

REVIEW ARTICLE

Linji's Evergreens

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Burton WATSON, trans., *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi*. Boston, London: Shambhala, 1993. xxx + 140 pp. Introduction, appendix, glossary. Paper \$10.00; ISBN 0-87773-891-2.

WHEN THE EDITORS of the *JRS* asked me if I would like a review copy of this new translation for the purpose of writing this piece I gladly said yes, even though I had earlier received a complimentary copy from the author. Knowing how often I look into the *Linjilu* (or the *Lin-chi lu* for those who prefer the Wade-Giles romanization), I thought a spare might come in handy. When it arrived I sat down and prepared to go through the brand-new book. A bit unruly like many new paperbacks, the book kept flipping pages and closing by itself, until I gently applied a bit of pressure in order to tame it: Crack! went its back. For a book, a broken back means the very opposite of paralysis: the owner soon faces lost pages, vanished stories, lack of coherence, dispersal, and possibly even more serious consequences. When my new book had been opened a few times, the word "Shambhala" on the back began hiding among white fissures, as if ashamed. Indeed, looking through my sizable collection of translated Zen texts, I was struck by a pattern: most of the Shambhala paperbacks have similar backaches, and the ones I consult with some frequency have pages—sometimes bundles of pages—sticking indecently out from top and bottom. But this is the first time that a spine has broken during the book's first minutes in my hand; what a curious contrast to the beautifully preserved ancient Chinese and Japanese texts, with their low-tech bindings of string that last for centuries! But paperbacks needn't be flimsy either—my Demiéville translation of the *Records of Linji*, in frequent use for almost fifteen years, has a few wrinkles and a respectable sun-tan, but its binding is as strong as ever. The difference is good glue that, unlike the Shambhala kind, bends willingly, and good old thread

that holds the pages in their proper sequence. I can handle that book with some abandon, unlike my second copy of the new Watson translation.

The book's broken back was unfortunate, since I had hoped to use the volume as my "cross-reference" copy, in which I add what most publishers and translators notoriously omit: page and line numbers from the Taishō edition of the Buddhist canon. Many Western classics, like the Bible and Plato's works, contain numbers (chapters, verses, etc.) that allow for easy cross-reference and consultation between the numerous versions of the original as well as the various translations. Finding passages in Eastern classics, on the other hand, is usually a time-consuming chore. Translators of the *Record of Linji* usually divide the text as they see fit (Watson, for example, uses the chapter divisions and numbers of AKIZUKI 1972). This habit makes comparison of translations and original texts unnecessarily difficult: the famous story about Rinzai planting pine trees, which I will bring up later, forms chapter 49 in Watson and Akizuki, chapter 67a in SCHLOEGL (1975), chapter 2 in SASAKI (1975) and IRIYA (1989), chapter 67 in DEMIÉVILLE (1972), chapter 39 section 1 in YANAGIDA (1972), and so on. Two German translations take the liberty one step further, mercilessly hacking apart the original text to produce an entirely new sequence, so that the pine-planting story is found at the very beginning of BRUN (1986) and in chapter 57 of MÖRTH (1987) (too bad these books aren't bound Shambhala-fashion—they could use a bit of reshuffling...). A simple trick makes finding the story rather easy: numbering all the translations according to the Taishō text, where the story begins in vol. 47, p. 505, section a, line 5, and ends at line 9 (T 47.505a5–9). Once the beginning and end of each page has been marked in terms of the Taishō lines, all texts and translations dance to the same rhythm, and any story can be found in a snap.

To my knowledge, Watson's translation of the *Linjilu* is the third in English. The translator mentions in his twenty-page introduction (which also includes biographical and textual information) that he first read the text in the fifties while working part-time for Ruth Fuller Sasaki, the American foundress of a small research center in Kyoto. Intending to improve her late husband's English translation of the text, she organized a study group headed by two Japanese professors: Iriya Yoshitaka, an expert in Tang colloquial language, and Yanagida Seizan, an expert on Zen texts and history. Copious notes were taken and entire days spent on details, with the result that when Sasaki died in 1967 the work was still unfinished. Yet it bore fruit even before its publication in 1975: in 1972 Yanagida published his ground-breaking

Japanese translation, and the same year the great French sinologist Paul Demiéville—who had visited Sasaki and consulted with Yanagida and Iriya—produced the first translation in a Western language. The above-mentioned translation by Akizuki also appeared in 1972. Three years later Irmgard Schloegl, who relied heavily on Japanese work and even more (though not nearly enough) on Demiéville and draft versions of Sasaki, published the first English rendition.

Since then a steady stream of translations has appeared on the market, especially in Europe, the most recent being a German rewording of Schloegl by a gynaecologist-turned-Zen-master named Zernickow, alias Sōtetsu YŪZEN (1990). Dr Zernickow apparently reads neither Chinese nor Japanese but lays claim to being a Zen master “certified in writing independently by two Zen masters” as well as a Chinese and Tibetan abbot (pp. 145–46). In contrast to these intimidating credentials, Burton Watson can cite only several decades of experience translating Asian texts and a long list of highly acclaimed renditions of some of the deepest and most beautiful literature that China and Japan have to offer (unpretentious as he is, he would hardly mention that he is also a long-time practitioner of Zen).

There seem to be two distinct groups of Zen text translators in the West today: academics who have learned how to read the score (that is, the particular kind of Classical Chinese or Japanese in which Zen texts are written), who are more or less sympathetic to the subject matter, and who try to render it as best they can; and Zen teachers or practitioners who have little or no ability in these languages yet claim that their grasp of the essence of Zen allows them to translate. Question: If you wanted to listen to a Beethoven sonata, would you choose a trained pianist who knows how to read musical scores or someone who cannot do this but claims that his perfect musicality gives him the ability to play the sonata without ever having heard it? Luckily for both reviewer and readers, Watson is an accomplished—and quite musical—representative of the first group.¹

But why one more translation of the *Record of Linji*? Aren't there plenty of Zen texts that have yet to be translated? Yes, there are. But of the numerous scores that Mozart wrote there are several that get recorded over and over again: symphony no. 40, piano concerto no.

¹ Achim Seidl, a German who claims to translate Zen texts, boldly states in his preface to a hamburgerized version of Wilhelm GUNDERT's rendition of the *Blue Cliff Records* (1979) that Classical Chinese is a completely intuitive language lacking in subject-object distinctions and fixed laws of grammar: a kind of picture script that unfolds its meaning to those who seek it (SEIDL 1988, p. 15). I suspect that Seidl's book would probably read like an answer sheet to a Rorschach test if he hadn't based his translation on Gundert's (that's the beef).

25, piano sonata no. 13.... Why not, if they are masterpieces? The analogy can be pushed further: Mozart also wrote a kind of text—the score—that has been transmitted with variations and changes, just like a Zen text. If this text is to resonate in our hearts, someone needs to interpret it and give it his or her voice. The translator’s task is thus not unlike the musician’s: he or she has to breathe life into a dead score and attempt to convey its essence.

Let us now have a look at several important passages from the *Linjilu*, comparing some of the various renditions in an attempt to see how the complex problems of translation have been met. I should preface my comments by noting that, although Watson’s versions of these particular passages are not the ones I most prefer, overall the quality of his translation is excellent. His is a wonderful attempt to breathe life into the old text. Much more fluid than the sometimes stiff pioneer Sasaki translation, and much more accurate than Schloegl’s, it generally stays close to the Chinese text and occasionally shows well-founded confidence in going against Japanese scholarly opinion as well as earlier English renderings. There is no doubt that this book will far outlast its present binding—or, if I may express myself more unequivocally—that this book deserves both a classic hard cover and a very sturdy and pliable paper back. (I do feel, however, that consultation with Demiéville’s version [and possibly less reliance on Akizuki] could have brought some improvement both to text and notes.)

Let us start with three versions of a passage that I consider central to the *Record*. First I give the Chinese text; the first English rendering is Watson’s, the second Sasaki’s, and the third Schloegl’s. The original text is found in T 47.497b2–4:

荷流，祇如自古先德，皆有出人底。。
如山僧指示人處，祇要爾不受人惑。要用便用，更莫遲疑。

[Watson] Followers of the Way, the outstanding teachers from times past have all had ways of drawing people out. What I myself want to impress on you is that you mustn’t be led astray by others. If you want to use this thing, then use it and have no doubts or hesitations.

[Sasaki] Followers of the Way, the eminent predecessors we have had from old all had their own ways of saving men. As for me, what I want to point out to you is that you must not accept the deluding views of others. If you want to act, then act. Don’t hesitate.

[Schloegl] Followers of the Way, the old masters had ways of making men. Do not let yourselves be deluded by anyone; this is all I teach. If you want to make use of it (genuine insight), then use it right now without delay or doubt.

Well, did the old masters draw people out, save them, or make men of them? Did they, as BRUN (1986, p. 56) has it, know “the way of becoming something special”—or had they, as MÖRTH translates (1987, p. 96), “(the truth of) their own way to help people escape from the world of delusion”? DEMIÉVILLE (1972, p. 55) stays almost as close to the Chinese as Watson does, saying that they “had their ways of making people get out,” while IRIYA translates “they make them go out and beyond” (1989, p. 34). YANAGIDA’s modern Japanese translation adds some weight by using the singular: “They all had ways of drawing out the person” (1978, p. 226). He points out (p. 229) that this refers to bringing out the original strength in every person.

Although these variations may seem minor, they set the stage for what follows. After Linji tells his audience not to be misled, he makes a statement that is rendered far differently in the respective translations. What exactly does Watson mean by, “If you want to use this thing, then use it and have no doubts and hesitations”? Does “this thing” refer to “genuine insight,” as Schloegl says in parentheses? The Chinese text does not mention any object to the verb *yong* 用, so that Sasaki’s rendering seems closest to the original. YANAGIDA (p. 226)² adopts a similar line: “If you want to do it, do it without hesitation,” while Iriya specifies, “If you want to do it on your own....” CLEARY translates “Act when you need to, without further hesitation or doubt” (1989, p. 4).³ The pivotal question is what *yong* means in this context and whether it implies any object. MÖRTH chooses to charge it with additional meaning: “If you want to let (the True Self) work, so let it work” and notes that *yong* is here used both in the passive sense of “to let act” and the active one of “to act” (p. 96). Brun, as every so often when his translation makes sense, simply reproduces DEMIÉVILLE’s quite different approach to this phrase: “If you have any use (for this advice), make use of it; but don’t hesitate and doubt!” (1972, p. 55).

Just like a musical score, the Chinese text forms a kind of telegram whose meaning the interpreter must decipher: “Want to use then use, but not hesitate doubt.” And as in music, the melodic and dramatic

² The paperback edition of this pioneer colloquial Japanese translation of the *Linjilu* (and of various other Chan texts) is one of the rare Japanese books with as fragile a backbone as the volume reviewed here.

³ As usual, Cleary does not mention where the twenty fragments of Linji’s sayings that he translated come from. Can you imagine a musician who specializes in playing melodies written by others but who refuses to tell his listeners what he is playing? Any record review would blast both him and his record company. I simply see no valid reason to withhold source information from the readership—it is an integral part of the service that an interpreter must render to the audience and to the authors. Linji will not sue and the readers have no choice, but on behalf of both I protest this extremely bad and annoying habit.

context plays an important role. To express the matter in musical terms, what Linji has said so far is a prelude that introduces a major theme of the speech, emphasizing that all the master is about to say is aimed at helping the listener to find his or her own path. Just like many musical preludes, the master's introduction culminates in a kind of "take it or leave it" that forms the essence of a good lead-in. Thus, in my view, Demiéville's rendering, below, is most natural and truest to the setting and dramatic structure of the speech (the translation from the French is mine):

Adeptes de la Voie, tous nos anciens ont eu leurs routes pour faire sortir les hommes. Quant à moi, ce que je leur montre, c'est à ne se laisser abuser par personne. Si vous avez usage (de ce conseil), faites-en usage; mais plus de retard, plus de doute! (1972, p. 55)

(Adepts of the Way, all our predecessors had their ways of making people get out. As for me: what I show them aims at not letting oneself be misled by anyone. If you have some use [for this advice] then use it; but no more delay, no more doubt!)

The *Linjilu* then continues as follows (497b4–7; the fourth rendition is Cleary's, but I won't tell you where it can be found):

如今學者不得,病在甚處。病在不自信處。
爾若自信不及,即便忙忙地。徇一切境轉,被他萬境回換,不得自由。

[Watson] When students today fail to make progress, where's the fault? The fault lies in the fact that they don't have faith in themselves! If you don't have faith in yourself, then you'll be forever in a hurry trying to keep up with everything around you...and you can never move freely.

[Sasaki] Students today can't get anywhere: what ails you? Lack of faith in yourself is what ails you. If you lack faith in yourself, you'll keep on tumbling along, bewilderedly following after all kinds of circumstances...and never be yourself.

[Schoegl] But students nowadays do not succeed because they suffer from lack of self-reliance. Because of this lack, you run busily hither and thither, are driven around by circumstance....You cannot find deliverance thus.

[Cleary] People today can't do this—what is their affliction? Their affliction is in their lack of self-confidence. If you do not spontaneously trust yourself sufficiently, you will be in a frantic state, pursuing all sorts of objects...unable to be independent.

With this, the theme of "trust" or "faith" in oneself gets into full swing,

starting with an analysis of the “disease” that prevents students from “getting [it]” or “attaining.” This appears to be more than just a “fault,” as Watson puts it; the text has *bing* 病 (ailment, illness, disease), which the other translations at least allude to. The transition between “the students” and “you” is also a bit abrupt and could be smoothed by “[You] students”; I prefer the classic translation by Sasaki here. Cleary connects this phrase directly with what I called the prelude; thus his “people can’t do this” implies “acting when they need to”—which is off the mark if one accepts Demiéville’s reading of the lead-in. Mörth translates, “They themselves do not believe,” thus revealing an ignorance of the laws of position that play so important a role in Classical Chinese grammar.

Linji uses the two-character compound 自由 to refer to the goal of the quest he is talking of; this term probably originated in the parlance of Tang-period Zen masters. In a note to an earlier passage, YANAGIDA (1972, p. 72) explains that this term is characteristic of such early Chinese Zen texts as the *Lengjia shiziji*, the *Platform Sūtra*, and the *Record of Baizhang*. Watson apparently wanted to convey some notion of movement (“move freely”); DEMIÉVILLE points out that it means “following only oneself,” and is used in East Asia today to express the Western concept of “freedom” (1972, p. 57). If one uses the modern Western term, the Chinese text of this last and crucial phrase simply reads: “[You] do not attain freedom.” The various translators, obviously not satisfied with this, offer a range of interpretations: Sasaki’s “never be yourself”; Schloegl’s “you cannot find deliverance thus”; Cleary’s “unable to be independent”; Demiéville’s “you will not find independence”; Brun’s Demiéville-inspired “you will not stand on your own feet”; and Mörth’s “you do not reach freedom.” Overall, I prefer Cleary’s rendering of this line; both “object” for 境 and “independent” for 自由 are close to the Chinese text. (Okay, it’s on page 4 of Cleary’s Linji medley in *Zen Essence*.)

But sometimes something more than mere adequacy or closeness to the source text is needed. To return to our performing-arts analogy: It is not enough for a musician to play all the notes in the score, or for an actor to pronounce all the words of the script. Similarly, a good translation of ancient Chinese texts appears to involve more than a simple transfer of text into another language according to the rules of grammar and style. Some acting ability is needed, some abandon, some type of performing skill. Several years back I witnessed a Russian woman, a sixty-year old singer, transform herself into a twenty-five-year-old maiden at the first note of a love song written by Tchaikovsky. Every fiber of her body, every movement of her face,

every modulation of her voice expressed youthful longing and the promise of love; in one magical moment she brought a song to life and made life into a song. But how much life can our Linji translators breathe into a bunch of dead old Chinese characters? We will now look at the famous story that was so hard to locate and that Watson translates as follows (pp. 107–108; corresponding to T 47.505a5–9):

師栽松次，黃檗問，深山裏栽許。作什麼。師云，一與山門作境致，二與後人作標榜。菊了，將鑿頭打地三下。黃檗云，雖然如是，子已喫吾三十棒了也。師又以鑿頭打地三下，作噓噓聲。黃檗云，吾宗到汝，大興於世。

The Master was planting pines when Huang-po asked, “Why are you planting so many of them way off here in the mountains?”

The Master said, “First, to improve the appearance of the temple grounds. Second, to mark the road for people who come after.”

When he had finished speaking, he took up his grub hoe and hacked at the ground three times. Huang-po said, “That may be, but you’ve already tasted thirty blows of my stick!”

Again the Master took his hoe and hacked at the ground three times, blowing out his breath with a loud noise.

Huang-po said, “When my teaching line passes along to you, it will prosper greatly in the world.”

Although there is some variation in the renderings of this episode (such as Schloegl’s “I’ll give you thirty blows of my stick”), they all tell essentially the same story. Why does the story remain somehow lifeless? What, for example, is the significance of Linji’s hacking three times? This is a good example of the necessity of footnotes, but only Demiéville and Yanagida offer anything of value here. The episode as a whole appears to deal with the theme of Zen education (“marking the road for people”), so that Linji’s hacking the ground three times would allude to his own “education” at the hands of Huangbo. DEMIÉVILLE (1972, p. 206) points to this in his note, where he refers to the three beatings that Linji had earlier suffered at the hands of Huangbo—beatings that ultimately drove him on to his breakthrough; Demiéville also notes the link between this story and another where Huangbo comments that Linji will surely become “a fine big tree that will provide cool shade for the people of the world.” In a case such as this, a footnote can bring life to a text that would otherwise remain more enigmatic than necessary. A singer or actor can express such an allusion by a voice modulation, facial expression, or gesture, but the

translator must often take refuge in square-bracketed text or footnotes.⁴

But regardless of the overall meaning of this episode, why did Zen Master Huangbo praise his disciple Linji so highly after Linji “hacked at the ground three times, blowing out his breath with a loud noise”? Since Linji had already hacked the ground three times before, we must assume that the loud breathing carries some pivotal significance. After listing the available translations of this phrase, I arranged them in three categories. In terms of acting or music performance, these would be:

1. splendid performances that bring the text to life and catch the viewer's or listener's heart;
2. performances that reproduce the text or score but somehow lack the power to convince;
3. performances that deliver the text correctly but leave you cold.

In my view, only YANAGIDA's translation belongs to the first category:

Again, the master struck the ground three times with his hoe, uttering: “Heave-ho!” (1972, p. 240)

Yanagida's “*yoisho, yoisho,*” (which sounds less clumsy than my “heave-ho”) is the sound one utters when making a great effort, which seems to be the point here—Linji, perhaps remembering Huangbo's three blows, is conveying his determination to keep digging away, planting evergreens and thus marking the road for those who will tread this path. No wonder Huangbo praised him so highly.

In the second category I would put the renderings by Demiéville, Chang Chung-yuan, and Iriya:

Again, the master struck the ground three times with his hoe, saying “*hio-hio.*” (DEMIÉVILLE 1972, p. 212)

Notes: *Struck the ground three times: he digs in order to plant the tree “that will [by its shadow] bring freshness [to the people of the entire world]” [Demiéville refers to section 66b of his translation];

**Hio-hio* (Tang pronunciation): “to exhale air with effort.”

⁴ For publishers suffering from phootmotophobia: this is the most convenient kind of note. Footnotes interfere only minimally with the main text (a small superscript number) but are a very convenient source of information for those who choose to read them. Those who don't are not bothered by their presence. Everybody is tired of looking for notes at the end of a book and using pens and post-it notes and dog-ears as markers. Footnotes look good on a page. They don't look academic, they intimidate no one, and book buyers love them. Watson's translation, by the way, features notes at the end of each section; this is not overly inconvenient since Akizuki's sections tend to be rather short.

Thereupon Lin-chi struck the ground three times with his hoe again, and puffed, “*Hsu! Hsu!*” (CHANG 1971, p. 119)

Again, the master struck the ground three times with his hoe, sighing deeply: “*Hyū!*” (IRIYA 1989, p. 187)

Note: To produce a sharp sound while exhaling protractedly from the back of one’s throat.

These three translations make an attempt at enacting this scene rather than just reciting it. Demiéville comes closest to Yanagida, but only by way of a note that gains significance only if one has seen Yanagida’s interpretation. Footnotes can be of enormous help, but they lack simultaneity and are in that sense comparable to a gesture that follows a statement instead of accompanying it. In the other two translations, the “gesture” remains enigmatic: what will the reader associate with Chang’s “*Hsu! Hsu!*” or with Iriya’s “*Hyū!*”? Some kind of hiss? A ghastly cry of pain? A loud sigh? At any rate, none of these renderings quite succeed in making Huangbo’s reaction intelligible.

The rest of the translations (including some from the Linji sections of Chan compendia) stay more or less in the descriptive mode and do not enact the text:

Lin-chi again punched the ground thrice, and then heaved a long sigh. (WU 1975, p. 196)

Again, the master struck the ground three times with his hoe, sighing deeply. (SCHLOEGL 1972, p. 80)

Again, Rinzai struck the ground three times with his hoe and sighed deeply. (YÜGEN 1990, p. 121)

I Hsuan again struck the ground thrice and gave a sigh. (LU 1961, pp. 88–89)

Again Lin-chi thumped the ground with his mattock three times and breathed out a great breath. (SASAKI 1975, p. 52)

Again, the master struck his hoe three times into the ground. During this he exhaled audibly.” (BRUN 1986, p. 15)

Hearing these responses, Huangbo would probably also have sighed deeply and left....

In spite of the growing number of translations, the *Record of Linji* is still little explored. While there are dozens of dissertations using tons of paper on, say, Heidegger, there are to my knowledge no Western monographs or dissertations devoted to Linji. We are still trying to understand at a very basic level what Linji said, and Watson’s fine rendering is a most welcome aid for this task. But I am also looking forward to the next interpretation, and one more, and another one—

knowing full well that only the reader can be the true creator of Linji's text. For this task, the many evergreens he planted may serve as signposts. For example:

Here in this lump of red flesh there is a True Man with no rank. Constantly he goes in and out the gates of your face. If there are any of you who don't know this for a fact, then look! Look! (WATSON, p. 13)

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