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The Nandimitrāvadāna: a living text from the Buddhist tradition

Chen, R.

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The *Nandimitrāvadāna*

A Living Text from the Buddhist Tradition

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Ruixuan Chen

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Promotores	Prof.dr. J.A. Silk (Leiden) Prof.dr. P.M. Harrison (Stanford)
Promotiecommissie	Prof.dr. P.C. Bisschop (Leiden) Prof.dr. J.-U. Hartmann (Munich) Prof.dr. M. Maggi (Rome) Dr. F. Lin (Leiden)

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As a child born into a Buddhist family, I cannot but conclude the acknowledgements in a conventional fashion: For whatever meaning I have distorted in this dissertation, I beg pardon from Buddhas. But if this humble piece of work has any merit, I share it with my family and all sentient beings!

Heidelberg
September, 2018

* The acknowledgements have been abridged due to the limited space allowed by the PhD regulations. I will publish the full version on another occasion.

Conventions

The present dissertation deals with primary sources mainly in three Buddhist languages, namely, Khotanese, Classical Tibetan, and Classical Chinese. For the sake of clarity and consistency, I adapt the following conventions with regard to the transcription and presentation of the multilingual materials included in the present study.

In my transcription of the Khotanese inscription, I use numbers in bold to indicate the beginning of the lines in the original, while different readings by Ernst Leumann and Ronald E. Emmerick are recorded in footnotes. The apparatus of the reconstructed Khotanese text consists of two tiers: my emendations of the original readings (i.e., Insc.) are found under the dashed line, while parallels and *testimonia* are adduced under the double line. The symbols used in my transliteration of Khotanese texts are as follows:

(abc)	restored <i>akṣara</i> (s)
[abc]	illegible or partially preserved <i>akṣara</i> (s) for which a reading can be suggested
<abc>	editor's supplement for which there is no lacuna
{abc}	editor's deletion
.a	illegible or partially preserved consonant (cluster) for which no reading can be suggested
b.	illegible or partially preserved vowel mark for which no reading can be suggested
+	illegible or partially preserved <i>akṣara</i> for which no reading can be suggested
Xa	legible consonant (cluster) for which no reading can be suggested
///	place where a fragmentary text breaks off
<u>abc</u>	<i>akṣaras</i> which Leumann and/or Emmerick read differently
¶	the double <i>daṇḍa</i> or <i>siddham</i> at the beginning of a text
+abc	editor's emendation or conjecture

All the Tibetan words are romanized throughout the dissertation according to the Wylie system. The apparatus of the critical edition of the Tibetan text is also two-tiered: the variants in the manuscripts and blockprint editions that are subject to stemmatic analyses are found under the dashed line, while differences in punctuation, orthographical peculiarities, and codicological

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features are recorded under the double line. The symbols used in my transliteration of Tibetan texts are as follows:

/abc\	letter(s) added below the line
\abc/	letter(s) added above the line, or on the top margin with the location of the addition indicated by a special symbol
<<abc>>	letter(s) added on the right or left margin
.:abc.:	scribe's deletion by adding three dots above every letter
.a	illegible or partially preserved consonant (cluster) for which no reading can be suggested
b.	illegible or partially preserved vowel mark for which no reading can be suggested
///	place where a fragmentary text breaks off
ï	reverse <i>gi gu</i>
+abc	editor's emendation

All the Chinese characters are transliterated in standardized orthography. The Mandarin or reconstructed Middle Chinese pronunciation of every character is noted in pinyin romanization or according to the Baxter/Sagart system, when specific words or proper names are under discussion. The apparatus of the diplomatic edition of the Chinese text has likewise a two-tier structure: the variants attested in the other manuscripts and blockprint editions are found under the dashed line, while orthographic variants and quotations in later works are jotted down under the double line. The symbols used in my transliteration of Chinese texts are as follows:

<abc>	editor's supplement for which there is no lacuna
□	illegible or partially preserved character for which no reading can be suggested
abc	restored character(s)
A→B	A is to be read as B
{abc}	editor's deletion
///	place where a fragmentary text breaks off
	end of a paper sheet
+abc	editor's emendation

In principle, I transcribe Korean proper names and titles of Chinese texts composed by Korean authors in McCune-Reischauer romanization, and those in Japanese according to the Hepburn system.



“This leaves me, then, with a double agenda: to try to reconstruct the actual experiences of real people (which is undoubtedly difficult), and to proceed on the assumption that in the problem posed by the sources lies the solution to our difficulties ... we have to rise to the challenge of taking the texts seriously, as referring in some way to actual historical events and to the real people who were caught up in them, rather than either writing them off as fiction, or taking them literally.”

Paul Harrison, “Mediums and Messages”¹

What Paul Harrison has proposed 15 years ago for the study of Mahāyāna scriptures holds *mutatis mutandis* for the research undertaken within the scope of the present dissertation, which focuses on the **Nandimitrāvadāna**, a text well known as the core text of the cult of the sixteen Arhats (or Elders) prevailing in East Asia since the second half of the first millennium. Doctrinally speaking, the text in question is not as seductively sophisticated as many Mahāyāna scriptures, so the effort to grasp its literal meaning may not be so demanding as to exhaust our energy to come to terms with its religious significance, as is often the case with Mahāyāna scriptures. Another notable factor differentiating the text from the rich body of Mahāyāna literature is its uninterrupted relevance to religious practices. While most Mahāyāna scriptures are shorn of context due to the scant evidence of their use for religious purposes, the historical practices of the Arhat cult are relatively well-documented and continued even nowadays in some Buddhist cultures. In this case, we are thus in a privileged position to investigate the text from the perspective of its interplay with various practices in reality, which is impossible with the lion’s share of Mahāyāna scriptures.

Be that as it may, there are commonalities shared between the present text and Mahāyāna scriptures, especially those not extant in any Indic language but only in Chinese and/or Tibetan translations. In both cases, we are dealing with normative texts, whose textual history is shaped by cross-cultural dynamics to a great extent. Thus, if only to properly understand what the texts say, it is the comparative approach that holds out any hope of success. This point has unfortunately gone unnoticed in most previous studies on the **Nandimitrāvadāna**. The first, and by far the most thorough, modern study of the text by two French savants, i.e., Sylvain Lévi and Edouard Chavannes,² is based on Xuanzang’s translation alone. This may give rise to an ungrounded presumption that the Chinese version is *the* **Nandimitrāvadāna** and

1. Harrison 2003: 117.

2. See Lévi/Chavannes 1916: 5–50, 189–304.

represents how *the text* looked in India.³ However, given the existence of the Khotanese and the Tibetan versions, it is at least overhasty to exclude the possibility that the Chinese version is but *a Nandimitrāvadāna*, before a comparison of all the three versions.⁴ Although their fundamental identity and family resemblance are beyond doubt, the degree to which they vary from one another, as is shown below in detail, is sometimes surprising. Therefore, it is a futile quest to seek a unitary origin, and the attempt to create an artificial unity out of this natural diversity blurs, if not distorts, the genuine character of the tradition.

On the other hand, it is staggering to see how the text is glossed over by scholars working on the Arhat cult. Since the publication of the monumental monographic study by M.W. de Visser,⁵ significant progresses have been made by scholars of East Asian studies and art historians, who have greatly improved our current state of knowledge about the historical development of the cult in various Buddhist cultures.⁶ Nevertheless, most of the scholars content themselves with a brief summary or free paraphrase of the Chinese version, as if this is what the *Nandimitrāvadāna* is all about. Little effort, if any, has been made to investigate the rôle(s) played by the text in the religious life of people who engaged in the cultic activities. Even though the text has long been recognized as the core text of the cult, no serious attempt has been made to shed light on the ways in which it was used in practice. Normative texts like this one, to be sure, cannot be read literally as a faithful record of what actually happened in history. But it is a move to the opposite extreme to dismiss them as fictional and thus irrelevant to the living religion. “Once again,” to quote from Harrison, “the well-known middle path seems to be the right one to follow.”⁷ And in order to embark on the middle path, a close reading of the *Nandimitrāvadāna* against a broader socio-religious background is indispensable. The present study has the ambition to take some experimental steps in this direction.

3. It is inevitable for me to use the expression ‘the *Nandimitrāvadāna*’ or ‘the text’ below for the sake of simplicity, but the reader is to be alerted to a potential misunderstanding that reads the meaning of singularity into the definite article. Whenever I use the expression, it refers to a diverse textual tradition rather than a single fixed text.

4. Shih 2002 claims to have undertaken such a comparative study, but the outcome of the dissertation has hardly made any contribution to this end.

5. See de Visser 1918–1919: 87–102, 222–231, 1920–1922: 117–144, and 1922–1923: 60–102.

6. For the studies of the Arhat cult in various cultures: a) late imperial China (especially during the Song dynasty), see Joo 2007 and 2009: 81–116; b) medieval Japan, see Faure 1996: 88–96; c) post-imperial Tibet, see Hadano 1955: 39–52, van der Kuijp 2016: 260–262, n. 146. Art historical works on the Arhat paintings, which have been published since the 19th century, are too numerous to survey, and the following listing is by no means exhaustive: Watters 1898: 329–347, Ōmura 1909, Fong 1958, Donohashi 1992, Little 1992: 255–281, Wang 1993: 25–36 and 118–121, Kent 1994: 183–213, Ōtani 2007: 15–69, and Lee 2010: 113–140.

7. Harrison 2003: 117.

Before delving further into the text and its various versions, I start this prolegomenon by addressing an issue and elucidating a concept so as to highlight some theoretical and methodological considerations, which remain the overall guidelines for the following chapters of this thesis.

The Issue of Historicity

Gregory Schopen is the first scholar who calls into question the predilection for text-based approach in the field of Buddhist Studies, which he considers a symptom of the “Protestant presuppositions” underlying the modern Buddhist scholarship in the West.⁸ In framing his argument against this predilection, Schopen sets out to characterize the scriptural materials as – in most cases – undatable, over-exploited, and normative, as opposed to archeological and epigraphic materials which are datable, under-exploited, and descriptive. This well-contrived dichotomy between the two bodies of materials leads in due course to the question: To which of the two should the primacy be given in historical studies of Buddhism? The answer to the question is, in that context, not far to seek.

Schopen’s thesis turns out to be seminal in the last two decades, and is often understood as a corrective to the over-reliance on literary sources, or a call for an extension of the Buddhologist’s toolkit,⁹ or some kind of “evidential criticism” or “cultural criticism”.¹⁰ In stark contrast to the popularity of Schopen’s article, the voice of his opponents seems to fall into a spiral of silence, as it were, insofar as very few scholars, to my knowledge, have critically engaged with his thesis. Among the few opponents, Jan Nattier stands out by offering the most in-depth critique of the thesis to date. Against Schopen’s claim that normative texts cannot be read as historical evidence, Nattier proposes four principles, which can be used to extract historical data from scriptural sources, furnishing each of these with examples of their *modus operandi*.¹¹ With respect to the representativeness of scriptural texts, Nattier argues that both their production and preservation involve a huge number of Buddhists who represent a diversity of religious views, rather than,

8. See Schopen 1991: 1–23 (= 1997: 1–22).

9. See Nance 2012: 9: “[Schopen 1991] can be (and should be) taken as a corrective to a one-sided model of Buddhist Studies that opts to focus exclusively on texts while ignoring other available data. Read in this way, Schopen is encouraging us to broaden the body of data from which we draw our conclusions.”

10. See Gómez 1995: 207, n. 13: “I believe Schopen is also doing a special kind of cultural criticism, although I have not seen him state anything like this publicly. Even his paper on ‘Protestant presuppositions’ shies away from the implicit cultural criticism.”

11. For the four principles (i.e. of embarrassment, of irrelevance, of counter-argument, and of corroborating evidence), see Nattier 2003: 63–69.

as Schopen believes, only a “small, atypical part” of Buddhist community.¹² In addition, Nattier goes so far as to suggest that even an unactualized ideal is able to shape, in one way or another, some facts of the actual life of Buddhists who fall short of it, as is the case with the cult of amulets blessed by forest monks in Thailand. Therefore, normative texts, to Nattier’s mind, are not necessarily otiose in everyday life of the faith community.¹³

Robert Sharf has attempted a more balanced view in his introduction to the *Treasure Store Treatise*. Agreeing with Schopen to the effect that exclusive textual focus results in misconception about, if not distortion of, the history of Indian Buddhism, Sharf does not fail to appreciate the perpetual tension between normative ideal and living practice, which is instrumental in bringing about functional model(s) of normative Buddhism laying claim to the authority and prestige under different socio-religious circumstances. In other words, idealized norms are meant to be distinguished from reality and detached from specific historical and cultural contexts so as to create such a tension, which perpetuates the modes of authority throughout the transmission of Buddhism in space and time. It is precisely this tension that Sharf considers part and parcel of ‘Buddhism’, an essentialist reading of which he is seemingly disposed to defend.¹⁴

Both Nattier and Sharf make considerable contributions to what seems to me a rehabilitation of the textual approach to Buddhism by demonstrating how the study of normative texts, a category under which the *Nandimitrāvadāna* is also subsumed, can still be a worthwhile endeavor in post-Schopenic terms. Yet, neither of them demurs to Schopen’s assertion that normative texts are not historical, insofar as these do not directly reflect what actually happened. This assertion seems to be *prima facie* plausible, but is based on a facile understanding of what ‘history’ is and a not quite fruitful definition of ‘historicity’. In what follows, I argue that normative texts are just as historical as descriptive ones, if not more so.

For Schopen, ‘history’ is what people actually did in the past, and ‘historicity’ is the reliability of a certain body of materials to reflect what actually happened.¹⁵ But if we briefly suspend the perennial inquiry into the hazy

12. See Nattier 2003: 103–105. She also points out that epigraphic data, on the contrary, are not as descriptive as Schopen claims, given their monotony and formulaic character (p. 104, n. 3). This point is corroborated by Nance 2012: 10–12, where more evidence in support of Nattier is adduced.

13. See Nattier 2003: 105.

14. See Sharf 2002: 12–17.

15. The word ‘historicity’ does not occur in Schopen 1991. But the paper abounds in the following expressions (emphasis added): “what someone actually did/practiced/believed” [8x], “actual practice/people/behavior etc.” [12x], “what was actually occurring” [2x]. These occurrences may serve as an indication of his predisposition to define history through historical actuality. At least in two cases, we read Schopen juxtaposing “actual (religious)” with “historical”; see Schopen 1991: 9, 20 (= 1997: 5, 13).

records of the past and remain alert to voices from other fields, it is possible to view the matter from a different angle. In the present study, I adopt a different definition of 'historicity' informed by phenomenological and hermeneutical philosophy. According to the phenomenological tradition, the concept of 'historicity'¹⁶ not only concerns what actually happened, but rather signifies that human beings are always "entangled in" history,¹⁷ which is not to be identified with the past *tout court*. To speak in a Heideggerian vein, historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) is based on temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*), which is the "unified phenomenon of a future which makes present in the process of having been" (*gewesend-gegenwärtigende Zukunft*).¹⁸ This somewhat abstruse definition can be further clarified: (1) Every moment of human experience has three dimensions: the past, the present, and the future. (2) Temporality lies in the unity of these three dimensions: "[A]ny moment is a crossing point of past and future. The present bears within it the past and the future. Past and future make it up."¹⁹

To be sure, Heidegger addressed the issue of historicity at an ontological level; but his theoretical framework provides a heuristic device for better understanding some empirical phenomena. Viewing acts of making and transmitting normative texts as one of the human attempts to cope with temporality is plausible and promising, since both the engagement with the past and the anticipation of the future are involved therein. The making of Buddhist texts is, in many cases, not so much a process of free composition as that of superposition, which consists in laying down building blocks stemming from different chronological strata. Thus, the outcome of the process is, as it were, in the grip of the past. On the other hand, the future makes its force felt to the extent that it sifts through texts or parts thereof – only those coming up to some expectations for the future stand a chance of survival. If we understand the historicity of normative texts through the entanglement of every moment of their development in the past and the future, we may not make a fuss over their inadequacy of reflecting what actually happened, but can come to terms with a not insignificant aspect peculiar to this body of materials, namely their fluid shape. Compared with descriptive texts which are concerned above all with the here and now, normative texts, conveying what ought to be, are rather Janus-faced, to wit,

16. For this concept and its history, see Bauer 1963, von Renthe-Fink 1964.

17. The interpretation of 'historicity' through the human entanglement in history was first formulated by Wilhelm Schapp in 1953 as the title of his classic book *In Geschichten verstrickt: Zum Sein von Ding und Mensch* (Hamburg: Meiner).

18. See Heidegger 1967: 326 (tr. Stambaugh). For the philosopher's systematic disquisition on the relationship between historicity and temporality, see Heidegger 1967: 372–404.

19. See Dostal 1993: 156. It should be kept in mind that the future, within Heidegger's philosophical system, ends in death. This theory, implied by the finitude of temporality and underlying the idea of being-toward-death, is not compatible with the Buddhist idea of transmigration (*samsāra*), and thus not implied in my thesis.

looking both backward and forward by interweaving paragons of the past with blueprints for the future. Thus, they are more susceptible to textual alterations so as to keep up with the times, and thus irreducible to a single textual archetype. This is exactly the case with the **Nandimitrāvadāna**, whose protean form bears witness to its entanglement in history and evinces its historicity. It is in this sense that I regard the present text as historical, or more precisely, historical as a 'living text'.

The Living Text

The concept of 'living text' has its origin in the field of New Testament Studies and has undergone a shift in focus during the last decade of the 20th century. The term appeared to be descriptive, when Kurt and Barbara Aland, in 1989, used it to characterize the text of the New Testament, especially the Gospels, as alterable and free from sacred rigidity:

Until the beginning of the fourth century the text of the New Testament developed freely. It was a 'living text' in the Greek literary tradition, unlike the text of the Hebrew Old Testament, which was subject to strict controls because (in the oriental tradition) the consonantal text was holy.²⁰

Although the presumed dichotomy between the Greek and the so-called oriental tradition is questionable, the concept of 'living text' undoubtedly brings to the fore the noteworthy fact that there is a huge number of textual variants in the Gospels which cannot be stemmatically analyzed and are probably due to the texts' transmission in early Christianity, and that similar phenomena are not observed in the text of the Old Testament. However, since that was something well known among the specialists, this new term addressing an old problem remained largely ignored up to the mid-1990s.

The watershed moment was David C. Parker's 1997 monograph *The Living Text of the Gospels*. Taking as a point of departure some methodological considerations presented in his 1991 paper "Scripture is Tradition,"²¹ Parker successfully breathed new life into the not quite old, but largely neglected, concept, which he reinterpreted and foregrounded in his book. In contrast to the Alands who anchored the term 'living text' historically to the literary tradition of ancient Greece, Parker understood it rather in the context of a living tradition which finds its expression in every manuscript:

It is as the written tradition which has survived and as the oral tradition which we have received that the tradition lives. The surviving manuscripts and the spoken word are not simply bearers of some prior living tradition. They are the living tradition.²²

20. Aland/Aland 1989: 69.

21. See Parker 1991: 11–17 (= 2009: 265–272).

22. Parker 1997a: 210.

Rejecting the idea that there is “a greater reality” apart from the written and oral traditions, Parker did not see the fluidity of the Gospels as a peculiarity of the Greek literary tradition which ended at some point in early Christianity, but hypothesized that there is a “continuing interplay between the Scripture – the text copied – and the tradition – the person engaged in the process of copying in and for the church.”²³ This hypothesis, if accepted, has fundamental implications for the study of the manuscripts. That is to say, in identifying the manuscripts with the tradition or part thereof, Parker understood the study of the surviving Gospel books as that of a living tradition, which is specific for every faith community. In this regard, the attempt to recover a single ‘original text’, an ill-defined term which has long been regarded as the obvious goal of the discipline,²⁴ is not only futile but also impossible.²⁵ Rather than reconstructing the ‘original text’ (in whatever definition of the word), Parker considered determining the sequence in which variants arose as the goal of textual criticism.²⁶ The determination, to his mind, aims at a framework for making sense of the tradition that has come down to us, and the process of textual investigation is focused on extant witnesses rather than reconstructed (hyp)archetypes. Tracing the textual history downward in time, Parker also drew attention to the rôle played by exegetes and scribes:

The textual scholar has to reckon with the fact that such a text, based on a period of transmission extending over (in the case of the Gospels) at least a century, will already show signs of what its readers rather than its author thought it should contain.²⁷

The same line of thought also finds expression in his contention that the distinction between ‘authorial’ and ‘scribal’ activity cannot be made.²⁸ In other words, Parker found it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between what an author – if this concept can be expediently used for the nonce – does with the evangelical sources at his disposal and what a scribe does with a manuscript. In doing so, he raised a fundamental issue at the heart of New Testament Studies, namely, the concept of authorship,

23. Parker 1997a: 204. See also *ibid.*: 209–211.

24. For this term and its multivalence, see Epp 1999: 245–281.

25. For a very similar viewpoint published almost simultaneously, see Epp 1997: 48 (emphasis added): “Thus, textual criticism, often conceived as having a singular goal of establishing the ‘original’ text, is in reality a discipline with broader goals, including the display of the variety of opinions and convictions that enlivened the life of the church throughout its early history. Exegetes, therefore, should never consider the New Testament text to be static or inert, for it was and remains a living text that, in turn, reveals the living church that transmitted it.”

26. See Parker 2008: 159.

27. Parker 2011: 20.

28. See Parker 1997b: 54: “[T]he line between separate gospels as retellings of the story of Jesus, and separate manuscripts which are literally re-writings (often with many differences) of the four Gospel stories is a line that cannot be drawn.”

which has been fiercely contested in a number of fields bearing on pre-modern literary traditions, such as Jewish Rabbinic literature, Pseudepigrapha, and medieval literature.²⁹ Scholars working in these fields have by and large the same conception of the texts on which they work: They are not the kinds of texts that have authorial originals,³⁰ but display a set of characteristics which Parker attributes to a ‘living text’. In the present thesis, I argue that it is promising to adopt ‘living text’ as a heuristic device to describe a certain number of Buddhist texts (including the **Nandimitrāvadāna**), which exhibit more or less the same characteristics.

First, these are texts characterized by alteration and re-composition, to the extent that no reconstruction of a single originating text is possible. To scholars of Buddhist texts, this feature is well known to be typical of Mahāyāna scriptures. Certain Mahāyāna scriptures, e.g. the **Saddharmapuṇḍarīka**, the **Kāśyapaparivarta**, the **Kāraṇḍavyūha**, the **Samādhirājasūtra**,³¹ are transmitted in multiple recensions, which vary from one another in wording to such an extent that their derivation from a single oral or written *Urtext* through scribal or aural variations is unlikely. The fluctuating nature of the Mahāyāna scriptures has attracted the attention of David Seyfort Ruegg who, with special reference to the **Saddharmapuṇḍarīka**, remarked as follows:

We are seemingly confronted here with a remarkable and highly important phenomenon in the history of religio-philosophical literature that has still to be fully addressed by modern scholarship, namely a Sūtra extant in recensions closely related in their contents but not necessarily in their verbal expression ... to postulate some *Urtext* from which distinct recensions derive, in the manner of a *stemma codicum*, would here appear to constitute a misapplication of otherwise sound philological method. What we seem to have before us in such cases is, instead, records of a set of teachings / ideas / narratives in parallel wordings, oral or written, that are all somehow linked with a more or less compact – but nevertheless not univocally expressed – Sūtra tradition that came to be expressed in distinct recensions.³²

Unlike the recensional variations in the canonical texts of mainstream schools (i.e., the Nikāyas and the Āgamas) which seem to correlate with school affiliations and can be explained through oral transmissions,³³ what is

29. For a historical reappraisal of this concept in Jewish, Hellenistic, and Christian traditions, see Wyrick 2004. For the complex of problems concerning authorship and authority in medieval literature, with special focus on the difference between modern and pre-modern understandings, see Weisweiler 1995.

30. See Holmes 2012: 670–672.

31. For useful references to previous studies of various recensions of the individual Mahāyāna scriptures, see Ruegg 2004: 20f., n. 27.

32. Ruegg 2004: 20–23.

33. For previous studies by way of attempts at explaining the recensional variations in the old canonical sources, see von Simson 1977: 479–488, von Hinüber 1994, and Allon 1997 (with further references).

attested in the various recensions of those Mahāyāna scriptures cannot be fully accounted for by orality alone, but may well have something to do with the ways in which such texts were (re)produced and used. To better understand the latter requires empirical inquiry into the historical background against which such kinds of textual variations took place.

Schopen has taken a step forward in this direction through a case study of the **Bhaiṣajyagurusūtra** at Gilgit.³⁴ Having meticulously examined four (or perhaps five) exemplars of this scripture, Schopen concludes his historical and philological investigation with notes on two chronological factors: (1) There are “very great differences in the linguistic shape” of the various **Bhaiṣajyagurusūtra** known in 6th/7th-century Gilgit which “cannot be a visible function of chronology or development over time”, since the various manuscripts “all circulated or were available at the same time at the same place”. (2) The manifold verbal formulations of **Bhaiṣajyagurusūtra** at Gilgit may chronologically not be far removed from the inception of this scripture; in other words, “[t]he great variation seems to occur nearer the beginning than the end of the textual tradition,” which implies that “Mahāyāna sūtras like the **Bhaiṣajyagurusūtra** had in their early phases no fixed, standard form.”³⁵ These observations are historically buttressed by a reinterpretation of the find-spot of the Gilgit manuscripts as “a kind of sacred workshop, a combination of genizah and scriptorium, where old, unusable, or returned manuscripts ... were kept, along with some master-copies, and where new manuscripts were manufactured and were for sale.”³⁶ In this sacred workshop, “more laymen than monks were involved in the production and use of these manuscripts,”³⁷ and lay participation in the process may well have contributed to the formation of their fluid linguistic shape.

A similar phenomenon is observed in the **Fanwang jing** 梵網經, a Chinese apocryphal text composed, in all likelihood, in the 5th century AD.³⁸ Having collated 21 manuscripts and block-print editions of the text, Funayama Tōru finds himself confronted with an extraordinarily large number of variants,³⁹ the majority of which is not comprised of “scribal errors or careless mistakes

34. See Schopen 2009: 189–219.

35. For the conclusion of his article summing up the two chronological factors, see Schopen 2009: 214–215.

36. Schopen 2009: 203.

37. This observation is based on the colophons of the manuscripts, see Schopen 2009: 203.

38. For the formation and prehistory of this apocryphal text, see Funayama 1996: 54–78.

39. The quantity of variants becomes more noteworthy, if compared with the cases of other translated texts; see Funayama 2017: 127f.: “The second fascicle of the F[an]w[ang] j[ing], seven pages long in the Taishō edition, has 304 locations for which variant readings exist ... Guṇabhadra’s translation of the *Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanādasūtra* (T353) ... is of nearly the same length, i.e. seven pages in the Taishō, but has only 78 locations of variant readings. Similarly, the first seven pages of Xuanzang’s translation of the *Great Sūtra of Wisdom* (T220) have only 24 locations of variant readings.”

but results of intentional rewriting or emendation.” The breeding ground for the proliferation of variants might well have been a persistent milieu, in which the **Fanwang jing** was used as “a foundational resource for the daily life and practice of ordinary monastics and laity”, who readily made changes or improvements to the text(s) that had come down to them.⁴⁰ In this regard, the distinction between such apocryphal texts and the aforementioned Mahāyāna scriptures is a distinction difficult to make.⁴¹ It is also to be kept in mind that the dichotomy between apocrypha and canonical scriptures is theological rather than historical by nature,⁴² and thus not necessarily useful for philologists and historians of religions. Therefore, it may be reasonable to subsume some apocrypha and Mahāyāna scriptures under the same rubric of ‘living text’, insofar as the two groups of Buddhist literature have been subject to an open process of transmission, in which variations were the norm rather than the exception.

Second, it is impossible, in the case of a ‘living text’, to draw a clear-cut line between the work of the author – if there is one – and that of every scribe or copyist who laid his (or her) hands on the text. When it comes to the literary tradition of Buddhism which was disseminated across linguistic and cultural boundaries, equal, if not more, credit should be given to every translator, whose activity is often as shadowy as the authorial and scribal.

This is not to repeat what we have learned from modern Translation Theorists, namely, every translator is an author under the skin, since translation is a process of textual manipulation which involves rewriting what is written by someone else.⁴³ With regard to Buddhist scriptural sources, however, it is fair to say that every author is essentially a translator, whose work consists in making known in his (or her) own language what is believed to have been taught by the Buddha. Although we have no idea what those who composed Buddhist scriptures thought they were doing, such a *confessio poetae* is found in the **Book of Zambasta**, a Khotanese poem which, albeit not scriptural, may have enjoyed a quasi-canonical status among the Khotanese-speaking Buddhists. By modern standards, this poem is a

40. See Funayama 2017: 141. Genealogically, Funayama divides all the manuscript and block-print editions at his disposal into two fundamental lineages, and the main differences between the both consist in stylistic improvements. For the two lineages of the received editions, see Funayama 2010: 179–211.

41. In the case of the **Bhaiṣajyagurusūtra**, the boundary is all the more blurred, since some philological evidence has recently been brought to light, which might suggest a possible Chinese apocryphal origin of the text, which does not seem to have been transmitted in Sanskrit until the 6th century; see Fang 2014: 90–100, and Loukota 2018. This issue is very controversial and thus better to be suspended for the moment.

42. For a reflection on the definition of ‘apocrypha’ and the fluid criteria for canonicity in the Buddhist tradition, see Buswell 1990: 3–7. For the problematics of designating this group of Chinese texts as ‘apocrypha’, see Funayama 2013: 173, and Silk 2015: 208.

43. See Bassnett 2002: 45f.

composition rather than translation. However, the anonymous poet, to whom we owe this *chef-d'œuvre*, apparently conceived of the nature of his own work not as authorial. In a number of statements in the first person singular dispersed throughout the poem, he referred to his own activity as either ‘translating’ (*byūh-*),⁴⁴ or ‘preaching’ (*hvāñ-*),⁴⁵ or ‘extracting’ (*thamj-*).⁴⁶ However the verbs are construed, on no account would he have made a claim to authorship, which, in this case, would have been tantamount to taking the credit due to the Buddha. On the contrary, he considered himself as something of a messenger conveying what the Buddha taught to his benighted fellow countrymen, who only valued the teachings in a language incomprehensible to them.⁴⁷ More than once, he expressed his apprehensions about occasional distortion of the meaning (*artha*) and possible contamination with what the Buddha had not taught.⁴⁸ From an emic perspective, there is virtually no difference between his activity and that of every translator or scribe of Buddhist sūtras.

The concepts of ‘translation’, ‘sermon’, and ‘re-composition’ do not seem to have been clearly distinguished from one another in quite a number of pre-modern Buddhist cultures. In early Chinese Buddhism, lectures delivered by Indian monks were not seldom handed down as if they were translations, as Funayama has convincingly demonstrated.⁴⁹ At least one way to make

44. Cf. **Book of Zambasta** 1.189a *cu aysu ttū hvanau byūttaimā* ‘since I have translated this teaching ...’; 23.2c *hvatānau yi hamjsāte byūhā* ‘I intend to translate it into Khotanese’; 23.372a *cu aysu ttū hvatānau byūttaimā* ‘since I have translated this into Khotanese ...’ [ed. Emmerick 1968: 8, 342, 366].

45. Cf. **Zambasta** 2.244a *cu aysu ttū dhātu hvatāimā* ‘since I have preached this law ...’; 6.1c *panina ttau sūtriṇa vaysña śśālo hvāñmā pyuviṛā* ‘of each sūtra thus for you now a verse shall I preach: Listen!’; 9.1cd *dharmānu paṃjīnu rraṣṭu sūtryau jsa hvāñmā arthu* ‘according to the sūtras, I preach the true meaning of five things (*dharmā*): ...’; 10.34cd *bodhisam̐bāru hvatāimā sūtryau jsa ttatvata rraṣṭo* ‘I have rightly, truly preached the *bodhisam̐bhāra* according to the sūtras.’ [ed. Emmerick 1968: 50, 116, 140, 150].

46. Cf. **Zambasta** 14.98cd *ku aysu ttuto ttāndāko thīyaimā batakū* ‘whence (i.e. from the sūtras) I have extracted this brief, short (epitome).’ [ed. Emmerick 1968: 226].

47. See Emmerick 1968: 343, 345 (= **Zambasta** 23.4–6): “But such are their deeds: the Khotanese do not value the Law at all in Khotanese. They understand it badly in Indi[c]. In Khotanese it does not seem to them to be the Law. For the Chinese the Law is in Chinese. In Kashmirian it is very agreeable, but they so learn it in Kashmirian that they also understand the meaning of it. To the Khotanese that seems to be the Law whose meaning they do not understand at all. When they hear it together with the meaning, it seems to them thus a different Law.”

48. See Emmerick 1968: 9 (= **Zambasta** 1.189): “I seek pardon from all the *deva* Buddhas, for whatever meaning I have distorted here”, and *ibid.* 141 (= **Zambasta** 8.48): “Whatever there may be here which the Buddha has not spoken in a sūtra, one should not accept. That is all my fault.”

49. See Funayama 2006: 39–55. His *ad hoc* description of this phenomenon as “masquerading” (in the title) might be in a way misleading. Since there is no evidence that Chinese Buddhists at that time drew a distinct line between such lectures and genuine

sense of this peculiar phenomenon is to presume that the two types of literature were not clearly distinguished from each other at their receiving end. It follows from the presumption that translating and lecturing on Indic texts were not considered mutually exclusive activities at that time. In several Central Asian languages, the verb ‘to translate’ seems to have such diverse connotations that it cannot be clearly distinguished from ‘to compose’ or ‘to recast’.⁵⁰ In other words, erstwhile speakers of these languages were incapable of articulating a clear-cut distinction between the two activities. It is thus not far-fetched to argue that the indistinct verbal expression reflects the speakers’ view of the world, in which the translatorial activity was not distinctly demarcated. Although the situation later in China and Tibet was different,⁵¹ the lack of a clear distinction between those literary types seems to have existed in various cultural spheres under Buddhist influence for a significantly long time, and thus should be taken seriously.

Methodologically, the concept of ‘living text’ raises the old question of authorship, especially with regard to Buddhist scriptures, which, to be sure, are attributed to the Buddha in most cases.⁵² However, pondering over the questions of how texts developed over time, how to interpret and translate them, we often find this simplistic attribution not quite helpful. Or to take it a step further: the very idea of ‘author’ raises more problems than it resolves, inasmuch as it implies some kind of historical hierarchy, which is repudiated by Jonathan Silk in the following rhetorical question:

What is it we, as scholars of Buddhist literature, study? If we answer this question by

translations, no historical attempt was made to disguise the former as the latter, and the impression of pretense arises only *ex post facto*.

50. In Khotanese, the verb ‘to translate’ (*byūh*- < **vi-yaufya*-; SGS: 106) is often “used in the literal sense of ‘transfer’ from one place to another,” and thus “means accordingly ‘transfer’ from one language to another. It is used both of literal translation as in the case of the close rendering of the *Siddhasāra* and of free paraphrase as in the case of the *Book of Zambasta*.” See Emmerick 1983b: 17. In the Uighur colophons of the *Maitrisimit*, two verbs in the same semantic field, i.e. *y’r’t*- (in reference to the transfer from Indic to Tocharian A), and (‘)*βyr*- (from Tocharian A to Uighur), are attested. According to Werner Thomas, (‘)*βyr*- does not mean a literal rendering of the Tocharian texts, but rather a sort of translating which is relatively oriented to the original and thus results in a considerable degree of conformity in the Tocharian and Uighur versions, between which discrepancies are by no means thus excluded. By contrast, *y’r’t*- refers to a free recasting, which varies considerably from the original by shortening, summarizing, and recomposing the Indic sources. See Thomas 1989: 8–9. The counterpart of *y’r’t*- in Tocharian A is *ritw*- (< PIE **rith*₂-u-C- ~ **rith*₂-u-V-, cognate of Latin *rīte*, *rītus*, Avestan *raēθβa*-; Weiss 2015: 181–198), which means originally ‘to join, mix, combine’ and thus ‘to put together, compose’.

51. For the Chinese translation process during the Sui-Tang period without audience and lectures, see Funayama 2006: 40. For the complexity of Tibetan translations from Sanskrit, illustrated with selected examples, see Hahn 2007: 123–149.

52. Note that there are some cases in which a beginningless transmission and an authorless production of the text are presumed, see Silk 2015: 223.

saying not that we seek the Buddha's sublime, transcendent and ahistorical message, but that instead we, even as text scholars, are primarily historians of Buddhist traditions, then instantly any pretense that origins actually matter must disappear like evaporating dew in the morning sun. There is no conceivable objective reason to value the product of one community over that of another, no reason why we should seek the earlier form of a text rather than a later one: why would the form in which Buddhists in 6th century China copied a *sūtra* translation be more valuable to us as historians of Buddhism *tout court*, than the form in which it was copied in the 16th century?⁵³

Such a historical hierarchy is not only, as Silk points out, unjustified in terms of the value system of historians, but also factually ungrounded as regards a living text, whose process of formation and transmission knows no clear-cut distinction between an authorial hand and an editorial / scribal / translatorial one. To reject the hierarchy entails reflecting on some commonplace terms used in literary criticism, e.g. 'author', 'transmitter' and 'translator', the usefulness of which is questionable in this context. As a substitute for all these terms, I use the concept of 'tradent' throughout the present study so as to steer clear of the problem of authorship.

The term 'tradent' has long been used in the study of Jewish Rabbinic literature to describe the ways in which Rabbinic sages themselves understood their rôle in the making of this body of materials. As the *de facto* creators of Rabbinic literature, they denied any creative rôle for themselves in the composition of the texts, but only took responsibility for "preserving the integrity of the received version as received from an authoritative teacher".⁵⁴ The first attempt at adopting this term into the field of Buddhist Studies is made by Robert Mayer, who thereby wishes to bring to the fore the creative rôle played by the so-called Treasure revealers (*gter ston*) in the formation of Treasure (*gter ma*) literature peculiar to Tibetan Buddhism.⁵⁵ Although the texts on which Mayer works differ from those under discussion in several respects, they have one characteristic in common, namely, their genesis cannot be adequately accounted for through the assumption of the absolute creativity of authors. In order to come to terms with some of their compositional features, more focus on communal aspects of their authorship is in order. Therefore, there is a good reason to follow in the wake of Mayer by making consistent use of the term 'tradent' in my discussions of the multifarious literary activities shaping the living text.

In short, the concept of 'living text' is a useful device to cope with some idiosyncrasies of Buddhist literature. To be sure, the aforementioned examples are derived from a limited number of texts, but at least some of the ideas engaged above may well have wider applicability. This is illustrated below with the specific case of the **Nandimitrāvadāna**.

53. Silk 2015: 211f.

54. See Jaffee 2007: 21–26.

55. See Mayer 2015: 227–242.

Modularity and Fluidity

This section begins with a synoptic presentation of what we know about the content of the **Nandimitrāvadāna** on the basis of the multilingual textual sources treated in the following chapters. The presentation must be preceded with a *caveat*: I try to incorporate all the textual units attested in any of the extant versions into the synopsis only for the convenience of comparison and analysis; therefore, what is presented below should by no means be misunderstood as a ‘complete’ – much less ‘original’ – shape of the **Nandimitrāvadāna**. The fact that almost all the units are testified to by both the Chinese and the Tibetan versions cannot be overgeneralized. The alphabetical headings of the sections, which are followed throughout the chapters below, are adopted from Hakamaya Noriaki, who has divided up the text thus in his *editio princeps* of the Tibetan version:⁵⁶

Sections	Content	Khot.	Tib.	Chin.
o	Title (+ translator or invocation)	×	√	√
A	<i>The frame narrative (incipit)</i> : 800 years after the Nirvāṇa of the Buddha Śākyamuni, Nandimitra, an Arhat of great attainments, before passing into Nirvāṇa dispels the sorrow or anxiety of his fellow monks by telling them that the Buddha Śākyamuni, when he was about to pass away, entrusted the teachings etc. to the sixteen Elders.	√	√	√
B	The fellow monks inquire about the names of the sixteen Elders, which Nandimitra enumerates one by one.	√	√	√
C	The fellow monks inquire about their places of residence, which Nandimitra enumerates one by one, along with the numbers of their accompanying Arhats.	√	√	√
D	<i>The timetable of the decline</i> : a. The increase in the human lifespan after the scourge of warfare (<i>śastrāntarakalpa</i>). b. The return of the sixteen Elders to Jambudvīpa when the	×	√	√

56. See Hakamaya 2007: 45–46.

	human lifespan reaches 100 years. c. The complete Nirvāṇa of the Elders and the ultimate disappearance of the teachings when the human lifespan reaches 700/70,000 years. d. The emergence of numerous Pratyekabuddhas in the world after the decline.			
E	<i>The prophecy of Maitreya:</i> a. The advent of the Buddha Maitreya in the world when the human lifespan reaches 80,000 years. b. The auspicious signs in Jambudvīpa. c. Three assemblies of the disciples under the preaching of the Buddha Maitreya.	×	√	√
F	Three types of wholesome potentialities (<i>kuśalamūla</i>) engendered under Śākyamuni will lead to the rebirths in the three assemblies under Maitreya, respectively:	×	√	√
	1. Wholesome potentialities with respect to the Buddha: commissioning images or stūpas for the Buddha.			
	2. Wholesome potentialities with respect to the teachings (<i>dharma</i>): disseminating, worshipping, and decorating the texts as the receptacle of the teachings, including: 2.1. Mahāyāna scriptures 2.2. The three Baskets (<i>tripiṭaka</i>) of Śrāvakayāna: Āgamas, Vinaya, and Abhidharma 2.3. Jātakamālā etc.			
	3. Wholesome potentialities with respect to the community (<i>saṅgha</i>): various offerings and donations to monks and monasteries.			
G	<i>The frame narrative (explicit):</i> a. Having displayed miracles, Nandimitra passes into complete Nirvāṇa. b. The worship and offerings to him made by his fellow monks. c. The circulation of the narrative.	×	√	√
o'	End title (+ colophon)	×	√	√

√ = found in the specific version; × = not found in the specific version.

At first glance, we discern three building blocks, through combinations of which the versions of the **Nandimitrāvadāna** are constructed: (1) the frame narrative centering around the last words of Nandimitra and the list of the sixteen Elders [= **ABCG**]; (2) the timetable of the decline, which provides a relative chronology correlating various incidents (e.g. the return of the Elders, the disappearance of the Buddha's teachings) with the steadily increasing human lifespan [= **D**]; (3) the prophecy of Maitreya, the future Buddha, and the ways to be reborn in the three assemblies of his disciples [= **EF**]. Judging from these building blocks, the modular nature of the **Nandimitrāvadāna** is transparent. That is to say: rather than conjuring words out of their mind, the tradents, who produced the texts known as the **Nandimitrāvadāna**, drew on a “pool of tradition” – to borrow a term from scholars of oral epics⁵⁷ – consisting of a register of pre-existing textual modules, which were independently transmitted oral textual units at the very beginning and could be used to construct a more complex textual structure. The modularity of the **Nandimitrāvadāna** is brought home to us, when we subject two out of the three building blocks to historical analysis.

The textual module underlying the building blocks (2) & (3) mentioned above is otherwise testified to by a sermon, which the Chinese pilgrim monk Faxian 法顯 claimed to have heard around 410 CE in Sri Lanka. The sermon begins with the legend of the Buddha's bowl, whose passing from sight is said to result in the gradual decline of the teachings,⁵⁸ and the story goes:

佛法滅後，人壽轉短，乃至五歲。五歲之時，粳米、酥油皆悉化滅；人民極惡，捉木則變成刀、杖，共相傷割殺。其中有福者，逃避入山。惡人相殺盡已，還復來出，共相謂言：“昔人壽極長，但為惡甚，作諸非法故，我等壽命遂爾短促，乃至五歲。我今共行諸善，起慈悲心，修行仁義。”如是各行信儀，展轉壽倍。乃至八萬歲，彌勒出世。初轉法輪時，先度釋迦遺法弟子、出家人及受三歸、五戒、齋法、供養三寶者，第二、第三次度有緣者。[ed. Zhang 1985: 162]⁵⁹

After the extinction of the teachings has taken place, the life of man will be shortened, till it is only a period of five years. During this period of a five years' life, rice and ghee will all vanish away, and men will become exceedingly wicked. The wood which they lay hold of will change into swords and clubs, with which they will hurt, cut, and kill one another. Among them, the lucky ones will manage to escape into the mountains; and when the wicked have exterminated one another, they will again come forth, and say among

57. For a nuanced explanation of this term in the context of oral epics, see Honko 2000: 18: “We cannot postulate a well-arranged library of earlier performed oral texts in the mind of the individual but rather a ‘pool’ of generic rules, storylines, mental images of epic events, linguistically preprocessed descriptions of repeatable scenes, sets of established terms and attributes, phrases and formulas, which every performer may utilize in an imaginative way, vary and reorganize according to the needs and potentials present at a new performance.” The same applies *mutatis mutandis* to the present text.

58. For the relationship between the Buddha's bowl and the decline of the teachings, see Wang-Toutain 1994: 69–73.

59. Emphasis added, cf. also Adachi 1936: 246. For this section translated in English, see Legge 1886: 110; in German, see Deeg 2005: 571, §168.

themselves, “The men of former times enjoyed a very great longevity; but through becoming exceedingly wicked, and doing all lawless things, the length of our life has been shortened and reduced even to five years. Let us now unite together in the practice of what is good, cherishing a gentle and sympathising heart, and carefully cultivating humaneness and righteousness.” When each one in this way practises faith and righteousness, life will go on to double its length. When it reaches 80,000 years, Maitreya appears in the world. At the time of his first turning of the Wheel of the teachings, he will in the first place save those among the disciples [following] the teachings left by the Śākya[muni, those] who have quitted their families, and those who have accepted the three Refuges, undertaken the five Precepts and the Abstinences, and given offerings to the three Jewels; at the [time of] the second and the third [turning], he will save those with whom he has a [karmic] connection.

This sermon is obviously based on an oral tradition, if we take at face value Faxian’s record that he once wished to copy the sūtra, only to be informed by the preacher that it was not taken from any scripture, but merely transmitted through oral recitation.⁶⁰ By and large, this discourse is reminiscent of a section of the **Zhuanlunshengwang xiuxing jing** 轉輪聖王修行經 of the Chinese **Dīrghāgama**, in which a similar parable correlating the increase in the human lifespan with the cultivation of morality after the intermediate period of violence and warfare is also integrated with the prophecy of the future advent of Maitreya.⁶¹ Faxian’s notes of what an Indian monk preached in early-5th-century Sri Lanka contain all the essential elements of its canonical counterpart, albeit in an abridged form. An innovation which differentiates the former from the latter is the emergence of the idea of the three assemblies under Maitreya, who will first save *inter alia* those who have made offerings to the three Jewels. The tradents of the **Nandimitrāvadāna**, as is evident above, elaborated on a similar idea, but did not assign all the munificent donors to the first assembly. Instead they reinterpreted every donor’s merits accumulated in relation to the Buddha, the teachings, or the community as a prerequisite for his (or her) rebirth in the first, the second, or the third assembly, respectively.⁶²

Another significant change which the tradents of the **Nandimitrāvadāna** made to the module extracted from the “pool of tradition” is the interpolation

60. Cf. **Faxian zhuan** IV: 法顯爾時欲寫此經，其人云：“此無經本，我止口誦耳。” [ed. Zhang 1985: 162]. According to the principle of embarrassment, it is unlikely that the story was made up by Faxian, who must have been eager to claim authenticity of every text that he had brought back. Such hearsay would hardly have served his purpose.

61. See T1, 1.41a27–42a9 (tr. Anālayo 2014: 11–14). This section finds parallels in the **Cakkavattisihanādasutta** of the **Dīghanikāya** (no. 26, III 75ff.) and the ***Cakravartīsūtra/Zhuanlunshengwang jing** of the Chinese **Madhyamāgama** (no. 70, T26, 1.523b1–524b29). However, the latter does not make any reference to Maitreya at all, while the former, though mentioning Metteya, precedes his paragraph with that of the Wheel-turning king Saṅkha; see Karashima et al. 2000: 310, n. 121. Thus, neither of the two texts could have been the direct source of what Faxian overheard.

62. This reworking of the module seems to have already been completed in the **Book of Zambasta** (no later than the late 5th century), see below pp. 55–60.

of the sixteen Elders in the timetable of the decline, which puts back the vanishing point of the Buddha's teachings. In the canonical versions of the parable, there is no mention of the disappearance of the teachings at all. In Faxian's notes, the teachings are said to have already become extinct before sentient beings are caught up in the maelstrom of war. But in the **Nandimitrāvadāna**, it is taught that the sixteen Elders will return to Jambudvīpa, performing all kinds of benevolent acts, when the human lifespan reaches 100 years; and that the teachings will not vanish away until it reaches 700 or 70,000 years. These two numbers are apparently contrived, since they do not fit in with the pattern of the gradual increase in the human lifespan, as attested in the three canonical versions.⁶³ This manipulation, artificial and indelicate as it may seem, betrays an organizing literary hand which (re)shapes every pre-existing module so as to integrate the latter into a larger rhetorical, narratological, or soteriological program.

The frame narrative forms part and parcel of the **Nandimitrāvadāna**, insofar as it provides information about the occasion on which the aforementioned timetable and prophecy were preached. In order that the reader believes in the veracity of what Nandimitra narrated, one would expect to see in the frame narrative a historicizing attempt, which sets out to convince the reader that this is what actually happened. It is precisely the conviction that makes it possible to use a narrative like the **Nandimitrāvadāna** as an authoritative text in religious terms. However, such an attempt, even if it has ever been made, is not traceable in the three versions, which, so far as the frame narrative is concerned, differ from one another in many a detail.

As a matter of fact, not a single proper name in the frame narrative is shared by any two of the three versions, except for the name of the secondary narrator Nandimitra (or Nandamitra).⁶⁴ First and foremost, there is no agreement on where the story is set. Xuanzang's Chinese translation unequivocally refers to Sri Lanka (zhí shīzi guó 執師子國 < *Simhala*). This reference tempted Lévi and Chavannes to go into great detail about the socio-religious environment of Sri Lanka, which was characterized by the syncretism between Mahāyāna and Śrāvākayāna ideas and practices. It is in such a milieu, as they argued, that a text like the **Nandimitrāvadāna**, which assigns to the Arhats the rôle of the Bodhisattvas, might have taken root.⁶⁵

63. For the series of numbers attested in the **Āṅgīrāgama**, the **Dīghanikāya**, and the **Madhyamāgama** (i.e. 20, 40, 80, 160, 320, 640, 2,000/2,500 ...), see Anālayo 2014: 18.

64. The variant Nandamitra is certainly attested in the Khotanese version and some manuscript editions of the Tibetan version (i.e. LSZ), whereas the title of the Chinese version seems to suggest Nandi- instead of Nanda- (cf. nántí 難提). An Elder under more or less the same name (i.e. Nandimitra) is attested in the Skt. **Ajitasenavyākaraṇa** from Gilgit and Khotan (see Hirabayashi/Rasmussen/Shomakhmadov 2015, *passim*).

65. See Lévi/Chavannes 1916: 47–50. Their arguments touched upon the long-debated problem of the so-called Mahāyāna-Sthaviras, and paid attention to the significant tendency of the convergence of the seemingly opposed ideals of the two vehicles in Sri

But the evidence for the Sri Lankan hypothesis evaporates into thin air, if we compare the Chinese text with its Tibetan counterpart, in which Sri Lanka is replaced by Śibika, a mythical tribe or country possibly located in northern Pakistan.⁶⁶ Geographically speaking, this is the polar opposite of Sri Lanka. The picture is further complicated by the Khotanese version, which points to the country of Surāṣṭra, i.e., the present-day Surat in the western Indian state of Gujarat. The Khotanese reading was considered superior by Jean Przyluski who, drawing on a record in Tāranātha's history of Buddhism, wished to see evidence of the presence of the Dharmaguptakas at Surāṣṭra in the **Nandimitrāvadāna**, whose 'authentic' text was, to his mind, rather preserved in the Khotanese version.⁶⁷ Such instances of unsophisticated historicism can easily be disproved by a systematic comparison of the three versions of the text in question. The closer we scrutinize the ways these vary from one another, the more we are convinced of the fact that there has never existed a unitary Indian original, as Przyluski took for granted.

The name of the king under whose rule Nandimitra was a subject is another element, which might have rung a bell with the target audience of the narrative. On this point, the three versions testify to three different names with the same second component (i.e., Chin. shèngjūn 勝軍 < *Vijitasena, Tib. *rig pa'i sde* < *Vidyasena,⁶⁸ Khot. Vajrasena). Phonologically, it would be possible to trace them back to a hypothetical originating form *Va^j(j)asena; still it remains unclear what the form exactly means, much less how it could have been historicized. To historians and epigraphists, the king's name is redolent of the Oḍi kings, who reigned over the territory of the Swat valley approximately from the end of the 1st century BCE to the middle of the 1st century CE. Among them there was a Vijitasena, who was the grandfather of the famous Senavarman, the patron of by far the longest inscription written in the Kharoṣṭhī script.⁶⁹ His son and the successor to his throne, by the name of Ajitasena, is otherwise known to us through another Kharoṣṭhī inscription dated around 20 CE.⁷⁰ It is tantalizing to note in this connection that an eponymous Buddhist text entitled **Ajitasenavyākaraṇa** is extant in

Lanka. This line of thought was followed in Lamotte 1958: 770. For the problem of the Mahāyāna-Sthaviras, see most recently Tournier 2014: 44 (with further references).

66. See the annotation on my translation below, pp. 166f., fn. 3.

67. See Przyluski 1928: 328f., especially: "La comparaison de ce fragment avec la *Relation de Nandimitra* traduite par Hiuan-tsang prouve que ces deux textes reproduisent, l'un en khotanais, l'autre en chinois, un même original indien. Toutefois, le manuscrit qu'utilisait Hiuan-tsang devait être incorrect ... La supériorité de la traduction khotanaise où ces noms sont donnés correctement n'est pas douteuse." Nothing can be farther from the truth than this statement.

68. Pace Hakamaya 2007: 64, who opts for *rīgs pa'i sde* < *Yuktisena; see below p. 167, fn. 4.

69. For editions of the Senavarman inscription, see Bailey 1980: 21–29, Fussman 1982: 1–46, Salomon 1986: 261–93, von Hinüber 2003, and Baums 2012: 227–233.

70. See Fussman 1986: 1–14, plates 1–6.

Sanskrit, in which a monk named Nandimitra also figures.⁷¹ The almost identical name has led some scholars to surmise that the text, which is doctrinally also intriguing in a number of respects,⁷² is kindred with the **Nandimitrāvadāna**.⁷³ If we presume that their surmise has some validity, we may hypothesize that the two Oḍi kings were the model for the respective characters in the two related texts, which were in turn adapted to different narrative frameworks in an anachronistic manner.⁷⁴ This hypothesis is not as far-fetched as it may seem, if we take into account the case that Aśpavarman, a warlord in the neighboring kingdom of the Aparacas, appears as a character in a 1st-century Gāndhārī avadāna, some birch-bark fragments of which have been brought to light.⁷⁵ It is thus not unprecedented in this milieu that new Buddhist literature was produced with well-known local historical figures appearing as *dramatis personae*. Be that as it may, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to further substantiate the hypothesis, given the scarcity of evidence. What merits more attention is the very fact that, for the tradents of the three versions, whether or not the king has a fixed name and is thus identifiable with a certain historical figure did not matter at all. The protean form of the king's name is but one example of the fluidity characteristic of such a living text as the **Nandimitrāvadāna**.

Not only the setting of the frame narrative is unsettled, but also the list of the sixteen Elders enumerated by Nandimitra, which constitutes the core of the **Nandimitrāvadāna**, seems to be susceptible to change. The basic information on the Elders (i.e., names, dwelling places, retinue numbers, order in the list), as attested in the three versions and other related sources, is summarized below in the **Appendix 1**,⁷⁶ a cursory skim through which may suffice to perceive how divergent the list has become in various traditions. Although I have made every effort to account for the intertextual dynamics underlying the divergence, it turns out to be impossible to reconstruct an archetype, which forms the starting point of all the variants. In this regard, the numbers of the accompanying Arhats serve as a good example. The Khotanese version seems to attest a sequence of numbers quite similar to that in the Chinese version, although the Khotanese tradent omitted most of the numbers with the exception of the first and the last. But in the Tibetan version, most of the numbers have multiplied tenfold. Whether this is to be attributed to an

71. For editions of the Sanskrit text with translation, see Rasmussen 1995, and Hirabayashi/Rasmussen/Shomakhmadov 2015: 89–133.

72. See Schopen 1977: 179–182, Cohen 1995: 5, and Williams 2009: 27.

73. See Dutt 1939: 73f., and Hirabayashi/Rasmussen/Shomakhmadov 2015: 86.

74. In the **Nandimitrāvadāna**, the king reigned over Sri Lanka, Śibika, or Surāṣṭra 800 years after the Buddha's Nirvāṇa, while the royal character in the **Ajitasenavyākaraṇa** was a king of Magadha when the Buddha was still alive.

75. For an edition of the fragmentary text with translation, see Lenz 2010: 85–93. For a discussion on this character with references to epigraphic data, see Salomon 1999: 145–151.

76. See below pp. 248–253.

intentional revision in Tibet or a different source-text remains for the moment inconclusive. With regard to the order in which the Elders are arranged, even though the Khotanese version differs from the other two versions on several points, a largely identical pattern is discernible. However, the illusion of regularity is dissipated if we extend the scope of the examination to include some later Tibetan liturgical texts and three Dunhuang Khotanese documents paying homage to the Elders incorporated into a Buddhist pantheon.⁷⁷ In those texts, the sixteen Elders, as is demonstrated in detail below, are arranged in completely different orders, some of which cannot be explained through casual deviations from the aforesaid pattern. Especially noteworthy is one of the three 10th-century Dunhuang documents, in which some of the Elders have been substituted with other well-known disciples of the Buddha, as the tradent may have wished.⁷⁸ It thus transpires that more forceful reconfigurations of the list seem to have taken place in some texts, which were more closely tied up with practical uses in everyday religious life.

To sum up, the above historical and structural analyses of the building blocks used by different tradents to assemble the **Nandimitrāvadāna** in various contexts clearly demonstrate their modularity and fluidity. On the one hand, the tradents seem to have availed themselves of a “pool of tradition”, from which textual modules were derived and adapted to the literary and theological scheme unique to the **Nandimitrāvadāna**. On the other, the extant versions and witnesses vary from one another to such an extent that there seems to have never been a standard form of the **Nandimitrāvadāna** at any point of its long history. Therefore, the text produced by every single tradent at best represents a kind of freeze-frame of the tradition, which remains fluctuating and unfinished.

Religious Affordances⁷⁹

Handed down as an edifying tale (*avadāna*), the **Nandimitrāvadāna** may raise a number of questions in terms of its position in Buddhist literature: In what sense does it qualify as an *avadāna*? To what degree is it deemed authoritative? What makes it usable as an authoritative text triggering religious practice? It is to these questions that we now turn.

77. See below pp. 65–70 and pp. 129–135.

78. See below pp. 66 (doc. α).

79. The term ‘affordance’ is not found in any dictionary, and is a coinage by psychologist James J. Gibson (Gibson 1979: 127). It was originally used to designate what the environment furnishes the animal. Later on, new meanings have been developed, since the term was borrowed into other fields. One of those meanings is ‘action possibilities perceivable by an actor’ (plurale tantum); my use of the term is based on this meaning.

The classic definition of *avadāna*, widely accepted by modern western scholars, analyzes the genre into four structural components: (1) an introduction, (2) a tale of the present, (3) a tale of the past, and (4) a conclusion which ties them together. In some cases, the tale of the past is replaced by or juxtaposed with a prophecy of the future.⁸⁰ According to John Strong's theory, these were works of a self-conscious group of specialists, labeled by him as 'Avadānists' (*avadānika*, *avadānārthakovidā*), who intended to propagate some core doctrines of Buddhism, such as the karmic law (i.e., the reward of evil action is evil, and that of good action good) etc.⁸¹ His theory is partially corroborated by some new findings from Gāndhāra, namely, a collection of Gāndhārī *avadānas*, which appear to have been written by such an 'Avadānist', who, as Timothy Lenz puts it, "wrote nothing but *avadāna*-type literature".⁸² The contents of the *avadānas*, however, seem to be at odds with the preconceived definition outlined above, inasmuch as they contain only a single tale, either one of the past or one of the present, labeled in the fragments as 'pūrvayoga' or '*avadāna*', respectively. The latter category, from an emic perspective, should be regarded as the *avadāna stricto sensu*.⁸³ The simple structure of the Gāndhārī *avadānas* is contrasted with the diversity of thematic issues addressed therein, the majority of which have no direct bearing on the karmic links between past and present.⁸⁴ In addition, it is also noteworthy that the Gāndhārī texts contain sporadic notes of abbreviation, which indicate that the tales should be expanded by the story-teller.⁸⁵ Such an expansion could have involved the addition of the other components, which are mentioned in the aforesaid definition and attested in the full-fledged *avadānas* at later times.

Judging from its structural format, the **Nandimitrāvadāna** does not quite fit into the standardized mold of *avadāna*. It mainly consists of a tale of the present (i.e., the frame narrative) and a tale of the future (i.e., the timetable and the prophecy of Maitreya), and the latter is embedded in a sermon delivered by Nandimitra to his fellow monks in the former. But there is virtually nothing about the past except a passing reference to the Buddha's appointment of the sixteen Elders as the protectors of the teachings before

80. See Feer 1891: xi–xiii, Speyer 1909: vii–viii, and Winternitz 1913: 215f. For the history of this concept, see von Hinüber 2008: 88f. For the original meaning of *avadāna*, see most recently Fukita 2018: 139–148; in which too much credit is given to the Śrāvakabhūmi by Asaṅga who ventured etymological speculations of a word that he also poorly understood.

81. See Strong 1985: 862–881. The functionality of *avadānas*, especially with regard to their emphasis on the karmic law, has been pointed out by other scholars previously; see Feer 1891: xiv, Speyer 1909: viii, and Mayeda 1964: 458 (with references).

82. See Lenz 2003: 104, and 2010: 6.

83. See Lenz 2010: 6.

84. See Lenz 2010: 7, 13.

85. E.g. *sarvo vistaro yaśayupamano siyadi* "The complete expansion should be according to the model"; see Lenz 2010: 7.

his complete Nirvāṇa, which can by no means be regarded as a tale. On the other hand, the two tales are not bound together by the karmic law, so there is no need for a conclusion to identify the lesson. Judging from its subject matter, the tale of the present resembles some of the Gāndhārī avadānas, which, if expanded with a prophecy, would have the same format as the **Nandimitrāvadāna**. The resemblance is all the more suggestive, since three of the Gāndhārī avadānas focus on the same thematic considerations, namely, the disappearance of the Buddha's teachings.⁸⁶ As is the case with the **Nandimitrāvadāna**, at least two out of the three avadānas have the storyline of the future demise of the teachings deployed in a conversation between the protagonist and (a) monk(s).⁸⁷ Therefore, it seems to me conceivable that these avadānas, if expanded, would have become something similar to, if not identical with, the **Nandimitrāvadāna**, which, despite the relatively late dates of its textual witnesses, is typologically quite archaic.⁸⁸

In principle, avadāna-type texts, albeit dealing with subject matters meant to be authoritative, are themselves not deemed scriptural. The main distinction between sūtras and avadānas is the ways in which they are believed to have come down to us: Those which were heard and laid down by a personal disciple of the Buddha – whether he was Ānanda or not – are sūtras, and those which were handed down by tradition and passed on by saints from generation to generation are avadānas.⁸⁹ This distinction also finds expression in their opening formula: While sūtras are normally introduced by “Thus have I heard ...” (Skt. *evaṃ mayā śrutam*, Pāli *evaṃ me sutam*, Gāndh. *eva me śuda/śruḍa/rśodu*),⁹⁰ avadānas, as a rule, begin with a slightly

86. For the theme and summaries of the three avadānas, see Lenz 2010: 9–10 (i.e. Avadāna 7, Pūrvayoga 5, and Avadāna [unnumbered]).

87. Cf. Avadāna 7 (i.e. the **Avadāna of Zadamitra**), see Lenz 2010: 82–84; and Pūrvayoga 5 (i.e. the **Dharmāntarhita-Avadāna**), see Lenz 2003: 182–192. As Lenz 2003: 183 points out, the latter, though self-styled as pūrvayoga, differs from other pūrvayogas in the same collections significantly, and thus may well be a wrongly categorized avadāna. For more Gāndhārī avadānas touching upon the fear that the Buddha's teachings are ephemeral and will ultimately be subject to decline, see Lenz 2013: 135–142.

88. It should be borne in mind that the so-called archaic type of avadānas is not uniform at all, and it is quite likely that the texts subsumed under the category of avadāna before the formation of the influential collections such as the **Avadānaśataka** etc. are very heterogeneous and share hardly any discernible common feature, as Mayeda Egaku demonstrated in his study of the avadānas mentioned in the **Da zhidu lun** / ***Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa**; see Mayeda 1964: 462–468.

89. See below p. 198: “These causes are expounded, having been passed on from one saint to another.” And see Lévi/Chavannes 1916: 23: “Cette Relation sur la durée de la loi, les maîtres de l’antiquité se la sont transmise et se la sont communiquée de l’un à l’autre; ils l’ont récitée et conservée sans l’oublier ...” That being said, there are some exceptional cases, in which the avadānas are put in the mouth of the Buddha, see Hayashiya *apud* Mayeda 1964: 471, n. 25(4).

90. For the received interpretations of this formula in various traditions, especially on the problem whether it should be construed with the following phrase “at one time” (Skt.

different formula, namely, “Thus it is (traditionally) heard” (Skt. *evam anuśrūyate*, Pāli *evam anusūyati*, Gāndh. *evo śuyadi/śrūyadi*).⁹¹ However, when it comes to a living text like the present one, the borderline between the two categories does not seem to be untraversable, since both of the formulas are attested in the three extant versions. In the Chinese tradition, Xuanzang obviously regarded it as an *avadāna*, when he translated the opening formula as ‘Thus it is transmitted and heard’ (rúshì chuánwén 如是傳聞), which presupposes Skt. *evam anuśrūyate*.⁹² But the other two versions unambiguously testify to an introductory phrase meaning ‘Thus have I heard’ (Tib. *’di skad bdag gis thos te*, Khot. *tta-ṃ pyūṣṭā*), which is otherwise only attested as a rendition of Skt. *evaṃ mayā śrutam*. In other words, when the Tibetan and Khotanese tradents rendered the text into their native languages, they treated it as a *sūtra* rather than an *avadāna*.

Although it is *prima facie* absurd to inaugurate a narrative set in an era distant from the Buddha’s Nirvāṇa with the opening formula of Buddhist *sūtras*, the fact that the same prestige was accorded to the text in some traditions does not seem to result from an error committed by ill-advised translators. There is good reason to interpret the seemingly paradoxical opening formula as witness to the tradents’ attempt at coming to terms with the *de facto* quasi-canonical status enjoyed by the **Nandimitrāvadāna**, which may well have raised a few eyebrows. In Tibet, the 11th-century translation of the present text was included in the Kanjur, which, by definition, should only contain what was believed to be ‘the Buddha’s word’, until the early 14th century, as the renowned scholar-monk Bu ston Rin chen grub made a proposal to reassign it to the Tanjur. His advice, as is demonstrated below, was taken by the redactors of the Tshal-pa canon, from which some widely consulted block-print editions are descended.⁹³ The Tibetan case is by no means isolated. The Chinese translation, despite its *avadānic* opening formula, was assigned to the *sūtra*-section in some Buddhist catalogs. Therefore, the Japanese tradent, to whom we owe the manuscript preserved at Kongō-ji (Nagano, Ōsaka), wrote an additional remark after the end title, attempting a theological explanation of the anomalous categorization of the text as a *sūtra*.⁹⁴ Whether his explanation convinced his contemporaries, we

ekasmin samaye, Pāli *ekaṃ samayaṃ*, Gāndh. *eka śamae*), see Brough 1950: 416–426, Silk 1989: 158–163, and Funayama 2007: 241–275.

91. A variant of this formula, i.e. *tad yathānuśrūyate* (cf. Pāli *taṃ yathānusūyate*), is attested in the *Jātakamālā*, the *Kalpanāmaṇḍitikā* and elsewhere.

92. Exactly the same rendering also occurs at the beginning of Xuanzang’s translation of another non-scriptural text, namely, the *Samayabhedoparacanacakra* by Vasumitra (T2031, 49.15a17). Both the Tibetan version of the same text (cf. *’di skad ces grags te* [ed. Teramoto/Hiramitsu 1935: 1]) and another Chinese translation by Paramārtha (cf. *rúshì suǒwén* 如是所聞 [T2033, 49.20a17]) seem to hint at Skt. *evam [anu]śrūyate*.

93. See the detailed discussion below pp. 117–122.

94. For the additional remark with a tentative translation, see below p. 241.

just do not know. But it is shown quite plainly by these testimonies that some tradents were at pains to cope with the nebulous status of this living text, which was oscillating between sūtra and avadāna.

Its undetermined status notwithstanding, the **Nandimitrāvadāna** was apparently recognized in more than one strand of Buddhism as more authoritative than most other avadānas, which were traditionally not deemed on a par with sūtras. This can hardly be serendipitous. At least one of the reasons that the present text was accorded more religious significance than the vast majority of Buddhist narratives might have been, I argue, related to its religious affordances.

‘Religious affordances’ are a type of ‘textual affordances’, which refer to the interpretive potentialities of a text or, put differently, the potential ways in which it can be interpreted. Religious affordances make possible a religious reading of a text, i.e., a reading underpinning a widespread belief in its content and various kinds of religious practices based thereon. In his innovative study of fiction-based religion, Markus Davidsen investigates the semiotic mechanisms that make fictional narratives usable as authoritative texts for religion. As a tentative conclusion, he highlights four types of religious affordances, one or more of which such religiously usable narratives usually contain: “a) they include *fantastic elements* which are real within the narrative world, but supernatural from the perspective of the world of the reader; b) they include *narrative religion*, especially in the form of ritual interaction with superhuman beings; c) they thematize and assert their own *veracity*; and d) they claim to stem from a *divine source*.”⁹⁵

Applying Davidsen’s theoretical construct to the present case, we observe that the **Nandimitrāvadāna** contains all the four types of religious affordances, two of which are more decisive than the other. Buddhist narratives such as avadānas normally include fantastic elements (e.g. supernatural powers of monks, tutelary deities, and the underworld) and, on a lesser scale, narrative religion (e.g. offerings and rituals in which the characters are engaged). However, they rarely make claims to veracity, much less to an origin from the Buddha, which is exclusively reserved for sūtras. Thus, the potentialities to use them as authoritative religious texts are only qualified. In this regard, the **Nandimitrāvadāna** stands out as a narrative with increased religious affordances: Apart from what ordinary avadānas have (e.g. miracles displayed by Nandimitra; the building of stūpa, offerings to the Elders), the present text also includes a skillful thematization of the veracity of Nandimitra’s last sermon through a rhetorical device in the frame narrative, and an inconspicuous claim to the Buddha’s command, which constitutes, as it were, the text’s ritual kernel particularly drawn on by worshipers of the Elders in ritual practices. I elaborate below on these two types of religious affordances (i.e., c & d), in which the **Nandimitrāvdāna** excels.

95. Davidsen 2014: 30.

In spite of the fluidity of the frame narrative in which all proper names can easily be changed, one of its elements remains unaltered, i.e., the narrative time at which the sermon was preached by Nandimitra. On this point, all the three versions agree that it was 800 years after the Buddha had passed into complete Nirvāṇa. The figure of 800 years is presumably significant, given that it remains unvaried in such an ever-changing text. Some scholars, who previously drew on this text, seem to have unjustifiably taken the figure at face value, venturing overbold hypotheses of the date of its composition.⁹⁶ Nonetheless, Lévi and Chavannes, as early as 1916, alerted us to the risks of such a pedantic ‘historical’ reading.⁹⁷ In all likelihood, the significance of the figure has to be sought elsewhere.

The extreme complexity and inconsistency of various Buddhist traditions on the dating of the Buddha’s complete Nirvāṇa poses a thorny problem to modern historians of Buddhism.⁹⁸ The lack of consensus among the various traditions from the early phase onward leads us to suspect that hardly any attempt was made to harmonize internal discrepancies on this issue. We may further speculate that such numbers (i.e., “so-and-so many years after the Buddha’s complete Nirvāṇa”) were not historically calculated by ancient Buddhists from a certain point in time so much as ideologically associated with significant events which were believed to occur in sequence. In a recent monograph, Michael Radich draws attention to a closely related group of Tathāgatagarbha scriptures, which attest a prophecy complex placing the start of the end-times of the teachings specifically 700 years after the Buddha’s complete Nirvāṇa.⁹⁹ According to Radich, this group of scriptures “was closely associated with a particular point in time, falling around the era of the florescence of the Śātavāhana kings and Kaniṣka,”¹⁰⁰ viz., in the 1st and the 2nd centuries CE. If this is approximately correct, the idea that the beginning of the end-times actually falls 700 years after the complete Nirvāṇa may well have originated in the first two centuries of the Common Era and have been very influential across the Indian sub-continent, from Āndhradeśa in the South to Kashmir/Gandhāra in the Northwest.

Thus, it seems to me promising to interpret the figure of 800 years in the **Nandimitrāvadāna**, a text putting back the end-times much later than the

96. *Pace* Shih 2002: 32–36 and Schober 2002: 133, who date Nandimitra to the 4th or 5th century CE on the basis of this figure alone. Hirabayashi/Rasmussen/Shomakhmadov 2015: 86 also take this figure as an indication of the lateness of the **Nandimitrāvadāna**.

97. See Lévi/Chavannes 1916: 25–27.

98. For the tentative, and partially negative, results of the herculean task undertaken by previous scholars to tackle this problem, see Bechert 1991–1997.

99. For the figure of 700 years after the Nirvāṇa as a regular part of the prophecy complex, see Radich 2015: 66–83; for other shared literary motifs in the prophecy complex, see *ibid.* 199–205.

100. Radich 2015: 83.

700-year timetable, as a rhetorical device counteracting this prevailing idea. The veracity of the 700-year timetable is called in question at the outset of the story, when a monk such as Nandimitra is known to be still alive one hundred years after the advent of the so-called end-times. In other words, this figure sends a clear message to the target audience that the ‘end-times’ are no more and the Buddha’s teachings persist in the foreseeable future. This rhetorical device, perched atop the frame narrative, not only constitutes a strong counterweight staving off the pervasive fear that the decline has started, but also thematizes the veracity of the alternate timetable contained in the same text, which was preached by an Arhat whose life itself alone suffices to invalidate the competing scenario.

My final remark in this section is on the text’s source of authority. As a rule, *avadānas* do not claim to stem from the Buddha; but this does not exclude their potentiality of serving as an intermediate conveyance of divine messages from the Buddha, especially when the protagonist is an Arhat, whose extraordinary faculties (*abhijñā*), including clairvoyance etc., make him a trustworthy herald. This is exactly the case with the *Nandimitrāvadāna*. Another element which the three versions have in common is the reference to the Buddha’s order that the sixteen Elders stay in this world so as to protect the teachings and generate merits to donors:

Khot. [B1+C1: 4] *Śācamuni baysä parauna* & [B2+C4: 2f.] *Śācamuni baysä parauya*
(The Elder dwells ... with ... Arhats,) by order of/at the command of the Buddha Śākyamuni.

Tib. [B2: 9–11] *bcom ldan ’das kyi bkas gnas pa yin no || sbyin pa po dang sbyin bdag rnam kyī sbyin pa yongs su dag par byed do ||*

[T]hey stay [in this world] by order of the Blessed One, and fully purify the gifts of patrons and donors.

Chin. [B2: 3–6] 承佛勅故[...]乃至世尊正法應住，常隨護持，及與施主作眞福田，令彼施者得大果報。

Because they were given the order of the Buddha ... so long as the true teachings of the Blessed One shall endure, they will always follow, protect and maintain (the teachings); and become a veritable field of merit (*puṇyakṣetra*) for donors so that those donors will reap great rewards.

It is of some interest to note that the three tradents seem to have comprehended the sense of ‘order’ along similar lines. All the three lexemes that they chose to render the word for ‘order’ (Khot. *parau*, Tib. *bka’*, Chin. *chì 勅*) mean also ‘rescript’ and were frequently used as equivalent to one another in some 10th-century letters from Dunhuang, which were exchanged between kings and rulers.¹⁰¹ It is likely that they formed part of a clerical

101. See Takeuchi 2004: 341: “Pl[ate] 2 is the concluding part of a letter from the Khotanese king to the Chinese ruler in Shazhou (P[elliot chinois] 5538), where a large Chinese character *chi* ‘rescript’ is written”; and 346, n. 23: “In the Khotanese text, the word *parau*, which corresponds to the Chinese *chi* ‘rescript’, is written in large size at the beginning of the first line below the large *chi*. The corresponding Tibetan word *bka’*, which is missing from the cover page due to paper damage, is found on the last page of the booklet. Note

idiom entrenched in the tradition of the cross-cultural *Kanzleisprache* along the Silk Road in the late first millennium. Although we cannot know whether all the tradents who used the lexemes understood their clerical implications, it seems plausible that those who read or heard the **Nandimitrāvadāna** in those regions during the time period in question may well have been aware of the technical use of the terms, which assured them of the existence of a Buddhist edict governing the behavior of the Elders and their accompanying Arhats which parallels royal edicts governing bureaucrats.

This reference to the Buddha's order or rescript, brief and casual as it may appear at first glance, seems to have become one of the most important parts of the text for those who were engaged in rituals of the Arhat cult. Thus, it is no exaggeration to call it the ritual kernel of the **Nandimitrāvadāna**, from which the text's religious authority developed, bringing about ritual efficacy in a variety of historical and cultural contexts. The importance of the ritual kernel is evinced in some 9th- and 10th-century Dunhuang manuscripts, which contain invitations to Piṇḍola (Bharadvāja), the first of the sixteen Elders, to preside over memorial services performed for the deceased.¹⁰² A sample text of the invitations, dating from the mid-10th century, is as follows:

謹請西南方雞足山賓頭盧波羅墮上座 和尚
右，今月六日，南瞻部州、<索>訶{何}世界， 今於大漢國、 沙州、
修仁芳(→坊)巷，就<弊>居。 奉為故父修七追念設供；伏願大聖誓壽(→
受)佛勅，不捨倉(→蒼)生，興運慈悲，依時早赴。¹⁰³

[I] humbly invite the Venerable, the Elder Piṇḍola Bharadvāja [ja dwelling] on Mount Kukkuṭapāda¹⁰⁴ in the Southwest –

the aforementioned [elder], on the 6th day of this month, [to] come to my humble abode now in the Xiuren neighborhood of Shazhou, in the kingdom of the great Han (i.e., the later Han dynasty, 947–951), in the southern [continent named] Jambudvīpa [of] the Sāhā world. [On that occasion, I will] humbly make offerings for the posthumous remembrance of my deceased father at his seven feast.¹⁰⁵ May

that the word *bka'* is used in a similar way in a letter from the Uighur Qaghan in Ganzhou in the 10th c[entury] (P[elliot tibétain] 1082). The use of the words *chi*, *parau*, and *bka'* in emperors' letters seems to become prevalent in the 10th century." The concept of *bka'* in its imperial Tibetan context is discussed at length by Scherrer-Schaub 2002: 263–340.

102. For the memorial services and the invitations, see Teiser 1994: 22f.

103. Cf. Pelliot chinois 3645 *verso*. The same formula is copied twice on the same side of this manuscript with slight variations; here I transcribe the first occurrence. For other dated samples of the invitations to Piṇḍola Bharadvāja from Dunhuang, cf. BD7133 (dated 887), Or.8210/S.2974 (dated 961), Or.8210/S.4632 (dated 968), Or.8210/S.6424 *verso* (dated 968 and 972), and Or.8210/S.5696 (dated 992); see Kin 2000: 195–199.

104. The association of the Elder's dwelling place with Mount Kukkuṭapāda is unknown elsewhere, and may have derived from some kind of syncretism between the Piṇḍola Bharadvāja and Mahākāśyapa, see Kin 2000: 203–205.

105. For the seven feast (xiūqī 修七, qīqī zhāi 七七齋) as part of the deathbed rituals in the Buddhism of Dunhuang, see Teiser 1994: 24–27.

the great saint (i.e., Piṇḍola), who swore¹⁰⁶ to obey the Buddha's order [and thus] did not abandon the common people, show compassion and betake himself early [so as to arrive] on time.

An almost identical formula, which follows the standardized format of a memorandum (shū 疏), is also attested in several invitations to monks to perform the memorial services, which are dated to the same time period.¹⁰⁷ The only difference between the two groups of invitations is the phrase underscored above, which those to monks lack, and the core of the phrase is precisely constituted by the reference to the order. The incorporation of the reference into a ritualized invitation to Piṇḍola Bharadvāja must have taken place quite early, as is evident from the **Qing bintoulu fa** 請賓頭盧法, the translation of which is attributed to Huijian 慧簡 (fl. 457 CE).¹⁰⁸ This brief ritual manual prescribes an Indian method of inviting Piṇḍola Bharadvāja, which recommends a layperson who wishes to have the Elder as his guest to ritually perform the following utterance:

大德賓頭盧頗羅墮誓，受佛教勅，為末法人作福田。願受我請，於此處食。
[T1689, 32.784b12–13]

O Reverend Piṇḍola Bharadvāja, you have been given the instruction and order by the Buddha to be a field of merit (*puṇyakṣetra*) for people [living] in the decadent period of the teachings. May you accept my invitation and dine in this place!

Although only Piṇḍola Bharadvāja is mentioned in this context, the utterance undoubtedly harks back to the aforesaid reference in the **Nandimitrāvadāna**. It transpires from the evidence adduced above that a belief in the order given by the Buddha to the Elders was well established in Chinese Buddhism from the 5th to the 10th century.¹⁰⁹ The belief is based on a religious reading of an unobtrusive, but exceptionally enduring element in the otherwise fluid text. Judging from its potentiality of triggering ritual practices, it is precisely this element that forms part and parcel of the **Nandimitrāvadāna**, which thus outshines most other avadānas in terms of religious affordances.

106. The peculiar occurrence of the verb 'to swear' (shì 誓) at this point is likely to have originated in an erroneous division of such a phrase as 賓頭盧波羅墮誓受佛(教)勅 by construing the last character of the Elder's name with the following phrase. Note that the character 誓 which should transcribe -ja, is consistently missing in the Dunhuang invitations; and that exactly the same phrase is attested in the **Qing bintoulu fa** quoted immediately below. See Kin 2000: 207–209.

107. For a list of such invitations to monks from Dunhuang, see Teiser 1994: 224–225. The dates of the manuscripts range from 887 to 993 CE.

108. Cf. T1689, 32.784b5–c17. For the translations of the manual, see Lévi/Chavannes 1916: 217–220, and Joo 2007: 295–298. The latter translation is misleading at some points, and thus to be used with caution. For the interrelationship between the manual and the invitations to Piṇḍola Bharadvāja from Dunhuang, see Kin 2000: 205–210.

109. A similar belief seems to be attested in some later Tibetan liturgies, which, before the invocation of the Elders, also make reference to the Buddha's order; see below p. 131, fn. 135: *bka' lung gi rjes su sgrub par* '[the Elders] obeyed the order [of the Buddha].'

Outline of the Chapters

This study sees as its objective a comprehensive treatment of a living text transmitted in at least three Buddhist languages, while doing justice to its historicity. The text, given its fluid character, presents quite a challenge for philologists. In order to cope with textual fluidity, a certain degree of methodological flexibility is in order. As is demonstrated in the following chapters, I treat the three versions of the text on a case-by-case basis, without adopting a sweeping, one-size-fits-all approach.

The Khotanese version, which forms the subject of the first chapter, differs from the other two versions insofar as it has never undergone the process of canonization, but is (re)discovered as a *codex unicus* inscribed on a wooden tablet, which may well have been used as a book cover. Therefore, the Khotanese text should not merely be studied as written words *tout court*, but also be interpreted as an integral part of an artifact, whose materiality and functionality ought to be duly understood. With this in mind, I probe into the inscription both philologically and from the perspective of material culture.

Among the two canonical versions which are handed down through uninterrupted transmission, the Tibetan version, dealt with in the second chapter, is available both in block-print editions and in manuscripts, and thus testified to by a number of witnesses which can be traced back to three lineages. Therefore, a quasi-Lachmannian method, on which I elaborate below in the “general considerations”, is adopted to come to grips with the textual development over the course of the transmission, yielding a critical edition of the Tibetan text, which is in turn translated into English with extensive annotations. The introduction to the edition and translation contains some remarks on sundry issues of historical interest (i.e., the reassignment to Tanjur, the translators etc.) so as to facilitate further investigations into this translation’s *Nachleben* in Tibet.

The third chapter focusing on the Chinese version, due to some methodological considerations detailed below, does not attempt a critical edition, but offers a diplomatic edition of the text transmitted in the first Koryō canon, against which a selection of block-print editions and two old Japanese manuscripts are collated. The diplomatic edition is introduced by some philological and bibliographical remarks, which set out to pave the way for an informed appreciation of the history of the Chinese version and its reception in Chinese Buddhism. Since the Chinese text has been rendered a few times into western languages, no new attempt at translation is made within the framework of the dissertation, in which innovative contributions should be foregrounded. An annotated translation reappraising the predecessors’ work is a demanding task to be left for another occasion.