

# The Taizō-kai and Kongō-kai Mandalas in Relation to the Shikoku 88-Temple-Pilgrimage

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本稿では、四国八十八ヶ所巡礼と関連した胎藏界と金剛界の曼荼羅を分析した。四道場と巡礼者の精神的発展に新視点を置いた。この研究により、両曼荼羅は巡礼者の志向から涅槃への変容と苦しみ、妄想の制覇を象徴している事が明らかとなった。

キーワード：Taizō-kai Mandala, Kongō-kai Mandala, Shikoku-88-temple-pilgrimage, Shingon Buddhism

## 1. Introduction

This paper analyses the relation that the Taizō-kai mandala (jp. 胎藏界曼荼羅, Skt. Garbhadhātu) and the Kongō-kai mandala (jp. 金剛界曼荼羅, Skt. Vajradhātu) have in relation to the Shikoku 88-Temple-Pilgrimage, especially with regards to whether this pilgrimage may be understood as a three-dimensional representation of pilgrims' spiritual evolution across the four prefectures of Shikoku, as depicted in these mandalas. While this idea is frequently asserted, no one has explained this concept until now. This paper provides a thorough in-depth analysis, presenting a crucial dimension for a deeper understanding the doctrine of Shingon Buddhism. The Shikoku 88-temple pilgrimage is one of the most, if not the most, important pilgrimage in Japan. In all 88 temples, regardless of their denomination, these two mandalas are hanging at the left and at the right of the main altar in the Main Hall. It is therefore important to analyse the function they fulfil in this pilgrimage.

Asquith and Kalleland (1997), by looking particularly at Japanese understandings of nature in the cultural and religious context, explain that the mandala's transformative process unfolds as one engages in meditative reflection, both visually and mentally, upon the tangible reality. This contemplation leads to a profound identification with the world, gradually erasing the boundaries between the observer and the observed. In this unity, humans harmonise with their encompassing medium, which encompasses the vast expanse of nature in its cosmic entirety. The mandala symbolizes the interconnectedness and interdependence that underlie all facets of existence (p. 265f.). To further connect these concepts to nature, the Awa 88-pilgrimage guide (1994) – Awa is the old name for Tokushima prefecture, which is often the beginning of the pilgrimage – states that the four prefectures of Shikoku Island (through which the pilgrim progresses) are related to his or her spiritual development as follows: Tokushima (Awa) Prefecture: the *dōjō* of awakening faith (religious awakening), Kochi (Tosa) Prefecture: the *dōjō* of spiritual practice (discipline), Ehime (Iyo) Prefecture:

the *dōjō* of enlightenment, Kagawa (Sanuki) Prefecture: the *dōjō* of entering *nirvāṇa* (p. 239). Weiss (1994), who wrote one of the first influential English publications on this pilgrimage, confirms these progressive divisions (p. 239). Shingon Bishop Miyata (2006) further explains that the pilgrimage generally starts in Tokushima prefecture and finishes in Kagawa prefecture, and that the island of Shikoku is “divided into four progressive patterns/stages for the pilgrimage... these schemes are not simply a theoretical explanation of the pilgrimage, but a direct course through which the *henro* must transform misleading eighty-eight karmas into ever-creative karmas/minds.” (p. 9f.). Here, a direct connection to Asquith and Kalleland is found. Could this progress in spiritual development therefore be similar to that what is expressed in these two mandalas? The paper will address these and related aspects and give a thorough explanation of this research question. To further engage in this analysis, the Awa 88-pilgrimage guide (1994) explains that “mandalas express in visual form the nature of Dainichi Nyorai and reveal much truth. The Taizō-kai and Kongō-kai mandalas are the mandalas in the most consummate form” (p. 20). Important here is the statement that the ultimate truth is revealed in these two mandalas in the most compressed, direct form. This paper will look at this aspect. It is also stated here that they represent Dainichi Nyorai’s true nature. But how so? Miyazaki (2007) adds that these two mandalas represent two fundamentally important books of Buddhist scripture: the Dainichi-kyō and Kongō-kyō (p. 35). He continues: “both mandalas the cosmological structures of Dainichi Nyorai are expressed graphically under the theoretical scheme of manifestation. A pair of mandalas hang inside the main altar of a Shingo temple, as objects of worship.” (p. 154). To draw yet another connection to Asquith and Kalleland, Reader (2005) finds throughout Japanese religious history a recurring pattern of perceiving the physical landscape as a conduit for spiritual experiences and transformations, where the natural world is viewed through the lens of sacred cosmologies, recognizing that the landscape itself embodies and reflects spiritual dimensions. He explains that Buddhist monks, for instance, often regarded mountainous regions as the manifestation of Buddha and as symbolic representations of the entire cosmos. This conceptualisation often evolved beyond simple contemplation, leading to the physical integration of sacred elements into the landscape, including the construction of temples, the placement of deity shrines, and the journeys of pilgrims who sought to witness this spiritual terrain. Walking through this landscape could therefore be likened to embarking on a sacred journey through scripture, with the lines between scripture and landscape and physical and spiritual realms blurring into a harmonious whole. Consequently, one can conceive the Shikoku pilgrimage as a sacred mandala encapsulating the cosmos, with its framework intricately woven into the very fabric of the island (pp. 50-53, 153). The Sanskrit term ‘*maṇḍala*’ literally means ‘(sacred) circle’ (Harvey, 1990, p. 264). What is the purpose of any mandalas? “...to find out a way from time to eternity, to help the primeval consciousness, which is fundamentally one, to recover its integrity” (Tucci, 1961, p. viii). The Taizō-kai and Kongō-kai mandalas that are looked upon in this paper are said to represent the quintessence of

the Shingon teaching, which can be understood if the practitioner sinks into it or becomes one with them in a meditative process; their meanings would be hard to be understood intellectually. Both two mandalas are divided into four major assemblies, symbolising faith, discipline, enlightenment and *nirvāṇa*. The 88-temple pilgrimage on Shikoku Island could therefore be seen as a physical representation of these two mandalas, and the pilgrim actively merges with the mandala and becomes one, thus receiving their quintessence. As a mandala is a ‘sacred’ circle, and so is this circular pilgrimage, too (unlike other linear pilgrimages). In other words, the 88-temple pilgrimage could also be called an ‘action mandala’. Kōbō Daishi explains in his work *Shōji jissō gi* (*The Meaning of Sound, Word and Reality*, written in 817), according to Hakeda (1972, p. 278), that the objects of our human sight are colours, forms and movements, and that correct understanding of these leads to *satori*, enlightenment, like “medicine to the man of wisdom” (quoted in Hakeda, 1972, p. 243). To these colours the five great elements can be assigned as follows: fire (red), earth (yellow), space (blue), air (black) and water (white). Based on Kōbō Daishi’s work, this table can then be established for the Shikoku-pilgrimage as a first step to understanding the relation between the two mandalas and this pilgrimage:

**Table 1:** *The relation of the four prefectures of Shikoku Island and the mandalas*

Prefecture in Shikoku	Temples #	Area of the mandala	Element	Colour
Tokushima (Awa)	1-23	Eastern region	Fire	Red
Kōchi (Tosa)	24-39	Southern region	Earth	Yellow
Ehime (Iyo)	40-65	Western region	Space	Blue
Kagawa (Sanuki)	66-88	Northern region	Air	Black
The pilgrim’s heart ( <i>kokoro</i> )		Centre	Water	White

Kōbō Daishi wrote in his work *Himitsu mandara jūjūshinron* (*Mysterious Mandala of the Ten Stages of the Mind*), as included in his major volume *Kōbō daishi zenshu* (6 vols, ed. Hase Hōshū, Tokyo, 1909-1911, 1966; included in Abé, 1999): “I wish to establish the Taizō-kai-mandala of Dainichi Nyorai in Shikoku, with four *dōjōs* as a mandala, Awa Province to awaken faith, Tosa Province to practice religious discipline, Iyo Province to attain enlightenment and Sanuki province to enter *nirvāṇa*”. As he had completed this text in 830 (according to Hakeda, 1972, p. 279), this would support those who believe that he himself had established this pilgrimage sometime around 816, in his *yakudoshi* year. It is interesting to note that the Sino-Japanese term *shiki-kai* (the world is form) is *rūpa-dhātu* in Sanskrit; however, linguistically, *shiki* means in fact *colour*; in other words, colour and form are coincident: Out of this follows that the colours of the mandala are to be seen in a context of non-duality. It is also of significance that the Sanskrit *maṇḍala* encompasses a ‘circle’, as explained above, and so does the Shikoku pilgrimage, which takes place on an island that is, more or less, round. Connections between these aspects thus become visible, and one might see that the whole island and

the pilgrimage is a 3-D-mandala into which the pilgrim ‘dives’ and transgresses in four clearly defined stages: The pilgrimage starts East, as East is the symbol of the rising sun, the symbol of beginnings and also associated with the Dainichi Nyorai, the “Nyorai of the Great Sun”; it should also be noted that the temple #1, Ryōzen-ji, or the Temple of Vulture’s Peak, in the eastern (Tokushima) Prefecture, is *nearest* of all 88 temples to the head monastery of Shingon, Mount Kōya and its Okuno-in-temple in the East. Both the Taizō-kai and Kongō-kai mandalas are of vital importance to the understanding of the pilgrimage; they are always put up at both sides of the main hall (*hondō*). Shingon temples follow the Chinese tradition and face south (in other words, the altar is put at the northern wall of the main hall so that the face and the eyes of the chief deity on the altar would look in the southern direction with the pilgrim facing North). The Kongō-kai mandala would always be on the western wall (that is, on the right side of the chief deity), and the Taizō-kai mandala would always be on the eastern wall (that is, on the left side).

## 2. Taizō-kai-Mandala (jp. 胎藏界曼荼羅, Skt. Garbhadhātu maṇḍala)

Literally translated into English it means ‘Womb Repository-World mandala’. *Kai* in Japanese means *world*; this term appears in the name of both mandalas (Taizō-kai and Kongō-kai). Also, in both, Dainichi Nyorai (Mahāvairocana Buddha) is the centre, as he is indeed the “centre” of all Shingon teachings. Others (for example Snodgrass, 1988 and Abé, 1999) translate it interpretatively as ‘Matrix-World mandala’, as it illustrates that all phenomena are interrelated and interwoven, just like a matrix. However, this is not the literal translation of the Chinese syllables. This mandala consists of twelve major assemblies, with a total of 414 deities enshrined. This mandala represents the one of two aspects of Dainichi Nyorai, *ri* (*reality to be known*), the other, *chi* (*knower of reality*) is represented in the other, Kongō-kai mandala. *Ri* and *chi* are “two sides of a coin”, and the Taizō-kai Mandala depicts reality as it is revealed in the phenomenal world of the produced *dharma*s; and the Kongō-kai Mandala depicts reality as it abides in the Buddha Realm, the domain of the unproduced (Snodgrass, 1988, p. 124). The static, passive aspect of *Ri* is symbolized in *the* Taizō-kai mandala through Dainichi Nyorai sitting in a full-lotus meditation posture, with his hands in the *Hokkai-jō-in mudrā*, the *mudrā* of meditation, surrounded by an eight-pedalled lotus in red. This *mudrā* symbolizes meditation and the purification of human nature. Shingon teaching regards this *mudrā* in this context as Dainichi Nyorai having been exempt from exterior sensations or defilements, that is, being in the state of *samādhi*. Once the practitioner becomes one with the centre of the mandala, he or she, too, will receive absolute calm and tranquillity, having purified his or her inner and outer natures, finding everlasting *nirvāṇa* or *samādhi*. Or, in other words, one has to proceed through one’s outer layers to arrive at one’s “Buddha nature” in the centre of ourselves (the middle of the mandala), which will then come out in “full bloom”. As can be seen in the mandala, Dainichi Nyorai and all his cooperating deities radiate salvation and perfection throughout the entire mandala, that is, all four prefectures of

the pilgrimage of Shikoku Island which also encompass the pilgrimage: In the centre, Dainichi Nyorai is surrounded by four Bosatsu and four Nyorai; the four Bosatsu serve the four Nyorai: Hōshō Nyorai in the East (Tokushima Prefecture), Kaifukēō Nyorai in the South (Kōchi Prefecture), Muryōju Nyorai in the West (Ehime Prefecture), and Tenkuraion Nyorai in the North (Kagawa Prefecture). The pilgrim can be understood as “walking” (or moving by other means, such as, for example, car, bus, or other public transportation) from the outer layer to the inner layer, that is, from prefecture to prefecture. We can therefore show that the development of the pilgrim through the 88-temple pilgrimage is depicted in this mandala:

1. Tokushima Prefecture: The far-outside layer represents the birth of Buddha (bodhi)-*citta*, the will to engage in the Way of Buddha. A gateway *torāṇa* (Sanskrit) / *mon* (Japanese) is found at all four directions, which symbolizes that everybody, everywhere can enter.
2. Kōchi Prefecture: The second layer shows: In the North Mañjuśrī (Monju) Bosatsu, representing *dharma*, or ultimate, wisdom developed through the pilgrimage, with this deity being a patron of the pilgrimage, in the East Ākāśagarbha (Kokuzō) Bosatsu, representing the development of creative knowledge towards enlightenment through the pilgrimage, in the South Kṣitigarbha (Jizō) Bosatsu, representing patient endurance of suffering throughout the pilgrimage, with this deity being a “weapon” to ward off any evil during the pilgrimage, and in the West Sarvanivāraṇaśāmbhū (Jokaisho) Bosatsu, representing keeping off of all hindrances during the pilgrimage.
3. Ehime Prefecture: The pilgrim’s development progresses, and this is symbolized in the next layer, which is not wrapped around, but is a separated field in the North and in the South: the layer of Shakamuni Buddha and his supporting guardian deities, representing the end of suffering through the Eightfold Noble Path and the Four Noble Truths; through entering the gateway *mon* (in the North), the pilgrim gets a first and motivating glimpse of *nirvāṇa*. This is also represented in the “Sword of wisdom” in the centre of the lower part of the third layer (in the South), which will cut through illusions and defilements of the pilgrim.
4. Kagawa Prefecture: The pilgrim then enters through the flaming triangle in the next layer. The triangle, also to be seen as a “birth diamond”, represents Dharma knowledge and virtues. The pilgrim, with the help of the depicted deities, will awaken to the ultimate reality by burning away illusion, lust, and ignorance.
5. The “Goal”: The central layer: Dainichi Nyorai, in complete enlightenment and peace, is sitting in meditation in the centre, surrounded by eight deities, sitting on eight leaves of the lotus flower. The following deities, four Tathāgatas and four Bodhisattvas, can be seen in the mandala.
  - a. On the petal in the North, i.e., above Dainichi Nyorai’s head: Amida Nyorai (Amitāba Tathāgata): “Thunderous Sound of the Celestial Drum Buddha”
  - b. On the petal in the North-East: Miroku Bosatsu (Maitreya Bodhisattva): “Benelovent Buddha”

- c. On the petal in the East: Kaifuke-ō (Samkusumita-rājā): “Jewel Pennant Buddha”
- d. On the petal in the South-East: Fugen Bosatsu (Samantabhadra Bodhisattva): “Bodhisattva of Teaching, Meditation and Practice”
- e. On the petal in the South: Kaifuke-ō (Samkusumita-rājā): “Buddha of the Opening Flower”
- f. On the petal in the South-West: Monju Bosatsu (Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva): “Bodhisattva of Perfect Wisdom”
- g. On the petal in the West: Amida Nyorai (Amitāba Tathāgata): “Buddha of Unlimited Love”
- h. On the petal in the North-West: Kanjizai Bosatsu (Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva): “Bodhisattva of Complete Compassion, Mercy and Love”

The eight deities surrounding Dainichi Nyorai are also symbolizing the four stages of the pilgrimage and the merits gained: awakening of faith (Tokushima Prefecture), practicing religious discipline (Kōchi Prefecture), achieving enlightenment (Ehime Prefecture) and entering *nirvāṇa* (Kagawa Prefecture).

*Centre:* The lotus flower in the very centre of this mandala represents the true nature of sentient beings, unstained from the “dirt” of *samsāra* and ignorance: the pilgrim, upon completion of the pilgrimage, will sit in the lotus “throne”, break through the cycles of existences, attain liberation, complete enlightenment, and enter *nirvāṇa*. Dainichi Nyorai (Mahāvairocana Tathāgata) sits on this throne: “Buddha of Great Sun/ Universe in its totality”.

*Vajras:* Between the eight lotus petals eight three-pointed *vajras* are found: these represent the crushing of illusion with the *vajra* diamond-bolt so that perfect knowledge is achieved; the lotus and *vajra* thus represent the union of principle and knowledge, form and mind, innate and cultivated, cause and effect, Taizō-kai mandala and Kongō-kai mandala. Perfect knowledge will be realised by the pilgrim.

*Vases:* Also, four vases “await the pilgrim upon completion” and are found in the centre, too. They hold a three-pointed *vajra* and a lotus-flower. Always found on any pictures of Kōbō Daishi (without the *vajra*, which is held in his own hand and without the lotus-flower), these are wish-granting vases, filled up with perfumed holy water; they are also drawn on all four corners of the second layer of this mandala. Upon completion of the pilgrimage, the pilgrim’s wishes are granted, some believe. This (worldly benefits for spiritual practice/hardship) is an interesting aspect of the pilgrimage. Snodgrass explains the water and vase aspect: “The vase is identified with the Element Earth... and the water it contains is identified with the Element Water. The seed syllable of Earth is “*a*”, which is also the seed syllable of... Boddhi-citta; and the seed syllable of Water is “*vaṃ*”, which is also the seed syllable of Knowledge. By these identifications the vase and the water equate Principle and Knowledge” (1988: 211).

*The band of five colours around the centre:* This has two meanings: first, it represents a circumambulation path (such as circumambulating *stūpas*) as well as a boundary/protector,

once the pilgrim has achieved perfect enlightenment and is “in” the centre, together with Dainichi Nyorai. The five colours are, from inside to outside: white, yellow, red, blue, black. The three primary colours yellow, red, and blue, and for shading the colours either brighter or darker, black and white all relate to the deities inside the centre as well as to the “five elements” (this closes the “circle”):

1. White: Dainichi Nyorai (Mahāvairocana Tathāgata), centre, water, conclusion of pilgrimage, “goal”.
2. Yellow: Kaifuke-ō (Samkusumita-rājā), south, earth, practicing religious discipline (Kōchi Prefecture).
3. Red: Kaifuke-ō (Samkusumita-rājā), east, fire, awakening of faith (Tokushima Prefecture).
4. Blue: Amida Nyorai (Amitāba Tathāgata), west, space, achieving enlightenment (Ehime Prefecture).
5. Black: Amida Nyorai (Amitāba Tathāgata), north, air, entering *nirvāṇa* (Kagawa Prefecture).

It can be seen now how this mandala reflects the Shikoku Island pilgrimage, with each prefecture symbolising stages of the pilgrim’s development. It begins with the birth of Buddha-*citta*, the will to engage in the Buddha’s path (Tokushima), and progresses through endurance (Kōchi), wisdom and knowledge (Ehime), and finally, the attainment of *nirvāṇa* (Kagawa). Its central layer represents the ultimate goal, with Dainichi Nyorai surrounded by eight deities. These deities represent stages of the pilgrimage: awakening of faith, practicing religious discipline, achieving enlightenment, and entering *nirvāṇa*. The lotus flower in the centre signifies the true nature of sentient beings, unstained by *samsāra* and ignorance. Pilgrims aim to sit in this “lotus throne,” breaking free from cycles of existence, achieving liberation, and entering *nirvāṇa*. *Vajras*, three-pointed diamond symbols, represent the crushing of illusion and the attainment of perfect knowledge, uniting principles, and knowledge. Four vases, filled with perfumed holy water, are wish-granting vessels believed to fulfil pilgrims’ wishes upon completing the journey. A band of five colours around the centre serves as both a circumambulation path and a protective boundary for those who attain perfect enlightenment. These colours are associated with deities and the five elements. The Taizō-kai mandala is a complex representation of Shingon Buddhist teachings, illustrating the stages of a pilgrim’s development toward enlightenment and the interconnectedness of all phenomena. Dainichi Nyorai, at its centre, symbolises the ultimate truth in Shingon Buddhism.

### 3. Kongō-kai-Mandala (jp. 金剛界曼荼羅, Skt. Vajradhātu maṇḍala)

The other mandala, Kongō-kai (Vajradhātu) mandala, or ‘Diamond-World mandala’ in literal English translation, is also enshrined in all Shingon temples, and does not have a single centre, but consists of nine major assemblies, with a total of 1,461 deities enshrined, all sitting on a lotus flower (symbolizing



Tathatā), surrounded by halos (symbolizing *prajñā*). Dainichi Nyorai is in the centre of each assembly, with his *chiken-in mudrā*, or *Wisdom Fist mudrā*. This *mudrā* represents the dynamic, positive, “diamond-strong” aspects (*chi*) of Dainichi Nyorai, as represented in this mandala, a “diamond-“strong evolution of the practitioner towards compassion, wisdom and consequently “enlightenment”. Altogether, nine assemblies are found, as explained below: This table illustrates the assemblies as seen when looking straight at the mandala; however, in fact, the “Assembly of Trailokyavijaya”, which is on the right, is pointing North. This mandala represents the other aspects of Dainichi Nyorai, “*Chi*”, “knower of reality”, and addresses the knowledge aspects of the pilgrimage. The nine assemblies in the Kongō-kai mandala are as follows (from North in a spiral to North-East, East, South-East, South, South-West, West, North-West to Centre). Altogether there are 1461 divinities. “Samaya-e”, “Mi-sai-e”, “Kuyō-e”, “Shin-in-e”, “Ichi-in-e”, and “Rishu-e” are regarded to be assemblies of Mahāvairocana, preaching Buddhism; whereas “Gōzanze-e” and “Gōzanze-sanmaya-e” are assemblies of fierce Vajrasattvas, converting sentient beings into Buddhism (Iwano, 1999: 200).

**Table 2: The nine assemblies of the Kongō-kai mandala**

	Southwest	West	Northwest	
	“Shin-in-e”: “Assembly of the Four <i>mudrās</i> ” (13 divinities) <b>Assembly #5</b>	“Ichi-in-e”: “Assembly of One <i>mudrā</i> ” (1 divinity) <b>Assembly #6</b>	“Rishu-e”: “Naya’s Assembly” (17 divinities) <b>Assembly #7</b>	
South	“Kuyō-e”: “Pūja-Assembly” (73 divinities) <b>Assembly #4</b>	Jōjin-e: “Central Assembly” (1061 deities) <b>Assembly #9</b>	“Gōzanze-e”: “Assembly of Trailokyavijaya” (77 divinities) <b>Assembly #8</b>	North
	“Mi-sai-e”: “Sūkṣma Assembly” (73 divinities) <b>Assembly #3</b>	“Samaya-e”: “Samaya Assembly” (73 divinities) <b>Assembly #2</b>	“Gōzanze-sanmaya-e”: “Trailokyavijaya Samaya Assembly” (73 divinities) <b>Assembly #1</b>	
	Southeast	East	Northeast	

It can be seen that the layout of this mandala mirrors the 88-temple pilgrimage on Shikoku Island, where the pilgrim starts in the North-East, the direction of origin, assembly #1 / temples #1- #23, and progresses circular through the different assemblies #2 - #8 / temples #24 - #65, and finishes at the central assembly #9 / temples # 66 - #88. According to this mandala, through which stages would the pilgrim progress, as per the assemblies?

Tokushima Prefecture: The starting prefecture also called “the *dōjō* of awaking aspiration to enlightenment, *bodhi-citta*”:

1. “Gōzanze-sanmaya-e”, “Trailokyavijaya Samaya Assembly”: the pilgrim realizes the cause of suffering / pain, *dhukka* and the three poisons: desire, anger and ignorance, and decides to “crash” them through the universal *kongō* or diamond-sharp *dharma* received through the



pilgrimage.

2. “Samaya-e”, “Samaya Assembly”: the pilgrim awakens *bodhi-citta*.
3. “Mi-sai-e”, “Sūkṣma Assembly”: the pilgrim gets a first glimpse of the ultimate wisdom, which is indestructible like a diamond. He realizes the nature of *dhukka* and develops a reflective mind in order to get off delusions.

Kōchi-Prefecture: The *dōjō* of disciplining:

4. “Kuyō-e”, “Pūja-Assembly”: for disciplining himself, the pilgrim engages in the practice of: right view (belief in principles of karma and rebirth, and the Dharma); right intention (away from sense-pleasures, non-ill-will, non-cruelty, etc.); right speech (no false, divisive, harsh and frivolous speech, etc.); right action (no killing or harming, theft, cheating, etc.); right livelihood (not causing suffering to others, etc.)

In return for this practice, all deities hold a lotus flower as a promise of four offerings to the pilgrim: joy; virtue; wonderful bliss; further maturation of *bodhi-citta*.

5. “Shin-in-e”, “Assembly of the Four Mudrās”: the pilgrim engages in the practice of: right effort (avoiding the arising of / undermining unwholesome states, developing and maintaining wholesome states); right mindfulness (mindful observation of the changing nature of body, feeling, mind, karma); right concentration (developing calm and insight, keeping the mind focused on the pilgrimage, keeping the mind peaceful, etc.). In return for this practice, all deities in this assembly will help the pilgrim, especially the less-spiritually gifted.

Ehime-Prefecture: The *dōjō* of enlightenment:

6. “Ichi-in-e”, “Assembly on One Mudrā”: the pilgrim is helped with his first step into enlightenment by Dainichi Nyorai (Mahāvairocana Tathāgata) himself, who is depicted in this assembly, clearly without any other deities. He is sitting in meditation, forming the knowledge fist (the same fist as in the other, Taizō-kai mandala). His body is of the same colour as the pilgrim’s clothing: white, symbolizing pureness and “death” in the meaning of enlightenment, “dropping off body and mind” as Dōgen Zenji expressed it. The four vases with holy water represent the four prefectures, or *dōjōs*, of this pilgrimage: the vase in the south-east represents Tokushima Prefecture (“awaken “faith”), the vase in the south-west Kōchi Prefecture (“practice religious discipline”), in the north-west Ehime Prefecture (“attain enlightenment”), and in the north-east Kagawa Prefecture: (enter “*nirvāṇa*”). The vases are held together by a band of pure lotus flowers.
7. “Rishu-e”, “Naya’s Assembly”: further developing his inner enlightenment, the pilgrim receives 17 offerings from 17 deities:
  1. Further development of the passion for refraining from all action that create evil.
  2. Further development of intellectual skills for deepening the understanding of Buddha-

dharma.

3. Further development of intellectual skills for 'casting away of body and mind'.
4. Further development intellectual skills for universal love and compassion / to live to benefit all beings.
5. Further development intellectual skills for doing good deeds.
6. Further development of meditation skills for deepening the understanding of Buddha-dharma.
7. Further development of meditation skills for casting away of body and mind.
8. Further development of meditation skills for universal love and compassion.
9. Further development of meditation skills for doing good deeds.
10. The bliss of spring.
11. The bliss of summer.
12. The bliss of autumn.
13. The bliss of winter.
14. An insight knowledge of the season's blisses: four seasons, which always appear in a circle and the four *dōjōs* / steps of development / prefectures of the pilgrimage.
15. Perfection of knowledge relating to the three jewels: Buddha.
16. Perfection of knowledge relating to the three jewels: *Dharma*.
17. Perfection of knowledge relating to the three jewels: *Sangha*.

Kagawa Prefecture, the *dōjō* of entering *nirvāṇa*:

8. "Gōzanze-e", "Assembly of the Trailokyavijaya": 'Trailokyavijaya' means 'The Conqueror of the Three Worlds' (Snodgrass, 1988: 716); the pilgrim now conquers by the help of the assembled deities the following.
  1. The realm of desire.
  2. The realm of form / anger.
  3. The formless realm / ignorance.

This is the pilgrim's first step into entering *nirvana*.

9. "Jōjin-e", "Central Assembly": the final step of entering *nirvāṇa*. The pilgrim completes his quest. Through completion of the pilgrimage, he has achieved perfect Buddhahood and ultimate bliss. Through conducting and completing the pilgrimage he has realized what is called in esoteric Shingon teaching:
  1. Perfection of the Diamond Body.
  2. Perfection of the Diamond Speech.
  3. Perfection of the Diamond Mind.

Please compare these similarities with Shingon's Three Mysteries:

1. Mysterious acts of the body: *mudras*.

2. Mysterious acts of the speech: *mantras*.
3. Mysterious acts of the mind: visualizations.

Unlike the Taizō-kai mandala, the Kongō-kai mandala does not have a single centre but consists of nine major assemblies, with a total of 1,461 deities enshrined. In this mandala, all deities sit on a lotus flower symbolizing Tathatā, surrounded by halos symbolizing *prajñā* (wisdom). Dainichi Nyorai, the central figure, adopts the *chiken-in mudrā*, or Wisdom Fist *mudrā*, representing the dynamic, positive, and “diamond-strong” aspects of Dainichi Nyorai. The Kongō-kai mandala represents the “*chi*” or “knower of reality” aspect of Dainichi Nyorai, focusing on the knowledge aspects of the pilgrimage. Each assembly corresponds to stages of the pilgrimage:

**Table 3:** *The stages of the pilgrimage corresponding to the nine assemblies of the Kongō-kai mandala*

	Southwest	West	Northwest	
	Continuation of spiritual practice. <b>Assembly #5</b>	Initial enlightenment. <b>Assembly #6</b>	Further development of qualities. <b>Assembly #7</b>	
<b>South</b>	Discipline through practicing the Noble Eightfold Path. <b>Assembly #4</b>	Culmination: entering <i>nirvana</i> . <b>Assembly #9</b>	Conquering the three realms. <b>Assembly #8</b>	<b>North</b>
	Insight into ultimate wisdom. <b>Assembly #3</b>	Awakening of <i>bodhi-citta</i> (aspiration for enlightenment). <b>Assembly #2</b>	Recognition of suffering and the three poisons. <b>Assembly #1</b>	
	<b>Southeast</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>Northeast</b>	

It becomes clear that the layout of the Kongō-kai mandala mirrors the 88-temple pilgrimage on Shikoku Island, with the pilgrim starting in the North-East, symbolizing the direction of origin, and progressing through various stages, ultimately reaching the central assembly. The above shows that the Kongō-kai mandala can therefore be seen as a complex representation of Shingon Buddhist teachings, illustrating the stages of a pilgrim’s spiritual journey towards enlightenment and the conquest of suffering and delusion through the diamond-strong wisdom of Dainichi Nyorai.

#### 4. Integrative Conclusion

Explaining both the Taizō-kai and Kongō-kai mandalas and relating them to the Shikoku 88-temple pilgrimage gives an amazing explanation of the 4-*dōjō*-concept and of the spiritual development of the pilgrim by entering into and completing this ‘Shikoku-mandala’-pilgrimage. These findings are new and therefore add to the existing knowledge pertaining to this subject-matter.

This paper has shown how the Taizō-kai mandala, on the one hand, is a symbolic representation of the Shikoku Island pilgrimage, with each of its layers corresponding to stages in a pilgrim’s spiritual journey. It starts with the aspiration for enlightenment in Tokushima Prefecture, progresses through endurance in Kōchi Prefecture, wisdom, and knowledge in Ehime Prefecture, and culminates in the

attainment of *nirvāṇa* in Kagawa Prefecture. The central layer features Dainichi Nyorai surrounded by eight deities representing various stages of the pilgrimage, with the ultimate goal of achieving liberation and entering *nirvāṇa*. *Vajras*, wish-granting vases, and a band of five colours all play significant roles in this intricate representation.

The Kongō-kai mandala, on the other hand, consists of nine major assemblies with a total of 1,461 deities, each seated on a lotus flower and surrounded by halos. Dainichi Nyorai, at the centre of each assembly, represents the dynamic and positive aspects of enlightenment. This mandala focuses on the knowledge aspects of the pilgrimage, with each assembly corresponding to stages of spiritual development, ultimately leading to the pilgrim's conquest of suffering and delusion and entering *nirvāṇa*.

Both the Taizō-kai and Kongō-kai mandalas hold profound significance in Shingon Buddhism, serving as visual representations of the spiritual journey toward enlightenment. In this view, the Taizō-kai mandala emphasises the stages of the Shikoku Island pilgrimage, symbolising the pilgrim's progression from aspiration to liberation; in contrast, the Kongō-kai mandala delves into the knowledge aspects of the pilgrimage, illustrating how the pilgrim conquers suffering and delusion to attain enlightenment and *nirvāṇa*.

These intricate mandalas demonstrate the interconnectedness of all phenomena and the profound teachings of Shingon Buddhism. They serve as powerful tools for meditation and reflection, guiding pilgrims on their own paths to spiritual growth and ultimate enlightenment through the 88-temple pilgrimage on Shikoku Island.

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