

# H-Net Reviews

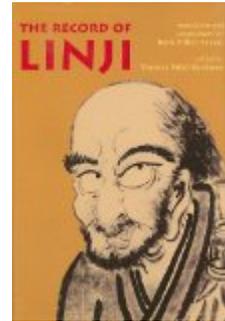
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Thomas Yūhō Kirchner, ed. *The Record of Linji*. Translated and with commentary by Ruth Fuller Sasaki. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009. xxxii + 485 pp. \$53.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8248-2821-9; No price listed (paper), ISBN 978-0-8248-3319-0.

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## Savoring the Linji Record

The long-awaited publication of this book is the belated culmination of an epoch-making research program. Beginning in 1954 and extending for over a dozen years until her death in October 1967, Ruth Fuller Sasaki (1892–1967) engaged a small group of exceptionally gifted scholars in the detailed study and annotated English translation of the recorded sayings of Linji Yixuan 臨□義玄 (d. 866), arguably the single most important—and certainly the single most captivating—text of the Chinese Chan (Zen) tradition. The English translation appeared, but with only minimal annotation, in 1975; the current volume contains an updated version of the translation, with the historical introduction and in-depth annotation planned for but not included in the original volume.

Indeed, it would be impossible to exaggerate the importance of the collaborative project leading to the initial preparation of this book, since two of its major participants, IRIYA Yoshitaka 入矢義高 (1910–98) and YANAGIDA Seizan 柳田聖山 (1922–2006), went on to transform the field through their seminars and Japanese publications, and since the English translation of the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* by another leading member of the group, Philip Yampolsky (1920–96), was such an important contribution to the English literature. Knowledgeable readers will also be impressed to note that the translator extraordinaire Burton Watson, the delightfully creative poet Gary Snyder, and the important early Zen teacher Walter Nowick were also involved in this project.

To be sure, it is regrettable that this richly annotated volume, the centerpiece of Ruth Fuller Sasaki's intrepid team of scholars, has only now seen the light of day, when so many of its primary contributors have passed away. Nevertheless, however poignant its appearance at this late date, it will nevertheless have a very substantial impact on the field. This is because *The Record of Linji* makes available to English readers a substantial portion of the philological researches of Iriya and Yanagida, which revolutionized the study of Chinese Chan in Japan in the last several decades. That is, Iriya, a specialist in Chinese literature with interests in the historical evolution of the vernacular language, first noticed in the 1950s that traditional Japanese Zen readings of Chinese Chan texts were ignorant of Chinese colloquial expressions. Yanagida, a specialist in Chan history and literature, produced the earliest translations of Chan texts into ordinary modern Japanese—and not the hoary transpositions into literary Japanese done up until then. Many, perhaps all, of the annotations presented in *The Record of Linji* have been available for decades in Japanese reference works and translations. Now they are made available, for the first time and in exquisitely readable form, for English readers.

That we have this book in our hands at all is to the infinite credit of Thomas Yūhō 釈雄峯 Kirchner, who with this contribution shows himself to be a significant authority in the academic study of Chinese Chan. Kirchner's résumé does not follow the standard academic pat-

tern of university study and professional appointments, but rather began with religious practice that has matured into a combination of deep empathy with and broad understanding of East Asian Buddhism. (This is a pattern much more commonly found among western participants in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition than those involved in East Asian Buddhism, I have recently realized—an intriguing difference that deserves further consideration by scholars of Buddhism in the contemporary world.) A long-time copyeditor at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, Kirchner has produced a volume that is impeccably well crafted, which reads smoothly and with elegance in every turn of phrase, and which provides the English reader with access to a foundational generation of scholarship on Chinese Chan.

It is inevitable that, in dealing with a collaborative work that evolved over the course of several decades, Kirchner had to make some decisions about how to present the text. His general policy has been to produce the work as Sasaki and her confederates envisioned it, with only minor emendations when the participants themselves had changed their readings of specific terms. Indeed, the overall organization of the book and its layout follow Sasaki's wishes as much as possible. In addition to a foreword by YAMADA Mumon Roshi 山田無文老師 (1900–88) and preface to the 1975 edition by FURUTA Kazuhiro 古田和弘 (1935–), Kirchner has added an eighteen-page “Editor’s Prologue” describing Sasaki’s life, the collaborative project she initiated, and the subsequent history leading to the volume as we now have it. To the very nicely crafted account of Ruth Fuller Sasaki’s life and the overall contour of her research project, I would add only the following: On a couple of occasions Professor Yanagida (with whom I studied during the years 1973–75, following an introduction by Professor Yampolsky) bemoaned to me the project’s sudden collapse at Sasaki’s death, in spite of her frequent assertions that there were sufficient funds to keep it going for some time. That the fruits of their labor were effectively locked away for so many years (by some infernal combination of personal animosities and temple politics I was never able to decipher, and which is carefully avoided in the present volume) was a matter of considerable pain to both Professors Iriya and Yanagida, as they mentioned to me repeatedly over the years.

Following this is the English translation, presented initially without notes (pp. 3–55); the original historical introduction to the text by Yanagida, translated by Kirchner (pp. 59–115); the Chinese text and English translation, with commentary (pp. 117–346); the Chinese text

by itself (pp. 349–64); an annotated bibliography of Chinese texts relevant to the *The Record of Linji* (pp. 365–433) and bibliography of secondary sources (pp. 433–36); a table of names giving Chinese characters, Chinese pronunciations in both Wade-Giles and Pinyin transcription, and Japanese pronunciations (pp. 437–50); and an index to the entire book (pp. 451–85).

Kirchner’s translation of Yanagida’s historical introduction to the text is masterful, not only in his articulate English rendition but his seemingly effortless presentation of its very complicated contents. Here the English reader will find a wealth of information about the man Linji Yixuan and the text associated with him—but even so it is an interpretation frozen in time, so to speak, and presented without any updating to incorporate more recent scholarly discoveries and interpretations. The approach taken was founded in part on Yanagida’s own reluctance to rewrite the piece, an attitude I find totally in keeping with the author’s personal style. He would have valued his original contribution not only as a potential reference for students of the *Linji lu*, but also as an artifact from a moment now past. In addition, when Kirchner was able to approach him about possible changes to the historical introduction, Yanagida was in a phase of his life devoted primarily to consolidating the contributions of his long career, during which he would have been little inclined to rewrite the past.

The result, though, is that readers will find a great deal of extremely useful information in Yanagida’s introduction, but not quite the final word on the subject. Fortunately, Albert Welter’s recent volume, *The Linji Lu and the Creation of Chan Orthodoxy: The Development of Chan’s Records of Sayings Literature* (2008), is there to provide many of the necessary answers.

I have very few quibbles about the Sasaki/Kirchner volume. Given his eminence in the world of Japanese Zen, it is not surprising that the book begins with a foreword by Yamada Roshi. He was by all accounts a most charismatic individual, but his comments begin with dreary stereotypes about the supposed differences of Indian and Chinese Buddhism, which are strikingly out of place in a work of such sensitive and sophisticated scholarship.

Once again, the University of Hawai’i Press has produced a beautiful volume, with a layout allowing the reader to explore either the Chinese original or the English translation individually, without annotation, or the Chinese text and accompanying translation and annotation. I did not notice any typographical errors (although

the name Yokochō Enichi listed on p. xxvii should be read Ōchō Enichi). Perhaps it is a function of my aging eyes, but I rather wish the Chinese and Japanese characters had been just a bit darker throughout—the typesetting is beautiful, but just a bit wispy. On the other hand, the extensive annotated bibliography of relevant primary texts (pp. 365–433) and the table of personal names with Pinyin, Wade-Giles, and Japanese transcription, along with the Chinese characters (pp. 437–50) are wonderful resources from which many readers are sure to benefit.

But forget the quibbles, and buy the book. Better yet, buy and read and study the book, immersing yourself into a totally remarkable religious and linguistic universe. As you do so, and as you read any of the modern works on Zen so deeply indebted to the legacy of this remarkable project, give thanks and transfer any merit deriving from your study to the memory of Sasaki, Iriya, Yampolsky, and Yanagida.

Gasshō.

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