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Dreaming the path: diagnosing Bodhisattva progress in early Mahāyāna

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Citation

Jiang, Y. (2024, October 23). *Dreaming the path: diagnosing Bodhisattva progress in early Mahāyāna*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4105017>

Version: Publisher's Version

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Chapter 2

The *Svapnanirdeśa*: Text and Context

In extracting the essential information from the *SvN*, I have pointed out some problems concerning its compositional and doctrinal background here and there, though most of them have remained unsolved. In this chapter, I shall attempt to confront these problems.

As hinted above, we have encountered two major problems. First, though we took it for granted that the text forms a homogeneous whole, the text does sometimes contradict itself; secondly, when it comes to any of the concepts included in the text, whether it is dream interpretation or *Triskandhaka*, we cannot find any close parallels within Indian Buddhist literature. In other words, there seem to be gaps both within the *SvN* and between the *SvN* and related sources. Surely, there is always inconsistency within a text and within a tradition, but in the case of the *SvN*, this inconsistency poses immediate questions; without resolving or understanding them, any further discussion will stand on shaky ground. If the text contradicts itself, in what sense should we understand it? If there is no kindred text of the *SvN*, in what context should we place it? The two problems all somehow point to one question, that of the textual history of the *SvN*: how was the text composed or compiled? How do we position it within the framework of the development of Mahāyāna? Given the scarce material we have, how can we manage to find the answers?

In this chapter, I will try to explore the textual history of the *SvN*. As stated at the beginning of Chapter 1, we have very few external sources on the *SvN*'s textual history. The known facts may be quickly recapped as follows: the Chinese translation was produced by one or more unknown translators, approximately between the fifth and sixth century; the Tibetan translation was reportedly undertaken by Prajñāvarman and Ye shes sde in the late eighth century or at the very beginning of the ninth century. Besides these details, the only clue to the text's background is its inclusion in the MRK collection, but the criteria for the works in this collection are also mysterious. Therefore, all we know about the *SvN*'s textual history is that virtually nothing is known; the only way to learn more is through textual and intertextual studies.

Methodology

Our task now is to understand the textual history of the *SvN* based purely on its internal evidence—the two translations. But how? When encountering similar inconsistencies in Mahāyāna scriptures, in addition to external evidence, scholars usually compare

several related but different versions of a text to reestablish a textual history of the text in question. This method not only provides a (relatively) complete picture of the textual development, but also helps us to better understand each version as a reflection of it.

The premise of such a comparison is the fluid nature of Buddhist scripture.¹ Textual fluidity is no longer a new matter of concern in the study of Mahāyāna scriptures. As put by Silk (2021a, 153), “The sources we have from the Indian world itself—Sanskrit manuscripts, translations, quotations—all represent essentially randomly preserved evidence of an ongoing and highly fluid process.” As a result of such fluidity, different versions of a Mahāyāna scripture are usually “characterized by alteration and re-composition, to the extent that no reconstruction of a single originating text is possible” (Chen 2018a, 10). For virtually every Mahāyāna sūtra for which there is sufficient extant material to retrace its textual development, such fluidity can be observed. While different texts have different models and degrees of textual fluidity, there are enough such examples to assume that a wide majority of Indian Mahāyāna sūtras was once fluid.

However, in most cases, the texts being carefully studied are popular Mahāyāna texts that have a large corpus of materials in multiple languages. Their textual history is reestablished by highlighting the inconsistency *between* different versions or recensions of the text. When it comes to lesser-known texts with limited available materials, however, although they make up a large body of Mahāyāna scriptures, there is still insufficient attention to the methodology of tracing their textual history while taking this fluidity into account.

In the case of the *SvN*, in contrast to well-studied Mahāyāna scriptures, we have very limited materials. Thus, some experimentation is required to deal with its textual history.

Since some general models of the textual development of Mahāyāna scriptures can be inferred from previous comparative works, we can assume that these developmental models are to some extent also applicable to other Indian Mahāyāna scriptures. Moreover, since textual fluidity and its complications generally emerge in every version of a given textual tradition, conversely, any text with these typical problems should be considered a product of similar textual fluidity. As we have already exhausted the external evidence, and further materials are inaccessible, the textual features of the *SvN* itself are the most telling clues that we possess, and the only thing we can rely on to hypothesize the textual history of this work.

Therefore, I propose to excavate the textual layers of the *SvN* on the model of previous studies, and then see how those layers may have piled up, and what can they tell us about the textual history of this mysterious text. Such a process differs greatly

¹ Besides the features of the composition of Mahāyāna sūtras that I will discuss in details below, similar but not completely same patterns can be observed from Indian Buddhist texts in general. For example, compared to Mahāyāna sūtras, the factor of oral performance and oral transmission have a greater impact on the composition and transmission of early Buddhist sūtras; for a summary of the recent scholarship on this matter, see Allon 2021, 109ff.

from that of a text with a known context: instead of collecting materials in a presumed chronological order and highlighting their similarity and differences, we will aim to find the cracks in the text itself and split them apart.

But before carrying out the core work of breaking the text down into possible compositional layers, a more immediate question is which textual traits will reveal the secrets of the textual development of a work.

Models: General Remarks

Recent scholarship on popular sūtras with multiple available recensions has provided excellent models for the study of the textual histories of Mahāyāna sūtras. The painstaking comparison between multilingual versions from different periods, on the one hand, offers us models for the development of Mahāyāna texts; on the other hand, these studies have proposed practical approaches to understanding the content of such works while taking the problems of textual fluidity into account.

In terms of the development of the Mahāyāna sūtras, the case studies show us more or less similar patterns in the formation of the texts. As the topic extends far beyond the scope of this study, I will list only a few points that can serve the purpose of better understanding the *SvN*: namely, expansion, compilation, alteration, and stabilization.

a. Expansion

Textual expansion is among the most discussed processes of textual development in Mahāyāna scriptures. Based on his comparison of the received versions of the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā* and the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, Harrison (2008, 241) has observed that their “general trend is toward amplification of the text over time, or towards more extended performances.” Regarding the textual expansion observed between the recensions of the smaller and larger *Prajñāpāramitās* as well as between the smaller and the larger *Buddhāvataṃsaka*, Nattier (2007, 112) has described the process in terms of a “club-sandwich” model of textual expansion: the materials from earlier works were largely incorporated into the later recensions while maintaining most of the preexisting content.² This model seems to apply to many Mahāyāna sūtras (as can be observed from the textual history of the major Mahāyāna sūtras included in the *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (hereafter, *BEB*): for example, the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, *BEB*, I: 138–139; the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-mahāsūtra*, *ibid.*, I: 158–159; and the *Samādhirāja-sūtra*, *ibid.*, I: 232–233), though not all were expanded as drastically (e.g.,

² More specifically, she observes that it “parallels material that is widely scattered in these larger (and later) texts” in the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* literature. Similarly, in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, “an early (smaller) sūtra has been expanded through countless interpolations interspersed here and there throughout the text, with hardly any material from the earlier work being lost in the process” (Nattier 2007, 112).

the *Ugra* and the *Lotus Sūtra*, Nattier 2003, 61–62). To avoid the tendency to oversimplify the issue, we should note here that the process of expansion in most texts does not follow a linear progression (Harrison 2008, 240; 2022, 661–662).

Though such textual expansion is usually observed by comparing several received versions of a work, we can also argue that, conversely, if we discern some clear insertions in a recension of a text, we may assume that the text has also undergone such a process.

In Mahāyāna scriptures, portions with obvious exegetical features were especially likely to have been added to the text at a later stage. For example, “Xuanzang’s expanded reading [of the *Vimalakīrti*] looks like an attempt to make some sense out of a comparatively opaque passage, making explicit some of the ideas implicit in the original reading [...] so, in other words, this textual expansion resembles—indeed is—a commentary, probably originating from glosses on the original reading, which at some point during the textual history of the sūtra (and in a particular branch of its tradition) was absorbed by the main text” (Zacchetti 2021, 15).

b. Compilation

As observed by Salomon (2022, 514), “Another important way in which Buddhist texts grow in size, on an entirely different level than what was discussed in the preceding section [i.e., on expansion], is what I refer to as ‘compilation,’ that is, the incorporation of pre-existing texts or text units into larger compendia.” Rather than having new materials inserted into preexisting texts as in the process of textual expansion above, the process of compilation is more about compiling an anthology from shorter materials that are concerned with a similar topic (e.g., “materials related to the Buddha’s life,” *ibid.*, 516).

As we will frequently see in this dissertation, many works that deal with developmental stages of a bodhisattva must have undergone a similar process of compilation which eventually result in providing more than one bodhisattva progression model within one work. One example should be given here is the *Mahāvastu*. This text famously includes two schemes that can be broadly defined as “bodhisattva progression models”—the four-*caryā* system and the ten-*bhūmi* system—and both external evidence (parallel materials) and internal evidence (inconsistencies within the text) strongly suggest that the parts including the two systems were compiled from separate materials (Tournier 2017, 616). We can thus infer that, when we spot more than one (incompatible) model of a certain practice or doctrine, it is possible that

these coexisting models were previously compiled from shorter materials of a shared topic.³

c. Alteration

Mahāyāna texts are not only often subject to expansion, but also alterations in words or sequences.

For example, again, in Harrison's study on the *Vajracchedikā* and the *Vimalakīrti*, by selecting some core passages and color-coding them, he offers readers an illustration of the frequent alteration that occurred in all the recensions (Harrison 2008, 221–239). Harrison (ibid., 242) further makes a distinction between “hard” parts and “soft” parts, with the “hard” parts being easier to memorize or “so distinctive that little or no change can be expected,” while the latter are likely to be substituted “without any loss of overall coherence.” In other words, some portions of a textual tradition are generally more stable, while others are more prone to substitution and change.

Unlike the above case, where our attention is drawn primarily to alterations made to words, when we have a list of several items, or a narrative with a storyline, the order of the items as well as logical connections between them are of special interest. For example, in conducting a comprehensive comparison of the *Sukhāvatī-vyūha* recensions, Kagawa (1984, 45–51) singled out the development of the list(s) of vows and made a detailed analysis of them. The number of list items in the different recensions ranged from twenty-four, to thirty-six, to forty-eight. According to Kagawa's study, the vows were shuffled and altered among the recensions, but a majority of the twenty-four vows were retained in later recensions. It is further worth mentioning that the number of vows did not simply expand over time, i.e., from twenty-four to thirty-six and then to forty-eight; rather, it is more likely that the version with forty-eight vows was developed before the one with thirty-six-vows (ibid., 50). Moreover, it is noticeable that the version with thirty-six vows is somewhat illogical, as it mentions all six kinds of higher knowledge (*abhijñā*) except for the knowledge of divine hearing (ibid.). It is not unlikely that the frequent changes made to the list caused the knowledge of divine hearing to be left out. In this example, the items in the list were expanded, but also shuffled and altered. Such an alteration of sequence can be also observed in examples that are not lists, but, for example, narrative scenes (Nattier 2003, 62–63).

Again, this model of alteration is revealed to us by the method of induction, but we can also infer from this fact that an insufficient list or illogical sequence may well result

³ For example, regarding the schemes of the bodhisattva progress in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* book of the *Yogācārabhūmi*, Deleanu (2013, 906) concludes, “the authors and/or editors of the *Ādhārānūdharmayogasthāna* and *Ādhārāṇiṣṭhayogasthāna* may have collected various materials available in their community. This actually resulted in two models: the twelve (or thirteen) abodes (*dvādaśa bodhisattvavihārāḥ*) and the seven stages (*sapta bodhisattvabhūmayah*).”

from such alteration processes. Additionally, portions that are hard to memorize or of lesser doctrinal importance may have been replaced during transmission or revision. In light of the above studies, we can determine (though unavoidably with much guesswork) which portions of a given text may have been altered in terms of content or sequence.

d. Stabilization

Generally, changes happen when a text circulates widely. Manuscripts preserved from, or translations made in, such periods of circulation allow us glimpses of these highly fluid textual traditions. Yet such changes will eventually come to an end.

For example, the textual tradition of the *LP* “seems to reflect a movement from fluid state, open to diverse exegetical influences, to a more stable text which, in one particular recension (the current Sanskrit [of the *Pañca*]), came to be influenced by a single, coherent exegetical tradition (the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra*)” (Zacchetti 2021, 78).

If the final result of the stabilization of the *LP* is for the most part coherent, as it was primarily influenced by a coherent exegetical tradition, stabilization also leads to inconsistency in some texts. By way of example, we may take a well-studied text that also exists in multiple languages and several manuscripts: the *Dvādaśāṅga-pratītyasamutpāda*, a “Buddhist” text on divinatory practices based on astrology. Though the text is hardly a typical Buddhist sūtra, it contains obvious Buddhist elements and is included in both Chinese and Tibetan canons.⁴ Kimura (1995) has produced a critical edition and Japanese translation of this work based on the Sanskrit manuscript, with parallels from the Chinese canon (*Shi'er yuansheng xiangrui jing* 十二緣生祥瑞經, T. 719, late tenth century)⁵ and Tibetan Tanjurs (*Rten cing 'brel par 'byung ba'i khor lo*, Peking 5811).⁶ A recent article by Nishida further incorporated four Tibetan manuscripts from Dunhuang into her study of the text. By collating these materials, she attempted to explain the inconsistencies that existed both within a single version (namely, the Chinese translation) and among all versions of the text (Nishida 2021, 228–229). Though a small fraction of these inconsistencies can be explained as

⁴ The Chinese text even employs the formulaic beginnings and endings typical of Buddhist sūtras (Kimura 1995, 289, 349) such as 如是我聞一時 (T. 719, 845a7) and 時諸大眾, 聞佛所說, 踊躍歡喜, 信受奉行 (ibid., 850a13–14). However, these formulas are absent in the corresponding Tibetan version included in the Tanjurs and Sanskrit versions (Kimura 1995, 289, 349; introductions are missing in all known Dunhuang Tibetan manuscripts, thus we do not know if they are closer to the Chinese version or the Tanjur version; see Nishida 2021, 232). In addition, only the Chinese text bears the word “sūtra” in its title, while none of the extant Tanjur and Sanskrit versions designates itself as a “sūtra.” Though the Sanskrit and Tanjur versions adopt fewer Buddhist elements compared to the Chinese one, the compilers’ intention of incorporating the work into a Buddhist context is still discernable by terms like “Buddha,” *pratītyasamutpāda*, etc. (Kimura 1995, 344–345, 348).

⁵ The Chinese translation was ascribed to Shihu 施護. Since the Zhaocheng Jin edition prefaced it with a general preface 通序 composed by Taizong of Song Dynasty (see *Zhonghua dazang jing* 1984–1996, LXIII: 974), it is clear that the translation was made during his reign, i.e., before 997.

⁶ Kimura used the Peking and Narthang Tanjurs for the Tibetan text; he (1995, 285–286) also noted that this work was not included in the Derge edition. The Otani catalog (https://web1.otani.ac.jp/cr/twrpe/peking/tibet.php?key=peking_vol&word=bzo%20rig%20pa.%20go&page=0&re_num=1) provides records of this text in three Tanjur collections: Peking (No. 5811, *bzo rig pa, go*, 32b3–43b8), Narthang (No. 4602, *go*, 31b5–42a5), and Golden Tanjur (No. 3813, *go*, 50b1–64a2).

possible corruptions due to confusion between similar words in Sanskrit or Tibetan (ibid., 233–234), some of the inconsistencies remain unexplained (ibid., 234). Moreover, the discrepancies and similarities among the seven versions of this textual tradition show us that “several variations of Sanskrit text or slightly different tradition of this divination practice are assumed to have prevailed from the period of the Dunhuang manuscripts until at least the 12th century. However, after the text of this divination method was included in the canonical texts, no other variant text in either Tibetan or Chinese has been brought forth” (ibid., 235). Despite being unresolved, the remaining inconsistencies within the text were also included in the canons.

The above texts, which exist in many sources, have shown us how a fluid textual tradition becomes gradually stabilized. On the other hand, the similarity—but not identity—between different versions of one textual tradition may also reflect some degree of stabilization that had taken place before the transmission of these versions. Moreover, since some texts were even fossilized despite the outstanding inconsistencies inherited from their fluid periods, various paradoxes that are found in more than one slightly different version strongly hint at the possibility that these versions were passed down to us after the work had largely been stabilized.

The above is a brief sketch of the general features of Mahāyāna scriptures and how different types of problems may reflect the compositional, recensional, and transmissional histories of these texts.

However, I must emphasize that the real question is always much more complicated. The threads are usually too intertwined to be unknotted. For example, when Schopen (2012, 278–279) examined three medieval Mahāyāna sūtras—namely, the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, the *Samghāṭa-sūtra*, and the *Bhaiṣajyaguru-sūtra*, each of which exists in multiple manuscripts in several languages—he concluded that none of the texts circulated in a fixed form, and their readings “present divergences nearly at every phrase” that cannot be forced “into the shape of what we call a ‘critical edition.’” Besides confirming the pervasive inconsistency caused by the transmission process, these examples also demonstrate how it is impossible to fully understand a textual history based on available materials when the situation was so complicated and how the proliferation of the materials would further complicate the situation. Further, the complexity of transmission is deeply rooted in a text’s sociohistorical background, as Zacchetti remarks (2021, 80) with reference to the *LP* textual tradition and its tendency toward stabilization, which “must reflect broader historical transformations undergone by Indian Buddhism at all levels (institutional, cultural, etc.), and that to be properly understood, they should be interpreted as comprehensive historical facts.” Given the general scarcity of historical records on Indian Buddhism, it is a great challenge to

contextualize the textual history of any given Mahāyāna scripture within its social-historical background.

Therefore, the four points summarized above have already oversimplified the problem. However, in the case of *SvN*, since the internal evidence is our only hope, we have to carry out this experiment.

Textual Features of the *SvN*

As promised above, in this part, I will examine the general textual features of the *SvN*. Along with models extracted from the broader context of Mahāyāna scriptures, the points of internal discrepancy and consistency within the work will allow us a better understanding of the textual history of the *SvN*.

In the following discussion, I will first make a comparison between the witnesses, and then between the two translations of the text. After aligning the textual materials, I will proceed to a survey of the structural constituents of the *SvN*. The work can be split into three divisions (beginning, dream manual, and end); the dream manual further consists of 108 dreams, each of which usually has two parts (Part A and Part B). Regarding the structural constituents of the text, I will ask the following questions: how does one part relate to the other within each dream? Is there any logical connection between the dreams? And how closely are the sūtra frame and dream manual connected? Afterward, from a conceptual point of view, as the text is made up of many pairs of correlations between its essential elements (i.e., dreams; bodhisattva *bhūmis*; their other conditions; instructions), it should be interesting to examine whether the correlations exhibit any consistent pattern. Do the dream interpretations in the text follow any discernible principles? Does the doctrine of ten *bhūmis* in this text exhibit any underlying system? How does the general doctrine fit into the bigger picture of Mahāyāna scriptures? Finally, and most importantly, what does the above information tell us about the textual history of the *SvN*?

Aligning the Materials

Witnesses

For both translations, a majority of the variants among the witnesses can be explained as scribal errors or corruptions (i.e., errors caused by the similarity of characters, omission of sentences, etc.), and most of them happen at the word level.⁷ Though this

⁷ However, it is not infrequent that the witnesses from the Ladakhi/Mustang group—for this study, I examined the

is not to say that such variants are insignificant, it is clear that no corruption in any witness is caused, for example, by contamination from heterogeneous materials, such as related works or commentaries on the work. This means that our philological method can only yield more possibilities for solving minor problems.⁸ The little information we obtain from witnesses of both translations, as well as the fact that the *SvN* mostly only circulated as part of the MRK in either translation,⁹ indicates that the received translations of the *SvN* were passed down to us in a relatively stable state after its inclusion in the MRK.

Hemis and Basgo manuscripts—differ from other versions in terms of complete sentence. Most of the variants in this group belong to two categories: 1) syntactically, phrases or words in a sentence are arranged in a different way; 2) semantically, words with similar meanings are substituted. For more details of the features of each Tibetan witness, see Appendix II.

⁸ In some cases, variants from other witnesses than the base text do make the passage more logical; for example, in Dream 53, Part C, by emending the base text (Derge Kanjur) with the readings from the Ulaanbaatar Kanjur, the part that is supposed to be the instruction finally reads as expected.

⁹ Most witnesses see the *SvN* as a part of the MRK collection, which is usually clearly stated in the colophon (“as the fourth text of the MRK collection”). As far as I am aware, all the extant Chinese printed canons (as well as the Fangshan stone canon) and all the Tibetan Kanjurs and canonical collections include the *SvN* as the fourth text of the MRK collection. However, there are at least two confirmed exceptions, and both are manuscripts of the Chinese translation. Manuscripts of the “older” form of the Chinese translation—the form before the *SvN*’s inclusion in the MRK—are preserved at Shōsōin 正倉院 (as a part of Gogatsutsuitachi kyō 五月一日經 of the Shōgozō collection 聖語藏) as well as at Nanatsu-dera 七寺 under the title *Pusa meng jing* (see the entry on the Koshakyō Database, <https://koshakyo-database.icabs.ac.jp/materials/index/1244>). The database does not record the two-juan manuscripts preserved at Shōsōin, though its existence is verified in Yamashita 2000, 49–50). The Shōgozō manuscripts were produced before 741 (ibid.), and the ones at Nanatsu-dera were written around 1179 (Ochiai 1994, 461). Unfortunately, none of these manuscripts are accessible to the public yet. According to the *Zhenyuan xinding shijiao mulu* 貞元新定釋教目錄 (T. 2157, 1046b4), the *Pusa meng jing* is excluded from the canon (*buruzang* 不入藏), as it is considered a repetition of the *Jingju tianzi hui*. Under the influence of this catalog, the extant Chinese canons did not include this *Pusa meng jing* and, along with other texts that were later incorporated into the MRK collection, the texts’ previous forms were considered lost until the discovery of the old Buddhist Manuscripts in Japanese Collections (*koshakyō* 古寫經). However, this very catalog, *Zhenyuan xinding shijiao mulu*, shows us that at least until its own time (800 CE), there were still single books of the *Pusa meng jing* in circulation (otherwise, there was no need to exclude it). Moreover, according to Ochiai’s (1999, 763–771) studies, there are various records of the writing and preserving of the *Pusa meng jing* and other texts in the *buruzang* category in Japan. Unfortunately, few manuscripts are available today, and none of them is accessible. In addition, since the colophon of the Dunhuang manuscripts of the Chinese translation is missing, we cannot ascertain whether it was circulated on its own or as a part of the MRK collection. I will present additional details of those manuscripts in Appendix I. Besides the Chinese witnesses, as far as I know, the available Tibetan witnesses all arrange the *rMi lam bstan pa* as a part of the MRK, and there are no available single manuscripts of it. It is noteworthy that one early Tibetan catalog, the ‘Phang thang ma catalog, instead of registering the *rMi lam bstan pa* under the MRK section, places it under the category of “Mahāyāna sūtras” (Tib. *mDo chen po*; Kawagoe 2005, 11 [107]). However, the lHan kar ma catalog—supposedly completed before the ‘Phang thang ma catalog—already registers the *rMi lam bstan pa* as the fourth chapter of the MRK collection (Herrmann-Pfandt 2008, 19 §28), although Herrmann-Pfandt (ibid., xl) suspects that the lHan kar ma may represent a rather later development of the arrangement of the MRK due to its later revisions. The implications of the arrangement in the two early Tibetan catalogs thus remain unclear, especially considering that the ‘Phang thang ma catalog only includes nine sūtras under the entry of the MRK (Kawagoe 2005, 8, n. 29). Recently, Li (2024 [forthcoming]) hypothesizes that this arrangement of the *Dkon brtsegs* collection of ‘Phang thang ma might reveal “a different (or premature) textual configuration in the imperial period” and these nine sūtras may have originated from the Chinese *Da Baoji jing* collection. For more discussion on the Tibetan catalogs, see Appendix II.

Translations

Discrepancies and Their Significance

Though we are not fortunate enough to have a larger corpus for our study, the similarities and differences between the two translations can already tell us quite a lot about the textual history of the *SvN*.

The rationale for comparing the two translations is that those translations all present snapshots of a fluid text¹⁰—*unless* the text is not a genuine Mahāyāna scripture.

The obscurity of the *SvN* may have raised readers’ suspicions that the work was in fact composed in China. The lack of parallels or references in Indic sources (including materials that were supposedly translated from Indic materials) and the uniqueness of its content (especially given the content’s resemblance to the “confirmatory” visions of Chinese apocrypha as discussed in Greene 2021a, 33) indeed lead us to doubt its “authenticity.” A definite solution to this issue is important to determine the context of the *SvN*.

The discrepancy between the two translations provides us with the most convincing evidence to dismiss the possibility of the *SvN* being an apocryphal work. As already noticed by Mitsukawa (1982, 125–130), judging by the very beginning of the list of 108 dreams alone, we see that the Chinese translation is deficient: the interpretation of the first two dreams is absent in the Chinese translations, but present in the Tibetan. More telling evidence comes from the comments of Dream 57 to Dream 58, where the Chinese translation missed the few lines that correspond to the Tibetan translation of the last lines of Dream 57 and the first of Dream 58. Although we cannot totally rule out that there once existed a complete Chinese text which served as the basis of the Tibetan translation, at least as we have it, this incompleteness of the extant Chinese translation and many disagreements between the two that we will come to below point to the case that the two translations were made independently from other (Indic) sources; moreover, the deficiency in the Chinese translation is more likely to have stemmed from the transmission or translation process rather than from textual expansion.

In this way, the major discrepancies between the two translations suggest that we can dismiss the possibility that the *SvN* was composed in China. All the catalogs that record

¹⁰ When it comes to Chinese translations, influences from previous translations should also be taken into account. But translations like the *Jingju tianzi hui*, as the only translation of the *SvN*, should quite faithfully reflect the Indic manuscript from which it was translated—according to Harrison (2008, 244), “the most reliable translation, i.e., the one most likely to reflect its Sanskrit exemplar with minimal interference from other sources, is likely to be the first and the oldest.” However, even so, translators could also interfere with the final products to a certain extent (ibid., 244–245). In the case of the Chinese translation of the *SvN*, since the translator(s) is anonymous, we can hardly know how the translation is affected by his style and knowledge.

the text and colophons of this text have already pointed to its Indian origin.¹¹ This origin is further supported by different readings in the two translations that likely stem from confusions that typically happen in Middle Indic languages.¹² Despite the seeming peculiarity of its content (which, as we will discuss in the next chapters, is not so peculiar after all), the text should be discussed in the Indian Mahāyāna context.

Similarity and Stabilization

If the *SvN* should be grouped with other Indian Mahāyāna scriptures, then some degree of textual fluidity is to be expected. Since we have accepted that the two translations must have been based on two different but related manuscripts, we want to find out how the Tibetan translation reflects an Indic text that is different from the base text of the Chinese.

First, the two translations are roughly three hundred years apart; considering the common textual expansion seen in later versions of a Mahāyāna sūtra, we may expect the Tibetan text (the later one) to be somewhat expanded or more refined (as a result of exegetical work).

Indeed, the two translations are quite different. However, the differences usually occur at the word level. At one point, in Dream 21, the Tibetan adds “thus, he should get rid of excessive pride; and, without jealousy, he should also inspire people to serve others. He should also recite the sūtra of the *Three Heaps* repeatedly; then that karmic obstruction of his will be cleared away,” all of which is absent in the Chinese. This part does resemble a “commentary” that was absorbed by the main text. However, the presence of a commentary-like addition in the Tibetan only happens once. Moreover, in Dream 107, the Chinese has an additional Part B, not found in the Tibetan, that describes variations on the main dream theme. In contrast to the previous example, here it seems that the Chinese is the expanded version. Other than these examples, the Tibetan text has only two supplementary paragraphs, both of which are insignificant.¹³

¹¹ See my appendices on the historical background of the Chinese and Tibetan translations.

¹² This means that some discrepancies between the two translations seem to originate from confusions of Sanskrit or related Middle Indic words. For example, in Dream 45, the difference between the Chinese reading (Chn. 盜, “stealing”) and the Tibetan one (Tib. *gnas par bya ba*, “should dwell in”) stems explicitly from the confusion between Skt. *steya* (“theft”) and *stheya* (“should stay”). In this case, the Chinese reading makes more sense considering its context. Another similar example is found in Dream 57, where the Chinese translation implies Skt. *gandha* (Chn. 香, “fragrance”), while the Tibetan suggests Skt. *gāthā* (Tib. *tshigs su bcad pa*, “verses”). This seems to be a confusion between a voiced consonant and an unvoiced one. In this particular sentence, the Tibetan reading is better. In both cases, the confusions indicate typical phonological changes undergone by some Middle Indic languages. However, I wish to note that the underlying original language and script of the *SvN* are not clear, and most of the differences between the two texts cannot be fully explained as confusion due to a specific Middle Indic language or script; see also my discussion in Appendix I. Therefore, regarding the Indic origin of the *SvN*, I consider the linguistic evidence less convincing than the external data.

¹³ The one at the beginning reads, “By the power of that concentration, all monks who in this three thousand-millionfold world realm, approaching from the ten directions, proceeded and approached the Blessed One there. After bowing their heads to the feet of the Blessed One, they sat to one side. By the power of that concentration, all

Therefore, we can rule out the possibility that the Tibetan translation is an expanded version of the Chinese one. In other words, even if the text has undergone some expansion, the text essentially stopped developing after the base Indic text underlying the Chinese had formed.

Next, can any structural rearrangement be discerned from the two translations? The overall structure, including the sequence of the 108 dreams, is identical in the two translations. On a few occasions, however, the order of the dreams' sublists, i.e., the correlation between the variant dreams and their *bhūmis*, has been altered (e.g., Dreams 31b, 75b). Nonetheless, such rearrangement occurs infrequently and only on a small scale. Besides this, as stated above, there are some discrepancies between the two translations at the word level.

Having analyzed the structural differences between the two translations, next, we would want to examine what the semantic differences between the two indicate. Yet, I must admit that, practically, in most cases, I cannot fathom what may have prompted the discrepancy: first, the Chinese translation is so obscure that many sentences are unintelligible without the aid of the Tibetan;¹⁴ secondly, even when the two translations are easily comprehensible, only in a few cases can we put forward plausible explanations for their differences. Leaving these difficulties aside for now, we could still make some general observations. In light of the observation that there are typically some parts of a text that are more stable and others that are more flexible and prone to change, we discern that, as suggested above, the dreams' sublists (i.e., Part Bs of the dreams) seem to vary between the two translations to a slightly greater extent—

individuals adhering to the bodhisattva vehicle from the eight assemblies [in this three thousand-millionfold world realm], proceeded and approached the Blessed One there. After bowing their heads to the feet of the Blessed One, they sat to one side" (For the Tibetan text, see my edition §IV–§V). And the one at the end is "Vajrapramardin, furthermore, one should realize and know that by those 108 signs of bodhisattvas an individual is one adhering to the bodhisattva vehicle." (§XXVI). The beginning is merely repetitions of the paragraph preceding it; the ending echoes the same phrase that can be found at the beginning. None of them provides important additional information.¹⁴ As I mentioned when I first brought up the issue of understanding the Chinese translation of the *SvN*, as a matter of fact, we have relatively few tools to understand the medieval Chinese translations (see n. 11 in Chapter 1). The problems that obstruct us from understanding them are of multiple origins; the two most discussed issues are, first, problems caused by vernacular elements, including the grammar and vocabulary; second, the possible mistranslation or misreading of Indic base texts. In the past decades, many attempts have been made to systematically study medieval Chinese Buddhist translations; as their starting point, these studies have primarily used translations made by famous translators and available in Indic languages. For example, several studies have been carried out on Dharmarakṣa's translation: e.g., on his lexicon, see Karashima 1998; on his style and the possible source languages and scripts of his translations, see Boucher 2008, 87–110; and, on his lexicon and stylistic patterns using computer-assisted methods, see Radich 2019b. Even though when studying the translations of famous translators researchers frequently encounter issues posed by the complicated teamwork procedures, false attributions, etc., their studies equip us with more general knowledge of medieval Chinese Buddhist translations and aid us in understanding the actual translation. However, not only have they not exhausted all the issues we encounter when reading these translations, but in the case of anonymous translations like the *SvN*, the issues are even more complicated, as the dates and styles of such texts are unknown. In some cases, the quality of the translations is also "poor" if we aim to understand the text based on the Chinese translation; for example, Nattier (2022, 30) noted that an anonymous translation, the *Fomu bannihuan jing* 佛母般泥洹經 T. 155, was "repetitive and wooden in style, imitating the format of Indian terminology and syntax." In the *SvN*'s case, being an anonymous translation with a similarly wooden style, the difficulties in understanding the translation are enormous.

although still rather uncommon and we cannot rule out that such discrepancies are rather a matter of translation.

Further, it is equally important to assess whether the Tibetan readings make more sense in general. Regarding the points where the text obviously contradicts itself, the situation is mixed. There are cases where the Tibetan is indeed more logical: for example, in Dream 31, a self-contradictory reading exists only in the Chinese.¹⁵ However, in the case of Dream 86, the Chinese is the one free of inconsistency.¹⁶ And Dream 47 has the same paradoxical content in both translations.¹⁷ Therefore, though the two translations may differ greatly at the semantic level, neither of the translations features a logically more “correct” and consistent version. Rather, it is more common that their inconsistencies overlap. This further demonstrates that no substantial development can be traced by comparing the two; in other words, the work should have largely been stabilized before the time of the Chinese translation (ca. the fifth to sixth century).¹⁸ As for the alterations and discrepancies on a smaller scale, they are more likely to reflect the complicated historical and linguistic factors involved in transmission and translation.

To wrap it up, the comparison between the two translations confirms that the *SvN* is an “authentic” Indian Mahāyāna sūtra that was not only produced before the sixth century, but also virtually ceased being fluid before that date. However, as demonstrated above, virtually all Mahāyāna scriptures have a phase of textual fluidity, a phase that usually coincides with the period of its being widely circulated; but neither comparing the text’s witnesses nor its translations provides any substantial evidence of fluidity. Does it mean it was never popular and fluid? How could we know?

Breaking Down the Text

Though I have entertained the notion that textual problems such as the *SvN*’s inconsistency originated from its once-fluid state, the different versions of the text

¹⁵ Part A in both translations claims that a bodhisattva who dreams of obtaining the clothes of the Tathāgata is a bodhisattva in the first eight *bhūmis*; however, Part B in the Chinese only lists detailed dreams that correspond to the first seven *bhūmis*, whereas the Tibetan lists eight *bhūmis*.

¹⁶ In this case, Part B in both translations list six dreams that indicate the first six *bhūmis*; however, Part A of the Tibetan translation says bodhisattvas who dream of obtaining flowers may be in any of the first seven *bhūmis*.

¹⁷ According to Part A of both translations, a bodhisattva who dreams of an earthquake is in the first *bhūmi*, but according to Part B of both translations, he could be in any one of the ten *bhūmis*, depending on the specific earthquake he dreams of.

¹⁸ In addition, based on the claim that the early-seventh-century Sanskrit manuscript Bodhiruci had in hand aligns with the Chinese translation (*Kaiyuan shijiao lu*, T. 2154, 584a17–19)—though we do not know to what extent, since they were similar enough for Bodhiruci to conclude that they do align, his conclusion can thus be taken as further evidence of the work’s stability after at least the sixth century. However, as already pointed out when discussing the issues around the Chinese translation, we do not know how credible the claims that *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* made about the compilation of the MRK collection are (See Chapter 1, n. 8).

cannot provide us with sufficient evidence of this. Therefore, I aim to break the text down into structural and conceptual units and examine the relationship between them.

Previous studies of multiple versions of a specific work have proved that textual fluidity may result in inconsistency within any version of that work. I will use this observation as a premise and assume that inconsistency within the Tibetan version of the *SvN* could be an outcome of its fluid textual history.

At the beginning of this chapter, I broke the *SvN* down into several divisions—beginning, dream manual, and end. Each dream in the dream-manual section can be further split into Part A (the main dream theme and principal explanation) and Part B (variations on the dream’s main theme). Moreover, Part A consists mainly of 1) the main theme of the dream; 2) the range of bodhisattva *bhūmis* it represents; 3) further remarks on the dreamer’s state (karmic obstructions, etc.); 4) instructions; and 5) stock phrases, while Part B consists of 6) a detailed list of variations on the dream’s main theme and the *bhūmis* it signifies; and 7) exceptions. In the following part, I will focus on problems in three main dimensions: 1) within an item (i.e., a single dream); 2) between two or more items; and 3) between the dream manual and “the sūtra frame.”

Within One Dream

I will start my discussion on a micro-scale, namely, within one dream. The most obvious and puzzling problems are paradoxes between a dream’s Part A and its Part B. As Part B is supposed to be a subcategory of the dream’s main theme and the range of *bhūmis* specified in its Part A, we should expect them to correspond. However, this is not always the case.

For instance, in Dream 47, Part A claims that a bodhisattva who dreams of an earthquake should be regarded as being in the first *bhūmi*, while Part B says that such a dream may indicate any of the ten *bhūmis*. A more perplexing paradox can be found in Dream 68, where two translations offer two different (but equally inconsistent) accounts, both between Parts A and B, and within Part B alone.¹⁹

Not only can Parts A and B disagree with regard to the bodhisattva’s *bhūmi*, but the content of the dreams may also diverge. For example, in Dream 29, while Part A focuses on dreaming of the Tathāgata turning the Dharma wheel, Part B is concerned only with the Dharma throne, not the wheel at all.

¹⁹ What *bhūmi* does a dream about sitting on top of Mount Sumeru indicate? The two translations provide several possible answers: the dreaming bodhisattva is abiding in one of the **first five *bhūmis*** (Part A, both translations), or in one of the **sixth to the tenth *bhūmis*** (Part B, both translations). However, there are still exceptions: for someone who is diligent, equipped with pure intention, influenced by spiritual friends, or tricked by Māra, even if he is in one of the **first seven *bhūmis***, he may still have such dreams (Part B, Tibetan); for someone who is in one of the **first five *bhūmis***, if he is diligent, equipped with pure intention, influenced by spiritual friends, or tricked by Māra, he may also have such dreams (Part B, Chinese). Not only does Part A contradict Part B in both translations but, in the Tibetan translation, Part B itself is also paradoxical.

Therefore, though it is not a common occurrence, Parts A and B of the same dream may deviate from each other on occasion. This, together with the fact that ninety-one out of 108 have a Part B, shows us that each Part B is not necessarily closely attached to each dream.

Except for the relatively loose connection between the two parts, no obvious inconsistency between the other elements in a single dream can be regularly identified. The only inconsistency that may suggest a structural expansion is between the description of the bodhisattva's condition and the prognoses. For example, in Dream 83, though the bodhisattva is said to have already cleared away his karmic obstruction, the prognosis is still presented with this stock phrase: "then, that karmic obstruction of his will be cleared away, and he will certainly progress toward enlightenment." The stock phrases appear in around two-thirds of the dreams, but not always as an integral part of the dream.

Between Dreams

On a larger scale, there are sometimes obvious paradoxes between some dreams: for example, the dreams that overlap. Since the *SvN* is a diagnostic text, we would expect each dream to have its own, exclusive interpretation. However, sometimes a specific dream image may have multiple, contradictory explanations. For example, dreaming of sitting on the peak of Mount Sumeru yields two possibilities: 1) "By sitting (at the top of Mount Sumeru), he is in the ninth *bhūmi*" (Dream 68); and 2) "If a bodhisattva perceives himself sitting on a mountain peak in a dream, that bodhisattva should be regarded as being in one of the first seven *bhūmis* [... The] seven great mountains are (the signs) of the (first) seven *bhūmis*; Sumeru is [the sign] of the rest (i.e., *bhūmis* 8 to 10)" (Dream 70). Thus, which *bhūmi* should be ascribed to a bodhisattva who dreams of sitting on Mount Sumeru?

These mutually incompatible items may suggest that some dreams were collected from different sources and incorporated into the text without undergoing close scrutiny.

Between the Dream Manual and Sūtra Frame

While the opening and end of the *SvN* generally seem to have a close connection with the dream manual, as I have noted while outlining the text's content, the verses at the end appear to be quite irrelevant. They do not seem completely unrelated—the verses spend several lines discussing Ajātaśatru,²⁰ which is perhaps coherent with the text's

²⁰ Hirakawa (1989b, 80) cites these verses to prove the importance of the story of Ajātaśatru in Mahāyāna sūtras, but he does not elaborate on the role of these verses in the *SvN*.

emphasis on confession—but they are not a summary or repetition of the text’s main content. It is therefore possible that the verses at the end of the *SvN* were superimposed on the main content; there are indeed examples of verses being movable and removable in Mahāyāna scriptures, and not necessarily originally joined to the main body.²¹

Correlation between Conceptual Elements

The above examination of the inconsistency between the *SvN*’s structural components has revealed the text’s hidden fluidity. Next, I would like to see what the correlation between the *SvN*’s conceptual elements can tell us about its textual history and context. The two main correlations in the text are 1) the links between dreams and the dreamer’s state, i.e., the dream interpretation, and 2) the association between the dreamer’s *bhūmi* and the additional details of his condition and prescribed instructions, i.e., the bodhisattva doctrine.

Dream Interpretation

Leaving the occasional paradoxical description aside, can we find any persistent pattern of the relationship between these elements on a larger scale?

A general assumption of previous scholarship is that the dream interpretations in the *SvN* form a persistent pattern. By “pattern” of dream interpretation, I mean a pattern that underlies the correlation between a dream’s content and the *bhūmi*(s) it signifies. For example, Mitsukawa (1982, 130–139) has attempted to find some patterns between the dreams and the dreamer’s stage. He notes that, for example, in dreams where the dreamer acts against the Tathāgata’s will, his developmental stage is a relatively low one, and the prescribed corrective practices are relatively easy, whereas if a bodhisattva dreams of anything related to the stūpa, his *bhūmi* is relatively high. However, to prove this pattern as consistent, Mitsukawa had to raise the bar for what constitutes a “high *bhūmi*”: that is to say, he had to consider the seventh *bhūmi* a “relatively” low one just because the dream image appears to be negative in a Buddhist context (ibid., 131–132), and the fifth *bhūmi* a “relatively” high one, as the dream content itself is positive (ibid., 136–137). Therefore, to convince himself and others that the *SvN* is consistent regarding its dream interpretations, Mitsukawa himself needed to be inconsistent.

²¹ For example, the verses in the *Kāśyapa-parivarta* were added to the main body around the sixth century (a conclusion that is based on the chronology of different recensions of the text and the linguistic features of the verses in the Sanskrit manuscripts; see Silk 2009, 182, 186). Similarly, several versions of the *Dbh* (including the two old Sanskrit manuscripts kept in Nepal [Matsuda 1996], and a widely circulated “alternative translation” preserved in the Kanjurs of the Them spangs ma group and some local canonical collections under the “sūtra” [*mDo sde*] section and surviving in several Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts) were passed down to us without concluding verses at the end of each chapter (Saerji 2020, 332–333). Matsuda (1996, xxi) therefore refers to such a recension as representative of a “prose recension.”

Further, though Young (1999, 11, 139–140) designated all the dreams of the *SvN* as “auspicious” signs—since, to her understanding, they all indicate the positive achievements of bodhisattvas—she noticed that some of their contents are not auspicious, but even frightening. This leads her to conclude that the text is inconsistent. Leaving the question of inconsistency aside for now, we can infer from her conclusion that uniformity between the desirability of the dream’s content and the desirability of its outcome is expected.

The above studies have made three chief assumptions concerning the interpretations of dreams in this text. First, dreams are viewed as either positive or negative.²² Secondly, the desirability of a dream’s image is judged by its desirability in reality. Third, the dream’s interpretation in the *SvN* is expected to have a consistent pattern. However, for this text, all three presumptions are only true to a partial extent. The first two assumptions are closely related; they address the question of how to assess the dreams in this text. The dreams in the original text are never explicitly specified as auspicious or inauspicious. Yet in very few cases are dreamers shown to react to their dreams. In Dream 20, if a bodhisattva dreams of himself revering a stūpa, he is told not to feel pride; this implies that such a dream could evoke pride. More surprisingly, in Dream 103, if a bodhisattva sees himself entering a garden, he is supposed to feel frightened during the dream, and to feel sorrow when he wakes up. This dream content seems completely harmless, yet, curiously, it is associated with a negative emotion. Again, this proves that we cannot take a dream’s image at face value. Next, the significance of the dreams relates to a mix of factors (a bodhisattva’s *bhūmi*, his karmic obstructions, demonic influences, and antidotes), which makes it hard to label them. For instance, “if a bodhisattva perceives himself sitting naked in a dream, for that bodhisattva, his karmic obstructions are few [...] He should be regarded as being in [one of] the first four *bhūmis*” (Dream 42); in this case, the good news is that such a bodhisattva has few karmic obstructions, while the bad news is that he belongs only to one of the first four *bhūmis* (considering that there are ten in total). The significance of the dreams in this text is always mixed: neither completely auspicious nor completely unpromising. Further, as I will soon discuss, though the text frequently hints that *bhūmis* above the sixth are considered to be high, this is not always true. Given the difficulty of evaluating the dreams and the *bhūmis* they represent, any claim to the systematic

²² Besides the abovementioned claim of Young (1999, 139–140) that all the dreams of the *SvN* are auspicious, Esler (2012, 321–323) also uses the dichotomy of “positive” vs. “negative” to describe the dreams, but he fails to define these terms. He implies that the dreams involving frightening images are negative dreams (for example, going into a battlefield, etc.; *ibid.*, 322), and notes that there is no fixed connection between dreams and their interpretations, as negative dreams can have positive interpretations—namely, they may signify higher *bhūmis* (the example he offers is that of dreaming of entering a battlefield, which signifies that the dreamer is in a *bhūmi* up to the fourth; *ibid.*). Greene (2021b, 143–144) acknowledges that the significance of dreams in the *SvN* is always a mix of progress and obstruction, but he also uses “inauspicious dreams” to designate dreams that diagnose bodhisattvas with karmic obstructions.

character of the interpretations is not valid for all members (dreams) of this “system” (the *sūtra*). Though the dream manual is coherent in the sense that the content of each unit fits together, it is not consistent, since their descriptions sometimes contradict each other.²³

Further, I wish to argue that a systematic interpretation of dreams cannot be expected from the *SvN*, since it is primarily a Buddhist scripture. In the following part, I will try to validate this argument by showing that dream interpretation is hardly systematized throughout the Indian Buddhist tradition.

Indeed, later Indian works on dream interpretation generally present somewhat consistent systems. The most famous dream manual in Indian culture is Jagaddeva’s *Svapnacintāmaṇi* (12th century), of which Negelein produced an edition and an annotated German translation in 1912; this helped to enhance its position among modern surveys of Indian dreams. It seems to have been very prominent in its cultural sphere, as its influence can be found in the Tibetan Tanjurs (e.g., the *Svapnohana* of Vibhūticandra; see Scheuermann 2019b, 177). While it is “the earliest independent treatise on *svapna* that we possess” (Pingree 1981, 77), many important Brahmanical scriptures already attest rather developed discourses on dream interpretation,²⁴ along with other omens,²⁵ especially in the category of the *Jyotiḥśāstra* texts (ibid., 72, 77). The *Svapnacintāmaṇi* presents a consistent approach to interpreting dreams;²⁶ to

²³ Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 45) distinguish “consistent” from “coherent” in their book on metaphors, and in this way, they argue that the seemingly contradictory system of metaphors may not be consistent, yet is still coherent: “although the two metaphors are not consistent (that is, they form no single image), they nonetheless ‘fit together,’ by virtue of being subcategories of a major category and therefore sharing a major common entailment. There is a difference between metaphors that are coherent (that is, ‘fit together’) with each other and those that are consistent. We have found that the connections between metaphors are more likely to involve coherence than consistency.”

²⁴ Houben provides a summary of Brahmanical materials on a similar topic as that of the *Svapnacintāmaṇi* (2009, 43–45); he notes especially that “earlier texts such as the Vedic *Samhitās* and *Brāhmaṇas* contain only dispersed statements and remarks (*on dreams and their interpretation).” The “parallel materials” of the *Svapnacintāmaṇi* are also listed in Negelein’s “introduction” (1912, xix–xx); many of the parallel sources on this list are not independent treatises on dreams, but excerpts from more extensive works. Meulenbeld (1999, I. B: 95–96, n. 32) also provides a full list of scholarly (mostly philological) works on dream meanings and dream interpretation in Indian culture.

²⁵ Perhaps omens are generally associated with superstition by modern readers; however, they are treated very carefully and systematically in this setting. We may take the works on divination based on human bodily marks (moleomancy) as an example: on the one hand, they have preserved earlier information on this subject, while on the other hand, the materials were gradually refined and systematized (Zysk 2014, 4), and the system tended to become more consistent over time (ibid., 5). This systematization or consistency has also been noted by Baur (2023) on his examination of a particular omen (house lizard) in the broad context of *Purāṇas*, *Pāñcarātra Samhitās*, and *Jyotiḥśāstra* texts.

²⁶ As far as I have observed, not once do the dream interpretations in this work contradict each other. For instance, in the case of one symbol, the “weapons,” this is said to be auspicious in combination with sheaths (Negelein 1912, 133), but inauspicious if the weapons are undesirable (ibid., 350). Thus, no confusion should be caused by the overlap of signs. Moreover, there is a consistent pattern of conceptual association implied in the dream interpretations; for example, “bees” symbolize misfortune (ibid., 259), while dreaming of “honey” is “disastrous” (ibid., 324–325). More generally speaking, auspicious images do correspond to good outcomes and inauspicious images to bad outcomes. This principle manifests itself especially clearly in looking at the index of omens Negelein provides: omens associated with kings generally symbolize good outcomes, and omens associated with low caste people signify bad outcomes (ibid., 418–419). Though we also encounter associations that are at least puzzling for modern readers—for example, “a man who wants to eat vomit or feces and does not feel disgusted to see either of these, or he who soils himself with them, will obtain money” (ibid., 49)—this can either be explained as the text occasionally using a paradoxical approach to dream interpretation (namely, bad omen means a good outcome), or this kind of self-restraint (not feeling disgusted even when seeing such filthy things) is perceived as auspicious.

express his intention of making a systematic presentation of dream interpretation at the beginning of the text, Jagaddeva says: “I will thoroughly present the auspicious and inauspicious dream signs (*svapna-lakṣaṇa*) that were first explained by the ancient sages in a fragmentary way in one place.”²⁷ Therefore, though the *Svapnacintāmaṇi* is “obviously” compiled from early resources (Negelein 1912, xvi), Jagaddeva’s editing efforts also significantly shaped the work.

However, such a clear arrangement seems to be absent in the Buddhist context. A very telling example of this is the *Svapnohana* ascribed to Vibhūticandra (ca. the 13th century), a brief “Buddhist” dream manual preserved in Sanskrit manuscripts found in Tibet (where it is titled *Svapnādhyāya*; see Saerji 2009, 244),²⁸ as well as in several Tibetan Tanjurs.²⁹ The work is obviously “based on the much more extensive *Svapnacintāmaṇi* of Jagaddeva or a work that is closely related to it and may have been conceived as a summary of some of its important points” (Scheuermann 2019b, 177). However, four stanzas appear peculiar: first, they have no parallels in the *Svapnacintāmaṇi*; secondly, they contradict the stanzas on the same subject that directly follow them; thirdly, the stanzas following these four are paraphrased from the *Svapnacintāmaṇi* (ibid., 171–172). In other words, there are four incompatible stanzas with an unknown origin inserted into a text that is primarily based on selections from the *Svapnacintāmaṇi* with minor rewording. Therefore, in this very short text, we find at least two heterogeneous layers. Despite the obvious discrepancy, there seems to have been no attempt to harmonize or separate the two layers. Nor can the inconsistency be solved by referring to other witnesses of the same text.³⁰ If we did not already possess the *Svapnacintāmaṇi*, we might only have guessed that the discrepancy arose from citing from different sources, since the text itself does not specify its origins. Therefore, in contrast to the *Svapnacintāmaṇi* above, this *Svapnohana*, though belonging to a later period and with a definitive “authorship,” makes no effort to form a consistent whole. It presents its materials more as a miscellany than an intentional system.³¹ This concurs with Young’s (1999, 140) observation on the inconsistency commonly found in Indian and Tibetan dream lists: “they appear in collected materials from various sources that never aimed at consistency in or between texts.”³²

²⁷ Skt. *kavibhiḥ kṛtāni khaṇḍoddeśena svapnalakṣaṇāny agre / tāny ekasthāni śubhāśubhāni saṃkṣepato vakṣye* // Negelein 1912, 1 §2; I also consulted Negelein’s German translation (ibid.).

²⁸ Saerji (2009) has provided a diplomatic transliteration and a critical edition of these Sanskrit manuscripts in his article. The manuscripts consist of two folios and are incomplete (ibid., 241–242).

²⁹ In D1749, Ganden 624, Narthang 1416, Peking 2621, Saerji (2009, 249–253) has also provided a critical edition of the Tibetan texts.

³⁰ None of the available witnesses (the digitalized versions of the Tibetan Tanjurs provided by the BDRC and the plates of the Sanskrit manuscripts provided by Saerji 2009) show any sign of highlighting or deleting this paradoxical part.

³¹ If we extend our survey to the broader context of Mahāyāna literature, we can find even worse cases of this lack of a conscious system in some so-called “scriptures” of late Tantric Buddhism. As concluded by Szántó (2016, 326), “such compositions were mostly done in a very unsubtle and careless manner, the result often being nothing more than a strange collage of non-sequiturs and half-sentences that defies traditional philological criticism.”

³² Her observation is based primarily on a work called *Milam Tagpa*, by “Glorious Advaya (dPal ldan gnyis su med),”

Later works with clear authorship are already quite inconsistent, as demonstrated above, let alone earlier Buddhist dream interpretations without any known authorship. In fact, such inconsistency pertains to almost all works on dream interpretation in the Indian Buddhist cultural sphere. As summarized in Young's (1999, 164) research on dream interpretation in Buddhism—the most comprehensive study to date—inconsistencies prevail in the canonical dream manuals, and “between the manuals and the dream interpretations preserved in the biographies.”

Indeed, besides the inconsistencies within a single source, from an intertextual perspective, we cannot find any unchanging systems of dream interpretation. Perhaps the genre that is most comparable to dream manuals like the *SvN* is that of the lists of dream interpretations included in Buddhist narratives. Like dream manuals, lists of dreams also consist of multiple items (dreams and dream interpretations) within a potential system. Only in the *Lalitavistara* and the relevant life stories of the Buddha can we find multiple lists of dreams foreshadowing important events in the Buddha's life.³³ These lists provide us with rare diachronic evidence of dream interpretation within certain Buddhist textual traditions. To illustrate this, I will use the lists of Yaśodharā's dreams—those she had before her husband, then a bodhisattva, departed—in the Buddha's life stories as an example to demonstrate the loose connection between events, dreams, and dream interpretation in Buddhist texts.

We have at least three versions of Yaśodharā's dreams: a five-dream-vision version in the *Xiuxing benqi jing* 修行本起經 T. 184, an eight-visions version in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, and a more extended version in the *Lalitavistara*. The available Sanskrit recension of the *Lalitavistara* does not directly state the number of dream signs, but eight groups of signs are included, whereas the corresponding Tang Chinese translation lists twenty.³⁴ In addition, it should be noted that the dream

that is said to be “collected from the writings of Nāgārjuna” (Young 1999, 137). Though Young does not make it very clear (there is more than one work titled *rMi lam brtag pa* in the Tanjurs), the *Milam Tagpa* she is referring to should be D2000, *rgyud 'grel, tshi*, 129b7–130b7. According to my knowledge, the work now exists only in Tibetan. The other explanations Young provides regarding the inconsistency of the Indian and Tibetan dream lists are as follows: “second, these lists are similar to, and indeed some contain, directed visualizations: they are guides for those who want to train their consciousness. Third, their lack of consistency requires the disciple to rely on her or his guru for an interpretation of whether a dream is good or evil. Fourth, as we have seen, and will continue to see, these texts are not necessarily complete; things are left out to be filled in by oral instructions from the guru. In the *Milam Tagpa* the mantra for the preparatory rituals is missing, and the final instructions for having an auspicious dream are explained in another text, the *Ratnamudra*. Fifth, the last two points, as well as the preceding instructions and those that follow, suggest both the esoteric element in these practices and the influence of the guru on the disciple's dream life” (Young 1999, 140). Since they are primarily used to explain “Tantric” dream manuals like the *Milam Tagpa*, I do not think some of the above explanations apply to all Buddhist scriptures.

³³ Other examples of dream lists include the ten dreams of King Kṛkin (for discussion and influence of this story, see Fujita 1997 and Silk 2018), the seven dreams of Ānanda (*A'nan qimeng jing* 阿難七夢經, T. 494), etc.

³⁴ The detailed story can be found in three groups of texts. Referring to Durt's (2004, 55–56) survey on textual materials for his study on Māyā's pregnancy, the three groups to be discussed here are 1) the *Samghabheda-vastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* and its translations (for a summary on the materials concerning the *Samghabheda-vastu* and parallels, see Clarke 2014, 31); 2) the *Lalitavistara* and its parallels; 3) and the life stories of the Buddha that are not fully identical with any known Indic texts. First, the *Samghabheda-vastu* lists eight signs Yaśodharā sees in her dream: 1) her maternal clan being defeated; 2) her bed broken; 3) her armlets and arms broken; 4) her teeth falling out; 5) her braid unraveling; 6) the glorious one having left home; 7) the lunar eclipse; and 8) the sun rising

interpretations are hardly an integral part of the Buddha's life story; in fact, this list of dreams is absent from many texts on the same topic, e.g., the Pāli *Nidānakathā*, the Sanskrit of Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita* (second century CE), and Dharmarakṣa's early Chinese translation of the *Lalitavistara* (*Puyao jing* 普曜經, T. 186, 308), among others. Though the topic of the signs is coherent, as they are all frightening signs of terror and decay and their symbolism is straightforward, the actual dream images differ considerably. The five-, eight-, and twenty-dream versions overlap only in one symbolic dream sign, in which Yaśodharā's hair bun falls out. The other signs, though some are very similar, do not agree with each other entirely: while the waning of the moon symbolizes Yaśodharā's imminent misfortune, the exact sign varies from the eclipse of the moon to the falling of the moon.

Therefore, both textual and intertextual studies confirm our observation of dream interpretation in Indian Buddhist scriptures: they provide nothing that can be described as systematic. On the one hand, the complicated textual histories behind the recensions

in the eastern direction, but also setting at the same moment (for the Sanskrit, see Gnoli 1977–1978, I: 83.4–8). The Chinese translation by Yijing 義淨 (*Genben shuoyiqieyou bu pinaiye posengshi* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶破僧事, T. 1450, 115b5–c22, early eighth century) reads almost the same, only with more details. The *Zhongxu mohedi jing* (衆許摩訶帝經) lists eight nearly identical signs, except for the sixth being “auspicious clouds” instead of “the auspicious (glorious) one” (T. 191, 945c22–26; this text may have been slightly edited by its Chinese translator; see Silk 2003, 191, n. 47). The parallel Tibetan version of this Vinaya agrees with the Gilgit Sanskrit text in general (D1, 'dul ba, nga, 9b2–3). Rockhill (1884, 24) interprets the signs as Yaśodharā dreaming of her husband abandoning her, which perhaps oversimplifies them. Secondly, the Sanskrit recension of the *Lalitavistara* lists eight groups of signs that Yaśodharā dreams of: “she sees the whole earth, including oceans and mountain peaks, shaken, and trees broken by the wind; The sun, moon, and stars fall from the sky; She sees her hair cut off by her left hand and her crown fallen; her hands and feet cut off, and she is naked, her pearl necklaces and jewels broken and strewn about; She sees her bed broken, lying on the floor, the king's parasol broken and fallen ornaments carried away in a river; Her husband's ornaments, clothing, and crown are scattered in disorder on their bed; She sees light coming from the city, which is plunged in darkness; The beautiful nets made of precious materials are broken, and the pearl garlands have fallen; The great ocean is in turmoil, and Mount Meru is shaken to its foundations” (Young 1999, 35–36; for the Sanskrit, see Hokazono 1994, 686.22–688.25). The later Chinese version of the *Lalitavistara* (*Fangguang dazhuangyan jing* 方廣大莊嚴經, T. 187, translated by *Divākara 地婆訶羅 in the early seventh century) provides a list of the twenty frightening signs Yaśodharā dreams of. Though this version is closer to the Sanskrit version of the text overall, the lists of Yaśodharā's dreams still show some differences. The twenty signs are: 1) the whole earth shaking; 2) her radiant white parasol being taken by Chandaka (?); 3) the banners of Śakra falling to the ground; 4) her necklace being carried along by water; 5) the sun, moon, and stars falling; 6) her hair being cut off by someone with a precious sword; 7) her elegant body turning into an ugly one; 8) her hands and feet being cut off; 9) her becoming naked for no reason; 10) her bed sinking into the earth; 11) the legs of the bed that she shares with her husband breaking; 12) a tall and steep mountain catching on fire and collapsing; 13) a fine tree in the palace being blown to the ground; 14) daylight fading into darkness; 15) the bright moon surrounded by stars suddenly disappearing in the palace; 16) a bright candle moving out of Kapilavastu city; 17) the guardians of the city standing by the city gate and crying; 18) the city turning to a wilderness; 19) the trees in the city withering and the springs and ponds drying up; and 20) strong men rushing forth with weapons in hand (T. 187, 571c16–572a7). For a comparison of the extant Sanskrit *Lalitavistara* with a Nepali parallel (the *Padya-lalitavistara*) on those dreams, see Yang 2013, 77–79; according to Okano (2013, 199), the *Padya-lalitavistara* (alias *Tathāgatajanmāvadānamālā*) is more a miscellany of various Sanskrit versions of the Buddha's life story. Third, in the *Xiuxing benqi jing*, Gopī sees five dreams before her husband's departure: 1) Mount Meru collapses; 2) the moon falls; 3) her jewels turn dull; 4) her hair bun falls out; and 5) her parasol is taken away (T. 184, 467c5–15). Though commonly ascribed to Kang Mengxiang 康孟詳, the date and actual translator of this translation are uncertain. According to Dao'an's catalog, this translation was produced shortly before the year 374 (Palumbo 2003, 201–203); for a summary of scholarship on the textual history of this text, see <https://dazangthings.nz/cbc/text/1580>. In the *Fo benxing ji jing* (佛本行集經 T. 190, 727b12–22), Yaśodharā dreams of twenty “fearsome” signs, but the text offers no description of them. Her husband reminds her of the reality that she is still in a well-guarded palace and should have no fear about her future. This Chinese translation was made at the end of sixth century by Shenajueduo 閼那崛多, and it “shows a few correspondences with the *Buddha-carita*” (Durt 2004, 215), though the latter does not mention Yaśodharā's dreams at all.

of each textual tradition make it impossible to sustain an unchanging association between the dreams and their meanings; on the other hand, there is no apparent effort to strive for such a system, even within a single scripture.

It is thus safe to conclude that there is no point in expecting the *SvN* to form a systematic dream manual, and the text was likely collected from various sources. Curiously, according to our preliminary research on the surviving Indian sources for dream books, even when dream signs that are prevalent in the Indian world are shared with the *SvN* or other dream books or lists (Mountain Meru, nāgas swimming, etc.), the interpretation of such signs never converges. Either there were comparable texts, but they did not survive or leave any trace in the extant literature,³⁵ or the sources used for the *SvN* were circulated in an exclusive circle or through another means than writing. But how could we know? The next section will, I hope, bring us one step closer to an answer.

Bodhisattva *Bhūmis*

In the above section, the text was examined from the perspective of dream interpretation. Now, we will focus on disentangling the complicated relations between each element of a dream's outcome, especially the connection between a bodhisattva's *bhūmi* and his other conditions (i.e., achievements and obstructions) and their corresponding instructions.

Again, we want to see what is “supposed” to be there when it comes to the ten *bhūmis* of bodhisattvas in the *SvN*. Surprisingly, as I have discussed extensively in the

³⁵ If this is the case, it would be curious why the dream manuals were eventually lost. The genre of “dream books” must once have been popular in the Indian context, as its traces are found in several Buddhist treatises. The mention of “dream books” is found abundantly in the Āgāmas, Vinayas, and Mahāyāna sūtras. For example, “dream divination” was recorded as one of the mantic practices of the *Brahmajāla-sutta* and its parallels (Guggenmos 2007). It is noteworthy that the Chinese translation of the *Amozhou jing* 阿摩晝經, i.e., the Pāli *Ambaṭṭha-sutta* of the *Dīrghāgama* (*Chang’ahan jing* 長阿含經, T. 1, 84c3), specifies the practice as “reading dream books” (讀夢書, Guggenmos 2007, 194), while the Pāli version simply has “dreams” (*supina*) (ibid., 186). Similarly, in Kumārajīva’s translation of the *Dbh*, one of the items of worldly knowledge that a bodhisattva on the fifth *bhūmi* should have is that of “dream books” (夢書), along with other mantic omens such as astronomical signs (*Shizhu jing* 十住經, T. 286, 512c8). A parallel translation of the *Dbh* by *Buddhabhadra 佛馱跋陀羅 also refers to “dream books” 夢書 (*Dafangguang huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經, T. 278, 557c3), whereas the translation made by Śikṣānanda simply reads “dreams” 夢 (T. 279, 192b17). In Kondō’s Sanskrit edition, we have the following correspondence: “the signs of moon, sun, constellation, planets, heavenly bodies, earthquake, animal, birds, and dreams” (Skt. *caṃdra-sūrya-graha-jyotir-nakṣatra-bhūmicāla-mṛga-śakuni-svapna-nimittāni*, Kondō 1936, 85.10). No “book” or “manual” is implied. It is curious why more than one Chinese translator rendered “dream divination” as “dream books,” though we cannot rule out the possibility that the Indic versions they had indeed read “dream books.” A slightly different phrase for “dream books” also appears in the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya, i.e., the *Sifen lü* 四分律 (T. 1428, 963b19–27): “books on classifying dreams” 別夢書 (Yang and Anderl 2020, 9). We may argue that this expression 夢書 is somewhat vague to be used as evidence of a comprehensive work on dream interpretation. Concrete dream books are mentioned: for example, according to the *Book of Sui* 隋書, one Indian dream book—“Sage *Garga’s Treatise on Dream Interpretation,” *Jiejia Xianren Zhanmengshu* 竭伽仙人占夢書, one *juan* (Mak 2019, 54, n.13; this dream book has been lost)—was recorded to have been transmitted to China along with some astrological books. Several Dunhuang manuscripts also witness dream lists that were presumably transmitted from India and translated to Chinese (Liu, 1990), but none of them resembles parallels of the *SvN*.

introduction to this thesis, this aspect of the work seems less interesting to modern researchers than the dreams themselves. Mitsukawa (1982, 139–143) has touched upon some bodhisattva doctrines (the *Triskandhaka* ritual and deeds of Māra), but he did not feature the ten *bhūmis* as a major topic due to limitations of space (ibid., 140). Similarly, though Harrison (2003, 135–140) indeed looked at the *SvN* from the perspective of bodhisattva practice, the ten *bhūmis* were not the center of his interest. Nevertheless, we need to form a general idea of the ten *bhūmis* of bodhisattvas before evaluating the typicality and peculiarity of the *SvN*.

Presumptions: Systems of the Ten *Bhūmis*

As elaborated in the Introduction, even limited to the scope of early Mahāyāna alone, a full exposition of the systems of the ten *bhūmis* of bodhisattvas is a task perhaps beyond the scope of a single scholar, all the more so if it could—as here—form only one topic of a many-pronged study. It is not the present study’s purpose to conduct such research.³⁶ However, we do need to contextualize the *SvN* within the framework of such ten-*bhūmi* systems. This is an especially challenging task, as the *SvN* approaches the *bhūmis* from the perspective of problem-solving rather than in a normative way. To determine which ten-*bhūmi* systems are most comparable to that presented in the *SvN*, the following questions will be asked: what are the ten *bhūmis* of a bodhisattva’s development? What factors determine a bodhisattva’s developmental stage? Which factors distinguish different versions of such stages?

Many studies have approached bodhisattva *bhūmis* descriptively, and all more or less answer the above questions—a full exposition of the current scholarship on *bhūmis* has been provided in the Introduction. To briefly recap what we have found out in the Introduction, three points are to be made here. First, there are multiple versions of the ten *bhūmis*; among these versions, that of the *Dbh* is understood as offering the standard system of measuring the spiritual progress of the bodhisattva and it consequently laid the groundwork for further discourses on the bodhisattva career. Second, thanks to the immense influence of the *Dbh*, later Buddhist scholars as well as modern academics generally take the presentation of *bhūmis* in this sūtra for granted. In other words, a generic description of *bhūmi* schemes generally follows the *Dbh*, which systematically correlates the ten *bhūmis* with their doctrines: namely, each *bhūmi* is paired with a set of specific doctrines. Third, however, despite the central attention the *Dbh* receives, previous scholars have also noted the diversity of the models of bodhisattva progress, especially those found in early Buddhist scriptures. To sum it up, the available sources

³⁶ Besides the Introduction to this thesis, for a complete outline of various *bhūmi* schemes found in Buddhist scriptures as well as later scholastic works, see my entry for the *BEB* III on “The Mahāyāna Path: The *Bhūmi* Systems” (Jiang 2024 [forthcoming]).

show us that the doctrines of bodhisattva developmental stages that circulated during the early Mahāyāna movement differed in their intended followers (either applicable to all three vehicles or exclusively to bodhisattvas), their overall terminologies (*bhūmi*, *vihāra*, among others), their number of stages (four to ten), the names of each stage, and each stage's correlation with other doctrines.

What are the ten *bhūmis* mentioned in the *SvN*? In terms of the above criteria, it is quite clear that the *bhūmis* are intended only for bodhisattvas,³⁷ and that there are ten *bhūmis*, the tenth being the highest. Other than this, the *bhūmis* have neither names nor normative descriptions.³⁸ However, though the *bhūmis* are not presented in a normative way, for each dream, each *bhūmi* (or range of *bhūmis*) is accompanied by additional descriptions of the bodhisattva's condition(s) as well as instructions (practices) prescribed to the bodhisattva at such *bhūmi*(s). In other words, the *bhūmis* in the *SvN* are also associated with sets of doctrines.

Thus, we would like to look at the correlation between the *bhūmis* and the doctrines. Since information on each *bhūmi* or specific doctrine is scattered throughout the text, we first need to collate these details. As discussed in Chapter 1, the *SvN* mentions all sorts of doctrines; it is impossible to draw up a clear scheme to accommodate everything. For this reason, I have decided to start by examining the correlation between the developmental stages and doctrines that are generally considered crucial to the bodhisattva path, and are used to trace the connection or development of different schemes of *bhūmis*. To exemplify this, when comparing the ten *bhūmis* of the *Dbh* and the ten abodes of the *SB*, one of the observations that convinced Hirakawa (1989a, 557) that the ten-*bhūmi* system is derived from the ten-abode system is that, in both systems, the attainments of “receptivity to the nonproduction of dharmas” (Skt. *anutpattikadharma-kṣānti*) and, as a consequence, “the state of being not liable to turn back (from enlightenment)” (*avaivartika*)³⁹ are reached in the seventh *bhūmi*.⁴⁰ Along

³⁷ The text states at the beginning, “Vajrapramardin, one should know that by 108 signs an individual is one adhering to the bodhisattva vehicle” (Appendix III §XXVI). Therefore, the intended audience of this text are those who “adhere to the bodhisattva vehicle.”

³⁸ It is important to note that the names of bodhisattvas' developmental stages are often associated with the doctrines that a bodhisattva in that stage should be practicing. One example is the name of the first stage of the six-stage system in the *Pinimu jing* 毘尼母經, T. 1463, “contemplation of the skeleton” (Chn. 白骨觀), which straightforwardly associates this practice with the stage (Hirakawa 1989a, 520). And this six-stage system appears to be a prototype of the “shared *bhūmis*” system of the larger *Prajñāpāramitās* (ibid., 525). Moreover, since the names of the shared *bhūmis* are comparable to the names of different levels of “individuals” (Pāli. *pudgalas*) in Pāli Abhidharma literature (ibid., 512–516), we learn that the names of stages are also some kinds of “qualities” or “practices” to modify a person. On the other hand, this clear association between the names and practices of stages implies that stages without fixed names may not have fixed practices or qualities associated with them.

³⁹ For various Sanskrit terms (and their different forms) “used by Buddhists to express notions of irreversibility” (Gilks 2010, 34), see ibid., 34–58. The term *avaivartika* appears to be the commonest word to denote “being not liable to return from enlightenment” in the Mahāyāna context, although the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature in general prefers the expression *avinivartanīya* (ibid., 47).

⁴⁰ His assertion is problematic. First, the *SB* never explicitly refers to the attainment of receptivity to the nonproduction of dharmas. Hirakawa (1989a, 557) arrives at his conclusion by equating the attainment of the seventh abode—irreversibility—as claimed in smaller *Buddhāvataṃsaka* to the attainment of receptivity to the nonproduction of dharmas (for a summary of what takes place at the seventh stage in the *SB*, see Nattier 2007,

with these two key attainments,⁴¹ early Mahāyāna sūtras generally accept that there is one other milestone on the bodhisattva's path, i.e., “receiving a prediction” (Pagel 1995, 186–87; Harrison 1993, 171–72; Aramaki 2003, 209; Strauch 2010, 42–43).⁴²

The three milestones occur quite frequently in this text: the “receptivity to the non-arising of dharmas” is mentioned approximately eleven times, the “non-returning” state is mentioned seven times in the dream manual part and “receiving a prediction” is mentioned twelve times. Each time they are mentioned, they are paired with a *bhūmi* or range of *bhūmis*. Now, let us extract them from the dreams and compare them to see if the relations between the doctrines and their associated *bhūmis* hint at any systematic ten-*bhūmi* scheme. Note that, in the *SvN*, the expressions for these milestones are not always straightforward: it could be an aim to pursue, or an attainment that has been achieved, and the event could have happened in the past or will take place in the future. Therefore, I will include most of the contexts when I record the occurrences of these milestones.

a. Receptivity to the nonproduction of dharmas (*Anutpattikadharma-kṣānti*)

Dream 6: If he [perceives himself] circumambulating a painted image of the Buddha [and keeping his right side toward it], he **should be regarded as being at the fifth**

127–128). We will revisit the *SB*'s treatment of the “three milestones” in Chapter 5, esp. my footnote n. 59. Secondly, the obtainment of the *anutpattikadharma-kṣānti* in the *Dbh* is in fact very complicated, which I will also elaborate on in Chapter 6. No matter whether we agree with Hirakawa or not, I cite him merely to showcase how the key doctrines can be utilized as key evidence when comparing different stage systems.

⁴¹ It is necessary to add some comments on the provenance of the concepts of “irreversibility” and “receptivity to the nonproduction of dharmas” here. Considering the complexity of Mahāyāna doctrines, what I will list are only the attempts to collect and analyze pertinent materials in previous scholarship. For a brief outline of the history of the concept of “irreversibility,” see Gilks 2010, 41–44, where he especially discusses the terms with similar connotation in the *Mahāvastu* and the *Mahāvibhāṣā*. Gilks concludes that “although the Mainstream schools did not devote much attention to the notion of the irreversible bodhisattva, the Sarvāstivādins at least do appear to have agreed with the interpretation by some Mahāyānists that irreversible bodhisattvas are those who possess an especially firm *bodhicitta* that prevents them from abandoning their quest for highest enlightenment” (ibid., 43–33). Notions similar to *avaivartika* in Pāli literature are also reviewed in Matsushita 2014, 52–55. The origin of “receptivity to the nonproduction of dharmas” seems even more complicated. Shizutani (1974, 42–43) holds the view that this concept first appears in the *SP*, and scriptures that include this concept were all influenced by this very scripture (see also Hirakawa 1989b, 204). Instead, Shichi (1990, 58) argues that the association between the new concept of *anutpattikadharma-kṣānti* and prediction in sūtras like the *SP* is influenced by the *Akṣobhyavyūha*. Besides these pieces of evidence from canonical texts, an early Gāndhārī manuscript of the Bajaur Collection (i.e., Bajaur Collection 2), which “can be tentatively dated to the first two centuries CE” (Strauch 2010, 26) and is closely associated with the worship of Akṣobhya/Abhirati, also relates to the notion “*dharma-kṣānti*.” In this manuscript, “Functionally, and with regard to its religious status, the *dharma-kṣānti* of the Gāndhārī sūtra should therefore be associated with the *anutpattikadharma-kṣānti* of contemporary Mahayana texts, although this terminological distinction was obviously unknown to the author of the text” (ibid., 43). For the doctrinal development of this notion, see also Pagel 1995, 182–189, although he does not explicitly explore the origin of this notion.

⁴² While it is true that the three milestones are closely related in general, Mahāyāna works like the *DZDL* claims that neither the attainment of *anutpattikadharma-kṣānti* nor the attainment of prediction is necessary for the state of irreversibility; see Sawazaki 2022, 36–37, 82–93. This issue is crucial for our study of bodhisattva progress, and we will come back to it in Chapter 6.

bhūmi. He should generate receptivity to the profound dharmas;⁴³ after this, he will also obtain a prediction.

Dream 9: That bodhisattva should be regarded as being at the **seventh bhūmi** and having been prophesied to attain enlightenment [...] and he **should be devoted to** receptivity to the profound dharmas.

Dream 14: If he serves virtuous spiritual teachers, then he **will attain** receptivity to [the nonproduction] of dharmas [...] He should be understood to be at **any one of the ten bhūmis**.

Dream 25: That bodhisattva was a vessel for the receptivity to the profound dharmas; he should be regarded as at a **bhūmi** from the **first eight bhūmis**.

Dream 41: [If he is] at the **fourth bhūmi**, he **should cultivate** receptivity to the profound dharmas.

Dream 44: By [striving for] receptivity to the dharmas, he will be eligible for the **third bhūmi**.⁴⁴

Dream 53: That bodhisattva **will become a possessor** of the receptivity to the non-arising of dharmas [...] That bodhisattva should be regarded as being in **one of the first seven bhūmis**.

Dream 59: That bodhisattva should be regarded as being at [one of] the **first six bhūmis**. He should **have conviction** in the Dharma and receptivity to “the certainty (**niyāma*?).”⁴⁵

⁴³ It seems “receptivity to the profound dharmas” (**gambhīra-dharma-kṣānti*) includes “receptivity to the nonproduction of dharmas”; see the *DZDL*, T. 1509, 99a3–25 and Lamotte’s translation (1944–1980, I: 337–338). Sakurabe (1966, 110) claims that the two terms are used in the same sense.

⁴⁴ This case is particular, since striving for receptivity happens while dreaming, i.e., the bodhisattva dreams that he is generating roots of merit regarding receptivity to the dharmas. Further, I wish to note here that Part A of this dream has a completely different description of the dream’s content: “furthermore, in a dream, he perceives himself as having gone to a never-before-seen region.” The two parts seem detached; we will come back to this dream later in this chapter.

⁴⁵ The terminology used here is literally “receptivity to the fixed” or “receptivity to the certainty” (Tib. *nges par gyur pa la bzod pa*; Chn. 決定忍). However, there are many problems concerning this phrase, and it should be rendered with a question mark. We cannot find any parallel of this Tibetan phrase *nges par gyur pa la bzod pa* in other sūtras. Nonetheless, the corresponding Chinese term—決定忍—can be found in several similar contexts. For example, “furthermore, there are monks who are designated as ‘non-returning’ bodhisattvas and as having obtained **receptivity to the certainty**; they have ascended to the right position of saints, and they have rejected all differentiating characteristics of things, attachment, and frivolous arguments; they will obtain the uninterrupted merits of the Tathāgata,” Chn. 復次，有僧所謂不退轉菩薩得決定忍，上聖正位，已離諸相、恃著、戲論，次得如來功德無間，the *Gaganagañja-paripṛcchā* (*Xukongzang pin* 虛空藏品), the eighth text of the *Mahāsaṃnipāta* collection (*Dafangdeng daji jing* 大方等大集經), T. 397 (8), 101b11–13, tr. *Dharmakṣema 曇無讖. However, the passage containing this sentence (ibid., 101b08–b17, on the levels of achievement of monks) is missing in its parallel Chinese translation, *Daji daxukongzang pusa suowen jing* 大集大虛空藏菩薩所問經, T. 404, and the Tibetan translation, *Nam mkha’i mdzod kyis zhus pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po’i mdo*, D184; a table of comparison between the three versions of the “Topics of the thirty-six questions and answers between Gaganagañja and the Buddha” is found in Han 2021, 5/19, though he does not note this particular difference. It is curious why this passage (T. 397 [8], 101b08–b17) is missing in the other translations (for a brief introduction on the three translations, see Han 2021, 848 [1–2/19]). Admittedly, this passage seems a bit abrupt here, as it is about a monk’s achievement, while the full context is about *anusmṛti*; could it be a comment that was somehow incorporated into the text? Without further research, I cannot conclude anything. Another comparable passage is that “Blessed One, after I have eliminated these karmic obstructions and sins, and due to having heard these verses, wherever I reborn, I [will be equipped with] sharp faculties and wisdom, I will obtain receptivity to the profound dharmas, **receptivity to the certainty**, and [I can] skillfully expound the profound Dharma,” 世尊，我畢是業障罪已，聞是偈因緣故，在所生處利根智慧，

Dream 78: That bodhisattva should be regarded as being at [one of] those **first six *bhūmis***; that bodhisattva does not have obstruction to the Dharma. He **should discover** receptivity to the nonproduction of dharmas.

Dream 82: That bodhisattva should be regarded as being in [one of] **the first six *bhūmis***; he **has acquired** receptivity.

Dream 95: In the **sixth *bhūmi***, he has **obstacles** to receptivity to the profound dharmas.

Surprisingly, the correlation between the *bhūmis* and receptivity seems nothing but random. Even if we distinguish practice from attainment—for example, in the strict sense of “attaining receptivity to the non-arising of dharmas”—the corresponding *bhūmis* still vary from “any of the ten *bhūmis*” (Dream 14), to “after the first seven *bhūmis*” (Dream 53), to “any of the first six *bhūmis*” (Dream 82). Similarly, the *bhūmis* to which receptivity to the nonproduction of dharmas is assigned as a practice also range widely, though most fall into a *bhūmi* between the sixth and the eighth.

Lamotte (1987, 411–413), by referring to a vast range of Mahāyāna scriptures, outlined how bodhisattvas gradually attain receptivity: in the first five *bhūmis*, they accept the idea in terms of verbal convictions (*ghoṣānugā*); in the next two *bhūmis*, they have “an intense preparatory conviction” (*anulomikī* [*sic*] *kṣānti*);⁴⁶ and in the eighth *bhūmi*, they ultimately obtain (*pratilabdha*) receptivity to the nonproduction of dharmas (a detail that Lamotte claims to be “unanimous”). In light of this overview, we can argue that ambiguous expressions like “in the fourth *bhūmi*, he should cultivate receptivity to the profound dharmas” mean the bodhisattva is in a preliminary phase of gradually obtaining receptivity, which does not contradict the common framework.

得深法忍，得決定忍，巧說深法，*Sarvadharmāpravṛtti-nirdeśa* (*Zhufā wuxing jing* 諸法無行經), T. 650, 761a24–26. Unfortunately, neither the fragmentary Sanskrit manuscript nor the quotation of this sūtra in the *Śikṣ* includes this part; see Braavig 2000, 85–86. In these two cases, this receptivity seems to be closely associated with the irreversibility and receptivity to the profound dharmas. If the Sanskrit word behind the Tibetan and Chinese is Skt. *niyāma* (Edgerton 1953, II: 298), then the same word is also frequently translated as “the [fixed] position of bodhisattvas” 菩薩位—a word that is amply discussed in the *DZDL*, and means essentially the same as the acquisition of *avinivartanīya* and *anutpattikadharma-kṣānti* in this context (T. 1509, 262a18–b4; see also Hirakawa 1989a, 424–425; Ozawa 1985; I will further my discussion on this word in Chapter 6). Despite the comparisons I draw above, I have to admit that the exact meaning of *nges par gyur pa* here is still unclear. It could also mean “the unchangeableness or fixedness (of dharmas),” close to the sense of *niyāma* in the “five *niyāmas*,” where *niyāma* means “laws of nature” (Jones 2012, 555–567).

⁴⁶ Regarding the *anulomikī kṣānti* in Mahāyāna scriptures, see Miyazaki 2018b (see also Miyazaki 2018a for presumably earlier materials of this term). The precise meaning of this receptivity is not completely clear, but most texts agree that it takes place before “receptivity to the nonproduction of dharmas,” though some are relatively vague about its relationship with “receptivity to the nonproduction of dharmas” (ibid., 33–34). In the *SvN*, Dream 81 states that “if a bodhisattva sees a nāga in a dream, he should be regarded as being in one of the (first) eight *bhūmis*; he possesses receptivity that conforms to the dharmas (**anulomikī kṣānti*).” What to make of this? As “receptivity to the nonproduction of dharmas” in the *SvN* is already confusing enough, it is hard to tell. It only confirms that the text is aware of this receptivity, and there is no trace of another receptivity that usually appears alongside receptivity that conforms to the dharmas and receptivity to the nonproduction of dharmas, i.e., receptivity to the oral teaching (*ghoṣānugā-kṣānti*; cf. Edgerton 1953, II: 220).

However, I should note that the model Lamotte provides for accepting receptivity in the first five *bhūmis* is from the *Aṣṭa*, which merely says that, “Subhūti, furthermore, there are bodhisattvas *mahāsattvas* who practice the Perfection of Wisdom believe that ‘all dharmas do not arise (*anutpattika*),’ yet they do not go so far as to having obtained receptivity to the nonproduction of dharmas; they believe that ‘all dharmas are quiet (*śānta*),’ yet they do not go so far as to having entered [the state of] having obtained the control of irreversibility among all dharmas.”⁴⁷ Most importantly, this passage is not in the context of the “ten *bhūmis*” per se. If we limit the discussion only to the context of the ten *bhūmis*, we find that associating this receptivity with the third or fourth *bhūmi*, as Dream 41 and Dream 44 do, is indeed unusual: scriptures like the *Dbh* never refer to this advanced receptivity in a *bhūmi* lower than the sixth. However, though the *bhūmis* associated with these two dreams show a significant divergence from the ten-*bhūmi* system of the *Dbh*, they remind us of the “shared *bhūmis*” in the larger *Prajñāpāramitā*. According to the “shared *bhūmis*,” the attainment of this receptivity is tied to the third *bhūmi*,⁴⁸ and the “non-returning” state that we will turn to next is associated with the fourth *bhūmi* (*DZDL*, 586a10; see also Lamotte 1944–1980, V: 2381).

Still, there is yet another exception. Dream 14 suggests that this attainment could take place in any of the ten *bhūmis*, and is conditioned by the spiritual teachers the bodhisattva serves, rather than his attaining a specific *bhūmi*. This claim contradicts all of the examples above, but we do not have a plausible explanation for it so far.

b. Incapable of retrogression (*Avaivartika*)

Similar to the treatment of receptivity to the non-arising of dharmas, the term *avaivartika* can hardly be understood precisely when taken out of context. Unlike in the *Dbh*, where the state of being incapable of turning back is clearly used to characterize the eighth *bhūmi*,⁴⁹ here, except for characterizing a *bhūmi* (which is not always the

⁴⁷ Skt. *punar aparāṃ Subhūte ye bodhisattvā mahāsattvāḥ prajñāpāramitāyāṃ carantaḥ sarvadharmā anutpattikā ity adhimuñcanti na ca tāvad anutpattikadharmakṣāntipratilabdā bhavanti sarvadharmāḥ śāntā ity adhimuñcanti na ca sarvadharmāḥ avinivarttanīyavaśitāprāptim avakrāntā bhavanti*, Wogihara 1932–1935, II: 856.24–29; see Karashima 2011, 431 for parallels. In explaining the term “*sarva-dharmāḥ śāntā*,” Lokakṣema renders it as “all dharmas do not exist, just like *nirvāṇa*” (Chn. 諸經法本無如泥洹, T. 224, 467c14–15).

⁴⁸ Cf. the *DZDL*, in which the third of the developmental stages shared by all the vehicles is called *aṣṭamaka-bhūmi* (八人地), and “The **aṣṭamaka-bhūmi* [...] for bodhisattvas, [that is the stage where] he obtains receptivity to the nonproduction of dharmas and enters the [fixed] position of bodhisattvas (**bodhisattva-nyāmā* or *-niyāma*)” (八人地者[...]於菩薩則是無生法忍入菩薩位, T. 1509, 586a8–9; Lamotte 1944–1980, V: 2380; for more discussion and a translation of this passage, see Chapter 6).

⁴⁹ This is because the wisdom of such a bodhisattva is irreversible: “O, sons of the Conqueror, this eighth bodhisattva *bhūmi* of knowledge [...] is called the ‘*bhūmi* of approaching’ for the wisdom [of a bodhisattva on this *bhūmi*] will not regress” Skt. *iyam bho jinaputra bodhisattvasyāṣṭamījñānabhūmir [...] abhivartyabhūmir ity ucyate jñānāvivartyavāt*, Kondō 1936, 144.7–8. It is possible that the “*abhivartyabhūmi*” is a corruption of “*avivartyabhūmi*” for the latter reading is supported by, as far as I am aware, virtually all translations (e.g., Chn. 不轉地 [T. 286, 522b16]; Tib. *mi ’gyur ba* [D44, *phal chen, kha*, 246a7]); yet, as we have no direct evidence, I choose not to make this emendation. For the compound *jñānabhūmi*, I follow the Tibetan translation of the *Daśabhūmivākyāna* which understands it as a genitive *tatpuruṣa* compound (e.g., D3993, *mdo ’grel (mdo)*, *ngi*, 110b2), although Vasudeva himself does not explicitly provide any explanation of this term in his commentary. This term seems to have multiple connotations, see Itō 2013, 190–200.

eighth *bhūmi*), it is also used to describe virtues and states, and sometimes in more puzzling ways.⁵⁰

Dream 20: If his mind feels no pride in meditation (after waking up from the dream), he should be regarded as being **at the fifth *bhūmi***. In addition, he should let his mind be unafflicted toward all people. **Then, he will immediately approach the *bhūmi* of irreversibility.**

Dream 27: If a bodhisattva sees the seat of enlightenment in a dream, that bodhisattva **is close to being unable to turn back from enlightenment**; he should therefore be regarded as at **a *bhūmi* from the ten *bhūmis***.

Dream 29: If a bodhisattva in a dream sees the Tathāgata turning the Dharma wheel, that bodhisattva should be regarded as **unable to return from any of the seven *bhūmis***,⁵¹ and he has fully cleared away the karmic obstruction.

Dream 55: If a bodhisattva in a dream sees the Bodhisattva departing [from home],⁵² that bodhisattva should be regarded as being at one of the **first six *bhūmis***. **After a certain amount of time, he will attain the *bhūmi* of irreversibility.**

Dream 68: If a bodhisattva in a dream perceives himself reaching the peak of Mount Sumeru, that bodhisattva should be regarded as being **irreversibly at [one of] the first five *bhūmis***.⁵³

Dream 96: That bodhisattva is close to being prophesied to be irreversibly at (one of) the **eight *bhūmis***.

Dream 101: At the **sixth *bhūmi***, he should **practice the virtues** of irreversibility.

As seen above, there is no consensus about the *bhūmi* in which a bodhisattva will achieve the state of being unable to turn back. However, we have a roughly similar range, namely, from the sixth to the eighth, as we saw above. Thus, the *SvN*'s treatment of this matter is not unique, as the *Dbh* attests that bodhisattvas are supposed to attain

⁵⁰ Similarly, by “irreversible” (不退轉), there are at least three implicit meanings in the *DZDL*; for a summary, see Sawazaki 2022, 48–51.

⁵¹ The Chinese reading, 此菩薩是不退轉，是七地初地, differs slightly. The Chinese more likely implies that the bodhisattva has acquired the status of *avinivartanīya*, and he is at (one of) the first seven *bhūmis*. The Tibetan *sa bdun po dag las sa gang yang rung ba las phyir mi ldog* is very confusing. Perhaps we should understand it literally as “he will not return from any of the seven *bhūmis*”—i.e., once he reaches a *bhūmi*, he will not return from that *bhūmi*—and that the irreversible here may not imply “irreversible from enlightenment,” but rather he will not regress from any *bhūmi* he has reached; no further progress is promised. While this could partially explain the sentence we are faced with here, I cannot find parallels to support such a reading. Further, the next sentence, “he has fully cleared away his karmic obstruction,” makes me suspect that the bodhisattva in this dream is a very advanced one. Note that, in comparison, the *Mahāvastu*, unlike Mahāyāna scriptures like the *Dbh* which only emphasizes irreversibility from enlightenment, specifies that a bodhisattva may regress from a higher *bhūmi* to a lower one in the first seven *bhūmis* (Fujimura 2002, 282–284).

⁵² This dream content is very likely to describe the Buddha's great renunciation.

⁵³ Again, as in the case of Dream 29, the Chinese, 此人不退轉，是見初地五地, sounds more like “he has attained the state of irreversibility, and he is at (one of) the first five *bhūmis*.” Here, regarding the Tibetan, we can also take “irreversible” literally, in that the bodhisattva is not liable to turn back from the first five *bhūmis*, rather than from enlightenment itself. This dream will be revisited below.

this in the eighth *bhūmi*, while this achievement also is linked to the seventh developmental stage in the *SB* (Nattier 2007, 127–128). Thus, the only exceptions would be Dream 27 and Dream 68, two cases that are beyond our capacity to explain.

c. Prediction (*Vyākaraṇa*)

The third milestone of a bodhisattva’s progress is “receiving a prediction” (*vyākaraṇa*), a concept that we have touched upon above when discussing it as a favorable condition. To save some time, here I will only single out the dreams that do not associate this achievement with a *bhūmi* from the sixth to the eighth.

Dream 12: if a bodhisattva obtains the Tathāgata’s relics in a dream, he should be considered as being at the **third *bhūmi***. He **will** not only meet with a buddha, but **also obtain a prediction in the next life**.

Dream 23: If, after waking up, he does not forget about it (i.e., the teaching he heard in a dream), he should be regarded as being at the **second *bhūmi***, in which the bodhisattva who has achieved non-loss (**aśaṃpramoṣa*) should be regarded as being **endowed with prophecy** and having possessed the six Perfections.

Dream 36: That bodhisattva should be regarded as being at **one of the ten *bhūmis***. If he has vigilantly begun making effort [...] that bodhisattva should be understood as **having been prophesied, and he is behind the barrier of prophecy**.⁵⁴

In Dreams 23 and 36, the obtaining of a prediction is conditioned by other achievements or practices (having achieved non-loss and diligence, respectively). Dream 12 seems to place such an advanced achievement at quite a low *bhūmi* (“after the third *bhūmi*,” perhaps implying the fourth *bhūmi* or higher). While this is indeed strange, we should note that, according to the alleged four-stage system of the *SP* as proposed by Kajiyoshi (1944, 651–652) or Lamotte (1944–1980, 2377–2378§III), the *bhūmi* of irreversibility—an achievement that is traditionally tightly linked with receiving a prediction (Gilks 2010, 60–62)—is the third one. Moreover, as discussed

⁵⁴ The expression here is perplexing and has no exact parallels (Tib. *lung bstan pa’i mtshams bcad pa*; Chn. 受記界). Both translations literally mean “[within] the boundary or limitation of prediction,” which might indicate that the bodhisattva in question belongs to the sphere or territory (i.e., state) of people who have received a prediction that they have been separated from bodhisattvas who have not received a prediction. Alternatively, the word “boundary” or “barrier” here could also imply some kind of protection. In other words, such a boundary shields bodhisattvas from the danger of regression and provides them a sense of safety that their enlightenment is fixed—similar to the term *niyāma* which has a similar literal meaning. Indeed, in support of this reading, a comparable passage of the Tibetan translation of the *Gaganagañja-paripṛcchā* states that “[bodhisattvas] who have received the prophecy of [obtaining] the wisdom and knowledge of the Tathāgata” are those who “have entered the boundary and the fixed position [*niyāma*] of bodhisattvas” (Tib. *de bzhin gshegs pa’i ye shes mkhyen pa’i lung bstan pa thob pa/mtshams bcad cing byang chub sems dpa’ nges par gyur pa la zhugs pa*; D148, *mdo sde, pa*, 254a4; for a critical edition of the Tibetan text and its parallels, see Han 2020, II: 149; see also his translation of this sentence in *ibid.*, 150; he translates *mtshams bcad* as “have set the boundary [for practice] (*sīmābandha*)” without further explanation.

above, according to the “shared *bhūmis*” of the *LP*, the “non-returning” state is assigned to the fourth stage.⁵⁵

As demonstrated above, the correspondence between certain turning points in a bodhisattva’s progress (*anutpattikadharma-kṣānti*, *avaivartika*, *vyākaraṇa*) and specific *bhūmis* do not appear to be fixed in this text. What about other key bodhisattva practices? For example, if we approach the six Perfections (*pāramitās*) with the above method, though the order of the list of six Perfections is fixed when mentioned together, when we single out any of the six, the correlation between the Perfections and the *bhūmis* appears to be random.⁵⁶ If we repeat this method for other key bodhisattva achievements or practices, such as equanimity or cultivating emptiness, the conclusion remains the same.

Is such inconsistency resolvable through philological work? Unfortunately, for all the above examples, which are of great doctrinal importance, we find little help in the different witnesses, and the inconsistency in the two translations usually overlaps. Even when the two translations do not coincide, as I explain in the footnotes, they only differ slightly, never substantially.

This overlap in inconsistency in both translations shows us that a majority of the problems in this text are not caused by mistranslation or corruptions that occurred after the translations were produced. Although we cannot rule out the possibility that the inconsistencies were caused by misreadings and corruptions during its transmission, finding any actual evidence of this and emending the text with the presumably correct readings is very difficult in practice. Thus, we have to accept that the received text is “intrinsically” inconsistent.

It is thus very curious how such inconsistency is allowed to exist when elaborating a core doctrine of bodhisattva practice (i.e., the ten-*bhūmi* system). Admittedly, the linkage between bodhisattva doctrines and bodhisattva *bhūmis* is loose and changes over time. I have stressed the diversity of ten-*bhūmi* schemes in terms of the names and doctrines assigned to each *bhūmi*. However, unlike the issue of dream interpretation, regarding which no consistent system has been purposefully established in a broad Indian Buddhist context, a ten-*bhūmi* scheme is still expected to be a coherent system,

⁵⁵ “Non-returning” is allegedly also the fourth and highest *caryā* of a bodhisattva in the *Mahāvastu*; see Lamotte 1944–1980, V: 2374. However, as extensively discussed by Tournier (2017, 210–218) and noted in my Introduction, n. 43, the exact name of this *caryā*, as well as its implication, is unclear.

⁵⁶ In the sublists of Dreams 20 and 59, the order of the six Perfections follows the usual convention, i.e., 1) *dāna*, 2) *śīla*, 3) *kṣānti*, 4) *vīrya*, 5) *dhyāna*, 6) *prajñā*. However, when any of the six is singled out as a prescribed practice or achievement, it has no fixed association with any of the *bhūmis*. In Dream 74, a bodhisattva on the first four *bhūmis* should practice the Perfection of Discipline; in Dream 92, a bodhisattva belonging to the first nine *bhūmis* should strive for the Perfection of Meditation; in Dream 100, the first three *bhūmis* correspond to the practices of receptivity, diligence, and wisdom, respectively; in Dream 105, a bodhisattva of one of the first eight *bhūmis* should practice the Perfection of Receptivity; in Dream 106, a bodhisattva from one of the first nine *bhūmis* should practice the Perfection of Wisdom.

as we have discussed in the Introduction. In other words, most scriptures on this subject provide readers with a set of uniform correlations between bodhisattva doctrines and *bhūmis*, and we also expect to find such a systematic correlation in the *SvN*.

Traces of Compilation and Editing in the *SvN*

As discussed at the beginning of this section, textual fluidity often results in inconsistencies within a Mahāyāna scripture (due to, e.g., inheriting materials from multiple sources, accretion of multiple layers of exegesis, etc.). The *SvN*'s self-contradictory account of the *bhūmis* leads me to suspect that the text, in fact, includes more than one ten-*bhūmi* “system”—thus prompting me to consider the possibility that the text contains more than one layer of which each, on its own, shows some degree of inner consistency. Since the different ten-*bhūmi* systems make different associations between key doctrines and *bhūmis*, I wish to leverage these associations to identify possible textual layers.

The most puzzling *bhūmi*–doctrine associations found in this text are those between advanced attainments (i.e., the three milestones) and very low *bhūmis* (in Dreams 12, 23, 41, and 44).

Putting these dreams together, we do see that they share some striking similarities. In all four dreams, the highest *bhūmis* the dreams may indicate are still low (here I am referring to the highest *bhūmis* in the part As; as we will very soon see, the part Bs diverge dramatically from the part As): Dream 12 may indicate one of the first three *bhūmis*; Dream 23, the second *bhūmi*; Dream 41, the fifth *bhūmi*; and Dream 44, the third *bhūmi*. More interestingly, in three out of the four dreams, part A and part B are detached; that is, the description of the *bhūmis* in part A contradicts that of part B. For example, Part A of Dream 12 claims that “obtaining the Tathāgata’s relics” signifies one of the first three *bhūmis*, whereas Part B lists ten. The only dream (Dream 41) in which parts A and B agree with each other in content and *bhūmis* is also distinct in another sense: Part B of Dream 41 concerns itself with antidotes, while in most cases, the B parts present sublists of dreams.

The final evidence that betrays the affiliation of this group of dreams is the similarity between Dream 41 and another dream, Dream 69.

Dreams 41 and 69 overlap with each other to a great extent. Both dreams share the same topic—mountains: one is about climbing a mountain while the other is about sitting on a mountain. The *bhūmis* indicated by both dreams range from the first to the fifth, and though other *bhūmis* do not entirely align with each other, in both dreams, sitting on a mountain signifies the fifth *bhūmi*. Moreover, they all enjoin bodhisattvas to recite the *Triskandhaka* to eliminate their karmic obstructions. Part B of Dream 69,

just like Part B of Dream 41, concerns instructions for each *bhūmi* rather than variations on the main dream.⁵⁷ It is quite clear that the two dreams derive from the same prototype, perhaps collected from a related dream book and later edited by the collector(s).⁵⁸

The inclusion of two, almost identical dreams with minor rewording suggests that at least some of the dreams were edited into the text in quite a careless way. Further, the shared features of the four dreams with unexpected *bhūmi*–doctrine associations show that they were all collected from a source, or several related sources, in which the highest bodhisattva *bhūmi* was perhaps only the fifth. And the loose connection between the A parts and B parts shows that—as we have already discovered—not only are the latter not necessarily an integral component of each dream item, but also, when heterogeneous materials are incorporated into this dream manual, the B parts are particularly prone to errors.

In addition, the heterogeneity of the *SvN*’s sources indicates that there must be more than one work (or, works within a single tradition) elaborating on this topic. In fact, there should be a trend of such texts.

Indeed, though we cannot find a strict parallel to dream interpretation as presented in the *SvN*, many Mahāyāna scriptures share a more or less similar interest in dream interpretation—a topic that we will focus on in the next chapter. The *SvN* was perhaps compiled from many products of the trend of dream interpretation prevalent in the text’s period of composition. The overlapping inconsistencies of the two translations of the *SvN* tell us that, perhaps as soon as the trend had passed and the text was included in some sort of proto-canon, it became stabilized and was barely improved after that point.

Nonetheless, though we have successfully identified one layer of the text, we still have two remaining issues.

First, when applying the same method to other *bhūmi*–doctrine associations—for example, if we put together all the dreams that associate the three milestones with any of the ten *bhūmis*—we cannot discern any obvious inner consistency. This conclusion is also true of the dreams that suggest that the crucial attainments take place in the sixth, seventh, and eighth *bhūmis*. We cannot resolve all the inconsistencies by individuating textual layers. Further, as the accretion of layers itself is complicated, many components were perhaps corrupted during the process. As we have seen above, on the one hand, the dreams were possibly taken from more than one source; on the other hand, some structural components (especially the B parts and stock phrases) seem to have been added to every item in the text by different editorial hands. Thus, there are horizontal

⁵⁷ In Dream 69, following Part B, there is some further explanation that includes a sublist of dreams (which I separated into a part C).

⁵⁸ A similar example can be drawn from Dreams 92 and 103: both are about gardens, and in both cases, the B parts have absolutely no connection with the topics of the A parts. However, this example is less convincing, since the *bhūmi* ranges do not match.

layers as well as vertical ones. Such a compilation and editing process may have blurred the boundaries between layers and made them harder to separate.

The second issue is, though the final form of the text seems chaotic and inconsistent, we still see a strong indication of editorial arrangement, it is thus curious why some significant inconsistency remains unresolved. First, the number of dreams, 108,⁵⁹ reflects the intention of its compiler(s). The frequent incompatibility of Parts A and B also shows that perhaps many B parts were superimposed on A parts at a later stage, when the editor(s) decided to add the former parts. All these textual traits clearly indicate a process of editing. Therefore, though the editing is flawed, the text should still be seen as a work with self-aware coherence (but not consistency).

Such an outcome is even more puzzling: if the editor(s) or compiler(s) was (were) careful enough to make the dreams equal 108 and add reassuring prognoses to most of them, why would they allow the bodhisattva doctrines to be so problematic throughout the text?

Doctrinal Dependence and the Dating of the *SvN*

Since a conscious doctrine of bodhisattva developmental stages is expected in Mahāyāna scriptures on this topic, it is challenging to understand how the contradictory descriptions of bodhisattva *bhūmis* could coexist within one text, with no apparent attempt to resolve the contradictions.

Perhaps we are approaching the matter of consistency from a wrong direction in the first place? Why should we assume the ten-*bhūmi* system is defined primarily by the *bhūmi*–doctrine correlation? This question also addresses the association of dreams and *bhūmis*: if there is an underlying systematic association between bodhisattva *bhūmis* and doctrines, why do bodhisattvas consult dreams to ascertain their developmental stages at all? In other words, if bodhisattvas are supposed to follow a fixed set of

⁵⁹ The number 108 is significant in Indian culture. For example, mantras are commonly said to be recited 108 times: in the *Yaoshi liuliguang qifo benyuan gongde jing* 藥師琉璃光七佛本願功德經, T. 451, Vajrapāṇi claims that “[if someone] recites this mantra 108 times a day [...] then I will appear in their dreams” (Chn. 每日誦呪一百八遍[...]) 我於夢中即自現身 T. 451, 418a2–4). Though some scholars call it an “auspicious” number, it does not necessarily signify auspiciousness. For example, in the Buddhist context, philosophical concepts such as the afflictions (*kleśa*), concentrations (*samādhi*), and sensations (*vedanā*) are also said to be of 108 kinds in the *DZDL* (T. 1509, 110b6–7; *ibid.*, 97a12; *ibid.*, 325a18–b9; for translations of the first two passages, see Lamotte 1944–1980, I: 424 and *ibid.*, I: 324 respectively). The text partially explains the mathematical grounds of the number’s significance by elaborating on the 108 *vedanās*. The number is multiplied by 6 (*vedanā*, based on 6 *viññānas*) × 3 (according to whether it is pleasurable, unpleasurable, or neutral) × 2 (according to whether it is pure or impure) × 3 (according to the past, present, or future) (T. 1509, 325a18–b9). However, in some instances, such as in the case of the 108 *kleśas*, different texts provide different formulas to reach the number 108: in the **Mahāvibhāṣā*, the list consists of 41+52+15 (T. 1546, 189a19–26), while the *DZDL* explains it as 98+10 (T. 1509, 110b4–7). As the usage of the number is so widespread in the broader Indian context, a great number of studies attempt to give a summary and explanation of the significance of the number; for example, it is possible that its significance was based on the astronomical knowledge that the distance between the earth and the sun or the moon is roughly 108 in terms of the sun or moon’s own diameter (Kak 1993, 134–135), or because it equals $1^1 \times 2^2 \times 3^3$. However, after some thousand years of interpretation, the real reason behind the significance of the number may never be revealed.

instructions step by step to reach buddhahood, they should be well aware of their own developmental stages at the first place; otherwise, how do they know what instructions are prescribed to them?

Therefore, we have to reexamine our presumptions of the ten-*bhūmi* scheme. Indeed, in previous scholarship, much ink has been spilled on how practices or virtues are assigned to bodhisattvas at each *bhūmi*. This belief even led Dayal (1932, 271) to accuse the *Mahāvastu* of lacking a definite plan, and the larger *Prajñāpāramitā* of “fail[ing] to evolve an intelligible system,” since “it does not assign any names to the *bhūmis* and mentions the same virtues and sins again and again.” The lack of a fixed *bhūmi*–doctrine correlation was clearly seen as a deficiency. However, despite this belief, we frequently encounter inconsistencies within a single text. Most of these still seem to be caused by textual fluidity; for example, in the *Mahāvastu*, when discussing the fourth *bhūmi*, one sentence says “onwards from the eighth [*bhūmi*, bodhisattvas] become non-returning.” This leads to the speculation that this achievement was originally associated with the fourth *bhūmi*, but was moved to the eighth *bhūmi* in a later phase of textual development (Takahara 1955, 51).

However, it is also possible that a fixed correlation between bodhisattva doctrines and *bhūmis* was not intended by all the traditions. Taking the *DZDL* as an example, the key doctrine of “irreversibility” is either conditioned by “receptivity to the nonproduction of dharmas” or by the prediction made by the Buddha. Gilks (2010, 194) therefore argues that “irreversibility” is rather a “condition that a bodhisattva must enter into at some point in order to avoid actualising arhatship; or a state of certainty with respect to the attainment of enlightenment,” and is somewhat independent of the ten-*bhūmis* system. With this new perspective, the textual tradition represented by the *DZDL* may simply not recognize a bodhisattva progression model as a strict plan with a strong causality between more advanced practices or virtues and higher *bhūmis*. Could this also apply to the bodhisattva *bhūmis* of the *SvN*?

Though we still need to take its careless editorial process and the heterogeneity of its sources into consideration, the way that the bodhisattva *bhūmis* only loosely correlate with bodhisattva doctrines—especially how, in many instances, a bodhisattva’s attainments are conditioned by other practices rather than a specific *bhūmi*—leads me to suspect that the *SvN*—or at least some of the materials later incorporated into this sūtra—perhaps does not intend a fixed linkage between bodhisattva *bhūmis* and bodhisattva practices.

This could mean two things. First, the text sees no universal path of progress. Though the destination of buddhahood is the shared aim of all bodhisattvas, the specific path bodhisattvas follow to that aim may not be universal. Considering the text’s emphasis on karmic and demonic obstructions, the *SvN*’s bodhisattva *bhūmis* may not be defined by a certain set of bodhisattva practices and virtues; rather, the *bhūmis* are conditioned

by the number and characteristics of individual bodhisattvas' obstacles to enlightenment. This view is comparable with Cox's (1992, 64) solution to the "complex presentations of the path" in the Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma, in which she argues that viewing the path from the perspective that the "ultimate objective" is "the abandonment of defilements [...] provides the first and essential key to resolving the numerous structural and historical issues encumbering a comprehensive interpretation of the path" (ibid., 66). Besides, the *SvN* is strongly concerned with gaining knowledge of external influences, such as being held in favor by buddhas and bodhisattvas, being rewarded with a prediction from the Buddha, being sabotaged by Māra, etc. Such passivity gives the impression that bodhisattvas have neither control over nor sense of their progress. The lack of control and oversight leads them to consult their dreams for a diagnosis of their obstructions.

This seemingly random *bhūmi*-doctrine correlation could also mean that, not only is there no universal path to enlightenment, but there were too many teachings of a universal path floating around at some point in history. Since there was no single authorized path toward enlightenment, bodhisattvas who were exposed to all those teachings felt great frustration, with no clear instructions to follow and no uniform standard to evaluate their progress, and therefore "wanted to give up and return to their household status," as suggested at the end of the text. It is this frustration that generated and nurtured the trend of consulting dreams for evaluation and instruction.

This question of the social circumstances of this fashionable idea again concerns the textual history of the *SvN*: why is it that parallel texts cannot be found? Does this absence mean that the materials were only circulated in an exclusive circle or in a form other than writing? If we accept the second hypothesis—that the text bore witness to a chaotic period of various similar but nonstandardized teachings on the bodhisattva path—my wild guess would be that a large portion of the text was taught orally by Dharma preachers (as the frequent mention of Dharma preachers in this text also prompts me to consider) during a time when no fixed scheme of bodhisattva *bhūmis* was widely acknowledged.

Yet the lack of any parallels may not reflect an oral transmission of the text, but simply its diminished popularity, which may have caused other parallels to ultimately be lost. The language style of the *SvN* shows that it was transmitted to China no earlier than Kumārajīva's time, while the *Dbh* translated by Dharmarakṣa already displays a highly systematic ten-*bhūmi* scheme, and has been largely stable ever since (Hirakawa 1989a, 556–557). Even at the time the Tibetan translation was made, there was still no attempt to adjust the *SvN* to a more consistent system. The most possible scenario is therefore that, when the *SvN* was composed, the author(s) or editor(s) was (were) not aware of or convinced by systematic works on the ten *bhūmis* such as the *Dbh*. When the ideas presented in the *Dbh* emerged and became popular, the *SvN* had already been

cut off from the center of discussion, and no effort was taken to make it compatible with systematic ideas on the ten *bhūmis*.⁶⁰ Thus, the *SvN* must have been stabilized, or, more bluntly, abandoned (in a sense that it was not actively practiced or commented upon), long before the date of its Chinese translation.⁶¹ This coincides with the neglect of the text in the later tradition. The decline of the *SvN*'s popularity perhaps indicates a transition from nonstandardized ten-*bhūmi* schemes to systematic ones: more established systems of bodhisattva *bhūmis* replaced the vague ones, and these well-organized schemes largely conceal the frustration that drove bodhisattvas to consult their dreams to determine their *bhūmis*. In this way, dream manuals like the *SvN* eventually lost their appeal. However, too much guesswork has been needed to reach this point; the historical development of the ten-*bhūmi* system cannot be understood simply from the perspective of one text—the text currently under discussion. We will continue this discussion in Chapter 6.

No matter how vague the textual history of the *SvN*, all the above hypotheses point to the notion that the *SvN* is representative of some very early Mahāyāna ideas. However, I must reiterate that the periodization of Mahāyāna scripture is almost an impossible mission, especially for a text with such little external or internal evidence. Though the core content of the text—the ten-*bhūmi* scheme—indeed suggests it should be discussed in the context of “early” Mahāyāna scriptures, how early it is is a question that perhaps no one can answer.

Textual Dependence

We have tried to situate the *SvN* in a larger Mahāyāna context based on its main doctrinal concern—the ten *bhūmis*. While this allows us to move one step closer in our pursuit of the textual history of the *SvN*, other doctrinal points may be of lesser importance for the whole text, but equally crucial in contextualizing the *SvN*.

The doctrines mentioned in the *SvN* are numerous: among them, the few references made to other texts are the most significant to the discussion at hand. As Harrison (2018a, 16) has pointed out, “the map of that intertextuality, once drawn, can then be compared with the information we have about the Chinese translations to see if any significant correlations are to be found, as well as factored into any discussion of

⁶⁰ As we have seen from popular sūtras especially the *LP*, although the models of bodhisattva progress found in its earlier recensions are evidently incompatible with the *bhūmi* scheme as described in the *Dbh*, its later recensions nonetheless adopt the names of *Dbh bhūmi* system. I have made this point in my Introduction.

⁶¹ In fact, it is not uncommon to see a centuries-long gap between the circulation of certain bodhisattva doctrine in India and the first translation into Chinese of a scripture(s) that fully embody this doctrine. As we have seen in the case of the *Triskandhaka* and the so-called *Bodhisattvapīṭaka* (Hirakawa 1989a, 217–226; see also my note Chapter 1, n. 72), the circulation of a certain doctrine, the formation of a scripture in which this doctrine constitutes its core, and the transmission and translation of such scripture often took place in different phases.

doctrinal and other developments.” Though we are not able to draw a “map” of any broader intertextuality, we can at least pull together the threads of intertextuality in the *SvN*.

The *SvN* does not refer to many texts; we have discussed the *Triskandhaka* extensively—a confession method, but above all a piece of text for recitation. In my discussion above, I have argued that, despite its ambivalence, the immense emphasis on the confessional aspect of the *Triskandhaka* in the *SvN* leads me to suspect that the *Triskandhaka* referred to here is a relatively early version, perhaps comparable to the *Shelifu huiguo jing*.

In addition to the *Triskandhaka*, though the *SvN* mentions many classifications of sūtras and *dhāraṇīs*, none of them appears to be specific. The least vague references are in Dream 59, a dream that revolves around hearing Vaipulya sūtras. The sublist of Dream 59, respectively, is about Vaipulya sūtras of the six Perfections.⁶² Again, these references cannot be identified with any extant sūtra. Perhaps it points to a phase when none of the now-familiar scriptures existed in a stabilized form; we do not know for certain.

More strangely, many collective terms occur in an abridged or even incomplete version of the standard lists: among the three receptivities (*kṣāntis*), receptivity toward the oral teaching (*ghoṣānugā-kṣānti*) never appears; among the three or four obstructions, the *SvN* only mentions two; and most remarkably, among practicing kindness, pity, joy, and equanimity, the list in the *SvN* skips “joy.” Maybe the above instances are a matter of corruption, and we should not put much weight on them,⁶³ but the frequency of such aberrant lists is noteworthy.

The Bigger Picture

The above evidence concerning the intertextuality and terminology of the *SvN* again leads us to suspect it of being a relatively early sūtra. Therefore, despite the scarcity of materials and external evidence, we are confident in concluding that the *SvN* should be discussed as an early Mahāyāna sūtra that was compiled from several highly fluid sources. The text lost its popularity and stopped developing (long) before the date of its Chinese translation, and the problems that stemmed from the accretion of heterogeneous materials and historical layers have also come down to us. Though the problems are troublesome for hermeneutic and philological studies, nonetheless, they

⁶² For a comprehensive overview of the term *vaipulya* and related terminologies, see Skilling 2013. According to Skilling (ibid., 90), “The term, which seems to have been a shared self-identity of emergent Mahāyāna literature, usually normalized as *Vaipulya*, is regularly used as an epithet in chapter colophons or in concluding colophons.” It seems that the “*Vaipulya* sūtras” in the *SvN* also loosely refer to Mahāyāna sūtras.

⁶³ Comprehensive surveys on any such doctrinal term in Mahāyāna prove that “aberrant lists” as such are a common occurrence; for example, on the nonstandard lists of *pāramitās*, see Apple 2016, 6–7.

help us discover its hidden textual history and shed light on the long-overlooked idea about bodhisattvas' dreams and their developmental stages in early Mahāyāna.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this chapter does not diverge too much from its presumption—the *SvN* is indeed a text peculiar in its presentation of bodhisattva *bhūmis* and obscure in its textual history. What this chapter brings us closer to is an understanding of the motives or anxieties behind this diagnostic dream manual and an explanation of the text's chaotic depiction of the bodhisattva progress.

The content of this text is peculiar, as the dream manual reflects bodhisattvas' anxieties over the obstacles as well as the knowledge of their progress in their way to enlightenment—a topic that is seldom explicitly brought up in sūtras concerning bodhisattva *bhūmis*. The textual history of the *SvN* is obscure because the text was presumably stabilized at quite an early date, and the accretion and heterogeneity of its materials and sloppy editing made the text problematic and difficult to read. However, the *SvN* is valuable precisely because its hypothesized textual history suggests it is an early Mahāyāna scripture revealing a once-fashionable idea of dreams and bodhisattva *bhūmis*.

Thus, the question is, if we have guessed right and this idea was indeed popular in an early Mahāyāna setting, why does this diagnostic dream manual seem so isolated from other Mahāyāna scriptures on dreams or bodhisattva *bhūmis*? In the next chapter, I will show that there is in fact a rich repertory of comparable ideas on dreams in Mahāyāna scriptures, and they all indicate more or less similar anxieties among bodhisattvas.