

Study on the Relationship Between Chanting Ceremony and Music in Chongqing Huayan Temple

CHEN Fang^[a]*

^[a]Institute of Taoism and Religious Culture, Sichuan University, Chengdu, China.

*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

The ceremony is formed by two elements, namely the implicit belief system and the dominant theological behavior system. The religious belief imposes deep-rooted and fundamental restrictions to the theological behavior but must be realized based on the latter. They are integrated. The dominant theological behavior system combines multiple artistic elements in which music outstands. Music attaches itself to sutra to develop into a form of chanting with words and music as an integral and constitutes the plot structure according to specific Buddhist etiquette to engage itself in the ceremony and display its functions.

Key words: Huayan temple; Chanting ceremony; Ceremony music; Relationship; Function

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INTRODUCTION

In the Western Han and Eastern Han Dynasties, Buddhism was spread from India into China and has gradually formed the Buddhist culture heritage with Chinese characteristics in the long process of collision, penetration and blending with the resplendent local culture of Huaxia

Nationality. The Buddhist ceremony is the core content of the Buddhist culture and is the Buddhist etiquette practicing process with fixed and normative procedures and integrating multiple artistic elements, which is conducted to express religious beliefs and achieve religious functions. The Buddhist ceremony, therefore, is a comprehensive performance system, into which music is absorbed as an independent form of artistic performance. Why is it so? How is music interacted with the ceremony?

1. STRUCTURAL FEATURES OF AND MUSIC APPLICATION IN THE CHANTING CEREMONY

Huayan Temple holds various complicated ceremonies every year, and they are usually classified into ceremonies of celebration and memorial, ceremonies of cultivation and ceremonies of salvation according to their function, content, purpose and other criteria.

Ceremonies of cultivation mainly consist of chanting and confessing sins for the purpose of cultivating samatha-vipassana. The chanting ceremony is most representative. It is also called morning and evening chanting or morning and evening work as it is held in the morning and evening. In India, when the primitive Buddhism came into being, the monks needed to go out to beg for food, and also had to do required cultivation every day to eradicate vexation, get detached from the eternal cycle of birth and death, and realize Nirvana. There are two methods for cultivation. One is to learn Buddhist principles and the other is to practice meditation. As Buddhism was spread into China, the classics preaching Buddhist principles were continuously translated into Chinese, sutra classics in the form of text were seen in the temples, and the daily ceremonies of reciting sutra classics, namely prototype of the chanting ceremony, were gradually formed. In the history of China, both the imperial court and the Buddhist

temples advocated and attached importance to cultivation through chanting in every morning and evening. “Without morning and evening chanting ceremonies, the monks are like runaway horses, and how can they cultivate themselves according to the religious doctrines?” said Xinci, a master also named as Guanyue, in the author’s preface of his work *Explanation on Both Morning and Evening Chanting*. In the beginning, there is not any uniform chanting system, and although *Monastic Rules for Zen Buddhists* compiled by Huaihai, a Zen master from Baizhang Mountain, early in the Tang Dynasty contained clear provisions on various affairs of the Buddhist temples, this book failed to be handed down in the Song Dynasty. What is exactly identifiable in textual research

is the conclusion about basic prototype of the chanting ceremony in *Cultivation According to Baizhang Monastic Rules for Buddhists* compiled by Master Dehui from Baizhang Mountain in the Yuan Dynasty. At the end of the Ming Dynasty and the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, all temples, whether large or small, and individual believers, took chanting as their compulsory work, and the chanting ceremony gradually got into shape.

In Huayan Temple located in Chongqing in Southwestern China, the procedures for the chanting ceremony are well preserved as influenced by the local humanistic and geological environments. The author lists the ceremony procedures and musical pieces recorded on the site as follows:

Table 1
Procedure Structure of Morning Chanting

Procedure		Content	Form	Musical instrument
I. Going to the hall upon the block knocking		Three rounds of drumbeat were conducted and the Buddhists worshiped by three times to pay respect for the Buddha	—	Bell and drum
II. Praising		Praise to precious tripod	Intonation	Tutti
III. Chanting	1. Chanting the names	Namo Surangama Assembly of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas	Intonation	Tutti
	2. Chanting mantras and sutras	The Great Buddha Head of Surangama Mantra, Great Compassion Mantra, Ten Short Mantras, and The Prajna Paramita Sutra	Chanting	Temple block and inverted bell
		Prajna Paramita	Intonation	Tutti
IV. Sharing virtue		Verses of Virtue Sharing	Intonation	Tutti
V. Chanting around the Buddha		Namo Amitabha Buddha	Intonation	Tutti
VI. Expressing desire		Namo Sakyamuni Buddha	Intonation	Tutti
VII. Conversion		Total Tisarana	Intonation	Tutti
VIII. Worshipping in front of Skanda	1. Chanting the names	Namo Dhammapala Skanda Bodhisattva	Intonation	Tutti
	2. Holding mantras	The Auspicious Fairy Mantra	Chanting	Temple block and inverted bell
	3. Praising	Praise to Skanda	Intonation	Tutti

Table 2
Procedure Structure of Evening Chanting

Procedure		Content	Form	Musical instrument
I. Going to the hall upon the block knocking		Three rounds of drumbeat were conducted and the Buddhists worshiped by three times to pay respect for the Buddha	—	Bell and drum
II. Praising		Praise to Buddha	Intonation	Tutti
III. Chanting	1. Chanting the names	Namo Lily Pond Assembly Bodhisattva	Intonation	Tutti
	2. Chanting mantras and sutras	Amitabha Sutra, Mantra of Rebirth	Chanting	Temple block and inverted bell
		Prajna Paramita	Intonation	Tutti
		Big Amitabha Praise	Intonation	Tutti
IV. Sharing virtue		Verse of Amitabha	Intonation	Tutti
V. Chanting around the Buddha		Namo Amitabha Buddha	Intonation	Tutti
VI. Expressing desire		Namo Sakyamuni Buddha	Intonation	Tutti
VII. Conversion		Tisarana	Intonation	Tutti
VIII. Worshipping in front of Sangha-arama	1. Chanting the names	Namo Sangharama Bodhisattva	Intonation	Tutti
	2. Holding mantras	Great Compassion Mantra	Chanting	Temple block and inverted bell
	3. Praising	Praise to Sangha-Arama	Intonation	Tutti

It can be seen from comparison and analysis of the above tables that on the whole, the morning chanting and the evening chanting have the same procedures in both quantity and scale. The whole ceremony consists of eight procedures, including going to the hall upon the block knocking, praising, chanting, sharing virtue, chanting around the Buddha, expressing desire, conversion, worshipping in front of Skanda or worshipping in front of Sangha-arama, and among them, praising the Buddha, chanting, sharing virtue and conversion are the core procedures with transitional procedures implemented before and after them.

In general, a ceremony is composed of several procedures, each of which has clear etiquette purpose. To realize this purpose, the contents can be either complicated or simple. The procedures are arranged in strict sequence and logic and together constitute the complete frame structure of the ceremony.

“Going to the hall upon the block knocking” is the preparation made for the formal start of the morning ceremony. As a rule, the block will be knocked at 05:00 in the early morning to remind the Buddhists to get up to wash their faces and rinse their mouths and then go to the hall.

The mark for the formal start of the ceremony is the start of the “praising” procedure. Praising is for the Buddhists to express their respect and yearning for the Buddha, Bodhisattva and Mortal Instruments, and what are praised may be all Buddhas or Bodhisattvas, various offerings and mortal instruments. The purpose of praising is simple and clear, and a musical piece that reveals one’s mind can express the inner feeling to realize the purpose of praising. Why the praising procedure is set at the beginning of the entire ceremony is because for one thing, it can serve to open the throat by singing, and for another, the slow singing tempo can remove morning sleepiness bit by bit to ensure sufficient preparation for the core procedures of the ceremony.

From “chanting around the Buddha” on, the procedures are core links of the chanting ceremony. According to the principles of Mahayana Buddhism, the ultimate purpose of the monks’ cultivation is to get away from the sufferings, to win rebirth in Amitabha’s pure land and to become a Buddha. As a result, the Buddhists will devote their whole life to devout cultivation by the most direct approach of chanting sutras in every morning and evening in the hope of earning virtue from chanting of principles. The main part of the entire chanting ceremony, in consequence, is to chant sutras, the most basic function of which is to accumulate cultivation virtues through chanting of sutras. The procedure “chanting around the Buddha” is the core procedure of the chanting ceremony. In this procedure, close coordination is required among two or three sessions. The first is to intonate the names of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, the second is to chant mantras and sutras, and in the evening chanting, praising of Buddhas

and Bodhisattvas is also required. These two or three sessions are closely connected and inseparable. Among them, “chanting mantras and sutras” is the core session, and the contents concerning the names of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas intonated before it and the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas praised after it is closely connected with the mantras and sutras chanted. For example, when chanting *Great Buddha Head of Surangama Mantra*, the name of “Namo Surangama Assembly of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas” must be yelled out; when chanting *Amitabha Sutra*, the name of “Namo Lily Pond Assembly Bodhisattva” or “Namo Buddhas and Bodhisattvas from Ten Directions”¹ must be yelled out and *Big Amitabha Praise* must be sung. No musical pieces and names of Bodhisattvas chanted can be changed at will. In addition, the mantra of “Prajna Paramita” has various functions, including relieving the suffering of life and death and taking the people across to the other shore of Nirvana, namely anutpada-anirodha. That is why this mantra needs to be intonated after chanting mantras and sutras both in the morning and in the evening.

“Sharing virtue” is another important procedure immediately following “chanting”. Sharing virtue in front of Sakyamuni Buddha is required whether in regular chanting or universal Buddha chanting. In universal Buddha chanting, sharing virtue with the vegetarian host is added, and the rites included are more tedious. “Sharing virtue”, or “transferring virtue” or “delivering virtue”, is to deliver the virtue of “chanting”, the previous procedure, to a place. While sharing virtue, the practitioners express good wishes to a place to bless a place or a person. For example, sharing virtue can be classified as follows considering different directions, contents and beneficiaries of sharing: first, “sharing virtue in front of the Buddha”, which means sharing the virtue from previous chanting of mantras and sutras with the west and the dharmapalas to pray that the practitioners themselves can become a Buddha soon; second, “sharing virtue with all living beings” without clear target audiences, which intends to deliver the virtue to all living beings so that they can recover from illness, enjoy longer life and gain happiness; third, when sitting in meditation and chanting sutras, the virtue is shared with the relatives or friends of the vegetarian host so that they can enjoy longer life or get to the pure land of ultimate bliss. This is “sharing virtue with the vegetarian host”. The procedure for sharing virtue can be either large or small in scale. The small ones include regular chanting. In the compact procedure, singing *Verses of Virtue Sharing* is enough to deliver the virtue gained from chanting of the name of Buddha to the dharmapalas. The larger ones include sitting in meditation and chanting sutras. An altar needs to be specifically built

¹ Amitabha is also known as the Immeasurable Buddha, in which immeasurable means indefinite, and *Amitayur-Dhyana Sutra* says that seeing Amitabha is seeing Buddhas from ten directions.

for the vegetarian host for the purpose of sharing virtue—an extended life altar is built in front of Medicine Buddha, or a future life altar is built in front of Amitabha. Praising, chanting the names, chanting mantras and sutras, sharing virtue, and expressing desire for all living beings are the major rites contained in the procedure. As with the first three items of the chanting procedure (except “going to the hall upon the block knocking”), “chanting the names” is closely connected with “chanting mantras and sutras”, and “sharing virtue” is closely connected with “expressing desire for all living beings”. If merged, the structure is made up of praising, chanting mantras and sutras, and sharing virtue. It can be seen from this that the procedure of “sharing virtue” with complicated sessions is also the reproduction of “Sanqi system” for chanting, which further proves that these three procedures play a core role in the entire ceremony.

Both chanting around the Buddha and expressing desire are chanting the names of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to express their respect to Buddhas and to confess their own sins. These are transitional procedures held between “sharing virtue” and “conversion”. Conversion refers to that the Buddhists are completely converted into the followers of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. The procedure of conversion means that ordinary people have become devotees to Buddhism, and for Buddhists or believers, this marks an essential change in the process of cultivation. In the contemporary era, the morning and evening chanting ceremonies of most temples in the Han region end with the procedure of Tisarana, so do some temples in Chongqing, such as Arhat Temple and Shuangguitang.

The last procedure of chanting is “worshiping in front of Skanda” or “worshiping in front of Sangha-arama”. Originally, this procedure is practiced only in the first and fifteenth days of a month in the Chinese calendar, but it is not the case in Huayan Temple where this procedure is practiced every morning and evening. This system has been followed and implemented every day as a temple rule, making the chanting ceremony not only complete in structure but also rich in musical pieces. Highly resembling the three rites in chanting around the Buddha, this procedure is also comprised of chanting the names, chanting mantras and sutras, and praising. *Praise to Skanda* or *Praise to Sangha-arama* is the exclusive musical piece for praising, which cannot be replaced by any other musical piece.

Thus it can be seen that there is a close logical connection between each procedure of the chanting ceremony. Every procedure has definite religious etiquette purposes. The sequence of each procedure is subject to strict regulations and cannot be exchanged or inverted at will. Not every procedure or rite, however, is of equal importance. “Praising, chanting around the Buddha and sharing virtue” are core procedures; “worshiping in front of Skanda and worshiping in front

of Sangha-arama” are secondary; and “chanting around the Buddha and expressing desire” are mainly for transitional purpose.

2. WAYS FOR APPLICATION OF MUSIC TO CEREMONIES

It can be concluded from analysis of Table 1 and Table 2 that, the music applied in the ceremonies demonstrates the following three features:

First, it is discovered from the statistical parameters of tempo that each tune in the morning ceremony is basically kept at 60 beats per minute, and in the evening ceremony, the tempo of each tune differs, which however, is also kept at 60-70 beats per minute. During the short transition from chanting around the Buddha to expressing desire, the tune has faster beats as the hint for change of ceremony procedure, but the whole song cycle does not experience obvious change of tempo. The Buddhist singing can be believed to have slow tune and rhythm in intermediate and moderate tempo.

Second, each Buddhist singing tune in the song cycle applies the same tone row, close relative key with five degrees above and below, tone row of the same tune or the halt sound in two adjacent tunes and the equal intimacy factor of the same beginning tone to structure the whole Buddhist singing, thus organically combining each independent tune into a complete tonality distribution.

Third, the tune materials are similar or identical. For example, *Praise to Buddha* at the beginning of the evening chanting and *Praise to Sangha-arama* at the end of the evening chanting are of the same tune. Other Buddhist songs also use similar tone materials to develop the melody through repetition and variation.

Music in the ceremony attaches itself to sutra to develop into a form of chanting with words and music as an integral and constitutes the plot structure according to specific Buddhist etiquette. It mainly engages itself in ceremony and displays its functions through the following three approaches.

Approach I: Independent style. Independent style refers to that music itself serves as a complete and independent ceremony procedure, and the etiquette purpose is to primarily express the feeling and secondarily express the meaning. Mostly being an independent song or a collection of multiple songs, such music usually plays a significant role in all ceremonies to reflect religious ideas via librettos and to express the feelings for the religion through singing. For example, the first procedure of the chanting ceremony is to praise the Triratna, the musical instruments and the offerings to show the respect and highly praise to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, so *Praise to Precious Tripod* or *Praise to Buddha* is chanted. In China, which is an ancient state of ceremonies, people are always hospitable to their friends,

and it goes without saying that people will voice their compliment and praise to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in the religious ceremonies held in the sacred and solemn hall. In ancient times, people convey their inner feelings by complimenting a thing or a scene because they are implicit, but not direct, and therefore, they rely on music, which is the best media for expression of inner feelings, to show their piety to the precious tripod and the incense burner for the purpose of praising the mercy of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and respecting their profound virtues. There are more cases where a complete tune is used as an independent ceremony procedure, including *Verses of Virtue Sharing* in the procedure of “sharing virtue”, “names of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas” chanted in the procedure of “expressing desire” and *Tisarana* in the procedure of “Tisarana”.

Approach II: Compound type. Compound type refers to that being not able to function as a complete ceremony procedure, music needs to be combined with language or other manner of presentation to form an independent procedure with a view to presenting the complicated and integral ceremony contents. For example, “chanting” in the second procedure of the chanting ceremony is the most important part in the entire ceremony, which cannot be fulfilled by either language expression like chanting of sutra or feeling expression like singing alone. Therefore, the three-step system of chanting the names of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, chanting sutra, and singing the mantra of “Prajna Paramita” is formed to not only express the praise to the Buddha but also to complete the task of chanting. In the procedure structure of “music + chanting + music”, music which constitutes a part of the etiquette and plays a supplementary role, is next to the first kind of music in terms of its importance. Such music still has an important status and role among all types of ceremony music pieces.

Approach III: Transitional type. In the ceremony, the transitional music only acts as a bridge between two procedures without any important content of the etiquette. It is transitional and indicates the end of this session and the start of the next session. In all ceremonies, such music is least important, but still indispensable. For example, in the session of “sharing virtue at the extended life altar” or “sharing virtue at the future life altar” in various ceremonies, the transitional music used to indicate session transfer is mostly applied at the start or end of the procedure. Chanting the name of “Namo Medicine Master Buddha for Disaster Eradicating and Life Extending” implies to walk over to the Medicine Master Buddha Altar to hold virtue sharing activities about extended life, and chanting the sutra of “Namo West Ambassador Amitabha” implies to walk over to the Amitabha Altar to hold virtue sharing activities about future life. Of course, instrumental music is also widely used to prompt conversion of the rite.

To sum up, it is discovered as follows by exploring into application of music in the complete procedures from the ways for application of music to ceremonies, the singing and chanting form of music and sutras and the features for application of musical pieces in the song cycle: the ceremony procedures and the ceremony music are not perfectly fitted, meaning that not all the typical tunes are used for the core rites. Meanwhile, considering that the ceremony music is relatively independent, and especially within a tune, the libretto structure is not perfectly fitted with the music structure, music can follow its own development logic.

3. FUNCTIONS OF CEREMONY MUSIC

(a) Cultivating the feeling for the religion and pursuing the artistic conception of “the true”, “the good” and “the beautiful”

As a religion, Buddhism is a part of the superstructure, the special form of social consciousness in the superstructure, and the alienated reflection of the objective world which is inverted in people’s subjective world (Marx & Engels, 1995, pp.666-667). Although such reflection can only be realized by human power with superhuman power, all religions, which are different from other ideologies, are rooted in the soil of reality. The religion, as a consequence, has to adopt the approach recognized by people in the realistic society for cultural exchange and transmission for the purpose of realizing general promotion and spreading of its thoughts and assertions. For instance, the ceremony carrying the cultural connotation of Buddhism is a ritual activity process integrating various cultural and artistic elements, including use of language to chant or recite the sutras, use of vocal music tune, instrumental music performance and performance of symbolic significance, beautified arrangement of the ceremony environment for creation of the sacred and solemn rite atmosphere, and other artistic means.

Despite the fact that the main function and purpose of the ceremony are not for aesthetic emotional education over the Buddhists, Buddhism does instruct the monks and believers to love the Buddha and the Buddhist doctrine. In the ceremony, music, as a good art form to express feelings, is indeed used to voice the monks’ sincere praise to the Bodhisattvas, thus developing the Buddhists’ feelings for the religion, forming firm religious belief and producing the actual effects of gathering the Buddhist groups, recruiting new believers and expanding the influence.

(b) Promoting Buddhist principles and spreading Buddhist culture

In a sense, Buddhism is a kind of moral education. The purpose of Buddhist cultivation is to become a Buddha, an important approach of which is to do the good and

accumulate virtues, while the principles of Mahayana Buddhism attach greater importance to egoism and altruism, because only by doing so can a person reach the Nirvana state in the end. Altruism means that Buddhism teaches people to take acts that bring benefits to the masses. Most of these principles and doctrines are spread and promoted to the monks by holding ceremonies with certain functions and purposes. The Buddhist principles implied in the ceremonies instruct the arhats to adopt a view of life that is inclined to goodness or charity without killing, stealing and inappropriate sexual behaviors. Once such a view of life is formed, the actions of monks will be dominated, and the public will have more experience about the beliefs in the Buddha in their daily life.

In addition, Buddhism believes that people will experience eight kinds of sufferings in their life, and Buddhism needs to remove the causes and results of such sufferings in order to pursue Nirvana. To reach the Nirvana state, cultivation needs to be practiced by the approaches in the theories of completing moral conducts, seeking for inner peace and developing wisdom. Participation in the ceremony is an important cultivation approach. Particularly, the music in the ceremony is considered to be a “language” to communicate with the Celestial Being. The Buddha can hear the praise from the Buddhists, so he will enhance the religious belief of the believers and better spread the music culture of Buddhism.

From the perspective of the sadhana drubtab system, these etiquette procedures with special functions are restraints to the Buddhists so that they will consciously form the consciousness of following and thus better observe the social order.

(c) Adjusting negative mood and leading to spiritual happiness

Zen Buddhism is a religious branch of Buddhism upon its sinicization, and it takes “getting detached from the eternal cycle of birth and death” as the ultimate purpose of cultivation. As the life of a man is very short, it is the destiny that the physical life will end. Either worship of the ghost in the primitive religion or care for humanity and divinity in the secular religion reflects the life attitude of pursuit for “getting detached from the eternal cycle of birth and death” by Zen Buddhists. The care for life in Zen Buddhism is also reflected by “cherishing life”, and cherishing the realistic life existence is embodied by very strong “life consciousness” (Li, 1998). Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch, ever said, “Buddhata originates in nature instead of coming from the outside. If one is lost, the Buddha comes from all the living creatures; if one understands from meditation, all the living creatures can become Buddhas.” (Fang et al., 1983, p.18). This means that Buddhata and physical life co-exist. All the living creatures have Buddhata, and the key is whether they can understand this on their own.

It is seldom the case that an individual life has no fear in face of death. The approach for Buddhism to balance such fear is to try to go beyond the short physical life and achieve external spiritual life through cultivation. For instance, the procedures of “practicing meditation”, “sitting quietly” and “confessing sins” in the Buddhist ceremony help the Buddhists to understand the Buddhata and experience the rational state of life existence. For another example, in the “terminal care” procedure in Buddhism, the monks intend to adjust the negative mood of those who are going to their doom through chanting of sutras and singing so as to help them to maximally experience the goodness of life before their death and remove their fear for death. In this process, music plays a critical role. The Buddhist music has unique advantages in easing the mental tension of patients because of its gentle, simple and elegant tone and steady and peaceful rhythm. When people hear this kind of elegant and fresh music as well as the rolling sutra chanting tone before their death, they can calm down from the emotional changes for vicissitudes of life, weaken their emotions, and therefore yearn for the happy sacred ground of Nirvana. Undoubtedly, the Buddhist music has far more than the three functions mentioned above, and none of the functions are dissociated. Instead, they have combined action on people in the process of the ceremony.

CONCLUSION

As one of the ten ancient temples in Bashu, Huayan Temple exerts decisive influence in the religious circle and among the people in the whole country and attracts the vast masses’ belief. The morning and evening chanting ceremonies of the Temple are well preserved and are representative and typical in Southwestern China. By analyzing the structure of the chanting ceremony in Huayan Temple and features for application of musical pieces, it can be believed that the religious belief in the ceremony imposes deep-rooted and fundamental restrictions to the theological behavior in the ceremony but must be realized based on the latter. They are integrated. Ceremony music attaches itself to sutra to develop into a form of chanting with words and music as an integral and constitutes the plot structure according to specific Buddhist etiquette to engage itself in ceremony and display its functions.

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