

Kūkai's Philosophy as a Mandala

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Introduction

KŪKAI (Kōbō Daishi, 774-835), one of the great figures in the history of Japanese Buddhism, is perhaps best known as the founder of the Shingon school of esoteric Buddhism. He was also a master calligrapher, philosopher, engineer, missionary, and religious genius. A gifted child, he entered college at the age of eighteen to study Confucianism and the Chinese classics for the purpose of entering public life. After a while, however, he abandoned his studies to wander about the countryside as an ascetic, eventually taking the vows of a Buddhist priest. At the age of twenty-four, he wrote his first major work, *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings (Sangō shiki)*, which compared Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. A few years later, he was granted permission to go to China to study esoteric Buddhism. The spiritual and material gifts he brought back to Japan established him as one of the preeminent religious authorities of his time. Eventually he was appointed head of the Tōji temple in southern Kyoto, and he established the temple complex on Mount Kōya southwest of the capital. These two sites became the headquarters of the Shingon school. He traveled throughout the country, preaching and performing works of social service. He composed a number of works which brought the development of esoteric Buddhist doctrine and practice to its apex. After his death in 835, the belief arose that Kūkai remains seated in deep meditation on Mount Koya, awaiting the appearance of the future Buddha Maitreya.

Kūkai remains a powerful figure in contemporary Japanese religion and culture. In Shikoku, the island of Kūkai's birth, a popular pilgrimage route

* The present article is an adapted translation of the author's "Kūkai no tetsugaku to mandara," which originally appeared in Matsunaga Yukei (ed.), *Mandara* (Osaka: Asahi Culture Books, 1983), pp. 85-115. For further details on the life and work of Kūkai, see Yoshito Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972); page numbers in parentheses refer to this volume.

¹ See Oliver Statler, *Japanese Pilgrimage* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1983).

consisting of sacred sites connected with his life attracts large numbers of the faithful daily.¹ Many pilgrims also visit Mount Koya deep in the mountains, and Tōji temple in the middle of modern Kyoto is the site of various religious and secular activities celebrating Kūkai. These three sites remain the major centers of Shingon Buddhism.

In this article, the author, Okamura Keishin, professor of religion at Kōchi University and a Shingon priest, uses the religious phenomena associated with the figure of Kūkai to illustrate the concept of a mandala, and then interprets Kūkai's thought as a 'philosophical mandala'.

THE TRANSLATOR

Kūkai's Philosophy as a Mandala

1. Kūkai, Japanese Religion, and Mandala

One can speak of three aspects with regard to the role of Kūkai (Kōbō Daishi) in Japanese religion. The first is that of faith in Kōbō Daishi in Kyoto where the figure of Kūkai has acted as a focal point for the various aspirations of the common people; this is the foundation of faith in Kōbō Daishi at the Tōji temple. Next we have the sacred area centered in the Oku-no-in (Inner Shrine) on Mount Kōya, which is the center of faith in the living Kōbō Daishi who is in a state of deep meditation. Mount Kōya, which is worshipped as a spiritual mountain, is an archetypal sacred space. Third is the faith of walking with Kōbō Daishi on the Shikoku pilgrimage. The eighty-eight sacred sites along the pilgrimage are held together by the route which the pilgrim walks, as the various beads of a rosary are held together by a string. The mysterious fact about these three religious phenomena is that, from a common origin in the figure of Kūkai, they were all tempered and developed their individual characteristics over a long period of time and have maintained a vigorous continuity to this day.

The reason I mention these phenomena is that they are all connected to the idea of a mandala. The motif common to each of them is faith in Kōbō Daishi. The worship of Kōbō Daishi takes on different forms in different places. The individual characteristics vary considerably, each according to its circumstances, but at each place the faith in Kōbō

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Daishi is alive and serving an appropriate function. This is the essence of faith in Kōbō Daishi. The form is different in each place, so that faith in Kōbō Daishi cannot be simply defined as the worship of a religious founder; there are far too many levels and an admixture of elements involved in the religious phenomena of faith in Kōbō Daishi.

In other words, when one attempts to unify many different elements into one category, there must be one unifying factor. When many heterogenous elements are thus unified, we have a situation in which there is a simultaneous unity and diversity; the one is the many, and the many is the one. What was originally one has taken on various forms and is manifested in many ways, yet it is still one. This logical relationship between the one and the many is concretely manifest in the religious phenomena of faith in Kōbō Daishi.

This phenomenon is not limited to Buddhism, but may well be said to describe the structure of faith of the Japanese people. When we are born, or marry, or when our children reach a certain age, we observe certain religious ceremonies connected with the faith in local or family deities called *kami*. Whether the *kami* of our family happens to be Hachiman or Amaterasu, there is no precise consciousness of these details, and we merely pray for the happiness of our children or family or social group. At this time the object to which our prayers are addressed can be called *kami*. This definition of *kami* includes the Buddhas enshrined at temples; whatever is absolute or ultimate is *kami*. In the eyes of the Japanese a certain *kami* may have certain characteristics and functions, but rarely is it limited to one function or one form. It assumes many forms and performs many functions. Therefore the worshipper can only bow his head in prayer and, like the poet Saigyō (1118-1190),¹ say, "Though I know not what you are. . . ." This structure of faith is the same whether one is considering religious activity at Ise Shrine² or faith in Kōbō Daishi.

Mandalas

People who have a monotheistic faith in a personal God, such as

¹ Saigyō, a famous Japanese Buddhist priest and poet. See William R. LaFleur, *Saigyō: Mirror for the Moon* (New York: New Directions, 1978).

² Ise is the location of the central Shinto shrine dedicated to the Sun Goddess Amaterasu.

adherents of Christianity and Judaism, find it very difficult to understand these sorts of religious phenomena. The very idea that God, or a *kami*, would manifest himself in various ways and forms is dismissed as idol worship. If I were to abstract the idea of the love or grace of God and attempt to construct a fixed image of this activity or attribute of God, I would immediately be criticized of idolatry. God is believed to exist from the very beginning, and to transcend all things which are limited by form. In Old Testament times, it was forbidden even to pronounce the name of Yahweh, and of course the construction of idols was not permitted. We are thus faced with a God which is strictly defined and transcends all worldly form; this is the God of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

The religious ethos of the Japanese, however, takes on a form which is comparable to a mandala. The concept of mandala is a difficult one, but I will try to explain it simply. Let us say that a deity or absolute being or *kami* were to assume a concrete form before us. When we try to express this religious experience in an organized, structured form, what we would inevitably end up with is an image or diagram centering around the relation of myself with the *kami*, with the whole world encompassed in the space which is emitted from and surrounds the *kami*. This is a mandala: a unified diagram or image in which the aspects of myself, the *kami*, and the world are unified.

If understood in this way, one can see that it would be very difficult to develop a mandala with a Christian world view. In contrast, the religions of India which gave birth to mandalas are very rich in religious images and are very free to create a variety of concrete forms to express religious experience. It was the creative power within this religious ethos which gave birth to the mandalas.

II. The Viewpoint of Tendai Doctrine

Annen's Theory of Absolute Non-Dualism

Let us consider the contrasting interpretations of esoteric Buddhism as developed by Kūkai on the one hand, and Saichō (Dengyō Daishi, 766-822), the founder of the Japanese Tendai school, on the other. This is one method of clarifying Kūkai's philosophy. However, the lack of sufficient documents makes it difficult to discuss the teaching

transmitted by Saicho, so I will consider the Tendai interpretation of esoteric Buddhism at the stage of its mature development.

For this we must turn to Godai-in Annen (841-897?), the disciple of Jikaku Daishi Ennin (794-864) who studied under Saicho. It was under Annen that the Tendai interpretation of esoteric Buddhism reached a high level of sophistication with regard to doctrinal systematization. Annen composed a work called *Questions and Answers Concerning Doctrine and Time (Kyōji mondō)* in which he develops the idea of the One Great Perfect Teaching (*ichidai enkyō*). In the Tendai scheme of doctrinal classification called the Five Periods (*goji kyōhan*), the Perfect Teaching is taught in the fifth and last period of the Buddha's life and consists of a straightforward explication of the highest truth. Thus, for the Tendai school, the Perfect Teaching was equivalent to the Lotus Sutra doctrine of Buddhahood as the ultimate goal of all beings; this was the doctrine of the Chinese T'ien-t'ai school as transmitted and taught by Saichō. Annen, however, attempted to go one step beyond the idea of Tendai philosophy as the epitome of all Buddhist doctrine and proposed that it was the Shingon doctrine of esoteric Buddhism which encompassed all of Buddhism, including the Tendai. I rather admire Annen's philosophy as great scholarship which takes Tendai philosophy to the limits of its possibilities and exhaustively examines its implications.

Annen pointed out that all Buddhas are, in the final analysis, one Buddha; likewise, all time is included in one moment, all places are one place, and all teachings are ultimately one teaching. These four categories of Buddha, Time, Place, and Teaching together form the content of the One Great Perfect Teaching as integrated in the Shingon doctrine of the ultimate unity of all things: the One Buddha, One Time, One Place, and One Teaching.

A difficult idea is often easier to grasp if one employs a short definitive term. The essence of Annen's philosophy can be described with the term "absolute non-duality" (*zettai ichigen ron*). In Buddhism we are faced with many scriptures which were preached by many different Buddhas. In the Shingon doctrine, these Buddhas are all regarded as being fundamentally and originally One Buddha, and that Buddha is called Mahāvairocana. The various Buddhas are merely the active manifestations, or phenomenal transformations, of its wisdom and virtue, and it is through their activities that Mahāvairocana is

manifested in this phenomenal world.

The One Buddha Does Not Have Form

The idea of "absolute non-duality" has interesting implications. If one claims that all Buddhas are ultimately One Buddha, then where can one find the basis for this unity? It is not possible to reduce all the Buddhas with their various phenomenal and formal manifestations into one form called "One Buddha." In order to truly claim that all Buddhas are One Buddha, this One Buddha must be the basis for all things which have form, yet it must itself be without form and separate from form.

If we claim that the One Buddha is something with form, and that all other Buddhas are derivations or manifestations of this One Buddha, then we are merely looking at two forms of the Buddha. If so, the idea of the "One Buddha" as the basis for all Buddhas would not be logically coherent. For the idea of the integration of all Buddhas in One Buddha to be coherent, the One Buddha must be in the same dimension as all phenomenal manifestations of Buddhas. This idea is expressed by the Buddhist term "no form" or "formlessness" (*musō*; Skt., *animitta*). Thus, "no form," or lack of any phenomenal characteristic, is a fundamental condition of the One Buddha. If we say that it is the individual Buddhas, as the manifestations of the One Buddha, which possess various concrete virtues and activities, then the One Buddha must transcend these concrete phenomenal activities and cannot possess these concrete virtues and activities. This is the greatest difference between that which is relative and that which is absolute.

That which is relative is always something which exists in contrast to or in relation to something else. Relative things exist in the same dimension, and yet have their individual form and activity. Thus all of the individual Buddhas exist on the relative plane of being characterized by concrete virtues. However, when we speak of the integration of all Buddhas in the One Buddha, if we describe all of the individual Buddhas in terms of the One Buddha, then the individual manifestations of the Buddha become unclear. From this point of view it is necessary to make some sort of distinction between the One Buddha and the phenomenal manifestations of the Buddha.

The Diamond Realm (*Kongōkai*) Mandala, one part of the dual man-

dala of the Shingon tradition, contains nine sections, which include the sections on the Single Mudra (*ichiin-e*) and that on the Four Mudras (*shiinne*). The middle section of the top row contains only one Buddha, the figure of Mahāvairocana. To the left is an assembly of five Buddhas, that is, Mahāvairocana surrounded by four Buddhas. The other seven sections contain a large number of Buddhas, but the section with the simplest construction is that of the Single Mudra, the section which contains only Mahāvairocana. The section of the Four Mudras is the section containing Mahāvairocana surrounded by four Buddhas. These two sections of one and five Buddhas, respectively, represent an attempt to symbolize artistically the theme of the integration of all Buddhas within One Buddha.

If we were to represent artistically the theory of the One Great Perfect Teaching of Annen, we could not go beyond the attempt to manifest the idea of the many contained in the one, and the one contained in the many. However, this would not be the same as the idea of the One which is the unity of the one and the many. Therefore, Annen claimed that the final, fundamental One Buddha could not be ultimately manifested by means of an artistic form such as a mandala.

In other words, all artistic representations such as mandalas have form. To have form means to have a certain figure or appearance. A mandala which of necessity takes on a certain form cannot be the essential truth itself. On the other hand, the One Buddha which is the essential truth cannot be perfectly or completely manifested or expressed by means of a mandala which has a concrete form. In this way, a thorough philosophy of absolute non-duality was developed by Annen.

A Philosophy Based on the Principle of Reality

Shingon often explains its doctrine in terms of a set of three concepts: essence (*tai*), appearance (*sō*), and function (*yū*). For example, Annen's philosophy of absolute non-duality teaches that the fundamental, ultimate absolute (essence) itself cannot be manifested with any concrete form (appearance) nor is it manifested in any concrete activity (function). This "essence" which is the basis of all phenomenal manifestations is the fundamental Buddha, the One Buddha. A mandala, since it has form, cannot depict the One, absolute Buddha in its

true entirety as it is. This is somewhat similar to the idea that one cannot depict in a mandala the concept of the One God that one finds in Christianity or Judaism. Annen also reached the point where a mandala was insufficient to portray the absolute. The mandala is developed only when the absolute comes down to the relative plane of formal appearance.

In Christianity and Judaism, the One God is not only absolute, but is also a personal God. He created the world according to His will, and will destroy creation according to His will. Thus He is characterized by ethical and moral qualities, and acts as a God of judgment and justice. These qualities are all based on the idea of God having a will. He created all according to His will; all things develop according to His will; He penetrates all things. The monotheism of Christianity and Judaism develops from this concept of God's will.

Annen's absolute non-duality of the formless Dharma Body is closely connected with the basic concepts of Tendai philosophy. The ultimate goal of Tendai practice, which is attained through the cultivation of contemplation such as the four kinds of samadhi (*shishu zammai*) or perfect contemplation (*endon shikan*), is insight into this principle of reality.

III. Kūkai's Philosophy of Absolute Equality

Mandalas and Kūkai's Treatise

In contrast to the Tendai position, what was the interpretation offered by Kūkai? Kūkai's magnum opus is the *Treatise on the Ten Stages of the Mind of the Secret Mandala* (*Himitsu mandara jūju shinron*); the words "secret mandala" modify the "ten stages of the mind." I believe Kūkai's philosophy begins and ends with the concept of mandala. The culmination of his philosophy, his ultimate "mandala," is this treatise on the ten stages of the mind.

At the beginning of this essay I discussed three forms of faith in Kōbō Daishi. If we were to develop this idea further, we would be able to perceive various stages of specific religious consciousness or the pattern of a certain religious phenomenon. Kūkai has done exactly this in organizing religious experience into ten stages. The ten stages of the mind refer to ten levels of religious consciousness. These are arranged

in order from the shallowest to the most profound. I would like to point out that these ten stages of the mind develop into a kind of mandala.

There are many different ways to explain Kūkai's theory of the ten stages of the mind. Some Japanese scholars say that it is a brilliant analysis of the depths of human consciousness; others say that it is an outline of Buddhist doctrine which organizes the basic teachings of the various schools of Buddhism. These are both accurate assessments. In addition, it is an explanation of the process of practice and enlightenment experienced by a practitioner who undergoes the gradual, step-by-step process of cultivating various practices according to the Shingon teaching. No matter how this treatise is explained, one must recognize Kūkai's creativity and sharp insight into the depths of human consciousness and presenting his insights in the form of a mandala.

Kūkai's Treatise as a Compendium of Eastern Thought

The *Treatise on the Ten Stages of the Mind of the Secret Mandala* contains many quotations of scripture which are skillfully employed by Kūkai to support his doctrinal interpretations. Actually, there are a number of "second-hand" quotations which, traced to their original source, present some problem with regard to accurate interpretation. At any rate, the treatise is rich in various references to Buddhist scripture and is a remarkable compendium of Buddhist doctrine. This work was presented to Emperor Junna (r. 823-833) in 830, as one of six works explaining the basic position of the major schools of Japanese Buddhism. Since this work was long and complicated, Kūkai was told that it was too difficult to understand. Kūkai therefore extracted the essential points and rewrote the work in three volumes to clarify the idea of the ten stages of the mind. This new work, the *Precious Key to the Secret Treasury (Hizō hōyaku)*, was then presented to the Emperor.

The Shingon school highly prizes this shorter version. This text gives a lucid explanation of the development of religious consciousness, the final stage being the Shingon interpretation of Buddhist doctrine, which is explained as superior to all other Buddhist schools; this is part of the Shingon classification of Buddhist doctrine and is a basic tenet of the sect. However, I do not believe this a good vantage point from which to view Kūkai's intention. He classifies the human consciousness

into ten progressive stages, from the shallowest to the most profound, and culminating in the realm of enlightenment. The lowest stage is the so-called "natural" state in which the mind of man is full of desires. The next stage is an advance to the state of moral consciousness in which man consciously attempts to control his mind. In becoming aware of moral issues, one does not follow the values of this world blindly, but abides by values which transcend this world. In the following stage, one establishes a relationship with the ultimate, whether it be God or heaven, and becomes awakened to one's true self. It is possible to recognize many stages within the framework of religious consciousness. Buddhism has traditionally discussed these various levels in terms of the *sravakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, and *bodhisattvas*. Kūkai organized all the doctrines of every Buddhist school into a structure of ten levels. The levels also include schools other than Buddhism, such as the teachings of various religions of India and also the Confucian and Taoist teachings from China. In this way Kūkai classifies all the religions and philosophies of the East in one book. The *Precious Key to the Secret Treasury* classifies these as progressive stages from the most inferior to the most superior, but his *Treatise on the Ten Stages of the Mind of the Secret Treasury* does not take such a simplified approach.

Philosophy and Magic

I have already said that, in contrast to Annen's absolute non-duality, Kūkai's philosophy is characterized as "absolute equality." The *Treatise on the Ten Stages of the Mind of the Secret Mandala* is the culmination of this philosophy of absolute equality.

What then is the meaning of "absolute equality"? Kūkai's philosophy is always developed from the perspective of meditation. The esoteric doctrine transmitted by Kūkai is often summarized as the teaching of the attainment of Buddhahood within this life (*sokushin jōbutsu*). In other words, if we practice according to the unique methods taught by the Shingon school, we can experience an integration of ourselves with the Buddha. We can enter into a kind of yogic trance and know that there is no Buddha outside of oneself, and no self outside of the Buddha. We can experience an absolute, non-dual equality of oneself and the Buddha. Some special qualifications and prepara-

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tions are necessary. One must be initiated by an *ajari*, a master, or one cannot start the practice.

Upon realizing the unity of oneself and the Buddha, another factor arises simultaneously; that is, the accompanying duty of the practitioner to pray to the Buddha on behalf of all people. On the one hand, one practices in order to attain one's own enlightenment; on the other hand, one prays on behalf of other people, to relieve their pain and suffering. This is the activity of compassion, and a necessary part of one's practice. The balance between these two activities, however, has often given rise to some problems. The Shingon school, and esoteric Buddhism in general, is often criticized as a religion of magic. Even though the Shingon school has developed an extremely profound philosophy, such as the theory of the ten stages of the mind, actual daily activity consists of magical prayers and incantations. The most prosperous centers are places such as Narita Fudō, Shigi-san or Ikoma-san, which emphasize magical remedies for the problems of daily life. I have often wondered why it is that such a profound philosophy is inseparably linked with such magical elements, and I have come to the conclusion that the integration of such seemingly contradictory elements actually presents us with a key for solving the mystery.

On the one hand, the esoteric Buddhism of the Shingon school is a philosophical religion. This is undeniable. It has absorbed the best philosophical elements developed by various schools of Chinese Buddhism, such as T'ien-t'ai and Hua-yen, and on this basis a magnificent philosophy was created by Kūkai. It is comparable, or even superior, to the philosophy of the One Great Perfect Teaching of Annen. In this sense, it is a philosophical religion.

The problem still remains that Shingon is a religion of magical prayers and incantations. Historians of religion often use the word "magico-religious." There are numerous religions in the history of the world which are best described as an amalgam of magic and religion. These are often "undeveloped" religions in which magic and religion are blended into one indistinguishable phenomenon which plays an important role in society. The prayers and incantations found within esoteric Buddhism, however, represent a more structured and refined development of such magico-religious phenomena. This development cannot be adequately described without a full discussion of both the philosophical and magical elements, for somehow they blend together,

or at least share some common ground.

The Three Types of Worldly Mind

Esoteric Buddhism is derived from the perspective of meditation. Now I would like to discuss the first three of the ten states of mind, as described by Kūkai in his the *Precious Key to the Secret Treasury*.

The first state of mind, "The Mind of Lowly Man, Goatish in Its Desires," is "the name given to lowly man who, in his madness, does not distinguish between good and evil, and who, ignorant like a stupid child, does not believe in the law of cause and effect" (Hakeda, p. 164). Essentially, this refers to people who are controlled by their instinctive desires such as for food and sex, and are not even conscious of the distinctions between good and evil or the law of cause and effect. They resemble animals in simply following their instincts and desires, but differ from animals in the sense of being self-centered and constantly attached to things. They are so preoccupied with their present happiness that they do not pay attention to the possibility of future misfortune. Although their suffering and misdeeds are due to their ignorance, they never realize that they are ignorant. This ignorance and self-centered attachment causes man to fall to a depraved state lower than the animals. This most inferior state of man's existence, the so-called "natural" state, is the object of meditation on the first level. The purpose of this meditation is, first, to know the true state of mind of sentient beings and to seek the true religion for the purpose of saving sentient beings. The first requirement is to be able to clearly perceive the state of sentient beings in the world, and this means to perceive the world with the vision of a Buddha.

Second is "The Mind that is Ignorant and Childlike, yet Abstemious," which means that "when favorable conditions are provided, even a fool aspires to the great Way, and while he follows the teachings faithfully, he aspires to be equal to a sage" (p. 167). This refers to men who are awakened to a moral consciousness and attempt to live a moral or ideal life, following guidelines such as the five cardinal virtues of Confucius or the five precepts or the ten virtues of Buddhism. They study the laws of nature, society, and nations, and strive to maintain a cultured life-style. This is certainly an advance over the first state of mind, but it is impossible to save sentient beings who per-

sist in their ignorance in any fundamental sense by means of political systems, culture, or morality. Nevertheless the way to Buddhahood is opened through moral practice such as the ten virtues. A moral life is clearly imperative in order to attain the goal of religion.

Third is "The Mind that is Infantlike and Fearless," which is the state of mind which hopes to avoid suffering and seeks pleasure by aspiring to be born in heaven (p. 170). This is the first stage in the religious life proper. It includes the religions of India and encompasses all religions which teach the existence of gods and heavens. It refers to the state of mind which is like a child seeking solace in his mother's arms. This state of mind transcends the natural and cultural consciousness which seeks eternal salvation. This state of mind is still insufficient to save those in the first two states. Nevertheless one finds here the first hints of religion which will lead to the ultimate truth. One can say that the potential for the ultimate truth is already found here in this state of mind, even though only a small part of the rich and varied content of religion is present.

Formula (Shingon) as Cryptograph

In this way the ten states of mind progress from the shallow to the deep, from the partial to the whole, and one proceeds step by step to that which is the foundation of all things and links all things into one reality. There are also two ways to interpret each state, the superficial interpretation (*senryaku-shaku*) and the profound interpretation (*jinpi-shaku*). The profound interpretation of the third state of mind, for example, consists of the formula (*shingon*, lit. "true word") of the Seten, that is, the enlightenment and concentrative state of gods, yaksas, and asuras, which contain the secret meaning of their state of mind. If a sentient being diligently chants and meditates on this formula, he can attain the concentrated state of mind of the Seten. This means that one can perfect this religious state of mind. In addition, if one attains the concentrated state of mind of the Seten, since it is one with Mahāvairocana (as in Annen's philosophy of the One Buddha), one has attained the concentrative state of Mahāvairocana.

As one advances to the fourth and fifth states of mind, this idea becomes progressively clearer. In the fourth stage one chants the formula of the sravakas; in the fifth stage one chants the formula of the

pratyekabuddhas. These are the formulas of the Two Hinayana Vehicles, criticized by Mahayanists as an inferior way. But if one cultivates further the concentrated state of mind of these stages, one can reach the concentrative state of Mahāvairocana.

The stages of the Two Vehicles are sometimes referred to as the stage of "the death of the bodhisattva." Those of the Two Vehicles who are concerned about their own awakening become arhats. These people of the Two Vehicles are not concerned about others and lack compassion for others, therefore they do not become bodhisattvas. In this sense the way of the bodhisattva is superior to those of the sravakas and pratyekabuddhas, and is thus called the Great Vehicle or Mahayana. Kūkai, however, taught that one who perfects the way of the Two Vehicles is not limited to the accomplishments of the Two Vehicles, but can reach the ultimate concentration of Mahāvairocana.

The sixth state of mind refers to the Yogācāra (Hossō) teachings and indicates the perfection of the concentrated mind of the Bodhisattva Maitreya. The Sanskrit letter *A* is the essence of the formula of Maitreya, and refers to the inner enlightenment of Mahāvairocana. The seventh stage is the teaching of the Three Treatise (Sanron) school, and indicates the concentrated mind of the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī. This formula has as its essence the letter *Ma*, and one attains the concentrated mind of Mahāvairocana through cultivating this letter. The eighth stage is that of the T'ien-t'ai (Tendai) school and the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, and the ninth stage is that of the Hua-yen (Kegon) and the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra. By cultivating these various concentrated states of mind, one can attain the state of concentration of Mahāvairocana.

In this way Kūkai has organized all states of mind and philosophies into ten stages of mind. These are all of one essence with the basic reality of Mahāvairocana. This is the world of contemplation as taught by Kūkai.

Kūkai's Subjectification of the Mandala

When Hegel discussed world history, he said that one should not look upon the face of history as if looking at a magnificent tapestry from above, but should also look at the back side and see how each thread is placed. In the same way, if one closely examines the threads

of the magnificent tapestry of Kūkai's theory of the ten stages, one can see its interpenetrating relationship.

The natural life, the cultural life, the religious life—these are all inseparably connected with the fundamental reality of Mahāvairocana. In each of these stages Kūkai has pointed out the various qualities or activities of Mahāvairocana. This cannot be explained in the same way as Annen's concept of absolute non-duality, because it is not an absolute that stands in relation to the relative; the absolute is not truly absolute unless it completely transcends the relative. However, the philosophy which Kūkai developed as seen in his treatise on the ten stages of the mind claims that within concrete and relative phenomena, there is something that transcends the relative and yet is manifested therein. Why then does one not swiftly advance to the ultimate position of the philosophy of mandala and directly perceive the absolute equality of all things? Kūkai himself writes that this question led him to write his treatise on the ten stages of the mind.

The reason I brought up these various subjects, and the point I want to make, is that Kūkai himself did not arrive at this conclusion from the very beginning. After Kūkai visited T'ang China at the beginning of the ninth century, the Buddhism which he brought back evolved around physical objects such as mandalas, esoteric texts and ceremonial implements. This is a great contrast to Dōgen's return from China. When Dōgen returned from China, he returned "empty-handed," that is, without bringing back any material goods. Kūkai, on the other hand, left Japan empty-handed and returned with an abundance of goods, as well as training in Buddhism. It is said that he transmitted the essence of Chinese Ch'ang-an culture, which was one center of world civilization at that time. He had also studied all there was to study, before he creatively developed his own philosophy. At that time the mandala was at the center of his religion, but it had not yet developed into the idea of a philosophy of mandala.

Nevertheless, one can find precedents for his mature philosophy in his early writings. His first book, *Indications of the Goals of the Three Teachings (Sangō shiki)*, written when he was twenty-four years old, explains Buddhism as superior to Confucianism and Taoism. His conclusion, however, is that these three religions are all basically one teaching. There is also his *The Difference between Exoteric and Esoteric Buddhism (Benkenmitsu nikyō ron)* written about ten years

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after Kūkai returned from China. In this work he compares the four great Mahayana sects of Three Treatise (Sanron), Yogācāra (Hossō), T'ien-t'ai (Tendai), and Hua-yen (Kegon) with the new esoteric Buddhism and explains their specific characteristics. Kūkai writes that esoteric Buddhism is superior, but does not put forward the concept of absolute equality. This idea does not emerge until Kūkai is about fifty years old. It was the final development of his later years.

Mandalas are generally considered to be physical objects, such as "hanging mandalas" which are used as the object of worship during Shingon ceremonies and meditation. They symbolize the realm of the Buddha. Kūkai also worshipped these "physical" mandalas. However, in the process of worshipping these mandalas and cultivating the basic Shingon practices, the mandala became a part of him; I call this the "internalization" or "subjectification" of the mandala. The mandalas which Kūkai brought back with him from China were among the most valuable objects which he brought to Japan. But the true depth of Kūkai's religion is revealed by the development of his philosophy from that of worshipping a mandala as a physical object, to his final position of the philosophy of mandala as taught in his treatise on the ten stages of the mind.

TRANSLATED BY PAUL SWANSON