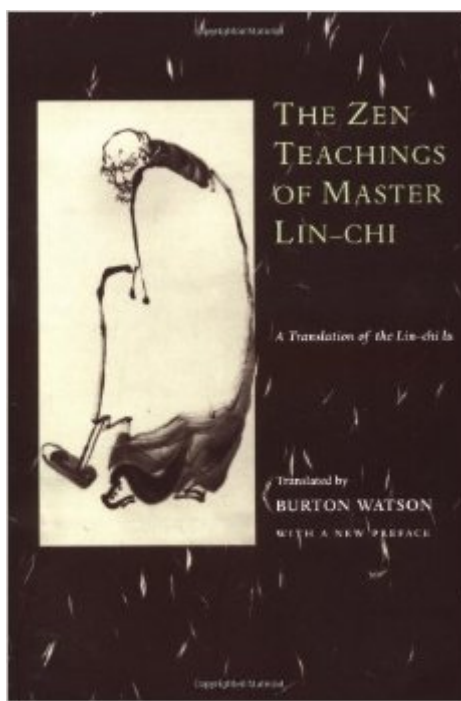


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The Zen Teachings Of Master Lin-Chi



Synopsis

Among the most important texts of Zen literature, the Lin-Chi lu details the insights and exploits of the great ninth century Chinese Zen master Lin-chi, one of the most highly regarded of the T'ang period masters. PEN Translation Prize-winner Burton Watson presents here an eloquent translation -- the first in the English language -- of this seminal classic, *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi*. The work is an exacting depiction of Lin-chi's words and actions, describing the Zen master's life and teaching, and includes a number of his sermons. Because Lin-chi's school outlasted other forms of early Chinese Zen to become dominant throughout China to this day, this translation bears unique significance within the literature of this great Asian nation. With Watson's lucid introduction to the work, a glossary of terms, and notes to the text, *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi* is a generously constructed and accessible model of translation that will stand as the definitive primary material on Lin-chi for many years to come.

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Customer Reviews

Nishida Kitaro, famous modern Japanese philosopher, founder of the influential Kyoto School, and expert on Mahayana Buddhism, once made the remark that if he were stranded on some remote island (Gilligan's Island? Where's the Skipper?) with only a couple books in his possession, one of them would be the *Rinzai Roku* (Chinese: *Linji Lu*). High praise indeed. And a sentiment shared by me, a lesser thinker than Nishida. There is simply something special in this book's extraordinary insight and power that comes shining through in these discourses (I grant here recent scholarship's

insights into the formation of the Linji Lu legend during the Song Period, but undoubtably Linji was an important figure himself). Presenting such a powerful message, it is no wonder the Linji school became the leading Zen sect in Japan down through history. If you, dear reader, have no knowledge of Mahayana insights, just start here. Never mind the colorful anecdotes in the book where Linji is slapping or yelling at everybody, just concentrate on the sermons. The Linji Lu will literally turn you into a Mahayana powerhouse yourself if you ponder the discourses long enough. It can well serve as a "primer" on Mahayana doctrines...Anyway, back to this translation. There have been several other translations into English, one by Irmgard Schloegl and another by Ruth Fuller Sasaki's team in Japan (both of which are hard to get nowadays in original form). And also a current one by Zen teacher Eido Shimano, and one by JC Cleary...there may be more. I've got all these versions, but I still like Burton Watson's translation the best. To me, Watson has done a masterful job rendering the Linji Lu into coherent English, no easy feat with this type of literature. He is simply a great translator.

This is one of the earliest and greatest Zen classics devoted to the teaching of an individual Master, a genre invented within Zen. In earlier Buddhism what was taught was what the Buddha had taught, what the Sutras recorded. Zen emphasised the uniqueness of the moment and the need for newly improvised teachings, because of the way the mind forms a "skin" over what it has learnt. So Masters taught directly from their own realisation and not from the Sutras. Devoted disciples would then note down and record their words. But there's a paradox here - a permanent record of a unique moment - and some Masters disapproved and actively tried to destroy such records of their teachings. Lin-chi was a formidable character even by the standards of Zen Masters. He was famous for the ferocious, unnerving shout which he would unleash when least expected, in the same way other Masters used blows: to stop the busy minds of his followers for a moment. But all of his teachings ultimately had no other purpose: and he can be scary, crude, confrontational. He uses all means to teach one simple but elusive lesson: what is to be sought is what does the seeking: Mind itself, and not any limited image, concept or insight that Mind can come up with. Thus he also uses those double-edged words that have caused so much trouble and confusion ever since: "There is nothing to be done, nothing to achieve, nothing to be attained". At times, surprisingly, he could also come out with passages of mysterious poetic imagery, in which he codifies some of the basic thought-structures of Zen, which have been argued over and commented upon ever since. He also coined the phrase "the real person with no position".

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