



(LYRCD 7222)

## **CHINESE BUDDHIST MUSIC**

**Recordings and photographs by John Levy.**

**Introduction by Dr. Laurence Picken.**

**Notes by Laurence Picken and John Levy.**

### **NOTES AND TRACKS**

(Track times listed below)

Tracks 1, 2, and 3, were recorded in 1963 at the Po-ihl Chi (In Mandarin: Pao-lien Szu), Precious Lotus Monastery, Ian Tao Island, Hong Kong. Other recording locations are listed below.

Track 1." WAKING THE MONKS.

A young monk goes round the monastery several times, alternately striking a wooden slab and singing either "Get up, get up, it's 5 o'clock," or "Namo omito pa" (Homage to Amitabha Buddha). The duration of the pauses has been reduced. Cicadas provide a background hiss. For the purposes of these Notes, the basic five-note Chinese mode is defined as fa sol la do re. The monk sings a repeating tune of 4 lines. In 4-beat rhythm. In the five-note la. mode (final b), with musical lines ending alternately on b and a.

Track 2. FROM THE MORNING SERVICE. Monks repeat a cantillation formula of ten equal beats in the fa. mode, with a compass of a fifth. Some voices recite on the upper fifth, others move between third, fifth and fundamental (b1'). The main recitation-note of the formula is the third. Soon the chant changes to recitation of the Buddha's clan-name: Sikamoni pa. (Sakyamuni Buddha), to a 6-beat formula, mainly on d. and c.. Again solo voices propose simultaneous melodic variants. The chant is supported by wooden fish and by a small bell at half the speed of strokes on the wooden fish, Later, a large drum is

struck on the fourth beat of the formula and subsequently at the pace of the syllables. The chant proceeds *accelerando* and a final section in fast tempo is heralded by a stroke on a large bell. The end is confirmed by a percussion formula that includes resting bell and drum.

Track 3. RECITING THE NAMES OF THE BUDDHAS. The bell ringer, who also recites the names (Cantonese dialect), strikes the huge bell by means of a small tree-trunk suspended from the ceiling by ropes. This is done daily at noon in the Hall of Kshitigarbha (Ti-tsang Tien) within the precincts of the Po-lin Monastery. Kshitigarbha is the bodhisattva who assists souls in the underworld. As this Hall is held to be directly over his abode, Buddhists consider the ritual done here to be particularly efficacious. The chant is unmeasured, largely syllabic, and in equal notes, but with a melisma at the end of each phrase followed by a stroke on the great bell. The mode is la, final c; the chant mostly moves round  $\underline{c}$ , f and a flat. Note the occasional filling of the minor thirds (f, g, a)'

Track 4. SOLO MELODIC CHANT. Fan pai (sacred declamation) is the term applied to all Buddhist vocal music, whether syllabic, chant-like recitations, or measured, melismatic tunes, whether sung by solo voice or by unison or heterophonic chorus. The term is also used in a narrower sense for styles of solo chant, in part consisting of melismatic and measured 'melodies to prose texts. The practice of fan pai is purely Chinese and owes nothing to India beyond, perhaps, the principle of syllabic, monotone recitation. Although Buddhist Service Books indicate the coincidence of bell and drum strokes with the singing of certain words, the rhythmic framework is not explicit, and cantillation formulas or melodies are not notated. The manner of performance has to be learned. The melodies in present use are said to be of T'ang or Sung date (roughly seventh to thirteenth centuries) but are probably of more recent origin,

Track 4 includes two consecutive hymns in praise of Incense. Both are sung by Abbot Lung Ken of the Chi-hsiang Szu, Good-fortune Monastery, of the Ch'an (Meditation) Sect, on Shu-lin Mountain, near Taipei, Taiwan. The Abbot comes from Hupei in Central China. The recordings were made in 1969. The first example, in the style fan ch'iang (sacred tunes) is without accompaniment and unmeasured. The mode is at first la (final b flat) but changes to sol (final b flat) at the fifth line. The text begins: "Incense is born of the mind. The mind through incense reaches out. Not remaining within the Three Bounds (Heaven, Earth, Hell), it can travel throughout the Ten Regions." The second example, in the style fan chi (sacred didactic hymns in prose lines of equal numbers of syllables) is accompanied (from the fifth word of the first line) by a small clapperless bell, *vin ch'ing*, mounted on a wooden handle and struck with an iron striker. The mode is sol (final b flat). The text begins: "Consider the initiating principle of this subtle incense, Originally there was nothing; this was the True Emptiness. The Great Void is everywhere full of the incense cloud." The dialect is Mandarin.

Track 5. From the MORNING SERVICE at the Chu-hai Szu, Bamboo Stream Monastery, out in the countryside, near Tainan, Taiwan. The dialect is Taiwanese and the recordings were made in 1964. The voices are those of the elderly priest and a

congregation of monks and nuns. Following the last lines of a melismatic, measured tune in the so, mode (final b), sung by unison chorus and pitched in relation to the great bell, note the two little bells, a semitone apart: i. sharp, s\_, heard over the sustained reverberation of the great bell (b) in the percussion formula. A solo voice then introduces the cantillation formula sung by monks at the beginning of Track 2. Again the solo voice is heard, followed by a heterophonic choral chant (in quarts' and eighth notes) giving the effect of a reiterated chord: b. s. sharp d sharp i. sharp 3. sharp, but in tact composed of many independent voices singing different cantillation formulas, all fragments of this same five-note set. The solo voice is heard once more, and the singers take up a unison, measured (4-beats), melismatic tune, modulating from the fa. mode to the do mode and back again, without change in final (b). Even in the singing of this unison chorus there are occasional touches of heterophony, where melodic variants are sung simultaneously. All voices remain within the same five note set.

Track 6. From the PEI-TOU (The Great Bear or the Northern Dipper) Liturgy, a rite of Taoist origin, performed to bestow longevity. Recorded in 1964 at the great Lung shan Szu, Dragon-mountain Temple, in Taipei; sung in Taiwanese. The rite is performed at the full moon, on the fifteenth day of the tenth lunar month of the Chinese calendar and is associated with Autumn. After a short passage of heterophonic, syllabic choral chant, the monks join in a unison chorus in praise of incense, in the re mode (final b) centered on f, sharp and heard against a great bell in a sharp. The special interest of this track lies in the large battery of percussion, and in the marvelous drumming. The grouping of eighth-beats in triplets within the framework of slow four-time is an unusual rhythmic feature.

When the recordist revisited Taipei in 1969, he found none of the original monks at this monastery. The same was the case with the Monastery in Lan Tao Island. Not only had the monks dispersed, but the old man who chanted the names of the Buddhas had died.

Track 7. From the HUA-VEN TZU-MU liturgy. A remarkable ritual, performed at the Good-fortune Monastery (here sung by Abbot Lung Ken), is the chanting of all possible combinations of syllable-initials and syllable-finals (tsu-mu) in the spoken Chinese language. This ritual originated with the Hua-yen (Avatamsa) Sect. The extract (sung in Mandarin) begins with a sequence of rhyming syllables in groups of three: ho lo to. thrice repeated, followed by hang lanq tang, heno leng tenq, hung lung tunq. and so on. After ten further triplets, a hymn is sung: "When the syllables ho lo to are sung, the Buddha desires all living things of the World of the Law, to enter the Fellowship of Holy Wisdom. The 42 syllables of subtle magic formulas - every syllable contains the Principles of Righteousness, Nam Hua-yen Hai-hui Of P'u-su (Homage to the Bodhisattva of the Buddha of the Avatamsa Sect)". The last phrase is sung three times at the end of the extract. Cantillation begins in the re mode (finale, but sharpening to f sharp), and the mode changes to the fa mode (final e) during the hymn. The Abbot accompanies himself with vin-ch'inq and wooden fish.

Tracks 8 and 9. From the SHUI-LU FA-HUI, a plenary requiem mass to save all those members of the Buddhist community who have died on land and sea, recorded in 1963 at the Chu-lin Ch'an-yuan, Bamboo-grove Meditation temple, at Tsun-wan in the New

Territories, Hong Kong, and sung in Mandarin, This rite is rarely performed because of its great cost. Both excerpts are from the seventh and last day.

Track 8. PRAYERS TO BUDDHIST SAINTS TO RELEASE SOULS IN THE UNDERWORLD, recited indoors. We hear a strophic hymn in triple time in the re. mode (final b), with unmeasured cantillation (syllabic and melismatic) between sections.

Track 9. PETITIONS reporting to the saints the names of the dead. The petitions are read out from yellow sheets of paper and, together with four life-size paper horses are sent (by burning them) to the North, South, East and West sides of Heaven, together with various messages\* This of course was done in the open air. With the removal of the petitions and the horses to their launching sites, crackers were fired. Track 3 begins with a fast, syllabic, heterophonic chorus in equal notes on .d .tab", final d,, which passes into a strophic, measured tune In the fa mode (final f ), modulating to the do mode with the same final and back again, the voices at last deciding to g.

Track 10 a & b. CH'ING-MING (Clear and bright Spring). This Is the Annual Ceremony at the graves of the Ancestors. Sweeping the graves forms part of the ceremony. Normally, custom requires graves to be located in the countryside, but in this instance, since the families participating came from the North and had no local graves, the main part of the rite was carried out In an apartment house in Hong Kong, while other rites were being performed outside in the garden. This explains why In quieter moments one hears the sound of distant drumming. Here two short excerpts from a ceremony lasting two to three hours. The dialect Is Mandarin, and the recording was made in 1963. A slow solo chant, the pitch of which gradually rises, changes to rapid, syllabic cantillation with spoken responses. After a brief, choral, unison chant in the Is. mode (final 3, there follows antiphonal 'ringing between precentor and unison chorus in a rapid 4-beat rhythm.

At the beginning of Track 10 b, the monks repeat the well-known formula: OM MANI PADMI HUM, probably adopted from Tibetan Lamaism in the thirteenth or fourteenth century. Buddhists say that OM is an auspicious beginning and HUN a confirmatory ending; that MANI, a jewel, refers to spiritual purity and in particular to the Buddha and his doctrine;

PADME, a lotus, to the spiritual body of the Buddha; and that the whole formula contains the quintessence of the teachings of all the Buddhas. This recitation Is followed again by antiphonal solo and chorus, fading out with reiterated strokes on a small bell.

Tracks 11, 12, and 13. PRIVATE REQUIEM MASS (Ch'ao-tu wang-hun) Saving disembodied spirits by enabling them to cross over the Sea of Suffering. This ritual is performed in private houses on the 21st and 49th days after the death of a parent. The three excerpts are from the 21st day. The dialect is Cantonese. A Taoist priest is invariably present and performs his own ritual. Recorded in Hong Kong in 1963. Track 11 begins with half-song, half-spoken recitative by a solo voice, followed by choral responses. The incipit: d sharp e sharp a sharp a sharp Is heard six times, followed by syllabic, choral responses.

Track 12. A solo voice is followed by fast heterophonic, syllabic, choral chant in equal notes on a flat, f, a flat b flat. with fast wooden-fish strokes and great bell; later, with drumming and cymbals. A highly decorated, melismatic, solo chant, unaccompanied, with occasionally filled minor thirds is followed by a strophic chant (or unison chorus, to which a flute (ti-tzu; cross-flute with membrane) and a two-stringed fiddle (erh-hu) provide a gay decoration. Notice the filling of the minor third, so that the tune descends: f, e, d, c, to the final (c) of the do mode.

Track 13. opens with alternating sequences of bell-strokes a semitone apart (c.f., Track 5) b flat and a". A solo voice enters with the same strophic hymn as in Track 6, accompanied by fiddle, bell and wooden fish, the voice descending to the final on d flat in the do mode, with the third filled (g flat, f, e flat, d flat).

### TRACK TIMINGS

1. Waking the Monks ( 2:19)
2. From Morning Service (3:17)
3. Reciting Names of the Buddhas, with large bell. ( 2:18)  
(Good-Fortune Monastery, Taipei)
4. Fan-pai, Solo Chant, two hymns (7:04)
5. From Morning Service - Nuns (4:04)  
(Dragon Mountain Temple, Taipei)
6. Pei-Tou Liturgy (from the Great Bear Liturgy) (4:59)
7. Fan-pai, solo chant, from the Hua-yen Tzu-mu liturgy. (8:38) (Bamboo-groove Meditation Temple)
8. & 9. Shui-Lu Fa-Hux From the Requiem Mass (1:26)
10. (A & B) Ch'ing - Ming (Ceremony at Graves of Ancestors) (2:28/1:49)
- 11, 12. & 13. Ch'ac-Tu, Wang-Hun, Private Requiem Mass (2:24, 4:52, 2:22)



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