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## Foreword

When Choong Mun-keat first told me that he was planning a research project on "emptiness" in early Buddhism, I greeted the proposal with enthusiasm. I was happy to act as consultant during the research; and now that his report on that research has taken shape as a book, I welcome this opportunity to comment on the outcome.

Research of the sort presented in this book is all too rare in the field of Buddhist studies. While the notion of emptiness in Mahāyāna Buddhism has been studied in depth by many competent scholars, the antecedents of that notion in the early Buddhist schools have received little attention. Also, there has been a widespread tendency for such studies of early Buddhist teachings to focus exclusively on what is found in the Pāli Nikāyas, the texts of the tradition that calls itself Theravāda. Such a narrow, one-sided approach has been avoided here, as I will now point out.

Dr. Choong has based his research on comparison of the Pāli Nikāyas with the corresponding texts of other early schools, as represented in the extant Chinese Āgamas. Being translations, mainly from Sanskrit, of the now lost texts of the Sarvāstivāda and other long extinct early schools, the Chinese Āgamas provide valuable material for comparative study. Comparison of the Pāli and Chinese versions of any particular sutra can reveal what is common and what is different. This enables the researcher to distinguish, with some confidence, between teachings that date from the period before the corresponding schools diverged and teachings that developed subsequently. If, for example, a sutra from Pāli Buddhism is compared with its Chinese counterpart from the Sarvāstivāda canon, then one is probably justified in claiming that any shared elements of doctrine date from before the split that yielded the Vibhajyavāda and Sarvāstivāda branches within

the Sthavira tradition. Since that split is known to have occurred shortly before the Third Council (mid third century B.C.), one can draw soundly based, though still tentative, conclusions about the antiquity of the pieces of doctrine in question.

What this means, in general terms, is that any study of the early phases of Buddhist doctrinal development should be based not only on the Pāli sutras, but also on their Chinese counterparts. This methodological principle, though recognized by a few Buddhist scholars, is only rarely applied in actual research. That it forms the basis for the study reported here therefore enhances considerably the value of this book. The work presented here is more than a study of an important Buddhist doctrine; it is also an exemplification of a research procedure that ought to be much more widely adopted in Buddhist studies.

Scholars will welcome the care and thoroughness with which the research reported here has been carried out, and the light it throws on early doctrinal developments in Buddhism. And devotees will find in the book not only Dharmic sustenance but also an excellent example of how the methods of the scholar can help elucidate, at least at the intellectual level, the meaning of an otherwise difficult aspect of the Buddha's teaching.

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## Preface to the Second Edition

This book presents an investigation into the teaching of *emptiness* according to the Pāli and Chinese versions of the early Buddhist canon. The second edition of this book has been revised and expanded from the first edition of 1995 (on which the author's name was given as SHI Wei-keat). I would like to express my gratitude to Associate Professor Dr. Rod BUCKNELL for his help in the revision process.

The notion of *emptiness* in early Buddhism is mainly concerned with the practical teaching for attaining in this very life *a mind that is liberated* (P. *cittaṃ vimuttaṃ*, Skt. *cittaṃ vimuktam*), a mind totally empty of (free from) affliction or distress. This is an essential teaching, relevant to elimination of "self-attachment" and "the two extreme views", a teaching based on the path of *wisdom* (P. *paññā*, Skt. *prajñā*) or *right view* (P. *sammā diṭṭhi*, Skt. *samyagdr̥ṣṭi*). In other words, the notion of *emptiness* in early Buddhism is about *wisdom* or *right view*, which leads to the mind becoming totally empty of self-attachment, empty of the two extremes, and thus attaining the highest peaceful state (*nirvana*), completely empty of affliction or distress. The teachings of the Buddha in both the Pāli and Chinese versions of early Buddhist texts are therefore said to be *connected with emptiness* (P. *suññatā-paṭisaṃyuttā*, Skt. *śūnyatā-pratisaṃyuktā*).

Another topic discussed in the early Buddhist texts is the teaching of *faith, confidence* (P. *saddhā*, Skt. *śraddhā*) or *definite faith* (P. *avecca pasāda*, Skt. *avetya prasāda*). For example, *definite faith* is equated with the *faculty of faith* (*saddhā-indriya*), which is one of the *five faculties* (P. Skt. *pañca-indriyāni*: *faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom*). Faith in early Buddhist texts is not passionate, fanatical, or blind faith, but is closely related to *wisdom*. "Calmed faith" (P. *pasāda*, Skt. *prasāda*), cultivated in daily