### Michael Zimmermann

## Foreword

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in:

Chen-kuo Lin / Michael Radich (eds.)

# A Distant Mirror

Articulating Indic Ideas in Sixth and Seventh Century Chinese Buddhism

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in memoriam

John R. McRae (1947-2011)

#### Foreword

#### About Hamburg Buddhist Studies

Buddhism has enjoyed a prominent place in the study of Asian religious ideas at the University of Hamburg for almost 100 years, ever since the birth of Buddhist Studies in Germany. We are proud that our program is housed in one of the pioneering academic institutions in Europe at which the study of Buddhism has become a core subject for students focusing on the religious dimensions of South and Central Asia.

With this publication series, the Numata Center for Buddhist Studies at the University of Hamburg aims to honor this long-standing commitment to research and share the results of this tradition with the academic community and the wider public. Today, Buddhist Studies as an academic discipline makes use of a broad variety of approaches and methods. The field covers contemporary issues as much as it delves into the historic aspects of Buddhism. Similarly, the questions shaping the field of Buddhist Studies have broadened. Understanding present-day Buddhist phenomena, and how such phenomena are rooted in a distant past, is not a matter of indulgence. Rather, it has become clear that fostering such an understanding is one of the many crucial obligations of modern multicultural societies in a globalized world.

Buddhism is one of the great human traditions of religious and philosophical thought. The *Hamburg Buddhist Studies* series aims to discuss aspects of the wide variety of Buddhist traditions that will be of interest to scholars and specialists of Buddhism, but it also wants to confront Buddhism's rich heritage with questions whose answers might not be easily deduced by the exclusive use of philological research methods. Such questions require the penetrating insight of scholars who approach Buddhism from a variety of disciplines building upon and yet going beyond the solid study of textual materials. We are convinced that the *Hamburg* 

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Buddhist Studies series will contribute to opening up Buddhist Studies to those who are not necessarily trained in the classical languages of the Buddhist traditions but want to approach the field with their own disciplinary interests in mind. We very much hope that this series will encourage a wider audience to take interest in the academic study of the Buddhist traditions.

### About this publication

It is my great pleasure to introduce the third volume in the *Hamburg Buddhist Studies* series, which is edited by Prof. Chen-kuo Lin and Michael Radich, and presents the work of an international team of fourteen scholars. In this book, the authors investigate a range of topics and materials in the Chinese reception of Indian Buddhist ideas, focusing on the broad period centering on the sixth and seventh centuries. The topics investigated include Buddhist logic and epistemology (*pramāṇa, yinming*); commentaries on Indian Buddhist texts translated into Chinese, or composed in Chinese; Chinese readings of doctrines and systems as diverse as Madhyamaka, Yogācāra and *tathāgatagarbha*; the working out of Indian concepts and problematics in new works by Chinese scholiast monks; and previously under-studied Chinese evidence for developments in India.

Through this work, the authors collectively aim to push back against a certain parochializing tendency to relegate the study of Chinese materials to the study of questions pertaining to China alone. Instead, they strive to consider the ways that Chinese materials, even those beyond translation texts, might furnish evidence of broader Buddhist trends. In so doing, they also aim to problematize a prevalent notion of "sinification", which has led scholars to consider the relation of Indic to Chinese materials predominantly in terms of the ways Indic ideas and practices were transformed into something ostensibly distinctive to China, which supposedly reflected perduring features of Chinese civilization as a whole. In the same spirit, the volume also tries to go beyond another paradigm, that of seeing the sixth and seventh centuries in China primarily as the age of the formation and establishment of the so-called "sects" or "schools" of "Chinese" Buddhism (such as Tiantai, Huayan,

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Chan, and Faxiang). Instead, by bracketing out possibly essentializing notions of "India" and "China", these studies attempt to view the ideas they study on their own terms – as valid Buddhist ideas, finding their existence in a rich, "liminal" space of interchange between two large traditions.

Michael Zimmermann