



Zen Masters Of China: The First Step East

Richard Bryan McDaniel

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Zen Masters of China presents more than 300 traditional Zen stories and koans, far more than any other collection. Retelling them in their proper place in Zen's historical journey through Buddhist Chinese culture, it also tells a larger story: how, in taking the first step east from India to China, Buddhism began to be Zen.

The stories of Zen are unlike any other writing, religious or otherwise. Used for centuries by Zen teachers as aids to bring about or deepen the experience of awakening, they have a freshness that goes beyond religious practice and a mystery and authenticity that appeal to a wide range of readers.

Placed in chronological order, these stories tell the story of Zen itself, how it traveled from West to East with each Zen master to the next, but also how it was transformed in that journey, from an Indian practice to something different in Chinese Buddhism (Ch'an) and then more different still in Japan (Zen). The fact that its transmission was so human, from teacher to student in a long chain from West to East, meant that the cultures it passed through inevitably changed it.

Zen Masters of China is first and foremost a collection of mind-bending Zen stories and their wisdom. More than that, without academic pretensions or baggage, it recounts the genealogy of Zen Buddhism in China and, through koan and story, illuminates how Zen became what it is today.

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