

## BOOK REVIEWS

***THE WARRIOR KOANS: Early Zen in Japan.* By Trevor Leggett. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985, pp. xiv+182. With index of Chinese characters. ISBN 1-85063-023-2 (paperback)**

Trevor Leggett is the author of *The Tiger's Cave*, an important "first book" for many Western Zen students. He has devoted himself for the past fifteen years or more to the study of the Zen which began developing in thirteenth-century Kamakura at the Rinzai temples Kenchō-ji and Engaku-ji, where samurai came to study with newly-arrived Chinese masters, and at Tōkei-ji, where nuns formulated the "Mirror Zen" kōans.

In *The Warrior Koans*, Leggett translates the *Shōnan Kattōroku* (The Shōnan [River] Tangled Vines Record), a sixteenth-century collection of one hundred cases and their test questions which were used at the Kamakura temples before the time of Hakuin Ekaku. He worked from a reconstituted version of the original made by Imai Fukuzan, who is best known today as the co-editor of *Zengo-ji*, a standard directory of Zen phrases. Leggett includes a translation of Imai's introduction to his 1925 edition, an important historical study of medieval Japanese Zen traditions. A selection from the *Shōnan Kattōroku* appears in Leggett's earlier study of Kamakura Zen, *Zen and the Ways*.<sup>1</sup>

The samurai whom the Chinese masters confronted in Kamakura were, it seems, quite ethnocentric. In trying to make Zen practice relevant for them, these teachers and their successors formulated Japanese kōans from Japanese folklore and history. Thus the kōans of this book often echo old Chinese Zen cases, but they are "Made in Japan."

For example, Case 9 of the *Shōnan Kattōroku* tells of a monk at Kenchō-ji who carried an 800-pound image of Jizō Bosatsu from the main hall when the temple was being attacked by soldiers. The image was 16 feet in height and breadth, and the doors were only eight feet wide.

Compare this with Case 62 of the *Pi-yen lu*:

Yün-men said to the community, "Within heaven and earth, through space and time, there is a jewel hidden inside the mountain of form. Pick up a lamp and go into the Buddha hall; take the triple gate [of the monastery] and bring it on the lamp."<sup>2</sup>

In responding to Yün-men's case, the student is asked to show how to place

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<sup>1</sup> Trevor Leggett, *Zen and the Ways* (Boulder and London: Shambhala, 1978).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas and J. C. Cleary, trans., *The Blue Cliff Record*, 3 vols. (Boulder and London: Shambhala, 1977), Vol. II, p. 400.

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the great triple gate of the monastery on a lamp. A test question for Case 9 of the *Shōnan Kattōroku* asks how you carry a 16' x 16' Jizō through an eight-foot door. The fundamental point is the same, but the samurai student probably felt more intimate with this truth when responding within a familiar cultural context.

There are several other cases which are reminiscent of familiar *Pi-yen lu* and *Wu-men kuan* dialogues, and a few that are quite original. One or two are startlingly sexual in metaphor. Still, I do not find the variety in the *Shōnan Kattōroku* that one comes to expect in kōan anthologies. For example, a number of them seem simply to echo Yen-t'ou's "last phrase" (*Wu-men kuan* Case 13)<sup>3</sup>: "Daikaku's One-Word Sutra" (Case 4); "The One-Word Charm of Engaku-ji" (Case 29); "Sermon" (Case 42); "The Basic Truth of Buddhism" (Case 48); "The One-Word Heart Sutra" (Case 55); "The Charm" (Case 58); and "The Lanka Sutra of One Word" (Case 84).

The Mirror Kōans of the Tōkei-ji nuns are more interesting than they seem on first reading, and are well worth close study. They play with themes set forth in the poems attributed to Hui-neng and Shen-hsiu,<sup>4</sup> but they do not refer back specifically to those old poems. They come forth in their own time and place, and they too have their source in Japanese folklore.

Many of the test questions in this book echo preliminary kōans that traditionally follow upon kenshō, and one gets the impression that the book was probably used rather early in the curriculum. Here are examples just from the first third of the book: "Let Jizō stand up" (Case 8); "What is the weight of the Great Buddha of Kamakura?" (Case 16); "Count the waves at Yui Beach" (Case 17); "Save the ghost of the Regent Moritoki" (Case 21); "How do you stop the fighting across the Wen River?" (Case 22); "Is Benzaiten a god or a goddess?" (Case 26); "Where does the wind arise from?" (Case 27); and "Which is the very first Jizō?" (Case 31).

These are, however, not merely one-line questions that stand alone, as such preliminary tests tend to be in the Hakuin tradition, but they are embedded in fairly long stories. For example, "Save the ghost of the Regent Moritoki" follows an extended account of ghosts in high political places during the last years of the Hōjō regime. In the Hakuin tradition, you are simply told: "Save a ghost!"

The brevity and freedom from cultural reference that are found in the koan "Save a ghost!" are in keeping with the Hakuin tradition of Chinese kōans

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<sup>3</sup> Kōun Yamada, trans., *The Gateless Gate* (Los Angeles: Center Publications, 1979), p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> Philip P. Yampolsky, trans., *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (New York and London: Columbia, 1967), p. 132.

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generally. I suppose that there are not more than a dozen cases in Hakuin's curriculum where the Chinese folklore or history must be explained, even to Western students. This freedom from culture is helpful to the kōan process, which ultimately transcends culture. At the same time, the absence of one's own cultural references in kōan study *can* make the process seem abstract, and this would probably be especially true for the patriots of medieval Kamakura.

There have not been teachers of the stature of Chao-chou and Yün-men since their time. Hakuin knew this, and so chose teaching materials that used their dialogues and the dialogues of other great teachers into the Sung period. In contrast, there is something a little easy about the *Shōnan Kattōroku*. For example, I count eight cases in which one of the test questions specifically invites no more than a hearty "Katsu!" (33, 34, 47, 53, 57, 68, 70, 80). At the same time, we must honor the Kamakura teachers for seeking out material suitable for their students. I am often asked why I do not develop American kōans. This book prompts me to ask myself that question.

I don't have the original to use for checking Leggett's rendition, but generally he seems to strike a good balance between translating such terms as *sanzen* ("interview") and leaving others in place, such as *nembutsu*. I am annoyed at his reference to kōans as riddles, but that is my only really negative reaction to the book.

This is an important historical study, one that prompts reflection on how Zen might acculturate as it settles in the West.

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