Stories about Xuanzang, that most famous of pilgrims, have traveled far and wide. It seems appropriate, then, that this book, a story about stories, has taken shape on the road. It began in Taiwan, where I spent a happy year at Academia Sinica’s Institute of Modern History. Paul Katz and Liu Shufen were gracious hosts, and their deep knowledge of Chinese popular religion and the life and legacies of Xuanzang both inspired and informed this book. In Taiwan, I also benefited from the friendship and insights of Will and Kristine Zhang, Ching-chih Lin, Cheng Weiyi, and Dafu.

A research fellowship from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation made it possible for me to continue this work over the course of two summers at the Universität Hamburg. I am indebted to Michael Zimmerman and the Numata Center for Buddhist Studies for hosting my visit. My time in Germany was further enriched by engaging conversations with Steffen Döll, Barend ter Haar, Michael Radich, and Daniel Boyarin.

Back in Ann Arbor, I am fortunate to work in a department filled with specialists in both Buddhist and Chinese Studies. Donald Lopez, Juhn Ahn, Micah Auerbach, Sangseraima Ujee, David Rolston, and S. E. Kile read through a draft of the manuscript and offered their expert advice. Susan Juster and Markus Nornes provided moral and logistical support. Our fabulous librarian Liangyu Fu never failed to locate obscure books for me, and Raymond Hsu was instrumental in securing permissions for several of the images reproduced here.

Several other friends and colleagues have assisted in ways large and small. An incomplete list includes Se-Woong Koo, Zhaohua Yang, Fabrizio Pregadio, Max Deeg, Jason Protass, James Benn, Chen Jinhua, Kurtis Schaeffer, Paul Copp, Ji Zhe, Jimmy Yu, Miranda Brown, Raoul Birnbaum, Megan Bryson, Nelson Foster, Gary Snyder, Hou Chong, and Ye Mingsheng.

Many of the ideas presented here began as talks delivered at the University of Chicago, the University of British Columbia, Universität Hamburg, Heidelberg University, Dharma Drum University, and the Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales. I am grateful to the organizers of these events and to all who
attended. Additional funding for research, writing, and publication was generously provided by the Fulbright Program, the Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation, the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation, and the Lieberthal-Rogel Center for Chinese Studies.

At the University of Hawai’i Press, Stephanie Chun supported this project early on and saw it through to completion. Editorial assistance was provided by Kristen Bettcher and Kathi Anderson. Thanks also are due to my not-so-anonymous readers, Meir Shahar and Jeffrey Kotyk. Their learned comments and critiques made this a better book.

Finally, this book is dedicated to Wendy and Barry Brose, Cora and Jerry Iby, and my own band of fellow travelers: Jennifer, Walker, and Kalina.