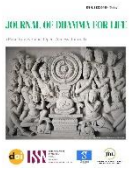
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An Analysis of the Relationship Between Music and Buddhism: Therapy, Meditation, and Enlightenment

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ABSTRACT

Music can help. Music may bring people together, not just because it can help us discover spiritual realities, but also because, as this chapter argues, music is inherently uniting. Music not only draws people together, but it also pulls ideas together, and it does so because its design aspects are unified. In this way, music is a tool for discovering spiritual realities and those spiritual realities themselves; it is my awareness of myself. Furthermore, recognizing oneself leads to understanding, accepting, and respecting the humanity of those around us.

This study answers to those proposals by hypothesizing the relationship between religion, social environment, and music today, and then tests that hypothesis against a theo-psychological interpretation of music. A conclusion summarizes my findings and highlights the importance of them. It emphasizes the relationship between music and Buddhism, highlighting how music is the basis of Buddhist teachings and rituals. Music also aids in healing, inspires individuals to produce wonderful things, and plays a significant role in achieving enlightenment.

Introduction

People in Thai society generally appreciate music exclusively in terms of aesthetics, and it exists solely for amusement purposes. Furthermore, music is frequently considered as something other than a requirement in Buddhism. Music is the source of amusement that promotes lust, may lead to wicked behavior, and violates morals. Furthermore, music is frequently connected with negative things, such as alcohol, drugs, or inappropriate locations. Although the wonderful sound of chanting contains elements of musical aesthetics, it also represents cultural beauty. However, music has societal value and is associated with religion.

Music and religion may appear to be two distinct methods; however, the Tripitaka contains evidence that music is involved in or aids the attainment of religious aspirations, or that it is a mechanism consistent with religious, social, and belief concepts. When we contemplate it, music can represent joy, celebration, and entertainment. The Tripitaka scriptures should be used for lessons or as a means of achieving Dhamma in accordance with religion's objective and goal, and they should convey a calm and worthy image. In presenting this article, we hope to investigate the context of music as it occurs in the scriptures and assess how it has participated in the context of belief according to the Buddhist scriptures, including where and how. Because, at the very least, it will show us that music and life, which combine many things into a part of the form of society, life and music culture have been involved with teachings and ideas in Buddhism in many dimensions, whether it is music for making merit or the results of making great merit as music that appears in the scriptures, music for therapy, or even music for achieving Dhamma. The interesting question is that music has become associated with "religion" in what dimension and how? At the same time, what impact has it had on Buddhists' "worldview" toward music, especially its employment in religious rituals or ceremonies?

The Buddhist philosophy encourages people to have faith, believe, and live according to religious principles, but when it comes to music, it has the opposite effect. However, music has been altered to meet the religious setting, as evidenced by the statement "Dhamma Pheri" is the drum or music of the Dharma. If music makes people happy, the Dharma has a comparable status. As a result, most Buddhist rites, particularly those of the Mahayana school, include musical instruments. When considered, it is clear that all of this music communicates Dharma. Can it be interpreted as music for the attainment of Dharma or a therapeutic instrument prior to obtaining Dharma

At the same time, if we assume that the occurrence of Prince Siddhartha’s ascetic practices, "music" has gotten involved in the following: The proof takes the shape of an analogy, and it is in this connection that the "turning point" of "Prince Siddhartha’s" practice occurred, resulting in a change in "therapy." He was able to relax, can get new ideas, and be more forgiving with his convictions until he found a solution or discovered new approaches, comparable to the present approach to music therapy. In this article, we will investigate information about music that appears in the Tripitaka, as well as the concept of how Buddhism and music that appears in the Tripitaka have evidence and are related in what dimensions, including how to use it as a therapeutic guideline as it appears in the Tripitaka.

Theoretical Framework and Related Concepts

The author begins by speculating about the relationship between religion, science, and music. This includes claiming that music might serve as a unifying factor across the sometimes-opposing areas of religion and science. This hypothesis is based on the assumption that music has inherent qualities that encourage harmony among various thoughts and opinions. Contributing to a theoretical analysis of music through the lens of anthropological understandings of music entails investigating historical and philosophical perspectives on music in order to argue that it embodies spiritual reality, providing a framework for understanding its role in mediating between religion and music.

This essay proposes a conceptual framework that connects music to spiritual truth and scientific investigation. This approach is used to examine how music might promote conversation and understanding between religious and scientific communities, implying that music is more than a tool for discovery, but rather an expression of spiritual truth. This article's approaches include hypothesis creation, theoretical analysis, a literature assessment, and the building of a conceptual framework to investigate the joint role of music in religion and science. different approaches use a comprehensive approach to understanding the intricate interactions across different domains, analyzing and presenting the results through both fieldwork and the review of pertinent documents and data.

Therefore, music has always been an element of Buddhism, whether in the form of Tripitaka scriptures or memorized chants that function similarly to teachings and precepts. The framework for this research is to investigate documents and conduct surveys as part of a field study in music anthropology. To prepare the data for analysis and presentation in the following procedure.

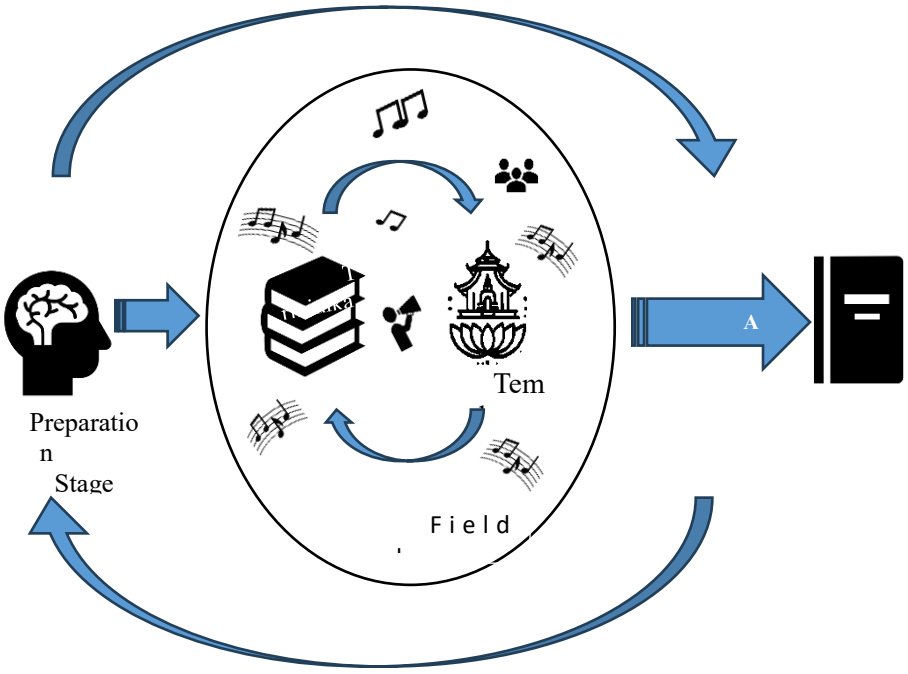


Figure 1 The relationship between theoretical concepts used in analysis
Source: Author (2025)

Research Objective

To understand the connection between music and Buddhism, treatment, meditation, and enlightenment.

Methodology

In this study, the researcher used qualitative research methods to create a teaching toolbox. The tools were subsequently applied in the classroom, resulting in field data collection, data analysis, and data organization for presentation, as seen below:

1. Preparation Stage. The researcher reviewed the literature using records and associated studies. After analyzing the literature and associated studies in terms of knowledge, history, and background, including notions such as the Tripitaka, a document on Buddhist rites that incorporates music.

2. Field data collection in this field study, the researcher used the interview approach, interviewing informants at various locations and times. The researcher performed formal and informal interviews with informants, employing a human ethics-approved questionnaire. For recording data from field data collection and picture and sound data gathering.

3. Data Management and Analysis. Data from both documentation and field investigations were handled to be consistent with the research objectives and then assessed for to arrange and present in the following sequence.

Results

Especially now, in the twenty-first century, an era of learning in which anyone may readily seek knowledge, freely access knowledge sets, and analyze and synthesize different knowledge sets throughout the vast world. It is an era in which knowledge is not limited to the classroom or to what is good or wrong. It is a time when people can freely express themselves and seek answers. As a result, the knowledge set that takes music, religion, and social contexts separately may lead to the use of assumptions from such a way of thinking to explain in a fresh way. It also incorporates an understanding of religion and music in various contexts.

This study creates a conceptual framework for connecting music to spiritual truth and musical anthropological investigation. This approach is used to examine how music can foster conversation and understanding between religious and social communities, demonstrating that music is more than just a discovery tool, but also an embodiment of Buddhism's spiritual truth.

Music is linked to Buddhism. In Buddhist religious rites, chanting is spoken with both short and long sounds, creating a melody. Chanting or praising the Buddha in Buddhism may aid in remembering and preserving the teachings since the uttering of sounds with a melody can alter the human brain's memory. Chanting in rituals, like poetry, creates beauty through high, low, short, and long tones. However, man's earliest musical instrument is his own "voice". The use of high and low, short and long tones makes a song. (Arunrat, U., 2023). As a result, the notion that Buddhism lacks music is disputed. Music is an aspect of Buddhism, although it is nonetheless forbidden in Theravada Buddhism as it violates Buddhist monastic regulations. Music, however, has played an essential role in Mahayana Buddhism's religious teachings and rites. In Japan, there is a lot of Buddhist music that is creatively adapting and growing religious

doctrine in an intriguing way, particularly the application of contemporary culture, pop culture, and contemporary music to music. There are sermons with rock, jazz, pop, hip-hop, and other musical styles. However, you can find music from traditional religions with characteristics such as Zen music, which uses the Zen sect's Shakuhachi flute for meditation to achieve enlightenment, and so on.

The study on Music in Tipitaka for Therapy, Marit Making, and Enlightenment discovered content in Buddhist texts known as "Tipitaka" indicating if music can make people happy, then Buddhist teachings are equivalent. Music may make people happy and assist relieve suffering, which is beneficial for obtaining the greatest teachings of Buddhism. Furthermore, the scriptures record an episode in which the prophet, before to becoming the ultimate prophet of Buddhism, interpreted the sound of the lute, which led to insight and enlightenment. Furthermore, it was discovered that in Buddhist scriptures, more than 100,000 names of musical instruments are referenced (Duangloy, D. & Phumathon, M., 2020) Music can also promote pleasant feelings, morals, and mental health, as well as serve to foster faith in Buddhism (Mongkhonwa, A., 2012). In other words, music in Buddhism that is related to both the chanting of hymns praising the prophet and the recitation of religious teachings that are similar to poetry with melodies can create a good emotional state, create peace, and lead to concentration, all of which are important in practicing Buddhist teaching. Buddhists regard meditation as a virtue. Advanced procedures for achieving enlightenment and increasing merit. When analyzed, it is discovered that the sound of such a melody is similar to therapy or music therapy in the Western concept, with the characteristics of short, long, high, and low sounds that are simple and do not agitate emotions, calming the human mind, creating concentration, and assisting in the forgetting of suffering and treating pain. Simply put, the sound of chanting can help treat and soothe human emotions and thoughts, as well as govern brain systems. Consistent with the study of Intarakaew, C. (2022) Music is recognized to have a favorable impact on individuals, improving learning and aiding in the healing process. Music has an impact on individuals' physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being. Musical waves resonate with the fundamental frequency of humans, influence vibrations throughout the body, and can aid in psychological recovery. Music therapy requires a suitable selection of music styles, the appropriate volume, and other influencing factors to achieve the desired effects of music in enhancing people's well-being. Many medical investigations demonstrated the effectiveness of music therapy in reducing suffering and promoting patient calm.

Furthermore, the notion that "music is the polar opposite of Buddhism" or that music is an impediment to following Buddhist teachings cannot be totally correct. Music can aid to influence the mind. It is also seen in Buddhist rites from the past to the present, both those involving live people and those involving the deceased. Throughout the history of Buddhism in Thailand, various forms of Buddhist rituals have evolved with music as an important component, whether for entertainment or rituals, until it has become a culture that has been passed down, adapted, and developed to reach the present Thai society. This has also had an impact on the development of numerous disciplines of art and education in Thailand. Studying Buddhist music will provide a clear picture of Thai society's growth. It can also be used to examine Thai society's history, as Buddhism has existed in Thailand from ancient times, until it merged with the local people's original religion or the worship of deceased ancestors, resulting in the formation of a new culture.



Figure 2 Presents the relationship between music and Buddhism in Thailand.
Source: Author (2024)

Discussion

The findings of this study illustrate the intricate relationship between music and Buddhism, revealing how music serves as a conduit for therapy, meditation, and enlightenment. In the contemporary era, where knowledge is increasingly interdisciplinary and accessible, the integration of music within religious contexts fosters a renewed understanding of its spiritual and psychological implications. This study expands upon conventional perspectives by demonstrating that music in Buddhism is not merely an artistic expression but an essential element in religious practice and spiritual development (Berkwitz, 2012; Cope, 2019).

Music as a Bridge Between Religion and Society

One of the key insights derived from this study is the role of music in fostering dialogue between religious and social communities. Historically, religious music has been instrumental in bridging cultural gaps, and this study affirms its relevance in Buddhism. In particular, Mahayana Buddhism's adaptation of music within religious rituals—such as the integration of contemporary musical styles like rock, jazz, and hip-hop—demonstrates how religious traditions can evolve while maintaining their doctrinal essence (Kopf, 2018). This phenomenon not only modernizes religious communication but also enhances accessibility and engagement, especially among younger generations (Titon, 2015).

The Role of Music in Buddhist Rituals and Teachings

Chanting, an integral aspect of Buddhist practice, exemplifies the musical nature of Buddhist rituals. The findings indicate that chanting utilizes melody, rhythm, and repetition to aid in the retention and internalization of Buddhist teachings (Miller & Strongman, 2002). The comparison of chanting to poetry further reinforces its role in shaping memory and emotional states. The discovery of over 100,000 references to musical instruments in the Tipitaka suggests that music has long been intertwined with Buddhist tradition, despite its prohibition in certain monastic contexts within Theravada Buddhism (Samson, 2020). This contradiction underscores the complexity of interpreting Buddhist teachings in relation to music (Rahula, 2007).

Music as Therapy and a Path to Enlightenment

The therapeutic aspects of music in Buddhism align with modern concepts of music therapy. The study identifies that Buddhist chanting, particularly when composed of soothing and repetitive sounds, has a calming effect on the human mind (Cook, 2017). This is consistent with previous research on the impact of music on cognitive and emotional well-being (Davis & Thaut, 2014). The findings suggest that Buddhist music can function similarly to Western music therapy by regulating emotions, fostering concentration, and alleviating suffering (Koen, 2008). This parallel reinforces the universality of music's healing power across different cultural and religious traditions (Hamel, 2006).

Implications and Future Research Directions

The results of this study have profound implications for both religious and therapeutic practices. The acknowledgment of music as a tool for spiritual and mental well-being calls for further interdisciplinary research that examines its application in meditation, mental health treatment, and religious studies (Gouk, 2021). Future research could explore the neurobiological mechanisms underlying Buddhist chanting's effects on the human brain and its potential applications in clinical therapy (Levitin, 2006). Additionally, comparative studies between different Buddhist traditions could yield deeper insights into the diverse ways in which music is utilized in spiritual practices (Becker, 2004).

In conclusion, this study reinforces the idea that music is an essential component of Buddhist practice and not merely an external cultural influence. By examining music through the lens of Buddhism, this research contributes to a broader understanding of how music can serve as a medium for enlightenment, emotional regulation, and communal harmony. The findings encourage a more inclusive view of religious practices and their intersection with artistic and therapeutic disciplines in the modern world (Patel, 2008; Nettl, 2010).

Conclusion

This study aims to comprehend the relationship between music and Buddhism, treatment, meditation, and enlightenment. The research approach employs papers and related

research. The data is then collated, processed, and evaluated to produce academic works utilizing the music anthropology method. According to the study's findings, music in the Tripitaka is associated with religious ideals and serves as a vital link between religion, society, and beliefs. However, it was discovered that music in the Tripitaka is viewed as an impediment to Buddhist monks' rules and discipline (or what is known as Abhati), making it harder to reach high morality to Buddhism's principles. It undermines Buddhism's fundamental traditions. However, evidence is still present.

Music in Buddhism can accurately portray the interaction between society and music. Music in Buddhism also accurately portrays the dynamics and changes in Thai society through religious perspectives, both old Indian and Thai Buddhism, which have previously undergone dynamic changes. Music is a way of life, a cultural expression, and a social product. The fascinating aspect of music in Buddhism discovered in this study is that, while certain teachings oppose music, music is nonetheless acknowledged. Music's importance may have been lessened. However, music continues to play a vital part in both religious propagation and achieving religious monks' purposes. In addition, different Buddhist sects discuss music and its evolution in different ways, which is an excellent topic for academic research. If Buddhism plays an important role in training people to be wise, musical discoveries in Buddhism provide an academic environment conducive to rational thinking and so wisdom.

Suggestions and Implementation

Based on the findings of this study, several practical recommendations and implementation strategies can enhance the integration of music within Buddhist practices for therapy, meditation, and enlightenment. These suggestions are structured across religious, educational, and therapeutic contexts to maximize their impact.

1. Strengthening the Role of Music in Buddhist Practice

Buddhist institutions should actively incorporate music into religious ceremonies and meditation sessions to enhance spiritual engagement.

Implementation:

1) Develop structured chanting programs that integrate traditional Buddhist melodies with scientifically validated therapeutic rhythms.

2) Encourage monastic communities to embrace musical expressions, particularly in non-monastic settings, to reach a broader audience.

3) Introduce live instrumental accompaniment during chanting rituals to create immersive meditative experiences.

2. Expanding Music-Based Meditation Programs

Meditation centers should adopt Buddhist music as a core element in mindfulness and meditation programs.

Implementation:

1) Design guided meditation sessions that incorporate Buddhist chants, mantras, and melodic recitations.

2) Develop mobile applications featuring Buddhist-inspired soundscapes to facilitate meditation practices globally.

3) Collaborate with neuroscientists to study the effects of different Buddhist chants on brainwave activity and relaxation responses.

3. Promoting Music as a Therapeutic Tool in Buddhism

Buddhist music should be utilized in therapeutic settings to support mental health and emotional well-being.

Implementation:

1) Train monks and meditation instructors in music therapy techniques to assist individuals dealing with stress, anxiety, and depression.

2) Establish Buddhist music therapy programs in hospitals, hospices, and counseling centers to aid emotional healing.

3) Conduct interdisciplinary research on the impact of Buddhist music on psychological well-being and cognitive functions.

Implementation

1. Develop streaming platforms dedicated to Buddhist music and chanting for meditation and relaxation.

2. Utilize virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) to create immersive Buddhist musical experiences.

3. Encourage Buddhist communities to share music-based spiritual teachings through podcasts and online workshops.

By implementing these strategies, Buddhist music can be further recognized as a powerful tool for therapy, meditation, and enlightenment. These approaches not only enhance religious practices but also provide scientific and cultural benefits, fostering deeper connections between Buddhism, music, and modern society.

Body of Knowledge

The relationship between music and Buddhism is deeply intertwined with religious, social, and psychological dimensions. Throughout history, music has served as both an aid and a challenge to Buddhist practice. This study aims to analyze how music functions within Buddhism in terms of therapy, meditation, and enlightenment, contributing to a broader understanding of its role in spiritual and psychological well-being.

1. The Historical and Doctrinal Context of Music in Buddhism

Buddhist scriptures, particularly the Tripitaka, reveal an ambivalent stance toward music. On one hand, music is viewed as a distraction that may lead to attachment and hinder spiritual progress, particularly in monastic life. The Vinaya Pitaka, which governs monastic discipline, discourages monks from engaging with music. However, Buddhist history and practices indicate that music has long been incorporated into rituals, meditation, and religious transmission. In Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions, music plays a more prominent role in

ceremonies, with the use of chanting, bells, and other instruments to facilitate meditation and devotional activities. Tibetan Buddhism, for example, integrates sacred music in the form of chanting, throat singing, and instrumental accompaniment, believed to aid in spiritual transformation. Theravāda Buddhism, while traditionally restrictive toward music, acknowledges the role of chanting and recitation as a means of memorizing and internalizing Buddhist teachings.

2. Music as a Medium for Meditation and Enlightenment

One of the central findings of this study is that music serves as a powerful tool in meditation. Buddhist chanting, such as the recitation of Pali Suttas or Mahayana Sutras, has been shown to promote focus, emotional stability, and mental clarity. Research on music-induced meditative states suggests that rhythmic and harmonic sound patterns facilitate deeper concentration and mindfulness. Music also plays a role in facilitating enlightenment by creating an environment conducive to spiritual awakening. Some Buddhist sects emphasize the transformative power of sound, as seen in the Pure Land tradition, where chanting the name of Amitabha Buddha (Nianfo) is believed to lead to rebirth in the Pure Land. Similarly, Zen Buddhism employs Shakuhachi flute music as a meditative practice to achieve a state of "no-mind" or mushin.

3. Music as Therapy in Buddhist Practices

Buddhist music is increasingly recognized for its therapeutic benefits, particularly in modern psychology and healthcare. Studies on music therapy indicate that chanting and melodic recitation can reduce stress, anxiety, and depression. Tibetan singing bowls, for example, are widely used in sound therapy due to their ability to induce relaxation and deep meditative states. Additionally, Buddhist music therapy is applied in hospice care, where chanting is used to comfort the dying and facilitate a peaceful transition. In traditional Buddhist healing practices, mantras and melodic invocations are believed to align the body's energy, promoting both physical and mental well-being.

4. Cultural Evolution of Music in Buddhism

This study highlights how music in Buddhism reflects broader social and cultural transformations. In Thai Buddhism, for instance, traditional Buddhist chanting (Phleng Phra) has evolved alongside local musical traditions, creating a unique blend of religious and folk elements. The adaptation of contemporary music styles, such as Buddhist hip-hop or fusion chanting, demonstrates how Buddhism remains relevant in modern societies while maintaining its core principles. The evolution of digital Buddhist music also exemplifies Buddhism's adaptation to modernity. Buddhist monks and lay practitioners now share chants and meditative music through online platforms, making Buddhist music accessible to global audiences.

5. The Paradox of Music in Buddhist Thought

A fundamental paradox emerges in Buddhist perspectives on music: while doctrinal teachings warn against its potential distractions, historical and practical applications demonstrate its profound benefits. This study suggests that the restrictive stance on music in early Buddhism may have been contextually specific rather than an absolute rejection. The Middle Way approach in Buddhism supports the idea that music, when used mindfully, can serve as a tool for both spiritual and psychological development.



Figure 3 Body of Knowlage based on the Relationship Between Music and Buddhism:Therapy, Meditation, and Enlightenment

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