驗記 (Record of *Lotus Sutra* Miracles, included in *Honchō Hokke genki* 本朝法華驗記 compiled by Chingen 鎮源, circa 1043), and *Konjaku monogatari* 今昔物語 (Tales from the Past and Present, compiler unknown, early twelfth century). Here, *setsuwa*, first introduced by *Nihon ryōiki* and now established as a ubiquitous fixture of Japanese literary history, was finally entered in a distinctive literary category.

In the twentieth century, *Nihon ryōiki* began to be included in collections of classic Japanese *literature*. However, books that we would today regard as *setsuwa* became tied to disciplinary frameworks that were established during the modern period, namely the disciplines of literature, history, and philosophy, despite the fact that such books spanned such disciplines. For example, the version of *Fusō ryakki* read today is typically the version in *Kokushi taikei* 国史大系 (Anthology of Japanese History). For the *Hokke genki*, it is typically the print edition in *Nihon shisō taikei* 日本思想大系 (Anthology of Japanese Thought). Additionally, *Konjaku monogatari* is included in both *Kokushi taikei* and various literary anthologies. Scholars of contemporary times tend to categorise such books under the name *setsuwa* or treat them as literature in the narrow sense of the word. This tendency reflects the disciplinary silos of the modern period. However, we could, and indeed we should, emancipate *Nihon ryōiki* from these disciplinary fiefdoms and consider the text in alternative contexts. For instance, we could start viewing *Nihon ryōiki*, along with pre-modern texts as a whole, as literature in a broader sense – text that spans philosophy, history, and literature as a discipline. This approach could open up new avenues for scholars of literature, one in which we still draw on the achievements of modern and contemporary academia, but not exclusively on them, and in which we explore the texts in an interdisciplinary manner or with the willingness to challenge our understanding of premodern scholarship and challenge epistemological frameworks. When approached in this way, *Nihon ryōiki* should yield new insights and provide valuable contributions to the history of literature.

## 5 Conclusion: *Nihon ryōiki* and Intertextuality

When we compare one text to another, we can encounter various scenarios of intertextual relationships. In some cases, a quotation may have been adapted and blended intricately into the text to such an extent that it is all but unrecognisable. Conversely, there are cases where a portion of the text is clearly traceable to a particular source, and this is likely to occur in the case of Chinese characters. As we

saw in the case of the character 遡 or character pairs 喞斜, 嗶吠, and 鼻眞, just a single character or character pair may be sufficient to evoke the image of a particular text or particular ancient source wherein that character or character pair appears. If the other cases can be likened to blended fruit juices, then these cases can be likened to *aemono* 和之物 (cold dishes with dressing): although the fish or vegetable is chopped up and dressed, its original form remains obvious. Text based on Chinese characters has this characteristic.

The Sinosphere has another important characteristic: a deeply entrenched tradition that continues to cherish and idealise the classical, no matter how much time passes; that values something for how much it connects with a classic text; and that has no desire for originality or novelty. For example, the *Selections of Refined Literature* has a section titled *zani* 雜擬, ‘mimicry’, that contains poems modelled after existing poems. In an annotated edition of the anthology recently published by Iwanami Bunko, Kawai Kōzō gives the following commentary on the ‘mimicry’ section:

For scholars of the classics, who valued adherence to tradition, retaining the original form was a requirement for any literary pursuit. Accordingly, the poems in the mimicry section were considered very different from mere counterfeits. Their mimicry was the very source of their value, and they constituted a distinct literary genre. (Kawai et al. 2019, 6)

We see the same values reflected in texts such as *Nihon ryōiki*. Such texts were modelled after Chinese texts. Rather than aiming for originality, the authors created a form of literature that was weaved in mimicry and quotation.

How can we effectively deploy the concept of intertextuality in a study of such Japanese texts and other texts in East Asia? Analysing Chinese-character texts from an intertextual perspective should unlock new possibilities regarding both the main text being studied and the texts it is being compared with.

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