

The Wisdom of Huineng, Chinese Buddhist Philosopher: The Platform Sutra and Other Translations

Chu Dongwei

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This graceful and flowing translation of an ancient Zen Buddhist text feels revolutionary, even in the twenty-first century.

Western Buddhists and others who wish to deepen their understanding of the history of Buddhism and its early practitioners and teachers will find Chu Dongwei's *The Wisdom of Huineng, Chinese Buddhist Philosopher: The Platform Sutra and Other Translations* inviting, informative, and satisfying.

Huineng (638–713) is a major Chinese sage known as the Sixth (and Last) Patriarch of Chan (“Zen” in Japanese) Buddhism. His “Platform Sutra,” so called because it purports to consist of a series of sermons delivered by Huineng from a high seat, or platform, in a temple lecture hall, is one of the most influential texts in all of Chinese Buddhism for its ability to open the door to understanding the nature of reality and the ground of being. Dongwei’s masterful handling of the difficulties inherent in translating a complex text rooted in a vastly different time and culture has resulted in a lucid and sensitive work that brings the teachings, and the teacher, to life for a Western, English-speaking audience. He has managed to transmit not just Huineng’s words, but the intent behind them, not just the master’s thought, but his heart. The book also includes the sermons of Shenhui, the disciple who popularized Huineng’s teachings, as well as epitaphs and biographies rarely found in English.

Complementing the thoughtful and fluent translation, the front cover art and layout are appealing, and the back cover matter invitingly describes the content of the text. The brief bio of the author lends credibility to his efforts. The design and layout of the book’s interiors are pleasing to the eye, making reading a pleasure. Grammar, syntax, and punctuation are basically error-free, and helpful footnotes are included to further clarify the text when necessary.

Primary in the Platform Sutra is the exhortation to see into one’s own nature and awaken, here and now. “The moment your own original nature is lost, you become an average worldling. The moment your own original nature is awakened, you become a Buddha,” the sutra declares. Dongwei writes that this “mind-blowing” statement is not about Buddhism; instead, he calls it “a wonderful philosophy of life,” affirming that “the Buddha is not a deity; it is just you and me in our sober moments.” His graceful and flowing translation of a text that seems revolutionary, even in the twenty-first century, is a welcome and inspiring contribution to the literature.

Dongwei is an associate professor at the School of Interpreting and Translation Studies at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies. He is the author of many books, translator of numerous English-to-Chinese and Chinese-to-English works, and editor-in-chief of the online and print journal, *Chinese Literature and Culture*.

KRISTINE MORRIS (July 8, 2015)

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