Preface

This project has had a long history. Its origins can be traced to my initial year as a graduate student at Harvard (1974-75), when I first discovered the pleasures of an in-depth investigation of a Mahāyāna sūtra while writing a paper on the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* under the direction of Professor Masatoshi Nagatomi. The memory of that experience—including the surprise of finding things in the text which (according to standard textbook definitions of the Mahāyāna) should not be there, and the delight of making a first foray into reading a Sanskrit Buddhist text in the original—has never left me, and indeed virtually all of my work since then could be viewed as a continued attempt to wrestle with questions that arose during that first and very formative year.

A more proximate beginning of this project, however, occurred almost twenty years later, after I had accepted a teaching position at my alma mater, Indiana University. A fellow alumnus of IU's Religious Studies program, Daniel J. Boucher (then a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Pennsylvania) shared an interest in the Chinese translator Dharmarakṣa, and together we organized a reading group (subsequently expanded to include IU professors Stephen R. Bokenkamp and Robert F. Campany) to peruse the Buddhist translations of this pivotal figure. Our attention soon fell upon Dharmarakṣa's translation of the *Ugrapariprcchā-sūtra*, which had particular appeal due to the existence of two other Chinese translations (one earlier, one later) as well as a considerably later Tibetan version which we could call upon for comparison. This small but intrepid group spent countless hours huddled around my kitchen table wrestling with Dharmarakṣa's often inscrutable translation choices, efforts that were rewarded at the end of most sessions by a feast of grilled fish, Boucher's signature guacamole, colossal salads (of which Campany's version won particular acclaim), and—when fortune was especially kind—a sampling of Bokenkamp's fine home-brewed beer.

The group eventually disbanded when Boucher (now at Cornell) accepted a fellowship to study in Japan, and our research interests moved in disparate directions. Boucher (always the pace-car of our group when it came to explaining the Indic antecedents of Dharmarakṣa's peculiar locutions) went on to write a Ph.D. dissertation on Dharmarakṣa's translation idiom, while Bokenkamp and Campany continued to produce important works on various
aspects of Chinese religion during the Han and Six Dynasties periods. My own interests remained centered on the use of Chinese sources to understand Indian Buddhism, and the experience of reading portions of the Ugra with this stimulating group convinced me that this sūtra could supply vital information on the rise of the Mahāyāna in India that had not yet been adequately mined by scholars. A complete translation of the Ugra, I was convinced, could bring this important text into the conversation.

A translation grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (1995-96), whose generous support I am happy to acknowledge here, made it possible to begin work on this project in earnest, and a first draft of the translation was produced at a tiny desk in Xiaguan, Yunnan, P.R.C., where my partner John McRae was doing research on the religion of the local Bai ethnic group. Since my spoken Chinese was quite minimal, distractions were few, and work on the Ugra proceeded with unanticipated efficiency.

Upon my return to the academic fray in North America in 1996 progress slowed considerably, but this was balanced by the opportunity to investigate a wide range of related primary and secondary sources, and above all by the valuable feedback provided by a number of colleagues. Daniel Boucher scrutinized every line of the initial drafts of the introductory chapters, providing critical comments (and additional bibliographical references) that have greatly enhanced the quality of this work. Paul Harrison did the same for the translation, improving the phrasing and saving me from a number of potential mishaps. Stephen Bokenkamp offered invaluable counsel on reading the early Chinese versions of the Ugra, while SASAKI Shizuka and Jonathan Silk directed me to important related publications by Japanese scholars. Others whose insights have contributed to the final product are Thanissaro Bhikkhu (who made some excellent stylistic suggestions and offered copious references to related Pāli texts), David Haberman (who took me to task for my original characterization of Hindu bhakti and may be slightly happier with the version that appears here), and my colleagues David Brakke and Constance Furey, whose insights into the study of ancient and early modern Christianity, respectively, were extremely helpful in clarifying some of the methodological issues raised here. Gil Fronsdal, Peter Gregory, and two anonymous reviewers offered encouraging comments, and Robert Campany and KARASHIMA Seishi caught some of the last remaining typos and raised a number of issues for further thought. At the eleventh hour Glenn Zuber and Jason
BeDuhn pitched in by offering precise references to Christian and Manichaean materials, respectively, while Ju-hyung Rhi knew immediately how to locate the image that now appears on the cover. Last—and very far from least—Gregory Schopen read through every line of the final draft, offering substantial comments and and catching a number of gaffes that would surely have caused confusion to the reader and embarassment to the writer. To all of these colleagues and friends I am immensely grateful. Any errors that remain, of course, are the sole responsibility of the author.

I would also like to thank the many scholars—most of whom I have never met—whose work is quoted or commented on below. Even in those cases where I have offered critical assessments of their methodology or conclusions, I have benefited greatly from their pioneering work.

This manuscript was originally submitted in 1999 to another press, where after being accepted for publication it languished through mid-2001. I then resubmitted it, at the invitation of series editor Luis O. Gómez, to the University of Hawai‘i Press, and I have never regretted that decision. Editor Pat Crosby, in particular, has been a delight to work with, and copy editor Stephanie Chun did a remarkable job with a difficult text. To them and the rest of the staff at the Press, my heartfelt thanks.

Above all I am grateful to my husband, John McRae, who has endured countless hours of speculations on the rise of the Mahāyāna, answered my seemingly endless questions on things Chinese, and read through the entire manuscript, putting a variety of infelicities out of their misery at an early stage. But more than this: his unflagging support and constant companionship mean more to me than I can possibly express.

My only regret is that my teacher, Professor Masatoshi Nagatomi, did not live to see the completion of this work. He would have been amused, I suspect, by the Ugra's seemingly retrograde position on certain issues, and no doubt he would have pushed me to think more deeply on some of the topics discussed below. The field of Buddhist Studies is diminished by his loss. As a very small gesture of gratitude, this work is dedicated to his memory.

Honolulu, Hawai‘i
30 June 2002