

# A Fusion of Horizons: *Shōmyō* in Kogi Shingon Ritual

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## Introduction

In a previous contribution to a *SCEAR* Forum (1992–3, Volume 5/6), I examined an excerpt from the *Shōmyō tai i ryakujū mon ge*, a commentary on *shōmyō* practice and theory, written by the Shingon monk, Jakushō (1833–1913). His commentary illuminates relationships between *shōmyō* musical theory, ritual practice and the soteriological goals of Shingon. In particular, Jakushō discusses the correspondences that link the pentatonic scale structure of *shōmyō* melodies and various series of fives (five Buddhas, five elements, five syllables) used in Shingon ritual theory.

The focus of this study is on elucidating the ritual complex within which *shōmyō*, in the Kogi Shingon school, projects relevance for its practitioners. To this end, the discussion of *shōmyō* centres upon its use as a ritual activity. General characteristics of the musical style are considered with an emphasis on elements that contribute to its aural beauty and efficacy as a ritual activity. With regard to the former, one function of *shōmyō* in the ritual complex is to provide a musical offering that is both beautiful and pleasant sounding.<sup>1</sup> A particularly prominent component in this aesthetic is the use of standardized motivic patterns. As for the efficacy of *shōmyō* as a ritual activity, within the scale structure of the songs we can discern a connection to the broader theoretical constructs which underlie Shingon ritual practice.

*Shōmyō* is a term used in reference to a particular style of Buddhist chant in Japan, practised primarily by the Shingon and Tendai sects, though other sects will employ *shōmyō* in a limited manner. It is distinguished from recitation of texts (usually utilizing one pitch with occasional short melodies to conclude a section) and from songs constructed of discrete pitches sung in a fixed metre by many of the features discussed below. Foremost among these are the relatively standard patterns that incorporate gradual and continuous variations of pitch, vowel modifications, and shifts in vocal timbre. In contrast to text recitation and songs in a fixed metre, *shōmyō* is sung in free rhythm. Another important distinguishing characteristic of *shōmyō* that must be kept in mind is the identification of the *shōmyō* tradition with

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<sup>1</sup> Good intentions are of prime importance. The emphasis is on the intent to provide a good performance of a piece. If, in actual fact, the performance is less than aurally satisfactory, it can nevertheless function as an acceptable offering if performed with sincere motivation.

the Buddhist tradition of religious music in China and India. While the precise mechanisms of transmittal, and clearly discernible parallels with the Chinese and Indian historical models remain problematical, for the practitioners, contemporary *shōmyō* follows upon a long, unbroken tradition dating back to Indian Buddhism.

*Shōmyō* has received little attention in either Western language ethnomusicological studies or in Religious Studies and, to the extent that it has, these studies have for the most part neglected the underlying concepts that inform Shingon ritual. Previous ethnomusicological studies have focused on the musical or historical aspects of *shōmyō* without acknowledging its place in the ritual complex. The referential framework of Shingon *shōmyō* extends far beyond the theory and structure of the music. This framework is the world that Shingon discloses, and to understand the place of *shōmyō* in Shingon ritual (and thereby attempt to gain an understanding of its meaning) one must look at this world and the manner in which it is disclosed.

Harich-Schneider (1973) remains the most complete and reliable general study of Japanese music in the English language. She concentrates on the history of music in Japan, including Buddhist music (noting its precedents in India and China), and gives a fine summary of the theoretical aspects of the music. Malm (1959) provides a short description of some of the scale theory used in Japanese Buddhist music, but gives no hint as to the significance of *shōmyō* within the ritual system. Gamer (1976) concentrates on an analysis of the motivic patterns used in Shingi *shōmyō*; and while his presentation has much to commend it for its originality, he does not expand the framework of his study far enough to incorporate any discussion of ritual. Giesen (1977) and Takakutsu and Demiéville (1929) concentrate primarily on history and musical theory. Kaufmann (1967) gives a brief reference to the notational system used in *shōmyō* and little more. Hill (1982) is correct in stating, “The ritual music of the Shingon sect and its place in the rich corpus of liturgies of body, voice and mind, provide the basis and the promise of a significant ethnomusicological topic” (1982:33). While recognizing Shingon *shōmyō* as a significant topic for ethnomusicological inquiry, Hill’s attempt to place *shōmyō* in the context of other aspects of Shingon ritual is not developed and contains inaccuracies.

While I truly wish I could claim a complete understanding of Shingon and its music, such is not the case. I have attempted to use two theoretical frameworks to tease at threads, to try and reach for connections. The first framework is the hermeneutic theory of Paul Ricoeur. I found that an analysis of Shingon ritual in the light of Paul Ricoeur’s work in the processes of understanding in metaphor and narrative was of assistance to me, both during the fieldwork and even more so subsequently, in attempting to integrate the diverse aspects of Shingon life. Ricoeur’s earlier work on the hermeneutics of text and action provides a point of departure, but it is primarily the later work (*Rule of Metaphor, Time and Narrative*,

and *Oneself as Another*) that, I believe, generates a framework that contributes to an understanding of Shingon *shōmyō*. The discussion of Ricoeur in Part I presents an interpretative theory that can be held in mind through the subsequent ethnographic description.

The second theoretical framework is provided by the concept of the *maṇḍala*. *Shōmyō* is situated, by Shingon practitioners, within the dynamic, all-encompassing field of the *maṇḍala*. There are specific textual and musical links to the *maṇḍala* used by the Shingon sect. More importantly, however, the *maṇḍala* provide experiential maps of the means and goals of Shingon ritual.

Why both Ricoeur and the *maṇḍala*? An analysis of Shingon *shōmyō*, in its defining context of Shingon ritual, risks the danger of tacking between almost mind-numbing ethnographic detail of ritual components and pronouncements of religious experience regarding the ultimate nature of the cosmos. In between is a broadened concept of action and the interpretive moves by which an action is meaningfully linked to other actions, events, beliefs and perceptions of the human heart. The *maṇḍala* provides an overall, unifying schema while Ricoeur's thought generates suggestions regarding the nature of these links and the processes by which they are established. There is an underlying ontological concern throughout Ricoeur's work which makes it particularly applicable to Religious Studies.<sup>2</sup> It is this concern which can inform the means by which *shōmyō*, and the other constituent elements of Shingon ritual, lead to a view of being. The *maṇḍala* is the paradigmatic expression of this view.

### **Part I: A Fusion of Horizons**

The thought of Paul Ricoeur, especially as expressed in his later works, *The Rule of Metaphor* (1975) and the three volume *Time and Narrative* (1984–5), suggests a homologous mode of understanding which can be adopted in an examination of the complex relationships that constitute Shingon ritual. In these works, Ricoeur turns his attention to how meaning is created in metaphor and narrative. Ricoeur's insights into this creative process suggest a cogent paradigm of how meaning is created and expressed in Shingon ritual.

A distinguishing characteristic of Ricoeur's hermeneutics is its world disclosing aspect. His concept of the hermeneutic circle, which incorporates personal involvement with a text and objective explanation revealed by an examination of structures, causes, laws and functions, proposes a dialogical relationship between the reader and the text from which a further world is disclosed. It is this further disclosed world that is interpreted as meaning in a text.

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<sup>2</sup> See Ricoeur 1992:297ff, Burton-Christie 1993.

There are two tasks associated with Ricoeur's hermeneutics, two interrelated steps that mitigate against either a reduction of explanation to an abstract combinatory system or a reduction of understanding to empathy. The first task is to reconstruct the internal dynamic that governs the structuring of the text while the second seeks "... to restore to the work its ability to project itself outside itself in the representation of a world that I could inhabit" (Ricoeur 1991:18). Throughout the course of this study I will endeavour to tack between these seemingly dichotomous poles. The demarcation of the realms of explanation and understanding, the implied tension between them, and the ultimate diffusion of this tension are characteristic features of Ricoeur's hermeneutics. Part of my intent in discussing Ricoeur at the beginning of this study is to harness his outline of the process of the hermeneutical project to an analysis of *shōmyō* in Shingon ritual. I will try to explain the "abstract combinatory system", the internal structure of Shingon ritual, while at the same time illustrating that the performance of the ritual leads, for the practitioner, to the disclosure of a world that he or she could inhabit.

It is precisely at this critical juncture that the multivalency of *shōmyō* resides. Critical in the sense that we are addressing a soteriology, a religious system designed to induce a metanoia, a change at a fundamental basis of the self. Multivalent in the sense that *shōmyō* is embedded in a combinatory arrangement of ritual components. The correct performance of the arrangement of these components is of prime importance and comprises a large proportion of a Shingon practitioner's training. It is, however, the interrelated nature of the components of the ritual that enables the projection of a ritually defined world. For the individual practitioner the performance of a ritual initially broadens the frame of reference and ultimately, the frame of relevance. The frame of relevance opened up to the ritual practitioner poses specific solutions to the those aporias of human existence recognized by Shingon.

Ricoeur, in *Rule of Metaphor*, examines the way in which a text unfolds by considering how metaphorical meaning is created. By examining the ground upon which a metaphor is understood, Ricoeur expands the frame of reference from the word to the sentence and ultimately to the text or work. With this movement from the word to the sentence, from the semiotic to the semantic, there likewise occurs a change in the level of understanding. Citing Benveniste, Ricoeur contends that the meaning of a sentence is not reducible to the sum of its parts, rather "the meaning inherent in this whole is distributed over the ensemble of its parts" (Ricoeur 1977:67). Likewise, we shall see that it is precisely this new order of relationships among the constitutive parts of Shingon ritual which demands, at the interpretive stage, a paradigmatic shift in our perception of the ritual process.

While the recitation or singing of texts forms a text-based element of Shingon ritual, much of the ritual activity is action, either external, in the form

of prescribed hand gestures, or internal, in the form of visualizations and states of meditative concentration. Is it then an unbridgeable leap to apply a paradigm of textual interpretation, such as Ricoeur's, to the interpretation of ritual action? Is there an unseen and presumed equation of text and action?

It is my belief that we can find suggestions for how to interpret Shingon ritual both at the level of the components of a ritual performance and at the level of the meaning of a world it projects for the practitioner, in Ricoeur's explication of how meaning is created in metaphor and narrative. In this sense Shingon ritual is not being construed as a "text", rather the emphasis is on how meaning is created by ritual. The title of Ricoeur's classic article, "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text" (Ricoeur 1971) somewhat belies the project which he attempted in that article. He identified four traits characteristic of texts and found parallels to them in an objectification of human action. The emphasis, however, was on the methodology of interpretation used in interpreting texts and action. In this regard it does make sense to say that I am considering, for the purposes of interpretation, Shingon ritual action as a text, but not construing it in such a manner. While Shingon ritual shares the four traits constitutive of text and action noted by Ricoeur in his article, the consideration of Shingon ritual in light of Ricoeur's work in metaphor and narrative is an interpretative move. This study orients itself around the question of the process by which meaning in Shingon ritual is created and how we can attempt to explain and understand that meaning.

The creation of meaning in a newly invented metaphor is a semantic innovation. The innovation lies in the making of a new semantic pertinence at the level of discourse, "that is, the level of acts of language equal to or greater than the sentence" (Ricoeur 1984:x). The perception of resemblances, the making of a new pertinence is the work of the productive imagination. For example, a metaphor collides with the literal meaning of the words with which it is constructed. From this breakdown in sense a new meaning is fashioned, a meaning which is derived from placing the metaphor (and the shattered sense of its words) within the more expansive context of the sentence. In reading Ricoeur it is perhaps more fruitful to look at the workings of the productive imagination rather than reifying it and attempting to place it as existent within the operations of the human mind. The act of "seeing" is used as a metaphor for the productive imagination. "It is the 'seeing'—the sudden insight—inherent in discourse itself which brings about the change in logical distance, the bringing-closer-together itself" (Ricoeur 1991:9). The productive imagination is the operation of bringing closer together dissemblances and in so doing, fashioning new meanings.

In *Time and Narrative* Ricoeur expands the concept of the productive imagination to the narrative. It is through the action of emplotment, the creation of a plot in a narrative, that the various events of a story are held together

in a temporal unity. It is the plot that unites and allows the diverse events of a story to be disclosed. Ricoeur writes, “The plot of a narrative ... ‘grasps together’ and integrates into one whole and complete story multiple and scattered events, thereby schematizing the intelligible signification attached to the narrative taken as a whole” (Ricoeur 1984:I x).<sup>3</sup> Once again, as in the case of the productive imagination, it is necessary to regard emplotment not in the rather static sense of a plot but rather as a “putting-into-the-form-of-a-plot” (Ricoeur 1991:3). Emplotment is a structuring operation that through its selection and arrangement of events makes a complete story.

Consequently, understanding (in this sense of understanding a narrative) is “grasping the operation that unifies into one whole and complete action the miscellany constituted by the circumstances, ends and means, initiatives and interactions, the reversals of fortune, and all the unintended consequences issuing from human action” (Ricoeur 1984:I x). Ricoeur’s theory of narrative situates understanding in a schematizing operation which, in the case of fictional and historical narratives, suspends the referential function of descriptive language in order to posit a remade world of reordered connections. “What is communicated, in the final analysis, is, beyond the sense of a work, the world it projects and that constitutes its horizon” (Ricoeur 1984:77). Understanding, in Ricoeur’s conception, involves a progressive enlargement of one’s horizons.<sup>4</sup>

It is the hypothesis of this study that the many and complex constituent parts of Shingon ritual are “grasped together” by the practitioner and from this schematizing operation a new image of identity emerges. Ricoeur invokes Dilthey’s equation of the concept of *Zusammenhang des Lebens* (the connectedness of life) to a concept of a life history in stressing the preeminent role of connectedness (Ricoeur 1992:141). In reading a fictional or historical narrative, one’s horizons are capable of being expanded through the process of grasping together previously unintelligible connections into a meaningful, perduring whole.

Likewise, I propose that in Shingon ritual a new way of being in the world is proposed to the practitioner. The horizons of the practitioner are continually remade by ritual practice and through a fusion of horizons with the deity of a ritual, new intelligible significations are experienced. It is in terms of this experience that one can speak not only of the meaning of the constituents (specifically for this study, *shōmyō*) of the ritual but also on a personal level, of meaning and a view of life—a disclosure of a world—for the individual.

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<sup>3</sup> The Roman numeral in the citation refers to the volume number of *Time and Narrative*.

<sup>4</sup> Burton-Christie, to some degree, applies Ricoeur’s hermeneutics to early Christian monastic culture (the Desert Fathers) and their reliance on and interpretation of Scripture. He writes, “These possibilities of meaning can be understood as the project of the text, the outline of a new way-of-being in the world which the text projects ahead of itself” (Burton-Christie 1993:19).

## Part II: *sokushin jōbutsu/sanmitsu*

Shingon was transmitted to Japan from China by Kūkai (posthumous Kōbō Daishi, 774–835), a figure of almost legendary status revered throughout Japanese history. A distinguishing characteristic of Kūkai’s thought is to be found in the concept of *sokushin jōbutsu* (lit. attaining Buddhahood in this very body). Hakeda, in discussing this aspect of Kūkai’s thought, writes, “His work that goes by that title is the most important systematic exposition of his thought. In time, this motto became the best-known characterization of Kūkai’s Buddhism” (1972:77). For Kūkai the search for Buddhahood was a process of revealing the innate nature present in everyone. This innate nature, Kūkai proposed, was the nature of the Buddha. He wrote in *Sokushin jōbutsu gi*, “The Existence of the Buddha [Mahāvairocana] is the existences of the sentient beings and vice versa. They are not identical but are nevertheless identical; they are not different but are nevertheless different” (Kūkai, in: Hakeda 1972:232).

The correlation between the Buddha and sentient beings is significant, for our purposes, for two reasons. Most importantly, it delineates the ontological ground of Shingon ritual; it makes specific the connection between Buddha nature and human nature. Secondly, by extension, the existence of the Buddha and the existences of sentient beings both include sound. *Shōmyō*, the sound of a drum in ritual, the sound of a bell, indeed ultimately, all sound in the world of sentient beings can be construed as being not identical and not different from sounds associated with the Buddha.

Kito Toshirō, in a recent book on *shōmyō*, proposes that the performance of *shōmyō* is the expression of the voice of a human being, operative on the microcosmic level. This performance, however, corresponds to the performance (in the sense of sound being made manifest) of sound on the macrocosmic level (Kito 1990:28). Jakushō, in the *Shōmyō tai i ryaku ju mon ge*, wrote,

For the ascetic practitioners (*gyōjin*) who have performed ascetic ritual (*gyō*), when they have practised for a long time and achieved complete mastery, their melodies become the melodies of the Buddha world. It is in this manner that the *maṇḍala*’s praise melody becomes clear.

(Jakushō 1910:44a8–12, see Monhart 1993:142)

It is the continued performance of *shōmyō* that links the practitioner with the all-inclusive world of the Buddhas.

Kūkai’s view of the nature of human existence is decidedly optimistic and egalitarian. He does not differentiate between people with regard to the possibility of attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime. No one person is intrinsically better than another; what makes the possibility a reality is practice of the teachings. Paramount in the practice of the teachings is ritual meditative practice.

Throughout his writings Kūkai continually stresses the value and necessity of meditation practice, specifically the practice of the *sanmitsu* (lit. “three secrets” or “three mysteries”). The *sanmitsu* are the ritually prescribed activities for the body, voice and mind, and they form the praxis of Shingon ritual. Kūkai writes in his *Sokushin jōbutsu gi*,

If there is a Shingon student who reflects well upon the meaning of the Three Mysteries, makes mudras, recites mantras, and allows his mind to abide in the state of samadhi, then, through grace, his three mysteries will be united with the Three Mysteries; thus, the great perfection of his religious discipline will be realized.<sup>5</sup>

(Kūkai, in Hakeda 1972:230–1)

In affirming the potentiality of Buddhahood innate in every person, Kūkai likewise affirmed that it is in this body with all of its attendant desires that Buddhahood is realized. This affirmation of human desire is expressed in the *Hannya rishu kyō* (Skt. *Prajñāpāramitānaya*), recited daily in Shingon temples. This sūtra was composed in India in the seventh century. It was translated into Chinese by Amoghavajra in China during the early part of the eighth century and was brought to Japan by Kūkai (Miyata 1989:2). This is the version used today in Shingon temples.

The *Hannya rishu kyō* forms the centrepiece of a Shingon priest’s daily practice. It is relatively concise, requiring 20–30 minutes to recite (depending on the tempo of the recitation, which can vary from temple to temple). Astley, in his fine translation and study of the sūtra in its Shingon context, makes the point that although the average priest or lay believer may not understand much of the sūtra, it nevertheless represents “a potential fund of knowledge and insight... which can be tapped at any moment in history” (Astley-Kristensen 1991:3–4). I found this to be true. While every word might not be understood by priests or the laity, the general purport of the sūtra was widely known. It provided a unfailing source of material for teachings and sermons precisely because it so succinctly summarizes many of the elements contained in the *Dainichi kyō* and the *Kongōchō kyō*, the canonical texts which underlie Shingon thought and *maṇḍala* practice.

Astley sees in Chapters 1 and 17 of the sūtra “the same basic idea of the transformation of the passions into the stuff of enlightenment... each of these crucial passages expresses the principle of “the passions themselves are enlightenment”” (Astley-Kristensen 1991:164). The sūtra, from the start, describes anger, greed, sexual desire, indeed the whole gamut of desires not often associated with the “sacred”, and the ritual means, most specifically the three secrets, used to transmute them. Miyata, in the introduction to his English translation of this sūtra, states,

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<sup>5</sup> The Three Mysteries (upper case) are the *sanmitsu* of Dainichi Nyorai while the three mysteries flower case) are the *sanmitsu* of the practitioner. In both cases, the *sanmitsu* serve as the link between the deity and human beings.



Through all the chapters the importance of human nature, such as the emotions of craving, passion, desire and anger, is exposed and emphasized as the chief force of enlightenment, leading one toward nirvāna... Instead of a negative view of human nature, it provides a way of cosmicizing/magnifying human awareness through which reality is apprehended and embodied. In this process of universalization, various symbols [*mantra*, seed syllables, bodhisattvas, and *mudrā*] are effectively used and arranged through seventeen stages for producing a cosmological, religious drama/activity

(Miyata 1989:1)

The *sūtra* stresses the notion that all of human nature is a “force of enlightenment”, that all emotions can be used in the process of attaining enlightenment in this lifetime.

Kūkai proposed that in this lifetime and in this body, with all its attendant desires, it is possible to attain Buddhahood. This is the goal of Kūkai’s Buddhism and functions as the locus around which Shingon ritual is constructed. The concept of an innate Buddha nature and the incorporation of the entire range of, in Ricoeur’s words, the “miscellany constituted by the circumstances, interactions, the reversals of fortune, and all the unintended consequences issuing from human action” (Ricoeur 1984:I x) expand the horizons of reference. Shingon ritual provides the framework which emplots the passions of human life into forces for enlightenment.

If *sokushin jōbutsu* is the goal of Shingon thought, then the *sanmitsu* are the means to that goal. The *sanmitsu* are the ritual activities of the body, voice and mind and generally are considered as referring to, in the case of the body, forming *mudrā* (*ingei*), ritually prescribed hand gestures; of voice, reciting *mantra* (*shingon*), ritually prescribed vocalizations; and of mind, meditating and performing ritually prescribed visualizations (*jō*). Shingon ritual involves ritual activities for the body, voice and mind in an attempt to effect a radical change throughout the entire self.

Shingon makes the concept of non-dual interpenetration the basis of an all-encompassing system of practice, one that involves the body as well as the mind. It valorizes bodily gestures and speech, using them as integral and essential components of ritual practices aimed at merging the sadhaka’s body, speech and mind with the Tathagata’s Dharma Body ... Every Shingon teaching, ritual, and maṇḍala expresses the postulate that the body, speech and mind of the being interpenetrate the Body, Speech and Mind of the Tathagata.

(Snodgrass 1988:15)

The use of ritual activities for the body, voice and mind is a characteristic of

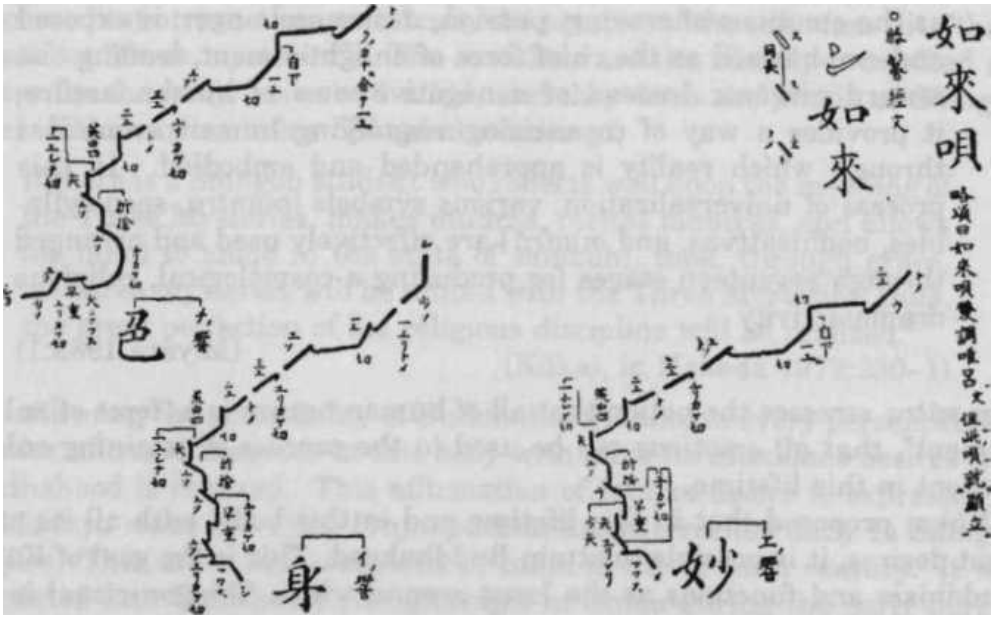


Figure 1: The beginning of the chant, *Nyorai bai*, taken from the *Gyosan taigaishū*, q.v.

Esoteric Buddhism. The *sanmitsu* are the concrete, prescribed procedures for the merger of the practitioner's entire being with the body, voice and mind of the Buddha.

### Part III: Elements of a Musical Style

Harich-Schneider (1973), as well as the article on *bombai*<sup>6</sup> in the *Hōbōgirin* (Demiéville 1930), discuss the music theory of Shingon *shōmyō* as it is derived from the *Gyosan taigaishū*, the compendium of notations and theory notes compiled by the Shingon monk Chōe in the fifteenth century. This work has been incorporated into the *Nanzan shinryū shōmyō rui jū*, the *shōmyō* collection which is the version presently in use at Kōyasan, the centre of the Shingon Kogi sect. I was often told, however, both at Kōyasan and elsewhere, that theory and practice have diverged significantly.<sup>7</sup> I found, generally, little attention paid in the temples to the theoretical aspects of the music. The songs were taught by example, with one priest singing phrases and the others following along or, alternatively, through the utilization of cassette tapes.

The texts may be in Sanskrit (*bonsan*), Chinese (*kansan*) or Japanese (*wasan*). Texts in Sanskrit and Chinese are more frequently used in ritual

<sup>6</sup> The term *bombai* is roughly synonymous in use with *shōmyō*.

<sup>7</sup> A divergence noted by Malm (1959:67).

contexts and exhibit more complex melodies. *Shōmyō* is antiphonal; generally, an opening stanza is intoned by one or two priests and then the other priests join in and sing the remainder of the piece in unison. Exceptions do exist (one is discussed below, because of its notable contour); however, this is the usual practice.

The ritual performances of *shōmyō* that I observed were sung unaccompanied by instruments, although instruments were, at times, integrated into other stages of the rituals.<sup>8</sup> This is a generalization, subject to exceptions. For example, I was allowed to witness one performance in which the singing of *shōmyō* alternated with melodies played on the shell (*hōragai*). Harich-Schneider (1973:341) recounts hearing a *shōmyō* example with instruments, but was unable to include it with her musical examples. She presents pictorial evidence that suggests that instruments played a more prominent role in the past.

There are two instruments which are in common use in the performance of daily rituals. The *kin* (also referred to as the *keisu*, *daikiri*, *daakin*, and *dōkin*) is a struck resting bronze bell with a diameter of approximately 40–60cm and a height of 30–40cm.<sup>9</sup> The metal is about 1–2cm thick. It is struck with a *bachi*, a padded wooden stick about 3–4cm in diameter (Kataoka and Yokumichi 1984:114). The *kin* is used to mark the beginning and ending of a ritual, of *sūtra* recitations and performances of *shōmyō*. It is typically struck three times, though the accelerating beat pattern (*shindō byōshi*) described by Ellingson (1979:188, 585ff) is occasionally used.

This same accelerating beat pattern can be somewhat discerned with the second of the two instruments utilized in common practice, the *nyōhachi* (also called simply *hachi*). These are bossed cymbals, approximately 40cm in diameter, with an approximately 3cm diameter boss (Kataoka and Yokumichi 1984:216–17). They are most commonly played before and after a *shōmyō* piece. They are struck in even pulses with varying numbers of repetitions. The “rebound-play”, described by Ellingson (1979:585) as a technique “... in which cymbals are allowed to oscillate freely against one another after the initial stroke, producing accelerating and diminishing sound pulsations ...” is characteristic of Tibetan Buddhist cymbal performance practice. In the Kogi school of Shingon, this technique is used to a limited extent. One hears some free oscillation of the cymbals but, in general, it is not a practice that is emphasised.

My fieldwork was conducted primarily at two temples, Saifuku-ji in Kagoshima and Sanbōin at Kōyasan. Saifuku-ji was unique for its prominent use of a drum, an instrument that was not used at Sanbōin. The drum was a

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<sup>8</sup> As noted, I have restricted my analysis to the Kogi school. A comparison of the *shōmyō* of the Kogi and Shingi schools awaits further study.

<sup>9</sup> *Kin* was the term used in all performance situations I encountered and I have retained it here.

barrel drum (*ō-daiko*), resting on a stand and played with two drumsticks. This type of drum is associated with the Shinto tradition, but is used at Saifuku-ji to accompany the fire ritual (*goma*). I did not observe it elsewhere; its use at Saifuku-ji was a result of a greater incorporation of Shintō and Shugendō elements.

*Shōmyō* is, primarily, in free rhythm. No indications of rhythm are given in the notation. Great emphasis is placed upon singing together and specific breathing points are given by the oral tradition. However, I did not encounter any articulated notion of an underlying beat as a means of organizing the temporal dimension of the music. In general, the rhythm of Shingon *shōmyō* appears to be event-oriented; the principal temporal structuring device is the event. In this sense, one moves not from beat to beat (construed as an underlying conceptual beat), spaced evenly apart, but rather from event to event. Ellingson's description of time organization in Tibetan music (in his discussion of cymbal techniques and styles) suggests an application to Shingon *shōmyō*:

... time organization in Tibetan music involves structuring units of time by ordered sequences of musical events (beats). ... In the Tibetan system, time is not a mechanical, metronomically regular unit of measure that continues on an abstract level regardless of the presence or absence of any musical sound. Rather, time is a product of perceptual experience, meaningful only in the presence of perceived events with concrete durations.

(Ellingson 1979:597–8)

The implications of this for Shingon *shōmyō* are, to my mind, particularly suggestive and demanding of further research. As in the case of the “rebound play” of the cymbals, the distinctions seem to be more clearly drawn in the Tibetan tradition. Nevertheless, Shingon *shōmyō* does exhibit attributes of an event-oriented music.

There are, in Shingon *shōmyō*, two fundamental scales from which five modes (*gochōshi*) are constructed. The two scales are *ryo* (D E F# G# A B C#) and *ritsu* (D E F G A B C). The five modes are *ichikotsu*, *sōjō*, *hyōjō*, *ōshiki*, and *banshiki*. The scale and modal theory of Shingon *shōmyō* is similar to that of *gagaku*, Japanese court music. There are actually six modes in *gagaku*; *taishiki* is not used in Shingon *shōmyō*.<sup>10</sup>

The repertoire of Shingon *shōmyō* is divided into four categories based upon scalar treatment. The four categories are *ryokyoku* (pieces entirely in the *ryo* scale); *rikkyoku* (pieces entirely in the *ritsu* scale); *chūkyoku* (pieces half in *ryo* and half in *ritsu*); and *hennonkyoku* (pieces that begin in one scale, modulate, then end in the original scale).

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<sup>10</sup> For discussions of scale and modal theory in *shōmyō* and *gagaku*, see Harich-Schneider (1973:327ff), Garfias (1975:61ff), and Ōyama (1989:281ff).

The scales provide a skeletal structure for the most distinguishing characteristic of *shōmyō*: the use of fixed motives or melismatic patterns. Each pattern is indicated by its name and/or a graphic addition in the notation. The patterns are standardized and a brief sign in the notation is sufficient for all involved to mark its performance. Harich-Schneider has written that *shōmyō* melodies are “an agglomerate of stereotyped motives put together like mosaics in varying sequences. . . . Every single motive is practiced in isolation by the student” (1973:333). None of the Shingon practitioners that I interviewed regarded *shōmyō* in this manner. The melodies were taught as a complete unit with special attention paid to correct performance of the melismatic patterns.

The difference between Harich-Schneider’s observations and mine may be entirely attributable to differences within teaching lineages. While Shingon is a very conservative tradition, it has been subject to numerous schisms throughout its history. Furthermore, the head priests at the individual temples are given wide latitude in the means by which they teach. While it is possible to make general descriptions of Shingon ritual and *shōmyō*, individual differences exist. I believe the pedagogical method I observed is the dominant one and is important for our purposes because it gives us a hint in how to listen (or how not to listen) to *shōmyō*. The presence of the patterns may enable us to distinguish a chant as *shōmyō*; however, I think if we listen to the melodies as aggregates of stereotypical patterns we will overlook the beauty of a piece perceived as a whole. The songs are regarded as whole units; they are most usually taught, practised and performed in their entirety.

*Sanrai* is one of the first pieces taught in the Shingon sect, though it is not as commonly performed as, for example, *Shichi bongo no san*. It is not a particularly difficult piece, compared to others within the repertoire, yet it does clearly exhibit the essential characteristics of *shōmyō*. *Sanrai* is a *kansan* piece, i.e, the text is in Chinese and uses the Chinese readings for the characters. It is used as worship directed at the three treasures: the Buddha, the teachings, and the spiritual community.

The text begins with the word *issai* (all), with the initial *i* silent. The subsequent *sai* exhibits one of the more commonly recurring motivic patterns, *yuri*.<sup>11</sup> This motivic pattern differs in the *ryo* and *ritsu* scales. *Yuri*, in *ryo*, consists of a fluctuation of a half or whole step, beginning with an ascent upward. This is repeated three times.<sup>12</sup> The stepwise movement should be

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<sup>11</sup> Its occurrence here can be attributed to a repetition in the text (the Buddha, *dharma* and *saṃgha* by turns receiving worship).

<sup>12</sup> It can also be sung as a half-step below which moves to the main pitch, followed by a quick rise to a half-step above and a subsequent descent to the main pitch. I have collected three different Shingon performances of *Sanrai*, all of which vary to some degree. Anraku (1988:14) lists five separate *yuri* for this scale type alone.

clearly articulated and the repetitions generally equal in length (Miyajima 1989). *Sanrai* is in the *ryo* mode. The *yuri* here moves in distinct shifts of approximately a half step. *Yuri*, in *ritsu*, also consists of a repeated fluctuation of a whole or half-step but with more repetitions which gradually decrease in rhythmic value. As one “event” it exhibits the accelerating beat pattern discussed above.<sup>13</sup>

The other motivic pattern utilized in *Sanrai* is *iro*. This, likewise, is a fluctuation in pitch of about a half-step, but it begins with an initial descent and features more alternations in the accelerating rhythm which was described above. The *iro* in *Sanrai* occurs in the third column on the last character, “sō”. The vowel is long, a lengthening that in Japanese is usually written as a “u”, though in speech remains voiced as a long “o”. Here the voicing shifts from “o” to “u”; this shift appears to be accented by the *iro*. The pattern occurs again at the end of the piece on the character “jō”, once more emphasising a vowel shift from “o” to “u”.

*Sanrai* displays two of the most characteristic motivic patterns, *yuri* and *iro*. The performance of these patterns will be fixed within a temple, dependent on its oral tradition, but can vary from temple to temple. The variation appears to be mainly one of interval size with the overall shape of the pattern remaining rather consistent. The patterns become aural models which are easily assimilated into the process of learning new songs. The correct performance of these patterns is emphasised as they definitely contribute to the aural beauty of *shōmyō*.

Many of these patterns utilize very fine gradations of pitch change joined with precise vowel and/or tone colour modifications. The *yuri* and *iro* encountered in the above example exhibit articulated distinctions between pitch levels. Other patterns, however, are not as clear-cut. Pitch movement shifts in a continuous glide. A representative graphic depiction of elements of these patterns would be contour-like in shape and indeed, such a contour notation is to be found in Shingon *shōmyō*. In this regard, both in melodic shape and in notational representation, *shōmyō* demonstrates marked parallels with Tibetan Buddhist music. The most significant difference is that *shōmyō* combines these contour melodies with a scalar overlay derived from Chinese models. Ellingson contends that

the introduction of scalar quantification into the Japanese notation system, as well as into the system of musical practice, is an artificial imposition on a musical structure which has as its primary characteristic the construction of continuously varying, subtly changing contour motifs that include both subtle and continuous changes of not only pitch, but also loudness and vowel

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<sup>13</sup> Perhaps accelerating sub-events is a more precise though somewhat inelegant description of the pattern in *yuri*, as no instrument is being “beaten” and the repeated fluctuations are not linked to an underlying concept of a beat.

color, features equally important for patterning and structuring the melodic contour.

(Ellingson 1986:319)

The melodic structure of *shōmyō* mixes a pentatonic scale with these contour motifs. The aural impression is of a seamless whole. It is important to note that the contour motifs are not considered by Shingon practitioners to be ornamental manipulations of a main melody. While generally categorizable, they are nevertheless intrinsic to each song.

The historical path by which these motifs were joined to the Chinese-derived scale system is unclear. Variations in performance of these motifs between the Shingon and Tendai sects, between the Kōgi and Shingi schools of the Shingon sect, and indeed between individual temples within a sect compound the difficulty. Shingon *shōmyō*, and within Shingon, Kōgi *shōmyō* especially, utilizes less of the contour motifs than the Tendai sect. Japanese scholarship regarding *shōmyō* has closely followed sectarian lines with little comparative work having been done. A comparative study would require not only extensive recording (to place the differences between temples of the same sect in context), but would also demand a critical analysis of the histories of the Shingon and Tendai sects. On a larger scale, analysis of Buddhist ritual often remains rather localized, not recognizing the more comprehensive issues presented by the intercultural nature of Buddhism.<sup>14</sup>

We are left with an incomplete picture and for that reason I hesitate to completely identify the scalar quantification as artificial and the contour motifs as the primary characteristic of the musical structure of *shōmyō*. As we will see below, the scalar system provides, in theory, an important link to the *maṇḍala* used in ritual practice. The fact that this link is more operative in theory than in practice does however place Ellingson's contention at the heart of future studies of *shōmyō*.

From general considerations of the Shingon religious system and elements of the musical style, we will now turn to an examination of the use of *shōmyō* in the ritual context. Specifically, rituals at two temples of the Shingon sect will be examined with the purpose of illustrating how *shōmyō* is used in a ritual in the context of the *sanmitsu*, and how this use is determined by the belief structure underlying Shingon ritual.

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<sup>14</sup> Such criticism could be directed toward this narrowly defined study of Shingon *shōmyō*. References to similarities with the Tibetan tradition have been briefly noted in a number of cases; however, this work remains a preliminary groundwork for what must be a more widely conceived study of Buddhist music.

## The Morning Ritual at Sanbōin

At 6 o'clock almost every morning at Sanbōin, one of the approximately 100 temples of Kōyasan, the priests file into the *hondō*, the main meditation hall. The candles are lit, incense is offered to statues of the deities and to the *maṇḍala* hanging in the recessed niches at the rear of the hall. If there are guests staying at the temple, they take up a single stick of incense, light it and place it silently before the small statue of Kūkai at the centre of the altar area. The priests move to their positions, do three prostrations, and sit in the traditional *seiza* fashion, their legs tucked beneath them. Rosaries are rubbed together, the sleeves of the robe extended, stretched straight, then left to fall neatly to the side. The hands slip into the robes and the Five Being-Protecting *mudrā* are done in secret, out of view, the corresponding *mantra* being recited silently, in the mind.

The ritual actions of the priests feature the performance of the *sanmitsu*.

Illustrative of the manner in which the *sanmitsu* are integrated into a ceremony are the *goshin-bō* (the Five Being-Protecting *mudrā*). This is an important practice in Shingon and is found at the beginning of most rituals. Its primary function is the protection and purification of the practitioner (Toganoo 1972:49). In practice, the *goshin-bō*, the five activities for the body, voice and mind, are joined by two additional sets of *mudrā/mantra/samādhi* which are performed in sequence after the five described above. The *goshin-bō* are each in themselves concrete examples of the performance of the *sanmitsu*. The importance of the *sanmitsu* is reinforced, in the structure of the performance, by the specific emphasis of the second, third and fourth of the *goshin-bō* on the purification, respectively, of the body, voice and mind. Three levels of *sanmitsu* thus interpenetrate—on one level the second, third and fourth of the *goshin-bō* centre the focus on one particular aspect of the *sanmitsu* while on another level each of the *goshin-bō* themselves constitute a complete performance of the *mudrā/mantra/samādhi* set of actions. Finally, the *goshin-bō* themselves are integrated into a ritual construct that employs specific activities for the body, voice and mind.

After the *goshin-bō*, the *kin* is struck and a priest starts to intone the opening phrase, “Shichi bongo no san” (“Sanskrit Hymn of the Four Wisdoms”). As he finishes the first phrase, the rest of the priests join in, singing, or attempting to sing, in unison. The music is part of the ritual, and the ritual itself is part of the everyday life at the temple. The priests are not presenting a concert; while the intent is to sing skilfully and beautifully, the *shōmyō* pieces are, nevertheless, often punctuated by coughs, voices cracking in the cold winter air, the scurrying to bring an altar offering that was forgotten. Malm (1959:68), in describing *shōmyō*, writes, “Musically, the point of greatest interest is the fact that each priest sings at his own pitch level. Some feel that this is not the intention of the original style, but be that as it may, the effect of some twenty men chanting as many pitches is quite striking.” It



is indeed quite striking, even with less than twenty men; however, it is not intentional.

*Sanbōin*, for example, is home for not only priests (of different ages, most in their mid-twenties) but also for high school and college students. A couple of these students would perform the service with the priests. Thus, one always had an age range from teenage to mid-thirties which often extended into an age range of the 60s or 70s with visiting priests present. One of the high school students was a teenage girl and so here, as was also true at Saifuku-ji, there was not only a wide age difference but also a mix of genders.

This range in age and gender obviously complicates unison singing; as does the fact that while most of the priests receive some training in *shōmyō* technique, singing itself is something I rarely heard being practised. *Shōmyō* is regarded as a ritual activity and as such is usually performed during a ritual.<sup>15</sup> The intent is to make a pleasant-sounding piece with the ideal being unison singing. In performance each person attempts to find a harmonizing note (hopefully the 3rd or 5th) if they cannot sing in unison. This is further complicated by the fact that, for many participants, *shōmyō* is the first sound that comes out of their mouths in the morning. There is little or no speaking beforehand and certainly no warming up of the voice. The emphasis here is on performance and not on aesthetics, the daily fluctuations from the ideal are not considered very problematical. The importance lies in voicing the piece with the proper concentration and intent.<sup>16</sup>

The first piece, *Shichi bongo no san* (also known as *Shichi no bongo san*, “Sanskrit Words of the Four Wisdoms”), is the most frequently performed piece in the repertoire and is used (in different versions) by other Buddhist sects in Japan. It is a song of praise which is directed to the four Buddhas surrounding Dainichi Nyorai in the Kongō-kai (*vajradhātu*) *maṇḍala*. It is through the offering of praise to these four Buddhas that praise is then directed to the central deity (Dainichi Nyorai) and thus the four wisdoms become the five wisdoms associated with Kongō kai *maṇḍala* (Koizumi and Kuriyama 1969:64–5). According to Jakushō, it is the five wisdoms of the Kongō-kai *maṇḍala* which are specifically associated with the five essential notes of the pentatonic scale used in *shōmyō* (see Monhart 1993:140).

*Shichi bongo no san* is a *hennonkyoku* piece, starting in the *ryo* mode, modulating to twice, and ending in *ryo*.<sup>17</sup> The use of the motivic patterns differs according to mode) as noted, *yuri* will take a different shape in *ryo* and *ritsu* modes. *Shichi bongo no san* presents an anomaly; it begins in

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<sup>15</sup> Recently, this situation is changing in Japan as *shōmyō* concerts, either of *shōmyō* alone, or blended with other musics, are being presented (see Kito) 1990, Vol. II).

<sup>16</sup> These notes on singing style and the emphasis of the performance of *shōmyō* are from conversations with priests at both Kōyasan and the temple of Saifukuji.

<sup>17</sup> *Shichi bongo san*, while being a representative example of *shōmyō*, nevertheless does pose some problems of analysis. For a discussion of these, see Arai 1983, and Arai’s entry on the song in Kataoka and Yokumichi 1984.

*ryo*, however, the *yuri* is that generally associated with the *ritsu* mode. The *yuri* in *Shichi bongo no san*, also uncharacteristically, occurs on the second degree of the scale instead of the first or fourth as in *ryo* or the fourth as in *ritsu*. Arai (1983) has proposed that this uncharacteristic usage is based on a past mistake in the reproduction of the notation by the Kogi sect.

The Sanskrit version of the text is as follows:

Om vajrasatva saṃgrahād vajraratnam anuttaram  
vajradharma gāyanair vajrakarma karo bhava

In the romanized Japanese:

On banzara satoba sogyaraka banzara ratannō madotaran banzara tarama  
kyayatai banzara kyarama kyaro hanba

And in English:

Om. Reciting the blessing of the salvation of the Vajra sattva, one obtains  
the ultimate Vajra-treasure. Through singing the Vajradharma, one may  
attain the Vajra-karma.

(Arai 1984:10)

Harich-Schneider, using a German translation, gives the English as:

Worship! by the grace  
Of the diamond being  
The unsurpassable diamond jewel  
Has been revealed.  
By the hymns of the diamond law  
The diamond actions are achieved.

(Harich-Schneider 1973:318)

She notes that the Sanskrit text deviates from the text of Ryōnin's which she provides. The text does indeed deviate slightly from the version of *Shichi bongo no san* in use today. In both cases, however, the meaning particularly of the final stanza, is clear—it is through singing the diamond law (*vajra dharma*) that the diamond actions (*vajra karma*) are attained/achieved. This echoes the statement of Jakushō's discussed above: namely, it is through performance of *shōmyō* that the melodies of the practitioners become the melodies of the Buddha world.

The opening *on banzara satoba* is intoned by one priest with the remainder entering at *sōgyaraka*.<sup>18</sup> From this point, given the above statement regarding unison singing, all sing together. Following *Shichi bongo no san* the *hachi* (cymbals) are struck 30 times. The *kin* is struck once, the

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<sup>18</sup> The distinctive *yuri* pattern that occurs at the beginning of *Shichi bongo san* will be discussed below in an example that provides a clearer performance of it.

cymbals are struck once more, and the beginning of the *Hanna-rishu-kyō* (Skt. *Prajñāpāramitānaya*) is intoned by one priest. He intones the introductory passages for the different sections, with the other priests repeating the stanzas after him. As the main body of the *sūtra* begins, the *kin* is struck once and all start the recitation of the *sūtra* together.

The recitation of the *sūtra* at Sanbōin is at 72 beats per minute. This was the average tempo for *sūtra* recitation at this temple, though it could be faster or slower depending on time constraints or other factors (such as degree of enthusiasm that day, or whether the participants that day were older and able to recite at a quicker pace). The recitation is ideally done in unison.

Following the conclusion of the *Hannya-rishu-kyō* the *kin* is struck once and the *shōmyō* piece *Buasan* is performed. The *hachi* are then beaten 30 times, the *kin* is struck once and the *hachi* is beaten once more. A concluding prayer is followed by the recitation of the *kōmyō* mantra, which is repeated seven times:

on abokya bei roshano makabodaramani handoma jinbara  
harabaritaya un

The *kōmyō* mantra expresses the virtue of the five wisdoms of the five Buddhas (Kataoka and Yokumichi 1984:124). Its recitation provides yet another link to the series of correspondences of five.

The following *mantra* is repeated seven times:

Namu Daishi Henjō Kongō<sup>19</sup>  
—Praise to Kōbō Daishi—

“Henjō Kongō” is the secret name of Kūkai and as such this phrase is in homage to the founder of the Shingon sect.

The ceremony concludes with the *shōmyō* piece, *Kōmyō Shingon* (*kōmyō* literally means light, hope). This piece features a motivic pattern which is somewhat unique. The pattern features a very striking upward glissando which differs in the extent of its pitch range from most of the more narrowly restricted motivic patterns used in Shingon Kogi *shōmyō*. It is a very striking example of a contour melody.

In contrast to *Shichi bongo no san* (and indeed to all the other *shōmyō* pieces discussed here), *Kōmyō Shingon* has a single priest intoning one of the three phrases alone, with the other priests then repeating the phrase together. This piece (also in contrast to the other *shōmyō* pieces under consideration here) features a performance style which has the performers singing while rising from a kneeling position to a standing position, with the Kongō-gasshō (*mudrā*) formed under the sleeves of the robe (and therefore hidden from view). As the priests finish singing a phrase, they return

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<sup>19</sup> In actual performance the “u” in mu is often stretched into an “o” sound.

to the kneeling position reciting the concluding phrase in a whisper. The performance of *Kōmyō Shingon* unites the *sanmitsu* in the performance of a dramatic piece of *shōmyō*. At the completion of this piece the *goshin-bō* are once more performed, three bows are made with their accompanying praises, and the ceremony concludes.

The morning ritual at Sanbōin uses the *sanmitsu* both united in a single practice such as the *goshin-bō* and separately as performed in the *samādhi* maintained through the ritual, in the singing of the *shōmyō* and recitation of *sūtra*, and in the bows and sitting posture (lotus or more generally half lotus). The performance of *Shichi bongo no san* reiterates the idea that it is through the actual performance of *shōmyō* that the diamond jewel and diamond law are revealed. In Shingon these aspects of the *dharma* are considered as manifestations of the *sanmitsu* of the all-encompassing deity, Dainichi Nyorai. The practitioner's performance of the *sanmitsu* interpenetrates with that of the deity. The ritual structure emplots the actions of the practitioners in a manner that links them meaningfully with those of the deity. The connection between practitioner and deity is further emphasised by the re-occurring correspondences of five (the five Buddhas and wisdoms, the pentatonic scale, the *goshin-bō*).

## Conclusion

The concept of *sokushin jōbutsu* (attaining Buddhahood in this body) provides the teleological orientation for Shingon ritual. The precise performance of the *sanmitsu*, the ritual actions for the body, voice and mind, are the means by which the practitioner enters a dialogic relationship with the deity. This new order of relationship implies a change of self, a coming to a different order of understanding. Both the structure of a single ritual and the continued repetition of rituals through a lifetime, are directed toward this intention.

In practice, however, for every occasion when a practitioner enters into such a dialogical relationship, there are probably countless other times when he or she thinks of lunch that afternoon, or, perhaps, how many donations the service will generate that day. Shingon theory proposes an ideal which human beings of varying capacities and motivations practice on good and bad days. The performance of the rituals is regarded, in general, as efficacious but not automatic.

The all-inclusive nature of the ideal is continually reinforced by the practitioner's daily recital of the *Hannya-rishu-kyō*. The *sūtra* explicates the view that all of human nature, the good days and the bad, are forces to be harnessed and focused toward the aspiration of becoming a Buddha in this lifetime. The all-inclusive nature of the ideal however also poses a problem, namely how to make sense of the mass of images, emotions, hopes and fears, the miscellany that comprises human life. There are two avenues from which

we can approach this question, one is the thought of Paul Ricoeur alluded to above, the second is the concept suggested in the *Hannya-rishu-kyō*, the *maṇḍala*.

The expansion of the frame of reference (incorporating all of human nature) unleashes a multitude of images compelling a fusion of sense and image into a new meaning (for example, an understanding of a previously unseen or unheard metaphor). Ricoeur adopts from Wittgenstein the concept of “seeing-as” to explain the fusion of sense and image, of verbal and non-verbal images. It is through the intuitive process of “seeing-as” that the selection is made. The ground of “seeing-as” is resemblance (for example, the “seeing-as” time as a beggar). Ricoeur takes this a step further, however, stating that in fact “Seeing-as defines the resemblance, and not the reverse. This priority of seeing-as’ over the resemblance relationship is proper to the language-game in which meaning functions in an iconic manner’s (Ricoeur 1975:213). “Seeing-as” also bridges the tension implied in a metaphorical statement. “‘Seeing X as Y’ encompasses ‘X is not Y’; seeing time as a beggar is, precisely, to know also that time is not a beggar. The borders of meaning are transgressed but not abolished” (Ricoeur 1975:214).

The *sanmitsu* in Shingon ritual function as “seeing-as”. In much the same way that “seeing-as” fuses the sense and image in a metaphorical statement, the *sanmitsu* fuse the horizons of practitioner and deity in Shingon ritual. The union of practitioner and deity is referred to as “self entering the Buddha and the Buddha entering the self” (*nyū ga—ga nyū*). The borders here are transgressed but not abolished, one does not lose the self/mind but rather, in Shingon terms, comes to “know the mind as it really is”.

In *Time and Narrative* Ricoeur carried further the project of the expansion of reference undertaken in *Rule of Metaphor*. In demonstrating that poetical language incorporates a capacity for revealing a level of reference deeper than that of descriptive language he points to “those ontological aspects of our being-in-the-world that cannot be spoken of directly. Seeing as thus not only implies a saying as but also a being as” (Kearney 1989:17). Ricoeur situates the capacity of poetic imagination to creatively redescribe and reinvent being in the narrative power of “emplotment” (*mise-en-intrigue*).

The schematizing operation of emplotment unites, in a temporal unity, the various events in a narrative. Ricoeur writes, “The plot of a narrative ... ‘grasps together’ and integrates into one whole and complete story multiple and scattered events, thereby schematizing the intelligible signification attached to the narrative taken as a whole” (Ricoeur 1984:a). Emplotment is a dynamic structuring operation, a “putting into the form of a plot” (Ricoeur 1991:3).

This conception of emplotment also contributes a way of perceiving the musical construction of *shōmyō*.<sup>20</sup> The melodies fuse a pentatonic scale with

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<sup>20</sup> I am grateful to Ter Ellingson for this suggestion.

the performance of fixed patterns which feature fine gradations of pitch and tonal manipulation. In my experience, *shōmyō* was taught and practised as a whole; in this sense each piece had a unique integrity, although the patterns, such as *iro and yuri*, are used similarly in many melodies. Rather than being collection of arbitrarily mixed notes with accompanying patterns, *shōmyō* melodies reveal an aural beauty which the practitioners, and I believe listeners alike, situate in the flow, or “plot” of the entire piece.

The meaningful combination of music structures, along with the correspondences of five (discussed in the Forum contribution, Monhart 1993), reveal a detailed and formalized conception of the nature of reality. A conception that is inclusive yet, at the same time, lends order to, as Ricoeur says, the miscellany of life. Understanding in this sense is the grasping of a mass of images, desires, hopes and fears into a coherent whole. This grasping together marks the shift from seeing as to being as, and situates the performance of the *sanmitsu* in a movement toward a redefined conception of being, articulated in the notion of *sokushin jōbutsu*.

One of the older, renowned scholars in Shingon said to me, shortly after my arrival at Kōyasan, “to understand you must understand *maṇḍala*.”<sup>21</sup> This can be a little puzzling until one understands that the *maṇḍala* can in itself become a paradigm for understanding how to understand. In parallel with the discussion above, the *maṇḍala*, in Shingon thought and ritual practice, is the bridge between seeing as and being as. The *maṇḍala* emplots Shingon ritual and it is this configuring action which leads the practitioner from the epistemological to the ontological. Understanding leads to a new conception of being.

The organizing aspect of the *maṇḍala* is emphasised by Toganoo who states, “It may safely be said that the symbol-system of ‘Mandala and *maṇḍala*,’<sup>22</sup> is the organization and systemization of all other symbol-systems” (Toganoo 1973:68). Yamasaki elaborates on the organizing capacity of *maṇḍala* yet cautions against regarding *maṇḍala* as only symbols.

It is easy to view maṇḍalas only as symbols of transcendent, universal Buddhahood, which, as symbols of the universe, they indeed are. This universe, however, is not apart from the self. . . Shingon considers maṇḍalas to be both mirrors of the mind and patterns of the manifold, ever-evolving activities of consciousness and of phenomena. The same patterns are equally applicable to all humanly conceivable levels of vision, macrocosmic and micro-cosmic. The innate Buddha is both the true self and the deity of the maṇḍala, and both are the universe.

(Yamasaki 1988:128)

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<sup>21</sup> Yamato Chikyō, personal communication 10/16/89.

<sup>22</sup> The use of upper and lower case here refers to his conception of Mandala as primary, essential, abstract and *maṇḍala* as the concrete, practical expression.

The *maṇḍala*, in Shingon, acts as the primary and all-encompassing symbolic system. It configures reality and provides the orientating focus for ritual practice. However, it is not entirely an abstract, symbolic construct; the patterns of the *maṇḍala* are as Yamasaki states, “equally applicable to all humanly conceivable levels of vision”.

The use of *maṇḍala* in Shingon is applicable in that they, through ritual practice, dynamically organize reality for the practitioner. This organization is not arbitrary; a point that Rambelli stresses in his article, “Re-inscribing Mandala: Semiotic Operations on a Word and its Object” (Rambelli 1991), stating that “... the esoteric cosmos ... is not the product of an individual imagination, but a structured and articulated cultural system” (1991:19). Rambelli envisions the *maṇḍala* as a fundamental modelling system which does not require, indeed somewhat defies, the “mediation of ordinary language” (*ibid.*). This modelling system is passed down in a strict, and mostly secret, transmission from teacher to disciple. The constituents of ritual practice are seen as particularly efficacious means to, initially, model and, ultimately, express reality.

Rambelli notes the “paradoxical idea of an absolute sign, directly and ontologically connected to the object or the event for which it should stand” (*ibid.*) It is his belief that in the process of this connection “the esoteric expressions lose their status of ‘signs’, since they no longer stand for something else in some respect or capacity” (*ibid.*). This aporia lies at the heart of the non-linguistic based nature of the *maṇḍala*. Through the multidimensional activity of ritual practice, most cogently embodied in the *sanmitsu*, the *maṇḍala* emplots reality in a continual expansion of the practitioner’s horizons.

*Shōmyō* functions as an important element of this emplotting process of ritual. Sound in Shingon is informed sound, it is given meaning by the immediate context of the particular ritual and also through the context of the entire world that constitutes Shingon. Sound in turn gives meaning, through the voicing of a syllable, the particular energies of the voice function are engaged and consequently as all the constituents of body, voice and mind are engaged, one becomes the meaning of Shingon ritual. The *maṇḍala* not only resembles reality, it is reality; it, in the Shingon view, is the universe and as it, through the performance of ritual, refigures or reinvents the individual’s horizons of experience a fusion occurs and a being-in-the-world is both disclosed and lived.

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