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Conclusion

This dissertation intends to retrieve an “Indian Buddhist discursive world” around different aspects of the power relation between the Buddha⁶¹² and his disciples—referring to both individual disciples (e.g., Śāriputra, Devadatta, Mahākāśyapa, Ānanda) and the *saṅgha* as the unity of the Buddha’s disciples; to uncover how different viewpoints concerning the central authority of monastic Buddhism are individualized as vibrant narrative traditions surrounding the Buddha and his significant disciples; and to shed light on how such a political question is at the same time a fundamental theological question lingering in the mind of Buddhists, transcending temporal, geographical and linguistic borders. My analyses in the dissertation shed light on several layers of meaning and ideologies and, although far from being the conclusion on many topics, intended to encourage thoughtful reading and deep thinking.

This study offers a narrative perspective of the power dynamics between the Buddha and his disciples. Life stories about the Buddha, about certain disciples or about the Teacher–disciple interaction, if nothing else, form the rhetorical architecture for claiming power and prestige for certain favored parties: the Buddha’s greatness is usually embodied through the disciples’ subservience; the excellence of disciples also relies on the recognition of the Buddha or other disciples. Because one’s privileged status is constructed through power competitions, stories must be deeply imbued with dialectics of power, legitimacy, and authority in order to convince the audience. In this sense, hagiographical stories provide natural platforms for discussing different power structures. Stories about Śāriputra, Devadatta and Mahākāśyapa/Ānanda represent three different patterns of power interplay in the early monastic community: the power dynamics between the Buddha and a foremost disciple, between the Buddha and a powerful challenger and between the Buddha and his successors. Although these different power situations are said to have occurred in the *saṅgha* of the remote past, they bear implications that always extend to the “present” and serve the living monastic community. Śāriputra’s confrontation serves as a rhetorical device for monks’ demands for autonomy (see later discussion); the Devadatta stories castigate actions undertaken in defiance of the authoritative body of the monastic community; and

⁶¹² Here, the Buddha’s authority is not examined on an epistemological level (for instance, as the third *prāmāṇika* [“authoritative”]; cf. Ruegg 1995: 818–819), but more on an institutional level, by investigating different types of the power confrontation between Śākyamuni and his individual disciples.

Mahākāśyapa and Ānanda's conflicts are designed to constructively serve different political agendas to prove the legitimacy of specific Buddhist lineages.

A variety of sub-themes are covered in my analyses of narratives of authority in monastic Buddhism. In order to understand how the Buddha is theologically distinguished from his disciples, the distinction and correlation between buddhahood and arhatship have been examined. Starting from a cross-sectarian idea that Śākyamuni Buddha was the “sixth arhat” in the story of the first preaching of the Dharma, I tentatively reconstruct a very early understanding of the figure of Śākyamuni and his relation to his disciples, in which the states of being a *buddha* and being an *arhat* are not radically distinguished. On the one hand, I discover that Śākyamuni is frequently considered an *arhat* in Buddhist canons of different languages; on the other hand, the term *buddhas* in many cases can interchangeably refer to Śākyamuni's disciples (e.g., the *Suttanipāta*, *Udāna* and Dhammapāla's commentary on the *Theragāthā*). Remnants of the ambiguity between buddhahood and arhatship can also be traced to the Mahāsāṅghika *Mahāvastu*, although most evidence comes from the Pāli Nikāyas/Vinayas, and in a relatively less obvious way from Chinese Āgamas/Vinayas. The possible ambiguity is strengthened by a later sectarian controversy concerning whether Śākyamuni and his disciples share the same path and the same goal; among different schools, the Mahīśāsakas are alleged to have favored the equalization of the Buddha and his disciples, while schools such as the Dharmaguptaka and Sarvāstivāda held equivocal attitudes.

The analysis of the Buddha-disciple relation constitutes another essential aspect of the discussion: through creating power confrontations between Śākyamuni and [the community of] his disciples, the stories shed light on different possibilities for power dynamics in Buddhist monasticism. I read Śāriputra's stories as the display of how the personal eminence of Śāriputra interacts with the Buddha's authority—sometimes it assists with the Buddha's leadership, but sometimes it replaces or poses pressures on the latter. In the Śrīvṛddhi narrative, Śāriputra's confrontation with the Buddha reflects the composers' worry that the high prestige of Śāriputra within the *saṅgha* and the eminence of disciples may threaten the authority of the Buddha. Śāriputra as an emulator of Śākyamuni is another pattern of the teacher-disciple. The elaborate description of Śāriputra's taming of six heretics and his *nirvāṇa* in the *SWF* are all modeled on the life stories of the Buddha, and Śāriputra acts just like an imitator of Śākyamuni. The fluidity of Śāriputra's image between a renowned disciple and a potential challenger is also evident in some other stories of the *SWF*. Through

a philological survey comparing the parallels in the *Divyāvadāna*, the *Mūlasarvāstivāda* Vinaya(s) and some other sources, I argue that the stories in the *SWF* reflect a narrative tradition that has a particular cult of Śāriputra and tolerates the role of Śāriputra as an emulator of Śākyamuni.

A topic which I keep undeveloped in the main body but want to supplement here is an experimental reading of Śāriputra's confrontation in a different light, namely, as the demonstration of the tension between the established textual authority and the monks' cries for autonomy. In this tentative reading, Śāriputra no longer represents the community of unsubmitive disciples, while the Buddha no longer speaks for himself; rather, Śāriputra stands for the normative, authoritative lifestyle, requiring the whole monastic community to behave precisely as prescribed by the sacred texts (here, the Vinaya), whereas the Buddha assumes a humane and sympathetic image and argues in favor of the living community's practical needs. The confrontation is not between the community of disciples and the Buddha, but between the sacred texts as the body of authority and the monks' updated demands in the practical running of the monastic community. Through the lips of the Buddha, what the narratives articulate are the monks' demands and viewpoints. This reading transforms the Buddha's authority into a "weapon" for Buddhists' to seek a certain degree of independence from the existing authority: following the logic that the sacred texts are the record of the Buddha's own words, the portrayal of the Buddha as a challenger of this rule can definitely compromise the authority of the sacred texts.⁶¹³

My lengthy treatment of the Devadatta narrative presents a fresh discussion of this narrative in its historical development and ideological complexities. The popular version of Devadatta's biography is effectively modeled on the definition of a schismatic in the Vinayas, and therefore, the real significance of the figure of Devadatta must first and foremost be understood in the Buddhist schismatic context. In the legal framework, the agent of schismatic activities should be a decent monk, which well explains why Devadatta is always recalled as having led a successful religious life. In the investigation of the different

⁶¹³ More intriguingly, stories that argue for autonomy from the written texts are transmitted precisely in the form of "sacred texts." Buddhist literature has a self-reflective consciousness of the tension between written authority and the living communities' demand for autonomy. The growth of Buddhist literature was propelled, at least partially, by this very tension: when old texts became outdated or too strict, living communities created new sayings, new perspectives, and new arguments to facilitate their needs; however, new sayings would eventually become old and undergo challenges, revisions, and reinterpretations by new generations. These kinds of constant negations and reconfigurations spurred the expansion of Buddhist literature.

categories of schism in different contexts, I demonstrate that schism is an issue of substantial ambiguity: on the one hand, schism is condemned as the gravest of the five *ānantarya* transgressions; on the other hand, Buddhist texts already perceive schism as an inevitable historical tendency and even justify certain forms of schismatic activities. If a schismatic is not necessarily to be condemned, we must then explain why Devadatta is so forcefully hated. One plausible answer is that in the Abhidharma scholastic tradition, schism became not purely a legal problem but also a morally reprehensible act (as one of the five *ānantaryakarmas*). From another perspective, the condemnation of Devadatta can be interpreted using the “scapegoat theory” proposed by René Girard: the demonization of Devadatta offers monks an object of blame, namely the sinful “other,” and transfers the responsibility for the schismatic history of Buddhism to specific individuals. In the scapegoat theory, one essential feature is that the link between the chosen scapegoat—in our case, Devadatta—and the cause of the trouble is constantly reinforced and strengthened. This is particularly true in the development of the Devadatta narratives: the image of Devadatta becomes more and more heinous, and various unfavorable qualities come to be attributed to him. In the process of creating an abominable Devadatta, Buddhists have realized that the ongoing defamation of Devadatta could cause serious problems, as it would not be compatible with the framework of karma, and moreover, could undermine the supreme authority of Śākyamuni. As an alternative approach, Mahāyāna texts argue not to treat Devadatta as a challenger: a useful antidote to problems caused by Devadatta’s evilness is not to further vilify him, but to dissolve his hostility toward the Buddha. From a literary perspective, the Devadatta narrative is a body of multilayered, ever-changing and self-reflective rhetoric, whose pivotal function is to cope with the potential troubles substantiated by Devadatta’s evildoings: schisms, desires for superfluous offerings, deviation and so forth are all practical problems that the monastic community has to cope with.

In the narratives of how to pass down the Buddha’s authority, the dialectic of legitimacy is more intensively reiterated. The Buddha’s robe, his seat, and the donations offered to him essentially become the building blocks for the metaphorical architecture of legitimacy, and different viewpoints are expressed as to how to pass them down, representing the controversy over legality among different Buddhist traditions. In this sense, telling stories becomes an apt tool for enacting power and securing privileged status. Moreover, many donation stories conduct a subtle discussion of the hierarchy between the buddha and the

saṅgha, showing considerable concern for the constructive interplay between the two sides in order to realize successful long-term sustenance of the *saṅgha*. Indeed, for religions that persist over the long history of human civilization or have the ambition to do so, it is crucially important for them to balance the authority of their primary figure and that of the living monastic community: only if the religion successfully demonstrates the primary figure's superiority can it attract more believers; in the meantime, in order to keep the religion flourishing, it must help followers to seek material security and grant them access to the ultimate religious goal.

In close readings of the image of each figure (Śāriputra, Devadatta and Mahākāśyapa), the reader may have already perceived that in each narrative matrix, the roles of disciples are dynamic and far from being stereotypical. Śāriputra as the faithful disciple is not always subservient but sometimes competes with the Buddha in the governance of the monastic community. Devadatta is also more than a condemnable challenger, and his heinous evildoings, which have gradually expanded over time, are totally deconstructed by Mahāyānists, who treat him as an aide of Śākyamuni; Mahākāśyapa's well-recognized status as the legitimate successor is also not an uncontroversial given but, so to speak, the result of skillfully-crafted rhetorical campaigns. The manifold, fluid, and unstable literary representations of the principle disciples' images reflect the function of these narratives as different trials and negotiations of power relations.

This study is concerned not only with the meaning of the texts but also with the ideological history and the function of religious narratives. Stories are not a mere tool of entertainment for Buddhist composers; on the contrary, they are means by which Buddhists understand and make sense of the essence and history of Buddhism, and they are running commentaries to explain away doubts and implant new ideas. My original plan was to conduct a dual-dimensional discussion of Śākyamuni's authority, not only from the perspective of the Buddha's relationship to his disciples but also in the context of a multi-Buddha cosmos. Macrocosmically speaking, Śākyamuni is not the only buddha and the notion of "past buddhas" were formed in an extremely early period. There are hints that the notion of past buddhas was utilized to undermine Śākyamuni's uniqueness, and in the meantime, we also read narratives that portray Śākyamuni as positioning himself among the other buddhas as a means of validating his legitimacy. Although it is an influential convention in Buddhist texts to grant buddhas of different epochs an equal status, many texts

still accept a hierarchy in the relationship between the present Buddha Śākyamuni and past/future buddhas. Although for the moment I forego consideration of this second dimension due to various constraints, it remains a rich field for future academic mining.

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English Summary

This dissertation offers a narrative perspective of the “Indian Buddhist discursive world” with respect to the power dynamics between the Buddha and his disciples. It selects multiple narratives revolving around figures from the early monastic community as represented by Śāriputra, Devadatta, Ānanda, and Kāśyapa, who attempt to compete with, challenge, or succeed the Buddha. Through close and contextualized readings, the dichotomy between the two concepts—“buddha” and “arhat”—in their usage in early texts is first challenged. A comparative reading of the narratives of Śāriputra and those of the Buddha in the *Sūtra of the Wise and Foolish* presents to us a variety of buddha–disciple interactions in which disciples not only obey but also challenge the Buddha’s authority. My treatment of the Devadatta narratives in their historical development and ideological complexities reveals that the Devadatta narrative itself is a body of multilayered, ever-changing and self-reflective rhetoric, whose pivotal function is to cope with the potential problems substantialized by Devadatta’s challenges to the Buddha. The narratives of how to pass down the Buddha’s authority in the fifth chapter concern not only the theoretical question of who are theologically legitimate inheritors, but also the practical issue of how monastic economy should be managed. All of the vibrant stories I analyze here, which are wide-ranging in terms of geography and chronology, are open windows into the Buddhist self-understanding of fundamental theological questions concerning the nature and significance of the buddha and the identity of being a Buddhist, as well as practical issues such as how to maintain their authority and accommodate their updated needs in an age without a buddha. Seeking its methodological basis in philology, history, literary theory, and linguistics, this dissertation sheds light on the dynamic interplay between narratives and ideologies and enhances our understanding of the significance of narrative in reflecting and stimulating new ideologies and constructing histories of early Buddhism.

Nederlandse Samenvatting

Deze dissertatie biedt een narratieve analyse van de discursieve wereld van het Indiaas boeddhisme, met een focus op de machtsverhoudingen tussen de Boeddha en zijn leerlingen. Hiervoor wordt er naar verschillende verhalen over personages uit de vroege monastieke gemeenschap gekeken, waaronder Śāriputra, Devadatta, Ānanda en Kāśyapa, die allen concurreerden met de Boeddha of de Boeddha trachtten op te volgen. Door middel van een nauwgezette gecontextualiseerde lezing van de teksten wordt de dichotomie tussen de begrippen ‘*buddha*’ en ‘*arhat*’, die gebruikt worden in vroege teksten, in vraag gesteld. Een vergelijkende studie van de verhalen over Śāriputra en de Boeddha in de *Sūtra over de Wijzen en Dwazen* toont verschillende manieren van interactie tussen de Boeddha en zijn leerlingen, waarbij de leerlingen niet alleen de Boeddha gehoorzamen maar ook zijn autoriteit bevragen. Mijn behandeling van de verhalen over Devadatta en hun historische ontwikkeling en ideologische complexiteit, laat zien dat deze verhalen gelaagd zijn, verandering hebben ondergaan, en zelf-reflectieve retoriek bevatten. Deze verhalen trachten voornamelijk om een antwoord te vinden op vraagstukken die voortkomen uit Devadatta’s kritische vragen aan de Boeddha. De verhalen over de opvolging van de Boeddha behandelen niet alleen de vraag wie de juiste opvolger is vanuit theologisch perspectief, maar gaan ook in op de wijze waarop het monastieke leven in goede banen geleid kan worden. De levendige verhalen die in deze studie behandeld worden, die uit zeer verschillende gebieden en periodes afkomstig zijn, bieden een inzage in het boeddhistische begrip van fundamentele theologische vraagstukken met betrekking tot de aard en betekenis van de Boeddha en de identiteit van de boeddhisten. Daarnaast verschaffen deze verhalen kennis over meer praktische zaken omtrent gezag en veranderende omstandigheden in een periode zonder de Boeddha. Met gebruikmaking van methodologieën uit de filologie, geschiedenis, literaire theorie en linguïstiek, werpt deze dissertatie nieuw licht op de dynamische verhouding tussen verhalen en ideologieën. Deze studie levert een bijdrage aan ons begrip van de relevantie van verhalen voor ideologische ontwikkelingen en aan de geschiedschrijving van het vroege boeddhisme.

Curriculum Vitae

Li, Channa was born on 11th, July, 1988, in Rizhao, a bright coastal city in Shandong Province, China. She enjoyed a happy early childhood, nurtured by the then beautiful nature and edified by the traditional Chinese literature and art. After finishing her middle school (2000-2004) and high school education (2004-2007), she was admitted by Renmin University of China in 2007 as one of the top students in Shandong Province (top 60 among 800,000 students in total). Later, she obtained a BA *sum cum laude* in Chinese Language and History (2011) and a MA *sum cum laude* in Chinese History and Tibetan Studies programs (2013) in the same university.

From 2013 to 2019, She has been employed by Universiteit Leiden as a researcher in Buddhist Studies, conducting researches on her Ph.D. dissertation, teaching courses in the Leiden University Institute for Area Studies (LIAS), and acting as a co-organizer for the Buddhist Studies Lecture Series, International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS). Her fields of interests range widely from Buddhist translation practices in medieval China and Tibet, Buddhist cultures and materials along the Silk Road (esp. Dunhuang), to the significance of Buddhist narratives in shaping the history of Tibetan and Chinese society.



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