



(LAS 7117)

## JAPANESE TEMPLE MUSIC: ZEN, NEMBUTSU AND YAMABUSHI CHANTS

These Buddhist chants, accompanied by traditional instruments, were recorded at Kyoto, ancient center of Japanese Buddhist worship. Chanting is what has been left to us, performed usually by groups of priests, monks and pilgrims. Ancient poems and scriptural narratives called sutras are the subject matter of the chants, and these differ from sect to sect as does the musical character and instrumentation used.

The Zen chant represents an aspiring to self-discipline, and is wholly unemotional in character. The striking of a hammered metal bowl (kei) marks the beginning and intervals between sutras. The wooden fish or mokugyo, a percussion instrument, accompanies the chant.

Goeika is the chanting of short poems called waka by pilgrims, accompanied by a little bell (rin) and tiny metal drum (fusegane) which is struck with a crystal hammer. The poems are generally sung by groups of ten or more pilgrims, nowadays mostly by women. The gong marks the transition from one poem to the next. An example of Goeika text:

The rain on my sleeves  
All wearied,  
I realize now,  
The value of one's heart.

Shomyo chants are pentatonic plainsong somewhat similar to Gregorian chant. They are considered the most musical of Buddhist chants, and are accompanied in the Tendai sect by the rin, nyo and shakujo which is a kind of rattle with a shuffling sound made toward the end of each chant.

In the main temple of the Jodo sect, Nembutsu, the reciting of the name of Buddha in faith and sincerity to achieve salvation, is the belief and the basis of the texts of worship. Accompanied by kei, mokugyo, nyo-hachi, and sometimes clappers, the chant is like a slow stream of water.

In the Zen sect a roshi (old respected priest) may chant at any time of the day he happens to feel like it. Though his chant resembles that of the group, there is greater flexibility allowed in his choice of sutras. He accompanies himself with kei and mokugyo.

Most colorful and distinctive of Buddhist priests are the Yamabushi, the esoteric mountain priests of the Shogoin Palace, the only Kyoto temple of the Shukon sect. They are the only sect to use the horogai which is a huge pink, white and brown conch shell with a metal blowing tip which emits a sound that has the effect of a sumi drawing. With the sound of the horogai begins the first part of their ritual, Hokesampo, a confession of human evil and a prayer for purification. Part two, accompanied by drum beat, is the heart sutra (Hannyashingo) of the Zen sect. It is followed by prayers of the Shukon sect for world peace, for family security, and for prevention of world disasters.

Nembutsu of the Jodod sect, Zen solo chants and Yamabushi rituals of the Shukon sect (LL117) were recorded by Katsumasa Takasago during actual temple ceremonies in Kyoto, Japan.

Katsumasa Takasago

#### BUDDHIST CHANT:

A recorded survey of actual temple rituals

Buddhism, founded by the Indian teacher S'Akyamuni Gautama in the Sixth Century B.C. is the world's fourth largest religion. The teachings of Buddha, the Enlightened One that Gautama became in his 29th year, were collected by his disciples in the form of sutras or scriptures. Essentially he taught that: salvation comes from within, life itself is the root of all imperfection and sorrow, and extinction of human desires enables one to achieve salvation.

Salvation in his view was a state of perpetual enlightenment reached through the practice of morality, meditation and intuition. By the time his philosophy had traveled through India, China and all of Asia, sectarian differences had developed. One tradition, Hinayana, which held that only monks and nuns could achieve enlightenment, spread south to Ceylon and east through Burma, Indo-China and Malaya. The "northern", or

Mahayana, tradition that reached Japan a thousand years after Buddhism was founded contained many elaborations and compromises with conflicting beliefs encountered on the journey, especially those of Taoism and Confucianism in China.

As Japan inherited a philosophy that had already splintered into many sects, it is not surprising to find approximately 170 sects of Buddhism established there today, worshipping in as many as 70, 000 temples. There are even many distinctly different conceptions of Buddha: one of the historical S'Akyamuni Gautama; there are mythical Buddhas of compassion, among whom Amida is the central figure; and there are cosmic Buddhas such as Dainichi. In addition, there are lesser Buddhas and Buddhas-to-be called Bodhisattvas.

But there are elements common to the teachings of most sects. These are: acceptance of Gautama as the founder, acceptance of his teachings as the essence of truth, the goal of "Buddhahood" as salvation, belief in Buddha, the law, and the church, and belief in three basic paths - morality, meditation and intuition - as the proper approach to truth. Generally speaking, a Buddhist seeks salvation, according to his sectarian affiliation, either by following the way laid down by the founder, Buddha, or by obtaining the favor of the Buddha Amida, or by apprehending "universal truth" and realizing the fundamental identity between himself and the cosmic Buddha, Dainichi.

Since Japanese Buddhism was based almost entirely on the Chinese Canon of Mahayana Buddhism, all sects respect this Canon, but none use it in its entirety. Each sect usually limits its own Canon to certain sutras, or even only parts of sutras. These are kept in the temples, and only touched by priests. Daily and at regular intervals, services are conducted which generally consist of chanting sutras and offering prayers. At such services drums are sometimes beaten, bells tinkled and incense offered. Laymen are not expected to attend these services, except those that are in the nature of festivals.

As one listens to the chants of various sects, it is easy to perceive musical differences that are even more distinct than the philosophical differences underlying each sect's beliefs. One thing common to all Buddhist sects is the use of bells. The sound of a bell is a lovely thing in the minds of the Japanese people. Hai-ku (the 17-syllable poem that the Japanese invented and so delight in composing) and waka (a 31-syllable poem) have some of the quality of temple bells, of that mysterious echo lingering in the air long after the bell has been struck.

ZEN:

#### SUTRA CHANTING IN THE ZEN SECT

Myohorengehyo -Kwannon- Fumon-BonNo. 25, generally called HOKEKYO, is one of the first sutras brought from India. The sutra teaches that Kwannon (the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara) is the savior of the world. The text is as follows:

One and all, by listening to the name of Kwannon and reciting it in his mind shall be saved.

By repeating his name, all the disasters that might block one's way, shall be terminated - fire, flood, robbery and four others.

By bearing his image in mind, three poisons (sandoku) of life shall be destroyed - the poison of desire, the poison of anger and complaints

By adoring him in temples and at home, one who wishes a son shall get a son, born with extreme virtue and intellect. One who wishes a daughter shall be bestowed with one of unimaginable beauty.

The text is less important to Zen monks than the discipline of the chant itself. Chanting gives them an approach to the state of muga, ego-less self. They sit in the zazan position with closed eyes. Their appearance is exactly like that of stone Buddhas. Two gongs signal the start, and the voices take up the chant in so detached a manner that the sound comes out like rain pouring on dry ground.

The aloof, impersonal style is very characteristic of Zen sutra chanting. The instruments, kei and mokugyo, are all that give the monotonous chant a musical quality. The kei is a hammered metal bowl which is struck with a wooden stick muffled by cloth. Its stroke signals the beginning, end and breaks of the chant. The mokugyo, an oddly-shaped percussion instrument, (see illustration) is heard during the chant, pacing its speed and volume.

#### DAIHISHU:

Daihishu, the second selection, is a sutra of devotion to Tri-Ratna, which simply means Buddha, his codes and teachers. The sound of a wooden block being struck tells the break of day. With the stroke of a big bell, tsurigane, five priests gather in Buddha's hall and sing the Daihishu after a second bell, nibangcme, is rung. A smaller bell called hansho is hit with a strong-weak-strong - weak beat, symbolizing the movement of monks entering the hall.

The text reads:

We're followers of Tri-Ratna  
We're followers of the Buddha  
Who extends mercy on all things?  
Oh, we are the followers of all who  
terminate fears  
These magic words shall accomplish  
all wishes,  
And any evil gods being unable to overwhelm them,  
Will purify us, all strayed lives.  
We dedicate them to the Buddha,  
soul of great wisdom,  
Who lives far beyond this world?

The great Buddha, with pure mind,  
has been preparing  
For the salvation of all creatures.  
He has attained the highest virtue and triumph  
And the great kingdom is in himself.  
Swiftly, swiftly, we'll welcome the  
Buddha of purity.  
Steadily, steadily, he'll awaken us  
and harmonize  
Our awareness with receptive power  
and action,  
And thus, suffice our empty mind  
with his great mercy.

Zen chant is either machine-gun-fast or extremely slow. As the priests explain it, with a typically Zen paradox, the faster you chant the more you forget what you are not supposed to have on your mind; the slower you chant, the more you must concentrate on what you are doing, or you will forget the next word.

#### SHIKUSEIGAN:

Shikuseigan, the third selection, is a repetition of four short prayers said not only in the Zen sect but also in the Tendai, Jodo and other sects. They are the aspiration toward the goal of all Buddhists, which is the state of enlightenment, called in Japanese satori. The words mean:

May all the living creatures reach  
the shore of satori  
May all the daily trifles be banished  
May we learn all that was taught by  
Buddha  
May we all reach the highest state  
of satori

The chant is very slow, and accompanied by the mokiigyo. There are seven beats and one rest in each line of prayer. These three sutras were recorded at Myoshinji Temple Reiunan, Kyoto. The singers are students and graduates of Hanazono University sponsored by the temple. Myoshinji is the main temple of the Zen Rinzai sect.

#### GOEIKA:

Goeika is the chanting of short poems called waka by pilgrims. The custom of religious pilgrimage in Japan is believed to have begun in the 8th Century, but numerous civil wars that broke out after the 11th Century interrupted the observance. In the 17th Century the practice again became fashionable.

Talented pilgrims used to compose the poems during the journey. Some of these were collected and regularly used at shrines and temples. The custom is now practiced mostly by women. Each carries a Goeika text and a little folder, which reads:

We are taking a life's journey. Embraced in the bosom of nature, we visit the great resting places of our souls. The hard training is an expression of our thanks to Buddha and also a petition for world peace. We depend on one walking stick and a casual straw hat that might be blown away by a single gust of wind. By doing this we learn the equality of all human hearts.

The Temple of the New Water Fall

Visiting here again At Hatsuse Temple Our oath is as deep As the valley from the mountains

Nan-en Hall

The spring sun glows The hall of Nan-en

A thin cloud clusters

On top of Mt. Mikasa

Mt. Nagara (Mii Temple)

Lo! the clearing moon Afloat on the waves, the lake is looming up With the bell of Mii Temple

SHOMYO:

The text contains words of poems in hiragana (simplified Japanese characters) and musical notation entirely different from that of Western music (see illustration inside box cover). All the notations are calligraphic, and the key note which becomes the basis of other diatonic scales is determined by the leader of the group (doshi).

Goeika is usually sung by groups of 10 or more. The singers sit on tatami floor mats in a kneeling position. A small metal drum, or fusegane<sup>^</sup> is placed in front of each, a bell (rin) is held in the left hand. The kei is struck by the leader to tell the break of one chant unit from another.

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Of the combination of two characters (sho meaning chant, and myo, light), is pentatonic plainsong similar to Gregorian Chant. Nowadays it is usually performed only in the Tendai and the Shingon sects. The Ten-dai use two instruments as accompaniment. They are the nyo, a cymbal, and the shakejo, a kind of rattle which makes a high shuffling sound to be heard toward the end of the chant.

The chant recorded here was performed as part of the ritual in Buddha's Hall in Enryaku Temple Compound on Summer Memorial Day (Urabon-e, August 16th). This is the day for the consolation of starved demons (gaki). As legend has it, "A priest, seeing his mother becoming a starved demon, asked Buddha 'How can I save my mother from the depths of the starved world?' Buddha answered, "Dedicate a hundred fruits and foods of a hundred tastes, and candles on August 16th, and read sutras to console her mind."

Foods are offered to the demons before the ritual and songs of adoration, confession or salutation are sung. The recorded selection is a song of adoration to Tri-rattna (Buddha, his codes, and teachers). Chanted by ten priests, it has the effect of purification so that the priests and everyone present are made worthy to face Buddha who may be in their presence during the performance. The soloist, called Daij ari, is one of the most respected priests in the Tendai-shu, the sect represented in this performance.

#### NEMBUTSU:

Kurodani Konkaikomyoji is the full name of the well-known Kurodani Temple of Kyoto, the main temple of the Jodo sect founded by St. Honen in the 12th Century. When fifteen, St. Honen was sent to Mt. Hiei to study Buddhist philosophy of the Tendai sect. At eighteen he was first taught the effect of nembutsu, the chanting of sutras and the names of the Buddha Amida. After reaching full maturity in his interpretations and beliefs in nembutsu, he went forth to spread his faith in the Buddha Amida, which was to lead all men to Jodo (Pure Land) by repeating, "I adore you, O eternal Buddha". Entering the city of Kyoto, he sat down by the roadside and rested, reading nembutsu. Suddenly a purple cloud gathered over his head and a heavenly light illuminated the scene. St. Honen interpreted this as a sign from Buddha, and chose that place to stay and spread the core of nembutsu.

He built a small cottage there for his religious activities. St. Honen became the most devout adherent of nembutsu and made it the basic tenet of the Jodo sect. For amateur believers, Jodo requires only the repeated recitation of the name of Amida, "I adore you, O eternal Buddha," unlike other sects where complex, lengthy rituals are demanded. Thus Jodo-shu earned the appeal to ordinary people. Jodo priests served also as social workers to alleviate poverty in small towns and villages. They were praised and respected for their pioneering in such good works and were called "saints". Nembutsu services by saints and priests in the temples, on the other hand, require higher skill in chant and wider knowledge of Buddhism.

The chant is like a slow stream of water and is generally accompanied by kei, mokugyo, nyo, hachi (nyo-hachi, a combination of drum and cymbal-like instrument) and occasionally, clappers. Nembutsu chanted is the very opposite of Zen sutra chant, making much more modest demands on self-discipline. Zen practice is largely self-oriented, for only by one's own will power can the shore of enlightenment be reached. In Jodo, the chant is only a sign of devotion to Buddha; in it, the qualities of devotion, faith and sincerity are implicit. The chant is pure and evanescent, emphasized by the use of the gong whose sound disappears like vapor. The recording offers four nembutsu chants comprising the first part of the noontime ceremony celebrated by 10 Jodo priests in

Kurodani Temple. The ritual begins with the sound of mokugyo followed by kei to mark the beginning of the chant.

KOGE, the first nembutsu, is a chant of purification preceded by the burning of incense to Buddha. Incense is symbolic of true devotion, its smoke compared to the heavenly cart that carries messengers to and from Buddha. KOGE ends as the voices drop at the sound of the bell. The second piece is SANPORAI, a salutation to Tri-rattna. The text reads: (small drum), hachi (cymbal), and big drum are struck for about two minutes, as a symbol of the belief that the door of the Pure Land is open to priest and public.

#### ZEN SUTRA SOLO CHANT:

The solo chant is performed by an old respected priest who is privileged to perform by choice and has greater freedom in his choice of sutras than young priests chanting in groups. He sits before the image of Buddha in his own temple and opens the sutra placed on a little table. After a short meditation, the kei is struck. The first chant is called DAIHISHINDARANI, narratives between Buddha and Avalokites-vara. The text is as follows:

We respectfully salute the eternal Buddha, the universal code of Buddha, and the everlasting preachers of all directions.

SANPORAI ends with a weak bell sound.

#### SHIBUJO:

Shibujo, the third piece, is the prayer of invitation to Buddha to the temple hall where the ritual is held. The names of four Buddhas are chanted. The sutra notation reads, "Chant with the true heart of invitation to all Buddhas wishing that they give you the strength and bravery for existence. TT

Then he sat up, straightening his robe and, after saluting Buddha, said, "I have the magic words of merciful spirit which I like to preach to people in order to bring them comfort, health, longevity, and to eliminate all the evils - in order to accomplish the virtuous spirit and suffice their wishes. . .When one falls into the depths of evils, these magic words shall help restore him. Those who chant the magic words shall help restore him. Those who chant the magic words shall reach the land of Buddha. Unless my magic words were for the benefit of the people's wishes, I would not have called them the words of merciful Buddha. "

#### KAKAIGE:

Kakaige, the fourth chant, expounds the preachings of Buddha. One is that friends and enemies reach the Pure Land by abolishing anger and resentment. After the chant, the nyo

The second piece is a short prayer dedicated to Avalokitesvara, a legendary figure who



represents 33 different characters. One of the characters, Enmei Kannon (Avalokitesvara of Longevity) is described in this prayer. The statute is painted deep yellow and has a merciful face. It is bejeweled and has many robes of adornment. The prayer consists of ten words adoring his magic power. The sutra tells that Buddha is great and trustworthy and that, by adoring him day and night, one may live long and comfortably.

The instruments used are the kei and mokugyo. unique. The Yamabushi (esoteric mountain priests) live at Shogoin Palace. These are the priests who, wearing a yellow robe with a square fur piece tied across the seat, sat on the mountain side and searched for their training and experience in the voices of nature. (Mountains are manifestations of Buddha and are therefore holy places.) They came down the mountain blowing on horagai (conch shell), and tried to create paradise among the common people.

After the chant the roshi was asked what he did every day besides chanting.

"Oh, nothing very much. . . I get up early and sweep the garden. I eat breakfast, and after the morning service I go back to sweeping. Sweeping the garden (also) means cleansing the soul. Every minute of the day the soul should be clean as the temple garden.

YAMABUSHI:

The origin of the Shuken-shu, a sect of learning through experience, goes back to the Seventh Century. It is a strange combination of Buddhism, Con-fucianism and Shintoism. Shogoin Temple (sometimes called Palace has maintained this sect for eight hundred years. The services performed there are

The horagai, now used only by the Yamabushi, is one of the most fascinating instruments used in Japanese Buddhism. It is an enormous spiral conch shell (pink, white and brown) with a metal blowing tip.

Chief activity of the priests is to visit ordinary homes and incant magic words with magic gestures to make wishes come true, prevent disease, create business prosperity, and defeat enemies. Yamabushi's magic power is revered even by some city people though its main appeal is in the country side. At occasions of grave illness \*or of launching a business, a Yamabushi maybe called to chant prayers throughout the day and night. During World War II, military authorities even ordered some priests to pray continually for the defeat of the enemy.

The morning service of the Yamabushi is in three parts, intermixing several rituals. After the ringing of the temple bell the service starts with the blowing of the horagai. The first part, the HOKESEMPO, is taken from sutras of the Tendai sect. It is a chant of confession. Led by the temple master, six monks and priests intone:

We salute with the best of our heart  
Toward ten infinitive directions  
All the Buddhas live:  
The eastern region governed by the

Buddha of virtue  
The south-east region governed by  
the Buddha of calmness  
The south-west region governed by  
the Buddha of brilliant actions  
The western region governed by the  
Buddha of immeasurable light  
The northern region governed by the  
Buddha of charity  
The upward region governed by the  
Buddha of common virtue  
The downward region governed by  
the Buddha for the publication of  
virtuous deed  
We salute with all our hearts and  
confess  
All the evils we have foolishly practiced:  
The evils in my eyes that cannot  
observe the truth  
The evils in my ears tempted by the  
evil voices  
Give my dirty ears the preaching of  
Buddha  
The evils in my nose, the evils on  
my tongue that gossips all the  
time  
And evils in my body.  
We confess all our serious sins And beg for purification.

The second part begins with the sound of the big drum. It is the main sutra of the Zen sect, HANNYASHINGYO. This "heart" sutra defines the concept of nothingness. It is followed by prayers of the Shuken-sect. The drum keeps on until the end of HANNYASHINGYO, taking the beat, roughly, of strong-weak-strong-weak-weak. The sutra is immediately followed by KOTO, the prayer for world peace, instead of the former prayer for victory. Then comes the prayer for family security and for prevention of disasters. The text reads:

May all the golden bodies of emperors  
be calm and safe May the world be peaceful and the  
harvest be abundant. May business and luck prosper.  
May all disaster be eliminated and  
may good fortune be brought to all.  
May the power of religion work.  
May all wishes be accomplished,  
and may all be content.

The chant is full of vigor. Reaching a climax emphasized by hand rosaries, shakejo and drum, it ends with the sound of the shell horn. After the morning service, the leader, Mr. Miyagi, was asked.

"How do you feel after chanting so long before breakfast?"

He smiled and said, "As a Japanese proverb goes, everything is easy before breakfast. But to tell the truth for my age, this is hard work. But hard work is the main purpose of our training. Oh, anything tastes delicious after the morning service. "

"What is the purpose of chanting?" he was asked.

"Well, asking me the purpose of chanting sounds like asking me the purpose of my life. " he replied.

#### CREDITS:

The recordings were made by Kat-sumasa Takasago, assisted by Kojiro Kishi and Norimichi Kimura, during actual services at Japanese Buddhist shrines. Mark Treganza assisted with the editing. This recording was originally released by Lyrichord Discs in 1963, and is now part of the Lyrichord Archive Series.

#### TRACKS AND TIMES:

1. Sutra Chanting (Nembutsu by priests of the Jodo Secto at Kurodani Temple) - 11:53
  - a) Koge (Chant of Purification)
  - b) Snaporai (Salutation to Tri-Raina)
  - c) Sjobikp (Prayer of Invitation to Buddha)
  - d) Kokaige (Preachings of Buddha)
  
2. Zen Solo Chants by preiest at Myoshinji Temple - 7:23
  - a) Dlshindarnai
  - b) Prayer to Avaikitesvara
  
3. Chanting of Morning Services by Yamabushi of the Shuken Sect at Shogoin Palace - 23:53
  - a) Hokesampo Sutra
  - b) Hannyashingo, Zen Heart Sutra
  - c) Kito, prayers for peace and security



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