



## ***DOMESTICATING AN AVADĀNA: A CASE STUDY IN NEWAR BUDDHISM***

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The *avadānas* are teaching stories that illustrate the qualities of a pious and spiritual life. There is a long tradition of using them to engage audiences of the laity in an effort to pass on the deeper spiritual truth of Buddhism. However, when a small handful of such stories, out of the hundreds that exist, achieve a distinctive prominence within a particular community, the reasons for this are likely to be less found in the universal truths of the *avadāna* stories than in the ways those stories have been adapted to the unique conditions and needs of that community. Understanding this process requires an approach that addresses the role of domestication: including redacting and editing to effectively localize the stories. Domestication in the context of *avadāna* stories simply means how such a number of distinctive stories can be better redacted and edited for the sake of both scriptural and spiritual significance.

Todd Lewis has observed that Buddhist scholarship has tended to err either on the side of an anthropology that takes inadequate account of the nuances of the spiritual tradition or a textual reading that is blind to the context of traditional *avadāna* narratives and rituals. This research paper investigates Lewis' path, striking a balance that leverages the strength of each approach to offset their respective weaknesses. The sources which will be consulted as the methodology for the research will be of Lewis' books and journals written on the subject.

Of the hundreds of Buddhist spiritual teaching stories that can be found in the Buddhist canon, why did these *avadāna* stories gain such widespread repetition and emphasis within Newar Buddhism? Answering that question requires understanding the kind of domestication process explained in this paper. As with much of the tone in Buddhism, the Newar found in this *avadāna* a particular concern for problems unique to the kind of trading life that they knew so intimately. That could be reason enough for its popularity. However, its exceptional popularity, within the ritual and festive context of their Buddhist practice suggests something more than just a valorization of their economic way of life. That is the kind of domestication explicated in this research paper.

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