

**Miraculous Stories from the Japanese Buddhist Tradition: The Nihon Ryoiki
of the Monk Kyokai.**



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beyond word and image—lie the realms of experience that give the arts their meaning.” With an attitude like that, coupled with seemingly unlimited energy for doing homework thoroughly, it is no wonder that this catalogue is so good. The author refuses to be satisfied with facile (or even tightly reasoned) explanations that lead to now-we-have-it-all conclusions, and the effect this has on his co-workers is always positive.

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Miraculous Stories from the Japanese Buddhist Tradition: The Nihon Ryōiki of the Monk Kyōkai. TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY KYOKO MOTOMOCHI NAKAMURA. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973. xii, 322 pages.

The *Nihon ryōiki* is the earliest extant collection of tale literature (*setsuwa bungaku*) in Japan. Kyōkai, the obscure monk from the Yakushi-ji in Nara who compiled this work early in the ninth century, stated his pious intent in a preface: “By editing these stories of miraculous events I want to pull the people forward by the ears, offer my hand to lead them to good, and show them how to cleanse their feet of evil. My sincere hope is that we may all be reborn in the western land of bliss, leaving no one on the earth, and live together in the jeweled palace in heaven, abandoning our earthly residence” (p. 222). Besides wanting to increase his own good karma and to lead others to salvation, Kyōkai was also motivated by pride in his country. The *Kojiki*, *Nihongi*, and *Manyōshū* had all been compiled in the eighth century by others eager to demonstrate that the Japanese were civilized enough to produce histories and poetry anthologies. Similarly, Kyōkai wanted to prove that Japan had religion. After mentioning two Chinese collections of religious tales, he writes: “Since we respect the documents of foreign lands, should we not also believe and stand in awe of the miraculous events in our own land? Having witnessed these events myself, I cannot remain idle” (p. 101).

Of the 116 tales presented, thirteen are retold from Chinese sources while others take

events from early Japanese chronicles or are drawn from oral traditions. The stories are divided among three volumes, each with a preface, and arranged in chronological order from 463 to 799. Although the tales are written in Chinese, scholars have noted the influence of spoken Japanese in some sections, although Nakamura does not discuss matters of style.

The stories themselves are sometimes delightful. Skulls, statues and sutras come to life; crows commit adultery, and snakes violate women; people are reborn as foxes, dogs, or oxen; distinctions between this world and the next, between life and death are passed over lightly—though beware if your body has been cremated and you want to return to it. Patterns recurrent in later art and literature are developed here. The statue (most often of Kannon) that rewards a devotee by appearing in another form and then leaving some tell-tale evidence on itself is a good example. Dreams also abound; in fact, Kyōkai relates two of his own which seem to have convinced him to pursue a spiritual path. Veneration of the Three Treasures is one of the book’s major themes; and Kyōkai, in his charmingly pragmatic way, often interprets this concretely to mean: don’t make fun of monks or steal from temples. For these and other evil deeds one must pay by going to hell, which is described by Kyōkai with the same vivid detail Genshin used two centuries later. Although suffering in hell seems almost inevitable, escape is ultimately possible through the very delicate balance of weights and measures that characterizes the law of karma.

What Kyōkai attempts to do in his book is to illustrate this law of karma. “The wise,” he states, “stand in awe and believe in the law of karmic causation. . . . Good and evil deeds cause karmic retribution as a figure causes its shadow, and suffering and pleasure follow such deeds as an echo follows a sound in the valley” (pp. 99, 101). The strange and wondrous events that Kyōkai describes are simply the working out of karma; to the uninitiated they may appear to be miracles; Kyōkai shows that in fact they are the results of a natural law. More specifically, Kyōkai is primarily concerned with “im-

mediate retribution" (*genpō*), the kind of karma in which "good and evil deeds originate and receive responses in the same lifetime" (p. 31). Although some of the stories are about rebirth, Kyōkai emphasizes events which occur within a single lifetime.

In her introduction, Kyoko Nakamura is less interested in the concrete and pragmatic orientation of the work than in broader questions about early Japanese religion and the interaction of Buddhism with native beliefs. Other than mentioning that it is the prototype of various kinds of later *setsuwa bungaku*, Nakamura does not deal with the *Nihon ryōiki* as literature. The introduction is full of useful information, but there are occasions when the wealth of detail needs additional clarification, as in her interesting discussion of cosmic renewal, repentance rites, and ancestor worship (pp. 45–69). Nakamura also credits Kyōkai with being more enlightened in his presentation of women than I would. "The *Nihon ryōiki*, instead of making negative statements about women, maintains the equality of women before dharma" (p. 71). The story used to support this claim (III, 19) is about a woman who is a dwarf and lacks a vagina. That kind of equality leaves something to be desired.

The translation appears to be generally accurate and reads quite well, but the format is annoying. There is no need to clutter an English text with *kanji*, especially when they involve numerous repetitions of such basic terms as Yamato, Nara, Tennō and Kannon. The proliferation of footnotes is also more irritating than informative. A glossary would have made the book much more readable and useful, but the blame here should be shared by the press.

Interesting as the *Nihon ryōiki* is, few western readers would have the patience to read through the original text. Kyoko Nakamura's work enables us to savor the whole, and tempts us to turn to Kyōkai's own words. I hope that Nakamura's translation will give impetus to further study of the entire field of *setsuwa bungaku*.

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Japan's Foreign Policy. By F. C. LANGDON. Vancouver, B.C.: University of British Columbia Press, 1973. xiv, 231 pp., Tables, Maps, Bibliography, Index. \$9.00.

For the bulk of the period since World War II, western studies of Japan have focused far more on domestic than on foreign policies. The result has been a growing consensus on many of the facts, and even some of the interpretations of domestic politics but far less consciousness of even the key facts of postwar foreign policy. This is in surprising contrast with western studies of prewar foreign policy and of studies of the postwar period by Japanese scholars. In spite of several fine case studies, and assessments of specific phases of postwar foreign policy, only in the last few years have a number of broad-reaching monographs appeared trying to fill this gap, seemingly in response to a sudden awareness of Japan's phenomenal economy, the scope of its involvement in Southeast Asia, questions on its military potential, its failure to ratify the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the size, scope and alleged inaccessibility of its investment market. Most of the monographs which have appeared have taken up the totality of Japan's foreign policy under sweeping labels such as imperialism or *realpolitik*. Langdon's book seeks similar breadth from a far more value neutral perspective.

Langdon postulates that the three main goals of the Japanese government are economic success, security and international prestige and, following a preliminary discussion of "the crisis of 1960," he examines how these goals have shaped three important aspects of Japan's foreign policy—economics, defense, and Asian policy—during the period 1960–72. Relying primarily on organizational and governmental declarations, public speeches, private revelations and newspaper accounts, he traces developments of a wide variety of component issues, implicitly assessing who has gotten what, when and how. General economic problems such as quotas, loans, credits, tariffs, and trade policies are discussed; so too are specific problems such as textiles and automobiles. Territorial questions involving Okinawa, the Southern Kuriles, and the Bonins are assessed along with broader problems of ties to the U. S.,