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The Buddha’s Voice: Ritual Sound And Sensory Experience In Medieval Chinese Religious Practice

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The Buddha's Voice: Ritual Sound And Sensory Experience In Medieval Chinese Religious Practice

Abstract
This dissertation explores Buddhist chanting practices in mainly the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE), showing that they were more than just one part of ritual practice: chanting could also be a type of music, an educational tool, a means for manipulating the supernatural, and a cure and cause of illness. Previous studies of chanting practices in Chinese Buddhism have addressed histories of transmission, doctrinal approaches, and made efforts to preserve melodies through notation. However, they do not necessarily capture how individuals who engaged in chanting experienced this practice. Therefore this dissertation aims to investigate this experience through accounts found in hagiography, miracle tales, and other Buddhist materials. In studying chanting from this perspective, we can see how local and individual experiences, goals, and needs interacted with practices, and how these practices operated within Chinese Buddhist communities. Furthermore, we can understand how and when these understandings and practices were informed by scripture, and when they were not, through how individuals performed, listened to, and promoted them.

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THE BUDDHA'S VOICE:
RITUAL SOUND AND SENSORY EXPERIENCE
IN MEDIEVAL CHINESE RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

Kelsey Seymour

A DISSERTATION
in
East Asian Languages and Civilizations
Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania
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2018

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THE BUDDHA’S VOICE: RITUAL SOUND AND SENSORY EXPERIENCE IN MEDIEVAL CHINESE RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

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Kelsey Alise Seymour
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This dissertation explores Buddhist chanting practices in mainly the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE), showing that they were more than just one part of ritual practice: chanting could also be a type of music, an educational tool, a means for manipulating the supernatural, and a cure and cause of illness. Previous studies of chanting practices in Chinese Buddhism have addressed histories of transmission, doctrinal approaches, and made efforts to preserve melodies through notation. However, they do not necessarily capture how individuals who engaged in chanting experienced this practice. Therefore this dissertation aims to investigate this experience through accounts found in hagiography, miracle tales, and other Buddhist materials. In studying chanting from this perspective, we can see how local and individual experiences, goals, and needs interacted with practices, and how these practices operated within Chinese Buddhist communities. Furthermore, we can understand how and when these understandings and practices were informed by scripture, and when they were not, through how individuals performed, listened to, and promoted them.
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INTRODUCTION

On December 31, 839 CE, the Japanese Buddhist pilgrim Ennin 圓仁 (c.794-864 CE) recorded the following ritual of chanting sūtras in his diary while he was staying at a Sillan monastery in Chishan:

The Sillan Ritual for Chanting the Sūtras: The Great Tang calls this “reciting the sūtras.” After the bell is rung to gather everybody, a low-ranking monk rises to strike a mallet and chants: “Everyone should reverently worship the eternal three treasures.” Next, a monk does the fanbai, [which is] the two verses of the “Tathāgata’s Body of Marvelous Form” gāthā. The melody is just like the Tang. When we do the fanbai as a group, one person raises an incense cup, and we pass it along in front of the seated group. After it is quickly passed, there is a pause. [Then] everyone chants in unison the title of the Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra, several tens of times. After a master explains the reasons for chanting this sūtra, everyone chants the sūtra in unison. Sometimes they pass out copies of the sūtra, and sometimes they do not. After chanting the scripture, the leader sings the

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1 Or just after that date. His next entry was Jan. 7, 840, so the rituals were recorded sometime within this week.
2 In modern-day Shandong. This monastery was established by the Korean figure Jang Bogo 張寶高 (787–846 CE), and during Ennin's visit it was jointly operated by a Korean officer called Jang Yeong 張詠, and two Chinese officials, Officer Lin 林使 and Wang Xun 王訓. They gave public lectures year-round, in the summer lecturing on the Sūtra of Golden Light 金光明經, and in the winter lecturing on the Lotus Sūtra 法華經. Everything except for the morning and evening services are done in a Korean style, and in the Korean language. Everyone there is Korean except Ennin and his companions. B95, 37a-37b; 43a.
3 Various versions of this verse are found in texts like the Huayan jing 華嚴經 and the Dabao ji jing 大寶積經. It appears to still be in use in modern Chinese Buddhist rituals.
three refuges solo. Then he intones the names of the Buddha and bodhisattvas. The leader sings “Homage to the twelve great vows...” and the congregation joins in [with the rest of the phrase], “…of the Medicine-Master Buddha of Lapis Lazuli Light.” The leader says “Homage to the Medicine-Master...” and the congregation says in unison, “…Buddha of the Lapis Lazuli Light.” The leader says “Homage to the greatly compassionate…” and the congregation in unison joins in, “…Guanshiyin Bodhisattva.” All the rest are like this. After the ritual for the Buddha, the leader [sings] alone the concluding vows and the dedication of merit. The dedication of merit is a bit lengthy. After the dedication of merit, the leader says: “Give rise to a mind [set on enlightenment].” The congregation in unison also says: “Give rise to a mind [set on enlightenment].” Next, after the leader sings the vows, [everyone] prostrates in reverence to the three treasures. Next, the patrons who provided donations sit, and after the leader offers incantations and vows, [the congregation] disbands.4

The ritual, as Ennin states, is also practiced in Tang monasteries, although with a different name. And despite the ritual being conducted in Korean, he points out that the melodies of certain verses remind him of Tang ones as well. The implication is that these kinds of chanting rituals constituted a transregional phenomenon.5

Both in this ritual and in the two lecturing rituals, Ennin comments specifically on aspects of the sound. What was it about the sounds of this ritual that drew so much of Ennin’s attention? Did he focus on these sonic elements because he could not understand the content provided by the Korean-speaking monks leading the procedure? This seems unlikely, given that he was able to follow along with each step, regardless of the spoken

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4 B95, 44b. Between Dec. 31 and Jan. 7, he records three rituals: the Sillan chanting and full-day lecturing rituals, and a daily lecture at Chishan Monastery. It is most likely that Ennin personally participated in these rituals: in the days prior to his recording of the rituals, he mentions the specific texts, the names of the monks who had leadership roles in the rituals, and in the full-day lecture, he mentions the names of specific deceased officials whom they dedicate merit to. For another translation, see Edwin Reischauer, Ennin’s Diary: The Record of a Pilgrimage to China in Search of the Law (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1955), pp. 155-156.

5 Kenneth Chen has noted that similar ritual programs were recorded on manuscripts found at Dunhuang, nearly 3000 kilometers west of Chishan. See Kenneth Ch’en, The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 250-251; Pelliot manuscript P3849. Ennin’s descriptions also bear similarities to rituals still practiced in modern Taiwanese temples.
language. Whatever his reasons, he did not seem interested in pointing out differences in doctrinal understandings between Tang, Sillan, and Japanese monks. Instead, his comments draw attention to the moments of singing, chanting, speaking, and listening, as well as the calls and responses. He emphasizes the bells and percussion that signal the start of the service, the melodies of the verses, which to him resemble those used in Tang temples, as well as when segments are chanted solo or in unison chorus. In the lecturing rituals too, which include the singing of many verses both before and after the lecture content, he reports on when the melodies seem to be done in a Tang style, when they instead remind him of Japanese ones, when the tones are elongated, and other sonic elements such as the volumes and vocal qualities of individual voices, and the pacing of the question and answer portion.

Beyond its position in a ritual procedure, what understandings did monks have of the chanting they practiced and observed in Tang and Sillan-Tang monasteries? We can first turn to the previous literature to figure out how scholars have tackled this and related questions. I have summarized the main contributors below.

Literature Review

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5 Even if orally there was a language barrier, Ennin still could have used one of the occasionally circulated scriptures and followed along with the written Chinese, or he could have just been intimately familiar after months of participation, since he seems to have been staying at Chishan Monastery since July of 839.
6 B95, 43a-44b.
The majority of studies on music and chanting in Chinese Buddhism generally fall into a few categories: 1) modern ethnomusicological studies utilizing fieldwork methodologies; 2) historical overviews that trace the origins of Buddhist musical practices back to either India or medieval China; 3) works that describe how sound is enmeshed in doctrinal principles.

In terms of ethnomusicological studies, Yuan Jingfang 袁靜芳 has conducted field observance and data collection at various Buddhist sites in China, dedicating half of her book to transcriptions of melodies from modern Buddhist rituals. In addition, she has compiled pre-modern data on Buddhist musical practices, including lists of pre-modern tune titles, lists of instruments found in Dunhuang caves and descriptions of instruments, transcriptions of musical notation and lyrics, outlines of ritual programs, and historical instances of Buddhist chanting meetings (fahui 法會), in order to provide historical background for her modern data.7

Han Jun 韓軍 also has engaged in fieldwork methodologies, basing his research at a specific site – Wutaishan 五台山. He provides extensive descriptions of the rituals and music used in them, the main historical and contemporary sources of Buddhist musical activity at Wutaishan, including the kinds of music notation used there, and the musical instruments used in these rituals, including technical details like their range, size, construction. Furthermore, he outlines musical characteristics of the tunes, structures of

7 Yuan Jingfang 袁靜芳, Zhongguo hanchuan Fojiao yinyue wenhua 中國漢傳佛教音樂文化 (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue chubanshe, 2003). She has another book based on fieldwork with a particular Buddhist group in Beijing: Yuan Jingfang 袁靜芳, Zhongguo Fojiao jing yinyue yanjiu 中國佛教京音樂研究 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe 2012).
verses, and percussion patterns. The second half of his book is likewise transcriptions of the melodies in Western notation.\(^8\)

Beth Szczepanski has continued the trend of fieldwork at Wutaishan, focusing particularly on the wind-instrument (shengguan 笙管) music performed there. While taking mouth organ (sheng 笙) lessons from a monk, she documents categories and styles of chant, instrumentation of the musical accompaniment, and locations where shengguan is preserved. She describes its decline due to 20\(^{th}\) century political events, and a more recent revival from tourism at the mountain. She provides descriptions of rituals (rites for donors, funerals, calendar events) with vocal and instrumental music, along with transcriptions of the tunes used in these rituals. Additionally, she describes how to play the instruments, as well as information on gongche 工尺 notation, extant tunebooks, the origins of tunes, and the overlap between secular and religious music. She is dedicated to her role as anthropologist-observer, and the book is rich in terms of description.\(^9\)

Pi-yen Chen adds a book based on fieldwork, specifically focusing on chanting rituals in Taiwan, rather than on instrumental music or music in general as in the above studies. Transcriptions of melodies comprise half of the volume, but unlike the other authors, she supplements them with recordings. Additionally, she briefly outlines the programs of modern morning and evening services at Buddhist temples, as well as the instruments used in accompaniment and the musical structure of the melodies. She

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\(^8\) Han Jun 韓軍, *Wutaishan Fojiao yinyue zonglun* 五台山佛教音樂總論 (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2012).

devotes effort to introducing various terminology related to chanting and definitions for a non-academic audience.¹⁰

These monographs reveal some general trends in the studies of Chinese Buddhist music that are based on ethnomusicological perspectives. First, much of this work relies on fieldwork, leading to detailed descriptions of the steps of each ritual and the notation of melodies. There is a sense that these melodies and rituals must be preserved. Second, there is an inclination to discuss the music itself in terms of style, whether this be of the style of a particular locality, like Wutaishan, secular and religious styles bleeding into each other, or other music details like ornamentation variants, and instrumentation. In some cases, such as a few moments in Szczepanski’s book, there are descriptions of the author’s own experiences as a participant, or the experiences as described by other participants. But in most cases, these works tend to follow the Béla Bartók model of collecting, notating, preserving, and promoting the music.

As for historical studies on Buddhist music and chanting, these are slightly more diverse. Tian Qing 田青 has written extensively on the historical development of Buddhist music, from its transmission to China and into the contemporary period. He points out how in the earliest periods, Indian and Central Asian musical traditions were categorized as foreign, then gradually sinicized over time through imperial patronage and musical activities at temples, witnessing a period of great flourishing during the Tang. He claims that, subsequently, Buddhist music was secularized and declined. Throughout his

work he is interested in themes of tracing musical trends back to their Indian or Chinese roots, and analyzing reception history.\footnote{Tian Qing 田青, Zhongguo zongjiao yinyue 中國宗教音樂 (Beijing Shi: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 1997).}

Li Xiaorong 李小榮 summarizes Dunhuang manuscripts from certain traditions of Buddhism, including the Pureland (jingtu 淨土), Chan (禪), and Esoteric (mijiao 密教) schools, that contain verses, praises, songs, and ritual processes for chanting. He outlines which hymns derive from which doctrinal sources, indicates whether they are performed in a group or solo, points out which rituals they are used in, and extensively describes the syllabic structures of verses. He concludes that these schools intermix and that many of the documents with verse lyrics contain influence from China, more so than from local Dunhuang or Central Asian communities.\footnote{Li Xiaorong 李小榮, Dunhuang Fojiao yinyue wenxue yanjiu 敦煌佛教音樂文學研究 (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2007).}

Lai Xinchuan 賴信川 argues that fanbai 梵唄 has been studied in terms of its music, but thinks that studies relating it to Buddhist doctrine are lacking. He attempts to explore this through looking at a Japanese text, Gyosan shōmyō shū 魚山聲明集, to extrapolate how fanbai was performed in premodern periods. He also examines the meaning of fanbai through its definitions and how it relates to the Buddha’s attitude towards music. He explains the placement of fanbai in various rituals, the verse structures that appear in its lyrics, and how sound can be accepted as non-harmful Buddhist activity. After a historical overview of the status of fanbai in various periods, he presents Gyosan
shōmyō shū as a case study, discussing its musical modes and preservation in Japan. He alleges that the status of fanbai in modern practice is higher than meditation.¹³

Nakanishi Kazuo 中西和夫 likewise reconstructs earlier chanting practices, in particular the Five Ways of Chanting the Name of the Buddha (wu hui nianfo 五會念佛), as practiced in Tang China and subsequently in Japan through Ennin’s transmission. He bases his reconstructions on Indian music theory.¹⁴

These works that trace the history of or reconstruct music and chanting practices seem to have two main interests. The first is that, through a search for Chinese or Indian origins, they attempt to display a continuum or lineage in order to manifest ancientness or authenticity, and thus the value of the tradition. The second is a concern for influences, which is rooted in the search for origins. These authors are interested in how Indian musical practices were sinicized after their arrival in China, how Chinese practices influenced musical activity in places like Dunhuang, and how Chinese and Indian chanting went on to influence practices in Japan.

As for works that investigate the entanglement between music and philosophical principles, these are likewise varied, and most are article length studies rather than monographs. The one exception is Cuilan Liu’s dissertation, which examines what monastic law (vinaya) says about music. She intensively discusses whether monks are allowed to participate in, listen to, and watch performances of music and dance, which

¹³Lai Xinchuan 賴信川, Yushan shengming ji yanjiu: Zhongguo Fojiao fanbai fazhan de kaocha 《魚山聲明集》研究: 中國佛教梵唄發展的考察 (Taipei: Hua Mulan wenhua chubanshe, 2010).
kinds were not allowed, and the punishments for them. When discussing Tang China in particular, she explores how monks dealt with, rationalized, and negotiated these restrictions against music, especially when these monastic regulations were in conflict with political and social expectations such as having musicians perform at monasteries for festivals, or dealing with imperial funding and personnel restrictions.¹⁵

Li Wei’s article compares attitudes towards music in Buddhism and Confucianism. He notes that secular music is often discouraged by Buddhists, but they still use or participate in musical activity at various times. He claims that Buddhists applied secular music for “popular lectures” (sujiang 俗講)¹⁶ because they hoped to convert more people through a familiar idiom, and they also used secular musical forms in activity outside of the monastery.¹⁷

Tsan-Huang Tsai discusses the sound of chanting as a transmission vehicle for merit from the profane body, the earthly one participating in the ritual, to the sacred body, the one that may be reborn in a Buddhist paradise. Additionally, he notes that reducing body movement while chanting decreases outside distractions, which in turn reduces movements of the mind, allowing more concentration on the chanting.¹⁸

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Pi-yen Chen’s articles prove more academic than her book, and one in particular integrates chanting practices with Buddhist thought. Here too, the conflict between doctrine and practice is emphasized. Sound in Buddhist thought, she notes, is a phenomenon that can cause attachment through stimulating the senses, yet it is still an integral part of Buddhist ritual. To reconcile this difference, she shows that this idea is only one facet of the thought on sound in doctrinal texts. In Mahayana Buddhism in particular, sound is also presented as an expedient means for achieving *samādhi*.\(^{19}\) Moreover, during rituals, producing sound provides a pathway for reflection: through “reflecting upon and observing the rising and passing away of the sound, ideas, and emotions in a constant flow of interconnected states of being, the chanter directly experiences the nature of the transformation in how he or she senses, perceives, and feels.”\(^{20}\)

Jan Yun-hua’s short article points out that there are almost a hundred accounts of reciters and chanters in the three medieval biographies of eminent monks. He takes these biographies as accounts of experience, outlines the types of scriptures chanted, and denotes three main characteristics. The first is their musicality: Chinese Buddhists reworked Indian chants to fit Chinese language and musical qualities. The second is vocality: monks needed working voices in order to perform chanting; sometimes these voices were achieved through dreams. The third is supernatural characteristics: chanting

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\(^{19}\) Meditative concentration, or an undisturbed mind. A mind not affected by distractions or incorrect perceptions. See Charles Muller, “*samādhi* 三昧,” *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*, http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?q=%E4%B8%89%E6%98%A7.

could attract animals, preserve tongues, cause light to emit from one’s mouth, be heard from far away, make water flow from dry springs, allow practitioners to escape from death or punishment, and affect rebirth. He claims that these texts imply that chanting alone is more effective than doctrinal study and moral perfection, from a practitioner’s point of view. Unfortunately the article is only two pages long.²¹

Yamada Toshiaki 山田利明 outlines the use of chanting scriptures, spells, and the names of Buddhas and bodhisattvas for protection. He shows first that this behavior was not singular in Buddhist traditions, but also occurred in certain types of magic and divinatory arts in pre-Buddhist China as well. He subsequently outlines the influence that these practices and Buddhist chanting had on later religious Daoist chanting rituals for summoning gods for protection.²²

In general, these shorter articles focus more on issues of doctrinal and legal understandings of a topic, how systems of thought interact and influence each other, and what to make of matters that are less clearly explained with doctrine, such as miracles. Specifically, they are interested in how Buddhist doctrine manifests in thought on sound, and how Buddhist thought and beliefs about sound interacted with other traditions such as so-called Confucian, Daoist, and popular traditions. Many of these studies come from the position that music – at least certain types of it – is discouraged in Buddhist

communities, so their task as scholars is to rationalize why it is used in Buddhist ritual practices nonetheless.

Research Objectives

These scholars have all contributed to the study of Buddhist chanting and Buddhist music broadly speaking in various, essential ways. However, studies on the Indian origins and thought behind Buddhist sonic practices do not necessarily explain how these practices were carried out by Chinese Buddhists in their daily lives; studies on the classification and structure of chants do not necessarily tell us what individuals saw as valuable in their chanting practices; musical transcription and notation is essential for preservation and comparative work in ethnomusicology, but there is no way to compare them with the melodies that existed in periods before notation. Furthermore, even if Buddhist doctrine presented certain understandings of sound or rules about sound production, practitioners did not necessarily follow these, or understand these in the same way. In other words, previous studies do not give us a sense of how listening to and producing sounds were experienced by Chinese Buddhists.

I think these understandings can be found in the hundreds of miracle accounts associated with chanting and chanters in Buddhist hagiography, proselytizing stories, ghost stories, and encyclopedic compilations. Therefore, I rely heavily on these, contextualized with both Buddhist and local Chinese thought where necessary, in order to explore the various ways in which practitioners related themselves to sonic practices.
Like Jan, I take these as accounts of experience, but with slightly more caution – they are idealized versions of what experience should look like, promoted among Buddhists and by Buddhists to non-Buddhists. And the ways in which vocal sounds were encountered and produced were diverse: chanting could be experienced as music, as a measurement of expertise, as a liaison with spirit audiences, as a physical and material action, and as an activity that impacted health.

When it comes to “experience,” what I mean here differs from what we find in explanations of “religious experience” or “enchantment” from theorists from as early as Rudolf Otto to more recently with Jane Bennett. These scholars often appeal to definitions involving irreducible feelings of numinousness or holiness, or states of wonder. Rather, like Wayne Proudfoot, I take experience as being understood through its representations and prior presuppositions. For chanting, this results in not only an examination of how individuals experienced the outcomes of religious actions, but also of their motivations and expectations.

By delving into the experience of chanting, this dissertation project endeavors to better understand what individuals were doing and what it meant to them. Understanding this is crucial, especially against a majority of prior scholarship that assumes a monolithic, pure tradition. In reality, transmission lines are often muddled, and local traditions transform ideas and practices. Buddhist communities in medieval China had

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their own needs and understandings, and their experiences occurred within these contexts. In studying them, we will better understand what it meant to be “Buddhist” in China.

Coming at experience from another angle, I also venture to explore the meanings and feelings assigned to chanting practices, which have likewise been glossed over in the literature. Often chanting is described as part of a ritual or as a routine, or in terms of merit or resonance. In trying to discern what chanting meant to the people practicing it in a less superficial way, miracle and hearsay accounts are particularly useful as a source for digging into the emotional content. I believe that examining these two sides of experience will make contributions towards both Buddhist studies and history of the senses.

In addition to these contributions, I also aspire to make a contribution to musicology. By incorporating these particular kinds of primary sources into the study of sound and music, I hope to confront a methodological issue: how to study sound when there are no notations, recordings, or instruments. Many of the previous works, especially the ones grounded in ethnomusicology, exhibit a trend of documenting melodies. I think that one can also notate the feelings and experiences associated with chanting as found in miracle accounts.

Source Clarifications

Before diving into the chapters of this dissertation, a few brief clarifications on Buddhist chanting are in order. First a note on what is being chanted and how:
Modern Chinese Buddhist chanting rituals consist of three main parts: verses, the scripture text, and dhāraṇī. The scripture texts are the claimed teachings of the Buddha, transmitted from India and Central Asia from the second century CE and translated into Chinese. Dhāraṇī are the sets of syllables that are used in a variety of ways, but purport to help one remember a teaching or have a kind of magical efficacy. These are untranslated, either left in Sanskrit (or other Indic) transcription, or occasionally, in an imitation pseudo-Sanskrit. The verses are the least well defined of these. Varies called fanbai and gāthā, these are the praises, hymns, and vows, pulled from or inspired by the sūtra texts, and translated into Chinese with existing poetic and tune forms. In the Tang, we can see all of these occurring together in a ritual, as in the case from Ennin above. But we can also see them practiced separately.

As for whether they were musical in the Tang as they are in modern ritual, the answer is harder to decipher, and is explored in further detail in the first chapter of this dissertation. I define vocal music as voiced expressions comprising of pitch, rhythm, and text, and distinguished from ordinary speech. Fanbai is always musical. The degree of musicality in the chanting of sūtra texts and dhāraṇī is not always clear, especially in Tang sources, but in all cases they are distinguished from ordinary speech.

The primary sources consulted for this dissertation consist firstly of Buddhist hagiography, Buddhist miracles, and Buddhist encyclopedia records. In my view, these all constitute forms of hearsay and proselytizing literature, having been written or

25 Some scholars say that gāthā are a subdivision of fanbai, and some say that they are separate. The distinction is based on content, and there is little consensus. In most cases, I choose to refer to them all as verses to reflect their literary forms. I discuss fanbai at greater length in the first chapter of this dissertation.
compiled by Buddhists for the purpose of promoting the efficacy of their doctrines and practices, and to promote a vision of what Buddhism is and who Buddhists were for a wide audience. Furthermore, I consult Buddhist teachings and law, Chinese classics, secular biographies, medical texts, stories of the strange, and other prose. All sources are written or translated during or before the Tang, and in the rare case of a later text, such as the Song dynasty compilation of biographies of eminent monks, the *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 by Zanning 贊寧 (919-1001 CE), or the *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 (completed 978 CE), the subject matter is still Tang monks.

For earlier texts, I made an effort to use those that were widespread. By that I mean they often appear in more than one source, and over a range of time. For example, certain accounts of monks from the 6th century *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 by Huijiao 慧皎 might also appear in the *Fayuan zhulin* (688 CE), which then might also appear in the *Hongzan fahua zhuan* 弘贊法華傳 (706 CE), which then might also appear in *Taiping guangji* (978 CE). They appear to be well-known and popular enough to have been passed around over a fairly long course of time and included in different texts by different people.

The Buddhist sources in this dissertation do no focus on a particular school of Buddhism. The reason for this is that, while schools had formed and were forming during the Tang, the sources that described chanting practices rarely distinguish them. This is especially true for the hagiographies, which tend to group monks by practices rather than by lineages. Even in the cases where a particular school was known, famous monks often interacted outside of these schools. Yijing 義淨 (635-713 CE), for example, ostensibly
belonged to the Vinaya School (liú zōng 律宗), but he also associated with esoteric monks and translated scriptures that would probably be counted as esoteric. Daoxuan 道宣 (596-667 CE) was also part of the Vinaya School, but he worked directly under Xuanzang 玄奘 (602-664 CE), who had started his own independent school, the Dharma Characteristics School (fǎxiàng zōng 法相宗). Daoshi 道世 (d. 693 CE), who closely associated with both Daoxuan and Xuanzang, likewise had no hesitation mixing everything together in Fayuan zhulin, again dividing by topic rather than school.
This chapter aims to answer the following questions: when Buddhist chant began to find popularity in China, was it considered to be a musical practice? And if so, was it considered to be Chinese music or foreign? To begin, we should perhaps address a more general question: can music itself be defined? Music is a concept that is notoriously hard to define. In contemporary Western Classical music, for example, music ranges from symphonic works following particular melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic rules, aimed to stimulate feelings, evoke dances, or tell stories, to the likes of John Cage, whose definition of music as “sounds organized in time” was broad enough to leave us with examples like 4’33”. The issue of breadth arises when we examine forms of Chinese music as well. Even in early China, the purposes of music ranged from entertainment to affirming the patterns of the cosmos during rituals. Though it very often would have sounded musical according to Chinese paradigms, I do not think Buddhist chant was considered “music” in every case. However, during the instances it was considered musical, its relationship with contemporaneous Chinese music is an important aspect that cannot be ignored.

26 Richard Kostelanetz, ed., Conversing with Cage (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 198. The idea behind it is that when a duration of time is partitioned off and marked as performance rather than ordinary time, automatically the sounds within that frame, be they restless shifting and coughing in the audience or car alarms going off outside, are organized in the most basic sense. Every sound audible to the audience becomes part of the performance.
My strategy to address the guiding questions of this chapter involves attempting to install some definitions, however broad, in order to facilitate a comparison. I will first clarify some terminology about Buddhist chanting that has been complicated by previous scholars. Next I will delve into a larger study of what music was in pre-Buddhist China and late Han post-Buddhist China in order to understand how musical chant would later fit into the larger picture. Then I will explore whether Buddhist chant would have been considered musical in its original context, early India. Finally, I will examine a case study of a form of Indian Buddhist music that was transmitted to China in order to show precisely how it was considered musical according to the Chinese model. I argue that Buddhist chant was not only often musical, but when it was, at least by the 6th century CE, it was definitively Chinese.

Clarification of Some Ambiguities in Terminology

The question of musicality is worth addressing because the terminology presents a problem, namely that there are several words used to describe the chant or the act of chanting, and not all of these carry a musical connotation. These terms range from ones that seem to entirely lack a musical trace, such as “turning and reading” (zhuandu 轉讀), to ones that are outwardly musical, like “singing” (chang 唱) and “chanting” (bai 唄), and to ambiguous ones such as “reciting aloud” (nian 念) and “intoning” (yin 吟), as well as many others and compounds made up of them.27 However, the most commonly used

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27 Translations of some of these terms are approximate, given their ambiguity. Often they have different meanings in different contexts, and there can be semantic overlap.
verb to indicate chant is *song* (“chanting” 誦). An additional problem derives from the fact that *song*, in its first appearances in classical texts, was not a musical term. It indicated repetition or recitation, as in *Mencius*:

子服堯之服，誦堯之言，行堯之行，是堯而已矣。
If one wears the clothes of Yao, repeats the words of Yao, and performs the actions of Yao, then one will just be [like] Yao.  

So was this verb used by Chinese listeners do describe the sounds they heard from newly-arriving Buddhist monks and practitioners, or was it used by non-Chinese translators to describe their own practice and distinguish it from other forms of music as they passed these texts to Chinese readers? There may not be a definite answer for this question, but I will tentatively hypothesize that it is the latter. Below we will see that Chinese listeners would have likely heard these sounds as musical and as such perhaps would have chosen more musical terminology to described what they were hearing, rather than something with an ambiguous meaning like *song*. In any case, it is certain that the definitions of *song* had significantly expanded by the Six Dynasties period.

There are two other terms that must be discussed in regard to chanting, “chant,” *bai* 呼 (pronounced by some as *bei*), and “turning and reading” (*zhuandu* 轉讀). Certain scholars have argued that *bai*, or *fanbai* (“Sanskrit chant” 梵唄), is separate from practices indicated by the verbs *song* 誦, *zhuandu* 轉讀, and other forms of chanting that

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28 Not to be confused with the English word “song,” which is only similar by coincidence.
were not necessarily musical, while others have claimed that they overlap or share a category. I will highlight some of the influential opinions below.

In a brief discussion of *song* and *bai*, Liu Cuilan distinguishes the verbs by level of musicality. Drawing on Lévi, she writes: “These two terms are used differently, but the difference is moderate. Lévi distinguishes the Chinese verb *bei 唄* from the typical verb for recitation, *song 誦*, which he translates as “psalmodier.” Although deeper understanding of these verbs depends on further investigation on how were they used in Chinese translations of Vinaya texts, *bei* probably corresponds to the chanting of the *Sāma Veda* with more embellished intonations, while *song* corresponds to the recitation of other Vedic texts with minimum musical intonation.\(^3^0\) For the convenience of discussion, I have used “chanting” and “reciting” for these two verbs and have reserved “singing” for *ge 歌*.\(^3^1\) While she is correct that these terms are often used separately, I have observed that there is still an overlap between the two terms. For example, the Tang monk Zhanran 湛然 (711–782) commented in his *Record of Phrases in the Lotus Sūtra* 法華文句記:

> 經云：“唄者，或云唄匿，此云讃誦。”
> The sūtra says: As for *bai*, some call it *baini*; this means the chanting (*song*) of praises.\(^3^2\)

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\(^{30}\)She has discussed reciting and chanting in detail in her dissertation on their practice in Jain and Vedic traditions. See Cuilan Liu, “Song, Dance, and Instrumental Music in Buddhist Canon Law” (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2013), pp. 143-164.


\(^{32}\) T1719: 245b08.
So *song* as a verb can be used to define *bai* as a noun. *Song* is also used in reference to *zhuan*; in the accounts of “Masters of Scriptures 經師,” in Huijiao’s 慧皎 (497-554) *Biographies of Eminent Monks (Gao seng zhuan 高僧傳)*, many of the masters excel in the practice of *zhuan*, but the verb for this action is *song*. Thus it seems that *song* is a more general verb used to describe various chanting practices, including *bai* and *zhuan*.

Then what is the difference between *bai* and *zhuan*? Is one musical and the other recitation? Richard Bodman extrapolates from *Gao seng zhuan* for his understanding, basing the difference in the content of the chant. However, he does not comment on the musicality: “Hui Chiao distinguishes two genres of chanting: chuan-tu, literally 'rotating reading', which refers to the chanting of sutras; and fan-pai, which is specifically limited to the chanting of hymns, or gāthās. He reveals that there are both religious and secular *pai*, and that chanting masters also produce popular Chinese songs in the *pai* form.”

I generally agree with Bodman, though I must point out that *zhuan* may differ from *bai* in terms of musicality. Huijiao notes in *Gao seng zhuan’s juan* 13 treatise that in China there was a difference between *bai* and *zhuan*, and while *bai* was clearly a musical practice, it is still unclear whether *zhuan* was:

然天竺方俗凡人歌詠法言皆稱為唄。至於此土經文則稱為轉讀。歌讚則號為梵唄。Thus for the local customs in India, generally singing and sermons are all called *bai*. When [this practice] arrived in this land [China], intoning the sūtras was then called *zhuan*. Singing praises was then called *fanbai*.

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However, according to the individual biographies in this section, *zhuandu* could perhaps be performed musically. Take for example the monk Zhixin 智欣 who, in regard to *zhuandu* was good at the inclined mode (智欣善能側調), and the monk Shi Tanping 釋滿憑, who was skilled at melodies:

As for Shi Tanping, his lay name was Yang, and he was a man of Nan’an in Jianwei county. When he was young he traveled to the capital to study *zhuandu*. He stopped at White Horse Temple. His melodies were extremely skillful, and he passed each day taking care of himself.\(^\text{35}\)

Bodman takes the above term *cediao* (“inclined mode” 側調), as well as *feisheng* (“flying voice” 飛聲) – listed in the same sentence for another monk – as linguistic terms. I think that these terms are ambiguous. *Feisheng* is certainly used by Liu Xie 劉勰 (5\(^{\text{th}}\) cent.) as a linguistic term in *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍, but also used later by Li Bai 李白 (701-762) as a musical term to describe a flute’s sounds (誰家玉笛暗飛聲，散入春風滿洛城? “From whose house [come] the soaring notes of a jade flute at sundown, dispersing into the spring breeze and filling all of Luo town?”\(^\text{36}\)). *Cedioao* can be used as a linguistic term, but it is also a specifically musical term; it is one of the three primary modes 三調.

\(^{35}\) Ibid, p. 504.

\(^{36}\) Li Bai 李白, “Chunye luocheng wen di 春夜洛城聞笛,” in *Quan tang shi* 全唐詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), p. 1877.
derived from Han dynasty court music. Likewise in the second example, \textit{yindiao} 音調 has a double meaning, both as a linguistic term, indicating a tonal or prosodic pattern, and as a musical term meaning melody, as translated above. While we may not have a clear answer from Huijiao on the musicality of \textit{zhuandu}, in any case, his descriptions of this practice of intoning scriptures still show that it must have contrasted with ordinary speech and reading. But in the following portion of an account of Cao Zhi 曹植 (192-232) from

\footnotesize{See Liu Xu 劉昫 [Later Jin 後晉], ed., \textit{Jiu tang shu 舊唐書}, vol. 4 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), p. 1063: “The Even Mode, Clear Mode, and Se mode are all pieces of music from the Zhou women’s quarters that have been lost. In the Han they were called the Three Modes.” \textit{平調}、\textit{清調}、\textit{瑟調}, \textit{皆周房中曲之遺聲也}。漢世謂之 \textit{三調}. And on the topic of the three modes \textit{三調}, a commentary by Li Shan 李善 in \textit{Wenxuan} states: “The first is the Even mode, the second is the Clear mode, the third is the \textit{Se} mode, the fourth is the \textit{Chu} mode, and the fifth is the Inclined mode. Thus now there are three modes, the Clear, Even, and Inclined.” \textit{第一平調、第二清調、第三瑟調、第四楚調、第五側調。然今三調，蓋清、平、側也。} See Xiao Tong 蕭統 [Liang 梁], ed., and Li Shan 李善 [Tang 唐] annot., \textit{Wenxuan} 文選, vol. 3 (Shanghai: Shanghai gu ji chu ban she, 1986), pp. 1316-1317.

\footnotesize{Music terminology was quite often borrowed to discuss poetry, blurring the boundaries between these two genres. See Kenneth J. DeWoskin, \textit{A Song for One or Two: Music and the Concept of Art in Early China}, Michigan Papers in Chinese Studies, No. 42 (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1982), p. 108: in the early Six Dynasties, music and poetry become further interconnected. Lu Ji borrows music terminology to discuss qualities of poetry. For more on how musical terms can represent particular kinds of linguistic articulations, as well as musical and linguistic aesthetics, see Adrian Tien, \textit{The Semantics of Chinese Music: Analysing Selected Musical Concepts} (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2015), pp. 81-116.

\footnotesize{Although the following account contains fictional elements, Cao Zhi 曹植 (192-232 CE) was indeed a real person. He was a son of the warlord Cao Cao 曹操, fond of wine, highly educated, and also uncannily talented. He was a proficient reciter of the Classics and a prolific poet, the first major poet of the Jian’an style (\textit{Jian’an fenggu} 建案風骨). The official histories do not seem to associate him with Buddhism. See K. P. K. Whitaker, “Tsaur Jyr and the Introduction of Fannbay 梵唄 into China,” \textit{Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London}, Vol. 20, No. 1/3 (1957), 585-597.}
Guang hong ming ji 廣弘明集, Daoxuan 道宣 (596-667) gives clearer evidence that zhuandu could be musical:

植字子建。魏武帝第四子也。初封東阿郡王。終後諡為陳思王也。幼含珪璋。十歲能屬文。下筆便成。初無所改。世間術藝無不畢善。邯鄲淳見而駭。遂轉讀七聲升降曲之響。故世之諷誦。咸憲䧟焉。咸憲章焉。

Zhi’s zi was Zijian. He was Emperor Wu of Wei’s fourth son. Initially he was established as the ruler of Dong’e commandery. After he passed away he was posthumously called King Si of Chen. When he was a baby he sucked on jade ritual objects. When he was ten years old he could write prose. From the moment he set brush to paper it was already perfect, from the beginning there was nothing to revise. As for all the arts in the world, there were none that he did not excel at. [The people of] Handan keenly observed him and were astonished. They admiringly called him a celestial being. Every time Zhi read a Buddhist sūtra, he would then wistfully sigh, thinking that it was the perfected Way and the ultimate of the schools. He would then execute it as zhuandu chant [with] the sounds of the seven tones ascending, descending, and winding. Thus all of the chanting in the world was modeled on this.

The “seven tones” here refer to the seven scale tones in music. There are no alternate meanings in this case.

I would like to propose another possible distinction that relates both to the content and performance technique. Take for example an alternative account of Cao Zhi from Yi yuan (also discussed later in this chapter, but for different reasons):

陳思王曹植，字子建。嘗登魚山，臨東阿，忽聞巖岫裡有誦經聲，清通深亮，遠谷流響，肅然有靈氣。不覺斂衿祗敬，便有終焉之志。即效而則之。今之梵唱，皆植依擬所造。一云陳思王遊山，忽聞空裡誦經聲，清遠道亮。解音者則而寫之，為神仙聲。道士效之，作步虛聲也。

40 T2103, 119b06. A text called Shigyōshō 資行鈔 (T2248, 795) by Shō'en 照遠 has “four tones” 四聲 instead of seven notes, but this is a 14th century Japanese text, so it should not have much bearing on the present example.

41 For comments on the seven tones vs. five tones, see n96 of this chapter.
Cao Zhi, King Si of Chen, was also named Zijian. He once ascended Fish Mountain, overlooking Dong’e commandery. He suddenly heard the sounds of chanting sūtras from inside a cliff-side cave. It was clear and penetrating, deep and resonant, and it echoed into distant valleys. It was solemn and had numinous qi. He unconsciously bowed in veneration. He had the will to end up there, so he followed it. The brahman singing of today is all from [Cao] Zhi. Someone said that when King Si of Chen went to the mountain, he suddenly heard the sounds of chanting scriptures from out of nowhere, it was clear and bright, strong and resonant. He understood music and thus notated them. They were the sounds of divine immortals. Daoist masters imitated them and made [the music called] “Pacing the Void.”

Here, the “sounds of chanting sūtras” is a spontaneous, disembodied sound. Cao Zhi notates the melodies, and after that it is transmitted as “brahman singing” (synonymous with fanbai). Additionally, in texts such as Gao seng zhuan and Fa yuan zhu lin, bai have specific titles. For example, according to Fa yuan zhu lin, Kang Senghui transmitted a specific bai called “Nirvana” (nihuan), and Cao Zhi transmitted six specific ones (“There were six bai that he transmitted”). Moreover, Daoxuan’s Si fen lü shan fan bu que xing shi chao notes the following:

行香時唱，未見經文，而諸經律多有唱詣比丘。十誦為諸天聞唱心喜，故開唱。When circulating the incense one should [sing] bai. Before the sūtra text, most sūtras and vinaya texts have baini chants for monks. [According to] the Ten Recitations/Vinaya (Sarvāstivāda-vinaya), because the divinities are happy when they hear bai, thus we open with bai.

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42 In present day Shandong Province.
43 This is fanbai.
45 T2122: 575c26 and 576a03.
46 T1804: 136b25.
According to this, it seems that the *bai* portion of the ritual is separate from the intoning of the scripture, although it is still part of the overall chanting ritual. In sum, it is clear that the *bai* is specifically composed since it can be notated and transmitted, as allegedly by Cao Zhi and Kang Senghui. It is likely memorized by the ritual leaders and practitioners. The scripture portion may or may not be melodic, but when it is, it remains unspecific: the most we can say is that one must be skillful to do it (as in the monk Shi Tanping) or have an element of spontaneity (as was implied by the first account of Cao Zhi). I think this suggests that scriptural chanting would have had an improvised (and perhaps optional) melody.

In addition to the historical clues, we also see this preserved in modern practice. During Chinese Buddhist services for chanting scriptures 誦經, the scripture itself is preceded by segments marked as *bai* 唄, *zan* 讚, and *ji* 偈. These have specific sung melodies; as the rector (*karmadana*, 維那) sings them, the congregation must follow along with the directed melody that was previously studied and memorized by the rector. For the sūtra text, superimposing a melody on the text is optional, especially for lay practitioners who may not be as familiar with the text as the monks and nuns. But for those who do choose to include a melody, it is improvised on the spot.47

Pre-Buddhist Chinese Music

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47 This information was gained through participation in chanting rituals at Fagushan 佛光山, Fagushan branches 法鼓山, and Linji Temple 臨濟寺 in Taiwan.
The main sources on music (yue 樂) in early China are classical transmitted texts and excavated texts that describe its function as a set of symbols representing cosmological principles, as well as its function in rituals and as a tool for self and societal cultivation. Cosmic processes were linked to music through metaphor and through the concept of resonance, and certain types of music could influence the behaviors of the state and individual, as well as reveal knowledge about the character and nature of the composer, performer, and listener. By the third century BCE, as Erica Brindley explains, it was widely believed that if one could fully understand the significance of music and take advantage of its attributes, then one could “attune oneself to the cosmos” and become a sage. 48 Below I will briefly touch on certain passages from main texts that reveal these important aspects of music in order to demonstrate how music was viewed in pre-Buddhist China.

Music as a source of moral cultivation was a prominent theme among pre-Han literati thinkers. Certain “proper” types of music were promoted as tools for the state which had a civilizing effect on the populace (human and animal), and which could cultivate and reveal the true natures of the people and the ruler. When Yan Yuan asked Confucius how to govern, the sage purportedly suggested certain types of music as useful in this regard:

顏淵問為邦。子曰：「行夏之時，乘殷之轅，服周之冕，樂則韶舞。放鄭聲，遠佞人。鄭聲淫，佞人殆。」
Yan Yuan asked about [governing] a state. The Master said: “Follow the seasons of Xia, ride the chariot of Yin, wear the cap of Zhou, if you have music it should be [the songs

and] dances of Shao. Do away with the sounds of Zheng and distance oneself from people who flatter. The sounds of Zheng are licentious and flatterers are dangerous.”

Mencius and Xunzi likewise elaborate on this, adding that music (along with its counterpart, rites) can reveal the virtue and will of a ruler whilst improving the state.

Mencius wrote:

子貢曰：見其禮而知其政，聞其樂而知其德。

[Mencius quoted] Zigong saying: “In seeing the rites [of a ruler] one will know [the character of] his governance, in hearing his music one will know his virtue.”

And Xunzi synthesized the ideas:

故樂坋而儀清漓，禮脩而坋坋，耳目聰明漓，血氣和('${\text{和}}')$漓，移風易俗漓，天下皆平安，美善相樂。

Thus when music is disseminated the will becomes clear, and when rites are cultivated, conduct is completed. The ears and eyes are acute and bright; blood and qi are harmonious and balanced. Altering customs and changing traditions, [it makes] all under heaven completely peaceful, and the beautiful and good give happiness to each other.

By the Han, music was thought to possess these behavior-altering and revealing qualities because it served as a conduit to the cosmos. Components of music came to represent components and processes of Heaven, as in the Huainanzi, which correlates solmizations and modes with the five phases, seasons, directions, etc. Through the concept of resonance (ganying 感應) one could use music to harness these

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50 Ibid, p. 236.
52 Itself an idea derived from music, based on how when a note is sounded on a string instrument, another instrument in the room will also be caused to emit sound at the same
relationships, as the ruler did during rites to announce the seasons. As Brindley puts it, “Pitch-standard sound not only provided the Han emperor with a means of tapping into knowledge about the natural cycles and states of affairs in the world. Its mystical capacity to resonate with cosmic qi and thereby complete natural cycles also rendered sound an effective tool which he might use to regulate the natural order and thus himself serve as the spiritual arbiter of cosmic prosperity in the social microcosm.”

The cosmos could likewise reveal its will through these correlations. For example, in a divination method described by Kenneth DeWoskin, pitch pipes are implanted into the earth in order to reveal the resonations of earthly qi. In military divinations, as described by Brindley, the same concept was applied:

師曠曰不害。吾臥歌北風，又歌南風，南風不競，多死聲。楚必無功。董叔 曰：天道多在西北。南師不時，必無功。叔向曰：在其君之德也。
Shi Kuang said, “It is not harmful. I repeatedly [listened to] the songs of the North Wind, and also the songs of the South Wind. The South Wind does not content and there are many sounds of death. Chu will certainly not have success.” Dong Shu said: “The Way of Heaven is mostly located in the Northwest. The Southern armies are not timely, and they will certainly not have success.” Shu Xiang said: “[This] lies in the virtue of the ruler.”

Also along these lines, metaphors of harmonization with earthly and heavenly music serve to explain the ideal sage who has returned to the original cosmic state in texts time without being sounded itself. The strings of the second instrument resonate with the frequency of the sound wave created by the first one.

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53 For more on this ritual, also see Nathan Sivin, *Granting the Seasons: The Chinese Astronomical Reform of 1280, With a Study of Its Many Dimensions and an Annotated Translation of Its Records* (Springer, 2009).
54 Brindley, p. 77.
55 See Brindley, pp. 69-73.
like the *Zhuangzi*. The sage understands the resonations of heaven and earth, and can align himself with them:

夫明白於天地之德者，此之謂大本大宗，與天和者也；所以均調天下，與人和者也。與人和者，謂之人樂；與天和者，謂之天樂。

As for one who has an understanding of the Virtue of Heaven and Earth, this is called the Great Root and Great Source, and one who harmonizes with Heaven. That by which he balances all under Heaven is [by] harmonizing with men. As for harmonizing with men, we call it human music; as for harmonizing with Heaven, we call it Heavenly Music.  

In addition to connecting humanity with the cosmos, and promulgating morality among the government and populace, music in pre-Buddhist China would also serve as a means for self-expression. It could both evoke emotions and intentions as well as exhibit them. The author of the *Lüshi chunqiu* wrote that, to have a successful state, one must play music that evokes joy rather than any negative feelings, tying this in with a metaphor about musical harmony being analogous to social harmony – the feelings must match the situations, and vice versa. Thus music was thought to transmit and evoke specific emotions. It was necessary to disseminate specific emotional states to society, as in the *Lüshi chunqiu*:

亡國戮民，非無樂也，其樂不樂。溺者非不笑也，罪人非不歌也，狂者非不武也，亂世之樂，有似於此。君臣失位，父子失處，夫婦失宜，民人呻吟，其以為樂也，若之何哉？

Vanquished states and conquered people are not without music, [it is just that] their music is not joyous. Those who are drowning are not unable to laugh, a guilty man is not unable to sing, and one who is crazy is not unable to be brave/dance. The music of a chaotic age has similarities to this. When rulers and ministers lose their positions, fathers

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57 Wang Xianqian 王先謙, ed. *Zhuangzi ji jie* 莊子集解 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1999), p. 114. Also see Brindley, p. 118.
and sons lose their places, and husbands and wives lose their propriety, the people groan.
As for what they consider music, how can it be like this?58

In addition, music acts as a channel for expressing intense emotions. Take for example
the Han preface to the Book of Odes, which places intentions as the source of poetry,

music, and dance:

詩者，志之所之也，在心為志，發言為詩，情動於中而形於言，言之不足，故嗟嘆
之，嘆嘆之不足，故詠歌之，詠歌之不足，不知手之舞之足之蹈之也。
As for poetry, it is where the intent goes. If in the heart there is an intent, then speech
issues forth as poetry. Emotions move within and take shape as words, when words are
not sufficient, then one emotes it. When emoting is not sufficient, then one sings it, and
when singing is not enough, then unconsciously the hands dance it and the feet stamp it.59

Furthermore, in the case of individuals, music served to reveal hidden personal intentions
and psychology. According to the lore, these intentions could be very specific, akin to
what normally would require language to be expressed:

伯牙子鼓琴，鍾子期聽之，方鼓而志在太山，鍾子期曰：「善哉乎鼓琴！巍巍乎若
太山。」少選之間，而志在流水，鍾子期復曰：「善哉乎鼓琴！湯湯乎若流水。
Bo Ya played the qin, and Zhong Ziqi listened to it. When [Bo Ya] played, and his
thoughts were about Mount Tai, Zhong Ziqi would say: “How wonderful your qin-
playing is! It is as lofty as Mount Tai!” In the next moment [Bo Ya’s] thoughts were
about flowing water, and Zhong Ziqi would again say: “How wonderful your qin-playing
is! It rushes like flowing water!”60

58 Chen Qiyou 陳奇猷, ed., Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi 呂氏春秋校釋 (Shanghai: Xuelin
chubanshe, 1984), p. 259. Also see Brindley, p. 40.
1970), Vol. 5, p. 34.
60 Liu Xiang 劉向 [Han 漢], Shuoyuan 說苑, in Zhang Wenyu 張問漁, ed., Zhuzi ji
77-78. Also preserved in Liezi.
Although ideas about music being a form of language did not plainly manifest until the *Taiping jing*, the implication is clear: with both a highly skilled performer and an acute listener, music communicated not only emotions and intentions, but also concrete ideas.

And the situation only grew in complexity in the latter half of the Han, when Buddhism was just beginning to filter into China. Ideas about music expanded and deviated from the earlier ones. In the *Taiping jing*, music’s ability for concrete expression was further solidified. Compounding on ideas about music being a tool for relaying and tapping into knowledge about the cosmos, the text establishes a direct link between music and language, stating that “notes are the language of music” (音聲者漓≲是樂之語談也。),\(^{61}\) and that “musical sounds are the language that rectifies Heaven, Earth, Yin and Yang, and the Five Phases.” (樂聲正天地陰陽五行之語言也。).\(^{62}\) Music is essentially taken as a device through which one can communicate with the cosmos.

Other thinkers, however, held opposing views. In Ji Kang’s 嵇康 (223-262) essay *Treatise on the Absence of Joy and Sorrow in Sound* 聲無哀樂論, he argues that musical sounds are incapable of transmitting specific emotions, as many of the prior thinkers espoused, and instead they are devoid of emotional content. They do stir emotions in the listener, but these emotions depend on the psychological and moral state of the listener himself, rather than stemming from any information conveyed through the music. Furthermore, the specific emotions that are evoked in each individual are subjective,

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\(^{62}\) Ibid, pp. 48-9.
depending on that person’s experiences and background. It is perhaps perspectives like Ji Kang’s on the inherent emotional emptiness of musical sounds that eased the formation of Buddhist genres of music in China in light of Vinaya texts that cautioned against them.

Music and Chant in Vedic and Buddhist India

In ancient India, the philosophical basis of music overlapped slightly with the Chinese ideas explained above. Annette Wilke notes that the hymns in the Rgveda were meant to facilitate communication with the gods, and according to certain texts, scale tones could be linked with animals and social functions, similar to the connections made through the concept of resonance in Chinese musical thought. The genre of Indian music perhaps most comparable to the Chinese ideas, though, was theater. According to the Nātyaśāstra attributed to Bharata (c. 200 CE), the aim of theater was not only to appease the gods, but also to “[set] an example of social values and good character traits, correcting bad behavior, pleasing the gods, it is a kingly duty that helps to achieve an excellent state.” Although, according to Lewis Rowell, for the most part Buddhist tradition did not differ greatly from Vedic traditions when it came to musicological thought, there were

66 Rowell, p. 96.
67 Ibid, p. 27.
debates between the two groups on the origin of sound itself. The majority of Vedantic thinkers claimed that sound had no cause, that it was spontaneously manifested from “inner consciousness, vital breath, and/or the primordial cause of the evolved universe.”

Buddhist thinkers, on the other hand, claimed that it did have a cause, that it was an effect of “disturbances in the elemental substances,” and thereby it “subsists in nothing and is subject to generation and destruction.”

But just as chant in China is rarely mentioned in mainstream music treatises from the histories, Vedic chant in India also found itself separated from other bodies of work about music. Instead it was found under the purview of linguistics. The earliest available example of writings about chant in India is Nārada’s Śikṣā (called Nāradīyaśikṣā), a phonetic manual that strove to provide instructions for correct performance in general, including “articulation, ritual procedures, grammatical and semantic analysis, the metrical basis of the texts, and the proper scheduling and timing for the ceremonies.” Rowell notes that although the final compilation of this text dates from around the 6th century CE, much of the material likely dates from the BCE era. The majority of this text focuses on the correct execution of the Sāmaveda.

Although it is technically a phonetic treatise, the information conveyed about chant within the Nāradīyaśikṣā is overwhelmingly musical. This is perhaps because the Sāmaveda itself is definitely musical: it is a set of hymns (mostly drawn from the Rgveda), “set to music for liturgical purposes”; unfortunately we cannot know if other

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68 Ibid, p. 41.
69 Ibid, p. 41.
70 Ibid, p. 69.
71 Ibid, p. 70.
vedas, like the *Ṛgveda*, would have been chanted musically.\textsuperscript{72} However, guidelines for how to chant the *Sāmaveda* musically were still set aside from other discussions of music, despite the fact that they had all the hallmarks of music: changes in pitch, particular scales, ornamentation, and even double reinforcement of the musical aspects by simultaneous mudras on both hands (the right hand indicating the pitch, and the left indicating temporal aspects such as syllable length, accent, and repetitions).\textsuperscript{73} Based on the *Nārādiyaśiṣṭā*, Rowell postulates that the distinction between song and chant rested in the fact that song relied mainly on pitch for making tonal distinctions, while the “tradition of recitation and chant continued to be regulated through a subtle mixture of pitch, dynamic, and timbral distinctions.”\textsuperscript{74}

Likewise, in explicitly Buddhist texts, chant was often afforded a position separate from other kinds of musical performances. A frequently mentioned example is the fact that in many *vinaya* texts, monks and nuns were prohibited from engaging in music, dance, and other worldly performances – as Mahinda Deegalle notes, for monks it is considered a minor offense, and for nuns it is a more serious offense requiring confession\textsuperscript{75} - yet chant was still considered an essential part of religious practice. While music was not prohibited for laypeople, they too were warned of its dangers – particularly that it posed the threat of diminishing their livelihoods:

\begin{verbatim}
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid, p. 58.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid, pp. 65-66, 70-80, 86-87.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, p. 83.
All you laymen! If people like musical performances, it should be understood that there are six distractions [from them]. What are the six? One is enjoying listening to songs, two is enjoying watching dances, three is enjoying going out to make music, four is enjoying watching people play with bells, five is enjoying clapping one’s hands, and six is enjoying large parties. All you laymen! If people like musical performances, they will not engage in activities, and if they do not engage in activities, then their work will be incomplete, and if they did not already have property, then they will not gain any, and if they already had property, then they will go on to exhaust it.

If musical performances with no Buddhist content were prohibited for monks and dangerous for laypeople, then what about performances with Buddhist content? Was chant musical, and if so, how did Buddhists reconcile the contradiction of barring music but allowing musical chant? Some texts espouse the practice of chanting, listing several benefits one can incur from doing so, such as in the case of the monk Bhadrika described in the *Sarvāstivāda-vinaya* (*Shi song lü* 十誦律):

There was a monk called Bhadrika. Among the *bai* [chanters] he was the best. This monk’s voice was good. He asked the Buddha: World Honored one, I wish for you to listen to me chant *bai*. The Buddha said: I will listen to you chant *bai*. *Bai* has five benefits. The body is not weary, you do not forget what you learned, the mind does not become fatigued, the sounds are not incorrect, and the language is easy to understand. There are an additional five benefits. The body does not become too weary, you do not forget what you learned, the mind does not become lax, the sounds are not incorrect, and when all the heavenly deities hear *bai* then their hearts become joyful.

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76 *Madhyamāgama*, T26: 639c18.  
77 T1435: 269c15.
However, most early vinaya texts and scriptures discourage the chanter from doing it in a musical way and have various lists of harms one can incur from it. For example, the Dharmaguptaka-vinaya (Si fen lü 四分律) describes the dangers of chanting musically:

When you are expounding the Dharma at the residence of the Thus-Come one, you cannot be the same as ordinary worldly people. Those who wish to expound the Dharma should expound the Dharma on the same level as Śāriputra or Maudgalyāyana. You cannot expound the Dharma like ordinary worldly people. Monks, if you sing excessively to expound the Dharma, then you will have the Five Faults. What are the Five? If a monk excessively sings to expound the Dharma, creating in himself a desire for musical sounds, this is called the first Fault. Furthermore, if a monk sings excessively to expound the Dharma, creating in his listeners a desire for musical sounds, this is called the monk’s second fault. Next, if a monk sings excessively when expounding the dharma, his listeners may adopt this practice, this is called the monk’s third fault. Next, if a monk sings excessively when expounding the dharma, the senior monks will all together give criticisms. As for our practice of a singing voice, if monks also expound the dharma like this, then it gives rise to an irreverent heart that is not respectful. This is called the monk’s fourth fault. Next, if a monk sings excessively to expound the dharma, when they go to a quiet place to reflect, it causes them to think of musical sounds that disrupt their meditative concentration. This is called the monk’s fifth fault.  

So it appears that chanting was at least not intended to be a musical activity. However, it seemed that practicing monks at that time were inclined to expound the dharma in a musical way, otherwise there wouldn’t have been a need for the prohibitions against it and the explanations of why it was so dangerous. And even still, certain monks

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78 T1428: 817a17.
were praised for their recitation in a musical style, and, as Liu Cuilan points out, in practice chant was often indistinguishable from song, even when the chanter had no intention of being song-like. She raises an example from the *Mūla-sarvāstivāda-vinaya bhaisajyavastu* in which a group of merchants who are presumably lay Buddhists travel on a ship, and during their travels recite several texts:

彼諸商人，晝夜常誦怛南頌，諸上頌，世羅尼頌，牟尼之頌，眾義經等，以妙音聲，清朗而誦。滿聞已，而問言曰：「汝等善能歌詠。」諸商答曰：「商主！此非歌詠。」圓滿問曰：「是何言辭？」商人報曰：「是佛所說。」

As for those merchants, night and day they constantly chanted the Uddāna Praise, all the Sthavira Praises, the śailañā Praise, the Muni Hymn, and the Artha-vargīya sūtra, etc. They chanted them with clear, sonorous, and beautiful voices. After Pūrṇa heard them, he commented: “You are all good at singing songs.” The merchants replied: “Captain! This is not singing.” Pūrṇa asked: “Then what are these words?” The merchants replied: “They are the words of the Buddha.”

In this case, the captain heard the chanting as ordinary musical singing even though that was not the intention of the merchants.

To sum up, for Indian Buddhists, chant and recitation were not considered to be music, and even though they might sound musical to the uninitiated ear, it was the intention and content that counted. Worldly songs were hazardous, and listening to or participating in them was irresponsible. But praises to the Three Jewels or words considered to have been spoken by the Buddha himself did not risk causing the same kinds of afflictions.

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79 Liu, pp. 268-269.
80 Sanskrit is an approximation here.
81 T1448: 11b5.
82 A later chapter of this dissertation will show that it was not always so simple. Even chanting scriptures and other religious content could be risky.
I agree with Liu’s hypothesis that Indian and Central Asian monks most likely used some forms of musical intonation (perhaps to varying degrees) when chanting and reciting texts, and it was these forms that were transmitted to China. It seems logical to think that the earliest instances of chanting scriptures in China would have been heard by an audience that perceived them as musical, just as the ship captain did in the *Mūlasarvāstivādavinaya bhaiṣajyavastu*. But due to the value placed on texts, Chinese readers would have eventually scrutinized translations, and the complicated situation described above may have puzzled them too. So how did they justify musical chanting when they heard one thing but read another? There were two methods for this.

The first was to alter the texts as they were translated in order to reflect what they wanted to read, rather than what the original actually said. Take for example, the account of a nun (called *Jiemu nü* 羌暮⼥) from the *Mahāsāṃghika-vinaya*: in the Sanskrit version of her story, the nun is invited to speak at the homes of laypeople, inciting jealousy in the other nuns. They tell the Buddha that she has been enchanting people, and the Buddha calls her in for questioning. She denies the accusations, and the Buddha believes her, stating that it was just because she had a nice voice. In the Chinese version, however, the content is changed entirely:

是時諸人家家請唄。聞歡喜而大得利養。諸比丘尼各生嫉心。便作是言。此妖艷歌頌惑亂眾心。諸比丘尼以是因緣來。來已問言。汝實作世間歌頌耶。答言。我不知世間歌頌。佛言。是比丘尼非世間歌頌。

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83 Liu, p. 269.  
84 Ibid, p. 265-267. For Sanskrit version, see Gustav Roth, *Bhiksunivinaya: Manual of Discipline for Buddhist Nuns* (Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1970), p. 113. Although this example is also brought up by Liu, she does not provide the same interpretation that I do.
At this time, all the people and families invited her to chant. When they heard it they were happy and greatly benefitted. All the nuns became very jealous, they even said these words: These flirtatious songs are confusing the people’s minds! All the nuns went to tell this to the Buddha. The Buddha said: call this nun forth. She came and [the Buddha] asked: Were you really engaging in worldly singing? She answered: I don’t know worldly singing. The Buddha said: [What] this nun [did] was not worldly singing. 85

Firstly, the Chinese version changes the content to be about singing rather than speaking. There are two possible reasons for this: either recitation was so blatantly musical at that particular place and moment that the translator felt it would be much more relevant to the readers in this way, or Chinese readers and their interests prompted the change. Secondly, the wording in the Chinese version is telling. While the nun may have originally made the visit to chant (唄), what she was accused of was singing (歌頌). In the passage the Buddha seeks to confirm that she was not engaging in worldly singing, for this is prohibited. However, the implication is that non-worldly singing – presumably singing with Buddhist content or intentions – is permissible. The vocabulary in this case betrays a blurring of categories: Buddhist chant usually marked with the verb 唄 can now have the explicitly musical label “song” (ge 歌) applied to it, as long as it is “non-worldly.”

The second method to justify musical chanting was to convert it into a Chinese practice. By doing so, it could be regarded as a tool to ameliorate the community – like indigenous ritual music yue 樂 – rather than something dangerous. 86 This is perhaps best illustrated with the case of fanbai 梵唄.

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85 T1425: 518c26.
86 Or as something empty if one took Ji Kang’s perspective, but this is not clearly expressed in Huijiao’s treatise.
The Case of *Fanbai*:

What is *Fanbai*?

*Fanbai* is the practice of chanting or singing praises to a Buddha. At the end of the thirteenth scroll of the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Gao seng zhuan* 高僧傳), the compiler and monk Huijiao 慧皎 (497-554 CE) elaborates on this practice in a treatise. He retrospectively notes that the majority of individuals responsible for transmitting or creating these praises were of Central Asian or South Asian origin and included several prolific translators and teachers. The name *fanbai* itself alludes to non-Chinese practices; the literal meaning of the graphs used to represent it are “brahman speech” or “Sanskrit chant.” The *bai* may be either a transliteration of the Sanskrit word “pāṭha” (to “recite,” “intone,” or “chant”) or “bhāṣā” (“speech”).

Moreover, Huijiao acknowledges that *fanbai* existed in Tianzhu (present-day India) and traveled to China:

然天竺方俗凡是歌詠法言皆稱為唄。至於此土詠經則稱為轉讀。歌詠則號為梵唄。

Thus for the local customs in India, generally singing and sermons are all called *bai*. When [this practice] arrived in this land [China], singing the *sūtras* was then called *zhuandu*. Singing praises was then called *fanbai*.

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87 Charles Muller, “*pāṭha* 唄,” *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*, http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?q=%E5%94%94%E7%94%84.
88 Robert E Buswell and Donald Lopez, Jr., *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 292. In the above account of the nun, *bai* is translated from *bhāṣā*, though given how much was changed between the original and Chinese versions of the story, this may have not always been the case.
89 An intoning of the texts of a *sūtra* that places emphasis on both the sounds and the words. See Huijiao, p. 508.
90 Ibid, p. 508.
The practice of *fanbai* was without a doubt musical, at least in the sense that these praises were sung with a melody and wind and string instruments may have accompanied it. Huijiao’s treatise notes these features:

Although both song and praise are unique, both harmonize with harmonious bell modes and correspond to *gong* and *shang*. Thus they are wonderful. Therefore when we perform songs to metal and stone (bells and chimestones), we call it *yue* (music); when we set praises to pipes and strings, we call it *bai* (*fanbai*).  

And,

Moreover, these praises expressed adoration and veneration of the Buddha, and were performed both as repayment for the teachings the Buddha, and in exchange for a multitude of advantages to aid in religious practice and self-cultivation. In describing this type of ritual, one could apply the term “gift theory,” coined by Edward Tylor and elaborated on by Catherine Bell, which denotes a practice that provides a means for human-divine interaction and transaction.  

Mabbett too observes this function of music in religious contexts, calling it “a conduit by which, temporarily, the line between the two realms [profane and divine] is breached and the line contact is made with the

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91 Ibid, p. 507.
92 The character for “winds” here is written as 綰 (wan, “to coil”), but this is most likely a mistake. 管 (guan, “winds, pipes”) is surely the intended character.
93 Ibid, p. 508.
In the case of *fanbai*, it functioned as a musical offering, much in the same way physical offerings, such as incense or food, would function. The deities are perhaps expected to hear the pleasing melodies and laudatory words of *fanbai* just as they smell the aromas of incense, and respond accordingly, initiating communication and interaction between the two realms.

Here, Huijiao notes that *fanbai* function as praises:

…

As for the dances and odes of the pure abode under the twin śāla trees, they are repayment for the benefits of the teachings of the Buddha’s life. In between [these dances and odes] they sing praises according to the time, and everywhere complete the sounds. So it is like the soft sounds of Hundred Million Ears [probably the Buddha’s disciple Śrōṇakoṭṭivimśa] at midnight, the fluttering sounds of devas in the Brahman’s palace, or making the doctrine of *animitta* appear above the *di* and *chi* flutes. Or the sounds of past deeds manifest below the *qin* and *se* zithers. They all modulate to express praise for the Buddha.

*Fanbai* also provide the practitioner and listeners with physical and mental benefits:

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96 A reference to the Buddha’s disciples giving offerings of song and dance after the Buddha achieved nirvana.
97 Huijiao, p. 507.
spoiled, and it will please the many devas. Thus through the five-stringed music and song from a stone chamber, one [can be] invited to open the first gateway of the sweet dew.  

*Fanbai* produced thaumaturgical effects as well:

This effect of music has been such since ancient times. Thus, when a master sings *fanbai* the red geese are fond of it and do not move. When a *bhikṣu* disseminates the sounds [of chanting *sūtras*] the verdant birds are pleased and forget to fly away. Tanping altered the rhymes, [but] still made birds and horses lie docile. Sengbian changed the melodies (or harmonies?) yet still made geese and cranes halt their flights.

Thus from chanting *bai*, these practitioners and listeners experienced calming effects, they felt rejuvenated and energetic, and their memories improved. Moreover, the sounds of the music have a taming effect on animal listenters. All of these effects fell into the realm of the miraculous.

The Rise of *Fanbai* in China

Given the situation of music in Buddhist thought (as something generally discouraged, and when allowed, often thought of as separate from other types of music), as well as the fact that *fanbai* was a new, foreign practice in China, the process of legitimization and popularization may not have been easy. Throughout the Six Dynasties period, and certainly by the time of Huijiao, *fanbai* had been reinvented as a distinctly sinicized practice. Most overtly, it was given a Chinese discovery myth, implying that while it may

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98 Ibid, p. 507.
have existed outside of China, it was not brought to China by foreigners; instead it was independently discovered through divine inspiration:

陳思王曹植，字子建。嘗登魚山、臨東阿，忽聞巖岫裡有誦經聲，清通深亮，遠谷流響，肅然有靈氣。不覺斂衿祇敬，便有終焉之志。即效而則之。今之梵唱，皆植依擬所造。一云陳思王遊山，忽聞空裡誦經聲，清遠道亮。解音者則而寫之，為神仙聲。道士效之，作步虛聲也。

Cao Zhi, King Si of Chen, was also named Zijian. He once ascended Fish Mountain, overlooking Dong’e commandery. He suddenly heard the sounds of chanting sūtras from inside a cliff-side cave. It was clear and penetrating, deep and resonant, and it echoed into distant valleys. It was solemn and had numinous qi. He unconsciously bowed in veneration. He had the will to end up there, so he followed it. The brahman singing of today is all created from [Cao] Zhi’s emulation. Someone said that when King Si of Chen went to the mountain, he suddenly heard the sounds of chanting scriptures from out of nowhere, it was clear and bright, strong and resonant, He understood tones and thus imitated them. They were the sounds of divine immortals. Daoist masters imitated them and made [the music called] “Pacing the Void.”

In addition to the efforts made to situate fanbai in China, it was also presented as a type of musical practice that accorded with distinctive features of pre-Buddhist Chinese musical practices. Chinese monks engaged in taking this practice from outside and placing it within their own cultural system, both matching and altering it corporeally and psychologically to earlier paradigms. In terms of corporeally altering fanbai to match a Chinese analog, Huijiao notes that the melodies of the bai themselves were changed to Chinese melodies:

乃譯文者眾。而傳聲蓋寡。良由梵音重複漢語單奇。若用梵音以詠漢語。則聲繁而偈迫。若用漢曲以詠梵文。則韻短而辭長。是故金言有譯梵響無授。

Translated texts are numerous, but the transmission of sounds is relatively rare. This is very much due to the prolixity of Sanskrit and the singularity Chinese. If one uses

100 In present day Shandong Province.
101 This is fanbai.
Sanskrit melodies to sing in Chinese language, then the sound is garbled because the *gatha* is too quick. If one uses Chinese melodies to sing in Sanskrit, then the rhyme is cut off because the words are too long. Therefore the Buddha’s words are translated and the Sanskrit melodies are not taught.  

Thus the nature of the language, either Middle Chinese or Sanskrit, determined which melody one uses when chanting. The texts of sūtras and the *gathas* contained within were translated for the practical reason of accommodating Chinese melodies. This indicates attempts to use Sanskrit to chant with a Chinese melody, but also attempts to apply Middle Chinese outwardly to Sanskrit melodies, testing the possibilities of its compatibility within the Sanskrit melodic templates. Such a phenomenon could only have arisen through dialogues between groups that used both Sanskrit and Middle Chinese languages as well as Sanskrit and Chinese melodies. There is some additional circumstantial evidence to suggest that the melodies were originally Indian and that this was not an immediate process, such as Daoxuan’s later account of Cao Zhi that states he chanted with the seven tones rather than the five tones, and a body of work about chanting methods by Shen Yue and other literati under the patronage of Prince Xiao

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103 Huijiao, p. 507.

104 Although since very early times the twelve tones of the chromatic scale were available to Chinese acousticians and musicians (see for example the range of notes available on bells and chimestones excavated from the tomb of the Marquis Yi of Zeng, 433 BCE), music was still largely organized around scale modes consisting of five tones with specific intervals picked from the larger set. When certain forms of Indian and Central Asian music were introduced in the Six Dynasties period, new scale modes consisting of seven tones each were described in detail. See for example the account of the Kuchean pipa player Sujivha 蘇祗婆 who gave a demonstration of Indian scale modes during the time of Emperor Wu of Northern Zhou (543–578AD), found in Wei Zheng 魏徵 (580-643), *Sui shu*, vol. 2 (Beijing : Zhonghua shu ju, 1973), pp. 345-346, and described in detail in Laurence Picken and Noel J. Nickson, eds., *Music from the Tang Court*, vol. 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 206-216.
Ziliang (460-494 CE), which was unfortunately lost. Nonetheless, due to the linguistic differences (isolating vs. synthetic) and melodic difference (perhaps shorter vs. longer melodic phrases, though there are no extant examples we can use to explore this), the two were inevitably deemed incompatible. Sanskrit was to be chanted with a Sanskrit melody, and if one were to use a Chinese melody, the accompanying text must also be in Middle Chinese. The resulting use of solely Chinese language and Chinese melodies indicated a privileging of the Chinese language and music and a tangible effort to modify the foreign models to match native ones. Mikhail Bakhtin called this the “centripetal force” of the dominant language (and in this case, also the dominant music) of a region; the tendency towards heteroglossia.

As for psychological alterations, the thought behind fanbai was also changed to conform to the Chinese one, or recognized as already corresponding. Drawing upon more ancient theories that explained the origins of music, Huijiao sought to find a place for fanbai according to this pre-Buddhist model. In his treatise he records:

情動於中而形於言。言之不足故詠歌之也。然東國之歌也，則結詠以成詠；西方之詠也，則作倡以和聲。雖復歌詠為殊，而並以協諧鐘律，符靡宮商，方乃奧妙。故奏歌於金石，則謂之以為樂；設詠於管弦，則詠之以為嘗。

Emotions move within and take shape as words. When words are insufficient, we then sing them. Thus the songs of the eastern lands are connected by rhyme to complete the song; for the praises/hymns of the west one composes gatha to harmonize the voice. Although both song and praise are unique, both use harmonious modes, and when they correspond to gong and shang, they are then wonderful. Thus when we perform songs to

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105 Bodman, pp. 117-118.
metal and stone (bells and chimestones), we call it yue (music); when we set praises to pipes and strings, we call it bai (fanbai).  

The opening line mimics the well-known Han dynasty preface to the Book of Poetry, a western Zhou period (1046-771 BCE) collection of poems that some would consider a foundational text for Chinese song and music, which by Huijiao’s time had persisted in China for more than a thousand years. Although mentioned above, I will reiterate it here for convenience. It states:

As for poetry, it is where the intent goes. If in one’s heart they have an intent, then they produce speech as poetry. Emotions move within and take shape as words, when words are not sufficient, then one emotes it. When emoting is not sufficient, then one sings it, and when singing is not enough, then unconsciously the hands dance it and the feet stamp it.

The use of this quote and allusion to the preface of the Book of Poetry place this Buddhist genre within the same framework and equates the two independent practices. Both the ceremonial music (yue 樂) and songs of the Odes, as envisioned by the people of the Han dynasty, and musical praises to Buddhist deities arose from similar emotional stimulation.

Additional links between fanbai and pre-Buddhist yue were both highlighted and forged. The “five benefits” of fanbai, quoted from the Sarvāstivāda-vinaya 十誦律, are

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107 Huijiao, p. 507.
108 Usually believed to be song lyrics.
110 Original quote: “Bai has five benefits. The body is not exhausted, one does not forget things, the heard does not become slack, the sounds will not be spoiled, and when the many devas hear the sounds of bai they will be pleased.”
paralleled with the “four virtues” of music, quoted from the *Han shu*,
presenting these two disparate practices as corresponding in their enumerated advantages. To restate them:

夫聖人制樂其德四焉。感天地。通神明。安萬民。成性類。如聽嘯亦其利有五。身體不疲。不忘所憶。心不懈倦。音聲不壞。諸天歡喜。是以般遮絃歌於石室。請開甘露之初門。

Thus when the sage makes music there are four virtues from this: it moves heaven and earth, it penetrates the spirits, it pacifies the ten thousand people, and it completes all living things. If one listens to bai there are also five benefits: the body is not exhausted, one does not forget things, one’s heart will not become slack, the sounds will not be spoiled, and it will please the many devas. Thus through the five-stringed music and song from a stone hut [temple?], one [can be] invited to open the first gateway of the sweet dew.\(^\text{112}\)

Additionally, Huijiao observes that the supernatural effects of *fanbai* had pre-Buddhist Chinese equivalents. He notes the power of *fanbai* to captivate and transform the behavior of animals, and also includes two allusions to the *Book of Documents* in which music has a similar effect:

This effect of music has been such since ancient times. Thus, when a master sings *fanbai* the red geese are fond of it and do not move. When a *bhikṣu* disseminates the sounds [of chanting *śūtras*] the verdant birds are pleased and forget to fly away. Tanping altered the rhymes, [but] still made birds and horses lie docile. Sengbian changed the melodies (or harmonies?) yet still made geese and cranes halt their flights. Although measurements

\(^{111}\)Probably completed in the early to mid 2\(^{nd}\) century. See Michael Loewe, ed., *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China, 1993), pp. 129-130. Original quote: “Thus for music, it is that by which the sages move heaven and earth, penetrate the spirits, pacify the masses, and complete all living things” 故樂者漓聖人之ㄿ以感⠨地漓通䡝明漓⪈萬民漓ㄏ性類者也。

\(^{112}\)Huijiao, p. 507.
and people can both be deep or shallow, the measuring tokens still move up or down according to this. Thus when Kui struck and tapped on stone then all the creatures accordingly danced, and when [someone] played the nine completions of the shao music on the xiao then phoenixes came and danced. The birds and beasts all still displayed their feelings, how much more so for humans and deities?\textsuperscript{113}

Roel Sterckx notes that these, among many other stories of music taming and domesticating wild creatures that appear throughout early Chinese texts, are all examples that serve as allusions to good government: just as perfect ritual music can transform the behavior of wild beasts and magical creatures, so too can morally upright rule extend and transform the people.\textsuperscript{114} When applied to Buddhist fanbai, this implies that these praises to the Buddha can have a similarly morally transformative effect, and can positively influence the behaviors of the creatures and humans who hear them.

Moreover, the moral imbalance of certain types of music in Buddhist thought found an equivalent in earlier Chinese thought as well. Just as not all music was equal in terms of its origination and effects according to Buddhist doctrine, as described above in the section on pre-Buddhist music in China, certain types of Chinese music could likewise be dangerous to the listener or indicate moral shortcomings of the performer. Both the Buddhist music flowing into China and the earlier forms of music that were already present could serve to encourage correct thoughts, aid in self-cultivation, and act

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid, p. 508. The passages he quotes are: 予击石拊石，百兽率舞。([Music Master Kui said] “I hit and tap the stones and the hundred animals accordingly dance,”) and 《箫韶》九成，凤凰来仪。(Playing nine completions of the ‘Xiao shao,’ a phoenix came and danced), both found in \textit{Shang shu} 尚書, in \textit{Shi san jing zhu shu} 十三經註疏, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhong hua shu ju ying yin, 1980), p. 144.

as offerings. Yet other types were portrayed as dangerous and indulgent practices, to which one can easily form attachments.

Readers of Huijiao’s *Biographies of Eminent Monks* and his short treatise on *fanbai* in particular would have been familiar with the ideas about music cited in classical texts, amplifying their ability to understand the connections he made between the two practices.

While we do not know whether *fanbai* and other Buddhist and non-Chinese musical practices ever faced any significant opposition as they pervaded China due to the limited number of texts that discuss their reception, Huijiao’s treatise and his linking of *fanbai* to pre-Buddhist Chinese musical forms certainly would not have inhibited its popularization, and in fact seems like an effort to promote it. The transformation of *fanbai* into a parallel, if not an equivalent, for the homegrown tradition of *yue* created a connection between the older practice and the newer one that fastened it in the public consciousness. The educated Chinese readers of Huijiao’s treatise, regardless of whether or not they were Buddhist, would have read his text with pre-conceived notions of what music was, based on the classical texts that continually circulated from Han and pre-Han times. That Huijiao highlighted (and even invented) similarities between the newer *fanbai* and the more ancient *yue*, and downplayed (and perhaps even erased) their differences, was what secured a place for *fanbai* within the Chinese cultural paradigms, giving it a role that diverged from its previous Indic context.
CHAPTER 2

Experts of Memory:
Chanting as a Method and Verification of Learning

Introduction

In the Six Dynasties and early Tang, the chanting and recitation of texts was not just one of many skills in a monk’s repertoire – it was the cornerstone practice for one to become a monk in the first place. A story recorded in the 5th century text *Luoyang qielan ji* 洛陽伽藍記 illustrates a view that chant, along with meditation, should be a monk’s primary enterprise:

The monk Huining of Lofty Perfection Temple died, and after one [period of] seven days he returned to life. He had endured King Yama’s test, and was released because of a mistaken name. Huining explained in detail that previously (while in the afterlife), there were five monks being tested at the same time. One monk said he was Zhisheng from Precious Illumination Temple, and through seated meditation and practices of austerities he achieved ascendance to the heavenly court. There was a monk who said he was
Daopin from Prajña Temple, and through chanting four [scrolls of the] Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra he also ascended to the heavenly court. There was a monk who said he was Tan Mozui from Harmonious Awakening Temple, who explained the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra and the Avatamsaka Sūtra, and had lead many thousands of people. King Yama said: “As for one who explains the sūtras, in their heart they harbor the [concept of] self and others, and arrogantly disdain non-self, among monks this is the first coarse conduct. Now, I only test seated meditation and chanting the scriptures, I do not ask for explaining the sūtras.” Tan Mozui said: “Since I was alive, I have only liked explaining the sūtras, I really did not know chanting.” King Yama ordered him to be handed over to the officials, and immediately there were ten people dressed in black escorting Tan Mozui to the northwestern gate. The residence was completely dark, and it appeared to be a bad place. There was a monk who said he was Daohong from Forest of Meditation Temple, he said he had personally converted four generations of temple benefactors, made a complete set of the Buddhist canon, and while still in the human realm [made] ten golden images [of the Buddha]. King Yama said: “As for the body of a śramaṇa, it is necessary to focus the mind and guard the Way. The will [of this] lies in meditation and chant, not engaging in worldly affairs or doing conditioned activities. Although you produced sūtras and images, you really wanted to obtain other people’s wealth. When you obtained their wealth, this then gave rise to a covetous heart; when you had a covetous heart, then the three poisons could not be removed, and this was enough [to cause] afflictions.” He was also handed over to the authorities, and together with Tan Mozui, they entered the dark gate. There was a monk who said he was Baozhen from Numinous Awakening Temple. He said that before he left his household [to become a monk], he had once served as the governor of Longxi, and he had built Numinous Awakening Temple. When the temple was finished, he then gave up his official position and entered the Way. Although he did not meditate or chant, his engagement in ritual worship was constant. King Yama said: “When you were governor, you bent the principles and twisted the law, and you seized people’s money. You falsely made this temple, not even using your own strength, how laborious [it is] to say this!” He was also handed over to the officials, and the black-clothed [people] sent him into the dark gate. When the Empress Dowager heard about this, she dispatched the Gentleman Attendant at the Palace Gate, Xu Ge, to visit all the temples according to Huining’s account… From that point on, all the monks in the city [engaged in] meditation and chanting, and did not again take explaining the sūtras.

To summarize, the five monks being tested and the observer Huining discover that among different devotional practices, only meditation and recitation will lead to a favorable

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115 This is probably meant to be “forty” (sishi 四十), to correspond with Dharmakṣema’s 5th century translation of this text.
116 I.e., activity produced as a result of causes and conditions, as opposed to being unconnected to cause and effect, or eternal.
117 T2092, 1005b-1005c.
outcome after death. These are the only practices that lead to a concentrated mind, and in fact other practices can even be harmful. Lecturing on the meanings of scriptures shows a “disdain for the non-self” in that the lecturer considers others as different from himself, perhaps through assuming that his own subjective understanding is clearer and that he has a right to lecture others. Building temples, commissioning images, and making and copying scriptures require money and resources, and are thus associated with material wealth and worldly attachments. Moreover, they are conditioned activities with ulterior motives. In contrast, meditation and chant require nothing beyond the monk’s own person and it is not possible for the individual practitioner to impose subjective interpretations on them.

When deciding who gets to become a monk, it is unsurprising that candidates were evaluated on their abilities to perform monastic practices. Between the two mainstay practices of meditation and chant, though, only one of these can be objectively evaluated. Meditation is silent and inward; even though one can perhaps measure the length of time spent, only the practitioners themselves (and perhaps a supernatural being like King Yama) can determine whether the meditation is performed properly. But chanting a scripture is easily measurable. It can be broken into lengths of time, or number of chapters, pages, or characters, and a second party can assess accuracy and immediately detect any mistakes. For this reason, chanting tests became a method to judge who could enter the clergy. In this chapter I argue that, unlike other Buddhist practices, chanting provided a means to cultivate Buddhist knowledge that could be objectively evaluated. This is most clear through monastic education and ordination exams. And at this initial examination stage, rather than focusing on the meanings of the
texts, chanting served to train a necessary skill: rote memorization. To illustrate this, I will first discuss Buddhist education in the early Tang, as well as the role of memorization in Buddhist education and practice. Finally I will look at records of ordination examinations and other accounts to examine the testing and assessment methods.

Buddhist Education

Is Education Meant to Standardize or Distinguish?

Thomas H. C. Lee’s book *Education in Traditional China: A History* takes the view that in pre-modern societies, “education” was a way to train people in conformity to shared sets of societal values.\(^{118}\) Literati education in China was no different, and indeed the contents of basic educational texts such as primers transmitted common cultural and moral knowledge. Scholars of Buddhism, however, have often placed emphasis on how learning a specific Buddhist corpus, one separate from the curriculum necessitated by imperial examinations, served as a means to help Buddhists distinguish themselves from other societal groups. In a seminal paper on Buddhist education, Erik Zürcher defined education as “the systematic transfer of specific skills such as literacy; and, as a result of this transfer, a special group forms whose possession of those skills distinguishes it from the rest of the community.”\(^{119}\) And more recently John Kieschnick took idealization and

self-definition as the central theme of his 1997 book *The Eminent Monk*, noting that monks revealed their ideal self-image as not only distinct from non-Buddhists, laypeople, and other Buddhist schools in reference to the Buddhist textual corpus they studied, but also through distinctions in dress code, eating habits, and supernatural abilities.

To emphasize the complex role of education in literati and Buddhist contexts, education can be a vehicle for both standardization and specialization – a means to both unify and isolate. Within the groups aiming to distinguish themselves, a common identity was cultivated through shared practices and curriculum. Furthermore, the objective of standardization or specialization also depended on the stage and objective of that education, and both objectives can be accomplished simultaneously. Training in the basic stages often serves to cultivate skills necessary to function at certain levels of society, such as literacy, familiarity with core cultural ideas, and moral and behavioral patterns, promoting conformity with certain groups and separation from others. At more advanced stages in the education process, when the objective of the learning is to pass a general examination – one that is not tailored to an individual student – the result of the study is still often standardizing. Although there were opportunities for specialization during Buddhist education, especially post-ordination when one could cultivate particular skills or texts, would-be monks training in the Six Dynasties and Tang promoted cultivation and standardization of memorization skills, something they had in common with so-called Confucian literati.

Buddhist Education in the Six Dynasties and Tang

I define Buddhist education in medieval China as processes leading towards familiarity and understanding of Buddhist texts and topics, and toward Buddhist-related goals, such as ordination, cultivating concentration in meditation, developing a fuller understanding of why to keep precepts, etc. In addition to the Buddhist education taking place, the scholastic environment of Buddhist institutions could be very broad, and they often encompassed literati education as well. Many young students and scholars also spent time in Buddhist monasteries studying secular texts and the Classics for imperial examinations, but these instances lack an identifiable Buddhist element in the content or method of education and are therefore not “Buddhist education.”

That being said, what were the contents and methods of the educational activities occurring in monasteries, and who was learning them? Monasteries often doubled as education centers for children and men. Although some students entered the clergy

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120 Broad and diverse learning was not just present in monasteries. Take for example the sixth century scholar Ma Shu who lectured at court on Vimalakīrti, Laozi, and the Book of Changes. See Lee, 372.
121 Ibid, 329.
122 Zürcher, 323. As for their ages, vinaya texts vary on when a child can enter into the monastery as a novice to begin training for ordination – the Dharmaguptakavinaya says no younger than eleven years old, and the Mahāsāṃghikavinaya says thirteen, but will allow boys as young as six to enter as monastic helpers called “crow chasers” to perform chores around the monastery (Zürcher, 307). In practice, though, the vinaya recommendations were not always strictly followed. A record of a chanting examination from the Fozutongji 佛祖統紀 notes a boy of twelve passing an ordination examination by chanting the Lotus Sūtra – a text which Zürcher notes could take talented monks a year to learn. See Zürcher, 314, and Michihata Ryōshū 道端良秀, Tōdai bunkyōshi no kenkyū 唐代佛教史の研究 (Kyōto: Hōzōkan 法蔵館, 1967), p. 34. This boy would either have to be extremely talented or would have had to start his monastic education before eleven years old. There appears to be no upper age limit for ordination, though, as
with prior literati educations, this scholastic function of monasteries could also benefit those who did not have access to a local school or a tutor at home. Buddhist and Daoist temples occasionally served as study retreats for scholars with literati training who did not aspire to become monks. The temples provided space, resources (meals, books donated by other scholars), and even stipends for independent scholars to conduct research, not limited to Buddhist or Daoist topics. There is also abundant evidence for temples and monasteries providing basic education for students, such as literacy training using non-Buddhist materials like the *Qianzi wen* 千字文 and other primers, examples of which can be found at centers such as Dunhuang. Nunneries provided similar educational opportunities for girls and young women, although as Kathryn Tsai notes, many of these young women entered nunneries with prior education, having grown up in upper class families.

The main textual contents of Buddhist education at a monastery included Buddhist sūtras and vinaya, and the predominant vehicle for learning them was memorization. One reason that memorization was stressed as a learning method in monastic education was because it was already a normalized method of learning outside the Buddhist monastery.

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the *Biaozhiji* 表制集 notes individuals in their forties and fifties sitting for examinations (Michihata, 31-2).

123 Zürcher, 301-2.
both in India and in China. As Wendy Doniger notes, in pre-Buddhist India memorization was essential: "The Mahabharata (13.24.70) groups people who read and recite the Veda from a written text (rather than memorize it and keep it only in their heads) with corrupters and sellers of the Veda as people heading for hell."\footnote{Wendy Doniger, \textit{The Hindus: An Alternative History} (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009), pp. 201-202.} In China as well, literati education depended on memorization in some form. The most popular texts for memorization by children in upper class households were the 	extit{Odes}, the 	extit{Analects}, and the \textit{Filial Piety}, and especially in the imperial households, girls were not exempted from this kind of learning. The \textit{Hou han shu} mentions princesses as young as nine and twelve displaying their recitation abilities of certain key texts.\footnote{Lee, 366.} Many monasteries possessed copies of these core texts too, indicating that monks and novices at the very least had access to them, even if they were not memorized as rigorously as the Buddhist material. Zürcher notes that these literati texts were studied at the monastery from the 4th century AD.\footnote{Zürcher, 314.} Non-monastic men put this knowledge to use in the various forms of the imperial examinations that existed from the Han onwards, and monks put it to use connecting with literati audiences.

The Buddhist material consisted of memorizing full or partial \textit{sūtras}, as well as learning \textit{vinaya} rules. Before ordination, novices were supposed to be trained in these two aspects with two teachers, though this was not always strictly enforced in Chinese Buddhism. They studied with a preceptor (\textit{heshang}和尚) to learn the \textit{vinaya} disciplinary

\footnote{\textsuperscript{128} Lee, 366.} \\
\footnote{\textsuperscript{129} Zürcher, 314.}
rules, and an ācārya (asheli 阿闍梨) for texts.\textsuperscript{130} Learners were assigned texts by their teachers and they presumably had more freedom in choosing and learning texts after ordination.\textsuperscript{131} The Lotus Sūtra, along with the Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra, were undoubtedly the most popular scriptures taken up by aspiring monks.\textsuperscript{132} In a sense, Buddhist education in texts echoed literati education: both groups memorized specific quantities of specific texts, and both endured evaluation of their progress by their teachers and often through official channels.

Memorization

How, then, did medieval Chinese Buddhists commit text to memory? In elucidating the factors that facilitate memorization of classics and poetry, Christopher Nugent mentions rhyme and familiar content - stock cultural motifs that the learner might already know from auxiliary reading or oral tradition.\textsuperscript{133} However, Buddhist sūtras are not poetry and literati classics, the focal points of Nugent's book. In sūtras there were certainly sections of rhymed verse, repeated or parallel phrases and sections, and other features that could act as mnemonic devices, but the majority of the sūtra text was not rhymed, and the motifs, parables, and sometimes even the key terms contained in them may not necessarily have been familiar to the memorizer. In exploring how Buddhist sūtras were

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid, 307-8.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid, 314.
\textsuperscript{132} Zürcher, 313-314.
memorized for chanting, we perhaps need to draw on some more diverse theories and methods of memory. In this section I contend that aspiring monks did not necessarily memorize based on an understanding of the contents of the scripture. Instead, it is more likely they memorized based on the sound and rote aloud repetition.

In discussing the memorization methods of Tibetan monks, Georges Dreyfus draws on theories that establish two kinds of memory: implicit memory, used for motor skills and other activities learned by practice, and semantic memory, used to remember information by drawing on its meaning, relationships to other concepts, and one’s understanding of it. While semantic memory may help one to memorize something in a shorter amount of time, implicit memory, developed through countless repetitions, helps one retain that skill longer. This is because it is much more difficult to master, and so the memorizer works harder to keep it in their memory.\footnote{134} And in fact, in Tibetan monasteries, it is implicit memory that is constantly exercised in memorizing Buddhist \textit{sūtras}. Monks memorize scripture based entirely on the sound and nothing else. The goal is for the \textit{sūtra} to become so ingrained that they can continuously chant without thinking about it.\footnote{135} Dreyfus notes that in his own practice and in practices he observed that memorizers were encouraged to add a melody to what they were learning, likely to add structure or pattern to the text to help with implicit memory.\footnote{136}

\footnotetext[134]{Georges Dreyfus, \textit{The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: The Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 93-95.}
\footnotetext[135]{Ibid, 94-97. He notes that they can carry on chanting whilst doing other activities, giving the example of monks who falling asleep while chanting but continue to carry on the chant for several minutes into their naps before the teacher would notice and wake them up.}
\footnotetext[136]{Ibid, 96-97.}
Exploring how music is memorized provides us with a helpful way to think about how long texts such as śūtras might have been memorized. In terms of the distinction made by Dreyfus, memorizing music can rely on semantic memory to the extent that musical phrases can have relationships to other phrases within the piece. However, the bulk of the memorization work comes from implicit memory – motor skills and muscle memory gained from multiple repetitions. Roger Chaffin notes that in order to deliberately memorize music two kinds of memories must be formed: one by associative chains, meaning that one needs to start at the beginning to recall the part; and the other is “content addressable,” meaning that one does not need surrounding associations to recall it. The former seems like it might rely on semantic memory based on relationship and cues, but for the most part, the association is made automatically, by habit. It develops spontaneously while learning. The latter is learned deliberately by muscle memory. In his discussion on how to memorize qin music, Sun Zhuo presents a related idea, that music is memorized by “chunking,” breaking down the music into “meaningful [sonic] units that can be retrieved through cues.”

Even if monks in the past chanted without blatant musical cues that could aid in memorization, each syllable still had a particular sound quality by virtue of being made

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138 Ibid, 559-560.
140 As Chinese Buddhist sutra chanting is done in modern contexts: without changes in rhythm to structure phrases (continuous pace is kept with the aid of a wooden fish), without fixed melody (when melody is present, it is improvised), and even without tonal features of the syllables.
up of phonemes. Oral muscle movements for producing particular strings of sounds could be learned and memorized, and patterns in the sounds would begin to emerge. Thus musical memorization techniques such as chunking are still applicable for something that is not obviously musical, especially when the text contains features like repetition and set phrases that become habitual to the reciter.

Repetition, set phrases, and other so-called “oral features” can also act as tools for the above kinds of memorization. Scholars often emphasize these oral features as clues that a text was composed orally, sometimes in a non-literate culture, before it was written down, but they have also noted that these features can work as mnemonics. Summarizing from Walter Ong’s book on the topic, Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World, works produced from oral traditions are “(1) additive rather than subordinative, (2) aggregative rather than analytic, and (3) redundant or ‘copious’.” This means that (1) in the narrative, grammatical constructions tend to be simple and clauses are linked by repeating conjunctions rather than being organized through subordination; (2) they tend to employ stock phrases, epithets, parallel terms, and other formulaic aspects; and (3) they tend to be repetitive, so as not to tax the working memories of the listeners.

141 This is thought to be the case for Buddhist sūtras and Indian Vedas, though some scholars have differing opinions in the case of the Vedas. See Donald Lopez, “Authority and Orality in the Mahāyāna,” Numen 42:1 (1995), pp. 21-47.
143 Ibid, 36-40. Also see Lopez, 30. Later studies have shown there to be many counterexamples to the dichotomy set up by Ong in specific cultural or textual contexts, but it still stands that these features appear in Buddhist texts. See Lourens de Vries, “Local Oral-Written Interfaces and the Nature, Transmission, Performance, and Translation of Biblical Texts,” in James Maxey and Ernst Wendland, eds., Translating
Though during the recitation of a Buddhist sūtra there was not necessarily any audience, the point still stands: there are specific features of texts that can make them easier to listen to, recite, and remember. In some cases these features may have aided in understanding the text, but in all cases they manifest as recognizable and patterned sound features.

Lopez has made a good start for Buddhist studies, but the topic of textual orality and memorization has been more widely explored in Biblical studies. A paper by Lourens de Vries likewise highlights the use of oral features as mnemonic aids for the oral transmission of the Bible. These features include, but are not limited to “chain words, parallelism, epithets, stock phrases, chiasmus, [and] acrostics.” De Vries argues that these kinds of features appear in the later-transcribed texts of cultures with memorization at the center. They appear when the order of the words matters to the practitioners. He shows this with an example of an oral society in Papua New Guinea he spent time with: the group was not concerned with exact wording or memorization, so many of these oral features were missing from their transmissions of the Bible, and the wording was

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145 He also asserts that these kinds of features tend to disappear from writing as new technologies for textual preservation appear, such as writing, books, and even computers. See De Vries, 82.
Many Buddhist texts are rife with precisely the kinds of oral features that Lopez, Ong, and De Vries assert help with memorization.

These kinds of features and the memorization skills they assist point toward a privileging of the sound over the meaning of the text. But could Buddhists in Medieval China really have memorized in this manner, or are these features just remnants of the language the sūtra was translated from? Below I will show that there is also evidence pointing towards the former: when the goal was recitation, Chinese Buddhists tended to focus on the sound.

Returning to the story of King Yama testing monks in the afterlife from the beginning of this chapter, we have our first example of Buddhists being told, if only in a fictional context, that understanding and explaining the meaning of the scriptures they chanted was not necessary – only the words themselves need to be preserved. However, these were not the only Buddhist texts being chanted with an incomplete understanding of the meaning. Dhāraṇī and mantras were (and still are) chanted often with only a vague idea of the purported effect, and both these and sūtras were memorized and tested for accuracy – but generally not interpretation – in ordination examinations during the early Tang.

There were some rare translated dhāraṇī and mantras and some commentaries on the meanings of syllables in dhāraṇī, but for the most part they remained untranslated strings of syllables meant to reflect a real or imitated Indic language. Dhāraṇī were

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146 Ibid, 84-5.
147 Paul Copp, *The Body Incantory: Spells and the Ritual Imagination in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), pp. 4-9. For the dhāraṇī that had commentaries, he notes that relatively few people had access to them. Joshua Capitanio has also recently written on the use of transcribed Sanskrit dhāraṇī and
valued for their sound and purported efficacy. On the topic of dhāraṇī, the Tang monk Huilin 慧纓 wrote in his Yiqie jìng yīn yì 一切經音義 (completed 807) that one should pay attention to the sound and not seek the meaning. He states “[one should] only take its sounds, not seek for the meaning of the graphs 但取其聲不求字義.” And it was not just because dhāraṇī and mantras were short that they could be memorized without taking into account the meaning. In fact, certain ones were long enough that they could match or surpass short sūtras in length. For example, the Śūraṅgama mantra 梟厳呪/佛頂呪 is longer than the Heart Sūtra 心經. When practitioners did understand dhāraṇī and mantras as having meaning, it generally was not a word for word or character for character literal meaning, but rather a meaning or effect of the dhāraṇī as a whole, such as a use for dispelling demons or increasing benefits. So for most people, the meaning was not derived from the semantic aspects of the words because they could not understand them. It instead came from the practice of intoning the phrases with an imagined meaning in mind.

When it comes to sūtras, we find cases of individuals memorizing these in Sanskrit rather than Chinese for ordination examinations. In a record of a Tang

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148 T2128, 366. This is Huilin’s comment on the term dhāraṇī 陀羅尼 from the Sūtra for Benevolent Kings 仁王護國般若波羅蜜多經. He follows it with a list of difficult terms from the dhāraṇī and notes on their pronunciations.
examination in 767, four of the five examinees chanted in Sanskrit for all or part of their exams:\textsuperscript{149}: 

行者畢數延年五十五(無州貫誦梵本賢護三昧經一部并誦諸陀羅尼請法名惠達住莊嚴寺) 
The acolyte Bi Shuyan, age 55 (of unknown origin, chanted the Sanskrit version of one section of the \textit{Bhadrapālasamādhisūtra} and chanted many \textit{dhāraṇī}, was given the dharma name Huida and was placed in Zhuangyan Temple). 

行者康守忠年四十三(無州貫誦經一百二十巻并誦諸陀羅尼請法名惠觀住東京廣福寺大弘教三藏毘盧舍那院) 
The acolyte Kang Shouzhong, age 43 (of unknown origin, chanted 120 pages of a \textit{sūtra} and chanted many \textit{dhāraṇī}, was given the dharma name Huiguan and was placed in the eastern capital’s Guangfu temple, at the Vairocana Institute for the Great Teaching of the Tripiṭaka). 

行者畢越延年四十三(無州貫誦梵本楞嚴經一部誦金剛般若經并諸陀羅尼請法名惠日住莊嚴寺) 
The acolyte Bi Yueyan, age 43 (of unknown origin, chanted the Sanskrit version of one section of the \textit{Laṅkāvatārasūtra}, chanted the \textit{Diamond Sūtra}, and many \textit{dhāraṇī}, was given the dharma name Huiri and placed in Zhuangyan Temple).\textsuperscript{150} 

童子石璨年十三(無州貫誦梵本大毘鳴孔雀王經一部誦隨求政羅尼呪并經請法名惠光住西明寺) 
The child acolyte Shi Huican, age 13 (of unknown origin, chanted the Sanskrit version of one section of the \textit{Great Peacock King Sūtra}, chanted the \textit{Great Protectress Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī} and the \textit{sūtra}, was given the dharma name Huiguang and placed in Ximing Temple). 

童子羅詮年十五(無州貫誦梵本出生無邊門經誦隨求陀羅尼咒并經請法名惠俊住西明寺) 
The child acolyte Luo Quan, age 15 (of unknown origin, chanted the Sanskrit version of the Birth of the \textit{Infinite Portal Sūtra}, chanted the \textit{Great Protectress Mahāpratisarā Dhāraṇī} and the \textit{sūtra}, was given the dharma name Huijun and placed in Ximing Temple). 

\textsuperscript{149} The second of the five is not listed as chanting in Sanskrit, but it is also not specified in the text which \textit{sūtra} he chanted. 

\textsuperscript{150} Bi Yueyan appears to be the younger brother of the first person on this list, Bi Shuyan.
右特進試鴻臚卿大興善寺三藏沙門大廣智不空奏。前件行者童子等。並素稟調柔。器性淳礭服勤經詠誦真言。志期出家精修報國。今因降誕之日請度為僧。各配住前件寺。冀福資聖壽地久天長。

As for the [people listed on the] right, I, the specially promoted Minister of great announcements, the Tripitaka šramana of Daxingshan Temple, he of great wide wisdom, Amoghavajra, recommend [them]. The above acolytes are naturally endowed with flexibility, they are innately honest and resolute, they diligently obey the scriptures and the laws, and they chant the true words. They aspired to leave the home and intensively practice loyalty to the state. Now, because it is the anniversary of the descent, I request to ordain them as monks. Each has been matched with the above-mentioned temples. I hope for good fortune, resources, and wisdom lasting as long as Heaven and Earth.

Did these individuals understand what they were chanting? There is considerable debate as to whether most Chinese acolytes and monks genuinely learned the vocabulary and grammar of Sanskrit or other Indic or Central Asian languages. Since 1956 many scholars have latched onto an idea posited by Robert van Gulik, and later promoted by Robert Sharf, that knowledge of the pronunciation of the Siddham script was generally mistaken for understanding of Sanskrit, but in fact Sanskrit grammar was not usually an object of education. Some scholars, such as Teng Weijen, more recently have disputed this, stating that van Gulik's and Scharf's assessments are inaccurate, and knowledge of Sanskrit grammar was likely more widespread than they assumed, citing writings on Sanskrit grammar transmitted by Xuanzang’s (玄奘, 602-664) disciple Kuiji 窺基.

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151 The Buddha’s birthday.
152 T2120, 835-6. This passage is from the Biao zhi ji (Collected Documents 表制集) compiled by Amoghavajra’s (Bukong 不空) disciple Yuanzhao 圓照 in the 8th century. The contents preserve memorials and other writings by and about Amoghavajra.
153 Transliterated as xitan 悉譏.
However, the evidence seems to be stacked against Teng. Scholars have suggested that the majority of monks who knew both Middle Chinese and an Indic or Central Asian language well enough to produce skillful translations were foreigners to China.\textsuperscript{156} There were certainly a handful of elite Chinese monks who learned Sanskrit grammar,\textsuperscript{157} but the number of people who left writings on these topics is miniscule compared to the total number of people who were studying Buddhism fervently, both as laypeople and as monks, a number that reached into the hundreds of thousands.\textsuperscript{158} And while vocabulary relating to Sanskrit grammatical processes sometimes appears in translations and


\textsuperscript{157} Chinese monks who knew Sanskrit include Dao’an 道安, given his thought on translation methods. See So, 56. Also, Xuanzang 玄奘 and Yijing 義淨, who both travelled to India and both left writings on Sanskrit grammar – though Xuanzang did so indirectly, through his biographers and his disciple Kuiji. See Saroj Kumar Chaudhuri, “Siddham in China and Japan,” in \textit{Sino-Platonic Papers} 88 (Dec. 1998), pp. 29-30; Teng, 174-5. Also see his book on the same topic: Saroj Kumar Chaudhuri, \textit{Sanskrit in China and Japan} (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 2011). Non-Chinese monks who transmitted information on Sanskrit grammar in China include the Sogdian monk Fazang 法藏 (643-712) who also left writings in Chinese about Sanskrit grammar that others may have read. See Chaudhuri, 31. Chinese individuals who wrote on Sanskrit phonetics (explanations of the Siddham script and guides to pronunciation of Sanskrit syllables) but not grammar include Emperor Wu of Liang (464-549), who wrote on this topic in a commentary to the \textit{Mahāparinirvāṇa Sutra}, Amoghavajra (Bukong 不空), and the monk Zhiguang 智廣 (d. 806), who wrote a primer detailing how to pronounce Siddham letters called \textit{A Record of Siddham Letters} (Xitan zi ji 悉曇字記) that is preserved in T2132. See Chaudhuri, 28-34.

\textsuperscript{158} Zürcher, 306. He notes that there were 260,500 monks and nuns forced to leave the clergy during a repression of Buddhism in 845, and that this figure only includes fully ordained monks and nuns. If acolytes and other non-ordained members of the sangha were included, this number would only increase. Of course, not all of these monks and nuns were ordained through chanting examinations; many also entered the clergy through paying fees. In 757 10,000 people were ordained through payment. See Michihata, 49.
commentaries, there is really no way to evaluate whether this knowledge was widespread among more than the select few Chinese Buddhists. The information on grammar and vocabulary necessary to help individuals chanting in Sanskrit to understand what they were saying does not appear to have proliferated in this period.

Moreover, the monk Yijing (who did know Sanskrit) stated that the language was rarely transmitted in China – it did not go beyond certain translators. He wrote:

然則來者梵巋罕談漓近傳經但云初七漓非不知也漓無財知之重。So from ancient times onwards, translators rarely discussed the rules of Sanskrit, and nowadays when they transmit the scriptures they only mention the first seven. It’s not that they do not know, [but because] it is not beneficial, they do not discuss it. Now I hope to comprehensively study Sanskrit because it is important to alleviate the troubles of the translation.

He notes that he hopes more people will endeavor to learn it, but the short explanation he provides to help posterity only states some basic information about noun declension, numerical categories, and verb conjugation; it is not actually very detailed at all.

Furthermore, the general attitude towards learning foreign languages was not always as

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159 Teng, 175. He notes that the terms chiyeshi 持業釋 (a type of compound term in which the first element describes the second one) and liuheshi 六合釋 (the six types of compound terms) appear in a hundred works. I think, though, that it is perhaps a bit incautious to make judgements about knowledge of a language based on the appearance of one or two terms.
160 This perhaps refers to seven noun cases (omitting the vocative case). Also see Chaudhuri, 30.
161 T2125, p. 228.
162 Chaudhuri, 30. This seems to be the case for all Chinese records of Sanskrit grammar from this time. Yijing’s, in fact, seems to be the most complete. Even Kuiji’s, the one Teng uses in his argument, is described by Teng as “confusing, and, at times, laughable from a Sanskritist’s point of view.” See Teng, 175. Perhaps the intricacies of Sanskrit grammar were better conveyed orally at the time, but we have no way to determine this.
open as Yijing’s. In his *Family Instructions for the Yan Clan*, the distinguished literatus and lay Buddhist Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531–591) commented on an acquaintance who urged his son to learn the Xianbei\(^{163}\) language:

齊朝有一士大夫，嘗謂吾曰：「我有一兒，年已十七，頗曉書疏，教其鮮卑語及彈琵琶，稍欲通解，以此伏事公卿，無不寵愛，亦要事也。」吾時俛而不答。異哉，此人之教子也！若由此業，自致卿相，亦不願汝曹為之。

During the Qi dynasty there was an official who once said to me: “I have a seventeen-year-old son who excels at book-learning. We are teaching him the Xianbei language and how to play the pipa. We’d really like him to understand it. He can serve officials this way. We are always doting on him about this important matter.” At that time I lowered my head and did not answer. How strange, what these people are teaching their son! If by this way one must strive to become an official, then I wouldn’t wish you to do it!\(^{164}\)

This atmosphere paired with the rarity of circulating texts on the language does not paint a particularly optimistic picture.\(^{165}\) Therefore it is reasonable to think that in cases of testing acolytes who were native speakers of middle Chinese, *sūtras* in Sanskrit were chanted like *dhāraṇī* – in shorter sections, and perhaps with a larger imagined meaning, but with words memorized by rote, according to sound only.

For *sūtras* chanted in Chinese translation, acolytes and monks certainly would have had a better chance at comprehension. However, this information was not necessary for chanting examinations. In order to pass an ordination exam in the early Tang, one

\(^{163}\) During the Tang, this was a language of a formerly nomadic group to China’s northwest. It is said to be either a Turkic or Mongolic language, but scholars dispute this. The Xianbei Tuoba 拓拔 clan also established and ruled over the Northern Wei (386-535), so their history in China is particularly long.


\(^{165}\) Although, Abramson notes that rare exceptions were made for Sanskrit, and certain writers went out of their way to distinguish Sanskrit from other “barbarian” languages, see Abramson, 159.
needed to accurately chant the text; explanations were usually not required.\textsuperscript{166} The examination itself was constructed in such a way that knowing the meaning of the text did not matter.

Ordination examinations for Buddhists likely stemmed from the government suspecting potential monks of avoiding conscription and taxes, rather than from existing Buddhists feeling a need to inspect the quality of people wishing to joining their ranks.\textsuperscript{167} We can see this through records of chanting examinations and memorials that mention examination requirements that appear beginning in the Tang.\textsuperscript{168} The requirements generally consisted of numbers of pages; the specific texts and the methods one used to learn them were most often left up to the examinee.\textsuperscript{169} The number of pages varied, often mirroring the political situation. For example, during Tang emperor Suzong’s reign in 757, the requirement to pass an ordination examination was to chant 700 pages, but the next year the requirement was relaxed to 500 pages or the payment of a fee – once instability had been resolved after a rebellion, the military could afford to let more people enter the sangha.\textsuperscript{170} Page requirements also reflected local situations as well: during emperor Jingzong’s reign in 825, a notice was issued to allow ordination of monks by

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{166} While we cannot know what Buddhist sūtra chanting sounded like in the Tang, if it was anything like it is in modern times, prosodic features may have also impeded understanding. Sūtras are generally punctuated now, but during the chanting, that punctuation and any normally-occurring prosodic differences (natural pauses between phrases, shortening of certain syllables in compounds, etc.) are entirely absent. It is chanted as one continuous string of rhythmically equal syllables.
\item \textsuperscript{167} Michihata, 33.
\item \textsuperscript{168} The earliest mention seems to be a sentence about 150 people taking an examination to become monks in 658, during the reign of Gaozong. This is preserved in Da Tang da ci en si Sanzang fashi zhuan 大唐大慈恩寺三藏法師傳 (T2053, 275). See Michihata, 35.
\item \textsuperscript{169} And likely their instructor, if they had one.
\item \textsuperscript{170} Michihata, 35-6.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
chanting 150 pages and ordination of nuns for 100 pages. In this case, the particular temple holding the examination was decrepit and the current monks were both old and substandard, so new monks were immediately needed and the requirements were eased.\textsuperscript{171} At the other end of the spectrum, at points under the reigns of Daizong and Wenzong, a 1,000 page requirement was issued to deliberately make it harder to obtain ordination.\textsuperscript{172}

However, chanting from memory remained the default examination type. If the requirements were changed, it seems to be specific to particular ordination occasions, so they were not enforced on a large-scale.\textsuperscript{173} Even in the Song dynasty, when the ordination examinations had expanded to a seven part ordeal, chanting still remained at the heart.\textsuperscript{174} This is because the method of evaluating memorized texts was straightforward and quantifiable.

\textsuperscript{171} Ibid, 37.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid, 37, Zürcher, 312. To demonstrate the difficulty of these page requirements, Christopher Nugent notes that a \textit{sūtra} page contained about 500 characters in estimate. So 150 pages was approximately 75,000 characters, and 1,000 pages was approximately 500,000 characters. See Nugent, 111. For comparison, he notes on pp. 91-93 that a basic \textit{mingjing} examination, consisting of the \textit{Analects} and the \textit{Filial Piety} plus two classics of the examinee’s choosing (either a long one and a short one, or two medium ones) totaled almost 100,000 characters of memorization. The longer \textit{mingjing} examination, consisting of the two base texts plus five classics of the examinee’s choosing, totaled approximately 500,000 characters. Zürcher notes that the \textit{Lotus Sūtra} totaled about 300 pages, and that it took gifted monks about a year to memorize the entire text. See Zürcher, 312-314. It seems that the requirements were also not standardized, as records of ordination in \textit{Biao zhi ji} seem to indicate wide variations even on the same ordination occasions.

\textsuperscript{173} For example, on rare occasions during the Tang, other requirements were included in addition to chanting to test other monastic qualities, such as meditation, wisdom, and disciplinary behavior under Xuanzong (see Zürcher, 312); reading (for literacy) under Wenzong’s reign (see Michihata, 37); and a written test on \textit{sūtra}, \textit{sāstra}, and \textit{vinaya} instituted in 773 under the reign of Daizong (see Michihata, 36).

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid, 38.
There are several examples from non-Buddhist contexts that state precisely how memory was tested. Take for example the account of Zhang Xun 張巡 and Yu Song 于嵩:

巡長七尺餘，鬚髯若神。嘗見嵩讀《漢書》，謂嵩曰：『何為久讀此？』嵩曰：『未熟也。』巡曰：『吾於書讀不過三遍，終身不忘也。』因誦嵩所讀書，盡卷不錯一字。嵩驚，以為巡偶熟此卷，因亂抽他帙以試，無不盡然。嵩又取架上諸書，試以問巡，巡應口誦無疑。嵩從巡久，亦不見巡常讀書也。為文操紙筆立書，未嘗起草。

[Zhang] Xun was more than seven *chi* tall, and he had a beard like an immortal. He once saw [Yu] Song reading the *Hanshu*, and he said to Song: “Why have you been reading this for such a long time?” Song said: “I do not yet know it.” Xun said: “I do not read books more than three times, [but] for my whole life I never forget [them].” Thereupon he chanted the book that Song had been reading, and for the whole scroll he did not miss a single character. Song was astonished; he thought Xun must have coincidentally known this [particular] scroll, so he then randomly selected another book to test him, but everything was [still] completely correct! Song again fetched several books from the shelf to test Xun, and Xun answered by chanting aloud with no mistakes. Song followed Xun for a long time, and he still did not often see Xun reading books. And for essays, he [just] grasped a paper and brush and immediately wrote, he never once made a draft.175

This account is significant for several reasons. First, it provides insight as to what it meant to “know” or “be familiar with” a text in the early Tang: being able to recite it from memory. Although it takes him much longer than Zhang Xun, Yu Song here is also reading the text with the goal of internalizing it in his memory – as he himself states, he spends long hours studying because he does not yet know it. Once Zhang Xun memorizes a text after just a few read-throughs, he is considered to know it and be familiar with it.

As Nugent also points out, the words are memorized independent of their content –

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175 From the *Latter Preface to the Biography of Zhang Zhongcheng* 張中丞傳後敘 by Han Yu 韓愈, in Ma Qichang 馬其昶, ed. *Han Changli wenji jiaozhu* 韓昌黎文旅校注, vol. 2 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1987), p. 77. This is my own translation, but it is also translated in Nugent, 82-3.
Zhang Xun’s knowledge of the texts is tested multiple times by Yu Song following along with his recitation to confirm that he speaks the right characters in the right sequence.\textsuperscript{176}

When knowledge is equated with precision of memory, the way to evaluate knowledge is by testing accuracy; testing interpretation is secondary.\textsuperscript{177}

Moreover, we have clues that this method of evaluation was applied in Buddhist contexts as well. When tested by King Yama, Zhao Wenchang 趙文昌 was tested according to this procedure:

隋開皇十一年。內太府寺丞趙文昌身忽暴死。於數日唯心上暖。家人不敢入殮。後時得語。眷屬怪問。文昌說云。吾死已有人引至閻羅王所。語昌云。汝一生已來作何福業。昌答云。家貧無物可營功德。唯專心誦持金剛般若。王聞此語合掌敘膝。讃言。善哉善哉。汝能受持般若。功德甚大。不可思議。王語所執之人。好須勘當。莫令錯將人來。使人少時之間。勘當知錯。即報王言。此人實錯。計活更合二十餘年。王聞此語。即語使人。汝引文昌向經藏內。取金剛般若經將來。使人受教。即引文昌。向西行五里。得到藏所。見數十間屋。甚精華麗。其中經卷皆悉滿滿。金軸寶帙莊嚴極好。文昌見已善心彌發。一心合掌閉目信手抽取一卷。大小似舊誦者。文昌忙怕。恐非般若。求使換。使人不肯。見及題云。功德之中最為第一。昌即開看乃是金剛般若。文昌歡喜將至王所。令一人執卷在西。昌令東立。面向經卷。遣昌誦經。使人勘試。一字不遺。皆通利。時王放昌還家。仍約束昌雲。汝勤受持此經勿令廢忘。令一人引昌從南門出。

During the eleventh year of the Kaihuang reign in the Sui dynasty (591 CE), Zhao Wenchang, the assistant to the inner treasurer, died a sudden death. After several days,

\textsuperscript{176} Nugent, 83. He also finds this to be comparable with medieval European memory techniques in which words were memorized independent of their meanings.

\textsuperscript{177} For several more accounts of individuals whose remarkable memories are tested by people following along with the texts (especially poetry and unknown texts), see Nugent, 82-87. Also see Victor H. Mair, “Lay Students and the Making of Written Vernacular Narrative: An Inventory of Tun-huang Manuscripts,” \textit{Chinoperl Papers} 10 (1981): 5–96. Mair’s catalogue provides notes to five hundred ninety-nine hand-written Dunhuang manuscripts and is essential to understanding the practices surrounding chanted and recited texts there. While we do not know whether these texts were specifically used for examination purposes, he notes that there is evidence of copying or following along and making notes on texts while a second party recited them, indicated by phrases such as “聽” “隨聽” or “隨聽記” in the colophons. This catalogue is now also available through the International Dunhuang Project Database at <http://idp.bl.uk/database/oo_cat.a4d?shortref=Mair_1981>.
his heart was still warm, so his family did not dare put him in a coffin. Later he was able to speak, and his family members asked him about it in amazement. Wenchang said: "When I died, there was someone who led me to King Yama's realm." King Yama said to me (Wenchang): "During your life, what good works did you do?" Wenchang said: "My family was poor and we had no goods with which to build up our merit. I only concentrated on chanting the Diamond Sūtra." The king heard these words and clasped his hands together and sat cross-legged. In praise, he said: "Wonderful, wonderful! You were able to uphold the Diamond Sūtra. Your merit is inconceivably great." Yama said to the men that were holding [him]: "We should verify this. I do not want to have made a mistake bringing a person [here]." After that, he ordered a messenger to verify if there had been a mistake. [The person] promptly reported to the king: "This person (Wenchang) is indeed a mistake. I have calculated that his life still has more than twenty years altogether." The King hear this and said to the messenger: "You should take Wenchang to the library to take out the Diamond Sūtra." The messenger received the instruction and immediately led Wenchang westwards, walking about five li. When they arrived at the library, he saw that it consisted of several tens of rooms, all very ornate and beautiful. Inside it was completely filled with scriptures with golden and bejeweled covers, all completely ornate. When Wenchang saw this, he exuded a virtuous heart, and single-heartedly he clasped his hands together and closed his eyes. [Relying on faith] he selected a single volume, about the same size as the one he used to chant (during his life). Wenchang was nervous and feared that it was not the Diamond Sūtra. He asked the messenger if he could switch it, and the messenger said he could not. Then he looked at what the title said: The Highest among Merits. Then he opened it to look, and thus it was the Diamond Sūtra. Wenchang was pleased and they went [back] to where the King was. [The King] made one person hold the scripture in the west, while Wenchang stood in the east, facing the scripture[-holder]. He requested for Wenchang to chant the scripture, while the messenger verified that not a single character had been omitted, and furthermore that there was no hindrance [in his recitation]. When the King was about to release Wenchang to return home, he still cautioned him, saying: "You have diligently upheld this scripture. Do not abandon or forget it." Then he made a person lead him out through the south gate.178

Here, when King Yama verifies Wenchang’s claim to have upheld the Diamond Sūtra, he commands him to stand on one side of the space and chant from memory. Meanwhile, a person on the other side of the space follows along with the text Wenchang selected, collating the chanting with the text, and confirming accuracy. A perfect recitation, as

178 T2122, 875c-876a. The story does not just end there: on his way out, Wenchang runs into the famous Chinese figures Emperor Wu of Northern Zhou and the Qin general Bai Qi, both suffering in Hell.
Wenchang demonstrates, does not leave out a single syllable of the text and is “unobstructed,” here understood to mean fluent, without hesitations or memory lapses.

In a *samgha* whose ranks increasingly included literati members and whose libraries served as study spaces for monks and literati alike, we can infer that learning and testing methods crossed over as well. Because the usual testing methods did not include interpretation, one could, in theory, pass without understanding the text, having memorized it entirely according to sound and vocal muscle memory.

Chanting in general was not about understanding; even already-ordained experts in [chanting] the scriptures, *jingshi* 經師, from *Gaoseng zhuan* were not praised for their understanding and interpretation of the text, but rather for the beautiful qualities of their voices and distinct or immaculate pronunciations. Zhi Tanyue 支畝 UsersController, for example, was “specially endowed with a wonderful voice and was good at chanting.” 179 And Shi Daohui 釋道慧 had a wonderful voice and was praised for extraordinary performances:

譜譜道慧。...特稟妙聲善於轉讀。發響含奇製無定准。條章折句綺麗分明。Shi Daohui: He was especially endowed with a natural voice. Thus he was inclined towards chanting. The sounds he emitted were marvelous and inimitable. The stanzas and verses were resplendent and clear.180

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179 T2059, 413.
180 T2059, 414. There is a second possibility of *zheju* 折句 also referring to *zheyaoju* 折腰句, a metrical device in which a phrase of seven-syllable poetry is divided into units of 3+4 or 5+2, rather than the much more frequent 4+3. However, this might be a case of *yatibhraṣṭa*, a metrical defect in poetry in which the line lacks a proper caesura. See Victor Mair and Mei Tsu-lin, “The Sanskrit Origins of Recent Style Prosody,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (1991), 468-469.
In the *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, the scriptural masters are known for their endurance: chanting many thousands of words, chanting for long periods of time, or chanting despite bodily discomfort. For example:

釋寶相。...夜自篤課誦阿彌陀經七遍。念佛名六萬遍。晝讀藏經初無散捨。後專讀涅槃。一千八十遍。兼誦金剛般若。終于即世。然身絕患惱休健習。...又志存正業翹注晨霄。蚤蝨流身不暇觀採。遇患不得念誦無捨。Shi Baoxiang: ...At night he would diligently chant the *Amitabha Sūtra* seven times, and chant the Buddha’s name 60,000 times. During the day he would read scriptures, at first unceasingly, but later especially reading the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* 1,080 times. He also chanted the *Diamond Sūtra*. When he was about to die, his body was severely suffering, he lost his vigor and strength. ...He still aspired to keep up his regular enterprise as he earnestly awaited the firmament. Fleas covered his body but he was too busy to notice and remove them; as his illness was reaching its worst his chanting was unceasing.\(^{181}\)

These monks may have been well-read and in complete comprehension of the texts they chanted. However, when it came to the actual performance of the chant, other factors such as sound quality and endurance took precedence.

The practice of chanting did not necessarily serve to further understanding, but instead served as a means for the individual to participate in Buddhist ritual activity, develop concentration, and to embody the words they believed to have been spoken by the Buddha, bodhisattvas, and other sages. As the *Mencius* famously states:

子服堯之服，誦堯之言，行堯之行，是堯而已矣
If one wears the clothes of Yao, repeats the words of Yao, and performs the actions of Yao, then one will just be [like] Yao.\(^{182}\)

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\(^{181}\) T2060, 690.

In other words, playing the role of a sage and imitating their words, thoughts, and behavior was thought to function as means to cultivate one’s own behavior. Imitation, whether through behavior patterns, or through memorization and recitation of a text, was a form of learning and being. In a way, reciters of Buddhist sūtras could themselves become the Buddha, an idea posited by the Lotus Sūtra itself. Charlotte Eubanks notes:

The idea that an actual piece of writing could be housed within the human body, could permeate that body, could actually be the force animating that body, and could also incorporate into a divine body is an idea that lies at the core of Mahāyāna Buddhism. …the Lotus Sūtra, issues the following mandate: ‘Wherever it may be preached, or read, or recited, or written, or whatever place a roll of this scripture may occupy, in all those places one is to erect a stupa of the seven jewels, build it high and wide with impressive decoration. There is no need even to lodge a śārīra [relic] in it. What is the reason? Within it there is already a whole body of the Thus Come One.’

Buddhist education may have emphasized texts that differed from those emphasized in literati education, and the goals may have differed as well, but both parties trained by similar methods for the same skill – memory. To many Buddhists, a text memorized was a text learned, and furthermore, memory was an ability that would continue to serve them throughout their careers as monks or officials. The vast majority of monks were not skilled enough to be eminent translators or thinkers. They may have tried and not had the talent, or they may have joined the clergy to fill a needed role in the

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183 Charlotte Eubanks, Miracles of Book and Body: Buddhist Textual Culture and Medieval Japan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), p. 137. This idea of embodying a text is a cross-cultural one as well. In reference to Quranic memorization and recitation, Helen Boyle notes that the point of memorizing the Quran is so that it can be embodied in the person when they recite it, and that this recitation is a demonstration of memorization, which is itself a demonstration of knowledge of the Quran. See Helen Boyle Quranic Schools: Agents of Preservation and Change (New York: Routledge, 2004).
community (as the monks may have done at the decrepit temple in 825), or they may have actually joined to avoid conscription and taxes. No matter their reason or method for ordination, though, they needed to chant from memory and meditate to participate in basic monastic ritual activities. And a pass on a sūtra chanting test was a demonstration of both learning and ability to continue learning.
Introduction

During the summer of 2015 I learned how to play the wooden fish (*muyu* 木魚) to accompany chanting of the *Heart Sutra* for an extended Buddhist retreat at Fo Guang Shan in southern Taiwan. A handful of other students also took up various dharma instruments (*faqi* 法器), including the hand bell, bowl chime, and drum, and together with our teacher, a resident nun, we would sing and chant the *gathas* and the *sutra* an hour each day, just as we would for the evening service. Besides the occasional pauses to repeat sections for practice or learn new rhythmic patterns, there was another crucial difference between our rehearsals and the ritual each night: next to the table where the instruments were laid out, there was an easel with a whiteboard, on which was written "The disciples are practicing the dharma instruments, so, Dragon Kings, Devas, and Dharma-Protectors, please do not participate (弟子練習法器，龍天護法莫參)!

The implications of this are twofold. First, there is a whole invisible world of beings listening in and reacting according to what they hear, and upon hearing the sounds of chanted scriptures, they will appear and form an audience. Second, these spirits cannot tell the difference between rehearsal and performance. Therefore the sign was written as a courtesy to them.
Although we do not have examples of "Rehearsal in Progress" signs from Tang dynasty Buddhist settings, the idea that the spirit world invisibly encroached on the human world was prevalent even then. The Buddhist encyclopedia *Fayuan zhulin* (668 CE), for instance, elaborates on a segment of the ghost population that live in dwellings on the peripheries of human activity – secluded valleys, the sky, beaches – and more who do not have dwellings but inhabit spaces humans use as well – gravesites, caves, toilets, and others. An earlier non-Buddhist text, the *Baopuzi* (4th cent. CE), takes this for granted and supplies its readers with an assortment of tools to compel spirits to reveal themselves to human observers when they are originally invisible or disguised.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I focused on what people were actually hearing when they listened to chant, especially in regard to its musical qualities. This chapter seeks to elucidate what Buddhists believed about how sound and chanting were listened to, not just by other humans, but by the broader imagined community of sentient beings that inhabited their worldview and benefitted from these practices. Previously scholars have emphasized the role of sympathetic resonance (*ganying* 感應) to explain the miraculous outcomes and presences of deities and spirits during Buddhist practices, including chanting. However, I contend that not every chanted sound produced effects through *ganying*; sometimes it was simply through hearing. In other words, all resonance produced responses, but not every response was from resonance. Chanting, as a vocal

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184 T2122, 311b.
production, was sonic and audible, and others listened to it. Moreover, not every listener responded or reacted in the same way.

To discuss this, I will explore the range of listeners in the Chinese Buddhist perspective, and then the types of hearing and listening they engaged in, as well as the believed results of such listening. Furthermore, I will address how the way certain beings were believed to listen also affected their cognition and behavior, and their understanding of the chanter themselves. But first, I must say something brief about the sources.

In this chapter I rely heavily on hagiography and miracle tales. Many of these sources contain accounts of chanting individuals either scattered frequently throughout the text or as independent sections of the text entirely devoted to the topic. Moreover, these kinds of accounts vastly outnumber first-hand accounts of chanting and listening, or doctrinal exegeses on chanting.

In using miracle tales and biographies as historical sources, I draw on the ideas surrounding religious repertoires set forth by Robert Campany. He treats works such as miracles tales as examples of elements adapted to a particular setting, and as depictions of imagined communities united by common characteristics, yet differentiated from other

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186 Such as in the Gaoseng zhuan 高僧傳, Xu gaoseng zhuan 續高僧傳, Song gaoseng zhuan 宋高僧傳, and Hongzan fahua zhuan 洪贊法華傳, which all have at least a chapter (and sometimes more) devoted to chanting, as well as collections like Chisong jingang jing lingyan gongde ji 持誦金剛經靈驗功德記 by Di Fengda 翟奉達, Jingang bore jing jiyan ji 金剛般若經集騐記 by Meng Xianzhong 孟獻忠, Mingxiang ji 冥祥記 by Wang Yan 王琰, or Huanyuan zhi 冥魂志 by Yan Zhitui 顏之推, etc. For more examples, see, for instance, Robert Campany, Signs from the Unseen Realm: Buddhist Miracle Tales from Early Medieval China (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2012), pp. 3-5, and Venerable Yong You, The Diamond Sutra in Chinese Culture (Los Angeles: Buddha’s Light Publishing, 2010), pp. 94-98.

Viewing the accounts as examples of adapting to locally useful modes of behavior is helpful in furthering discussion of why certain behaviors are transferred across communal boundaries (rather than remaining stuck in what is transferred and how, via influence, borrowing, etc.), and it helps to center the focus on the practices of individuals and groups, rather than lead to large abstractions about religions or schools of thought.\textsuperscript{189}

Furthermore, while most scholars agree that one purpose of these kinds of accounts was to convince a variety of audiences about the truth of a claim (for example, Campany notes that the goal of the late 5\textsuperscript{th} century text Mingxiang ji 冥祥記 was to teach people about the power of karmic retribution\textsuperscript{190}), it is unhelpful to look at these accounts as either fact or fantasy. Nonetheless, I find these accounts useful as historical sources regardless of whether they are true or not. Firstly, while some people in the Six Dynasties and Tang may have read or listened to them merely as entertainment, many also believed these kinds of miraculous events were possible; they did not conflict with the various understandings of the world then. Secondly, with particular reference to accounts assembled by monks in hagiographical collections such as the Hongzan fahua zhuan or any of the biographies of eminent monks, they represent how people saw monks and how monks wanted others – monastic, lay, and non-Buddhist – to see themselves. They are

\textsuperscript{188} Ibid, 107-111.
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid, 107-111.
projections of a monastic identity likely believed and certainly promoted by monks themselves.\(^{191}\)

The Experience of Hearing

In this broad community of Chinese Buddhism, aural experiences can be examined from two sides. One the one hand, we can discuss real heard experiences as they are described occasionally in first person accounts of performances, such as Ennin’s account of listening to chanting during his pilgrimage to China.\(^{192}\) On the other hand, and appearing much more commonly, we can look at accounts that describe an imagined understanding of hearing, that is, accounts in which the writer describes experiences that are not his or her own. These include accounts of both Buddhists and non-Buddhists hearing Buddhist sounds, but also accounts of ghosts, demons, and spirits hearing as well.

Chinese Buddhists had various philosophical lenses through which they could understand the phenomenon of hearing sounds. For example, Buddhist views of hearing generally take sound as an intangible object that interacts with the sense organ of the ear to give rise to auditory consciousness, that is, objective awareness of sound:

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童子。譬如有人作如是言。我有諸聲。若象聲。若馬聲。若駱駝聲。若牛聲。若驢
聲。若騾聲。若伎樂聲。若婦女聲。若丈夫聲。若種種鳥聲。拍鼓大鼓及貝角等種
種音樂之聲。及以談話之聲。世間所有音聲者。皆安置箋中。我若須時各於箋中取
聲而作。童子。於汝意云何。彼人是正語不。答言不也。世尊。何以故。世尊。聲
不可取故。聲不可見故。世尊。彼聲不從東方。不從南方。不從西方。不從上方。不
從下方。世尊。聲若可見者應有聚積。佛言童子。是音聲雖不可見。而生耳識覺知之相。亦起愛憎。聲不可見。但以聞時而生苦樂。童子。如是如是。以無智故當生苦樂。彼
不可見。若不可見彼即無色。若無色者彼應不著。童子。汝莫如是於彼聲中而生染著。

[The Buddha said:] “My child, take for example a man who says this: ‘I have many
sounds, [like] elephant sounds, horse sounds, camel sounds, ox sounds, donkey sounds,
mule sounds, musical sounds, women’s sounds, men’s sounds, all kinds of bird sounds,
all kinds of musical drum and horn sounds, conversational sounds, all the sounds in the
world. I have put all of these sounds in a box. Whenever I want to make a sound, I can
just take any of them from the box.’ My child, what does this mean to you? Is that person
speaking the truth?” He answered: “No. World-honored one, why is this? World-honored
one, it is because sounds cannot be grasped, and sounds cannot be seen. World-honored
one, those sounds do not come from the east, south, west, or north, and they do not come
from above or below. World-honored one, if sounds could be seen, then one should be
able to gather them.” The Buddha said to the disciple: “Although sounds cannot be seen,
they generate signs of comprehension of auditory consciousness. They also give rise to
desire and dislike. Sounds cannot be seen, but through the instance of hearing they
generate suffering and pleasure. My child, this is so. Lack of awareness will generate
suffering and pleasure. As for that which cannot be seen, if it cannot be seen, then it has
no form. If they have no form, then they should not become attached. My child, you
should not thusly generate attachments through those sounds.”

The sense organ of the ear then works in conjunction with the sense organ of the mind
to formulate opinions and judgments on what one hears. This process and the processes
undergone by the other sense organs lead to consciousness that arises from interacting
with the conditions of visual forms, sounds, odors, tastes, tactile contact, and ideas.

However, not understanding the true nature of sound as formless can lead to attachments.

The *Lotus Sutra* further elucidates another mode of hearing:

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193 T1341, 770b.
194 The mind is conceptualized as a sense organ in Buddhist thought. Together with the
eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin, there are six senses in total, the *liu gen* 六根.
If virtuous men and women uphold this sutra, if they read it, chant it, explain it, or copy it, they will achieve the 1,200 merits of the ear. By means of these purified ears, they can hear every kind of language and sound in the great trichiliochosm, from the lowest Avīci hell, to the highest Akaniṣṭha heaven, to every inner and outer realm in between—elephant sounds, horse sounds, ox sounds, cart sounds, crying sounds, sighing sounds, conch sounds, drum sounds, bell sounds, … hell sounds, animal sounds, hungry ghost sounds, monk sounds, nun sounds, śrāvaka sounds, pratyekabuddha sounds, bodhisattva sounds, and Buddha sounds. If you want to say them, then as for all the sounds in the great trichiliochosm and every realm in between, then even if one has not yet achieved a divine ear, and [instead] have purified ordinary ears from their parents, in all cases they will come to know through hearing, and thus distinguish every kind of sound and not spoil their faculty of hearing.

So, through Buddhist practice—particularly practices surrounding the Lotus Sutra itself— one can achieve purified ears that not only can hear and distinguish any kind of sound in the universe, but can also avoid distortions of hearing that lead to these attachments.

These understandings of listening contend that the state of mind of the listener is what has an effect on the experience of listening, rather than the sounds that are listened to. In extension, one could listen to any sound, but depending on the state of their mind,
they will generate emotional reactions, or if they understand the formless nature of sound, they will experience it with no risk of generating suffering, pleasure, or attachments therefrom. With the exception of Ji Kang’s philosophy, this Buddhist understanding of hearing is categorically different from early Chinese theories, which place the burden of the experience on the sounds that are being produced.

Chinese ideas about sound, both from early Chinese thought and early medieval Chinese thought, also circulated among literate groups.198 Explanations of music and sound from the accounts of Bo Ya and Zhong Ziqi preserved in the *Shuoyuan* 說苑 and *Liezi* 列子, as well as descriptions of it in the *Taiping jing* 太平經 posit sound, particularly musical sounds, as something that communicates feelings or concepts from the sound source to the listener. In other words, the sound producer and the sounds themselves affect the experience of the listener. Other thinkers, such as Ji Kang, posit that sound transmits no meaning from the performer to the listener – the sound itself has no intrinsic meaning – but instead rouses emotions and meaning in the listener based on the listener’s prior experiences and cultural backgrounds. This is more in line with the Buddhist understanding.

Despite their differences, these views of listening do have something in common. Regardless of whether the sounds themselves carry meaningful content from the performer to the listener or have no intrinsic meaning, when they are heard by the listener, they give rise to emotional knowledge in the listener. From the Buddhist perspective, one gains awareness of the existence of a sound by hearing it, and then the

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198 These ideas are addressed in more detail in the first chapter of this dissertation.
mind formulates a reaction to it, generating, as the sutra puts it, feelings of “suffering and pleasure” and “desire and dislike.” When sound is viewed as a communicator of meaningful content, as in the case of Bo Ya and Zhong Ziqi, then emotional knowledge is directly transmitted to the listener. And in the case of Ji Kang, although the sound has no intrinsic meaning, emotions arise in the listener nonetheless.

In medieval China, readers of accounts of listening and listeners themselves had the option to view these hearing experiences through the lens of one of these frameworks, a combination of frameworks, or even none of them. As we will see below, Buddhist accounts of listening in China did not stick to a solely Buddhist view of listening.

Who is Listening? The Imagined Community and the Imagined Audience

The sentient beings inhabiting the Buddhist worldview comprised of a diverse range of deities, demons, humans, ghosts, animals, and hell denizens, variously referred to as beings in the Six Paths (or sometimes more, when amended to include bodhisattvas at various stages). I draw on Benedict Anderson's idea of an "imagined community" to reflect the envisioned continuities between human Buddhists and the broader population, both human and spiritual. Anderson uses this idea as a means to explain nationalism, but I diverge from him on this point and just focus on his idea of religious imagined communities from his first chapter.

In using the descriptor "imagined," Anderson refers to the notion that "members [of a community] … will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even
hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion." Most monks would not personally know, or in many cases even know of, specific monks and lay people outside of their own small community - for example, the members and patrons of a certain temple, or residents of a certain town. Yet they imagined themselves connected to a larger network of unknown Buddhists through shared beliefs, practices, texts, and goals, that extended past not only local regions, but also past territorial borders. Likewise, they saw themselves as situated within a larger worldview occupied by spirits, deities, and demons. While many monks likely did not have direct personal experiences with spiritual beings, the notion that many monks around them did have these experiences was heavily promoted by coeval literature, both by and about Buddhist practitioners. Additionally, it is conceived of as a community since despite social, linguistic, and other differences between them, there is still a mutual camaraderie between them based on shared ideas.

In regard to religiously constructed communities, Anderson notes that they were "connected through cosmological hierarchies that continued into society and were shared by everyone" in that community. However, he argues that they waned for two reasons, namely, exploration and exposition to other cultures and traditions, and demotion of a

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200 This view likely contributed to the reasons behind pilgrimages to China by Japanese and Korean monks, and also pilgrimages from China, such as those of Xuanzang 玄奘 and Yijing 義淨.

201 Anderson, 7.

202 Ibid, 15-16.
sacred language. Here I diverge from Anderson's theorizing: at least in the Six Dynasties and Tang, we see the larger Buddhist community thriving in what was generally a religiously pluralistic, flexible, and absorbent society, and embracing not only the written lingua franca of literary Chinese over Indic and Central Asian languages, but adjusting with colloquialisms and oral transmission when convenient. These attitudes were reinforced especially in periods during which Buddhism was supported by the state.

Related to Anderson’s idea of the imagined community is the idea of the imagined audience – the body of listeners, readers, or viewers observing the activity of a performer regardless of the performer’s direct awareness of them. This idea has progressed in theater and media studies, especially in regard to performer-audience relationships in acting. In both cases, individuals perform in front of real or invisible audiences, and the imagined, intended audiences do not always align with the actual audiences. Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford distinguish these audience categories as the audience addressed, i.e., the actual audience reading, watching, or listening, and the audience invoked, i.e., the audience as intended by the performer or writer. Related to this idea is that of

multivalent interpretations by readers of a single text, often arriving at understandings that differ from those intended by the author. This idea too can be extended into the realm of oral performance and listening.

The idea of the imagined audience has seen less attention in the field of religious studies, but I believe it is worth examining more closely for its applications. Applied to Chinese Buddhist chanting in the Six Dynasties and Tang periods, the idea of an imagined audience seems almost necessary to account for a worldview so robustly populated with invisible beings. In scripture, hagiography, and stories of the strange, an assortment of spirits constantly eavesdrop on chanting humans, reacting to what they hear and then interacting with the chanters. A monk or layperson chanting may have no invoked audience, intending the practice to supplement their own cultivation or devotional activity, but there may still be audience addressed with an intention to listen. In other words, monks chanting by themselves are never truly alone. There is always an invisible audience just beyond human detection.

Eavesdropping Spirits


Performance studies, however, have received much more attention: scholars have studied ritual performance, its ties to theater, and the role of the audience. However, this mainly seems to concern actual audiences and their participation and not imagined or unintended ones. See, for example, Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982).
Just as in the modern temple, accounts of various spirits listening in and overhearing abound in medieval sources and extend beyond Buddhist sources. A quite literal and outrageous example is found in 4th century text *Soushen ji*:

During the Wu period, Ni Yansi from Jiaxing was living in the west of the county in Shanli, when he suddenly saw a ghost enter his house. It spoke with people, ate and drank like a human being, only you could not see its form. Among Yansi's servants, there was one who secretly cursed the family. The ghost said: "Today I'm going to tell on you." Yansi punished her, and [from then on] there were none who dared curse them. Yansi had a young wife, and the ghost chased after her, so Yansi invited a Daoist master to get rid of it. After the ritual offerings of wine and meat were arranged, the ghost went into the toilet and took out feces, smearing it on top [of the offerings]. The Daoist master then vigorously struck his drum to summon various spirits. The ghost then took a chamberpot and blew a horn sound from the shrine area. In an instant, the Daoist master suddenly felt something cold on his back, and startled, he began to remove his clothes – it was the [contents of the] chamberpot! Then the Daoist master gave up and left. During the night, Yansi secretly spoke with his eldest wife under the bedcovers, sharing their suffering from this ghost. The ghost then called down to Yansi from the rafters: "You and your wife are talking about me, so I will now cut the rafters of your house!" Then there was a rumbling sound. Yansi was scared that the rafters would break, so he lit his candle to have a look, but the ghost extinguished the fire. The sound of cutting rafters became more pressing. Yansi was scared the house would collapse, so he made everyone go out, then lit a light to have [another] look. The rafters were as they were before. The ghost laughed and asked him: "Are you still going to talk about me?" A regional agricultural official heard about this and said: "This spirit is certainly a fox." The ghost then went to the agricultural official and said: "You take from the government so many hundred pecks of grain, you store them in such-and-such a place, as a functionary you are corrupt, and you dare talk about me? I'm going to tell the government, and they will send people to fetch your stolen grain." The agricultural official was greatly frightened and apologized to him.
After that, no one dared to talk about him. Three years later, he left, no one knows where he went.208

Here we have three instances of eavesdropping: first, the ghost overhears the servant talking about the family behind their backs; second, the ghost overhears Yansi and his wife talking about him despite their attempt to seek privacy under the bedcovers; and third, the ghost is able to overhear a local official speculating about him despite not necessarily being in the same location. Being a malevolent ghost, he retaliates on all three counts.

This account serves as an example for popular understandings of the spiritual realm in medieval China. Spirits are understood as having wills and sensory capacities much like human beings. In this account readers witness the ghost invading human spaces, tasting food, grasping objects, blowing out candles, and, most prominently, making and listening to sounds. Moreover, this ghost has a particular mission to end gossip, both about himself and others, though his motivation for this is unclear.

This view of ghostly listeners with individual agency is not specific to this single story or time, but in fact persisted throughout the medieval period. Take, for example, the account of Tang Xuan 唐晅 from Chen Shao's (陳劭, c. 795-820 CE) mid-Tang compilation of stories Tongyou ji 通幽記, which still circulated into the Song dynasty through its preservation in the Taiping guangji 太平廣記: Tang Xuan is visited by the ghost of his deceased wife after she listens in on his mournful poetry recitation from the

Moreover, the account of Ni Yansi is also included in the Taiping guangji, which demonstrates the endurance of this story and others like it.

This story is also useful in examining the messiness of classification and terminology for ghosts. The ghost who harasses the Ni family is referred to by the terms guimei (鬼魅, ghost-monster), mei (魅, monster), shen (神, spirit), and liwu (狸物, cat-thing). As Poo Mu-chou points out, both before and after Buddhism was introduced to China, these terms and others like them had been used ambiguously and sometimes interchangeably to refer to both malevolent and beneficial ghosts and spirits. Although some new kinds of ghostly beings were introduced through transliterated terms, these were often appended with indigenous terms like gui and shen, such as yechagui or yechaguishen (夜叉鬼/夜叉鬼神, yaksa demon). But regardless of the new beings entering this worldview from interactions with Buddhists, the Chinese ideas about how spirits interacted, and how people should interact with spirits, changed less. As Poo emphasizes, in order to secure Buddhism's place in Chinese society,

[Buddhist monks] utilized the indigenous conceptions to interpret the tenet of their belief, to translate their texts, and even to argue with the Chinese intellectuals using Chinese terminologies to propagate Buddhism.… Buddhist monks also needed to confront those popular beliefs in society that people were engaged in or accustomed to, and tried to show how they, the Buddhist monks, could provide people with reliable services, to expel evil spirits and ghosts from their lives, and to ensure a happy future, whether in this world or in the netherworld.

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211 Ibid, 165.
In other words, Buddhist monks, translators, and converts provided solutions to deal with and manipulate previously-existing concepts of spirits.

As we see illustrated in the account of the Ni family, this popular notion of spirits was one in which spirits encroached on the activities of the living. This was the case in Buddhist contexts too. Through audible chanting, Buddhists often (and sometimes unconsciously) interacted with this invisible audience of spirits. As we will see below, these spirits employed different modes of listening and displayed particular audience behaviors. Furthermore, through engaging their sense of hearing, these beings reacted in certain ways. Some typified reverential listening and, delighted by good performances, dealt out rewards. Others attained knowledge from their aural experiences. And some, particularly demons and other malevolent spirits, reacted inimically. In all cases, these accounts of the imagined experience of hearing served as models for real listeners for how they should listen and what they could expect to gain through listening, and for chanters in terms of the kinds of performances they should strive to give. They disclosed to readers and potential chanters who their imagined audiences were and the kinds of responses they would receive for performances.

Modes of Listening

Varieties of Audience
In hagiography and miracle stories meant to convince readers of the truth of Buddhist teachings and practices, stories of devout chanter individuals abound. Just as in the stories of the strange, these individuals are depicted as experiencing visitations from a range of beings, from demons and malevolent spirits, to dangerous animals, and to benevolent spirits and deities. To medieval readers who understood these accounts as depictions of actual people and events, they acted as evidence for what happened when individuals chanted, and thereby portrayed models of behavior for chanting, as well as models of behavior for listening.

In terms of chanting, individuals are often depicted as chanting alone, unaware or at least unconcerned with any witnesses. This chanting also generally occurs outside of group chanting rituals with other monks and laypeople, during the chanter’s free time. In this sense it is voluntary and supplemental to scheduled practices. Through these depictions, faithful readers are thus encouraged to not limit their chanting of the sutras to Buddhist meetings in the community, since they can expect rewards when they exhibit extra devotion.

Likewise, listening is modeled in the accounts. Characters who can be identified as virtuous stop and listen respectfully when they hear devoted chanting:

Shi Xuanzhen had the surname Ping as a layperson. He was originally from Shouchun. When he was young he left his household and said he was travelling to Yangtu. He stayed in Yongfu Temple and chanted a section of the Lotus Sutra. He was never negligent. Once on a moonlit night in autumn, he was chanting this scripture. Halfway

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212 Or listeners, in the event that these stories were transmitted orally.
through the seventh [watch],213 there was a śramaṇa from a nearby room who suddenly got up to use the toilet. He saw a figure of a large person in the courtyard. He turned around with his head raised to have a look around, and suddenly saw a deity appear out of nowhere, standing there nobly. As for this śramaṇa, he just stood there in admiration, not moving for a long time. When the scripture was finished, the deity was suddenly nowhere to be seen. From that day on, that monk studied chanting, and for his whole life he was never negligent.214

Here, upon hearing the sounds of chanted scriptures, a deity appears and forms an audience. He listens silently until the end of the scripture before disappearing and presumably resuming his godly activities. His presence was unknown to the chanter for the entirety of the account, and was only revealed through an accidental witness.

Other visiting listeners go out of their way to correct improper audience behavior.

In the account of Shi Daoqiong and his roommate Famin, an eavesdropping deity interacts with them directly:

Shi Daoqiong had the surname Zhang while he was a layperson. It is unknown where he came from. Between the sixth and seventh years of the Zhen'guan reign period (632-633CE), he went to Qixuan Temple in Jinling. He practiced nothing but chanting a section of the Lotus Sutra. Both his voice and style were clear and elegant. It made people happy to listen. His roommate was a śramaṇa by the name of Famin. Deep into the night, [Dao]qiong would sit upright chanting the scripture. [Fa]min would lie there naked on the side of the bed. His body was especially strong, and in the past he had never suffered from disease. Suddenly from on top of the bed he was tossed onto the ground. It was as if a human force had pulled him up and was beating him with a cudgel while he begged for mercy. It was thus more than once. Daoqiong was frightened at first, and he involuntarily cried out. The whole temple fled with alarm, saying it was a tiger. In a flash [Dao]qiong had reported [the incident] himself. Then they went to inspect together, and the mallet was nowhere to be found. After a day passed, they gradually deemed it safe,

213 The expression here is unclear, and so the translation is tentative.
214 T2067, 38a.
and gave up their original idea [that a tiger was on the loose]. When asked the reason, he [Famin] responded: "I saw that there was a deity staring angrily at me because I was lying there naked, not respecting the scripture, etc."²¹⁵

Here again, we see an eavesdropping spirit increase the audience size. Neither monk is aware of its presence until it chooses to make itself known, first staring angrily, then going as far as to beat the unfortunate śramaṇa Famin. The spirit, attracted by the delightful sounds of sutra chanting, is outraged to discover another being not listening with the same decorum as himself and violently lashes out to punish Famin for his behavior.

Moreover, respectful listening involved a recognition of the virtue of the chanters and the merit generated from the activity. In other words, model listeners – here represented by Bodhisattvas and individuals who have already achieved salvation – took delight in the sounds of chanted sutras:

During the Jin there was a person from Zhao called Que Gongze. He lived quietly and simply, only applying himself towards Buddhist matters. During the time of Emperor Wu of Jin, he died in Luoyang. Monks and laypeople alike arranged a service for him in White Horse Temple. That evening while they were chanting, at midnight, they heard the sound of singing praises from the sky. Looking upwards, they saw a person with a robust look, his stately clothing was entirely beautiful. He said: "I am Que Gongze, I've now been born in the Western Paradise. I've come here with many Bodhisattvas to listen to the scriptures." The whole hall leapt in surprise, they could all see him.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ T2067, 37a.
²¹⁶ T2122, 616b. Also in Mingxiang jì, translated by Campany in Signs from the Unseen Realm: Buddhist Miracle Tales from Early Medieval China, pp. 106-108.
But not every being had the same reaction to hearing Buddhist chanting. Others – often those categorized as malevolent or harmful – rejected the sounds of sutras and made efforts to distance themselves from the sound source:

Guo Shouqiong, from Zhengping county in Jiangzhou, once held the post steward for the Officer of State Visitors. Because he was returning to his ancestral residence, he was staying as a guest several tens of li from his home. The sun was setting, and only then did he finally say he should return. At that time it was cloudy, and also lightly raining. In the past it was said that on the left side of this road there were many tombs, and ghostly lights [appeared] in front of carriage, confusing travelers. Some were in the graves, others were in pits. Because there was a deceased soul who had died during this month, Shouqiong was afraid. It seemed there was no way out. First he saw the ghostly lights within several tens of li. Some say there were ten, other say twenty. They suddenly arrived. He was only riding a horse, he was not with other people. In the past he'd chanted the Heart Sutra, so he started to chant it in a defiant voice. The ghostly lights suddenly scattered. He looked around intently, but could only see them at a far distance. Then he stopped chanting and after a few moments the ghost lights returned. He started chanting as before, and the lights gradually became distant. Thus he knew the power of prajña could connect the hidden and the visible.\(^{217}\)

In this scenario, the graveyard lights immediately distance themselves as soon as Gou Shouqiong begins chanting. In the case of Dong Ji, the listening ghosts politely express their concerns:

\(^{217}\) X1629, 451c.
During the Jin there was a man from Yuqian called Dong Ji. His family had been Buddhist for three generations, but Ji was particularly dedicated. He always fasted and chanted the Śūraṅgama Sūtra. … To the northwest of Ji’s home there was a mountain that was tall and rugged. On that mountain there were lots of demons that were harming the residents. Ji wanted to subdue them through the power of the sutras and precepts. In a 4 or 5 mu area of land at the mountain’s border, he felled a tree and constructed a hut where he installed a high seat and chanted the Śūraṅgama Sūtra. After more than a hundred days, it grew silent and then nothing was heard, and the harm coming to people had lessened somewhat. Later several people came to Ji’s place and spoke with him for a long time. Ji thought: these visitors sound like they are not from Yuqian. Why had they come here, so deep and remote in the mountains? He suspected they were spirits, so he said to them: “Are you gentlemen the ghosts from this mountain?” “Yes,” they answered. “We have heard of the purity of your virtuous conduct and have come to see you. We have one matter we request you listen to. We have had this mountain for generations; it was entrusted [to us for our] peaceful living. As for your arrival here, we consider it offensive, and it has caused us constant anxiety. Now we would like to demarcate the borders. We will fell some trees to decide it.” Ji said: “I only wanted to quietly chant, I did not mean to offend you. Now that you have approached me, I vow to see that you are assisted.” The ghosts answered: “And we will trust you not to further harm us.” Their dialogue concluded and they left. After one night, in the previously cut-down area, outside of the four borders, the trees all dried up as though they were burned down.218

The implication here is that the ghosts were offended and even harmed by the sound of chanting, to the point that they felt it was necessary to renegotiate the mountain border.

To readers of these accounts, this displayed another application of chanting: if you feel like you are in danger, chanting a sutra could save you from harm.219 This was so effective that it was even espoused to work when chanting silently to oneself:

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218 T2122, 417b-417c. Also in Mingxiang ji, translated by Campany in Signs from the Unseen Realm: Buddhist Miracle Tales from Early Medieval China, pp. 117-119. Here Campany notes the important themes of the scripture and that in certain translations it promotes itself as a demon-quelling text. He also states that the nature of demons as “evil” in many Buddhist texts and stories is ambiguous. Rather, they have a certain function to fulfill, and that does not always accord with, and sometimes encroaches on, human endeavors and localities. Although he notes that the text is chanted, he does not consider why chanting is so effective.

219 The use of chanting as an apotropaic tool is also recounted in stories involving robbery or assault being staved off by chanting, as well as avoiding the death penalty or
In ancient times in a foreign mountain temple there was a young bhikṣu who always chanted the Lotus Sutra. Once he was walking outside of the temple he encountered a female rākṣasa demon. She changed into a human woman with a very beautiful face and gracefully approached the bhikṣu. The bhikṣu was fooled and had intimate relations with her. Afterwards, his essence was depleted and he could not remain conscious. The demon carried him on her back and flew off, desiring to return to her original place where she planned to eat him. It was just before midnight, and they passed over a samghārāma. From on top of the demon, the bhikṣu heard the sounds of chanting the Lotus Sutra from inside the samghārāma. Because of this, he began to wake up a little, and remembering what he had practiced, he started to softly chant it in his mind. The demon started to feel heavier and gradually approached the ground. When it could no longer lift off, it abandoned the bhikṣu and left. The bhikṣu then woke up more and heard the sound of a bell, and he followed the sound to a temple. He knocked on the door and asked to be admitted, completely stating what had happened. Then they calculated the distance to his town – it was more than 2000 li. All the monks said this person's fault is serious, he cannot stay with us. But one senior monk said he was bamboozled by the demon, it was not his own intent. He has already escaped and shown the power of the sutra. He can stay for a night. They made him repent, and later they received a letter from his village, so they dispatched him back.²²⁰

Incorrect listening is thus displayed through disrespectful behaviors while in the same space as the chanting, as well as a rejection of the sound and thereby a rejection of the content. However, incorrect listening can be corrected, and, ironically, it seems that the best way to correct it is through listening to the chanting of scriptures:

²²⁰ T2067, 27a. There is another instance of listening in this account, though it is less relevant to the current argument: the bhikṣu hears the chanting of the Lotus Sutra while being carried through the air and it causes him to become more alert.
Again Saṃgharākṣita went on the road, and in the distance he saw a forest. It was thriving and made him happy. He entered into the forest and saw five hundred immortals roaming in the mountains and trees. When the immortals saw Saṃgharākṣita, they immediately dispersed. Together they called out: “Follower of Śākyamuni, you are defiling our garden!” Saṃgharākṣita asked the immortals to borrow a tree so that he could lodge there for a night, [saying he] would leave in the morning. Among the immortals, the first one was the leader and he had a lot of compassion. He ordered the lesser immortals to lend a tree [to the monk]. So Saṃgharākṣita gained a tree. Under the tree he laid out a nīṣīdana mat, and sat down cross-legged. At the beginning of the night he extinguished the five obstructions,221 in the middle of the night he rested briefly, and later in the night he sat upright and started chanting in a loud voice. At that time, the many immortals heard his chanting. They suddenly comprehended the emptiness of their nature and attained the result of non-returner. They saw the dharma and were delighted. They went to where the monk was. Their appearance was reverent. They asked the monk to receive the three pillars of the faith, and wished to leave home [become monks] to follow the Buddha’s teachings. At that time, Saṃgharākṣita liberated the immortals and they left the home in accordance with the dharma. He taught them the methods of cultivation and meditation, and not long after, they achieved the result of Arhat.222

When Saṃgharākṣita first encounters the immortals, they identify him as Buddhist and reject him. Upon hearing the chanting, however, the immortals undergo a cognitive transformation, and their rejection becomes not only acceptance, but immediate comprehension of Buddhist principles.

Moving past listening behaviors of the characters depicted in these accounts, we can also look at them from the angle of hearing as theorized by Chinese and Buddhist thinkers. Are emotions and information being conveyed through the sounds, from the sound source to the listener, or are the listeners understanding the sounds and deriving the

221 Desire, wrath, dullness, agitation, doubt.
222 T749, 568a.
informational content from themselves? In the cases above, we see both kinds of listening.

In the first three accounts, the kind of hearing portrayed through these acts of listening is ambiguous. With the primary listeners already identified as benevolent or even virtuous spirits, we cannot know if their delight in listening to Buddhist teachings derives from their own good natures or from the virtue set forth in sound by the chanting monks. However, based on the secondary listeners, namely the śramaṇa who wandered out of his room to use the toilet, and the inappropriate śramaṇa Famin, we can see that the goodness espoused by the chanter did not carry through the sound and affect the listeners. The first śramaṇa only understood the value of the practice after he saw the audience behavior modeled by the visiting deity, and Famin’s behavior demonstrates that his roommate’s chanting had no effect on him. Neither felt willing to listen, let alone be moved by the performances, until the deities demonstrated how they should be listening, or, in the case of Famin, punished him for misconduct.

The same can be said for the following three examples: the spirits and ghosts are not moved by the goodness of the chanting, but rather repelled. However, the final example given above showcases another kind of listening. One might think that mindsets of the immortals would cause them to push back against the chanting, but instead the truth of the Buddhist teachings is transmitted from the monk to the immortals via the sound. As we can see, along with the various theorizations of listening, we also see various depictions of listening in Chinese Buddhist sources and stories.
Listening vs. *Ganying*

There has been a tendency in scholarship to attribute the events of “miracle stories” such as those presented in Buddhist hagiography and proselytizing literature to sympathetic resonance (*ganying* 感應).\(^{223}\) Scholars will agree that the concept of *ganying* changed in the medieval period and did not necessarily continue to accurately reflect its Han dynasty explanations, but they have not clearly stated how it has changed.\(^{224}\) More importantly, they still liberally apply the term *ganying* as an explanation for communication between human beings and spirits in collections of Buddhist tales, hagiography, and in ritual activity. We can see this through two scholars’ definitions of *ganying* in their works.

Robert Campany writes that “the Buddhist unseen world is exquisitely responsive: it is not aloof and indifferent like the Heaven of Zhuangzi or Xunzi among classical thinkers, nor is it capricious in its responses, as lesser spirits or local gods were sometimes thought to be.”\(^{225}\) He also states that these miracle-tale compilations are collections that are “in a sense, nothing more or less than compilations of specific instances of stimulus-response… the *gan* in the phrase, as well as the *ying*, may be understood as characterizing the actions of unseen beings: they sense or feel (*gan*) what humans do and respond (*ying*) accordingly.”\(^{226}\) To summarize Campany’s idea, an instance of *ganying* consists of any being in the unseen realm reacting in almost any way to any action of a human being.

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\(^{223}\) Also translated as “stimulus-response” etc.

\(^{224}\) Scholars such as Robert Campany, Robert Sharf, and John Kieschnick.

\(^{225}\) Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm: Buddhist Miracle Tales from Early Medieval China*, p. 49.

\(^{226}\) Ibid, 49.
In contrast to this broad definition, Robert Sharf offers another explanation of *ganying* that derives from classical sources, such as the *Zhuangzi* and *Huainanzi*.\(^{227}\) Sympathetic resonance, he explains, can be demonstrated through a musical example: when one plucks the *gong* string of a lute, the *gong* string of another lute in the room will also sound.\(^{228}\) This idea developed further in the Han dynasty in works such as the *Huainanzi* and Dong Zhongshu’s *Chunqiu fanlù*, which promote the theory that this resonance occurs between things that have the same *qi*, and by extension, things that are categorically related.\(^{229}\) In popular understandings of this concept in the medieval period, he continues, *ganying* is absorbed into notions of retribution: the actions one undertakes in their life are recorded, and after their death, they are rewarded or punished accordingly.\(^{230}\) In other words, their fate after death matches their actions during life.

When applied to certain stories, though, neither definition adequately explains what happens in accounts of chanting. Take for example the following account:

釋弘明。本姓嬴。會稽山陰人也。少出家。貞苦有戒節。止山陰雲門寺。誌法華經　習禪定。精勤禮懺。六時不輟。… 有時見一小兒。來聽明誦經。曰：汝是何人。答云。昔時此寺沙彌。盜帳下食。今墮中。聞上人歸業。故來聽誦。願助方便使免累也。明即說法勸化。領解方隱。… 以齊永明四年。卒於柏林寺。春秋八十有四。

Shi Hongming was originally surnamed Ying. He was a man from Shanyin in Kuaiji. When he was young he left his household. He was disciplined in his practices of chastity and austerities. He was stationed at Yunmen Temple in Shanyin. He chanted the *Lotus Sutra* and practiced meditative concentration. He was particularly diligent at ritual confession, not stopping for six hours… One time, he saw a small boy come to listen to him chant the sutra. [Hong]ming said: “Who are you?” The boy replied: “In the past I was a novice at this temple. I stole some food from under a canopy, and now I have fallen

\(^{227}\) John Kieschnick has also used the notion of *ganying* for explaining events in hagiography. See Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk*.


\(^{229}\) Ibid, 84-88.

\(^{230}\) Ibid, 93-95.
into [the ghost rebirth] in the toilet. I heard about your karmic skill and so I came to listen to you chant scriptures. I hope that you can assist me through skillful means to escape this obstruction.” [Hong]ming then preached the dharma and urged him towards virtuous conduct, and he disappeared after the teaching. … In the fourth year of the Yongming reign during the Qi, [Hongming] died at Bailin Temple. He was 84. 231

By Sharf’s definition, we have no instance of *ganying* from the virtuous act of chanting. The chanting itself does not rouse any response in a corresponding category, but instead attracts a suffering, hungry ghost. Applied to the ghost, this definition is suitable: he is suffering a punishment that matches his actions in life. But in this case, the chanting actually serves as a tool to circumvent or alter the matching punishment rather than generating a response itself. In fact, the reader does not know what kind of reward Shi Hongming receives for chanting, since the events after his death are not revealed.

According to Campany’s definition, the unseen being (the ghost) senses through hearing the virtuous chanting of the monk and responds through making himself visible and asking for help. The definition, in this case, technically works, but ultimately its breadth causes larger problems. First, despite his claim that responses are not capricious, if a response is simply a reaction by a being in the unseen realm, then *any* reaction can be a response from *ganying*. By explaining *everything*, this definition loses explanatory power. A ghost could hypothetically laugh at a joke told by a human, and this would have to be explained by *ganying*. Second, this definition requires no manifestation on earth: the responses could be confined to heaven or remain invisible, but as long as a response occurs, it must be *ganying*.

While I can see the value of both definitions in particular situations, I think there is a more straightforward way to deal with this issue. Rather than over-interpret, we

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231 T2067, 28a. Also in T2059, 408a.
should lend more credibility to how the authors of these accounts interpret and describe the situations. This is not to say that *ganying* does not occur; when an individual chants the name of Guanyin, and their devotions correspond to the Bodhisattva’s compassion, this is absolutely *ganying*. Or if the account explicitly states that an event will occur because of *ganying*, then this too is absolutely *ganying*. But when a deity or ghost stops to listen to chanting with no intention of meting out a reward, or even revealing himself, as in the accounts of Shi Xuanzhen, Que Gongze, and Shi Hongming above, why not take this as it is implied or literally described: as simple listening?

This suggestion is not just splitting hairs: seeing these depictions of chanting as accounts of listening or as accounts of *ganying* makes a difference. It influences how the readers and believers understand their access to the spiritual world. The deities are imagined as occupying the same space; they are not separated by distances and barriers like beings suffering in hell, or Bodhisattvas in a far-off heaven. What’s more, these barriers are less segregating and more penetrable when one can reach beyond them with only their voice. Accordingly, people’s behaviors change when they are aware of an observer or a listener nearby.

The experience of the listener was theorized in early Chinese and Buddhist thought just as *ganying* also was, and spiritual beings such as deities, ghosts, and demons were conceptualized as interacting with humans through their senses as much as humans detected them in the same way. When the spiritual beings are imagined as inhabiting the

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232 For an example, see Campany, *Signs from the Unseen Realm: Buddhist Miracle Tales from Early Medieval China*, p. 125-126.
233 Also in the same story: Campany *Signs from the Unseen Realm: Buddhist Miracle Tales from Early Medieval China*, p. 125-126.
same spaces as humanity and as a continuation of the larger community, then they constitute part of an imagined audience just as other humans and animals do. The Chinese Buddhist world was not just wonderfully responsive, but diversely populated with spirits who observed and listened to those around them.
CHAPTER 4

Sound Objects and Sound Bodies:

The Materiality of the Voice in Buddhist Miracle Tales

Introduction: The Physicality of Chanting and the Materiality of Sound

The action of chanting is an intensely physical one, even if on a small scale. If the Buddhists in hagiographic sources chanted as relentlessly as described, they certainly would have agreed: they likely would have experienced vocal fatigue, hoarseness, and other dysphonic physical sensations associated with frequent vocal exertion and overuse of the voice through speaking or singing.234

The production of chant begins in the material body. When one transforms thoughts into vocal language, their airstream, vocal folds, oral cavity shape, tongue, and lips all work simultaneously and in sequence to produce sounds and words. First one inhales air to fill the lungs. During exhalation, in the larynx, the air builds pressure behind the glottis, a small opening between the vocal folds, and as it passes through it causes them to vibrate, resulting in phonation. The sound waves produced from this process of phonation are then modified in the resonating chambers of the vocal tract: by positioning of the tongue root in the pharynx, by positioning the body and apex of the

tongue in the oral cavity, by the shape of the nasal cavity, and at the lips. This is only the process for vowels, not to mention consonants, and other features of speech like pitch, volume, and vocal quality, which all require additional physical gestures. Sound is thereby embodied in the speech organs of a human being.

In the previous chapter we discussed how immaterial sound – that is, sound dislocated from its source – was transmitted to and heard by audiences of often invisible and immaterial ghosts and deities. Certain Buddhist scriptures have also discussed the intangible property of sound. However, Chinese hagiographical literature actually displays an additional perspective on sound: it details specific ways in which chanted sound can take on material forms.

But how can we talk about the voice as material? In periods before recordings and notation, this has been less of a problem for studies of instrumental music, since unlike vocal music, instrumental music is tied to material instruments. In fact, many scholars have looked into the material culture of music in the fields of art history and archaeology, especially for the earlier periods of ancient China, due to the abundance of excavated musical instruments. The difficulty of studying the material voice has likewise manifested in studies of vocal performances – such as poetry and song – from these same periods.

Of course, Chinese music as a field is still very small. However, substantial works have emerged dealing with this, especially from the early periods. See, for example, Lothar von Falkenhausen, *Suspended Music: Chime-Bells in the Culture of Bronze Age China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Ingrid Furniss, *Music in Ancient China: An Archaeological and Art Historical Study of Strings, Winds, and Drums During the Eastern Zhou and Han Periods (770 BCE-220 CE)* (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2008); Jenny So, ed., *Music in the Age of Confucius* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000); Li Chunyi 李純一, *Zhongguo shanggu chutu yueqi zonglun* 中國上古出土樂器總論 (Wenwu chubanshe 文物出版社, 1996); Albert Dien, *Six Dynasties Civilization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 339-353.
periods. Here we can find literary analyses of verse and lyrics\textsuperscript{236} or examinations of social or ritual context. In the cases of music in the broad sense, we often see scholarship on its theories and conceptualization.\textsuperscript{237} These studies tend to avoid the voice itself.

Paul Copp’s recent work has presented a case in which vocal sound can materialize: the example of \textit{dhāraṇī} amulets and pillars.\textsuperscript{238} He shows that by writing out \textit{dhāraṇī} and wearing them as amulets on the body, as well as inscribing them on stone pillars, Buddhists were able to physically engage with the incantations. As amulets, the protective efficacy of the object was transmitted by touch to the wearer; for inscribed pillars, if dust from the pillar was blown onto someone by the wind, or if their body was enveloped in the shadow of the pillar, then they were cleansed of their sins.\textsuperscript{239} Here, I endeavor to explain another form of sonic materiality: the body itself as a sound producer and as an object transformed through sound production.

This chapter therefore addresses the materiality of the voice in medieval Chinese Buddhism. Through examining somatic transformations associated specifically with chanting and vocalization, as well as the manifestation of speech capabilities in non-human bodies, I show how the human voice provided corporeal proof of its efficacy and acted as an instrument to transform physical forms by allowing access to Buddhist


\textsuperscript{239} Copp, 31, 146.
teachings and practices. Specifically, I examine accounts of tongue relics posthumously produced by exceptional chanter, bodily transformations, and accounts of parrots who learned to intone the name of the Buddha or chant the sūtras. These transformations are reliant on vocal production and speech organs, carried out through constant movement and exercise in a discrete space – the mouth.

Flesh Relics

Relics, whether they be bones, teeth, hair, or fingernails, invoke remembrance of a person after their death; in this sense they constitute a continuation of the person. In the case of bead-like śarīra in particular, they also reveal a crystallization of the person’s attainment through practice. As Robert Sharf puts it,

The relic is a potent vestige of the death of an enlightened being, a memento of his or her abiding liberation. The same holds true for the image of the Buddha and his stūpa – they all signify the unfathomable freedom of nirvana. By instantiating a numinous absence, relics, images, and their kin function as a physical locus for the saint's enduring charisma, apotropaic power, and grace.  

In this context, tongue relics are particularly notable because they represent attainment through the practice of chanting, and the endurance of the sound even after the departure of the body.

In Chinese sources, there are at least twenty accounts of monks whose tongues endured, moist and pink, long after their deaths. These are scattered mostly across a few important hagiographies: the Xu gaoseng zhuan 續高僧傳 (T2060), the Hongzan fahua

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zhuan 弘贊法華傳 (T2067), and the Fahua jing zhuanji 法華經傳記 (T2068). As the titles of two of the three suggest, this phenomenon was associated with upholding the Lotus Sūtra, and it happened almost entirely to those who upheld it through sustained chanting.

Although there is only one record of miraculous tongue preservation occurring outside of China, the phenomenon in China seems to have at first been associated with foreign monks spreading the dharma. In particular, Kumārajīva, a proficient chanter himself, is famously purported to be the owner of the first tongue preserved in China. In his hagiography in the Gaoseng zhuan, he claims on his deathbed that if nothing he translated was incorrect, then his tongue would not burn during his cremation. And sure enough, it remained intact. From this point onwards, however, accounts appear almost exclusively in cases of excellent chanters, both foreign and Chinese, and both monastic

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241 See James Benn, Burning for the Buddha: Self-Immolation in Chinese Buddhism (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), p. 70. He calls this the “Indestructible Tongue,” the “Incorruptible Tongue,” and the “Unburned Tongue,” variously. Suwa Gijun has also written systematically about this miracle, its origins, practices surrounding it, and its later evolution in Japan over the course of three articles. See Suwa Gijun, 謏訪義純, Chūgoku nanchō Bukkyōshi no kenkyū 中国南朝仏㑘⋱の研究 (Kyoto 京都: Hozokan 法蔵館, 1997), pp. 303-347. Suwa refers to the phenomenon as the “Unburnt Tongue (zetsu fushō 舌不焼),” though in my opinion, using this term exclusively is a misnomer since the majority of the stories do not involve any burning whatsoever.

242 Benn points to one exception, the 5th century monk Daojin 道進, whose tongue remained intact when he was cremated after sacrificing his own flesh to feed the hungry. Kumārajīva is perhaps another. Although he is known to have chanted, his preserved tongue is related to a deathbed vow he made concerning his translation work.

243 The account of a Central Asian monk with an unburnt tongue is in Da zhī du lún 大智度論, T1509, 127a. In the account, he chants the Amitābha Sūtra. The account is translated by Benn, 71-72. Also see Suwa 320-321.

244 Suwa 321.

245 Suwa 321; T2059, 332c-333a.
and lay. Suwa Gijun notes that the spread of these accounts of indestructible tongues may have led to the popularization of Buddhist chanting assemblies in Tang China, especially ones committed to group chanting of the *Lotus Sūtra* and the perfection of wisdom sūtras.246

Some of these accounts detail tongues that remain pink and moist after their owners have self-immolated, or been cremated as part of funerary rites. But many more explain that after these chanting monks and laypeople passed away, their bodies were interred or exposed to the elements. When later people stumbled across their remains, or when their tombs were opened for reburial, they would discover that all the flesh of the body, save for the tongue, had completely decomposed, leaving only a skeleton. For readers of these accounts, this meant that they did not necessarily need to burn their bodies to produce relics; instead, they could follow local burial customs and the proof of their practice would still manifest.

Just like jewel-like śarīra fragments, tongue relics were placed in reliquaries and stūpas, presumably to be venerated like other relics. In fact, in this regard there was little difference between the two kinds. Śarīra relics represented a solidification of pure practice and keen understanding of the dharma – the evidence that the practitioner achieved insight and awakening during their lifetime. Tongue relics were analogous to this, but specifically favored chanting practices over other kinds of practice. They displayed a particular use of the tongue as a sense organ: rather than indulging in extravagant tastes or using it to vocalize lies and slander, it is employed with restraint, intoning the dharma relentlessly, speaking truthfully, and tasting only frugal, vegetarian

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246 Suwa 325-326.
meals. James Benn points to the *Lotus Sūtra* as an origin for this belief. In particular, he points to the *Fashi gongde pin* 法師功德品 section which states that the sense organs of the body will be transformed through various practices of upholding the scripture²⁴⁷:

Next, you should always be diligent! If there are good men and women who uphold this *sūtra* by reading it, chanting it, explaining it, and writing it, then they will attain the 1,200 merits of the tongue. Whether one is good, shameful, beautiful, or ugly, all the bitter things on one’s tongue will all transform into a superior flavor, just like a heavenly sweet dew, there is nothing that will not be delicious. If one uses their tongue to deliver a speech to the masses, then they will issue forth the profoundly marvelous sound, which can enter people’s hearts and make everyone joyous. In addition, the heavenly boys, the heavenly girls, Indra, Brahma, and the *devas*, will all hear this profoundly marvelous sound and if there are some remarks following the speech, they will all come to listen. And all the *nāgas* and *nāga* maidens, *yakṣas* and *yakṣa* maidens, *gandharvas* and *gandharva* maidens, *asuras* and *asura* maidens, *garudas* and *garuda* maidens, *kimnaras* and *kimnara* maidens, and the *mahoragas* and *mahoraga* maidens, because they listen to the dharma, they will all come close and respectfully present offerings. And monks, nuns, *upāsakas*, *upāsikās*, kings, princes, officials, attendants, small wheel-turning kings, great wheel-turning kings, the thousands of children of the seven treasures and their inner and outer attendants will all ride up to the hall to listen to the dharma, because this is the perfect speech of a bodhisattva. Brahmins, laypeople, and the people residing in that state will willingly serve and give offerings to them for their whole life. Also, voice-hearers, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas, and various Buddhas will all appear to this person. Wherever this person is, the Buddhas will always preach towards him, and in all cases he can uphold all the buddhadharmas and he can issue forth a profoundly marvelous sound.

²⁴⁷ Benn, 70-71.  
²⁴⁸ T262, 49b.
For each sense organ, the chapter lists the virtues that will be developed through constant practice. The 1,200 virtues of the tongue are not listed in full, but summarized, and they include benefits such as every food coming into contact with the tongue will take on a delicious flavor, the sound of the practitioner’s voice moving people to happiness, and hosts of deities and supernatural beings will flock to listen to the practitioner.²⁴⁹

But the phenomenon of the indestructible tongue is not just interesting because of origins and manifestation in China; it is very much relevant to ideas of materialized sound and the transformed body. In the example of Shi Chong 史崇, we see this in action:

As for Shi Chong, he was a person from Jiaonan near Chang’an. When he was young he was a Daoist, and early on he was entrusted to the Yellow Turbans, where he lived at Xuandu Belvedere. Later, he suddenly gave rise to a mind set on enlightenment, and he chanted the Lotus Sūtra once a day. He personally set up a Buddhist image and engaged in a six-hour repentance ritual. Because this made all the Daoists resentful, he returned to the laity and became more focused on chanting. Later, he contracted a disease and suddenly died. It was midsummer at the time, [but] his body experienced no decomposition. There was only a fragrant qi. Those close to him respectfully carved a niche and installed him in it near the wall. They often smelled a wonderful fragrance. Later, after more than a year had passed, his flesh and sinews had all disappeared. Only the shape and color of his tongue was no different from that of a living person. There were some doubters who did not believe it, so they tried to scorch it with fire, but it was not affected. They also chopped it with an axe, but it did no damage. People from near and far heard about this, and their belief increased a hundred-fold.²⁵⁰

Here, Shi Chong takes up daily chanting after an epiphany moment. Years after his body has decomposed, his tongue not only remains as it was during his life, but it also becomes indestructible. It can be neither burnt nor cut. This happens to his tongue specifically,

²⁴⁹ Benn, 70-71; T262, 49b.
²⁵⁰ T2067, 38c.
since this is the organ conceptualized as the source of speech and sound, and it is a direct result of his chanting practice. The bodily manifestation of chanting is likewise showcased in the case of Blind Wang:

清信士王。梵行。琊琊臨沂人。小失兩眼。其母慈念。口授法華。至年十三。一部通利。仍晝夜誦習。憑心專到。誦得一萬七千遍。雖目無覩。而行來不須前導。自識坑坎。能織席簞。縫衣為疏。勝有眼人。人咸疑其別有所得。蔬食持齋。永無妻娶。年七十一。開皇六年終。屍陀草野。鳥獸不敢近。肉既消盡。唯餘白骨。舌方出口。長一尺餘。色如蓮花。其弟慧義。以塼函龺之。久而不爛。There was male lay disciple called Wang from Langye in Linyi who practiced celibacy. When he was young he lost both of his eyes. His mother was compassionate and orally transmitted the Lotus Sūtra to him. By the time he was thirteen, the whole text was completely fluent. So day and night he chanted it single-mindedly, and eventually chanted it 17,000 times. Although he could not see, when he was coming and going he did not need a guide since he had naturally learned the uneven spots in the road. He could weave straw mats and baskets, and stitch clothing and letters, even better than people with eyes. People all suspected he did not have any belongings. He regularly kept a vegetarian diet and never married. In the sixth year of the Kaiyuan period (718 CE), he died at age 71. He body was exposed in the wild but birds and beasts did not dare approach it. When his flesh had already disappeared and all that was left was a white skeleton, only his tongue came out from his mouth. It had grown over one chi in length, and its color was that of a lotus. His disciple Huiyi stored it in an earthenware container, and it did not decompose for a long time.

In this case too, Wang chants the Lotus Sūtra an astonishing number of times.

Hypothetically, if he began chanting it at the reasonable age of five years old, he would have had to chant it more than 260 times per year until the end of his life to achieve this number, about twice every three days. According to Kumārajīva’s translation in seven scrolls amounting to more than 69,000 characters, that would be at least 46,000 distinct syllables chanted each day. By comparison, in the Tang, Chishan Temple (Chishan fahua yuan 赤山法花院) required a whole winter to chant the entire Lotus Sūtra, doing it bit by bit.252

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251 The Sanskrit term for 屍陀 is śītavana, meaning “cemetery.”
252 T2067, 32c.
The constant exercise of Wang’s tongue would have been quite arduous. It is therefore small wonder that miraculous effects appear at the site of physical activity.

Also of note is how the overuse of one sense organ, the tongue, counteracted disability in another sense organ, the eyes, and supplemented his tactile abilities. Despite Wang’s blindness, he is still able to navigate around difficult spots on the paths he walked. Furthermore, without sight he can adeptly use his hands to weave and stitch, crafting baskets and clothing, better than sighted people. In this case, his chanting practice makes up for any perceived lack in ability; his eyes become inessential because of it. In this view, the whole body benefits from the actions of one organ, and its materiality is transferred from one place to another.

Furthermore, both the accounts of Shi Chong and Wang relate to broader views about the materiality of the Buddha’s body. Specifically, their human bodies seem to take on physical qualities and features associated with the body of the Buddha. First, Shi Chong’s tongue begins to resemble the adamantine body of the Buddha (jin’gang shen 金剛身). As the Sūtra on the Accumulation of Great Treasures (Da bao ji jing 大寶積經) states, “As for the body of the Tathāgata, it is a dharma body. It is an adamantine body, a body that cannot be harmed, a solid and strong body, a body that surpasses the most superior bodies in the three worlds (如來身者即是法身、金剛之身、不可壞身、

\footnote{253 B95, 37b. This is from Ennin’s Diary, \textit{Nittō guhō junreikōki} 入唐求法巡禮行記 (9\textsuperscript{th} cent.).}

\footnote{254 The true, spiritual body of the Buddha, as opposed to his earthly body. Given its description, it appears to still be physical, though.}
Shi Chong’s tongue, too, cannot be harmed—neither by fire, nor blades, nor putrefaction over time.

Next, Wang’s posthumously enlarged tongue also recalls characteristics of the Buddha’s body. Specifically, it invokes the Thirty-Two Marks of a Great Man (san shi er da zhangfu xiang 三十二大丈夫相). As outlined in the Yogâcârhûmi-śâstra (Yujia shidi lun 瑜伽師地論), “The twenty-sixth [mark] is a broad and flat tongue. If it comes out of his mouth, then it completely covers his round face up to his hairline (二十六者其舌廣薄。若從口出普覆面輪及髮邊際).” While we have no comment on the breadth of Wang’s tongue, it is certainly described as unusually long, just like the Buddha’s. In sum, both cases reveal human bodies taking on a specific characteristic of a Buddha body through vocal exercise and sound.

Through speech production, sound becomes a process of the body; it is literally embodied. Through indestructible tongues, we have seen how this materiality can even endure beyond the body as well. But how do we know this is a materialization of sound and not just a product of physical action that the sound has already departed from? The case of the strange object found near Bingzhou provides an example of how the sound exists within the material form of the tongue. This intrinsic tie between sound, body, and physical movement is showcased through how, in Chinese sources, speech organs separated from their owners could even be reactivated through sound:

齊文成世。并州東看山側。有人堀地。得見一處土。其色黃白。與旁有異。尋見一物。狀人兩脣。其中有舌。鮮紅赤色。以事聞奏。問諸通人。無能知者。沙門大統

255 T310, 307b.
256 T1579, 566c.
During the Wencheng period of the Qi dynasty, east of Bingzhou sightseeing on the side of a mountain, there was a man who saw a dirty spot in a cave. It was yellowish-white, and it was different from the other areas of the cave. He looked closer and discovered an object. It was shaped like a person’s two lips, and inside it was a bright red tongue. He reported this matter and consulted several experts, but none of them knew what it was. The monk Fashang, Director of the Buddhist Clergy, wrote a memorial that stated: “This is someone who upheld the Lotus Sūtra and has achieved the reward of the Six Roots not spoiling. This must be profound evidence of having chanted it completely 1,000 times.” Thus an imperial order was made to the Librarian Attendant Gao Zhen: “You are a believer, so you should go there and make an inspection. If there is a supernatural effect, then you should move it to a clean place and set up a fast to make an offering.” Zhen respectfully accepted the order and went there. He gathered together all the monks who chanted the Lotus Sūtra, and they lit a fire for a ritual for purification. As they circumambulated, they chanted: “The bodhisattva’s nirvana was very long ago. The Semblance Dharma is spreading, and we pay tribute to the one free of errors. We request a manifestation of sympathetic response.” Then they began to chant. At that moment, the tongue and lips began to move at the same time. Although it made no sound, it seemed to be chanting too. As for everyone who looked on together, there was none whose hair did not stand on end. Zhen reported back, and the emperor ordered a stone box sent in which to store it, and they moved it to a space in a stūpa (etc.).

Here, the enduring tongue and lips of a departed chanter of the Lotus Sūtra begin to move along with the chanting group during Gao Zhen’s experiment to identify it. It appears that the sound, here used as the instrument of testing rather than the object of testing as in chapter two, resonates with the tongue and cause it to move. This may be read as not merely a case of ganying. In addition, it implies that the deceased chanter exercised his lingual muscles so frequently as to ingrain the movements into his muscle memory.

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257 There is no such emperor or reign name as this in either the Northern or Southern Qi. This seems to be a textual corruption. There is a monk called Fashang who lived in the Northern Qi, in the mid-sixth century, so most likely this account it meant to take place then. The source of this account, the Hongzan fahua zhuan 弘贊法華傳 (T2067), itself is dated to 706 CE.

258 T2067, 31c.
Having practiced this much – at least 1,000 times – the movements became instinctive and unconscious. Thus being immersed in the same sounds once again reactivated the reflex. In fact, the tongue no longer needs the chanter to chant.

The tongue is next placed in a box and installed in a stūpa as a relic. Although it begins within the body as an artifact of sound and physical movement, it is now treated as a distinct, numinous entity, and no longer as a bodily organ. This is similar to how other Buddhist material culture, such as written forms of sūtras, are also regarded as relic-like, numinous objects. Robert Campany has pointed out that Buddhist sūtras were not just read in order to understand the teachings; the physical scriptures themselves were collected, preserved, venerated, and worn as amulets. Because it contained a text within it, a written scripture was a symbolic stand-in for the teachings of the Buddha, and hence also the Buddha himself. He states, “The Buddha, his teaching, Buddha images, and sūtra texts: all seem to have been regarded—or at least were represented—as functionally interchangeable,” and points out that the text was equated to the very body of the Buddha in the Medicine King chapter of the Lotus Sūtra.

藥王！在在處處，若說、若讀、若誦、若書，若經卷所住處，皆應起七寶塔，極令高廣嚴飾，不須復安舎利。所以者何？此中已有如來全身。

Medicine King! In any location, if [this scripture] is preached, read, chanted, or copied, or if the scrolls of the scripture are occupying a space, in all cases one should build a seven-jeweled stūpa, making it very tall, wide, and ornate. There is no need to house any

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260 Ibid, 43.
śārīra in it. Why is this? The whole body of the Thus-Come one is already contained inside.\textsuperscript{262}

Thus the written scripture, the sonic scripture, and even the spaces where the scripture has rested or been chanted are all equal to the body of the Buddha and worthy of being placed in a stūpa for veneration. This was the case for tongues as well. In the same way that the written scripture was a physical repository for the written form of the scripture, the tongue becomes a repository for the sonic form of it.

Sūtras written in scrolls, codices, and manuscripts appear to share numinous characteristics with tongue relics in Chinese miracle stories. For example, the Fa yuan zhu lin 法苑珠林 preserved the following account:

周嵩婦胡母氏有素書大品。素書五寸。而大品一部盡在焉。又並有舍利。銀甖貯之。並緘于深篋。永嘉之亂胡母將避兵南奔。經及舍利自出篋外。因取懷之以渡江東。又曾遇火不暇取經。及屋盡火滅之於灰燼之下。儼然如故。會稽王道子就嵩曽雲。求以供養。後曾暫在新渚寺。劉敬叔云。曾親見此經。字如麻大巧密分明。新渚寺今天安是也。此經蓋得道僧釋慧則所寫也。或云。晉在簡靖寺。靖首尼讀誦之。

Zhou Song’s (d. 324 CE) wife from the Humu clan had a copy of the Mahāprajñāpāramitā- sūtra\textsuperscript{263} written on white silk. The silk was only five cun\textsuperscript{264} wide, but the whole sūtra was completely written on it. Together with a relic, she stored it in a silver vase, which was then sealed in a deep chest. During the Disaster of Yongjia (311 CE), she was fleeing south from the armies, and the sūtra and relic came out of the chest by themselves. Because of this, they took them and carried them while crossing the river to the east. At another time, there was a fire, and there was no time to remove the sūtra. After their home was completely destroyed by the fire, they discovered it under the ashes, still completely intact. The ruler of Kuaiji, Daozi, later went to [Zhou] Song’s great-grandson Yun, requesting to give offerings to the scripture. Later, when it was once temporarily stored at Xinzhu Temple, Liu Jingshu (d. 468 CE) said: “I once personally saw this sūtra. The characters were [only] as big as sesame seeds, but still skillful, dense, and distinct.” Xinzhu Temple is now [called] Tian’an Temple. This sūtra must have been

\textsuperscript{262} T262, 31b. Also translated by Campany, 43n61, and Eubanks, 41.
\textsuperscript{263} Two translations are T223, by Kumārajīva, and T224, by Lokakṣema.
\textsuperscript{264} About 25cm.
written by the monk Shi Huize. Someone said: Once at Jianjing Temple, the nun Jingshou chanted it.\textsuperscript{265}

In this case, the textual form of the sūtra has much in common with the tongue relic. Both are material objects produced through merit-generating somatic actions: the text through hand-copying of a sūtra (chaojing 抄經), and the tongue through chanting (songjing 誦經). Both are stored in particular containers and venerated like śarīra relics; the text is even stored alongside other śarīra. And, both of the items are resistant to harm. The sūtra will not burn, and the tongues do not burn, cannot be cut, and do not decay.

Tongue relics, then, present us with physical evidence of a practitioner’s devotion and the efficacy of their practice, as well as a materialization of the sonic form of a scripture. Chanting is used as a technique to not only convert the body into a “repository for scripture,” as Charlotte Eubanks has called it,\textsuperscript{266} but also to even construct a version of the sūtra within oneself, ingrafting the dharma in the speech organ. The qualities of these objects represent a transformation of the body from ordinary to Buddha-like. And moreover, they betray a materialization of sound, in that the sound, which constructed and constitutes the tongue, can endure and be triggered long after the rest of the body has disappeared.

Correcting and Improving the Human Body

\textsuperscript{265} T2122, 417b. It was also recorded in Mingxiang ji 冥祥記. See Robert Campany, \textit{Signs from the Unseen Realm: Buddhist Miracle Tales in Medieval China}, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2012), pp. 110-111. I have relied on his skillful translation to produce this one.
\textsuperscript{266} Eubanks, 112.
Tongue relics are a clear example of a materialized voice distinct from the whole body. However, there are other ways that chanting altered the materiality of the body as a whole. We have seen a hint of this through the account of Blind Wang – his constant practice of chanting not only preserved his tongue, but it also enhanced his other senses. Unlike posthumous indestructible tongues, these changes to the materiality of the larger body, as a result of chanting, tend to occur during the chanter’s lifetime.

Stories of devout monks and laypeople transcending human abilities and encountering marvels implied to audiences that with enough dedication and sincerity in their beliefs and practices, they too could perform and experience miraculous feats. This promise of exceptional somatic capabilities and supernatural powers in return for devotion and training was not exclusive to schools of Buddhism. Daoist traditions also guaranteed adherents that their commitment could lead to abilities such as x-ray vision, dental regrowth, poison immunity, invisibility, imperviousness to fire, and immortality.267 Indeed, even in later Ming fiction, the Monkey King traveled all the way from the Eastern continent to study with a Daoist master – not because he cared about understanding and following the Dao, but precisely because he wanted to gain immortality and the powers of transformation.268

Charlotte Eubanks has discussed the reinvention of the body from disgusting flesh and pus to a “repository for memorized scriptures” in Buddhist accounts of

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267 See *Shangqing jiu zhen zhong jing nei jue* 上清九真中經内訣. Anonymous. Early Six Dynasties (DZ589, S908), pp. 1a-4b; also see *Taishang deng zhen san jiao ling ying jing* 太上登真三矯靈應経. Anonymous. Song period? (TT136, S286), particularly the method for summoning and riding dragons.
“contemplating on the impure” (fujōkan 不浄観) in medieval Japan.²⁶⁹ In Tang Chinese writings, we likewise see physical responses to Buddhist practice. However, these Chinese stories are not limited to a range of precept holders, as Eubanks describes. As in the accounts of indestructible tongues above, access to these transformations was open to all sorts of beings, as long as they diligently engaged in vocal practice. In other words, chanting served as a technology to correct, enhance, and transform the physical body.

As a tool for body augmentation, chanting provided access to improved physical output. The case of Shi Senghuan is one such example. In this account, preserved in the Tang collection *Hongzan fahua zhuan* 弘贊法華傳 (706 CE), Senghuan is an ailing and frail monk living in the Liang 梁 period. The constant exercise of chanting the *Lotus Sūtra* repairs his insufficiencies and causes his strength to magically grow, to the point where it surpasses that of an ordinary person:

> 釋僧歡。未詳其姓氏。出家。住金陵治城寺。本羸病。乏氣力。乃至心於寺塔下懺悔。祈請愼到。誦法華經不輟。於少時間。鬱然膂力。寺塔前。有兩石獅子。形甚重大。歡忽以兩臂。各貫獅子腹下。擎之而走。行十許里。都不覺倦。梁高祖。聞而駭之。乃勅罷歸。隷裴徂viar。而殞。  

As for Shi Senghuan, his family name is unknown. When he left his household, he stayed in Zhicheng Temple in Jinling. Originally, he was thin, sickly, and lacked strength. So with a sincere mind repented and prayed earnestly at the foot of the temple *stūpa*. He chanted the *Lotus Sūtra* relentlessly, and after a short while, his bodily strength began to grow. In front of the temple *stūpa* there were two stone lions that appeared to be extremely heavy. [Seng]huan suddenly strung an arm under the belly of each of the lions, hoisted them up and began walking. He walked about ten *li* and was not tired at all. The first Liang emperor²⁷⁰ heard about this and was astonished. Thus he (Senghuan) was

²⁶⁹ Eubanks, 112. In Japan this seems to a genre of literature surrounding corpse contemplation (Ch. *bujing guan* 不淨観), whereby one rids oneself of desires and lusts by meditating on repulsive things like dead bodies. After the “visual shock” of the corpse during contemplation, the “body recoheres minus its cargo of lust.” Cleared of these foul desires, it is ready to be filled with pure teachings.

²⁷⁰ Emperor Wu of Liang 梁武帝, r. 502-549 CE.
ordered to give up monastic life and was sent to fight with Pei Sui (d. 525 CE) in his expedition to the North, where he died.\textsuperscript{271}

The changes to Senghuan’s body through chanting could be attested externally – he provided proof of the strength-gain through heavy lifting, and the communities around him witnessed it. Even the emperor took advantage of the transformation.

In the case of Kuai Wu’an, we see this taken to an extreme when his entire body changes between animal and human:

隋蒯武安，蔡州人，有巨力，善弓矢，常射大蟲。會嵩山南為暴甚，往射之。漸至深山，忽有異物如惍人，手開大蟲皮。冒武安身上。因推落澗下。及起，已為大蟲矣。惶怖震駭，莫知所為，忽聞鐘聲，知是僧居，往求救。果見一僧念金剛經，即閉目俯伏。其僧以手摩頭，忽爆炸巨聲，頭已破矣。武安乃從中出，即具述前事。又撫其背，隨手而開，既出，全身衣服盡在，有少大蟲毛，蓋先灸瘡之所粘也。從此遂出家，專持金剛經。\textsuperscript{272}

In the Sui there was a man from Caizhou called Kuai Wu’an. He was incredibly strong and good at hunting with a bow. He often shot tigers. It just so happened that to the south of Songshan there was an extremely fierce [tiger], so he went to shoot it. As he gradually went deeper into the mountains, there was suddenly a strange thing, like a wild man. In his hands he held a tiger pelt and he draped it over Wu’an’s body and pushed him into a ravine. When he got up, he had become a tiger! He was terrified and horrified; he did not know what had happened. Suddenly he heard the sound of a bell, and he knew that [nearby] there was a residence for monks. He went to seek help, and indeed he saw a monk chanting the *Diamond Sūtra*. He approached lying prostrate with his eyes closed, and the monk rubbed his head with his hand. Suddenly there was a tremendous noise and his head split open. Wu’an[’s head] emerged from the inside and he completely explained what had happened. The monk continued stroking his back and it easily opened, so that his whole body could come out. His clothes were all still there, just with a little tiger fur that was sticking to some previous sores that had been treated by moxibustion. Because of this, Wu’an left his household [to become a monk] and specialized in upholding the *Diamond Sūtra*.\textsuperscript{272}

\textsuperscript{271} T2067, 30a6.
\textsuperscript{272} X1634, 505c2. This text is in *Jin’gang bore jing lingyan zhuan* 金剛般若經靈驗傳, although the story claims at the end that it comes from a text called *Baoying ji* 報應記. The same account is also preserved in *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記.
Here, Kuai Wu’an engages in the violent activity of killing living creatures. One might say that his behavior is not so different from a wild animal, and his misfortune of being turned into a tiger is retribution for this immorality. It takes skillful chanting, this time of the Diamond Sūtra, to return him to humanity, releasing his him from an animal form. Although the chanting comes from a second party, it produces a transformation that encompasses the complete shape and substance of his body.

Articulate Animals

If Kuai Wu’an had not encountered that chanting monk, would he have remained a tiger forever? It seems likely. Given that tigers cannot produce human language, he would not have been able to chant for himself even if he knew to do it. Speech production then requires a specific physiology that only humans and a few other kinds of animals have. It in turn distinguishes humans from animals in general. But as we will in the Tang accounts, humans and exceptional animals, especially parrots, can be grouped together based on their speech capabilities.

The difference between human and animal has been theorized broadly across time and space, from ancient civilizations to even the present day. Speech production is often one aspect of this complex discussion. As Euripides (5th cent. BCE) stated through the character of Theseus in his play The Suppliants,

He has my praise, whichever god brought us to live by rule from chaos and from brutishness, first by implanting reason, and next by giving us a tongue to declare our thoughts, so as to know the meaning of what is said...273

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In essence, language and reasoning distinguish humanity from chaotic and animal-like behaviors. Likewise, similar ideas about human exceptionality in regard to speech capabilities, although not fully understood at that time, were espoused by certain Victorian theorists and scientists at the cusp of the fields of animal cognition and comparative psychology in the 19th century.274

Although less directly stated, a version of this idea is present in Chinese Buddhist thought as well: “Thus the scriptures say that a human body is difficult to attain, and the teachings of the Buddha are hard to hear (是故經中說人身難得，佛法難聞).”275 In other words, the rare gift of a human body grants access to Buddhist teachings in ways that are inaccessible to other kinds of beings. The statement goes as far as to imply that without human physiology to engage in Buddhist practices, and human faculties such as language cognition to understand the teachings, it is much harder to gain a rebirth in the Western Paradise and guarantee one’s release from the cycle of suffering.


274 Studies of human and animal language are ongoing, so it would seem that our understandings of these phenomena are still far from complete. In the Victorian period in particular, though, certain understandings of speech capabilities were used to make now-controversial claims about the cognitive development of not just animals, but also human beings who lacked speech, such as deaf and mute people. See, for example, Jennifer Esmail, *Reading Victorian Deafness: Signs and Sounds in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Ohio University Press, 2013), and for a couple centuries earlier, see Anita Guerrini, *The Courtiers’ Anatomists: Animals and Humans in Louis XIV’s Paris* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

275 T441, 222a20.
As we have seen in the previous chapter, even with a voice and human-like bodies, hungry ghosts still relied on compassionate acts and would ask monks to perform practices such as chanting on their behalf. Those in animal rebirths were left in an even more pitiful state. Born in unclean conditions, most lacked the physical and cognitive abilities to generate merit for themselves to achieve a better rebirth; instead they had to rely on compassion from those who made vows to generate merit on their behalf, else they would suffer through many more miserable lifetimes as an animal or in other lower rebirths before being granted the rare opportunity of an attempt at human life. But parrots are perhaps an exception to the rule; their animal bodies may have blocked them from certain meritorious activities, like scripture copying, but their human voices allowed them to chant.

Recent scholarship on speaking animals in Buddhist cultures includes a substantial portion of a new monograph by Reiko Ohnuma. In this volume she discusses how and when animals are given voices in Indian Buddhism, particularly in Jataka tales. Animals in these accounts, she notes, are “represented as thinking, speaking, planning, and reasoning in much the same manner as human beings.” They speak amongst themselves, and they speak to human beings. However, in these cases the animals are really more human than animal: they are allegorical human beings.

The parrots described in the final part of this chapter diverge from this scheme. Since they allegedly lived during the Tang, and not in the distant past of Jataka literature,

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277 Ohnuma, 44.
278 Ohnuma 44-45.
they were not allegories of humans. Instead, they were ordinary parrots that could articulate speech and chant, learned through continuous training. Their human features are not allegorical; they are instead enabled wholly through the possession of a voice.

This ability to intone scriptures with a voice lent access to Buddhist practice and bodily transformation, to the extent that even parrots could produce relics. Furthermore, because they experienced the material voice in the same way human beings did, we can thus see how chanting as an embodied action was transferrable from one corporeal location to another.

The most famous account of a gifted bird is that of the white parrot belonging to the consort of the Tang emperor Xuanzong 玄宗, Yang Yuhuan 楊玉環 (719-756 CE; also known as Yang Guifei 楊貴妃, “Imperial Consort Yang”):

In the Kaiyuan era (713-741 CE), [emissaries from] Lingnan presented a white parrot as tribute. They raised it in the palace for many years; it was quite intelligent and it could understand speech. The emperor and the imperial consort both named it “Snow-Clad Girl.” Since it was tame, they often let it out [of the cage] to feed and fly around chirping, and so it stayed within the confines of the room screens. The emperor ordered that the current scholarly officials teach it poetry, and after several repetitions it could repeat it. Every time the emperor and the consort were with all the lords amusing themselves with games, and the emperor was not quite winning, the attendants would call for Snow-Clad Girl and she would certainly fly into the area and strike the drum and dance. She would scramble their arrangements [of chess pieces], or use her beak to peck the hands of the palace girls and lords, making them unable to take the correct paths [in chess]. Suddenly one day, the parrot flew onto the consort’s mirror stand and said: “Last night I dreamt that a bird of prey seized me, will I perish here?” The emperor then made the consort
teach it the *Heart Sūtra*, and she was quite adept at memorizing and chanting it. [She chanted it] continuously day and night, as if she were scared of an impending disaster, and this could help somewhat. [Later] when the emperor and the consort went out to a different hall, the consort placed Snow-Clad Girl on a pole attached to the palanquin so that they could go together. When they arrived, the emperor ordered his entourage to go hunting around the hall, while the parrot played above the hall. Suddenly an eagle seized her and she was killed. The emperor and the consort were heartbroken for a long time, so they ordered that she be buried in the garden, and they established a burial mound for her, called the Parrot Tomb.  

The remarkable bird described in this account could not only assume a human voice to repeat poetry and Buddhist texts that had been taught to her, but she is depicted as also being able to communicate original ideas, relating her thoughts about her dreams and fears to her caretaker, Yang Yuhuan. Snow-Clad Girl’s human voice allowed her to do more than merely mimic the chanting of the *Heart Sūtra*. Just as a human being might also do, she used chanting as a practice to protect herself from the potentially terrible consequences of an untimely death. She chanted constantly, mirroring the behavior modeled by eminent monks in hagiography. Despite her parrot body, she applies her vocal apparatus like a human, adapts certain human behaviors, and is ultimately given a burial mound like a human. She is not an allegorical human, but she is in some sense a symbolic one; the form of her body does not change, but its substance does.

Another parrot story, the “Record of the Reliquary of the Parrot of Xichuan (西川鸚鵡舍利塔記),” attributed to the general Wei Gao 韋皋 (746-805CE), reveals more concrete evidence of a material reconfiguration via a human voice:


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此鳥聲容可觀，音中華夏。有河東裴氏者，誌樂金仙之道，聞西方有珍禽，群鳴和鳴，演暢法音，以此鳥名載梵經，智殊常類，意佛身所化，常狎而敬之。始告以六齋之禁，比及辰後非時之食，終夕不視，固可以矯激流俗，端嚴梵倫。或教以持佛名號，曰當有有念，以至無念，則仰首奮翼，若承若聞。其後或俾之念佛，則默然而不答，或謂之不念，即喻言阿彌陀佛，曆試之，曾無爽異。余謂其以有念為緣生，以無念為真際。緣生不若，為緣起也；真際雖言，為本空也。每虛室戒署，發和雅音，穆如笙竽，靜鼓風，下上其音，念念相繫，聞之者莫不洗然而嘉善矣。

於戲！生有辰乎？緣有盡乎？以今年七月，緇佛不豫，七日而逝。馴養者知其將盡，乃鳴鈴告曰：「將西歸乎？為爾擊磬，爾其存念，每一擊磬，一稱彌陀。」洎十擊磬，而十念成，斂羽委足，不震不仆，奄然而絕。按經典，十念成，往生西方。又云：「得佛慧者，殊有舍利。」知其說者，固不隔於殊類哉？遂命火以閹維之法焚之，餘燼之末，果有舍利十餘粒，炯然在掌。識者驚視，聞者駭聽。咸曰：「苟可以誘迷世，安而弗非菩薩之化歟？」時有高僧慧觀，常詣三學山巡禮聖迹，聞說此鳥，涕淚悲泣，請以捨利於靈山用陶甓建塔，旌其異也。余謂此禽，存而由道，沒有明徵，古之所以通聖賢階者。女媧蛇軀以 спец帝，中衍鳥身而建侯，紀乎策書，其誰曰詀怪？而況此鳥有玄於道流，聖證昭昭，胡可没已。是用不愧，直書於辭。貞元十九年八月十四日記。

The primordial essence produced the myriad categories by means of the five qi, and although they were scaly, shelled, feathered, or furry, there were certainly animals with honorable and pure senses. Some were bright [even] without flames, some were endowed with an unusual deep-blue essence, but they all responded to human culture with reverence, like the seasons. Then there was this winged bird that could learn to speak through instruction, it achieved the marks of emptiness through no-thought, and left true relics after its death. It was likely the manifestation of a great sage, and, moved by the minds of human beings with similar unusual karma, it underwent a true transformation. Last year there was someone who presented a parrot. When speaking, this bird’s voice was impressive, and it used Chinese language. There was a Mr. Pei who lived in Hedong who delighted in the way of the Golden Sage (the Buddha). He heard that in the West there were rare birds who would flock together and sing, expounding the sounds of the dharma. He conveyed Buddhist sūtras to this bird, and its perception was exceptional. It contemplated the transformations of the Buddha’s body, constantly getting closer to it and venerating it. They once announced an observance of purifications for six days, from morning until evening there was fasting. It indeed inspired the laypeople with its stately Sanskrit system. Someone taught it (the parrot) to uphold the Buddha’s name, and they said that because it had awareness to the extent of freedom from [false] thoughts, then it would raise its head and shake its wings, as if it were listening. Later, someone made it chant the name of the Buddha, and it was silent and did not respond. Someone said it did not remember, and then it promptly chanted ‘Amitâbha.’ Each year they tried it the same way, but there was nothing special. I say that they took having awareness as being produced by causal conditions, and they took being free from false thought as the limit of reality. As for putting aside causal conditions, this is dependent arising; although we talk of the limits of reality, this is fundamentally empty. Each morning an empty room sends forth harmonious sounds, solemn like the sheng and yu mouth organs, quietly struck by
the wind, the sounds above and below successively replenish each other; as for those who hear them, there are none who do not become pure and good. Ah! Does arising have an hour, is karma finite? In the seventh month of this year, it (the parrot) suddenly became extremely ill for seven days. The person who raised it knew that it was about to die, so he struck a stone chime and announced: “Will you return to the West? I will strike this chime for you. As for your maintaining the chant, every time I ring the chime, we will chant the name of Amitâbha Buddha.” When the chime was rung ten times, and the ten recitations were complete, it arranged its feathers down to its feet, then without shaking or collapsing, it suddenly expired. According to Buddhist doctrine, when ten recitations are complete, one is reborn in the Western Paradise. It also says: “As for those who have achieved the Buddha’s wisdom, when they die they leave relics.” Knowing this explanation, could it, a parrot, indeed be no different from this? So they ordered a fire to burn it according to the method of cremation, and in the embers, there were indeed ten granules of relics, bright, brilliant, and lustrous in one’s palm. Those who learned of this looked on in surprise, and those who heard about it listened with astonishment. Everyone said: “If it can create a delusion to benefit the world, how can it pass away and not become a bodhisattva?” At that time there was an eminent monk called Huiguan who once visited the mountain of the three disciplines to seek traces of the dharma. He heard about this bird, and [he was so moved that] tears flowed down his face, and he requested that the relics be moved to Lingshan and placed in a ceramic stūpa to display their marvelousness. I say that this bird followed the Way in its life, and in its death there was clear proof [of its following the Way], because in the past it was one who, through sageliness, ascended to transformation. Nüwa had a snake body to succeed the ruler, and Zhongyan evolved to a bird body to establish the noblemen. It is chronicled in record books, who could call this strange? Moreover, this bird was great at spreading the Way – how could this not be clear proof of it being a sage? Here I shamelessly and faithfully record it in words, on the 14th day of the 8th month, in the 19th year of the Zhenyuan reign [Sept. 3, 803 CE].

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280 Wei Gao 韋皋 [Tang 唐], “Xichuan yingwu sheli ta ji 西川鸚鵡舍利塔記,” in Quan Tang wen 全唐文, Vol. 5 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), pp. 4631-4632. There are other similar accounts, especially modern ones, such as news items posted on online forums and videos of birds intoning gāthās or the name of Amitâbha Buddha posted on YouTube. For exemplary modern video examples, see “A Scaly-Breasted Munia that can Chant the Name of the Buddha (Yì zhī huì niànfó de bànwénniǎo 一隻會念佛的斑文鳥),” YouTube, uploaded by 法鼓山 DDM, 18 April 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GofxfctzxV0>, in which nuns from Dharma Drum Mountain 法鼓山 explain how they nursed scaly-breasted munias back to health and raised them after a typhoon, teaching them to chant the name of Amitâbha Buddha, and “A Myna that can Chant the Name of the Buddha (Huí niànfó de jiǔguānniǎo 會念佛的九官鳥),” YouTube, uploaded by 葉起筠, 15 October 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LpAGDsP63Ao>, in which a myna recites the gāthā “Amitâbha’s Golden Body” (Āmitūfo shēn jīnse 阿彌陀佛身金色) in the same voice as its teacher. For a more ancient version, refer to, for example, the wall paintings
The writer of this eulogy likewise claimed that this parrot possessed an uncanny intelligence and was able to communicate it through human language and engage in chanting practices. Without this vocal skill, its human caretakers would have had no knowledge of the extent of its understanding. Moreover, as proof of the parrot’s ability to engage in Buddhist practice through chanting, its body produced relics after it was cremated. These relics served as testaments of the power of the voice; animals without this faculty could not chant or express understanding as humans did. Through articulating like a human, this parrot was treated like a human being on the cusp of its death, afforded human cremation rites, and, like the human bodies described in the first part of this chapter, it produced material evidence of the efficacy of chanting – its relics. This parrot too retains its parrot shape, but by its death, it seems to be little different from human.

The distinction between humans and animals is blurred when the animals can do what humans can do. As for the parrots in these two Tang accounts, they are assumed to understand Buddhist teaching as humans did, and are even treated to post-death rites as humans were. Snow-Clad Girl was honored with a burial mound, and the second, unnamed parrot was cremated. The reason for this is that the same sonorities that occupied human bodies occupied parrot bodies as well, and altered their materiality and substance in the same manner. In a way, these parrots achieve a transcendence of body category, going from animal to more human.

These parrots and other mimicking birds were thought to possess unusual intelligence, demonstrated through their abilities to mimic human language. This

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of consort Yang teaching her parrot to chant, preserved in the Liao period Baoshan Tomb #2 in Chifeng 赤峰, Inner Mongolia.
impression of avian intelligence and human capacity, demonstrated through speech and

crystalized in relics, only began in the Tang; it has lasted into modern Chinese

Buddhism.\textsuperscript{281}

Conclusion

Tongue relics were intimately connected to the voice and the ability to chant \textit{sūtras}.

Additionally, the message these accounts delivered was little different from those of

figures like Blind Wang, Shi Senghuan, or the parrots: it is possible to transcend one’s

original body through chanting. Desirable traits, such as incredible physical strength,

could manifest as a result, or one could be protected and saved from curses. Relating to

the tongue in particular, beings could also preserve sound in a material form within

themselves and make progress in the process of converting their own bodies into

extraordinary ones. The voice, still, is the essential component in these cases. After all,

among the merit-generating activities commonly mentioned in scriptures like the \textit{Lotus

Sūtra}, only vocal production results in a distinct relic type materialized through the body;

\textsuperscript{281} It is important to note that while the following are miraculous accounts of birds with

human voices, not all extraordinary birds were held in esteem. Edward Schafer notes a

record of an omen in which a bird with a human face is spotted in 856. Although it is not

quite human language, the call of the bird is a recognizable, though undefined, syllable

(“kam!”), and it is considered to be an inauspicious omen. See Edward Schafer, “The


219. On another note, in addition to various Jataka tales of the Buddha as a parrot in a

past life, there is also a \textit{Parrot Sūtra (Yingwu jing 鸚鵡經, T79)} in the Buddhist canon,

translated into Chinese in the mid-5\textsuperscript{th} century by Guṇabhadra 求那跋陀羅. However, the

“parrot” in this case is just a translation from the name Šubha, the Brahmin figure in the

text who receives a teaching about karma from the Buddha. It does not refer to a bird.
reading the scriptures leaves behind no pale, glassy eyeballs, nor does copying the scriptures leave unwithered, golden hands.

In 1987, a green parrot was adopted by a sincere Buddhist layperson with the surname Wang in Baotou City in Inner Mongolia. This parrot originally was unable to mimic any clever phrases and had a predisposition for pecking people, but over the next ten or so years, it listened to many tapes of Buddhist chanting, and gradually it became more gentle and sweet. What's more, to the amazement of the community, the parrot learned to chant the names of the Buddha Amitâbha and the Bodhisattva Guanyin, and other short phrases related to Buddhism. This was remarkable, since they originally thought it not too clever: it was still unable to learn even basic phrases like “hello,” despite hearing them constantly. On the brink of the parrot's death in May of 1998, the whole Wang family helped the parrot chant for twelve hours, and after its death, monks from Mount Wutai performed its funerary rites and cremation which resulted in a number of extraordinary relics: more than twenty floret relics, several tens of granule relics, solidified feathers, and an intact tongue.282

Thus the enduring tongue not only endures beyond the body and constitutes chanted sound itself beyond the chanter, but it also endures well past the Tang.

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282 This story is found on, among other places, the “Understanding Buddhism” website that promotes the Pure Land teachings of the Taiwanese Ven. Master Chin Kung, at “A Parrot Dies and [after] its Cremation its Tongue does not Spoil (Yingwu nianfo wangsheng huohua shetou bu huai 鴉鵡念佛往生火化舌頭不壞),” Jingzong fengfan 淨宗風範, <https://www.amtfweb.org/sample/parrot.htm>, and at Xinyuan 心源, “A Parrot Dies and [after] its Cremation it Produces Relics (Yingwu nianfo wangsheng huohua chu sheli 鴉鵡念佛往生火化舌出舍利),” Xuefo wang 學佛網, 31 October 2009, <http://www.xuefo.net/nr/article2/18013.html>, an online forum and repository of short articles discussing Buddhist beliefs, experience, and resources by laypeople and monastics.
CHAPTER 5

Therapeutic Tones and Hazardous Hymns:
The Relationship between Sound and Health in Tang Dynasty Buddhism

Introduction

In 2014, the English version of the *Global Times* posted an unusual article to their online news outlet. The piece, about local agriculture in Liangshan, stated that farmers had managed to boost the yield of their rice crop by fifteen percent, as well as increase the size of the individual grains, and reduce damage from pests. How did they manage this agricultural feat? They reported that it was through playing Buddhist music – chants and mantras – through 500 lotus-shaped speakers in various areas of the paddies. The article likewise notes that there may be scientific evidence for these kinds of results; citing from the China Agricultural University, the author points out that “certain sound waves, such as those found in the rhythmic chanting of mantras, can stimulate the pores on a plant's leaves to help better absorb sunlight.”\(^{283}\) The one caveat? The article cites a local official who states, “only positive music aids growth, while rock music would probably harm it.”\(^{284}\)

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\(^{284}\) Ibid.
If this represents a popular understanding of how certain types of sounds can stimulate or harm growth, development, and productivity in even just plants, how much more is the effect of certain sounds on human beings who can cognize what they listen to? In fact, the idea that sound influences human activity, such as development, emotions, and behaviors, has a global presence, especially with popular movements like the “Mozart Effect,” which claim that listening to certain types of music will make a person smarter.²⁸⁵ More than just affecting cognition, though, sound has been promoted as a means to encourage physical care and recuperation. For example, music therapy is likewise a growing field in healthcare that promotes itself as a therapeutic intervention for issues of stress management, pain alleviation, physical rehabilitation, and others.²⁸⁶ In fact, in Tang dynasty Buddhism we can find similar trends in thought: various types of sounds had an impact on the health and mental state of the listeners, as well as on those producing sounds.

The previous chapters of this dissertation have discussed ways in which chanting benefitted people. Yet despite its boons, certain texts still warned of improper sounds. This has also been alluded to in the previous chapters: in the first chapter we saw that, in vinaya texts, not only are monastics and laypeople discouraged from performing and listening to secular vocal and instrumental music, but these texts also discouraged overly-

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²⁸⁵ The veracity of these claims is debatable. There have been studies with results both for and against it. For example, in support of it, see F. H. Rauscher, K. D. Robinson, J. J. Jens, "Improved maze learning through early music exposure in rats," *Neurol. Res.* National Center for Biotechnology Information, Vol. 20 No. 5, (July 1998): 427–32. And against it see Jakob Pietschnig, Martin Voracek, Anton K. Formann, "Mozart effect–Shmozart effect: A meta-analysis," *Intelligence*, Vol. 38 No. 3 (2010): 314–323.

musical recitations of Buddhist texts; and, in the third chapter, we have seen a case in which listening to chant with improper decorum invites retribution. Particularly in the 
v\textit{vinaya} cases, performing and hearing the wrong sounds or in the wrong manner fell into the category of “crimes” (\textit{zui 罪}), and resulted in punishments from the religious community. Offenders were made to repent their ill behavior.

In this chapter, I endeavor to discuss another sense of hazard associated with chanting practices: sound as a disorder. Previous scholars – particularly ethnomusicologists of non-Chinese sonic traditions – have devoted pages to describing medical uses of sound, especially music and chanting as agents for healing mental, physical, and spiritual afflictions. But as we will see, secular music, religious chanting, and amusical noise could all also act as agents of disorders (\textit{bing 病}), and the production of the wrong sounds, or production of sounds in the wrong way, was also conceptualized as disorder. In this chapter I show that sound can heal as well as cause disorders. This is especially relevant to Buddhist practices – both chanting and meditation – where inability to produce sounds in a certain way can interfere with cultivation, and the sound environment can disrupt concentration. Thus sound adversely interacts with health in two ways: it can originate from unhealthy or unhygienic mouths, thereby reducing its efficacy; and it can act as a destructive power that is expressed as a pathology.

\begin{itemize}
\item The case of the \textit{śramaṇa} Famin 法敏.
\item Liu (2013), 105-126.
\end{itemize}
The therapeutic effect of music has not only enjoyed rising significance in modern healthcare, but is also been granted its own academic sub-field, medical ethnomusicology. As Benjamin Koen describes it,

Medical ethnomusicology further strengthens the course of integrative, complementary, and alternative medicine by bringing in-depth understandings of music and sound phenomena, as well as multiple and diverse practices of music and healing, to bear with the ever-present frame of culture, the place where music, other specialized sonic expressions, and related praxes are assigned or empowered with a highly personal, culture-specific, or culture-transcendent meaning that can increase health and facilitate healing.

While this field is continually broadening, there appear to be two obstacles, in my opinion. The first is the relegation of the “medical” aspect of medical ethnomusicology to mainly refer to issues of healing, therapy, and care – essentially the treatment of diseases, disorders, and afflictions through sound. However, sounds can also be the causes of irritation and disorder, as well as symptoms of it, and can have a broader relationship with other health-related issues such as hygiene.

The second, more serious issue is the dismissal of studies of healing and music in Chinese contexts by certain scholars. In regard to the contents of his edited volume on historical approaches to music and therapy, for example, Peregrine Horden states:

Part of [this collection’s] point is to show where music therapy has not been significant as well as where it has. There seemed, however, to be no need to carry the principle to its extreme and include a chapter on the last of the great traditions of learned medicine, the Chinese. … But, as with both Hippocratic and Ayurvedic medicine, there is (so far as I

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290 As in the practice of music therapy and in alternative medicine.
can establish) nothing in the canonical texts of Chinese medicine to suggest that music, though an image of cosmos, body politic, and individual body, was much used to transfer order - that is, health - from the cosmos to individuals. Like those of the Indian tradition, anecdotes about the quasi-magical transformative power of music concern its effects on nature, not on disease. Hence the ancient Mediterranean, the Islamic Middle East, and India are all represented in what follows; China is omitted. With this particular subject, ancient learned medicine, returns seemingly diminish as one moves across Eurasia.  

Even if we concede that Horden had little English-language scholarship to draw from on Chinese music and healing at the time of his volume’s publication (2000), we are still left with significant problems. First, must we exclusively rely on canonical sources? Second, which “nature” is being referred to? And third, is it not logically fallacious to assume that just because one has failed to gather evidence for it, a phenomenon must not exist?

Horden’s statement that music therapy has not been significant in Chinese contexts is simply not true. In Chinese Buddhism, music and healing were often linked, especially in the medieval period. Moreover, when also conceptualized as a cause or symptom of disorder, we can see that sound not only played a role in healing, but that it also was present in broader understandings of healthcare.

Before diving in, we need to clarify what is meant by disease in medieval China. Scholars of Chinese medicine have already dedicated much time to addressing what is

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292 Peregrine Horden, ed., *Music as Medicine: The History of Music Therapy Since Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 47-48. Italics added by Kelsey Seymour. The further gross overgeneralizations about Chinese culture are omitted from the quote. In short, he states that “the whole of Chinese culture is therapeuric.” However, this characterization (of a whole culture, no less) is based on a misunderstanding of the term “culture” (wenhua 文∕文化) in Chinese. He uses a paleographic explanation from a personal communication with an obscure source to explain what the term means. But in the periods the classical texts were produced, wenhua as a bisyllabic word, was hardly used, and when it was used, it certainly did not refer to “culture” in any sense we would recognize. It only gained this meaning after being exported into Japanese as bunka 文化 and then repatriating into China, probably in the 19th century.
meant by this and medicine in pre-modern Chinese communities. The field of medical ethnomusicology defines medicine broadly, as “diverse practices of healing,” “that can increase health and facilitate healing.”²⁹³ But, as Nathan Sivin points out, in Chinese medical history, medicine generally refers to what is practiced by physicians (yi 醫).²⁹⁴

In the cases presented below, it is rarely physicians who make diagnoses and recommend therapies. Therefore, where possible I refer to this more broadly as healthcare.²⁹⁵

Because Horden obfuscates what disease means in Chinese contexts, it is important to clarify this as well. In this chapter, I translate the word bing 病, sometimes translated as “disease,” instead as “disorder.” As Sivin has also mentioned, bing encompassed much more than just disease; it included issues such as wounds and birthing complications as well.²⁹⁶ In this regard, I follow him here as well. In fact, the disorders presented in this chapter perhaps push the boundaries a bit further. It involves problems of hygiene that affect health and religious efficacy, as well as problems of meditation that affect the mind, yet are still classified as bing. Extending from this, it may be possible to say that it can include disorders of nature, in the sense of “psyche,” as well. As Sivin has noted again, not all suffering is biological.²⁹⁷

Sonic Healing in Tang China

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²⁹³ Koen, 6.
²⁹⁵ Also following Sivin’s usage of the term. See Ibid, 9-10.
²⁹⁶ Ibid, 10.
²⁹⁷ Ibid, 34-35.
The eminent monk Daoxuan (道宣 596–667 CE) never left China during his lifetime, but in the final year of his life, he narrated a fantastical vision of Jetavāna monastery in Śrāvasti in his *Illustrated Sūtra on Jetavāna Monastery in Śrāvasti in Central India* (*Zhong tianzhu Sheweiguo Qihuansi tujing* 中竺舍衛國祇洹寺圖經). One such structure in his elaborate description is a hospital:

次北第三院名佛病坊。開門如上。堂宇周列花樹兩列。耆婆阿難在此瞻侍。大梵天王施八部樂。一一樂器有十六種。皆以金銀七寳所成。佛為眾生示疾。凡此諸樂出音以娛樂佛。如來聞音病即除愈。若病不除樂音便奏六度神足等曲聲遍三千。初地十住有現疾者聞音除愈。

Next, the third building to the north is called the Buddha’s Hospital. One opens the doors as above. In the main hall, flowers and trees are arranged in two rows along the periphery. Jīvaka and Ānanda attend to everything here. The king of the Brahman heaven entertains the eight kinds of beings with each of the sixteen kinds of musical instruments, all made from gold, silver, and the seven jewels. The Buddha manifests sicknesses on behalf of the sentient beings, and this music produces sound to delight the Buddha. When the Thus-Come one hears these sounds, the disorder is immediately healed. If the disorder is not eliminated, then they play the music of the tunes of six perfections, or of spiritual powers, each consisting of 3,000 sounds. If a bodhisattva in the first stage of the ten abodes develops a sickness, when they hear these sounds it will be healed.\(^{298}\)

Whether drawn from his imagination or from accounts told to him by his colleague Xuanzang (玄奘, 602–664 CE), who did make the pilgrimage, the vision of instant healing through musical sounds is nonetheless extraordinary. Also included in his account is a second healing facility (*yifang zhi yuan* 醫方之院), which contains a bell that, when struck, instantly heals all those suffering from afflictions and illness,\(^{299}\) as well as descriptions of heavenly deities whose voices are the agent of healing:

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\(^{299}\) T1899 893b.
There is also an image of the thirty-three celestials. These celestials are on top of an elephant’s head. The image of the celestials measures five chi (2.5m); they are made of green crystal and wear silver crowns. Each of the celestials grasps a white chowry in their hands. When the elephant trumpets, all of these people raise their chowries and dance and sing to musical compositions on the Noble Eightfold Path, the lyrics of which were written by Indra. Each composition has 84,000 tunes, and the lyrics also have 84,000 words. One tune will cure sentient beings of diseases of affliction.

But more than just being a fanciful imagination of how Buddhist music operated in a sacrosanct location, such as the site where the historical Buddha preached, instructions to heal physical ailments through sound appeared in scriptural sources as well. One such example is Yijing’s (義淨, 635–713 CE) translation of the short scripture *The Sūtra on Curing Sores, Explained by the Buddha* (*Fo shuo liao zhibing jing* 佛說療痔病經). After listing the various sores one can suffer from, the Buddha tells Ānanda, “[Even] if sores have appeared on one’s entire body, these sores will all undoubtedly dry up, fall off, disappear, and completely heal. In all cases one should chant this spell (遍身支節所生諸痔，如是痔瘻，悉皆乾燥，墮落，消滅，畢差無疑。皆應誦持如是神呪)”. Following this statement, the spell – a transliteration from Sanskrit – appears. After the spell, the Buddha reiterates its effect on the ailment, and claims additional benefits to chanting not just the spell, but the scripture as a whole: the ability to recall the events of the past seven lifetimes of oneself and others. In terms of curing, however, the

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300 T1899 885c.
301 T1325, 490c.
only solution offered is an intoned phrase; there are no suggestions of ointments, medicines, bathing, acupuncture, or other medicinal and hygienic techniques.

Moreover, Chinese Buddhists wrote about using vocalizations to dispel disease in their own localities as well. The most prominent method was, again, healing through incantations. As John Kieschnick has pointed out, incantations were applied for healing illnesses with no obvious causes, as was done by the 3rd century monk He Luojie, when “during a period when a plague was spreading and many people were dying in succession, [He Luo]jie used spells to cure them, healing eight or nine of every ten (時疫疾甚流卒死者相繼，竭為呪治，十差八九).” He also points out that spells were a primary cure for illnesses that were believed to have been brought about by demons and ghosts, as in the case of the monk Shi Puming: 

又善神呪所救皆愈。有鄉人王道真妻。病請明來呪。明入門婦便悶絕。俄見一物如狸長數尺許從狗竇出。因此而愈。[Shi Puming] was also good at using spells to save and cure people. When the wife of the villager Wang Daozhen had fallen ill, they invited him to come and chant incantations. He entered their household [to perform the incantations] and the woman passed out. Suddenly he saw a creature like a fox, about several *chi* long, rush out from a dog-hole. Because of this, she was cured.

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303 Kieschnick, 84-85.

304 T2059, 407b. Also mentioned in Kieschnick, 84 (untranslated).
This exorcistic method of incantation for healing was also recommended by Zhiyi (智顗, 538–597 CE) in cases of demon-borne illness.\(^{305}\)

Moreover, this was not a curing method relegate[d] to exclusively Buddhist circles; in the Tang, healing through sonic incantations pervaded many Daoist and popular traditions as well. Incantations on their own, or in conjunction with ingested substances, talismans, ritualized movement, and visualizations are present in a large number of texts describing therapies, and in individual recipes.\(^{306}\)

**Oral Hygiene and the Efficacy of Chanting**

Yet there were also circumstances under which individuals could produce the correct sounds, but in the wrong way. In many cases, the efficacy of chanting scriptures and intoning spells was dependent on the practitioner’s oral hygiene and health of the body in areas that affected speech production.

Without a healthy mouth and throat, speech is compromised. This was recognized even in the Tang, where texts like Sun Simiao’s 孫思邈 (d. 682 CE) *Recipes for Emergencies Worth a Thousand Cash* (*Beiji qianjin yaofang* 備急千金要方) discussed various ailments with symptoms including vocal disorders. For example, Sun notes a

\(^{305}\) Kieschnick, 85.

kidney disorder with symptoms including muddled speech and blocked ears, as well as a depletion of the spleen that causes oral problems:

依源麻黃湯：治脾虛寒厲風所傷，舉體消瘦，語音沉澀如破鼓聲，舌強不轉而好咽唾，口噤唇黑，四肢不舉，身重如山。

Soup made from the ephedra source: Cures spleen depletion and cold that has been harmed by ulcer-causing winds. The whole body begins to waste away, speech becomes rough like the sound of a broken drum. The tongue stiffens, making it difficult to swallow. The mouth becomes silent and the lips turn black, the four limbs cannot be raised, and the body becomes as heavy as a mountain.

While these recipes did not directly point out the difficulties that compromised speech and compromised speech organs can cause to individuals chanting any text, Buddhist or otherwise, this can be inferred.

For Buddhists specifically, there was a more pressing oral issue: improper diets. Scholars have previously plotted out the intricacies of the mostly-vegetarian monastic diet in relation to vinaya texts and monastic identity, its pre-Buddhist precedents and non-scriptural sources, and the broader ideals of not harming sentient beings. They describe accounts of monks eating meat, as well as vinaya texts that do not completely prohibit it under some circumstances, such as consuming a piece of meat that has been placed in the alms bowl (as long as that meat was not prepared specifically for the monk).

308 Sun Simiao 孫思邈 [唐], 286b16-287a.
But in general, monks and many laypeople strove to exclude it from their diet.\footnote{Kieschnick, 22-25.} But consuming the wrong foods could also lead to ill behavior and halitosis.\footnote{Sun Simiao also includes a cure for the disorder (bing 病) of halitosis, though he does not state any issues of speech production deriving from it. Sun Simiao 孫思邈 [唐], 205b7.}

Besides just breaking the precept against killing, eating meat – and for that matter other forbidden substances such as alcohol and the five pungent herbs (wuxin 五辛\footnote{Also known as the \textit{wu hun} 五荤. The list varies, but commonly includes vegetables like scallions, leeks, shallots, onions, garlic, and ginger. In addition to the effects on breath mentioned below, they were also thought to cause irritability and lack of concentration, and, according to more popular understandings, increase lustful thoughts.} – caused both literal and symbolic impurity directly in one’s mouth. Because of this, among other terrible side effects, chanting scriptures and spells became ineffective. Daoxuan perhaps put it most succinctly in a list of reasons not to eat meat in his commentary on the \textit{Dharmaguptakavinaya} (Sifen lü shanfan buque xingshi chao 四分律删繁補闕坋行事鈔): “There are infinite reasons that one should not consume meat. I will narrow it down to ten: …number seven, because it makes incantations ineffective (有無基因緣不食肉。略說十種。。。七令呪術不成就故).”\footnote{T1804 117c-118.} His colleague Daoshi 道世 (d. 683) likewise emphasized the pollution associated with meat-eating. After outlining the how and why of using willow chewing sticks to clean the teeth and bean dregs to wash one’s hands,\footnote{Also in C. Pierce Salguero, “Karma in the Bathhouse: The Sūtra on Bathing the Sangha in the Bathhouse,” in C. Pierce Salguero, ed., \textit{Buddhism and Medicine: An Anthology of Premodern Sources} (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), pp. 84-91.} he lamented,
When reading scriptures and taking meals one should certainly practice this and clean one’s hands in these cases. How much more so when one has polluted their body and mouth by taking life by their own hands and drinking the blood and eating the meat [of the animal]? Even if they wished to transmit the dharma, their mind would be impure.\textsuperscript{317}

Elsewhere in \textit{Fayuan Zhulin} 法苑珠林, Daoshi further elaborates on the futility of engaging in oral practices like chanting and incantation while under the impure influences of meat, alcohol, and the five pungent herbs. In the case of alcohol, chanting under the influence was ill-advised because of the adverse effect it has on one’s mind and respectful behavior. He urges:

There is also a scripture on Śrāmānerī Precepts that says: You should not drink alcohol. You should not be fond of alcohol, and you should not taste alcohol. Alcohol has thirty-six faults. Losing the way, destroying one’s family, endangering the body, and losing one’s life all derive from it. One leads east and it takes them west, they maintain south but it takes them north. One cannot chant the scriptures, and it is disrespectful to the three treasures.\textsuperscript{318} One does not take their friends and teachers seriously, and they are unfilial to their parents. Their minds close and the thoughts become stuck, and throughout the world they become stupid.\textsuperscript{319}

Following that, he reiterates that eating meat will cause a person’s attempts at spellcasting to be unsuccessful, and society will view such a person as a sorcerer\textsuperscript{320}:

第六明食肉之人，學世呪術尚不得成。況出世法。何由可證。是故行者不應食肉。如彼經說。世間邪見諸呪術師。若其食肉呪術不成。為成邪術尚不食肉。

\textsuperscript{317} T2122, 1016b.
\textsuperscript{318} Buddha, dharma, sangha.
\textsuperscript{319} T2122, 972a-972b.
\textsuperscript{320} John Kieschnick has also pointed out that at various times in the Tang, spellcasting was actually illegal. Those who were caught doing it, especially in situations outside of ordinary exorcism, could be sentenced to death by the Tang government. Kieschnick, 92-95.
The sixth is people that eat meat. If they study the arts of incantations, then even this will not be successful, how much more so for the dharma that transcends the world? On what basis can it be realized? Therefore a practitioner should not eat meat. Just as this scripture states, all the world views masters of incantation arts as false. If they eat meat, their incantations do not work. [Even if they want to] successfully perform sorcery, then they still do not eat meat. \(^{321}\)

Moreover, if one chants after having eaten meat and the five pungent herbs, it is counted a violation of monastic law, and in order to return to chanting inoffensively, one must first undergo forty-nine days of oral purification through mouth-washing:

又五辛報應經云。七眾等不得食肉葷辛讀誦經論得罪。有病開。在伽藍外白衣家服。已滿四十九日。香湯澡浴竟。然後許讀誦經論不犯。

Furthermore, the *Sūtra on Retribution for the Five Pungent Herbs* states: Those in the seven groups of Buddhist disciples should not eat meat or pungent substances. If they [do this and] chant the sūtras and śāstras, this is a violation. It will cause disorders, and [the person suffering] should stay at the home of a layperson for forty-nine days, and also completely bathe in fragrant water. Only afterwards can they chant sūtras and śāstras without offense. \(^{322}\)

But why precisely was chanting so dependent on the cleanliness of the mouth? Was not chanting the teachings of the Buddha, syllable by syllable, enough to ensure and demonstrate purity of at least the speech, from the trio of body, speech, and mind (*shen kou yi* 身口意)? It was not, for at least two reasons. First, substances that were restricted from a monk’s diet, especially meat and the five pungent herbs, were believed to cause halitosis, and this mouth odor was a symbolic stand-in and unmistakable evidence for duplicitous or unreliable speech. The sixth-century repentance manual *Fo shuo foming jing* 佛說佛名經 outlines it thus:

\(^{321}\) T2122, 975c. Elsewhere in *Fa yuan zhu lin*, Daoshi mentions that incanting can be rendered ineffective through lack of sincerity, incorrect characters in the text, and problems in intonation and pronunciation. See T2122, 735a, as well as Capitanio, 354. 

\(^{322}\) T2122, 981b.
The Sūtra explains: A violation of oral activity can make sentient beings drop into hell and receive suffering as hungry ghosts. If they arrive at an animal rebirth, then they receive the form of an owl or vulture. Of those who hear its cries, there are none who do not abhor it. If they receive a human rebirth, then their breath will always stink. No one will trust anything they say, and they will not get along with family because they constantly like to argue.325

The “oral activity” here is karma-producing speech, and a violation of it refers to lying, foul language, exaggeration, and other speech discouraged in monastic law. The retribution of having bad breath during one’s next human rebirth is a reflection of the previous speech violations. In other words, people with poor oral hygiene are imagined as not speaking the truth, and even if they did speak the truth, others do not trust them.

Second, the eavesdropping audience of benevolent spirits324 found oral stench off-putting when they stopped by to listen to chanting. Hungry ghosts, on the other hand, delighted in the foul aroma. Śikṣānanda’s (Shichanantuo 實叉難陀, c. 695 CE) translation of the Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra (Dasheng ru lengqie jing 大乘入楞嚴經) puts it bluntly when it states, “As for those who eat meat, the heavenly deities depart from them, and their breath always stinks (食肉者諸天遠離，口氣常臭).”325 The Śūraṁgama-sūtra (Shou lengyan jing 首楞嚴經)326 elaborates this further in regard to the five pungent herbs:

323 T441, 218c.
324 Discussed in more detail in the third chapter of this dissertation.
325 T672, 632c.
326 Another Tang text, widely accepted as apocryphal. It is purported to have been translated in the early 8th century by the Central Asian monk Pramiti (Bocimidi 般刺蜜帝).
When sentient beings are endeavoring to achieve samādhi, they should abstain from the five kinds of pungent vegetables in the world. As for these five kinds of pungent herbs, if eaten cooked they arouse lust, and if eaten raw they increase irritation. As for a person in the world who eats the five kinds of pungent herbs, even if he can transmit the teachings of the twelve divisions of the Buddhist canon, all the celestials and immortals from the ten directions will dislike that person’s stench, and they will all depart from him. Based on what he ate, all the hungry ghosts will lick his lips, and he will constantly be in the company of ghosts. His fortune and merit will dissipate daily, and for a long time he will be without benefits. When a person who eats pungent herbs cultivates samādhi, bodhisattvas, celestials and immortals, and the benevolent spirits from the ten directions will not come to protect him. Powerful demon kings will help him out. If the Buddha himself appeared to preach the dharma for [him], that person would [still] break the precepts and praise the three poisons of lust, anger, and delusion. When he dies, he will become a member of the demon king’s entourage, and when the charity from the demon runs out, he will fall into the hell of unremitting pain.

Thus chanting with bad breath not only posed health risks, but it also affected reception by human and ghostly audiences. Eavesdropping, benevolent deities who stopped by to listen would smell the aromas emitted from a practitioner’s mouth. They become disgusted by the odor and driven away, while inauspicious creatures like ghosts and demons are attracted to it, and it ultimately leads the practitioner to suffer in hell. This being the case, prudent monks would have striven to keep their breath fresh.

Luckily for chanters, surrounding these ideas about malodorous speech production was a large literature of guidelines for oral care. Therapies and preventative

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327 Lust, rage, delusion.
328 T945, 141c.
measures against it included chewing willow twigs,\textsuperscript{329} tongue scraping,\textsuperscript{330} additional incantations,\textsuperscript{331} mouth-rinses, and bathing.\textsuperscript{332} As Pierce Salguero notes in his introduction and translation from \textit{The Sūtra on Bathing the Sangha in the Bathhouse (Foshuo wenshi xiyu zhongseng jing 佛說溫⪣浴眾僧經)}, maintaining oral and dental care was a way for preachers to gain respect in society,\textsuperscript{333} and in general, physical cleanliness was equated with moral purity.\textsuperscript{334} The cleansing itself was often done in a ritualistic manner.

For example, in the \textit{Great (Sūtra) of Three Thousand Dignified Observances of a Monk (Da biqiu sanqian weiyi 大比丘三千威儀)},\textsuperscript{335} monks were required to use a chewing stick with precise measurements, and they could only chew three times during a use. Tongue-scraping likewise should not exceed three times, and should be stopped immediately if blood is drawn. In all cases, talking should be avoided during the activities, to maintain decorum and avoid additional mess, and one should avoid doing these and other activities like gargling in front of stupas and superiors.\textsuperscript{336} These hygienic

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{331} Heirman and Torck, “Toilet Care in Buddhist Monasteries: Health, Decency, and Ritual,” 141-2.
\item \textsuperscript{332} Salguero, “Karma in the Bathhouse: The Sūtra on Bathing the Sangha in the Bathhouse,” p. 88.
\item \textsuperscript{333} Ibid, 88.
\item \textsuperscript{334} Ibid, 85. He translates from T701.
\item \textsuperscript{335} T1470. Likely translated in the 5\textsuperscript{th} century. See Ann Heirman and Mathieu Torck, \textit{A Pure Mind and a Clean Body: Bodily Care in the Buddhist Monasteries of Ancient India and China} (Gent: Academia Press, 2012), p. 114.
\item \textsuperscript{336} Ibid, 114-115.
\end{itemize}
habits were not only generated to prevent rot and disease in the mouth, but also to ensure that pure speech originated from a ritually pure location.

The rules regulating a monk’s diet were related to the precept against killing in a multifaceted way. As we see here, one such way was how it affected vocal production. Chanting could be ineffective, or even harmful through repelling and attracting certain spirits, depending on the diet of the chanter. As one was able to make their mouth cleaner through eliminating stench and pollution, they could then increase the benefits of efficacy, audience trust, and benevolent spirits. Moreover, because others could detect a monk’s breath through their olfactory senses, a clean mouth was a way of gaining respect in the community since it served as a standard for purity. In other words, the purer the mouth, the purer the words from it, and the purer the person saying them. Diet and oral hygiene may not have been adjusted solely to maximize the efficacy of chanting, but we can say that, at the very least, chanting played a role in the broadening thought on diet and oral hygiene as they developed in medieval China.

Listening and Chanting Incorrectly

Chanting in an untoward manner was only one way in which sound intersected with health. Complications in the faculty of hearing arose as well, both in the sense of being unable to hear, and in the sense of hearing things wrongly.

Inability to hear – whether that be through deafness, obstructed or imperfect hearing, inability to process heard sounds, or even willful ignorance – blocked
transmission of the dharma. As a countermeasure, we see cures for deafness scattered throughout Buddhist texts. For example, the likely apocryphal scripture *Secret Essential Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness (Zhi chanbing miyao fa)*, a manual for curing practitioners of disorders (*bing* 病) that occurred during meditation, includes a combined cure for headaches, eye pain, and deafness. After a visualization to quench a fire, the practitioner is encouraged to visualize the god Maheśvara (Moxishouluo 摩醯首羅) on a golden ox, bearing a vase of medicinal water that the practitioner drinks. After that, Maheśvara places a pearl on his head and out from the pearl flows medicinal decoctions that irrigate the eyes, ears, and nose. Once this has been seen, then the illnesses – presumably the eye pain and deafness – have been cured. Maheśvara subsequently turns into the Buddha, guarded by 500 immortals, and teaches the practitioner another method for curing illness.

Other texts with methods to unblock ears cured deafness through dhāraṇīs and pharmaceuticals. The *Great Compassion Dhāraṇī Sūtra (Dabei xin tuoluoni jing)*

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337 Title translation from Eric Greene in Pierce Salguero’s edited volume. On its status as Buddhist apocrypha, he notes that whether or not it was apocryphal, it was in circulation at least by 454 CE., and it circulated fairly widely after that, as it was referenced by Zhiyi in the late 6th century. See Eric Greene, “Healing Sicknesses Caused by Meditation: ‘The Enveloping Butter Contemplation’ from the Secret Essential Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness,” in C. Pierce Salguero, ed., *Buddhism and Medicine: An Anthology of Premodern Sources* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), pp. 373-374. Greene has also discussed this scripture at length in his dissertation, although in this case he uses it to show examples of what he calls “verificatory visions (jingjie 境界),” defined as sudden visualizations that appear to a meditator during a meditation as proof that they have achieved the proper state of mind. He does not consider, however, how was sound is portrayed as interacting with the practitioner, as I do in this chapter. See Eric Greene, “Meditation, Repentance, and Visionary Experience in Early Medieval Chinese Buddhism” (PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2012), pp. 15-76.

338 The method is summarized from T620, 338c-339a.
instead recommends an empowered ointment: “If one is suffering from deafness, then use the dhāraṇī to empower sesame oil. If one applies it in their ears, then they will be cured (若患耳聾者，呪胡麻油，著耳中，即差).”

Aside from experiencing deafness, one could also deliberately listen to the wrong sounds, or listen in excess, such that an attachment to the sound forms. Both issues are addressed together in the “method for curing indulgence in music” in the Secret Essential Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness. First, the Buddha presents to Śāriputra the cause and symptoms of the disorder:

復次，舍利弗！若四部眾樂諸音樂，作倡無厭，因是動風，如縱逸馬、亦如秋狗、似伊尼利鹿王，耽惑愚癡，心如鰷膠，處處隨著不可禁制，當疾治之。

[The Buddha said]: Next, Śāriputra, if [someone in] the four groups of Buddhist disciples indulges in all kinds of music and they engage in performances without restrictions, then because of this they change their habits, and they are like a wild horse. They are also like an autumn dog, or like a black antelope, delusional and foolish. Their minds are like birdlime, they accordingly form attachments everywhere, and they cannot be controlled. They need to cure this illness.

Thus the problem here is not just listening to the wrong kind of music – secular music – but listening indulgently and in excess. The listener’s behaviors change and their mind

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340 T1060, 110b.

341 A pleasure derived specifically from using one of the senses (except mind).

342 T620, 337c
becomes incontrollable and unconducive to meditation practices. The method to cure it does not involve any pharmaceutical substances or techniques like acupuncture. Instead, like the Maheśvara visualization that cured deafness, the Buddha recommends another visualization:

The method for curing it: First, visualize a goddess of incomparable elegance, in her two hands she naturally has many musical instruments, emitting the sounds of myriad kinds of music. After the practitioner sees this, then he will see that this goddess exceeds external forms by a trillion-fold, and he will hear that this heavenly music is incomparable to anything in the world, and he will have mental afflictions because of this observation of form and hearing of sounds. Because of this one should teach [the practitioner] to observe confirmatory visions that arise from this goddess’s six sense roots. Through the power of counting one’s breaths, he will therefore see [her] compassionate eyes generating six poisonous snakes. They come out of her eyes and enter into her ears. Then he sees two insects shaped like owls, emitting sinister sounds. They break open her head and come out of her brain, fighting over eating it. For the remaining four roots (ears, nose, tongue, body), he visualizes a cat, rat, dog, and jackal fighting over eating them. Because of this he can see the complete material existence of this woman, and that the thirty-six parts of the body are all polluted and impure. He sees that her pearl necklace is in fact harboring roundworms, that all the various instruments she is holding have been stirred in excrement, that all the insects are roused into motion as the jackal howls. Not even monsters can listen; it is like a rākṣasa crying. And because of this, he distances himself [since the illusion is broken]. He should go to a place with a learned person and explain his prior evil acts and bad deeds and sincerely repent, and the learned person should teach him contemplation on impermanence.343

Thus when sounds have interfered with the practitioner’s understanding of reality by creating attachment and illusion, the practitioner is expected to perform a visualization that will manifest frightful images to disrupt their delusional views. After imagining the

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343 T620, 337c-338a.
musical sounds embodied in a musician goddess, the practitioner receives visions of the corrupted nature of her sense organs. Like a “contemplation on the corpse” meditation, he witnesses the body become gruesome; all that once seemed pure is revealed to be polluted, even the musical instruments. In this case, then, sound is certainly the cause of disorder: it leads to delusional thoughts and attachments. Listening to secular music itself was already risky to Buddhist practitioners, and even more so when listening without a perspective that allowed them to remain detached. The cure is thus breaking the delusion and correcting the viewpoint.

Besides intentionally enjoying music, monks could also be exposed to hazardous sounds unintentionally. For example, if a monk had already settled into a state of meditation, they could still be subject to distracting, disturbing, or sudden sounds from outside. The Secret Essential Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness provides one such case:

Once the Buddha was in Jetavāna park in Śrāvastī with 1,250 monks. In the summer, on the fifteenth day of the fifth month, 500 disciples practiced the twelve solitary contemplations of the mind under the bamboo grove, and through counting their breaths they entered the samadhi of lapis lazuli. At that time, King Prasenajit had a son called Virūḍhaka, and together with 500 elders the son mounted an elephant in heat and near Jetavāna engaged in theatrics and sport. Moreover, he caused the elephants to be intoxicated, and pitted them against each other in fights. There was one dark elephant who trampled on lotuses, its sounds were terrible, like thunderclaps with cat-like

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344 That is not to say they did not do it. See Liu, (2013), pp. 220-251; and also any number of accounts in Luoyang qielan ji.
screeching in between. The disciples – Nandika the Meditator, Upanandi, and the rest of them – were terrified, and their hair stood on end, and during their meditation on the wind element, they went mad and began having ignorant delusions. They arose from their meditative concentration, and like mad elephants running about wildly, they could not be controlled.

It is not clear if these disciples heard these terrible noises before or during their meditation, but in either case, the result is that the mental concentration required to meditate was too taxing after being subject to such sonic abuse. As Eric Greene has noted, for the whole of the text of the *Secret Essential Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness*, including this particular madness from frightful noise, it “presents an implicit warning— that meditators, by virtue of the rarefied states they attain, are potentially exposed to numerous unique and dangerous maladies.” In this case, the etiology is sound.

But what was the cure? Ānanda’s initial response to “Board up all the rooms! Do not let them escape!” does not seem to work, so all present turn to Śāriputra and plead for him to have compassion and save the disciples. Being rather sensible, Śāriputra takes Ānanda by the hand, and together they go to ask the Buddha:

World Honored One, we only wish that you would take compassion on everything, for the sake of future generations of monks. Because of five kinds of phenomena, they have gone mad: the first is caused by disorderly sounds; the second is caused by bad reputation; the third is caused by seeking profits; the fourth is caused by external winds; the fifth is caused by internal winds.

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345 Following Eric Greene’s reconstructions of the names. See Greene (2012), 544.
346 T620, 333a.
347 Greene (2017), 374.
348 T620, 333a.
and the fifth is caused by internal winds. How should we cure these five kinds of illness?
We only wish that you would explain it for us.³⁴⁹

By the end of his diagnosis, it becomes apparent that the first step to eliminating madness
is to eliminate sound. He replies,

若行者行阿練若修心十二，於阿那般那因外惡聲觸內心根，四百四脈持心急故一
時動亂。風力強故，最初發狂，心脈動轉五風入咽，先作惡口。應當教是行者服食
酥蜜及阿梨勒，繫心一處，先想作一頗梨色鏡，自觀己身在彼鏡中作諸狂事。見此
事已，復當更觀而作是言：『汝於明鏡自見汝身作狂癡事，父母、宗親皆見汝作不
祥之事。我今教汝離狂癡法，汝當憶知。先教除聲。』

If there are disciples practicing the twelve solitary contemplations, and during their
breath counting there is an external, terrible sound that touches their inner faculty of the
mind, then the 404 veins palpitate and are all at the same time thrown into turmoil.
Because the wind is strong, when one first goes mad, the heart tract is agitated and the
five winds enter the throat, first causing a reviling mouth.³⁵⁰ One should instruct this
practitioner to ingest yogurt and myrobalan fruit, fix their mind on a single place, and
first visualize a crystal-colored mirror. [The practitioner] will observe his own body
engaging in various mad acts in the mirror. Upon seeing these acts, [the instructor] should
continue observing and say the following phrase: ‘In this bright mirror you observe
yourself engaging in mad and delusional acts, and your parents and relatives all see you
doing these inauspicious things. I will now teach you the method for departing from
madness. You should remember it. First I will teach you to eliminate sound.’³⁵¹

The Buddha first recommends some ingestible supplements, but once again, the main
remedy recommended is a visualization. He continues with the method:

除聲法者，舉舌向腭，想二摩尼珠在兩耳根中，如意珠端猶如乳滴，滴滴之中流出
醍醐，潤於耳根使不受聲。設有大聲，如膏油潤終不動搖。此想成已，次想一九重
金剛蓋從如意珠王出，覆行者身，下有金剛華，行者坐上。有金剛山，四面周匝繞
彼行者，其間密繫靜絕外聲，一一山中有七金剛，為行者說四念處。爾時，寂然
不聞外聲，隨於佛教，此名除亂法門去惡聲想。

The method for eliminating sound: Lift the tongue to the palate, and visualize two mani
pearls inside the two ear roots. These wish-granting pearls are just like drops of milk, and
from inside each drop effuses the richest butter, engulfing the ear roots and not allowing
them to receive sounds. Even if there is a huge noise, just like oily butter, it will not even

³⁴⁹ T620, 333a-333b.
³⁵⁰ Bad language.
³⁵¹ T620, 333b.
vibrate. When this visualization is complete, next visualize a nine-layered diamond canopy emerge from the wish-granting pearls, covering the body of the practitioner. Below there are diamond flowers, and the practitioner sits on top of them. There is a diamond mountain, and its four sides completely surround the practitioner. Inside is so dense that it completely cuts off external noises. Inside each mountain there are seven seated Buddhas, for the sake of explaining the four bases of mindfulness to the practitioner. Then, in silence, he will not hear external noises, in accordance with the Buddha’s teaching. This is called the doctrine of eliminating disturbances, and the visualization of expelling terrible sounds.\(^{352}\)

In summary, the practitioner first uses visualization techniques to craft himself a pair of butter earplugs that cut off sounds from the outside. Additionally, within his mind, he constructs an impenetrable mountain, to block sounds from reaching any part of his body. In this way the practitioner achieves a state conducive to meditation practices, one of complete stillness and quiescence, both physical and aural.

However, the Buddha continues, external sounds are not the only issue one has to worry about when curing this madness. “Next, Śāriputra (復次漓儌),” he states, “when the external noise has been expelled, one should expel the internal noise (既去外聲已，當去內聲).”\(^{353}\) These internal sounds are defined in the text as movements of the six sense organs and distortions of the heart tract that are caused by external sounds. They allow evil winds to enter, and thereby cause strangeness [in behavior] such as singing and dancing.\(^{354}\) The recommended therapy is again a long visualization, called the “Contemplation on Cleansing the Heart.” It encompasses images of medical treatments such as fumigation and acupuncture, as well as ritual purification of the body and the mouth, within the mind:

\(^{352}\) T620 333b.
\(^{353}\) T620 333b.
\(^{354}\) Summarized from T620, 333b.
The contemplation of a pure and unfettered heart: first contemplate one’s own heart, gradually making it brighter like a ruby – with 404 veins like lapis lazuli and golden plantains just at its side. The ruby emits a qi, not cold, not hot, not rough, and not delicate, in order to imagine the fumigation of all the veins. [Next] one should visualize a King of the Brahma Heaven grasping a mani mirror to illuminate the chest of the practitioner. Then the practitioner should contemplate his own chest as a wish-granting pearl, with the bright, pure, lovely ruby as the heart. In the palm of the King of the Brahma Heaven, there is a wheel-turning seal, and in the center of the wheel-turning seal is a white lotus, and on top of the white lotus there is a divine youth ladling milk out of the wish-granting pearl in order to irrigate all the veins. As the milk gradually flows down to the heart, the youth grasps two needles – one golden and one blue – and at the two sides of the heart he attaches two golden lotuses with the needles. After seven (times) boring them in [with the needles], the heart becomes pliant again. Just as before, one should again use milk to cleanse the heart. The milk trickles into the large intestine, and when the large intestine is full, it fills the small intestine. When the small intestine is full, all the milk flows out from it, drop by drop continually entering the mouths of the 80,000 kinds of parasites [in the body]. When all the parasites are full, then it fills the inside of the body, completely extending into the 336 nodes of the bones. After that, [the practitioner] should visualize a milk pool with a white lotus emerging from the center of it. The practitioner sits atop it and cleanses himself [with the milk]. In the place where the practitioner is, he should visualize willow-floss like a white lotus winding around the body seven times. The King of the Brahma Heaven takes milk from his own body and cleanses the mouth of the practitioner. When this is finished, he takes a canopy and covers the practitioner, and from the King’s canopy, one can completely see all kinds of superb confirmatory visions, and retrieve his original mind. There is no longer any distortion.

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355 Interpreting zhuyang 珠王 here as “pearl” or “bead.”
356 T620 333b-333c.
The use of milk and other dairy products as curatives here, even in a meditation, is worth noting. When the Buddha himself became sick, as he does in the *Milk-Radiance Sūtra*, he requested milk as a cure. Ānanda was sent on a mission to obtain the milk, and after helpful interventions from Vimalakirti and Indra, he successfully delivers it back to the Buddha. Moreover, milk is a metaphor for the teachings of the Buddha. The *Nirvana Sūtra* states:

譬如從牛出乳，從乳出酪，從酪出酥，從酥出醍醐，醍醐最上，若有服者眾病皆除，所有諸藥，悉入其中。善男子！佛亦如是，從佛出生十二部經，從十二部經出修多羅，從修多羅出方等經，從方等經出般若波羅蜜，從般若波羅蜜出大涅槃，猶如醍醐。言醍醐者，喻於佛性，佛性者即是如來。

For example, milk (*ru* 乳) comes from a cow, soured milk (*lao* 酪) comes from milk, raw butter (*shengsu* 生酥) comes from soured milk, hot butter (*resu* 熟酥) comes from raw butter, and ghee (*tihu* 醍醐) comes from hot butter. Ghee is the most superior. If you take it, it will eliminate all disorders; all medicines are found in it. Good sons, the Buddha is also like this. The twelve divisions of the scriptures come from the Buddha, the *sūtras* come from the twelve divisions of the scriptures, the Mahayana teachings come from the *sūtras*, the perfection of wisdom comes from the Mahayana teachings, great nirvana comes from the perfection of wisdom, just like ghee. When we speak of ghee, it refers to Buddha-nature, and Buddha-nature is the Buddha.

Thus dairy can be seen as a panacea for all disorders, and is equated with the teachings of the Buddha. Individuals who hear, study, and practice these teachings are spiritually nourished, just as milk nourishes infants.

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357 T809, 754b-756b.
358 The character 酥 here should probably be 麻.
After the Buddha transmits this cure, the disciples suffering from madness are all instantly cured, having additionally freed themselves from all afflictions, gained perfect understanding of the doctrine of emptiness, amassed super powers, and achieved a state that guaranteed they would go on to become arhats. Thus we see how both external sounds, and their counterpart internal sounds, can be causes of disorder. For a final case of harmful sound, we can turn to sound as a symptom of disorder, wherein defects are signaled through a person producing certain types of sounds. One more example from the *Secret Essential Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness*, the “Method for Curing [Over-]Fondness for Singing and Chanting Verses and Hymns,” shows how chanting in a certain way was a cause of certain feelings – in this case, arrogance – but that it was also a symptom of these feeling. In this case, singing hymns in praise of the Buddha, texts drawn mainly from scriptural sources and, unlike some secular music, generally approved for use by Buddhist communities, was just as hazardous as engaging in other sonic practices. The Buddha explains to Śāriputra:

復次，舍利弗！若行者好作偈頌美音讚歎，猶如風動娑羅樹葉出和雅音，聲如梵音悅可他耳，作適意辭令他喜樂。因是風嚮，貢高慢慢、心如亂草，隨煩惱風處處不停，起慢慢幢、打自大鼓，弄諸脈零，因是發狂——如癡猨猴採花果，心無暫停，不能數息——當疾治之。[The Buddha said]: Next, Śāriputra, if a practitioner is fond of intoning verses and hymns and using beautiful tones for [singing] praises, it is just as the wind moves the leaves of the śāla trees to produce harmonious tones. The sounds are like the Brahma’s voice that can please the ears of others, they are composed of agreeable and meaningful words and bring others joy. Because of his reputation, [the practitioner] becomes arrogant, his mind becomes like wild grass, it accords with the wind of affliction and does not stop anywhere, raising a banner of arrogance, beating the drum of self-aggrandiztion, making all his veins wither, and because of this he becomes mad. It is just like an ignorant ape

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360 See chapter 1.
361 One of the 32 marks.
362 This is perhaps also a play on the words for musical style. Certain editions have the character 響 instead of 嚮. See Greene (2012), 582-583.
picking fruits, there is no pause in his mind, and he cannot count his breaths [in meditation]. We must cure this.\textsuperscript{363}

Here, the practitioner’s beautiful voice is comparable to that of the Buddha. Yet despite this, the beauty of his voice and the enjoyment and fame he gains from having such a voice and chanting the hymns causes feelings of arrogance to stir. Being too good at chanting, then, also becomes an indicator and symptom of chanting in an incorrect manner. The emotional stirrings become so extreme that the practitioner goes mad, and at this point it is also possible to count the excessive singing as a symptom of madness.

Outside of Buddhist contexts, another example of this is found in cases of madness, which often include excessive laughter and excessive singing as symptoms. Lee Jen-der has pointed out how, in early medical canons, symptoms of madness – especially excessive and unstoppable laughter, but accompanied by singing – are caused by excesses in emotion, excessive spirit (\textit{shen} 神), and the \textit{qi} of the heart being full (\textit{xin qi shi} 心氣實).\textsuperscript{364} Other causes of excessive laughter include cold or chill in certain viscera, eating dangerous fungi, and – particularly for women – having relations with creatures like ghosts.\textsuperscript{365} Ghost-related illnesses included symptoms that affected speech, like “elective mutism, wild talking, singing, crying, and laughing.”\textsuperscript{366}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{363} T620, 338a.
\textsuperscript{365} Ibid, 101.
\end{flushright}
Lee points out that doctors diagnosing patients with madness could listen to vocal productions such as laughter and singing to better understand the illness.\(^{367}\) Common treatments, she notes, are fox meat or pork soups.\(^{368}\) In any case, abnormal vocalizations seemed to be indicative of disorder, and they were commonly related to difficulty and excess in emotional responses. Abnormal vocalization thus signaled disorder; in the Buddhist case above, the abnormality is being too good at singing.

Again the Buddha offers a cure through visualization:

The method for curing it: First [the practitioner] should visualize a tall, seven-jeweled banner. There is a gandharva on the front of the banner. His body is like white jade, and he moves his body to the verses and gāthās. From his pores emerge great lotuses, and a hundred thousand monks intone the myriad kinds of sounds from on top of the lotuses, surpassing the practitioner himself more than a billion-fold. Because of this, his arrogance slowly subsides. The learned person should further teach the practitioner clear observation of the front of the banner, visualizing a crystal mirror on the front of the banner. All the monks [on the lotuses] depend on sound for this arrogance, and those whose minds are impure transform into rākṣasas emitting sinister sounds, and with flames coming out of their mouths. Then yakṣas come from the four directions, they pull out their (the monks’) tongues and pluck out their hearts and place them on the front of the banner, their hearts are [still] palpitating. They wail and cry out like intoxicated elephants trumpeting. Others make meager sounds like goblins groaning. Because of this he then visualizes all the beautiful tones as if they were [sounds of] people calling out as their parents brutally scold them. And because of this, [the practitioner] comes to loathe it, and his ears no longer take pleasure in hearing it and he develops a distaste for it that frees him from the perception. The learned person should teach him to contemplate the eight kinds of suffering, and thus he explains this contemplation.\(^{369}\)

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\(^{367}\) Lee, 110.  
\(^{368}\) Ibid, 113.  
\(^{369}\) T620 338a-338b.
Once again, the visualization consists of graphic imagery and raucous soundscapes, perhaps to jolt the practitioner into an understanding of their faults. Unlike the visualization recommended in the “method for curing indulgence in music,” which focuses on exhibiting the corruption of the sense organs and the dangers of sensory perception, this one instead focuses on sound production. The practitioner first visualizes his own voice as inferior to others, then visualizes all sounds as perverse and nightmarish.

As I have shown in this chapter, there were diverse ways in which sound impacted human health in Tang Buddhist thought. It could be a cure for ailments, as in Daoxuan’s imaginary Jetavāna hospital; it could be a factor that influenced dietary and hygienic choices, so as to avoid halitosis while chanting; and it could be a cause of disorder, as we have seen in the Secret Essential Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness. In these cases, sound posed a threat to correct practice, or derived from incorrect practices, but at the same time, the very habits they were linked to, such as vegetarianism and visualization, thus played a role in the elimination and control of pathological sound.

Finally, despite the dismissal of scholars like Horden, I hope I have shown that sound, and especially vocalizations like chanting, played a significant role in thought about healthcare in medieval China. “Disease,” broadly speaking, was both cured by and caused by sounds. The topic of music and health may not have had its own genre or corpus in medieval sources, nor was it necessarily well-represented in what some might call “doctrinal” medical texts, like Huangdi neijing 黃帝內経. But there is enough distributed through Buddhist texts in particular to show that reflections on the topic were present and had an impact on the daily practices of Chinese Buddhists.
CONCLUSION

Returning to the chanting ritual described by Ennin during his stay at Chishan 赤山, we perhaps have a better picture of the multiple ways he and his Sillan and Tang acquaintances may have experienced and interacted with the sounds they listened to and produced. We already know from his descriptions of chanting that Ennin, as a listener, had an ear for melodic nuance. But while Ennin had a good ear, there was no “right” or “wrong” melody to him. It was of little consequence whether the tunes were Tang, Sillan, or Japanese. Huijiao, too, in describing the transmission of Indian melodies into Chinese contexts, was also not promoting the idea of a correct melody that required indefinite preservation; the music was converted out of convenience, to match a linguistic environment.

Likewise, Ennin attached no doctrinal meaning to the sound. The times that he mentions doctrine are instead in reference to the lectures, explanations, and questions posed in the midst of the rituals, and these are about the content of the scripture being chanted, rather than about the action of chanting. This is not to say that no one related chanting to doctrine, but it certainly widens the ground to multiple experiences and ways of participating. We see these in the variety of literature discussing chanting throughout this dissertation.

Now that we have a new vision of Ennin’s experience, we might imagine that as he chanted during his travels in China, and when Chinese Buddhists themselves chanted, that they may have had many understandings of their practice. They may have thought about the rigorous effort of memorizing the scripture, or they may have chanted with remarkable ease since the movements for each syllable had been ingrained in their
muscle memory. They may have wondered which, if any, of a host of eavesdropping spirits may have stopped to listen for a moment. They may have reflected on the care taken in purifying one’s mouth beforehand so as not to offend any of these deities. And, in some cases, they may have experienced unease in the back of their minds as they strove to chant and listen in ways that would not harm them. The study of chanting and other Chinese Buddhist music, thus, should extend beyond preserving melodies and philosophizing on sound and reflect the multiple meanings of the practice, and its relationships with other practices.

These experiences derive from the senses and from associations. Individuals listened to chanting, judging sounds as musical, or voices as pleasing. Based on this, chanters likewise had expectations of what their audiences – visible and invisible – were hearing, and how they were hearing. Moreover, Chinese Buddhists could physically observe their own action of chanting, not only understanding this as a way to learn a text, but also as an activity with specific performance standards and particular results.

When it comes to understanding how monastic and lay Buddhist practitioners engaged in religious activity in medieval China, these accounts of miraculous results from hearing and vocalizing – whether real, idealized, or imagined – provide a good case for understanding their heterogeneity, since even practitioners who did not appeal to doctrine could share these experiences. Moreover, they showcase the interrelatedness of chanting with other aspects of Buddhist daily life: it has bearing on how individuals learned Buddhist texts, it influences daily habits such as hygiene, it engages with modes of personal practice, and it reveals the wider belief in spirits and miracles.
And finally, the vocal practice of Buddhist chanting, despite having no known notation in the Tang, nor even musical instruments beyond the material human body, can still be studied through the accounts of vocal production, listening, and miracles, beliefs, and practices associated with them.

\[^{370}\] The use of dharma instruments such as the wooden fish (muyu 木魚) as accompaniments to Buddhist chanting is unclear from textual sources in the Tang. The accompanied fanbai chants mentioned by Huijiao were accompanied by local Chinese instruments, so even with excavated examples, these cannot be distinctively Buddhist.
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