A BRIEF HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION OF THE ESOTERIC BUDDHISM IN KOREA

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It is my pleasure to be in this prestigious assembly. I would like to introduce myself as Sang-Kyu Sun a Buddhist priest and a lecturer in Jangak College, which belongs to Jangak Sect of Korean Buddhism. It is also my pleasure to let you know that I am a Ph.D. student of Delhi University in the Department of Buddhist Studies under Prof. S.N. Singh. I am thankful to respected Prof. S.S. Singh who introduced me to this seminar.

I also would like to pay my heartfelt thanks to the organizer for giving a chance to read my paper though my paper is not concerned to the topics of this seminar.

My paper is entitled as "A Brief Historical Introduction of the Esoteric Buddhism in Korea". In fact, it is not a seminar paper but an information of Esoteric Buddhism in Korea.

Generally, it is believed that the Esoteric Buddhism was appeared during seventh century A.D. in India as the further development of Buddhism. In this context, the term of Esoteric Buddhism used by me here is as synonymous of term such as Tantric Buddhism, Mantrarana and Vajrayana etc. The esoteric Buddhism had been succeeded to occupy an exalted position in Northern countries such as Nepal, China, Tibet, Bhutan, Mongolia etc. in Korea, Buddhism was first introduced in fourth century A.D. Later on, during seventh century A.D. Esoteric Buddhism was introduced by Korean monk Myeungro from China, and named Sima Sect or Madra Sect in Korea. It is believed as the Earlier Esoteric Buddhism which is based on the Korea Tantras.

In course of time, Chonggi Sect of Bhurani Sect founded by monk Hyeljong in Korea. It is regarded as the Middle Esoteric Buddhism which deals with Guru and Joga Tantras. These two Korean monks named Myeungro and Hyeljong are paid respect by country people as the founder of Esoteric Buddhism in Korea. Here, I would like to say that as Sadmasamthaya (Guru Rinpoché), the founder of Esoteric Buddhism in Tibet, Shaksam and other places has occupied a prominent position in Tibetan history. Likewise, the two Korean monks have also occupied an exalted position in Korean Esoteric Buddhist history.

In course of time, a number of Buddhist sects had been appeared. In this way, total 11 sects were in practice till 1406 A.D. as the further propagation of Buddhism in Korea. These sects merged into seven and again into two sects in 1424 A.D. and finally into one without any particular name. Thus, decrease of the number of sects shows the declination of Buddhism under the policy of Chosun Dynasty in Korea. And Confucianism was enwowing under the patronage of Chosun Dynasty. Though the Esoteric Buddhism was almost disappeared from country due to policy of Chosun Dynasty, yet it was under practice in Buddhist society. The practice remained as seed of Esoteric Buddhism in Korea.

Finally, the restoration of Esoteric Buddhism in Korea was attempted 50 years ago by a Buddhist scholar named Hoonag. He who formerly a laityman was initiated in Svisyllabeled Mantra OM MANI PADME HUM. He, who founded Jangak Sect as the Esoteric Buddhist sect in Korea, is regarded as the Chief Buddhist Priest of that sect.

Nowadays, there are 30 Buddhist sects in Korea. Among them, three Esoteric Budhists sects namely Jangak, Jincon and Chonggi are in practice. Jincon Sect and Chonggi Sect
are those which appeared as sub-sects of Jingak Sect. Those three sects which differ from traditional Esoteric Buddhist system, try to implement the Esoteric Buddhism in modern society of Korea.

Buddhism is the proper way of life rather than the worship of God and the preservation of tradition. Its aim is to make all beings happy and to purify the society. The society is changing rapidly and becoming of habit of new system. In this context, though the Esoteric Buddhism is the further development of Buddhism according to the time changing, but it seems to me that certain changes should be brought again. Nevertheless, I don't mean that the fundamental principles of Buddhism must be modified.

The following few points are given here in the respect of modernization of Esoteric Buddhism not as any final conclusion but as means for discussions.

1. Importance of Esoteric Buddhism in modern society should be clear.
2. Secret way of initiation of Esoteric Buddhism should be modified.
3. Esoteric Buddhism should be institutionalized with the modern concept of education.
4. Further study and publication of texts in regular journals of Esoteric Buddhism seems to be very limited. I think that further research works, publication of texts and journals should be brought in to light.