Zeitschrift: Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie

Herausgeber: Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft

Band: 74 (2020)

Heft: 4

Artikel: Some references to visualization practices in early Chán Buddhism with an emphasis on gun and kàn

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-976548

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DE GRUYTER ASIA 2020; 74(4): 853–882

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Some References to Visualization Practices in Early Chán Buddhism with an Emphasis on *guān* 觀 and *kàn* 看

https://doi.org/10.1515/asia-2018-0028

Abstract: In the analysis of processes of sensory perception in the framework of Buddhist contemplation practices, the visual sense faculty has played a crucial role. In this paper, references to Chinese Buddhist terminology referring to visual processes will be analyzed in their historical context, with a focus on the interpretations of *guān* 觀 and *kàn* 看 by proponents of the early Chán School. Crucial questions include the notions of the "agent" (i.e., the entity engaging in the process of visualization or viewing), as well as the ontological status of the "object" to be viewed, in addition to the nature of the *process* of viewing and the bodily preconditions for engaging in visualization practices. The creative reinterpretations of terms such as *guānxīn* 觀心 "contemplate the mind" and *kànxīn* 看心 "view the mind" were also important devices to create a distinctive identity for this newly emerging Chinese Buddhist school. As will be shown, despite the fierce attacks on "gradualist" meditation practices by proponents of the "Southern School" of Chán during the 8th century, the concepts of *guānxīn* and *kànxīn* by no means disappeared from the discourse on meditation but continued to play an important role at least until the 10th century and beyond.

Keywords: early Chán, internal visual processes, meditation, visualization practices, 看心; 觀心

Analysis of processes of sensory perception has played a crucial role in Buddhist practice and philosophy. The visual sense faculty (*yǎn'gēn* 眼根 lit. "eye-root") in particular is of great importance, since it is the primary "gate" (*mén* 門) through which the mind (*sèshí* 色識 "eye consciousness") perceives visual sense objects (*sèjìng* 色境). In Buddhism, these processes are usually described as the root of human delusion since, for unenlightened beings, they ultimately create an erroneous representation of phenomena.

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However, "vision" can also be employed as a tool for gaining salvation when it is directed to wholesome *external* objects, such as a statue of a Buddha, a sacred scripture, or another object of devotion. This shift to an increasing use of visible objects of devotion in Buddhism must have been a major milestone in the spread of the religion, with the initial trigger probably occurring around the first century CE in the Kushan Empire. Kudara (2012: 96) observes:

> They began transcribing the Buddhist scriptures and producing images of the Buddha and bodhisattvas. This marked the birth of Buddhist statuary. Scholars have not yet determined whether the first Buddhist statues were created in Gandhāra or in the Indian region of Mathurā. Either way, it happened under the reign of the Kushan Empire. The transcription of Buddhist scriptures and the production of Buddhist statues occurred under similar circumstances. Once the Indian taboo was broken during the second century CE, the Buddhist scriptures transcribed into visible form and the visually appealing Buddhist statues became very effective means for the propagation of Buddhism, especially to the general public.

Or, as an integral part of Buddhism since its very beginnings, the vision can be directed *inwards*, either through observing and analyzing inner processes such as thoughts, emotions, and *imaginations* which happen to appear in the mind, or even by consciously *creating* certain *visions* that are expected to yield wholesome results. The early appearance of a variety of so-called "visualization *sūtras*" provides evidence of the importance of this practice in the medieval Chinese context, too.

When ancient Buddhists discussed visuality and "seeing" in the these more positive senses, several complex questions arose. These problems, which were intensely discussed in medieval China, included such questions as whether the Buddha can be truly reflected in iconographic form, and whether material expressions of Buddhist themes accessible to vision can reflect the truth. Especially in the context of Mahāyāna philosophy, this can lead to problems, since truth is considered to be free of any distinct form. How then can it be expressed by means of material images? These issues were ardently discussed in medieval China, and they continue to cause headaches for modern scholars.

> 詔云。真佛無像。信如誠旨。但耳目生靈， 賴經聞佛籍像表真。若使廢之， 無以興敬。帝曰虛空真佛。咸自知之。未假經像。
>
> (*Xù gāosēng zhuàn* 續高僧傳, T.50, no.2060: 490b10–13)

> [The monk Huìyuán said:] "His Majesty has proclaimed that *the true Buddha is beyond representation*; this sincere instruction is trustworthy! But the sentient beings (*shēnglíng* 生靈) [equipped] with ears and eyes rely on the scriptures to hear [the teaching of] the Buddha, and depend on *the aid of images for the truth to be made manifest*. If they are now to be done away with, there will be no way to arouse devotion." The Emperor replied: "The

true Buddha of the Void is known naturally by all men, not indirectly from scriptures or images."[1]

1 Background

1.1 *"Visualization* sūtras*"*

Medieval Chinese Buddhists were well aware that they were living in an age of decline of the Buddhist Dharma, since *direct access* to a living Buddha was denied. (This direct access was indeed pursued in relation to the future Buddha Maitreya.) As such, *representations* of the Buddha and his teachings were of paramount importance in the age of "Semblance of the Dharma" (*xiàngfǎ* 像法)[2] and even the "End of the Dharma" (*mòfǎ* 末法). These representations consisted mainly of his relics, images, or the scriptures associated with his sermons. This material presence guaranteed the continuation of the Dharma; however, its exact status and function were matters of fierce debate. As such, there was a dynamic between the image itself and contemplation on it, and the notion of the *disappearance* or transcendence of any form (which was the foundation of many Buddhist epistemological schemes). What kind of vision is superior? What is the "true countenance" or essence of the Buddha?[3] Can this true countenance be found in China or only in India, where Buddhism originated? As such, there were tensions between a variety of (seemingly contradictory) ideas concerning the status and significance of visually accessible objects, no matter whether they were externally or internally perceived.

The practice of contemplation or visualization[4] as introduced by the early visualization and meditation *sūtra*s seems to have been regarded as one possibility to gain access to the essence of the Buddha despite his physical absence and the chasm of time and space that separated medieval China from Śākyamuni. In the context of our discussion on visuality, only a few of the visualization *sūtra*s will be discussed in this paper.[5] As Greene (2016: 293–294) points out:

1 For an alternative translation, see Soper 1959: 119; see also Wenzel 2011.

2 On this question, see, recently, Greene 2018.

3 This question was addressed in Choi 2012.

4 On a very good study of the notion of "visualization" in Chinese Buddhism (including a cross-cultural perspective), see Greene 2012: 139–198 and Greene 2016: 289–328.

5 For a list of the visualization *sūtra*s, see Abe 1990: 5. Scholars have focused on Central Asia as the most likely source for many of the visualization/contemplation *sūtra*s, such as the famous

> But in later texts, it is often recommended that one recollect the Buddha in terms of his physical appearance, with the goal now being to actually *see* the Buddha as if he were present. These forms of the practice are the ones frequently discussed in terms of visualization. Their emergence in Indian Buddhism has been linked by scholars to the increasing prominence in the early centuries of the Common Era of "seeing" as the most profound form of interaction with the Buddha and his teachings, a historical change that touches on questions of new literary conventions, the growth of image worship, and the rise of literacy, to name but a few relevant domains. [Emphasis in the original citation]

Guān wúliàng shòu jīng 觀無量壽經 (T.12, no.365; on this text, see especially Yamabe 1999 and Fujita 1990). The scripture focuses on a sixteenfold scheme of visualizations (*shíliù guān* 十六觀) on themes from the Pure Land and related bodhisattvas. On a possible origin of this scripture in the Turfan area, and related visualization practices in the caves of Toyok, see Yamabe 2002.

Other visualization texts include the *Guān Xūkōngzàng púsà jīng* 觀虛空藏菩薩經 (T.13, no.409; dealing with contemplation of Ākāśagarbha Bodhisattva) and the *Guān Pǔxián púsà xíngfǎ jīng* 觀普賢菩薩行法經 ("*Sūtra* on the contemplation/visualization of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva practicing the Dharma," T.9, no.277). The latter text recommends visualizing Samantabhadra in order to encounter buddhas and bodhisattvas, and to achieve purity of the six sense faculties (T.9, no.277: 389c19–21). The merits achieved by this practice are so great that they will remove all hindrances (此觀功德除諸障礙; ibid.: 389c22). The practice involves extended periods of single-minded visualization. Interestingly, there is also an emphasis on seeing Samantabhadra teaching the Dharma in one's dreams while sleeping. Upon waking, one will have achieved an understanding of his teaching and eventually one will be able to encounter the various buddhas. This practice has to be performed in combination with confession rituals and the veneration of the buddhas of the ten directions. Indeed, the scripture also includes passages that are reminiscent of popular themes in early Chán texts, such as the following redefinitions of "sin" and "repentance" (T.9, no.277: 392c25–393a2):

觀心無心。從顛倒想起。如此想心。從妄想起。如空中風無依止處。如是法相不生不滅。何者是罪。何者是福。我心自空。罪福無主。一切法如是。無住無壞。如是懺悔。觀心無心。法不住法中。諸法解脫滅諦寂靜。如是想者名大懺悔。名莊嚴懺悔。名無罪相懺悔。名破壞心識。行此懺悔者。身心清淨不住法中。

Visualize the mind as no-mind. From confusion (lit. "upside-down") thoughts arise. This kind of thinking mind arises from deluded thinking. Like the wind not depending on any support in empty space; therefore, the characteristics of phenomena are such that they do not arise and do not cease. What is "sin"? What is "good fortune" (or: "blessing")? Our mind is naturally empty (insubstantial) and sin and blessing do not have any "possessor." All phenomena are like this, neither aiding nor undergoing destruction. In such repentance one contemplates the mind as no-mind, and phenomena will not reside amidst phenomena. All dharmas (phenomena) are [in a state of] liberation, [pertaining to] the noble truth of the cessation of suffering and tranquility (synonymous to *nirvāṇa*). Such thinking is referred to as "great repentance," and is [also] called "adorned repentance," "repentance with no feature of sin," and "destroying mind and cognition." If one practices this repentance, then body and mind will be pure and not reside amidst phenomena.

For another fifth-century contemplation/visualization *sūtra*, the *Guānshìyīn guān jīng* 觀世音觀經 ("*Sūtra* on the contemplation of Alokiteśvara"), see Greene 2012: 328–336.

However, Greene (2016: 320) also notes that in this early corpus of contemplation texts, "vision" does not necessarily equate to "visualization" (i. e. in a causative sense, to actively generate mental images), as the majority of Buddhist scholars assume. Instead, the mental images often simply *occur* and are passively received.[6]

Besides the definition of *guān* and the specific methods recommended, the scriptures are also important as sources for understanding the *context* within which the visualization practices should be conducted. For example, despite its brevity and focus on visualizing Maitreya's ascent to Tuṣita Heaven (where he "waits" to descend in order to realize Buddhahood) in the *Guān Mílè púsà shàngshēng dōushuò tiān jīng*, the scripture also emphasizes the precondition of observing the "five prohibitions" (*wǔjìe* 五戒), the "eight precepts" (*bāzhāi* 八齋), and the correct effort in pursuing the "ten good Dharmas" (*shí shànfǎ* 十善法; T.14, no.452: 419c9–10). The merit derived from observing the Buddha's precepts is then dedicated to the wish to reborn in the presence of Maitreya (ibid.: 420b24–25).[7]

2 *Remarks on the* Guān Fó sānmèi hǎi jīng 觀佛三昧海經

This complex text ("*Sūtra* on the Ocean-like Samādhi of the visualization of the Buddha")[8] promotes the visualization of *mental* images after the disappearance of the Buddha, based on visual contact with a *material* image of the

6 For an interesting discussion on the English rendering of Indian terminology concerning meditative processes involving visual objects, see Greene 2016: 294–297.

7 Also the *Fó míng jīng* 佛名經 ("*Sūtra* of Buddha's names"; T.14, no.440) emphasizes the correct environment and proper preparations as preconditions for engaging in the practice of contemplation, as described by Abe (1990: 10):

[T]he practitioner, whether monk, nun, novice, or lay person, must first repent his or her sins by bathing and purification. Then the devotee should enter a quiet place such as a meditation chamber that is decorated with banners, flowers, paintings, and an image of the Buddha. After burning incense and scattering flowers, the practitioner should contemplate the austerities of the Buddha and the Buddha's resolve to attain enlightenment. A monk must continue this practice for forty-nine days and nights, a novice for twenty-one, and a lay person for seven. Only after completing the required rituals with an act of repentance can the practitioner move on to paying reverence to the Buddhas, reciting their names, and finally worshipping them. The same text enumerates a total of 11,093 Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and pratyekabuddhas to honor.

8 Abe (1990: 5) assumes that scriptures such as the *Guān Fó sānmèi hǎi jīng* 觀佛三昧海經 (T.15, no.643; translation traditionally attributed to Buddhabhadra) were originally compiled in Central Asia. Although they all deal with the topic of "visualization," there are significant differences among them on this subject and the methods used:

Buddha, such as the bodily features of the Tathāgata, which are investigated in great detail. At the beginning of the *sūtra*, the Buddha is asked how he can be *seen* after his physical disappearance from the world: 佛涅槃後後世眾生。當云何觀佛身色相。 ("After the Buddha has entered *nirvāṇa*, how shall the sentient beings of later generations observe (*guān*) the material appearance of the Buddha body?"; T.15, no.643: 645c28). In his answer, Śākyamuni recommends visualizing the physical features of his body (*sèshēn* 色身 lit. "color/form body") as a superior practice: 若能至心繫念在內。 端坐正受觀佛色身。當知是人心如佛心與佛無異。 ("If you are able to concentrate and *fix your thoughts inwardly* (*xì niàn zài nèi* 繫念在內), sit straight up and in concentration observe/contemplate (*guān*) the physical body of the Buddha. You should know that *this person's mind is like the Buddha's mind* and he is not different from the Buddha"; T.15, no.643: 646a17–18). Later in the text, the Buddha discusses the above-mentioned notion of *xì niàn* 繫念 ("tying/fixing one's thoughts or attention"). While the Buddha was alive, people could simply fix their thoughts on his living body; however, after his death, followers had to direct their attention *inwards* to visualize him. In this state of mental concentration, the practitioner must observe (*guān*) the physical features of the Buddha (including the 32 major and 80 minor features). In the fourth fascicle of the text, the focus shifts to contemplation on the light that the Buddha emits.

The culmination of the visions seems to be the *disappearance* of the mental images and developing the ability to see the "real body" of the Buddha. As such, the soteriological scheme is as follows:[9]

(1) *Observation* of the material image of the Buddha;
(2) *Creation of a mental image* based on that;
(3) Increasingly detailed imagination of the mental image;
(4) *Examination* of the mental image (e. g. bodily features);
(5) Proceeding from one image to numerous images ("filling the mental space");
(6) Karmic obstructions must be purified (> precepts, etc.);

There is a major difference between the *Sea* and *Maitreya Visualization* sūtras, however, in terms of what is to be visualized. While the goal of the *Sea sūtra* is seeing Śākyamuni and eventually multiple Buddhas, the focus of the *Maitreya Visualization sūtra* is not Maitreya but the visualization of the practitioner "amidst all the splendors of Tuṣita Heaven, splendors that certainly include, but are not limited to, Maitreya." The goal is to "place oneself in the presence of Maitreya and his heaven." (Abe 1990: 5)

9 Based on Wenzel 2011 (emphasis added).

(7) "Near the end of the visualizations, all images suddenly disappear, and the practitioner's insight into the emptiness of all phenomena causes the Buddha's shadow, namely the real body of the Buddha, to appear."[10]
(8) Transference into the *presence of the Buddha*.

In another early Chinese meditation text, the medium-sized *Chán mì yào fǎ jīng*,[11] the term *guān* is used more than 500 times, frequently in the compound *dì guān* 諦觀 ("to observe minutely"). The scripture is a practical guide to meditating on all parts of the body and their impermanence and impurity, from the joints and bones to the organs, imagining them as white bones or being devoured by insects, etc., finally seeing one's body as a white skeleton, and as such generating "purity": 當自觀身作一白骨人。極使白淨。 ("You should reflect on your own body as becoming one white skeleton, ultimately making [it] pure white"; T.15, no.613: 245a17). This contemplation is then applied to all kinds of "bodies" imagined by the practitioner. The visualization of being constituted of white bones is expanded to imagining oneself as a person made of white jade sitting cross-legged on a high platform, with one's bones illuminating everything around (ibid.: 248a25–27). This meditation is gradually expanded to numerous variations concerning the insubstantiality and impermanence of oneself and others. The scripture concludes by promoting the results of this type of visualization practice: 千歲之時，四部弟子億分之中十人百人，修無常觀得解脫道。 ("A thousand years [after the Buddha has died] only ten or a hundred people out of a million will practice this visualization of impermanence and thereby gain liberation"; ibid.: 269b27).

3 *Traditional meditation practices and the term* guān 觀

In addition to its use within the context of the kind of "visualization" practices described above, the term *guān* 觀[12] was also known through traditional

10 Wenzel 2011: 283.

11 The compilation or translation of the *Chán mì yào fǎ jīng* 禪祕要法經 (T.15, no.613) is a matter of ardent debate among scholars. The text is traditionally attributed to Kumārajīva, but the author may have been Dharmamitra, or it could be a "hybrid" composition consisting of a translation of Central Asian material coupled with elements added in China. For a major study and translation of this text, see Greene 2012, especially pp. 82ff.

12 The original meaning of *guān* (OC **kôn*; EMC *kwan*; LMC *kuan*) is "to inspect; to survey; look very carefully," with the noun *guàn* ("tower (from which one has a good view)") probably

analytical meditation practices, particularly the method of *zhǐguān* 止觀 (Skr. *śamatha-vipaśyanā*; lit. "stop and view" > "concentration and contemplation").[13] Although originally one of the basic Buddhist meditation methods, a "Mahāyānization" of *zhǐguān* is evident by the seventh century.[14] Important in this context are famous meditation masters such as Sēngchóu 僧稠 (480–560), scriptures such the *Dàshèng qǐxìn lùn* 大乘起信論 ("Treatise on arousing of faith in Mahāyāna"), and works of the Tiāntái 天台 master Zhìyǐ 智顗 (538–597), to name just a few.[15] This development saw the focus of concentration shift from physical/bodily processes (bodily functions, breathing, etc.) to more abstract objects, such as *dharmakāya* (*fǎshēn* 法身), etc.[16] Through these redefinitions, differences in the interpretations between the two stages of the practice seem to have become somewhat blurred. *Śamatha-vipaśyanā* is traditionally closely related to *sìniànchù* 四念處 ("four places of mindfulness"), which consists of a more structured approach in terms of both practice and epistemology.[17]

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derived from the causative, OC **kôns* (EMC *kwan^h*). The meaning of mentally surveying or analyzing something is also of relatively early origin: e. g. *guān qí zhì* 觀其志 ("observe his ambitions"; *Lúnyǔ* 論語, Xué ér dì yī 學而第一 Chapter). The character 觀 appears in the earliest Chinese Buddhist translations, such as Lokakṣema's translations: e. g. *dìshú guān zhī, biàn hū yán* 諦熟觀之，便呼言 ("he inspected him carefully and then exclaimed"; T.8, no.224: 447b08) or in the compounds *guānshì* 觀視 ("to look at, observe"; also with abstract objects, e. g. T.2, no.105: 501a16) and *guānchá wúwǒ* 觀察無我 ("investigate selflessness"). In the late second century, Ān Shìgāo 安世高 explains the term as being able to understand Buddhist key concepts: 何等為觀？觀名為了陰 ("What is *discernment* (*guān*)? *Discernment* means understanding (*liǎo* 了) the aggregates"; T.15, no.603: 176a12).

13 E. g. based on the *Zá āhán jīng* 雜阿含經, T.2, no.99: 28a, 146c, 318b. The term is usually discussed in combination with other traditional methods, such as *wǔtíng sìniàn* 五停四念 ("five-stops and fourfold-mindfulness"), etc. For the basic *mārga*, see, e. g. Buswell and Gimello 1992: 6–7, including *sīla* (basic moral rules/restrictions as precondition for meditation), which is the basis for *śamatha* ("focus; concentration"; often described in nine steps), which, again, is the precondition of *vipaśyanā* ("discernment; contemplation"), ultimately thought to lead to *prajñā* ("insight; wisdom").

14 On the reception of *zhǐguān* in China, see Faure 1986a: 101; see also Buswell and Gimello 1992: 6–7.

15 On meditation traditions of that period, see especially Chen 2014a and 2014b.

16 See, e. g., the influential *Móhē zhǐguān* 摩訶止觀 (T.46, no.1911: 11b22): "Take the *dharmadhātu* as an object and concentrate all your thoughts on it. To take it as an object is 'calming' (*śamatha*), and to concentrate your thoughts is contemplation (*vipaśyanā*)." For a discussion of another work of Zhìyǐ on meditation, the *Shì chán bōluómì cìdì fǎmén* 釋禪波羅蜜次第法門 ("Explanation of the sequential path of Dhyāna Parāmitā"), a very important source on meditation practices and repentance rituals in the sixth century, see Greene 2012: 203–218.

17 This refers to contemplation (*guān*) on the impurity of the body, on the painfulness of feelings, on the impermanence of the mind and mental processes, and on the insubstantiality of mental phenomena (dharmas). The practice was known in China through various scriptures

4 Guān *in early Chán*

The appearance of the early Chán school(s) in the seventh and early eighth centuries[18] is often explained as a reaction against Buddhist scholasticism and the increasingly sophisticated discussions on Buddhist doctrine and the nature of mind during the sixth and seventh centuries. Alternatively, many early Chán texts focus on methods of contemplation and meditation. The terms *guānxīn* and *kànxīn* play central roles in this discourse.

4.1 Guānxīn 觀心 *("observe/contemplate the mind")*

When studying the emergence of meditation techniques in early Chán Buddhism, we have to consider two critical questions. If contact between the bodily eye and the physical object does not give access to the truth, what about the "mental eye"? If viewing with the mental eye produces delusion, what is left for the perception of truth? As a necessary conclusion, the early Chán School(s) labeled "visualization" involving a concrete object of viewing as insufficient. In the *Guānxīn lùn* 觀心論,[19] attributed to Shénxiù 神秀 (605–706), *guānxīn* is described as the most *essential* method (T.85, no.2833: 1273a29–b01; also ed. in Bingenheimer and Chang 2018, Vol.2: 141, 189; punctuation modified):

> 味觀心一法，總攝諸行，名為最要。[...] 但能攝心內照，覺觀常明，絕三毒，永使消亡。

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such as the *Dàzhìdùlùn* 大智度論 (*Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra*; T.25, no.1509: 198c–202b) and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* (T.12, no.374: 433–434), a version of which was translated in the middle of the fifth century by Dharmarakṣa. Sēngchóu (480–560), a monk of great significance in the development of early Chán, specialized in that scripture, and probably based his meditation method upon it.

18 For a very good study on the "East Mountain" (Dōngshān 東山) and "Northern School" (Běizōng 北宗) of Chán, see McRae 1986.

19 The *Guānxīn lùn*, one of the key texts of early Chán, has been thoroughly studied by a number of scholars. It was traditionally attributed to Bodhidharma, but was probably composed in the eighth century by Shénxiù 神秀 or one of his disciples (for further information, see McRae 1986: 325, fn. 159). Fragments of the text are preserved in the following Dūnhuáng manuscripts: Ryūkoku 122, P.4646, P.2657, P.2460, S.5532, S.2595, S.646. For a new, annotated edition of all the extant manuscript versions of the text, see Bingenheimer and Chang 2018, Vol.1: 121–184 (including facsimiles of the manuscripts) and Vol.2: 139–190.

> Only the one method of contemplating (*guān*) the mind can comprise all practices, therefore it is referred to as "utmost essence." [...] If one is just capable of collecting (i. e. concentrating) the mind and *illuminate it inwardly* (i. e. practice introspection), *in an awakened state contemplating* (*juéguān* 覺觀) *permanent luminosity*, this will cut off the three poisons [of desire, rage, and ignorance], causing them to disappear forever.

The *guānxīn* method is not exclusive to the early Chán School; it also appears in *sūtra* literature and in the works of other schools (e. g. Tiāntái).[20] This might be one of the reasons why in later texts of the Chán School the term is usually replaced with *kànxīn* 看心 ("to view the mind"; see below).

Why did the *guānxīn* method receive so much attention in early Chán? One explanation might be the strong influence of "mind-only" (*wéixīn* 唯心) and "consciousness-only" (*wéishí* 唯識) theories on early Chán, in combination with Buddha-nature thought. Everything is produced by the mind (which then—by definition—excludes an "external" object of the mind), and the true nature of one's mind is identified with the mind of the Buddha; impurities and defilements are only peripheral and secondary features.[21] As such, references to other

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20 *Guānxīn* is also an important concept in the soteriological scheme of Zhìyǐ's 智顗 (538–597) *Móhē zhǐguān* 摩訶止觀. The practice begins with contemplating the body as "impure" (*guānshēn bùjìng* 觀身不淨), followed by contemplating the mind as "impermanent" (*guānxīn wúcháng* 觀心無常). Eventually, one arrives at the realization that body and mind "are neither permanent, nor not-permanent, not empty, nor not-empty". In the culmination of this practice, both body and mind are contemplated as dharma-nature, i. e. the "ultimate truth" (*fǎxìng* 法性; see T.46, no.1911: 8b29–c6). As such, in this work, *guānxīn* is firmly embedded in a Mādhyamika context (for a thorough discussion of Tiāntái soteriology, see Ng 1993 and especially Donner and Stevenson 1993; on a contextualization of Tiāntái philosophy and practice, see Swanson 1989). The term *guānxīn* also appears very frequently in a commentary on the *Lotus sūtra*, the *Miàofǎ liánhuá jīng xuányì* 妙法蓮華經玄義, attributed to the Tiāntái monk Guàndǐng 灌頂 (561–632), a disciple of Zhìyǐ 智顗. In this work, *guānxīn* is closely associated with the notion of "concentration" or *samādhi*, and in several passages it is also indicated that the "object" of visualization/contemplation is the true nature of the mind, or Buddha-nature: e. g. 上定者謂佛性也。能觀心性名為上定 ("Supreme concentration is called Buddha-nature; to be able to contemplate the *nature of the mind* is called the utmost concentration"; T.33, no.1716: 696a18). For Guàndǐng, this is clearly the supreme practice (ibid.: 726a18). In the *Guānyīn xuányì* 觀音玄義, traditionally regarded as a sermon by Zhìyǐ as recorded by Guàndǐng, *guānxīn* is described as a method of analyzing the constituents of existence (*fǎ* 法) as they arise in the mind, and of realizing their true "Middle Way" nature of being neither empty nor existing. This realization equals the enlightenment of the buddhas: 若觀心非空非有。則一切從心生法亦非空非有。如是等一切諸法在一心中。若能如是觀心。名上上觀得諸佛菩提。("If one contemplates the mind as neither empty nor existing, then all phenomena arisen from the mind are also neither empty nor existing. All such phenomena exist [only] in the mind. If one is able to *contemplate the mind* is this way, then this is called '*highest of the highest contemplation*' and one will attain the enlightenment of all the buddhas"; T.34, no.1726: 887b17–20).

21 See Yamabe 2014.

practices (e. g. *vinaya*,[22] *niànfó* 念佛, and other meditation methods) are reduced to a minimum. This seems to imply a reevaluation of the traditional *mārga* schemes (merit accumulation through cause-and-effect by performing wholesome deeds), and traditional practices are regarded as expedient methods for sentient beings of lower mental capacity.

The focus on the *guānxīn* method had far-reaching implications for interpreting Buddhist concepts in the context of early Chán; indeed, the insight based on one's originally enlightened mind was thought to enable the *redefinition* of traditional key Buddhist concepts (usually in terms of mental processes). This procedure (originally adapted from Tiāntái usage) actually became one of the defining features of Chán Buddhist epistemology and soteriology. By extension, the redefinitions helped to define sectarian identity and the localization of "true" Buddhism in a Chán Buddhist context.[23] (See also the discussion on "contemplative analysis" below.)

4.2 Kànxīn 看心 *("view the mind")*[24]

An important term related to *guānxīn* is *kànxīn* 看心, another key concept of early Chán. Despite (or perhaps because of) this term's ubiquity, an essential question—"How should the character 看 be read?"—is rarely asked in the secondary literature. This is not a trivial question, since the reading one chooses has a significant impact on the interpretation of the semantics of the term. Whereas *kàn*[25] primarily refers to visual contact with a physical object ("gaze at/look upon > read"), *kān*, besides meaning "look at/watch/view," also has the extended meaning of "guard/take care of." As such, 看心 combines semantic nuances from

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22 This is also explicitly stated in the *Guānxīn lùn*: 今令學者唯須觀心不修戒行。 ("Today, you let students only contemplate the mind and not cultivate the practice of the prohibitions (*vinaya*)"; T.85, no.2833: 1271a24). Also, in the *Dàshēng wǔ fāngbiàn mén*, the prohibitions are redefined as 以佛性為戒 ("regard the Buddha-nature as the precepts"; ed. Ui 1966: 450; on this text, see below).

23 In Western scholarship, this is often referred to as "contemplative analysis," a term adapted from Zhìyǐ's phrase *guānxīn shì zhe* 觀心釋者 ("as for an interpretation based on the *contemplation of the mind*"), which introduces his (re-)interpretation of Buddhist terms in the *Miàofǎ liánhuá jīng xuányì* 妙法蓮華經玄義 (T.33, no.1716: 692c25). For contemplative analysis in early Chán, see McRae 1986: 201–202; for a contextualization and examples, see Anderl 2012: 212–214.

24 On the *kànxīn* method, see Gomez 1983: 103–104; Démieville 1952: 78ff; on the monk Móhéyán's use of the term, see Gomez 1987: 153, fn. 119 and 154, fn. 124. On the term in Tibetan Chán, see van Schaik and Dalton 2004.

25 *kàn*: Old Chinese: *[k^{h}]^{ʕ}a[r]-s, Middle Chinese: *k^{h}an*`; *kān*: Old Chinese: *k^{hʕ}a[r], Middle Chinese: *k^{h}an*.

both *guānxīn* ("contemplate the mind") and *shǒuxīn* 守心 ("guard the mind").[26] It is thus tempting to regard it as a term that was used to combine the semantics of the key terms *guānxīn* and *shǒuxīn*, though such an interpretation must remain speculative. Indeed, arguing *against* the *kānxīn* reading are the Tibetan translations of the term, which focus on the visual component of the semantics. The term *sems srung* ("protect the mind") does not appear in Tibetan Chán sources (although it does feature in other Tibetan Buddhist material), whereas *sems la lta* and related terms definitely refer to the process of "viewing the mind."[27]

4.3 Kànxīn *in early Chán texts preserved in Dūnhuáng manuscripts*

Below, we will investigate the interpretation of *kànxīn* in a selection of early Chán material as preserved in the Dūnhuáng corpus. In the *Dàshèng xīnxíng lùn* 大乘心行論 ("Treatise on the practice of mind in Mahāyāna"),[28] attributed to

26 For an analysis of *shǒuxīn*, see McRae 1986: 136–144 (for the passages concerning *shǒuxīn* translated from the *Xiū xīnyào lún* (with references to the corresponding passages in McRae's edition at the end of the book provided after "/"), see ibid.: 122/1, 123/3, 124/5, 125/5, 126/7, 127/9). *Shǒuyī* 守一 was also known as Daoist practice, and McRae (1986: 139) points out: "It is possible that the Taoist practice of *shou-i* [*shǒuyī*] represented a sort of generalized mindfulness of one's internal harmony that appealed to the followers of early Ch'an." On the term *shǒuxīn*, see also McRae 1983: 208, 229; Buswell 1989: 140; and, more recently, Hán Chuánqiáng 2013: 285–304. On the related term *shǒuyī*, see Chappell 1983: 99.

27 I wish to thank Sam van Schaik (British Library) for his very helpful suggestions concerning these terms (personal communication).

28 P.3664/3559, lines 667–670 (see also the edition in Jan Yün-hua 1991: 76; punctuation altered). The manuscript Pelliot 3664/3559, the most important source in relation to the teachings of the early Chán School (the East Mountain/Northern School), has been extensively studied (see especially Yanagida 1963 and McRae 1986) as it reflects Chán thought of the second half of the seventh and the beginning of the eighth centuries. The *terminus ad quem* is 751 (the date on the verso side of P.3018, the continuation of P.3559; see McRae 1986: 326, fn. 160, and Tanaka 1969: 207). Besides the Sēngchóu texts, the manuscript contains texts attributed to Shénxiù 神秀 (*Yuánmíng lùn* 圓明論; "Treatise of perfect illumination") and Hóngrěn 弘忍 (*Xiū xīnyào lùn* 修心要論; "Treatise on the essentials of the practice of mind") in addition to the early transmission text *Chuán fǎbǎo jì* 傳法寶紀 ("Record of the transmission of the Dharma treasure"), which constructs a patriarchal lineage between Bodhidharma, Huìkě 慧可, Sēngcàn 僧璨, Dàoxìn 道信, Hóngrěn 弘忍, Fǎrú 法如, and Shénxiù 神秀. Other material includes a poem by the Northern School master Pǔjì 普寂 (651–739), a text entitled *Jīngāng wǔ lǐ* 金剛五禮 ("Five Vajra rituals"), some lines concerning the recitation of the *Prajñāparamitā sūtra*, and a short text entitled *Xiù héshàng zhuàn* 秀和尚傳 ("The transmission of Preceptor [Shén]Xiù"). For an overview of early Chán manuscripts, see Tanaka and Cheng 2014.

Sēngchóu (480–560) but most likely composed around 700, *kànxīn* is interpreted in the following way:

> 心中出無量法，是故經云：'三界虛妄，但一心作。'自好看心，何者是心？心復大小？心是何物？其形若為？覓取心得來看，心既無時，阿誰造善惡？若無善惡，即是菩提。
>
> In the mind the countless *dharma*s (i. e. phenomena) are produced; as such, a *sūtra* says: "The Triple-world is empty (illusionary) and only produced by the One Mind." If one fancies to *view the mind*, what then is the mind? Is the mind big or small? What thing is the mind? What is its shape? If one seeks to get hold of the mind to view it, *it is not there at such a time*. Who then is creating good or evil [deeds] (i. e. there is no one, and therefore karma does not, ultimately, exist)? When there is no notion of good and bad, then this is *bodhi* (enlightenment).[29]

In this early Chán reference to *kànxīn*, the question about the nature of the mind—and its accessibility for the viewer—is posed. However, by trying to view the mind and its features, the practitioner realizes that the mind has no distinguishing characteristics and that it is impossible to "grasp" it.[30] Indeed, viewing the mind seems to be a practice to verify that the mind is not there when one tries "to view" it.[31] The passage also emphasizes that the mind does not qualify as an *agent* of instigating good or evil deeds.

Despite the abstract description of the processes of viewing, *kànxīn* primarily refers to a *psychophysical* exercise, at least according to the early Chán transmission text *Léngqié shīzī jì* 楞伽師資記 ("Records on masters and disciples of the *Laṅka*[*vatāra sūtra*]").[32] This text also contains one of the earliest concrete meditation instructions of the Chán School. It is interesting that it is directed toward beginners of meditation practice (*chūxué zuòchán* 初學坐禪), with

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29 All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. In this text, a strong "mind-only" (Yogācāra) influence is also discernible. This is evident in many other early Chán texts, too (see, e. g. Yamabe 2006 and Yamabe 2014).

30 This is also confirmed in other passages of the text, e. g. line 713, where the unobtainability of the mind is even equated to the perfection of right effort, Skr. *vīrya-pāramitā* (自心不可得，是名毗梨耶波羅蜜).

31 Interpretation of *wúshí* 無時 is difficult. In some Buddhist contexts, it can also mean "immediate" (Skr. *ākālika*); however, I believe this meaning does not apply here.

32 This text, which is attributed to Jìngjué 淨覺 (683–?), is preserved on P.3294, P.3436, P.3537, P.3703, P.4564, S.2054, and edited in T.85, no.2837. For a critical edition and annotated translation, see Yanagida 1971: 49–326. For translations in French and English, see Faure 1989: 87–182 and Faure 1997, respectively. Recently, all extant manuscripts have been critically reedited in Bingenheimer and Chang 2018 (also included in DMCT). For a short description, see McRae 1986: 88–90.

detailed instructions on how to prepare *physically* for it,[33] but at the same time emphasizes the ultimate goal (with the following soteriological paradigm: *dé xìng* 得性 "obtain the [Buddha-]nature" → *jìmiè* 寂滅 "tranquility > *nirvāṇa*" → *shèngxīn* 聖心 "saintly mind > the mind of the Buddha"), suggesting that even novice students have the capacity to achieve this.

> 初學坐禪看心，獨坐一處，先端身正坐，寬衣解帶，放身縱體，自按摩七八翻，令腹中噫氣出盡，即滔然得性，清虛恬靜。身心調適，能安心神，則窈窈冥冥，氣息清冷，徐徐斂心，神道清利，心地明淨。觀察不明[34]，內外空淨，即心性寂滅。如其寂滅，則聖心顯矣。
>
> (*Léngqié shīzī jì* 楞伽師資記)[35]

> If you commence to *study seated meditation and view the mind*, sit at a place in solitude. First, straighten your body[36] and sit upright, loosen your garment and untie your belt, relax the body by massaging yourself (i. e. your shoulders?) a few times, causing the breath in your abdomen to be completely exhaled. Then you will immediately attain the [Buddha-] nature,[37] pure and tranquil. *Mind and body will be in harmony*, and you will be able to pacify your mind.[38] Obscure and profound, your breathing will become "fresh," and gradually you

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33 This focus on the physical framework of the meditation might be inspired by meditation manuals, such as those composed by Zhìyǐ (see Bielefeldt 1988), and scriptures such as the *Chán mìyào fǎ jīng* 禪祕要法經 (T.15, no.613: 243b25–26): 結跏趺坐。齊整衣服。正身端坐。偏袒右肩。左手著右手上。閉目以舌拄腭。定心令住。 ("Sit cross-legged [in the Lotus position]; even out your garment and sit up straight. Bare the right shoulder, and place the left hand on top of the right hand (i. e. palm). Close the eyes and touch the palate with the tongue. Concentrate your mind and cause it to reside (i. e. be fixed on the object of meditation)." The emphasis on seated meditation is also a recurring topic in early Chán material. See, e. g. the very short *Xiù héshàng zhuàn* 秀和尚傳 on P.3664/3559, a eulogy on seated meditation that urges practitioners to *nǔlì qín zuò* 努力勤坐 ("carefully sit [in meditation] with great effort") and advocates several years of a meditation as the foundation of one's practice (坐為根本，能坐三五年). The text also recommends ignoring all bodily needs and hardships, such as hunger, cold, the urge to urinate or defecate, etc. Moreover, one should discontinue reading the Buddhist scriptures and talking to people, and focus all of one's energy on sitting. On this text, see Shinohara and Tanaka 1980: 176–177; Huáng Qīngpqíng 2008: 72; and Hán Chuánqiáng 2013: 59–60.

34 This phrase does not seem to make much sense here. I follow P.3436, line 359: 照察分明.

35 This extract is based on the critical edition in Yanagida 1971: 255 (see also T.85, no.2837: 1289a and Bingenheimer and Chang 2018, Vol.1: 40, Vol.2: 57). The passage is originally from the *Rùdào ānxīn yào fāngbiàn fǎmén* 入道安心要方便法門, attributed to the retrospective fourth Chán patriarch Dàoxìn 道信, integrated into the *Léngqié shīzī jì* 楞伽師資記. The text is one of our earliest sources of the term *kànxīn* in Chán.

36 I interpret 放身縱體 as a "nested" phrase in which compounds were "separated" for rhetorical reasons: → 放縱身體 ("to unrestrain/loosen up the body").

37 *Tāorán* 滔然 ("overflowing/abundant"), probably used as an intensifier here.

38 *Xīnshén* 心神 (lit. "mind and spirit"), an expression that rarely appears in Chán Buddhist material. For an alternative and more elegant translation of the passage, see McRae 1986: 142. For the purposes of our discussion, I have attempted to translate as literarily as possible here.

> will gain control of your mind (i. e. thoughts), and the way of your spirit (spiritual path) will be pure and keen [?]. The Mind-ground will be bright and pure, your observing (investigating) will be illuminatingly distinct, and interior and exterior will be empty and pure. Then your Mind-nature will be tranquil. When it is tranquil, the sagely mind will become manifest.

This passage illustrates the close connections between bodily posture, breathing processes, and the revelation of the true "Mind-ground" and "Mind-nature," ultimately equating to the mind of the Buddha. Another important term in the passage is *ànxīn* 安 ("pacifying the mind"), achieved through harmonizing body and mind.

The practice of viewing the mind is hailed as the very best technique (*wànbān qiú fǎ, bù rú kànxīn* 萬般求法，不如看心; "among the 10,000 methods of pursuing the Dharma, nothing is superior to viewing the mind"), as it has the potential to remove all false thoughts (*wàngxiǎng* 妄想). However, later generations of Chán masters criticized it on the grounds that the process of *kàn* 看 or *guān* 觀 presupposes an object one "views."[39]

Although the term *kànxīn* is quasi-synonymous with *guānxīn*, there seem to be some subtle differences. The *xīn* ("mind") that is viewed in the *guānxīn* practice may be either "pure" (*jìng* 淨) or "defiled" (*rǎn* 染), whereas the mind that is viewed in *kànxīn* is exclusively the "pure" (Buddha-)mind, which is synonymous with Buddha-nature (*fóxìng* 佛性). Therefore, the term *kànjìng* 看淨 ("view purity") seems to be synonymous with *kànxīn* and at least very similar to the concept of mind in *shǒuxīn* 守心 ("guard the mind") practice.

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39 This criticism, initiated by the monk Shénhuì 神會 (668–760) in the 730s, had a polemical and sectarian background. In the *Pútídámó nánzōng dìng shìfēi lùn* 菩提達摩南宗定是非論 (ms. Dunbo 77, *folio* 14), "viewing" is characterized as a gradualistic and inferior practice: 凝定，住心看淨，起心外照，攝心內證 ("being frozen in *samādhi*, one stops the mind and *gazes* at purity; activating the mind, one illuminates the outside; collecting the mind, one realizes on the inside").

Ironically, the monk Mahāyāna, who was active in the late eighth century and closely related to the East Mountain/Northern School, supposedly employed the *guānxīn/kànxīn* method to defend the concept of "sudden enlightenment" at the famous Council of Lhasa, where Chinese and Indian monks debated the nature of enlightenment. He defined the terms as "non-reflection and non-examination" (*bù-sī bù-guān* 不思不觀):

To turn the light of the mind towards the mind's source—that is, contemplating the mind. This means that one does not reflect or examine whether conceptual signs are in movement or not. It also means *to reflect on non-reflection*. This is why the [*Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*] *sūtra* explains: "Non-examination is enlightenment."

(P.4546, *folio* 135a; P.116, *folio* 161; cited in Gomez 1987: 103–104; see also Démieville 1952: 78ff and van Schaik 2003; on the monk Móhēyǎn 摩訶衍 (Mahāyāna), see Gomez 1987: 153, fn. 119 and 154, fn. 124)

> 你坐時，平面端身正坐，寬放身心，盡空際遠看一字，自有次第。若初心人攀緣多，且向心中看一字。澄後坐時，狀若曠野澤中，迥處獨一高山，山上露地坐，四顧遠看，無有邊畔。坐時，滿世界寬放身心，住佛境界。清淨法身，無有邊畔，其狀亦如是。
>
> (*Léngqié shīzī jì* 楞伽師資記, P.3436, lines 408–411)[40]

> When you sit [in meditation], sit upright with a straight body on a level surface, relax your body and mind, and on the horizon *view* the character "one" (一; i. e. a horizontal line). Based on that procedure (lit. sequence), if the attachments are numerous in the beginning, then view the character "one" in your mind. When you sit in meditation after having settled (become clear),[41] your state [of mind] will be as if you were in a *vast wilderness*, distantly dwelling alone on a high mountain, sitting on the bare ground[42] on top of the mountain, viewing afar into the four directions, without there being any boundary. When you sit, you fill the world and relax your body and mind, dwelling in the realm of the Buddha. The pure Dharma-body (*fǎshēn* 法身) does not have any borders, and [the mind's?] state is also like this.

Once again, physical posture is emphasized here. In addition, a meditation aid is recommended for beginners: visualize the character for "one" (*yī* 一) on the horizon, as if sitting in solitude in an elevated position, such as a mountain top. As a result, the text describes a gradual vanishing of borders as the mind expands and final realization of the Dharma-body (i. e. the "truth-body" of the Buddha).

Similarly, in the *Dàshèng wǔ fāngbiàn Běizōng* 大乘五方便北宗 ("The Northern School of the Five Expedient Means of Mahāyāna"),[43] there is an emphasis on the harmony between body and mind, and the Northern School practice of *líniàn* 離念 ("distancing oneself from (>transcending) thinking"). Indeed, while the object of viewing is the Buddha-nature, in addition the agent that performs the viewing is the "realized mind" (*juéxīn* 覺心). Based on

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40 Compare T.85, no.2837: 1289c28. See also Ui 1966 (Appendix 北宗殘簡): 439 and Bingenheimer and Chang 2018, Vol.1: 43, Vol.2: 60–61.

41 Yanagida has here corrected the text to 澄後坐時. By contrast, the two manuscripts in which this passage is extant both have 證後坐時 (P. 3436r, line 409 and P. 3703r, line 1), which makes more sense to me: "after having attained realization."

42 *Lùdì* 露地 ("exposed/open ground") appears frequently as a metaphor for a state of freedom from defilements and afflictions in Buddhist texts from the *Lotus sūtra* onwards.

43 This is actually a group of interrelated texts (the "Five Expedient Means"), consisting of the *Dàshèng wúshēng fāngbiàn mén* 大乘無生方便門 ("The gate (i. e. teaching) of skillful means of Mahāyāna No-birth"; preserved in S.735v, S.2503, S.7961, and Beijing 1351v) and the *Dàshèng wǔ fāngbiàn Běizōng* (preserved in S.2058 and P.2270). Related texts with different or no titles can be found in S.182, S.2503, P.2270, S.1002, and P.2836. The interrelations among the various versions of the text are explored in Tadashi 1970; Ibuki 1991; and Ibuki 2012. For a short discussion of these manuscripts, see also McRae 1986: 327–330 (with further references).

this *qīngjìng běnjué* 清淨本覺 ("pure original realization; i. e. enlightenment"), one may intensify the process of viewing the pure Dharma-body and finally enter Buddhahood:

> "阿誰看？" "覺心看。所言覺者，為身心離念。離念是佛道。身心離念，返照熟看。清淨法身，得入佛道。身心離念，着力硬看。清淨本覺，得入佛道。"
>
> (*Dàshèng wǔ fāngbiàn Běizōng* 大乘五方便北宗)

> "Who is viewing?" "The realized (i. e. enlightened) mind is viewing. What is referred to as 'realized' means that body and mind have distanced themselves from thinking. To distance oneself from thoughts is the Way of the Buddha. If body and mind distance themselves from thoughts, counter-illuminating (i. e. reflecting back on one's own Buddha-nature?), one *perfectly* (lit. 'maturely') [?] *views* (*shú kàn* 熟看) the pure Dharma-body and is able to enter the Way of the Buddha. Body and mind distancing themselves from thinking, with all one's effort one *views even more firmly* (*yìng kàn* 硬看) the pure Dharma-body, and is able to enter the Way of the Buddha."

Both the subject of viewing and the object seem to disappear. This suggests that only the "process of viewing" remains. That there is indeed a *practice* of viewing is confirmed in a passage from the version of the "Five Expedient Means" preserved in S.1002.[44] Indeed, realization (*jué* 覺; synonymous with "enlightenment") seems to be a precondition for the proper practice of viewing, and in that state *not a single thing* is seen:

> 子答："覺了分明，看無一物。妄念時，覺心隨起後，妄心即止。"和言："看，覺時，不起；起時，不覺。更看！"

> The master answered: "Having realized distinctively, you *do not see/view a single thing*. When one is thinking in a deluded way, and the realized mind has arisen subsequently, then the deluded mind (*wàngxīn* 妄心) will cease." The monk said: "[As for] *viewing*, when realizing, [the deluded mind] does not arise; when arising, one has not realized. [Then] *view more*!"[45]

The "Five Expedient Means" contains numerous references to *kàn* ("viewing"). Indeed, in the *Dàshèng wǔfāngbiàn Běizōng* version, it is the opening theme of the treatise, with the word appearing ten times in a rhymed section. Here, the viewing

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44 This manuscript is not yet digitized in IDP. For a photographic reproduction, see *Dūnhuáng bǎozàng*, Vol.8: 200.

45 Compare a similar passage in the *Dàshèng wúshēng fāngbiàn mén* 大乘無生方便門 (ed. Ui 1966: 450): 和問言："見何物？"子云："一物不見。" ("A monk asked: 'What thing do you see?' The master answered: 'I do not see a single thing.'"). In the passage above I am not sure about the punctuation and whether the 更看 should be included in the phrase spoken by the monk, or whether it is a reaction by the master to the monk's difficulties concerning the practice.

(i. e. meditating) is expanded both spatially (viewing the far distance ahead, behind, to both sides, up, down, in the ten directions) and qualitatively (in a busy place, in a quiet place), prior to the recommendation that it should be performed in all situations (walking, standing, sitting, and lying).[46] Immediately after this rhymed section, the theme continues in a short dialogue in which the term appears a dozen times:

> 問：“看時看，何物看?” “看看無物。” “阿誰看?” “覺心看。透看十方界，清淨無壹物。常看無處相應即是佛。豁豁看看，看不住，湛湛無邊際，不染即是菩提路。”[47]

> [Somebody] asked: “Viewing when viewing, what thing does one view?” [Answer:] “Viewing, one does not view a single thing.” [Question:] “Who is viewing?” [Answer:] “The realized (i. e. enlightened) mind is viewing. Seeing through the world of the ten directions, it is pure without a single thing. Continuously view that this ‘no-place’ (i. e. there not being anything whatsoever) just corresponds to the Buddha. Vastly open, view, view, view without interruption, clear and without any borders, not stained, this is the path of *bodhi*.”

Given the possibility that “there being no-thing” (*wú yī wù* 無一物) or “no-place” could itself turn into an object of attachment, the *Dùnwù zhēnzōng yàojué* 頓悟真宗要决[48] states:

> “看無所，可不是着無所耶?” 答曰：“令無所心，看無所處，名‘無為法’，即不着無所，看即得見。” 問曰：“無心雖不着（＝著）無所，看即有所見，豈不着見耶?” 答曰：“無心看，不取不舍。以不取不舍故，此見是‘無見之見’，是名‘真大見’。以真見故，得見實相，是故菩薩之心，常在無所。”

> “[If one] views ‘no-place,’ could it not happen that one attaches to this ‘no place’? [The master] said: “Viewing ‘no place’ is called ‘non-constructed (non-conditioned) dharmas (phenomena)’; then one does not attach to any place, and when viewing, one is able to see [it].” [The disciples] asked: “Although ‘no-mind’ does not attach to ‘no-place,’ if one views, then there is

46 Ui 1966: 468 (punctuation modified). This is rephrased later in this long text in a dialogue on “realization” (*jué* 覺; ibid.: 494). Here, the topic is discussed in more detail, with the mind identified as the “causer” for realizing one’s true nature (*jué xìng* 覺性): *jué shì zhǔ xīn shì shǐ* 覺是主，心是使 (“enlightenment is the ‘master/agent,’ and the mind is the ‘messenger/causer’”). In all situations, “viewing/gazing” (*kàn*) is the expedient method that finally leads to the “path of *bodhi*” (*pútílù* 菩提路).

47 Ui 1966: 469.

48 The full title of this text is *Dùnwù zhēnzōng jīngāng bōrě xiūxíng dá bǐ àn fǎmén yàojué* 頓悟真宗金剛般若修行達彼岸法門要決 (“Essential determination of the doctrine of Adamantine wisdom according to the true teaching of sudden enlightenment”). It is attributed to a certain Zhìdá 智達 (a.k.a. Hóumòchén Yǎnzhī 侯莫陳琰之), a disciple of Lǎoān 老安 and Shénxiù (see McRae 1987: 239). The text, which was composed around 712 CE, is extant in P.116. For an edition, see Ueyama 1976. On this passage, see Okimoto 1980: 417–418; Faure 1986b: 123–132; and Faure 1997: 66; see also McRae 1987: 227–278.

> something to see, does one then not necessarily attach to the seeing?" [The master] answered: "If no-mind is viewing, then there is no grasping and no rejecting. Since there is no grasping and no rejecting, this [type of] *seeing* is then the 'seeing of no-seeing'; and this is called 'true great seeing.' Since one truly sees, one can see the 'real mark' (i. e. the true nature of phenomena). Therefore, the mind of the bodhisattva permanently dwells in 'no place.'"

Note that in the final section of this passage, the author unexpectedly introduces the notion of *jiàn* 見 ("seeing"), contrastive to *kàn* ("viewing"). Whereas *kàn* refers to the *process* of meditative reflection/vision, *jiàn* signifies the resulting *understanding* (insight).

Epistemologically, when there is an object to view that may be perceived, the mind can fixate on that object, which again can lead to "grasping" and attachment:

> 若有物看，即有住，即有着（＝著），即有業；若有業，即有苦。
>
> (*Dàshèng wǔ fāngbiàn Běizōng* 大乘五方便北宗)[49]

> If there is an object one views, then there is abiding, then there will be attachment, and then there will be karma; if there is karma, then there will be suffering.

By contrast, if there is no object to discern, liberation will ensue:

> 若無物看，即無住，即無着（＝著）；若無着（＝著），即無業；若無業，即無苦；若無苦，[...]
>
> (*Dàshèng wǔ fāngbiàn Běizōng* 大乘五方便北宗)[50]

> f there is *not a thing to be viewed*, then this is *non-abiding*, this is *non-attachment*; if there is non-attachment, then there is no karma; if there is no karma, then there is no suffering; if there is no suffering, [...]

According to the *Yèzuò hào* 夜坐號,[51] one should focus on the realization that the object of viewing (i. e. the mind) cannot be attained:

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49 Ui 1966: 494 (punctuation modified).

50 Ibid.(punctuation modified).

51 The *Yèzuò hào* is an anonymous Northern School treatise of ca. 400 characters preserved on P.3664/3559 (in addition to a fragment preserved on Дx00649(M.1227)). For an edition, see Rǎn Yúnhuá 1990: 160–173; see also Yuán Délǐng 2000 and Hán Chuánqiáng 2013: 57–59. In this treatise, the importance of practicing *kànxīn* is emphasized through expressions such as *qínqín kàn* 勤勤看 ("view with great effort"), *dìdì kàn* 諦諦看 ("view attentively"), *shúshú kàn* 熟熟看 ("completely view"), *xìxì kàn* 細細看 ("meticulously view"), etc. Besides its focus on *kànxīn* and seated meditation, the text features typical Northern Chán concepts such as *bù qǐ xīn* 不起心 ("not giving rise to the [deluded] mind"), *duàn wàng niàn* 斷妄念 ("cutting off deluded thoughts"), *wàng niàn yǒng xí* 妄念永息 ("ceasing deluded thoughts forever"), etc.

若也看心，心不得，勤於‘不得處’中看。

As for *viewing the mind*, the mind cannot be attained [as an object of viewing], and one has to exert oneself in *viewing the place that cannot be attained*.

Indeed, one must avoid forming an attachment even to the "voidness" that results from the fact that neither mind nor no-mind can be viewed:

亦不看心，亦不觀空，是名真看。
(*Qǐng èr héshàng dá Chán cè shí dào* 請二和尚答禪策十道)[52]

To *neither view the mind nor contemplate the void*, this is called "true viewing."

Despite these efforts to refute the notion that the practitioner views a particular object, later Chán adherents would still criticize *kànxīn* practice on the grounds that "viewing" must always involve an object.[53]

5 Kànxīn *beyond the Northern School: A few notes*

Although they were vigorously attacked by the "Southern" factions of Chán and became obsolete in the subsequent mainstream doctrinal debates of the various Chán schools, *guānxīn* and *kànxīn* by no means disappeared from discourses on meditation. Indeed, there is evidence that they continued to play an important role in the transmission of Chán in Northwestern areas, especially the Dūnhuáng region, and several manuscripts containing references to the two practices were eventually translated into Old Tibetan, Old Uighur, and Tangut. In addition, scribes in the

52 This short text is extant in S.4113 and consists of one question and ten answers concerning Chán teaching. For a brief description, see Tanaka 1974: 34; for an edition, see Tanaka 1983: 265–273. The manuscript is not yet digitized in IDP. For a photographic reproduction, see *Dūnhuáng bǎozàng*, Vol.34: 52–53.

53 For example, Zōngmì 宗密 (780–841; a disciple of the Northern School critic Shénhuì) states: 北宗看心是失真指，若有可看，即是境界也 ("the Northern School [practice of] viewing the mind is losing the true teaching; if there is a mind that can be viewed, then this is a [perceptual] object"; *Chányuán zhū quánjí dūxù* 禪源諸詮集都序 "Preface to the collection of Chán sources"; T. 48, no.2015: 405). There is further criticism of *kànxīn* in the early ninth-century *Niàn Fó jìng* 念佛鏡 ("Mirror of remembrance of Buddha's name"), in which the merits of the practice are defined as manifestly inferior to those of *niàn Fó*: 問：「看心功德，多少於念佛功德？」答：「看心功德，少於念佛功德百千萬倍。」; T.47, no.1966: 128c2–3). Likewise, the Huáyán master Chéngguān 澄觀 (738–839) criticized the practice as follows: 起心看心是即妄想。故非真知。("If you give rise to the mind and view the mind, then this is the same as deluded thoughts, and therefore not true knowledge"; T.36, no.1736: 261b25).

Dūnhuáng area continued to copy manuscripts that included mentions of *guānxīn* or *kànxīn*. One example is a tenth-century copy of the *Fóshuō Lèngqié jīng chánmén xītán zhāng* 佛說楞伽經禪門悉談章 ("The Siddhaṃ Chapter of the Gate of Chán [according to] the *Laṅkavatāra sūtra* expounded by the Buddha"), which is extant in several Dūnhuáng manuscripts. This text, which encourages engagement with Buddhist practice, was probably aimed at a general audience. The passage in which the term *kànxīn* appears reads as follows:[54]

> 第三：看心須併儻。掃却垢穢除災障。即色即空會無想。妄想分別是心量。體上識體實無謗。[55]

> Thirdly, when *viewing the mind* [in contemplation], it is necessary to get rid of [obstacles]. [Therefore, one must] sweep away all dirt, getting rid of calamities and obstacles. Form is the same as emptiness, [when this is realized] one will be able [to attain] no-thought. The discrimination of false thinking constitutes the capacity (i. e. essential feature) of the mind. As for "essence": if one realizes the essence, then there is no further slandering.

In addition, *kànxīn* features in a Chinese text attributed to the meditation master Wòlùn (?–626), the *Wòlùn chánshī kànxīn fǎ* 臥輪禪師看心法 ("Chán Master Wòlùn's method of viewing the mind"), as well as the Tibetan translations thereof.[56] Virtually unknown to his contemporaries in China, he helped to inspire the *Cig car ba* ("Sudden Teaching") meditation methods that developed in Dūnhuáng and Tibet in the eighth and ninth centuries.[57]

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54 The text integrates many "Indian sounds" transcribed into Chinese in its rhyme schemes (arranged in eight strophes), focusing particularly on the four Sanskrit liquids *ṛ ṝ ḷ ḹ* (rendered in Chinese as 魯留盧樓). It is preserved in P.2204, P.2212, P.3082, P.3099, S.4583v, and Beijing *niǎo* 鳥 64 (BD00041–1). For a study of this text, see Anderl and Sørensen *forthcoming*. The text was so popular in the Northwestern area that it was also translated into Old Uighur.

55 T.85, no.2779: 536a27-29; ed. Anderl and Sørensen *forthcoming*: 113.

56 P.tib.116.

57 As Meinert 2007 points out in her study on Wòlùn, his fame in these regions meant that teachings attributed to him were reimported into China in the centuries after his death (previously, he had been virtually unknown in Chinese Buddhist circles): "Thus P.tib.116 presents a context where Wolun is ranked among other eighth-century masters who were well-received in Dunhuang. Although Wolun is the only figure who did *not* live in the eighth century, this fictitious Wolun was in fact even integrated in a regional current of Meditation Buddhism in Dunhuang" (ibid.: 192). The *Wòlùn chánshī kànxīn* is extant in S.1494 and fragmentarily in S.6103. Another version is preserved at the Ryūkoku University 龍谷大學 depository of Dūnhuáng texts (previously, this Wòlùn text was part of the private collection of Mr. Tokushi Yūshō 透氏祐祥).

More generally, the term *kànxīn* (Tib. *sems la bltas*) features prominently in Tibetan Chán texts.[58]

Furthermore, there are indications that *guānxīn* was used as a general term for "meditation." In a tenth-century copy of a manuscript fragment of a vernacularized account of the Buddha's life, the prognostication specialist Ajita arrives in the royal palace of Śākyamuni's father in order to examine the bodily features of his newborn son. In this account, the palace attendants suspect the baby is a demon due to his bodily characteristics (i. e. the 32 marks of a superior man). The following exchange then takes place between the attendants and Ajita after the visitor is informed that the infant is asleep:

> 「伏乞尊仙，莫生疲圈（倦）。」仙人答曰：「太子是四生慈父，睡眠不敢侵身，片時入定觀心，方便令生拔濟。」[59]

> "We humbly beg forgiveness of the venerable immortal (i. e. Ajita)." The immortal [Ajita] answered as follows: "The crown prince (i. e. Śākyamuni) is the benevolent father of the living beings born by the four kinds of birth. [If he is] sleeping, I do not dare to intrude on him. For a little while [he is] entering *concentration* (*rùdìng* 入定) and *meditating* (*guānxīn* 觀心), as an expedient means saving sentient beings from their troubles.[60]

Here, *rùdìng guānxīn* 入定觀心 is obviously used in the sense of *zhǐguān* 止觀. It does not refer to a particular meditation practice or technique.

A more systematic survey of developments concerning *guānxīn* and *kànxīn* after the eighth century would certainly yield important results. However, this is far beyond the scope of the present paper.

6 Final observations

We may make a number of observations following this brief and selective excursion into the viewing, visualization, and contemplation practices associated with the terms *guānxīn* and *kànxīn* in medieval China. The practice of *guān* was

58 See, e. g. van Schaik 2006: 213, 346 and van Schaik 2012: 8. Even the most important single figure in the development of Tibetan Chán, the monk Móhēyǎn 摩訶衍—otherwise known for his "subitist" approach to Chán—recommended the *sems la bltas* method in his writings.

59 This fragment is preserved in S.4128r; for a short description of the manuscript, see Mair 1980: 330.

60 The way I interpret the passage, Ajita suggests that the infant's sleep is in reality a form of meditation and expedient means to save sentient beings. This would fit well into the overall framework of the story which is characterized by accounts of supernatural events.

introduced to a Chinese audience through a variety of sources. On the one hand, there were translations of texts dealing with traditional analytical meditation methods such as *zhǐguān* ("concentration and contemplation"). On the other hand, there were the so-called visualization *sūtra*s, most of which were Central Asian in origin, or even compiled in China itself. These had an enormous impact on the understanding of *guān* in China. Common to these sources is their focus on embedding the manifold visualization processes in a larger soteriological scheme, including preparatory or simultaneous practices related to observing the precepts and confession rituals.[61] In addition, there are frequent references to proper preparation of the body for contemplation practice, including the *locus* of meditation (i. e. the surroundings), the *modus* (e. g. in solitude), the posture, the garment that should be worn, preparatory breathing exercises, etc.

When traditional methods of meditation were gradually adapted in China, the *object* of contemplation shifted to more abstract entities and key Mahāyāna concepts and terminology, such as "Dharma-body," "Buddha-nature," etc. Moreover, there were significant shifts in the *mārga* and the methods used for viewing/contemplating. Early Chán sources, such as the treatises attributed to Sēngchóu, those produced by the Northern Chán master Shénxiù, and others, still mention the precepts. However, the rules are not presented as concrete prohibitions against killing, stealing, etc., as in previous Buddhist literature. Rather, they are frequently reinterpreted as *functions of the mind*. As such, the various aspects of the diverse soteriological schemes—including controlling one's actions, speech, and mind vis-à-vis "the other" (e. g. an external entity)—became increasingly self-contained in *pure mental activity*, blurring the distinction between an agent and its object. Indeed, the only aspect that is emphasized in early Chán texts in addition to the practice of contemplation itself is the *body*—specifically the notion that contemplation is only ever effective when body and mind are in a state of harmony. In this respect, there is direct continuity with the emphasis on physical preconditions for meditative practices in the visualization *sūtra*s and Tiāntái texts. Indeed, we may speculate that the more abstract the objects of meditation became, the more emphasis was placed on this bodily and ritualist frame in order to provide a concrete physical "anchor" for the practitioner.

One interesting aspect of references to meditative practices in the Chán School pertains to the use of terminology associated with processes of visual perception. Is a process verb used, or a verb indicating the result of visual

61 This analysis has a textual and rhetorical focus, but, of course, Chán practice and meditation did not take place in a soteriological vacuum. We know, for example, that repentance and ordination rituals, performed by Chán masters for large congregations, were immensely important.

perception? Is the *agent* in focus, or does the term indicate that the subject is *affected* by the object that is seen or perceived? More generally, what is the degree of agency of the "viewer," and what is the nature of the object to be viewed? Is it concrete, abstract, even "thinkable"? If it is abstract or not "thinkable," how can it be viewed or imagined? What about an object that is inaccessible to every human sense-field?

In the context of the emerging Chán movement, the traditional use of *guān* as a term for viewing or meditative visualization processes gradually disappeared. Traditionally, the *guān* method could have either internal or external *objects* (it is often difficult to make clear distinctions between them), which were viewed and, more technically, analyzed. Concrete objects (such as a statue of the Buddha) or internal visions that arose in the mind (such as an image of a Pure Land) could affect the passive "viewer." Alternatively, other mental images—such as features of the Buddha's physical body, the splendors of Maitreya's realm, etc.—could be *generated* in the mind. In certain *guān* practices, the agent consciously interfered with the process of merely viewing and instead analyzed the concrete or abstract object along certain paradigms (e. g. the gradual disintegration of the physical body after death, determining the specific feature of impermanence and insubstantiality, etc.). As such, in the traditional sources on *guān*, agent and object are usually clearly identifiable. By contrast, by postulating the mind or mental activity—*xīn* 心—as an object of *guān*, early Chán adherents (following in the footsteps of Zhìyǐ) consciously blurred this distinction in accordance with the doctrines of "mind-only" and "consciousness-only."[62] Now, since the locus of viewing is usually also the mind, the "mind is viewing/perceiving the mind" (i. e. the "agent" is indistinguishable from the object of perception). As can be seen in the selection of textual material presented above, Chán adherents tried to clarify the status of both subject and object, emphasizing their inherent "voidness/emptiness." They argued that, ultimately, not a single thing can be viewed. This *disappearance* of any possible object to view or being visualized is a distinguishing feature of realization. The agent of viewing might fade away, and the object might disappear, yet the following aspects do not seem to be negated in the texts: the *process of viewing* itself and, importantly, the *physical presence* in a specific meditation posture.[63]

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62 On the influence of mind-only theories on the early Chán schools, see, e. g. Yamabe 2006 and Yamabe 2014.

63 The passages cited above indicate that agency is still emphasized, too, albeit sometimes indirectly. The discourse on *guān/kàn* is often embedded in dialogues designed to *encourage* students. The visualization practices clearly demanded considerable effort and continuous attention from the agents performing them if they were to be successful.

This reinterpretation of *guān* practices probably led to the appearance of the term *kànxīn* ("view/observe the mind"). Here, the specific and agent-oriented term *guān* is replaced with a more general term for visual processes—*kàn*. As we have seen, the reinterpretation of traditional Buddhist terms and the coining of new words were typical features of early Chán. In our specific case, *kàn* replaced—or at least coexisted with—*guān*. Whereas *guān* can have both wholesome and unwholesome objects of meditation, and the contemplation can concern the mind in both pure and impure states, the mind as an object of *kàn* always seems to be "pure." Indeed, it is the original pure mind—the "Buddha-mind."

However, *kàn* was the subject of fierce criticism, especially among adherents of so-called "Southern Chán." Their issue with the term was that it still denoted a *process* and had a notion of duration; as such, it was deemed incompatible with the idea of "sudden/instantaneous enlightenment." Indeed, in the tenth-century *Zǔtáng jí* 祖堂集 ("Collection from the Patriarchs' Hall"),[64] the first comprehensive Chán transmission text, the emphasis is on *jiàn* 見, the most general verb for "to see."[65] There is also no durative aspect to this word; it simply indicates that an object enters the field of vision of the subject. Although the latter is only syntactically the agent, he/she is actually "affected" by the sensed object.

Notwithstanding this criticism of *guān* and *kàn* practices during the later Táng Dynasty, the discourse on visualization and contemplation had a lasting impact on Chinese thought and meditative practices, and subsequently was even evident in a Confucian context.[66]

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64 See Yanagida 1971.

65 E. g. *jiàn Fó* 見佛 ("to see the Buddha", with the extended meaning "to realize; to understand"); *jiàn Fǒlǐ* ("see (>understand) the principle of the Buddha"); *jiàn xìng* 見性 ("see (>realize) one's [Buddha-]nature"). *Kàn* appears occasionally in ZTJ, but it is usually criticized: e. g. 師問: "作什摩?" 對曰: "看靜。" 師曰: "看者何人? 靜者何物?" ("The master asked: 'What are you doing?' [The disciple] answered: 'Contemplating on stillness.' The master said: 'The one who contemplates—what person is this? Stillness—what is this?'"; ZTJ 1.130).

66 For an interpretation of *guānxīn* by Zhū Xī 朱熹, see Tiwald 2018: 77, 114, 123, 153.

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Supplementary Material: The online version of this article offers supplementary material (https://doi.org/10.1515/asia-2018-0028).