



# Chan Rhetoric of Uncertainty in the Blue Cliff Record: Sharpening a Sword at the Dragon Gate

*Steven Heine*

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This book provides an in-depth textual and literary analysis of the *Blue Cliff Record* (Chinese *Biyuanlu*, Japanese *Hekiganroku*), a seminal Chan/Zen Buddhist collection of commentaries on one hundred *gongan/koan* cases, considered in light of historical, cultural, and intellectual trends from the Song dynasty (960-1279). Compiled by the disciples of Yuanwu Keqin in 1128, the *Blue Cliff Record* is considered a classic of East Asian literature for its creative integration of prose and verse as well as hybrid or capping-phrase interpretations of perplexing cases. The collection employs a variety of rhetorical devices culled from both classic and vernacular literary sources and styles and is particularly notable for its use of indirection, allusiveness, irony, paradox, and wordplay, all characteristic of the approach of literary or lettered Chan.

However, as instrumental and influential as it is considered to be, the *Blue Cliff Record* has long been shrouded in controversy. The collection is probably best known today for having been destroyed in the 1130s at the dawn of the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279) by Dahui Zonggao, Yuanwu's main disciple and harshest critic. It was out of circulation for nearly two centuries before being revived and partially reconstructed in the early 1300s. In this book, Steven Heine examines the diverse ideological connections and disconnections behind subsequent commentaries and translations of the *Blue Cliff Record*, thereby shedding light on the broad range of *gongan* literature produced in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries and beyond.

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