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## Chanting the Medicine Buddha Sutra: A Musical Transcription and English Translation of the Medicine Buddha Service of the Liberation Rite of Water and Land at Fo Guang Shan Monastery

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***Chanting the Medicine Buddha Sutra: A Musical Transcription and English Translation of the Medicine Buddha Service of the Liberation Rite of Water and Land at Fo Guang Shan Monastery.*** Reed Criddle, editor.

Recent Researches in the Oral Traditions of Music 13. Philip V. Bohlman, general editor. Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2020. 77 pages.

Designed as a chantbook for a practicing Buddhist community, Reed Criddle's text centers on a week-long Medicine Buddha (Sanskrit: Bhaiṣajyaguru; Pinyin: Yàoshīfó) ritual service that takes place annually at Fo Guang Shan's main temple in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. *Chanting the Medicine Buddha Sutra* opens with an ethnographic account of the context. Criddle describes the historical background of the ritual, as well as the site and manner of its practice; then he focuses on the musical elements of this important service, which is meant to relieve the suffering of all vulnerable beings, living and deceased, whether the suffering is experienced as physical, mental, or emotional.

Since its inception in 1967, Fo Guang Shan (hereafter FGS) has become an international network of temples—or, more properly, temple-based complexes—that serve as monastic centers for the study of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Nearly every FGS temple complex has courtyards, a library, a main assembly hall, and classrooms. These facilities are open to laity (non-monastics) and the wider public, who benefit through learning from their core teachers and ceremony officiants (primarily ordained Buddhist nuns). Criddle's edition is based on the Medicine Buddha ritual service as practiced in Taiwan, where he did his primary ethnographic fieldwork for five months in 2017 and made recordings of the Medicine Buddha service that are heard on the accompanying CD.

As might be expected, *Chanting the Medicine Buddha Sutra* emphasizes the first word of the title. With the help of the CD, one can participate in the service to the extent one is comfortable and able to do so, either by oneself or in community at one of the FGS branch temples around the world. The musical transcription, written in Western notation on a single staff line, is meant to be a calming presence on the printed page, serving the one who holds the pages open. (The book's trim size is 8.5 by 11 inches, making it 17 by 11 inches when held open.) On some pages one sees the music notation as well as the chanted Mandarin characters, with *pinyin* transliteration directly underneath. Other pages, without musical transcription, contain an English translation of the chant as well. This substantive text is not meant to be tucked away on a bookshelf but to be actively used as part of a liturgical prayer collection near one's home altar or at one's ceremonial temple. What this text does well is to lay the foundation, or more accurately, to set an example of how the methodological tools of ethnomusicology, as well as the practical tools of Western staff notation, can inform the design of a chantbook for an extended liturgical ritual service (with many subritual sections) used within a linguistically and culturally diverse Buddhist community.

Presently, around the world, many Buddhist temples, lineages, and communities are actively engaged in designing and

publishing their own chantbooks, which are important negotiated spaces. Editorial decisions—involving the abbot/abbess, rector/chant master, experienced ordained and lay leadership members, Buddhist studies scholars, and music scholars—entail prioritizing which design will facilitate both the most effective *musical transmission* of the ritual ceremony (a performance-focused concern), and the most effective *Buddhist transmission* of the lineage and meaning of the ritual (a Buddhist practice-focused concern). Given these two goals, mutual understanding between the rector and temple community about the respective roles of the written text and its orality (aural realization) necessarily becomes an important locus of discussion. For the benefit of all participants, determinations must be made as to which language(s) will be prioritized and appear first below the musical staff (e.g., Sanskrit, Mandarin, English, etc.); whether and how to include a transliteration of the chanted language in Romanized or phoneticized script (e.g., *pinyin*); whether the transliteration should have diacritical markings (the symbols on Romanized letters distinguishing correct pronunciation); and whether to include a line of translation into the contextually appropriate lingua franca (e.g., English or another local language).<sup>1</sup> There is also a crucial aesthetic choice to be made: in which font (size and style) each of these textual layers should appear in order to facilitate the musical score's readability.

Criddle's text finds itself in this creatively rich space that has many decades of complex conversations already very much in motion amid the modern transcultural translation of Buddhism—and Buddhist *practices*, which is germane to this text—within the global dissemination

of lineages across linguistic lines and into diverse language spaces. In light of FGS's Humanistic Buddhism ethic of welcoming new participants, the decisions made within this discursive negotiated space of developing a chantbook—for a week-long Medicine Buddha ritual service that is open not only to attendance but also to participation throughout the wider community—deserves a much broader discussion than space allows here. Such a discussion ideally needs to take place both in advance of such a publication and afterwards, because chantbooks are one of the main vehicles for the translation and transmission of the Buddha's teachings.<sup>2</sup>

Criddle's edition—an older multi-section liturgy with his newly transcribed musical score—needs to be tested for its efficacy in practice and then adjusted to satisfy recommendations made by the Buddhist community, which, in my limited experience, usually envision modifications intended to enhance inclusivity. For example, in Montreal (Canada), at a Buddhist temple I have attended, four languages appear on every page of the chantbook: in addition to the Romanized phonetics that are chanted by all, there are translations into Vietnamese, French, and English.

Criddle's chantbook, and others like it, result from delving into questions about a range of compromises that offer a negotiated comfort for newcomers and seasoned veterans alike—who all aim to join together to chant a ceremonial rite—those who need a textual guide for a liturgically centered ceremony, ritual dharma instrument specialists, and a chant leader/rector to lead its performance practices. Services in which such chantbooks are used are typically led by a spiritual teacher and/

or rector, who may be well versed in the host country's native languages. The diverse assembly of practitioners is comprised of multiple generations – grandparents, working adults, and grandchildren – each of whom likewise has varying degrees of ability in reading original-language characters (here: Mandarin), transliteration (here: *pinyin*), and English or, ideally, trilingual (rather than Italian and German) musical performance indicators. At this ceremony's home base in the originary temple space of Kaohsiung, Taiwan, the linguistic concerns primarily circulate around Mandarin and English, but what of satellite branch FGS temples in France, Germany, and elsewhere around the world? Should Romanized phonetics be included in their chantbooks?

As a choir director himself, Criddle understands how challenging it can be to design – and read – a musical score in which multiple languages are vertically situated under a given sung syllable in Western staff notation. Language occupies significant spatial real estate in the score; but for a spiritual community and the efficacy of its rites and rituals, such adjustments tend to lean toward accommodating inclusivity – one additional line of language – while sacrificing perhaps a modicum of aesthetic finery. Most of the melodies transcribed in Criddle's musical score are melismatic, but where words are intoned, only the Mandarin character and *pinyin* underneath it are displayed, not the translation of that word or syllable. Thus, a question to consider: how important is it that participants know the meaning of the words they are chanting? This is the issue at the heart of many creative endeavors in the community of translators of Buddhist liturgical texts.

Such is the reality of this critical historical moment in modern Buddhism, a familiar tension, analogous perhaps to the tension felt in the Catholic Church prior to the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), when local communities' authorization to sing in their own vernacular, to participate orally in their familiar native mother tongue, was called into question. Subsequently, rather than retaining Latin as the main language in liturgical texts, accessible mostly to ecclesiastically educated clergy and music directors, local scholars/rectors were first allowed and then encouraged to create linguistically balanced liturgical chantbooks, enabling greater unity within the church. It is not an irrelevant comparison to the FGS spiritual community, which is said to have a center-periphery model akin to that of the Catholic Church, emanating outward from Taiwan, with its unique lineage of Pure Land Chan Buddhism.

In this context, if Criddle's text can be made open-source within the FGS community, it would benefit from the insertion or modification below each musical staff of one line of whichever additional language(s) is/are relevant to the community of diverse participants, in their own temple spaces, anywhere in the world. In the spirit of the dissemination of the Buddha's teachings that the founder of FGS, Master Hsing Yun (b. 1927), has sought, such an open-source e-file could be widely utilized, with allowances for such specific modifications as editorial committees would permit, authorize, or perhaps even request of Criddle and the group of rectors, nuns, and laity in Taiwan with whom he worked while creating the first edition of *Chanting the Medicine Buddha Sutra*. In such a form, this chantbook

could not only become an example of Humanistic Buddhism, with philanthropic service to humanity as a thriving ethos; it could also be periodically revised in service of local spiritual healing purposes, alleviating mental stress and material loss in the wake of environmental calamities, and calendrical ceremonies. Even if the Medicine Buddha service continues to be chanted in Mandarin well into the future, the insertion of phonetics or translated text in the score would assist native speakers of French, Spanish, German, Italian, English, and other languages in chanting along and participating in the ritual.

Significantly, Criddle's transcription does not include a percussion stave—usually represented by one or two additional lines that run horizontally under the voice stave—to register the temporal articulations of the accompaniment of the traditional dharmic instruments, drum, bell, wooden fish, or woodblock, that we hear in three different contexts during this two-hour ritual: under the chant as accompaniment, guiding the tempo of the chant, and in semi-improvised interludes between chanted subritual sections. Hearing these instrumental textures on the CD without also seeing them in the score could be a disconnect for some readers. Even for a newcomer to this tradition, hearing the distinctive sonorities of the dharmic musical instruments alongside the vocalized melodic chant, the austere texture feels evocative of meditational purpose. It makes one curious to see how Criddle would have chosen to represent this sonic austerity in the score. Transcribing the instrumental parts so as to indicate both their accompaniment and leadership roles in relation to the chanted liturgical text would bring a different overall

appearance to each page of the liturgy once they became integrated into the musical score of, say, a second published edition.

But there is little doubt that in this first effort one of the many negotiated decisions behind *Chanting the Medicine Buddha Sutra* was to exclude the sounded dharmic instruments from the musical transcription, and instead focus this iteration on illustrating how well Western staff notation could be made to suit the setting of the transcription of the oral/aural vocal performance. Yet for the global FGS community (if not for what we might consider, broadly speaking, intrinsically academic interests), Criddle's stated purpose was to design a chantbook "intended to be a tool for all those who wish to participate . . . from the uninitiated monastery visitor to musical ensembles that might use these musical fragments as inspiration for appropriately staged performances" (back cover) and "for those who might seek to perform parts of this service in concert settings" (ix). Given this motivation, transforming the musical score with the already transcribed melody, chanted by a revered nun rector during the stated ceremonial occasion, to include a (descriptive)<sup>3</sup> rendering of the dharmic musical instruments accompanying her, would aptly contribute to enlivening the "vocal elements of the service" in the creation of a more comprehensive (prescriptive) chantbook for such ritual occasions in the future.

The challenge at the interface of Buddhist ethno/musicology<sup>4</sup> is for scholars to gain sufficient immersion in both Buddhist studies and ethno/musicology to be able to speak across both the broader disciplinary vocabularies and local cultural meanings and expectations. Criddle's

work makes key moves in both directions and is, therefore, a welcome addition to the Recent Researches in the Oral Traditions of Music series. And yet, those of us interested in advancing Buddhist ethno/musicology can do more. *Chanting the Medicine Buddha Sutra* complements these two discursive frameworks, while affording room for some elements that could be improved upon. In this way Criddle's chantbook elicits a conversation about what is possible to create in a document that is valuable and efficacious for congregants seeking to participate in the Medicine Buddha service—hence the negotiated confluence of the *descriptive* and *prescriptive* notational approaches he takes, as described below. Indications are left for scholars to investigate more deeply the profoundly subtle vocal gestures, variations, and contextual adaptations of this ritual for varied sites.

A negotiated tension persists in this chantbook, a not uncommon academic purveyance between two contrasting goals for a musical transcription. On the one hand, the musical notation is meant to be a *descriptive* analog of and performative complement to the recording of a single occasion, a precise portrayal of what is heard on the CD (*this transcribed notation is how it was done at this temple by this community on this occasion*). On the other hand, there is the measured unfolding of the *prescriptive* notation (*generally, this notated score illustrates how this ritual ought to be performed, by this community on this and future occasions, especially if it is to take place at this temple, as verified by respected living exponents*). Still, there is a third goal for Buddhist ethno/musicology, which is to ensure that the context of this ritual occasion is framed by a historical and cultural accounting—that we

situate this transcription of what is practiced, performed, heard, and notated (i.e., *this is how it came to pass that this ritual exists among this community as a liturgical corpus previously transmitted as an oral tradition, which is now newly notated*). In addressing these three goals, the author can present this chantbook as a performative liturgical corpus (*an oral tradition that is now notated for potential future reference by both community members and scholars*), delicately balanced for participatory engagement and study.

Criddle states that during his five months at the temple complex he was able to make two complete recordings of the ritual, sung by two different rectors, both nuns, each of whom had decades of cantorial leadership experience. Based on these recordings, he notes variations in their vocalizations of anticipatory “grace notes” on certain syllables at the beginning of phrases, and other musical elements. The resultant transcription, he states, is a generalized presentation of both ritual occasions that also takes into account standard deviations from the norm. In accord with contemporary ethnomusicology, he reflexively draws our attention to the decision-making that informed the transcription. *Chanting the Medicine Buddha Sutra* is the result of his first making a *descriptive* text, by carefully transcribing (read: textualizing a heretofore oral tradition) what we hear chanted on the CD, and then editorially working with it to provide a *prescriptive* notation for the global FGS community. His score is replete with performance indicators of tempo, melodic movement, and formal structure. It also marks out the responsorial roles between “rector” and “assembly,” a feature that may be especially useful to participants in coming years.

Criddle's work may be considered as advancing a step toward service to the FGS community, which is an evolution following decades of presentations to Western scholarly audiences of sounded Buddhist ritual chants in practice. During the 1960s and 1970s, several ethnographic field projects – conducted by the Folkways, Nonesuch, and Lyricord record labels – sought to make recordings in situ of a given Buddhist ritual chanted by a practitioner at a special meditation site or temple. These projects were often geared toward offering international audiences a sampling of several genres (some a cappella, others with instrumentation), with one example of each, which have sometimes become an unwitting urtext in the discography of potentialities.

Judging from the accompanying recording, Criddle's chantbook appears to be an example of work in service of the oral tradition within the community itself, which is most welcome. Its scope might be seen as narrow in terms of not recording all the variants that temples practice and participants experience during ritual performance occasions. Yet this problem of limitations has more to do with technological and material constraints, such as reduced lengths for recordings on devices, than with Criddle's approach, since he stayed focused on his stated task.

Authoritative voices of rectors/chant leaders in a Buddhist community often achieve their community's trust through decades of service. Likewise, the two nun rectors with whom Criddle worked are important exponents and gatekeepers of this oral tradition. He notes, with sensitivity, the differences in their vocal tone and approaches to the liturgy, and respectfully emphasizes the “decades of experience

leading these chants between them” (vii). This gives weight to the verisimilitude of the textualization of one of the nuns' oral performances in this recording, and Criddle's musical transcription of it, which could allow the present realization of the melody to become an urtext of *this* rite.

Making observations in Buddhist ethno/musicology can engage scholars in noting how a chant leader (rector) will – depending on the context of the ritual occasion (home blessing, funeral, healing ceremony, inauguration, removal of obstacles, etc.) – adapt by selecting appropriate instrumentation and capable musician personnel, and making other performance choices related to setting the tempo, dynamic variation, and texture. For the larger communitywide annual ceremonial occasions, such as this Medicine Buddha rite, the variation might be more circumscribed because participatory expectations typically do not vary greatly from year to year. Such performative choices can be fascinating for teasing out what is essential to the service and what can be elaborated upon or adapted to circumstances.

Criddle's musical score contains some Italian performance indicators that appear at first blush to upend the chantbook's stated purpose, but they can easily be fixed for a second edition. Either replacing the Italian terms with English equivalents – for instance, *poco a poco accel.* could be rendered as “slowly and gradually increasing the tempo,” with its corresponding Mandarin and *pinyin* versions – or providing an additional glossary of Italian performance directions that goes further than the few symbols represented in Table 1 (viii), both would help include readers who may lack knowledge of Western music notation. Perhaps the local community of

rectors and participants in Taiwan would welcome a trilingual set of performance directions—in Mandarin, *pinyin*, and English—whereafter the Italian could be omitted from the score, except when the chantbook is employed in FGS temples in Europe where such performance directions could be quadrilingual. In the general interest of translating concepts and not merely terminologies, it would also be useful to change the subsection title “pitch” to “scale” or “key” (xxii). Here, pitch is not discussed, but rather the relationship between pitches, and Criddle’s discourse about pentatonic pitch relationships is of substantive interest.

Another opportunity for improvement is the glossary of Buddhist terminology. In some instances there seems to be a misplaced efficiency in providing cursory definitions, or awkwardly ethnographic accommodations, for some important terms such as “dharani” that refer to larger-font boldface-type subtitles in the main text. Criddle states in his glossary that the meaning of “dharani” is “largely unknown” to those at FGS.<sup>5</sup> Yet having personally known members of the ordained leadership at FGS temples in Canada, the United States, and India, and observed the high caliber of scholarship achieved by the nuns in both Western and monastic college education systems, it is more likely and culturally appropriate that the musical/religious/cantorial leadership know the meaning of the mantric syllables but are not permitted to transmit them to the uninitiated. To invoke and invite Medicine Buddha to the site of worship when chanting this sutra, the practitioners need to be initiated. Then, once Medicine Buddha arrives (at least in visualization), they need to prostrate themselves

and make inner and outer offerings, requests, and vows pertaining to keeping commitments (such as reciting the mantra a certain number of times daily).

Diacritics is another area in which improvements could be made in a second edition. No doubt Criddle gave serious consideration to which renderings of Sanskrit, Romanized Sanskrit, Romanized Mandarin, and such would be preferred when inscribing the name of certain buddhas and bodhisattvas. The Buddha of Wisdom (Manjushri) is rendered in the main text without the normative diacritics—“Manjusri” rather than “Mañjuśri.” The latter allows for the diacritic “ś” commonly used in modern Buddhist literature to signify the “sh” sound in Romanized Sanskrit.

One further technicality of terminology deserves closer investigation. Criddle discusses briefly whether the music’s melodic texture should be termed polyphony, monophony, or homophony. More accurate descriptors might be “heterophony” with some “drone polyphony.” “Heterophony” refers to the aurally experienced texture comprised of a known melody in which several participants are chanting different variants, and one or more individuals are sounding ornamented versions simultaneously along with others’ less ornamented vocal expressions. “Drone polyphony” implies that a melodically pitched instrument, or a vocally enunciated melodic pitch, is either repeated or sustained while other melodic lines sound around it. Notably, “around” is merely a spatial descriptor, since the “drone” (played, say, by bell or drum) could be technically “higher” or “lower” in pitch (Hz frequency) than the moving melodic lines that accompany it. What matters here is the contrast between a staid, constant melodic pitch sounding

relatively stable and continuous, and other instrumental or vocal lines that move pitchwise around it, but stay within the same set of pitch relationships, or “key.”

In his Introduction, Criddle addresses translation issues in the discipline of ethnomusicology, but he does not do so for the distinctly fraught translation issues in Buddhist studies, a subfield of a particular kind—involving religious studies, philosophy, and linguistics—amid the current transcultural translation of Buddhism into the West. Buddhist studies scholars now meet relatively regularly with publishers, editors, presses, and associated translators to discuss which distinctive language modifications to make that will curate a literature to solve the problem of reaching both the wider public and fellow scholars.

It may be important to consider how, in a Buddhist ritual music context, translation does not work unless it is effectively accomplishing transmission. In order to stay focused on the larger project—the efforts of scholars who have discovered Buddhism in the East and attempt to translate its concepts, commentaries, ritual texts, and liturgies to a modern Western Buddhist audience who read in English and other languages—there needs to be an aesthetic logic to language arts: an expressive enunciation of those aesthetic structures and ritual processes that underly a performative architecture. With language arts as the expressive medium for commentary on performative ritual expressions, communicative integrity has become a preoccupation of many scholars of Buddhism. A number of translation conferences have been convened recently that were designed to air challenges and make broad decisions about terminology

and how to offer simplified renderings of the complex diacritics of Sanskrit and other languages relevant for the curating of writings on Buddhism and Buddhist ritual.

In 2014, one year before the launch of the *Yale Journal of Music and Religion*, an inaugural annual meeting was convened as a Buddhist Studies Translation and Transmission Conference in Colorado. (This was prior to Criddle’s immersive foray into the Fo Guang Shan and Dharma Drum Mountain temple communities.) The conference, which involved over 250 leading translators, focused primarily on language issues relevant to audiences who seek expansive translations on ritual for academic purposes, broader public appeal, or a negotiated compromise of both. Criddle’s work falls into the third category. It is academic in tone, structure, and approach, while also not merely acknowledging but necessarily appealing to the visiting public and insider participants of the ritual service invoking Medicine Buddha’s aid.

We have stated that translation of a ritual text is likely not achieving its goals unless it is also effectively accomplishing transmission. But that is a pronouncement reflecting a perspective that is more crucially important on the Buddhist studies side of the equation, and less so from the side of the musicologist or ethnomusicologist. And here we can contrast the latter two. Musicologists with a music theory background are always already holding back the wish to analyze the audible features they hear and see in a transcribed score (to invest analytical acumen into the pitch relationships, to name the scale, and unpack the formal design, etc.). Whereas ethnomusicologists may wish—previous

to any musical transcription and analysis work—to make sense of the Buddhist ritual for an audience of scholars by describing the contextual configuration of this “other” without “othering” what they experienced and discovered in situ, contextualizing the performance occasion of this “non-Western” music in an unfamiliar setting. Certainly, these days, either music scholar may be asked to provide the prescriptive version of a transcribed score, in service of the community’s request.

It is from within the Humanistic Buddhism space of the temple complex that could invite Criddle for a revised version that might more carefully situate, or remove, the privileging of foreign terms—the Italian music terminology traditionally used *among musicians* for performance practice indicators—because, at the moment, deciphering them requires specialist knowledge of both Buddhism and the Western art music canon. Even if a glossary of foreign musical terms were to be added on the back page, after the glossary of Buddhist terms, the readers are asked to flip pages midritual, effectively taking them “out” of the numinosity of the experience. Let us instead inscribe the performance indicators in all three language forms: Mandarin characters, with *pinyin*, and English translation (rather than the Italian). This should not be an issue for those of us interested in transmission via translation, because essentially these terms are less performance directions for a choral score than descriptors of those musical elements, sounds, and performative gestures that the participant will hear in any event, while being there in attendance, among the assembly during the ritual service.

Those of us in the growing subfield of Buddhist ethno/musicology, scholars and translators emerging from the varied disciplines noted above, ought to consider how our role can help to clarify in translation without confounding efforts of transmission. For example, how can we help practitioners at temple-based communities like FGS, who wish to rely on a textualized liturgy of an oral tradition, to pick up a chantbook like this and read from it with musical and liturgical performance directions, while joining together to perform this rite? (It is far and away too practical a question, is it not?) The space for such editorial conversations can be assiduously designed around translation with transmission in mind, asking newbies and seasoned rectors alike to read the resultant score and, through focus-group testing, make editorial adjustments that suit the community’s wishes.

Academe itself is a sacred space that allows for such conversations animated by genuine curiosity; but during a ritual committed to relieving the sufferings of beings seen and unseen, living and deceased, may not be the time or space for less than clear performance markers. Greater clarity, across linguistic lines, would make a second edition of *Chanting the Medicine Buddha Sutra* the useful text that Criddle promises. Meanwhile, a great deal of its intended purpose is served through the work he has already done.

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## NOTES

1 One cannot assume that all people in the Kaohsiung temple space speak Mandarin in the same dialect, since there are other languages in regular use: Hakka, indigenous Taiwanese, and Mandarin. Criddle's text uses traditional Mandarin characters, rather than simplified Mandarin, which is appropriate to the context.

2 A *sūtra* refers to the spoken teachings and transcribed discourses of Buddha Śākyamuni.

3 Descriptive and prescriptive approaches to musical notation may be contrasted as follows: An ethno/musicologist adopting a descriptive approach will try to render on the page a written transcription of what is heard in a performance recording or live performance—in a very literal sense, “describing” what is aurally experienced. In contrast, a prescriptive notation offers a written manual of how to perform the vocal and instrumental parts on subsequent occasions. Criddle's text displays a wish to resolve the negotiated tension between these two approaches.

4 Buddhist ethno/musicology refers to the large number and variety of ethnomusicological and musicological studies of Buddhist ritual music published in peer-reviewed journals, and which comprise the focus of many doctoral dissertations and master's theses. These are studies of aural,

oral, and dance expressions found across numerous traditions, originating in India, and known globally from Japan to Sri Lanka, and Bhutan to Buryatia. Together, these appear to constitute a distinct subfield, within Ethnomusicology and Buddhist studies, with a recognizable scope of cultural, religious, performative, and practice-centered similarities in their reliance on: liturgical texts of *sūtra* or *tantra*, vocalization styles for chanting, specific instrumentation, settings for appropriate practice, and annual calendrical lunar dates for worship services, among other attributes. These also share a similarity with many religious/spiritual traditions: an expansive scope regardless of the locale of the ritual practice across the Buddhist landscape. This is the underlying altruistic aspiration that forms the Mahāyāna motivation for engaging in this Medicine Buddha ritual service—a wish that any accumulated merit will help toward relieving the suffering of all sentient beings throughout the universe.

5 Criddle defines “*dharani*” in his glossary as follows: “A form of mantra whose syllables have inherent power in their utterance. Among practitioners at Fo Guang Shan, the exact meaning of these Sanskrit words, spoken in a modified Chinese syllabification, is largely unknown” (77).