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To cite this article: Miriam Levering (2006) Guanyin/Avalokitesvara in Encounter Dialogues: Creating a Place for Guanyin in Chinese Chan Buddhism, *Journal of Chinese Religions*, 34:1, 1-28

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1179/073776906803525147>



Published online: 29 Nov 2013.



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Guanyin/Avalokitesvara in Encounter Dialogues: Creating a Place for Guanyin in Chinese Chan Buddhism

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Preamble

At the gift shop of the White Cloud Daoist temple in Beijing today, one can buy a lovely small gold-washed Guanyin 觀音 to wear on a chain necklace, reminiscent of the image of Guanyin in the temple itself. The presence of Guanyin at the headquarters of Chinese Daoism is a sign of a widespread phenomenon: the presence of Guanyin in almost every place of worship at every level of Chinese religion, whether it is Daoist, Buddhist, the temple of the City God, or a shrine for prayer to local deities who protect fishermen on the sea.

One branch of Chinese religion, the Chan 禪 Buddhist school, seemed at first as if it would have no place for Guanyin. But by the late Five Dynasties period, Guanyin appears, not only in monasteries and temples famous for their Chan masters, which after all were probably not exclusively Chan establishments, but also in Chan's most sacred texts, its genealogical histories and "records of sayings" (*yulu* 語錄) of Chan masters. What follows is an account of the domestication of Guanyin even in the Chan school, as it was accomplished in part through the increasing presence of Guanyin in Chan's encounter dialogues and "public cases" (*gong'an* 公案, in Japanese, *kōan*).

Others have noted the evidence that during the Song dynasty and afterward, both in China and Japan, participants in the Chan and Zen schools loved Guanyin, particularly the White-robed Guanyin who was often the subject of so-called Chan paintings.¹ But Chan (and Zen) are primarily systems of training. Beyond loving Guanyin lies the question, could Guanyin be made a part of Chan and Zen training. In this essay, the focus is on how and to what extent Guanyin became a part of Chan (and Zen) training.

¹ Chün-fang Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 251. Jan Fontein and Money L. Hickman, *Zen: Painting and Calligraphy*, xxvi and catalogue entries 19, 33, and 35.

Introduction

The emergence of the Chan school was portrayed by early scholars such as Hu Shih 胡適 (1891-1962) and D.T. Suzuki as a radical departure from past Buddhist traditions; it was seen as the creation of a distinctly Chinese form of Buddhism. According to Hu Shih, Mazu Daoyi 馬祖道一 (709-788) and his disciples did away with “the medieval ghosts, the gods, the bodhisattvas and the Buddhas.”² The Chan of the eighth century was “no Chan at all, but a Chinese reformation or revolution within Buddhism.”³

Yanagida Seizan, a leading Japanese scholar of early Chan, likewise has suggested that in the eighth century Chan rejected traditional models of religious practice, formed its identity by wholesale repudiation of established beliefs, and created a new soteriological paradigm that featured using unconventional pedagogical devices such as shouting, beating, and engagement in oral “dialogues” (*wenda* 問答). In Yanagida’s view, four closely related developments brought about this invention of a different kind of Buddhism: (1) constructing lineages back to the Buddha to give legitimacy to the Chan movement and establish a sectarian tradition; (2) establishing independent Chan monasteries; (3) rejecting all traditional forms of Buddhist practice, including formal meditation, and creating a new style of religious praxis centered on the “encounter dialogue” (*jiyuan wenda* 機緣問答) model; and (4) creating a new type of literature, principally represented by the Chan “records of sayings” genre, written in vernacular Chinese.⁴ Yanagida is wrong in thinking that all of this occurred in the eighth century, and that the second and third items among these four can be traced to the Hongzhou 洪州 school of that time. And I believe that early Chan communities of teachers and students both rejected some traditional models of religious practice outright, and reinterpreted some. For up until the time of the Hongzhou Chan school, early schools practiced what Bernard Faure called “symbolic exegesis.” That is, early schools rejected an

² Hu Shih, “Ch’an/Zen Buddhism in China: Its History and Method,” 17. See also D.T. Suzuki’s rejoinder to Hu’s article, “Zen: A Reply to Hu Shih,” 25-46, and Bernard Faure’s critique of Suzuki’s and Hu’s views in his *Chan Insights and Oversights*, 53-67, 94-99.

³ Hu, “Ch’an/Zen Buddhism in China: Its History and Method,” 17.

⁴ Yanagida Seizan, “The ‘Recorded Sayings’ Texts of Chinese Chan Buddhism,” 185-205. Also Yanagida, “Basozen no sho mondai,” 33-41. Later in this essay when I write of “early Chan” and “middle Chan,” I am using John McRae’s widely-known periodization of Chan history, which is summarized in a simplified form in his *Seeing Through Zen*, 11-15. In McRae’s periodization, “early Chan” refers to the Chan of the “fifth patriarch” Hongren (601-74), Shenxiu (606?-706), Huineng (638-713), and Shenhui (684-758), and the Northern, Southern and Oxhead factions. The *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (c. 780) is one of its characteristic documents. The emergence of “lineage theory” and the absence of “encounter dialogue” characterize this period. “Middle Chan” begins with Mazu (709-88), and continues through the publication of the *Anthology of the Patriarch’s Hall* (*Zutangji* 祖堂集) in 952. In this period encounter dialogues emerge and at the end of the period become prolific, and lineage theories become very important. “Song dynasty Chan” begins with the Song dynasty in 960, and continues till 1300. But in describing Prof. Yanagida here, I am using “early Chan” more loosely to refer to what McRae would call “proto-Chan,” “early Chan,” and “middle Chan.”

externalized version of traditional practices, but built a bridge between traditional, canonical ideas of practice and Chan understandings of practice by advocating “formless” versions, as with “formless precepts” and “formless repentance” as taught, for example, in *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*.⁵ Nonetheless, if one accepts that making practices “formless” and internalizing them involved a rejection of the way that others practiced them, we can say that early Chan did form religious identity by rejecting traditional practices and creating new ones.

To come to the somewhat later Hongzhou school of “middle Chan” that dominated Chinese Chan during the ninth century, Mario Poceski points out that among the characteristics of the extant Hongzhou school literature (prior to 952) is that “there is very little reference to popular religious beliefs and practices that were integral to Tang Buddhism. For instance, there is scarcely a mention of the salvific powers of the various Buddhas and bodhisattvas ...”⁶

With the exception of the establishment of independent Chan monasteries, the other three developments Yanagida emphasizes did come to characterize the Chan tradition after the ninth century. In the new Chan practice of encounter dialogue between master and student, there was no room for the traditional emphasis on the efficacy of the vows and powers of bodhisattvas. The invocation of bodhisattvas and the cultivation of spiritual connections with them seem to have been set aside along with other “external” forms of Chinese Buddhist practice. There is a sense in which Hu Shih is right to say that Chan did away with “the medieval ghosts, the gods, the bodhisattvas and the Buddhas.”

On this account, one would not expect to find in Chan texts from before 952, that is, Chan texts that do not incorporate “encounter dialogues” in significant numbers, as those in late “middle Chan” did, any figures in authority who advocate the recitation of Guanyin’s name or allude to his powers.⁷ With a single important exception, that is true. In fact, what we find in the early texts when Guanyin is mentioned is advice to turn away from thinking about Guanyin at all as a bodhisattva external to oneself in order to find the real Guanyin within one’s mind.

What is more unexpected is that beginning in 952 with the first Chan text substantially to include encounter dialogues, the *Anthology of the Hall of the Patriarchs* (*Zutangji* 祖堂集), Guanyin and her powers enter Chan texts through the medium of encounter dialogues. These encounter dialogues that feature Guanyin gain some of their power from the common Chinese

⁵ See Bernard Faure, *The Will to Orthodoxy*, 41. John McRae uses the term “contemplative analysis” for this same phenomenon; see McRae, *The Northern School*, 201-02.

⁶ Mario Poceski, *Ordinary Mind as the Way: The Hongzhou School and the Growth of Chan Buddhism*, 226-227. This and the preceding paragraph are indebted to Poceski’s summary of these matters. For “middle Chan,” see fn. 4 above.

⁷ In the view of many scholars, encounter dialogues are not attested before the completion of the *Anthology of the Ancestral Hall* (*Zutangji*) in 952. See John McRae, “The Antecedents of Encounter Dialogue.” As noted in fn. 4, in this essay I am using John McRae’s periodization of Chan history. He finds four periods: proto-Chan, early Chan, middle Chan, and Song dynasty Chan. See *inter alia* his *Seeing Through Zen*, 13 and 18-19, and description in fn. 4 above.

Buddhist faith in the supramundane powers of the celestial Bodhisattva Guanyin. They eventually culminate in an important “public case” (*gong’an*) in the collection of one hundred “public cases” and “eulogies of the ancients” (*songgu* 頌古) written and compiled by Xuedou Chongxian 雪竇重顯 (a.k.a. Xuedou Mingjue 明覺, 980-1052) in the Tianxi 天禧 era (1017-1021) of the Song 宋 dynasty, and published in 1026.⁸ This public case becomes even more central to the school as one of the one hundred cases (*gong’an*) in Yuanwu Keqin 圓悟克勤 (1063-1135)’s *Blue Cliff Record* (*Bianlu* 碧巖錄), which incorporates Xuedou’s collection of *gong’an* and *songgu*. In this “public case” Guanyin achieves a permanent place in the literature of the Chan and Zen school, and the imagining of Guanyin is shaped by a new hermeneutic, that of the indigenous Huayan 華嚴 school, the school in which the *Huayan* (or *Avatamsaka*) *Sutra* and its teachings form the basis of cosmology and buddhology. Eihei Dōgen 永平道元 (1200-1253), a Japanese Zen monk who studied Chan in China, opens his chapter entitled “*Kannon*” (觀音), written in 1243 after his return from China and collected in his work of extended *gong’an* commentary, the *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼藏, by quoting the “public case” found in the *Bianlu* case 89, an exchange between the Tang dynasty Chan figures Daowu 道悟 (769-835) and Yunyan 雲巖 (782-841) (see below).⁹ Dōgen then comments, “There are many stories [in Chan] about this Guanyin who attained the Way, but none can be compared to this one.”¹⁰ That Dōgen should know of many stories in Chan about Guanyin and should devote a chapter to one of them shows that some kind of change had taken place in the Chan school in its stance toward celestial bodhisattvas. In what follows we will attempt to describe and evaluate that change.

Guanyin in Texts from Early and Early Middle Chan

Most texts from early and early middle Chan do not mention Guanyin at all. Two early texts of the Southern school of Chan that scholars agree come from these periods, the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* from the early Chan period, and the *Chuanxin fayao* 傳

⁸ The format of Xuedou’s *gong’an* and *songgu* collection is one followed by later similar collections, all called *songgu*. It consists of a retelling of the *gong’an*, followed by a short and enigmatic poem in the free-form *ci* 詞 style that comments on the *gong’an*. Monks and literati in the Song both prized *songgu* collections. There is one extant Song dynasty published edition (*banben*) and many Yuan dynasty editions of Xuedou’s *songgu* circulating separately from the *Blue Cliff Record*, as well as a listing of Xuedou’s *songgu* as a separate work in an extant Song dynasty book catalogue. On these, see Shiina Kōyū 椎名宏雄, *Sōgen ban zenseki no kenkyū* 宋元版禪籍の研究, 424 and 573. Writers on *songgu* in the Song dynasty all named Xuedou’s *songgu* as the first and the model, and described it as widely circulated from the 1020’s. The *Blue Cliff Record* was published in the early Southern Song. See Morten Schlütter, “The *Record of Hongzhi*,” 190-191, and Foulk, “The Form and Function of Kōan Literature,” 28-33.

⁹ Dōgen Kigen, *Shōbōgenzō* (Terada), fascicle 18, “*Kannon*,” 231-236.

¹⁰ Dōgen (Terada), 237.

心法要 by Huangbo Xiyun 黃辟希運 from the Hongzhou school of the early middle Chan period (ninth century), do refer to Guanyin. But in line with the tendency of the authors of these early texts to make practices formless and internalize important Buddhist symbols, they mention Guanyin only to point out forcefully that the internal (i.e., formless and mental) Guanyin is the “real” Guanyin. In effect, they mention Guanyin only to discourage Chan adherents from worshipping the bodhisattva in the manner of many adherents of his/her cult. From the references to Guanyin in these two texts, we might conclude that the various early Chan lineages were not only not interested in the cult of Guanyin as a supramundane being, they were rather interested in discouraging people from making a connection with a bodhisattva understood to be external to the practitioner.

Thus, in its only reference to Guanyin, *The Platform Sutra* puts in Huineng’s 慧能 mouth the following statement: “The Buddha is the product of one’s own nature. Do not seek it outside of your body. If the self-nature is deluded, even a Buddha becomes an ordinary human being. If their self-nature is enlightened, all living beings are Buddhas. Compassion is the same as Avalokitesvara [Guanyin]. Happiness in almsgiving is the same as Mahasthama. The ability to be pure is the same as Sakyamuni. And not to make differentiation but to be straightforward is the same as Maitreya.”¹¹ Huangbo similarly is represented as saying:

[The bodhisattva] Manjusri represents fundamental law [principle] and Samantabhadra, activity. By the former is meant the law [principle] that is empty and unobstructed, and by the latter the activity that is inexhaustible and beyond the sphere of form. Avalokitesvara represents boundless compassion, Mahasthama, great wisdom, and Vimalakirti, spotless name. ... All the qualities represented by the great Bodhisattvas are inherent in persons and are not separated from the One Mind. Awake to it, and it is there. Students of the Way today do not awake to this in their own minds, and are attached to appearances and seek for something objective outside their own minds; they have all turned their backs on the Way.¹²

Another text which very likely comes from the Hongzhou school in its early period, perhaps authored by Mazu’s immediate disciples, is the “Song of Enlightenment” (*Zhengdao ge* 證道歌) attributed, probably wrongly, to Yongjia Xuanjue 永嘉玄覺 (665-713). The *Zhengdao ge* mentions “Guanzizai 觀自在,” another translation of the name “Avalokitesvara.”¹³ Again, the message is not that there is a compassionate bodhisattva out there to help the practitioner. It is that the awakened practitioner who sees not a single dharma

¹¹ *Liuzu tanjing* 六祖壇經 (Philip Yampolsky, *The Platform Sutra*), 95; *Liuzu tanjing* (*Rokuso dangyo*, translated by Taka Nakagawa), 128.

¹² Huangbo and Pei Xiu, *Huangbo Duanji chanshi chuanxin fayao*, T.2012a.48.380a22-27. Huangbo and Pei Xiu, *The Zen Teachings of Huang Po*, translated by John Blofeld, 32-33. I have modified Blofeld’s translation.

¹³ Or Avalokitasvara.

is worthy to be called “Guanzizai,” i.e., “Avalokitesvara,” or “the Lord who Observes.”¹⁴

The single important exception mentioned above is found in the “Transmission of the Treasure Grove [Temple] (*Baolin zhuan* 寶林傳) of 801 C.E. This work contains a conversation featuring the thaumaturge and alleged incarnation of Guanyin, Baozhi 寶誌 (425-514) in which he says that Bodhidharma is Guanyin’s transformation body (*huashen* 化身).¹⁵

In the Chan school, Baozhi, who comes to be understood by the eighth century to be a transformation body of the eleven-headed Guanyin and is worshipped as such,¹⁶ first appears in a story added to the account of Bodhidharma’s interview with Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty (hereafter Liang Wudi 梁武帝) (464-549). Liang Wudi, who established the Liang kingdom in 502, was a devout Buddhist who called himself “Buddha Mind Son of Heaven.”¹⁷

In this story, sometime after Bodhidharma leaves the Liang court after his fruitless interview with Liang Wudi, the famous wonder-working monk Baozhi, who was greatly admired and trusted by the emperor, asks Liang Wudi whether he recognized the Indian monk he just interviewed. When Liang Wudi says no, Baozhi says: “That was the transformation body of the bodhisattva Guanyin come to transmit the Buddha’s mind seal.” This story appears for the first time in Chan texts in the *Baolin zhuan* of 801.

Baozhi’s testimony to Liang Wudi associates Bodhidharma with the supernatural Guanyin, thus giving him and the lineages that spring from him added authority. As Baozhi himself came to be widely seen as a transformation body, and thus a manifestation, of Guanyin, the authority Bodhidharma and the Chan lineages derived from this reported conversation could only have doubled in the eyes of those for whom the supernatural powers of the celestial bodhisattva were attractive.

¹⁴ Jia Jinhua 賈晉華 notes the frequent occurrence of Hongzhou school language in the *Yongjia zhengdao ge*, and suggests that it was a creation of the Hongzhou school in the time of Mazu’s immediate disciples. It was already popular by 830 C.E. See Jia Jinhua, *The Hongzhou School*, 89-95. Of the translations of the *Zhengdao ge* into English, only those by D.T. Suzuki in *Manual of Zen Buddhism*, and Nyogen Senzaki and Ruth Strout McCandless in *Buddhism and Zen*, preserve what many Chinese readers doubtless read as a reference to Avalokitesvara, since “Guanzizai” was one of the ways of translating the name of this Bodhisattva into Chinese, one that the famous translator Xuanzang 玄奘 (ca. 596-664) had employed. Suzuki’s otherwise somewhat problematic translation of the two relevant lines reads: “The Tathagata is interviewed when one enters upon a realm of no-forms, Such is to be really called a Kwanjizai (Avalokitesvara).” D.T. Suzuki, *Manual of Zen Buddhism*, 101. Other recent translations by Lu K’uan-yu (Charles Luk) in his *Ch’an and Zen Teachings*, vol. 3 and Master Sheng-yen in his *The Sword of Wisdom* translate the term as “Sovereign Regarder” and “Supreme Observer.”

¹⁵ *Baolin zhuan. Hōrinden (Baolin zhuan) yaku chu* (translated by Tanaka Ryōshō), *juan* 8, 493. Yanagida Seizan 柳田聖山, *Shoki Zenshūshisho no kenkyū* 初期禪宗史書の研究, 408 and 416, note 4.

¹⁶ Makita Tairyō, *Chugoku Bukkyōshi kenkyū* 中國佛教史研究, 2, 56-84.

¹⁷ For recent articles on the Buddhist activities of Liang Wudi, see Andreas Janousch, “The Emperor as Bodhisattva: The Bodhisattva Ordination and Ritual Assemblies of Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty,” and Jinhua Chen, “Pancavarsika Assemblies in Liang Wudi’s Buddhist Palace Chapel.”

Guanyin in Late Middle Chan and Song Chan: Context

In early and early middle Chan texts the story of Baozhi and his reference to Bodhidharma as an incarnation of Guanyin is an isolated instance. But beginning with the *Anthology of the Hall of the Patriarchs* from late middle Chan, the picture changes. And in the important early Song Chan compilation of encounter dialogues, *The Transmission of the Lamp from the Jingde Era* (*Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄, 1004) we find an even greater number of encounter dialogues in which Guanyin is the focus of attention. We find two important groups of these encounter dialogues, those derived from the *Surangama Sutra* (*Shou lengyan jing* 首楞嚴經), believed to have been translated by Paramiti in 705, but now thought to have been composed in China, and those concerning the Tantric images of Avalokitesvara with eleven heads, and a thousand hands and eyes. As we shall see, the records containing encounter dialogues from late middle Chan and Song Chan preserve the attitude of not encouraging the worship of Guanyin or looking to Guanyin for external aid. But they give Guanyin a place in their discourse.

In this essay I will briefly introduce the anecdotes that reflect the Avalokitesvara of the *Surangama Sutra*. I will particularly focus on the line of encounter dialogues that concern the Tantric images and imaginings of Guanyin that are found in the *Zutangji* and the *Jingde chuandenglu*. This line of stories culminates in the encounter dialogue made into a *gong'an* or “case” in Case 89 of the *Blue Cliff Record*, the story to which Dōgen refers.

Scriptures

Before we look at the Chan encounter dialogues and *gong'an* that feature the esoteric forms of Guanyin, we need to recall the context in which Chan teachers and practitioners lived. Their monasteries were not isolated from other Buddhist schools or the larger culture, where intense interest in Guanyin was found. Signs of this interest are found, *inter alia*, in the availability of scriptures and the widespread creation of visual images of Guanyin. All of the Buddhist schools created in the Tang dynasty chose as their central or highest scripture sutras in which Avalokitesvara figured prominently.

Who was Guanyin in India and Central Asia, before he came to China?¹⁸ He was a bodhisattva who promised to rescue anyone who called on his name, or thought about him with faith, from a variety of perils, as taught in the “Universal Gate” chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*. He was a bodhisattva who promised to appear in any form from which a being needed to hear the Dharma in order to take it in and be transformed by it, as also taught in the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Surangama Sutra*. He was a helper to Amitabha Buddha, his teacher, in the Pure Land texts. In the texts of the esoteric “Tantric” school, he was a universal savior who on his

¹⁸ Throughout this essay, until I reach the discussion of the Guanyin *gong'an* in the *Blue Cliff Record*, I will refer to Guanyin as “he,” since the appearance of feminine forms of Guanyin does not begin until the Song dynasty.

own authority promised to rescue beings from all sorts of dangers, including a bad death and a bad rebirth.

We know something about the importation and spread of scriptures from India and Central Asia in which a bodhisattva called Avalokitesvara (and sometimes Avalokatesvara) figures.¹⁹ By the middle of the Tang dynasty the following scriptures important to the Chinese cult of Guanyin had been translated and were widely circulated:

a) The *Lotus Sutra* (translated several times; the most popular translation is called the *Miaofa lianhuajing* 妙法蓮華經), with its “Universal Gate” chapter devoted to Guanyin, was the final and most complete teaching of the Buddha according to the Tiantai 天台 school.

b) The *Sutra of Visualization of Amitayus Buddha* was one of the three sutras canonized in the Pure Land school.

c) The 60-fascicle *Huayan Sutra* (*Flower Adornment Sutra*, *Avatamsaka Sutra*) was translated in 420. The 80-fascicle *Huayan Sutra* was translated in 695-699. This sutra was the Buddha’s highest teaching according to the Huayan school.²⁰

d) The *Surangama Sutra* (*Sutra of the Heroic March Concentration*), later associated with the Chan school, was traditionally believed to have been translated by Paramiti in 705. This has been called into question; many believe the sutra was composed in China around the same time.²¹

e) Most important to our topic here is that various esoteric sutras that glorify Avalokitesvara as the bodhisattva who teaches saving *dharanis* had been translated.

Esoteric Teachings

The distinguishing marks of esoteric teaching are the emphasis on everyone’s attaining Buddhahood in one lifetime, and the use of *mandala*, *mudra*, *mantra*, *dharani* and visualization to obtain both spiritual and worldly benefits. The deities worshipped in these practices are supramundane saviors. This is emphasized in the way they are to be visualized, with many eyes, arms and heads.²²

Sutras emphasizing the keeping of *dharanis* taught by Avalokitesvara were translated before the Tang dynasty (618-907), the first of them as early as the late 4th or early 5th centuries. More were introduced during the Northern Zhou dynasty (556-681).

Sutras of the eleven-headed Guanyin were translated in China in the sixth century, the seventh century, and the eighth century. Sutras of the thousand-handed and thousand-eyed Avalokitesvara were translated during the Tang dynasty, beginning in the seventh century. In 650 C.E., Bhagavadharma translated what became the most widely known and popular Avalokitesvara *dharani* sutra, the *Qianshou qianyan Guanshiyin pusa guangda yuanman wuai*

¹⁹ For a summary of the varying proposals for the origin and meaning of the puzzling variant names “Avalokitesvara” and “Avalokatesvara” and their various Chinese translations, see Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 14, 37-42.

²⁰ Yü summarizes these well-known facts in *Kuan-yin*, 18.

²¹ Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 40. A more extensive description of the contents and appeal of this sutra to Tang and Song readers is found in Beata Grant, *Mount Lu Revisited*, 26-30.

²² Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 48.

dabeixin tuoluonijing 千手千眼觀世音菩薩廣大圓滿無礙大悲心陀羅尼經, known as the *Qianshou jing* for short. There were thirteen translations in all in the Tang, a sign of the popularity of this form of Guanyin.²³ (We will discuss the *Qianshou jing* further below.)

Common characteristics of these sutras include their emphasis on the chanting of *dharanis* and their promises of both unfailing deliverance from all worldly disasters, and the gaining of worldly benefits and transcendent wisdom. The sutras emphasize minute, detailed and correct procedures: how to make a two- or three-dimensional image of the deity, how many times one should chant the *dharani*, what ritual ingredients one should use in performing the fire offering (*homa*) to the deity, what *mudra* and visualizations to carry out. When the practices (*sadhanas*) are performed correctly, Avalokitesvara will appear to the devotee in a vision either as a monk or in a form as imagined by the practitioner.

Images

The spread of the two esoteric images of Guanyin that are important in Chan materials began rather late both in India and China. In India, the eleven-headed Avalokitesvara in Cave 41 at Kanheri, near Mumbai, which dates to the late fifth or early sixth century, was possibly the first Tantric image of Guanyin to appear in India.²⁴ In China, the eleven-headed Guanyin was also the first esoteric form of Guanyin to appear in images. Two early Tang representations were found at Dunhuang, and a number of bas-relief sculptures from the early eighth century were found in Chang'an.²⁵ According to Henrik Sorensen, there are more than a hundred images of the eleven-headed Guanyin in banner-paintings and murals found at Dunhuang.²⁶

The appearance of the thousand-armed and thousand-eyed image in China is the result of a later phase of influence from post-Gupta (from the seventh to the twelfth centuries) India that traveled the southern sea-routes through Southeast Asia to China. No images are found in India, though scholars believe there must have been such images. Images of the thousand-armed Guanyin in China are found in caves along the tributaries of the Yangtze River in Sichuan. In Cave 45 at Anyue, ascribed to the late eighth or early ninth century, is an image that shows the lower arms dispensing objects to two tiny figures near the base. One of those is a hungry ghost receiving nectar, showing an association of Guanyin with those suffering in other non-human realms of rebirth.²⁷

In the Northern Song dynasty, Tang dynasty types such as the esoteric forms of the

²³ Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 59. Maria Dorothea Reis-Habito points out that Bhagavadharma's version is the only version that contains the sections on the ten great vows and the blessing of the fifteen kinds of good deaths, as well as protection from fifteen kinds of bad deaths. Maria Dorothea Reis-Habito, *Die Dharani des grossen Erbarmens*, 97-117. Yü also suggests that "the dharani's concrete power over death and the comprehensiveness of the bodhisattva's vows could be the reason for this particular sutra's greater attraction." Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 69.

²⁴ Patricia Eichenbaum Karetzky, *Guanyin*, 11.

²⁵ Karetzky, *Guanyin*, 24-25.

²⁶ Henrik Sorensen, "Typology and Iconography," 2: 285-349; 302-305.

²⁷ Karetzky, *Guanyin*, 26-27.

eleven-headed and thousand-armed Guanyin continued to be popular in art, especially with the upper levels of society. But in the Song dynasty esoteric images of Guanyin are most often of the thousand-armed type, such as the unique colossal bronze that the Song emperor Taizu ordered to be cast at Longxingsi near Shijiazhuang in Hebei province. It was finished in 971, and is 21.3 meters high.²⁸ In 1075 Su Dongpo 蘇東坡, a famous poet of the Northern Song dynasty, wrote a wonderful poem on the occasion of the construction in Chengdu of the Pavilion of the Compassionate One (the thousand-armed, thousand-eyed esoteric Guanyin); the pavilion contained an image of the thousand-armed Guanyin made of red sandalwood.²⁹ The National Palace Museum in Taipei has a large and beautiful Song dynasty painting of the Great Compassion Guanyin with a thousand hands and eyes.³⁰ There is an eleven-headed Guanyin in the Dule Temple in Tianjing municipality, made in 984 under the Liao. It is polychrome, made of clay, and over 16 meters tall.³¹

Thus in the period in which Guanyin encounter dialogues and *gong'an* appear with some regularity, the larger Chinese Buddhist world, and probably the monasteries at which Chan monks practiced, were very familiar with and interested in all forms of an teachings about Guanyin, but perhaps especially the Tantric forms and teachings.

Chan monastic ceremonial

In its own practices the cult of esoteric forms of Guanyin entered into Chan monastic life itself at least by the very late Song dynasty and the early Yuan dynasty. As indicated in rule books and daily office recitation handbooks, it was a widespread Chan practice to recite communally the *Dabei zhou* 大悲咒, the *dharani* of the Tantric Great Compassion Guanyin, particularly as part of elaborate funeral ceremonies for abbesses and abbots, and simpler ones for monks and nuns. In 1274 a ceremonial and procedural rulebook was circulated called the *Conglin jiaoding qinggui zongyao* 叢林較定清規總要. In this text, reciting the *Dabei zhou* is part of the prescribed funeral ceremonies for the death of the abbot, and of a monk, of receiving the news of the death of an abbot of another monastery, as well as part of a ceremony to remember all the Patriarchs. The *Chanlin beiyong qinggui* 禪林備用清規, completed in 1317, prescribes reciting the *Dabei zhou* in the memorial ceremony for Bodhidharma, as well as in a ceremony for all the patriarchs and for the lineage of Dharma heirs. In addition, it prescribes reciting the *Dabei zhou* in seven different contexts that are all parts of funeral ceremonies for abbots and abbesses or monks and nuns. The *Chixiu baizhang qinggui* 敕修百丈清規 (compiled between 1336 and 1343) prescribes reciting the *Dabei zhou* for the well-being of the dynasty and the emperor, as well as for the death of a master, the

²⁸ Karetzky, *Guanyin*, 33; 35-36.

²⁹ Tay, "Kuan-yin," 100-101. Su's poem is translated in full in Beata Grant, *Mount Lu Revisited*, 88-89, where important parts of the preface to the poem are also translated. Su and his brother also wrote poems about another statue of the thousand-armed Guanyin in Bianliang, the Northern Song capital, which was made of iron.

³⁰ Yu-min Lee, *Visions of Compassion*, plate 8, 58-59.

³¹ Karetzky, *Guanyin*, 38-40.

death of an abbot, and for a sick monk.³² In these texts we can see reflected what appears to be a growing use of, indeed a fundamental importance given to, the Great Compassion *Dharani* of Guanyin of the thousand hands and thousand eyes.³³

Although the earliest detailed Chan Code text we have, the *Chanyuan qinggui* 禪苑清規 [Rules of Purity for Chan Monasteries] of 1103, contains no reference to the recitation of the *dharani* of the thousand-handed ‘Great Compassion’ Guanyin in any ceremony, it does include among the 120 questions with which a monk or a nun should test her or his spiritual progress the following question: “Do you have a thousand hands and arms or not?”³⁴

In daily lesson books, like the *Chanmen risong* 禪門日誦 or the *Chanmen kesong* 禪門課誦, that give the order and content of *gatha*, *sutra*, *mantra* and *dharani* recitations that took place daily in Chan and other Buddhist monasteries at least as early as the 17th century, the Great Compassion *Dharani* was to be recited twice a day in the morning and evening assemblies of all the monks and/or nuns in the monastery. As these books were ephemera, we do not have daily lesson books going back to earlier periods. So we do not know when this practice began.

Why was the *Dabei zhou* so popular in funeral or memorial contexts in Chan monasteries? In the *Dabei zhou jing* (or *Qianshou jing*), Avalokitesvara promises that he will not achieve complete, perfect enlightenment if anyone who recites the *dharani* should fall into an evil realm of rebirth, or not be born into one of the buddha lands. Avalokitesvara specifies that the keeping of the *dharani* will result in fifteen kinds of good rebirth. These include (1) always being ruled by a virtuous king wherever one is born; (2) always to be born in a good country; (3) always living in a peaceful time; (4) always meeting with good friends; (5) always born without any physical defects; (6) always born with a pure and ripe heart for truth; (7) not breaking any precepts; (8) having harmonious and virtuous family members; (9) fully endowed with money and food; (10) always being respected and taken care of by others; (11) never getting robbed; (12) always having one’s desire fulfilled; (13) always being protected by *nagas*, *devas* and virtuous gods; (14) can see the Buddha and listen to the Dharma in the place of rebirth; (15) can understand and penetrate the correct Dharma.³⁵ Clearly, one would be wise to ask dharma brothers and sisters to recite it after one’s death.

Encounter dialogues and “public cases” featuring Guanyin

As mentioned above, there are two broad streams of Guanyin-related encounter dialogues

³² References to the *Dabei zhou* in this text include T.2025.48.1114b; 11115a; 1116a; 1118c; 1127c; 1128c; 1129a; 1148a; 1148b; 1148c; 1149a.

³³ Reis-Habito, *Die Dharani des grossen Erbarmens*, discusses these texts. I have verified her findings.

³⁴ *Chanyuan qinggui*, HTC 111.438a-471c. Edited and translated by Kagamishima et al. *Yaku chu Zen'en Shingi* 訳註禪苑清規 (Tokyo: Sôtōshū Shūmichō, 1972), 286.

³⁵ Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 61.

and *gong'an* in Chan texts from the Tang through the Yuan dynasties. The two are those derived from or alluding to the Avalokitesvara of the *Surangama Sutra*, and those concerning the esoteric images of Avalokitesvara with eleven heads and a thousand hands and eyes. Guanyin-related encounter dialogues alluding to the Avalokitesvara of the *Lotus Sutra* make up a much smaller number. In this essay I will introduce both of the major streams, but give more attention to the stream that features the esoteric images of Avalokitesvara. These encounter dialogues and *gong'an* are found in the *Anthology of the Hall of the Patriarchs* and the *Record of the Transmission of the Lamp from the Jingde Era*.

Encounter dialogues featuring the Guanyin of the *Surangama Sutra*

Quite a number of expository answers and puzzling dialogues in Chan texts connect Guanyin and hearing in the way that the *Surangama Sutra* does. One of the most important masters depicted as making this connection is Baizhang Huaihai 百丈懷海 (749-814). Two masters whose records allude to the *Surangama Sutra* frequently and make the connection between Guanyin and hearing more than once are Guizong Zhichang 歸宗知常 (active 806-810), a dharma-heir of Mazu Daoyi, and Changsha Jingcen 長沙景岑 (d.868), who was a disciple of Nanquan Puyuan 南泉普願 (748-834), one of Mazu Daoyi's great dharma-heirs.

For example, in Changsha's chapter of the *Jingde chuandenglu* of 1004, Avalokitesvara is identified as the bodhisattva who attains liberation through hearing, as he is in the *Surangama Sutra*. Again, as in the *Platform Sutra* and the *Chuanxin fayao* passages quoted above, the question to which the master gives an answer is how to understand the celestial, mythical bodhisattvas from within the Chan perspective:

The monk said, "The Buddhas are as many as the sands of the [Ganges] river. Why do they all have various names although their essence is the same?"

The Master [Changsha] said, "One who returns to the origin by means of the organ of the eye is called Manjusri; one who returns to the origin by means of the ear is called Avalokitesvara; and one who returns to the origin by means of mind is called Samantabhadra. Manjusri is the wonderful observation wisdom of the Buddha, Avalokitesvara is the uncaused great compassion of the Buddha,³⁶ and Samantabhadra is the wonderful conduct of non-doing of the Buddha. The three holy ones are but the names given to the wonderful functions of the Buddha, and the Buddha is the essence of the three holy ones."³⁷

³⁶ This term is found in the *Guanwuliangshoujing* 觀無量壽經, T. 12, 343c. The Keitoku dentōroku Kenkyukai interprets it as referring to compassion that is equal, without distinction; see Keitoku dentōroku Kenkyukai, under the supervision of Iriya Yoshitaka, *Keitoku dentōroku* vol. 4, 34. Hereafter "*Keitoku dentōroku*."

³⁷ *Jingde chuandenglu*, fascicle 10, Changsha entry. T.51.275.18-23. *Jingde chuandenglu* (Sohaku Ogata, *The Transmission of the Lamp: Early Masters*), 339-40. *Keitoku dentōroku*, IV, 33. I have modified Ogata's translation. I have translated "*san sheng*" 三聖 as "the three holy ones." It could also be translated as the "three sages."

The locus classicus in Chinese Buddhism for the connection between Guanyin and hearing in the sense of examining (*guan* 觀) with penetrating insight both sounds and the sense organ and sense faculty of hearing until the void is perceived is the *Surangama Sutra*. Because of its emphasis on the inner practice of meditation, among other reasons, this sutra was very well known in the Chan school. The sutra was allegedly first translated in the early eighth century; scholars now believe it was in fact written in China at that time. In the *Surangama Sutra* the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara describes how he attained awakening and universal compassion by meditating on the organ of hearing:

“At first by directing the organ of hearing into the stream of meditation, this organ was detached from its object, and by wiping out (the concept of) both sound and stream-entry, both disturbance and stillness became clearly non-existent. Thus advancing step by step, both hearing and its object ceased completely, but I did not stop where they ended. When the awareness of this state and this state itself were realized as non-existent, both subject and object merged into the void, the awareness of which became all embracing. With further elimination of the void and its object, both creation and annihilation vanished, giving way to the state of Nirvana which then manifested.”³⁸

In the *Surangama Sutra* Guanyin also says: “Since I myself do not meditate on sound but on the meditator, I cause all suffering beings to look into the sound of their own voices to attain liberation.”³⁹ In the sutra, this is one of fourteen kinds of fearless merit.⁴⁰ Luk comments: “This is a very profound meditation which readers should not let pass without careful study if they wish to know why Avalokitesvara is so popular in Far Eastern countries where he is the merciful patron saint. By discarding the sound to look into the meditator himself, that is, into the nature of hearing, he disengages himself from both organs and sense data and thereby realizes his all-embracing Buddha nature which contains all living beings.”⁴¹

This practice method of turning the hearing inward is known as “the Gate through which Avalokitesvara enters the Principle.”⁴² Various masters refer to this Dharma-gate. For example, in the *Ancestral Hall Collection* and the *Transmission of the Lamp compiled in the Jingde Era* (*Jingde chuandenglu*), the following story is told about the master Baizhang Huaihai and a monk who appears to have awakened through hearing: “On one occasion the monks had all

³⁸ *Shou lengyanjing*, *juan* 6, T.19.945.19.128b. *The Surangama Sutra*, translated by Charles Luk 135. This is Charles Luk’s translation.

³⁹ T.945.19.129a.27-29, Luk, *Surangama*, 139. *Guan-yin*, or more fully, *Guan-shi-yin*, is usually interpreted as meaning “the Perceiver (*guan*) of the Sounds (*yin*) of the World (*shi*). Here Guanyin explains his name differently: I do not meditate on the sounds of the suffering beings of the world to rescue them; I meditate on sound (*guanyin*), and cause suffering beings to look into (*guan, avalokita*) the sound (*yin*) of their own voices to attain liberation.

⁴⁰ Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 517, note 13.

⁴¹ Luk, *Surangama*, 139, note 1.

⁴² See *Keitoku dentōroku*, IV, 498.

been asked to dig the ground. When they heard the mealtime drum, one monk came back carrying his mattock and laughing heartily. The Master remarked, “This is the gate whereby Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara enters into the Principle.” When they returned to the temple, the Master sent for the monk and asked him, “Why did you behave like that just now?” The monk answered, “On hearing the sound of the drum I came back to have dinner.” Then the Master laughed.⁴³

Insights into the sense organs and sense faculties and what lies behind them and unifies them all that are found in the *Surangama Sutra* are important in Chan, and are at the heart of a number of other encounter dialogues. Guanyin states in the *Surangama Sutra*: “When I first realized the hearing mind which was most profound, the Essence of Mind (i.e., the Tathagata Store) disengaged itself from hearing and could no longer be divided by seeing, hearing, feeling and knowing, and so became one pure and clean all pervading Bodhi.”⁴⁴

The Chan encounter dialogue that associates Guanyin and hearing that challenges a student most profoundly to understand Guanyin’s teachings in the *Surangama Sutra* is the following account of a conversation between a monk and the master Guizong Zhichang:

A monk asked: “What is the profound message?”

[a dialogue follows in which he fails to understand the exchange and is dismissed ...]

The monk pleaded, “Why, is there not some skillful means I might follow?”

The Master [Guizong] answered [quoting the Universal Gate chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*]: “The wonderful wisdom of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara can help the sufferings of the world.”⁴⁵

The monk asked, “What is the wonderful wisdom of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara?”

The master tapped the lid of the tripod [kettle] three times and said, “Did you hear the sound or not?” The monk replied, “Yes, I did.” The master asked, “Why do I not hear it?” The monk could make no reply.⁴⁶

This encounter dialogue could be read as simply about whether “I exist or not”; in that reading, it has perhaps no connection with the *Surangama Sutra* other than the association of Avalokitesvara and hearing. But one can also read it as asking the monk to understand the statement by Avalokitesvara in the *Surangama Sutra* that by turning hearing inward he ceased

⁴³ *Jingde chuandenglu*, fascicle 6; T.2076.51.250a.4-8; Ogata, *The Transmission of the Lamp*, 212-213. Also in Baizhang’s entry in the *Zutangji*. See Yanagida, *Zen goroku*, 522.

⁴⁴ T.945.19.129c.5-7; Luk, *Surangama*, 141. In the *Surangama Sutra* the Buddha demonstrates to his disciple Ananda how false are his ordinary perceptions of reality, and how true seeing has nothing to do with the eyes at all (Grant, *Mount Lu*, 28).

⁴⁵ This is a quotation from the verse at the end of Chapter 25, the Universal Gate chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, Kumarajiva’s translation of 406 C.E. See *Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law (Miaofa lianhua jing)*, T.262.9. In the translation of Kumarajiva’s version by Bunno Kato, revised by W. E. Soothill, Wilhelm Schiffer and Yoshiro Tamura, in *The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, 325, the line is translated: “The Cry Regarder with his mystic wisdom Can save [such] a suffering world.”

⁴⁶ *Jingde chuandenglu*, fascicle 7, T51.255c28-256a6.

to hear external sounds in the mind.

In the *Zutangji* and the *Jingde chuandenglu* there are other encounter dialogues that associate Guanyin and hearing along the same lines. The ones given above are, however, a representative sample of the significant stream of encounter dialogues that feature the relevance of Guanyin's practice regarding hearing to that of the student.

Encounter dialogues and “public cases” featuring esoteric forms of Guanyin (especially the Great Compassion [Dabei] Guanyin)

In Chan texts a number of masters raise the puzzling phenomenon of Dabei Guanyin's thousand hands and eyes with their students. Perhaps the earliest teacher to whom such an encounter dialogue is attributed is National Teacher Nanyang Huizhong 南陽慧忠 (d.775), allegedly a direct disciple of the Sixth Chinese Chan patriarch Huineng. In his record in the *Zutangji* we find:

A monk asked: “What is the great meaning of the Buddha's Dharma?”

The Master said: “In Manjusri's Hall, ten thousand bodhisattvas.”

The monk said: “I do not understand.”

The Master said: “Great Compassion [Bodhisattva] thousand hands thousand eyes.”⁴⁷

In another brief reference in the *Zutangji*, Jiufeng Heshang 九峰和尚 replies to a monk's question:

“If you don't fall into ‘ordinary person’ or ‘sage (*sheng* 聖),’ what is that like?”

“A thousand eyes don't reach it.”⁴⁸

Broadly, encounter dialogues that focus on the esoteric forms of Guanyin are of three kinds. The first kind asks, “Is the eleven-headed or thousand-armed Guanyin ordinary or holy?” Here are two examples:

a) In Mi 米 Heshang's entry in the *Zutangji* the following story appears:

Linji Yixuan 臨濟義玄 asked Mi Heshang, “As for the 12-faced Guanyin, is it holy or not?” Mi answered: “It is. What is its original face?”⁴⁹

b) In the *Jingde chuandenglu*, Danyuan Zhenying (or Yingzhen) 耽源真應 (應真) asked Magu Baoche 麻谷寶徹, “Is the 12-faced Guanyin ordinary or holy?” “[Magu] answered: “Holy.” Danyuan then hit [Magu] one blow. (Because he hasn't let go of the notion of “Holy”?) [Magu] said: “I know that you have not arrived at the stage [of comprehension] (perhaps, the stage of transcending holy and ordinary).”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *Zutangji* (Zenbunka kenkyūjo), *juan* 9, 113-114. Also in *Jingde chuandenglu*, T.51.244c29-245a1.

⁴⁸ *Zutangji* (Zenbunka kenkyūjo), 360.1. This story is not found in the *Jingde chuandenglu*.

⁴⁹ *Zutangji* (Zenbunka kenkyūjo), 755.14-756.1. This story is not in this form in the *Jingde chuandenglu*.

⁵⁰ *Jingde chuandenglu*, *juan* 7, Magu chapter, T.2076.51.254a.1-2. *Keitoku dentōroku*, III, 48. Ogata, 235. Ogata translates the word ‘*sheng*’ as ‘sage.’ Magu Baoche had his career on Mt. Mayu or Magu in present-day Shanxi province. The name of the mountain is written both as *Ma gu* (hemp valley) and *Ma yu* (hemp, bath, to bathe). The Japanese tradition reads the name of the mountain, and thus Magu's name, as Mayu (in Japanese *mayōku*). Danyuan Zhenying was a dharma heir of Nanyang

A second kind of dialogue concerning the esoteric forms of Guanyin focuses on the fact that, as a Bodhisattva, Guanyin stands for the universal compassionate activity of Buddhahood. Here the question usually is, “Why does he need so many hands and eyes?”⁵¹

This question becomes a popular formula in Chan encounter dialogues. If a student asks it, it enables the master easily to point back to the student. For example, allegedly the famous minister and thinker Li Ao 李翱 once asked master Shinzhou Ehu Dayi 信州鵝湖大義 (746-818), a direct student of Mazu Daoyi, “What does Great Compassion [Bodhisattva] need a thousand hands and eyes for?” Ehu Dayi replied, “What does the Emperor need you for?”⁵²

A similar story is told of the important master Nanquan Puyuan. Governor Lu 陸 asked, “What is the purpose of the many hands and eyes of the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion, Guanyin?” Nanquan answered: “Just as our nation employs you.”⁵³

The third kind of dialogue that focuses on the esoteric forms of Guanyin asks, “Which is Dabei Guanyin’s true face or true eye?” A good example of this question and the response to it by a master is found in the *Record of Linji*. It goes as follows:

One day Linji [i.e., Linji Yixuan (d. 866)] went to Hefu. Counselor Wang the Prefectural Governor requested the Master to take the high seat [from which masters lectured]. At that time Magu came forward and asked,

“The Great Compassionate One has a thousand hands and a thousand eyes. Which is the true eye?”

The Master said, “The Great Compassionate One has a thousand hands and a thousand eyes. Which is the true eye? Speak, speak!” Magu pulled the Master down off the high seat and sat upon it himself. The Master went up close to him and said, “How do you do?” Magu hesitated. The Master, in his turn, pulled Magu off the high seat and sat upon it himself. Magu went out. The Master stepped down.⁵⁴

As a contemporary Chan teacher, Master Sheng-yen, comments, this dialogue is about the “treasure of the correct Dharma eye” transmitted, according to Chan legend, from the Buddha Sakyamuni to his disciple Mahakasyapa at an assembly at Vulture Peak. The question in this and all similar dialogues then becomes, “What is the true Dharma-eye?”⁵⁵

Huizhong. He also studied with Ancestor Ma. See *Jingde chuandenglu* entry in *juan* 13. The substantially identical story with the roles reversed occurs in Danyuan’s entry in the *Jingde chuandenglu*, *juan* 13. T.51.305b.14-15. Danyuan’s entry is 305b.1-17.

⁵¹ Huizhong’s answer in the dialogue above also points to the marvelous activity of the enlightened person as the “great meaning of the Buddha’s Dharma.”

⁵² *Jingde chuandenglu*, *juan* 7. T.2076.51.253a2-3. Ogata, 228-29. *Keitoku dentōroku*, III, 28.

⁵³ *Jingde chuandenglu*, *juan* 8; T.51.258c29-259a1. Chang Chung-yuan, *Original Teachings*, 161; See also Ogata, 266, and *Keitoku dentōroku*, 3, 143.

⁵⁴ T.1985.47.496c4-9. I have taken this translation from that by Ruth Fuller Sasaki et al. in *The Record of Lin-chi*, 2. See similar story in *Jingde chuandenglu*, T. 51.291a.2-5.

⁵⁵ Sheng-yen, “The Recorded Sayings of Master Linji with commentary by Master Sheng-yen,” 24-28.

Master Sheng-yen comments: “There are two kinds of meaning in the Dharma: the Dharma of secondary meaning, and the Dharma of ultimate meaning. Whatever can be spoken, heard, understood, or learned refers to the Dharma of secondary meaning. The Dharma of ultimate meaning is beyond words and language, phrases and names. To directly understand the Dharma of ultimate meaning is to be enlightened.”⁵⁶ Thus the answer to the question about Great Compassion Bodhisattva’s thousand eyes that asks “Which is the true eye,” cannot be expressed in words. But the Dharma of ultimate meaning is expressed in the story—a prepared listener could realize it from hearing the story.

We come now to the story of Daowu and Yunyan’s exchange as presented in the *Blue Cliff Record*. Of all the encounter dialogues that present the Tantric Guanyin of eleven heads or a thousand hands and eyes, this is the one whose transformation into a “public case” during the Song dynasty made sure that Guanyin had a lasting place in Chan discourse.

The story goes (in the *Biyantu* version):

“Yunyan asked Daowu, ‘What does the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion use so many hands and eyes for?’

Daowu said, ‘It’s like someone reaching back groping for a pillow in the middle of the night.’ Yunyan said, ‘I understand.’

Daowu said, ‘How do you understand?’

Yunyan said, ‘All over the body (*bianshen* 遍身) are hands and eyes.’

Daowu said, ‘You have said quite a bit there, but you’ve only said eighty per cent of it.’

Yunyan said, ‘What do you say, Elder Brother?’

Daowu said, ‘Throughout the body (*tongshen* 通身) are hands and eyes.’⁵⁷

The story comes from “middle Chan,” the period from the mid-eighth to mid-tenth centuries, in which the Hongzhou school doctrine of “ordinary mind is enlightenment” came to dominate the Chan movement, and the practice and construction of encounter dialogues formally emerged and matured.⁵⁸ The kind of story it is, one involving an invented “encounter dialogue” between two persons, could not have originated prior to the late Tang dynasty. A version of the story appeared in the *Anthology of the Hall of the Patriarchs*, and yet another version in the *Transmission of the Lamp compiled in the Jingde Era* (*Jingde chuandenglu*).

The *Zutangji*’s version is closer in content to the *Blue Cliff Record* version than that of the *Jingde chuandenglu*, but introduces a third speaker. The *Jingde chuandenglu* version in fascicle 14 goes as follows:

Daowu asked: the Great Compassion [Bodhisattva’s] thousand hands and eyes—which

⁵⁶ Sheng-yen, “The Recorded Sayings,” 27.

⁵⁷ Yuanwu Keqin, *Biyantu*, T.48.2003.213c19-26. Cleary and Cleary, *Blue Cliff*, 571. The story that Yunyan and Daowu were brothers that appears in the *Zutangji* is not factual; it has been disproved by Ui Hakuju. See Ui Hakuju, *Daisan zenshūshi kenkyū* 2, 23-26. See also Jia Jinhua, *The Hongzhou School*, 110.

⁵⁸ John McRae, *Seeing Through Zen*, 13, 18-19. Jia Jinhua, *The Hongzhou School*, 47-52.

is the true eye?

Yunyan replied: it is like grasping your pillow when there is no lamp—what is that like?

Daowu said: I understand! I understand!

Yunyan said: How do you understand?

Daowu said: Every inch of the body (*tongshen*) is eyes.⁵⁹

Here, compared to the *Blue Cliff Record* version, the speakers are reversed, and we find missing the challenge to the hearer to determine whether *bianshen* and *tongshen* have different meanings. Not only that, the initial question is different!

These differences in earlier versions raise the question of where Xuedou obtained his version, or whether he himself crafted it out of earlier versions. At the very least we can say that by the eleventh century in the early Song dynasty the story had not reached a settled form.

This *gong'an* relies on bringing together the idea of the celestial bodhisattva Guanyin in his thousand-hand and thousand-eyed form with the idea that an ordinary human being reaching out to grasp a pillow in the middle of the night is also Guanyin. It relies therefore on the point made in the *Platform Sutra* and *Essentials of the Transmission of Mind Dharma* that one should look for Guanyin within, not without. As with most good *gong'an*, a question asked about Guanyin and not oneself becomes pointed at oneself. At the same time, the *gong'an* would lose its force if the idea of the celestial Avalokitesvara, who unlike the questioner has realized the essence and functioning of awakened being, had been completely forgotten in the Chan school and the Buddhist culture surrounding it. For the *gong'an* to work, there must be a tension between the lofty ideal represented by the celestial Bodhisattva and the recognition that the person who reaches out for his pillow and is challenged by the master's question is a person of ordinary, not ideal, functioning.⁶⁰

Further, the *gong'an* draws on Guanyin's popularity. As we saw above, the available *gong'an* and the references in other Chan sources suggest that the Tantric Great Compassion (Dabei) Guanyin of a thousand hands and eyes, with all his/her explicitly enumerated powers and activities, was popular in the Chan school, so much so that reciting the Great Compassion Dharani became an important ritual activity in Chan monasteries.

This *gong'an* sums up the whole line of encounter dialogues concerning the Tantric Guanyin, while providing a twist that makes it even more challenging than the others. The other types of dialogues featuring Guanyin with a thousand hands and eyes mentioned above are different from the *gong'an* in Case 89, but not irrelevant to it. The beginning of the encounter dialogue featuring Nanyang Huizhong points to the identity of the one and the many, the universal and the particular, in Dabei Guanyin:

“A monk asked: ‘What is the Great meaning of the Buddha’s Dharma?’

The Master said: ‘In Manjusri’s Hall, ten thousand bodhisattvas.’”

And it also points to the marvelous inconceivable activity of awakened mind. Both of these points are relevant to the *gong'an* in case 89. As for all of the encounter dialogues in

⁵⁹ T.2076.51.281.

⁶⁰ I am indebted to Luis O. Gomez for clarifying this point. See his “From the Extraordinary to the Ordinary,” 141-191, 159, 164.

which the question is, “Which is Guanyin’s true eye?”, they seem to be asking a different question. They seem to have substituted a question about Guanyin’s essence for one about Guanyin’s functioning. Not, “What is it that great compassion does? How does it function in this world and in the *Dharmadhātu*,” but rather, “What is Avalokitesvara’s essence, what is her/his core truth?” But in fact, as Huayan thought reminds us, Guanyin’s essence, his/her reality, is precisely her functioning, her regarding with many eyes or one eye the suffering of beings and her responding with one hand or many hands. The answer given by masters Shizhou Ehu Dayi and Nanquan, is “How does the Emperor employ you? Why does the Emperor need you?” This brings together again the mythical, supramundane activity of Guanyin on behalf of wisdom and compassion with the realm of the ordinary person in the mundane world, just as the *gong’an* of Case 89 does with an even more intimate, concrete, mundane image.

Xuedou’s poetic commentary in his eulogy (*song* 頌), and Yuanwu’s prose commentary on Case 89, both bring up categories and teachings of the indigenous Huayan school to hint at the meaning of the exchange between Yunyan and Daowu. Xuedou brings up the metaphor of the Jewel Net of Indra put forward by the Huayan school patriarch Fazang 法藏 (643-720). Yuanwu brings up and expounds the fourfold *Dharmadhātu* of another Huayan school patriarch, Chengguan 澄觀 (738-839). So apparently we are to understand the thousand-armed Guanyin and our own arm reaching for a pillow with the aid of insights expressed in the Huayan school’s depiction of harmoniously interpenetrating reality.

The strong interest in the *Huayan Sutra* and the ideas of the Huayan school displayed by many Chan masters from the Tang through the Song is an extraordinary phenomenon. Jia Jinhua argues that Mazu Daoyi’s teaching that the ordinary mind is the Buddha, and that essence and function are totally identified, was inspired by the Huayan theory of nature origination from the Tathagata, which was an interpretation of the essence/function paradigm of the two aspects of one mind in the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith* (*Dasheng qixinlun* 大乘起信論).⁶¹ On this basis, Mazu proposed that the ultimate reality of enlightenment was manifested in function, and consequently affirmed that the entirety of daily life was of ultimate truth and value.⁶²

Both the “Five Ranks of Particularity and Universality” of Dongshan Liangjie 洞山良价 (807-869) and the “Four Processes of Liberation from Subjectivity and Objectivity” of Linji Yixuan (d. 867) are closely related to Fazang’s doctrine of the identification of ultimate reality (*li* 理 Principle) and phenomenal appearance (*shi* 事, events or happenings), and to the idea of the fourfold Dharma realm (*Dharmadhātu*) offered by Chengguan.

Huayan concepts are reflected throughout the *Biyānlù* or *Biyānji* (*Blue Cliff Record*), the

⁶¹ This text is usually called “The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana.” The outline of ontology, anthropology, psychology and soteriology presented in this text, attributed to Asvaghosa but now believed to have been composed in China, is fundamental to the thinking of the Huayan school and the Chan school. The classic English translation is by Hakada. On the fundamental intellectual structure of this text, see Peter N. Gregory, “The Problem of Theodicy.”

⁶² Jia Jinhua, *The Hongzhou School*, 78.

Linji school text by Yuanwu Keqin (1063-1135), but are brought to the fore particularly in Case 89. They are also reflected in the writings of the rival Caodong 曹洞 school's eminent teacher Hongzhi Zhengjue 宏智正覺 (1091-1157), and in the Caodong school's answer to the *Biyuanlu*, the collection of *gong'an*, *songgu* (eulogies of the ancients) and commentary by Wansong Xingxiu 萬松行秀 called the *Congrong lu* 從容錄. To date this important emphasis within the Song and Yuan Chan school has not been systematically studied.⁶³

Let us look briefly at some key concepts of the *Huayan Sutra* and the Huayan school that come to the fore in Chan discourse. Luis Gomez points to the message of the *Huayan Sutra*:

“[T]his world embodies enlightenment. It is the sphere in which Buddhas and Bodhisattvas exercise their wisdom and compassion. It is the source for the truth of the Buddha's Dharma. In every single human being live a thousand Buddhas, all incessantly praising the Bodhisattva's compassionate career. In every single human being shines a Buddha, and each of these Buddhas reflects clearly the Buddhas in all other beings.”⁶⁴

The Huayan school found explicitly Chinese ways to explain the nature and import of the vision captured in the *Huayan Sutra*. In the Huayan school doctrines, the sutra's vision was largely reformulated in terms of essence and function. The Huayan school combined an essence/function (*ti/yong* 體/用) metaphysics and hermeneutical principle with the Indian Buddhist notions of emptiness (*kong* 空) and form (*se* 色), as well as emptiness and *pratityasamutpada*, or codependent co-arising. Huayan thinkers gave more positive, more Chinese terms for these fundamental realities. For emptiness, they substituted Principle, *li*, and for form they substituted Phenomena, events or happenings, *shi*.⁶⁵

The fundamental idea of the *Huayan Sutra* and the Huayan school is the unimpeded mutual solution of all particularities; mutual interpenetration.⁶⁶ Each particularity, besides being itself, penetrates all other particularities and is in turn penetrated by them. Huayan scholars pointed out that this is possible because the essence, the fundamental nature, of all particularities is empty. “Empty” here does not connote an unoccupied space. Rather, it is the

⁶³ Among those who have helped to open up the topic, Chang Chung-yuan provides a valuable chapter on this topic in his *Original Teachings of Ch'an Buddhism*. Yoshizu Yoshihide 吉津宜英 in *Kegonzen no shisōshiteki kenkyū* 華嚴禪の思想史的研究 and Peter N. Gregory in *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism* have provided important studies of how Guifeng Zongmi (780-841), recognized as a Dharma-heir in the Chan lineage of Shenhui (670-762) and a “patriarch” of the Huayan school, created a form of Huayan philosophy that was compatible with Chan. Zongmi's version of “Huayan Chan” no doubt influenced many masters after the Tang; the influence is most obvious in the case of Dahui Zonggao (1089-1163). In my Ph.D. dissertation, “Ch'an Enlightenment for Laymen,” I devoted a chapter to Dahui, Huayan teachings, and the Huayan school.

⁶⁴ Gomez, “Extraordinary,” 143-144.

⁶⁵ See A. Charles Muller, “East Asia's Unexplored Pivot of Metaphysics and Hermeneutics: Essence-Function/Interpenetration,”

<http://www.hm.tyg.jp/~acmuller/articles/indigenoushermeneutics.htm>.

⁶⁶ Chang Chung-yuan, *Original Teachings*, 42.

absolute reality, free from the dichotomy of form and formlessness, being and non-being. To avoid the negative connotation of the word “empty,” Huayan school scholars chose to substitute the term “*li*” or principle. It is *li* that is the universal that inheres in, is expressed in, and is coterminous with each particular and all particulars.⁶⁷

For Huayan thinkers, the harmonious interplay among particularities and also among each particularity (*shi*) and universality (*li*) creates a luminous universe, absolutely free from spatial and temporal limitations, and at the same time itself the world of daily affairs. This universe is called the *Dharmadhatu*, or “Dharma realm.” Chengguan used the idea of four *Dharmadhatu*, Dharma realms, to explain the structure of reality. In the words of Yuanwu Keqin’s commentary on Xuedou’s *gong’an* and *songgu* in Case 89 in the *Blue Cliff Record*, the first *Dharmadhatu* is the Dharma realm of principle, to explain one-flavor equality. The second *Dharmadhatu* is the Dharma realm of phenomena, to explain that principle in its entirety becomes phenomena. The third *Dharmadhatu* is the Dharma realm of principle and phenomena unobstructed, to explain how principle and phenomena merge without hindrance. The fourth *Dharmadhatu* is the Dharma realm of no obstruction among phenomena, to explain that every phenomenon everywhere enters all phenomena, that all things everywhere embrace all things, all intermingling simultaneously without obstruction.⁶⁸ These of course are four ways of looking at a single *Dharmadhatu*. The implication of Huayan thought is that complete enlightenment is a full realization of the reality that is described by the third and fourth *Dharmadhatu*. Awakening is characterized not simply as a realization of the reality of emptiness, but as a realization of the mutual interpenetration of all particularities.

In the light of the Huayan thought and concepts to which Yuanwu points in his commentary on Case 89, we are not surprised that the fundamental realization about Avalokitesvara and oneself to which this “public case” points lies in the realization that the *li* of Guanyin is fully present in the *shi* of oneself, that the functioning of one’s arm groping for the pillow at night in a dark room is the functioning of Guanyin. No thought is required and the pillow is found, as *shi* and *shi* interpenetrate harmoniously in the marvelous activity of Guanyin.

In sum, case 89 and the preceding encounter dialogues featuring the esoteric Great Compassion Guanyin and the Guanyin of the *Surangama Sutra* are Chan’s contribution to what Chun-fang Yu has called the “domestication” of Guanyin. This is particularly true of case 89, which as interpreted by Xuedou and Yuanwu in the Song dynasty brings Guanyin and his/her activity into the *Dharmadhatu* of all-pervasive, perfectly mutually non-obstructing *li* and *shi* and *shi* and *shi*, the core vision of one of the main indigenous Chinese schools of Buddhist philosophy, the Huayan school.

Conclusion

⁶⁷ Chang Chung-yuan, *Original Teachings*, 43.

⁶⁸From Yuanwu’s commentary to the verse in case 89. Yuanwu Keqin, *Biyuanlu*, T.48.2003.213c19-26. Translated in Cleary and Cleary, *Blue Cliff*, 575, translation somewhat modified.

Case 89 in the *Blue Cliff Record* is the culmination of a process in which Chan masters admitted Guanyin into Chan discourse, and came to interpret both the mundane individual and the nature and activities of the celestial Bodhisattva through the categories of Huayan Buddhism. Although the *Huayan Sutra* includes Avalokitesvara, and in the *Gandavyuha* section of the sutra the pilgrim Sudhana visits Avalokitesvara to ask for teachings, the Huayan school in China had focused on the bodhisattvas Manjusri and Samantabhadra, not on Guanyin. Not only did Chan give a place to Guanyin, but also, by expounding a deep understanding of the nature of awakened, compassionate activity through concepts developed in the indigenous Huayan School, the late middle Chan school and the Song Chan school contributed a new appreciation of and relationship to Guanyin to the already existing array of interpretations and imaginings of Guanyin in China. This new appreciation and interpretation of Guanyin is at once “internalized,” “formless,” and cosmological, true to the origins of the Chan school yet expressing a newer vision of universal interrelatedness and universally active compassion at the heart of everything and throughout the universe of particulars. In this way, Chan contributed a profound new dimension to the “transformation” or “domestication” of Guanyin in China. Such an outcome reflects a considerable change from its early period in Chan’s stance toward “the medieval ghosts, the gods, the bodhisattvas and the Buddhas.”

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Abbreviations

- HTC *Xinbian wanzi xuzangjing* 新編卅字續藏經 (Newly Compiled Continuation of the Buddhist Canon). 150 vols. Reprint of *Dai Nihon zokuzokyo* 大日本續藏經. Taipei: Hsin-wen-feng, 1977.
- T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經 (The Buddhist Canon Newly Compiled during the Taishō Era). Edited by Takakusu Junjirō and Watanabe Kaigyoku. 100 vols. Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924-35.

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