

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

BOOK OF SERENITY. Translated and introduced by Thomas Cleary, Foreword by Robert Aitken. Lindisfarne Press, Hudson, N.Y., 1990. 463 pp. + xlii.

Thomas Cleary has provided English readers with yet another jewel from the treasury of East Asian wisdom. The *Book of Serenity* (Shōyōroku in Japanese; Ts'ung-jung Lu in Chinese) is a 13th century Chinese collection of kōans—Zen dialogues and stories. Thirty-six of the hundred cases in this anthology also are featured in either the *Blue Cliff Record* (Hekiganroku) or the *Gateless Gate* (Mumonkan), kōan collections well-known in modern Zen and used in the formal training system of the Japanese Rinzai school. Although all three works have stories from masters of all five classical Zen schools, the *Book of Serenity* is distinct in that it is primarily a work of the Sōtō (Chinese: Ts'ao-tung) branch of Zen, belying the myth that only the Rinzai, and not the Sōtō tradition, has engaged in kōan study and practice. The *Book of Serenity* accordingly demonstrates the different emphasis and approach of the Sōtō teaching style.

The cases in the *Book of Serenity* were selected and arranged by the Chinese Sōtō master Hung-chih Cheng-chueh (1091–1157), abbot of the T'ien-tung monastery (in Japanese he is known as Wanshi Shōgaku; in the pinyin transliteration used by Cleary he is Tiantong Hongzhi Zhengjue). Hung-chih, or Tiantong as he is called in the *Book of Serenity*, also wrote verse commentaries for each case, which are replete with allusions to Chinese cultural lore as well as Zen and Buddhist references. Hung-chih was widely learned, an accomplished poet, who also left a great quantity of exquisite prose teachings, and represents the culmination of the Chinese Ts'ao-tung teaching tradition. His meditation teaching, known as silent illumination (which came to be called *shikan taza* or “just sitting” in Japan), was an important influence on the famed Japanese Zen founder, Eihei Dōgen (1200–1253).

Hung-chih's kōan collection was taken up by Wan-sung Hsing-hsiu (1166–1246; in Japanese, Banshō Gyōshu) a later Ts'ao-tung master, who was persuaded to record this commentary by his lay disciple Yeh-lu Ch'u-ts'ai. Yeh-lu, a statesman in the government of the Mongol Genghis Khan, requested the work for study while serving in the Mongolian hinterland for the new conqueror (who he influenced towards a somewhat more benevolent rule). Wan-sung followed the pattern of the earlier *Blue Cliff Record* by adding for each case a brief introduction, extensive prose commentaries to both the case and Hung-chih's verse, and graffiti-like added sayings for each line of the case and verse. This format follows that adopted by the Lin-chi (Rinzai) master Yuan-wu K'o-ch'in (1063–1135; in Japanese, Engo Kokugon), who wrote commentaries on the case selection with verses of the Yun-men lineage master Hsueh-

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tou Chung-hsian (980–1052; in Japanese, Setchō Juken), to create the *Blue Cliff Record*.

The *Book of Serenity* and *Blue Cliff Record* are complementary, naturally suggesting comparisons. The dominant mode of the *Blue Cliff Record* is Dharma combat—challenging, dynamic, full of put-downs and penetrating insightful wit. While such is not entirely absent from the *Book of Serenity*, its primary style is more gentle—subtle, literary, warm-hearted, “user-friendly.” Hung-chih’s verses are well worth sustained attention, subtly amplifying and deepening the main cases. Wan-sung’s extended commentaries explicate the rich web of allusions in the cases and verses, and his introductions aptly set tone and theme. As the reader settles further into this world of monks and adepts mutually exploring the life of the Way, the soulfulness of the old Chinese masters becomes apparent.

The story of Zen founder Bodhidharma’s encounter with the Emperor Wu upon arriving in China, which leads off the *Blue Cliff Record*, appears second in the *Book of Serenity*. The latter opens instead with the story of the World-Honored-One (Shakyamuni) ascending the lecture seat, whereupon the bodhisattva of wisdom, Manjusri, ceremonially strikes the gavel and says, “Clearly observe the Dharma of the King of Dharma; the Dharma of the King of Dharma is thus.” The World-Honored-One then wordlessly descends from the seat. Hung-chih’s verse comment goes, “The unique breeze of reality—do you see?/ Continuously creation runs her loom and shuttle,/ Weaving the ancient brocade, incorporating the forms of spring./ But nothing can be done about Manjusri’s leaking.”

Wan-sung’s introduction to this case, the beginning of the whole *Book of Serenity*, goes, “Closing the door and sleeping is the way to receive those of highest potential; looking, reflecting, and stretching is a roundabout way for the middling and lesser. How can it bear sitting on the carved wood seat sporting devil eyes? If there is any bystander who doesn’t agree, come forward. You can’t blame him either.”

These cases and commentaries are not intended to be read so much as lived with, turned inside out and upside down and unfolded as their awakened ‘logic’ is ever more deeply experienced. Excerpts outside of this context, and of the relationship of the different koans to each other, can only slightly suggest their potential richness.

For another example, in the penultimate case 99 of the *Book of Serenity*, a monk asks Yun-men, “What is every-atom samadhi?” and Yun-men says, “Rice in the bowl, water in the bucket.” In his verse comment Hung-chih says, “Rice in the bowl, water in the bucket:/ Opening his mouth, he shows his guts, seeking one who knows himself./ Try to think and you fall into second and third impulses,/ Face to face suddenly becomes ten-million miles./

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Master Yunmen realized a little bit:/ The metal-cutting meaning—who is the same?/ The mind firmer than rock alone can be like this.”

Wan-sung’s introduction to this case says, “There’s a particular knowledge for chess, a particular stomach for wine. The three holes of a crafty rabbit, the myriad raids of a wily fox. There’s still another uninhibited one—tell me who is it?”

I am told that the Cleary translation of the *Blue Cliff Record* is frustrating for Westerners engaged in the Japanese Rinzai kōan training system because it often does not use the interpretations and readings followed by contemporary Japanese Rinzai teachers. This is not an issue for the *Book of Serenity*, as it is not widely used in modern formal kōan training systems. Though not adopted by the Rinzai school, the *Book of Serenity* is still greatly esteemed in the Sōtō tradition. Translations of portions of some individual cases have appeared previously, for example in *On Zen Practice* from the Zen Center of Los Angeles, but this is the first full published translation of the text.

In addition to his lucid and lively translation, Dr. Cleary has included notes, glossary, and a very useful introduction with a survey history, not only of major figures in the Ch’an tradition, but also with a succinct exposition of major teaching principles such as the fourfold host and guest, the five ranks, the three roads, and Yun-men’s three phrases. He also warns of several aspects of the tradition often confusing to modern Zen scholars and students. For example, he discusses the common misinterpretation of appropriate, skillful applications of teaching, often seen in kōans, as indicating contradictions or doctrinal disputes. “Certain features of authentic Ch’an commentary, such as overturning previous formulations, switching points of view, altering support and opposition, and so on, are not reflections of sectarian differences or changes in the course of intellectual history, as some outside observers have imagined, but are reflections of the diagnosis and treatment of sclerotic tendencies in the transmission of Ch’an lore. . . . When viewpoint switching has been taken as representative of differences of opinion or doctrine, the effect of this method has been lost. Literalistic interpretation, coupled with primitive concepts of right/wrong, superior/inferior, win/lose, either/or, which Ch’an commentary explicitly says cannot be applied to such cases, is often seen in external doctrinal/intellectual history treatments of the materials, as well as in sectarian movements, which may virtually freeze for centuries around some of the formulations of one or two ‘patriarchs.’ ”

Unfortunately, Dr. Cleary’s fine introduction has been marred by someone’s careless editing, resulting in a number of misspelled names. Most dramatically, the name of the great Baizhang Huaihai (to use the pinyin transliteration adopted in this volume) is spelled three different ways in consecutive sentences. Also, ‘u’ has sometimes been altered to ‘n’, so that

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Xuedou (initiator of the *Blue Cliff Record*) becomes “Xuedon,” and, most grotesquely, Shitou, the great progenitor of what would become the Ts’ao-tung lineage, is “Shiton.” In addition, the book jacket erroneously identifies the Serenity Temple, for which the work is named, as the residence of Tiantong (Hung-chih). In fact, this temple was the hermitage where the later master, Wan-sung, completed this work. Thankfully, this negligence does not seem to have effected the translation of the text itself, which was completed and edited some years ago. Despite the above errata, it is fortunate that this work is finally available. Serious students of Zen will undoubtedly find the *Book of Serenity* to be endlessly invaluable and illuminating.

TAIGEN DAN LEIGHTON

MEISTER BANKEI, DIE ZEN-LEHRE VOM UNGEBORENEN: Leben und Lehre des grossen japanischen Zen-Meisters Bankei Eitaku (1622–1693), aus den japanischen Quellen herausgegeben (Master Bankei, The Zen Teaching of the Unborn: Life and Teaching of the Great Japanese Zen Master Bankei Eitaku. Edited and translated from the Japanese sources by Norman Waddell. Bern, Munich, Vienna: Scherz Verlag, O.W. Barth Verlag, 1988, 205pp.

As the translator states in the preface to the present work, it is mainly due to Daisetz Suzuki that for the first time, in the early 1940’s, the true meaning of Bankei’s Zen was brought out; after two and a half centuries of neglect D. T. Suzuki—still Bankei’s unsurpassed interpreter—had accorded him his rightful place in Zen history. According to Suzuki, Bankei’s Zen of the Unborn (Fushō Zen) “espoused a fresh departure for the first time since the Zen patriarch Bodhidharma.” He wrote moreover that there is little Zen exposition since Bankei that can bear comparison with the exuberant creativeness of his Fushō Zen. Suzuki considers Bankei one of the greatest Buddhist masters Japan has produced. This opinion is certainly borne out by the view taken of Bankei’s life and activities by the historian Sodo Mori in the *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism* (vol. II, fas. 4, p. 543f.; Colombo, 1968). According to Mori, Bankei, Takuan, and Hakuin were the greatest figures in Rinzai Zen during the 17th and 18th centuries. After attaining “final enlightenment” at the age of 36, Bankei greatly enriched the religious culture of Japan. Apart from his regular meditation retreats and indefatigable preaching, he founded important monasteries. “At a later period he reconstructed 47 temples and