

DEDICATED TO  
TEACHERS & STUDENTS



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# Classifying Buddhist Deities

**TENBU 天部 CATEGORY.** A group of Heavenly Deities, Celestial Beings. A god (Skt. = deva) or goddess (Skt. = devi) of non-Buddhist origin, primarily from the Hindu pantheon of India. The term TEN 天 (meaning “heaven”) is used because the many deities in this group live in one of the various Buddhist heavens. The term BU 部 (meaning “group”) is added to TEN when referring to this category of deities. As a group, they were subjugated by Buddhism and converted into protectors of Buddhism. But their HINDU associations and attributes were largely retained.

These gods/goddesses/beings live in various paradises, but they are still trapped in the Wheel of Life, the Six States of Karmic Rebirth, the Six Realms of Transmigration. Although they live long and pleasant lives, they are eventually reborn at a lower level. There are various classes of Celestial Beings, e.g., those who protect the Buddhas and Buddhist teachings, those propitiated for the public good, those worshipped for good fortune, private benefit, or vexing one’s enemies.

Prior to the 9<sup>th</sup> century, there were very few deva/devi in Japan. But with the introduction of Esoteric Buddhism to Japan in the early 9<sup>th</sup> century, hundreds of these deities began appearing in the mandala artform. They appear in great number in both the Diamond World Mandala (some 20 deva/devi) and the Womb World Mandala (some 200 deva/devi). Most of them appear only in mandala paintings and have no cult. **But a handful gained great popularity among both the aristocracy and lower levels of society and remain very popular among the common people in modern times.**

|  |   |
|--|---|
|    | Buddha<br>Tathagata<br>Nyorai (Jp.)<br>如来                               |
|   | Bodhisattva<br>Bosatsu (Jp.)<br>菩薩                                      |
|   | Vidyaraja<br>Myō-ō (Jp.)<br>明王  |
|   | Deva<br>Tenbu (Jp.)<br>天部   |
|  | Busshi / Monks<br>The Sculptors<br>Who Made the<br>Buddha Statues<br>仏師 |

**TENBU.** Bedazzling pantheon of foreign, awe-inspiring tantric deities, introduced by monks Kūkai (Shingon) and Saichō (Tendai) in the early 9<sup>th</sup> century. Aristocrats often commissioned esoteric monks to secretly conduct prohibited ceremonies, with the intent to harm or destroy their political rivals and enemies.

| BUDDHA 如来  | BODHISATTVA 菩薩   | MYŌ-Ō 明王  | TENBU / DEVA 天部   |
|--|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>peaceful countenance</li> <li>elongated earlobes</li> <li>third eye</li> <li>bump of knowledge</li> <li>simple robes</li> <li>no jewelry</li> <li>no ornamentation</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>peaceful countenance</li> <li>elongated earlobes</li> <li>princely clothes</li> <li>crowns, headwear</li> <li>necklaces</li> <li>armlets</li> <li>bracelets</li> <li>anklets</li> <li>crowns sometimes bear an effigy of the Buddha they serve</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>fearsome, wrathful faces</li> <li>multi-headed</li> <li>multi-armed</li> <li>holding weapons</li> <li>adorned with animal skins</li> <li>adorned with skulls</li> <li>adorned with snakes</li> <li>wreathed in flames</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>many different forms</li> <li>gentle and fearsome</li> <li>heavenly and demonic</li> <li>multi-headed</li> <li>multi-armed</li> <li>humanlike, two-arms, one head</li> <li>often dressed in armour of warriors</li> <li>sometimes shown as figures from India</li> <li>sometimes shown in Chinese dress</li> </ul> |

**GUIDELINES TO IDENTIFY THE DEITIES**

See chart at left. There are exceptions, mind you, but these guidelines go far in enhancing your understanding.



Most TENBU (Deva/Devi) have no cult in Japan. But some are well known. They include: (1) Shitennō 四天王, (2) Deva of 28 Lunar Mansions · Nijūhasshuku 二十八宿, (3) 12 Deva Protectors · Jūniten 十二天, (4) Some Deva/Devi (not many) are given independent status as objects of devotion. They are (5) Daikokuten 大黒天 (6) Benzaiten 弁財天 (7) Bishamonten 毘沙門天.

EAST  
Jikokuten



持國天

SOUTH  
Zōchōten



增長天

CENTER  
Taishakuten



帝釈天

WEST  
Kōmokuten



廣目天

NORTH  
Tamonten



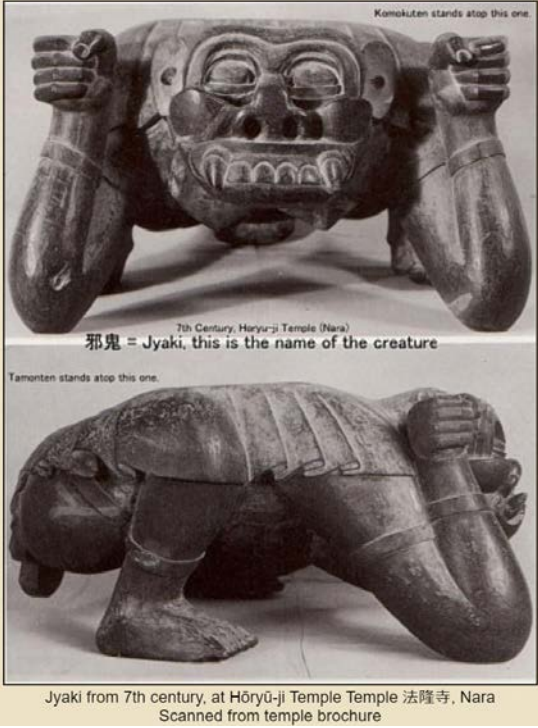
多聞天



The Shitennō are Buddhist protectors of the four directions. They originated in India as deva generals protecting Lord Indra, but were later adopted into the Buddhist pantheon in China and Japan. They ward off evil, guard the nation, and protect the world from malicious spirits, hence the Japanese term Gose Shitennō 護世四天王, literally “four world-protecting deva kings.” Each represents a direction, season, color, virtue, and element.

They are nearly always dressed in armor (yoroi 鎧), looking ferocious (funnusō 忿怒相), and carrying weapons or objects (jimotsu 持物) said to eliminate evil influences and suppress the enemies of Buddhism. They are also typically shown standing atop evil spirits (known as Jaki in Japan), symbolizing their power to repel and defeat evil.

In Japanese statuary, the Shitennō are almost always portrayed in animated warrior poses rather than static postures of ease or meditation. Among the four, Tamonten (aka Bishamonten) is considered the most powerful, and over time, supplanted the other three in importance.



Shitennō (Four Heavenly Kings), Hōryūji Temple 法隆寺, Nara Mid-7th Century. Oldest extant set of the four. National Treasures. Kōmokuten 広目天, Zōchōten 增長天, Tamonten 多門天, Jikokuten 持国天 Painted Wood, Each Statue Approx. 133.5 cm in Height Photos from Comprehensive Dictionary of Japan's National Treasures 国宝大事典 (西川 杏太郎. ISBN 4-06-187822-0.

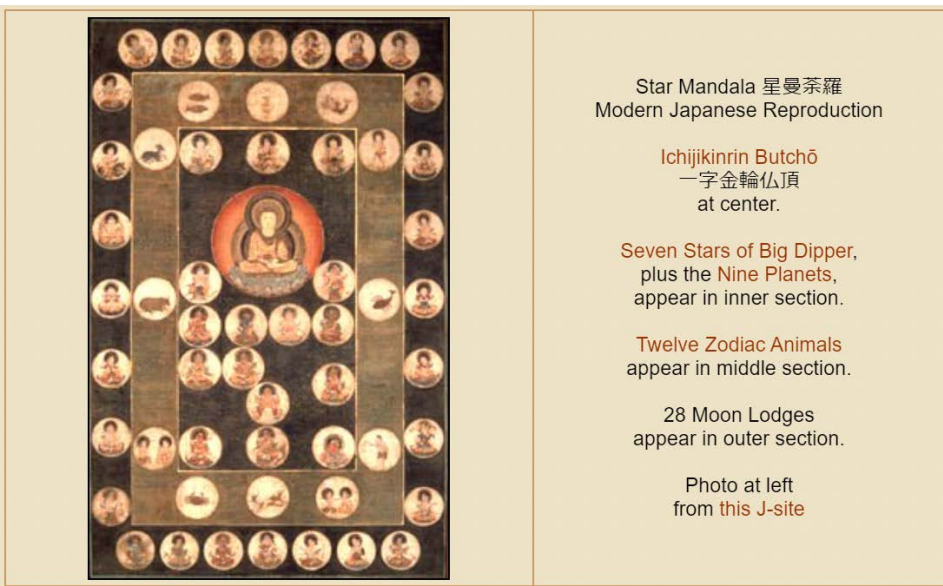
Shitennō iconography is related to the Four Celestial Emblems (dragon, red bird, tiger, turtle) of China, who also guard the four cardinal directions.

Origin = China



Click images to jump to specific creatures.

Tortoise (Black Warrior) = North, Winter, Black, Water  
White Tiger (Kirin) = West, Fall, White, Metal  
Red Bird (Phoenix) = South, Summer, Red, Fire  
Dragon = East, Spring, Blue/Green, Wood



## 28 Constellations 28 Moon Lodges 28 Lunar Mansions

←→

### 二十八宿 Nijūhasshuku

### Origin = China



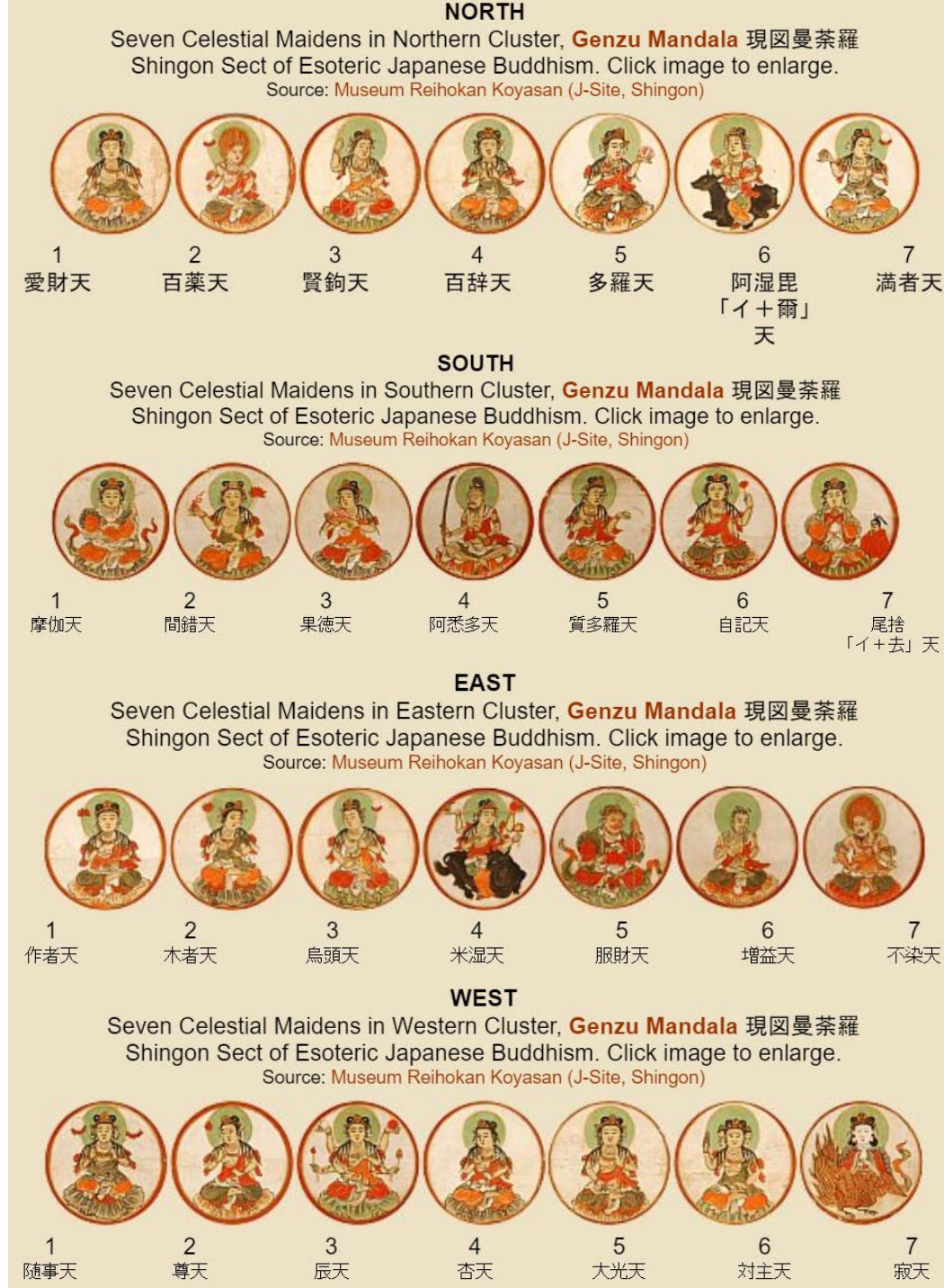
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Tortoise (Black Warrior) = North, Winter, Black, Water  
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### Four Guardians of the Four Compass Directions, Celestial Emblems of the Chinese Emperor Japan = Shishin 四神 China = Sì Shòu 四獸

### Four Heavenly Kings Four Celestial Guardians Four Protectors of the Nation SHITENNŌ = 四天王



Jūniten 十二天 or 十二大天衆, Deva of the 12 Directions, 12 Celestial Beings, Protectors of Buddhism, Doctrine-Abiding Deities Guarding All Directions. Minor Gods in Pantheon of Esoteric Buddhism. Origin = India, Hindu Deities. Guardians of Esoteric Buddhist monasteries.



Bonten



Taishakuten



Katen



Nitten



Futen



Jizaiten



Bishamonten

SOURCE:  
kyohaku.go.jp/eng/syuzo  
u/meihin/choukoku/item  
03.html



OVERVIEW. Originated from the Hindu guardians of the four cardinal and four intermediary directions (Jp. = Happōten 八方天). In later years, the gods of heaven and earth (**up and down**) were added to create a grouping called the Ten Deities (Jp. = Jitten 十天), and still later the gods of the **sun and moon** were added to create the Jūniten (Group of 12 Deva). These twelve generally supplant the [Shitennō](#) (Four Heavenly Deva Kings) in esoteric artwork in Japan, although they serve the same role as the [Shitennō](#) in protecting Buddhism and crushing evil demons.



Bishamon-ten



Ishana-ten



Taishaku-ten



Ka-ten



Enma-ten



Rasetsu-ten



Sui-ten



Fu-ten



Bon-ten



Ji-ten



Nitten



Gatten

- 1. **Bonten** 梵天 (Skt. = **Brahmā**); Up; Heaven Deva
- 2. **Taishakuten** 帝釈天 (Skt. **Indra**); East; Lord of Deva
- 3. **Suiten** 水天 (Skt. Varuna); West; Water Deva
- 4. **Bishamonten** 毘沙門天 (Vaiśravaṇa); North; Wealth
- 5. **Enmaten** 焰魔天 (Skt. Yama); South; Underworld
- 6. **Katen** 火天 (Skt. Agni); Southeast, Fire Deva
- 7. **Rasetsuten** 羅刹天 (Skt. Raksasa); SW; Demons
- 8. **Ishanaten** 伊舍那天 (Skt. Isana); NE, Dharma
- 9. **Futen** 風天 (Skt. Vayu); NW; Wind Deva
- 10. **Nitten** 日天 (Skt. Aditya); Sun Deva
- 11. **Gatten** 月天 (Skt. Candra); Moon Deva
- 12. **Jiten** 地天 (Skt. Prthivi); Down; Earth Deva.

Set of 12 Hanging Scrolls. Late-Heian Period (Dated 1127). Tōji Temple, Kyoto. The Twelve Devas are the gods of the twelve directions in Esoteric Buddhism, including the four quarters and four semi-quarters, up and down, and the sun and moon, and are the guardians of Esoteric Buddhist monasteries.  
<https://www.kyohaku.go.jp/eng/syuzou/meihin/butsuga/item05.html>



水天 羅刹天 焰摩天 火天 帝釈天 伊舎那天 月天 日天 地天 梵天 毘沙門天 風天



AT LEFT  
12 Deva from the Butsuzō-zu-i 仏像図彙 (late 17th century). As reproduced by Philipp Franz von Siebold. Nippon Archiv zur Beschreibung von Japan. Leiden (1831 CE)

ABOVE  
Tōji Temple 東寺, Kyoto  
Jūniten 十二天 or 十二大天衆  
12 Deva, 12 Celestial Beings, Protectors of Buddhism  
Doctrine-Abiding Deities Guarding All Directions  
Minor Gods in Pantheon of Esoteric Buddhism  
Origin = India, Hindu Deities

Among the 12, [Bonten](#) ([Brahma](#)) and [Taishakuten](#) ([Indra](#)) serve in the highest position. Also known as the Twelve Gods Protecting the World.

Emanations of Vajrapani Bodhisattva. Represent Alpha & Omega, Beginning & End, Birth & Death. One with mouth open, the other with mouth closed.



L = Agyō 阿形 (mouth open) R = Ungyō 吽形 (mouth closed)  
At Sanjūsangendō 三十三間堂, Kyoto  
12th Century, Life Size Wooden Statues



Agyō 阿形 H = 836.3 cm  
Kongō Rikishi 金剛力士 (Kongou, Kongo)  
Wood with Paint (Saishiki 彩色)  
Made by the famous **Kei school** of sculptors.  
(including **Unkei** and **Kaikei**) in the Kamakura Era.  
Tōdaiji Temple 東大寺 (Toudaiji, Todaiji), Nara.



Ungyō 吽形 H = 842.3 cm  
Kongō Rikishi 金剛力士 (Kongou, Kongo)  
Wood with Paint (Saishiki 彩色). Made by the famous **Kei school** of sculptors.  
(including **Unkei** and **Kaikei**) in the Kamakura Era. Tōdaiji Temple 東大寺, Nara.

THE MANDALA OF THE ESOTERIC SCHOOLS (Shingon, Tendai) – the main vehicle for both Myo-ō Category and Tenbu Category in Japan.

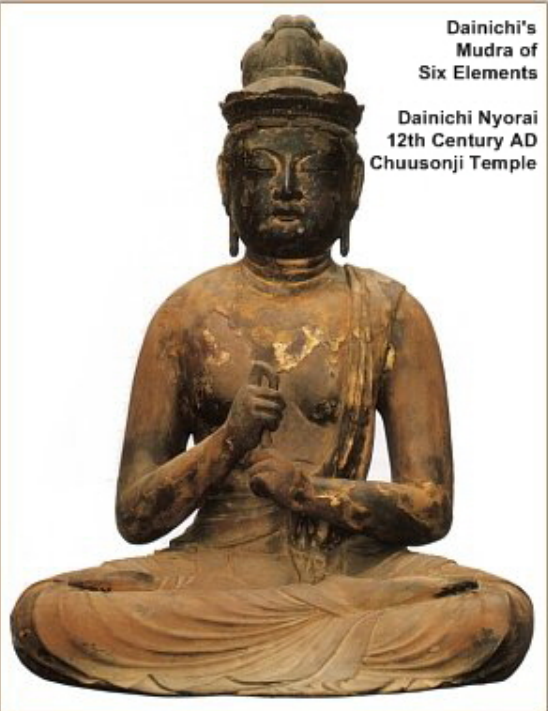
**Japan's Ryōkai (Ryokai) Mandala**  
**Ryōkai = Two Realms = Diamond World and Womb World**  
**Followed by Mandala A-to-Z Glossary & Mandala A-to-Z Deity Dictionary**  
There are numerous mandala forms in Japan, but the most widely known is the **Ryōkai Mandala** 両界曼荼羅 (Mandala of the Two Realms or Two Worlds). This famous mandala pairing is represented by the **Taizōkai Mandala** 胎藏界曼荼羅 (Womb World, Matrix Realm) and the **Kongōkai Mandala** 金剛界曼荼羅 (Diamond World, Adamantine Realm). As a unified set, the pair embody the central devotional images of modern Esoteric practice in Japan. The **Kongōkai Mandala** is associated with wisdom (chi 智), while the **Taizōkai Mandala** is associated with ultimate principle (ri 理). Below, on this page, we present graphical layouts and descriptions for each of the principle mandala sections and related deities. Jump to [Kongōkai Layout](#) | [Taizōkai Layout](#)



Kongōkai (Diamond World)  
National Treasure, Heian Period, 9th C  
Kyōōgokoku-ji 教王護国寺 Temple (Tōji 東寺)  
From temple catalog



Taizōkai (Womb World)  
National Treasure, Heian Period, 9th C  
Kyōōgokoku-ji 教王護国寺 Temple (Tōji 東寺)  
From temple catalog



**Dainichi's  
Mudra of  
Six Elements**  
  
**Dainichi Nyorai**  
**12th Century AD**  
**Chuusonji Temple**

Deity Families & Divisions

**Maroon text** = Jumps within this page or to other site page.  
Simplified. This topic is much more complex. For example, deities in the Kongōkai Mandala are arranged in nine different panels (or nine mini mandala), while those in the Taizōkai Mandala are arranged in twelve different well-defined sections. See [Kongōkai Layout](#) | [Taizōkai Layout](#)

| MAHAYANA BUDDHISM<br>Ten Realms (Jikkai 十界)                               | KONGŌKAI FAMILIES<br>Kongōkai Mandala  | TAIZŌKAI FAMILIES<br>Taizōkai Mandala, Others   |
|---|--|---|
| 1. <b>Buddhas</b> (Jp: Nyorai, Tathagata, Hotoke 仏 -- highest level)      | 1. <b>Nyorai-bu</b> 如来部, Buddha Realm, Skt. = Tathagata-kula; <b>Dainichi Nyorai</b> 大日如来 (Skt. Mahavairocana)   | 1. <b>Buddha</b> = Butsubu 仏部; e.g., Butsugen Mandala   |
| 2. <b>Bodhisattvas</b> (Jp: Bosatsu 菩薩); the compassionate ones           | 2. Kongōbu 金剛部, Daimond Realm, Skt. = Vajra-kula; <b>Ashuku Nyorai</b> 阿闍 (Skt. Akshobhya)   | 2. <b>Buddha Crown</b> = Butchōbu 仏頂部; e.g., Ichijikinin Mandala, Sonshō Mandala  |
| 3. <b>Pratyeka Buddhas</b> (Jp: Engaku 縁覺); self-enlightened beings       | 3. Hōbu 宝部, Jewel Realm, Skt. = Ratna-kula; <b>Hōshō Nyorai</b> 宝生 (Skt. Ratnasambhava)  | 3. <b>Sutra-Rite</b> = Kyōbōbu 經法部; e.g., Hokke Mandala, Ninnōgyō Mandala, and Shōgyō Mandala                                   |
| 4. <b>Sravaka Arhats</b> (Jp: Shōmon 声聞); listeners of Buddhist teachings | 4. Rengebu 蓮華部, Lotus Realm, Skt. = Padma-kula; <b>Amida Nyorai</b> 阿弥陀 (Skt. Amitabha)  | 4. <b>Bodhisattva</b> = Bosatsubu 菩薩部; also includes Kannonbu 觀音部; e.g., Nyoirin Mandala, Miroku Mandala, Hachiji Monju Mandala |
| 5. <b>Heavenly Beings</b> (Skt: Deva, Jp: Ten 天)                          | 5. Katsumabu 羯磨部, Action Realm, Skt. = Karma-kula; <b>Fukūjōju Nyorai</b> 不空成就 (Skt. Amoghasiddhi)   | 5. <b>Myō-ō</b> = Myō-ō-bu 明王部; e.g., Aizen Mandala, Anchin Mandala   |
| 6. <b>Humans</b> (Skt: Manasya, Jp: Ningen 人間)                            | Before reaching Japan, the mandala traditions of India, China, and Tibet followed a three-family format – the Buddha, Lotus, and Vajra families. Around the 8th century, however, this was replaced by a five-family format. | 6. <b>Celestial Gods</b> = Tentōbu 天等部; e.g., Enmaten Mandala, Kichijōten Mandala   |
| 7. <b>Bellicose Demons</b> (Skt: Asura, Jp: Ashura 阿修羅)                   | <b>Related Links</b><br><a href="#">Five Tathagata of Wisdom</a><br><a href="#">Dainichi Buddha</a>  | 7. <b>Others</b> . Deities who personify the planets, stars, and heavenly bodies; e.g., Jūniten Mandala                         |
| 8. <b>Animals</b> (Skt: Tirasyoni, Jp: Chikushō 畜生)                       | In a larger grouping, there are actually 28 forms in Three Realms (Skt: Triloka).  |   |
| 9. <b>Hungry Ghosts</b> (Skt: Preta, Jp: Gaki 餓鬼)                         |  |   |
| 10. <b>Hells</b> (Skt: Naraka) Jp: Jigoku 地獄 -- the lowest level          |  |   |

**TAIZŌKAI DEITIES.** The Womb World, Matrix Realm). In the popular **Genzu Version** of the **Taizōkai Mandala**, some 414 deities are arranged in various deity families and grouped in 12 (twelve) sections or courts.



Taizōkai (Womb World)  
National Treasure, Heian Period  
Kyōōgoku-ji (Tōji 東寺) Temple



TAIZŌKAI FAMILY DIVISIONS

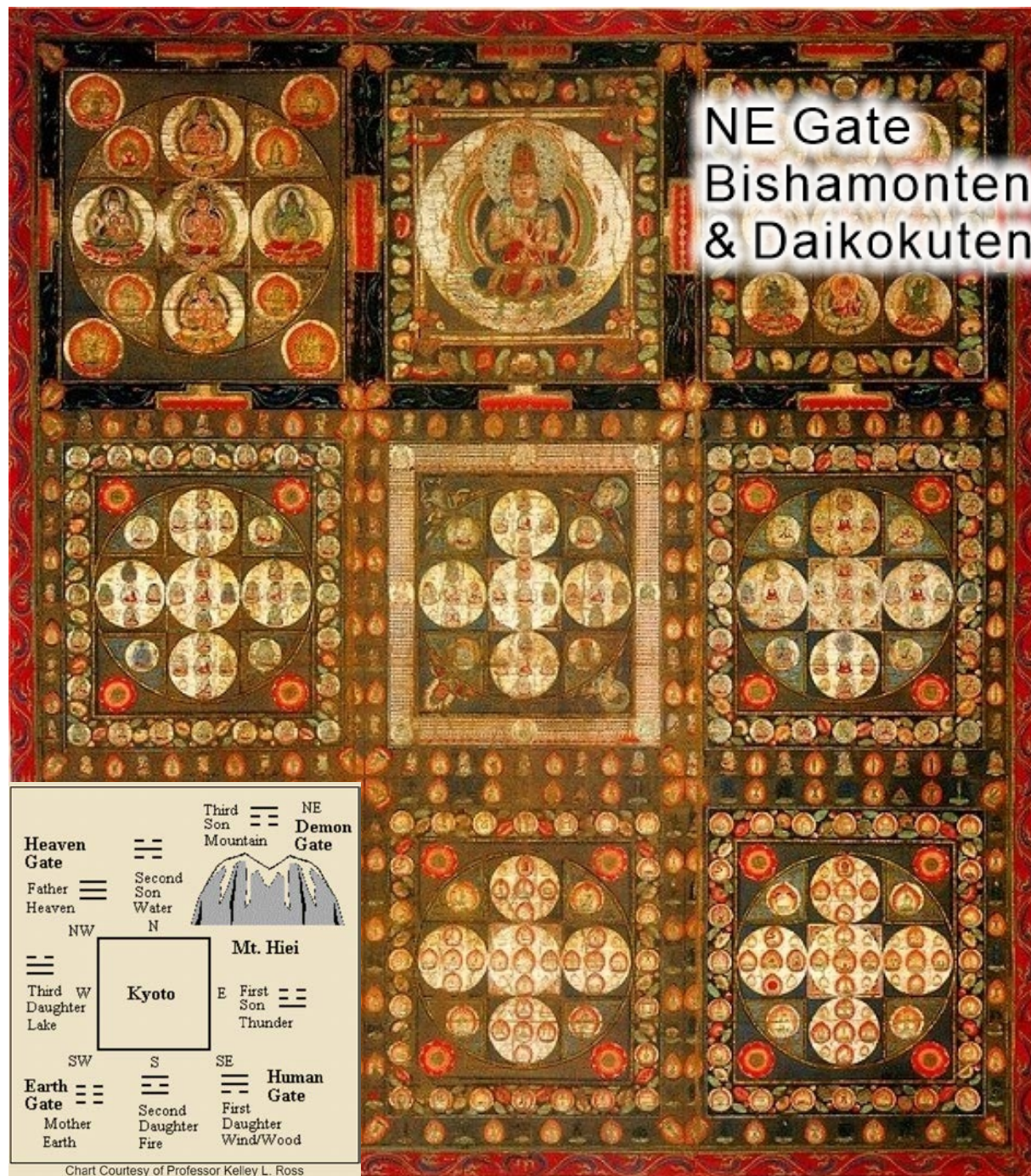
**Note:** Each below-listed mandala has in [Mandala A-to-Z Glossary](#).

- Buddha Family, Buddha Division = Butsubu 仏部 (e.g., Butsugen Mandala)
- Buddha-Crown Family = Butchōbu 仏頂部 (e.g., Ichijikinin Mandala, Sonshō Mandala)
- Sutra-Rite Division = Kyōbōbu 經法部 (e.g., Hokke Mandala, Ninnōgyō Mandala, and Shōgyō Mandala)
- Kannon Family = Kannonbu 觀音部 (e.g., Nyoirin Mandala; Kannon's esoteric forms appear primarily in the Kannon-in 觀音院 or in the Renge-in 蓮華院 section of the Taizōkai)
- Bodhisattva Family = Bosatsubu 菩薩部 (e.g., Miroku Mandala, Hachiji Monju Mandala)
- Myō-ō Family = Myō-ō-bu 明王部 (e.g., Aizen Mandala, Anchin Mandala)
- Celestial Gods = Tentōbu 天等部 (e.g., Enmaten Mandala, Kichijōten Mandala)
- Others (e.g., deities who personify the planets, stars, and heavenly bodies)

The Taizōkai Mandala (Womb World) is associated with ultimate principle (ri 理) and the Kongōkai Mandala (Diamond World) with mind or intelligence (chi 智). Says the Digital Dictionary of Buddhism: “The two realms are fundamentally one, as are the absolute and phenomenal, e.g. water and wave. The Garbhadhātu (Womb World) representing the 理 and the 因 (principle and cause), the Vajradhātu (Diamond World) the 智 and the 果 intelligence/reason and the effect, i.e. the fundamental realm of being, and mind as inherent in it 胎 and 金剛.” <end DDB quote> NOTE TO ME……talk about Dainichi mudra……five fingers inanimate, only with consciousness (sixth finger) can we grow beyond our stupidity.

In Esoteric Buddhism, the five elements (Jp. = Goshiki 五行) are combined with one additional element, the MIND, for a total of six. Statues or paintings of Dainichi Buddha, the central deity of Esoteric Buddhism in Japan, often portray Dainichi with a characteristic hand gesture called the Mudra of Six Elements (Chiken-in 智拳印), in which the index finger of the left hand is clasped by the five fingers of the right. This mudra symbolizes the unity of the five worldly elements (**earth, water, fire, air, and space**) with a six element, spiritual consciousness.

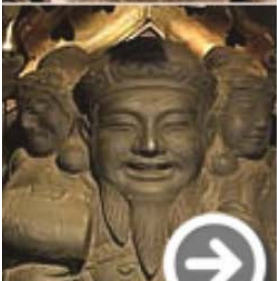
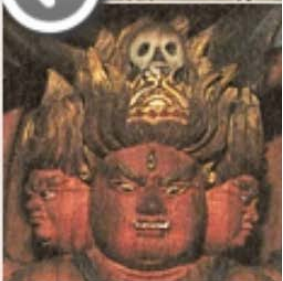
In the Mandala artform, which is of special importance to Japan's Esoteric sects (Shingon, Tendai), the five elements are considered inanimate (this equates to the Garbhadhatu or Womb World Mandala). Only by adding the sixth element -- mind, perception, or spiritual consciousness -- do the five become animate. This equates with the Vajradhatu or Diamond World Mandala. Phrased differently, there is “unity” only when the sixth element is added. Without the sixth element, ordinary eyes see only the differentiated forms or appearances.



Some individual Ten (Deva) are given independent status as objects of devotion. The main (and most popular today) are: (1) Shitennō 不動明王 (2) Deva of the 28 Lunar Mansions · Nijūhasshuku 二十八宿 (3) 12 Deva Protectors · Jūniten 十二天 (4) Daikokuten 大黒天 (5) Benzaiten 弁財天 (6) Bishamonten 毘沙門天 (7) Kankiten 歓喜天

Demonic

Benign



pyright 2017 Schumacher

INDEPENDENT DEVA

Some Tenbu are worshipped independently, not as part of a group.

**Benzaiten** (Sarasvati)

Governs music and arts; one of Japan's Seven Lucky Gods.

**Bishamonten** (Tamonten)

God of warriors, and one of Japan's Seven Lucky Gods.

**Daikokuten** (Mahakala)

One of Japan's Seven Lucky Gods; god of wealth and farmers.

**Idaten** (Skanda)

Kitchen God, Protector of Monasteries and Monks.

**Kankiten** (Ganesh)

God of Conjugal Harmony, Child-Giving, & Long Life. Also known as Shouten, Shoten, Kangiten.

**Kariteimo** (Hariti)

Easy delivery & child-rearing. Also known as Kishimojin.

**Kichijōten** (Sri Laksmi)

Wife of Vishnu in Hindu myth; wife or sister of **Bishamonten** in Buddhism. Also read Kishshouten or Kudokuten.

**Suiten** (Varuna). Suiten's Shinto counterpart is

**Suijin**, who is worshipped independently. Suiten is not an object of central devotion.



Happi Benzaiten  
8-Armed Version  
Warrior Goddess  
Defender of the State  
[Details Here](#)



Myō-on Benzaiten  
Playing Biwa.  
Music Goddess.  
Main Iconic Form.  
[Details Here](#)



Daibenten; holds sword  
and jewel; Bestower of  
Virtue & Merit.  
[Details Here](#)



Hadaka Bente  
Nude deity playing  
biwa.  
Kami of Art.  
[Details Here](#)



Uga Benzaiten  
Snake & shrine  
gate atop head  
Food kami.  
[Details Here](#)



Tenkawa Bente  
Amanogawa; three white snake  
heads  
Food kami.  
[Details Here](#)

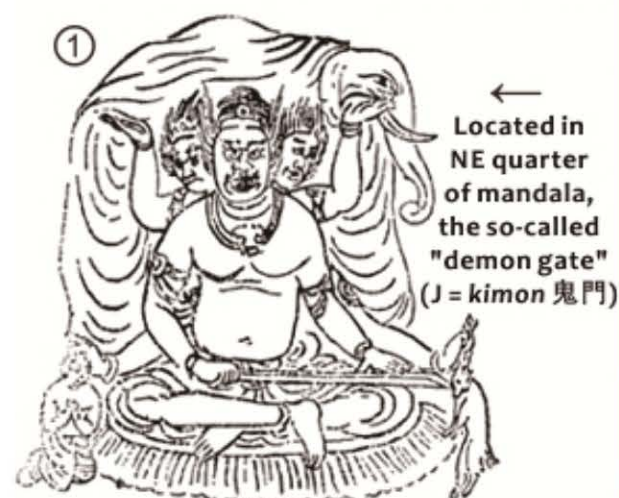
8th Century Onward  
Traditional Form

9th Century  
Onward

Late 12th Century Onward  
Goddess of music, art, warriors, wealth, luck. Worshipped independently.



# Slide Eleven -- Condensed Visual Guide to Daikokuten Iconography in Japan OLDEST EXTANT DRAWINGS • FIERCE • DEMONIC • MANDALA FORM



← Located in NE quarter of mandala, the so-called "demon gate" (J = kimon 鬼門)

Genzu Version  
現図曼荼羅, 9th century



Taizō Zuzō Version  
胎藏図像, 9th century

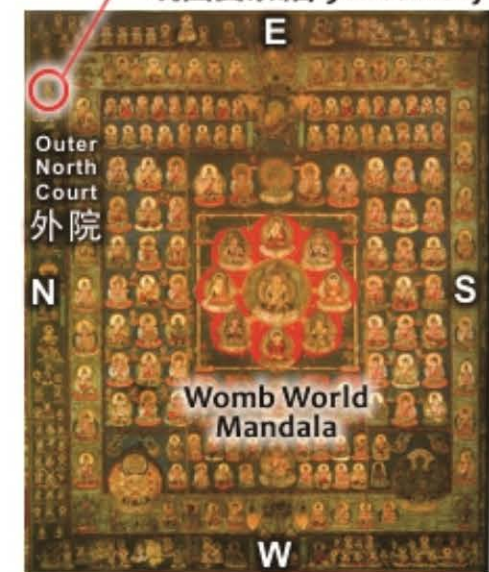
Placed at the southern gate of the mandala, just like the Taizō Kyūzuyō. In contrast, the multi-armed Mahākāla of the Genzu appears in the northeast.



Only one head, not three; human sinner replaced by upright sword; ewe moves from middle-left arm to middle-right arm; holds trident, not sword.



⑥ Daihi Taizō Dai Mandara  
大悲胎藏大曼荼羅  
12th century



Womb World  
Mandala



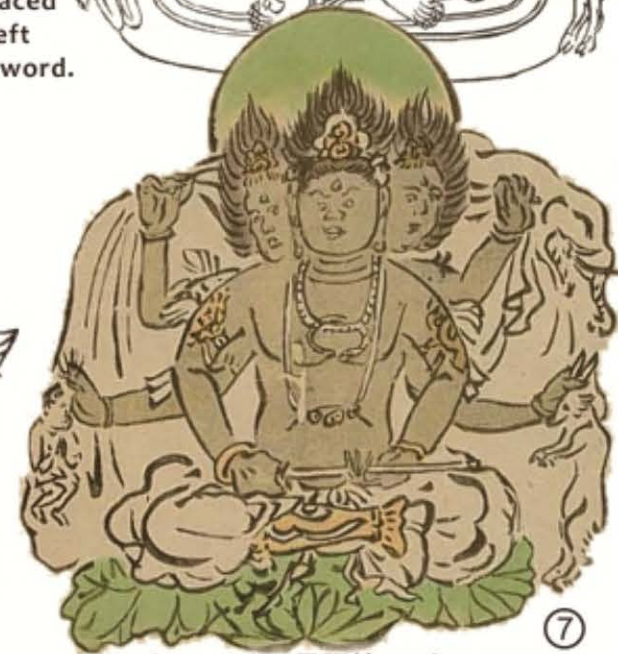
Taizō Kyūzuyō Version  
胎藏旧図様, 9th century

Unlike the Genzu and Taizō Zuzō mandalas, the Taizō Kyūzuyō contains two Mahākāla, both placed in the south section of the mandala (in the second and fourth registers).

← Unlike the Mahākāla of the Taizō Zuzō, these two hold empty bowls in their left hands. The bowl is known as the kapāla (lit. = skull); Śiva's drinking bowl, generally filled with blood.



⑤ Taizō Kyūzuyō Version  
胎藏旧図様, 9th century



Kakuzenshō 覺禪抄, 12th century

# Slide Twelve -- Condensed Visual Guide to Daikokuten Iconography in Japan OLDEST EXTANT DRAWINGS • FIERCE • DEMONIC • MANDALA FORM

Mahākāla



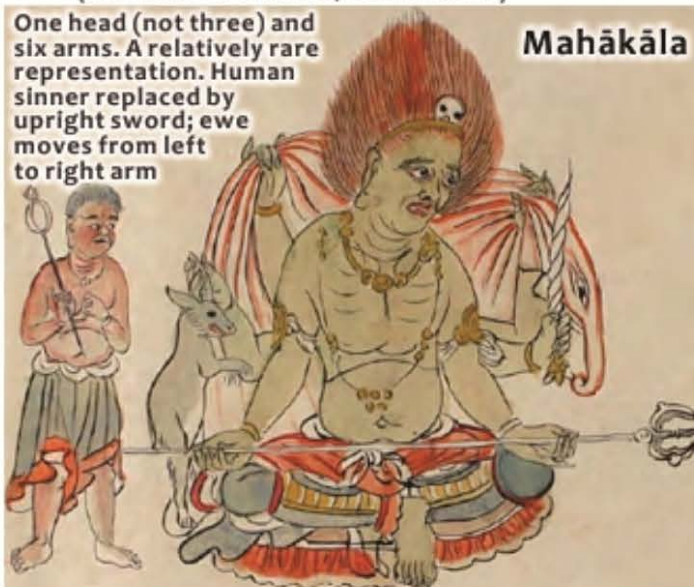
① Zuzōshō 図像抄 (Iconographic Selections), 12th century, compiled by Heian-era monks Yōgon 永嚴 (1075-1151) and Ejū 惠什 in the first half of the 12th century, TZ 3, 3006. The Zuzōshō is considered the first comprehensive iconographic treatise produced in Japan.

② Shoson Zuzō Shū 諸尊圖像集, 13th Century (Kanazawa Bunko, Yokohama)



Mahākāla

③ Shoson Zuzō Shū 諸尊圖像集, 13th Century (Kanazawa Bunko, Yokohama)



Mahākāla



Mahākāla

④ Shishu Goma Honzon Byō Kenzoku Zuzō 四種護摩本尊及眷屬圖像 early 13th century

# Slide Twenty-Seven -- Condensed Visual Guide to Daikokuten Iconography in Japan

## OLDEST EXTANT STATUES ATOP RICE BALES • HOLDING MALLET • PUDGY



①

Wish →  
Granting  
Jewels

Hokkeji Temple 法華寺, Nara. 1319 CE. H = 27.5 cm. Painted wood. Oldest extant statue of Daikoku seated on rice bales, holding a magic mallet and treasure sack. The auspicious wish-granting jewel is engraved on the mallet, the rice bales, and his clothing. Wearing cap (eboshi 烏帽子). Sitting in half lotus posture (hanka), right leg pendant.



②

Amanosan Kongō-ji Temple 天野山金剛寺, Osaka. 1336 CE. H = 82 cm. Wood. Known as Hashiri Daikoku 走り大黒天 (Running Daikoku), for his left leg is stepping forward. Fiber-scope analysis shows the name of the sculptor as Keishun 慶春.



③

Formerly at Tōdai-ji Temple 東大寺, Nara. Now owned by Agency for Cultural Affairs. 1347 CE. H = 90 cm. Wood, crystal eyes. By Kaiken 快兼. ICP. Stands on bales of rice, holds magic mallet & treasure sack. Wish-granting jewels & other auspicious symbols adorn clothing & sack.



④

Hase Dera 長谷寺, Kamakura. 1412 CE. H = 62 cm. Wood. Ichiboku Zukuri 一木造 (single-block carving). The temple's placard says the Muromachi-era (?) text 大黒天神法式 equates Daikokuten with Ōkuninushi. Daikokuten was in fact conflated with Ōkuninushi around the early-to-mid 14th century. See Slide 34.



⑤

Kongōrinji Temple 金剛輪寺, Aichi-gun, Shiga. Muromachi era. H = 155 cm. Wood. Yosegi Zukuri 寄木造り (joined-block carving). Wearing crown shaped as wish-granting jewel. Although not extremely old, this statue shows that the deity's warrior aspect did not disappear suddenly.

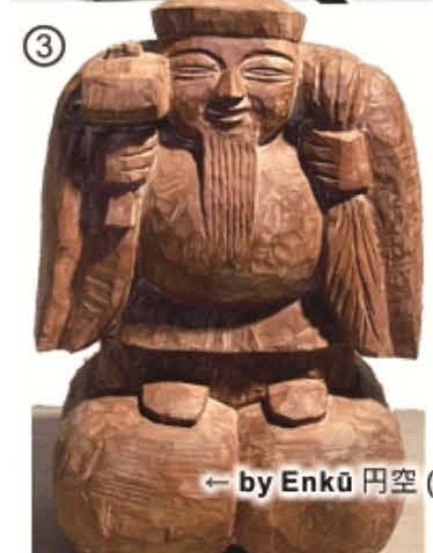
Slide Thirty-Seven -- Condensed Visual Guide to Daikokuten Iconography in Japan  
EARLY MODERN ERA (1603-1867) -- DAIKOKUTEN AS GOD OF THE RICE PADDY

Ta-no-Kami  
田の神

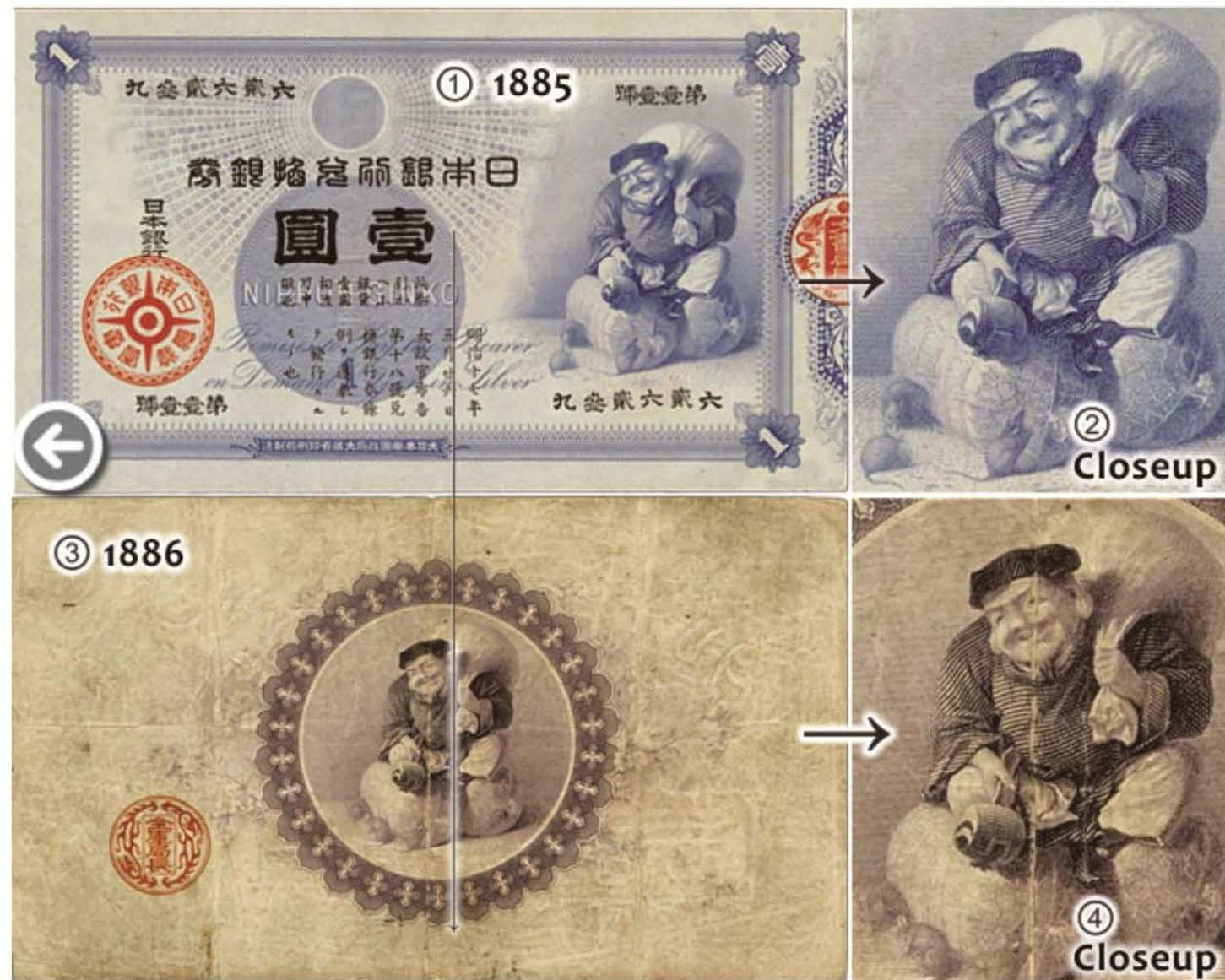


# Slide Forty-One -- Condensed Visual Guide to Daikokuten Iconography in Japan

## EARLY MODERN ERA (1603-1867) HATCHET CARVINGS BY ENKŪ AND MOKUJIKI






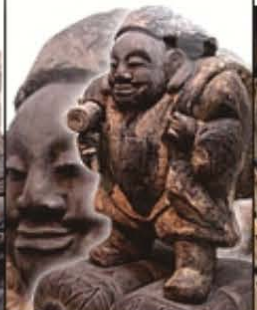






# Slide Forty-Two -- Condensed Visual Guide to Daikokuten Iconography in Japan 19th-20th Century -- LEGAL TENDER & COMMEMORATIVE COINS



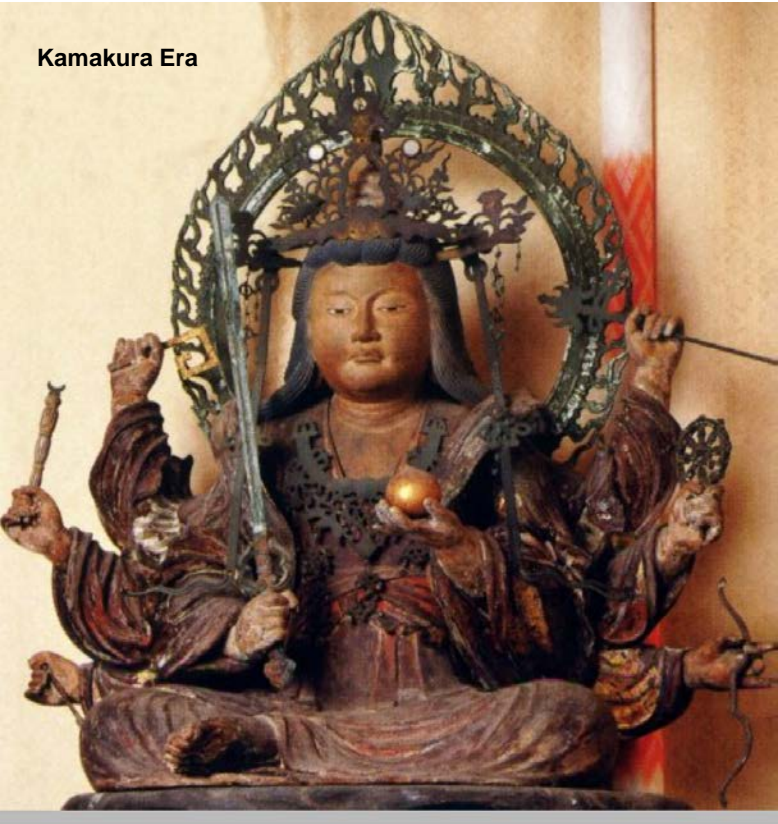
# Slide Forty-Four -- Condensed Visual Guide to Daikokuten Iconography in Japan

## CONCLUSION - Benign Daikokuten, Demonic Mahākāla

Chinese Proverb 一枚の絵は一千語に匹敵する  
One Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

| 9th - 10th C.  | 11th - 12th - 13th C.  |   | 14th-15th C.   | 16th-17th C.   |   | 18th C.   | 19th C. to Modern Times  |   |
|--|--|---|--|--|---|---|--|---|
|    |   |          |    |   |   |    |   |  |
| <div>←</div> <p><b>Demonic Multi-Headed Multi-Armed</b><br/>Via China to Japan</p> <p><b>Flesh-Eating Blood-Drinking Graveyard Deity</b></p> | <p><b>Benign Human Form Standing Version</b><br/>Shingon School<br/>Stern Face, Gentry</p> <p>Japan's oldest statues of standing and sitting human-like Daikokuten</p> | <p><b>Benign Human Form Sitting Version</b><br/>Tendai School<br/>Stern Face, Martial</p> | <p><b>"Santa Claus Form"</b><br/>Dwarfish, pudgy, rice bales, mallet, treasure sack, jewel</p> <p>Modern Japan's "Standard" Form of Daikokuten</p> | <p><b>Benign 3-Faced Daikoku, One Body, 3 Faces, 6 Arms</b></p> <p>Daikokuten becomes extremely popular during this period, partly owing to his link to the <i>kami</i> Ebisu (<i>kami</i> of oceans, fishing folk, merchants)</p> | <p><b>Six benign forms of Daikokuten</b></p> <p><b>Daikokuten as God of Rice Paddy</b><br/>Holds rice scoop and rice bowl</p>   | <p><b>Seven Lucky Gods Daikokuten is the core member</b></p> <p>Daikokuten's key role in this group is largely forgotten</p>                  | <p><b>Daikokuten on modern Japan's first bank notes</b></p> <p>Daikokuten still remains one of Japan's most popular deities of good fortune, wealth, &amp; the kitchen</p>   | <p><b>Modern-day cartoon image Santa Claus</b></p>                                  |
| ▼ <b>Related Deities</b>   | ▼ <b>Related Deities</b>   |   | ▼ <b>Related Deities</b>   | ▼ <b>Related Deities</b>   |   | ▼ <b>Related Deities</b>  | ▼ <b>Related Deities</b>   |   |
| Dākinīs, Durgā, Gaṇa, Gaṇeśa, Hārītī, Jambhala, Kubera, Kālī, Pāñcika, 7 Mothers, Śiva, Skanda, Vaiśravaṇa, Yama                             | Benzaiten, Bishamonten, Dainichi Buddha, Daijizaiten, Dakiniten, Dōro Shōgun, Ebisu, Enma, Kankiten, Kenrō Jiten, Matarajin, Shōten (Gaṇeśa), Ugajin (snake)           |   | Benzaiten, Bishamonten, Dakiniten, Ebisu, Inari, Matarajin, Miwa Kami, Ōmononushi, Ōnamuchi, Sannō, Shōten, Ugajin                                 | Benzaiten, Bishamonten, Daikokuten, Dakiniten, Ebisu, Inari, Matarajin, Shōten, Tanokami   |   | Benzaiten, Bishamonten, Ebisu, Fukurokuju, Hotei, Jurōjin, Matarajin, Ōkuninushi<br><b>Aggressively conflated with <i>kami</i> Ōkuninushi</b> | Ōkuninushi, Seven Lucky Gods<br>Modern Japan's "standard" form of Daikokuten emerged in the early 14th century. Today, his ancient mythologies are largely forgotten. There is no clear precedent for the popular image which Daikokuten assumed in the medieval period. |   |
| <b>Some of Daikokuten's many affinities, associations, conflations, and identifications.</b>   |  |   |  |  |   |   |  |   |

Kamakura Era



Happy Benzaiten (8-Armed Benzaiten). At the Hoan-den of Enoshima Jinja Shrine (Enoshima Island, Japan), Kamakura Era. Kanagawa Prefectural Asset. Wood. H = 59.2 cm, Yosegi-zukuri joined-block technique, crystal eyes. Legend says shogun Minamoto Yoritomo asked the Buddhist monk Mongaku to make this statue to curse his enemies. Since the Edo period, this statue has been prayed to by samurai seeking protection on the battle field and victory in war. Photo and data from Fujisawa City Tourist Association, Enoshima Jinja, and Kamakura Butsuzo Meguri Magazine (Gakken), June 15, 2010 edition.

Image 8 of 192

CLOSE X



OLDEST STATUE  
NARA 8<sup>th</sup> Century  
Modern reproduction



Enoshima Benzaiten, Nude Sculpture,  
Located inside Enoshima Jinja.

CLOSE X

# Slide Thirty-Six-- Condensed Visual Guide to Daikokuten Iconography in Japan

## DAIKOKUTEN'S LINKS TO THE EARTH GODDESS, LAND GODS, LANDLORD KAMI



Slide 36. Special Report by Iyanaga Nobumi (b. 1948). The 11th-C. Japanese text *Daikoku Tenjin Hō* [T.21.1287.0355b13] says Daikokuten is a form of earth-deity Kenrō Jiten 堅牢地天 (Slide 35, Fig. 9). This fusing certainly impacted the 14th-C. identification of Daikokuten with the *kami* of Mt. Miwa & the 17th-C. conflation of Daikokuten with the *kami* Ōkuninushi (of Izumo). Details on Slide 35. Kenrō Jiten's origin can be traced back to ancient India's "earth goddess" Pṛthivī 地天 (J = Jiten). Curiously, in China, Pṛthivī morphed into a male "land" deity who manifested itself in the guise of an old man (Fig. 7). This sex change represents a double transformation -- a female goddess turned into an elderly male, & the earth replaced with the land. Pṛthivī is closely associated with Kubera / Vaiśravaṇa (J = Bishamonten; details Slides 22-24). In Asia & Japan, Pṛthivī appears in early art holding the warrior deity Tobatsu Bishamonten 兜跋毘沙門天 atop her hands (Figs. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5). Like Tobatsu Bishamonten, India's Mahākāla (aka Daikokuten) was, early on, described as standing atop Pṛthivī's hands. The Chinese text *Issaikyō Ongi* (Sound & Meaning of All Sūtras) by central-Asia monk Huilín 慧琳 (737-820) IT.54.2128.366b14-171 says: "Under Mahākāla's feet is earth goddess Dìshén Nǚ Tiān 地神女天 (aka Pṛthivī), who holds him on

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# Slide Twenty-Nine -- Condensed Visual Guide to Daikokuten Iconography in Japan

## THREE-FACED SANMEN DAIKOKUTEN • 1 BODY, 3 HEADS, 6 ARMS



Daikokuten, Bishamonten, & Benzaiten originated in the Hindu pantheon. All are members of Japan's Seven Lucky Gods.

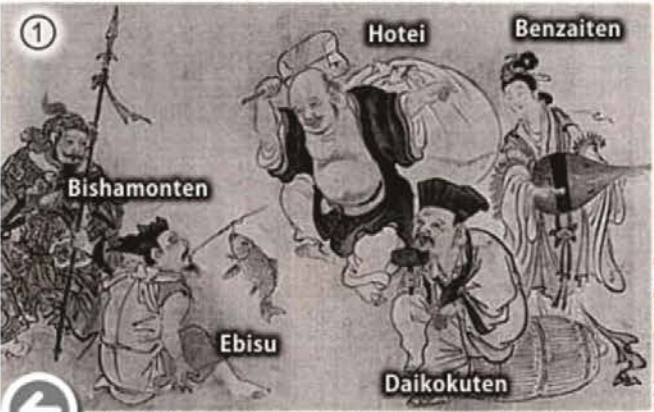


Slide 29. Mahākāla / Daikokuten's (M/D) demonic form (Slides 11–15) never achieved the popularity of his benign human form (Slides 16–21). Around the 16th C. CE, his demonic & benign forms were “reconnected” in a new configuration known as Sanmen Daikokuten (SMD) 三面大黒天, which fused three deities into one – M/D, Bishamonten 毘沙門天 (Skt = Vaiśravaṇa) & Benzaiten 弁才天 (Skt = Sarasvatī). This form is specific to Japan. Unknown who created it, but most legends involve Saichō 最澄 (767–822). See Slide 19 for legends. This form protects warriors & the three treasures (Buddha, Buddhist law, community of believers). It shares affinities with Kōjin 荒神 (fig. 6 above), Japan's god of the kitchen fire. Today both are considered identical, for icons of SMD placed in kitchens are called Kōjin. By the Edo era, the main pillar of the home (often near the kitchen) was called Daikoku-

Says Iyanaga Nobumi:  
“This triad confirms the mythical associations between Mahākāla, Vaiśravaṇa (Kubera, Pāṇcika) & Sarasvatī (Śrī-Lakṣmī)—associations that are not apparent but underlie the evolution of these deities across India, Central Asia, China & Japan.”



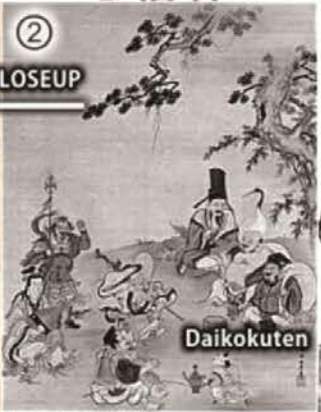
Slide Thirty-One -- Condensed Visual Guide to Daikokuten Iconography in Japan  
DAIKOKUTEN & JAPAN'S SEVEN GODS OF GOOD FORTUNE



① One of the oldest drawings; an abbreviated assemblage of the group. By Kanō Tanyū 狩野探幽 (1602-1674).



② One of the oldest paintings of all seven in the standard set. By Kanō Yasunobu 狩野安信 (1613-1685).



② CLOSEUP



⑥ Standard sets (L) by Tosa Mitsusuke 土佐光祐 (1675-1710) and (R) by Tosa Mitsuyoshi 土佐光芳 (d. 1772)



Fukurokuji is missing from this set. In his place we find the female deity Kichijōten.

In modern times, however, Kichijōten is no longer a member of the Seven Lucky Gods. In her place we find Fukurokuju.

Her conflation with the more popular goddess Benzaiten is one probable reason for her removal from the group. **Today the group of seven includes only one female, Benzaiten.**

Shichifukujin  
七福神

See →  
Slide 30



|           |            |             |
|-----------|------------|-------------|
| 老 壽 酒 美 恵 | 天 祥 吉      | 天 門 沙 魁     |
| Jurojin   | Kichijoten | Bishamonten |
| 宮 王 船     | 天 黒 大      | 天 財 辨       |
| Hotei     | Daikokuten | Benzaiten   |

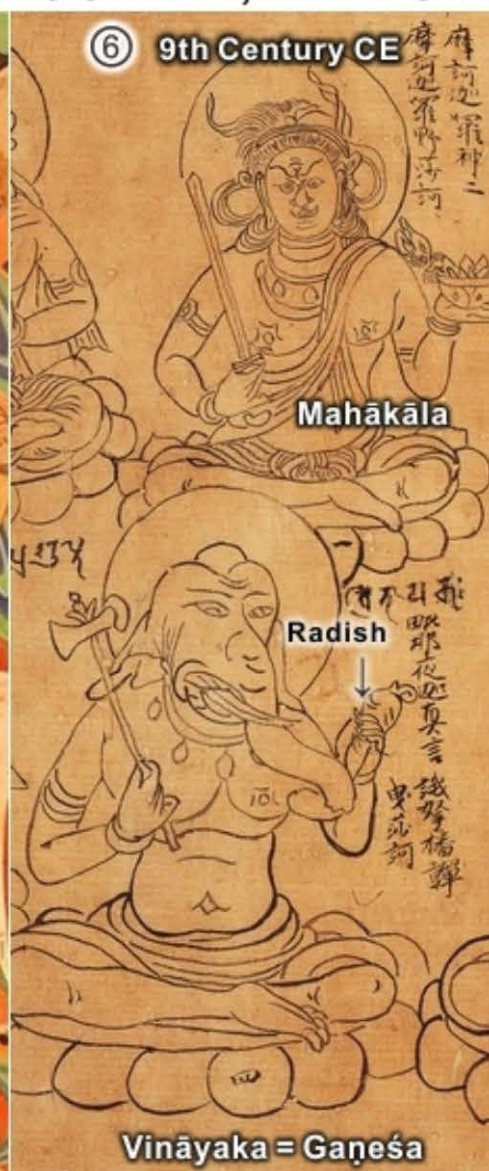
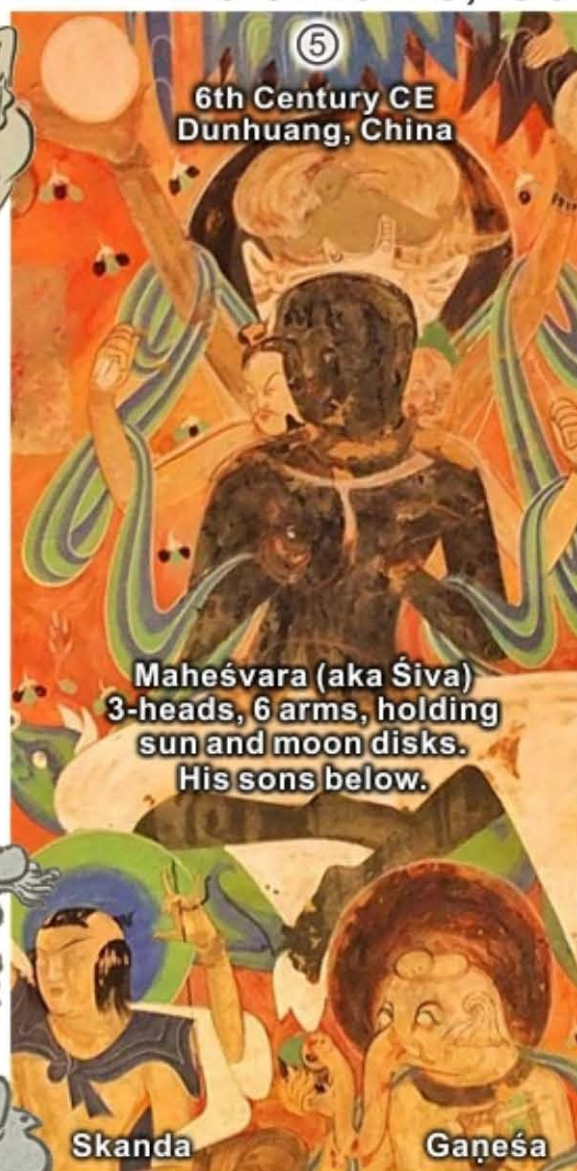
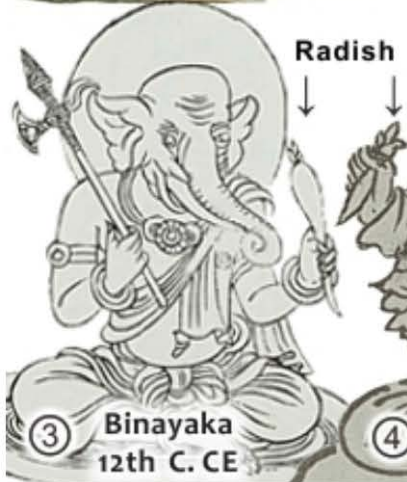
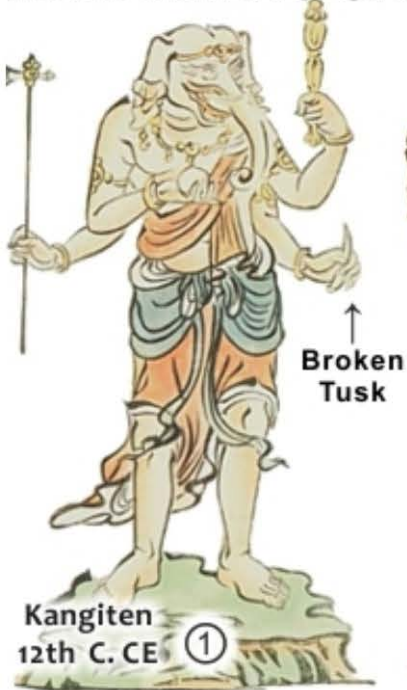
Butsuzō-zu-i 仏像図彙, 1783 CE. Non-standard set.  
The 1690 & 1783 versions of this text show non-standard sets.  
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Ebisu, Daikokuten, Benzaiten, Bishamonten, Jurojin, Fukurokuju, Hotei

# Slide Fourteen -- Condensed Visual Guide to Daikokuten Iconography in Japan

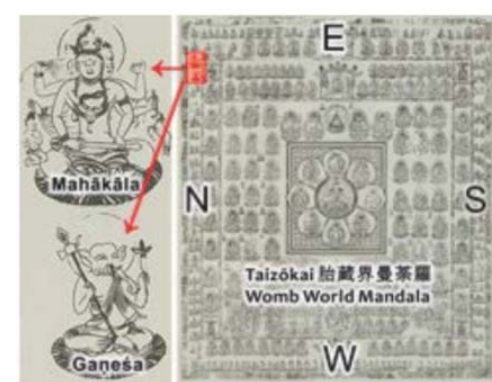
## MAHĀKĀLA & GAṆEŚĀ -- OVERLAPPING ORIGINS, ICONOGRAPHY, AND FUNCTIONS



**Gaṇeśa's Various Names**  
SANSKRIT (S) / JAPANESE (J)

S = Gaṇeśa, Nandikēśvara  
S = Gaṇapati, Gajāśura  
S = Vināyaka, J = Binayaka  
J = Shōten 聖天, Tenson 天尊  
J = Kangiten 歡喜天  
J = Daishō Kangiten 大聖歡喜天

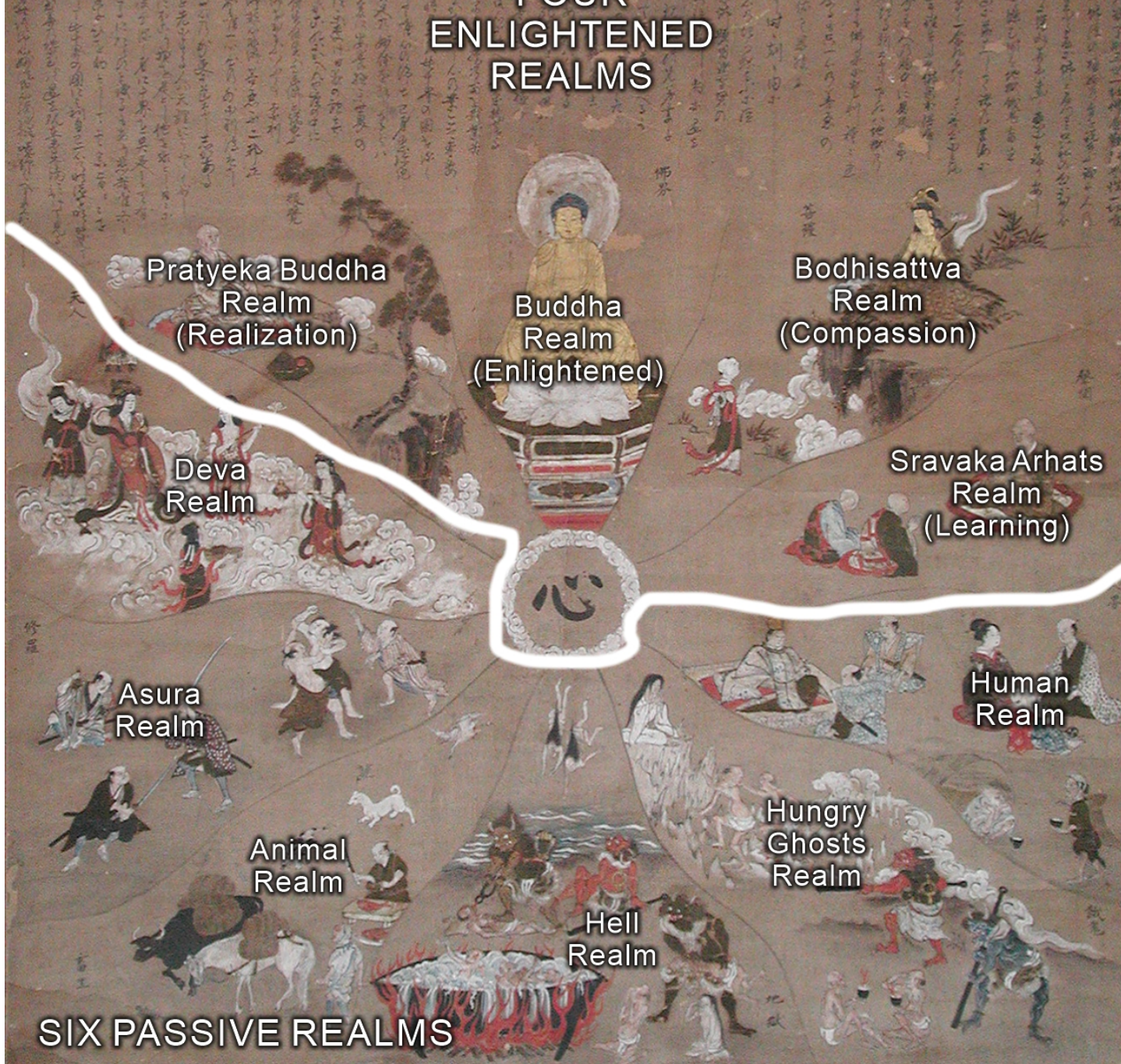




It must be stressed that the devas, in Japan, were considered Buddhist figures from the very start. Mahākāla & Gaṇeśa are “paired” together in the outer northeast (NE) corner. NE is particularly inauspicious in Chinese geomancy and is called the "demon gate" (J = kimon 鬼門) -- place where demons gather & enter.



# ENLIGHTENED REALMS



## TEN WORLDS OF EXISTENCE The "Ten Realms" (Jp: Jikkai 十界)

1. Hells (Skt: Naraka, Jp: Jigoku 地獄 -- the lowest level)
2. Hungry Ghosts (Skt: Preta, Jp: Gaki 餓鬼)
3. Animals (Skt: Tirasyoni, Jp: Chikushō 畜生)
4. Bellicose Demons (Skt: **Asura**, Jp: Ashura 阿修羅)
5. Humans (Skt: Manusya, Jp: Ningen 人間)
6. Heavenly Beings (Skt: **Deva**, Jp: Ten 天)
7. Sravaka **Arhats** (Jp: Shōmon 声聞); listeners of Buddhist teachings
8. Pratyeka Buddhas (Jp: Engaku 縁覚); self-enlightened beings
9. Bodhisattvas (Jp: **Bosatsu** 菩薩); the compassionate ones
10. Buddhas (Jp: **Nyorai**, Tathagata, Hotoke 仏 -- highest level)

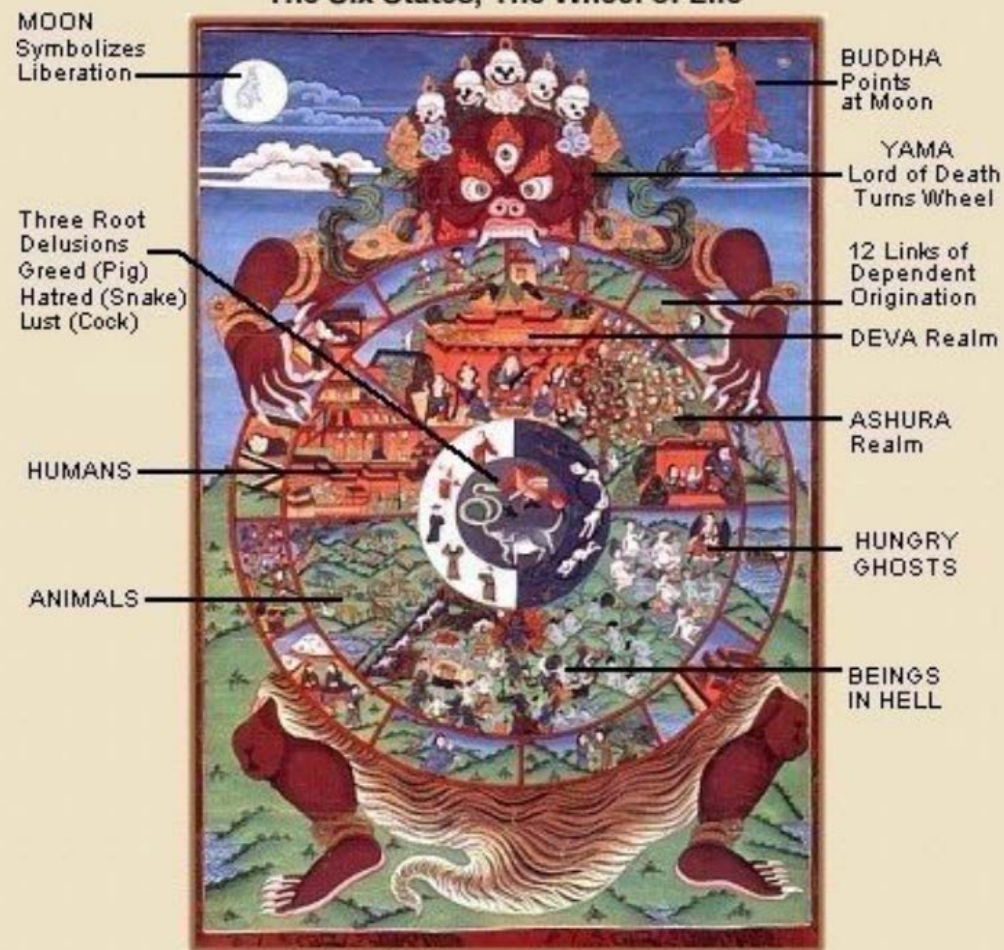
### TEN WORLDS MAY ALSO BE WRITTEN AS:

1. Hell (Beings in Hell -- the lowest level)
2. Hunger (Hungry Ghosts)
3. Animality (Animals)
4. Anger (**Ashura**)
5. Tranquility (Humans)
6. Rapture (**Deva**)
7. Learning (**Theravada** Traditions, **Arhat**)
8. Realization (**Theravada** Traditions, **Arhat**)
9. Bodhisattva (**Mahayana** Traditions, **Bosatsu**)
10. Buddha (**Nyorai**, Tathagata, Hotoke -- highest level)

The "Ten Realms" are divided into two groups. The first group (1 to 6) comprises the **Six Paths of Suffering** (also called the **Wheel of Life** in Tibet). The second group (7 to 10) comprises the four realms of enlightened existence, the "Four Noble Worlds." For many more details, [click here](#).

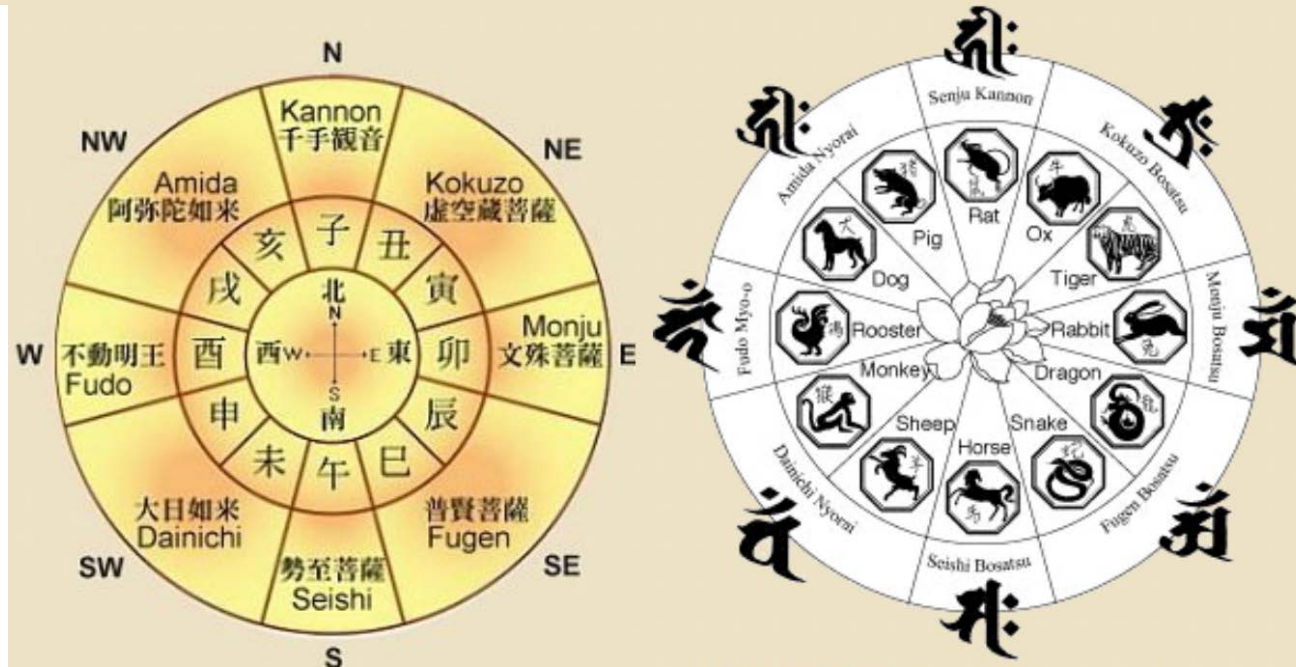
## SIX PASSIVE REALMS

# **TIBETAN TANKA** **The Six States, The Wheel of Life**



# SIMPLIFIED ZODIAC CHART (Solar Calendar)

| Zodiac Animal | Buddhist Patron | Compass Direction | Year of Birth<br>For people born in Jan. or Feb., see Caveat |
|---------------|-----------------|-------------------|--|
| Rat 子         | Senju Kannon    | N                 | 1924, 1936, 1948, 1960, 1972, 1984, 1996, 2008               |
| Ox 丑          | Kokūzō Bosatsu  | NE                | 1925, 1937, 1949, 1961, 1973, 1985, 1997, 2009               |
| Tiger 寅       | Kokūzō Bosatsu  | NE                | 1926, 1938, 1950, 1962, 1974, 1986, 1998, 2010               |
| Hare 卯        | Monju Bosatsu   | E                 | 1927, 1939, 1951, 1963, 1975, 1987, 1999, 2011               |
| Dragon 辰      | Fugen Bosatsu   | SE                | 1928, 1940, 1952, 1964, 1976, 1988, 2000, 2012               |
| Snake 巳       | Fugen Bosatsu   | SE                | 1929, 1941, 1953, 1965, 1977, 1989, 2001, 2013               |
| Horse 午       | Seishi Bosatsu  | S                 | 1930, 1942, 1954, 1966, 1978, 1990, 2002, 2014               |
| Sheep 未       | Dainichi Nyorai | SW                | 1931, 1943, 1955, 1967, 1979, 1991, 2003, 2015               |
| Monkey 申      | Dainichi Nyorai | SW                | 1932, 1944, 1956, 1968, 1980, 1992, 2004, 2016               |
| Rooster 酉     | Fudō Myō-ō      | W                 | 1933, 1945, 1957, 1969, 1981, 1993, 2005, 2017               |
| Dog 戌         | Amida Nyorai    | NW                | 1934, 1946, 1958, 1970, 1982, 1994, 2006, 2018               |
| Boar 亥        | Amida Nyorai    | NW                | 1935, 1947, 1959, 1971, 1983, 1995, 2007, 2019               |



Eight Buddhist Patron Deities  
and the 12 Zodiac Animals

8 Buddhist Patrons, 12 Zodiac Signs, & Sanskrit Seeds  
Courtesy Horie Yasutaka (Modern Buddhist Artist)

BUTSUZŌ = Images of the Various Buddhist Deities and Deity Classes

The term Butsuzō encompasses all of the below categories of gods, creatures, demons, & humans.

# 佛像 or 仏像

Chn. = Fóxiàng  
Jpn. = Butsuzō

## TEN REALMS OF THE UNENLIGHTED & ENLIGHTED (J = Jikkai 十界)

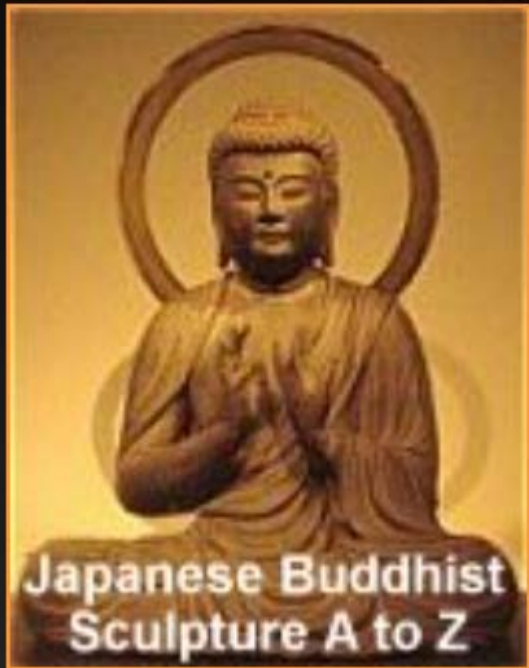
| REALM            | CLASS / CATEGORY         | JAPANESE TERM         | TYPE OF REALM       | KARMA CLASS              |  | NOTES                                     |
|------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|--|---|
| Realm 10 Highest | Buddhas                  | <i>Nyorai-bu</i> 如来部  | Enlightened Realm   | Free from Karmic Rebirth | Escape from Suffering and Karmic Rebirth         | Mahayana Traditions - highest level       |
| Realm 9          | Bodhisattvas             | <i>Bosatsu-bu</i> 菩薩部 | Enlightened Realm   | Free from Karmic Rebirth |  | Mahayana Traditions                       |
| Realm 8          | Pratyeka Buddha          | <i>Engaku-bu</i> 縁覚   | Enlightened Realm   | Free from Karmic Rebirth |  | Realization (Theravada Traditions, Arhat) |
| Realm 7          | Sravaka Arhats           | <i>Shōmon-bu</i> 声聞部  | Enlightened Realm   | Free from Karmic Rebirth |  | Learning (Theravada Traditions, Arhat)    |
| Realm 6          | Heavenly Deities (Deva)  | <i>Ten-bu</i> 天部      | Unenlightened Realm | Good Karma               | Six Realms of Karmic Rebirth (aka Wheel of Life) | Rapture                                   |
| Realm 5          | Humans                   | <i>Ningen</i> 人間      | Unenlightened Realm | Good Karma               |  | Tranquility yet suffering                 |
| Realm 4          | Bellicose Demons (Asura) | <i>Ashura</i> 阿修羅     | Unenlightened Realm | Good Karma               |  | Anger                                     |
| Realm 3          | Animals                  | <i>Chikushō</i> 畜生    | Unenlightened Realm | Evil Karma               |  | Servitude, Stupidity                      |
| Realm 2          | Hungry Ghosts            | <i>Gaki</i> 餓鬼        | Unenlightened Realm | Evil Karma               |  | Hunger (Hungry Ghosts)                    |
| Realm 1 Lowest   | Hells                    | <i>Jigoku</i> 地獄      | Unenlightened Realm | Evil Karma               |  | Beings in Hell -- lowest level            |

The “Ten Realms” are divided into two groups. The first group (1 to 6) comprises the Six Paths of Suffering (also called the Wheel of Life in Tibet). The second group (7 to 10) comprises the four realms of enlightened existence, the “Four Noble Worlds.”

\*\* Not included above, but definitely part of Buddhist cosmology and artistic representation in statuary and painting.

- Monks
- Kōsō高僧 •Soshi 祖師
- Sculptors
- Busshi 仏師
- Wisdom Kings
- Myō-ō 明王部

**A-to-Z  
Deity Dictionary  
4000+ Photos of  
Japan's Buddha  
Divinities**



[onmarkproductions.com](http://onmarkproductions.com)



国宝  
兜跋毘沙門天立像  
(とぼつびしゃもんてんりゅうぞう)  
唐時代



Kitsune (fox)  
Oinari's Messenger  
Fox at Tsurugaoka  
Hachimangu Shrine  
Kamakura City



Tanuki, modern, ceramic. Sake Kai Tanuki  
酒買狸 (lit. Tanuki Procuring Sake).  
Depicted with big tummy, staff, giant  
scrotum, straw hat, sake flask, and  
promissory note. Welcoming icon found  
frequently outside Japan's bars and  
eateries ("come in, don't be stingy"). Also  
a wealth-bringing icon adorning gardens.



Sannou (Sanno) Gongen  
Above two photos courtesy of **James Baquet**  
Female with babe and male monkey guard the gates  
at Hie Jinja (Hie Shrine), Akasaka, Tokyo, Japan



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Also known, in Japan, as [Daijizaiten](#) 大自在天, which is the translation of Sanskrit Mahesvara (also transliterated as Makeishura 摩醯首羅), one of the many names of [Shiva](#) (Siva), who, along with Brahma ([Bonten](#) 梵天) and Visnu is one of the three chief gods of Hinduism.

Indra – Taishakuten East, one of 12 deva. Protector of the Historical Buddha. king of the gods on Mt. Sumeru (Jp. = Shumisen 須弥山), and as a protector of the Historical Buddha

**Śiva. The "Destroyer."** Comes in various form, including Daikokuten 大黒天, Daijizaiten 大自在天 and Ishanaten 伊舍那天.

Brahmā. The "Creator." Lord who created the world. In Japan, Brahma is known as Bonten 梵天, one of 12 deva

Vishnu. The "Preserver." Represents ultimate reality, the all-pervading essence. In Japan, Vishnu appears in numerous forms, including **Ungyo** 吽形 (Ungyō), the latter the closed-mouth Nio Guardian. His wife in Hindu myths is the Buddhist deity known in Japan as Kichijoten 吉祥天 (Kichijōten) or Kudokuten 功德天, the goddess of fortune and merit. In Esoteric Buddhism, he appears as a divinity in the outer court 外金剛部院 (Jp. = Gaikongōbuin) of the Taizokai 胎藏界曼荼羅 (Taizōkai) mandala. He has many different names, including 那羅延天 (Skt. Nārāyana), 納拉辛哈 (Skt. Narasimha) and 婆藪天 (Skt. Vasudeva).

Sarasvati, Sarasvatī. The Hindu goddess of learning, known as Benzaiten 弁財天 in Japan, where she is worshipped as the goddess of music, poetry, learning, and art. She is one of Japan's Seven Lucky Gods.

