Spells, Images, and Mandalas: Tracing the Evolution of Esoteric Buddhist Rituals; Columbia University Press, 2014; 368 pages; 9780231537391; 2014; Koichi Shinohara

THE EVOLUTION OF ESOTERIC BUDDHIST RITUALS Esoteric Buddhist rituals are enacted in the presence of deities, often in the form of images, and a rich image culture came to characterize the tradition. But sometimes the deities are present more immediately as visions, or in visualizations by the practitioners, who create mental pictures of the deities and then imagine themselves becoming one with them. At such times physical images may not be present, or their role may be ambiguous and unstable. One central thesis of this study is that the relationship between image and ritual changed fundamentally Esoteric Buddhism is a book originally published in 1883 in London; it was compiled by a member of the Theosophical Society, A. P. Sinnett. It was one of the first books written for the purpose of explaining theosophy to the general public, and was "made up of the author's correspondence with an Indian mystic." This is the most significant theosophical work of the author. According to Goodrick-Clarke, it "disseminated the basic teachings of Theosophy in its new Asian cast." Koichi Shinohara traces the evolution of Esoteric Buddhist rituals from the simple recitation of spells in the fifth century to complex systems involving image ...