

## Foreword

*Mārga*, the “Path” to attain liberation, is a central notion of Buddhist praxis and thought. Revolving around the practical rather than the theoretical, and interwoven with visions of liberation, *mārga* designates specific patterns of behaviour and methods of practice connected with transformative powers and soteriological goals. Ideologies of the Path have variously influenced the formation and development of Buddhist identities in the religious and intellectual landscape of Asia. In South Asia, in particular, such ideologies were reflected in Buddhist doctrinal and narrative literature, philosophical views and iconographic programmes for more than one-and-a-half millennium. This volume collects ten papers on *mārga* in Buddhist traditions of South Asia. The papers derive from the contributions presented at the international symposium *Mārga: Paths to Liberation in South Asian Buddhist Traditions*, convened by the editors of this volume from 17 to 18 December 2015 at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna. On that occasion, seventeen scholars from various areas of Buddhist Studies shared aspects of their research connected with the topic of *mārga*. The principal aim of the symposium was to revisit this topic, which became an explicit focus of consideration for the first time in the 1992 book edited by Robert E. Buswell and Robert M. Gimello, *Paths to Liberation. The Mārga and its Transformations in Buddhist Thought* (Honolulu, University of Hawai‘i Press). Its editors identified the concept of *mārga* as “a theme central to the whole of Buddhism” and potentially useful “in the cross-cultural study of religion and in the study of religions other than Buddhism.”<sup>1</sup> Their book offered an overview of the meaning and role of Buddhist theories of the Path in premodern Asia. In the same year, Rupert Getzin’s *Buddhist Path to Awakening* (Leiden, Brill) presented a thorough study of the “thirty-seven conditions that contribute to awakening” based on Pāli sources, while Wilhelm Halbfass’s *Tradition and Reflection* (especially Chapter 7; State University of New York Press, 1991) provided insightful reflections on the relationship between philosophy and soteriology in South Asia. In showcasing the complexity of the concept of

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<sup>1</sup> See Buswell and Gimello 1992, Introduction: 2.

*mārga* and related issues, these and a few other publications expanded our common understanding of the Path, as reflected in descriptions of “the noble eightfold path” or “the Bodhisattva path”.

In the last three decades, the study of (sometimes newly available) texts and other types of sources concerning South Asian Buddhist traditions has increasingly addressed topics concerning the Path, such as the dynamics between insight, meditative practices, and ethical commitment; the interplay between the Path and rituals or ritual-related actions; and the reciprocal influence that soteriological and philosophical discourses exerted on one another. Following the concept of the symposium, the chapters comprising this volume form a partial update of Buswell and Gimello’s book insofar as they are a series of case studies on the Buddhist *mārga*, but are limited in scope to traditions of South Asia.

The chapters are loosely arranged according to the chronological sequence of the sources discussed therein. With *mārga* as their common focus, the authors offer new analyses—rather than general pictures—of particular texts, textual corpora or iconographic materials. They explore specific aspects of descriptions of the Path as expounded or reflected in those sources, and show the links between *mārga* and a variety of views and concerns. Also, they unfold some more general research on Buddhism in South Asia.

Overall, this collection of papers makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the Path by displaying important facets of how it was interpreted, discussed and represented in premodern Buddhist traditions of South Asia. Moreover, the volume shows that there are many historically-given embodiments of the Path which still need to be fully explored, thus possibly opening up new avenues of investigation that look into the entanglements between views of the Path and the religious and intellectual discourses of South Asia and beyond.

It is our pleasure to thank the Institute for the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia (IKGA) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences for its generous financial and organisational support of the symposium *Mārga: Paths to Liberation in South Asian Buddhist Traditions*, out of which this volume has grown. Our thanks also go to all the symposium participants. In addition to the authors represented in this volume, contributions were presented by Martin Delhey, Harunaga Isaacson, Anne MacDonald, Cristina Pecchia, Francesco Sferra, Federico Squarcini, and Alexander von Rospatt. The initial impulse to organize the symposium came from the need to understand in

more detail the critique of other Paths in a sixth/seventh century philosophical text in Sanskrit, Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika*. It was this critique that was the focus of investigations in the project *Indian Buddhist Epistemology and the Path to Liberation* (2013–2016) and is one the subjects of the current project *The Nobles' Truths in Indian Buddhist Epistemology*—both conducted by Cristina Pecchia at the IKGA and financed by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) (Project Numbers P 26120-G15 and P 30710-G24). Vincent Eltschinger's confidence in the importance of the symposium and the related publication provided and maintained momentum in the course of events. By the end of December 2015, when the symposium took place, he had left the IKGA and become Professor for Indian Buddhism at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris. The editorial work carried out for the completion of this volume has given us a rewarding opportunity for continuing our conversation between Paris and Vienna. For the care they have put into finalizing their respective chapters, we are very grateful to the authors who contributed to this volume.

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Vienna and Paris, December 2018