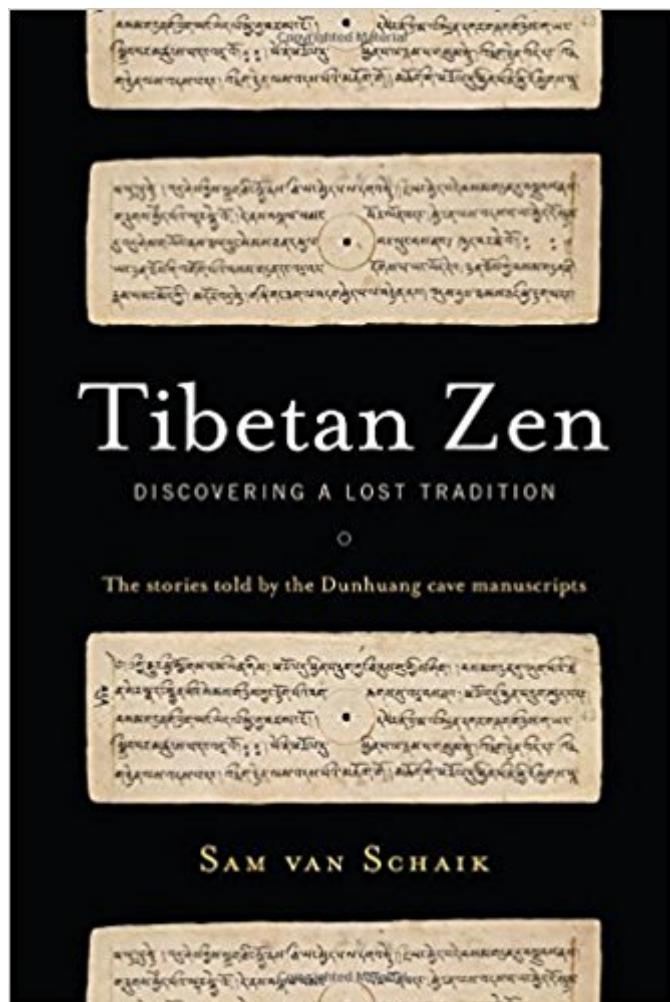


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Tibetan Zen: Discovering A Lost Tradition



Synopsis

A groundbreaking study of the lost tradition of Tibetan Zen containing the first translations of key texts from one thousand years ago. Banned in Tibet, forgotten in China, the Tibetan tradition of Zen was almost completely lost to us. According to Tibetan histories, Zen teachers were invited to Tibet from China in the 8th century, at the height of the Tibetan Empire. When doctrinal disagreements developed between Indian and Chinese Buddhists at the Tibetan court, the Tibetan emperor called for a formal debate. When the debate resulted in a decisive win by the Indian side, the Zen teachers were sent back to China, and Zen was gradually forgotten in Tibet. This picture changed at the beginning of the 20th century with the discovery in Dunhuang (in Chinese Central Asia) of a sealed cave full of manuscripts in various languages dating from the first millennium CE. The Tibetan manuscripts, dating from the 9th and 10th centuries, are the earliest surviving examples of Tibetan Buddhism. Among them are around 40 manuscripts containing original Tibetan Zen teachings.

This book translates the key texts of Tibetan Zen preserved in Dunhuang. The book is divided into ten sections, each containing a translation of a Zen text illuminating a different aspect of the tradition, with brief introductions discussing the roles of ritual, debate, lineage, and meditation in the early Zen tradition. Van Schaik not only presents the texts but also explains how they were embedded in actual practices by those who used them.

Book Information

Paperback: 176 pages

Publisher: Snow Lion (August 25, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1559394463

ISBN-13: 978-1559394468

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.7 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 13 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #210,929 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #61 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Eastern > Buddhism > History #75 in Books > History > World > Religious > Buddhism #212 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Eastern > Buddhism > Zen > Philosophy

Customer Reviews

"Tibetan Zen is an unprecedented work. Van Schaik's explanations expand our notion of just

what Tibetan Buddhism wasâ "and isâ "while his translations offer contemporary readers the opportunity to expand their own minds by engaging classic Zen writings from a deeply creative period of Buddhism."â "Kurtis R. Schaeffer, University of Virginia"The Chinese character Zen (ç)a has two parts that mean â ^symbolize the singleâ ™ or â ^inseparable meaning,â ™ while the great Kagyu master Phagmodrupa says nonduality is Mahamudra. Therefore, there is no essential difference between Zen, Mahamudra, and Dzogchen teachings."â "His Holiness the Drikung Kyabgon Chetsang, author of The Practice of Mahamudra"This selection of some core texts of Tibetan Zen provides us with another map through the mysteries of our human hearts and minds and helps us walk our own way to realization. How wonderful!"â "James Ishmael Ford, author of Zen Master Who?"In this beautifully written book, Sam van Schaik guides his reader into a lost world, bringing the Dunhuang manuscripts to life through his careful analyses. The result is a comprehensive presentation of an extinct and in many ways unique Buddhist tradition, a study whose brilliant insights into early esoteric ritual, the bodhisattva precepts, and much more shed light on the origins of both Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese Chan/Zen.â "Jacob P. Dalton, author of The Taming of the Demons

SAM VAN SCHAIK received his PhD in Tibetan Buddhist literature from the University of Manchester, England. He currently works at the British Library's international Dunhuang Project in London, researching early Tibetan manuscripts, and is the author of Tibet: A History.

This is a very well written book! The teachings contained herein were holed up until 1900 in remote caves in China. Reading through this smartly translated work, I marveled at the connecting threads of these teachings now appearing in English for the first time. I feel very fortunate and blessed to be able to study them in the language of my mother tongue. The breadth and scope of details from this historiography is wonderfully presented, as well as, pith instructions for all levels of practitioners on the path. It is a gem.

This book is excellent! I haven't finished it yet, but it's really fun, it helps me a lot to understand the overall history of Zen Buddhism and it is full of wonderful Dharma, profound teachings that apply now just as much as a thousand years ago. I highly recommend it for people with some Buddhist background and curiosity about its origins in East Asia.

Thanks!

It was very good

This is a very unusual book. In a way it is scholarly, but more like a fascinated Indiana Jones way rather than dry intellectualism. But the translations themselves are incredible, showing how Zen and Vajrayana are not distant cousins but close siblings. Whether you are interested in Zen or "Tibetan Buddhism", this is a fascinating, eye-opening read.

This is an exciting study of a new set of translations marking a fresh perspective on the history and historical development of Buddhism in ancient Tibet. Van Schaik's approach is scholarly and archaeological (looking for details about the function, purpose and context of these texts and the other materials discovered with them), and goes a long way towards fleshing out details and making the historical record more accurate, especially in regard to the semi-mythical 8th century debate between proponents of the Indian gradualist (Sutric Mahayana) approach and the Chinese sudden path (Zen) approach. But it also has value and relevance as a set of translated Zen texts, which by nature are practice oriented and timeless. Tibetan culture is full of hagiographic biographies of renown teachers, and in some respect the overall histories of the various schools and development of Buddhism in Tibet is also strongly hagiographic in flavor. All too often the details, subtlety and nuance are lacking (what would make a study from a Western cultural perspective interesting and engaging). This study looks at both the content of the translations and what the actual physical evidence may suggest about the bigger picture (how they were practiced and by whom). The translated texts are from a mass of documents discovered in the early 20th century in a sealed cave at Dunhuang in Chinese Central Asia, an area controlled by Tibet in the 8th to 9th centuries, with the relevant Tibetan texts dating from the 9th to 10th centuries. There is no doubt these are early Zen teachings from China (mixed in with teachings from other schools of Buddhism), teachings that were apparently widely practiced and accepted in Tibet before the rise of the "New Schools" and their renaissance of Indian based Buddhism. Tibetan Buddhism offers a tremendously wide range of practices from the sutric and tantric traditions, and it is often difficult for both the indigenous culture and an outsider just learning about it to make sense of it all. Each of the various major and minor schools has their own way of classifying and organizing let alone valuing and prioritizing as well as applying these teachings. As van Schaik notes in his introduction (a helpful 23 page background essay which I thought could have easily been expanded to two or three times that length to great effect) the 10th century scholar Nub Sangye

Yeshe classified the 4 main approaches to Buddha-dharma in Tibet in ascending order as; (1) the gradual approach (2) the instantaneous approach (3) the tantric meditation of mahayoga and (4) the formless approach of atiyoga, and was concerned that Tibetans were mixing up Zen (2) and Ati (4) although not a whole lot more is said about this distinction in the context of these translations. This is really not an unexpected confusion since it is looking at the same Perfection of Wisdom based teachings from the exoteric, esoteric and non-dual perspectives, much like how there is to this day sutric, tantric and essence Mahamudra traditions (a "New School" equivalent of Ati teachings) which also covers such a wide range of approaches and can confuse the uninitiated due to the overlapping use of many of the same terms. So that is a glimpse of the fascinating background for the translations themselves. The translations included here have the flavor of being ancient texts but also very much to the point as practical nondual teachings, which aim to get to the heart of the often dogmatic and intellectual formulation of Buddhism as it was imported from India down through the ages. Most of these texts take the form of question and answer dialogue to clarify the uniquely Zen approach with abundant reference to scriptural authority (which in itself is an amazing resource), although some are straightforwardly descriptive of people and events and of meditation techniques. These are presented in this book in 10 short separate chapters each preceded by a very helpful several page introduction by the translator. For a taste of van Schaik's skillful translating; "The preceding answers are merely teachings aimed at those who instigate superficial debates, but those who have reached the limit of perfection do not cling to their own texts or refute those of others, just as they do not accept nirvana or reject samsara." (p. 41) The scriptures say, "Know that the six objects are deceptive, and consciousness is distracted in the hubbub; turn away without engaging with them." So, when the sage transforms the confused mind through the path of conceptual analysis, is that the mind's nirvana? No, it is not like this. The scriptures say, "The essential point of realization is nothing more than your own awareness." (p.185-6) Again, beside the essential timeless jewels of Buddha-dharma translated here what is most interesting to me is the archaeological approach emphasized, and what this reveals about the history and development of Tibetan culture and dharma practices. We can also get a glimpse of how Buddhism was practiced 1200 years ago before rigid and formal doctrinal divisions were developed, a glimpse which I think has important practical relevance today. Overall, I don't think this is a very useful kind of book for someone new to Tibetan Buddhism and seeking a clear and unconfusing path in one of the practice lineages being presented today, but for someone who is not so concerned with being grounded in a specific tradition, who seeks to synthesize and apply the nondual essence of the

Buddha's message this may be very stimulating and liberative indeed.

This excellent book illustrates how "original" Zen was introduced and practiced in Tibet from the eighth to the 11th centuries, based on manuscripts from the Danhuang Library Cave. It has been the cause of much discussion and thought in my Sangha's book club & is recommended by all who have read it.

not a necessary read, just intellectually interesting

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