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FEATURE REVIEW

A Critical Survey of Works on Zen since Yampolsky

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Introduction: 1967—A Very Good Year

The year 1967 was indeed a very good year in the development of Zen Buddhist studies on both sides of the Pacific, as evidenced by the publication of two monumental works that forever changed the course of scholarly approaches to the history of Zen. In Japan, Yanagida Seizan issued what has remained the single most important book on the formation of early Zen writings in China, cast in a social-historical context, *Shoki Zenshū shisho no kenkyū* (Study of the historical writings of the early Chan school). This work lifted studies by Japanese scholars out of the traditional sectarian approach to Zen scholarship and into the arena of contemporary critical theoretical studies by challenging many of the myths and fabrications as well as highlighting the sheer creativity and inventiveness that characterized the self-definitions of the early Zen school.

Meanwhile, in America, Philip Yampolsky, who worked with Yanagida on translation projects—and, along with his Japanese colleague as well as Masatoshi Nagatomi and Stanley Weinstein, among others, helped train a generation of Western scholars—produced a translation with a substantial historical introduction and handy bilingual critical edition of one of the main Zen texts, the *Platform Sutra* by sixth patriarch Hui-neng. While by no means the first solid Western piece of academic work on Zen in an era still dominated by the popular writings of D. T. Suzuki, Alan Watts, and Eugen Herrigel, as well as European scholarship by Demiéville, Gernet, and Zürcher, Yampolsky set a new standard for what a translation and book-length study in the field should accomplish. His work has for years been widely read and consulted by specialists and nonspecialists alike. It was in 1967 that the page was turned, and mature Zen Buddhist studies was born.

It is not surprising to find that both books, while still well distributed, have been criticized for an out-of-date or old-fashioned approach, especially for unintentionally supporting a romantic, idealized view of Zen masters and ideology that the historical method they represented was supposed to be critiquing and undermining. Nevertheless, their impact will remain strong and continue to cast long shadows over other recent and future publications that struggle to capture the spirit of innovation and evoke the originality and authority of Yampolsky and Yanagida. After forty years of absorbing the impact of these works, now is a good time to assess what has been accomplished in the ensuing decades in addition to what has not yet developed or

failed to develop; that is, the strengths and weaknesses, achievements, and lacunae in the field of Zen studies.

What follows consists of two interconnected parts: a short essay that sums up critically the state of the field and what the student can expect to find available, and a selected bibliography upon which it is based. The bibliography in the second part is a selected list of the major works on Zen in the West, primarily by American scholars since the time of the seminal publications cited above. Several guidelines were followed in the selection process. First, the list is intended to be representative of more advanced scholarship and thus limited in scope rather than comprehensive or exhaustive. My apologies go in advance to scholars and their works that may have been inadvertently left out. In addition, I extend an invitation for constructive feedback and suggestions about what is missing or overlooked so that the list can be improved. Second, the list focuses primarily on books—monographs, collections, and translations—although several articles as well as a few unpublished dissertation titles and an important online resource are included, particularly in cases when a prominent scholar's work or a subfield is best represented that way.

Third, the list is organized into several categories and subcategories. Following a short list of works from the years leading up to 1967, the bibliography continues with two “breakthrough” categories for monographs and collections. The notion of breakthrough used here refers to works that in their own way created at least a mini-revolution by opening up a new area of inquiry or breaking down conventional methodological barriers so as to generate a strong following and stimulate or inspire the research agendas of many others. Each of these works are being read and re-read by nearly everyone interested in Zen, Buddhist, or East Asian studies, or in religious studies, philosophy, or intellectual history more generally because they cross over lines normally dividing culture, period, or method or are outstanding case studies that set a model or standard for how scholarship should be carried out. Many copies of these works will likely be considerably marked up by eager readers who will underscore or make notations in the margins about key or useful passages, and the titles evoked at countless conferences and academic gatherings or in publications. Following these two sections, the rest of the bibliography reflects a regional, chronological, or methodological emphasis.

A final objective in the selection process was to limit the list to works that are primarily academic or scholarly investigations of a key aspect of the history of Zen theory or practice. This has meant excluding some kinds of books that may have had a greater impact on more readers or have enjoyed a higher recognition value and are targeting a general audience. Also, studies dealing with Zen in relation to culture or the arts or works associated with Kyoto School philosophy, which is sometimes seen as a branch of modern Zen, are not contained herein. Works that might be considered primary rather than secondary sources are not included here. For these and related reasons, another category that was considered for inclusion but has been left out would have contained works on “Applying Zen,” with a variety of topics ranging from the arts and literature to psychotherapy or self-help. Such a compilation would be valuable in a different context.

Part One: Fields and Subfields

This section reflects on the state of the field by organizing the main accomplishments and lacunae around thematic areas rather than following the structure of the bibliography. The first two categories below are rather “conservative” in referring to studies of the mainstream institution and its leading figures, whereas the next two categories refer to practices and methods for studying them that tend to stand outside or break the mold of the tradition’s conventions.

Institutional History

Following the historical studies of Chinese Buddhism by Ch’en and Zürcher that dealt extensively with Chan, as well as the early work of Dumoulin (1953), the latter, after a series of publications, delivered a comprehensive historical study from the formative to modern periods of Zen in China and Japan (1988–1990). More significantly, each of the main historical periods have been covered in depth beginning with the Tang (Poceski), Song (Foulk 1987, Yifa), and Ming (Yü) dynasties in China and continuing with the Kamakura (Collcutt, Bodiford 1993, Faure 1996), Tokugawa (Williams), Meiji (Ketelaar, Jaffe), and contemporary (Kraft) eras in Japan. We now have a good description of the origins of the monastic institution and the rules and regulations that governed it as well as how it transferred and developed in Japanese history including modern reforms that turned celibate, nonviolent Buddhist monks into married meat-eaters.

One interesting feature of this development is that whereas for a number of years the Rinzai sect was given priority in Western scholarship primarily because of the predilections of Suzuki, with Sōtō Zen nearly entirely overlooked, the proportionality has shifted. Now many of the best works cited above, such as Bodiford, Faure 1996, Williams, and Jaffe, deal almost exclusively with this once far less known aspect of Zen history. What seems to be missing in this category as it now stands, however, is a balance in method in some approaches focusing on the great tradition of monks and their official affiliates, supporters, and donors and others on popular religiosity or the assimilation of folk, indigenous, and esoteric Buddhist or non-Buddhist elements. The field needs to catch up with itself, so to speak, so that there would be multiple works representing diverse methodologies and outlooks on the various schools represented in the different historical periods.

Patriarchal Literature

Many of the major historical figures in Zen have had their works translated and analyzed and/or lives examined. This includes Bodhidharma, Linji (Lin-chi), Zhaozhou (Chao-chou), Yunmen (Yün-men), Zongmi (Tsong-mi), Dongshan (Tung-shan), Layman Pang, Hongzhi (Hung-chih), and Dahui (Ta-hui) in Tang and Song China, in addition to others such as Mazu (Ma-tsu), Baizhang (Pai-chang), and Huangbo (Huang-po). Also included are medieval through modern Japanese monks and thinkers including Dōgen, Ikkyū, Daitō, Tetsugen, Menzan, Hakuin, Tōrei, Bankei, Takuan, Bassui, Tosui, Ryōkan, and Hisamatsu. The translation of Chinul (Buswell

1986) is particularly important for understanding intellectual developments in both China and Korea. In a number of instances, there are multiple translations available, and once again in a case of Sōtō scholarship seeming to surpass Rinzai, nearly all of Dōgen's major works have been rendered in English, with a definitive version of the *Shōbōgenzō* expected to be available as a central part of the Bielefeldt online project. The translation of *Eihei Kōroku* in Leighton and Okumura 2004 is noteworthy. In addition, following the early work by Miura and Sasaki on kōan literature, there have been translations of the collections that are most important from a Japanese perspective, including the *Wumenguan* (Jpn *Mumonkan*), *Biyānlū* (Jpn *Hekiganroku*), and *Congronglū* (Jpn *Shōyōroku*), as well as capping-phrase texts used extensively in the Rinzai sect's training curriculum (Hori 2003 and Kirchner 2004). However, these efforts have not necessarily reflected what is most representative in terms of the history of Chinese writings.

Furthermore, if TV programming in America has been depicted as a "vast wasteland" that is all too readily accessible for all, then the case of Zen literature is one of a "vast storehouse" that is nearly inaccessible to everyone but a small handful of specialists who can read these works. That is, there are voluminous transmission-of-the-lamp records, sayings of masters, and kōan collections and commentaries that have barely been dealt with and need to be made available. This is certainly one of the main new areas for the expansion of Zen studies in the next generation. In studies of Western religion and literature, new scholars continue to approach Augustine or Shakespeare, even though these figures have been well covered for years, whereas others pursue uncharted, seemingly obscure territories in early or late medieval writings. It is important for Zen studies as well to maintain a thoughtful balance between novel approaches to the tried-and-true and tried-and-true approaches to what appears novel.

For instance, the Song dynasty transmission records, of which the prominent *Jingde chuāngdēng lū* (Jpn *Keitoku dentōroku*) is just one of many examples of this all-important genre, has only appeared in a partial translation in Chang 1969 and been analyzed in depth in Welter 2006 and elsewhere. In addition to vast amounts of Chinese kōan literature, including quite a few kōan collections that were forgotten because they were not as popular as the small handful that caught on in Japan, there are also other huge areas that have barely been explored. These include medieval Japanese Five Mountains poetry (*gozan bungaku*), which was crucial to the intellectual development of the Rinzai sect and its interface with indigenous culture, and the extensive records (*shōmono*) of commentaries by Sōtō masters that incorporated esoteric symbols along with complex literary styles and structures.

Heresies, Unorthodoxies, and Stre-e-e-e-e-tching Boundaries

It has been argued that while Zen frequently and flagrantly uses the rhetoric of irreverence and iconoclasm, or what Robert Gimello has called "disingenuous blasphemy," even or especially toward its own patriarchs, who consistently get reprimanded, slapped, and upbraided in hagiographical accounts, Zen is like many other traditions in that it has fiercely pursued the establishment and preservation of

orthodoxy along with the suppression of heresy and unorthodoxy. Therefore, much of the most interesting and important research has been involved with ferreting out areas of ideological conflict and dissent that emerged at key turning points in the development of the tradition by looking at rivalries as well as absorptions involving other schools, sects, movements, and rites. These points of challenging intersection within the school and between Zen and its rivals in a competitive East Asian religious environment were crucial at historical junctures, and were obviously prominent at the time of occurrence, but have been hidden or dormant and remain neglected since they were pushed under the rug, so to speak, like Gregor Samsa in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. After the early work of Zeuschner, the Northern school, the original heresy of gradualness that was crucial at the time of the formation of the Southern school orthodoxy, has been treated in several key works (McRae 1986 and Faure 1995). Similar issues include debates between the Linji and Caodong factions during the Song (Schlütter 2000) and the role of the Daruma school (Faure 1991) at the dawn of Zen in early Kamakura Japan, as well as the emergence of the third sect in Tokugawa Japan, Ōbaku, which integrated kōan and *nembutsu* practice (Baroni 2000).

Another significant area of inquiry responding to general academic trends emphasizing realms of society beyond and stretching or challenging conventional boundaries has been a focus on the popular religious quality evident in Zen practice throughout every phase of its historical development. This began in China, where the deification of masters particularly after death was a major component in the spread of the movement, and continued in Japan, where prayer temples (*kitō jūin*) featuring festivals and talismans incorporated with esoteric Buddhist and indigenous icons and images is the rule rather than the exception. Several works have brought out the role of funeral rites (Faure 1991), mummification (Sharf 1992), and ritual portraiture (Foulk and Sharf 1993) in preserving the images of abbots, while other studies have emphasized folk practices pervasive in the Sōtō sect, including Heine 1999, Rowe, and Williams. In addition, popular religiosity has been treated in Gimello 1992 and Sawada, and the role of women has been explored in Song literature (Levering) and Sōtō monasticism (Arai). A sense has been created that we do not really know what the "real" Zen really is and that it is necessary to sort and sift through the records to find the appropriate materials rather than just rely on what the tradition says it is, especially since much of the prevalent self-definition was generated as late as early modern Japan.

Other Approaches, Other Cultures

While early debates about how to conduct studies of Zen involving Hu Shi 1953 and Suzuki 1953 focused on the relation between historiography and philosophy, with the latter seeming to play a dominant role, it is clear that over the past few decades the field of Zen scholarship has been greatly influenced by philological and socio-historical methods. This has left the area of philosophical studies somewhat limited in scope and with relatively few proponents. In dealing with a school of thought that eschews logical discourse expressed through "words and letters" yet has been

greatly influenced by the poetic traditions of East Asia, perhaps the most relevant work in this area has involved literary-critical approaches, as in Wright and Wang. One of the reasons that philosophy proper has not been applied to studies of Zen in the past twenty years is that this approach has been superseded by a newer focus, which came to the fore in the 1990s, on ethical issues. This has involved an analysis of how Zen in Japan has contributed to social problems, such as discrimination (Hubbard and Swanson) and nationalism/imperialism (Heisig and Maraldo, and Victoria), as well as the potential for reform (Ives and Odin). Some of these works have tried to dethrone Zen from the lofty seat of idealism and expose it as a corrupt and tainted tradition more content with preserving its institutional status quo than seeking to liberate sentient beings from the throes of stubborn ignorance.

Finally, it seems that forty years has not been a sufficient amount of time to yield a high volume of scholarly works on Zen manifested outside China and Japan. While there are a couple of outstanding books dealing with history or practice in Korea (Buswell 1992) and Vietnam (Nguyen), there remains much research to be accomplished in regard to these areas that are so rich in historical tradition and contemporary practice, particularly with the Buddhist revival in Vietnam in recent years. Studies of Zen coming to the West over the past century since it was introduced at the time of the famous 1893 World's Parliament of Religions have focused primarily on narratives about individual teachers (Chadwick) or on adaptations to the new environment (Asai and Williams, and Rocha). This is certainly one of the growth areas in the field.

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