



The Record of Linji. Translation and commentary by Ruth Fuller Sasaki, edited by Thomas Yūhō Kirchner, with forewords by Mumon Yamada and Kazuhiro Furuta.

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009. Nanzan Library of Asian Religion and Culture. Annotated bibliography, list of personal names, and index. xxxii + 488 pp. Cloth, \$55.00. ISBN 978-0-8248-2821-9; paper, \$27.00. ISBN 978-0-8248-2821-0.

THE PUBLICATION of the *Record of Linji* (Ch. *Linji lu*, Jp. *Rinzai roku*) with the annotation by the group led by Ruth Fuller Sasaki (RFS) is an important event in Western Chan (Jp. Zen) studies. The *Linji lu* purports to contain the recorded sermons of Chinese Chan master Linji Yixuan (d. 866), as well as a number of stories about him, and is a key text of the historically powerful Linji tradition of Chan (Jp. Rinzai Zen). Scholars have long known about the large body of research on the *Linji lu* that was left behind when RFS died suddenly in 1967, but only the notes and annotated bibliography in the long-out-of-print *Zen Dust* (with Isshu Miura, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967) could give any real hint of the nature of this material. Through Thomas Kirchner's painstaking work we now have a highly useful and

beautifully polished edition of the group's work on the *Linji lu*, the core of which is a translation of the *Linji lu* with an enormous, and enormously useful, note apparatus.

The book begins with an informative introductory essay by Kirchner, explaining the circumstances under which the work on the *Linji lu* was done, and how the current edition came about. This is followed by the translation of the *Linji lu* presented as continuous text, and a "Historical Introduction" of the *Linji lu* by Yanagida Seizan. Then comes the annotated translation with the Chinese original, broken into short sections with numerous notes attached, ranging from comments on specific words to essays several pages long on Buddhist texts or Chan concepts. Following this comes the Chinese text in continuous form, an annotated bibliography, and a chart of all Chinese personal names in the book which gives *pinyin* transcription, the Chinese characters, Wade-Giles transcription, and Japanese pronunciation.

The translation presented is essentially the one published in Ruth Fuller Sasaki, *The Record of Lin-chi* (Kyoto: The Institute for Zen Studies, 1975), although the language has occasionally been updated and Kirchner has retranslated several passages in light of more recent research. The translation reads well, but the real contribution of *The Record of Linji* is, of course, the notes to the text. The circle around RFS included two of Japan's foremost Chan researchers, Yanagida Seizan and Iriya Yoshitaka, as well as several Westerners who later became prominent in the field, such as Philip Yampolsky and Burton Watson, and the work on the *Linji lu* produced by the group is truly astonishing. Almost every word that a reader of the Chinese text of the *Linji lu* might have questions about is explained and discussed. The translation frequently argues against traditional Japanese interpretations of the text with the reasoning meticulously explained in the notes, making clear the independence and originality of the research. Furthermore, there are a great many detailed references to Chinese Buddhist texts inside and outside of the Chan tradition, to various Buddhist sutras, as well as to a number of Chan figures, all of which place the *Linji lu* in a richer doctrinal and historical context than any other translation of a Chan text in English has been able to do. The notes are so detailed and extensive that they almost amount to a course in Chinese Buddhism, in which the reader is introduced to a large number of important texts, doctrinal points, and pivotal figures. Thus the annotations in the *The Record of Linji* are not only useful for specialists who can read classical Chinese, but they are also accessible to those who are simply interested in learning more about Chan and Chinese Buddhism in general.

Yanagida's "Historical Introduction" discusses Linji's biography and the development of the *Linji lu* in China and Japan, with detailed endnotes that together are as long as the main text of the article. It was written before the death of RFS in 1967 (and a shorter version of it was published in the *Eastern Buddhist* in 1972). Given the early date of composition it is not surprising that the article is rather dated in its outlook, presenting us with what many would now consider a romantic view of Chan and what could be seen as a misguided attempt at determining the correct dates and sequence of events in Linji's life. However, the article is still useful for its

many textual references and translated passages, and for the discussion in the notes of the traditional biographies of numerous Chan figures.

Of course, as Kirchner's introduction points out, the translation and its notes also reflect the state of the field of Chan/Zen studies in the 1950s and 1960s, and this does show. The most obvious way in which *The Record of Linji* appears dated is in its depiction of the recorded sayings and other texts associated with specific Tang-dynasty Chan masters as essentially reproducing their actual words and teachings. *The Record of Linji* also accepts at face value several traditional claims of the Chan school, such as the notion that Baizhang Huihai (traditional dates 749–814) wrote the first special Chan monastic rules and made manual labor mandatory for Chan monks, which otherwise has been seriously questioned by scholars. Kirchner reports in his introductory essay that Yanagida advised against trying to update the scholarship of his historical introduction, or the text and note sections, on the grounds that the material has value for understanding the history of academic Chan/Zen studies, and that it presents views that are still accepted in the Zen tradition today and so would be useful to Western Zen practitioners. While one might question the wisdom of perpetuating what we now can see is a distorted view of Chan history in order to accommodate Zen enthusiasts, it clearly would have been an almost impossible task to update the whole work to reflect the current state of Chan scholarship. However, a section giving an overview of some of the newer research on Chan would have been helpful to many readers. The one paragraph in Kirchner's introduction that notes that many Chan texts, and perhaps particularly the *Linji lu*, underwent significant change over the centuries does not seem quite adequate.

Nevertheless, used in conjunction with more recent scholarship on Chan and the *Linji lu* (such as Albert Welter's *The Linji lu and the Creation of Chan Orthodoxy: The Development of Chan's Records of Sayings Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), *The Record of Linji* will be tremendously useful to scholars of Chan Buddhism and anyone else interested in the topic. The textual notes to the *Linji lu* still represent the best available scholarship on understanding the Chinese original, which was far ahead of its time in the 1960s and has yet to be surpassed. Together with the massive amount of information on Chan and Chinese Buddhism the book contains, the *The Record of Linji* is truly a treasure trove.

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