

Brief Reviews

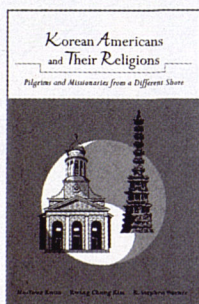
Judy Roitman JDPSN



Butterflies On A Sea Wind: Beginning Zen by Anne Rudloe, published by Andrews McNeel, Kansas City, 2002

Anne Rudloe is the abbot of the Cypress Tree Zen Group in Tallahassee, Florida. This book is basically a description of what it's like to be a relative beginner in Zen practice, both on and off the

cushion. Rudloe brings together three strands of her life: her experience practicing Zen (especially on retreats); her personal life—family, work, and ecological activism; and the natural world around her. Her description of practice deliberately focuses on its difficulties—no one reading this book will confuse Zen practice with relaxation techniques—and her own practice experience is embedded in clear descriptions of the broader picture of how both sangha and retreats are organized and function. Episodes from her personal life show the results and rewards of practice, as well as the ways in which we all fall short (and hence need to practice). Nature grounds her, and she has dedicated her professional life to its preservation. Her lyrical, meticulous descriptions of birds, water, plants and sky make the area around her home in Panacea, Florida, seem an enchanted place, one of the most beautiful on earth. I will never again see palmetto as scrub, or overlook the way creatures as small as captive brine shrimp reflect light.

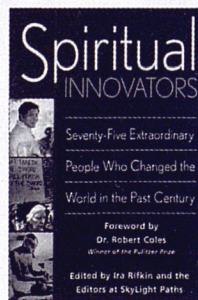


Korean Americans and Their Religions: Pilgrims and Missionaries from a Different Shore, ed. by Ho-Youn Kwon, Kwang Chung Kim, R. Stephen Warner, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001

An academic book of essays mostly presented at a conference and focused mostly on the Christianity

of the Korean American community; four of its fifteen chapters are on Buddhism. Two of these chapters feature prominent profiles of Zen Master Seung Sahn. *The Growth of Korean Buddhism in the United States, with Special Reference to Southern California* by Eui-Young Yu profiles six Zen teachers among other prominent personalities involved with Korean Buddhism in America (including at least two non-Korean Americans). It's interesting to see

our school in the broader context of Korean Buddhist activity in southern California—did you know that there's a temple in Los Angeles not in our school known as Kwan Um Sa? The two longest profiles are of Samu Sunim, based in Toronto and teaching mostly European-Canadians/Americans through his Zen Lotus Society; and of Zen Master Seung Sahn, giving a slightly different version than the canonical one most of us have heard. More interesting is Samu Sunim's very generous article *Turning the Wheel of Dharma in the West*, which has an excellent synopsis of the history of Buddhism in Korea, and then profiles three teachers: Ven. Dr. Seo, Kyung-Bo, a charismatic teacher who towards the end of his life became the self-proclaimed world dharma-rajā; Kusan Sunim, one of only two (the other is Zen Master Seung Sahn) Korean teachers who went out of their way to encourage western students to study in Korean monasteries; and Zen Master Seung Sahn. Samu Sunim also gives an extensive history and description of our school, and responds directly to charges made against Zen Master Seung Sahn and our school both by traditional Korean Buddhists and at least one former monk in our school (such charges include a confusion in the Korean community about our school having married monks, because lay people wear long robes; charges that Zen Master Seung Sahn basically moves too fast in making centers and teachers at all levels; that he encourages quantity at the expense of quality; and so on). Samu Sunim clearly has great respect for Zen Master Seung Sahn's teaching, compassion, and energy, and I recommend this article for its discussion of our school and founding teacher, its broader treatment of Korean Buddhism both in Korea and America, and for its indirect introduction to Samu Sunim.

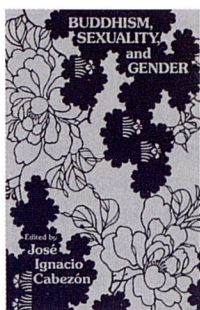


Spiritual Innovators: Seventy-Five Extraordinary People Who Changed the World in the Past Century, ed. by Ira Rifkin and others, SkyLight Paths Publishing, projected publication date 2002

I have this book only in uncorrected proof, so things might have changed but from the Amazon.com reviews they have not changed that much.

The editors basically asked a bunch of people to list people they thought were spiritually important, collated and tweaked the results, and ended up with seventy-five people ranging from Dr. Bob, the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, to Pope John XXIII. Each of these people gets a profile of about two pages, followed by an extensive quote or two, and a brief bibliography. This format is guaranteed to oversimplify and even miss the point entirely—for example, Zen Master Seung Sahn is thrown into a group characterized by the chapter heading *They*

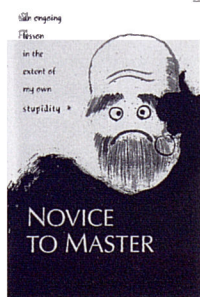
spoke from the power of silence, on the grounds that he was asked to maintain teaching silence for three years after receiving transmission.



Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender, ed. by José Ignacio Cabezón, State University of New York Press, 1992

Okay, why am I reviewing an out-of-print academic compilation ten years after publication which I got for free because it was so tattered and faded sitting in a window display focused on something like basketball

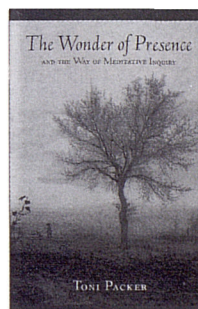
that the bookstore people couldn't bear asking me for money? Because it has stuff that shouldn't be lost to the broader community, including generous quotations from primary texts. The two articles of most interest to people in our school are Barbara E. Reed's *The Gender Symbolism of Kuan-Yin Bodhisattva*, and Miriam L. Levering's *Linchi (Rinzai) Ch'an and Gender: The Rhetoric of Equality and the Rhetoric of Heroism*. The complex and contradictory gender mythologies of Avalokitesvara/Kuan Yin make fascinating reading, and Reed's article in a relatively small number of pages manages not only to state it but to analyze it seriously in relation to both gender and culture. Her article is especially remarkable because it manages to go deeper than some of the much longer treatments of the subject that have appeared since. Levering's article focuses on a sermon honoring a woman lay practitioner of Ch'an, Lady Ch'in-kuo. This sermon is placed in the context of Ch'an teachings about the irrelevance of gender, in the context of ancient Chinese cultural premises about male and female and the rhetoric this engenders, and in the context of feminist rhetorical analysis. About half of this article consists of direct quotes from 8th to 12th century Ch'an texts, especially from Master Ta-hui, a champion of the hua-t'ou technique that is also prominent in Korean Zen, and it is terrific to meet these old masters face to face as they confront an issue we like to think we've invented, as well as to learn that female dharma heirs were not unknown in ancient Chinese Buddhism.



Novice to Master: An Ongoing Lesson in the Extent of My Own Stupidity, by Soko Morinaga Roshi, translated by Belenda Attaway Yamakawa, Wisdom Publications, 2001.

Lost and despairing at the end of World War II, barely managing to focus enough to graduate from high school, Morinaga became a Zen monk as a way of finding some sort

of discipline. This book is a memoir of his early days in training, interspersed with teaching and a number of vigorously told stories, some from the classic Zen tradition, and some from the lives of his friends and acquaintances. His early training was very physical—a lot of cleaning and caretaking. Then he moved into a training monastery, where he was intermittently beaten and verbally abused for three days outside the gate before being allowed in. The classic Rinzai style, as depicted here, is short on encouragement and long on disparagement. Tremendous determination, and maybe desperation, is needed in order to stick it out. Morinaga's practice in its early years was dominated not by serenity and calm, but by exhaustion and stress, which led, as they are supposed to in the Rinzai tradition, to a breakthrough, after which the real work could begin. Morinaga presents his weaknesses and doubts honestly, shows tremendous gratitude and respect for his teachers (including one of his secular teachers) and presents himself as not being particularly special. There is an interesting contrast between the memoir aspect of this book, which focuses on the difficulties of classic Rinzai training and the difficulties of Morinaga's life, and the teaching aspect, which simply and even gently encourages the reader, whether lay or monastic, practitioner or not, to believe in her/himself, to face each moment directly, and to live a clear life in the face of death. For example, talking of an old friend dying of cancer: "Always now—just now—come into being. Always now—just now—give yourself to death. Practicing this truth is Zen practice." (p. 132)



The Wonder of Presence and the Way of Meditative Inquiry by Toni Packer, Shambhala, 2002.

Toni Packer was supposed to be Philip Kapleau's dharma heir in a Rinzai-style tradition, but she broke with her training and founded a center in northern New York State with no formal hierarchy (although she is clearly in charge), no required activities, and pots of tea always

available. We could not be further in atmosphere from the monasteries of her original lineage. Packer's teaching is to be aware, and basically this book, taken from talks given on retreats, is a series of exhortations on why we should and how we can be aware. Her language is gentle and even a bit abstract. For example, taking a quote at random: "Meditation is coming into intimate touch with our habitual reactions of fear, desire, anger, tenderness, or whatever, discovering them freshly, abstaining from automatically judging them good or bad, right or wrong." (p. 128)