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Challenging the Buddha's Authority: a narrative perspective of power dynamics between the Buddha and his disciples

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Stellingen

Door Channa Li, auteur van

Challenging the Buddha's Authority: A Narrative Perspective of Power Dynamics Between the Buddha and His Disciples

1. The relics of the ambiguity between buddhahood and arhatship can be traced in various sectarian schools, not only those stemming from the Sthaviras, but also those originating from the Mahāsāṅghikas.
2. Stories with the motif of Śāriputra and Devadatta competing with the Buddha can be read as a literary means by which the tension between the Teacher and disciples was intentionally created; and the process of resolving these challenges disclose profound doctrinal and socio-political messages regarding the nature of being a buddha, that of being a Buddhist monk, and practical issues such as how to accommodate the monks' updated needs in an age without a buddha.
3. The conventional portrait of Devadatta as a heinous, evil person is the result of a long historical development. The core of Devadatta's biographies 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 context of Buddhist schismatic discussions.
4. The understanding of schismatic sins in the Vinaya context and those of the scholastic traditions are different: the Vinayas' legal discussions divide schisms into the justifiable and unjustifiable, while in the scholastic understanding of schisms, splitting a *saṅgha* is a morally reprehensible action subject to intensive polemics.
5. Devadatta's five ascetic points do not constitute a coherent and fixed tradition since lists of the five points vary among different Vinayas. Its polemical intent to cast Devadatta as a controversial figure is much more important than its actual content.
6. The rampant growth of Devadatta's evil behavior in narratives over time also impairs the prestige of the Buddha, arouses paradoxes

and contradictions concerning the karma theory and the omnipotent abilities of the Buddha.

7. Although no one seriously questions Śākyamuni Buddha's position as the first leader of the monastic community nowadays, Buddhism, in fact, never established a clear-cut, fixed power pyramid in the monastic community.

8. The prestige of a prominent disciple can become a theological problem as a prestigious disciple could not only assist in enhancing the charisma of the master, but sometimes challenge or replace the latter.

9. Buddhists are good story-tellers.

10. Stories are not a mere tool of entertainment for religious composers; on the contrary, they are means by which religious practitioners understand and make sense of the essence and history of their religion, and they are running commentaries to explain away doubts and implant new ideas.

11. Telling stories can be always an apt tool for enacting power and securing privileged status in not only religious domains but every field of the society (no wonder we always need stories!).

12. A good study of religious stories requires multiple methodologies ranging from historical, philological, and theological methods, to narratology and sociology.