



The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-Chi: A Translation of the Lin-Chi Lu

Línjì Yìxuán , Burton Watson (Translator) , Yuanjue Zongan (Compiler)

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Among the most important texts of Zen literature, the "Lin-Chi lu" details the insights and exploits of the great ninth century Chinese Zen master Lin-chi, one of the most highly regarded of the T'ang period masters. PEN Translation Prize-winner Burton Watson presents here an eloquent translation -- the first in the English language -- of this seminal classic, "The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi." The work is an exacting depiction of Lin-chi's words and actions, describing the Zen master's life and teaching, and includes a number of his sermons. Because Lin-chi's school outlasted other forms of early Chinese Zen to become dominant throughout China to this day, this translation bears unique significance within the literature of this great Asian nation. With Watson's lucid introduction to the work, a glossary of terms, and notes to the text, "The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi" is a generously constructed and accessible model of translation that will stand as the definitive primary material on Lin-chi for many years to come.

The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-Chi: A Translation of the Lin-Chi Lu Details

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From Reader Review The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-Chi: A Translation of the Lin-Chi Lu for online ebook

Chant Cowen says

Master Lin Chi really liked to shout and beat the shit out of his students. My type of guy.

Peter says

i'm digging the hell out of the medieval chinese zen buddhism scene.

agnostic says

Five stars are for the long, brilliant sermons in the middle of this work. The many short anecdotes at the beginning and the end (so-and-so "gave a shout," or slapped someone, or "shook out his sleeves") are silly and worthless in my opinion. I realize they're very "zen" but I expect people to at least take a shot at explaining the inexplicable, rather than just acting like a pretentious version of the Three Stooges.

David says

I was interested in reading this book after I heard Leonard Cohen mention in an interview that he became very interested in Rinzai which is the school of Buddhism started by Lin-Chi Lu.

As I was reading I was struck by the irony of my attempt at seeking and understanding each little chapter. A primary message was to not seek, just be, and eliminate the dualistic notion of the individual and our surroundings. Seeking leads to constant reincarnation and being trapped in the cycle of birth and death- a desperate search for meaning in life. Lin-Chi Lu teaches: "Fellow believers, just act ordinary, don't affect some special manner." Don't try so hard to reach enlightenment, don't venerate the master, the Buddha, or the patriarchs just find them inside ourselves and in our own contexts. And the path to that is not through active seeking.

Many of the passages were like riddles that only made the irony more delightful and challenging. Answers were not clear or tidy, they led my mind to a great expanse of questions. Such as this following story that simply ends with the Master bluntly refusing to answer and rejecting the question, which he did often:

"When the Master arrived at Ming-hua's place, Ming-hua said, 'Coming and going, coming and going- what is it all about?'

'Just tramping around wearing out my straw sandals,' said the Master.

Ming-hua said, 'In the end, what is it for?'

'This old man doesn't even know how to talk!' said the Master."

This particular translation had very helpful footnotes and gave very helpful background to Hindu and

Buddhist terms out of which Lin-Chi Lu's teaching grew.

valixt says

“... you take the words that come out of the mouths of a bunch of old teachers to be a description of the true Way. You think, This is a most wonderful teacher and friend ... saying, ‘I would never dare speak ill of such a good friend, I’d be afraid of making mouth karma! ... good friend is someone who dares to speak ill of the Buddha ... pass judgment on anyone in the world ...” [Master Lin-Chi]

Pan_filuta says

Druhé ?tení, ješt? lepší než první.

Shell says

KATSU and CRACK!

Pan_filuta says

První ?tení, náro?né.

David Withun says

Burton Watson's excellent introduction to this translation of the Lin-Chi Lu is of great assistance in understanding this rather difficult text. I will be honest here and say that Chinese philosophy, which its love of the riddle, the obscure, and so on, has always been a difficult subject for me. While I have a great deal of admiration for Confucius and have found many aspects of Taoism, of the philosophy of Chuang-Tzu, and of Ch'an Buddhism to be interesting, overall Chinese ideas have remained a closed book to me. While this text is no exception in the department of difficulty, Watson's introduction made the entire book more than worth a read and helped to crack that closed book just a bit for me.

As for the Lin-Chi Lu itself, it does make for an interesting, even if sometimes difficult, read. Watson is right in pointing out in his introduction that it is, in spite of its delight in obscurity and frequent vulgarity, one of the most approachable primary source introductions to Ch'an Buddhism.

This book, especially Watson's introduction, is enjoyable and I do recommend it, again: especially the introduction, for those interested in learning more about Chinese philosophy and about Ch'an/Zen, one of the greatest and most important branches of Buddhism.

Steve says

Imaginary portrait of Lin-chi by the Japanese Zen master, Hakuin Ekaku (1686-1769)

You don't drive a nail into the empty sky!

In Buddhism, as in every other serious endeavor to deal with the riddles of our brief existence on this little planet in the midst of an enormity one can hardly fathom (even as a trained physicist), there are serious disagreements concerning the means of attaining the desired goals. For some elitists (shall we say) what is required is a detailed study/memorization of the canonical texts and the attainment of a polished command of the techniques of dialectics and logic in order to arrive at the Truth; for others, more folksy (shall we say), what is required is regular attendance of church and performance of rites, regular payment of tithes, and regular recital of a few ~~magical formulae~~ prayers; for yet others, all the eggs are placed in the basket of attaining sudden enlightenment through the dedicated exercise of various meditation techniques supplemented by shocks to the mental and physical system (through koans and sudden smacks with a wooden rod, respectively) in order to disturb the complacent habits to which all human beings are prey.(*)

In Buddhism, the latter school of thought is referred to as Ch'an in China and as Zen in Japan, and its texts are thus primarily concerned with technique and not with dogma(**), though its masters have produced some rather recondite texts.

In *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-Chi* (1993/1999) Burton Watson translates one of the most important texts in the Ch'an tradition, the *Lin-chi ch'an-shih yü-lu* (The Recorded Saying of the Ch'an Master Lin-Chi) and includes a useful introduction providing historical and cultural context, as well as explanatory notes to the text itself. Lin-chi I-hsüan (Línjì Yíxuán, d. 866) founded the only branch of Ch'an Buddhism that still survives, and, in Watson's words,

[] his is the oldest and most authentic voice that has come down to us from the early tradition of Chinese Ch'an or Zen, the fullest exposition of its teachings, particularly as they are associated with the line of transmission that honors his name, the Lin-chi or Rinzai school of Zen. The early figures in the Zen lineage in China who precede him are veiled in legend, their sayings fragmentary and often difficult to interpret.

But how can one briefly summarize this very unique text to an audience with little foreknowledge of Zen?

KHAT !

Watson tells us that it is with such a shout that Lin-chi answered disciples' questions about the nature of Buddhism. I'd like to leave it at that, but as it probably won't have the desired effect I guess I'll have to say a few things.

Lin-chi (and recall that essentially all of Ch'an and Zen Buddhism since his death has been commentary on and use of his approach) distrusted humans' ability to express the Truth with words (as did the Taoists), and so, though it is evident from this text that he was familiar with the main texts of Mahayana Buddhism, his

primary purpose was to exhort his disciples to ignore all the external trappings of religion, disregard the words of the "Masters" (including his own) and realize that the Buddha nature is already within them; they need but go within themselves and make the connection in order to find *nirvana* - direct and total communion with Everything. But habit and many other things complicate this apparently simple matter, so Lin-chi suggests (one cannot write "explains") in his homilies and illustrates in his reported interactions techniques students can use to overcome the many obstacles within and without us to the simple realization that Everything Is One and all the rest is transitory illusion, i.e. of no real concern to us. Once that is done one experiences the peace and mindfulness of the enlightened, a state that is indistinguishable to me from the *ataraxia* of Pytho, Epicurus and Epictetus.

Aside from the blows and the shouting, the primary tool for breaking up the icepack of mental habit is the use of pregnant paradox, of apparent or real *non sequitur*. There is much of this here, but the unsuspecting reader should be forewarned that though some of these apparent riddles have "solutions," many are expressed just to startle, to perplex, to intrigue, in short to get one to jump over one's own spiritual shadow. The incidents of pedagogical exchange are in the same spirit.

The master ascended the hall. A monk asked, "What is the basic meaning of Buddhism?"

The Master held his fly whisk straight up.

The monk gave a shout.

The Master struck him.

Another monk asked, "What is the basic meaning of Buddhism?"

Again the Master held his fly whisk straight up.

And the monk gave a shout.

The Master also gave a shout.

The monk was about to say something, whereupon the Master hit him.

In other words,

KHAT !

(*) Some well-timed shouting at the top of the master's voice can also be observed. But not all is shock and awe: during a long session of *za-zen* (sitting in lotus position and meditating), one's body develops some remarkable pains and cramps; when the session master observes that they are impeding the meditation, he steps behind the person meditating, slaps his hands together sharply and places them roughly on a suitable portion of the meditator's body, whereupon a startling sensation of great warmth will ease the latter's suffering beyond my limited means of expression.

(**) Just like those of the Roman Stoics such as Musonius Rufus and Epictetus; indeed, there are many parallels between Ch'an Buddhism and Stoicism.

Alex says

edit: tr. by Burton Watson.

This is great! Monks shouting at each other and hitting each other with sticks! (and sermonizing too).

They should teach Linji instead of "Plato."
