



Thomas Yūhō Kirchner, *Entangling Vines: Zen Koans of the Shūmon Kattōshū*

Kyoto: Tenryū-ji Institute for Philosophy and Religion, 2004, 237 pp. \$49.00, hardcover.

THIS IS AN excellent first translation of an important Japanese Rinzai kōan collection compiled in the late seventeenth century, first published in 1689. *Shūmon Kattōshū* consists of 282 kōan cases, all presented without any appended comments. The

title, *Shūmon Kattōshū*, might be rendered as “Collection of Tangled Vines from the Source Gate,” and the helpful Translator’s Preface explains that *kattō*, or entangling vines, is a Zen synonym for *kōans*. Nearly a third of the cases are familiar from the classic Song period Chan *kōan* collections.

The first thing to be noted about this English edition is the exemplary format, with the name of the case and the whole case itself given in Chinese characters before the translations. While no hindrance to those who cannot read Chinese, it is an extraordinary aid to those who are able, allowing Chinese readers to check nuances of the originals against Kirchner’s fine translations. The use of so many Chinese characters interspersed in the text seems, unfortunately, unfeasible for most American publishers, so we have reaped the benefit of this volume’s private publication in Japan, by the Tenryū-ji Institute for Philosophy and Religion.

Each of the cases, in Chinese and English, is followed immediately by useful annotation from Kirchner, with some cross-referencing of the cases in the better-known Chinese *Wumenguan* (*Mumonkan*), *Blue Cliff Record*, or *Record of Tranquility* *kōan* collections, or in the *Record of Linji*. The footnotes also provide informative allusions, definitions of terms or phrases, instances where the Chinese terms are complex and might yield other interpretations, and occasionally, helpful interpretive material. However, the annotation is intentionally kept to a modest length, attempting to strike a balance such as never to overwhelm the text itself with what Kirchner calls the “unnecessary and distracting,” while still providing practical assistance. As delineated in the Foreword by Ueda Shizuteru (including a noteworthy excerpt from Kirchner’s own training journal), Kirchner is extraordinarily well qualified to provide such assistance, as he has spent decades as a Rinzai *unsui*, including practice with Yamada Mumon Roshi and periods in the Shōfukuji, Kenchōji, and Kenninji monks’ halls, and residence at Daitokuji and Tenryūji, as well as scholarly study and work at Ōtani, Nanzan, and Hanazono Universities.

Easily worth the price of the book by itself is the appended Biographical Notes, a seventy-four page alphabetized reference for all the persons mentioned in the cases, mostly Chinese masters, but also including Indian figures such as Ānanda and Aṅgulimāla as well as archetypal bodhisattvas such as Avalokiteśvara and Maitreya, with the cases wherein they each appear. These comprehensive notes provide an exceptional wealth of historical information, reminiscent of the endnotes in the 1966 classic *Zen Dust* by MIURA and SASAKI, no longer in print or easily available. But Kirchner’s invaluable Biographical Notes are further informed by the scholarship that has appeared since then. Other apparatus, along with a Bibliography, consist of alphabetized Wade-Giles and Japanese Name charts, each with both Wade-Giles and Pinyin equivalences along with Chinese characters and Japanese names (the text itself employs pinyin).

This *Shūmon Kattōshū* is part of the regular *kōan* curriculum of the Takujū branch of Rinzaï Zen, following the *Mumonkan* (Ch. *Wumenguan*; *Gateless Barrier*) and the *Hekigan roku* (Ch. *Biyanlu*; *Blue Cliff Record*), so this first translation is an important event for Rinzaï scholars and practitioners. Of the two hundred and eighty-two cases,

forty-three cases also appear (in part, or within the commentary) among the forty-eight cases of the *Mumonkan*, thirty-nine cases similarly appear in the *Hekigan roku*, and eleven cases are in the *Shōyōroku* (Ch. *Congronglu; Record of Tranquility*), another popular collection available in translation. Another fifteen of the cases appear, at least in part, in the *Rinzairoku* (Ch. *Linjilu, Record of Linji*). Of the *Kattōshū* cases not present in these Song period collections, eight cases interestingly deal with native Japanese figures, and another one even includes a comment by Hakuin, obviously added later since Hakuin was born in 1685, only four years before this collection's first publication. Significantly, along with new, good translations of many familiar cases, with their original Chinese, this collection includes many *kōan* cases not heretofore available in English. Kirchner notes that seventeen of the cases from the Song involve Xutang Zhiyu (1185–1269), Chinese progenitor of the dominant Japanese Rinzai Ōtōkan lineage (including both Takujū and Inzan lines).

As to Kirchner's translations themselves, generally his renditions are lucid, quite readable, and clearly reflect careful consideration of the Chinese originals. Thanks to Kirchner's experience as an *unsui*, these translations also are informed by the traditional interpretations conveyed in the modern Rinzai lineages, often described directly in the footnotes (although Kirchner is quick to clarify in his preface that these interpretations do not constitute "answers" to the *kōans*). One minor example is case 16, the celebrated story of the ox passing through a lattice window except for its tail. Kirchner notes that the preposition can also refer to the ox simply passing *by* the window, although the underlying meaning of the case is not changed in either reading. While there are current Rinzai and Sōtō masters who read it as passing by, Kirchner notes that most Rinzai masters prefer the more melodramatic reading, right through the window, "for the sake of emphasis."

Two recent translations of *kōan* collections by the Japanese Sōtō Zen founder Eihei Dōgen bear mention in comparison to Kirchner's new translation of *Kattōshū* and its 282 cases without comment. Strikingly similar in form is Dōgen's collection of 300 cases also without any commentary, known as *Mana Shōbōgenzō*—not to be confused with Dōgen's completely different, renowned work *Shōbōgenzō*—with long poetic essays, many elaborating on the same *kōans*. Dōgen's collection of three hundred cases has recently been translated by Kazuaki Tanahashi and John Daido Looi as *The True Dharma Eye* (2005). In contrast to Kirchner's work, this edition has no scholarly annotation, though it does have appended very brief Biographical notes, useful lineage charts, and an eight-page glossary. Of much more value is a chart of cross-references, locating each case in the *Mumonkan*, the *Hekigan roku* (*Blue Cliff Record*), and the *Shōyōroku*, as well as in Dōgen's essays in the better known *Shōbōgenzō*, and in his *Eihei Kōroku*. In contrast to Kirchner's annotation after each case, this edition follows each case with Looi's original Dharma teaching in brief commentary, capping verse, and added notes for each line, all reminiscent of the format and Dharma-combat style of the *Blue Cliff Record*. While of little scholarly relevance, practitioners can decide for themselves if these comments are illuminating or "unnecessary and distracting."

Another new translation of a Dōgen kōan collection can be found in volume nine of this reviewer's translation with Shohaku Okumura of *Eihei Kōroku*, as *Dōgen's Extensive Record* (LEIGHTON and OKUMURA 2004). Volume nine contains ninety cases selected by Dōgen, but also with his own verse commentaries, in the same form as the original cases with verses by Xuedou and Hongzhi, which became the bases for the *Blue Cliff Records* and *Book of Tranquility* (*Shōyōroku*), respectively.

One provocative example for a brief comparison of these different collections is case 9 in the *Kattōshū*, the response of Zhaozhou (Jp. Jōshu) to questioning about the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming from the West as, "the juniper tree in the garden" (in other translations an oak or cypress). In addition to appearing in the two newly translated Dōgen texts, this story also is found in the *Mumonkan*, *Shōyōroku*, and in *Zhaozhou's Recorded Sayings*. Characteristically, the *Mumonkan* version concisely includes only the initial question and response, while the others (in the commentary for the *Shōyōroku*) offer the inquiring monk's follow-up admonition to Zhaozhou to not teach, "using external objects." Thereupon Zhaozhou insists he is not using external objects, but when the monk asks the basic question again, Zhaozhou repeats his answer of the juniper tree. Whereas all the other versions end there, the *Kattōshū* continues with the later great teacher Fayan asking a disciple of Zhaozhou if he had indeed spoken of a juniper, which the disciple heatedly denies, saying, "don't slander him!" Thereupon Fayan exclaims, "The true child of a lion gives a good lion's roar!"

Of the above versions, only the *Shōyōroku* and the *Eihei Kōroku* offer extensive commentary, the latter not only with three capping verses, unique for volume nine, but also with a variety of Dōgen's stimulating commentary and interlinear comments on the story in three other sections of *Eihei Kōroku*. As to what kind of tree grew in Zhaozhou's garden, the translation of *Zhaozhou's Recorded Sayings* (GREEN 1998) and three of four translations of *Mumonkan* that I checked call it an oak; the other versions all call it a cypress. Only Kirchner calls it a juniper, but his footnote is most helpful. He notes that the character is a kind of juniper tree (Matthews mentions juniper, cypress, and cedar), but that the reading of "oak" comes from the Japanese reading of the character as *kashiwa*. He further adds Harada Shōdo Rōshi's illuminating comment about "the uselessness of the Chinese juniper for lumber or nearly any other purpose."

Trying to find shortcomings in *Entangling Vines* is challenging. Given the high quality of the footnotes, my own preference, and probably that of many academic scholars, would have been for the translator to offer slightly more annotation. The difficulty of availability of this new volume in the West might also be mentioned. While the notes do provide references to other texts, these are not so readily accessible in this format (compared to the helpful cross-reference chart in the Tanahashi and Looi translation). As more translations of kōan materials appear, a full English concordance of cases, including their occurrence in the *Recorded Sayings* and *Lamp Transmission* anthologies, will become increasingly desirable. Of course such a kōan concordance would be a considerable, separate project from the translations themselves.

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Editors' note: *Entangling Vines* is available on the Internet at Abebooks.com or directly from the translator at kirchner@mbox.kyoto-inet.or.jp (mark subject line "Entangling Vines").