**PART ONE:**

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF *KAJI KITO***

**BEFORE NICHIREN’S TIME**

**CHAPTER ONE:**

**The Beginnings of Esoteric Buddhism in India**

Since Siddhartha Gautama became the historical Buddha and first introduced Buddhism to the world over 2500 years ago, its spread from India and adaptation into different countries and cultures have led to its development and differences in interpretation of the religion. The major branches of Buddhism include Theravada (“The School of the Elders”) and Mahayana (“The Great Vehicle”) Buddhism, the latter of which has spread primarily to East Asia. While the core teachings of Buddhism have remained the same, both branches have differing views of

the Buddha’s teachings (Herbrechtsmeier 1993: 1-5). Further subdivisions of Mahayana Buddhism, in particular, into separate Buddhist schools show varying views primarily based on issues of canonicity of scriptures and practice towards attaining *nirvana* (Enlightenment), liberation from suffering.

Another important category of Buddhism that developed after the end of Mah!y!na

Buddhism in India, is that of “Esoteric Buddhism”, which in Japanese is referred to as “*mikkyo*”. Other translations of this term can be found in Chinese and Korean as well (*Chinese. mijao* and *Korean. milgyo*). The term can often be divided into (*mi*(*tsu*)), which translates into “secret” and 􀚭(*kyo*), which is teaching, precept or religion (Masaki 2004: 5). Esoteric Buddhism in itself generally refers to tantric (Vajrayana) Buddhist thought, focusing primarily on the use of rituals, yet its secretive nature along with focus on translating tantric scriptures have resulted in its lack

of understanding, aside from providing a strong sense of mysticism. To explain in short, *mikkyo* uses both rituals and its associated Buddhist symbols in order to portray mysticism. Today, Esoteric Buddhism is a broad category consisting of different forms and as a result, there are specific forms that also incorporate and emphasize the use of flesh within the practice and others that do not. Further understanding of *mikkyo* requires looking at the historical roots and development of esoteric Buddhism until its incorporation into Japan.

**Indian Esoteric Buddhism**

The origins of tantric Buddhism stem from India, which many suggest were serving as a way for individuals to observe spirituality by projecting one’s fantasies of a radical religious path, driven by a yearning for ecstasy (Payne 2006: 9-11). This suggests a period demonstrating the zenith of Indian thought, which directly preceded the end of Indian Buddhism. Yet, the development and elaboration of tantric traditions in itself result from the social and political factors encompassed by the militaristic rule following the end of the Imperial Gupta and the beginnings of medieval India (500-1200 CE). The formation of esoteric Buddhism in itself could

be related to a differing form of Buddhism from the preceding period in that Buddhism in early Medieval India was a “tradition under duress” (Davidson 2003: 111-112). The argument remains that the period showed the centralization of power that would result in the “military opportunism” and become the fundamental core leading to the formation of esoteric Buddhism.

Despite the several societal changes of the time, some primary examples included the declination of *madhyamaka* (skeptical) and *pramanika* (epistemological) thought as well as the formation of feudal monastic estates (Davidson 2003: 99). Esoteric Buddhism as a whole encompassed the major aspects such as the ideology and aesthetics contained in the feudalistic ways of medieval India, thus furthering and representing the sanctification of both the society and the politics of the 7th to 8th century India. Even within this environment, there were two separate communities

that could be seen, including those that focused on either “institutional” or “noninstitutional” esotericism. While the institutional esotericism was formed by monks within monasteries and showed Machiavellian features, the noninstitutional esoteric ways were led by *siddha* (“perfected” or “accomplished”) ideology, derived from several origins, including not only local, but also outcaste groups (Davidson 2003: 173). The *siddhas*’ main attempts at legitimization primarily included validation of new scriptures and introduction of rituals. Thus, a symbiotic relationship between the esoteric rituals developed by the siddhas as well as its incorporation into

the monastic communities resulted in the beginnings of esoteric Buddhism.

The incorporation of rituals could stem from the emphasis that Buddhism was to be a

religion requiring physical practice. In particular, yogic practices provided a strong influence and altered to evoke a stronger sense of discipline. Thus, developers of esoteric Buddhism saw this as a way to connect both the physical body and the spirit (Levine 2009: xxii)—developing the spirit requires not only spiritual training and practice, but also use of physical practice such as yogic practices.

Aside from the social and political aspects explained, the time period also marked the last stage when Mahayana Buddhism was still practiced in India. Three aspects of esoteric Buddhism emphasized during this time included Buddhist mysticism, symbolism and rituals, all of which contributed to the development and eventual heightened interest of esoteric Buddhism by the common people (Masaki 2004: 12-26). Thus, the formation of Indian esotericism involved communities of monks and *siddhas* involved in developing mandalas, reciting esoteric mantras

and partaking in rituals.

The ultimate end of Indian esoteric Buddhism came during the 13th century along with

the gradual declination of Indian Buddhism. Historical reasons include violence and invasion by Islamic leaders and also disputes with Hindu lay people. However, during this time, Buddhist followers still remained in India, although by the 15th century, Buddhism in India no longer existed in the same form as when it had flourished centuries before (Payne 2006: 36; Masaki 2004: 12-26). A better understanding of the failed attempts at spreading Buddhism and thus esoteric Buddhism within India requires analysis starting from the state of the society during the 5th century, when approximately 1000 years had passed since the historical Buddha’s initial propagation of Buddhism to the world. Even during this time, debates between Hindu and Buddhist followers remained prevalent, though Hinduism played a larger significance and influence in the society during the time (Eliot 1998: 113).

Masaki states three possible reasons behind the lack of acceptance of Buddhism by the Indian people. The first includes that Buddhism of that time primarily spread among only the educated, separating the common people. In contrast, Hindu leaders did not concentrate on only a particular group of people of a specific rank, yet gave everyone a position and an opportunity to be incorporated within the religious sphere. The second reason included how Buddhism was more secluded because the temple or monastic setting remained the main location of Buddhist propagation. Similarly the priests who were the main propagators of the religion primarily stayed within these confines and therefore, transmission of Buddhist understanding to the lower ranked

individuals within the community remained difficult and less common. The isolated setting also did not provide a welcoming or friendly environment for the common people and did not allow people seeking advice from the priests to openly visit the temple. This further decreased the number of people who came to the temple (Masaki 2004: 12-26). Because often times religion provides a place of safe haven and a sense of belonging for the individual, a lack of approachability and friendliness probably provided a negative view of Buddhism. In fact,Hinduism that remained closer to the people would seem to provide a more positive approach towards faith and spirituality compared to Buddhism. While many emperors had once supported

the spread of Buddhism within the country, such kings were no longer in existence during that time. Further, the increasing invasions and battles within India also decreased the number of Buddhist individuals that had traveled to different temples to provide lectures on Buddhism. Agriculture in India, which maintained a stronger connection to Hinduism than Buddhism,became the main political and economic factor that influenced the Indian society (Eliot 2004: 330).

The first stage of development in esoteric Buddhism occurs approximately in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. The most prominent difference between esoteric Buddhism during and prior to this time is the emphasis on the purpose behind such practices. Initial esoteric practice focused on the general notion of attaining Enlightenment and guidance by the Sakyamuni Buddha. Therefore, the practice was defined by the use of mantras, which are words or a specific combination of words recited for the purpose of usually incantation. However, Masaki notes that classification of this initial stage as “esoteric Buddhism” could be too “basic”, since this suggests only the very

beginnings of what is now known as esoteric Buddhism (2004: 15). The development of esoteric Buddhism relates to the metaphor of “the practitioner becoming the overlord” (Davidson 2003: 114) and thus could represent the increasing sanctification of the sociopolitical environment of India during the 7th and 8th century. Yet, the commonly representative characteristic of esoteric Buddhism is in reference to the use of mandalas, a pattern or symbol of the universe presented in graphic form—often times it in the form of a circle and is primarily used during meditation.

Davidson notes relationships of this mandala to the sociopolitical environment where the Buddha, often placed in the center of the mandala, represents the position of the overlord, with respect to the other surrounding figures. In that same sense, using the mandala during meditation allows the individual to become the controller of their religious practice as well as sanctifying their world that they were living in (Davidson 2003: 131). In contrast, esoteric Buddhism in the 6th and 7th centuries focused on Mahavairocana, a celestial Buddha that is often interpreted as the *dharmakaya* (“truth body”) Buddha, meaning that combination or merging of the dharma or the teachings of the historical Buddha with the spirit of the historical Buddha. Especially in Sino-

Japanese Buddhism, Mahavairocana is suggested to embody *shunyata* or emptiness (Hakeda 1972: 72). Esoteric Buddhism became closer to the common people by suggesting that it would aid in accomplishing their wishes and needs. Thus, it provided a more direct relationship between the benefits attained from the individuals and the individual attaining enlightenment.

Recognizing the rapid declination of Buddhism around the 5th century, several Hindu

gods became sanctified and incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon. Particularly in the case of

Japanese Buddhism, we see that any of these deities adapted from Hinduism end their name with

“-ten”, such as “*Bishamonten*”, the Japanese name for Vaisravana, one of the Four Heavenly

Kings in Buddhism (Masaki 2004: 14). Most interestingly, this was probably significant because

Buddhism until that point had focused primarily on the need for individual practice in order to

accomplish one’s spiritual goals. However, by incorporating the Hindu gods that the Hindu

followers praised within esoteric Buddhism, it added an element of worshipping a higher deity

that could assist in achieving one’s spiritual goals. In doing so, however, the notion of praying to

a higher deity in seeking guidance made this practice of esoteric Buddhism very similar to

Hinduism. To differentiate between the two religions and practice, the developers of esoteric

Buddhism included the need for both a meditative and physical connection in the form of a

sexual act, a practice considered a taboo in most all religions (Masaki 2004: 14). The sexual act

can be visualized through meditation with a Hindu god. Yet this also correlates with the idea also

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developed during the second phase of development of esoteric Buddhism during the 6th and 7th

centuries, which included the notion of the practitioner trying to merge and become “one” with

Mahavairocana. The added notion of using sexual acts created the third and what could also be

seen as the last phase of development of esoteric Buddhism in India, ultimately known as

tantrism or Tantric Buddhism. However, it is important to note that all forms of esoteric

Buddhism do not encompass this idea, as we will later see, including early Chinese esoteric

Buddhism, which was initially generated from the beginnings of Indian esoteric Buddhist

thought. These texts became known as *tantras*, which focused on rituals and rules formulated

from the practice of religious teachings (Fic 2003: 23). In contrast, sutras focused on theoretical

and philosophical narratives. Often times there is a misunderstanding that all *tantras* incorporate

notions of sexual acts, however, this is not always the case.

After the rapid decline and end of Indian esoteric Buddhism in India, remains of esoteric

Buddhism were still observed in a few countries. Esoteric Buddhism in Bengal remained in a

much converted and altered form, more closely relating to Hindu teachings. Thus, Indian esoteric

Buddhism left little influence within the region (Masaki 2004: 12-26). Esoteric Buddhism

flourished and developed to a greater extent outside of India even before its disappearance in

India, including at one point in Indonesia and Cambodia. A more direct example is that seen in

Nepal, where its history suggests incorporation of two types of esoteric Buddhism, where the

first and initial type comes directly from India and therefore, a direct continuation of the original

Indian esoteric Buddhist teachings and thought after the decline of esoteric Buddhism in India. It

may be possible to further look into Nepal to better understand the Indian esoteric roots and its

basis for the current esoteric Buddhist teachings we observe today. The other form of interest is

that adapted from Tibetan esoteric Buddhism, which developed in the 1950s under the influence

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of Tibetan monks who fled Tibet due to political strife between Tibet and China (Ramble 2008:

279). Thus, Tibetan esoteric Buddhism has currently taken precedence over the initial Indian

esoteric Buddhist thought and has become the main source of esoteric Buddhist thought in

Nepal.

**Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism**

While many are less aware of the Indian origins of esoteric Buddhism, a more commonly

recognized example includes the elements of esotericism seen in Tibetan Buddhism. Esoteric

Buddhism caught the interest of westerners in the mid-1960s, due to increased interest in Tibet

and the trouble with Communist China that was widely noted during that time (Frechette and

Schatzberg 2002: 40). Thus, the majority of the information and analysis on esoteric Buddhism

in the west is in the context of Tibetan Buddhism.

A detailed explanation of Tibetan esoteric Buddhism will not be provided given the focus

of this paper. Esoteric Buddhism came directly to Tibet from India between the 7th and 13th

centuries, after what was noted as the third phase of development of Indian esoteric Buddhism

(Payne 2006: 79). Thus, Tibetan Buddhism is the most “esotericized” or developed form of

esoteric Buddhism and also Mahayana Buddhism. One important characteristic of Tibetan

esoteric practice includes the incorporation of both what could be termed the “developmental

stage” and the “completion” of esoteric practice. The “developmental stage” incorporates the

first and second phase of development of esoteric Buddhism, while “completion” includes the

use of sexual acts as the final means and the main characteristic from the last phase of

development of esoteric Buddhism (Masaki 2004: 44).

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The spread of Tibetan Buddhism could also result from the strong relationship between

religion and politics in Tibet, which is not or was only briefly observed in countries that adapted

esoteric Buddhism. Thus, Tibetan esoteric Buddhism has spread to several different countries

including Bhutan, where esoteric practices are very similar to Tibetan forms of practice as well

(Masaki 2004: 68).

**Chinese Esoteric Buddhism**

In the context of this paper, esoteric Buddhism that flourished in China, became the basis

that defined the core teachings of *mikkyo* brought to Japan. Esoteric Buddhism was initially

introduced to China between the 3rd and 4th century, which was a time when many Buddhist

sutras were being translated into Chinese. Thus, the initial introduction of esoteric Buddhism

included primarily the use of mantras, which had been popular since the first phase of

development of Indian esoteric Buddhism. Initial influence was limited and an increased

awareness and incorporation of esoteric Buddhism within the Chinese society came after the 7th

century, during the Tang dynasty (618-907) and took full effect in the 8th and 9th centuries

(Linrothe 1999: 11). Within this 100-year period, many changes to esoteric Buddhism were

observed, including the development of Chinese esoteric Buddhism that developed from the

teachings from the first two phases of development of Indian esoteric Buddhism. The following

patriarchs brought esoteric Buddhism to China: Subhakarasimba (*Japanese. Zenmui*) (637-725),

an Indian Buddhist monk attributed for translating esoteric scriptures, including the

Mahavairocana Sutra from Sanskrit to Chinese; Vajrabodhi (*Japanese*. *Kongouchi*) (671-741), an

Indian Buddhist monk who brought the Vajrasekhara Sutra, a Buddhist tantra, to China; and

Amoghavajra (*Japanese*. *Fukuu*) (705-774), a Buddhist monk translator of Indian and Sogdian

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background. Other influential individuals of this time period include Yi Xing (*Japanese*.

*Ichigyou*) (683-727), a Chinese Buddhist monk, mathematician and astronomer; and Hui-kuo

(*Japanese*. *Eka*) (746-805), primarily responsible for transmitting the teachings of Chinese

esoteric Buddhism to Kukai (774-835), the founder of the esoteric Buddhist lineage in Japan

(Tamura 2000: 89).

Esoteric Buddhism never truly flourished in China. During the initial introduction of

esoteric Buddhism to China, individuals were not as interested in the Buddhist notion of

attaining Enlightenment, but had hopes and curiosity towards the benefits that they could attain

from the “exotic” powers that came from esoteric teachings and prayers in Indian Buddhism.

However, for esoteric Buddhism to become prominent in China, there was the need to adjust and

find ways to co-exist with Daoism, one of the most a prevalent teachings of Chinese philosophy.

Daoism in itself used what could be termed as “magic” or “sorcery”, which to many were similar

to the mantras and prayers used within esoteric Buddhist practices. Both esoteric Buddhism and

Daoism emphasized the notion of assisting individuals in attaining their goals. Yet because the

attainment of Enlightenment remained one of the major factors behind the practice of esoteric

Buddhism, the Chinese were uninterested in the new form of Buddhism and remained strong

proponents of Daoism. Because esoteric Buddhism and Daoism co-existed for some time,

esoteric Buddhism is suggested to have left some influence on Daoism (Kohn 2000: 825). Aside

from the societal factors, another reason for the lack of spread of esoteric Buddhism results from

the persecution of Buddhists under the rule of Emperor Wuzong (814-846) during the Tang

Dynasty, which in effect almost succeeded in completely ridding of the Chinese lineage of

esoteric Buddhism (Buswell 2004: 141).

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The last reason for its disappearance could relate to how esoteric Buddhism held different

meanings for the people of China as opposed to several other countries that had incorporated the

tradition. When Amoghavajra translated the esoteric Buddhist texts, he made attempts to gain

political support for the acceptance of esoteric Buddhism among the Chinese. As a result, he

rewrote many of the texts containing segments stating that the purpose of prayers were for the

“people” to state that the purpose of prayers were for the “country”. Esoteric Buddhism in India,

although not widely accepted among the Indian community, did experience moments of positive

acceptance by the common people. By changing the purpose of prayers for the country,

Amoghavajra increased the expectations that the political leaders had with regards to religion

and its benefits for the country. This way of changing the meanings of the translations to better

adapt to the country can also be seen by different translators of esoteric texts. More specifically,

Amoghavajra along with other translators of the time added notions including the protection of

the emperor rather than the common people as it had originally been written in the Indian

esoteric texts, as well as concepts of filial piety, which remains an important component of

Chinese philosophy (Masaki 2004: 50-51). By adding both elements, esoteric Buddhism became

more popular among both the Chinese civilians as well as gaining support of the spread of

esoteric Buddhism from the emperor. In some sense, we can argue that this does not represent

the true origins and reason behind the development of esoteric Buddhism. Esoteric Buddhism

later adapted into Japan would encompass elements of Chinese esoteric Buddhism. In the end,

esoteric Buddhism could not fully live up to the expectations and promises written in

Amoghavajra’s translations and resulted in the decline of Chinese esoteric Buddhism in China.

While this marked the first disappearance of esoteric Buddhism in China, another

possible attempt of esoteric Buddhist revival occurred during the Song dynasty (960-1279) when

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