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Dreaming the path: diagnosing Bodhisattva progress in early Mahāyāna

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Chapter 4

Symptoms: Dreams and the Bodhisattva Career

Our survey of diagnostic dreams in modern scholarship, Buddhist exegetical literature, and the Buddha's life story in Chapter 3 has shown the prevalent acknowledgment of dreams' epistemic value in pan-Buddhist traditions. More importantly, the emic insights provided by the commentaries and narratives of the Bodhisattva's dreams have proved that the association between dream signs and the knowledge of karma and external influences is not a casual folk belief, but well-rooted and attested in essential Buddhist scriptures of the Mainstream schools and sufficiently backed by a set of sophisticated dream theories. This understanding of diagnostic dreams in Buddhism has prepared us to extend our survey to concrete diagnostic dreams in Mahāyāna scriptures. It is necessary to recap our definition of diagnostic dreams here—a diagnostic dream is a truthful source of knowledge and a method of identifying the unknown causes of the conditions of bodhisattvas; in addition, underlying the diagnostic dreams, there is a causality between the cause of the condition, the condition, and the contents of dreams.

In this chapter, I will present a full investigation of diagnostic dreams in Mahāyāna scriptures. As “diagnostic dreams,” the category will be as inclusive as possible; that is, I will also include dreams that do not satisfy all the six descriptive criteria presented in the last chapter, for they may either provide insight into the questions we are concerned with or challenge some of our assumptions. In terms of a full investigation, although previous scholarship has identified the theme of true dreams of bodhisattvas in Mahāyāna scriptures, many scriptures that were considered minor have gone unnoticed, and even when it comes to the best-known Mahāyāna sūtras, like the smaller and larger *Prajñāpāramitās*, studies on their discussion of dreams are still insufficient. This chapter therefore aims to fill in these gaps in the studies of Mahāyāna dreams.

Besides providing a complete picture of diagnostic dreams in Mahāyāna sūtras, the ultimate goal of our survey on dreams in Mahāyāna scriptures is to find out what implications for the bodhisattva path can be inferred from the dreams. Therefore, while we will mostly concern ourselves with the epistemic status of the dreams, we will pay sufficient attention to the aspects of the bodhisattva ideal and concerns of bodhisattvas that can be deduced from the dreams.

To better serve our purpose, I will sort the materials roughly by the subject of each dream's diagnosis. Since the starting point of this thesis is to understand the context of

the *SvN*, the following discussion will start with dreams that signify whatever is closest to bodhisattva *bhūmis*, and then proceed to dreams that diagnose karmic obstructions or prescribe confessions. Though we certainly hope that the dreams can be examined in the framework of the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism, many sūtras that we will see here unfortunately come with a very ambiguous or complicated textual history, and it would be dangerous to attach questionable chronological assumptions to them. That said, for texts within a single textual lineage, like those of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, it is still possible to catch a glimpse of how the perception of dreams evolved over time. Finally, almost all the texts referred to in this study have more than one version. As the subject of this dissertation is Indian Mahāyāna, I will prioritize the extant Sanskrit versions (if available), even when they do not represent the most influential or archaic versions of those texts.

On the basis of these Mahāyāna dreams that we have attempted to understand, as well as the dream theories that we have reviewed in Chapter 3, finally, I will approach the dreams from an etic perspective. This etic perspective will show how dream divination—as a common strategy of uncertainty management throughout human society—reflects bodhisattvas’ uncertainty over the trajectory of their progress and the factors involved in this progress.

The objective of our study on dreams is only to explain how belief in dreams can shed new light on our previous understanding of the bodhisattva path. However, we cannot resolve all the issues raised by the juxtaposition of dreams and bodhisattva *bhūmis* only from this perspective: after this discussion on dreams, it will remain unclear why the uncertainty of bodhisattvas implied by their dreams is involved in the framework of bodhisattva *bhūmis*. In the next chapter, I will examine how a bodhisattva’s concern with knowledge of his progress reveals previously overlooked aspects of the causative factors of bodhisattva developmental stages.

Dreams of Milestones on the Bodhisattva Path

Dreams of Enlightenment: The *Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka-sūtra*

After reviewing the dreams of the yet-to-be Buddha in the Buddha’s life story and Avadānas, we encounter yet another dream of the future Buddha. This time, however, the story is featured in a Mahāyāna sūtra—the *Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka-sūtra*. The *Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka-sūtra* was supposedly composed between the early third century and, at the latest, the year 419—when Dharmakṣema finished his Chinese translation

(Yamada 1968, I: 174).¹ This work has survived in multiple Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese versions.²

What interests us here is the dream of Samudrarenu, the future Śākyamuni Buddha. At that time, he was a minister of King Araṇemin, who in the future was to become Amitābha (or Amitāyus). The dream is recounted in Chapter 3, after the “core question” of the sūtra is posed to the Buddha: “by what reason [...] did you (=Śākyamuni Buddha) appear in this world of fivefold defilements, [...] attain enlightenment, and teach the religion of three vehicles to fourfold followers?” (ibid., I: 77). In answering this question, the Buddha attributed reasons to his vow (*praṇidhāna*) and told the following “past story (*pūrvavogā*)” (ibid., I: 78)—the main narrative of this sūtra:

When King Araṇemin and Samudrarenu made offerings to Tathāgata Ratnagarbha (a buddha at that time), a question occurred to Samudrarenu: “Someone please inform me through my dream, be he a deity, a yakṣa, a nāga, a buddha, a *śrāvaka*, or a brahmin: First of all, what does the king desire? Does he wish to become majestic among gods, to become majestic among people, to become a *śrāvaka*, to reach the level of pratyekabuddha, or to attain unsurpassable perfect awakening?”³

Then, Samudrarenu brāhmaṇa dreamt a dream, in which he saw a ray of light illuminating as many buddhalands as there are grains of sands of the River Gangā, and many buddhas in these buddhalands. Each buddha presented Samudrarenu with a lotus flower of golden leaves (*svaṇa-patra*), silver stalk (*rūpya-daṇḍa*), [beryl pericarp]⁴ (*vaidūrya-karṇika*) and emerald filament (*aśmagarbha-keśara*). In each lotus flower there was a sun-disc (*sūrya-maṇḍala*) over which a parasol (*chat[t]ra*) made of seven jewels was hanging. Each sun-disc emitted 60 million

¹ This conclusion is based on doctrinal and intertextual evidence; see Yamada’s analysis (1968, 167–174). It is noteworthy that, after comparing the two Chinese translations—i.e., that of Dharmakṣema 曇無讖, *Beihua jing* 悲華經, T. 157, completed in 419, and that by an anonymous translator (dated to the Qin 秦 dynasty, approx. 351–394), *Dasheng bei fentuoli jing* 大乘悲分陀利經, T. 158—Yamada (ibid., 17) concludes that the anonymous one appears to be slightly earlier. Thus, 419 would be a conservative estimate—the scripture would have been compiled earlier than this date.

² Iwagami has published a series of literature reviews and studies on the *Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka-sūtra*. For the primary sources of this text, see Iwagami 2009 and 2014, where he lists all the manuscripts of every version of the text that are known to him. For secondary scholarship on this sūtra, see Iwagami 2010. I believe his survey to be quite exhaustive. According to the survey, the aspect of the text that modern scholars have found most interesting is that of Amitābha Buddha (Iwagami 2010, 11–18), while other elements, such as the dreams in this text, have not been highlighted.

³ Skt. *kaccit [sic] svapne nivedayatu devo vā yakṣo vā nāgo vā buddho vā śrāvako vā brāhmaṇo vā kin tāvad rājā devaśriyaṃ kāṅkṣate uta manuṣyaśriyaṃ atha śrāvakatvam atha pratyekabuddhabhūmim atha vānuttarāṃ samyaksaṃbodhiṃ*, Yamada 1968, II: 66.1–5. Note that Yamada’s readings of the Sanskrit are criticized for their “carelessness” in de Jong’s review of the book (1971, 304). I will emend Yamada’s Sanskrit reading with de Jong’s suggestions (ibid., 305–308). To be sure, there is more work to be done on Yamada’s reading besides correcting the errors that have been pointed out by de Jong. However, as I aim only to provide a preliminary study of the *Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka-sūtra* in regard to the dreams mentioned in this sūtra, I will read the Sanskrit primarily according to Yamada’s edition.

⁴ Yamada renders *vaidūrya* as “lapis lazuli”; however, a correct translation of *vaidūrya* should be “beryl.” According to Biswas (1994, 142), “the South Indian word *veluriya* which originally stood for white crystals of quartz and beryl, and later coloured beryl (blue and green) was retained in Pali and converted to *vaidūrya* [sic] in Sanskrit.”

rays of light, all of which entered into Samudraren̥u's mouth. He saw his own body become tall and as clean as a mirror ([*ādarśa*]-*maṇḍala*), in which millions of bodhisattvas were sitting upon lotus flowers and meditating with crossed legs. He saw the sun (*sūrya-vigraha*) encircling his head like a halo, and a huge parasol stretched in the sky reaching up to the Brahmaloḥa. He saw many lotus flowers around him and heard heavenly music coming forth from the flowers (ibid., I: 80).⁵

The dream continued, and the protagonist of the dream switched to King Araṇemin, “who had been transformed into a boar-head (*sūkara-mukha*) with a blood-stained human body. Pursuing many animals, he devoured them, and in turn, they pursued him and ate his body [...] The king repeated this self-sacrifice many times. Samudraren̥u saw the princes, too” (ibid., 81); some princes turned into animal-headed hybrids and were devoured, while others left for the South on carriages drawn by buffaloes. Finally, “gods, Śakra, Brahmā, lokapālas, and others appeared and advised Samudraren̥u to divide and give the lotus flowers to King Araṇemin, his princes, minor lords ([*koṭṭarāja*]) and other people (*jana*)” (ibid.).

Upon awakening, Samudraren̥u went to Tathāgata Ratnagarbha for an interpretation of his dream. Ratnagarbha gave a prolonged and detailed interpretation. He divided the content of the dream into six categories, and each category of signs ended with the following identical remark from the interpreter: “This is the portent (*pūrvanimitta*) of your dream.”⁶ We will follow this arrangement and likewise divide the dream signs into six groups.

Since the interpretation is so detailed, different scholars may pick up on different points. For example, if we read Yamada's rendition (which is not a literal translation), the impression is that *all* the dream signs that cast Samudraren̥u as the protagonist invariably point to Samudraren̥u's future as a great teacher who grants the means to enlightenment to others and receives great honors (ibid., I: 81–82). However, I would suggest that *each* group of signs is concerned with a different developmental phase of the future Samudraren̥u. The order of these signs is significant.

The first four groups of signs—all about Samudraren̥u himself—show that 1) since Samudraren̥u has urged innumerable people in the Jambudvīpa to engage in the three items of meritorious actions (*tri-puṇyakriyāvastu*),⁷ and he has urged innumerable people to become intent upon being inspired (*samādāpita*) toward unsurpassable,

⁵ Note that what Yamada here provides, though detailed, is a paraphrase; the Sanskrit text of the dreams can be found in Yamada 1968, II: 66.6–68.7. Note that de Jong (1971, 306) has pointed out an error of Yamada's Sanskrit reading in Yamada 1968, II: 67.5.

⁶ Skt. *idaṃ tasya svapnasya pūrvanimittam* / Yamada 1968, II: 71.15–16; 72.7, etc. Occasionally, there is the additional vocative *brāhmaṇa*; see, for example, ibid., 74.1–2.

⁷ The three kinds usually refer to *dānamaya*, *śīlamaya*, and *bhāvanāmaya* in Pāli texts (Edgerton 1953, 346), which are being accomplished in giving, discipline, and cultivation. Here, however, they are *dāna*, *yama*, *saṃyama* (clarified later in this text; see Yamada 1968, II: 74.11), i.e., giving, control, and restraint.

perfect enlightenment for a hundred years, buddhas will give him the prediction to enlightenment, protect him, and teach him the Dharma;⁸ 2) he will receive the teachings and attain unsurpassable, perfect enlightenment in one night;⁹ and 3) after attaining enlightenment, other bodhisattvas will revere him. After those bodhisattvas attain concentration (*samādhi*), *dhāraṇīs*, and receptivity (*kṣānti*), they will further spread his teachings to other Buddha fields;¹⁰ 4) “he will help other beings to attain the stage irreversible (*avaivartika*) from the highest enlightenment” (ibid., I: 82), and after attaining complete nirvāṇa (*parinirvṛta*), buddhas will continue to praise him.¹¹ The other groups of signs in which the king and his princes are featured indicate that 5) the king will teach those who suffer here in saṃsāra (depicted as half-animal hybrids), while 6) some of the princes will suffer and some will become śrāvakas (signified by them choosing a wrong path and their vehicles being buffalo-drawn).¹²

Accordingly, the main content of the dream is organized, or at least interpreted, in a clear chronological order: the first group of signs is portents of prediction; the second, portents of enlightenment; the third, portents of preaching the Dharma, while the last is portents of complete nirvāṇa.

The dream reminds us of several texts that we have reviewed. The dream of the *Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka-sūtra* displays some degree of analogy with the Five Great Dreams—both dreams contain portents of the future, and though the hierarchical order implied by the interpretation of the Five Great Dreams is much vaguer than that here, a deliberate arrangement according to the order of events is discernible. The story, not only limited to the dream, is highly reminiscent of the story of Sumati and Dīpaṃkara as told in the *Dīvyāvadāna*. Just as Yamada has also pointed out (ibid., I: 145), “one is struck by the similarity between this story [i.e., the story of Dīpaṃkara’s prediction] and the framework of the *K[aruṇā]P[uṇḍarīka]* as a whole.” In both texts, the dreams of a not-yet-awakened bodhisattva urge the subject to set off in search of the Buddhist teaching, and both bodhisattvas receive their prediction directly or indirectly through dreams. In these two stories of the then-buddha meeting the future buddha, the knowledge of future enlightenment is delivered to the future buddha in symbolic dreams, and by decoding the dream signs with the then-buddha’s higher knowledge, the present buddha passes down the knowledge of the future as well as the seed of enlightenment itself to the next buddha.

The long account of Samudrarenū’s dream and its interpretation in the *Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka-sūtra* is not only interesting for its position in the narrative

⁸ Somehow, Yamada (1968, I: 81) understands the first part of the passage as being in the future tense even though the sentences are clearly in past tense; he renders it as “Samudrarenū will wander around the Jambudvīpa in order to teach religion to countless beings.” For the Sanskrit, see Yamada 1968, II: 70.19–71.15.

⁹ Ibid., II: 71.16–72.6.

¹⁰ Ibid., II: 72.6–73.4.

¹¹ Ibid., II: 73.5–74.1.

¹² Ibid., II: 74.2–75.10.

framework, but the dream must also reveal some unspoken beliefs about a bodhisattva's dreams in general. Among all the points we can make about this dream, what caught my attention most are: 1) in this text, different signs symbolize different phases of the future buddha; therefore, although, unlike in the *SvN*, the signs do not directly reveal the current developmental stage of a bodhisattva, they are considered to be able to show different phases of a bodhisattva or a buddha symbolically; and 2) although the dream here is about the dreamer's future, the dreamer's past is implicit in the dream: in the interpretation of the first group of signs, it is Samudrarenū's wholesome karma in past lives that leads to this prediction from buddhas. By this analysis, despite the obvious differences between the dream in the *Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka-sūtra* and what we refer to as diagnostic dreams, the same mechanism underlies both of them.¹³

Dreams as Rewards: The *Lotus Sūtra*

According to the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, the Buddha obtained the knowledge that would eventually generate the Five Great Dreams from past buddhas. The story told above is yet another example of the continuity of the buddha lineage being made known through dreams. Yet these stories and dreams are dreamt by the heroes of the stories. In contrast to these stories, in most of the texts that we will discuss below, the dreamers are not the characters of the dreams, but (are, were, or will be) the audience whom the texts address.

In one well-known Mahāyāna sūtra—the *Lotus Sūtra* (*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*)—the Buddha teaches future bodhisattvas who will live in a time after the Buddha's *nirvāṇa* a series of dreams that will inform the Buddha about a bodhisattva's intention (*āśaya*) of pursuing the Dharma, and grant the bodhisattva the prediction (*vyākaraṇa*) of becoming a future buddha (at least as it appears to be in many versions; we will come back to this question later).¹⁴ Thus, dreams are not only a medium of

¹³ Yamada (1968, I: 172) calls our attention to “the close link between the *K[aruṇā]P[puṇḍarīka]* and the sūtras grouped together as the *Mahāratnakūṭa*.” He further gives examples in *ibid.*, 172–173, including the *Sukhāvātī-vyūha*, the *Akṣobhyatathāgatasya-vyūha*, and the *Mañjuśrībuddhakṣetrāgūṇa-vyūha* of the MRK collection. We cannot conclude anything substantial from this fact, as we do not know the criteria for the sūtras that are included in the MRK collection. However, it could imply some connections between the *Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka-sūtra* and the MRK from the perspective of date, region, or doctrinal affiliation, etc.; thus, it would not be surprising that the notion of dreams is similar in the *SvN* and the *Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka-sūtra*.

¹⁴ “Having perceived his intention, the lord of the world gives him a prediction that he will become the best among men (lit. the bull among men): ‘O young man of good family, you will grasp the unsurpassable auspicious knowledge in a future time even in this world.’” (Skt. *jñātvā ca so āśaya lokanāthas taṃ vyākaroṭi puruṣarṣabhatve / kulaputra tvam pīṭha anuttaram śivam sprśisyasi jñānam anāgate 'dhvani* // Kern and Nanjio 1912, 294.8–10 §13.65). As there is a large quantity of primary sources for this (at least in East Asia) very influential Mahāyāna scripture in Sanskrit and Chinese, and many studies on it in the later Buddhist tradition as well as in modern scholarship, it is not realistic to exhaust all the materials for this study; for a summary of the sources for the *Lotus Sūtra*, see *BEB* 2015, 144–146. As the objective of this study is to provide a survey on dreams in Indian Mahāyāna sūtras, I choose primarily to consult Kern and Nanjio's Sanskrit edition, despite the edition having been “criticized as a conflation of distinct recensions” (*ibid.*, 145). As for the English translation, although I will refer to and consult Kern's English translation (1884), considering the language of his translation being archaic, I provide my own translation. In addition, we are also fortunate enough that the vast primary materials of Chapter 13 have been carefully collected and edited by Karashima (2003–2005); his edition includes several Sanskrit manuscripts, three Tibetan versions, and two Chinese

connection between past buddhas and the Buddha, but also between Śākyamuni Buddha and potential future buddhas, i.e., bodhisattvas who are listening to this discourse. Moreover, the content of the dreams featured in this text is joined with several distinctive Mahāyāna concepts embedded in the Buddha's life story. Since the authors of the *Lotus Sūtra* “focus virtually all their attention on Śākyamuni, and especially on the mystery of his continued presence in the world after his (for them, only apparent) *nirvāṇa*” (BEB 2015, I: 144), it is only logical that the text utilizes every means to stress this continuity, which also includes the dreams. Nonetheless, there is a great ontological problem lying behind the dreams of the *Lotus Sūtra*, which we will come back to.

Chapter 13 of the *Lotus Sūtra* (i.e., Chapter 14 in Kumārajīva's Chinese translation), “Peaceful Life” (*Sukhavihāra-parivarta*), “explains the proper conduct, the proper sphere of relationships and blissful ways (*sukhavihāra*) of a bodhisattva in order to preach the *sūtra* in the age of decay of the dharma” (ibid., 150); at the end of this chapter, the Buddha promises Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī that those who desire enlightenment will acquire a series of benefits (*ānuśamsa*)¹⁵ including good rebirth, a fine appearance, excellence in body and manner, superior power, and most importantly (and with the most lengthy description), a series of dreams:

He sees dreams with images of buddhas; he sees monks and nuns; he sees [his] body like such [sitting] on lion thrones elucidating various kinds of Teachings. In the same manner, in his dreams, he sees as many gods and yakṣas as the sands of the Ganges, and many kinds of asuras and nāgas; they all fold their hands in reverence to the one who expounds the utmost Dharma. He sees in his dream the Tathāgata—the golden-colored Lord who is emitting thousands of rays and is endowed with a lovely voice—teaching the Dharma to many *koṭis* of beings. And he stands there, keeping his hands folded in reverence, and praises the Sage—who is the most excellent among men, while the Conqueror, the Great Physician, is expounding the utmost Dharma to the four assemblies. Having heard [the Teaching], he becomes delighted; being full of joy, he pays his worship. In his dream, he acquires *dhāraṇīs* and he quickly comprehends the irreversible knowledge. Having perceived his intention, the Lord of the World gives him a prediction that he will become the best among men: “O young man of good family, you will grasp the unsurpassable auspicious knowledge in a future time even in this world.”¹⁶

translations. For the passage that most concerns us, see Karashima 2005, 130–144. I will note readings in versions other than Kern's edition only when I consider them to be crucial.

¹⁵ The word *ānuśamsa* only appears at the end of the discourse, see Kern and Nanjio 1912, 296.1–2 §13.73. We will revisit this word below.

¹⁶ Skt. *supināṃś ca so paśyati buddharūpaṃ bhikṣuṃś ca so paśyati bhikṣuṇīś ca / śiṃhāsanaśtham ca tathātmabhāvaṃ dharmam prakāśen tu bahuprakāram // devāṃś ca yakṣān yatha gaṅgavālikā asurāṃś ca nāgāṃś ca bahuprakārān / teṣāṃ ca so bhāṣati agradharmam supinasmī sarveṣa kṛtāñjalīnām // tathāgataṃ so supinasmī*

Moreover, after the prophecy, in his dream, he would go through the events of Śākyamuni's life after Śākyamuni's renunciation.¹⁷

Differently from many of the dreams that we have examined, which are mostly symbolic, the dreams here are a mixture of visions of the Buddha, events, and direct messages. Thus, there are some urgent ontological questions to solve: if all the events take place in a bodhisattva's dreams, do they have the same effect as if they take place in real life? What kind of experience is dreaming? Is dreaming of Śākyamuni's life journey tantamount to reliving his life? In addition, all the versions have their own nuanced readings; some differences may seem trivial, while others could prove crucial if we base our argumentation on them:¹⁸ for example, Kumārajīva's translation suggests the dreams should be recurring ones, but to my knowledge, none of the other versions specify this.¹⁹ Yet if similar dreams, especially significant dreams such as

paśyati deśenta dharmam bahuprāṇikoṭinām / raśmīsaḥsārāṇi pramuñcamānaṃ valguśvaraṃ kāñcanaḥaṇaṇātham // so cā tahī bhoti kṛtāñjalisthato abhiṣṭavanto dvipaduttamaṃ munim / so cā jino bhāṣati agradharmam caturṇa parśāṇa mahābhiṣaṭkaḥ // so ca prahrṣto bhavati śrūṇitvā prāmodyajātaś ca karoti pūjām / supine ca so dhāraṇi prāpuṇoti avivartiyam jñāna sprṣitva kṣipram // jñātvā ca so āśayu lokanāthas taṃ vyākaroṭi puruṣarṣabhatve / kulaputra tvam pīṭha anuttaraṃ śivam sprṣisyasi jñānam anāgate 'dhvani // Kern and Nanjio 1912, 293.9–294.10 §§13.60–65. Regarding §13.64, although Kern (1884, 279) seems to understand that a bodhisattva first obtains irreversible knowledge and subsequently he obtains (a) *dhāraṇīs* based on the gerund “*sprṣitva*,” judging by the typical description of the events taken place before one receives prophecy (for example, a passage from the above discussed *Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, Yamada 1968, II: 39.18–40.5; see my translation of this passage in Chapter 6, n. 125), I incline to read the sentence as a bodhisattva first obtains *dhāraṇīs* and then a prediction.

¹⁷ “After having seen the one who is golden in color and has auspicious bodily marks of hundred virtues, he hears the Dharma; after hearing [the Dharma], he elucidates it to the [four] assemblies. Certainly, this dream of his [is] as such. In [his] dream, he renounces all of his kingdom, the women's quarters, his kinsmen, attendants, and as such; having left [home] and abandoned all desires, he approaches the seat of enlightenment. There, aiming at enlightenment, at that place, he is seated on the lion throne at the root of the [bodhi] tree. With seven days passing by, he obtains the knowledge of tathāgatas. Having achieved enlightenment, he rises up from there [i.e., the bodhi tree] and turns the wheel that is devoid of affliction; he teaches the Dharma to the four assemblies for an inconceivable number of thousands of *koṭis* of kalpas. Having elucidated the Dharma there, he leads many *koṭis* of people to unafflicted (*nāsrava*) nirvāṇa; afterwards, he would be extinguished (*nirvāyati*) like a lamp when his purpose has been fulfilled (*hetuḥsaye*). This dream is as such.” Skt. *suvarṇavarṇam śatapuṇyalakṣaṇam supinasmi drṣtvā ca śrṇoti dharmam / śrutvā ca taṃ parśadi samprakāśayī supino khu tasyo ayam evarūpaḥ // svapne 'pi sarvaṃ prajāhīva rājyam antahpuram jñātigaṇam tathāiva / abhiṣkramī sarva jahitva kāmān upasamkramī yena ca bodhimaṇḍam // śiṃhāsane tatra niṣṭhīyāno drumasya mūle tahi bodhi ārthikaḥ / divasāna saptāna tathātyayena anuprāpsyate te jñānu tathāgatānām // bodhiṃ ca prāptas tatu vyutthahitvā pravartayī cakram anāsravaṃ hi / caturṇa parśāṇa sa dharmā deśayī acintiyā kalpasahasrakotyaḥ // prakāśayitvā tahi dharmā nāsravaṃ nirvāpayitvā bahuprāṇikoṭyaḥ / nirvāyati hetuḥsaye va dīpaḥ supino ayam so bhavat evarūpaḥ // Kern and Nanjio 1912, 295.1–10 §13.68–72. For the particularities of gerunds ending in *ī* in the Lotus Sūtras, see Edgerton 1953, I: 175–176 §35.49. Note that the Sanskrit version differs from Kumārajīva's translation in some details. Though “gold-coloured Buddha” and “hearing the Dharma” appear in dreams according to the extant Sanskrit version and Dharmarakṣa's translation (T. 263, 110a28–b2), in Kumārajīva's translation, it is unclear whether those visions are perceived during meditation or dreams (T. 262, 39c4–8; for an English translation, see Kubo and Yuyama 2007, 206–207).*

¹⁸ In addition, while the prediction indeed appears to take place in dreams, it is not specified. In other words, the two stanzas on predictions, i.e., §65 and §66, are not modified by locatives like “during dreams (*supinasmi*).” This has led some scholars to treat it as separate from dream visions. For example, Young (1999, 88) believes that the prediction happens in real life, and only after that prediction will the bodhisattva dream again. However, the absence of such specifications should not be significant at all. From the philological point of view, it may well be a matter of meter; from a doctrinal aspect, if a bodhisattva can obtain irreversibility during a dream, the attainment that is generally considered as arising almost simultaneously, prediction, should also be accessible in dreams.

¹⁹ “They will always have such pleasant dreams [Chn. 常有是好夢, *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經, T. 262, 39c7–8]” (Kubo and Yuyama 2007, 207). However, none of the Sanskrit or Tibetan versions included in Karashima's comparative study (2005, 139–143) implies that the dreams should be recurring. There seem to be relatively few discussions of this issue, and among these few, different scholars hold different views: for example, Tejima (1920b,

receiving a prediction, occur repeatedly, what function do they have? Are they some kind of practice that should keep going on a regular basis? Or could they still have the function of confirming or actualizing merits? Regarding these questions, the last stanza of the chapter seems to clear up the mystery for us: the dreams are for the benefit of those who will teach this sūtra “in the last age”;²⁰ in other words, dreams are considered the benefit or result of the practices, rather than the practice per se.

The dreams presented in the *Lotus Sūtra* may appear somewhat dissimilar from what we have defined as “diagnostic dreams”: they are not symbolic, and the text is ambiguous about the truthfulness or nature of the experience. However, they also display some similarities to “diagnostic dreams”: the dreams arise as rewards (*ānuśamsa*); as noted by Edgerton (1953, II: 34), this term is usually used in the sense of a blessing or advantages “as derived from virtuous actions of various kinds.” Therefore, despite the ontological questions regarding the dreams in this text, dreaming of the Buddha’s life is also a testimony to the practice of good conduct. The confirmative function is especially significant in a period after the Buddha’s *nirvāṇa*: until receiving prophecy from a future buddha in an undetermined future time, where else except in dreams could a bodhisattva experience this event after the Buddha’s passing and thus become confident in the certainty of his awakening?²¹ Therefore, the dreams are old yet new; while the core parts of the dreams contain frequent Buddhist themes that we have seen previously, like visions of the Buddha and events derived from the life story of the Buddha, there are a few new motifs that will recur in the following studies on dreams in Mahāyāna sūtras: one is dreaming of being irreversible (*avaivartika*);²² the other is strong concern over the Buddha’s absence.

Dreams like these, but with fewer details, proliferate in Mahāyāna sūtras. The statement “seeing buddhas in dreams” can be found in several of the most influential Mahāyāna sūtras; for example, “the *Pra[tyutpanna]S[amādhi]* claims that the results of the practice of the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi* can be experienced in dreams, while the *L[arger] Sukh[āvatīvyūha]* promises the vision of Amitābha and his realm in dreams to

25) understands the dreams to be recurring, while Okada (2011, 26) believes it is more about “re-experiencing” (追体験) the Buddha’s life.

²⁰ “O Mañjuśrī, one who will elucidate this sūtra—the utmost Dharma that I have thoroughly taught—in the last age will have a great amount of endless advantages at all times” (Skt. *bahu ānuśamsās ca anantakāś ca ye mañjuśrī sāda tasya bhonti / yo paścime kāli imagrādharmam sūtram prakāśeya mayā sudeśitam*, Kern and Nanjio 1912, 296.1–2 §13.73). Kumārajīva’s translation also agrees with the Sanskrit here (Chn. 若後惡世中，說是第一法，是人得大利，如上諸功德, T. 262, 39c16–17).

²¹ Of course, there are other ways than dreaming to obtain a prediction in the future or to learn of a prediction that had taken place in a past life. Receiving or confirming the prediction in dreams is common, but different texts have significantly divergent views on this matter. We will come back to this from the perspective of prediction in the next chapter.

²² The concept of *avaivartika* is not entirely new. Similar concepts (but in different terminologies) have appeared in pre-Mahāyāna works, though arguably the definition is different than in Mahāyāna works (Gilks 2010, 41–44). According to Aramaki (2003, 210), its association with prediction is already implied in the *Mahāvastu*; even if his claim is justifiable, however, there is no straightforward connection between them (Tournier 2017, 217–218; see also my note n. 140 in Chapter 3). Moreover, as far as dreams are concerned, dreaming of being “irreversible” is, according to my knowledge, restricted to Mahāyāna scriptures.

certain practitioners” (Harrison 2003, 140).²³ Though Harrison’s point is about dreams that function as inspiration and revelation, as his statement indicates, in these two cases, dreams promise bodhisattvas experiences that verify one’s practice or conviction.²⁴ Many other sūtras mention the dreaming of buddhas in passing (for a survey on such dreams, see Honbu 1979), but most of these passages on dreams are too concise to conduct a detailed analysis without making questionable assumptions.

Dreams of Irreversibility and Other Dreams: The *Prajñāpāramitā* Literature

Yet there is an exception—one text, or rather, one textual tradition that offers an expanded version of Buddha sightings in dreams, and much more: the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature features several elaborations on dreams. We have mentioned some of these when dealing with the *DZDL*’s stance on dreams. I would like to reiterate the interest in dreams within this tradition: several discourses on dreams are included in the five recensions of the smaller and larger *Prajñāpāramitās* that Xuanzang collected for his translation of the *Da banreboluomiduo jing*.²⁵ Despite the sūtras’ historic popularity, from the point of view of modern scholars there are multiple questions that remain unanswered, which make it challenging for us to attain full comprehension of these passages. Regarding the massive quantity of materials in the smaller and larger *Prajñāpāramitās*, I will prioritize the *Aṣṭa* for, as we will soon see, some key discourses on dreams are missing in the larger recensions.²⁶ The Sanskrit version edited by

²³ For Harrison’s more detailed discussion of the dreams in the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi*, see Harrison 1978, esp. p. 46. For a comparison of the Sanskrit, Tibetan, and several Chinese translations of the passage on dreams in the larger *Sukhāvatī-vyūha*, see Kagawa 1984, 252–253.

²⁴ In the larger *Sukhāvatī-vyūha*, people who see Amitābha Buddha in their dreams before their death are guaranteed rebirth into Amitābha’s land. Therefore, such dreams also overlap with the so-called “deathbed” visions, which could also be “confirmatory visions,” as convincingly suggested by Greene (2021b, 152–155). Confirmatory visions in dreams or on one’s deathbed “were not just revelatory but also diagnostic” (ibid., 153).

²⁵ In Xuanzang’s *Da banreboluomiduo jing* 大般若波羅蜜經, T. 220, the first five *fen* 分 or *hui* 會 all include the passage on dreams as characteristics of irreversibility; this means that all three recensions of the *LP* and two recensions of the *SP* translated by Xuanzang retain this passage. It is included, respectively, in the *Śatasāhasrikā* (*Chufen shanxue pin* 初分善學品, T. 220 [1], 702c26ff.); the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* (*Di’erfen Zengshangman pin* 第二分增上慢品, T. 220 [2], 283a24ff.); the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* (*Disanfen Qiaofangbian pin* 第三分巧便品, T. 220 [3], 649a5ff.); and the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* (*Disifen Juemoshi pin* 第四分覺魔事品, T. 220 [4], 836a20ff.; *Diwufen Mengxing pin* 第五分夢行品 T. 220 [5], 908b22). For the correspondence between Xuanzang’s *Da banreboluomiduo jing* and recensions of the *Prajñāpāramitās*, see Zacchetti 2013, 183, 190. Given the complexity of the recension history of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, the Sanskrit titles (i.e., number of *granthas*) are only given here to distinguish the *fens*; they are not accurate.

²⁶ Although the predominant Chinese view and some Indian traditions take the *Aṣṭa* as an excerpt of the larger *Prajñāpāramitā*, modern scholarship strongly leans toward the “historical primacy” (Zacchetti 2015, 177) of the *Aṣṭa*, which is evidenced by the dates of the Chinese translations, textual analysis, and the Gāndhārī manuscripts found in recent years. The *LP* seems to have undergone several expansions on the basis of the *Aṣṭa*. For more details, see Zacchetti 2015, 177. To be sure, we should take all claims on the textual history of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature with extreme caution since each text has more than one historical layer. For example, regarding the *Aṣṭa* subfamily, “modern scholarship has tended to regard the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* as the outcome of a process of gradual growth and stratification” (ibid., 181). As we see many times in our survey, the translations and versions of one subfamily may

Wogihara (1932–1935) will be our primary source for the *Aṣṭa*. I favor this over the Chinese versions, as we need better demonstrations of the Sanskrit terminology in order to examine which concepts are most likely consistent in Mahāyāna sūtras. The second-century Chinese translation by Lokakṣema, i.e., the *Daoxing banre jing* (道行般若經, T. 224), will be used as a supplement. Not only is this Chinese translation one of the earliest pieces of evidence for this text (Karashima 2011, xii–xiii), but Karashima’s critical edition of the translation is also extremely helpful for our study.

In the *Aṣṭa*, six passages are noteworthy for our study of dreams; for ease of discussion, I will mark them from (1) to (6).

The first passage (**passage 1**) displays certain similarities with the dreams in the *Lotus Sūtra*: they are dreams of auspicious Buddhist motifs, such as seeing the Dharma wheel and hearing Dharma discourses,²⁷ which are promised as merits (*guṇa*) to those who revere the Perfection of Wisdom.²⁸ The only slight difference is that the dreams

differ much, e.g., the *Daoxing banre jing* differs from the extant Sanskrit *Aṣṭa* frequently. Therefore, my point is that, on the one hand, we should always take the complexity of textual histories of each recension of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature into consideration; on the other hand, we can still make general claims about the development of the *Prajñāpāramitā*s when there is enough evidence.

²⁷ “Moreover, Kauśika, that young man or young woman of good family will have no physical or mental fatigue. Rather, they shall prepare their bedstead with content and resort to it with content; they will have no evil dreams when sleeping, when dreaming [lit. seeing], they will only see truly worthy and perfectly enlightened tathāgatas, they will only see stūpas, they will only see bodhisattvas, they will only see the disciples of tathāgatas (*tathāgata-śrāvaka*); when hearing any sound [in dreams], they will only hear the sound of the Perfections, they will only see the qualities favorable to enlightenment [*bodhipakṣa dharma*; see Edgerton 1953, II: 402ff.]; they will only see trees of enlightenment; they will only see the truly worthy and perfectly enlightened tathāgatas attain perfect enlightenment there [i.e., under the trees of enlightenment]; also, they will only see perfectly enlightened buddhas turning the Dharma wheel; they will only see many bodhisattvas; they will hear [many bodhisattvas] chanting this very Perfection [and] delighted by the chanting of this very Perfection of Wisdom about in which manner all knowledge should be comprehended and in which manner buddha fields should be purified, and [they will hear the chanting bodhisattvas] demonstrating the skillful means; they will hear the glorious buddhas’ sublime sound of perfect enlightenment: ‘in a certain direction, in a certain quarter [of the world], in a certain buddha field a certain worthy and perfectly enlightened tathāgata with such-and-such a name teaches the Dharma, [and he is] surrounded and attended by many hundreds of bodhisattva disciples until [...] many hundred-thousands of koṭīs of *niyutas* of bodhisattvas and śrāvakas.’” Skt. *punar aparaṃ Kauśika tasya kulaputrasya vā kuladuhitur vā na kāyaklamatha na cittaklamatha utpatsyate / sa sukhā eva śāyāṃ kalpayiṣyati sukhā ca prakramiṣyati suptaḥ ca san na pāpakān svapnān drakṣyati paśyaṃś ca punas tathāgatān evārhatāḥ samyaksaṃbuddhān drakṣyati stūpān eva drakṣyati bodhisattvān eva drakṣyati tathāgataśrāvakān eva drakṣyati śabdāṃś ca śṛṇvan pāramitāśabdān eva śroṣyati bodhipakṣān eva dharmān drakṣyati bodhivṛkṣān eva drakṣyati teṣu ca tathāgatān evārhatāḥ samyaksaṃbuddhān abhisambudhyamānān drakṣyati tathā ’bhisambuddhānāṃ ca dharmacakrapravartanaṃ drakṣyati bahūṃś ca bodhisattvān eva drakṣyati imān eva prajñāpāramitānāṃ saṃgāyamānān prajñāpāramitāsaṃgātīratān evaṃ sarvajñatā parigrahītavyā evaṃ buddhakṣetraṃ viśodhayitavyam ity upāyakauśalaṃ copadiśata udāraṃ ca buddhānāṃ bhagavatāṃ abhisambodhiśabdāṃ śroṣyati / amuṣyāṃ diśi amuṣmin digbhāge amuṣmin lokadhātāu amuko ’sau nāmnā tathāgato ’rhan samyaksaṃbuddho bahubhir bodhisattvaśrāvakāṇāṃ śatair [...] bahubhir bodhisattvaśrāvakakoṭīniyutaśatasahasraiḥ parivṛtāḥ puraskṛto dharman deśayati // Wogihara 1932–1935, I: 261.14–262.9. For the translation of Lokakṣema and other parallel texts, see Karashima 2011, 98–99. For a condensed English rendition of this passage, see Conze 1975, 114.*

²⁸ The text continues: “Kauśika, truly, when a young man or a young woman of good family has dreams with such contents, he/she will sleep comfortably and wake up comfortably, and his body will feel vitality-restored and comfortable, he will feel active and easy [...] Kauśika! This young man or young woman of good family will obtain those merits relating to this present world (*drṣṭadhārmika guṇa*).” Skt. *yaś ca khalu punaḥ Kauśika kulaputro vā kuladuhitā vā imān evaṃrūpān svapnān drakṣyati, sa sukhā eva svapsyati, sukhā ca pratibhōtsyate ojaḥprakṣiptaṃ ca kāyaṃ sukhā ca pratisaṃvedayiṣyati laghu ladhv eva ca pratisaṃvedayiṣyati [...] sa Kauśika kulaputro vā kuladuhitā vā drṣṭadhārmikān guṇān parigrhṇāti // Wogihara 1932–1935, I: 262.9–13, 263.12–13. The title of this chapter also suggests that dreams as such are merits (*guṇa*): “Reverence for the stūpa of the Perfections, which holds immeasurable good qualities” (Skt. *aprameya-guṇa-dhāraṇa-pāramitā-stūpa-satkāra-parivarta*; Karashima 2011, 57).*

in the *Aṣṭa* are definitely recurring; nonetheless, they are also the merits of honoring a specific doctrine.

The second passage (**passage 2**) is more significant for our study of “diagnostic dreams.” The tale is told by Śāriputra:

O Blessed One, O Sugata! An analogy appears appropriate to me. O Blessed One, just like if a young man or a young woman of good family who adheres to the bodhisattva vehicle sits on the seat of enlightenment even in dreams, O Blessed One, people should know that this bodhisattva *mahāsattva* is close to [attaining] unsurpassable and perfect enlightenment. Blessed One! This is also the case for a young man or a young woman of good family who succeeds in viewing this profound Perfection of Wisdom, venerating it, worshiping it, and learning [lit. hearing] it [i.e., that they are close to attaining enlightenment]. How much more so if such a young man or young woman who, having heard this Perfection, were to take up it, retain it, recite it, master it, perform it, teach it, instruct it, explain it, and make others rehearse it. O Blessed One, people should know that this individual who adheres to the bodhisattva vehicle is someone who has come a long way and has set forth on the [bodhisattva] vehicle for a long time, and this individual who adheres to the bodhisattva vehicle is close to [obtaining] a prediction. Honorable buddhas will predict this bodhisattva *mahāsattva* to unsurpassable and perfect enlightenment, for this bodhisattva *mahāsattva* should be known as someone who has set forth for a long time and whose roots of merits are fully matured, and he will succeed in this profound Perfection of Wisdom even so much as merely by listening to it. Blessed One! Regarding this, how much more [would it be], if a young man or young woman of good family were to take up [this Perfection of Wisdom], retain it, recite it, master it, perform it, teach it, instruct it, explain it, and rehearse it?²⁹

²⁹ Skt. *pratibhāti me Bhagavan pratibhāti me Sugata aupamyodāharaṇam / tadyathā 'pi nāma Bhagavan yo 'yaṃ bodhisattvayānikāḥ kulaputro vā kuladuhitā vā svapnāntaragato 'pi bodhimaṇḍe niṣīdet veditavyam etad Bhagavann ayaṃ bodhisattvo mahāsattva āsanno 'nuttarāyāḥ samyak sambodher abhisambodhāyeti / evam eva Bhagavan yaḥ kulaputro vā kuladuhitā vā imāṃ gambhīrāṃ prajñāpāramitāṃ lapsyate darśanāya vandanāya paryupāsānāya śravaṇāya / kaḥ punar vādaḥ śrutvā codgrahītum dhārayitum vācayitum paryavāptum pravartayitum deśayitum upadeṣṭum uddeṣṭum svādhyāpanāya / veditavyam etad Bhagavan dūrato 'yaṃ bodhisattvayānikāḥ pudgala āgataḥ cirayānasamprasthita āsanno 'yaṃ bodhisattvayānikāḥ pudgalo vyākaraṇasya / vyākariṣyanty enaṃ buddhā bhagavanto bodhisattvaṃ mahāsattvaṃ anuttarāyāḥ samyak sambodher abhisambodhāyeti // cirayānasamprasthitaḥ paripakvakuśalamūlo hi sa bodhisattvo mahāsattvo veditavyaḥ yasyeyam gambhīrā prajñāpāramitopapatsyate 'ntaḥ śravaṇāyāpi / kaḥ punar vādo 'tra Bhagavan yaḥ kulaputro vā kuladuhitā vā enaṃ gambhīrāṃ prajñāpāramitāṃ udgrahīṣyati dhārayiṣyati vācayiṣyati paryavāpsyati pravartayiṣyati deśayiṣyati upadeṣyati uddeṣyati svādhyāsyati // Wogihara 1932–1935, I: 469.17–470.11. See also Conze 1973, 155 for his English rendition. See Karashima 2011, 213 for the corresponding passage in Lokakṣema's translation. For the translation of “*udgrahītum dhārayitum vācayitum paryavāptum pravartayitum deśayitum*,” cf. similar usages in the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā*, see Harrison 2022, 652–653.*

What is the reason behind the dream that signifies the dreamer's future enlightenment?³⁰ Śāriputra, who was inspired by the Buddha's might,³¹ continued by telling two parables: a traveler who has come out of a wilderness, when he sees portents (*pūrvanimittas*) such as herdsmen or gardens, would know he is close to a city.³² Moreover, this would lend him the courage (*āśvāsa*) to go further and he would not worry too much about thieves (i.e., possible dangers).³³

This passage on the parable of dreams of enlightenment—though it is meant to stress that receiving the profound teachings of the Perfection of Wisdom in the first place already signifies that “by the force of his wholesome roots, [accumulated] since previous times, he should be recognized as a *bodhisattva-mahāsattva*” (Karashima 2011, 217, n. 220)³⁴—betrays the fact that dreams such as “dreaming of oneself sitting on the seat of enlightenment” are acknowledged as a portent (*pūrvanimitta*) of that bodhisattva's imminent enlightenment. Either the signs in dreams or the signs of being able to receive this teaching are enabled by the force of merits (*kuśala-mūla*). In addition, the signs provide a bodhisattva with the courage to proceed on this troublesome path.

A rephrased version of this passage is also found in the *LP*:³⁵ the rephrasing appears to be an expansion with added formulaic stock phrases—the contents of dreams increase from dreams of sitting on the seat of enlightenment to also including dreams of fulfilling the six Perfections. More importantly, the text claims, compared to only dreaming about them, “how much more valuable” is actually practicing the six Perfections when awake?³⁶

³⁰ The text itself uses this rhetoric question “Skt. *tat kasya hetoḥ?*” (Wogihara 1932–1935, I: 470.15) to introduce the explanation of why the above dream signifies future enlightenment.

³¹ Karashima 2011, 214, n. 187; he notes that the newer versions, such as the extant Sanskrit version, do not have this sentence.

³² “Having come out [of the wilderness], he would see indications (*pūrvanimitta*) such as cowherds, herdsmen, boundaries, gardens, wood, or other signs. By those signs he would know that [there is] a village, a town, or a city, it [would] occur to him that ‘[I] have seen those indications.’” Skt. *sa niṣkramya paśyet pūrvanimittāni gopālakān vā paśupālakān vā sīmā vā ārāmasaṃpado vā vanasaṃpado vā tato 'nyāni vā nimittāni yair nimittair grāmo vā nagaram vā nigamo vā sūcyeta tasya tāni pūrvanimittāni drṣṭvaivaṃ bhavati* / Wogihara 1932–1935, I: 471.9–13.

³³ “Having plucked up courage (*āśvāsa*), he will have no further fear [*manasikāra*, lit. intense attention] for thieves.” Skt. *sa āśvāsaprāpto bhavati nāsyā bhūyaś coramanasikāro bhavati*, Wogihara 1932–1935, I: 471.14–15.

³⁴ Skt. *sa bodhisattvo mahāsattvo veditavyas tenaiva pūrvakeṇa kuśalamūlenopanāmitayaṃ tasmai gambhīrā prajñāpāramitā*, Wogihara 1932–1935, I: 474.8–10.

³⁵ However, the *Guangzan jing* 光讚經, T. 222, translated by Dharmarakṣa in 286 (for the textual history of this text, see Zacchetti 2005, 3), does not include this passage.

³⁶ For example, the *Pañca* states that, “Indeed, O Blessed One, just as a young man or a young woman of good family who has set off on the Great Vehicle cultivates the Perfection of Wisdom, or he/she cultivates the Perfection of Meditation, the Perfection of Vigor, the Perfection of Receptivity, the Perfection of Morality, and the Perfection of Charity while dreaming [...] until he/she sits on the seat of enlightenment [while dreaming], O Blessed One, people should know that this young man or young woman of good family becomes close to [attaining] unsurpassable and perfect enlightenment. Regarding this, O Blessed One, how much more [would it be] if he/she were to cultivate the Perfection of Wisdom, or he/she were to cultivate the Perfection of Meditation, the Perfection of Vigor, the Perfection of Receptivity, the Perfection of Morality, and the Perfection of Charity when awake; O Blessed One, people should know that this young man or young woman of good family has become close to [attaining] unsurpassable and perfect enlightenment.” Skt. *tad yathāpi nāma bhagavan svapnāntaragato mahāyānasamprasthitaḥ kulaputro vā kuladuhitā vā prajñāpāramitāṃ bhāvayet, dhyānapāramitāṃ vīryapāramitāṃ kṣāntipāramitāṃ śīlapāramitāṃ dānapāramitāṃ bhāvayet, yāvad bodhimaṇḍe niṣīded, veditavyam etad bhagavann*

The next passage (**passage 3**) features only a brief mention of the characteristics and signs (*liṅga* and *nimitta*) of irreversible bodhisattvas, which include keeping the ten precepts (*daśa-kuśala-karmapatha*)³⁷ even during dreams (Karashima 2011, 305).

The text seems so concerned with dreams that it also offers a long discussion on the effect of practices undertaken during dreams (**passage 4**)³⁸—a rather ontological question about the nature of the dream experience³⁹ that is not very relevant to our studies. The conclusion could be simplified as “dreaming state and waking state are not distinguishable from each other,”⁴⁰ which, as we will see, is also the principal premise that the *LP* and the *DZDL* used to explain dreams of irreversibility.

Next is a passage (**passage 5**) that persists as a core part of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature tradition—that on dreams of irreversibility (*avinivartanīya*). This passage echoes the above passage (3), in which morally good dreams are considered one of the characteristics of irreversible bodhisattvas. Though the passage has a place in several versions of the smaller and larger *Prajñāpāramitās* (so that we can compare the readings in these versions), and exegetical works such as the *DZDL* as well as the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra-vṛtti* and *Abhisamayālaṃkāra-ālokā* all devote much discussion to it,⁴¹ as we will soon see, the passage still presents some challenges to comprehension. As it is one of the most interesting discourses on dreams in Mahāyāna sūtras, I would like to present the whole account of the dreams of irreversibility here. The following translation is arranged in such a way that each paragraph is about one characteristic of irreversibility (*avinivartanīya-lakṣaṇa*)⁴²:

Furthermore, Subhūti, if a bodhisattva *mahāsattva*, even while dreaming, reflects that “all dharmas are like a dream,” [even though] he does not directly witness

abhyāsannībhavaty ayaṃ kulaputro vā kuladuhitā vā anuttarāyāḥ samyaksaṃbodheḥ. kaḥ punar vādo bhagavan yaḥ prativibuddhaḥ prajñāpāramitāṃ bhāvayet, dhyānapāramitāṃ vīryapāramitāṃ kṣāntipāramitāṃ śīlapāramitāṃ dānapāramitāṃ bhāvayet, veditavyam etad bhagavann abhyāsannībhavaty ayaṃ kulaputro vā kuladuhitā vā anuttarāyāḥ samyaksaṃbodheḥ. Kimura 1986–2009, IV: 16.14–16.23. Note that I emend *abhyāsannībhavaty* in Kimura’s edition into a compound; I also modified the punctuations.

³⁷ Wogihara 1932–1935, I: 668.17–20.

³⁸ Karashima 2011, 332ff.

³⁹ This topic is also discussed as a part of dream theories as in the *Mahāvibhāṣā*; see T. 1545, 192b22–193b3.

⁴⁰ “What is the reason for that? O Venerable Śāriputra, it is because the Blessed One once said that dreaming state and waking state are not distinguishable [from each other].” Skt. *tat kaśya hetoḥ / avikalpo hi āyusman Śāriputra svapnāś ca divasāś cokto Bhagavatā*, Wogihara 1932–1935, I: 729.6–9. This passage retains its importance in the *LP*; for example, in the *Pañca*, see Kimura 1986–2009, IV: 178ff. Further, this idea receives extensive analysis in exegeses such as the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra-vṛtti* as well as the *-ālokā*; for the Sanskrit text of the *ālokā* and the text that it comments on, see Wogihara 1932–1935: 728.13ff.; there is no currently accessible Sanskrit edition of the chapter in question (i.e., Chapter Four) of the *vṛtti*, see Nakamura 2014, 15; for English translations of the two commentaries, see Sparham 2006–2012, III: 88ff. and 335ff.

⁴¹ Comments on this passage can be found in Chapter Five in both works; for English translations of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra-vṛtti*, see Sparham 2006–2012, IV: 3–6 as well as Nakamura 2014, 501–506. The latter also offered a critical edition of the Sanskrit and Tibetan texts in, respectively, pp. 109–114 and pp. 331–335; for an English translation of the *Abhisamayālaṃkāra-ālokā* by Haribhadra, see Sparham 2006–2012, IV: 133–136.

⁴² I consulted Conze’s (1973a, 227–229) English translation of the Sanskrit *Aṣṭa*. However, his translation is rather a paraphrase, which is too free to be used for the purpose of my own study.

(*sākṣātkaroti*) that [fact], Subhūti, this too should be known as a characteristic of the irreversibility of an irreversible bodhisattva *mahāsattva*.⁴³

Furthermore, Subhūti, if a bodhisattva *mahāsattva*, even while dreaming, does not produce the desire for, or, the thoughts of benefits about (*anuśaṃsā-citta*) the *bhūmi* of *śrāvakas*, about the *bhūmi* of pratyekabuddhas, or for the triple world, Subhūti, this too should be known as a characteristic of the irreversibility of an irreversible bodhisattva *mahāsattva*.⁴⁴

Furthermore, Subhūti, if a bodhisattva *mahāsattva*, even while dreaming, sees himself as a worthy and perfectly enlightened *tathāgata* who is sitting in a circular hall and preaching the Dharma, in the middle of more than one hundred, more than one thousand till more than one *niyuta* of *koṭi* of assemblies, surrounded by the community of monks and attended by the community of bodhisattvas. Subhūti, this too should be known as a characteristic of the irreversibility of an irreversible bodhisattva *mahāsattva*.⁴⁵

Furthermore, Subhūti, if a bodhisattva *mahāsattva*, even while dreaming, having risen into the air, preaches the Dharma to beings, perceives [his] fathom-wide halo (*vyāma-prabhā*),⁴⁶ and conjures up monks who, after going to other directions, carry out the duties of buddhas (*buddha-kṛtya*) in other worlds and preach the Dharma—if an irreversible bodhisattva *mahāsattva* perceives such [visions] even while dreaming, Subhūti, this too should be known as a characteristic of the irreversibility of an irreversible bodhisattva *mahāsattva*.⁴⁷

Furthermore, Subhūti, if a bodhisattva *mahāsattva*, even while dreaming, does not fear, shiver, or tremble when [seeing that] a town, a city, a village, a country, or a kingdom is being devastated, or a fire is raging, or having encountered carnivores or other wicked animal species, or when his head is about to be cut off, or having encountered other great dangers, terrors, suffering, or despair, or having seen great dangers, terrors, or suffering visited on others, if he does not fear, shiver,

⁴³ Skt. *sacet punaḥ Subhūte bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ svapnāntaragato 'pi svapnopamāḥ sarvadharmā iti vyavalokayati na ca sākṣātkaroti / idam api Subhūte 'vinivartanīyasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasyāvinivarttanīyalakṣaṇaṃ veditavyam //* Wogihara 1932–1935, II: 763. 19–22. I include a detailed discussion of the term “*sākṣātkaroti*” in Chapter 6.

⁴⁴ Skt. *punar aparaṃ Subhūte bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ svapnāntaragato 'pi śrāvakabhūmau vā pratyekabuddhabhūmau vā traidhātukāya ca sprhām anuśaṃsācittaṃ notpādayati / idam api Subhūte 'vinivarttanīyasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasyāvinivarttanīyalakṣaṇaṃ veditavyam //* ibid., II: 764. 3–7.

⁴⁵ Skt. *punar aparaṃ Subhūte bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ svapnāntaragato 'py anekasatāyāḥ parśado 'nekasahasrāyā yāvad anekakoṭīniyutaśatasahasrāyāḥ parśado madhyagataṃ maṇḍalamāde niṣaṇṇaṃ bhikṣusaṃghaparivṛtaṃ bodhisattvasaṃghapuraskṛtaṃ dharmam deśayantaṃ tathāgataṃ arhantaṃ samyaksambuddham ātmānaṃ paśyati / idam api Subhūte 'vinivartanīyasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasyā 'vinivarttanīyalakṣaṇaṃ veditavyam //* ibid., II: 764. 11–18.

⁴⁶ This halo is typically associated with the Buddha (Edgerton 1953, II: 518). Here, it seems to suggest that the bodhisattva perceives the halo around himself, which implies that he also becomes a buddha in his dreams.

⁴⁷ Skt. *punar aparaṃ Subhūte bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ svapnāntaragato 'pi vaihāyasam abhyudgamaṃ sattvebhyo dharmam deśayati tāṃ ca vyāmaprabhāṃ saṃjānīte tāṃś ca bhikṣūn abhinirmimīte ye 'nyāsu dikṣu gatvā 'nyeṣu lokadhātūṣu buddhakṛtyaṃ kurvanti dharmam ca deśayanti // evam api Subhūte svapnāntaragato 'vinivarttanīyo bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ saṃjānīte / idam api Subhūte 'vinivarttanīyasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasyāvinivarttanīyalakṣaṇaṃ veditavyam //* Wogihara 1932–1935, II: 764.20–765.1.

tremble, or feel horror or terror [even when seeing these visions]; then, immediately after waking up from these dreams, he thinks excitedly that “everything [related to] this triple world is like a dream, and when I have attained unsurpassable, perfect enlightenment, I should correctly teach the Dharma accordingly,” Subhūti, this too should be known as a characteristic of the irreversibility of an irreversible bodhisattva *mahāsattva*.⁴⁸

Furthermore, Subhūti, if a bodhisattva *mahāsattva*, even while dreaming, having seen beings in hell, reflects that “this is what I will do: once I have attained unsurpassable, perfect enlightenment, there will be absolutely no evil state (*apāya*) in my buddha field”—Subhūti, this too should be known as a characteristic of the exemption of all evil states (*apāya-pariśuddhi*) of an irreversible bodhisattva *mahāsattva*.⁴⁹

Thus, Subhūti, how does one know that there will be absolutely no evil state in the buddha field of an irreversible bodhisattva *mahāsattva* who has attained unsurpassable, complete enlightenment? Subhūti, if a bodhisattva *mahāsattva*, even while dreaming, having seen beings reborn into hell, or reborn as animals or ghosts (*preta*), develops this mindfulness (*smṛti*); and after developing such mindfulness, he reflects as follows: “This is what I will do: once I have attained unsurpassable, perfect enlightenment, there will be absolutely no evil state (*apāya*) in my buddha field”—Subhūti, this should be known as a characteristic of the exemption of all evil states of an irreversible bodhisattva *mahāsattva*. Subhūti, this too should be known as a characteristic of the irreversibility of an irreversible bodhisattva *mahāsattva*.⁵⁰

Furthermore, Subhūti, if a bodhisattva *mahāsattva*, even while dreaming, [perceives that] a town or a village is on fire, and, awakening from that dream, he

⁴⁸ Skt. *punar aparaṃ Subhūte svapnāntaragato bodhisattvo mahāsattvo not[t]rasyati na saṃtrasyati na saṃtrāsam āpadyate grāmaghāte vā nagaraghāte vā nigamaghāte vā janapadaghāte vā rāṣṭraghāte vā 'gnidāhe vā vartamāne / vyāḍamrgān vā tato 'nyān api vā kṣudramrgajātīn dr̥ṣṭvā / śiraśchede vā pratyupasthite / tato 'nyāny api vā mahābhayabhairavāni duḥkhadaurmanasyāni vā prāpya / tato 'nyeṣān api vā sattvānāṃ mahābhayabhairavāni duḥkhāni dr̥ṣṭvā / nāśya bhayabhairavam utpadyate not[t]rasyati na saṃtrasyati na saṃtrāsam āpadyate / tataś ca svapnāntarāt prativibuddhasya samanantaravyutthitasyaivaṃ bhavati / svapnopamam idam sarvaṃ traidhātukaṃ / evaṃ ca mayā 'nuttarāṃ samyaksaṃbodhim abhisambudhya samyag deśayatā dharmo deśayitavya iti / idam api Subhūte 'vinivartanīyasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasyāvinivartanīyalakṣaṇaṃ veditavyam // ibid., II: 765.4–18. I repunctuated this passage for the purposes of clarity.*

⁴⁹ Skt. *punar aparaṃ Subhūte 'vinivartanīyasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasya svapnāntaragatasya nairayikān sattvān dr̥ṣṭvā evaṃ bhavati / tathā kariṣyāmi yathā me 'nuttarāṃ samyaksaṃbodhim abhisambuddhasya buddhakṣetre sarveṇa sarvaṃ sarvathā sarvaṃ sarve 'py apāyā na bhaviṣyanti / idam api Subhūte 'vinivartanīyasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasyāpāyapariśuddhilakṣaṇaṃ veditavyam // ibid., II: 765.21–27.*

⁵⁰ Skt. *tatra Subhūte kathaṃ vijñāyetāsyāvinivartanīyasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasyā 'nuttarāṃ samyaksaṃbodhim abhisambuddhasya buddhakṣetre sarveṇa sarvaṃ sarvathā sarvaṃ sarve 'py apāyā na bhaviṣyanti / sacet Subhūte bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ svapnāntaragato 'pi nirayagatāṃs tiryakpretagatān vā sattvān dr̥ṣṭvā smṛtiṃ pratilabhate / sa tām smṛtiṃ pratilabhya evaṃ cintayati tathā kariṣyāmi yathā me 'nuttarāṃ samyaksaṃbodhim abhisambuddhya buddhakṣetre sarveṇa sarvaṃ sarvathā sarvaṃ sarve 'py apāyā na bhaviṣyanti / evaṃ Subhūte bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasyāpāyapariśuddhilakṣaṇaṃ veditavyam // idam api Subhūte 'vinivartanīyasya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasyā 'vinivartanīya-lakṣaṇaṃ veditavyam // ibid., II: 765.27–766.12.*

thinks like this—“Just as my dreaming self has seen the attributes (*ākāra*), tokens (*līṅga*), and signs (*nimitta*) identical to the attributes, tokens, and signs that an irreversible bodhisattva should bear, I possess these attributes, tokens, and signs. By this truth, by the utterance of this truth (*satya-vacana*), let the town or village fire that is raging here be extinguished, cool, and die out”—Subhūti, if that town or village fire is extinguished, cools, and dies out, people should understand that this bodhisattva *mahāsattva*, who is irreversible, has been predicted by past worthy and perfect enlightened *tathāgatas* to attain unsurpassable, complete enlightenment. If [the fire] is not extinguished, does not cool or die out, people should understand that this bodhisattva *mahāsattva* is not predicted to attain unsurpassable and complete enlightenment. Furthermore, Subhūti, if the burning fire, having grown, spreads from house to house, from street to street, and [further] to other houses, other streets—[if the fire] is not extinguished, does not cool or die out—people should understand that this bodhisattva has accumulated karma commensurate with the refusal of the Dharma (*dharma-pratyākhyāna*) and [actions] conducive to inferior wisdom (*duḥprajñā-saṃvartanīya*); for that reason, his karma ripens to this situation, conforming to his present existence (*dr̥ṣṭa-dharma-saṃvartanīya*)—[i.e.,] his lingering karma (*avaśeṣa-karma*) ripens because of his [past] refusal of the Dharma. Thus, Subhūti, this is the reason—this is the cause (*pratyaya*)—of the characteristic of the irreversibility of a bodhisattva *mahāsattva*. Subhūti, one should consider this bodhisattva *mahāsattva* [who succeeds in taming the fire] as irreversible from unsurpassable, complete enlightenment.⁵¹

In its presentation of this passage, the *Pañca* does not differ substantially from the *Aṣṭa*,⁵² except that “[i]t is not absolutely clear from the text [i.e., the *Pañca*] whether

⁵¹ Skt. *punar aparaṃ Subhūte svapnāntaragato bodhisattvo mahāsattvo nagaradāhe vā grāmadāhe vā vartamāne prativibuddhaḥ saṃs tataḥ svapnād evaṃ samanvāharati / yathā mayā svapnāntaragatenā ye ākārā yāni līṅgāni yāni nimittāni dr̥ṣṭāni yair ākārair yair līṅgair yair nimittair avivartanīyo bodhisattvo mahāsattvo dhārayitavyas te ākārās tāni līṅgāni tāni nimittāni mama saṃvidyante / etena satyena satyavacanenāyaṃ nagaradāho vā grāmadāho vā vartamāna upaśāmyatu śīt[ī]bhavatu astaṃ gacchatu // sacet Subhūte grāmadāho vā nagaradāho vā upaśāmyati śītībhavati astaṃ gacchati veditavyam etat Subhūte vyākṛto 'yaṃ bodhisattvo mahāsattvas taiḥ paurvakais tathāgatair arhadbhiḥ samyaksaṃbuddhair avivartanīyo 'nuttarāyāḥ samyaksaṃbodher iti / sacen nopaśāmyati na śītībhavati nāsta[m] gacchati veditavyam etat Subhūte nāyaṃ vyākṛto bodhisattvo mahāsattvo 'nuttarāyāḥ samyaksaṃbodhāv iti / sacet punaḥ Subhūte so 'gnidāho 'tikramya gr̥hād gr̥haṃ rathyāyā rathyāṃ anyatarānyatarāṃ rathyāṃ vā gr̥haṃ vā gacchati dahati nopaśāmyati na śītībhavati nāstaṃ gacchati veditavyam etat Subhūte dharmapratyākhyānaṃ duḥprajñāsaṃvartanīyaṃ tena bodhisattvena mahāsattvena karmopacitaṃ / tato 'syaitad dr̥ṣṭadharmasaṃvartanīyaṃ eva karma vipacyate / tata eva dharmapratyākhyānāt sāvaśeṣaṃ karmaivaṃ vipacyate / ity ayaṃ Subhūte hetur ayaṃ pratyayo 'sya bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasyāvinivartanīyalakṣaṇatāyā iti / ayam api Subhūte bodhisattvo mahāsattvo 'vinivartanīyo 'nuttarāyāḥ samyaksaṃbodher dhārayitavyaḥ // Ibid., II: 766.17–767.13.*

⁵² For example, see the *Pañca* edited by Kimura (1986–2009, V: 1.1–3.13); except for details like the exact vision of the Buddha in dreams (in the *Pañca*, the thirty-two bodily marks are mentioned, while they are absent in the *Aṣṭa*), I do not discern any significant differences between the extant Sanskrit text of the *Aṣṭa* and that of the *Pañca*. However, there are indeed some discrepancies among the recensions: for one, the first mark or characteristic is absent in some recensions, e.g., in the *Daoxing banre jing*; see Karashima 2011, 353.

the conflagration is burning in the dream or is a real one seen only when the bodhisattva wakes from it” (Harrison 2003, 138).⁵³ Another difference pertains only to the above-cited Sanskrit version of the *Aṣṭa*: instead of blaming it on the karma of the sinful householders, as in several other recensions of the *Aṣṭa* and the *Pañca*,⁵⁴ this Sanskrit version of the *Aṣṭa* blames the fire sweeping from house to house on the not-yet-irreversible bodhisattva himself, but since this view is only present in a limited number of recensions, I will not devote much discussion to it.⁵⁵

The central idea of the above passage is clear, especially considering that on top of this passage, the *Pañca* explicitly states that the mechanism behind dreams of irreversibility is that “the states of dreaming and wakefulness [lit. by day] are not two [separate] states.”⁵⁶ This passage on dreams is built on two premises: first, the dreaming state is not distinguishable from the waking state; secondly, achievements that are acquired (or events that happen) in either state are the consequences of actions, whether sinful karmic acts or wholesome bodhisattva practice. These premises allow the possibility of confirming one’s irreversibility in dreams. Following this logic, just as explained in the *DZDL*, not coveting the attainment of the *bhūmi* of śrāvakas or of pratyekabuddhas in dreams showcases that the dreaming bodhisattva does not covet the

⁵³ “[T]he *Larger Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* presents a somewhat problematical passage concerning the ‘act of truth’ (*satyakriyā*, *satyādhiṣṭhāna*, etc.) performed when a dreaming bodhisattva sees a great conflagration. It is not absolutely clear from the text whether the conflagration is burning in the dreams or is a real one seen only when the bodhisattva wakes from it, one possible explanation being that it takes place within the dream, and that the bodhisattva goes back to sleep to deal with it. However, the equivalent passage in the *Aṣṭa* is somewhat clearer in this regard (see Vaidya ed., p. 178; cf. T. 224, 459c8–23): the blaze is a real one, and on waking the bodhisattva attempts to extinguish it with an act of truth, invoking the veracity of the signs of non-regressing status he has previously experienced in his dreams” (Harrison 2003, 138). Since our discussion here concentrates on the *Aṣṭa*, we do not have to engage much with this problem. However, it demonstrates how this passage in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature is problematic on a literal level, not to mention on the doctrinal level, as we will discuss below.

⁵⁴ For example, the *DZDL* explains that as the bodhisattva has accumulated merits of immeasurable *kalpas*, he is able to extinguish the fire with the aid of deities, ghosts, and nāga kings. The households that are burned down, on the other hand, have accumulated the karma of refusing the Perfection of Wisdom, and even the bodhisattva cannot redeem them from their karmic consequences by the power of his merits and wisdom. “Since this bodhisattva has accumulated merits for immeasurable *kalpas*, and has learned the true character of dharmas, gods and spirits, as well as nāga kings, all aid him in ceasing the fire. Among those cases in which [the fire] does not cease, and it sets one house on fire [but] spares another, it is because those beings have committed grave sins which cannot be eliminated [even] by the power of that bodhisattva’s merits and wisdom. The so-called ‘grave sin’ here refers to the karmic conditions [that stemmed from] the refusal of the Dharma. The ‘Dharma’ refers to the Perfection of Wisdom.” Chn. 是菩薩於無量劫修集福德，得諸法實相故，鬼神、龍王等助滅是火。其中有不滅，燒一家、置一家者，是眾生重罪故，菩薩福德、智慧力不能滅。重罪者，所謂破法業。法者，般若波羅蜜。T. 1509, 597c7–12, Var. 集] Sx, Pn. 習。

⁵⁵ As Karashima (2011, 357, n. 156) has already noted, “In the Sanskrit and Tibetan versions, the fire results from the bodhisattva’s past karma, consisting in the refusal of the Dharma. In the other versions, the houses of those, who refused the Dharma in their previous lives, catch fire, while other houses do not. I assume the latter story is original and that in the Sanskrit and Tibetan versions, it is the result of redaction.” Indeed, the Tibetan version of the *Aṣṭa* (D. 12) also attributes the outcome of the fire to the bodhisattva’s past karma (Tib. *rab ’byor de ni byang chub sems dpa’ chen po des chos spong ba nyid dang shes rab ’chal bar ’gyur ba dang mthun pa’i las nye bar bsags par rig par bya ste des na ’di la mthong ba’i chos la ’byung bar ’gyur ba dang rjes su mthun pa nyid kyi las rnam par smin pa yin pas chos spong ba de nyid las lhag ma dang bcas pa’i las rnam par smin pa yin nol / D. 12, brgyad stong, ka 209b3–4). As for the *Pañca*, besides the above-cited passage, on which the *DZDL* comments, the extant Sanskrit agrees with the *DZDL*, and states that the reason the fire spreads to one house but spares another is because of the ripening of the owners’ past karma (Kimura 1986–2009, V: 3.8–13).*

⁵⁶ “It is because [the state of] dreaming and that [state of] wakefulness [lit. by day]—all these states (*dharma*)—are not two [separate,] diversified states.” Skt. *tathā hi yaś ca svapno yaś cāha[n] sarva ime dharma advayā advaidhikārāḥ*. Kimura 1986–2009, V: 2.22–2.23.

two lower *bhūmis* while awake;⁵⁷ when seeing the Buddha in dreams, the dreaming bodhisattva receives the Buddha's teaching as efficiently as in real life,⁵⁸ since the dreaming state and waking state are the same. Thus, the state of being irreversible is also reflected in bodhisattvas' dreams, and the characteristic of irreversibility (putting out a fire through the power of a truthful resolve) that has been attained in dreams is also manifest when awake.⁵⁹

With reference to other discussions on dreams in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, we could further confirm the central idea that a bodhisattva's state and practice, as explained in another influential commentary of the *Prajñāpāramitās*—Haribhadra's *Ālokā*, could be reflected in dreams because of the "strong habituation" of those cultivations (Sparham 2006–2012, IV: 133). In other words, if a bodhisattva has fulfilled irreversibility when he is awake, then "even while dreaming" he has the characteristics of an irreversible bodhisattva, such as the ability to reflect that "all dharmas are like a dream;" he is certainly irreversible in any condition.

If dreaming of irreversibility is just a continuation of the state of irreversibility while awake, bodhisattvas who are not liable to return from enlightenment should be well

⁵⁷ "Since this bodhisattva always practices emptiness during the daytime, he has no attachment to the three realms even when dreaming at night [...] This bodhisattva, even though he has not yet acquired a prediction when being in the presence of the Buddha (現前授記) nor is he endowed with the remaining qualities (餘法), should still be known as irreversible. Why? Bodhisattvas turn back on two grounds: first, due to attachment to worldly enjoyment; secondly, by clinging to the [other] two vehicles [i.e., the *śrāvaka-yāna* and the *pratyekabuddha-yāna*]. This bodhisattva has a firm determination and has immersed himself in the [teaching of] emptiness and benevolence to the extent that he has no attachment to the three realms or the two vehicles even while dreaming, let alone while awake." Chn. 是菩薩晝日常習行空故，夜夢中亦不貪三界[...]是菩薩雖未得現前授記，餘法未具足，亦名阿鞞跋致。何以故？菩薩於二處退轉：一者，著世間樂故轉，二者，取二乘故轉。是菩薩堅心，深入空及慈悲心故，乃至夢中亦不貪三界二乘，何況覺時。T. 1509, 597b6–14, Var. 退轉] Fs. 轉. For a Japanese rendition of this passage, see Sawazaki 2022, 89; for Sawazaki's interpretation from the perspective of the issue of irreversibility, see *ibid.*, 99.

⁵⁸ "That is to say, seeing the Buddha's body that is immeasurable [...] by the superior power of meeting the Buddha [in dreams], that bodhisattva hears the Buddha's preaching with deep and pure thought, learns the true character of dharmas (諸法實相), and this is the reason he is considered irreversible." Chn. 所謂見佛身無量[...]是菩薩見是佛神通力故，深心清淨聞佛法，得諸法實相，是名阿鞞跋致。T. 1509, 597b16–22, Var. 聞] T. 問.

⁵⁹ "Furthermore, Subhūti, if a bodhisattva *mahāsattva* witnesses hellfire torturing beings in a dream, and makes the following [truthful] resolve (**satyādhiṣṭhāna*)—"if I am truly an irreversible bodhisattva, the fire should cease"—then the fire immediately ceases. If the hellfire dies out, this is the characteristics of irreversibility [that this bodhisattva is endowed with]. Then, during the day, if that bodhisattva sees a town on fire, he thinks to himself, "[as] I have seen the dispositions (**ākāra*), marks (**līnga*), and signs (**nimitta*) of irreversibility in dreams, I have indeed attained it by now." Then, he will make a [truthful] resolve: "the fire should cease." If the fire ceases, you should know that this bodhisattva has obtained a prediction of unsurpassable, perfect enlightenment, and he abides on the *bhūmi* of irreversibility (**avinivartanīya-bhūmi*). If the fire does not cease, and it sets one house on fire [but] spares another; sets one village on fire, [but] spares another. Subhūti, you should know that the houses burn down because they [i.e., the residents of the houses] had accumulated a great number of karmic conditions [that stemmed from] the refusal of the Dharma. For that reason, the fire sets one house on fire but spares another, so that all those [sinful] people are being burned as they suffer from lingering misfortune from refusing the Dharma [also] in this life. Therefore, O Subhūti, you should know that this irreversible bodhisattva *mahāsattva* is endowed with [such] characteristics of irreversibility (**avinivartanīya-lakṣaṇa*)." Chn. 復次，須菩提，菩薩摩訶薩夢中見地獄火燒眾生，作是誓：“若我實是阿鞞跋致者，是火當滅。”是火即滅。若地獄火即滅，是阿鞞跋致相。復次，若菩薩晝日見城郭火起，作是念：“我夢中見阿鞞跋致行、類、相貌，我今實有是者”，自立誓言：“是火當滅。”若火滅者，當知是菩薩得受阿耨多羅三藐三菩提記，住阿鞞跋致地。若火不滅，燒一家、置一家、置一里、置一里。須菩提，當知被燒家破法業因緣厚集。以是故，燒一家、置一家，是諸眾生今世受破法餘殃故被燒。須菩提，以是因緣故，當知是阿鞞跋致菩薩摩訶薩阿鞞跋致相。T. 1509, 595a23–b6. For the reconstruction of the Sanskrit, I have consulted the *Pañca*; see Kimura 1986–2009, V: 2.25–3.13. I have also consulted Karashima's notes on (2010, 607) and English translation of the *Daoxing banre jing*.

aware of their attainment, then, why do they still attach much importance to the signs of irreversibility in dreams? As has already been questioned by the *DZDL*, “there is already an extensive discourse on the characteristics of irreversibility in the chapter on irreversibility; why repeat it”⁶⁰—especially in the context of dreams? And, if the irreversible bodhisattvas are conscious of their state while awake, why does this passage matter for our survey on *diagnostic* dreams?

Admittedly, the *Aṣṭa* repeatedly stresses that dreams are only a reflection of the reality of a bodhisattva’s state, so it should be unnecessary also to require a similar examination of irreversibility in a dream. However, when contrasting it with what the *DZDL* designates as “extensive discourse on the characteristics of irreversibility,” i.e., the “chapter on the dispositions, marks, and signs of irreversibility” (Skt. *avinivartanīya-ākāra-līṅga-nimitta-parivarta*; Karashima 2011, 303, n. 4), we see that both the smaller and larger *Prajñāpāramitās*, in fact, view dreams differently from active conduct that is carried out in reality. The chapter on irreversibility, though it also states that keeping the ten precepts even in dreams is a mark or token, rather focuses on the active conduct of irreversible bodhisattvas, whereas the passage cited above is concerned with confirming or revealing a bodhisattva’s irreversibility by means of dreams and truthful resolve. In addition, what immediately follows this discourse on dreams is further discussion on truthful resolve (this time, it has nothing to do with dreams) or, as Conze (1973, 229) calls it, “the magical power of veracity” in relation to verifying irreversibility.⁶¹ Thus, when it comes to revealing a bodhisattva’s irreversibility, the *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras, on the one hand, place dreams and truthful resolve side by side; on the other hand, they present these two methods as completely separate from moral conduct and virtues.

Revelatory dreams and the so-called “magical power” of truthful resolve indeed seem quite different in nature from the conduct and virtues of bodhisattvas: one’s conduct and virtues are cultivated with some sort of self-awareness, whereas, according to the understanding of theories in Religious Studies, by using the methods of divinatory dreams and magic power, the one who employs the methods attributes the result to a force *other than* him/herself despite carrying out the activities (which we will elaborate at the last section of this chapter). Dreams and magic thus seem not logically related to irreversibility—a state that is achieved through a bodhisattva’s effort, virtues, and insight. But how does the tradition itself see it? I will leave the question unanswered here but return to it at length at the end of this chapter. For now, it is clear that these dreams, in relation to truthful resolve, are greatly valued for their function of verifying facts. Further, as the *DZDL* has implied, the confirmation of irreversibility is necessary

⁶⁰ Chn. 阿鞞跋致品中已廣說阿鞞跋致相，今何以更說? T. 1509, 597a19–20.

⁶¹ Wogihara 1932–1935, II: 767.22–768.27; see also Karashima 2011, 358–359.

because there are different conditions for obtaining irreversibility, and these conditions in turn depend on different kinds of predictions.⁶² Therefore, virtues and conduct alone seem not sufficient to ensure a bodhisattva's achievement of irreversibility.

Finally, according to our definition of diagnostic dreams, dreams of irreversibility 1) are true; 2) serve as a legitimate means of confirming a bodhisattva's achievement; and 3) share the same causality with the achievement of irreversibility itself—in other words, the dreams and the achievement are all based on a bodhisattva's merits and insight. Thus, we may conclude that the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, including its commentary such as the *DZDL*, while more sophisticated, nevertheless agrees in the existence of true dreams with the *Samantapāsādikā* and *Mahāvibhāṣā* to some extent.⁶³

The last passage (**passage 6**) to be discussed is of a narrative nature: a story about deities urging Bodhisattva Sadāprarudita to seek the Dharma by sending him two dreams⁶⁴ (Zhao 2018, 70–72). It is again reminiscent of the story in the *Divyāvadāna*, in which Bodhisattva Sumati's encounter with Dīpaṃkara is also motivated by a series of dream visions. The dreams Bodhisattva Sadāprarudita receives are unambiguous messages from deities, and they are regarded as true and ultimately as the fruits of the merits that he accumulated in past lives (ibid., 69). Moreover, after having these dreams, Sadāprarudita continues to receive otherworldly instructions, but outside of dreams: the instructions manifest in the form of sounds issuing directly from the sky (ibid., 72ff.). Together with the dreams, Beyer calls these revelatory experiences an “involuntary visionary revelation” (ibid., 67). More interestingly, these dreams are only found in the

⁶² “Some people claim: ‘There are two kinds of irreversibility: first, [irreversibility that is feasible] for someone who has obtained a prediction; second, for someone who has not yet obtained a prediction. There are two kinds of obtainment of prediction: first, obtaining a prediction in the presence [of a buddha]; second, obtaining a prediction not in the presence [of a buddha]. There are two kinds of predictions that are obtained not in the presence [of a buddha]: first, for someone who has fulfilled the conditions of a prediction; second, for someone who has not yet fulfilled the conditions of a prediction. One who has fulfilled the conditions of a prediction is someone who has realized the true character of dharmas, and is endowed with the six Perfections. One who has not yet fulfilled the conditions of a prediction is someone who has realized the true character of dharmas and only possesses the partial endowment of the Perfection of Wisdom but not the other Perfections.’” Chn. 有人言：「有二種阿鞞跋致：一者、已得記，二者、未得記。得授記有二種：一者、現前授記，二者、不現前授記。不現前授記有二種：一者、具足授記因緣，二者、未具足授記因緣。具足授記因緣者，知諸法實相，具足六波羅蜜；不具足授記因緣者，但知諸法實相，得般若波羅蜜分，餘波羅蜜未具足。」 T. 1509, 597a24–b2. Here, I tentatively translate “般若波羅蜜分” as “partial endowment of Perfection of Wisdom,” but this phrase also possibly means “the capacity of [practicing] Perfection of Wisdom” (cf. Karashima 2001, 92–93). For an interpretation of this passage from the perspective of the nature of irreversibility, see Sawazaki 2022, 88–90. We will revisit this passage later in this chapter and in Chapter 6.

⁶³ That being said, there are several barriers to concluding that the *DZDL* fully acknowledges the truthfulness of dream signs. First, never in this work are dreams with certain characteristics clearly termed “signs.” The Chinese character 相 in the passage of the dreams of irreversibility, though often a rendition of *nimitta* and used in a divinatory sense, refers more to the “characteristics,” “virtues” of an irreversible bodhisattva in this context, and the underlying Sanskrit should be *lakṣaṇa*. Further, as is well known, the *DZDL* does not present a unified system of ideas; rather, it is more of a “storehouse” that collected many exegetic traditions (Zacchetti 2021, 110). Therefore, the various comments on dreams in different parts of the work do not necessarily cohere. Therefore, we should be cautious not to force the *DZDL* or the *LP* into my narrative of the significance of dreams in Buddhism.

⁶⁴ For details of the dreams in this story, see Zhao 2008, 70–72; for the Chinese translation by Lokakṣema, see Karashima 2011, 464–465. Zhao also dedicates a long discussion to a comparison of the visions (including dreams) of Sadāprarudita in the *Aṣṭa* and the closely related *Pratyutpanna-samādhi-sūtra* (Zhao 2008, 67–69).

two earliest Chinese translations of the *Aṣṭa*, i.e., the *Daoxing banre jing*, translated by Lokakṣema (second century), and the *Da mingdu jing* 大明度經, translated by Zhi Qian 支謙, T. 225 (ca. third century), while the other versions of the *Aṣṭa* and all the recensions of the *LP* skip this part (ibid., 67). It is worth wondering whether any special intentions underlying the concept of dreams being sent by deities may be discerned from this redaction—either to propagate the possibility of receiving dreams of inspiration in the earlier recension on which the Chinese translations were based, or to deliberately downplay such a concept in the later recensions.

The above is an outline of the six discourses on dreams in the *Aṣṭa*. What are we to make of the above accounts of dreams? From the perspective of this study, I wish to make the following points: 1) the text hints strongly that dreams are results of past activities; 2) dreams can be portents (*pūrvanimitta*); 3) the long passage on characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*) of irreversibility shows a compelling need for the verification of irreversibility through a means that does not purely constitute conduct and practices. Despite passages 3 and 5 both addressing the characteristics of irreversible bodhisattvas, the former prescribes a list of moral virtues for bodhisattvas, while the latter is more concerned with “magical” powers (i.e., truthful resolve and dreams). This contrast will be revisited in the final section of this chapter; 4) dreams can encourage bodhisattvas to advance further on the bodhisattva path, as evidenced in both passages 2 and 6.

Other Texts

We have not yet exhausted our materials: two additional texts may further contribute to our discussion of signs of a bodhisattva’s achievement. Unlike the aforementioned texts, which have attracted enormous attention and popularity throughout history, the two texts we are about to discuss have gone very much unnoticed by the later tradition and modern scholarship.

The first text is called the **Catuṣkanirhāra-sūtra*, according to its Tibetan colophon. The text is only extant in its Chinese and Tibetan translations. The Chinese text, the *Dasheng sifa jing* 大乘四法經, T. 774 is ascribed to Śikṣānanda (652–710), while the Tibetan translation, (*’phags pa*) *bZhi pa sgrub pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po’i mdo* (D252), contains little information about its translator and time.⁶⁵ As the text is quite

⁶⁵ It is noteworthy that there is another sūtra with the same Chinese title, i.e., *Dasheng sifa jing* T. 772 (parallel with T. 773), which corresponds to the Tibetan D251, (*’phags pa*) *Chos bzhi pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po’i mdo*; the Sanskrit title of this sūtra is most possibly *Caturdharma-sūtra*, as cited in the *Śikṣā* (Bendall 1902, 41, 160). There is no extant Sanskrit version known. While T. 774 is the most elaborated among the three *Dasheng sifa jing*, T. 774 does not appear to have developed from T. 772–773. For a summary of this *Caturdharma-sūtra* based on the Tibetan translation, see Feer 1883, 196–197. Interestingly, of Śāntideva’s two citations of this text, the first one, i.e., “O Monks, a bodhisattva *mahāsattva*, as long as he is alive, should never abandon his virtuous spiritual friend even for the sake of [saving his own] life” (Skt. *kalyāṇamitraṃ bhikṣavo bodhisatvena mahāsattvena yāvajjīvaṃ na*

elaborate and both translations seem to be of a late date, though we cannot say for certain, the text is probably not from an early stage of the development of Mahāyāna. For this text, Feer (1883, 197–198) has made a short summary based on its Tibetan version, and Müller (1992, 355–356) has provided a German translation of its teaching on dreams from the Chinese.

The text expounds the broad topic of a bodhisattva's virtues, and the main body of the text ends with ten kinds of dreams: dreams that indicate 1) obstructions to the Dharma; 2) karmic obstructions; 3) obstructions due to afflictions; 4) obtaining *dhāraṇīs*; 5) obtaining *samādhis*; 6) encountering the Tathāgata; 7) obtaining the thirty-two bodily marks of great men (**mahāpuruṣa-lakṣaṇa*); 8) obtaining irreversibility; 9) overcoming Māra; and 10) sitting on the seat of enlightenment. Each of the ten categories of dreams is further followed by a sublist of four highly symbolic dreams.⁶⁶

parityaktavyam api jīvitaheṭor, Bendall 1902, 41.7–8) clearly parallels the extant Chinese *Dasheng sifa jing* (cf. T. 772, 708b24–25); however, the second citation, on the removal of sins (Bendall 1902, 160.4–11; for a discussion and an English translation of this passage, see Haskett 2010, 192–193), is nowhere to be found in the corresponding Chinese and Tibetan versions. Besides, to further complicate the situation, there is yet another Tibetan translation with a similar title, i.e., (*phags pa*) *Chos bzhi bstan pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po 'i mdo*, D249. This *Chos bzhi bstan pa* also exists in a Sanskrit manuscript titled *Caturdharmikasūtra*, kept in the Potala Palace (as well as in a Sanskrit manuscript kept in a private collection, see Bhikṣuṇī Vinītā 2010, I: 392, n.1). A transliteration and an English translation of the Sanskrit text (which might be restored from the Tibetan translation) were published by Bhikṣuṇī Vinītā (ibid., I: 391–407). Recently, the 84000 project has published English translations of all these three Tibetan texts with similar titles (i.e., D249, D250, D251); see <https://read.84000.co/translation/UT22084-066-007.html>, <https://read.84000.co/translation/UT22084-066-008.html>, and <https://read.84000.co/translation/UT22084-066-009.html> respectively.

⁶⁶ “Der Bodhisattva hat vier Arten von Dharmahindernis-Träumen [法障夢]. Welche vier? Er träumt, der Mond falle in einen Brunnen in der Ebene. Er träumt, der Mond erscheine in trüben Quellen und Tümpeln. Er träumt, der Mond werde im Himmel von großen Wolken verdeckt. Er träumt, der Mond werde im Himmel von Rauch und Staub getrübt. Diese sind die vier. Weiterhin hat der Bodhisattva vier Arten von Karmanhindernis-Träumen [業障夢]. Welche vier? Er träumt, in einen großen Abgrund zu stürzen. Er träumt von hohen und tiefen Wegen. Er träumt von felsigen krummen Wegen. Er träumt, die Orientierung zu verlieren und erschrickt. Diese sind die vier. Weiterhin hat der Bodhisattva vier Arten von Leidenschaftshindernis-Träumen [煩惱障夢]. Welche vier? Er träumt von Unruhe stiftenden Giftschlangen. Er träumt von bösen Tierrufen. Er träumt, Räubern in die Hände zu fallen. Er träumt, sich mit Staub zu bedecken. Diese sind die vier. Weiterhin hat der Bodhisattva vier Arten von Dhāraṇi-Träumen [得陀羅尼夢]. Welche vier? Er träumt, der versteckte Speicher sei voller Schätze. Er träumt, daß sich Blumen in einem reinen Teich ausbreiten. Er träumt, ein paar reine Baumwollstoffe zu bekommen. Er träumt, alle Devas hielten eine Decke über ihn. Diese sind die vier. Weiterhin hat der Bodhisattva vier Arten von Samādhivollendungs-Träumen [得三昧夢]. Welche vier? Er träumt, ehrenwerte Jungfrauen überreichten ihm feierlich Blumen. Er träumt, weiße Gänse flögen im Himmel in Formation umher. Er träumt, der Tathāgata streiche ihm mit der Hand über den Kopf. Er träumt, der Tathāgata sitze auf einer Lotosblüte im Meditationssitz in Samādhi. Diese sind die vier. Weiterhin hat der Bodhisattva vier Arten von Tathāgataschau-Träumen [見如來夢]. Welche vier? Er träumt, der Mond komme hervor. Er träumt, die Sonne komme hervor. Er träumt, eine Lotosblüte öffne sich. Er träumt, Brahman ruhe in Erhabenheit. Diese sind die vier. Weiterhin hat der Bodhisattva vier Arten von Träumen über das Erlangen des Zeichens eines großen Menschen [得大人相夢]. Welche vier? Er träumt, ein Teakbaum sei voller Samen von wunderbaren Blüten. Er träumt, ein Bronzebehältnis sei voller Schätze. Er träumt von der Feierlichkeit einer Flagge. Er träumt, der Cakravartin führe die Welt mit dem Dharma. Diese sind die vier. Weiterhin hat der Bodhisattva vier Arten von Träumen über das Zeichen des Nichtmehr-Zurückfallens [不退相夢]. Welche vier? Er träumt, sein Haupt sei von weißer Seide umschlungen. Er träumt, eine Almosengemeinschaft ohne Hindernisse zu errichten. Er träumt, auf dem Dharmasitz zu sitzen. Er träumt, Buddha lehre den Dharma am Erleuchtungsort. Diese sind die vier. Weiterhin hat der Bodhisattva vier Arten von Träumen zur Überwindung von Māras Haß [降魔怨夢]. Welche vier? Er träumt, der starke Krieger dränge den schwachen zurück und trage das Siegesbanner davon. Er träumt, der mutige General gewinne den Kampf. Er träumt vom Empfang der esoterischen Weihe. Er träumt, unter dem Bodhibaum zu sitzen und alle Teufel zu besiegen. Diese sind die vier. Weiterhin hat der Bodhisattva vier Arten von Träumen über das Sitzen am Erleuchtungsort [坐菩提場夢]. Welche vier? Er träumt, die glückverheißenden Vasen seien voll. Er träumt, alle gingen rechts um ihn herum. Er träumt, daß, wohin er geht, alle Bäume die Zweige neigten. Er träumt, Goldglanz scheine überall. Diese sind die vier” (Müller 1992, 355–356). For the Chinese, see T. 774, 710a26–b24.

As noted by Müller (1992, 356), the signs are straightforward: the dreams of obstructions are also undesirable events or sights in real life, while all the signs of high achievements are auspicious.

As the reader may also be thinking at this point, our first observation should be the above passage's remarkable similarity with the dreams of the *SvN*. Indeed, they share the same concerns: obstructions and achievements such as irreversibility. In both texts, the dreams are symbolic in nature. Moreover, both texts present the dreams with a list consisting of a superset and several subsets. If we judge the dreams here by the standard of “diagnostic dreams,” we see that these dreams are true dreams and by placing the dreams at the end of its main body (i.e., the lists of virtues), the text may indicate that the dreams could serve to diagnose a bodhisattva's condition before they carry out the practices prescribed above. The only criterion of “diagnostic dreams” we cannot definitively say the dreams here meet is that of an obvious causal connection between the reasons behind the conditions (karma, etc.), the obstructive and favorable conditions, and the symptoms (i.e., contents of the dreams). While the nature of dreams in the *Catuṣkanirhāra-sūtra* is very much similar to that in the *SvN*, the contents of the dreams cannot be aligned. There are a few comparable ones—for example, dreaming of obtaining a vessel of plenty (probably Skt. **pūrṇa-kumbha*) suggests enlightenment in both texts—but no direct association can be extracted from the two texts. If my suspicion in Chapter 2 is correct, then this *Catuṣkanirhāra-sūtra* may be seen as yet another proof that there were indeed several lists of dreams circulating among Buddhist practitioners.

Another text worth a brief mention is the *Chusheng putixin jing* 出生菩提心經, T. 837, translated by Jñānagupta in 595. One parallel Chinese translation, translated by Shihu 施護 under the Song Dynasty, is titled *Fa putixin po zhumo jing* 發菩提心破諸魔經, T. 838. To my knowledge, there is no Sanskrit or Tibetan parallel. As Overbey (2010, 48–49, n. 173) summarizes, “[t]his scripture features a conversation between Śākyamuni and the *brāhmaṇa* Kāśyapa. It begins by discussing four types of dreams which foretell an encounter with the Buddha, and then focuses on the distinctions between the Three Vehicles of *śrāvaka*, *pratyekabuddha*, and *bodhisattva*. The text closes with a short *dhāraṇī* intended to crush the demonic horde.” The plot is comparable to the stories of Sumati and Sadāprarudita: a series of dreams inspire the main character to begin his quest for the Dharma. The four dreams of Kāśyapa are interpreted as signs of an encounter with the excellent Dharma (得於勝法).⁶⁷ This text

⁶⁷ “At that time, in Rājagṛha, there was a Brahmana named Mahākāśyapa. While sleeping, he dreamed of a great lotus growing in Jambudvīpa—a lotus with a thousand leaves, and its great lustre lights up three thousand times many thousands of world-realms, and it is most delicate; it is made of the seven jewels. He saw a moon inside the lotus, and moreover, inside the moon, there is a great man, whose lustre lights up everything. Everyone in the four continents under heaven [四天下, cf. Karashima 2010, 465–466], when seeing the light, is greatly pleased, leaps with great joy, and feels happy. Then, when Brahmana Kāśyapa woke up and reflected on his dreams, he felt delighted [but also] had questions: ‘what are the causes and conditions [behind my dream]? What is exactly

does not disclose much information on dreams, but it again testifies to the popularity of dreams that signify, and in fact lead to, one's future encounter with the Dharma or guidance from a buddha.

Dreams, Karmic Obstruction, and Confession

The above accounts of dreams are in fact composed of a complex of ideas. Just as in the *SvN*, what underlies these dreams is a series of doctrinal questions, such as: how are the practices of bodhisattvas actualized? What makes a bodhisattva irreversible? How important is it to receive teachings or predictions directly from the Buddha? How does a bodhisattva know for certain that his future enlightenment is guaranteed?

If we accept the widely shared exegetical explanations for the dreams of enlightenment, then the governing force behind these *nimitta* dreams can always be simplified to one word—karma. In other words, a bodhisattva's achievement (mostly irreversibility or enlightenment) manifests itself both as *nimitta* dreams and as spiritual achievement, as they are both consequences of merits. Indeed, the exact karmic indication of enlightenment and a bodhisattva's progress is a difficult question that deserves our full attention,⁶⁸ and therefore will be one of the main topics in the next two chapters. For now, this generalized concept—karma—should be recognized as the shared origin of both dreams and a bodhisattva's condition.

Thus, *nimitta* dreams can also manifest in a less sophisticated form—dreams that (are said to) reveal the karma of the dreamer. Following this lead, we find a large number of

happening? A never-before-heard amazing sign (相) occurred to me, which I saw in my dreams.' After thinking to himself like this, he became extremely happy and he was amazed [未曾見有, Skt. **adbhuta*, cf. Karashima 2001, 280], and he again reflected like this: 'We have Śramaṇa Gautama here. I heard from others that he engaged in ascetic practices for six years. He has overcome Māras, attained great enlightenment, turned the excellent Dharma wheel, and defeated all the followers of other paths. He is praised by all wise men. He is intelligent and skillful, and he knows about the signs of everything. I should visit that Śramaṇa Gautama to ask about this dream sign.' Then, Brahmana Kāśyapa, soon after that night, went to the Buddha in Kalandakanivāpa from Rājagṛha. Having arrived, he bowed his head to the feet of the Buddha and sat on one side. Afterwards, he told the Buddha his dreams. When he finished detailing his dream, the Blessed One told Brahmana Kāśyapa: 'you, young man of good family! There are four kinds of good dreams that signify encountering excellent Dharma. Which four? Dreaming of a lotus, a parasol, the moon, or the image of a buddha while sleeping. You should rejoice in your encounter with the excellent Dharma after having seen [such dreams].'" 爾時王舍大城有婆羅門姓大迦葉，於睡眠中夢見閻浮提內有大蓮華，其華千葉，光明遍照三千大千世界，微妙最勝，七寶所成。於蓮華內見有月輪，彼月輪內又見丈夫，放大光明普照一切，此四天下所有眾生見斯光者，生大歡喜，踊躍無量，皆受快樂。爾時迦葉婆羅門睡覺已，念所夢事心喜生疑：「此何因緣？竟有何事？於先現此未曾有相，昔所未聞，如我夢見。」作是念已，生大歡喜，未曾見有，復作如是念：「此有沙門瞿曇，我從他聞六年苦行，降伏魔眾，證大菩提，轉妙法輪摧諸外道，為諸智人之所讚歎，聰明善巧，知諸事相。我今應往詣彼沙門瞿曇問此夢相。」爾時迦葉婆羅門，夜既過已，從王舍城往詣迦蘭陀竹園，往到佛所，到已頂禮佛足却住一面。住一面已，如夢所見而向佛說。時婆羅門具說夢已，爾時世尊告迦葉婆羅門言：「汝善男子！有四種善夢得於勝法。何等為四？所謂於睡眠中夢見蓮華，或見繖蓋，或見月輪，及見佛形。如是見已，應自慶幸我遇勝法。」 T. 837, 891c26–892a17.

⁶⁸ Although the commentaries (e.g., the *Samantapāsādikā*) attribute the Buddha's dreams of future enlightenment to wholesome karma, which seem to suggest the Buddha's future enlightenment is based on the Buddha's merits, it is questionable if merits alone would lead one to his/her enlightenment. To be sure, other factors like one's insight should also contribute to one's enlightenment. Admittedly, the question of what contributes to one's enlightenment is one of the most complex questions in Buddhist studies, but we will touch upon several early Mahāyāna works' view on it in the next chapters.

Mahāyāna scriptures in which dreams are literally attributed to karma: wholesome or unwholesome, concrete or nonspecific, purified or tainted.

This section will concentrate on karmic dreams in Mahāyāna scriptures. The existence of these dreams is by no means a new finding: previous scholarship on Buddhist dreams invariably touched upon this issue. Especially worth mentioning is Greene’s recent book on meditation texts in medieval China, in which he dedicated a chapter to visions of karma.⁶⁹ The difference I aim to make in my survey is, first, as simple as it is, that no relatively comprehensive studies on this subject in an Indian Mahāyāna context exist and this gap will be redressed. More importantly, though it has long been noticed that several Mahāyāna scriptures are built around stories of karmic dreams, no study has yet treated such dreams of karma as a recurring motif. Thus, the question is, as a theme that prevails in Mahāyāna scriptures, what makes dreams of karma essential to the whole discourse?

Dreams of Eliminating Karmic Obstructions

I will start with a piece of material that is neither Mahāyāna nor even Buddhist in a strict sense.

The *Kathā-sarit-sāgara*, the famous eleventh-century Indian collection of stories compiled by Somadeva in Kashmir, tells a story with a discernible Buddhist influence. The story is about the king Vinītamati, who converted to Buddhism on losing a debate with a Buddhist monk; “the king [i.e., Vinītamati] wishes to learn how to practice the *bodhisattva-caryā*, and the monk instructs him that first he must rid himself even of subtle obstacles” (Silk 2020, 300):

When the generous king Vinītamati had heard this tale from the Buddhist mendicant, he again used, when the night came, that charm for obtaining a dream (*svapna-māṇava*). And after he had had a dream, he told it the next morning to the mendicant: “I remember, a certain divine hermit said to me in my dream ‘Son, you are now free from sin (*niṣ-kalmaṣa*), enter on the discipline for obtaining the rank of a Bodhisattva (*bodhisattva-caryā*).’ And having heard that speech I woke up this morning with a mind at ease.” When the king had said this to the mendicant,

⁶⁹ For example, according to Sumegi (2008, 62), “True 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,” but none of the examples given are from Mahāyāna texts per se. Müller 1992 has covered much ground on important karmic aspects of dreams in Buddhism—for example, dreams of the karmic obstructions of bodhisattvas (Müller 1992, 356) and karma as an overarching principle that enables the predictive power of dreams (ibid., 373). He (ibid., 352–353) also includes a discussion of the conceptual “dilemma” (according to him; ibid., 252) of karma’s effect on dreams, especially on revelatory dreams; we will come back to this question later in this chapter.

who was his spiritual guide, he took upon himself, with his permission, that difficult vow on an auspicious day. (Tawney 1924, VI: 76–77)⁷⁰

The first thing that catches our eye may be the “charm for obtaining a dream (*svapna-māṇava*),” a method for obtaining a dream that reveals the “karmic value” of the dreamer. The technique itself is not limited to Buddhism. Young (2001, 12) notes that “yet another story in this collection uses the same term in a Hindu context when it has a Kṣatriya pandit do a *svapna māṇavaka* in order to have a dream for his king.” The term *māṇava*, which is translated as “charm” by Tawney, “denotes someone who indulges in magic and witchcraft,” and is attested in the *Arthaśāstra* as a specialized art (Meulenbeld 1999, I.A: 107).⁷¹

It is certainly noteworthy that this technique represents the practice of provoking—as Young (2001, 12) has termed it—“sought dreams.” Moreover, dreams are again associated with some practices that are commonly considered “magic” (similar to the case of truthful resolve). In this sense, this dream practice is most notable for its manipulative nature—the dreamer wants to exert influence on his own dreams by the force of this verbal formula. However, I wish to call more attention to the causal chain indicated by this story: first, the king has to cleanse his sins to become a bodhisattva; secondly, the king needs a message dream, i.e., a divine force to inform him about his karma; thirdly, the acknowledgement of the message (i.e., the king’s elimination of his sins) delivered through the dream, again, relies on the authority of the monk. Further, “sought dreams” or desirable dreams, under the influence of Freud, may sound to us like wish-fulfillment dreams.⁷² However, the dream here is desired for its being a true source of knowledge, rather than fulfilling the dreamer’s heart’s desire. The twofold authority—the monk’s acknowledgement in reality and the divine message in dreams—reinforces the truthfulness of this dream of karma.

⁷⁰ For the Sanskrit, see Durgāprasād and Parab 1903, 378–379 §XXXV.152–155. I supplemented the above translation with the Sanskrit correspondences.

⁷¹ See also Meulenbeld’s (1999, I.B: 188, n. 76) note. He mentions *svapna-māṇava* as an example, but without specifying whether there is any established classification of the *māṇava-vidyā* (knowledge of *māṇava*) or whether the *svapna-māṇava* is a common one. The *Arthaśāstra* does not elaborate on this term, but it indeed describes some of the *māṇava-vidyās* that secret agents use: “After the employment of secret agents—agents working undercover as thaumaturgic ascetics should entice criminals with **magic skills** for crime: bandits with a spell that induces sleep, makes one invisible, or opens doors; and adulterers with a love-inducing spell” (Olivelle 2013, 233 §4.5.1; Skt. *sattiprayogād ūrdhvaṃ siddhavyaṅjanā māṇavān māṇavavidyābhiḥ pralobhayeyuḥ, prasvāpanāntardhānadvārāpohamantreṇa pratirodhakān, saṃvadanamantreṇa pāratalpikān*, Kangle 1969, I: 136.1–2 §4.5.1). It seems that all these magic skills are in the form of spells (i.e., *mantras*). Olivelle has made no comment on the term in his notes.

⁷² According to Freud (1955, 147): “Dreams are not to be likened to the unregulated sounds that rise from a musical instrument struck by the blow of some external force instead of by a player’s hand; they are not meaningless, they are not absurd; they do not imply that one portion of our store of ideas is asleep while another portion is beginning to wake. On the contrary, they are psychical phenomena of complete validity—fulfilments of wishes; they can be inserted into the chain of intelligible waking mental acts; they are constructed by a highly complicated activity of the mind.”

Despite the text not coming from an “authentic” Buddhist source, this story concerns itself with various Mahāyānic conceptions, such as that of the bodhisattva and the six Perfections (Tawney 1924, VI: 77; Silk 2020, 300). It is very telling that the compiler (who is not a Buddhist per se) depicts the king’s initiation into “the bodhisattva rank” as purification of unwholesome karma through a dream. In the following discussion of dreams of karma in Indian Mahāyāna scriptures, we will repeatedly encounter indications of similar causal chains—full or partial—and we will further uncover the logic behind them.

Indeed, similar dreams also occur in “proper” Buddhist scriptures themselves.

Dreams of eliminating karmic obstructions are found in the *Fangbo jing* 放鉢經 T. 629, a Chinese translation that likely represents a “‘building block’ from which the [Ajātaśatrukaukṛtyavinodanā-sūtra] was constructed” (Harrison and Hartmann 2000, 167). The text is attested in Dao’an’s catalog as anonymous, which allows us to date its translation to a time earlier than the completion of Dao’an’s catalog—that is, the year 374. As we have mentioned in Chapter 1, the story of Ajātaśatru had a significant influence on subjects like confession and redemption in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

The passage in question corresponds to Chapter 3 of the *Ajātaśatrukaukṛtyavinodanā-sūtra* in Dharmarakṣa’s influential translation (*Wenshushili puchao sanmei jing* 文殊師利普超三昧經, T. 626). Despite this general parallelism, according to my preliminary survey, no passage resembling the following one⁷³ can be found in any of the related Sanskrit, Tibetan, or Chinese materials.⁷⁴ Having been asked the question how to free oneself of sins committed in past lives,⁷⁵ the Buddha answered:

If those who pursue the bodhisattva path, while lying down [to sleep], dream of enemies running after them with weapons and arms and intimidating them, [when] they feel fear in dreams, the sins (殃惡) of past lives are eliminated. For young men or young women of good families who pursue the bodhisattva path without having their sins eliminated, they will be reborn in hell and suffer for a *kalpa*. [Only after] receiving instruction in confession in each of the three time periods for one day and one night, [which is] the precepts attested in scriptures [經戒, cf. Karashima 2001, 228], from a good teacher, and after [carrying that out every day

⁷³ Miyazaki (2019, 104) notes that, compared to other parallels, the *Fangbo jing* has a unique and longer discourse on the Sahāloka, and the passage on dreams that we will soon discuss belongs to this apparently unique discourse. Miyazaki suspects that this part was added when the *Fangbo jing* was circulating and developing on its own.

⁷⁴ For a list of parallels of the *Ajātaśatrukaukṛtyavinodanā-sūtra* and the authors’ observations of them, see Harrison and Hartmann 2000, 167–168.

⁷⁵ 何因緣得除宿命之惡? T. 629, 450a26–27.

until they] refrain from sinning, will they completely rid themselves of illness such as headaches and fevers, and not descend to hell again.⁷⁶

Again, the dreams here not only inform bodhisattvas about their unwholesome karma in the past, but also assist in the process of the elimination of that unwholesome karma. In the *Kathā-sarit-sāgara*, dreams merely fulfill the function of announcing such elimination through the agent of divine messages. In the *Fangbo jing*, besides indicating the existence and the success in removing unwholesome karma, dreams directly enable its elimination: Bodhisattvas get rid of their sins while dreaming fearful dreams. By stressing the intense negative feelings during dreaming and associating such fear with the removal of “sins of past lives,” the text may suggest that suffering in dreams, just as suffering while awake as a consequence of past sins, would compensate for unwholesome karma and thus eliminate it. As the language of the Chinese translation of the *Fangbo jing* is quite archaic and perplexing, we cannot fully establish this connection—yet it will become clearer when we read a highly similar account of dreams in the *Samghāṭa-sūtra* which we will encounter immediately below.

Moreover, the dreams here, though indirectly, are again associated with the method of eliminating negative karma and confession. The way that the text prescribes the confession to be practiced “in three time periods for one day and night” also reminds us of the recitation of the *Triskandhaka* Dharma discourse, which is also sometimes designated as “confession in three time divisions”⁷⁷—though it would be risky to posit a connection between them, as the language of the *Fangbo jing* is ambiguous. Related or not, from the evidence of the *Fangbo jing*, the *SvN*, and other scriptures, we can confirm that this model of diagnosis (karmic obstruction), symptom (dreams), treatment (suffering while dreaming and confessing while awake), and prognosis (a promising future) indeed recurs in Mahāyāna scriptures.

A highly similar description of dreams is found in the *Samghāṭa-sūtra*, “a popular devotional text” that “could be used as a kind of guide book on how to attract laity to Buddhism by instruction and consolation particularly in times of worries and crisis” (von Hinüber 2021, vii). Besides the Sanskrit manuscripts, which have been newly edited by von Hinüber, the text survives in three Chinese translations, a Tibetan

⁷⁶ 若有求菩薩道者，臥坐夢中見怨家持刀兵追逐怖恐，夢中恐懼，復除宿命之殃惡。若有菩薩道家善男子善女人宿命殃惡未盡，死當入泥犁中勤苦一劫。得善師教悔過一日一夜各三時經戒，不復作惡，一日一夜者，頭痛身熱諸病悉除盡，不復入泥犁中。ibid., 450b22–25; I follow the readings of the Pilu edition 毗盧藏 (for its history, see Li and He 2003, 197–222) kept in the Imperial Palace of Japan, for the pictures, see https://db2.sido.keio.ac.jp/kanseki/bib_frame?id=007075-1665; var. 坐] 出 T.; 殃惡] 惡 T.; 過一日一夜各三時經戒不復作惡] 過 T. The adverbial phrase 一日一夜者 appears out of place to me, nor do the readings offered by the variants make sense to me; therefore, I am unable to provide a literal translation for these sentences.

⁷⁷ Chn. 三時懺悔, e.g., in Śikṣānanda’s translation of the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, T. 279, 436b29. I have discussed this term in note 60 in Chapter 1.

translation, and several Sogdian and Khotanese manuscripts (Silk 2021b, 394–396). A summary of the passage in question is provided by von Hinüber (2021, lxxxi–lxxxii):

Now the subject changes and continues to move from the never decreasing number of beings to the career of a Bodhisatva, which comes into focus when Bhaiṣajyasena asks about the dreams of a Bodhisatva who has developed the initial resolution [*prathamacittotpādiko*]. The Buddha explains that this Bodhisatva sees many horrors (*bhayāni*) in his dream. When this happens, he cleans himself (*pariśodhayati*) of all bad actions [*pāpakarman*] because a being that has committed bad deeds cannot remove intense suffering (*tīvra duḥkha*). When the Bodhisatva has seen a bad dream, he is free from fear (§186).

Next, Bhaiṣajyasena inquires about the nature of the dreams of a Bodhisatva who has developed the initial resolution. First, he sees a blazing fire, and he should think that all his impurities (*kleśa*) are burnt. In a second dream, he sees agitated (*luḍita sampraluḍita*) water. The Bodhisatva should not be afraid [*na bhettavyam*], because after he is released from the fetters of delusions (*mohabandhana*), all evil is annihilated (*sarvapāpakṣaya*) (§187). In a third dream of great horror (*svapna mahābhaya*), he sees his head shaven (*muṇḍita*). Again the Bodhisatva should not be afraid because passion, hatred and delusion (*rāgadveṣamoha*) are shaved off, and the Saṃsāra with its sixfold rebirth (*ṣaḍgatika*) is overcome (*parājita*). The Bodhisatva who has developed the initial resolution will not be reborn in hell (*narakavāsa*) or among animals, Pretas, Asuras, Nāgas or the gods, but in pure Buddha-fields (§188).⁷⁸

Both the *Samghāṭa-sūtra* above and the aforementioned *Fangbo jing* associate terrifying dreams with the purification of bad karma (*pāpa-karman*). However, there appears to be a sharp contrast: the *Fangbo jing* seems to say that the instant the bodhisattva “feels terrified,” the bad karma is cleared away, whereas the *Samghāṭa-sūtra* stresses that “being free from fear” even when experiencing nightmares validates a bodhisattva’s purity. Nevertheless, the explanation provided by the *Samghāṭa-sūtra* gives away the fact that the mechanism underlying these two dreams is the same. Accordingly, as “a being that has committed bad deeds” cannot escape from suffering, rather than suffering while awake, a bodhisattva who “has developed the initial resolution” undergoes the process of eliminating unwholesome karma suffers in his

⁷⁸ I added several Sanskrit counterparts that I consider important for our discussion in brackets. Von Hinüber’s summary is based on his readings of two Sanskrit manuscripts; for manuscript C, see von Hinüber 2021, 75.8–76.13 (Ms. C) §186–188; for manuscript F, see *ibid.*, 75.8–76.12 §186–188. For von Hinüber’s analysis of the stemma of the Sanskrit manuscripts, see *ibid.*, xiv–xix; he notes that “text of manuscript F is sometimes rather far removed from the C-group in many details” (*ibid.*, xix). In terms of the passage in question, manuscript C appears more extended than manuscript F, but there is no substantial difference.

dreams; knowing the purifying effect of the fearful dreams, this bodhisattva should not feel terrified about the contents of dreams. The subsequent details of the three dreams of “a Bodhisattva who has developed the initial resolution” provided by the sūtra further show dreaming as a particularly effective and swift pathway to the elimination of bad karma.

In this way, dreams in the *Samghāṭa-sūtra* and *Fangbo jing* in fact go even further than what we have defined as diagnostic dreams—they not only indicate one’s karma but also counteract it; they are not only symptoms but also a part of the treatment itself. The psychological impact of these dreams is thus highlighted as the dreams could provide a direct solution of residual karmic obstruction.

Dreams and Confession

Truly, when dreams and karma are associated in the Mahāyāna scriptures, perhaps due to the overriding concerns of karmic obstructions’ negative effect upon progress to enlightenment (or more practically—as we have seen in the *Fangbo jing*—a bad rebirth), it is always about negative karma. Yet, in another influential sūtra, the *Suvarṇabhāsottama-sūtra*, it is not a dream of karma, but a dream of a confession method that is dreamt by a bodhisattva:

In chapter 3 (*Deśanāparivarta*, Confession), the bodhisattva Ruciraketu falls asleep and has a dream in which verses of confession issue forth from a shining golden drum. When he awakens, Ruciraketu visits the Buddha and recites the verses, which move from the confession of past evil acts, through the resolve to work for the benefit of beings, to praise of the Buddha and rejoicing for the merit earned by others. The efficacy of this ‘confession of Utmost Golden Light,’ it is said, is such that a single recitation destroys negative karma accumulated over thousands of aeons. The chapter ends with the assertion that all those ‘in whose ear this confession enters’ have already served thousands of buddhas. (Gummer 2015, 251)⁷⁹

Modern scholarship generally considers this chapter on confession (*Deśanāparivarta*) the core of the sūtra: Nobel (1937, xli; see also Gummer 2015, 255) argues this more from a textual-historical perspective, whereas Suzuki (2014, 765–766) claims that the notion of confession is the very core of the whole sūtra. Given the importance of

⁷⁹ For a full English translation of this chapter, see Emmerick 1970, 8–17. His translation is based on Nobel’s 1937 Sanskrit edition. For the Sanskrit of this chapter, see Nobel 1937, 20–44; for a description of the dream in question, see *ibid.*, 20.1–8. For a comparative version of the Khotanese, the Sanskrit, and an English translation of the Khotanese text, see Skjærvø 2004, I: 34–65; for a description of the dream, see *ibid.*, I: 34–37.

confession, it is curious that this confession method is delivered through a dream. Here, though the dream is not a diagnostic tool—that is to say, it does not reveal a problem (negative karma)—nor does it directly solve a problem as do the dreams of eliminating karma that we have reviewed above, it instead discloses a cure for the problem. More significantly, the truthfulness of the confession verses Ruciraketu receives through his dream is taken as self-evident in most versions of the text; only Yijing’s translation and its kindred versions add the Buddha’s approval of the authenticity of the dream content.⁸⁰ We again see the recurring motif of dreams as an authentic epistemic medium for revealing knowledge of any link on the chain of diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis of karmic obstructions.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Yijing’s translation reads as follows: “at that time, after the Blessed One heard of this discourse [on confession], he praised Bodhisattva Ruciraketu: ‘Well done, well done, young man of good family! Just as in your dream, voices that issued forth from the golden drum praise the true merits of the Tathāgata and the method of confession. One who hears them will obtain great blessing, he will benefit greatly [other] people and eliminate [his?] obstruction of sins. You should now know that great deeds like this are all due to praises (of the Buddha and the Dharma) and vows that were made in the past, because of the causes and conditions inherited from past practices, and thanks to the blessings by the might of all buddhas. I will explain to you the causes and conditions of this.’” Chn. 爾時，世尊聞此說已，讚妙幢菩薩言：「善哉！善哉！善男子！如汝所夢，金鼓出聲，讚歎如來真實功德并懺悔法。若有聞者，獲福甚多，廣利有情，滅除罪障。汝今應知此之勝業，皆是過去讚歎發願，宿習因緣，及由諸佛威力加護，此之因緣，當為汝說。」 *Jin’guangming zuishengwang jing* 金光明最勝王經, T. 665, 413b28–c4; see also Nobel’s German translation in Nobel 1958, 94. The passage is absent from the Sanskrit version edited by Nobel, the two earlier Chinese translations, i.e., *Jin’guangming jing* 金光明經, T. 663 and *Hebu jin’guangming jing* 合部金光明經, T. 664, and one of the three Tibetan translations, D557 ([‘phags pa] gSer ’od dam pa mdo sde’i dbang po’i rgyal po zhes bya ba theg pa chen po’i mdo). Two other Tibetan translations, D555 ([‘phags pa] gSer ’od dam pa mchog tu rnam par rgyal ba’i mdo sde’i rgyal po theg pa chen po’i mdo) and D556 ([‘phags pa]a gSer ’od dam pa mdo sde’i dbang po’i rgyal po zhes bya ba theg pa chen po’i mdo), on the other hand, parallel Yijing’s translation (for the passage in question in D556, see D556, *rgyud*, pa, 176b3–6; see also Nobel’s edition in Nobel 1944, 215; for the passage in question in D555, see D555, *rgyud*, pa, 47b6–48a2). According to Gummer’s (2015, 250) overview of the sources for this sūtra, D555 has been confirmed to be a translation of Yijing’s Chinese translation. Regarding D556, despite the claim of it being a translation of the Sanskrit text, some chapters are actually proved to have been translated from the Chinese (ibid.); thus, this passage could also have been influenced by Yijing’s translation. For the *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra*’s “very complex textual history of translations into Tibetan,” see also Li 2021, 198. Therefore, except for Yijing’s Chinese translation and the Tibetan translations influenced by it, other versions of the *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra* imply that the truthfulness of the confession method revealed in dreams is self-evident.

⁸¹ Some may oppose simplifying the issue of confessions and designating the *triskandhaka*, *pāpa-deśanā*, etc. equally as confessions. Haskett (2010, 254) differentiates the *pāpa-deśanā* as in the *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra* from other confession methods, such as *triskandhaka*: “Alongside the contextual, formal, and linguistic distinctions, the absence of negative emotion (which I have argued is key to understanding the functioning and purpose of *pāpadeśanā*) further suggests that the function, purpose, and use of confession in the *triskandhaka*, as well as the *triskandhaka* as a whole, should also be understood as separate and distinct from those of *pāpadeśanā*”; according to him, in the *triskandhaka*, “[t]he presence of the buddhas, along with the knowledge that one had acquired merit, may also have been a positive emotional experience” (ibid., 250). He also argues that the *pāpa-deśanā* and *triskandhaka* have different concerns and functions regarding a bodhisattva’s career: “I would argue, though, that in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and *Suvarṇabhāṣottama*, this lesser insight into his past is the gateway to all the subtler ones, as is the case in the *Ākāśagarbha*. In the [*Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya-vastu*] and the *triskandha*, it is the fence that keeps him in this rarefied *gocara*, and in all these cases, entrance into the Mahāyāna and persevering continuation in it are what makes the bodhisattva who he truly is” (ibid., 260). While I agree that the significance of *triskandhaka*, and that of *pāpadeśanā* to the bodhisattva career are not exactly the same, given the complicated history of the forms and contents of the *triskandhaka* and *pāpa-deśanā* (especially if we take other early Chinese materials that Haskett did not directly utilize into consideration), I can hardly say whether there was a clear-cut difference between these confession methods. It could well be the case that the differences in the aims of the confession methods, instead of addressing different concerns of bodhisattvas, in fact reflect a change in views toward the bodhisattva career. In addition, as we have discussed in Chapter 1, I am not convinced that the *triskandhaka* has positive associations overall, since the confession part is unexceptionally the core while the merit-making and presence of the Buddha are not always integrated into this Dharma discourse throughout its long developmental history. For this reason, in this chapter, I prefer to see them equally as confession methods—methods to eliminate negative karma—and we will discuss the positions of eliminating bad karma in terms of the bodhisattva career in the next two chapters.

As Yamabe has pointed out, the association between confession methods and dreams is only established by “the personal experience of Ruciraketu” (Yamabe 2005, 27) in the *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra*; the *Ākāśagarbha-sūtra*, on the other hand, also “[encourages] practitioners in general to have the same experience in their dreams” (ibid.).⁸² According to the *Ākāśagarbha-Sūtra*, which is cited in *Śikṣā*, a beginner (*ādikarmika*) bodhisattva who is guilty of an offense (*sāparādhā*) should call on Ākāśagarbha Bodhisattva for help: “In a dream, please teach me some means by which I can confess my downfall” (Goodman 2016, 69).⁸³ It is curious that, among all the mentions of seeing Ākāśagarbha Bodhisattva in this sūtra,⁸⁴ knowledge of the confession method is gained specifically in dreams. Nonetheless, the aim of this section is only to showcase what Mahāyāna sūtras tell us about dreams of karma and confession; I will leave the question “why” unanswered for now.

Despite our range of study being limited to Mahāyāna scriptures with a generally accepted Indic origin, there is a surprisingly large number of Chinese “apocrypha” that incorporate dreams of karma or of enlightenment into their narrations. We have mentioned the Contemplation Scriptures in passing when discussing the *Triskandhaka* confession method, and seen how they treat this motif—visions (including dreams), sins, and confession—as their central concern.⁸⁵ Besides the dreams of karma

⁸² “[...] each beginner bodhisattva who has committed an offense should rise just before dawn, and facing toward the east, should make the earth fragrant with incense, and then pray to the Divine Prince Dawn with the following words: ‘Dawn, Dawn, of great compassion and great fortune, you are famous on Earth. Right away, cover me with compassion. Quickly inform the greatly compassionate Ākāśagarbha of my message, which is: In a dream, please teach me some means by which I can confess my downfall, and can regain the skillful means and the wisdom of the noble Great Way.’ Then he should return to bed and go back to sleep. In this way, as soon as the dawn comes, he can meet the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha in his own form, right here on Earth. Then the beginner bodhisattva, standing before him, confesses that root downfall through the skillful means of the Great Way” (Goodman 2016, 69; for the Sanskrit, see Bendall 1902, 65.2–12).

⁸³ Skt. *mama svapnāntare tam upāyam upadarśaya yenāham upāyenāpattim pratideśayāmi*. Bendall 1902, 65.6–7.

⁸⁴ Just before the abovementioned passage, the text claims: “If those bodhisattvas who have heard the name of Ākāśagarbha should wish to see him, or want to confess a root downfall from fear of falling into the lower realms, if they reverentially salute the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha and call his name, then according to their karmic fortune, he will appear to them, either in his own supreme form, or in the form of a Brahmin, and so on up to: in the form of a young girl, he will stand before them” (Goodman 2016, 68). It is unclear what the nature of those visions might be.

⁸⁵ Greene (2021b, 144) briefly defines the Contemplation Scriptures as “apocryphal scriptures associated with the foreign chan masters of the fifth century [...] These texts give various instructions for contemplating (*guan*) the Buddhist deity with which each is concerned. Usually, practitioners are directed to contemplate or imagine (*xiang*) the physical form of the deity and possibly the land or heaven in which he dwells, all of which is described in rich, visually evocative language. Such contemplation will, the texts say, destroy a vast quantity of sin (*zui*) and ensure rebirth in the heaven or pure land in question;” as his survey proceeds to examine specific scriptures (ibid., 144–147), we can see that such contemplation mostly takes places in dreams. Besides the Contemplation Scriptures, I wish to mention another sūtra, which Hattori suspected (1990, 113) to belong to the category of Contemplation Sūtras due to their shared features: namely, the *Wenshushili banniepan jing* 文殊師利般涅槃經, T. 463, which also contains a whole discourse on the dreams of Mañjuśrī. The text is attributed to Nie Dao’an 聶道安 (late fourth to early fifth century)—a highly problematic attribution, according to Hattori (ibid., 112). Quinter (2010, 115–116, 121) dates the text to somewhere before 515 based on the catalogs and the dates of comparable Contemplation Sūtras. Both Hattori and Quinter believe that the text is an apocryphon composed in China and apparently associated with the Contemplation Scriptures. Quinter (ibid., 112) translates the passage concerning dreams as follows: “If there are still people who have obstacles from residual karma, then they will be able to see him in dreams. If those who see him in dreams in their present incarnations pursue [the path of] auditors (*śrāvakas*), they will, as a result of seeing

mentioned in the Contemplation Scriptures, dreams of enlightenment are included in the *Zuishengwen pusa shizhu chugou duanjie jing* 最勝問菩薩十住除垢斷結經, T. 309, “translated” by Zhu Fonian 竺佛念 but most likely compiled from multiple sources by Zhu Fonian himself (Lin and Radich 2020),⁸⁶ while dreams of karma are found in the *Zhancha shan’e yebao jing* 占察善惡業報, widely recognized as an apocryphal work.⁸⁷

On the one hand, I hope that the above survey shows that we can trace this idea found in the Chinese apocrypha back to genuine Indian Mahāyāna sūtras. With the help of the exegetical works we have extensively explored in Chapter 3, we should understand this idea of dreams as being built on some theoretical consensus from an emic perspective. On the other hand, in the very next section, I would like to prove that, from an etic perspective, diagnostic dreams solve problems. Such problems that urgently need remedies can occur to pursuers of enlightenment regardless of time and place, as they are intrinsic to the bodhisattva path.

Theories Revisited: An Etic Perspective

Unlike the theories of dreams in the exegeses, where we see a unified pattern throughout our survey, the dreams taught in the sūtras contain much to disentangle. Although we have identified the key traits of a “standard” diagnostic dream based on the model of dreams in the *SvN* and theories in Buddhist exegesis, the more sūtras we review, the more our sight of diagnostic dreams is obscured, or even challenged, by the diverse and nuanced accounts of these dreams. Though we had set out to discover the overarching

Mañjuśrī, attain a stage from *srotaāpanna* to *anāgāmin*. If those who have left the household see Mañjuśrī, once they have attained the sight of him they will in one day and one night become arhats. If they have deep faith in the Broad-and-Equal scriptures, this Dharma-Prince will expound the profound dharma for them while they are in meditation. For those whose minds are full of disturbances, he will explain the true meaning in their dream. He thereby makes them firm in the unsurpassed way, where they will attain the stage of non-regression.” For the Chinese text, see T. 463, 481a21–28. The dreams are different from those we have defined as diagnostic dreams; they are more like dream revelations, but the text also associates attainments like irreversibility with dreams.

⁸⁶ Based on Nattier’s hypothesis that this *Zuishengwen pusa shizhu chugou duanjie jing* was Zhu Fonian’s (fl. late fourth to the beginning of the fifth century) composition from several earlier materials, Lin and Radich (2020, esp. 17–29) have provided further internal evidence for the source materials that Zhu Fonian used. A useful summary of scholarship on this hypothesis is also provided by Radich at <https://dazangthings.nz/cbc/text/1814/>. The passage in question is about people becoming śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and finally buddhas in a series of dreams. Upon awakening, their attainment would be confirmed by bodily marks and additional higher knowledge. I must confess that the syntax of this passage appears difficult to me and I cannot fully grasp its meaning. For the Chinese text, see T. 309, 1039c10–1040a4.

⁸⁷ This late sixth-century apocryphon is fully explored by Lai 1990. The first part of this text, concerning penance and confession, introduces some methods of confession; then, “After seven days of such penance, the sinner should consult the set of three tops [Chn. 輪, lit. “divinatory wheels;” wooden, four-sided spinning tops to symbolize the wheel of Dharma; on this word, see *ibid.*, 179] each morning at dawn. If body, speech, and mind are indeed shown to be pure, this is taken as an indication that the confessionals have removed the evil karma. Some people might then see light, smell fantastic aromas, or even receive dream visits from buddhas and bodhisattvas, although any such sightings prior to the achievement of true purity are illusory and false. It is only after the completion of this *śīla* step that one may go on to practice samādhi. However, since not everyone can pursue meditation, a person can appeal to Kṣitigarbha instead” (*ibid.*, 185). For the details of the karmic dreams in this text, see T. 839, 904a28–b19.

beliefs and concerns behind the phenomenon of dreams in Mahāyāna scriptures, we may feel still far from our goal.

Finally, at this point, I would like to redirect the question from “how” (mechanisms) and “what” (descriptions) to “why”: *why* do these sūtras feature dreams in such a way? Can we answer the question “why” without arbitrarily imposing the model of “diagnostic dreams” on these diverse dreams?

If we stick to the reasoning given by the exegeses and understand all true dreams as manifestations of karma and, to a lesser extent, visitations from deities, this will only leave readers half-convinced: the whole packages that the abovementioned dreams bear cannot be fully attributed to karma or deities. For example, dreams indicating negative karma fit easily into the framework of traditional explanations, but how should we understand the dream of the golden drum in *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra*, in which the dream reveals a confession method instead of knowledge of karma? Further, texts that situate dreams in doctrinal discussions of bodhisattva practices, like the recurrent dreams of buddhas in some version of the *Lotus Sūtra*, make dreaming sound rather more like a matter of a bodhisattva’s self-cultivation than the effects of karma. If we still believe there is a reason behind these scriptures designating dreams as the epistemic medium of confession or a bodhisattva’s self-cultivation, then what is the reason?

Moreover, while the validity of true dreams is fully supported by the reasoning in traditional exegeses, and such reasoning may well suffice for the practitioners themselves, it still cannot fully convince modern readers. Though present-day scholars may not follow the stance of Rahula (1978, 259) in arguing that dream signs are not compatible with “real” Buddhist doctrine, many nonetheless believe that dream signs are not coherent with the highly philosophical Mahāyāna scriptures. For example, Campany has argued (2020, 71–72) that, “Nor was there much room or rationale for divination in Buddhist texts privileging emptiness and non-duality. Such texts usually associate dreams, not with knowledge but with delusion, cognitive error, and ephemerality,” and goes on to give some examples—virtually all from the *Prajñāpāramitā* textual tradition—as proof. However, as we have seen, the *Aṣṭa*, which “represents the most seminal *Prajñāpāramitā* scripture” (Zacchetti 2015, 180), repeatedly extends its discussion to dreams that are referred to as portents (*pūrvanimitta*). Furthermore, the *Buddhāvataṃsaka* literature, which indeed almost unexceptionally refers to dreams only as similes, alongside illusions, also mentions dreaming of the Buddha as evidence of wholesome karma accumulated in the past on some occasions.⁸⁸ Therefore, whether a text endorses the view of “emptiness and non-

⁸⁸ “Bodhisattvas *mahāsattvas*, there are ten kinds of works of the Buddha (佛業), what are the ten? [...] Seeing the Buddha in a dream is the second work of the Buddha, thanks to the growth of the roots of merit in the past.” 菩薩摩訶薩，有十種佛業。何等為十？[...] 夢中見佛是第二佛業，發起過去諸善根故。T. 278, 663b25–28; see also T. 279, 308a28–29.

duality” does not affect its acknowledgment of true dreams. So which doctrinal concern(s) determines an individual Mahāyāna scripture’s outlook on dreams?

The prevalence of dreams as *nimittas*—as a source of diagnostic or prognostic knowledge—has certainly caught the attention of modern scholars. We have repeatedly cited Greene’s observation of “confirmatory visions,” yet we have not introduced his interpretation of such visions. Regarding fifth-century Chinese Buddhist meditation texts, Greene (2021a, 38–39) has made this argument: “To claim that awakening and other states of meditative attainment are signaled by dreamlike visions concretizes what might otherwise be an irredeemably individual experience. It makes such attainments a matter of truly personal experience—you must really see this vision, it is claimed—while at the same time objectifying, and hence making public, the interpretive authority concerning the significance of those experiences.” While I am wholeheartedly convinced and largely inspired by what he designates as “strategy of objectification” (ibid., 37) or “communicatively private experiences as key pieces of evidence demonstrating meditative attainment” (Greene 2021b, 61),⁸⁹ especially in the context of his argument, I would however argue that objectification is not the central concern implied by the “diagnostic dreams” of the Indian Mahāyāna sūtras.

Admittedly, following the lead provided by the terminology—“signs” (*nimittas*)—the implicit semiotic system is one of the foremost features of dream signs. Moreover, we have discussed the analogy between dreams and other visionary experiences with semiotic implications, especially meditative visions, in terms of confirmation of overall achievement (as in the *Akṣayamati-paripṛcchā*) and revealing the existence or purification of karmic obstructions.⁹⁰ However, a large number of the dreams that we have examined are not symbolic but uncoded.⁹¹ These uncoded dreams are still

⁸⁹ As a side note, this purpose of confirmatory visions concurs with observations on the purpose of divinatory signs on a societal level: “Divination is a form of individual acting in situations of uncertainty which identifies and articulates consent and dissent by using certain social roles to interpret standardized signs and to ritually deal with them. In such a performance a specific appropriation of social roles and religious traditions is indicated” (Rüpke 2013, 9). But as I will soon demonstrate, we should concern ourselves more with the purpose of signs on an individual level.

⁹⁰ In fact, there is only very limited genuine Indic evidence for meditative visions as a medium of past karma (Greene 2021b, 137). Besides the ones Greene mentions, the *Upāli* arguably makes such an association, but it is likely a later development (Yamabe 2005, 28–32). The examples Yamabe (ibid., 26–28) gives for “vision and bodhisattva precepts” (ibid., 26) are all dream visions. Therefore, it is likely that, in the Indian context (differently from scriptures created in China), dreams are more commonly seen as a medium of the knowledge of past karma, not meditative visions. This fact is in accord with the dream theories in exegetical works (especially the *Mahāvibhāṣā*; see my note in Chapter 3, n. 35).

⁹¹ Even for symbolic dreams, the correlation between signs and signified condition is highly identifiable. Consider this dream in the abovementioned *Catuṣkanirhāra-sūtra*: “dreaming of sitting on the Tathāgata’s lotus throne and being submerged in concentration” is one of the four dreams that indicate “the bodhisattva has obtained *samādhi*.” (Chn. 復次，菩薩有四種得三昧夢[...]夢如來坐蓮花座，入於三昧，T. 774, 710b7–10). For a dream like this, an interpreter who acts as an authority is not necessary, and a dream that needs no interpretation by an external agent allows the dreamer to gain knowledge without having to depend on external religious authority. Therefore, the dreamer would consider such a dream more a proof for him- or herself than for his or her community. In this sense, it differs from the confirmatory visions that are “personal, indexical experience while simultaneously proposing that its full meaning is only legible in a symbolic manner unmoored from direct, iconic connection to what it denotes, is to permit—indeed, it is to demand—claims to meditative experience whose content is known only to the person in

regarded as a trustworthy and important source of knowledge about the same subjects as the encoded ones. The uncoded dreams, as they need no interpretation, allow dreamers to communicate with whatever is delivered directly by dreams. In this sense, the definition of signs according to modern semiotics may not perfectly apply to *nimitta* in this study due to semiotics's enormous emphasis on interpretation.⁹² For the diagnostic dreams in question, their significance lies less in displaying specific achievements via objectification and interpretation than in being a source of knowledge that is available on a personal level.

If we are to view these diagnostic dreams from an etic perspective, to position them in the context of modern scholarship, they fit better into the model of “divination” than that of “semiotic ideology”: dreaming as a diagnostic or prognostic medium is practically a method of “divination” since, by definition, “divination is the art or practice of discovering the personal, human significance of future or, more commonly, present or past events” (Zuesse 1987, 2369). The central concern of divination is the knowledge of the hidden, just as for the dreams we have encountered in our survey.

What the model of “divination” brings to our study is a renewed vision of the overarching concern and mechanism behind dreams. Divination is undisputedly regarded as a response to, and management of, uncertainty: “Prognostication responds to a need for orientation concerning the uncertainties of the past, present or future and there are numerous witnesses of techniques designed to support individuals in their decision-making processes throughout the history of humankind” (Scheuermann 2019a, xxv). In light of this observation and our previous analysis of the *SvN*,⁹³ we may now claim that what underlies these dreams is indeed a feeling of a lack of control. So far, however, we have not fully answered what the origin of this uncertainty is; we will revisit this question after making another point on the framework of divination.

Exogeneity of Dreams and Its Significance for Bodhisattvas

The framework of “divination” also helps to explain the frequent juxtaposition of dreams with what modern scholars call “magic”: in the *Aṣṭa*, dreams of irreversibility are placed side by side with truthful resolve (*satyādhiṣṭhāna*, which Conze translates as the “magical power of veracity”) of irreversibility; in the *Kathā-sarit-sāgara*, the dream of purification of sins is gained through *svapna-māṇava*, a “charm” of dreams. But what

question while also constraining final authority over the significance of those claims to those with institutionally sanctioned access to the requisite interpretive knowledge” (Greene 2021b, 107).

⁹² By “modern semiotics,” I mean Pierce’s theory of signs (see Atkin 2013). Truly, by definition, message dreams are also signs, as language itself is signs. I only want to stress that the significance of interpretation is not the primary concern in our context.

⁹³ As I stated at the end of Chapter 2, “the dream manual [i.e., *SvN*] reflects bodhisattvas’ anxieties over the obstacles as well as the knowledge of their progress in their way to enlightenment.”

does “magic” mean? Why are dreams so frequently mentioned alongside “magical practices” like truthful resolve?

This combination is not limited to Buddhism; rather, from the perspective of religious studies, such a model of the juxtaposition of divination and magic is “a ubiquitous phenomenon among humans” (Sørensen and Petersen 2021, 11). The association between diagnostic dreams and “magic” practices should not be surprising then. In explaining the juxtaposition of divination and magic found in all cultures, Sørensen and Petersen (ibid., 10) summarize how “diagnosis or prognosis achieved through divination is both temporarily and logically related to the manipulative, protective or alleviative function of magical rituals. In divination one finds the cause of an ailment or a potential danger, in magic one subsequently acts upon this knowledge [...] when specific events are understood to be, at least partially, a result of superhuman, occult, superempirical or non-mundane agencies or forces, it will, evidently, take similar non-mundane and supernatural methods to extract additional, relevant information, and it will take special, non-ordinary and causally opaque actions to respond.”⁹⁴ The ultimate goal of the combination of practices is again to “regain some degree of control” (ibid., 11).

While this appears to explain the association between diagnostic dreams and magical practices in Mahāyāna scripture from an etic perspective, this explanation seemingly contradicts the emic view of dreams: the truthfulness of dreams only pertains to *nimitta* dreams and, with some reservations, to dreams brought by deities. Though both the emic view of true dreams and the etic view of divination see dreams brought by deities as having something to do with “superhuman, occult, superempirical or non-mundane agencies or forces” (ibid.), nonetheless, the *nimitta* dreams, as they are governed by the law of karma, should not be regarded as supernatural.⁹⁵ Otherwise, how should we understand *nimitta* dreams?

⁹⁴ In a slightly different Buddhist context, citing a story about Dao’an’s dream after a truthful resolve that he had made, Company (2020, 39–40) analyzes the model that sees dreams as “response” and truthful resolves as “stimuli”; he further comments, “this responsiveness plays out on a spectrum of characteristics running from personal and intentional at one hand to mechanical and automatic at the other hand” (ibid., 40). Though the order of divination and magic is reversed in this example, the intention is also that of seeking an otherworldly response for a personal concern. The dream in question is attested in the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳, T. 2059: “[Dao] An frequently annotated the *sūtras*, but he feared that [his interpretations] did not harmonize with the principles [of the sacred texts], so he then pronounced the following vow (*praṇidhāna*). ‘If what I have explained is not very far from the principles, may I behold an auspicious sign!’ He then dreamed that he saw an Indian man of *Tao* who had white hair and long eyebrows, and who spoke to An, saying, ‘The annotations made to the *sūtras* by you, Sir, are quite in harmony with the principles [of the sacred texts]. As for me, I have not obtained *nirvāṇa* and I live in the Western Regions. I will aid you in diffusing [the doctrine]. From time to time you may make me an offering of food.’ Afterwards when the *Sarvāstivāda-vinaya* 十誦律 arrived, the Reverend [Hui-]yuan [慧遠] then recognized that he about whom the *Upādhyaṃya* (i.e., Dao’an) had dreamed was the [*Arhat*] Piṇḍola 賓頭盧. Thence they established a seat to make food offerings to him, and everywhere this became the rule” (Link 1958, 34–35). For the Chinese, see T. 2059, 353b17–23. This dream is also discussed in Jensen 2018, 243–244.

⁹⁵ Note that the usage of words like “non-mundane,” “otherworldly” here may appear to be an abuse of the similar Buddhist concept “*lokottara*” (Pāli *lokuttara*)—“supramundane” or “superworldly,” but the connotation of the term “otherworldly” in religious studies (i.e., related to “superhuman, occult, superempirical or non-mundane agencies or forces,” Sørensen and Petersen 2021, 11) differs quite drastically from that of the term “*lokottara*” in Buddhism. The

The nature of *nimitta* dreams indeed poses many challenges for modern scholars. For instance, after reviewing the fourfold typologies of the sources of dreams in the *Shanjian lü piposha lun*, Müller (1992, 352–353) spots two paradoxes regarding this dream theory’s emphasis on karma as sources of certain dreams. According to him, 1) since karma is a “subjective” and “psychological” factor, dreams of karma are expected to be individualized; however, the descriptions and instructions of dreams in scriptures are usually standardized without much room for individuality, especially those under a scheme of correspondences between dreams and one’s developmental stages (e.g., bodhisattva *bhūmis*) on a standardized path;⁹⁶ 2) the psychological-karmic interpretation (*psychologisch-karmatische Auslegung*) of dreams—as an opposite of dreams under the influence of what Müller referred to as “pre-Buddhist elements,” including external and physiological/medical elements—should inherently conflict with “apparitions” (*Erscheinungen*) in dreams, that are, divine or demonic visitations, because the Buddhist interpretation of dreams, being primarily psychological, “basically aim[s] at a closed system” (within dreamers themselves).⁹⁷ The second dilemma is especially evident when it comes to the nightmares of advanced practitioners. According to Müller, attributing nightmares to an evil character, i.e., Māra, does not really solve the problem, as it allows an external factor to interfere with the supposedly “closed system” of dreams.⁹⁸

Müller’s analysis posits dreams of karma as the opposite of dreams influenced by external agencies. Indeed, following his argument, dreams of karma should be understood as psychological⁹⁹ and subject to the law of karma—a moral causality—

latter, being opposed to “worldly” (Skt. *laukika*; Pāli *lokiya*), is mostly used to denote deities and practices in relation to liberation from the world, that are, in general, Buddhist deities and practices, as opposed to the deities and practices that are seen as lower than the Buddhist ones or at least not exclusively Buddhist (see Seyfort Rugg 2008, esp. pp. 8–11; Granoff 2000, 404, 422, n. 5; Jones 2022, 102). For a discussion of English translations of the word pair—“worldly” (*laukika*) and “superworldly” (*lokottara*)—and its significance in terms of Buddhist divination, see Fiordalis 2014b, 98–101. According to him, “I do not think the *lokiya/lokuttara* distinction is itself the problem [in terms of the legitimacy of divination in Buddhism]. Rather, the way it has often been utilized has not helped to show how closely the practices and beliefs designated by these terms are intertwined in many Buddhist understandings” (ibid., 99).

⁹⁶ This touches upon a core question of the bodhisattva path: are the path and a bodhisattva’s position on the path standardized? Should they be standardized in the first place? We have seen that the *DZDL* indicates that there is more than one way to irreversibility. More discussion on this issue will follow in Chapter 6.

⁹⁷ “Die Akzent auf der psychologisch-karmatischen Auslegung hebt dennoch, wie sich am klarsten im Vierer-Schema des Vinaya-piṭaka zeigte, die Integration ‘präbuddhistischer’ Elemente nicht auf: medizinische wie ‘übernatürliche’ Traumursachen, wobei aber gerade letztere eine Herausforderung an eine buddhistische Interpretation darstellte, die im Grunde auf ein geschlossenes System anstrebte” (Müller 1992, 352).

⁹⁸ According to Müller (ibid., 354), another solution is to introduce a more drastic notion of emptiness in order to integrate the “supernatural” factors into consciousness.

⁹⁹ Similarly, when surveying the ancient Indian dreams presented in the *Svapnacintāmaṇi* and other Hindu works on dreams, Houben (2009, 54) holds the view that meaningful dreams and “magic” rituals dealing with the consequences of dreams may all be regarded as “psychological”: “Practices like singing a song and requesting a deity to drive away a bad dream do not try to bring about any change in the outside world, whatever they aim at remains entirely within the sphere of the mind. The fact that a dream is effective only if it is remembered and told to someone else (as appears from the abovementioned verse of the *Svapnacintāmaṇi*, SC 1.21) suggests that the corrective actions and rituals (such as the singing of a song to ward off *duṣvāpnya* [nightmare]) address first and foremost the psychology of a person and the impressions he retains from a bad dream and his interpretation of these, not any objective ‘reality’ of the dreams or any objective ‘reality’ to which the dream symbols would necessarily point. If it

rather than under the control of any supernatural agency. Moreover, since dreams of karma are the only invariably acknowledged true dreams, while dreams brought by deities are comparatively controversial, then, true dreams in Buddhism seem to have little to do with otherworldly forces.

But is it true? In my opinion, there is sufficient evidence to say that dreams under the force of karma should also be perceived as dreams external to dreamers. To be sure, dreams of karma still differ from dreams of visitations ontologically, otherwise, the exegeses would not separate them into different categories. However, in the cases of both kinds of dreams, dreamers are perceived as under the passive influences of certain “otherworldly” forces, and they are recipients of external knowledge.

The alleged passive reception and exogeneity of dreams are not only based on my own observation. Though still far from a consensus, many scholars have also expressed similar views. Evidenced by Indian and Tibetan languages’ consistent use of the verb “to see” for dreams, Young (1999, 9) argues: “To say one has *seen* rather than *had* a dream is to suggest that the dreamer is the passive recipient of an objective vision.” Similarly, on dreams of karma found in Chinese Buddhist literature (including those translated from Indic languages), Campany (2020, 66) concludes that regarding Buddhist dreams of karma, “even when a dream is due to a factor from one of our own previous lives, the self who dreams is in effect, *dividual*—but now *dividual* in being distributed over rebirth-time rather than across internal bodily space.” In other words, at least for these scholars, the karma of the past is not internal to oneself from an epistemic perspective.

The above two arguments are perhaps not convincing enough, as they are pure scholarly observations (i.e., from *etic* perspectives) without being evidenced by the accounts of ancient Indian dreamers about whether they perceive dreams of karma as from an external source other than themselves (i.e., *emic* views). To further clarify this exogeneity of dreams, I propose to look at studies of dreams and dreamers in a broader Indian context from both *emic* and *etic* perspectives. The rich materials provided by ancient Indian literature on dreams may shed further light on our understanding of dreams of karma in Buddhism.

First, to be sure, there is no such thing as a clear-cut gap between “pre-Buddhist” dreams and Buddhist dreams with the former accepting supernatural and physiological influences and the latter sticking only to moral causality. In fact, the dream belief in

is next realised that most if not all of the aims which seem to lay outside the mind, such as gaining supremacy over others etc., are also largely determined by someone’s mind and the interpretations he constructs of his experiences and his world, perhaps much more of a text like the [*Sāma-vidhāna-brāhmaṇa*] and much more of texts dealing with dreams can be understood in terms of psychological processes that will undermine a ‘Frazerian’ concept magic.” However, I am not aware of any textual evidence that clearly shows that, to ancient Indian dreamers *themselves*, the aims of rituals are to influence their own minds (i.e., psychological, as argued by Houben above). Therefore, I think at least in our study, there is no point in assuming that ancient Indian authors take a psychological approach to dreams and related rituals.

Buddhism is not significantly divergent from its root—the ancient Indian view(s) toward dreams. In Sanskrit literature, dreams of karma are as prevalent and well-accepted as true knowledge as they are in Buddhism. Secondly, the exogeneity and passivity of meaningful dreams (including dreams under the influence of karma) are well attested in ancient Indian works. In other words, the basic perception of true dreams does not differ in Buddhism and in a broad Indian context, but there exist more in-depth comments on the mechanism of true dreams in ancient Indian philosophical works and modern scholarship.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, we can rely on them for further elucidation of the nature of dreams of karma.

Though we are all aware that any concept in Indian culture comes with inherent complexity and oftentimes diversity, the belief that dreams of certain sources are true seems to be consistent across time and religions. According to the twelfth-century dream manual *Svapnacintāmaṇi*, dreams caused by gods (*deva*), merits (*punya*), or demerits (*pāpa*) are considered meaningful (Von Negelein 1921, 3–7)—just like the categorization of true dreams in Buddhism. But there appears to have been a shift in views of dreams in history. As noticed by Stuhmann (2021, 205–209), the subjective conception of dreams (in which a dreamer acts as the active subject of the dream, the creator of the dream content, and is responsible for it; *ibid.*, 27) prevalent in the earlier Vedic literature gradually loses its dominance to the mantic and transcendental view of dreams. For the latter two kinds of dreams, dreamers are passive recipients of dreams (*ibid.*, 27). Stuhmann (*ibid.*, 153) believes that the conception of the truthfulness of dream content is derived from dreams of visitation by the dead (which Stuhmann refers to as transcendental dreams). This conception is further generalized and leads to a belief in the mantic value of dreams. Whether or not his reasoning is convincing is another matter; his conclusion, also presented in a separate article (2009, 38), shows that both prophetic and transcendental dreams in the post-Vedic Indian context are perceived as having an exogenous origin.

Other studies on Indian notions of dreams may not explicitly stress the exogeneity and passivity of dreams but, following their threads, we can see dreams of cognitive value have been understood in this way by Indian thinkers throughout Indian history: for Vedānta philosophers like Rāmānuja, dreams of karma are created by a higher being (Abegg 1959, 14); in the framework of the Jyotiḥśāstra tradition, the cosmic force is considered a source of knowledge beyond the human body (Chavan 2017, 197–199), and the dreaming state is one of the states of consciousness open to such knowledge.

¹⁰⁰ In Chapter 2 (n. 24), I have already made reference to some overviews of primary sources on dreams in Sanskrit. Adding to that, here I wish to mention a few secondary studies: the two-volume collection of articles *The Indian Nights: Sleep and Dreams in Indian Culture*, edited by Claudine Bautze-Picron, touches upon almost every aspect of dreams in Indian culture. Doniger 1984's book on dreams in Hindu narratives, *Dreams, Illusion, and Other Realities*, has been extremely influential. In addition, two dissertations, Layek 1988 and Chavan 2017, focus more on dream theories; both utilize a great quantity of primary sources of philosophical discussion on dreams.

Therefore, the notion that true knowledge in dreams is provided by sources external to dreamers is immanent in the Indian cultural context. In this way, true dreams in Mahāyāna scriptures should be understood as having external, non-mundane origins, from both an emic perspective as well as the etic observation suggested by the frequent juxtaposition of dreams and magic.

To understand dreams as a means of divination with a pronounced concern for non-mundane forces should not be astonishing when talking about dreams in any ancient culture, yet we may still find this notion hard to integrate into Mahāyāna Buddhism.

In the first place, there is considerable controversy when putting Buddhism and divination together. We have been told how much Buddhism opposes divination practices in the Nikāyas and Vinayas.¹⁰¹ Even so, factually speaking, this cannot conceal the popularity of dreaming as a means of divination in the scriptures that we have examined. And the reason for the later decline in using dreams as a source of true knowledge does not lie in a shift in views on the truthfulness of certain dreams (as already evidenced by Dharmakīrti and Śāntideva's comments on true dreams); as we will see in Chapter 6, the main underlying reason is the shift in views on the bodhisattva career.

Moreover, from the standpoint of theory, as an epistemic method, "divination" should not be taken as inferior to other methods no matter whether from the perspective of modern scholarship or from the tradition itself. Despite the negative meanings that scholars of previous generations usually attached to it (as with magic),¹⁰² we should see this phenomenon merely as a way to acquire knowledge. Approaching scriptures with the model of "divination" is not to degrade those scriptures by over-emphasizing their mythological aspects.¹⁰³ As Struck (2016, 15) comments on divinations in classical antiquity, "divination will be best understood as driven not mainly by exotic theological commitments, nor by primitive minds tempted by superstition, nor by political ambitions to manipulate the masses; but rather by an underlying characteristic of the nature of human cognition." Further, as "a strategy for managing anxiety" (Campany 2020, 69) and creating a feeling of control over a chaotic situation (ibid., 70),

¹⁰¹ Besides the list of divination methods in the *Dīgha Nikāya* and comparable passages that have been discussed by Guggenmos 2017, 185–195, the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya also includes a list of divination methods that are criticized as an improper way of gaining a livelihood; see T. 1428, 963b19–c6. See also Fiordalis's article (2014b) for a full discussion on the evidence for and problems of Buddhist divination. An overview of Buddhist magic, including divination methods, can also be found in Van Schaik's monograph on this topic (2020), especially its Chapter 3 on the "Sources of Magic in Buddhist Scripture."

¹⁰² The narrative of magic being inferior to religion is so well established that "[t]he claim of the importance of magic was maintained against protests of Indian scholars who were eager to emphasise elements that place Vedic religion and Hinduism on a higher level in the evaluative scheme common in that time, with monotheism and Christianity implicitly or explicitly placed at the top" (Houben 2009, 40).

¹⁰³ As the "common charge" of the development of Buddhism is that Buddhism "degenerating from a noble and humanistic path of self-improvement into a religion distinguished by faith in a higher power, grace and revelation" (Harrison 1987b, 257), emphasis of the aspect of divination and revelation in Buddhism could be seen as accusations against the "popular and scholarly imagination" of Buddhist path being an "humanistic, practical, rational, and perhaps even scientific path of wisdom, ethics, and meditation" (Greene 2016, 289–290).

it is not necessarily a method inferior to “scientific” epistemic methods,¹⁰⁴ and there was no dichotomy between superstition and science in our context in the first place. Even if certain Buddhist traditions openly oppose divination practices, as evidenced by the list of practices that monks should abstain from in the Nikāyas (Guggenmos 2017, 185–195), according to Guggenmos (ibid., 164), “in general, the Buddhist tradition does not negate the functioning of mantic practices, but stresses their non-helpful impact on the practitioner and their danger to the monastic community.”¹⁰⁵ In other words, divination is not dismissed as ineffective, nor is it held to be an inferior method of knowing the future in contrast to other epistemic methods that Buddhism authorizes (for example, the cognitive ability to recollect previous lives, *pūrvā-nivāsānusmṛti-jñāna*, attained through meditation). As shown by the texts discussed in this chapter, if divination serves the purpose of helping Buddhist practitioners proceed on their pursuit of arhathood or buddhahood, there is no problem with it.¹⁰⁶

Then, when anxiety over a certain kind of knowledge, like knowledge of one’s karma, meets a belief in a trustworthy source of this knowledge, like *nimitta* dreams in our context, it is only logical that bodhisattvas would seek knowledge of their karmic obstruction through dreams. It also partially explains why, intentionally or unintentionally, the composers of the *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra* feature the disclosure of the confession method in a dream. Not only is confession related to knowledge of karma, but it is also associated with a strong feeling of anxiety;¹⁰⁷ it would thus be

¹⁰⁴ In a modern context, as Zuesse (1987, 2369) summarizes it: “Divination involves communication with personally binding realities and seeks to discover the ‘ought’ addressed specifically to the personal self or to a group. Science, however, if faithful to its own axioms, cannot enunciate any ‘ought’ because of its methodological, cognitive, and moral neutrality: it only offers hypotheses about reality and is concerned with general statistical regularities, not with unique persons or events.”

¹⁰⁵ Similarly, regarding the Buddhist view toward astrology in early textual evidence, “It is clear that *some* members of the early saṃgha, so far as the extant literature suggests, prohibited astrology as *a livelihood* on the grounds that it was inappropriate for a *śramaṇa* to practice, although we must be clear that the validity of astrology and its underlying belief that the auspiciousness of a time is determined by favorable arrangements of celestial bodies were *not* rejected at this point” (Kotyk 2018, 148).

¹⁰⁶ Similarly, on the problems of Buddhist divination, Fiordalis (2014b, 102) argues that, “When seen in the light of our comparative analysis, neither the rational/irrational dichotomy nor that between science and pseudo-science—distinguishing which has been such a strong modern concern even among apologists for the category of religion—seems to be clearly reflected in the classical Buddhist literature we have examined in this essay. Nevertheless, on the interpretation offered here, Buddhist literature depicts Buddhists as being very much engaged in the affairs of this world, and the supposedly ‘otherworldly’ rhetoric reflects and can even be made to justify this engagement.” I think our observations concur with his conclusion: divination practices as a method of gaining knowledge are not the key concern; the issue is about the field to which the practices are applied. In this context, using similar divination methods to aid a bodhisattva’s career could easily be justified. For example, when the seventeenth-century Chinese monk Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 talks of utilizing divination methods to diagnose his karmic obstruction in his commentary on the abovementioned *Zhancha shan’ e yebao jing* (namely, the *Zhancha shan’ e yebao jing xuanyi* 占察善惡業報經玄義), “Ouyi defends divination from charges of degeneracy by arguing that even if one criticizes the object of divination (good and bad karma), the subject or act of divining itself is not blameless [*sic*] if performed with wisdom; moreover, it can sometimes contribute to one’s spiritual development, erasing doubts and bolstering faith in one’s spiritual potential. Since one can use divination for others, it can also cause other people’s virtue to increase and resolve their doubt and regret” (McGuire 2013, 418).

¹⁰⁷ On the effect of confession (*pāpadeśanā*) practice in Mahāyāna treatises, especially in the *Suvarṇabhāṣottama-sūtra* and *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Haskett (2010, 197) argues that “*pāpadeśanā* intends to provoke a particular emotional response on the part of the reciter [...] As Brekke and Heim have each shown, fear has long motivated Buddhists generally (Brekke 1999a and 1999b) and ethically (Heim 2003). However, the [*Bodhicaryāvatāra*] *pāpadeśanā* is far more overt and direct than any other text in encouraging dis-ease in its reciters, and the *pañjikā* only makes that

quite a natural reflex to incorporate confession methods into dreams, as dreams are already there to manage such anxiety and uncertainty.

Secondly, we have not yet really answered the question of why bodhisattvas are so eager to know about their past karma and influence from external agencies, such as buddhas, deities, and Māra.

This is again a twofold question: first, isn't there a better means to learn about past lives than dreaming? Faure (1996, 122) comments on the epistemic importance of dreams and visions in the context of medieval Japanese Buddhism: "on the level of practice, dreams and visions played an essential role in marking and authenticating the steps on the Buddhist way. It was through them that 'auspicious signs' were received, which provided the only way to verify spiritual progress of the practitioner." Are dreams also the best way—or even "the only way"—to verify a bodhisattva's spiritual progress in our Indian Mahāyāna context?

The answer is both yes and no. Due to the scarcity of sociohistorical records of Indian Mahāyāna, it is hard to answer the question "on the level of practice," while on the level of literature, other methods are also recorded. For example, the attainment of the knowledge of past lives is called *jāti-smara*,¹⁰⁸ literally "remembrance of (past) lives." According to Schopen's outline of the term's appearances and historical changes in Mahāyāna literature, this knowledge seems to be an eternal concern, but the method of gaining it changes throughout history. In early Mahāyāna scripture—for example, in the *Upāli*—the knowledge could be gained through the means of meditation or from external agents (ibid., 182). Later, in the medieval sūtras, the attainment of *jāti-smara* is generalized, and becomes a promise accompanied by mere activities such as hearing the Dharma or circulating text, etc. (ibid., 208).

Therefore, some other sources or forces also promise bodhisattvas knowledge of their past karma,¹⁰⁹ and there has always been a tension between promises of this knowledge and the exaggeration of such promises. There is no easy answer to this question; the solution to the concern over knowledge always changes, along with other doctrinal concerns and sociohistorical factors. In Chapter 6, we will pay close attention to the dynamics between changes in doctrinal prerequisites and the solution to the

intention more clear and forceful. *Pāpadeśanā* intentionally disturbs emotional equilibrium—or, perhaps, seeks to induce a steady state of what we would call disturbed emotions—in several directions and harnesses a range of social, personal, familial, and religio-cosmological forces."

¹⁰⁸ The knowledge of past lives, as one of the higher knowledges (*abhijñā*), is also called *pūrva-nivāsānūsmṛti-jñāna*, lit. "knowledge of the remembrance of previous dwellings" (Pāli *pubba-nivāsa-anussati-ñāna*), in some sources. For the references on the names of the higher knowledges, see Edgerton 1953, II: 50, as well as Wayman 1992, 133–134.

¹⁰⁹ It should also be noted here that *jāti-smara* is slightly different from the knowledge of karmic obstruction that we are discussing here; according to Schopen (2005, 212–213): "It should be clear from all of this that in our texts the significance of the obtainment of *jāṭismara* appears to have been conceived of primarily in terms of the fact that it could or did effect not [...] the confirmation of a given doctrinal position, but a radical restructuring of behavior and attitude in the individual concerned, and—importantly—the release from, or avoidance of, rebirth in the hells and other unfortunate destinies." In other words, *jāti-smara* is also a blessing for future rebirths.

corresponding concerns provoked by these prerequisites. In a sense, a dream is just a placeholder; as a source of knowledge, other methods should, in theory, work equally well. Indeed, we also see body and personality traits considered as “signs” of the fact that a “wholesome root has been planted” (Buswell 1992, 111), etc. However, curiously, when Śāntideva introduced the practices of remedies (*pratipakṣa-samudācāra*) to eliminate negative karma (*pāpakṣaya*), among all the methods he cited a large proportion can be summarized as using wholesome karma to counteract the negative or adhering to correct views, while a small fraction is about meeting buddhas or bodhisattvas. Yet the only clear mention of *knowing* the success of eliminating sins is seeing signs (*nimitta*) through dreams subsequent to the recitation of the *Cundā-dhāraṇī* (Goodman 2016, 169–179; Bendall 1902, 171.7–178.16). It is unclear whether other methods require a confirmation or if dreaming is seen as the only way to receive this confirmation.

All in all, as the belief in true dreams is deeply rooted in Indian culture, the knowledge brought by dreaming meets the concerns of spiritual practitioners, and such knowledge is very much accessible (since everyone dreams). There is no wonder that dreaming is among the most popular ways to unlock the knowledge about one’s past and future of their spiritual progress.

A second question raised by the investigation of “why bodhisattvas are eager to know about their karma and influence from external agencies such as buddhas, deities, and Māra” is how this knowledge matters to their bodhisattva career. The reason behind this will be the subject of our next two chapters—what is involved in a bodhisattva’s progress, and how do karmic obstructions and influence from external agencies affect a bodhisattva’s progress. Many may think that a bodhisattva’s achievement has nothing to do with otherworldly power and that the bodhisattva progress model should be more sophisticated and objective. In fact, as we have seen in the *SvN*, it does have much to do with otherworldly powers and karmic obstructions. I will cite the *DZDL* both as an answer and—at the same time—as a question for the next chapter.

As we have seen elsewhere, regarding the dreams of irreversibility, when being asked, “there is already an extensive discourse on the marks of irreversibility; why repeat it?” the composers of the *DZDL* answered the question with a list of the varied conditions for gaining irreversibility—most importantly, the exact course of attaining irreversibility depends on whether or not a bodhisattva has already obtained a prediction from a buddha.¹¹⁰ This indicates that, first, there is no unified way to achieve irreversibility. Secondly, the attainment depends on a bodhisattva’s conditions, especially his obtainment of a prediction. Therefore, in a sense, a bodhisattva’s progress is related to the karmic conditions that bodhisattvas have inherited from their previous

¹¹⁰ T. 1509, 597b6–14; see n. 57 in this chapter for an English translation.

lives and an external agency who is a buddha. Both implications may lead to a great feeling of uncertainty among bodhisattvas. But do other scriptures and treatises hold a similar view toward the progress of a bodhisattva? If they do, how do these scriptures propose to deal with the uncertainty that comes along with this view?

Conclusion

Everyone dreams. As long as people have dreamt, they have sought meaning in their dreams. Even after neuroscientists have declared dreams “the product of the random, brain-stem driven activation of the brain during sleep” (Windt 2019), the fascination with Freudian or Lacanian dream interpretation has not ceased, let alone the public’s strong belief in the prognostic value of dreams and their hope of meeting their loved ones or receiving instructions from a higher being in dreams.

The same holds for bodhisattvas. Despite dreams being famously depreciated as illusory in Mahāyāna Buddhism, since the belief in the truthfulness of dreams that are dreamt through the power of karma or external agency is firmly rooted in ancient India, in our texts, bodhisattvas still attach much epistemic value to dreams. As a result, the Mahāyāna scriptures that we have reviewed tell dream tales, interpret dreams, and even prescribe dreams to bodhisattvas.

On the other hand, almost everyone pursues a certain kind of career. Those who pursue a career almost certainly encounter uncertainty at some point in their careers. Guidelines or career training, though aimed at reducing uncertainties, cannot eliminate it. To manage such uncertainty, people turn to any resource that claims to provide them with advanced knowledge.

The bodhisattva career is the same. Given the involvement of factors in a bodhisattva’s career that are beyond his knowledge, it is conceivable that a bodhisattva would also feel uncertain about his career development.

When concerns over knowing the predictions of buddhas and the obstructions imposed by Māra and negative karma meet a deep belief in the epistemic power of dreams, it is only natural that bodhisattvas turn to dreams to relieve their concerns. Mahāyāna scriptures like the *SvN* reflect such uncertainty and the effort to provide a remedy.

However, a better solution than *managing* the uncertainty through such individualized experiences (i.e., dreams) is certainly to *eliminate* the uncertainty in the first place.

But is it possible to wield control over such uncertainty? More specifically, in our context, could a bodhisattva control the external influence of buddhas, Māra, and the karmic consequences of his or her past?

In the next two chapters, we will view models of bodhisattva progress from the perspective of the dynamics between the sources of uncertainty and attempts to eliminate or gloss over the uncertainty.