

"Plants and lands, all become Buddhas". This saying means that all things, whether sentient or insentient, can become Buddha. This conception is characteristic not only of the Shingon Sect but of Buddhism in general; it is, however, regarded as particularly important by the Shingon Sect. Everything is Buddha; Buddha is omnipresent. Therefore religious services do not need to be held in temples alone. Since ancient times it has been a common practice to take the representation of Buddha from the temple to a place convenient for the worshippers and to hold the service there. Every autumn the representative Buddhist schools celebrate their services in the National Theatre in Tokyo. Sometimes the ceremonies are observed even without statues or pictorial representations of Buddha, since the pious participants are regarded as the Buddhas painted in the mandala. (A mandala is a mystical Buddhist diagram which gives a pictorial interpretation of the universe and depicts the various Buddhas in the forms they assume according to their functions).

In the "Shoji Jisso-gi" (The Meaning of the True Nature of Voice and Characters) by Kukai we find the following passage: "We can no longer hear Buddha's voice. However, even now we can hear voices like that of Buddha. When all things in this world that have a voice utter it all together, maintaining their characteristics, yet merging into one sound, then it approaches closest to Buddha's voice". Because all things are endowed with Buddha's nature, when they are united in one being, it comes closest to perfection, that is, it becomes one with Buddha. Although Kukai's book does not contain a direct and detailed account of shomyo, the above passage offers an important key to the understanding of this music.

In the chanting of shomyo there are parts where the pitches are not indicated, and this can even apply to passages sung in unison. The resulting deviations in pitch are not fortuitous inaccuracies, but a feature of the style itself. Most shomyo chants have no regular rhythm or clearly defined tempo. The tempo varies according to the size of