



Record of Miraculous Events in Japan: The Nihon ryoiki (Translations from the Asian Classics)

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The *Nihon ryoiki*, a collection of *setsuwa*, or "anecdotal" tales, compiled by a monk in late-eighth- or early-ninth-century Japan, records the spread of Buddhist ideas in Japan and the ways in which Buddhism's principles were adapted to the conditions of Japanese society. Beginning in the time before Buddhism was introduced to Japan, the text captures the effects of the nation's initial contact with Buddhism?brought by emissaries from the king of the Korean state of Paekche?and the subsequent adoption and dissemination of these new teachings in Japanese towns and cities.

The *Nihon ryoiki* provides a crucial window into the ways in which Japanese Buddhists began to make sense of the teachings and texts of their religion, incorporate religious observances and materials from Korea and China, and articulate a popularized form of Buddhist practice and belief that could extend beyond monastic centers. The *setsuwa* genre would become one of the major textual projects of classical and medieval Buddhism, with nearly two dozen collections appearing over the next five centuries. The *Nihon ryoiki* serves as a vital reference for these later works, with the tales it contains finding their way into folkloric traditions and becoming a major source for Japanese authors well into the modern period.

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Editorial Review

Review

These stories amuse, enchant, sometimes delight... A wonderful addition to the bedside table.

(Buddha Diaries)

Review

Compiled by a low-ranking monk active in the capital, the Nihon ryoiki is the earliest example of setsuwa (explanatory tale) literature in Japan and, as such, is a foundational work. Burton Watson's turns of phrase are really delightful, very smooth, and very accurate

(Charlotte Eubanks, Pennsylvania State University)

About the Author

Burton Watson has taught at Columbia, Stanford, and Kyoto universities and is one of the world's best-known translators of Chinese and Japanese works. His translations include *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*, *The Demon at Agi Bridge and Other Japanese Tales*, *The Analects of Confucius*, *The Tales of the Heike*, and *The Lotus Sutra*; the writings of Mozi, Xunzi, and Han Feizi; *The Columbia Book of Chinese Poetry*; and *Records of the Grand Historian*.

Haruo Shirane is Shincho Professor of Japanese Literature and Culture at Columbia University and the author and editor of numerous books on Japanese literature.

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