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The Nandimitrāvadāna: a living text from the Buddhist tradition

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STELLINGEN

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The Nandimitrāvadāna: A Living Text from the Buddhist Tradition

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door Ruixuan Chen

1. Normative texts, whose historicity has been questioned in the field of Buddhist Studies, can be regarded as historical from a phenomenological perspective. Their historicity (*Geschiedtlichkeit*) is embedded in their entanglement in the unity of the three dimensions of human experience, i.e., the past, present and future.
2. Living texts distinguish themselves from other texts in two aspects: 1) the highly fluid text-form which makes the reconstruction of a single originating text impossible; 2) the absence of distinguishing marks between the authorial activity and the scribal/editorial/translatorial one.
3. A certain number of Buddhist texts can be considered 'living texts.' This concept is a heuristic device instrumental in explicating this type of texts. With regard to the issue of their authorship, it is advisable to replace the concept of author (or scribe/editor/translator) with that of 'tradent,' a term which refers to a producer of religious texts who claims not to invent new doctrines, but merely to pass on ancient ones.
4. The key elements in the frame narrative of the *Nandimitrāvadāna* vary considerably from one version to another. There may have never been a standard form of this text at any point of its history.
5. In light of its components, the *Nandimitrāvadāna* is not typical among Buddhist narratives subsumed under the category 'avadāna.' However, it exhibits some archaic characteristics reminiscent of the newly discovered Gāndhārī avadānas dating from the 1st or 2nd century AD.
6. The *Nandimitrāvadāna*, albeit categorized as an avadāna, was accorded a prestige of sūtras in some milieux. This phenomenon can be accounted for *inter alia* through the text's increased religious affordances, which lie behind its usability as an authoritative text triggering religious practices.
7. Textual fluidity should be tackled with methodological flexibility. Given the variety of sources and their entirely different histories, different

approaches are adopted to the three versions of the *Nandimitrāvādāna*: While the Khotanese version is investigated from the perspective of material culture, the Tibetan version is treated in a Lachmannian fashion, and the Chinese version in a quasi-Bédierian manner.

8. The idea of “critical translation,” proposed by Constantin Régamey in 1938, is doomed to failure, if applied to living texts from the Buddhist tradition.
9. Neither school/lineage affiliation nor the dichotomy between Mahāyāna and Śrāvakayāna is useful to historically understand living texts.
10. In the case of living texts, it is pointless to speak of a ‘work’ of a single author; however, it is possible to envision the entire textual tradition as a collective ‘work’ of various tradents. In this sense, it is a ‘work in progress,’ which remains unfinished and is constantly enriched by the experiences of people it engages with in various cultural spheres.
11. What is said of living texts in the preceding propositions also holds true *mutatis mutandis* in the case of the present dissertation.