Dreaming the path: diagnosing Bodhisattva progress in early Mahāyāna

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Chapter 3
Diagnostic Dreams: The Common Ground

Per our previous analysis, the *Svapnanirdeśa—Teaching on Dreams*—teaches bodhisattvas to search their dreams for knowledge about their progress on the bodhisattva path. While we may claim that we have tried our best to make sense of this difficult text, we have not yet fully understood the doctrinal implications of the *SvN* in its context. If our analysis in the first two chapters is built on solid ground, then the central ideas of the *SvN*—which are never clearly stated, but taken for granted in the text—should also leave traces in scriptures or treatises that share similar historical or doctrinal backgrounds. The aim of the rest of the chapters is to understand the doctrinal context of the *SvN*. Nevertheless, the ultimate goal is not to gain a better understanding of the *SvN*, but to use the idea presented in the *SvN* to uncover some prevalent, yet previously overlooked, doctrines and concerns in early Mahāyāna scriptures.

As I have promised readers in the Introduction, the idea in question is the seemingly unusual connection between dreams and bodhisattva *bhūmi*s.

If we take it at face value, the system of bodhisattva *bhūmi*s seems to be highly rational and sophisticated, with dream interpretation at the opposite end of the rationality scale. To take an example, namely from Rahula's modern study on the *Mahāvastu*, the author's comment on the Buddha's (then a bodhisattva) Five Great Dreams of enlightenment[1] tells much about how and why the presence of dreams seems irrelevant to the topic of a bodhisattva's progress. Rahula (1978, 259) argues that "although the Buddha's discipline and doctrine has no place whatsoever for superstitious conventions like the belief in repercussions of premonitory signs and dreams, the zealous propagators could not neglect the points of such popular recognition of the time, whence we find Siddhārtha having propitious dreams before his grand success." Here, according to Rahula, dreams that "indicated the fulfilment of the *bodhisattva*'s objective" (ibid.), i.e., dreams that signify Bodhisattva Siddhārtha's progress, have no place in "the Buddha's discipline and doctrine." Later in his book, Rahula (ibid., 338) again indicates that forms of divinatory practices such as dream interpretation reflected the public tastes in the historical context of the *Mahāvastu*, but he never fully elaborates why dream interpretation is incompatible with Buddhist doctrine. Yet elsewhere, when talking about bodhisattva *bhūmi*s in the *Mahāvastu*,

[1] We will discuss the Buddha's Five Great Dreams extensively in the last section of this chapter.

Rahula (ibid., 64) notes that "the text remarks that even a single *bhūmi* is infinite (*aparimita*) and beyond the limitations of human comprehension. It is not therefore possible to measure the *bhūmi*s of *bodhisattva*s."[2] On the same page, he summarizes each *bhūmi* as "presented with its particular disposition (*sandhi-citta*) which enables the adept to advance to and abide in that stage." The implication is thus that, according to the doctrine of bodhisattva progress in general, bodhisattva Siddhārtha's fulfillment of his objective cannot be evaluated and measured in the first place. Even if there is a way to know about a bodhisattva's imminent enlightenment, it should entail examination of the bodhisattva's character, rather than his or her dreams.

The above example shows that, by investigating the association between a bodhisattva's dreams and his progress, we may discover some previous misunderstanding of dreams, bodhisattva developmental stages, or both.

On the other hand, to claim that the ideas presented in the *SvN* were, in fact, prevalent, we want to find out which doctrines and concerns are shared between the *SvN* and other Mahāyāna scriptures. However, as we have noticed already, there are no close parallels of the *SvN*. Further, as again noted above, a direct association between a bodhisattva's dreams and his progress seems strange. We should thus abandon the hope of approaching the Mahāyāna scriptures simply with some keywords like "*bhūmi*" and "dream." Instead, we must determine which essential ideas can be extracted from the *SvN*.

In Chapter 2, we analyzed the central ideas of the *SvN* by reducing them to two main topics—dream interpretation and bodhisattva *bhūmi*s. Though we mainly approached them from the perspective of consistency, we also made an effort to dismiss some unnecessary presumptions attached to the two main topics. Stripped of these presumptions, what are the essences of dreams and bodhisattva *bhūmi*s?

Dreams are a universal state of consciousness—that needs no further explanation. But the meaning of dreams, or whether dreams are meaningful at all, has been controversial throughout human history. In the *SvN*, leaving aside the interpretation of individual dreams, dreams by and large offer dreamers insight into their yet-to-be-revealed conditions. In this sense, dreams are valued as a source of truthful knowledge about personal conditions. In this study, we will primarily understand dreams as signs of epistemic value, and we will take similar signs (though not necessarily manifested in the form of dreams) into consideration.

The term "bodhisattva *bhūmi*s", on the other hand, already sounds quite technical. After the previous chapters' dismantling of the presumptions attached to *bhūmi*s—that

[2] For the sentence that Rahula refers to, see Tournier 2017, 472.289−292. For my English translation and discussion on this sentence, see n. 54 in Chapter 5.

is, understanding them to entail a fixed plan of bodhisattva practices and achievements—what is left as the substance of this concept?

The word *bhūmi*, though conventionally translated as "stage" in Buddhist studies,[3] means "earth" if we go back to the beginning of the chain of semantic development (i.e., for the meaning attested in the *Ṛgveda*, see Böhtlingk and Roth 1855−1875, V: 348 and Mayrhofer 1992−2001, II: 268−269). In the Buddhist context, a less derived (i.e., than "stages") but more proper rendition of this term is perhaps "ground" or "foundation." Judging by its synonyms in Mahāyāna scriptures and later commentarial traditions, *bhūmi* is mostly explained in the sense of "ground," without any necessary hierarchical implication. For example, Gilks (2010, 181−184) has listed some instances in the *Aṣṭa* that show the term is best understood as "state" or "condition."[4] Based on his understanding of the Tibetan translation of the *Daśabhūmivyākhyāna* (D3993), Itō (2013, 170) claims that the meaning of *bhūmi* in the *Dbh* is akin to *ākara* or *garbha*, i.e., "sources" or "origin" (of, according to Itō, wisdom and the Dharma). With further references to the *Daśabhūmivyākhyāna*—besides *ākara*, Itō also gives examples of the usage of *bhūmi* in the sense of "field (**gocara*) of activity (**caryā*)" and "sphere (**viṣaya*) or root (**praveśa*, *abhinirhāra*) of knowledge" (ibid., 177) Similarly, Deleanu (2012, 1−2, n. 2) argues that in the context of the *Yogācārabhūmi*, *bhūmi* should be understood as "foundations," since (as put by Sthiramati in his commentary) they are "the basis (**āśraya*) and the ground (**nidāna*; or: **adhiṣṭhāna*) of the cultivation (**bhāvanā*) of spiritual practice (*yoga*)," and "the term °*bhūmi* has not a straightforward, unequivocal meaning of 'step' on a ladder of spiritual progression. There is no implication, for instance, that a yogi must first practice according to the Śrāvakayāna, then follow the Pratyekabuddha's path, and then engage in the bodhisattvic course of salvific activity and spiritual cultivation."

But even if *bhūmi* does not necessarily imply the strictly linear spiritual progression of practitioners, a hierarchical undertone seems undeniable. Even in the case of the *Yogācārabhūmi*, the *bhūmi* in the title perhaps implies "hierarchical evaluation of religious ideals from the perspective of the Great Vehicle" (ibid.). More importantly, according to Hirakawa's survey of the term in a broader range of Buddhist literature, *bhūmi* as used to designate "the developmental stages of progress to enlightenment"

[3] This term has long been rendered as "stage" in English in influential studies on the topic. For example, Rahder (1926, 214) defines *daśabhūmi* as the "ten stages in the career of a bodhisattva" in his introduction to the *Dbh*. Dayal (1932, 270) also uses this metaphor in his survey on *bodhisattva bhūmis*—"[a] bodhisattva's entire career has been divided into several parts and stages. He rises and advances from one stage to another till he attains Enlightenment." Though he also gives other definitions of the word *bhūmi,* the conclusion he arrives at is "*[b]hūmi* has thus become a philosophical term, meaning 'Stage' (of spiritual progress)."

[4] It is worth noting that he proposes to understand *bhūmi* as a "ground" with emphasis on the term's connotation of stability: "the literal meaning of *bhūmi* as ground, or firm support, is perhaps used to highlight the stability of the condition of being an irreversible bodhisattva in the sense that it is a condition from which one cannot fall" (Gilks 2010, 184). Relevant to this question, Gilks (ibid., 176) also cites some examples in the *Lotus Sūtra* where *bhūmi* should be understood as "state" or "range."

was already prevalent in Buddhist scriptures at an early stage. For instance, the term "*bhūmi* of trainees" (Pāli *sekha-bhūmi*, Chn. 學地), as being lower than the "*bhūmi* of adepts" (Pāli *asekha-bhūmi*, Chn. 無學地), can be found in the Nikāya−Āgama literature and the Vinayas of several schools (Hirakawa 1989a, 508−510).

Another perspective by which to look at this matter is by studying the verbs paired with *bhūmi.* On the one hand, in the introductory part before elaborating on each *bhūmi*, the *Dbh* states that, by the power of a vow (*praṇidhāna*),[5] "bodhisattvas enter (*avataranti*) the *bhūmi* of knowledge of blessed buddhas."[6] The verb used here—*ava-√tṛ*—is explained by Edgerton as to penetrate (intellectually), comprehend (1953, II: 71) when it is paired with terms like knowledge or doctrines. In this sense, the phrase *jñāna-bhūmim avataranti* should be better understood as "[they] comprehend the foundation of knowledge [of buddhas]," and *bhūmi* here appears closer to the sense of "foundation," a "state" rather than a "hierarchical stage." On the other hand, however, every section on each *bhūmi* formulaically starts with a sentence as such, *mutatis mutandis*, "having purified their intention (*āśaya*), bodhisattvas of the second bodhisattva *bhūmi* advance to (*ākramati*) the third *bhūmi*."[7] Here, the verb *ākramati* implies a sense of gradual progress (cf. Mayrhofer 1992−2001, II: 409−410).

Thus, the term *bhūmi*, depending on the focus of the discussion, can be rendered either as "area, ground, foundation" or "stage, level" (Schmithausen 2014, 11, n. 1). In my opinion, however, it is not an either/or matter. We should understand both senses as forming the essence of *bhūmi*'s meaning. As far as the *SvN* is concerned, the hierarchical tone of *bhūmi* is obvious: phrases like the verb "to set forth" (Tib. *'byung bar 'gyur*; Chn. 趣向) and the notion of a "higher *bhūmi*" (Tib. *sa gong ma*, Chn. 上地, Skt. **upari-bhūmi*) indicate that the term is related to progress. Nonetheless, after reviewing the term's usage in the broader context of Buddhist literature, I would stress that we should not overlook the other meaning of *bhūmi* even when it remains unstated. Here, to combine the two aspects of the term *bhūmi*, I tentatively understand it as the foundation or basis on which one's current spiritual status builds; when discussing this concept within a hierarchical framework such as ten bodhisattva *bhūmi*s, it also underlies the firm position one is occupying in terms of his/her progression to the final goal.

Accordingly, the two main subjects of the *SvN* should be understood in this way: dreams are the source of knowledge of a bodhisattva's state and *bhūmi*s are the foundation that constitutes a bodhisattva's spiritual status. Both terms relate to the state

[5] On the *praṇidhāna*'s role in bodhisattva progress, see my further discussion in Chapter 5, n. 31.
[6] Skt. *bodhisattvā* […] *buddhānāṃ bhagavatāṃ jñānabhūmim avataranti*. Kondō 1936, 6.10.
[7] Skt. *bodhisattvo dvitīyāyāṃ bodhisattvabhūmau supariśodhitādhyāśayas tṛtīyāṃ bodhisattvabhūmim ākramati,* ibid., 52.4−5. This sentence is from the beginning of the third *bhūmi.*

of a bodhisattva: *bhūmi*s represent a concern with its basis, while dreams represent a concern with its knowledge.

In this way we can say that, the central idea of the *SvN* is based on two closely intertwined beliefs. The first deals with the *causality* of a bodhisattva's progress, the second with the *knowledge* for determining a bodhisattva's state of progress or the factors that determine one's progress. While the *SvN* is heterogeneous in terms of its material and descriptions of the bodhisattva *bhūmi*s, the text is nonetheless coherent—all items are underpinned by this twofold belief.

In terms of *causality*, in the *SvN* a bodhisattva's career is subject to the influence of a series of factors, such as his past karma and Māra, while the linkage between a bodhisattva's career and his self-cultivation appears surprisingly loose, though self-cultivation is undeniably required. The consequence of such a view of soteriology—as some of the relevant factors are external to a bodhisattva's self-awareness—is an urgency to know about these influences. The dreams in the *SvN*, as an epistemic means, provide individuals on the bodhisattva vehicle with the *knowledge* that they seek.

This twofold concern is valid on its own. However, we should immediately recall that neither Mahāyāna soteriology nor any other soteriology is supposed to work in this way. In other words, the answers Buddhist scriptures are presumed to provide are different.

From the angle of causality—i.e., the "grounds" of a bodhisattva's spiritual status which allow his further progress—we commonly see that a bodhisattva's self-cultivation constitutes the groundwork for his status. Many examples have been given in this dissertation, but I will cite yet another description of bodhisattva *bhūmi*s, from the 1971 version of the *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* published by the Sri Lankan government:

> The account of the stage given above presents us with an idea of the gradation in the spiritual life of a bodhisattva […] The transition from one stage to the following takes place according to the progress made by a bodhisattva in respect of certain virtues. The first seven stages together constitute the active career of the bodhisattva, during which he exerts himself, and his acts imply movement and intellectual work. The seventh marks the completion of his career and the preparation for passing into the career which is free from movement and intellectuation, the so-called career of knowledge and supernatural virtues. (Nanayakkara 1971, 78)

Following this account, which is obviously based on the *Dbh* (though the objective of this entry is to provide information about bodhisattva *bhūmi*s in general), the foundation of a bodhisattva's spiritual status is his virtue, and, especially in terms of

the first seven *bhūmi*s, a bodhisattva's virtue comes from his active effort. Thus, the sequence of bodhisattva *bhūmi*s should proceed as in a coursebook. By actively completing each lesson, the eventual goal will be reached. A fuller discussion of the *Dbh*'s description of the bodhisattva *bhūmi*s is to follow in Chapter 6, but for now, it is only important to know that, according to this understanding of the *bhūmi*s, there should be no concern over knowledge about the contributing factors to progress or one's exact position in the course of progress.

From the angle of dreams, what is better known on the topic of dreams in a Mahāyāna context is perhaps their metaphorical significance. The *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā* famously ends its discourse on emptiness with these verses: "A shooting star, a clouding of the sight, a lamp, an illusion, a drop of dew, a bubble, a dream, a lightning's flash, a thunder cloud—This is the way one should see the conditioned" (Harrison 2006, 158). In this sense, not only are dreams not valued as an epistemic tool, they are devalued as one of the most representative examples of the deceptive nature of phenomena, although they are valued as a metaphor for understanding reality at the same time.

But are dreams with epistemic value really uncommon in Buddhist scriptures? In the previous chapter, we have examined some prognostic dreams (those in the *Lalitavistara*), but none of them concerns itself with bodhisattva *bhūmi*s. Nonetheless, previous scholarship has already observed some associations between dreams and a bodhisattva's progress (Sumegi 2008, 62; Müller 1992, 365−367, among others). For instance, in Young's study on Buddhist dreams in Indian and Tibetan scriptures (1999, 11), she comments that "the *Lotus Sūtra* (XIII. 60−70) offers a typology of dreams that precede enlightenment, while the *Ārya Svapna Nirdeśa Sūtra*, in its description of 108 auspicious dreams, suggests both the common dream world that is available to striving Buddhists and the value of dreams as signs of spiritual progress and accomplishment." However, in my opinion, although the aforementioned scholarship has observed this association between dreams and a bodhisattva's progress, none of them sufficiently *explains* the prevalence of the association: do all scriptures that establish such an association believe that dreams are "signs of spiritual progress and accomplishment"? If yes, what is the exact epistemic value attached to dreams in those scriptures? How is this epistemic function justified? And how does the knowledge provided by dreams matter to a bodhisattva's progress? The study presented in the following two chapters aims to answer the above questions.

Although, judging from the *SvN*, the epistemic concern is induced by a specific causation model of bodhisattva progress, I suggest we leave aside the question of causation for now. Instead, it would be better first to follow the thread of the epistemic concern: by learning what knowledge about their progress bodhisattvas are eager to

find in their dreams, we would also have a better view of the causative factors involved in a bodhisattva's progress.

In the following two chapters on dreams, I will argue that belief in the epistemic value of dreams is in fact well established in Mahāyāna literature, both theoretically and factually. More importantly, these pieces of theoretical and factual evidence not only reflect the mechanism behind this idea of dreams, but also important facts about the developmental stages of an ideal bodhisattva.

This chapter aims to lay the theoretical ground for our further survey on diagnostic dreams in Mahāyāna scriptures. I will first define the domain of our research: what kind of dreams do we want to include in our research? My definition of diagnostic dreams is also a response to the previous scholarly discussions on Buddhist dreams. Secondly, I will show that the legitimacy of dreams' epistemic value is not merely a popular and irrational belief. Rather, it is supported by theoretical claims about dreams widely found in Indian Buddhist treatises. Such theories can further help us to understand the mechanism behind this belief from an emic perspective. Lastly, I will examine the widespread story of the dreams that *the* Bodhisattva had shortly before his awakening. The shared belief in dreams' epistemic value and the Bodhisattva's dreams of enlightenment in a pan-Buddhist context leads to the proliferation of diagnostic dreams in scriptures about the bodhisattva path—the topic for the next chapter.

Diagnostic Dreams: A Definition

The brief analysis above has extracted the essence of the dreams presented in the *SvN*: the dreams are an epistemic tool that informs bodhisattvas about their progress. However, this description of dreams is biased exclusively toward the idea presented in the *SvN*, and is not built on observations of textual evidence found in other scriptures. Therefore, to fulfill the aim of surveying dreams of epistemic value in relation to the bodhisattva path, we need to determine the scope of our research subject by tailoring the above description of dreams.

The problem is that, on the one hand, there exist no close parallel texts about dreams of bodhisattva *bhūmi*s. On the other hand, dreams of epistemic value (either prospective or retrospective, in narratives or in more philosophical discussions) but not necessarily related to the bodhisattva path present themselves in a surprisingly large quantity in Mahāyāna scriptures. That means there is either a void of sources on the most relevant dreams or an overwhelmingly large corpus of sources for a general overview of dreams in Mahāyāna.

Fortunately, comprehensive surveys on dreams in the Buddhist context exist in several previous studies; consulting these before diving directly into primary sources

would be more effective. By learning which patterns of dreams recur in the Mahāyāna texts from these studies, we might determine which definition of dreams could help us identify the dreams that are most useful to our study.

Amid the effort of putting a mass of dream materials in order, previous studies all found ways to classify dreams for their own purposes. No matter the perspective from which previous researchers have approached the dreams—in terms of genres, chronologies of the scriptures, dreamers, patterns, or functions of dreams[8]—they have all noticed a type of dream that is close to our interest. Such dreams are what Young calls "dreams as signs of spiritual accomplishment" (1999, 95−113).[9] In another summarization of frequent themes in Indian Buddhist dreams, Sumegi (2008, 61−62) lists several dreams under the category "dreams of awakening."[10] When Müller (1992, 345) approaches dreams in Buddhism from the perspective of Chinese materials, he divides his discussion into four parts according to the dreams' functions. One of these functions, analyzed under the subtitle "bodhisattvas and dreams," pertains to a class of dreams that is said to be showing dreamers their status on the way to enlightenment (ibid., 365).[11]

The universal presence of the class of "dreams as signs of spiritual accomplishment" is significant to our study, especially given the diversity of texts examined by the above studies: In Young's (1999, 75) study, "dreams as signs of spiritual accomplishment" is one of the most persistent themes of dreams "in Buddhist biographies from earliest texts into the present" in India and Tibet. According to Müller (1992, 365), "bodhisattvas' dreams of their status" is the most significant motif found in Chinese Buddhist texts when dreams and bodhisattvas are juxtaposed. Sumegi's research on Indian Buddhism

[8] Many actual categorizations of dreams in modern scholarship will be provided in the following footnotes, and most of the studies organize their discussions by the topics and functions of dreams. However, I would note two exceptions here. Tejima (1920b, 17−28) organizes his discussion of dreams in Mahāyāna based primarily on the order of the Chinese canon; though this arrangement does not deliberately take the actual contents of dreams into consideration, we can see that the dream contents or discussions often display some similarities within each section (namely, *bu* 部) of the canon as traditionally organized in China. However, the similarity may not mean anything as the texts featuring those dreams within one section could be historically related from the perspective of their textual history (e.g., the dreams in the *Aṣṭa* and the *Pañca* certainly share great commonality as they all belong to the *Prajñāpāramitā* textual family). Yet another categorization that deserves some attention is that of Crescenzi and Torricelli's cursory survey on Tibetan literature on dreams (1997, 63−64); they divide the texts into just "two wide categories: 1. Texts focusing on the signs in a dream; 2. Texts focusing on the dreams as Path. The former includes all those texts dealing with the oneiric signs in a manifold perspective, such as ordinary life, spiritual practices, medicine, 'incubation,' philosophical metaphors, and so forth; the latter contains all the instructions on the process of inner transformation, i.e. 'purification' or 'dream yoga.'" According to them, the *SvN* belongs to the latter category (ibid., 64). I put their categorization here in the footnotes because I think that, in the case of the *SvN*, these two categories in fact overlap: dreams in the *SvN* are signs (category 1) that provide instructions for the process of inner transformation (category 2). Therefore, this categorization is not very helpful to our study.

[9] Young has noted that the motif of "dreams as signs of spiritual accomplishment" is one of the three most frequent dream motifs in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist biographies. The other two motifs are 1) conception dreams and 2) shared dreams (Young 1999, 75−94). Young (ibid., 95−113) mainly discusses the dreams in the biographies of the Buddha and Milarepa.

[10] Sumegi (2008, 49−69) divides the themes of dreams into the following groups: 1) dream and direct perception of the Buddha; 2) dreaming and paranormal powers; 3) dream interpretation and classification; 4) the conception dream (of Māyā); 5) dreams of awakening; 6) dreams and the moral condition of the dreamer.

[11] The four subtitles under the "functions of dreams" that Müller (1992, 345) elaborates are: 1) dreams and metaphors; 2) dreams and conversion; 3) bodhisattvas and dreams; and 4) dreams and dream interpretation.

is based mostly on English translations (which only constitute a small proportion of extant Indian Buddhist texts), but even within those materials, "dreams of awakening" are prominent enough to warrant a separate categorization. Evidently, this type of dream should be frequent and distinct from other dreams.

These overviews greatly help us gain an impression of the frequent types of dreams and the role of "dreams as signs of the spiritual status of bodhisattvas" in the Buddhist context. However, the categorizations are based mainly on observation rather than in-depth analysis, and they do not tell us much about the mechanism and implication of those dreams. For example, per Sumegi's categorization, "dreams of awakening" and dreams that reflect "the moral condition of the dreamer" are separate categories; however, as we will soon see, the mechanism behind both kinds of dreams is similar.[12] Since the objective of this research is also to understand the doctrinal implications of such dreams, we also want to see what dreams are not strictly "dreams as signs of the spiritual status of bodhisattvas," but are implicitly related.

In fact, scholars have long noticed links between dreams of one's bodhisattva status and other dreams that may seem irrelevant at first glance. For instance, Müller (1992, 365−367) has pointed out that bodhisattvas' dreams are consistent with the five awakening dreams found in the life stories of the Buddha. He also notes the significance of dreams both in confirming a bodhisattva's achievement and in performing repentance rituals, although he did not fully explain the rationale behind it.[13] This connection reminds us of our observations of the content diagnosed by dreams in the *SvN*: in the *SvN*, dreams not only reveal the developmental stages of bodhisattvas but also urge them to recite the discourse of confession, i.e., the *Triskandhaka*. Are these purely coincidences?

Further, not only can the scope of what is signified by dreams be expanded, but, as Sumegi (2008, 62) notes, "Just as the archetypal and legendary life of a buddha is marked by dream prophecy, so in Mahāyāna literature the career of a bodhisattva includes the dreams or visions that signal the stages of spiritual attainment." The example she gives is how visions "signal" the ten *bhūmi*s in the **Akṣayamati-paripṛcchā*, another text belonging to the MRK collection.[14] The analogy of dreams

[12] To be fair, Sumegi does make note of a similar mechanism that underlies the two kinds of dreams: "[t]rue prognosticatory dreams are karma driven, because they arise on the basis not only of a person's accumulation of merit, but also on the accumulation of demerit" (Sumegi 2008, 56); accordingly, "dreams of awakening" arise on the basis of a person's merits while dreams that reflect "the moral condition of the dreamer" arise on the basis of a person's accumulation of both merit and demerit. I use this example only to denote the possible misunderstandings caused by categorizations and how such categorization does not apply to our research.

[13] Müller has attempted to provide explanations of his observation. He explains that it is the presence of awareness during dreaming that verifies a bodhisattva's position on the path to enlightenment in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature (Müller 1992, 365−366); because of their vow, bodhisattvas are eager to use any method—even dreams—to seek instruction, such as instructions for repentance (ibid., 366−367, though this claim is primarily based on the "Contemplation Scriptures," i.e., *guan jing*s, that we have referred to in Chapter 1). However, the separate explanations are not sufficient to make a connection between the two kinds of dreams.

[14] Sumegi refers to this text as the "*Mahāratnakūṭa sūtra*," perhaps because her argument is built on English translations of excerpts from the MRK collection made by Garma C. C. Chang (Sumegi 2008, 62−63): i.e., Garma

and meditative visions is something that we have touched upon when explaining the implications of the term *nimitta.* Here, again, we see that the function of dream visions and meditative visions overlaps.

Now is the right time to bring up the term Greene coins in his recent book, "confirmatory visions":

> Despite their many differences on matters ranging from the possible objects of meditative attention to the names of the stages of meditative progress, the *Visuddhimagga* and the *Meditation Scripture* make similar claims about the process leading to *dhyāna* and—what I wish to highlight—the semiotics of its attainment. Both assert that the attainment of *dhyāna* (or its immediate precursor, access concentration) will be communicated not only by the arising of the specific attributes that characterize said attainment as a novel state of body and mind, attributes such as bliss, happiness, and mental concentration, but also by an encounter with a new and distinctive *object* of consciousness characterized in visual terms—in less rarified language, a vision. Unlike the descriptions of the attainment of *dhyāna* from early canonical sources, which do not address such questions at all, both the *Visuddhimagga* and the *Meditation Scripture* explicitly frame the significance of these visions in semiotic terms. These visions are valuable not because of what is directly disclosed to the meditator through them, such as the details of Buddhist doctrines or the reality of some external object or being whose existence was in doubt, but rather because their occurrence is a reliable indicator that the meditator has obtained *dhyāna*. For this reason, I shall refer to them as "confirmatory visions." (Greene 2021b, 70)

Accordingly, a "confirmatory vision" is an "*object* of consciousness characterized in visual terms" that indicates "the meditator has obtained *dhyāna*" in a pan-Buddhist meditative context (e.g., in the above passage, in the fifth-century Pāli *Visuddhimagga*, and in a compilation of meditation literature of possible Indic origin but only extant in a Chinese translation—the *Meditation Scripture*[15]). Despite Greene's discussion here being restricted to visions confirming *dhyāna* achievement, in the next chapter, primarily following the logic of the *dhyāna* scriptures composed or compiled in China, he further establishes that the confirmatory visions "can be signs that reveal past karma"

C. C. Chang, 1983, *A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras: Selections from the Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press. However, it is clear that the actual sūtra she means to cite is the *Akṣayamati-paripṛcchā*, the forty-fifth text of the MRK collection (*Wujinhui pusahui* 無盡慧菩薩會, tr. Bodhiruci, T. 310 [45]; [*'phags pa*] *bLo gros mi zad pas zhus pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*, D89). On this text, see my notes in the Introduction, n. 42.

[15] That is, the *Zuo chan sanmei jing* 坐禪三昧經, T. 614. For the textual history and content of the *Meditation Scripture*, see Greene 2012, 41−46; 2021b, 65−70.

(ibid., 125). This "past karma" not only manifests itself as abstract achievements, like meditative achievements or bodhisattva developmental stages (ibid., 143) but also concrete ones, e.g. the "need for (or subsequent success of) the performance of a ritual of repentance" (ibid., 125) to secure karmic purity or purification, as a basis for meditation practice (ibid., 134).

On the other hand, confirmatory visions, being *nimitta*s, include not only meditative visions but also visions with a similar underlying mechanism, such as dreams (ibid., 141) and deathbed visions (ibid., 147−148). By pointing out that the nature of spiritual attainments and purification rituals is primarily an issue of karma, and that the importance of visions "lay, rather, in being *signs*, occurrences deemed to communicate, in a more or less symbolic way, important information about the person to whom they appeared" (ibid., 141), Greene convincingly explains the mechanism behind the analogies of visions signifying achievements and visions providing instructions for confession, as observed by scholars.

Since Greene has already included the *SvN* in his framework, we could simply borrow his theory and terminology of the semiotics of attainment. However, while this theory itself is solid, the description and connotations of "confirmatory visions" are not entirely pertinent to the dreams of the *SvN*. By "confirmatory,"[16] Greene (ibid., 70) emphasizes, as cited above, that "These visions are valuable not because of what is directly disclosed to the meditator through them, such as the details of Buddhist doctrines or the reality of some external object or being whose existence was in doubt, but rather because their occurrence is a reliable indicator that the meditator has obtained *dhyāna*," perhaps in contrast to revelatory dreams that convey direct messages to dreamers. Admittedly, while the dreams of the *SvN* (and many other materials that I will cite in the next chapter) are also symbolic dreams, in my opinion, in the early Mahāyāna context, these dreams are primarily valued for disclosing soteriological knowledge that is otherwise hard to obtain—whether such knowledge is encoded symbolically or conveyed directly is not the foremost concern. In the next chapter, I will give several examples to show that a piece of knowledge could be revealed either through message dreams or symbolic dreams, and that these are effectively the same. Moreover, although Greene emphasizes that the visions he intends to discuss are not valuable because they reveal the "reality of the external object," in the case of the *SvN* and comparable texts, as I will illustrate in this chapter and the next, the revelation of the "reality of the external object" plays an important role in the notion of *nimitta*

[16] In Greene's dissertation on the same subject, he uses a slightly different term, "verificatory visions," and his definition is as follows: "I use the term 'visions' because they are presented as the sudden arising of new objects of consciousness described in primarily visual terms, as something the meditator suddenly 'sees.' By 'verificatory' I mean that these visions are not significant merely as acts of perception or as the acquisition of knowledge relative to the object seen. Rather the occurrence of the vision—having this particular experience—is deemed to signify something about the person to whom it appears" (Greene 2012, 7).

dreams. Therefore, the term "confirmatory visions" does not ideally characterize the dreams that I wish to discuss in this study.

Therefore, I propose to designate dreams signifying a bodhisattva's condition in a broad sense as "diagnostic dreams," a term that I have used in Chapter 1, with a connotation similar to, but not the same as, Greene's "confirmatory visions." By "diagnostic," I wish to stress that such a vision (dream) is a medium to identify the *cause* of a bodhisattva's spiritual status.[17] The central concern is knowledge of the underlying causes of a situation, and there is a presumed causality between the causes and the vision. It is true that, as Greene has already pointed out, confirmatory visions need to be situated within the framework of karma. Karma, on the one hand, determines the so-called spiritual achievements of Buddhist practitioners, since spiritual progress is primarily the process of accumulating wholesome karma and removing unwholesome karma. On the other hand, signs also arise by force of karma. In this sense, the mechanism of diagnostic dreams is very close to that of "confirmatory" dreams. However, this is not the whole story: karma is not the sole cause behind the mechanism of diagnostic dreams. Several other factors also form the basis of a bodhisattva's condition and manifest themselves through visions, such as those of higher beings like deities—we will return to this topic later.

In addition, I wish to clarify that, though the analogy of visions produced during meditation and while dreaming is undeniable—they are both *nimitta*s—I intend to confine my discussion only to dreams in this dissertation: Meditation is not the focus of the core text of this dissertation, the *SvN*. More importantly, while most descriptions of dreams that we encounter in Buddhist literature have been reduced to visions by the composers of scriptures, meditative experiences are generally not solely described in terms of concrete visions. Despite Greene having convincingly explicated a semiotic perspective on meditative experience in fifth-century Chinese *chan* scriptures (Greene 2021b, 63)—from which perspective, meditative experience is indeed comparable to dreams—there is more than one perspective on meditative experience. An alternative perspective is already brought up in Greene's own argumentation: in some early Indian

[17] The usage of the term "diagnostic" also coincides with what Campany (2020, 6) calls "the diagnostic paradigm" of dreams in early Chinese scriptures. His definition reads as follows: "The dream concerns aspects of the dreamer. It indicates the nature and origin of a problem (medical or otherwise) within the dreamer. Dreams thus open access to an otherwise hidden domain within the dreaming subject. The dream is usually in code, not direct. Interpretation is thus required, and the work done by texts of this paradigm is primarily to provide keys for such interpretation." Later, when talking about the *SvN*, Campany further differentiates "diagnostic dream books" from "predictive" ones: "The hidden information it brings across is not a likely future course of events but rather the dreamer's current, temporary position on a fixed soteriological path, combined with a snapshot of whatever specific bit of his karmic history triggered, by some unspecified mechanism, the dream. Neither that karmic history nor the dreamer's present position on the path would otherwise be knowable to him" (ibid., 90). Similarly, I use the term "diagnostic" to stress the dreams' revealing nature and their emphasis on the "nature and origin" of a situation. Where my definition differs from his, as I will demonstrate later in this and the next chapters, is that in this study, "diagnostic dreams" are not necessarily coded, and interpretation is not one of the foremost concerns. More importantly, diagnostic dreams could also be predictive, since the underlying cause of a dreamer's condition (karma, etc.) also determines the future of the dreamer.

meditation literature, meditative experience does not entail concrete visions ("Meditative attainment, here, seems to be primarily an inner, self-known psychological achievement;" ibid., 62). Moreover, in many cases, meditative experience seems to involve both visionary and "self-known psychological" aspects.[18] Therefore, it is questionable whether our discussion of *nimitta* dreams (visionary experiences with a semiotic emphasis) is applicable to meditative experience when a large portion of descriptions of meditative experiences concern themselves with non-visionary aspects of the experiences.[19]

Besides the problem of the non-visionary perspectives of meditative experience, moreover, even limited to visionary meditative experiences, many theories on dreams expounded in Buddhist scriptures are not applicable to meditative visions. The most distinctive characteristic of dream visions in this respect is, but is not limited to, the passivity of dreams. More specifically, visions that arise during meditation are commonly described as a result of "visualization," that is, "the controlled generation of perfectly lifelike, 'eidetic' mental visual imagery" (Greene 2016, 291). Though recent scholarship such as that of Greene 2016 has debunked this (partial) misconception about meditation, and redefined meditative visions as "sudden, unanticipated" (ibid., 320), Buddhist tradition still recognizes subtle differences between visions while dreaming and during meditation. For example, according to Theravāda exegesis, "it is possible to state that during the dream there is a rapid alternation of the passive state of consciousness called *bhavaṅga* and the state of *javana*, often translated as 'impulsion,' whereas during the meditative absorption there is an uninterrupted sequence of *javana*s" (De Notariis 2019, 257, n. 80).[20] Here, in comparison to meditative experiences, the passivity of dreams is stressed.

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[18] For instance, even in the *Pratyutpannabuddhasaṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi-sūtra*, a text that teaches "literally, the *samādhi* of the one who stands (*avasthita*) face-to-face with, or in the presence of (*saṃmukha*), the present (*pratyutpanna*) Buddhas" (Harrison 1978, 42)—a text that obviously focuses on the visionary aspect of meditative experiences—the attainment of this *samādhi* is sometimes described in both philosophical and visionary terms. For example, in Chapter 18 of this text, bodhisattvas who "continue to observe the body in the body, but do not think any discursive thoughts (Skt. *vitarka*) connected with the body […] obtain this *samādhi*" (Harrison 1990, 144 §18B), and "the bodhisattvas who possess this *samādhi* see immeasurable and incalculable Buddhas […] They also obtain the unobscured cognition and vision of liberation" (ibid., 145; see also Harrison 1978, 50). Here, the meditative experience or meditative attainment seems to involve both visions and cognition.

[19] Also, I would argue that it is hard to conceptualize and describe meditative experience in the first place, especially when no concrete description of corresponding visions is offered. As has been pointed by Sharf (1998, 114), "all attempts to signify 'inner experience' are destined to remain 'well-meaning squirms that get us nowhere;'" for a full discussion, see Sharf's article "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience" (1995). Given how hard it is to embed meditative experiences in a proper framework, in this dissertation, I will not go any further than merely taking the description of meditative experience offered by scriptures literally and only mention comparable meditative experiences when their visionary import is specified.

[20] This way of differentiating the state of *citta* between dreaming and meditating is based on two concepts, *bhavaṅga* and *javana*, where *bhavaṅga* is "the resting state of *citta*," "a state which also occurs in dreamless sleep" (Harvey 1995, 145), while *javana* is "'impulsion,' in which the mind reacts to the perceived object in some way, thus generating karmic results" (ibid., 146). According to Harvey's survey (ibid., 162−164), Pāli treatises like the *Milindapañha* and *Visuddhimagga* implicitly differentiate the states of dreaming and of meditation; a more explicit statement is made in the commentary on the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*: "the sequence in dreaming thus becomes one which rapidly alternates between *bhavaṅga* (or its disturbance), advertence, and *javana* […] This is not the case, though, when the mind attains the meditative states known as the *jhāna*: deeply calm lucid trances, based on strong

Given the difference in nature between the two kinds of visions, it is risky to extrapolate assumptions about dreams to meditative visions. For example, regarding the *Akṣayamati-paripṛcchā*, despite our eagerness to relate it to the *SvN*, the differences cannot be ignored. Though the signs of the ten bodhisattva *bhūmi*s as presented in the *Akṣayamati-paripṛcchā* are also called portents (**pūrvanimitta*, Chn. 先相, lit. "foregoing signs"), they are provoked by the power of *samādhi*[21] and they are discussed in the context of bodhisattva cultivation. Thus, do bodhisattvas cultivate these visions, or do the visions come to them spontaneously? It is hard to give a definite answer. Therefore, despite the striking similarity to the signs of the ten *bhūmi*s in the *Akṣayamati-paripṛcchā*, it is better not to force them and similar visions into the category of diagnostic visions.

Taking all these considerations into account, I will stick to the term "diagnostic dreams" in the following discussion. Diagnostic dreams are 1) a truthful source of knowledge and 2) a method of identifying the unknown causes of the conditions of Buddhist practitioners (in our context, bodhisattvas); moreover, 3) there is an underlying causality between the cause of the condition, the condition, and the contents of dreams. Besides these three criteria, diagnostic dreams generally but not invariably 4) feature visual content, but also occasionally auditory content; 5) are not provoked by prescribed instructions; 6) are symbolic, i.e., the information is not conveyed by direct messages.

The Theoretical Basis of Diagnostic Dreams: An Emic Perspective

In the previous section, we have surveyed some overviews of dreams in Buddhism in modern scholarship. Next, we will review the categorization of dreams in traditional Buddhist treatises in a broad context. In fact, there is more than one traditional Buddhist scripture that offers a typology of dreams, and the overall typology of dreams presented in traditional Buddhist scriptures shows a certain degree of uniformity but differs drastically from modern observations.

concentration and mindfulness. Here, wholesome *javana cittas* alone occur for hours, with no *bhavaṅga*. *Jhāna* is thus pure *javana*, with the mind in a state which is more awake and (calmly) active than in normal waking consciousness" (ibid., 164).

[21] "By force of concentration (**samādhi*), bodhisattvas *mahāsattva*s clearly see the above portents of ten *bhūmi*s." Chn. 菩薩摩訶薩以三昧力顯現如是十地先相。*Wujinhui pusa hui* 無盡慧菩薩會, T. 310 (45), 649c21−22. For the corresponding Tibetan passage, see (*'phags pa*) *Blo gros mi zad pas zhus pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*, D89, *dkon brtsegs, cha* 181a3; note that the Tibetan text does not explicitly state the signs are produced by the force of concentration.

The *Samantapāsādikā*

A representative typology of dreams can be found in the *Samantapāsādikā*, an influential Pāli commentary on the Vinaya. In discussing dreams, the *Samantapāsādikā* states that there are four types of dreams:

> "Except for when dreaming:"[22] here, "dreaming (*supinanto*)" means a dream (*supino*). When someone sees a dream, he or she does so for one of four reasons: disharmony of the [four great] elements (*dhātukkhobha*); previous experiences (*anubhūtapubba*); [because it was] brought by deities (*devatopasaṃhāra*); [or because it serves as a] portent (*pubbanimitta*). Of those reasons, people who suffer from fluctuations of bile, etc., see a dream due to disharmony of elements. When such a person is dreaming, he sees various images: for example, falling from a mountain, walking through the sky, or being followed by a predaceous animal, an elephant, or a thief. In the case of people who see [dreams] due to previous experiences, one sees an object (*ārammaṇa*) on the basis of previous experience. For people who see dreams because [the dreams] are brought by deities, the deities bring diverse objects [into the dreams] out of benevolence or malevolence, [causing] fortune or misfortune [for the dreamer]. [The dreamer] sees these objects by the power (*anubhāva*) of those deities. In the case of people who see dreams [that serve as] portents, one sees [the dreams] as a portent of fortune or misfortune that will happen by the power (*vasa*) of wholesome or unwholesome karma, like the Bodhisattva's mother saw the sign of conceiving a son, the Bodhisattva saw the five great dreams, and Kosala's king saw the sixteen dreams.[23] Among those dreams, dreams that are seen due to disharmony of [the four great] elements and previous experiences are not true. Dreams that are provided by deities are either true or false; because furious deities bent on destruction show [dreamers] false [portents]. However, dreams that are portents are invariably true.[24]

[22] Pāli *aññatra supinantā.* This citation is from the Pāli Vinaya collection that the *Samantapāsādikā* comments on: "intentional emission of semen **except during a dream** is an offence requiring a formal meeting of the Order" (Horner 1949, I: 196; for Pāli, see Oldenberg 1881, III: 112.17−18); "except during a dream" is explained as "setting the dream aside" in the same text (Horner 1949, I: 196; Pāli *aññatra supinantā 'ti ṭhapetvā supinantaṃ*; Oldenberg 1881, III: 112.25).

[23] For the conception dreams of the Bodhisattva's mother, which have attracted great attention from scholars, see Young 1999, 21−24 and Deeg 2010, among others. Regarding the five dreams of the Bodhisattva, see my extensive discussion below. Lastly, the sixteen dreams of Kosala are famously narrated in the *Mahāsupina Jātaka*, the seventy-seventh story in the *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā*; for the original Pāli text, see Fausbøll (1877) 1962, I: 334−345. The story is summarized by Young (1999, 39) as: "the king of Kosala has a series of sixteen dreams and wakes up terrified, thinking that they predict his death. Brahman priests advise him to offer many sacrifices and to perform rituals that will offset the danger these dreams predict. However, the king's wife, Queen Mallika, advises him to ask the Buddha, himself a Brahman priest in this life, to interpret these dreams, thus setting the scene for a contest. While the Buddha agrees with the Brahmans that the dreams foretell dire events, he says these events will occur in a distant future, when his teachings have declined and unrighteous kings rule."

[24] Pāli *aññatra supinantā ti ettha supino eva supinanto, taṃ ṭhapetvā apanetvā ti vuttaṃ hoti. tañ ca pana supinaṃ passanto catūhi kāraṇehi passati dhātukkhobhato vā anubhūtapubbato vā devatopasaṃhārato vā, pubbanimittato vā ti, tattha pittādīnaṃ khobhakaraṇappaccayayogena khubhitadhātukhobhato supinaṃ passati, passanto ca*

The names of each type of dream indicate that the principle behind this categorization is the origin of the dreams—except for the last one. Immediately following this categorization, however, the text further specifies the origin of the portents (*pubba-nimitta*) as "the force of wholesome or unwholesome [karma]" (*puññāpuñña-vasa*). Moreover, among those four groups, there is one additional criterion to distinguish dreams: whether the dreams are "true," i.e., present facts. According to the *Samantapāsādikā*, portents are "invariably true" (*ekanta-sacca*). The dreams brought by deities, on the other hand, could be either true (*sacca*) or false (*alika*), though the Chinese "translation," i.e., *Shanjian lü piposha* 善見律毘婆沙, claims all dreams brought by deities are true.[25] Therefore, according to this typology of dreams, the two most emphasized criteria are their origins or causes (*kāraṇa*) and their truthfulness, and the latter category depends on the previous criterion.

This typology of dreams diverges drastically from the modern categorizations of Buddhist dreams that we have reviewed above; while modern scholars are interested in the function of dreams, the role of dreamers, and the subjects associated with dreams, the primary concerns of the *Samantapāsādikā*'s typology are the origin and epistemic value of dreams. Further, we find that almost all the groups of dreams discussed and categorized by modern scholars belong to *pubbanimitta* (with a limited number of

nānāvidhaṃ supinaṃ passati, pabbatā patanto viya ākāsena gacchanto viya vāḷamigahatthicorādīhi anubaddho viya hoti. anubhūtapubbato passanto pubbe anubhūtaārammaṇaṃ passati. devatopasaṃhārato passantassa devatā atthakāmatāya vā anatthakāmatāya vā atthāya vā anatthāya vā nānāvidhāni ārammaṇāni upasaṃharanti, so tāsaṃ devatānaṃ ānubhāvena tāni ārammaṇāni passati. pubbanimittato passanto puññāpuññavasena uppajjitukāmassa atthassa vā anatthassa vā pubbanimittabhūtaṃ supinaṃ passati, bodhisattassa mātā viya puttapaṭilābhanimittaṃ, bodhisatto viya pañca mahāsupine, Kosalarājā viya soḷasa supine ti. tattha yaṃ dhātukkhobhato anubhūtapubbato ca supinaṃ passati na taṃ saccaṃ hoti. yaṃ devatopasaṃhārato passati, taṃ saccaṃ vā hoti alikaṃ vā, kuddhā hi devatā upāyena vināsetukāmā viparītam pi katvā dassenti, yaṃ pana pubbanimittato passati taṃ ekantasaccam eva hoti. Takakusu and Nagai [1924–1947]1966−1998, III: 520.13−521.1. For a paraphrase of this passage, see Young 1999, 45, which is not very accurate.

[25] The "parallel" passage in the *Shanjian lü piposha* reads as follows: 夢有四種，一者四大不和，二者先見，三者天人，四者想夢。問曰：云何四大不和夢？答曰：四大不和夢者，眠時夢見山崩，或飛騰虛空，或見虎狼師子賊逐，此是四大不和夢，虛不實。先見而夢者，或晝日見或白或黑，或男或女，夜夢見，是名先見，此夢虛不實。天人夢者，有善知識天人，有惡知識天人，若善知識天人現善夢，令人得善。惡知識者，令人得惡想現惡夢。此夢真實。想夢者，此人前身，或有福德或有罪，若福德者現善夢，罪者現惡夢，如菩薩母夢菩薩，初欲入母胎時，夢見白象從忉利天下入其右脇，此是想夢也。若夢禮佛誦經持戒，或布施種種功德，此亦想夢。T. 1462, 760a2−16. There is much dispute about whether the *Shanjian lü piposha* should be seen as a Chinese translation of the *Samantapāsādikā*; for a review of literature on this issue, see Pinte 2010, 435−437. The overall categories are the same: 1) disharmony of the four great elements (四大不和); 2) previous experiences (先見); 3) [connection between] gods and men (天人); 4) portents (想夢), with 想夢 being equivalent to 相夢, i.e., "dreams that are signs (**nimitta*)" (cf. 想 as a rendition of *nimitta* in Lokakṣema's translations, Karashima 2010, 356−358). The major difference is that in this Chinese "parallel," the third kind of dreams, i.e., dreams brought by deities, is true (此夢真實). There is no statement about the truthfulness of dreams that are signs, but by referring to them as *nimitta*, and giving examples of such dreams from sūtras, the implication is that they are also true. Besides, the Chinese has an additional sentence explaining that "dreams about various virtuous behaviors such as honoring the Buddha, reciting sūtras, maintaining the disciplines, and donations are also *nimitta*s" (若夢禮佛、誦經、持戒或布施種種功德，此亦想夢). For a translation of this passage in the *Shanjian lü piposha*, see Bapat and Hirakawa 1970, 356−357. Campany (2020, 59−60) also offers a rendition of this discourse, where he translates 想夢 as dreams "based on thoughts" (ibid., 59 as well as ibid., 181, n. 96), which, according to my understanding, is wrong. For this passage's influence on the Chinese Buddhist notion of dreams, see Jensen 2018, 19−20.

dreams that are brought by deities) according to the *Samantapāsādikā*'s typology, perhaps because only the noteworthy and true dreams are recorded in Buddhist scriptures and hence discussed by modern scholars. That means that the dreams most frequently encountered in scriptures are also *nimitta*s.[26]

The above account not only allows us a glimpse of Buddhist typologies of dreams, but also reminds us of some familiar elements that we have seen in the *SvN*. This theoretical work could be even read as a commentary on the dreams of the *SvN*: Most of the dreams recorded in the *SvN* are also "signs" (*nimitta*s), and they appear to dreamers because of the power of karma—similar to the description of portents in the *Samantapāsādikā*; therefore, bodhisattvas could diagnose their karmic obstructions or wholesome karma through dreams. On the other hand, when there is interference from Māra—who may be malicious but is still technically a "deity" (Boyd 1971, 65)—dreamers see a false dream, because of Māra's ill intention to deceive bodhisattvas and divert them from enlightenment. Such dreams can be seen as false dreams brought by "furious deities bent on destruction" as they have been characterized by the *Samantapāsādikā.*

However, we may well doubt whether we can simply apply this theory (attested in a Pāli exegesis) to a seemingly unrelated scripture (a Mahāyāna one). Our previous surveys of the connotations of concepts such as karmic obstructions, Māra, etc., all show a certain degree of divergence among Buddhist scriptures, and the definitions of these concepts in Mahāyāna exegeses cannot entirely fit into the *SvN*. Thus, how can we assume that the discussions of dreams in pan-Buddhist exegeses apply to diagnostic dreams in the *SvN* and other Mahāyāna scriptures?

Surprisingly, as I will show below in this section, although the typologies of dreams and the corresponding expositions of these typologies vary among the commentaries, the pan-Buddhist exegetical traditions hold a similar opinion on the truthfulness of some dreams and the source of such truthfulness. This widespread notion of dreams further explains the mechanism behind diagnostic dreams that we find in the *SvN* and, as we will later see, in many other Buddhist scriptures of both Mainstream schools and Mahāyāna Buddhism.

[26] Despite the *Samantapāsādikā* (and many of the scriptures cited below) specifying dream signs as "portents"—i.e., Pāli *pubbanimitta*, Skt. *pūrvanimitta,* Chn. 先相, Tib. *snga ltas*—there are other works using the more general term "signs," i.e., *nimitta*. It is hard to tell whether there is any substantial difference between the two terms when referring to dream signs, since sometimes the two terms appear to be interchangeable. I am inclined to use *nimitta* when referring to a specific category of dreams, as 1) dreams in the *SvN* are not exactly portents or foregoing signs, so the prognostic function need not be emphasized; and 2) *nimitta* has a broader usage when it comes to meditation signs, bodhisattva characteristics, etc., as I have already demonstrated in Chapter 1. These are the connections that I wish to stress throughout this work.

The *Milindapañha*

As has been reviewed, the two crucial pieces of information about Buddhist notions of true dreams disclosed by the *Samantapāsādikā* are, first, that the source of a dream determines its truthfulness, and second, that true dreams come to dreamers through a specific power (Pāli *anubhāva* or *vasa*).[27] Besides the *Samantapāsādikā*, some of the most elaborated accounts of dreams can be found in the *Milindapañha* and the *(*Abhidharma-)Mahāvibhāṣā.* Both of them express similar opinions on the truthfulness of dreams.

The *Milindapañha* offers a sixfold typology of dreams: "these six (people), sire, see a dream: (the person) who suffers from wind sees a dream, the bilious (person) sees a dream, the phlegmatic (person) sees a dream, (the person) [instigated by] a *deva*[28] sees a dream, (the person) who is exercised in his mind sees a dream, (the person) who sees a dream as a portent. Among these, sire, only the dream one sees as a portent is true; all the rest are false" (Horner 1969, II: 128; modified).[29] Though this typology of dreams differs slightly from that of the *Samantapāsādikā*, the portents (Pāli *pubbanimitta*, exactly the term used in the *Samantapāsādikā*) are considered true (*sacca*) as well. In explaining the mechanism of signs, however, the *Milindapañha* does not attribute the source of signs to the force of karma; in fact, the *Milindapañha* gives no exact source

[27] It is necessary to differentiate these two terms here. Translating *anubhāva* in the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, Fiordalis (2014a, 13, n. 55) explains the implication of *anubhāva* as follows: "The Tibetan usually translates *anubhāva* as *mthu*, 'power,' but the Sanskrit term conveys more than this: *anubhāva* is the power that emanates from the Buddha or another powerful person simply through the wondrous presence of that person." According to Harrison (1993, 170), in Lokakṣema's Chinese translations of early Mahāyāna scriptures, "Also significant is the concept of *anubhāva*, the 'might' or 'authority' of the Buddha (Lokaṣema's equivalent is *wei-shen* 威神), which permits an extension of the Buddha's function. By the authority of the Buddha his followers are empowered to perform acts which would otherwise be beyond their capabilities, and are thus able to take part in his work of teaching and saving sentient beings." Fronsdal (1998, 152) goes one step further by arguing that "While it might be argued that *anubhāva* here refers to the Buddha's authority rather than his intervention, most of the occurrences of *anubhāva* in the early bodhisattva sutras, including the *Daoxing jing*, clearly refer to someone's ability to perform supernatural feats, particularly the Buddha's ability to act through or upon others." Similarly, according to Okayama (2003, 135), the emphasis on the *adhiṣṭhāna*, *anubhāva*, and *prabhāva* (all three words can be loosely translated as "power") of the Buddha in early Mahāyāna sūtras shows that bodhisattvas are supposed to act through the Buddha's power instead of through their own intention and ability. To differentiate the effect of *anubhāva* and *adhiṣṭhāna* as used in the *Dbh*, Hiraga (2008, 285) notes that Bodhisattva Vajragarbha first entered *samādhi* through the Buddha's *anubhāva*; only after that, was he able to receive *adhiṣṭhāna* from buddhas and bodhisattvas. On the other hand, *vasa* and the Sanskrit equivalent *vaśa*, when used in the instrumental case, mean "on account of, for the sake of, by reason of" (Edgerton 1953, II: 473). Thus, though both words can be translated as power or force, *anubhāva* emphasizes that the power derives from a powerful agency, while *vasa* has no such implication. Such a nuanced meaning is consistent with the usage of the two terms in the *Samantapāsādikā*; the power linked with deities is *anubhāva*, while karma is paired with the word *vasa*.

[28] Horner (1969, II: 128) translates *devatūpasaṃhāra* as "possessed of a deva." The Pāli Text Society's dictionary also translates the word *upasaṇhāra* as "taking hold of, taking up, possession" (Rhys Davids and Stede [1921−1925] 1986, 147), citing the *Milindapañha* as the sole example, and renders *devatūpasaṃhāra* as "being seized or possessed by a god" (ibid.). Edgerton (1953, II: 142) criticizes the rendition by Horner and proposes to translate *devatūpasaṃhāra* as "thru providing, procurement, causation of, i.e., by, a god." In addition, *A Critical Pāli Dictionary* (1960, 480) renders *upasaṃhāra* as "1. taking away; 2. bringing near;" although the compilers have also supplied the phrase "*devatūpasaṃhāra*" as an example, there is no additional explanation of it. In the most recent Pāli dictionary, Cone (2010, 439) translates this phrase as "bringing by the gods." Considering the similar usage of this phrase in the *Samantapāsādikā*, I have emended "possessed of a deva" to "instigated by a deva" according to my understanding.

[29] For the Pāli, see Trenckner 1880, 298.4−10.

for signs, but only vaguely claims that "it is not that his mind, going along of its own accord, seeks for that portent, nor does anyone else come and tell him of it, but from wherever the portent comes it comes into the focus of his mind (*cittassa āpātham*)" (ibid., 129).[30] Besides, the composers of the *Milindapañha* believe that the receiver of a sign does not know its meaning, and should ask others for its interpretation (ibid.). We can perhaps interpret the signs here in this way: some dreams are signs, and they are true; signs come sponteneously from an unspecified external source; signs need to be interpreted, which means they are not straightforward—perhaps implying that they are coded. In this sense, these descriptions largely overlap with our definition of diagnostic dreams.

The *Mahāvibhāṣā*

The *Mahāvibhāṣā* offers an extremely detailed elaboration on dreams that covers their moral qualities (*Apidamo dapiposha lun* 阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論, T. 1545, 192a22−192b22), their impact on wholesome and unwholesome karma (ibid., 192b22−193b3), their nature (ibid., 193b3−193c15), and the typology of dreams and dreamers (ibid., 193c15−194c15).[31] According to this work, Sarvāstivādins hold the view that there are five groups of dreams:

> 1) they are stimulated by other beings [他引], for example, sages, spirits, gods, and so on; 2) they result from previous experience [曾更], or habitual activity; 3) they presage a future event [當有], that is to say, the dreamer first perceives the indicative mark [相, Skt. **nimitta*] of an auspicious or inauspicious future event in a dream; 4) they result from conceptual thought [分別], specifically, discriminative consideration that occurs in the waking state when one is about to fall asleep; 5) they result from illness, that is to say, due to a conflict or imbalance among the fundamental material elements (*dhātu*, *mahābhūta*) [諸大不調], the dreamer sees a dream image that conforms to the predominant element. (Cox 1988, 52−53)[32]

[30] Pāli *evam-eva kho mahārāja na tassa cittaṃ sayaṃ gantvā taṃ nimittaṃ vicināti, nāpi añño koci āgantvā āroceti, atha kho yato kutoci nimittaṃ āgantvā cittassa āpātham-upagacchatīti* (Trenckner 1880, 298.20−23). Ramaiah and Rao (1988, 33) interpret the *pubbanimitta* here as "Foregoing signs, prophetic dreams, due to the force of character of the Clairvoyant dreamers."

[31] The *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophy*, edited by Potter (1996, VII: 536), provides a brief (and rather incomplete) summary of this passage: "Dārṣṭāntika: Dreams do not really exist. But the orthodox hold that there is textual evidence that they do. Dreams are to be found classified among the representative cognitions. Vasumitra is cited as holding that dreams are conditioned by five conditions. Āyurvedins are said to hold the number as seven." Kajihama (1992) paraphrases the whole passage on dreams in Japanese, but he does not add any comment; for his summary of the typology of dreams, see Kajihama 1992, 27. Additionally, Tejima (1920a 7−15) gives a rather detailed discussion of this passage in relation to several other sources, such as the *Samantapāsādikā* and *DZDL*; we will discuss his arguments later in this section.

[32] For the Chinese, see T. 1545, 193c24−194a2. Cox's paraphrase of the passage is accurate. The actual Chinese passage only contains more detail on the external sources of dreams (i.e., the first group of dreams); besides those

This typology, again, almost aligns with that of the two Pāli texts that we have discussed, though there is no discussion of the truthfulness of the dreams—so far. Immediately following the typology of dreams is an attempt to explain the truthfulness of the Five Great Dreams the Bodhisattva had before his awakening—a series of dreams on which we will elaborate in the next section—the text states that the Bodhisattva had the five dreams because he had heard of these dreams from buddhas of the past.[33] Moreover, since the dreams are portents (**pūrvanimitta*) of enlightenment, they are not delusions. The full passage reads as follows:

> **Question:** How shall we explain the Five Great Dreams attested in the sūtras? Had the Bodhisattva ever experienced those five events and thus dreamed of them? **Answer:** There are two kinds of experiences: first, those one has seen; secondly, those one has heard of. Although the Bodhisattva had not seen these events, he had heard of them. Therefore, he dreamed of them. **Question:** When did the Bodhisattva hear of these events? **Answer:** When he practiced pure conduct

listed by Cox, the external sources also include spells and magic rituals (呪術), medicines (藥草), and thoughts of relatives and dignitaries (親勝所念及諸聖賢所引; the usage of 引 here may underlie the Sanskrit word *upasaṃhāra*, cf. Pāli *devatopasaṃhāra* in the abovecited two sources). Cox (1988, 82, n. 106) adds two more related sources in her note: "The causes for dreams offered by Saṅghabhadra (NAS [*Nyāyānusāra*] 50 p.623.c.9ff) and the *Tattvasiddhiśāstra* (TS 2 #19 p.254.b.l3ff) are generally consistent with those in the *Mahāvibhāṣā* with a few exceptions: both Saṅghabhadra and the *Tattvasiddhiśāstra* omit dream images based on future events, and the *Tattvasiddhiśāstra* adds past actions (karma) as a possible cause." This shows a general continuity of views on dreams in the Abhidharma tradition. Campany (2020, 61) also offers a summary of this passage when discussing Buddhist taxonomies of dreams; he comments that designating certain dreams as *nimitta*s "asserts that some dreams do prefigure the future, but like many other texts leaves unanswered the questions of why and how" (ibid.). Nonetheless, contrary to his claim, the *Mahāvibhāṣā* does imply why and how "some dreams prefigure the future" when recounting the Five Great Dreams of the Bodhisattva, as I illustrate here. Admittedly, the text does not specify whether the mechanism behind these five dreams also applies to other *nimitta* dreams.

[33] Before giving a full explanation of the Five Great Dreams of the Bodhisattva, the text first discusses the topic whether dreams come from experiences: "Question: Do the contents of dreams come from things that were experienced by the dreamers or not? What would be the fallacy of either theory? If they are from experiences, why do people dream of people with horns? Has anyone ever seen a person with horns? And how to explain the Five Great Dreams attested in the sūtras [Note: I skip the details of these five dreams in my translation, since they will be a main topic of the next section]—had the Bodhisattva ever experienced these five events and thus dreamed of them? If the content of dreams is not something that has been experienced by the dreamers, then how is it that the Bodhisattva was not deluded? [Answer:] Some people state that all dream content is from experience. Question: If so, why do people dream of people with horns? Has anyone ever seen a person with horns? Answer: The dreamers [who dream of people with horns] have seen people and horns [separately] on different occasions when awake; since people are confused while dreaming, the two things merge. Therefore, there is no fallacy [of this theory]. Furthermore, there are creatures resembling a person with horns at sea; people who have seen such creatures in the past dream of them afterward. There are creatures of every possible appearance in the sea; it is why the sea is called **sāgara.*" Chn. 問：夢所見事，為是曾更，為非曾更？設爾何失？若曾更者，云何夢見有角人耶？豈曾有時見人有角？契經所說復云何通？如說菩薩於一夜中作五大夢[…]菩薩何處曾更此事而夢見耶？若所夢事非曾更者，云何菩薩非顛倒耶？有作是說，夢所見事皆是曾更。問：若爾，云何夢見有角人耶？豈曾有時見人有角？答：彼於覺時異處見人，異處見角，夢中惛亂，見在一處，故無有失。復次，於大海中有獸似人，頭上有角，彼曾見之，今還夢見。以大海中遍有一切有情形類，故名大海。T. 1545, 194a28−194b17. It is unclear how we should interpret the sentence that "There are creatures of every possible appearance in the sea; it is why the sea is called **sāgara.*" It seems to suggest a folk etymology for the sea; a similar passage can be found in the *Gaganagañja-paripṛcchā* (Han 2020, II: 397−398), but no clues can be inferred from that parallel. I suspect that the folk etymology may have explained the sea (Skt. *sāgara*) as "with (every) appearance" (Skt. *sa-ākāra*). In some Middle Indic languages, those two words can be easily confused. For example, the Gāndhārī *Dharmapāda* attests the word for "sea" as *sakaro*; see Brough 1962, 163 §279.

> according to the teachings given by the buddhas of the past. The buddhas of the past also had dreamed of these events [before their awakening,] and [therefore] taught the Bodhisattva about them; the Bodhisattva heard about these events from them. This led to the Bodhisattva's dreams at that point. Some say that people had those [five] dreams at the beginning of the *kalpa* and passed the [knowledge of] dreams on to the Bodhisattva. Further, some hold the view that dreams do not necessarily come from experience. **Question:** If so, how is it that the Bodhisattva was not deluded? **Answer:** They are portents (先兆, **pūrvanimitta*) of unsurpassable and perfect enlightenment; therefore, not under the control of delusion.[34]

This explanation implies that 1) all buddhas dream of certain things before enlightenment; 2) these dreams, as they are proved to signify the imminent enlightenment of buddhas-to-be, are exempted from delusions. Moreover, after this exposition on the Five Great Dreams, the text subsequently legitimates the epistemic value of dreams in revealing both the future and the karmic past in a more general sense. Regarding using dream signs attested in dream manuals as prognostic tools, to cite Cox's summarization (1988, 82, n. 105), "The *Mahāvibhāṣā* (MVB 37 p. l94.b.27ff) explains that in the case of oneiromancy, one knows future events in a dream through inference; one infers that a certain event will occur in the future on the basis of an experienced cause and effect relation between the past and present."[35] Finally, in terms of learning about past lives, according to the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, dreams are even superior to meditation, although no further reasoning is provided here.[36]

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[34] Chn. 問：菩薩五夢復云何通？菩薩豈曾更如是事？答：曾更有二。一者曾見，二者曾聞。菩薩昔時雖未曾見，而曾聞故，今夢見之。問：菩薩何時聞如是事？答：曾於過去諸佛法中修習梵行，彼佛亦曾夢見斯事，為其宣說，從彼得聞，故今夢見。有作是說：劫初時人亦有夢見如是事者，從彼傳說，菩薩得聞，由此今時復還夢見。復有說者，夢所見事，非必曾更。問：若爾，云何菩薩非顛倒耶？答：此是無上正等菩提之先兆故，非顛倒攝。T. 1545, 194b17–b27.

[35] "Question: Who composed these dream manuals? Answer: They are composed by sages. Sages composed the manuals through their powers of recollection and remembrance of past lives. Question: But their knowledge is not enough to look into the future, as insight into the future depends on the ability to know whatever they wish (願智), which sages do not possess. How could they compose books about divination and dreams [that predict the future]? Answer: They use inference to know about the future predicted by dreams. Since they had observed dreams and their outcomes in the past and [knew that these patterns] also hold true in the present, they could infer the outcomes of dreams should also be as such in the future and therefore composed the dream manuals. Some say that there are sages who had acquired the ability to know whatever they wished to know and could compose the manuals to extricate people from danger." Chn. 問：諸占夢書誰之所造？答：仙人所造。彼由宿住隨念智力，憶念本事，而造此書。問：彼智不能觀未來境，觀未來境乃是願智，彼無願智，云何能造占未來事諸夢書耶？答：彼由比知未來夢事。謂見過去如是夢者，有如是果，現在亦然。由此比知未來如是夢者，亦當有如是果，故彼能造諸占夢書。有說，諸仙亦有獲得妙願智者，能造此書為諸有情避危難故。T. 1545, 194b27–c6.

[36] "Question: Which one is better [i.e., recalls more past lives]—dreams or the cognitive ability to recollect previous lives (宿住隨念智境, Skt. **pūrve-nivāsānusmṛti-jñāna*)? Answer: Dreams, not the cognitive ability to recollect previous lives in the fourth stage of meditation [i.e., the highest stage of meditation]. For what reason? The cognitive ability to recollect previous lives in the fourth stage of meditation can only recall [the past lives of] three immeasurable *kalpa*s, while dreams can reveal [the past of] immeasurable numbers of immeasurable *kalpa*s. Some ask whether people can know about the events of immeasurable numbers of immeasurable *kalpa*s without immersing themselves in meditation and acquiring higher knowledge (通慧)? Answer: Yes, they can." Chn. 問：夢境宿住隨

In summary, the elaboration on dreams in the *Mahāvibhāṣā* shows that Sarvāstivādins perceive dreams as a legitimate source of insight into both the past and the future, for both individuals with superior knowledge like bodhisattvas and in general.[37]

Mahāyāna Exegesis

So far, all the sources we have cited support the legitimization of *nimitta* dreams that are very similar to what we have defined as diagnostic dreams. Further, the sources seem to be representative of diverse schools and a large range of time: the *Samantapāsādikā* is a Pāli commentary on Vinaya works that was compiled in the fifth or sixth century in Sri Lanka (von Hinüber 1996, 103−104); the *Milindapañha* is a "paracanonical" Pāli scripture whose core text possibly originated in Northwest India around the start of the common era (ibid., 83−86); and the *Mahāvibhāṣā* represents the Sarvāstivāda school, and its compilation date is believed to be around 150 CE (Dhammajoti 2020)—yet they all recognize dreams as a valid way to reveal the past and future. However, it is far too early to conclude that we have found the theoretical basis of diagnostic dreams in a pan-Buddhist context.

For instance, as mentioned above, the *Mahāvibhāṣā*'s target of criticism is the Dārṣṭāntikas' stance on dreams: Dārṣṭāntikas "claim that dream images are nonexistent because the dreamer discovers when awakened that events experienced in a dream did not actually occur" (Cox 1988, 52).[38] More relevant to our discussion on "diagnostic dreams" is the claim of the *DZDL*—a commentary that, as Tejima noted as early as in

念智境，何者為多？答：夢境多，非第四靜慮宿住隨念智境。所以者何？第四靜慮宿住隨念智唯能憶念三無數劫，夢則能知無數無數大劫之事故。有問：言頗有不入靜慮，不起通慧而能得知無數無數大劫事不？答：有。T. 1545, 194c6−c12.

[37] In addition, in the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*, in answering whether the Buddha's mother's conception dream reflects the Buddha's intermediate state (Skt. *antarābhava*) before his birth (i.e., whether he existed in the form of an elephant before entering his mother's womb), Vasubandhu calls that dream "only an omen (*nimitta-mātra*), for the Bodhisattva has been disengaged from animal rebirths for a long time" (La Vallée Poussin 2012, II: 966; Skt. *nimittamātraṃ tat tiryagyoneś ciravyāvarttitatvāt*, Pradhan 1967, 124.3−4), and gives another example of *nimitta* dream, that is, King Kṛkin's ten dreams. In Xuanzang's Chinese translation, there are additional comments saying that, as signs foreshadowing events, they function in a rather encoded way (但表當來餘事先兆，非如所見, *Apidamo jushe lun* 阿毘達磨俱舍論, T. 1558, 45c29, tr. Xuanzang; the alternative translation by *Paramārtha 真諦 only mentions that the dreams are prognostic signs—Chn. 於事前得此夢, *Apidamo jushe shilun* 阿毘達磨俱舍釋論, T. 1559, 202c9). While there is much dispute regarding the identity and doctrinal positions of Vasubandhu, as far as the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* is concerned, "Vasubandhu's early Sarvāstivāda affiliation is generally accepted" (Kritzer 2019, 505). That said, it is still important to note the complexity of the doctrinal affiliations of the works attributed to Vasubandhu (for a summary on the discrepancies of the traditional accounts of Vasubandhu's life, see Funayama 2021, 206−214; regarding the hypothesis developed by Frauwallner that there were two Vasubandhus, see ibid., 215−227 as well as Kritzer 2019, 497), I therefore tentatively present this piece of evidence in the footnote following my discussion on the dreams in the *Mahāvibhāṣā*.

[38] "Furthermore, to dispute the [false] claim of other schools and to show the right view: some may hold the view that dreams are not true; for example, Dārṣṭāntikas claim: 'People who dream of feasting and become full and satisfied, will feel hungry, thirsty, and weak on waking […] Therefore, you should know that dreams are not true.' I will negate his wrong view and show that true dreams exist." Chn. 復次，為^破他宗顯正義故，謂或有執夢非實有。如譬喻者彼作是說，夢中自見飲食飽滿諸根充悅，覺已飢渴、身力虛羸[...]由此應知夢非實有。為遮彼執顯實有夢。T. 1545, 193b4−10, var. 破] Sx, Pn: 止.

the 1910s (1920a, 14−15), expresses a very different view on dreams than the *Samantapāsādikā* and the like—namely, that all dreams are delusions: "[The dharmas are said to be] 'like dreams' because there is no reality in a dream and yet we believe in the reality of the things seen in a dream."[39] Besides a general statement about dream illusions being created by "ignorance under the influence of sleep,"[40] the text further claims that no matter which of the five origins a dream may have, it is not true. The five origins of dreams consist of disharmonies of the body (**kāya-vaiṣamya*), i.e. 1) the predominance of hot vapor; 2) the predominance of cold vapor, and 3) the predominance of windy vapor; 4) experiences (i.e., things that are seen and heard, **dṛṣṭa-śruta*); and 5) deities who want to inform the dreamers about the future.[41] The typology of dreams and the examples of dreams that the text uses to reiterate its standpoint[42] are very similar to the three texts that we have examined above. However, the *DZDL* holds a seemingly opposite view, namely that there is no room for truthfulness in any type of dreams—dreams are simply not true. This is somehow predictable: as cited at the beginning of the chapter, *Prajñāpāramitā* scriptures commonly deploy dreams as a metaphor to illustrate that the intrinsic nature of conditioned dharmas (Skt. *saṃskṛta*) is emptiness; no wonder that the commentary of the *LP*, the *DZDL*, does the same. Regarding this, a comparison of the views on dreams in the *Mahāvibhāṣā* and *DZDL* has led Tejima (1920a, 14) to suspect that the contradiction between them showcases the development from "Hīnayāna" to Mahāyāna: the latter reflects the overarching notion of emptiness in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature.

Is this true? Does it mean that the Mahāyāna tradition abandons the belief in the truthfulness of dream signs, as dreams are no more than illusions?

In my opinion, the above-cited passage of the *DZDL* is not sufficient to prove that the Mahāyāna tradition as a whole does not recognize the legitimacy of dreams (or at least certain dreams) as a source of knowledge. First, the *DZDL* does not deny the truthfulness of *nimitta* dreams; in fact, it does not mention them at all in the above passage. Secondly, the later Mahāyāna exegetic traditions still very much accept the truthfulness of certain dreams. Thirdly, Mahāyāna scriptures, including the

[39] Chn.「如夢」者，如夢中無實事，謂之有實。T. 1509, 103b29−c1.

[40] Chn. 無明眠力故。Ibid., 103c4.

[41] "Furthermore, there are five kinds of dreams: [1.] if there are disharmonies of the body (**kāya-vaiṣamya*), by the predominance of hot vapor, the dreamer would frequently dream of fire, yellow, or red [colors]; [2.] if by the predominance of cold vapor, the dreamer would frequently dream of water and white color; [3.] if by the predominance of windy vapor, the dreamer would frequently dream of flying and black color; [4.] moreover, if someone repeatedly reflects on the things that are seen and heard, he/she would dream of them; [5.] or, deities send dreams for they want the dreamer to know about some future events. These five types of dreams all have no truthfulness in them; they are false visions." Chn. 復次，夢有五種：若身中不調，若熱氣多，則多夢見火、見黃、見赤；若冷氣多，則多見水、見白；若風氣多，則多見飛、見黑；又復所聞見事，多思惟念故，則夢見；或天與夢，欲令知未來事故。是五種夢皆無^實事而妄見。T. 1509, 103c8−c13, var. 實事] Sx, Pn: 事. I have consulted Lamotte's (1944−1980, I: 373−375) translation and reconstruction of the Sanskrit.

[42] That is, a dream about a person with horns; see ibid., 103c19−29 and Lamotte 1944−1980, I: 374−375. We have seen discussions on such dreams in the *Mahāvibhāṣā*; see above—n. 33.

Prajñāpāramitā literature, do in fact generally acknowledge (at least some types of) dreams as a source of knowledge. I will reserve the third piece of evidence for the next chapter; first, let us return to the *DZDL*.

As Tejima (ibid., 15) has noticed, the fivefold typology presented in the *DZDL* aligns—or almost aligns—with that of the *Samantapāsādikā*. Moreover, as we have noted, the *Samantapāsādikā*'s classification of dreams is highly comparable with the typologies presented in the *Mahāvibhāṣā* and the *Milindapañha*. To better illustrate the relationship between the four sets of dream classifications, I have put them in the following form:[43]

<table>
<tr><th>DZDL</th><th>Mahāvibhāṣā</th><th>Milindapañha</th><th>Samantapāsādikā</th></tr>
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[43] The sources of this form are to be found in the abovementioned T. 1509, 103c8−c13 (*DZDL*); Cox 1988, 52−53, T. 1545, 193c15−194c15 (*Mahāvibhāṣā*); Horner 1964, II: 128; Trenckner 1880, 298.4−10 (*Milindapañha*); and Takakusu and Nagai (1924–1947) 1966−1998, III: 520.13−521.1 (*Samantapāsādikā*).

[44] According to Salguero (2010, 63−65), when translating the Indian medical terms for the "three *doṣas*," i.e., *pitta*, *śleṣman* or *kapha*, and *vāta*, into Chinese, "the overarching strategy seems to have been to employ Chinese characters that captured the qualities of heat associated with the Indian understanding of the Bile defect and those of cold associated with Phlegm."

[45] The category *samudāciṇṇa* does not totally align with the corresponding groups of dreams (i.e., dreams that stem from previous experience); however, as both *samudāciṇṇa* and 多思惟 point to the exercise of mind or intention, I tentatively place it here.

It is now crystal clear that the only significant difference among the typologies of dreams presented in the Buddhist scriptures above is the absence of the category of signs ([*pūrva-*]*nimitta*) in the *DZDL*. Moreover, signs are the only group of dreams that the other three scriptures all agree to be true. Thus, what is the place of signs in this important *Prajñāpāramitā* commentary? Does the work recognize any dream as carrying true knowledge, commonly designated as "signs," at all? While examining the *Mahāvibhāṣā* and the *Samantapāsādikā*, we have noted that both texts supply such a category with exemplary dreams from sūtras, especially from the Buddha's life stories. The *DZDL* and the sūtra it comments on, the *LP*, on the other hand, do not concern themselves with the Buddha's life stories; nonetheless, the *LP* also includes several passages on dreams as signs—a topic that I will explore extensively in the next chapter. Then, what is the *DZDL*'s stance on such dreams? I will leave this question for now, and revisit the *DZDL*'s view toward dreams when discussing one of the most important passages on dreams in Mahāyāna—the *Prajñāpāramitā*s' elaboration on dreams of irreversibility in the next chapter.

However, no matter what our conclusion about the *DZDL*'s typology of dreams would be after our discussion in Chapter 4, regarding the attitudes toward dreams in Mahāyāna tradition(s), some commentaries by well-known Indian Mahāyāna scholars also present something that may be seen as a continuation of relatively earlier Buddhist Abhidharma texts such as the *Mahāvibhāṣā*.

Most evident of this are the discussions on the term "true dreams" (Skt. *satya-svapna*) in the Buddhist epistemological tradition, especially in the Vijñaptimātra school (Hayashi 2001, 599−560). The way Dharmakīrti describes "true dreams" in the *Santānāntarasiddhi* is strongly reminiscent of the *Samantapāsādikā*'s account of true dreams: "[we] experience a *true dream* by the strength of the deed (*karma*) and the power of the divinity and so on" (ibid., 560). Further, according to Vinītadeva's commentary on Dharmakīrti's *Nyāyabindu*, in a true dream, "one can perceive occurrences belonging to the past and the future. Moreover it is specified that the 'true dreams' are without errors" (ibid., 562). Such correspondence between the knowledge acquired by true dreams and that of the real world is widely recognized by Buddhist scholars such as Kamalaśīla, Jñānaśrīmitra, and Ratnakīrti (ibid.). Setting aside the more philosophical discussion of "true dreams" in relation to Vijñaptimātra theory (which is examined in ibid., 563−564), judging from the descriptions of the Indian epistemologists, we see that at least within their circle, there circulated a wide belief in true dreams—a genuine source of knowledge—and such "true dreams" are produced

by the power of deities or karma.[46] This belief is again very similar to what we have defined as "diagnostic dreams."

In fact, if we make further surveys of the rich materials on dreams in Indian Mahāyāna commentaries, we will find many accounts of notions comparable to true dreams or diagnostic dreams. For example, in the *Śikṣ*, Śāntideva cites the *Cundā-dhāraṇī*'s instruction on dream signs with the following comment: "you should recite the *Dhāraṇī of Cundā* (*Cundā-dhāraṇī*) until you see, in a dream, signs of the wasting away of vile actions (*pāpa-kṣaya-nimitta*)" (Goodman 2006, 170).[47] This shows that Śāntideva also recognizes the true significance of dreams in verifying a bodhisattva's karma (here, eliminating vile karma through confessions). We may argue that this comment is not aimed at scriptures that are strictly Mahāyānic, but it is very telling that Śāntideva, who is traditionally considered an influential figure of the Madhyamaka school, acknowledges—just as did the above-cited epistemologists—the epistemic value of dreams, and designated them as "signs" (*nimitta*).

Thus, by examining the theories of the origins of dreams and their truthfulness as disseminated by Buddhist treatises, especially the exegeses, we discover that, despite the negative tone famously associated with dreams in Buddhism, there is a widely acknowledged theoretical basis for the epistemic significance of dreams. The diverse sources that we have examined all agree that some dreams are genuine sources of knowledge. Some materials have a more positive attitude toward dreams in that they recognize dreams of multiple sources to be true, while others hold a more reserved view; nonetheless, they all unquestionably recognize that some dreams, being signs (*nimitta*), provide valid knowledge about the past, present, or future under the influence of karma. Some texts also legitimate the dreams as being brought by deities. Therefore, the conceptual frameworks of dreams set out in these sources are very much comparable to what we observed of dreams in scriptures like the *SvN*.

Having surveyed theoretical discussions of dreams in a broad Indian Buddhist context, we might wonder whether these theories mutually agree with the sūtras. In addition, in the light of these theories, could we better comprehend the undertones of the narrations of dreams that are contained in the sūtras?

With these questions in mind, in the following part, we will explore diagnostic dreams in Indian Buddhist scriptures. Before delving into dreams of individuals who

[46] On a slightly irrelevant note, this belief in true dreams may relate to the close association between "seeing" and "cognizing" which is long established by Indic epistemological traditions (Pecchia 2020, 771−772). This association between "seeing" and "knowing" also underlies the Buddhist notion of gaining the knowledge of truth through "yogic perception," which "radically differs from the ordinary cognition of empirical objects and results from a special training that includes ascetic toil and meditative practices" (ibid., 772). Again, we see an overlap between dreaming and meditative practices in terms of learning about the truth. However, as has been stated previously, the matter of meditative practices and yogic perception is too complicated to be fully explored in this study.

[47] Skt. *cundādhāraṇīṃ vā tāvaj japed yāvat pāpakṣayanimittāni paśyati svapne*, Bendall 1902, 173.4−5.

consider themselves as progressing on the bodhisattva path which will be the center of concern in Chapter 4, we would like to examine a narrative found in a wide range of scriptures of Mainstream schools that links the exegetic view of dreams and bodhisattvas' dreams together, that is, the Five Great Dreams of *the* Bodhisattva.

"The Five Great Dreams" of the Bodhisattva

Among the materials that we have examined above, many of them (e.g., the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, the *Samantapāsādikā*, and the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*) make references to the dreams that form part of narratives of the life of the Buddha as evidence of the truthfulness of dream signs.[48] The dreams that are mostly referred to are the so-called "Great Dreams" (Skt. *mahāsvapna*, Pāli *mahāsupina*) of the then-Bodhisattva Siddhārtha.

These five dreams will be our starting point in exploring diagnostic dreams in scriptures: they are *nimitta*s, symbolic, interpreted as signs of enlightenment for the then-Bodhisattva; and finally, though the dreaming bodhisattva here is *the* Bodhisattva, not *a* bodhisattva in the sense of Mahāyāna sūtras such as the *SvN*, his life is certainly the biggest inspiration for later Buddhist practitioners, and so too are his dreams.

However, to look into the dreams of the Bodhisattva, we face an enormous bulk of materials. Just as for the then-Bodhisattva's wife's (i.e., Yaśodharā or Gopā) prognostic dreams before the Bodhisattva's departure, discussed in Chapter 2, for the dreams of the Bodhisattva himself there are several groups of texts with varied descriptions. Unlike in Yaśodharā's dreams, however—for which different versions of the Buddha's life story provide rather different accounts in terms of their number and content—the Buddha's dreams of enlightenment align to a greater extent, as we will soon see. What makes the situation more complicated is that not only does the life story of the Buddha include the Five Great Dreams, but the stories of the Buddha's previous births, especially the birth stories concerning a past buddha, Dīpaṃkara, also tell of dreams that signify future enlightenment. Just as we have seen in the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, here the underlying idea is that "when the Bodhisattva practiced pure conduct according to the teachings given by the buddhas of the past, the buddhas of the past also had dreamed of these events [i.e., the Five Great Dreams] and [therefore] taught the Bodhisattva about them; the Bodhisattva heard about these events from them. This led to the Bodhisattva's dreams at that point."[49] Similarly, according to the *Lalitavistara*, all past

[48] We could also argue that, in the opposite direction, as exegeses, these works came up with such solutions to make sense of the dreams included in the Buddha's life stories and thus claim the epistemic value of some dreams. However, as a survey on Indian dream theories (not limited to the Buddhist traditions) will show us later in Chapter 4, these theories are deeply rooted in Indian culture. I tend to understand that these theories manifest themselves in the actual dreams in the narratives; and the exegeses, as well as sūtras, made use of those beliefs, not vice versa.

[49] T. 1545, 194b21−23. This has been cited and translated in the previous section.

buddhas "are believed to have these specific dreams at the same time in their lives" (Young 1999, 25).[50] Holding on to this belief, Śākyamuni Buddha is bound to have these dreams; the only difference is whether he dreams the Great Dreams in his final rebirth or in a birth prior to it. Though both include Śākyamuni and Dīpaṃkara's stories, the *Mahāvastu* and the *Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing* (過去現在因果經, T. 189)[51] discuss only one set of dreams each: the *Mahāvastu* contains only the Five Great Dreams of Śākyamuni while the *Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing* only contains the dreams of Sumati (i.e., a previous birth of Śākyamuni). Though the two texts may not intentionally have been composed in this way (given the complexity of their compositional history), the distribution coincides with the theory offered above of the Buddha's dreams of enlightenment.

Fortunately, these dreams have attracted careful studies in previous scholarship, which will lighten our burden of navigating through the complicated textual lineages of the narratives. Among them, Young (1999, 24−31) offers a lengthy discussion of parallels of the "Five Great Dreams." She examines the descriptions and circumstances of the dreams in five major works preserved in Indic languages: the *Lalitavistara*, the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the *Divyāvadāna*, the *Mahāvastu*, and the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya. Among these works, in the *Divyāvadāna* the dreams are dreamt in a previous birth of the Buddha, while the other four texts narrate the dreams in the framework of Śākyamuni's final rebirth (but they are vague on the exact time of the dreams; ibid., 29). I will base the following on Young's study, with supplemental sources that are preserved only in Chinese or Tibetan. In the following study, what we will pay special attention to is the functions of these dreams, their nature or origins, as well as their reception and influence in later Buddhist scriptures. The dreams' exact contents and their interpretation are of less concern to us.[52]

Among the five versions preserved in Indic languages, the contents of the "Five Great Dreams" agree with each other to a surprisingly great extent (see Young's

[50] "He [i.e., the Bodhisattva], who is resplendent on account of merits, respected, and filled with radiance and splendor, sees these foregoing dream signs—the signs that appear to the best of men [i.e., previous bodhisattvas] who have previously accumulated wholesome karma at the time when they renounce [their worldly life]." Skt. *so [puṇyuteju] 'pacito śiritejagarbho pūrve nimitta supine imi addṛśāsi, ye bhonti pūrvaśubhakarmasamuccayānāṃ naiṣkramyakālasamaye narapuṃgavānāṃ.* Hokazono 1994, 694.4−7 §14.40

[51] According to Matsumura (2011, 65), this text, or at least its narration of Dīpaṃkara's story, should be regarded as being related to the *Divyāvadāna*. This Chinese translation is attributed to *Guṇabhadra 求那跋陀羅 by Sengyou and dated to 435−443. For discussions related to its textual history, see https://dazangthings.nz/cbc/text/1561.

[52] Since Young's objective is to explore the roles of dreams in biographical texts (1999, 13−14), much of her emphasis is on how dream interpretations and interpreters reveal the subject's character development as a religious authority. This means that she is interested in the contents and outcomes of dreams. However, the exact contents of dreams are less interesting to us for we have different focuses than hers. In addition, studying the contents of the Five Great Dreams is not very helpful for our study of the *SvN*. As stressed repeatedly in Chapter 1, just like other lists of dreams, the Five Great Dreams show no parallelism of content with the *SvN*. Instead, the dreams here share only the same nature and function as the dreams of the *SvN*. Therefore, in examining the five dreams' contents, what interests us is the underlying implications of their textual history told by their similarities and discrepancies; the other details do not matter as much.

summarization of each version in Young 1999, 25−28). For example, according to the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the five dreams relate the following: 1) "this mighty earth was his bedstead; the Himālaya, king of mountains, was his pillow; his left hand rested on the eastern sea, his right hand on the western sea, and his two feet on the southern sea"; 2) "a kind of grass called *tiriyā* rose up from his navel and stood touching the sky"; 3) "white worms with black heads crawled from his feet up to his knees and covered them"; 4) "four birds of different colors came from the four quarters, fell at his feet, and turned all white"; 5) "he climbed up a huge mountain of dung without being soiled by it" (Bhikkhu Bodhi 2012, 813−814). The Five Great Dreams of the *Mahāvastu* and the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya present more or less the same.[53] Only the second dream in the extant Sanskrit version of the *Lalitavistara* shows significant divergence; in which the Bodhisattva "saw a light spread throughout the world, dispelling darkness, and a parasol came out of the earth, spreading light in the three worlds and extinguishing suffering" (Young 1999, 25).[54]

As Young uses predominantly Indic materials, if we extend our survey to include the Chinese parallels, we find that the narrations of the Five Great Dreams indeed bear great similarities.[55] The second dream in the Tang translation of the *Lalitavistara* even reads the same as versions like that of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*—that is, unlike the extant

[53] There are of course some differences of details. For example, the "white worms with black heads" are often other creatures, e.g., "animals" in the *Lalitavistarata*: Skt. *kṛṣṇāśubhāś caturi* ***prāṇaka*** *pāda le[k]hī,* (Hokazono 1994, 694.18 §14.43); in the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, "birds": Skt. *sarvaśvetāṃś* ***chakunakān*** *kṛṣṇaśirasaḥ pādayor nipatya yāvaj jānumaṇḍalam utthitān* (Gnoli 1977−1978, I: 82.25−26).

[54] Note that what Young provides here is a rather free rendition; the corresponding Sanskrit text is highly difficult and irregular in terms of its grammar, I therefore do not attempt to provide my translation here. For the Sanskrit, see Hokazono 1994, 694.14−17 §14.42. Further, the dreams in Dharmarakṣa's translation of the *Lalitavistara—Puyao jing* 普曜經 T. 186, 503b21−c4—diverge greatly from all the extant versions. The first three dreams here correspond to the second, fourth, and fifth dream of the Sanskrit *Lalitavistara*, respectively (ibid., 503b24−b26). The other dreams differ substantially from the other versions of the Five Great Dreams; nonetheless, their themes are common ones in Buddhist scriptures: 4) crossing a wide river; 5) curing people; 6) sitting on a lion throne; 7) defeating enemies in a battle and being revered by deities (ibid., 503b26−c3). Besides the contents of the dreams, this translation also includes an explanation of the origin of the dreams: they are from the accumulation of knowledge and merits ("furthermore, this Bodhisattva has previously accumulated [great] knowledge and merit. He is [furnished with] power and auspiciousness [even] when in the womb." Chn. 又其菩薩宿積智德，在胎中時威神吉祥). Also, as we have seen from the extant Sanskrit version of this work, the *Puyao jing* also claims that such dreams are supposed to be shared by all bodhisattvas: "when genuine saints see these things in dreams, they are very much endowed with pure and auspicious characteristics. When gods and men hear about these dreams, they are pleased, [as such a saint] will attain enlightenment and soon become supreme among gods and men" (Chn. 真正聖人夢中見此，清淨吉祥行正具足，天人聞之，心懷悅豫，不久成道為天人尊).

[55] Again, referring to Durt's (2004, 55−56) survey of the textual lineages of the Buddha's life story, I have looked only briefly at the Chinese parallels of the texts that have been examined by Young 1999. I will offer a short introduction to them without going into detail. Among the parallels of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, Yijing's translation of the *Saṃghabheda-vastu* reads almost identically (T. 1450, 115b24−c3) while the dreams of the *Zhongxu mohedi jing* (T. 191, 945c26−946a4) are somewhat different; for example, dreams 3 and 4 of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* version have been merged into one dream (ibid., 945c29–946a2). In this text, however, the general keywords seem to concord with those of other accounts of the dreams; as previously noted by Silk (2003, 191, n. 47), the text contains traces of editing by its Chinese translator, therefore the differences may stem from the translating and editing process. I have examined the *Lalitavistara* textual tradition above. Third, regarding the two separate texts of the Buddha's life story that have no known extant Indic parallels, the *Xiuxing benqi jing* (T. 184) discusses no dreams resembling the Five Great Dreams, whereas the *Fo benxing ji jing* offers a narration (T. 190, 728a27−b9) that aligns with that of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya.* Finally, though it is not a sūtra, the contents of the Five Great Dreams are also the same in the *Mahāvibhāṣā* (T. 1545, 194b2−10).

Sanskrit version of the *Lalitavistara*.[56] Considering the fluidity and diversity we often see when it comes to Buddhist narratives,[57] such a great degree of concurrence is quite significant. Leaving aside the complicated question of the doctrinal affiliations of the above texts, the resemblance among the different versions of the Five Great Dreams certainly indicates that both the contents and the very existence of the dreams of enlightenment were once well recognized among many schools.[58]

The situation is slightly different for the dreams of enlightenment in Avadānas. Among the numerous accounts of the story of Dīpaṃkara's prophecy, only in the *Divyāvadāna* and its two parallels[59] does the future Śākyamuni Buddha, whose name was Sumati at that time, have various dreams of enlightenment (Matsumura 2011, 70):

> That night, Sumati had ten dreams—he saw himself (1) drinking the great ocean; (2) flying through the air; (3) touching and stroking with his hand the sun and the moon, which are full of magic and power; (4) harnessing a royal chariot; and he also saw (5–10) sages, white elephants, geese, lions, a great rock, and mountains. After having these dreams, he woke up. And when he woke up, it occurred to him, "Who [will] interpret [Skt. *vyākaraṇaṃ kariṣyati*] these dreams for me?" (*Divyāvadāna*, Rotman 2017, 26−27)[60]

When Sumati came to Dīpaṃkara to interpret these dreams, he did not get a direct interpretation (*vyākaraṇa*); instead, he is predicted (*vyākṛta*) to become a future buddha.[61] Here, both dream interpretation and prediction are technically *vyākaraṇa*s—essentially, explanations of the dreams. The *Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing*, a Chinese text that contains a parallel to the *Divyāvadāna*'s Dīpaṃkara story (Matsumura 2011, 65),[62] narrates five dreams with different contents but similar themes. More importantly, its

[56] "Secondly, he dreamed of a kind of grass called **tiriyā* (建立) rising up from his navel with its [i.e., the grass's] tip reaching the Akaniṣṭha heaven." Chn. 二者，夢見有草名曰建立，從齊而出，其杪上至阿迦膩吒天。 *Fangguang dazhuangyan jing*, T. 187, 572a15−17. It is uncertain whether the Indic word underlying 建立 is related to *tiriyā*; I cannot propose any plausible explanation here.

[57] This is arguably common sense among scholars, but if examples are necessary, Matsumura's (2011, 2012) and Oyama's (2020) survey of the story of Dīpaṃkara's prophecy and Durt's (2004) research on the story of Māyā's pregnancy are quite telling. Moreover, Yaśodharā's dreams, discussed in Chapter 2, show more diversity, as the number and contents of her dreams appear to be unsettled.

[58] It is also true that many schools may never have acknowledged these dreams; for example, as Bhikkhu Anālayo (2013, 202, n. 47) points out, the Five Great Dreams are not found in any Chinese Āgamas.

[59] That are, Kṣemendra's *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* and the *Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing* (Matsumura 2011, 65).

[60] For the Sanskrit, see Cowell and Neil 1886, 247.29−248.4. For the ten dreams in the *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā*, see Das, Vidyābhūṣaṇa, and Vidyābhūṣaṇa 1888−1918, II: 795.11−14 §89.89−90; as pointed out by Matsumura (2011, 67), "Since the text's main source is [*Divyāvadāna*], its content is essentially the same."

[61] "Later, Dīpaṅkara gave the brahmin youth, Sumati, a prediction to perfect enlightenment." Skt. *paścād Dīpaṅkareṇa samyaksaṃbuddhena Sumatir māṇavo vyākṛtaḥ*, Cowell and Neil 1886, 252.10−11.

[62] The *Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing* appears to be related more closely to the *Divyāvadāna* in terms of the Dīpaṃkara story, but share more commonalities with the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya on the whole (Okumura 2013, 185).

plot agrees with that of the *Divyāvadāna*:[63] in both texts, the dreams inspired Sumati to seek instruction and eventually met Buddha Dīpaṃkara.

Young (1999, 26) argues that precisely this shows the "activating function of dreams," which, according to her, can also be discerned in the interpretation of the first two dreams in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*: "The *AN* [*Aṅguttara Nikāya*] suggests a causal relation for these two dreams: they contain signs that both cause the Buddha to 'awaken' and cause the Eightfold Path to awaken within him. This term *sambuddha*, 'awakened,' suggests that the seed for awakening and the seed of the Eightfold Path were lying dormant in the Buddha—they only needed to be stimulated by dreams" (ibid.). I would argue that this activating function is a bit far-fetched here, as her argument is built on one specific way of interpreting the Pāli sentences.[64] Yet it is true that, in both cases, the dreams not only signify the imminent awakening, but also offer direction to the dreamers and encourage them to go further in their quest of spiritual achievement. Moreover, especially in the case of the *Divyāvadāna*, the dreams are not merely foreshadowing devices to add some literary flavor to the narratives, but are integral to their plots.

Regarding the nature of the dreams, among the above sources of the Buddha's dreams of enlightenment, only the *Lalitavistara* designates the dreams as signs

[63] The contents of the dreams are quite different, though the themes are somewhat similar to those of the *Divyāvadāna*. In addition, the first two dreams remind us of the first dream in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* and the like, but it is unclear whether there was a stock of similar dreams of saints circulating at that time, or whether compilers intended to make the dreams of Sumati similar to those of Śākyamuni (if they were aware of the Five Great Dreams). "At that time, when Sage Sumati [was sleeping] in the mountains, he had five peculiar dreams: first, his bed is the ocean; second, his pillow is Sumeru; third, all beings of the ocean enter his body; fourth, he holds the sun in his hand; and fifth he holds the moon in his hand. After having seen these in his dreams, Sumati woke up astonished. He thought to himself: 'these dreams that I just had are not an insignificant matter. Whom should I ask? I should go to the city and ask some wise men.'" Chn. 爾時善慧仙人，在於山中，得五奇特夢：一者，夢臥大海；二者，夢枕須彌；三者，夢海中一切眾生入其身內；四者，夢手執日；五者，夢手執月。得此夢已，即大驚悟，心自念言：『我今此夢，非為小緣，當以問誰？宜入城內，問諸智者。』T. 189, 621b26–c2.

[64] Though the Pāli text indeed seems to indicate the Buddha was awakened to enlightenment as a consequence of the content the then-Bodhisattva saw in his dream (e.g., in the interpretation of the first dreams: Pāli *tathāgatena, bhikkhave, arahatā sammāsambuddhena anuttarā sammāsambodhi abhisambuddhā,* Hardy 1883–1900, III: 241.31–32), it shows no clear "causal relation" between the dreams and enlightenment. Bhikkhu Bodhi translates what Young sees as evidence of the activating function of dreams (e.g., the above sentence) as follows: "[this was a foretoken] that he would awaken to the unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment" (Bhikkhu Bodhi 2012, 814). His translation does not support Young's interpretation; rather, according to his interpretation, the dreams are signs of the Bodhisattva's future awakening, but not the causes for it. Moreover, Bhikkhu Bodhi notes that the exact meaning and implication of these sentences are not clear and that the traditional commentator's stance differs from Young's interpretation (which she does not discuss further in her notes). According to Bhikkhu Bodhi, "I have added 'this was a foretoken' in compliance with M[anoratha]p[ūraṇī]'s use of the word *pubbanimitta* to characterize the significance of the dreams. [The contemporary scholar] Brahmāli suggests: '[the dream] … represented his awakening to the unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment,' with a parallel construction for the corresponding sections below" (ibid., 1744, n. 1200). As for the stock phrase that is added to the interpretation of all five dreams—i.e., Pāli *tassa abhisambodhāya ayaṃ paṭhamo mahāsupino pātur ahosi* (Hardy 1883–1900, III: 241.33–34)—Bhikkhu Bodhi (2012, 1744–1745, n. 1201) notes, "Brahmāli suggests here: 'This was the first great dream that was beneficial for his awakening,' again with a parallel construction for the corresponding sections below. The sentence as it stands is perplexing; yet M[anoratha]p[ūraṇī] does not comment and there is no Chinese parallel […] I find the sentence is more intelligible if we read *tassa* (as in the following sections), taking it to mean 'to him,' that is, to the future Buddha. We can then see the whole sentence as affirming that the dream was indicative of his imminent awakening." Therefore, Young's conclusion is built on assumptions about sentences that are considered vague by Pāli experts and are traditionally understood differently.

(*nimitta*s);[65] others hint at their prognostic nature by stressing how dreams are dreamt before the Buddha's enlightenment (though not necessarily right before it; see Young 1999, 29) and are later "realized" or "ripened" (*vipāka*)[66] after his enlightenment. By saying that they appear to the Bodhisattva "for the purpose of his enlightenment" (*abhisambodhāya*),[67] the dreams are taken as purposeful.

If the dreams are effectively signs—as the exegeses we examined in the previous section are all concerned with the origins of these signs (e.g., the *Mahāvibhāṣā* attributes the dreams to the Buddha's previous lessons from past buddhas, while the *Samantapāsādikā* implies that the signs are enabled by the power of past karma)[68]—we might wonder what the sūtras' stances on this question are. Again, the *Lalitavistara* is the only source to offer a straightforward answer: "He [i.e., the Bodhisattva], who is respected for his merits and glory and filled with radiance and splendor, sees these foregoing dream signs—the signs that appear to the best of men [i.e., previous bodhisattvas] who have previously accumulated wholesome karma at the time when they renounce [their worldly life]."[69] Thus, in this presentation of the Buddha's life story, the dreams arise by the power of merit—concurring with the theory of the *Samantapāsādikā.* The other sources make no direct comment on the sources of dreams, but by the repeated phrase "This […] great dream appeared to him [as a sign] that his awakening [was imminent]" (Bhikkhu Bodhi 2012, 814),[70] the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* seems to indicate that the dreams appear spontaneously; this agrees with the *Milindapañha*'s theory that signs come to dreamers who are not actively seeking them (Horner 1969, II: 129).

This spontaneity may not seem significant on its own, but it becomes more interesting when contrasted with how dreams predicting the Bodhisattva's renunciation appear to the Bodhisattva's father, Śuddhodana: in the *Lalitavistara*, the prognostic

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[65] Hokazono 1994, 694.4−5 §14.40; I have cited this verse several times in this chapter, e.g., n. 50 above.

[66] As in the *Mahāvastu,* Skt. *ayaṃ tasya svapnasya vipāko* (Sernart 1890, 139.2; Marciniak 2020, 177.2). According to Jones's English translation (1949−1956, II: 138): "This was the fulfilment of that great vision." Regarding the word *vipāka*, Young (1999, 27) comments: "The Buddha says that the prophecy contained in each dream was fulfilled (*vipāka*) by a later act of his, a term that we shall see is used in the *Milindapañha* to mean the outcome or result of a dream. Buddhaghosa, the great fifth-century C.E. scholar-monk who wrote voluminous commentaries on the Pali canon, uses the word *vipāka* to discuss how prophetic dreams predict future events that have already matured, making it just a matter of time before they manifest in waking reality." Unfortunately, she does not give the source. What she is most possibly referring to may be the following sentence from the *Samantapāsādikā* (Note that although here Young attributes this work to Buddhaghosa, the *Samantapāsādikā* "was not a work of a single person"; see von Hinüber 1996, 109): Pāli *sv āyaṃ dubbalavatthukattā cetanāya paṭisandhiṃ ākaḍḍhituṃ asamattho, pavatte pana aññehi kusalākusalehi upatthambhito* ***vipākam*** *deti, kiñcāpi* ***vipākaṃ*** *deti, atha kho avisaye uppannattā abbohārikā 'va supinantacetanā, tenāha: ṭhapetvā supinantaṃ ti* (Takakusu and Nagai [1924–1947] 1966−1998, III: 521.27−31; see also the Chinese "parallel" in *Shanjian lü piposha*, T. 1462, 760a26−29). But I do not see how Young derives her conclusion from the above sentence. This passage seems to me more about dreams' karmic fruition.

[67] As in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, "This […] great dream appeared to him [as a sign] that his awakening [was imminent]" (Bhikkhu Bodhi 2012, 814); Pāli *tassa abhisambodhāya ayaṃ paṭhamo mahāsupino pāturahosi* (Hardy 1883−1900, III: 241.33−34).

[68] We may of course argue that previous lessons from buddhas are also past karma.

[69] Skt. *so puṇyu teju 'pacito śiritejagarbho pūrve nimitta supine imi addṛśāsi, ye bhonti pūrvaśubhakarmasamuccayānāṃ naiṣkramyakālasamaye narapuṃgavānām*, Hokazono 1994, 694.4−7 §14.40.

[70] Pāli *tassa abhisambodhāya ayaṃ paṭhamo mahāsupino pātur ahosi*, Hardy 1883−1900, III: 241.33−34.

dreams of Śuddhodana were sent by the Bodhisattva.[71] This again reminds us of the exegetic explanations of the dreams reviewed above—truthful dreams could be brought by superior beings or produced by the power of karma, while *nimitta* dreams, like the Bodhisattva's Five Great Dreams, arise of their own accord.

After examining the function and nature of the dreams of the Bodhisattva's enlightenment, we find these dreams 1) are true; 2) signify spiritual maturity; 3) are understood to be fruits of the Buddha's accumulated merits, the same as his spiritual achievement; 4) are visions; 5) arise spontaneously; and 6) are symbolic, and further, can arguably act as guides in one's spiritual life. Thus, they tick all the boxes of my definition of diagnostic dreams. This concurrence is unlikely to be a coincidence; rather, it proves that these dreams of enlightenment are valid, according to the logic about true dreams. Even if they were fabricated by the authors as a literary device—or, according to Rahula's (1978, 259) comments on the Five Great Dreams of the *Mahāvastu*, they are made up for propaganda purposes to please the masses—they were not casually imagined. The dreams reflect a Buddhist conception of how the Buddha should learn about his enlightenment beforehand, and in what form this knowledge should be conveyed to him. Moreover, as Young (1999, 31) summarizes, "the fact that these dreams were preserved in various texts indicates that some importance was attached to them by several Buddhist authors in different times and places"; these dreams could have been well circulated, and though there is no explicit reference to these five dreams in Indian Mahāyāna scriptures (to the best of my knowledge), there is little doubt that Mahāyānists would also have heard of the dreams, considering their vast popularity.

Thus, if *the* Buddha's dreams were like this when he was a bodhisattva, people who aspire to become *a* buddha might also expect to obtain knowledge and guidance through their dreams. The Buddha's life stories are certainly a major source of the bodhisattva ideal; similarly, the stories of his past lives, especially the story of Dīpaṃkara's prophecy, also inspire bodhisattvas to follow the path cleared by the Buddha (Tournier 2019, 99; Appleton 2020b, 94; see also Hirakawa 1989a, 262−274). In the study of dreams in Mahāyāna scriptures that is shortly to follow, we will identify some common traits shared by Mahāyāna dreams and the Five Great Dreams. For example, Müller (1992, 366) has already associated the 108 dreams of bodhisattvas in the *SvN* with *the* Bodhisattva's dreams. Yet it would be too hasty to come to a conclusion. In the next chapter, I will collect the accounts of dream signs in strictly Mahāyāna sūtras, and see what indicates continuity and what points to new doctrinal developments.

[71] "Thus [in the above chapter], monks, the Bodhisattva was compelled by the deity [to go forth]; he [then] showed the king Śuddhodana [the following] dreams as a prediction." Skt. *iti hi bhikṣavo bodhisattvaḥ saṃcoditaḥ san tena devaputreṇa rājñaḥ śuddhodanasyemaṃ svapnam upadarśayati sma*, Hokazono 1994, 670.1−2. According to Edgerton (1953, II: 135), *upadarśayati* should be translated as "exhibits (in words) as a future prospect; promises, predicts (for someone)."

Lastly, according to the interpretation of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the five dreams reveal, respectively, that 1) "he would awaken to unsurpassed, perfect enlightenment"; 2) "he would awaken to the noble eightfold path and would proclaim it well among devas and humans"; 3) "many white-robed householders would go to the Tathāgata for lifelong refuge"; 4) "members of the four classes […] would go forth from household life to homelessness in the Dhamma and discipline proclaimed by the Tathāgata and realize unsurpassed liberation"; and 5) "he would receive robes, almsfood, dwellings, and medicines and provisions for the sick" (Bhikkhu Bodhi 2012, 814−815). The implications of these dreams are likely arranged in chronological order—only after gaining enlightenment (implied by the first dream) can the Buddha preach it among others (indicated by the fourth dream), etc. Thus, this chronological order also has a hierarchical implication. However, it would be too far-fetched yet to associate such sequences of dreams with any kind of developmental stages for bodhisattvas. As we will see in the next chapter, however, this model for dreams, as well as other frameworks for dreams of bodhisattvas, always take into consideration the order of the events implied by dreams.

The Common Ground

The above survey shows how two widely circulated beliefs about dreams—a typology and a story—are complementary to each other. The classification of dreams, especially the universal recognition of *nimitta* dreams, explains the epistemic value of dreams within a framework of karma; the Five Great Dreams of the Bodhisattva exemplify this truthfulness of dreams when it comes to one's progression to liberation. This triangular connection between dreams, karma, and spiritual status forms the theoretical ground for our discussion of the next research topic, that is, dreams in Mahāyāna scriptures.