H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Albert Welter. *The Linji lu and the Creation of Chan Orthodoxy: The Development of Chan's Records of Sayings Literature.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. xii + 236 pp. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-532957-5.

Reviewed by Stuart Young (St. Lawrence University)
Published on H-Buddhism (March, 2009)
Commissioned by Dan Lusthaus

Linji Lu and Chinese Orthodoxy

Albert Welter's new monograph, *The* Linji lu *and the Creation of Chan Orthodoxy*, is a welcome addition to the growing body of scholarship on Chinese Chan Buddhism during the Song dynasty (960-1279). Continuing along the lines of Welter's earlier work on the formation of Chan identity through the so-called lamp-record (*denglu* 燈錄) genealogies (*Monks, Rulers and Literati: The Political Ascendancy of Chan Buddhism* [2006]), the present book situates Song-era "records of sayings" (*yulu* 語錄) and other writings pertaining to Linji Yixuan 臨濟義玄 (d. 866) within the context of Song religious, cultural, political, and literary movements. Linji was regarded as the preeminent patriarch of the leading branch of Chan Buddhism during the Song, as members of the lineage bearing his name headed influential state-sponsored monasteries and authored works commissioned by imperial edict. From that time, Linji himself became seen as the primary exemplar of the iconoclastic, antinomian spirit for which Chan and Zen Buddhism have since become so well known. But Chan was not always envisaged in this way; Linji was not always the master of beatings, beratings, and vulgar sayings; and the Linji faction did not always hold sway over all Chinese Buddhism. In *The* Linji lu *and the Creation of Chan Orthodoxy*, Welter examines how all of this came about. Along the way, he makes at least two important contributions to the field of East Asian Buddhist studies: he clearly documents the major sources and figures involved in the Linji faction's assumption of orthodoxy and construction of its model patriarch, and he provides a compelling analysis of how the "records of sayings" genre grew from earlier modes of Chan writing into the very *summum bonum* of enlightened Chan discourse across factional bounds.

Chapter 1, "Defining Orthodoxy in the Chan/Zen Traditions," examines the formulation of Chinese Chan and Japanese Zen orthodoxies, from the famous "Northern/Southern School" debates of the Tang through the Song Linji rise to prominence and the modern construction of Rinzai orthodoxy in Japan and the West. However, lest one question the utility in the East Asian context of this Western, Christian notion of "orthodoxy"–with its typically Protestant valorization of faith over works, "doxa" over "praxis"–Welter briefly outlines the Christian construction of the concept from the Middle Ages through the Reformation, and argues that its chief defining characteristics are equally applicable to the case of Chan/Zen. In fact, it is precisely those central traits of Christian formulations of orthodoxy–the battle over the determinant *criteria* of truth as much as specific doctrines, as well as the starkly political nature of it all–that predominated in the legitimization of various Chan/Zen traditions. Welter sets out to illustrate this process throughout Chan/Zen history, before laying out the major trends, texts, and players involved in the Song dynasty establishment of Linji orthodoxy.

Beginning closest to home, Welter discusses the modern rise to prominence of the Japanese Rinzai sect. Here he follows well-tread ground, largely recapitulating the earlier work of Robert Sharf and Bernard Faure on D. T. Suzuki's Rinzai reformulation as a response to Western imperialism and threats to Japanese cultural autonomy. As Suzuki's efforts in this regard are well known, Welter's aim is merely to reemphasize the role played by political and cultural forces in the determination of Chan/Zen orthodoxies. As such, although Suzuki's cultural context indeed had its unique characteristics, the fact that his reformulation of Zen orthodoxy was driven by sociopolitical exigencies is anything but unique. Welter then continues this line of analysis by rehearsing the account of the "first 'power struggle' in recorded Chan history"–the eighth-century battle between Shenhui 神會 (668-760) and Puji 普寂 (651-739) over the right to succession in the Chan patriarchal line (p. 26). Here Welter argues that because "Chan's success at this critical

juncture [was] determined more by the external circumstances of official acceptance" than by internal doctrinal debates, this factional battle determined one key criterion for all subsequent disputes over Chan orthodoxy: "who you knew (i.e., who supported you) was as important (more important?) than what you knew (i.e., your doctrinal positions)" (pp. 25, 26).

Such was likewise the case in the next instance of Chan debates over orthodoxy that Welter examines–the rise to prominence of the Linji tradition in the early Song dynasty. Welter begins by discussing two locally powerful Chan groups in the southern Tang 南唐 and Wuyue 吳越 regions, who first attempted to unify a Chan tradition that had become fragmented over the preceding centuries. The Wuyue Fayan faction 法眼宗 was particularly influential in early Song formulations of Chan orthodoxy, and its members promoted Chan as an ecumenical tradition that was essentially compatible with the so-called doctrinal teachings of Tiantai 天台 and other schools. This Fayan faction was the first to obtain official recognition at the Song court, which it did under the auspices of the Buddhist scholar-official Zanning 贊寧 (919-1001).

After Zanning's death members of the resurgent Linji line began to make inroads in establishing their own Chan vision as official orthodoxy. This we see first in the *Jingde Chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄 (Jingde Era Record of the Transmission of the Lamp), compiled by Fayan follower Daoyuan 道原 (n.d.) in 1004 but edited under the supervision of court literatus Yang Yi 楊億 (974-1020), who was sympathetic to the Linji interpretation of Chan as separate from and superior to all other Buddhist teachings. The resultant *Chuandeng lu* "represents a concession by Fayan lineage representatives at the Song court toward the formation of Chan as an independent movement"–a concession that paved the way for the eventual installment of Linji Chan as official state orthodoxy (p. 38). The vehicle for this installment was the *Tiansheng Guangdeng lu* 天聖廣燈錄 (Tiansheng Era Expanded Lamp Record), compiled by the official Li Zunxu 李遵勗 (988-1038) in order to document the achievements of Linji master Shoushan Shengnian 首山省念 (926-93) and his disciples. The *Guangdeng lu* upheld Linji himself as a major Chan patriarch, disputed *Chuandeng lu* claims of Fayan supremacy, and established the motto of "a special transmission outside the teaching" as a cardinal Chan principle. As such, and as an imperially sponsored compilation, the *Guangdeng lu* solidified Linji institutional and ideological priorities and established this line as official Chan orthodoxy.

Chapter 2, "Tracing the Elusive *Yulu*: The Origins of Chan's Records of Sayings," furthers Welter's central aims of elucidating the cultural and political forces at play in Chan orthodoxies, highlighting the key roles played by literati officials in the development of the tradition, and unseating normative Rinzai interpretations of premodern Chan. This chapter accomplishes these aims by examining the genre of *yulu* and related literary forms both within and beyond the Chan tradition. Here Welter sets forth his central thesis that *yulu* emerged not as Tang-era recordings of Chan masters' oral sermons, but rather in the writings of Song court literati who were trying to define a popular new brand of Chan literature. Further, the rise of *yulu* as a distinctively Chan genre probably had little to do with the famed Mazu Daoyi 馬祖道一 (709-88) and his lineage, despite claims to the contrary by upholders of modern Rinzai orthodoxy.

Welter begins this chapter by outlining modern scholarly attempts to define *yulu*. He focuses on the influential analyses of Ishii Shūdō 石井修道 and Yanagida Seizan 柳田聖山, who both advocate all-inclusive definitions that incorporate most kinds of Chan literature under the *yulu* umbrella. In Welter's estimation, such broad definitions elide the specific historical circumstances from which *yulu* proper emerged and they overlook the novelty and distinctiveness that attracted attention to *yulu* in the first place. Welter himself, therefore, opts for a far narrower definition: *yulu* means "the recorded sermons (*shangtang* [上堂]), conversations, anecdotes, and poetic utterances of a specific master"; it is "Chan's defining literary form," so it should be clearly distinguished from other genres such as *denglu* or *gong'an* 公案 (public cases), even as it often constitutes their foundation (p. 49).

Welter readily acknowledges that many classic *denglu* texts were compiled on the basis of *yulu*-style sources, and he argues that the first such collections were the mid-tenth-century *Zutang ji* 祖堂集 (Patriarch's Hall Anthology) and *Jingde Chuandeng lu*. These texts are not to be counted as *yulu* proper–since they were not labeled as such and they include disparate materials–but they were based largely on hitherto privately circulating documents of *yulu* ilk. As such, Welter argues that the impulse to edit and publish *yulu*-style materials first arose at the beginning of the Song dynasty, and the stimulus for this activity was provided by members of the Fayan lineage. Representatives of this and affiliated lines were responsible for the *Zutang ji* and *Chuandeng lu*, as well as the *Zongjing lu* 宗鏡錄 (Records of the Source-Mirror), which likewise draws upon *yulu*-style sources.[1] The first actual *yulu* of this period, then, was the *Fenyang*

Wude Chanshi yulu 汾陽無德禪師語錄 of 1004, which includes a preface by Yang Yi that indicates state involvement in defining the literature of this new Chan trend. Finally, given that the impetus for the formulation of *yulu* proper was provided by the Fayan faction, Welter argues that we should reconsider the normative Rinzai interpretation promoted by Yanagida and others, according to which *yulu* originated as "books of sayings" (*yuben* 語本) compiled in lineages descended from Mazu.

The first use of the term *yulu* to indicate the kind of "live" discourse, in the master's own words, with which the genre would come to be associated, actually occurs within a non-Chan text–Zanning's *Song Gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 (Song Biographies of Eminent Monks) of 988. According to Welter, this indicates that "the term *yulu* was not originally used by Chan monks themselves to refer to prominent masters' teachings but was used by 'outsiders' to define a burgeoning trend" (p. 67). Because Zanning was highly placed in the Song court and compiled his works by imperial order, it is likely that these "outsiders" were court literati–again demonstrating the profound influence of the state in defining Chan orthodoxy. And finally, since Zanning was himself sympathetic to Fayan Chan ideals of catholicity over and against the Linji drive toward Chan independence, this further shows that the Mazu/Linji line should not be seen as the originator of this literary style that would come to represent the apex of enlightened Chan discourse.

Having thus delineated the historical and literary context for the establishment of Linji orthodoxy and the formalization of the *yulu* genre, Welter then turns in chapter 3 to Chan writings concerning Linji himself. Here Welter focuses on early Song hagiographical sources that preceded the full-blown accounts of Linji's life and teachings in the *Tiansheng Guangdeng lu* (1029) and *Linji yulu* (1120). These earlier sources include especially the *Zutang ji* of 952, which contains the oldest extant fragments of Linji's teachings, and the *Jingde Chuandeng lu*, in which Linji first emerges as an important Chan figure. In examining how the depictions of Linji evolved through these and contemporary collections, Welter argues that we can observe a clear attempt "to transform Linji into a new kind of dynamic patriarch," one with a "vigorous spirit" who championed "a revolutionary understanding of Buddhism" (p. 89). Further, while the orthodox master-disciple lineage of Mazu, Baizhang Huaihai 百丈懷海 (749-814), Huangbo Xiyun 黃蘗希運 (d. ca. 850), and Linji was standardized around the time of the *Tiansheng Guangdeng lu*, Welter argues that in earlier sources Linji's Dharma lineage was a matter of some dispute, and was not the foregone conclusion that it would come to be from the standpoint of orthodox Linji/Rinzai posterity.

Welter here emphasizes that the *Linji lu* and its textual sources are more the story of the Song Chan movement than they are of Linji himself, as the sayings and teachings attributed to him "evolved through the filter of collective memory and imagination" (p. 83). As such, Welter's aim in this chapter (as throughout the book) is to examine the filter itself–the motives underlying the compilation of early Song texts depicting Linji's activities–rather than looking through these sources to a supposed originary reality of the master's own words and deeds. With this central aim explicated, Welter then examines the Linji ideal of the "true man with no-rank" (*wuwei zhenren* 無位真人), which the early Song sources are consistent in regarding as central to Linji's teachings. However, Welter argues, the shift from Linji's description of this ideal as an "impure thing" in the *Zutang ji*, to a "dried lump of shit" in the *Chuandeng lu*, signals (together with other changes) a drive to sharpen Linji's antinomian imagery. Such increasingly iconoclastic depictions then tie in with the similarly strengthened push to solidify Linji's place in the master-disciple lineage that Linji proponents were attempting to naturalize: that of Mazu, Baizhang, Huangbo, and Linji. While all of the sources discussed in this chapter are somewhat ambiguous about the master responsible for Linji's enlightenment–whether precipitated by Huangbo or the little-known Gaoan Dayu 高安大愚 (n.d.)–later sources, such as the *Tiansheng Guangdeng lu*, attempt to bolster Linji's connection with Huangbo over and against Dayu.

However, by the time Linji's reinvention had culminated in the formation of the *Linji yulu* 臨濟語錄, questions concerning Linji's lineal affiliation, and of Linji factional orthodoxy more broadly, had long been decided. As such, Yuanjue Zongyan 圓覺宗演 (ca. 1074-1146), the compiler of this first full-blown *yulu* devoted to Linji, had other priorities in mind. Welter's task in chapter 4, "Giving Form to the Formless: The Formation of the *Linji lu*," is to elucidate these priorities, as gleaned from a comparison between this text and its sources in the *Tiansheng Guangdeng lu* and the *Sijia yulu* 四家語錄 (Records of Sayings of the Four Masters). The *Guandeng lu*, as noted above, was the first text to establish Linji as a major Chan patriarch in direct descent from Mazu, and it includes the earliest comprehensive account of Linji's teachings. The *Sijia yulu*, attributed to Huanglong Huinan 黃龍慧南 (1002-69) but compiled in 1085, basically excerpts from the *Guangdeng lu* its sections on the "four masters," Mazu, Baizhang, Huangbo, and Linji.

Emphasizing once more that we should not read these sources as transparent accounts of the teachings and activities of Linji himself, but rather as representing the "collective Chan consciousness" through which the figure of Linji was constructed, Welter reiterates the key features of the *Guangdeng lu* as regards its promotion of Linji (p. 109). These features include especially its drive to affirm the orthodox Linji lineage over and against the *Jingde Chuandeng lu*, which was compiled some twenty-five years prior when the Fayan line still held sway. The *Guangdeng lu* does this in part by beginning its Linji account with tales of his encounters with Huangbo, thus solidifying this master-disciple relationship while eliding Linji's earlier Dayu connections. The *Sijia yulu* then makes essentially the same move–working primarily to bolster the Mazu > Baizhang > Huangbo > Linji line against other possibilities, at a time when Chan orthodoxy was still contested territory and *yulu* of different "four-master" lines were popping up all over the place. However, different priorities are evident in the revised structure of the *Linji lu*. Yuanjue mostly copies the sections on Linji from the *Guangdeng lu* and *Sijia yulu*, but he rearranges their contents to promote the central aims of the twelfth-century Linji faction, which revolved around securing state patronage. According to Welter, the most important change in Yuanjue's arrangement is his placement of Linji's encounters with Huangbo at the conclusion of the text, rather than at the beginning as they had been in the *Guangdeng lu* and *Sijia yulu*. Yuanjue does this because by his time the master-disciple relationship between Linji and Huangbo had long been established. Instead, Yuanjue opens the *Linji lu* with Linji's Dharma Hall Sermons, emphasizing that they were preached at the behest of various important officials. Because of this new arrangement, Welter argues that Yuanjue designed the *Linji lu* to highlight the appeal of Linji Chan to the Song court literati, and secure continuing state patronage of the Linji faction as official Chan orthodoxy.

In chapter 5, "Strange Brew: The Fictional Background to *Yulu* Encounter Dialogues," Welter returns to the big picture of *yulu* formation as gleaned from the specific case of the *Linji lu*. Here Welter focuses on the questions of how the *yulu* genre developed historically, and why *yulu* took its eventual shape as "encounter dialogue" in the mode of "historical fiction" (p. 147). As for the "how" question, Welter posits a four-stage development of *yulu* from earlier writings called "oral teachings" (*yanjiao* 言教), which in some cases were actual transcripts of Tang masters' public sermons. The first stage of this development was the recording of the masters' lectures, delivered in traditional format in formal Dharma Hall settings (i.e., *shangtang*), and with no question-and-answer component. The records of these monologues were then broken up and interspersed with ostensibly imagined inquiries from audience members, for which later sections of the masters' original sermons were reorganized as rejoinders. In the third stage of this process, these newly constructed master-disciple dialogues would be refined, recast in more vivid and rambunctious terms–the striking portrait of the radical Chan master shooting straight from the hip. Finally, Welter describes the fourth stage as either the formation of the *yulu* proper or the "commentarial tradition that episodes involving illustrious Chan masters like Linji inspired" (pp. 161, 137).

With this hypothesis in hand for how *yulu* developed from traditional sermons into antinomian encounter dialogues, Welter next discusses *why* this transformation might have occurred. Here he ties *yulu* formation to a number of interrelated factors, including the contemporaneous rise of the Chan ideal of a "special transmission outside the teaching," and the "fictional climate" that resulted from the late-Tang emergence of *chuanqi* 傳奇 (transmission of the marvelous) literature (p. 154). Firstly, with Chan being hailed from the tenth century as a "special transmission" that transcended traditional forms of Buddhist learning and instruction, the great Chan master could no longer sermonize in the standard format–with books and notes and the weight of age-old commentarial tradition on hand. Instead, his enlightened discourse had to be immediate, and unmediated–thus the radical, iconoclastic spontaneity of the encounter dialogues. Further, Welter argues that the *yulu* genre is analogous to contemporary *chuanqi* writings, which were fictional pieces made to look like actual historical records. These writings stimulated the development of a literary tradition that "might be termed 'believable fiction,' fantasy parading as history" (p. 143). Following this trend, *yulu* compilers likewise excerpted the contents and applied the structures of actual historical documents to create a new brand of historical fiction that could serve a variety of contemporary agendas.

As stated at the outset, such hypotheses about the formation of the *yulu* genre in the early Song dynasty are among the most important contributions that Welter makes in this book. The connections that he draws between the rise of *yulu* and the machinations of Song court literati, the fortunes of the Fayan and Linji lineages, and such earlier Chan writings as *yanjiao* and *denglu* are well documented and often quite compelling. At the same time, his understanding of the *yulu* genre as a kind of "historical fiction" following the model of late-Tang

chuanqi is somewhat problematic. That is, whether or not *chuanqi* writings were self-consciously composed as fiction (given that, as Welter acknowledgeson page 144, their authors never admitted as much), I see no reason to assume that Chan authors likewise saw themselves as weaving fantasy in the guise of fact. Welter often asserts that *yulu* were compiled to serve the agendas of Song-era ideologues; why could these agendas not have included the transmission of what was understood to be historical fact? How do we know that Yuanjue did not believe every detail of his *Linji lu*, why should we assume that in his heart he *knew* it was mostly made up, and why could *yulu* compilers not think that the actual words and deeds of their revered Tang predecessors both justified and corresponded perfectly well with the ambitions of their Song-era factions?

Similarly, another potential quibble with this book arises from one of its greatest strengths: Welter's detailed documentation of the formation of the *Linji lu* and the Song Linji faction's rise to orthodoxy. In fact, the problem is not so much with his documentation, which is indeed quite convincing and nicely fills in our picture of Song dynasty Chan Buddhism. The problem arises with Welter's repeated rhetoric to the effect that there is no Tang grounding in these Song-period sources and Song Buddhists invented much of what we thought we knew about Tang Chan. While all of this is actually documented in Linji's case for the first time–again, a major contribution of Welter's work–the arguments driving the details will probably strike many readers as directed at straw men. Perhaps for an audience that has read only premodern Chan texts in translation, or Rinzai sectarian scholarship, Welter's claims here will appear striking and timely. Specialists in East Asian Buddhism, however, will likely find the rhetoric outdated.

In any event, *The* Linji lu *and the Creation of Chan Orthodoxy* clearly succeeds in what it sets out to do: it accounts for the rise of Linji Chan and the *yulu* genre in the context of Song dynasty Buddhism, culture, and politics. I would recommend this book to any reader, specialist or nonspecialist, who appreciates fine-grained and closely documented historical analysis of the premodern Buddhist institution.

Note

[1]. Cf. James Benn's translation of this title: *Record of the Principle That Mirrors* [*the Ten Thousand Dharmas*] (James Benn, *Burning for the Buddha: Self-Immolation in Chinese Buddhism* [Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007], 110).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:
http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl.

Citation: Stuart Young. Review of Welter, Albert, *The Linji lu and the Creation of Chan Orthodoxy: The Development of Chan's Records of Sayings Literature.* H-Buddhism, H-Net Reviews. March, 2009.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=23405

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.