

SHINGON BUDDHISM

Kūkai and Esoteric Buddhism

Outstanding among the Buddhist leaders of the Heian Period was Kūkai (774 – 835), a man whose genius has well been described, "His memory lives all over the country; his name is a household word in the remotest places, not only as a saint, but as a preacher, a scholar, a poet, a sculptor, a painter, an inventor, an explorer, and—sure passport to fame—a great calligrapher."¹

Kūkai came from one of the great aristocratic families. At the time of the decision to move the capital from Nara, Kūkai's family was closely associated with the group opposed to the move, and was even implicated in the murder of the leader of the opposing faction. The subsequent disgrace of his family may have been a factor in Kūkai's eventual decision to become a Buddhist monk rather than to win the high place in the government that his talents and birth should have guaranteed him. Even as a small boy he showed exceptional ability in his studies, and was taken under the protection of his maternal uncle, a Confucian scholar. In 791 Kūkai entered the Confucian college in the capital. According to some sources, it was in the same year that he completed the first version of his *Indications to the Teachings of the Three Religions*, a work which treats the doctrines of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism more or less novelistically. In its early form the book may actually have been intended more as a literary exercise than as an interpretation of the three religions. If it was in fact composed in 791, it was an amazing achievement for a youth of seventeen, but, as often in the case of the great men of former ages, it may be that Kūkai's admirers have sought to make him appear even more of a prodigy than he was.

The 797 version of the *Indications* was Kūkai's first major work. In it he proclaimed the superiority of Buddhism over the other two religions discussed because it went beyond them in its concern for man's



Mandala of the Diamond (detail), Muromachi Period, 15th-16th c.

future existence. Kūkai did not deny the validity of Confucian and Taoist beliefs as such, but pointed out how inadequate they were. For Kūkai Buddhism was not only superior, but actually contained all that was worthwhile in the other two beliefs. We can thus find even in this early work signs of the syncretism which marked his mature philosophy. Although Kūkai clearly reveals himself as Buddhist in the *Indications*, we know that he was not satisfied with the forms of the religion known to him in Japan. In later years he recalled that period of his life: "Three vehicles, five vehicles, a dozen sūtras—there were so many ways for me to seek the essence of Buddhism, but still my mind had doubts which could not be resolved. I beseeched all the Buddhas of the three worlds and the ten directions to show me not the disparity but the unity of the teachings."²

In the hope of finding the unifying Buddhism he sought, Kūkai sailed to China in 804 with the same embassy that Saicho also accompanied, although on a different ship. At this early date a voyage to China was extremely hazardous; ships which arrived safely were the exception and not the rule. When Kūkai's ship was about to sail, apprehension of the dangers

¹ G.B. Sanson, *Japan a Short Cultural History* (London, 1946), p. 230.

² From Kūkai's so-called *Testament*, written by another hand. Quoted in Moriyama (ed.), *Kōbō Daishi Den*, p. 85.

was so great that the ambassadors' "tears fell like rain and everybody present also wept."³ The crossing took thirty-four days, and instead of arriving at the mouth of the Yangtze, the probable goal, the ship reached the coast of Fukien, where the authorities were at first unwilling to let the Japanese ashore. Kūkai's mastery of written Chinese here served the embassy in good stead; the governor was so impressed that he created no further obstacles.

Kūkai proceeded with the embassy to the capital at Ch'ang-an. There he met his great master Hui-kuo (746-805) who was immediately struck by the young Japanese and treated him as his chosen disciple. After Hui-kuo's death in the following year Kūkai was selected to write the funeral inscription, a signal honor for a foreigner. He returned to Japan late in 806. The Emperor Kammu, who had strongly favored the removal of the capital from Nara, and who was thus presumably not so well disposed towards Kūkai, had died in the spring of that year, and his successor showed Kūkai every kindness. After Kūkai had been granted many honors, he asked in 816 for permission to build a monastery on Mt. Kōya, which later became the center of the Shingon Sect. In 822 Saichō, Kūkai's rival, died, and in the following year Kūkai was appointed Abbot of the Tōji, the great Buddhist temple which commanded the main entrance of the capital. He died in 835 on Mt. Kōya.

The Buddhism which Kūkai learned in China and brought back to Japan was known as the True Words (*Mantrayāna* in Sanskrit, *Shingon* in Japanese). The name itself indicates the importance accorded to speech as one of the Three Mysteries—body, speech, and mind. These three faculties are possessed by every human being, but in them resides all secrets, and through them one can attain to Buddhahood. The mysteries of the body include the various ways of holding the hands (known as *mūdra*) in accordance with the Buddha or bodhisattva invoked, the postures of meditation, and the handling of such ritual instruments as the symbolic thunderbolt (*vajra*) and lotus flowers. The mysteries of speech included the "true words" and other secret formulas. The mysteries of the mind referred mainly to the "five wisdoms," methods of perceiving truth. In Shingon Buddhism

these mysteries are transmitted orally from master to disciple and not written in books where anyone might read of them. This constitutes one of the main differences between esoteric (for the initiated) and exoteric (for the public) Buddhism. The reason given for keeping these teachings secret is that, unlike the doctrines of Shākyamuni, the historical Buddha, which were expounded with the limitations of his audience in mind, the esoteric teachings were voiced for his own enjoyment by Vairochana, the cosmic Buddha. The truths of the esoteric teachings were considered to be absolute, independent of place or time, and uniting in them the truths of all schools of thought. Only the initiated could hope to understand fully doctrines of such magnitude.

In the Esoteric school of Buddhism the relation between a master and disciples was extremely close. Often the master would divulge all of his knowledge of the secret teachings only to one pupil of outstanding ability. Kūkai related how his master, Hui-kuo, waited almost until his death before he found in the Japanese an adequate receptacle for his knowledge. The personal nature of the transmission of the teachings was such that no independent Shingon sect was formed in China. It was left to Kūkai to present the Shingon teachings as a systematized doctrine and thus to establish a sect. The immediate occasion for Kūkai's *Ten Stages of the Religious Consciousness*, in which Shingon is treated as a separate philosophy, was a decree issued in 830 by the Emperor Junna ordering the six existing Buddhist sects to submit in written form the essentials of their beliefs. Of the works submitted at this time, Kūkai's *Ten Stages* was by far the most important, both in quality and magnitude. It consisted of ten chapters, each one presenting a successive stage upward of religious consciousness. The work was written entirely in Chinese, not merely good Chinese for a Japanese writer, but with an ornate poetical style which may remind one somewhat of Pope's attempt in the *Essay on Man* to present philosophical ideas in rhymed couplets. Kūkai's use of this cumbersome medium of expression was dictated largely by the fashion of his time. We may regret this today, for in spite of Kūkai's remarkable mastery of the techniques of Chinese composition, his statement of the doctrines of Shingon Buddhism was inevitably hampered by the necessity of casting his words into a rigid and unsuitable mold. His writings are today difficult to

³ Kuwabara Jitsuzō. "Daishi no Nyūto" in *Kōbō Daishi to Nihon Bunka*. P. 479.

understand, and his attempts at parallel constructions made him at times prolix; but in spite of such handicaps Kūkai remains the towering intellectual figure of Japanese Buddhism.

The *Ten Stages* was the first attempt made by a Japanese to appraise existing Buddhist literature of every variety preliminary to his elucidation of the doctrines of a new sect. Kūkai even went beyond the field of Buddhism in his discussion of the stages of the religious life: Confucianism and Taoism were considered as two stages of the ten. At the bottom of the ten stages Kūkai placed the animal life of uncontrolled passions, the life without religious guidance. Only one step upwards was Confucianism, where the mind is as yet ignorant of the true religion, but is led by teaching to the practice of secular virtues. The third stage was Taoism (and, according to some authorities, Brāhmanism), where the believers hope for heaven but ignore its nature. Two Hīnayāna stages follow; here there is a partial understanding only, and the highest aspiration is that of personal extinction in Nirvāna. This is in contrast to the Mahāyāna belief that even those who have attained Heaven must descend to the lower stages of existence to help save others. The sixth stage is the first of Mahāyāna belief sometimes identified as Quasi- or Pseudo-Mahāyāna. It is that of Hossō Buddhism which aims at discovering the ultimate entity of cosmic existence in contemplation, through investigation into the specific characteristics of all existence, and through the realization of the fundamental nature of the soul in mystic illumination.⁴ Because it is Mahāyāna it is also characterized by its compassion for those who still wallow in ignorance. The seventh stage is the Sanron, which follows Nāgārjuna in the "Eightfold Negations" as a means of eliminating all false conceptions which hinder the mind in its search for truth. The eighth stage is that of the universality of Tendai where one moment contains eternity and a sesame seed may hold a mountain. The Kegon teachings, with its insistence on interdependence and convertibility, form the ninth stage. At the summit are the esoteric teachings of Shingon.

Although Kūkai insisted on the difference between the exoteric teachings of the other schools of

Buddhism and the esoteric Shingon teachings, an examination of doctrine would seem to show that the concept of Vairochana, the cosmic Buddha, had been anticipated by the Tendai concept of the eternal Buddha or the Kegon interpretation of Lochana Buddha. The essential difference was that the latter two concepts of Buddhahood were purported to have been visions revealed to the historical Buddha, while the Vairochana Buddha discussed by Kūkai was not merely an ideal, but the cosmos itself, limitless, without beginning or end. The cosmos was held to consist of six elements: earth, water, fire, air, space, and consciousness. Unlike certain other Buddhist schools, Shingon did not consider the world to be consciousness only; matter and mind are inseparable, "two but not two." In the Shingon insistence on consciousness as an element it differed from the Chinese Five Elements which were physical forces. Esoteric Buddhism was able to synthesize both the previous Buddhist concepts of the universe and the yin-yang theory of the five elements. It was later also to absorb Shinto.

The great appeal of Esoteric Buddhism for Heian Japan lay in its aesthetic qualities. Kūkai himself excelled in the arts, and this fact may partially explain the important role which art played in his teachings. Kūkai's master, Hui-kuo, had told him that only through art could the profound meaning of the esoteric scriptures be conveyed, and when Kūkai returned to Japan he elaborated this theory:

The law [dharma] has no speech, but without speech it cannot be expressed. Eternal truth [*tathatā*] transcends color, but only by means of color can it be understood. Mistakes will be made in the effort to point at the truth, for there is no clearly defined method of teaching, but even when art does not excite admiration by its unusual quality, it is a treasure which protects the country and benefits the people.

In truth, the esoteric doctrines are so profound as to defy their enunciation in writing. With the help of painting, however, their obscurities may be understood. The various attitudes and mudrās of the holy images all have their source in Buddha's love, and one may attain Buddhahood at sight of them. Thus the secrets of the sūtras and commentaries can be depicted in art, and the essential truths of the esoteric teaching are all set forth therein. Neither teachers nor students can dispense with it. Art is what reveals to us the state of

⁴ M. Anesake, *History of Japanese Religion*, p. 95.

perfection.⁵

The arts' were generally considered by Kūkai's school under four aspects: 1) painting and sculpture, 2) music and literature, 3) gestures and acts, and 4) the implements of civilization and religion. Ability in any or all of the arts may be achieved by a mastery of the Three Mysteries, and can result in the creation of flowers of civilization which are Buddhas in their own right. For Kūkai whatever was beautiful partook of the nature of Buddha. Nature, art and religion were one. It is not difficult, then, to see why so aesthetic a religion found favor at a time when Japanese civilization was at the height of its flowering.

Probably the most important use of painting made by the Shingon school was in the two Mandalas, representations of the cosmos under the two aspects of potential entity and dynamic manifestations. The indestructible potential aspect of the cosmos is depicted in the Diamond (*Vajra*) Mandala. In the center Vairochana Buddha is shown in contemplation, seated on a white lotus and encircled by a white halo. Around him are various Buddhas and the sacred implements. The dynamic aspect of the cosmos is depicted in the Womb (*Garba*) Mandala, "wherein the manifold groups of deities and other beings are arrayed according to the kinds of the powers and intentions they embody. In the center there is a red lotus flower, with its seed pod and eight petals, which symbolizes the heart of the universe. . . ."⁶ Vairochana Buddha is seated on the seedpod of the lotus and the petals are occupied by other Buddhas.

The Mandalas were used to represent the life and being of Vairochana Buddha, and also served to evoke mysterious powers, much in the way that the mudrās were performed. One important ceremony where the Mandalas figured was that in which an acolyte was required to throw a flower on the Mandalas. The Buddha on which his flower alighted was the one he was particularly to worship and emulate. It is recorded that Kūkai's flower fell on

Vairochana Buddha both in the Diamond and Womb Mandalas. His master was amazed at this divine indication of the destiny in store for the young Japanese.

An unusual feature of Kūkai's teachings was the emphasis placed on a knowledge of Sanskrit. It is not certain what degree of proficiency Kūkai himself was able to attain in Sanskrit after his relatively brief study of the language in China, but with his unusual gifts he may well have gained a considerable command. He described the importance of Sanskrit:

Buddhism had its inception in India. The lands of the West and those of the East are culturally and geographically far removed, and both in language and writing India differs from China. Thus we have had to rely on translations in order to study the Buddhist texts. However, the True Words in the original language are exceedingly abstruse, each word possessing a profound meaning. This meaning is changed when its sound is altered, and can easily be falsified by different punctuation. One may get a rough impression of the meaning, but no clear understanding. Unless one reads the Sanskrit original it is impossible to distinguish the qualities of the vowels. That is why we must go back to the source.⁷

According to traditional accounts at least, Kūkai put his Sanskrit to excellent use in the invention of the Japanese syllabary (*kana*), a contribution which made possible the glorious literature of the Heian Period. Regardless of Kūkai's part, it is certain that the syllabary was evolved in imitation of Sanskrit use.

Esoteric Buddhism became the most important religion of Heian Japan. Although its profound secrets could be transmitted only from masters to their disciples, the main features of the doctrines could be grasped quite easily. Life was conceived of in terms of constant change, upwards to Buddhahood, or downwards to hell, when Mahāyāna compassion led the enlightened ones to seek the salvation of those still living as "butting goats." However, the esoteric teachings did not deny the importance of this world and of happiness in this life. By correct performance of the mysteries, material benefits could immediately be obtained. This belief led at first towards a spirit of intellectual curiosity in the things of this world which distinguishes Shingon

⁵ From Kūkai's *Memorial on the Presentation of the List of Newly Imported Sūtras*, quoted in Moriyama (ed.), *Kōbō Daishi Den*, p. 249.

⁶ Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion*, pp. 126-27.

⁷ Moriyama, *Kōbō Daishi Den*, p. 246.

from most other forms of Buddhism. Later, however this hope of securing practical advantages through the intermediary of an adept in magical formulae led to many superstitious excesses. It was largely in protest against this latter development of Shingon Buddhism that the Jōdo and other dissident sects first arose.

Kūkai and His Master

[This passage and the one following are taken from the Memorial Presenting a List of Newly Imported Sūtras which Kūkai wrote to the emperor upon his return from studying in China. In addition to listing the many religious articles which he brought back with him, Kūkai reported on the results of his studies and extols the doctrines into which he was initiated. Among the points which he especially emphasizes are 1) his personal success in gaining acceptance by the greatest Buddhist teacher of the day in China; 2) the authenticity of this teaching in direct line of succession from the Buddha; 3) the great favor in which this teaching was held by the recent emperors of the T'ang dynasty, to the extent that it represented the best and most influential doctrine current in the Chinese capital; and 4) the fact that this teaching offers the easiest and quickest means of obtaining Buddhahood, probably an important recommendation for it in the eyes of a busy monarch].

[From *Kōbō Daishi Den zenshū*, I, 98–101]

During the sixth moon of 804, I, Kūkai, sailed for China aboard the Number One Ship, in the party of Lord Fujiwara, ambassador to the T'ang court. We reached the coast of Fukien by the eighth moon, and four months later arrived at Ch'ang-an, the capital, where we were lodged at the official guest residence. The ambassadorial delegation started home for Japan on March 15, 805, but in obedience to an imperial edict, I alone remained behind in the Hsi-ming Temple where the abbot Yung-chung had formerly resided.

One day, in the course of my calls on eminent Buddhist teachers of the capital, I happened by chance to meet the abbot of the East Pagoda Hall of the Green Dragon Temple. This great priest, whose Buddhist name was Hui-kuo, was the chosen disciple of the Indian master Amoghavajra. His virtue aroused the reverence of his age; his teachings were lofty enough to guide emperors. Three sovereigns

revered him as their master and were ordained by him. The four classes of believers looked up to him for instruction in the esoteric teachings. I called on the abbot in the company of five or six monks from the Hsi-ming Temple. As soon as he saw me he smiled with pleasure, and he joyfully said, "I knew that you would come! I have been waiting for such a long time. What pleasure it gives me to look on you today at last! My life is drawing to an end, and until you came there was no one to whom I could transmit the teachings. Go without delay to the ordination altar with incense and a flower." I returned to the temple where I had been staying and got the things which were necessary for the ceremony. It was early in the sixth moon, then, that I entered the ordination chamber. I stood in front of the Womb Mandala and cast my flower in the prescribed manner. By chance it fell on the body of the Buddha Vairocana in the center. The master exclaimed in delight, "How amazing! How perfectly amazing!" He repeated this three or four times in joy and wonder. I was then given the fivefold baptism and received the instruction in the Three Mysteries that bring divine intercession. Next I was taught the Sanskrit formulas for the Womb Mandala, and learned the yoga contemplation on all the Honored Ones.

Early in the seventh moon I entered the ordination chamber of the Diamond Mandala for a second baptism. When I cast my flower it fell on Vairocana again, and the abbot marveled as he had before. I also received ordination as an āchārya early in the following month. On the day of my ordination I provided a feast for five hundred of the monks. The dignitaries of the Green Dragon Temple all attended the feast, and everyone enjoyed himself.

I later studied the Diamond Crown Yoga and the five divisions of the True Words teachings, and spent some time learning Sanskrit and the Sanskrit hymns. The abbot informed me that the Esoteric scriptures are so abstruse that their meaning cannot be conveyed except through art. For this reason he ordered the court artist Li'Chen and about a dozen other painters to execute ten scrolls of the Womb and Diamond Mandalas, and assembled more than twenty scribes to make copies of the Diamond and other important esoteric scriptures. He also ordered the bronzesmith Chao Wu to cast fifteen ritual implements. These orders for the painting of religious images and the copying of the sūtras were issued at various times.

One day the abbot told me, "Long ago, when I was still young, I met the great master Amoghavajra. From the first moment he saw me he treated me like a son, and on his visit to the court and his return to the temple I was as inseparable from him as his shadow. He confided to me, 'You will be the receptacle of the esoteric teachings. Do your best!' I was then initiated in the teachings of both the Womb and Diamond, and into the secret mudrās as well. The rest of his disciples, monks and laity alike, studied just one of the mandalas or one Honored One or one ritual, but not all of them as I did. How deeply I am indebted to him I shall never be able to express.

"Now my existence on earth approaches its term, and I cannot long remain. I urge you, therefore, to take the two mandalas and the hundred volumes of the Esoteric teachings, together with the ritual implements and these gifts which were left to me by my master. Return to your country and propagate the teachings there.

"When you first arrived I feared I did not have time enough left to teach your everything, but now my teaching is completed, and the work of copying the sūtras and making the images is also finished. Hasten back to your country, offer these things to the court, and spread the teachings throughout your country to increase the happiness of the people. Then the land will know peace and everyone will be content. In that way you will return thanks to Buddha and to your teacher. That is also the way to show your devotion to your country and to your family. My disciple I-ming will carry on the teachings here. Your task is to transmit them to the Eastern Land. Do your best! Do your best!" These were his final instructions to me, kindly and patient as always. On the night of the last full moon of the year he purified himself with a ritual bath and, lying on his right side and making the mudrā of Vairochana, he breathed his last.

That night, while I sat in meditation in the Hall, the abbot appeared to me in his usual form and said, "You and I have long been pledged to propagate the esoteric teachings. If I am reborn in Japan, this time I will be your disciple."

I have not gone into the details of all he said, but the general import of the Master's instructions I have given. [Dated 5th December 806.]

The Transmission of the Law

[From *Kōbō Daishi Den zenshū*, I, 83–84]

The ocean of the Law is one, but sometimes it is shallow and sometimes deep, according to the capacity of the believer. Five vehicles have been distinguished, sudden or gradual according to the vessel. Even among the teachings of sudden enlightenment, some are exoteric and some esoteric. In Esotericism itself, some doctrines represent the source while others are tributary. The masters of the Law of former times swam in the tributary waters and plucked at leaves, but the teachings I now bring back reach down to the sources and pull at the roots.

You may wonder why this is so. In ancient times Vajrasattva personally received the teachings from Vairochana. After many centuries it was transmitted to the Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna, who later transmitted it to the Āchārya Nāgabodhi. He in turn transmitted it to the Āchārya Vajrabodhi, the master of Indian and Chinese learning, who first taught the esoteric doctrines in China during the K'ai-yuan era [713-42]. Although the emperor himself revered his teachings, Vajrabodhi could not spread them very widely. Only with our spiritual grandfather Amoghavajra, the great master of Broad wisdom, did the teachings thrive. After he had been initiated by Vajrabodhi, Amoghavajra visited the place in southern India where Nāgabodhi had taught, and silently mastered the eighteen forms of yoga. After attaining a complete understanding of the Womb Mandala and other parts of the esoteric canon, he returned to China during the T'ien-pao Era [742-65]. At this time the Emperor Hsüan-tsung was baptized; he revered Amoghavajra as his teacher.

In later years both the Emperors Su-tsung and Tai-sung in turn received the Law. Within the imperial palace the Monastery of the Divine Dragon¹ was established, and in the capital ordination platforms were erected everywhere. The Emperor and the government officials went to these platforms to be formally baptized. This was the period when the Esoteric sect began to flourish as never before; its methods of baptism were widely adopted from this

¹ "Divine Dragon" was an era (705-6) during the reign of the Emperor Chung-tsung.

time on.

According to exoteric doctrines, enlightenment occurs only after three existences; the esoteric doctrines declare that there are sixteen chances of enlightenment within this life. In speed and in excellence the two doctrines differ as much as Buddha with his supernatural powers and a lame donkey. You who reverence the good, let this fact be clear in your minds! The superiority of the doctrines and the origins of the Law are explained at length in the five esoteric formulas of Vajrasattva and in the memorials and answers written by Beshō.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN EXOTERIC AND ESOTERIC BUDDHISM

(BEN KEMMITSU NIKYO-RON)

[This work of Kūkai was probably an outgrowth of disputations among the sects established in or near the capital, and is intended to show the superiority of the Shingon doctrine to all others. Kūkai puts Shingon in a class by itself as the Esoteric (private) teaching of the Buddha, while other sects, whether identified as Mahāyāna or Hīnayāna, are classed together as exoteric (public) teachings. The superiority of the former is based on its claim to represent the inner experience of the Buddha in his absolute, spiritual aspect, as revealed in secret formulas to his closest disciples. Although shrouded in mystery, this Truth is attainable by all because each individual has the potentiality for Buddhahood as the very Law of his being. Properly understood and practiced this teaching offers the quickest and surest means of attaining Buddhahood in this life.]

Kūkai's argument is carefully and systematically presented, taking up one by one the positions of the other schools and commenting upon them. Often he makes reflective use of the impersonal dialogue form. After examining passages from the sūtras upon which the other teachings are based, he cites his own scriptural passages to show that the supreme knowledge of the Cosmic Buddha, Vairochana, was not totally incommunicable, as other sects maintained, and that certain of Buddha's followers possessed the secret keys to the storehouse of Truth. Kūkai's introduction to this work summarizes the arguments elaborated in the body of the text.]

Introduction

[From *Kōbō Daishi Den zenshū*, pp. 474–75]

Buddha has three bodies;² his doctrines are in two forms. The doctrine expounded by Nirmāna Buddha is called exoteric, since the words are open and brief, and adapted to those taught. The doctrine taught by Dharma Buddha is called the esoteric treasury; the words are secret and of absolute truth. The sūtras used in exotericism number in the millions. The collection is divided by some into fifteen and by others into eleven parts. They speak of single, double, triple, quadruple, and quintuple Vehicles. In discussing actions, the six ways of obtaining salvation are one of their main tenets; in explanations of the absolute, three great characteristics are delimited. The reasons why these complicated doctrines arose was clearly explained by the Great Sage. According to the esoteric *Diamond Crown Sūtra*, Buddha manifested himself in human form and taught the doctrine of the Three Vehicles of gradual enlightenment for the sake of bodhisattvas-to-be and the believers in Hīnayāna and 'Quasi-Mahāyāna.³ Buddha also manifested himself in his Sambhogabody and taught the exoteric doctrine of the One Vehicle of universal enlightenment for the benefit of bodhisattvas on earth. Both of these teachings were exoteric. The Dharma Buddha who manifested himself for his own sake, for his own enjoyment, expounded the doctrine of the Three Mysteries, with only his own retinue⁴ present. These were the esoteric teachings. The doctrine of the Three Mysteries lies in the realm of the inner wisdom of the Buddha, and even bodhisattvas who have attained ten steps of enlightenment cannot penetrate it, much less the ordinary believers of the Hīnayāna and Quasi-Mahāyāna. Therefore, though the *Jiron* and

² The three bodies are called in Sanskrit Dharmkāya, Sambhogakāya, and Nirmānakāya, respectively the Buddha-body in its essential nature; Buddha's body of bliss, which he "receives" for his own "use"; and his body of transformation, by which he can appear in any form. In the Esoteric sect, the Dharma-body is associated with Vairochana, the Sambhoga-body with Amitābha, and the Nirmāna-body with the historical Buddha, Shākyamuni.

³ Hossō, Sanron, and various other Mahāyāna schools were so termed.

⁴ That is, the bodhisattvas, dragon kings, etc.

*Shakuron*⁵ declare that the Truth does not depend on the faculties, and the *Yuishiki* and *Chūkan*⁶ praise the Truth as a thing beyond words or thought, the absolute truth of which they speak was known to the compilers of these commentaries (shāstras) only in theory; they were not the work of men who had attained Buddhahood.

How can we know the Truth? Within the Buddhist canon itself is clear evidence, and in the following pages I shall indicate it in detail. It is hoped that all who seek Buddha will understand their import. Some may become entangled in the net of exotericism, and thereby get into inextricable difficulties. Or, blocked by the barrier of the Quasi Mahāyāna, they may waste their days. They will be lotus-eaters in the false Nirvāna of the Hīnayāna, children prizing yellow willow-leaves like gold. How can they hope to preserve the glorious treasures which lie within themselves, numberless as the sands of Ganges? They will be casting away the rich liquor skimmed from butter⁷ to look for milk; or discarding pearls⁸ to pick up fish-eyes. Such believers are victims of a mortal disease before which even the King of Medicine would fold his hands in despair, a disease for which even the most precious medicine would be of no avail. If men and women once catch the fragrance of these teachings, they will behold the source of knowledge reflected as in a flawless mirror, and the differences between the temporal and the real doctrines will melt away.

Selection taken from Wm. Theodore de Barry, ed., with Ryusaku Tsunoda and Donald Keene, *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, Vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958).

⁵ Shāstras—commentaries—written not by Buddha but by bodhisattvas and other holy men, in this case Vasubandhu and Nāgārjuna respectively.

⁶ Commentaries by Dharmapāla and Kumārajīva respectively.

⁷ Used for the perfect Buddha-truth as found, according to Tendai, in the *Nirvāna* and *Lotus* sūtras.

⁸ A symbol of Buddha and his doctrines (in Sanskrit, *mani*).