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Confucianism as the Basis of the Buddhist Catechism in Its Assimilation into Japanese Thought—Focusing on the Synthesis of Benevolence 仁 and Compassion 慈悲 in the *Nihon-ryōiki*

Efraín Villamor Herrero

Foreign Languages, Teikyō University, Tokyo 192-0395, Japan; evillamor@usal.es

Abstract: This paper examines the intersection of Confucianism and Buddhism as presented in the *Nihon-ryōiki* (NIH), focusing on the catechetical efforts of its Buddhist author to fuse these ethical traditions. A central concern of the text is the introduction of karmic law and rebirth, concepts that Buddhism imported from ancient India that were not fully accepted in Japanese society at the time of its composition. This study explains how many of the miracles described in the NIH are consistent with Confucian values, particularly in their emphasis on benevolence, compassion, and social duty. In this paper, I argue for synthesizing Confucian and Buddhist ethics in the NIH as universal values that underscore the importance of social harmony based on filial duty—the Confucian worldview underlying the NIH's linking of personal conduct to the cosmic law of karmic retribution.

Keywords: Confucianism; Buddhism; *Nihon-ryōiki*; benevolence; compassion

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1. About the *Nihon-ryōiki* (NIH)

The *Nihon-ryōiki* 日本霊異記 (NIH) is a collection of Buddhist miracle stories compiled by the monk Kyōkai (景戒) in the late 8th century. Kyokai lived at Yakushi-ji 薬師寺, a prominent temple in Nara 奈良. The NIH is considered one of the earliest[1] and most influential examples of *setsuwa* literature 説話文学 (Golay 1970), a genre of legends and folklore that depicts the early reception of Chinese[2] concepts and Indian thought[3] (Shioiri 2007). The official name of the NIH is *Nihon-genpō zen' aku ryōiki* 日本国現報善悪霊異記. This title refers to the main catechetical point, which is to define what is good and evil according to the thought[4] reflected in the stories compiled by Kyōkai. The application of morality, which he introduced mainly at the end of each tale, determines the criteria of karmic law and its retribution—the main religious belief that Kyōkai tried to spread in Japanese society (Saitō 2023; Shirato 1974). The criteria of the ethics inferred in the narratives of the NIH are based on the ancient teachings attributed as the Dharma that date back to the Buddhas[5]. However, the intriguing point of this collection of literature is that it is plausible how its author advocates the combination of respecting different religious traditions, although, as is described, the common view seems to have been to discredit each other's beliefs. Its prologue[6] began by mentioning the equal importance of following both Confucianism and Buddhist thought[7].

> When we ask about the period from the transmission of Buddhism and Confucian thought to Japan to its widespread dissemination, we know of two main periods. Both arose from the journey of these traditions across the seas from the [Korean] kingdom of Kudara. During the time when the regent Ōjin of the great Yamato Empire resided in Toyoakira, in Karushima [Nara], Confucian writings were transmitted. Buddhist texts, meanwhile, arrived when Emperor Kinmei reigned at Kanazashi, his imperial residence of the Yamato lineage, on the island of Shikishima [Nara]. At that time, those who studied Confucian texts criticized Buddhism, and those who studied Buddhist scriptures belittled the teachings of

> Confucius. The most ignorant do not believe in the law of karma. Lost in their boastfulness, they did not realize that all actions are connected. He who sows good will receive good. He who sows evil will be rewarded accordingly. Wise Buddhist believers do not act in this way. They appreciate both the Buddhist scriptures and the classical texts of Confucianism. They believe in the law of karma as true [and fear the consequences of their own actions][8].

2. Reception of Confucianist Ideas in the NIH

Ethical values in the NIH are discussed through the complex reciprocity and mixture of significant ideas from Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism (Collcutt 1991). Japanese thought was constructed through constant communication between indigenous beliefs (Shimode 1979) and Confucian and Buddhist ideas (Sekiguchi 2013), which had already been introduced as part of national policies.

Some of the most popular Confucian concepts can be seen mentioned along the NIH[9] in the context of Buddhist teachings. Many of these terms are introduced as part of the Buddhist catechism, inherited from the Chinese translation of Buddhist texts (Funayama 2022). The term 義 (*yì*) (for righteousness or justice) is used to express the principles of filial love (父子の義にして、孝養を失はざりき NIH I.18) and, as usual in other Buddhist scriptures (Villamor 2024a, p. 75), to refer to Buddhist teachings, with the moral of not committing the sin of killing (by hurting even ants 是の義を以ての故に、蟻子を殺害するだに NIH II.22), to explain how karmic law works ('If someone does not deeply consider the relationship between cause and effect, this illogical injustice will result. An unreasonable karmic retribution in this life is the evil reward for unrighteousness' 因果を睦みず、非理無義なり (…) 非理の現報、無義の悪報なることを NIH III.26), and in a quotation from 梵網経 (Tanaka 1995, pp 336–37) regarding punishment for an infraction of monastic rules 今此の義解に云はく、「血を出すも、仏道を障ふること能はず NIH III.33.

Except for certain cases, such as the mystic and meditative Indian traditions, branches of philosophy throughout human history have usually embraced knowledge as one of their most relevant ways to attain truth. The Chinese Buddhist scriptures were arranged, in part, on the basis of the consensus that Chinese (and Indian) translators saw among the many paradigms already common in their society. This obviously contributed to the spread of Buddhism throughout East Asia. Examining Chinese archaic texts, one can notice the possible parallelism in thought that Buddhist translators might have seen. Sinograms such as 聖 for Sage, benevolence 仁, and wise 智, quoted by 孟子 Mencius to praise Confucius 孔子 (ICS MN: 3.2), are characters that have merged with many Buddhist concepts. In the sense of Sage, the character 聖 appears frequently in the tales of the NIH to convey respect for relevant individuals as emperors (聖朝之人) or, as in many other medieval Japanese tales, with reference to Buddhist monks as portrayals of Buddhism—the most sacred knowledge for the Japanese at that time (法師思之: 我國聖人 NIH II. 28). Benevolence and its relationship to the teachings of compassion in the Buddhist context of NIH will be discussed in the next chapter. The prologue of the first book of the collection in the NIH employed this character to express the wisdom of those (智之儔) who respected both Confucianism and Buddhism. It was also cited to refer to the wise who understood the Buddhist doctrine of Dharmakāya (理智法身 NIH II.36), the wise monks of the Buddhist school of Tiāntái (天台智者之問術 NIH III.0, 天台智者之甚深解NIH III.38), to the disciples of the Buddha as followers of renowned wisdom (高名智者 NIH III.19). Therefore, it can be asserted with less probability of failure than with respect to wisdom 智 that it cannot be overlooked that the profound background of the use of this sinogram in Buddhist scriptures to associate it with the alleged superiority of their teachings was such that it was likely that no Buddhist in Japan at the time would have associated this term with any other Chinese thinker who was not a Buddhist (CTP 2024). Similarly, the character 德 (*dé*), which in Chinese thought refers to the virtue one attains when one acts out of high moral conduct, was extensively introduced into Buddhist scriptures to refer to the religious merit associated with these ethical values. The cultural syncretism seen in Asian religions was probably also influ-

enced by this background of thought in which Confucianism and Buddhism converged. In the NIH, the character of 德 was associated, as it was through the Sinicization of Buddhism, with the image of religious merit brought about by understanding the law of karma (功德。因果之理 NIH I.10), as well as the practice of the Buddhist teaching of universal love (慈應大德 NIH I.11, 慈應大德 (…) 大德垂慈 NIH I.12) and the Confucian view of filial piety 孝德, which was noted as part of embracing Buddhism 佛法, which is narrated as the purification process of one's heart 端心掃庭 that even a layman can do 居住俗家 to obtain the five religious merits 得五功德 (NIH I.13). Moreover, the continuous worship of the Imperial Japanese figure 天皇尊was regarded as a fruitful ascetic practice 乃修行之功 that was derived from the merit of universal love and piety 慈悲之德 NIH I.26. Quoting a Chinese version of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*[10], a passage of the NIH indicates the following:

> As stated in the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*: All evil actions arise from wrong views. That is what this [teaching] means (…) By extending universal love to [just] one person, you will generate religious merit as vast as the earth. Being generous to everyone will be rewarded as fruitfully as [mustard] flowers grow.
>
> 涅槃經に云へるが如し。「一切の悪行は，邪見を因と為す」と者へるは、其れ斯れを謂ふなり。(…)「悲心をもちて一人に施さば、功德大ならむこと地の如けむ。己が為に一切に施さば、報を得むこと芥子の如けむ。 NIH I.29

The religious merit that the Japanese probably had in mind through the narratives of the NIH showed no concern for society but sought individual retribution for religious merit within Buddhist beliefs. The religious merit granted by popular bodhisattvas, such as Kannon (觀音威德 NIH I.31), through the recitation of Buddhist scriptures (誦經之功德也 NIH I.32), among many other passages, appear as a recurring motif to make believing more appetizing, as the catechism inferred. Another aspect of Confucianist terms adapted in Japanese thought is the doctrine of trustworthiness or faithfulness expressed by the term 信 (*xìn*), commonly associated with faith, in Buddhist scriptures (Sk. *śrāddha*). In the NIH, it serves to allude to the main teaching of the text, which is to legitimize the need to believe in the idea of karma[11]. The belief in retribution for one's behavior is the hope that encourages belief in this idea imported from ancient India. To Confucious, its central social aspects to be adopted in order to live in harmony with the environment can be noticed in the next line, where moral echoes suffice the social implications of believing that our actions are connected and reciprocal with the environment.

> (…) 主忠信，無友不如己者，過則勿憚改」 (学而篇)
>
> (…) 主忠信、無友不如己。則勿憚改 (子罕篇) ICS LY: 1.8 (Asano 2012, pp. 121–22)
>
> [Hold] loyalty and trustworthiness above all else, have no friends who are not your [morally], if you make mistakes, don't be afraid to correct them.

Another important value in Chinese thought, filial piety 孝 (*xiào*), is described in the NIH in terms of filial love, not as related to Confucian teachings but as part of the teachings described in the Buddhist scriptures (読経求道，過現二生，重誦本経。現孝二父 NIH I.18). Moreover, it is narrated how one can fall into hell if filial piety is not practiced towards one's parents, while those who practice it are said to be reborn in the Pure Land(s) (不孝衆生，必墮地獄。孝養父母，往生淨土 NIH I.23). The importance of filial piety as a significant moral value is repeatedly discussed throughout the NIH, where the Buddhist catechism in the NIH describes it as deadly (不孝養而死 NIH I.24) and the consequences of not participating in its practice as disastrous (孝養父母 NIH I.30). On the other hand, the term 忠 (*zhōng*) for the concept of loyalty in the context of Confucianism can also be found in some of the morals of the NIH.

> As the morale says, Oh Lord Ōmiwa, of a famous lineage. Since your childhood you have loved to gain knowledge. You are loyal and benevolent. Your heart is pure because you do not stain it [with attachment to material things]. You are merciful to your vassals. You even withhold your rice fields to supply water to many of your people. Because of your kindness, it is said that the rain of

> immortality fell [on your lands], and the honor you gained as a ruler was passed on, to many more generations.
>
> 賛に曰はく、「修々たる神の氏。幼き年より学ぶることを好む。**忠にして仁有り。**潔しくありて濁こと無し。民に臨み恵を流ふ。水を施さむとして、田を塞ぐ。甘[12]雨時降り，美しき誉長に伝はる」といふ NIH I.25.

Other passages of the NIH portray how many Chinese characters related to Daoism also served to transmit ancient religious ideas such as the purification of the body through ritual baths 沐浴潔身, purifying the body, mind, and thus karma 為身心業, by always practicing 常以是行 and regulating one's energy 彼氣調, evoking an image of someone with a heavenly presence 恰如天上客 NIH I.13, which covers the unification of many ascetic practices from Indian thought, described in Chinese terms, with Daoist echoes. The karma of believing in and worshipping the Three Jewels of Buddhism 仰信三寶，以之為業 and cultivating the ability to breathe in the universal energy 吸噉於養性之, take ritual baths 沐清水之, and perform other methods of incantation 咒法 that lead to the attainment of extraordinary powers, 證得奇異之驗術, are described as the practices of one who is a guest of the Immortal Palace 仙宮 (NIH I.28). The lexicography of the NIH tells us about the transmission and assimilation of yogic ideas as *prāṇa*, translated as 氣, as the technology of ascetics who seek to overwhelm the world of suffering. Moreover, the teaching of a *bodhisattva* 菩薩 referred to as 義 and the term for antonomasia in Daoism, path 道[13], to explain the concept of being pleased by the opportunity to hear Buddhist teachings 感應之, explained in Chinese terms, are another good example of the appropriation of these Chinese characters to explain Buddhist teaching narratives (NIH I.9).

The process of translating Buddhist scriptures from Indian languages into Chinese required the transmission of many ideas in Confucian and Daoist terms. The following passage illustrates how Buddhist catechism is supported by many terms borrowed from ancient Chinese thought.

> As the morale says, (…) a seeker of the path, read Buddhist scriptures, and after two lives, finally recited this sutra. In the present, he transmits filial piety and the beauty of his name. He is a true sage, not an ordinary person. This is the divine power of the *Lotus Sūtra*, derived from the miraculous mercy of Kannon.
>
> 賛に曰はく、「（…）経を読み、道を求め、過去の二生、重ねて本経 を誦 じぬ。 現に二父に孝ありて、美名後に伝はる。是れ聖なり、凡に非ず。誠に知る、法花の威神にして，観音の験力なることを」といふ NIH I.18

Even more explicit is the adaptation of the concept of 陰陽 (yīnyáng) as a necessary skill 術, alongside the profound wisdom of Tiāntái Buddhism 天台智, as aspects of the teachings that the compiler of the NIH, Kyōkai 景戒, has not yet achieved and thus must pay the consequences of NIH III.38. The hope of obtaining 長生 longevity (or immortality in Daoism) and the deterministic interpretation of fate 宿業 is rejected with the aim of the main catechetical intention of the NIH, which is to spread belief in the karmic law, not as something inscrutable but as free will, as a pillar to obtain blissful retribution in this life 現報, as a priority (NIH I.8).

An illustrative example of the fusion of Confucian and Daoist ideas within the Buddhist emphasis of the narratives compiled by the Japanese monk, author of the NIH, can be seen in the following passage:

> Lord Ōtomo is told to be wise and good, to purify his heart by following the path of the hermit [who seeks immortality] and to familiarize himself with Buddhism. He fulfilled his loyalty and maintained longevity and good fortune until his last days. As an administrator of the government, he never lost the opportunity to serve bravely and express filial love, that descendants inherit. It is truly known that this was the miraculous merit resulting from the protection of the gods.

> 善きかな、大部の氏。仙[14]を貴び、法に儻ヒ、情を澄し忠を効 し、名福共に存ち、世を逕て夭ニナリヌルコト无し。武は万機に振ひ、孝は子孫に継がる。諒に委る、三法の験徳、善神の加護なり(…) NIH I.5

Nara (1987) is the only known work that considers the Tales of Compassion as a Buddhist teaching (慈悲行). This study claimed that the catechetical intention of the author of the NIH was to extend certain criteria based on ethical rules for Buddhist monks 四波羅夷 (probably taken from the Chinese translation 梵網経, of the *Brahmajāla Sūtra*) to explain the moral values to be held by society (Nara 1987, p. 310). However, Nara's analysis (Nara 1987) is limited to a brief consideration of a few passages and does not attempt to examine the transmission and interpretations of compassion in the NIH. Since in many Chinese scriptures the term for benevolence 仁 taught in Confucianism was used as a synonym for Buddhist teachings on compassion 慈悲, in this paper we will focus on the reception of the Confucian concept of benevolence 仁 in order to understand how it was adapted within the Buddhist catechism of the NIH.

3. The Synthesis of Benevolence and Compassion in the NIH

The concept of benevolence 仁 (*rén*) embodies the highest moral standard in Confucian ethics[15]. It encompasses compassion, empathy, and kindness towards others as a humanistic virtue that primarily involves altruistic concern for social welfare (JinSook 2013). The Confucian ideal was to extend this love and care from one's family to friends, neighbors, and ultimately to all of humanity. This does not mean, however, that Confucianism regards benevolence as a unique value to be expressed uniquely toward human beings. The social implications of living harmoniously with nature and animals have been described in the thought of several thinkers associated with Confucianism. The idea of not harming 無傷, mentioned by Mencius (ICS MN: 1.7/4/19), can be seen in line with the teachings of Indian ascetic traditions such as Jainism or Buddhism, especially when it is introduced as the ability of a benevolent man 仁術, who also cares about the suffering of animals. (The superior man is [so aware of the suffering of] animals that, having seen them alive, he cannot tolerate seeing them die; having heard their dying, he cannot endure eating their flesh. 君子之於禽獸也，見其生，不忍見其死；聞其聲，不忍食其肉 ICS MN: 1. 7/4/19) (Niu 2015, p. 212). It was also said that a ruler's duty must also be granted for the sake of animals 及禽獸 (ICS MN: 1.7/4/30). The next passage is even more revealing, where it is defined as the way for a wise king 此聖王之道也 to practice benevolence 仁愛 as a ruler, not only to people but even to animals 禽獸之加 (ICS SY 貴德 7). It is beyond the main objective of this paper, but for further studies it would be interesting to analyze the possibility of a comparative study of Confucianist texts such as the following, where humans are characteristically represented with inhumanity, while animals are described with more empathy, a recurrent theme in Buddhist *jātaka* literature.

> Even animals today know how to stay close to their parents and not forget their relatives. A person who forgets his own body, neglects his parents, and is disloyal to his ruler is less benevolent than animals. The one who is in conflict always believes that he is right and that the other is wrong.
>
> 仁者必敬人。凡人非賢，則案不肖也。人賢而不敬，則是禽獸也（…）若夫忠信端慤，而不害傷，則無接而不然，是仁人之質也。忠信以為質，端慤以為統，禮義以為文 (ICS SY: 5.26/37/22).

In Confucian texts, 慈 is used as kindness, especially in filial relationships, and 悲 as an expression of one's grief, while their adaptation of Buddhist scriptures appeals to expand these values as universal The criticism of a perverse man who died poisoned 毒瘡遍身 because of his lack of benevolence 不仁after taking the skin of a rabbit alive, and because he enjoyed killing 喜殺生命, is expressed by synthesizing the concepts of Confucian benevolence 仁 with the terms used in the Buddhist context to express universal love 慈 and empathy or piety for the pain of others 悲 (NIH I.16). The reminiscence of Confucian thought in which its texts refers to a benevolent man as 仁者 can also be seen in the NIH, where

this appellation is used in the sense of respect for the interlocutor (仁者何人？ NIH I.18, 慈母 NIH III.16).

The practice of compassion described in the tales of the NIH includes not only passive harmlessness toward sentient beings but also the active act of liberating animals, which is one of the most prolific patterns of Buddhist *jātaka* literature. Many motifs from Indian thought, such as the Buddhist criticism of killing cows by Brahmins 婆羅門[16] and the heavenly bird Garuḍa 迦留陀夷 or Yama 閻羅, adapted as part of Buddhist cosmology, can be found in the tales of NIH II.5. This story also used the expression of 仁者誰人？ to politely respond to fantastic beings, who, after being liberated by a human 買放生, decided to embrace the bow as a bodhisattva 發誓願. And after rebirthing 還甦 from the underworld, they go to thank that man for his kindness, because they do not forget his (Confucian) duty 忘彼恩. The man becomes rich as a grant of karmic law in this life 現報流水長者 (NIH II.5).

A similar usage of this term can be found in the NIH III.27 to remark on the kindness of a shepherd that took away the pain of the eye of a skull. The moral of this tale based its statements on how karmic law works, in light of the Confucian concept of duty 恩, which serves here to support the belief in miracles. The spirit of that skull expresses the following:

> Thank to your kindness benevolent man, I do not suffer pain anymore. Now, I am so happy that I have plenty to spare. I will never forget my owe with you—said [the spirit of the skull] overwhelmed by its happiness. (…) It is certainly repaid kindness, when given. Even so, how could people in the present world forget this duty? This is, as explained in the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*.
>
> 仁者の慈を蒙りて、痛苦既に除かる。今飽くまでに慶を得たり。其の恩を忘れじ。幸の心に勝へず。仁者の恩に酬いむと欲ふ。（…）恩を与ふれば恩を報ず。何に況や、現の人、豈恩を忘れめや。涅槃経に説きたまへるが如し。NIH III.27.

The Buddhist teachings expressed in the NIH reflect the main assumption of this compassion and universal love as values not only for human beings but for every sentient being, as indicated in NIH I.21. But this is not all. As I have already discussed, the very idea of karmic retribution is introduced by the premise that one is morally bound to the duty of the benefits received—the Confucian social claim to maintain harmony.

> The karmic retribution in this life is closer [than expected]. That is why there must be faith in the law of cause and effect. Even if they are seen as [only] beasts, they could be your parents from previous lives. The four kinds of beings born in the six worlds of rebirth it must be understood as one's home. Therefore, one must not forget to practice universal love and piety [toward other beings].
>
> 現報甚だ近し。因果を信ずべし。畜生に見ゆと雖も、而も我が過去の父母なり。六道の四生は、我が生れむ家なり。故に慈悲无くはあるべからず (NIH I.21)

Another passage, in NIH II.16, presents the transmission of compassion as a practice of embracing love for others as if they were our own children, an ancient teaching intimately connected with Buddhist history (Takemura 2010) and the teachings of the Buddha in India[17] for the purpose of exposing the retribution that one can expect depending on the moral value of his acts. Lack of compassion is described in the NIH as the root of further suffering. The narratives focus on the fatal consequences of not being mindful when there is an opportunity to act kindly.

> One tale expressed the extreme suffering of being burned out 今身燒煮雞子者, 死墮灰河地獄, of a man that fell to hell地獄現在, due 應信因果 to his lack of compassion 無慈悲者 (NIH II.10). Another story tells about the inability of a mother fox 母狐結怨 to act compassionately 不無慈心 ultimately led to a cycle of resentment and revenge 報怨有術, in the rebirth realm of beasts 雖賤畜生, which is described as the morale of being retributed in this life 現報甚近, for not embrac-

> ing a merciful heart 不無慈心 (NIH II.40). Contrarily, but in the same regard, the story of NIH III.4 explain that repaying resentment with compassion is like extinguishing fire with water 以慈報怨，如水滅火.

The story of NIH II.42 quotes the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* 如涅槃經說 to refer to a mother's love for her son 母慈子 as the act that made her reborn in heaven—not anyone but Brahmāloka 因自生梵天[18]. Here, we can see that the explanations for compassion shift from different sources but still converge in the same point—the synthesis of them as unconditional love.

Probably, therefore, other accounts portray empathy as a fruitful value. The story of NIH I.33 recounts how a Buddhist painter, because of his empathy for the love of a widow, who wanted to worship the spirit of her husband 供養霊, cried out 泣悼 because of the piety in his heart 情 and how both, because of this synergy, mutually developed the will to embrace Buddhism 共同発心. This usage of 情 reads as kokoro (heart) is not exclusive to these lines, since it is used to express what the appropriate understanding of compassion 情 is as a fundamental aspect not only of the moral mind 心, but also as a factor that produces a fruitful amount of religious merit 功德 and prosperity 福德, describing it as the maximum manifestation of 'buddhahood' 佛性之頂 for those who, it is said, should follow the path of the Buddha(s) (NIH II.0).

The sinogram 悲 echoes in the NIH its uses in Confucianist texts, as (filial) piety to the suffering of one's parents 父母懇惻哭悲 NIH I.9 and the compassion for worshipping one's father, similar to the Chinese beliefs in ancestors 檀越即起悲心、而就牛邊，敷藁白言：實吾父者，就此座 NIH I.10. Other lines used it to describe the mercy of a monk 法師悲之 who saved the soul of a skull from suffering (mentioned above), NIH I.12, and as the mercy of a governor, which again echoes the concept of benevolence 仁 in Confucianism (國司聞之大悲 NIH 3.13). I do not think that the emotional connection with the deities of Japanese believers would have anything to do with Buddhist catechism then. The NIH, as is often the case in Buddhist literature, speaks of the 'great unanimous compassion of the Buddha (Gautama)' (佛平等大悲 NIH III.19), which is presented as the premise of infinite value for 'the sake of all sentient beings' (故為一切衆生 NIH III.19). The benefits of unconditional mercy 無緣大悲 are presented as the most representative value of Buddhist figures such as Kannon 觀音無緣大悲，馳法界救有情也 NIH III.38), for the salvation of sentient beings. The Buddhist catechisms that present the tales of the NIH tend to describe the miraculous powers of the Mahāyāna deities 大乘神咒奇異之力 as being able to cure a person of sickness due to their unconditional mercy 無緣大悲 if that person properly responds to them by accumulating the necessary religious merit (病人行者積功之德 NIH III.34). I believe that this interpretation by the Japanese author of the NIH was based on his synthesis of the moral values of Confucianism and Buddhism. And even more, as is revealed in the last moral of his collection, I do not believe that his main concern was to spread only Buddhist thought but Buddhism as a social medium to achieve harmony in society, with obvious nuance of what can be seen of his true synthesis, between Buddhism and Confucian thought. In other words, compassion is not the path to individual liberation but the duty to work for social interest.

> Certain man, blame that the emperor is not legitimately noble, so drought and pandemic diseases ravaged the region. In addition, great natural disasters and a great famine struck the place, but hunting with falconers and hounds did not cease, culminating in the extermination of many birds, boars and deer. Some people say that this is contradictory and does not follow Buddhist compassion. But how could the people blame the holy emperor when everything in that domain belonged to the emperor, even the most insignificant tip of a needle? In the Chinese kingdom, when the legendary sage-king Yáo ruled, there was also drought and pandemic disease. So, this [Japanese] emperor should not be accused.
>
> Thus ends my compilation of the stories I have chosen from the oral tradition. I have written down and arranged those strange stories that serve to discern what

is good and what is evil. I hope that the religious merit of writing this will serve to lay people who are forgotten in life, to rebirth without fail, in the Pure Land of the West.

或る人は、聖君に非ずと誹謗りて、「何を以ての故にとならば、此の天皇の時に，天の下旱厲有り。又、天の災、地の妖、飢 饉の繁く多に有りと雖も、又、鷹犬を養ひ，鳥猪鹿を取る。是れ慈悲の心に非ず」とまうす。是れ儀 然らず。食す国の内の物は，皆国皇の物にして、針を指す許の末だに、私の物　都て無し。国皇の自在の隨の儀なり。百姓と雖も敢へて誹らむや。又、聖君 堯 舜之の世すら、猶し旱厲在るが故に、誹るべからぬことなり。

我、聞く所に従ひて口伝を選び、善悪を儻ひ、霊奇を録せり。願　はくは、此の福を以て、群迷に施し、共に西方の安楽国に生れむことを (NIH III.39)

4. Conclusions

This paper has briefly reviewed some of the main concepts of Confucianism introduced in the NIH as part of the catechetical purposes of its Buddhist author. His main concern seems to be to implant an ethical view that pays special attention to rebirth, and the retribution of karmic law as dictated by this process. They conclude that these ideas, imported from ancient India by Buddhism, were not yet socially accepted at the time of the composition of the NIH. On the other hand, the evidence discussed in this paper is sufficient to confirm that many of the Buddhist teachings explained as miracles in the NIH narratives are supported by Confucian concepts. The author argues for the synthesis of both ethical traditions as universal values to be embraced by all. Benevolence and compassion, among many other ideas, were seen as the pillars of religious practice. Rituals and belief in powerful deities are also present. However, the most significant aspect of the catechism of this collection tends to emphasize the relationship of gods and humans, fathers and children, and many other individuals, as related to an overall view of society where their duty is attributed to the values that support its main concern, the possibility of retribution of karmic law. The teachings of Confucious were latently the social base from which to consider compassion and benevolence as the same thing—the most universal capacity of the individual to realize harmony in this life.

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Abbreviations

CTP	Chinese Text Project
Dhp	Dhammapada
ICS MN	Mengzi 公孫丑上—Gong Sun Chou I (Niu 2015)
ICS LY	Lunyu 論語 (The Analects 480 BC–350 BC) (Asano 2012)
NIH	Tanaka (1995)
Sk.	Sanskrit language
Sn	Suttanipāta
ICS SY	Shuoyuan 說苑

Notes

1 From the perspective of literary studies, one of the most relevant aspects of the NIH is that, as noted by previous scholars, it contains many valuable descriptions of the development of Buddhism in rural areas in the Nara period (Asaeda 1989), when non-burocratic 私度僧 Buddhist monks played a major role in the vernaculization (Sun 2020) of this religion among ordinary people (Yoshida 1995, 2006a, 2006b).

2 On the NIH in East Asian history, see (Yamaguchi 2013). On the parallelism with Chinese Buddhist scriptures, see (Hong 2003). Notable scholarship has been carried out on its characters, focusing on its adaptation of the Chinese literary style (Kuranaka 2003; Li 2008).

3 On the relation of its narratives with Indian Buddhist literature, see (Kawaguchi 1972; McDaniel 2002).

4 On the supernatural and fantastic miracles portrayed in the NIH narratives, see (Matsuo 2009). On the social representation of women, see (Migliore 2010a). For stories of human rebirth in animals, see (Mutō 2021). On the meaning of dreams, see (Yamaguchi 1999). On the Buddhist thought of the NIH, see (Maeshima 2013; Saitō 2017, 2024).

5 'Not to do evil, to practice what is right. To purify one's mind, that is what taught the Buddhas' (*sabbapāpassa akaraṇaṃ kusalassa upasampadā/sacittapariyodapanaṃ etaṃ Buddhāna sāsanaṃ* Dhp 183; 諸惡莫作 衆善奉行 自淨其意 是諸佛教 『増一阿含経』 T125.2.551a13).

6 The references and quotations from the primary source of the NIH have been provided principally in the reading transcripted form of the Chinese classics into Japanese 書き下し文 to facilitate the accessibility of further studies to analyze this text. Unless otherwise stated, all translations in this article are by the author. The transcription of the classic NIH script used by the author for the translation follows Tanaka's (1995) adaptation method of reading ancient 'Japanese'. For an updated version in modern Japanese, see also Hongō and Komai (2019). For adaptations of some of his stories in Western modern languages, see (Nakamura 2013; Migliore 2010b; Villamor 2025; Watson 2013).

7 内経 refers to Buddhist texts, while 外書 refers to Chinese texts, especially Confucian thought.

8 原夫れば、内経　外経の日本に伝はりて興り始めし代には、凡そ二時有りき。皆、百済の国より浮べ来りき。軽 嶋の豊 明の宮に宇御メタマヒシ誉田の天皇のみ代に、外書来りき。磯城嶋の金刺の宮に宇御めたまひし欽明天皇のみ代に、内典来りき。然れども乃ち外を学ぶる者は、仏法を 誹れり。内を読む者は、外 典を軽みせり。愚 痴の類は明執を懐き、罪 福を信なりとせず。深智の儔ハ内外を覩て、信として因果を恐る (NIH I.0).

9 The references to the volumes of the NIH are organized in this paper as following: 上 = I, second 中 = II, third 下 = III.

10 Ishii (1999) has argued convincingly about many of the quotations that the NIH took from this Chinese adaptation (大般涅槃經 SAT 2018. T7.1.191), which transmitted the Indian thought of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, and also the references from the Chinese translation 梵網経 (SAT T1484.24.997) of the *Brahmajāla Sūtra*.

11 信恐因果 (…) 深信修善，以生霑祐。善惡之報 NIH I.O, 因果之理，豈不信哉 NIH I.10, 有一愚人，不信因果 NIH I.15, 信因果 NIH II.10, II.12, II.19, II.22, II.34, believing (or not) 觀音威德，更不信哉 NIH I.31, 不信因果 NIH III.33, in the powers of the bodhisattva Kannon 觀音之力，信心至之 NIH 1.17, a monk who has deep faith in the great compassion of the bodhisattva Kannon 觀音大悲, 法師深信 NIH III.4, in the merit one can receive from this bodhisattva 觀音德力 NIH III.12, faith in the mystic power of Hannya (related scriptures) 般若驗力 NIH III.21, 現報甚近，應信因果 NIH I.21, 現報不遠，豈不信乎 NIH I.23, belief in the Three Jewels of Buddhism 信三寶 NIH I.28, II.6, II.12, II.20, II.35, 信敬三寶 NIH II.19, 三寶信正教 NIH II.0, disbelief in them 不信三寶NIH I.29, II.11, II.35, deep faith in the miraculous power of the Mahāyāna 大乘不思議力，試于願主至深信心 NIH II.6, the faith of an emperor in compassion 天皇信悲 NIH III.35.

12 This character is derived from the Chinese 甘露, translation of *amṛta*, a Sanskrit term which conveys the idea of a sacred, nourishing substance often associated with immortality or divine blessings—the nectar of immortality. Its Chinese adaptation appears in NIH I.30, where it quotes a Buddhist scripture on the benefits of not only embracing Buddhism but also practising many of the Confucian teachings that are seen as part of the same ethical dimension.

> 'As one Buddhist scripture explains: '[as] taking the nectar of immortality now results in drinking the jewel of steel in the future'; this teaching means as follows: After the revival of the domain of Hiro (Buzen 豊前国), Buddhist sculptures were erected in honour of fathers, Buddhist scriptures were transcribed, and the Three Jewels of Buddhism were properly worshipped. Thus, the duty to my father was fulfilled. Because of these religious merits, the oath for my father's sins was fulfilled. Since then, evil has been avoided in the Hiro domain and people have followed the right path'.
>
> 所以に経に云はく、「現在の甘露は未来の鉄丸なり」と者へるは、其れ斯れを謂ふなり。広国、其の父 の奉為に、仏を造り、経を写し、三宝を供養して、父の恩に報いまつり、受くる所の罪を贖ひにき。これ　以後は、邪を廻らして正にお趣きき (NIH I.30).

13 This sinogram was widely used under the influence of Daoist thought to symbolize in Buddhist scriptures translated into Chinese, the 'fruit' of the absolute truth (Funayama 2022, pp. 56–58). In the NIH, it appears repeteadly to indicate the path of Buddhism 佛道 NIH II.0, NIH II.26, NIH III.29,NIH III.33, as a synonym of the Buddhist Dharma 佛法 NIH I.0, NIH I.4, NIH I.13, NIH I.22, NIH I.28, NIH 2.0, NIH II.22, NIH III.0, NIH III.36.

[14] The NIH also contains a few allusions, which are probably references to Chinese medicine transmitted as the knowledge of hermits (願服仙藥 NIH I.5, 仙藥感應 NIH I.13 神仙感應，春野採菜，食於仙草 NIH I.13).

[15] It seems clear that one of the most important aspects of Confucius' philosophy was the concept of humanity (仁), which in the *Analects* means treating others as you would like to be treated, a fundamental principle often referred to as Confucius' 'golden rule' (Tucker 2022).

[16] The other passage of the NIH that refers to Indian Brahmins explicitly shows how the teachings of the Buddha were 'interpreted' through Chinese terms taken from the Confucian context. This passage reflect an excesive concern of the social implications of Buddhism as a religion that should not perish, saying as follows: 'In the tenth chapter of the Nirvāṇa Sūtra, the Buddha says, 'My heart holds Mahāyāna Buddhism in the highest esteem. Therefore, if I hear that a Brahmin is denigrating Mahāyāna Buddhism, I will decide to end his life. The karmic retribution that follows this, is not going to hell'. Furthermore, in the same scripture, in the thirty-third chapter, it says: 'Let those *icchantika* [who hopelessly will never practise Buddhism] perish forever. As the Buddha principle 義 taught here, those who kill just a little ant will commit the sin of hurting. However, [contrary to what one might expect] those who kill someone who will never attain the mental peace of a Buddha will not commit the sin of killing. This is what the Buddha meant'. This thief blames the Three Jewels of Buddhism, and he does not preach it to save people. He understands nothing about duty or loyalty 恩義無き. Therefore, the moral is that even if you kill him, no one will commit a sin.「我が心大乗を重みす。婆 羅門の方等を誹謗すと聞くときには、其の命根を断たむ。是の因縁を以て，是れより以來 は，地獄に堕ちずあらむ」とのたまへり。又彼の経の三十三巻に云はく、「一闡提の輩は，永く滅せむ。故 に、是の義を以ての故に、蟻子を殺害するだに、猶し殺罪を得れども、一闡提を殺せば，殺罪有ること無し」と者へるは、其れ斯れを謂ふなり。此の人は佛法僧を誹謗し、衆生の為に法を説かず。恩義無きが故に、殺すとも罪无者となり (NIH II.22).

[17] The primary source of the NIH reads as follows: I myself, out of compassion, accepted him as one of my own children 我、慈悲の故に、家の児の数に入れむ NIH II.16. That recalls the following point, one among the most famous teachings of the Buddha: 'Like a mother protecting her only child, one should also unfold a boundless heart and extend infinite (love) to every sentient being (*Mātā yathā niyaṃ puttamāyusā ekaputtamanurakkhe; Evampi sabbabhūtesu, mānasaṃ bhāvaye aparimāṇaṃ* Sn 149).

[18] Many of Buddha Gautama's metaphors used the very terms of the Brahmins, who, after converting to Buddhism, probably influenced their understanding of his teachings. Brahmins in ancient India, even those who converted to Buddhism, regarded the practice of Brahmavihāra as the path to reunification with light in the Brahmāloka realm, a claim that seems to have been derived under the influence of Brahminical thought on the Buddha's teachings (Villamor 2024b).

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