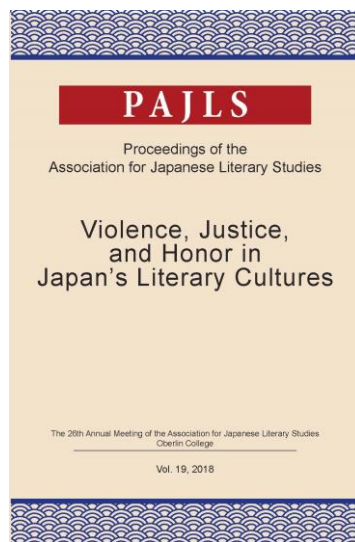


“Violence Against Monks in Shabby Stoles: Justice and Punishment in *Nihon ryōiki*”

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**VIOLENCE AGAINST MONKS IN SHABBY STOLES:
JUSTICE AND PUNISHMENT IN *NIHON RYŌIKI***

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In this paper, I focus on a specific episode in the *Nihon ryōiki* (*Record of Miraculous Events in Japan*, 日本靈異記) about Prince Nagaya 長屋王 in the Nara period. This particular text describes Prince Nagaya as being put to death in retribution for his violent punishment of a monk who was in “shabby shape” (賤形). In another episode of *Nihon ryōiki*, Prince Shōtoku identifies a beggar as a “hidden sage” (隱身聖人) who left a shabby stole after death. The significant difference between the two princes, as described in *Nihon ryōiki*, is their capability to identify a person of low status or miserable shape as a sage. Official historic records, however, lead us to the conclusion that violence toward a monk was unlikely to be the cause of Nagaya’s death since the historical figure Nagaya was a high-ranking courtier who was recognized as an avid promoter of Buddhism. I argue that *Nihon ryōiki* depicts Nagaya as a wicked figure because of the compiler’s dissatisfaction with the reality of Nara period when untrained monks, in particular, were suppressed by the court. Indeed, aristocrats had the authority to punish low status monks, violently in some cases. The compiler of *Nihon ryōiki* uses the story of Prince Nagaya to affirm that anyone who engaged with the Buddhist teachings, regardless of his status, should be treated with respect unconditionally.

Nihon ryōiki, compiled by Kyōkai 景戒 between 787 and 824, is the earliest extant collection of Buddhist setsuwa, or anecdotal tales. As the full title in Japanese (*Nihonkoku genpō zen’aku ryōiki*, 日本国現報善惡靈異記) suggests, one of the central messages of *Nihon ryōiki* is that disdain for Buddhist teachings will merit serious penalties and immediate retribution in the present life.² It includes a number of episodes in which characters who commit violence against monks are immediately punished—namely, *On Depending on One’s Exalted Virtue, Committing*

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² Very little is known about the compiler Kyōkai, who belonged to the lower aristocracy and was active in the provinces rather than at the central court. Unlike more prominent monks of his time such as Saichō 最澄 and Kūkai 空海, his name is not found in historical records. As a “self-ordained monk” (shidosō 私度僧), or a monk that did not receive official ordination from the court, he became affiliated with Yakushi-ji 薬師寺 and received a humble priest rank only late in his life.

the Offense of Hitting a Humble Novice, and Receiving the Immediate Penalty of a Violent Death 恃己高德刑賤形沙弥以現得惡死緣。

This distinctive episode describes how Prince Nagaya held a Dharma gathering at Gangō-ji where he punished an uninvited novice by striking him on the head hard enough to draw blood, and soon after was forced to commit suicide as retribution. After Nagaya was forced to commit suicide, his bones are exiled to Tosa province, where his vengeful spirit caused many local people die. Arguing that Nagaya's death resulted from his offense against the low-status monk, Kyōkai concludes his story as follows:

Ah, how pitiful! However widely known in the capital and beyond for his wealth and good fortune, when misfortune fell on him, he had nowhere to turn, but perished in a day. Truly we learn that taking pride in his high virtue, he struck a novice in punishment, and because of this, defenders of the Law frowned on him and the good deities hated him. We should respect those who wear the surplice, humble though they might seem, for there are sages hidden among them. The *Kyōman-gyō* says: "Even among the high ranking, those who accidentally stepped on Shakyamuni's head with their boots on were guilty of offenses."³ Needless to say, then, that those who strike one who wears the surplice are guilty of error!⁴

The protagonist of this story, Prince Nagaya, was one of the most influential political figures of the early eighth century. According to historical record, he was forced to commit suicide after being accused of practicing witchcraft and attempting to overthrow the state by his rivals from the Fujiwara lineage. This was almost certainly a political stratagem to remove him from power.

The story in *Nihon ryōiki*, however, attempts to relate Nagaya's death to his offenses against the Buddhist clergy. This is curious given that in other texts Nagaya is portrayed as an active promoter and protector of Buddhism. In other words, the violent character created in the *Nihon ryōiki* story is very different from Nagaya's image in historical records and literary collections.

The only other instance of *Nihon ryōiki* critiquing the behavior of an imperial prince occurs in the thirty-fifth story of the second volume, in

³ The source of this quotation, *Kyōman-gyō*, has not been identified.

⁴ Watson, *Record of Miraculous Events in Japan*, 65–66.

which a prince named Uji 宇遲王 receives the immediate penalty of death after punishing a monk named Taikyō 諦鏡 who did not yield to him on a narrow road. However, little mention can be found of this prince, who is said to be “innately evil and put no faith in the three treasures 天骨邪見、不信三宝”, in historical records.⁵ The *Nihon ryōiki* story was thus likely a fiction created by the compiler Kyōkai.

In contrast, Prince Nagaya is one of the best documented political figures of the Nara period. He was a grandson of Emperor Tenmu and the son of Prince Takechi 高市皇子, who contributed greatly in the Jinshin War as a military leader and was promoted to the Great Minister (Dajō daijin) of the Realm and may have been appointed Crown Prince before his death in 696. Nagaya’s mother, Princess Minabe 御名部皇女, was a daughter of Emperor Tenji 天智天皇, and his wife, Princess Kibi 吉備内親王, was daughter to Empress Genmei 元明天皇 and Prince Kusakabe 草壁皇子, and sister of Emperor Monmu 文武天皇 and Empress Genshō 元正天皇.⁶ Nagaya was the wealthiest and most powerful statesman of his age, serving as the Minister of the Left (Sadaijin) from 721 until his death in 729.⁷

Nagaya was also the most prominent protector and promoter of Buddhism of his time. According to *Shoku nihongi*, he donated manuscripts of the *Dai-han’nya kyō* 大般若經 or *Great Wisdom Sutra* to Gangō-ji 元興寺 twice, on 712 and 728.⁸ He also distributed the *Golden*

⁵ Records about Prince Uji are scarce in *Shoku nihongi*. In the *Nihon ryōiki* story, he was killed by a curse that Taikyō placed on him. However, Emperor Shōmu, who is defined as one of the sages in *Nihon ryōiki*, did not blame the priest but judged that the prince deserved this retribution.

⁶ Unlike Prince Kusakabe 草壁皇子 (662–689) whose mother was Jitō, Takechi’s mother was a daughter of the Munakata clan, which made him a less competitive candidate to the throne than Kusakabe. When Takechi helped his father Emperor Tenmu to defeat Tenji’s heir in the Jinshin War, Kusakabe was still a child. Being a son of Takechi and Princess Minabe (a daughter of Tenji), Nagaya was a descendant of both Tenmu and Tenji lines. See Duthie, *Man’yōshū and the Imperial Imagination in Early Japan*, 298–299.

⁷ Prince Nagaya became the most influential politician at court after Fujiwara Fuhito’s 藤原不比等 death. When Shōmu succeeded to the throne in 724, Nagaya was promoted to Senior Second Rank and filled the position of the Minister of the Left.

⁸ The historians call the first manuscript *Wadō kyō* 和銅經, and the later *Jinki kyō* 神龜經. According to the postscript written in the fifth year of Wadō, the *Wadō kyō* was transcribed in order to mourn the past Emperor Monmu, who was the older brother of Nagaya’s wife Princess Kibi and a cousin of Prince Nagaya. See Terasaki, *Nagaya ō ke no monjo mokkan* 長屋王家の文書木簡. *Nihon rekishi* 日本歴史, no. 500, 110–115. Unlike the *Wadō kyō*, *Jinki kyō* is somehow controversial

sutra 金光明最勝王經 to the provinces in the same year. His sponsorship of manuscript copying is attested by archeological evidence such as the wooden documents unearthed in the remains of his residence. The roofing tiles found in this site also suggest a close connection to many temple buildings.⁹

Nagaya's sponsorship of the Buddhist faith is also attested to in records from the late eighth century such as *Tō daiwajō tōseiden* 唐大和上東征伝 (*The Great Master of the Tang Travels East, 779*)¹⁰ which describes his connection to the Chinese priest Ganjin 鑑真 (Ch. Jianzhen), who traveled to Japan late in his life and established an ordination platform at Tōdaiji where he ordained the retired emperor Shōmu. According to this biography Ganjin met Yōei 榮叡 and Fushō 普照, two monks sent by the Japanese court in 742 (Tenpyō 14). In this meeting, trying to persuade Ganjin to travel to Japan, the two monks mentioned that a Japanese Prince whose name is Shōtoku predicted that the Buddhist teaching will prevail in Japan in two hundred years after his death. Ganjin answered he once heard that the Prince who promotes Buddhism in Japan is the reincarnation of Chinese monk Huisi 慧思, the second patriarch of the Tiantai School (J. Tendai), and also another Japanese prince with the name of Nagaya who donated one thousand monk robes in order to promote Buddhism. On these robes, there was a poem stitched into the sleeves, which said:

Although the mountains and rivers are divided into different
territories,
The moon and the wind share the same sky.
I send this poem to all the disciples of Buddha and

in terms of the content of its postscript and the time of release. According to the postscript of the *Jinki kyō*, Nagaya dedicated this copy to the “honored two spirits” of his parents, Prince Takechi and Princess Minabe and wished for them to “ascend to immortality” (登仙二尊神靈). The postscript is dated to the fifteenth day of the fifth Month of 728. At this stage, the news that crown Prince Motoi (the male heir of Emperor Shōmu and Fuhito's daughter Empress Kōmyō) was very sick was well-known by most higher-ranking court officials. Prince Nagaya's *Jinki kyō* was completed only ten days after the prince had passed away. This is possibly why the Fujiwara four brothers regarded Nagaya's action as a potential threat intended to enthrone his own sons.

⁹ See Terasaki, *Nagaya ō ke no monjo mokkan* 長屋王家の文書木簡. *Nihon rekishi* 日本歴史, no. 500, 110–115.

¹⁰ The text was written in Hōki 宝龜 10 (779) by Shinjin Genkai 真人元開, better known as Ōmi no Mifune 淡海三船. Genkai 元開 is the Buddhist name that Daoxuan 道璿 gave him as one of his disciples. After Jianzhen arrived at Japan, Mifune became one of his students.

wish for a karmic bond in the next life.

山川異域、風月同天、寄諸佛子、共結來緣。¹¹

The message of this poem is clear: no matter how far the distance is in between Japan and China, we all are bound together with the same heart to admire the Buddhist teachings. According to the story, Nagaya's generous donation appears to have been one of the reasons that encouraged Ganjin to travel to Japan.¹² In Chinese texts, the same episode can be found in *Song Gaosengzhuan* 宋高僧傳 or *Song Dynasty Biography of Prominent Monks*, 988, and the poem stitched on the robes is also included in *Quan Tang Shi* 全唐詩 or *Complete Tang Poems*.

In addition to these various accounts written in both Japan and China, archaeological evidence from wooden documents discovered in Nagaya's residence also show that there were dying and weaving workshops located at Nagaya's residence, which would suggest that the story about the donation of one thousand robes is possible.¹³

Thus, while every other written source and archaeological evidence suggests that Nagaya was a devout Buddhist and sponsor of the Buddhist faith, the *Nihon ryōiki* is unique in depicting him as offending the Buddhist clergy and being forced to commit suicide in retribution.

As far as we can tell from historical sources, the accusation of witchcraft (*sadō* 左道, or literally "sinister way") against Nagaya and his forced suicide appear to have been the result of a succession dispute with his rivals, the Fujiwara lineage.¹⁴ This is strongly suggested by the fact that

¹¹ Andō, *Ganjin daiwajō den no kenkyū* 鑑真大和上傳の研究, 111.

¹² Before Mifune's work, One of Jianzhen's disciples Situo 思託 had already completed a three-scroll biography of Jianzhen, titled *Daitō denkaishi sōmeiki daiwajō Ganjin den* 大唐伝戒師僧名記大和上鑑真伝. Based on a request of Situo, Mifune synthesized the content of the three-scroll biography and wrote the concise one-scroll *Tō daiwajō tōseiden*. Although Situo's work is not extant, the *Song Gaosengzhuan* 宋高僧傳 cited this story using Situo's text.

¹³ Several wooden pieces excavated at the site that is considered Nagaya's residence also provide evidence that professional craftsmen, painters and calligraphers were hired and paid to work at his residence. See Terasaki, *Nagaya ō ke no monjo mokkan* 長屋王家の文書木簡. *Nihon rekishi* 日本歴史, no. 500, 110–115.

¹⁴ Aoki et al., *SNKBT Shoku nihongi*, vol.2, 205: "The tenth day of the Second Month, the first year of Tenpyō. Nuribe no Yatsuko Kimitari (Junior Fifth Rank, Lower Grade) from the eastern sector of the capital and Nakatomi no Miyako no muraji Azumahito (no Rank) secretly informed the emperor, claiming that the Minister of the Left, Prince Nagaya (Senior Second Rank) was privately studying the Sinister Way and attempting to overthrow the state." Translations of *Shoku nihongi* citations by the author, unless otherwise noted. 《天平元年（七二九）二月

not only he, but his wife Kibi (who as I noted above was the daughter of one sovereign and sister to two other sovereigns), and their four sons were also condemned to death.¹⁵ Given the fact that the Fujiwara consort had no male heirs, any of Nagaya's sons would have had a strong claim to the throne. This is almost certainly the real reason why Nagaya was forced to commit suicide with his spouse and four sons.¹⁶

The *Nihon ryōiki* episode does not describe Nagaya as an “innately evil” figure who pays no respect to Buddhism like it does Prince Uji, but rather as a person who thinks he can punish monks due to his “exalted virtue.” According to the story, Nagaya was holding a great Dharma meeting at Gangō-ji temple in 729, when he found an uninvited novice wearing a shabby robe (賤形) who was trying to get some of the food that was being served to the monks. Nagaya struck the novice on the head, hard enough to draw blood, and only two days later, he was accused of attempting to overthrow the state and had to commit suicide.

There are many problems with the details of this story. First of all, this great Dharma meeting described in *Nihon ryōiki* is not recorded in the *Shoku nihongi*, which otherwise describes all of Nagaya's activities in great detail. Second, a high-ranking minister would never be in the position of identifying the attending monk. Third, even if there was actually a Dharma meeting and Nagaya did inspect the event, someone of his rank would never have struck the monk himself. As Terakawa Machio has

辛未【壬戌朔十】】左京人從七位下漆部造君足。無位中臣宮処連東人等告密。稱、左大臣正二位長屋王私學左道。欲傾國家。

¹⁵ Aoki et al., SNKBT *Shoku nihongi*, vol. 2, 205–206: “The twelfth day of the Second Month, the first year of Tenpyō. Prince Nagaya was ordered to commit suicide. His consort Princess Kibi (Second Rank), his sons Prince Kashiwade (Junior Fourth Rank Lower Grade), No Rank Prince Kuwata, Prince Katsuragi and Prince Kagitori also committed suicide.” 《天平元年（七二九）二月癸酉【十二】》癸酉。令王自盡。其室二品吉備內親王。男從四位下膳夫王。無位桑田王。葛木王。鉤取王等。同亦自經。

¹⁶ Given the fact that Nagaya was forced to commit suicide for his plot to “overthrow the state,” the historical record documents that Prince Nagaya and his consort were treated with exceptional respect and honor after death: The emperor sent a minister to bury Prince Nagaya and Princess Kibi at Mount Ikoma, and issued a decree that says, “Prince Nagaya offended the law and died. Even though he is the equivalent of a sinner, his funeral must not be defamed. Prince Nagaya is a grandson of Emperor Tenmu. He is a son of Prince Takechi. Princess Kibi is a daughter of Hinamishi no miko no mikoto.” 長屋王者依犯伏誅。雖准罪人。莫醜其葬矣。長屋王、天武天皇之孫。高市親王之子也。吉備內親王、日並知皇子尊之皇女也。See Aoki et al., SNKBT *Shoku nihongi*, vol. 2, 206.

argued, this story is clearly written by someone who is not familiar with court etiquette or the duties of a high-ranking minister.¹⁷

However, the question I am interested in is not whether the *Nihon ryōiki* story has any basis in reality, but rather why it depicts Nagaya in antagonistic terms to the Buddhist order. There are a number of possible answers to this. The first is related to the court's policies on Buddhism. The Nagaya administration issued an official declaration to strictly regulate unauthorized religious activities by unordained Buddhist priests in the seventh month of 722 (Yōrō 6) because these activities threatened the court's authority and the stability of the society.¹⁸ Among those unordained monks, Gyōki was extremely influential and accumulated large numbers of followers in the provinces. He is also the protagonist of several stories in *Nihon ryōiki*. Because Kyōkai honored Gyōki as one of the "hidden sages" like the novice punished by Nagaya in the first story of the second volume¹⁹ in *Nihon ryōiki*, Prince Nagaya's suppression policy must be unacceptable. Gyōki's activities were officially approved only after Nagaya's death.

However, Nagaya was the least to be blamed for this suppression policy. In fact, the first edict that criticized Gyōki by name (小僧行基) was issued in the first year of Yōrō (717), under Fuhito's administration before Nagaya was fully in power. The edict was issued in the fourth month of the year to condemn Gyōki as a guilty man who violates the regulations of the priesthood (Sōni ryō 僧尼令).²⁰ As Terasaki points out, "Generally

¹⁷ See Terakawa, *Nihon koku genpō zen'aku ryōiki no kenkyū* 日本国現報善惡靈異記の研究.

¹⁸ Aoki et al., *SNKBT Shoku nihongi*, vol. 2., 123. "The tenth day of the Seventh Month, sixth year of Yōrō. Recently, monks and nuns who dwell near the capital use their fawning words to falsely preach about punishment and rewards of cause and effect with their shallow wisdom... These activities have been discussed for a long time and must be prohibited." 《養老六年（七二二）七月己卯【十】》己卯。近在京僧尼。以淺識輕智。巧說罪福之因果...永言其弊。特須禁斷。Although he is not named, the target of this decree is Gyōki and his group.

¹⁹ See Watson, *Record of Miraculous Events in Japan*, 110: "This was the work of a sage who, a manifestation of the Buddha body appeared in Japan. It was the Buddha in disguise!" 聖人明眼...於日本国、是化身聖也。隱身之聖矣。In this context, "onjin 隱身" refers to Gyōki's status as a monk who was not yet officially approved by the court in his early life.

²⁰ Aoki et al., *SNKBT Shoku nihongi*, vol. 2, 27: "Now, the humble monk Gyōki and his disciples disturb social order. They gather on the streets, preach on punishment and reward without permission... First of all, the group's behaviors are against the teachings of Buddha. Furthermore, they violate the codes and laws of the court." 方今、小僧行基。并弟子等。零疊街衢。妄說罪福...進違教。退犯法令。The words used to condemn Gyōki in this edict are actually stronger than in

speaking, the policies of Prince Nagaya's administration were very similar to Fuhito's. Fuhito's legacy was well inherited by the prince."²¹

As a self-ordained monk himself, Kyōkai seems to have highly admired Gyōki and his group (with whom the imperial court would eventually compromise and decide to make use of his influence rather than try to suppress him in 731 during Shōmu's reign).²² Kyōkai's story seems to be a statement to the effect that virtue is not determined by official rank or political power. In fact, the monk in a shabby stole who is struck by Nagaya is described, in the *Nihon ryōiki* account, as a "hidden sage."

This is a phrase that is used on only two other occasions in the *Nihon ryōiki*. In one of these instances, it is used to describe Gyōki, and in the other, the beggar at Mt. Kataoka 片岡山飢人 who is famously identified as a sage by Prince Shōtoku.²³ In the fourth story of the first volume of *Nihon ryōiki*, Prince Shōtoku met a sick beggar when he visited Kataoka. He took off his cloak and placed it on the beggar. On his way returning, the beggar had gone and only the prince's robe left:

On his way back, he saw his cloak hanging on the limb of a tree, but the beggar was gone. When the prince put on the cloak again, one of his ministers said, "Are you so poor that you have to wear a dirty cloak worn by beggar?" The prince replied, "It's all right — you wouldn't understand."

After the beggar died, Prince Shotoku managed to bury him near the Okamoto village, but a messenger sent by the prince found the door to his grave was open and the remains disappeared. Kyōkai concludes the story as follows:

Thus we know that a sage recognizes sagely worth, but an ordinary individual does not. The eyes of an ordinary man saw only a humble person, but to the keen eyes of a sage, his hidden

one issued by Nagaya.

²¹ See Terasaki, *Nagaya ō* 長屋王, 224.

²² Aoki et al., *SNKBT Shoku nihongi*, vol. 2, 247–248: "Since this year, among the male and female lay disciples followers of Master Gyōki who practice the Law, those who are male and over sixty-one years old, and those who are female and over fifty-five years old, are permitted to enter the Way." 比年、隨逐行基法師。優婆塞・優婆夷等。如法修行者。男年六十一已上。女年五十五以上。咸聽入道。 This edict is a de facto endorsement to approve Gyōki and his group.

²³ A variant tale is recorded in the *Nihon shoki*.

identity was apparent. This was a miraculous event.²⁴

Since the point of this story is that a hidden sage can only be identified by another sage (聖人知聖、凡人不知), the implication of the Prince Nagaya story in *Nihon ryōiki* is that in spite of his efforts to promote Buddhism, Nagaya is no sage since he failed to identify a hidden sage, and that although he may be a man of “exalted virtue” in the political world of the court, he is not so in the Buddhist realm. However, as I have mentioned earlier, according to *The Great Master of the Tang Travels East*, Ganjin mentioned the reincarnation legend of Shōtoku and Nagaya’s donation of robes as reasons that encouraged him to travel to Japan. Ganjin’s juxtaposition of the two princes implies that Nagaya is also a sage like Shōtoku. The story is clearly sympathetic to Buddhists who are not in a position of authority like the Mt. Kataoka beggar or Gyōki.

Another reason may be Nagaya’s connection to the Chinese priest Ganjin, who established the first ordination platform at Tōdaiji. Given the fact that *Enryaku sōroku* (*Monk registration of Enryaku Era, 788*), a text compiled also by Ganjin’s disciple Situō, was compiled around the same time of *Nihon ryōiki*, it seems strange that *Nihon ryōiki* does not mention Ganjin or any of his disciples even though he had no reason to reject Tiantai teachings.²⁵ As Emperor Shōmu is depicted as a sage in many *Nihon ryōiki* stories, there seems no reason for Kyōkai to ignore Ganjin, who ordained Shōmu and his spouse, Empress Kōmyō. Moreover, given the fact that both Shōmu and Gyōki are honored as sages by Kyōkai, it is quite suspicious that there is no account in the *Nihon ryōiki* about the connection between the two after Gyōki was approved by the court, or his support for the project of building the statue of the Buddha Vairocana at Tōdaiji. This also suggests that Kyōkai, as someone who did not hold an official priest rank until late in his life, may have had an unfavorable view of the state system of ordination.

To conclude, the story of Prince Nagaya striking a novice in a shabby stole in *Nihon ryōiki* suggests a tension between unofficial non-ordained Buddhist monks and the powerful courtiers who suppressed them. Kyōkai related Prince Nagaya to a violent behavior against a low-status monk in a

²⁴ Watson, *Record of Miraculous Events in Japan*, 19.

²⁵ In the thirty-eighth story of the third volume, Kyōkai mentions humbly that he was not knowledgeable enough to “learn the profound wisdom” of Tendai. Also, in the preface to the third volume, his attitude toward the Tendai teachings is stated in a similar way: “I, the miserable monk Kyōkai, have not studied enough to rival the Learned One Tiantai. 羊僧景戒、所學者、未得天台智者之間術。 Watson, *Record of Miraculous Events in Japan*, 133.

narrative that contradicts other records. Such an offence cost Nagaya's life as an instant retribution. The story hence implied Kyōkai's antipathy toward the high-ranking courtiers who suppressed low-ranking or self-ordained monks like himself. Whatever the reality of Prince Nagaya's contributions to Buddhism, the *Nihon ryōiki* story makes him into a scapegoat figure responsible for suppressing powerless Buddhists.

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