INTRODUCTION

Modern (“Western”) scholarly engagement with Chinese Buddhism appears to have significantly deeper roots, and to have exerted significantly more profound influences on the development of European thought, than had previously been believed.¹ This still largely unknown history notwithstanding, critical investigations of Chinese Buddhism from a historically grounded perspective remain a relatively recent phenomenon,² one of the prime movers in this regard having been the Leiden professor Erik Zürcher (13 September 1928–7 February 2008). Beginning with virtually his first academic contribution, the epoch-making *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, his doctoral dissertation published in 1959, for four and a half decades Zürcher continued his studies of Chinese Buddhism with a number of very influential papers, though never again did he produce a book-length study of the topic. The present volume, then, while not a synthesis per se, for the first time brings together the most important of Zürcher’s continuing contributions to the study of Buddhism in China, including several studies that, even in this internet age, have remained very difficult to locate, and others translated for the first time into English. The present Introduction, for its part, offers no more than a brief sketch of Prof. Zürcher’s academic life, his contributions, and some remarks on the papers presented here.³

² If one wants to look backwards, certainly early works such as those of Beal, Edkins and a few others deserve serious mention, as do the works of Zürcher’s predecessors and teachers, including Bagchi, Chavannes, and Demiéville, as well as, needless to say, those of a number of Japanese scholars.
It is not intended to offer a critical appraisal of this work; for that, a conference will be convened in Leiden in early 2014, the papers from which will be edited as a companion volume to the present one, offering the essential evaluation, revision, correction and continuation Zürcher’s research calls forth. It is important to emphasize at the outset, however, that, as is only to be expected of innovative work which so often broke new ground, not every conclusion reached by Zürcher can be accepted, and needless to say, his work also contains plain errors. In the present volume it was decided not to editorially correct or augment Zürcher’s findings (with the exception of corrections of misprints and such things as wrong romanization of Chinese). Therefore, quoted Chinese texts are not repunctuated, for instance, even when they probably should be, and so on.

Erik Zürcher was born in Utrecht, in the center of the Netherlands, where he was educated through secondary school. Although he originally intended to study Egyptology, when he came to the University of Leiden he began instead the study of Sinology, and was soon invited to join more advanced classes with Jan Julius Lodewijk (J. J. L.) Duyvendak (1889–1954). During this time his interests in art led him to Sweden, where he worked with Osval Siren (1879–1966), this resulting in one of his first publications, “Imitation and Forgery in Ancient Chinese Painting and Calligraphy.” Later he was to publish a few other papers also directed at art and material culture, including one reprinted here, the extremely stimulating “Buddhist Art in Medieval China: The Ecclesiastical View”, although this field...