

ceremony of the scattering of lotus flowers is performed with a recitative in Sanskrit and choral singing in Chinese, somewhat like a Roman Catholic service where the words may be sung in Greek, Hebrew and Latin as well as in the modern language of the country. The characteristics of the different languages are also expressed in the transcriptions of the texts, which are written partly in the Japanese phonetic system and partly in Chinese ideograms. A study of the languages, the verse texts and the vocal techniques is one of the primary disciplines in the Buddhist curriculum.

The technique of Buddhist chant employs two main forms of articulation: yuri, a double attack in slow tempo, and sugu, a sustained, unchanging delivery. The orchestra reveals its ancient Indian origin, although all the imported instruments came from China. It consists of kettle-drums, various sizes of bells, jingles, gongs, and a barrel-drum, the Japanese additions being the wooden percussion instruments with a dry or hollow timbre and different dynamic registers. In all, the percussion department thus comprises an o-gane, a densho or a hansho, a kei, a kin and a mokugyo.

During the Kamakura period Buddhist music began to employ the heike biwa, and later on the shakuhachi and even the shamisen. The earliest manuscript containing Buddhist musical notation dates from the year 1110, but only the vocal part is transcribed. The scale is basically Chinese, but with a different tonal structure comprising five or seven degrees, depending on the sect, and centred on the kaku, or key note. Each scale has two auxiliary notes which introduce modulations (ei = sharp, hen = flat). The modulations and transpositions indicated in notations and theoretical works rarely correspond to the realities of a performance, which is solely dependent on the musicianship and imagination of the executant. The main difficulty, however, lies in mastering the rhythms, since these are based on no less than seventy-five verse syllables, but in actual practice again depend on the knowledge and skill of the officiants. The folk-music style of choral singing is made easier by the repetition of stereotyped rhythmic patterns and phrases.