The division between ‘China,’ ‘Korea,’ and ‘Japan’ (expeditiously used in the very title of this publication) is to a certain degree artificial, and especially in the early stages of Chinese Chán 禪 and Korean Sŏn, these regional divisions only make limited sense. Korean monks, for example, took a very active part already during the formative period of Chán development (as far as in the distant area of nowadays Sichuán 四川), and there was by no means a one-way transmission from China to Korea, but rather a constant exchange between regions. In the same way that there are no clear divisions along state borders in terms of the characteristics of Buddhist practices and doctrines, Chán is no unified phenomenon but there have been many kinds of Chán, Sŏn, and Japanese Zen. Especially in the formative period of the Táng 唐 Dynasty (618–907), impulses and ideas were emerging from and pulsating between cultural and religious ‘hubs,’ for example in the form of important centers of Buddhist practice and culture, e.g., large cities such as Cháng’ān 長安, Luòyáng 洛陽, or regions at the periphery of or beyond the influence of Chinese control (e.g. Dūnhuáng 敦煌, the region of nowadays Sichuān, and Southeast China), or in the form of Buddhist communities living in secluded monasteries. In accordance with sociopolitical, geographical, sectarian, and many other settings and conditions, ideas, practices, and doctrines would at times be contained within limited spatial borders, and during other periods they would spread with great speed throughout large areas. During their journey to other areas, ideas or sets of doctrines could undergo significant modifications (e.g., in the form of the selection of texts which were circulating, or by incorporating influences absorbed during their journey, or based on the personal preferences by the human agents transmitting these ideas). In addition, having spread to specific areas, these ideas, doctrines, or practices would undergo adjustments and modifications, and be adapted to local religious and cultural contexts. Although the
study of the historical and doctrinal developments of early Chán has progressed immensely during the last decades, research of these important questions of regional variety is still in its initial phase.\footnote{E.g., the form of Chán practiced in the Northwestern regions, most importantly in Dùnhuáng during the Táng Dynasty; or, later on, the specific varieties of Chán developed in the non-Chinese context of the Liáo (Khitan), the Tangut (scholars such as Kiril Sollonin have recently addressed this issue), or the translation of Chán scriptures into Uyghur (an aspect studied by Peter Zieme, Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften). Recently, a large project on Tibetan Chán has been initiated by Sam VanSchaik (“Tibetan Zen,” funded by the British Academy, 2011–2013).}

This volume does not focus on theoretical discussions on rhetoric,\footnote{On a short discussion concerning the differences between Western and Indian/Chinese rhetoric, see the article by Jens Braarvig.} or on the interpretation of Zen doctrines. Rather, it is an attempt to identify concrete linguistic and rhetorical devices and ‘rhetorical modes’ that have been used in Chán, Sôn, and Zen texts at specific times and occasions, and relate them to sociopolitical, doctrinal, and sectarian contexts; as well as pursuing questions concerning motives, continuities or changes of rhetorical strategies, and target-audiences.

It suffices to note that in China—as in the case of ancient Greece—the relationship between language/rhetoric and ‘truth’ was a question of ardent discussion among Buddhists, especially from the 6th century onwards. As will be discussed below—despite the predominant negative attitude towards words frequently expressed in Zen texts, stressing their incapability to express the ultimate truth—we find ample reference in late Táng and Sòng sources (960–1279) sources, for example, that enlightenment was triggered/conditioned exactly by words. Linguistically, this is not indicated by constructions with coverbs/prepositions indicating ‘cause’ or ‘dependence’ (such as 在 or 依), as we would expect, but it is idiomatically expressed by using an extended meaning of the relative place word 下 ‘under’ (typically, 言下大悟 ‘he was greatly enlightened based on these words’). To my knowledge this construction 言下 is not current in other text-types, and seems to be specific ‘Chán/Zen language’ (‘UNDER > AT THE OCCASION OF (?) > caused by, triggered by words’). Why was this unusual construction chosen? As will be demonstrated below, in ‘Chán/Zen language’ the semantics of common words are frequently manipulated or metaphorically extended, rare words are introduced or ‘revived,’ and even