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Guanyn/ 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 阿彌陀佛 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” (subo 論語) 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” (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. 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.


Introduction

The emergence of the Chan school was portrayed by early scholars such as Hu Shih (1862-1947) 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 代宗法, — (809-878) and his disciples did away with “the medieval ghosts, the gods, the bodhisattvas and the Buddha.” The Chan of the eighth century was “just Chan at all, but a Chinese reformation or revolution within Buddhism.”

Yamagda Seiun, 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 esotericological paradigm that featured using unconventional pedagogical devices such as shouting, beating, and engagement in oni “dialogues” (wenda 同沓). In Yamagda’s view, four closely related developments brought about this invention of a different kind of Buddhism: (1) constructing lines 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” (byomon wenda 間門問答) model; and (4) creating a new type of literature, principally represented by the Chan “records of sayings” genre, written in vernacular Chinese. Yamagda 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 林州 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 excess.” That is, early schools rejected an 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. 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 Hongschou school of “middle Chan” that dominated Chinese Chan during the ninth century, Mario Pacek points out that among the characteristics of the extant Hongschou school literature (prior to 952) is that “there is very little reference to popular religious beliefs and practices that were integral to ‘sang Buddhism. For instance, there is scarcely a mention of the salvific power of the various Buddha and bodhisattvas ...”

With the exception of the establishment of independent Chan monasteries, the other three developments Yamagda 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 Buddha.”

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 reception of Guanyin’s name or allude to his powers. 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 (Zazang wenchangzang 千家集, 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
Buddhist faith in the supranatural 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 “qualities of the ancients” (zongzi 众仙) written and compiled by Xuedou Chongxian 雪窦崇痚 (s.d. Xuedou Mingde 明德; 980-1052) in the Tiandi 天地 era (1017-1021) of the Song 宋 dynasty, and published in 1026.6 This public case becomes even more central to the school as one of the one hundred cases (gong’an) in Yuanwu Keqin 言無契勤 (1601-1153)’s Blue Cliff Record 藍崖录, which incorporates Xuedou’s collection of gong’an and zongzi. In this public case, Guanyin achieves a permanent place in the literature of the Chan and Zen school, and the imaging of Guanyin is shaped by a new hermeneutics, that of the indigenous Huayan Huayan school, the school in which the Huayan (or Avatamsaka) Sutra and its teachings form the basis of cosmology and buddhology. Elie Dègen 永平道元 (1208-1253), a Japanese Zen monk who studied Chan in China, opens his chapter entitled “Cannon” (巖壑), written in 1243 after his return from China and collected in his work of extended gong’an commentary, the Shōkyōgakusei 正法眼藏, by quoting the “public case” found in the Bijinga case 89, an exchange between the Tang dynasty Chen figures Danwu 道悟 (769-832) and Yumao 渝茂 (782-841) (see below).7 Dègen then comments, “There are many stories in [Chan] about this Guanyin who attained the Way, but none can be compared to this one.”8 This Dègen 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 Chinzezhu 真淨珠 (840-909). The Platform Sutra, from the early Chan period, and the Chinese translation of

6 The format of Xuedou’s gong’an and zongzi collection is one followed by later similar collections, all called zongzi. It consists of a retelling of the gong’an, followed by a short and enigmatic poem in the free-form ci style that comments on the gong’an. Monks and literati in the Song both prized zongzi collections. There are one extant Song dynasty published editions (bothan 談翰) and many Yuan dynasty editions of Xuedou’s zongzi circulating, separately from the Blue Cliff Record, as well as a listing of Xuedou’s zongzi as a separate work in an extinct Song dynasty book catalogue. On these, see Shima Kei’s 西馬敬’s Xuedou han tan san shi no kōron 詩文編譯卷 研究, 424 and 373. Writers on zongzi in the Song dynasty all named Xuedou’s zongzi as the first and the model, and described it as widely circulated from the 1026’s. The Blue Cliff Record was published in the early Southern Song. See Morten Schlichter, “The Record of Fangzi,” 198-191, and Poitl, “The Form and Function of Kōan Literature,” 18-25.

7 Dègen Kigen, Shōkyōgakusei (Tokuda), fascicle 18, “Cannon,” 23-236.

8 Dègen (Tokuda), 237.

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Heartland by Huangbo Xiyuan 黄檗希運 from the Hongzhou school of the early middle Chan period (11th 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 supernatural 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 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 Mahasthamaprapta. The ability to be pure is the same as Sukanyamun. And not to make differentiation but to be straightforward is the same as Maitreya.”9 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, Mahastama, great wisdom, and Virulakshita, 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 minds; they have all turned their backs on the Way.10

Another text which very likely comes from the Hongzhou school in its early period, perhaps authored by Maozhi’s immediate disciple, is the “Song of Enlightenment” (Zhengdaoxue zhi le zheng jiang) attributed, probably wrongly, to Yingzi Xuanjue 永嘉玄默 (665-713). The Zhengdaoxue ge mentions “Guanyin 關音,” another translation of the name “Avalokitesvara.”11 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

9 Lian tai sian 尊祖傳 (Philip Yampolsky, The Platform Sutra, 95: Lian tai sian (Rokudo shamyo, translated by Taka Nakanishi, 125).


11 De Avalokitesvaram.
is worthy to be called “Guanyin,” i.e., “Avalokitesvara,” or “the Lord Who Observes.”

The single important exception mentioned above is found in the “Transmission of the Treasure Grove Temple” (Baoli zhuan 袖林傳) of 801 C.E. This work contains a conversation featuring the thirteenth- and thirteenth-century images of Guanyin, Baizhi 薄伽(425-514) in which he says that Bodhidharma is Guanyin’s transformation body (化身化身).13

In the Chan school, Baizhi, who comes to be understood by the eighth century to be a transformation body of the eleven-headed Guanyin and is worshipped as such,14 first appears in a story added to the account of Bodhidharma’s interview with Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty (therefore Liang Wudi 禪武帝, 464-549) Liang Wudi, who established the Liang kingdom in 502, was a devotee Buddhist who called himself “Buddha Mind Son of Heaven.”15

In this story, sometime after Bodhidharma leaves the Liang court after his fruitless interview with Liang Wudi, the famous wonder-working monk Baizhi, 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, Baizhi 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 Baoli zhuan of 801.

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

13 Jia Ji 阿基 (阿基) notes the frequent occurrence of Hongzhou school language in the Yongfei 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 850 C.E. See Jia Ji, The Hongzhou School, 89-95.

14 Of the translations of the Zhengdaoge into English, only those by D.T. Suzuki in Manual of Zen Buddhism, and Nyogen Senzaki and Ruth Stuett Nelson in Buddhism and Zen, preserve what many Chinese readers would also read as a reference to Avalokitesvara, since the “Guanyin” was one of the ways of translating the name of this bodhisattva into Chinese, one that the famous translator Xuanzang 孝慈 (596-664) had employed. Suzuki’s otherwise excellent and very thorough translation of the two relevant lines reads: “The Patriarch is interviewed when one enters upon a realm of no-form. Such is to be really called a Kwannon (Avalokitesvara).” D.T. Suzuki, Manual of Zen Buddhism, 100. Later, recent translations by Lu K’uan-yu (Charles L. Lu) in his Chinese Zen Teachings, vol. 3 and Master Sheng-yen in his Tao of Wisdom translate the term as “Sovereign Regarder” and “Supreme Observer.”

15 Baoli zhuan, Meiwden (Baoli zuan) yake chu (translated by Tanaka Ryōhō), June 8, 492.

16 Yamaguchi Shigen 岩谷重信, Shiku Zenshinshū no koyō:初期禅心書の研究, 405 and 416, note 4.

17 Makita Tarō, Chōgen Kōdōshi (こうどし) 中世佛, 56-84.

18 For recent articles on the Buddhist activities of Liang Wudi, see Andreas Jannach, “The Emperor as Bodhisattva: The Bodhisattva Ordination and Ritual Assemblies of Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty,” and Junhui Chan, “Prakrit/sanskrit Assemblies in Liang Wudi’s Buddhist Palace Setting.”

Guanyin in Late Middle Chan and Song Chan: Context

In early and early middle Chan texts the story of Baizhi 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 lù 聚德傳燈錄, 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 (Shurong jing 般若心經), 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 discourses.

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 imaginations of Guanyin that are found in the Zanzen and the Jizai chudengli. This line of stories culminates in the encounter dialogue made into a going on or “case” in Case 90 of the Blue Cliff Record, the story to which Dogen refers.

Scriptures

Before we look at the Chan encounter dialogues and going on 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, most notably, 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? 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 so that he may appear in that form and also be transformed by it, as also taught in the Lotus Sutra and the Surangama Sutra. He was a helper to Amitābha Buddha, his teacher, in the Pure Land texts. In the texts of the esoteric “Tantric” school, he was a universal savior who on his...
own authority promises 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 Avalokiteśvara) figures. By the middle of the Tang dynasty the following scriptures were important to the Chinese cult of Guanyin had been translated and were widely cited:

- The #Lotus Sutra (translated several times; the most popular translation is called the #Mawangdui #Lotus Sutra, and is considered the most complete teaching of the Buddha according to the Tiantai school).
- The Sutra of the Visualization of Amida's Buddha was one of the three sutras canonized in the Pure Land school.
- The 60-deity Hanuman Sutra (Flower Adornment Sutra, Avalokiteśvara Sutra) was translated in 620. The 60-deity Hanuman Sutra was translated in 692–699. This sutra was the Buddhist highest teaching according to the Pure Land school.
- The #Avatamsaka Sutra (Sutra of the #Avatamsaka Sutra; Sutra of the #Avatamsaka Sutra) was translated in 705. This sutra was the most important scripture in China around the same time.
- Most important to our topic here is that various esoteric sutras that glorify Avalokitesvara as the bodhisattva who teaches saving dharmas had been translated.

Esoteric Teachings

The distinguishing marks of esoteric teaching are the scriptures on which everyone's attaining Buddhahood in one lifetime, and the use of mandala, mantra, mantra, dharma and visualization to obtain both spiritual and worldly benefits. The deities worshipped in these practices are supermundane saviors. This is emphasized in the way they are to be visualized, with many eyes, arms, and heads.

Sutras emphasizing the keeping of dharmas taught by Avalokitesvara were translated before the Tang dynasty (118–907), the first of them as early as the late 4th or early 5th centuries. More were introduced during the Northern Zhou dynasty (556–611).

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 630 CE, Bhavavardhaka translated what became the most widely known and popular Avalokitesvara dharam sutra, the #Quanzhou guanyin Guanwuyin puza guangdi jing, written in 630 CE.

For a summary of the existing proposals for the origin and meaning of the puzzling variant names "Avalokiteśvara" and "Avalokiteśvara" and their various Chinese translations, see Yu, Kuan-yin, 14, 37-42.

Yu summarizes these well-known facts in Enam-syu, 18.

Yu, Kuan-yin, 90. A more extensive description of the contents and appeal of this sutra to Tang and Song readers is found in Bento Funai, Vomot Lue Revisted, 26-30.

Yu, Kuan-yin, 48.

Creating A Place for Guanyin

Images

The spread of the two esoteric images of Guanyin that are important in China materials began rather late both in India and China. In India, the eleven-headed Avalokitesvara in Cave 41 at Kausiki, near Mumbai, which dates to the late fifth or early sixth century, is the first surviving image of Guanyin to appear in India. 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 Danagou, and a number of late images from the early eighth century were found in Changsha. According to Henrik Sorensen, there are more than a hundred images of the eleven-headed Guanyin in banner-paintings and murals found at Danagou.

The appearance of the thousand-armed and thousand-eyed image in China is the result of a late 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 Yangze River in Sichuan. In Cave 45 at Aysee, ascribed to the late eighth or early ninth century, is an image that shows the lower arms dispensing objects to two tiny figures below 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.

In the Northern Song dynasty, Tang dynasty types such as the esoteric forms of the
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 Taizong ordered to be cast at Longxing in Shandong in Hebei province. It was finished in 971 and is 21.3 meters high. 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 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. 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. There is an eleven-headed Guanyin at the Dule Temple in Tianjin municipality, made in 984 under the Liao. It is polychrome, made of clay, and over 16 meters tall.

Thus in the period in which Guanyin encounter dialogues and hannya 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 such teachings about Guanyin, but perhaps especially the Tantric forms and teachings.

**Chan monastic ceremonies**

In its own practices the cult of Tantric 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 widespread among Chan practices to recite communally the *Dabei zhou大悲周*, 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 foeding qingguang zangren* 我林佛定清凉咒頌, in which 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 *Chaoju baozeug qingguang* 長修寶座清光 (compiled between 1336 and 1337) 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 death of an abbot, and for a sick monk. 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.

Although in the earliest detailed Chan Code text we have, the *Chuanzhen qingguang* 禪傳清光, [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 nun should test her or his spiritual progress the following question: "Do you have a thousand hands and arms or not?"

In daily lesson books, like the *Chuanzhen risong* 禪門日聲 or the *Chemen kesong* 禪門禪歌, that give the order and content of *guzhu*, *sangha*, *minda* 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 ephemeral, 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 *Qingman jing*), Avalokítēśvara promises that he will not achieve complete, perfect enlightenment if anyone who recites the *dharani* should fall into an evil realm of rebirth, or reborn into one of the buddha lands. Avalokítēśvara 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 right 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, deities 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. 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...
and going on in Chan texts from the Tang through the Yuan dynasties. The two are those derived from or alluding to the Avadānakūta of the Sarvagupta Sūtra, and those concerning the esoteric images of Avatākutā in which elea ideas are a thousand hands and eyes. Guanyin-related encounter dialogues alluding to the Avatākutā of the Lotus Sūtra 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 Avatākutā. These encounter dialogues and goin on are found in the Aṣṭasahasrika Bodhisattva (748-804), one of Mazu Daoyi’s great dharma-heroes.

For example, in Changsha’s chapter of the Jingle chenmanghong, 1004, Avatākutā is identified as the bodhisattva who attains liberation through hearing, as in the Sarvagupta Sūtra. Again, as in the Platform Sūtra and the Chenmang fāngō passage 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 Marjupi; one who returns to the origin by means of the ear is called Avatākutā; and one who returns to the origin by means of mind is called Samāntabhadra. Marjupi is the wonderful observation wisdom of the Buddha; Avatākutā is the unceasing great compassion of the Buddha; and Samāntabhadra is the wonderful conduct of non-doing of the Buddha. The three holy ones are the same names given to the wonderful functions of the Buddha; and the Buddha is the essence of the three holy ones.93

The locus classicus in Chinese Buddhism for the connection between Guanyin and hearing in the sense of examining (quán 喟) with penetrating insight both sounds and the sense organ and sense faculty of hearing until the void is perceived is the Sarvagupta Sūtra. Because of its emphasis on the inner practice of meditation, among other reasons, this sutra was very well known in the Chan school. The text was the first translated in the early eighth century; scholars now believe it was in fact written in China at that time. In the Sarvagupta Sūtra the bodhisattva Avatākutā 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 Nirvāṇa which thus manifests.94

In the Sarvagupta Sūtra Guanyin also says, “Since I myself do not meditate on sound but on the mediator, I cause all suffering beings to look into the sound of their own voices to attain liberation.”95 In the sutra, this is one of fourteen kinds of fearless merits.96 Luō comments: “Thus is a profound meditation which readers should not let pass without careful study if they wish to know why the bodhisattva is so popular in Far Eastern countries where he is the most popular saint. By discarding the sound to look into the mediator himself, that is, into the nature of hearing, he disengages himself from both organ and sense data and thereby realizes his all-embracing Buddha-nature which contains all living beings.97 This practice method of tuning the hearing inward is known as “the Gate through which Avalokiteśvara enters the Principle.”98 Various masters refer to this Dharma-gate. For example, in the Assembled Hall Collection and the Transmission of the Lamp compiled in the Single Jīva (Jingle chenmanghong), following the story is told about the master Baizhong Huai'ai and a monk who appears to have awakened through hearing. “On one occasion the monks had all

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93 T.12, 343c. The Kaitoku denjōhō, 12, 343c, Kaitoku denjōhō, under the supervision of Inya Yoshinaka. Kaitoku denjōhō, vol. 18, 35. Same as “Kaitoku denjōhō.”
94 Jingu chuancheng, fascicle 10, Changsha entry T.51.37b-13b, Jingle chenmanghong (Sōdoku Ogita, The Transmission of the Lamp: Early Masters, 339-40). Kaitoku denjōhō, IV, 35. I have modified Ogita’s translation. I have translated “sō shōhō” 三致 as “the three holy ones.” It could also be translated as the “three sages.”
95 T.145, 129a-29b, Luō, Saravadāna, 139, Guan-yin, or more fully, Guan-yin-zi, is usually interpreted as meaning “the Perceiver (guan) of the Sounds (shēng) of the World (shí).” 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 (guan-yin), and cause suffering beings to look into (guan) avalokita the sound (shēng) of their own voices to attain liberation.
96 T.11, 127b, note 15.
97 Luō, Saravadāna, 139, note 1.
98 See Kaitoku denjōhō, IV, 408.
been asked to dig the ground. When they heard the martial drum, one monk came back carrying his mace 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 save dinner." Then the Master laughed.

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 State) 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 Bodhisattva.

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?"

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

The monk pleaded, "Why do I fail to understand this exchange?"

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." 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.

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 to hear external sounds in the mind.

In the Surangama and the Jingde chuanlu 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 [Daihejiao] Guanyin)

In Chan texts a number of masters raise the puzzling phenomenon of Daihe 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 Huihong (杨慧忠) (d.775), a representative disciple of the Sixth Chinese Chan patriarch Huineng. In his record in the Zuti Sui we find:

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

The Master said: "In Mahayana's Hall, ten thousand bodhisattvas," The monk said: "I do not understand."

The Master said: "Great Compassion (Daihejiao) thousand hands and thousand eyes...

In another brief reference in the Zuti Sui, Jufeng Heshang (九峰和尚) replies to a monk's question:

"If you don't fall into 'ordinary person' or 'sage (saeng 屋), what is that like?"

"A thousand eyes don't reach it."

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 Heshang's entry in the Zuti Sui the following story appears:

Linji Yixuan (临济宗) asked Mi Heshang, "As for the 12-faced Guanyin, is it holy or not?"

Mi answered: "It is. What is its original face?"

b) In the Jingde chuanlu (金地疏远), Danyuan Zhenying (陈宴) (d.748) called Magu Baodai (摩谷寶德), Is the 12-faced Guanyin ordinary or holy?" (Magu) answered: "Holy." Danyuan then hit (Magu) once 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 comprehensive (perhaps, the stage of transcending holy and ordinary)."

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 Buddhism. Here the question usually is, "Why does he need so many hands and eyes?"

This question becomes a popular theme 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 Sharman Li Ao 南陽 曾 asked master Shanzhou Ehi Dayi 發大德大師 (746-818), a direct student of Ma Zu Droy, "What does Great Compassion (Bodhisattva) need a thousand hands and eyes for?" Ehi Dayi replied, "What does the Emperor need you for?"

A similar story is told of the important master Nanquan Puja. Governor Lu 論 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."

The third kind of dialogue that focuses on the esoteric forms of Guanyin asks, "Which is Dafo. 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 Hui. 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 come?" Magu hesitated. The Master, in his turn, pulled Magu off the high seat and sat upon it himself. Magu went cut. The Master stepped down.

As a contemporary Chao teacher, Master Sheng-yen comments, this dialogue is about the "treasure of the correct Dharma eye" transmitted, according to Chen 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?"


Hui-ch'ang'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."


Jingle chua shou eden, jina 8: T.51.238.299-299a1. Chang, Ching-yüan, Original Teachings, 161; See also Ogata, 36v, and Kesho daishiboku, 3, 14.

T.1985.479-491.9. I have taken this translation from that by Ruth Fuller Sasaki et al. in the Record of Linji, 2. See similar story in Jingle chua shou eden, T. 51.291.a.2-5.


Ma'sher 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. 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 Dazu and Yün-an's exchange as presented in the Blue Cliff Record. All of 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 Byobu version):

"Yün-an asked Dazu, 'What does the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion use so many hands and eyes for?'

Dazu said, 'It's like someone reaching back graspig for a pillow in the middle of the night.' Yün-an said, 'I understand.'

Dazu said, 'How do you understand?'

Yün-an said, 'All over the body (shinsen 看身) are hands and eyes.'

Dazu said, 'You have said quite a bit there, but you've only said eighty percent of it.'

Yün-an said, 'What do you say, Elder Brother?'

Dazu said, 'Throughout the body (tongshen 涂身) are hands and eyes.'"

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. 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 Patriarch, and yet another version is in the Treasury of the Lamp compiled in the Jingle Era (Jingle chua shou eden). The Zanju version is closer in content to the Blue Cliff Record version than that of the Jingle chua shou eden, but introduces a third speaker. The Jingle chua shou eden version in fascicle 14 goes as follows:

Dazu asked: the Great Compassion [Bodhisattva's] thousand hands and eyes—which

80 Sheng-yen, "The Recorded Sayings," 27.
81 Yün-an K'o-shih, Byōbu, T.48.208:9-9-26. Cleary and Cleary, Blue Cliff, 571. The story that Yün-an and Dazu were brothers that appears in the Zanju is not clear; it has been disputed by Li Hakja. See Li Hakja, Daison zen'ei-ki kōmei 2, 23-26. See also Jia Linhan, The Hongzhou School, 110.
which the question is, “What 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 Dharmachakra, but rather, “What is Avalokiteshvara’s essence, what is her heart’s core truth?” But it is fact, as Guanyin thought reminds us, Guanyin’s essence, her very 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 Shi Xiuhe Eho Dayi and Nanqian is, “How does the Emperor employ you?” Why does the Emperor need you?” This brings together again the mythic, supremely mundane activity of Guanyin on behalf of wisdom and compassion with the realm of the ordinary person in the mundane world, just as the gong am of Case 89 does with an even more intimate, mundane image.

Xuedou’s poetic commentary in his edition song, and Yunseng’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 Yuyan and Daozu. Xuedou brings up the metaphor of the jewel net of Indra put forward by the Huayan school patriarch Faang (玄奘, 643-720), Yunseng brings up and expands the fourfold Dharmachakra of another Huayan school patriarch, Chengquan (成全, 728-839). So apparently we are to understand the thousand-eyed 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.

Further, the gong am draws on Guanyin’s popularity, as we saw above, the available gong am and the references in other Chan sources suggest that the Tantric Great Composition (Dahai) 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 Composition Dharani became an important ritual activity in Chan monasteries.

This gong am 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 am in Case 89, but not irrelevant to it. The beginning of the encounter dialogue featuring Nanyang Huizong points to the identity of the one and the many, the universal and the particular, in Dahai Guanyin:

“Master asked, ‘What is the Great meaning of the Buddha’s Dharma?’

The Master said, ‘In Maitreya’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 am in case 89. As for all of the encounter dialogues in

53 T276:51.281.

54 I am indebted to Luis O. Gomez for clarifying this point. See his “From the Extraordinary to the Ordinary,” 141-161, 159, 164.

52 Both the “Five Ranks of Particularity and Universality” of Dangshang Nengqing (807-869) and the “Four Processes of Liberation from Subjectivity and Objectivity” of Linji Yixuan (687) are closely related to Faang’s doctrine of the identification of ultimate reality (h 境) Principle and phenomenal appearance (f 境, events or happenings), and to the idea of the fourfold Dharma realm (Dharmachakra) offered by Chengquan. Guanyan concepts are reflected throughout the Biyinshu or Biyinshu (Blue Cliff Record, the
Li Xian 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 school's eminent teacher Hongyi Zhongyan (1011-1157), and in the Caodong school's answer to the Ri, the collection of gongan, sanga (cantiides of the ancients) and commentary by Wansong Xinguo, called the Congrong Ji in Chinese. To date this important emphasis within the Song and Yuan Chan school has not been systematically studied. 83

Let us look briefly at some key concepts of the Huayan Sutra and the Huayan school that came 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 lies 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." 84

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 (tongyong 御用) metaphysics and hermeneutical principle with the Indian Buddhist notions of emptiness (kong 空) and form (sheng 聲), as well as emptiness and spontaneous co-arising. Huayan thinkers gave more positive, more Chinese terms for these fundamental realities. For emptiness, they substituted Principle, 理 for form they substituted Phenomena, events or happenings, 聲. 85

The fundamental idea of the Huayan Sutra and the Huayan school is the unimpeded mutual co-arising of all particulars; mutual co-arising. 86 Each particularity, besides being itself, permeates all other particularities and is in turn permeated by them. Huayan scholars pointed out that this is possible because the essence, the fundamental nature, of all particularities is emptiness. "Emptiness" here does not connote an unoccupied space. Rather, it is the absolute reality free from the dichotomy of form and formlessness, being and non-being. To avoid the negative connotation of the word "emptiness," 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 consummated with each particular and all particulars. 87

For Huayan thinkers, the harmonious interplay among particularities and also among each particularity (li) 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 Dharmadhatus, or "Dharma realm." Chenguan used the idea of four Dharmadhatus, Dharma realms, to explain the structure of reality. In the words of Yuanwu Keqin's commentary on Xuedou's gongan and sanga in Case 89 in The Blue Cliff Record, the first Dharmadhatus is the Dharma realm of principle, to explain one-flavor equality. The second Dharmadhatus is the Dharma realm of phenomena, to explain that principle in its entirety becomes phenomena. The third Dharmadhatus is the Dharma realm of principle and phenomena unobstructed, to explain how principle and phenomena merge without hindrance. The fourth Dharmadhatus 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. 88 These of course are four ways of looking at a single Dharmadhatus. The implication of Huayan thought is that complete enlightenment is a full realization of the reality that is described by the third and fourth Dharmadhatus. Awakening is characterized not simply as a realization of the reality of emptiness, but as a realization of the mutual co-arising 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 Avatarkasana 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 grooping for the pillow at night is the functioning of Guanyin. No thought is required and the pillow is found, is shi and shi interpenetrate harmoniously in the marvelous activity of Guanyin.

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

Conclusion

83 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 Chan Buddhism, Yoshio Yoshidate, "Chinese Buddhists in the Keiyan mon shihshih sheh kaiyi 聖經的 研究 and Peter N. Gregory in Song-shih and the Singleview of Buddhism have provided important studies of how Guifeng Zongmi (780-844), recognized as a Dharma-heir in the Chan lineage of Shenxian (676-752) and a "patron" of the Huayan school, created a form of Huayan philosophy that was compatible with Chan. Zongmi's version of "Huayan Chan" so deeply influenced many masters after the Tang; the influence is most obvious in the case of Dihua Zongguang (1089-1163). In my Ph.D. dissertation, "Citizen Enlightenment for Laymen," I devoted a chapter to Dihua, Huayan teachings, and the Huayan school.

84 Gomez, "Extraordinary," 143-144.


86 Chang Chung-yuan, Original Teachings, 62.


88 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 Buddhist teachings. Although the Guanyin Sutra includes Avalokitesvara, and in the Guanyin section of the sutra the pilgrim Suddhara visits Avalokitesvara to ask for teachings, the Guanyin 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 expanding 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 interconnectedness 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 Buddha.”

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The “Great Teaching of Yoga,” the Chinese Appropriation of the Tantras, and the Question of Esoteric Buddhism

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Introduction

What became of the texts called Tantras when they were imported to China? Despite a wealth of historical evidence, this apparently simple question is remarkably difficult to answer; not the least because the transmission of the Tantras involved a complex process of translation and appropriation—both literally and figuratively. Asian and Western scholars alike have identified an “Esoteric” or “Tantric” school that briefly flourished during the eighth century in China. In the common historical narrative this school was founded by three teachers, Subhakarasimha, Haribhadra, and Amoghavajra, and it was Amoghavajra’s disciple Huiguo (746-803) who passed these teachings on to the Japanese pilgrim Kūkai (774-835), who then returned to Japan in 805 to establish Shingon Buddhism.1 A few decades after Kūkai’s departure from China the school apparently vanished.2

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1 A survey of recent scholarly publications finds this name rendered variously as Subhakarasimha, Subhakara-simha, and Subhākara-simha. Williams, made a convincing case some twenty-five years ago in “Triplakha Shun-wu-wei’s Name” that the proper rendering of Shunwuwei’s name should be Subhākara-simha. Preferring to avoid a parenthesis in a name I opt for Subhākara-simha in this article.

2 For the biographies of the three teachers see Chao I-hsiang [Zhou Yiangling], “Tantrism in China,” (1945): 241-332. It has recently been reprinted in Poynt, ed., Tantric Buddhism in East Asia (2006), 33-60, minus its detailed appendices.

3 Indeed, a look at the Chinese lines of the complex transmission lineages contained in Mindo-ji’s Mūtoku-ji’s works six (1-39) show them petering out a generation or so after Kūkai.