

Meeting Buddhas Now, Part 2: *Samādhi*, the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*, and *Prajñāpāramitā*

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Abstract:

This is the second of two articles related to exploring the notion of meeting Buddhas of the present as described in the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*, the 般舟三昧經 (T 418). The present exploration begins by discussing the term *samādhi* employed as a form of self-reference in the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*. Then a brief survey of dimensions of the practice described the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* leads over to relating aspects of T 418 to the *Prajñāpāramitā* translation extant as the 道行般若經 (T 224).

Keywords:

Amitābha; early Mahāyāna; Lokakṣema; *Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*; Pure Land; recollection of the Buddha; revelatory dreams; Sadāprarudita; *samādhi*; T 224; T 418; visions of the Buddha

Introduction

With the present article I continue my exploration of the idea of encountering Buddha(s) of the present. In the first of the two articles dedicated to this topic, I mainly surveyed relevant material from *Āgama* literature.¹ In what follows, I first of all turn to the question, to be explored in critical dialogue with stimulating suggestions offered by Skilton (2002), of how far the term *samādhi* in its use in the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* indeed refers to some form of meditative practice, or more literally a “concentration” (I). Next, I take up selected indications relevant to an actual cultivation of the *samādhi* that leads to meeting Buddhas of the present, in particular a concretization of this meditative approach in relation to the Buddha Amitābha (II.1). Then I turn to the indication that seeing him and receiving his teachings can also take place while asleep, whereby dreams assume an important revelatory role (II.2).

The *Prajñāpāramitā* (T 224) translated by Lokakṣema and his team refers to what appears to be an instance of the practice described in the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*, which leads me over to an exploration of the Sadāprarudita tale within which this reference occurs (III.1). By way of contextualization, I take up various indicators relevant to appreciating the intertextual relationship between these two texts (III.2).

Before embarking on these topics, however, I need to introduce the text that forms the central point of reference for my exploration in what follows. The translation of the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*, 般舟三昧經 (T 418), attributed to Lokakṣema and a team of

¹. Anālayo 2025a.

collaborators,² was reportedly completed in the year 179 of the present era.³ My concern is throughout with this text in particular, so that whenever I refer to the “**Pratyutpanna-samādhi-sūtra*,” then this intends T 418. Within the confines of my present exploration, it will unfortunately not be possible to engage in a comparison with the other versions, which I just list here for the sake of completeness. Three such parallel versions are extant in Chinese:

T 416 (大方等大集經賢護分), a complete version translated in the sixth century,
 T 417 (also titled 般舟三昧經), which appears to be a Chinese abridgement of T 418,
 T 419 (拔陂菩薩經), a partial version that only covers the first chapters of the text.

In addition, a full parallel exists in a Tibetan translation from the ninth century, and fragment parallels are extant from a Gāndhārī manuscript belonging to the so-called Split Collection as well as from Sanskrit manuscripts pertaining to the British Library collection. These can conveniently be listed based on the divisions adopted by Harrison (1978b) in his edition of the Tibetan text, followed by referring to the manuscript and its most recent edition:⁴

6D–6E: Crosby 252/253; see Wille (2006: 505f),⁵
 7E–7G: Split Collection; see Harrison, Lenz, and Salomon (2018: 124–127),
 9B–9E: Or.15010/15: 1; see Karashima (2009: 348–351),
 14E–14J: Or.15011/16 (= Hoernle MS, No. 143, S.A.3); see Harrison (1990: 280–299),
 19D: Or.15008/47; see Harrison 2020: 275,
 20B–20J: Or.15008/47, Or.15009/257, and Or.15009/258; see Harrison (2020: 277–280),
 22A: Or.15008/47; see Harrison (2020: 276),
 23B: Or. 15009/258; see Harrison (2020: 281).

I. Some Cases of **Pratyutpanna*-‘*samādhi*’

The **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* has the term *samādhi* in its title and expounds in detail a particular type of *samādhi* yielding visions of Buddhas, which would make it a natural choice for *sūtras* concerned with some form of meditation practice. This type of assumption has been called into question in a stimulating article by Skilton (2002), who proposes that at times the term *samādhi* rather serves as a referent to textual lists. In full appreciation of his contribution by problematizing a usage of the term *samādhi* that indeed calls for investigation, in what follows I critically examine selected instances of his presentation that appear to be directly relevant to my present study.⁶

One such case is when Skilton (2002: 64f) takes up a passage from the Tibetan version of the *Pratyutpannabuddhasaṃmukhāvasthitasamādhi-sūtra*. In reply to an inquiry regarding

² The complex question of the translatorship attribution has been taken up in detail by Harrison 1990: 221–249, with a summary in Harrison 1993: 145–147, followed by discussions in Nattier 2008: 81–83, Harrison 2019: 703, and in Radich 2025 forthcoming.

³ T 2145 at T LV 47c5.

⁴ Correlations are for the most part based on the indications provided in Harrison 2020.

⁵ For additional observations see also Harrison 2020: 272n8.

⁶ Some criticism has already been articulated by Li 2023, for the most part regarding positions taken by Skilton 2002 in relation to the *Śūraṅgamasamādhi-sūtra*. Li 2023: 2 and *passim* refers to another articulation of criticism by Fukita Takanori published in 2020 in the *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies*, 68: 84–88. My ignorance of Japanese unfortunately prevents me from taking this contribution into account.

the *samādhi* under discussion, this passage begins with taking up the Buddha as the meditative object and then continues by listing a series of supportive conditions, such as the absence of distraction, etc.⁷ Skilton (2002: 65) notes that some of the items in this list show that, strictly speaking, “we are not dealing with a list of meditational terms.” Yet, as convincingly argued by Li (2023: 10), “the relationship between the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi* and the enumerated items” reflects “the relationship between the outcome and its conditions. The listed items are the conditions or meritorious deeds that produce the attainment of the concentration on the Tathāgata, and the concentration is the outcome as well as the converging location of these meritorious deeds.” This would be in line with an observation offered elsewhere by Skilton (2002: 55), in that already in *Āgama* literature “*samādhi* includes both the range of preparatory practices and the series of distinct altered mental states which they produce and support.”⁸

A similar perspective would be relevant to another passage in the *Pratyutpannabuddhasaṃmukhāvasthitasamādhi-sūtra*, which refers to those who, on hearing about this *samādhi*, do not copy it in book form, teach it, recite it, etc.⁹ Skilton (2002: 79) regards this as one of several examples that “unambiguously demonstrate that *samādhi* is used in this and other texts to denote a text,” followed by evaluating the alternative possibilities that the reference may be either to the *sūtra* as a whole or else to a list of terms found within the *sūtra*.

In assessing such references, it may be helpful to keep in mind that in the ancient setting copying the description of a *samādhi*, teaching and reciting it, etc., were required to be able to cultivate or put into practice that *samādhi*. An example from the Pāli tradition that perhaps illustrates this situation would be the treatment of the topic of *samādhi* in the *Visuddhimagga*. After explaining the general characteristics of *samādhi*, the exposition of the actual practice begins by surveying different potential problems when residing in a particular monastery.¹⁰ This of course does not mean that *samādhi* is merely about housing. Nevertheless, finding the appropriate monastery to live in or having access to relevant instructions—in the form of a written copy or due to being able to recite these from memory—are important conditions for being able to cultivate *samādhi*. The overall situation that emerges in this way could perhaps be compared to medicine and the prescription detailing how to take it. The latter is needed and for this reason included alongside the medicine itself among what the doctor or pharmacist will give to the patient.

Yet another passage in the same *Pratyutpannabuddhasaṃmukhāvasthitasamādhi-sūtra* commends that one should not rest in or take a stance on (*gnas par mi bya'o*) various items

⁷ Harrison 1978b: 21,18 (2D), with its counterpart in T 418 at T XIII 904b26.

⁸ An example in support of this assessment would be DN 10 at DN I 207,10, where the noble *samādhikkhandha* comprises practices like restraint of the senses, clear comprehension with bodily activities, contentment with requisites, and withdrawal to a secluded location (DN 10 abbreviates, which needs to be supplemented with the full exposition of the respective part of the gradual path found in DN 2 at DN I 70,7). A Sanskrit fragment parallel to DN 10 has preserved references to the *samādhiskandha* (not qualified as noble), making it quite possible that it had a similar type of exposition; see SHT V 1290dR9+10, Sander and Waldschmidt 1985: 212. The gradual path account given in DN 2 has a counterpart found in the *Saṅghabheda-vastu*, Gnoli 1978: 240,18, which also lists restraint of the senses, clear comprehension with bodily activities, and withdrawal to a secluded location; it does not mention contentment with requisites.

⁹ Harrison 1978b: 49,18 (6A): *thos nas kyang glegs bam du 'dri bar mi byed, ston par mi byed, 'don par mi byed* (here and elsewhere, I have adjusted to the Wylie system), with its counterpart in T 418 at T XIII 907a11.

¹⁰ Vism 118,1.

that, for the most part, relate to meditation.¹¹ This then leads on to the statement that the actual *samādhi* consists of the application of these dharmas in practice.¹² Skilton (2002: 81) reasons that “the Buddha is shown explicitly excluding from consideration a collection of the most important meditative practices used and associated with the term *samādhi* in the Śrāvaka and Mahāyāna traditions.” This then leads him to the conclusion that the text “is specifically excluding sustained experience of meditative practices/states” (p. 82) from what is designated with the term *samādhi*. However, the passage in question can perhaps more fruitfully be understood to call for nonreification of the various practices listed—not taking a stance on them—rather than intending that these are not to be cultivated at all. In other words, the passage seems to me to be about the right attitude in support of *samādhi* practice by giving priority to the absence of attachment.

Regarding the tendency for various lists, some of them of significant length, to be associated with the term *samādhi*, a possibility to be kept in mind is that some instances of this type could be the result of a growth of the respective texts in the course of time. This possibility can be exemplified with a passage found in the *Prajñāpāramitā* translation by Lokakṣema and his team, which describes the gaining of the *samādhi* of seeing the Buddhas of the ten directions. This could well be a reference to the **Pratyutpannasamādhi*,¹³ which would make it directly relevant to my main theme, and I will return to this reference below. Of particular relevance for the present context is the circumstance that this passage reflects a broadening of the scope of the term *samādhi*:¹⁴ What in Lokakṣema’s translation is a single

¹¹ Harrison 1978b: 155,12 (18A), with its counterpart in T 418 at T XIII 915c24.

¹² Harrison 1978b: 155,16 (18A): *de la ting nge 'dzin gang zhe na? gang chos de dag la nan tan du byed kyi*, with its counterpart in T 418 at T XIII 915c25. A somewhat comparable case occurs in relation to a list of qualities in the *Samādhirāja-sūtra*, Matsunami 1975: 194,8, which ends by defining *samādhi* as the practice of the previously listed qualities. Skilton 2002: 80f reasons that “the concluding sentence attempts some explanation of the phenomenon, by asserting that *samādhi* in this usage should be understood as the ‘correct practice’ of the items in the list. Explanation is necessary when the usage is questionable ... We seem not to have been the first to have been baffled over this matter.” To my mind, the indication in this part of the *Samādhirāja-sūtra* seems quite straightforward, and I fail to see a need for assuming the existence of some kind of bafflement regarding a supposedly questionable usage that calls for explanation.

¹³ Karashima 2011: 479,1 (= T 224 at T VIII 472a19): 即得見十方諸佛三昧. Harrison 1978a: 47f reasons that “there can be no doubt that a specific *samādhi* is being referred to in this early version of the *Aṣṭa*. Now, we have no way of knowing whether or not that *samādhi* can be equated with the *pratyutpanna-samādhi*; what is important for our purposes is that, given the production at some time of the *Pratyutpanna-sūtra*, we are liable to regard the experience of the vision of the Buddhas of the ten directions ... as a specific experience on the path to the Perfection of Wisdom and awakening.” The present instance does not seem to be the only one of this type, as another text translated by Lokakṣema has a comparable reference: T 283 at T X 454b7+24 reports that the bodhisattva Dharmamati gained the *samādhi* of seeing the Buddhas of the ten directions, 三昧悉見十方諸佛, and subsequently gave teachings to other bodhisattvas based on what he had realized in that *samādhi*, 於三昧中覺, 便語菩薩言. As shown by Nattier 2005, T 283 stems, together with T 280 and T 282, from a single translation by Lokakṣema of a proto-*Buddhāvataṃsaka* or smaller *Buddhāvataṃsaka* that, due to some accident in transmission, was broken up into three texts.

¹⁴ Perhaps the pattern evident in the present example may also provide a perspective on a combination of different lists under the header of *samādhi* in the *Prasāntaviniścaya-prātihāryasamādhi-sūtra*, which Skilton 2002: 75f takes as implying that “we see the work of an editor within the Buddhist tradition ... who nevertheless clearly understood the usage of the word *samādhi* to mean ‘collection of terms.’ This represents objective confirmation of a high order for the present thesis.” At any rate, a combining of different lists as such is a pervasive feature of Buddhist texts that is not confined to the topic of *samādhi*. Several instances of such combination of lists even result in inconsistencies; see Anālayo 2022a: 136–140. This goes to show that such combinations need not invariably be seen as an expression of a deliberate editorial intent. Instead, it seems to me preferable to view such phenomena as the outcome of the dynamics of textual transmission, resulting in a

samādhi, in the Sanskrit version becomes a proliferation of *samādhi* names too long to be quoted in full here.¹⁵ Without thereby intending to posit a linear development—as the different members of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* textual family are probably best considered distinct versions in their own right—it seems fairly probable that the present case of a long list of *samādhi* names could be the result of a textual proliferation that had a reference to a single *samādhi* as its starting point.¹⁶

In sum, at least as far as the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* is concerned, I am not persuaded by the main argument by Skilton (2002: 90) that in the examples he has surveyed the term *samādhi* has become a designation for “a ‘collection’ of terms and should be translated as such.” In other words, I am not ready to take the step of considering the *sūtra* under discussion to be the “Discourse on [Textual] Collection(s) [on Buddhas] of the Present” and instead prefer to continue thinking of it as the “Discourse on the Concentration [on Buddhas] of the Present.”

A general assessment offered by Lancaster (1976: 200)—not related to the present *sūtra* in particular—goes further than the position I would take. This assessment forms part of an article mainly devoted to listings of *samādhi* names in Mahāyāna *sūtras*. The relevant part proposes the following:

In keeping with the thought that these *samādhis* represent an essential part of the Mahāyāna practice as described in the major *sūtras*, it does not seem to be the case that the Buddhists intended to present these colourful and wonder producing *samādhi* names as similes or symbols. Rather they describe the experience of meditative trance and they occur in the literature because of this actuality.

In view of the general tendency of lists to proliferate, it seems to me preferable to allow room for the symbolic nature of such references, at the same time keeping in mind that the powerful associations called up by the term of *samādhi* as some form of meditative practice may well be a central driving force influencing the proliferation of lists of *samādhi* names. To borrow a term suggested to me by Paul Harrison in a personal comment, such lists can best be understood to be “rhapsodic” in nature.¹⁷ Another relevant comment by Deleanu (2000:

tendency to proliferate textual items quite independent of the topic they purport to describe. Without intending to deny the possibility of intentional editorial intervention, it seems best to allow also for alternative explanations.

¹⁵ Wogihara 1932/1935: 940,21 to 942,5 (also in Mitra 1887/1888: 490,11 to 492,6); this difference has already been noted by Harrison 1978a: 47. The present instance features among the examples cited by Skilton 2002: 57n28 for what he refers to (p. 56) as “*samādhi*-name lists, some of considerable length.” At the same time, it is an example that stands in contrast to the following proposal by Skilton 2002: 90: “In fact, it seems that such lists came to be so embedded not by chance, but were themselves the original, even if later misunderstood, foci of such *sūtras*.”

¹⁶ This suggestion would find support in the other extant Chinese versions. A brief reference to a single *samādhi* occurs in the comparatively early translation T 225 at T VIII 504c6: 入見十方佛定. Long lists of different *samādhis* can in turn be found in later translations, namely T 227 at T VIII 581b24 and T 228 at T VIII 670a5, as well as in T 220 at T VI 1061c2 (the last is the version of the *Sadāprarudita* tale translated by Xuánzàng, 玄奘, which here occurs in the text whose Sanskrit version is known under the title *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, being absent from his two translations of members of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* textual family). In all these three cases, the long lists culminate in the *samādhi* of seeing all Buddhas, which is the only *samādhi* mentioned in the two early translations, T 224 and T 225.

¹⁷ 18th July 2024.

73) takes the form of considering

whether these *samādhis* actually refer to specific meditative techniques. The texts are not very clear and generous in details. It appears, however, that apart from some well-attested methods, many of these *samādhis* represent rather stylistic devices stressing the fact that the apprehension of the most profound aspects of reality must be connected with a state of concentration.

In this way, it seems possible to arrive at a middle way solution to what could be considered as two extremes, namely either assuming that references to *samādhi* must be reflecting actual meditation practice or else reducing such references to mere textual lists.¹⁸ The powerful attraction of the notion that a state of concentration will enable apprehending the most profound aspects of reality could then be visualized as the central axis around which a rhapsody of proliferation of names evolves and whose inspirational power eventually encompasses the whole *samādhi-sūtra*.

The problem correctly identified by Andrew Skilton could in turn be approached in line with the notion of “fuzzy self-reference” articulated by Harrison (2022: 652), “in which the text refers indeterminately to itself and to whatever it is—the *samādhi*, the *dhāraṇī*, the quality, etc.—that it teaches.”¹⁹ In the present case, “the referent could be the meditative practice called the *pratyutpannabuddhasaṃmukhāvasthitasamādhi*, or it could be the sūtra of that title which propounds it, or it could be both.” Harrison (2022: 653) concludes that “[i]n this way the wording of the sūtra repeatedly blurs the distinction between the container and its contents, between medium and message, between the text and what it is ostensibly talking about, promoting both at the same time.” This appears to me to constitute indeed the key aspect of this type of usage.

¹⁸ Skilton 2002: 57n30 refers to another statement on the same page by Deleanu 2000: 73 in the form of a comment on the *Samādhirāja-sūtra* that “there is no clearly identifiable meditative technique which can be singled out as this particular *samādhi*.” A lack of presenting clearly identifiable meditative techniques can at least to some extent also be found among Pāli discourses, where meditative items like the ten *kaṣiṇas* (Sanskrit: *kṛtsna*), for example, are merely listed, and no detailed information about their meditative cultivation is available, for which a practitioner needs to turn to the *Visuddhimagga*; see Vism 122,30 to 177,31. The *Visuddhimagga*, however, presents a substantially later perspective, to the extent of dropping one of the *kaṣiṇas* from the list—the consciousness *kaṣiṇa*—presumably because it does not fit the proposed mode of meditative cultivation; see also Anālayo 2024a: 44.

¹⁹ The employment of the notion of “self-reference” in relation to such contexts in the *Śūraṃgamasamādhi-sūtra* has been criticized by Li 2023: 20 as follows: “Indeed, how could the text refer to itself when it does not yet exist within the [framework of the] narrative?” As far as a mere self-reference is concerned, the circumstance that the text referred to is still in the making need not be considered a problem. In *Āgama* literature advance references can be found in the form of the Buddha reportedly announcing that he will teach such-and-such an exposition (*pariyāya*) or analysis (*vibhaṅga*), which then serves as the title to the respective discourse even though at that moment in narrative time the discourse itself had not yet come into existence. One example would be the teaching given in the *Mūlapariyāya-sutta*, announced in MN 1 at MN I 1,5 as *sabbadhammamūlapariyāyaṃ vo ... desessāmi*, with a parallel in EĀ 44.6 at T II 766a5: 我今與汝當說妙法 ... 此經名曰一切諸法之本. Another example would be the teaching given in the *Salāyatanavibhaṅga-sutta*, announced in MN 137 at MN III 215,26 as *salāyatanavibhaṅgaṃ vo ... desessāmi*, with a parallel in MĀ 163 at T I 692b25: 我當為汝說法 ... 謂分別六處經. This suggests that it was not necessarily considered problematic to refer to a text/teaching that at the time of the reference being spoken had not yet come fully into existence. In principle, it seems quite natural to preface what is going to be said or written by some form of announcement of what is going to come, so that such a type of self-reference appears quite natural. On self-references in Mahāyāna *sūtra* literature see also O’Neill 2020 and Anālayo 2024b.

II.1 Seeing Buddhas in *Samādhi*

After describing the august assembly present at the delivery of this teaching,²⁰ the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* begins with the bodhisattva Bhadrapāla requesting the Buddha to teach a *samādhi* that will lead to the fulfilment of a vast array of wishes. These culminate in the wish to be able to see Buddhas and hear their teachings without having to be reborn in their Buddhafields, instead of which this should take place in just the same manner as Bhadrapāla is right now in the Buddha's presence.²¹ In his reply, the Buddha explains that all the different wishes mentioned by Bhadrapāla will be accomplished through the *samādhi* in which all Buddhas of the present are in front of oneself.²²

In the narrative setting of the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*, the Buddha Śākyamuni is still alive and therefore at least in principle accessible, which is why Bhadrapāla can ask his question. But the situation differs of course for audiences hearing or reading the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*, who share with all Buddhists born after Śākyamuni's time the inability of having any kind of in-person relationship with the master. The type of loss resulting from the Buddha's final Nirvāṇa can safely be assumed to have had a rather substantial impact in the ancient setting, leading to a whole range of developments in the ensuing period. Among these, I am not aware of any other approach more promising than the one presented in the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* with its emphasis on meeting a Buddha face to face and being able to hear his teachings (and even pose questions if opportune). What more could one possibly ask for?

With this remarkable potential in view, the next and obvious question is how to go about cultivating this *samādhi*. Śākyamuni explains that this takes place by directing mindfulness toward the Buddha in accordance with the conditions for recollection of the Buddha, based on having an undistracted mind from which wisdom is gained as well as unremitting energy.²³ Clearly, the practice of recollection of the Buddha forms an important starting point, yet, what the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* has on offer goes further than that.

The *sūtra* then continues by listing various supportive conditions for such practice, which involves the type of broadening of the scope of term *samādhi* discussed above. Further indications for actual practice are that one should constantly be mindful of the virtuous qualities of all Buddhas, and take refuge in and rely on the Buddha to gain mastery of

²⁰ T 418 at T XIII 902c27 begins without the standard introduction of what follows as “Thus have [I] heard” (see also, however, note 4 in the Taishō edition, and on the two different versions reflected in the actual edition and the annotation Harrison 1990: 223). Harrison 1990: 270 comments that the “original translation was distinguished by the rudimentary *nidāna* ... [which] possibly indicates an earlier stage in the composition of Mahāyāna *sūtras*, when their authors were unwilling to attach to them the usual mark of canonical authenticity.” Nattier 2008: 75 considers such cases (listed in her note 173) to be rather an apparently deliberate divergence from the content of the originals. Based on a detailed discussion of this type of absence as a distinct mark of translations by Lokakṣema, Nattier 2014: 51 reasons that “a plausible explanation might be that Lokakṣema (and/or his local advisors in China) thought that to begin a sacred scripture with a reference to hearing would undercut rather than emphasise its authority in the writing-centred culture of China.” My comments in Anālayo 2024c: 78n5 on this type of phenomenon are unfortunately marred by failing to take into account the important discussion in Nattier 2014, which somehow had escaped my attention.

²¹ T 418 at T XIII 904a27. Karlsson 1999/2000: 69 comments that “[t]he text has an expressed soteriologic purpose. It wants to teach a meditation practice and bring the practitioners in the presence of a particular *buddha* for the purpose of listening to his teachings (*dharmā*).”

²² T 418 at T XIII 904b16: 佛言：今現在佛悉在前立三昧，其有行是三昧者，若所問者，悉可得 (adopting a 宋, 元, 明, and 知 variant that adds 者 after 三昧).

²³ T 418 at T XIII 904b26: 何等為定意？從念佛因緣，向佛念，意不亂，從得點，不捨精進。

concentration.²⁴ The power generated by such a wholehearted inclining of the mind toward a Buddha appears to be an important component in the trajectory that takes off from traditional forms of recollection but aims to lead to a direct meeting with a Buddha.

The **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* then concretizes the actual practice by focusing specifically on Amitābha Buddha.²⁵ Relevant instructions are explicitly addressed to both monastics and laity who, based on firmly keeping their respective precepts and constantly keeping him in mind for one day and night up to seven days and seven nights, can expect to see Amitābha either while awake or else at least in a dream.²⁶ The *sūtra* clarifies that this vision does not require the use of the divine eye or the divine ear, it does not rely on using supernormal powers to travel to that Buddhafield, nor does it involve passing away here and being reborn in that Buddhafield. Instead, just seated where they are, practitioners will see Amitābha and hear him teach, being able to receive his teachings in such a way that, on rising from the *samādhi*, they can share these with others.²⁷

Although the overall emphasis is on meeting Amitābha now, the possibility of rebirth also receives brief coverage. On seeing Amitābha, practitioners can ask what it takes to be reborn in his realm. Unsurprisingly, Amitābha explains that the same *samādhi* that leads to meeting him now will also result in eventual rebirth in his realm.²⁸ The rebirth prospect that emerges in this way appears to be just one among various beneficial side-effects of the promoted *samādhi*. Throughout, the emphasis in the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* seems to be rather on the experience of meeting Amitābha, or any other Buddha for that matter, right here and now.

²⁴ T 418 at T XIII 904c22: 常念諸佛功德, 自歸為依佛, 定意得自在。

²⁵ Harrison 1993: 148 notes “the appearance in the text of the Buddha Amitābha, who is held up as an example of the many ‘Buddhas of the present’ who can be made the object of the *samādhi*; this in fact is our earliest dateable reference to the cult of Amitābha.” On still earlier evidence that is instead of an epigraphic type, in the form of a mention of Amitābha on an inscribed image pedestal from Govindnagar, see Schopen 1987/2005, Fussman 1999: 541–543, and Acharya 2008/2010: 24–26 (on another inscription mentioned by Fussman 1999: 543f see Salomon and Schopen 2002). Rhie 2010: 241 comments on this pedestal that “[t]he tendency is to consider this type of image (a large sculpture) simply as an object of worship and merit rather than a specific reflection of a particular text. If one were, however, to consider the ‘visual’ aspect of Amitābha in the early texts, in standing form it could be that this is Amitābha as ‘standing before one’ (in Chinese the translation can be interpreted as literally ‘standing’ as stated in the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi Sūtra* ...).”

²⁶ T 418 at T XIII 905a14: 菩薩, 若沙門, 白衣, 所聞西方阿彌陀佛刹, 當念彼方佛, 不得缺戒, 一心念, 若一晝夜, 若七日七夜, 過七日以後見阿彌陀佛, 於覺不見, 於夢中見之。Greene 2021: 142 notes that in the different versions of the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* “visionary encounters with the buddhas resulting from sustained religious practice will occur either while the practitioner is immersed in *samādhi* while meditating or else during a dream ... meditation, like dreams, creates *actual* contact with faraway things, such as the buddhas presently dwelling in other world systems, in defiance of the normal laws of space and time.”

²⁷ T 418 at T XIII 905a23: 是菩薩, 摩訶薩, 不持天眼徹視, 不持天耳徹聽, 不持神足到其佛刹, 不於是間終生彼間佛刹乃見。便於是間坐見阿彌陀佛, 聞所說經, 悉受得。從三昧中, 悉能具足, 為人說之。Zürcher 1959/1972: 220 offers the following comment on T 418: “The subject of this important sūtra is a form of mental concentration which enables the devotee to behold all Buddhas ‘as if they were standing before his eyes’ (現在佛悉在前立三昧, *pratyutpanna-buddhasaṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi*). Although such a feat can normally only be performed by persons endowed with supernatural faculties, it is expressly stated that in this case the vision is not realized by the ‘divine eye’ (天眼, *divyacakṣus*) or the ‘divine ear’ (天耳, *divyaśrota*) ... [h]ence this ‘simple way’ does not require any complicated preparatory exercises.” On an apparent controversy related to this option see Lamotte 1980: vii.

²⁸ T 418 at T XIII 905b9: 見佛已從問: 當持何等法生阿彌陀佛國? 爾時, 阿彌陀佛語是菩薩言: 欲來生我國者, 常念我, 數數常當守念, 莫有休息, 如是得來生我國。Harrison 1990: 253 draws attention to an intriguing variation of Amitābha’s reply in T 417 at T XIII 899a29: 欲來生者, 當念我名, where “*bodhisattvas* are instructed to ‘call to mind my *name*’,” which indicates “the influence of Pure Land theory and terminology current in China at the time of the composition” of T 417, revealing “the use to which the *sūtra* was put in China, namely as a support for Pure Land practice.”

The idea of achieving a particular rebirth by dint of forming a strong aspiration can be related to a Pāli discourse entirely dedicated to this topic. The discourse describes how a monastic may aspire for a particular type of rebirth, such as among a family of eminent warriors, brahmins, etc. Based on being endowed with faith, virtue, learning, renunciation, and wisdom, if the monastic wholeheartedly dedicates the mind to this aspiration, then this will indeed lead to such rebirth. The discourse continues from rebirth in human families to various celestial rebirths, including different types of Brahmā worlds—which would in principle require mastery of absorption—even including the Pure Abodes, realms in which only non-returners are reborn. Even for this lofty goal, the discourse does not explicitly offer any additional stipulation beyond the same set of five qualities required for an aspiration to human rebirth to be successful, namely faith, virtue, learning, renunciation, and wisdom.²⁹

As far as the actual *samādhi* is concerned, a relevant *Āgama* passage discussed in the first of the present set of two articles describes Mahāmaudgalyāyana receiving teachings from the Buddha even though they are both at distant places and neither of them uses the supernormal ability to travel to where the other is at present.³⁰ As another *Āgama* episode involving King Prasenajit exemplifies, it is one thing to be reminded of the Buddha—be that through external circumstances or internal recollection of his qualities—but being able to see him directly and engage in a conversation with him is of a different order altogether.³¹ The whole vision component comes to the fore in a way that recollection can never accomplish.

The main difference compared to the Mahāmaudgalyāyana episode is that the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* offers access to a similar teaching encounter without any need for the divine eye and ear. These were the means of which Mahāmaudgalyāyana and Śākyamuni availed themselves, and these means are explicitly set aside here. The comparatively easier access provided in this way could perhaps be related to the account in *Āgama* literature of Śākyamuni cultivating a meditative vision of *devas* and being able to communicate with these during the period before his awakening, which closer inspection suggests to be starting off with a level of concentration that falls short of providing the required foundation for exercising the divine eye and ear.³²

Such apparent dispensability of the divine eye and ear would hold all the more for the case of meditative visions related to a Buddha, which combine whatever concentrative ability

²⁹ MN 120 at MN III 103,1; see also Anālayo 2018: 129f and 2025a: 98. The formulation used for the aspiration to be reborn in the highest heaven of the Pure Abodes—based on being endowed with the earlier mentioned five qualities—reads as follows, MN 120 at MN III 103,3: *tassa evaṃ hoti: aho vatāhaṃ kāyassa bhedaṃ paraṃ maraṇā akaniṭṭhānaṃ devānaṃ saṃvattanti. This could be compared with the aspiration to be reborn in Akṣobhya's Buddhafield, found in T 313 a T XI 761b26 in the context of a detailed treatment of conditions leading to such rebirth: 是菩薩, 摩訶薩當學阿閼佛昔求菩薩道時行, 當發如意願: 令我生阿閼佛利. 菩薩, 摩訶薩用是行故得生彼佛利. After the first part (from 是 to the first 行), which concerns the precondition relevant to the present context (in MN 120 taking the form of the five qualities faith, virtue, learning, renunciation, and wisdom), both descriptions reflect the importance of mental aspiration, 意願/cittaṃ dahati, adhiṭṭhāti, bhāveti, in relation to the wish for such rebirth, 令我生/ aho vatāhaṃ ... upapajjeyyaṃ, and the assurance that such 行/saṅkhārā (combined in the PTS edition of MN 120 with vihāro or else in the Asian editions with vihārā) will indeed lead to the desired rebirth 生彼/tatrupapattiyā. Without intending to suggest a direct relationship, the similarities are noteworthy.*

³⁰ SN 21.3 at SN II 276,1 and its parallel SĀ 503 at T II 132c20; see in more detail Anālayo 2025a: 93f.

³¹ MN 89 at MN II 118,24 and its discourse parallels MĀ 213 at T I 795b24 and EĀ 38.10 at T II 724c7; see in more detail Anālayo 2025a: 86.

³² AN 8.64 at AN IV 302,8 and MĀ 73 at T I 539b22; see in more detail Anālayo 2025a: 89f.

the practitioner may muster with the power possessed by a Buddha. The **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* in fact clarifies that success in the *samādhi* it teaches relies precisely on this power rather than just on concentrative mastery of one's own mind.³³

A perhaps relevant perspective from a distinctly late Pāli text could be found in the *Apadāna* of Subhūti. Appreciating this perspective can be combined with the indication in the *Visuddhimagga* that, from the perspective of the Theravāda tradition, recollection of the Buddha can only yield levels of concentration below the attainment of the first absorption.³⁴ According to the *Apadāna* report, in an earlier life in the distant past Subhūti had met a former Buddha who encouraged him to take up recollection of the Buddha, recommending it as the supreme form of meditation.³⁵ The recommendation comes with the promise that Subhūti will experience a series of very fortunate rebirths until eventually becoming a disciple of Śākyamuni. Needless to say, Subhūti indeed cultivated recollection of the Buddha and in turn reaped the promised fruits.³⁶ For a hundred thousand eons he never experienced a bad rebirth, this being the fruit of recollection of the Buddha.³⁷ Here, too, the amazing benefits of recollection of the Buddha are quite clearly not confined to the circle of those highly accomplished in mastery of *samādhi*. Moreover, even without any counterpart to Sukhāvatī, the benefits of recollection of the Buddha play out in matters of rebirth, and that in relation to the disciple who in *Prajñāpāramitā* literature acquires a chief role in giving teachings on the sixth perfection so as to facilitate the progress of bodhisattvas to Buddhahood.

II.2 Seeing Buddhas in Dreams

An intriguing aspect among the instructions offered in the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* is the proposal that experiences had in a dream can be relied on to give teachings to others.³⁸ In the context of a series of similes in *Āgama* discourses preserved in Pāli and Chinese, experiences had in a dream exemplify the illusory nature of sensual gratification.³⁹ The illustration provided in this way relies on the common-sense understanding that the contents of a dream are unreal and can therefore be deceptive.

Although this type of understanding recurs elsewhere,⁴⁰ this is not the only position on the

³³ T 418 at T XIII 905c15: 是三昧佛力所成。持佛威神。In a comment on the occurrence in the next line of 持佛威神力, Sharf 2002: 119 notes that such a type of reference involves “the power of a tathāgata to come to the assistance of the supplicant, making possible the transposition of the supplicant into the realm of the buddha without the aid of supernormal powers acquired through one's own meditative accomplishment.”

³⁴ Vism 212,29.

³⁵ Ap 21.36 at Ap 69,18: *bhāvehi buddhānussatiṃ bhāvanānam anuttaram*.

³⁶ Ap 21.46 at Ap 70,6: *sadā bhāvesiṃ mudito buddhānussatiṃ uttaram*.

³⁷ Ap 21.51 at Ap 70,15: *satasahass' ito kappe yaṃ kammam akariṃ tadā duggatiṃ nābhijānāmi buddhānussatiyā phalaṃ*.

³⁸ For a detailed discussion of the role of dreams in Mahāyāna *sūtras* see Harrison 2003: 135–141.

³⁹ MN 54 at MN I 365,29 describes seeing lovely parks, groves, meadows, and lakes in a dream, whereas its parallel MĀ 203 at T I 774c13 refers to dreaming of the enjoyment of the five sense pleasures. Both versions agree that, on waking up, the person finds that the parks and groves or else the sensual enjoyment can no longer be seen, *na kiñci passeyya/都不見一*. In other words, despite differing on the content of the dream experiences, the main point is similarly the lack of reality of what is seen in a dream.

⁴⁰ A reference to seeing something in a dream that is no longer seen on waking up occurs also in Sn 807. Another passage presents the image of wealth gained in a dream; see SN 35.132 at SN IV 117,26 and its parallel SĀ 255 at T II 63c13. Here, too, the central point of the image is the unreality of the contents of such a dream.

nature of dreams found in *Āgama* literature. A Pāli discourse without parallels reports five great dreams experienced by Śākyamuni during the time before his awakening.⁴¹ The images he saw in these dreams were portents of his eventually realizing full awakening, successfully teaching the noble eightfold path, gaining many lay disciples, gaining monastic disciples from all four classes of ancient Indian society, and receiving ample supplies without getting attached to these. The discourse as such reflects a mature stage of Buddhology, as it takes for granted that already well before his awakening Śākyamuni was destined to become a Buddha with the different achievements predicted in his dream.⁴² From the viewpoint of the significance of dreams, this presentation brings in a different perspective compared to the set of similes on sensual pleasures, etc. Clearly, the content of these five dreams should be taken as portents of what is real rather than unreal, as true rather than deceptive.

The **Pratyutpannasamādhī-sūtra* deftly negotiates these two dimensions. The relevant passage describes a hungry and thirsty person who falls asleep and dreams of eating and drinking but on waking up finds the stomach in the same condition as earlier. The episode ties in with the notion of the unreality of dreams used to illustrate the nature of sensual pleasures. This is not the end of the story, however, as in the **Pratyutpannasamādhī-sūtra* this person then reflects that everything is like a dream and, by dint of such recollection of emptiness, gaining the patient acceptance of the non-arising of dharmas (*anutpattikadharmakṣānti*) and becomes irreversible (*avaivartika*) in regard to the path to Buddhahood.⁴³ In this way, alongside acknowledging the unreality of the contents of a dream—after all the person is still hungry—the **Pratyutpannasamādhī-sūtra* dexterously weaves in the topic of the *Prajñā-*

⁴¹ AN 5.196 at AN III 240,15; see also the *Saṅghabhedavastu*, Gnoli 1977: 82,20, the *Mahāvastu*, Marciniak 2020: 174,13 (or Senart 1890: 136,14), and the *Lalitavistara*, Lefmann 1902: 196,15 (according to the *Divyāvadāna*, Cowell and Neil 1886: 247,29, the future Śākyamuni experienced premonitory dreams already at the time of the Buddha Dīpaṃkara). For a Jain counterpart to the notion of great dreams as portents of a great person being destined to become a leader in the spiritual or worldly realm see Balbir 2009: 138f. The Pāli commentary Mp III 316,11 begins its exegesis of AN 5.196 by listing four causes of a dream, on which O’Flaherty 1984: 153 comments that “the Buddhist commentator on this passage shows his awareness of this heritage [of the ancient Indian analysis of dreams] when he rehearses the four causes of dreams,” adding that, at the same time, the actual dream motifs are “given decidedly untraditional (i.e., non-Hindu) Buddhist glosses.”

⁴² Young 1999: 25 reasons that “[t]he AN’s presentation of these five dreams provides some insight into one of the functions of dreams in Buddhist biographical narratives: they can be stimulators of enlightenment.” The proposed interpretation is based on consulting the translation by Hare 1961: 176 of the formulation related to the first wish in AN III 241,32f; see also Bodhi 2012: 1744n1200f. The context makes it clear that the wishes are not in themselves instrumental in bringing about what they describe, instead of which they are portents of future events that, by the time of the composition of this discourse, were believed to have been certain to take place already before the Buddha actually realized awakening. Similarly unconvincing is the overall conclusion in Young 1999: 32 that “the origins of Buddhism can be attributed, at least partially, to these dreams. Given the widespread Indian belief that the whole universe originated in the dream of Viṣṇu, the origination of a new religious belief system in dreams poses no real break in Indian thinking.” In *Āgama* literature, the creator god is still Brahmā; see, e.g., DN 1 at DN I 17,18, DĀ 21 at T I 90b21, T 21 at T I 266b14, Weller 1934: 22,21, T 1548 at T XXVIII 657a19, and Up 3050 at D 4094 *ju* 145a1 or P 5595 *tu* 166b4. The tale of Viṣṇu’s dream is clearly a later element; see, e.g., McGovern 2011: 18. In sum, in the words of Wayman 1967: 7, the five dreams are just “premonitory of his full enlightenment,” rather than being instrumental in bringing his awakening about.

⁴³ T 418 at T XIII 905b24: 時有人行出入大空澤中, 不得飲食。飢渴而臥出, 便於夢中得香甘美食。飲食已, 其覺腹中空; 自念: 一切所有皆如夢耶? 佛言: 其人用念空故, 便逮得無所從生法樂, 即逮得阿惟越致。The illustration of the nature of dharmas with the example of experiences in a dream recurs in other texts apparently translated by Lokakṣema, such as, for example, in Karashima 2011: 288,1 (= T 224 at T VIII 452c6): 諸法如夢, and in T 283 at T X 455c10: 諸法譬夢中所有 (see Nattier 2005 on the translatorship attribution); see also T 624 at T XV 362c4: 其知諸法如夢, which Nattier 2008: 85 places in the category of “third-tier” among translations attributed to Lokakṣema, in the sense of bearing only a distant resemblance to his style of rendition.

pāramitā type of emptiness, which throughout forms an undercurrent of its presentation (a topic to which I will come back in part III.2). In this way, the *sūtra* manages to make the dream become something profoundly liberating rather than being deceptive. Akamatsu (2015: 70f) explains that,

because a dream, like an illusion, lacks reality when viewed from the waking state, it is used as an analogy for what is false. There are many examples in ancient India in which a dream was used as an analogy for what is false ... But the dream is also described as a state of unrestricted activity by the mind (or spirit) freed from the constraints of the physical body ... in the Upaniṣads.⁴⁴ Therefore, since the “Practice” chapter of the *Pratyutpanna-buddhasaṃmukhāvasthitasāmadhi-sūtra* deals with the dream especially as an analogy for states of meditative experiences aimed at realizing the truth, there can be little doubt that here the dream is ... primarily meant to give expression to the autonomous activities of the mind.

Another episode in the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* describes a person dreaming of visiting his homeland and seeing his family. After waking up, he tells others that he went back to his homeland and saw his family.⁴⁵ By presenting this person as saying something that, at least from a subjective perspective, is not necessarily wrong, the *sūtra* provides further support for a distinct perspective regarding the import of dreams. A similar image of meeting relatives, etc., in a dream came up already earlier in the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*, in the form of describing a person so moved by the sights experienced in the dream as to start crying after waking up.⁴⁶

The **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* continues after the case of the hungry person with another example no longer related to a dream experience but instead involving a monastic contemplating the bones of a dead person.⁴⁷ This can be related to a form of practice found in *Āgama* literature as an implementation of the first establishment of mindfulness (*smṛty-upasthāna*), which requires contemplating a corpse in various stages of decay, several of which involve bones.⁴⁸ The choice of this example in the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* thereby seems to correspond to what in *Āgama* literature features as about the most

⁴⁴ An example mentioned by Akamatsu 2015: 66n6 for “the view that during a dream the soul of a sleeping person freely roams about the external world and that experiences in a dream are events in the real world” is *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* 4.3.14. On the significance of dreams in the ancient Indian setting see also, e.g., Bollin 1912, Esnoult 1959: 209–221, O’Flaherty 1984: 14–24, and Devi 2024.

⁴⁵ T 418 at T XIII 905c4: 其人於夢中歸到故鄉里，見家室，親屬，喜共言語。於夢中見已，覺為知識說之：我歸到故鄉里，見我家室親屬 (adopting the 宋, 元, 明, 知 variant 已 instead of 以).

⁴⁶ T 418 at T XIII 905a13: 後自淚出，念夢中所見。In the context of the present article it is not possible for me to follow up the topic of the significance of dreams in China, hence suffice it to quote Jensen 2023: 99 that “dream experiences—and, in particular the experience of intentionally sought dreams—were an important source of religious revelation and verification for Chinese Buddhists in the Sui and early Tang dynasties (late 6th to mid-7th c. CE).”

⁴⁷ T 418 at T XIII 905c10: 比丘觀死人骨著前。The *sūtra* continues by describing bones of different colors and then applying the rhetoric of emptiness to these, concluding that the bones do not exist as such but rather are perceptions constructed by the mind, 是意所作想有耳。

⁴⁸ MN 10 at MN I 58,23 (= DN 22 at DN II 296,10), MĀ 98 at T I 583c1, and EĀ 12.1 at T II 568b12. Incidentally, it may be worth mentioning that T 418 at T XIII 914a2 offers a basic survey of the four *smṛty-upasthānas*, distinguished according to whether each of these four is contemplated in relation to oneself (自觀), in relation to another person (觀他人), or in relation to both. This corresponds to the distinction between internal, external, and internal-and-external *smṛtyupasthāna* practice, which closer inspection shows to be indeed concerned with oneself, another, or both; see Anālayo 2020a and 2020b.

prominent example of a form of meditation practice that in some sense can be considered to involve visualization. Although ideally based on an actual vision of a corpse to be recalled later, undertaking this form of contemplation could alternatively take the form of imagining the stages of decay.⁴⁹

The exploration of the power and relevance of dreams in the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* reaches a climax when Śākyamuni reports that in one of his past lives as a king he had a dream in which he heard about “this *samādhi*.”⁵⁰ The impact of this dream-experience was so compelling that the future Śākyamuni gave up the throne to follow a monk who could teach him this *samādhi*, serving him for thirty-six thousand years without ever getting to hear teachings on it even once, which was due to interferences by Māra. Unsurprisingly, the Buddha follows this *jātaka* by enjoining his present audience that they should quickly take up this *samādhi* and not forget it.⁵¹ Besides helping the members of the audience realize their good fortune in so easily gaining access to what the future Śākyamuni unsuccessfully struggled for so many years to obtain, the same episode also highlights the impact of a single dream experience, which leads to the decision to abdicate and pursue for many years what this dream had conveyed. Just as with Śākyamuni’s five pre-awakening dreams reported in a Pāli discourse mentioned earlier, the present episode makes it indubitably clear that pursuing the path to Buddhahood requires taking seriously the reality of dreams.

The **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* has much more information to offer on the cultivation of the *samādhi* [on Buddhas] of the present that in principle calls for an examination.⁵² In the present context, however, I am not able to pursue things further and need to allow this part of the present article to conclude at this point, despite having barely scratched the surface of the wealth of information relevant to this particular type of meditation practice.

III.1 The Sadāprarudita Tale

A passage in the *Prajñāpāramitā* translation by Lokakṣema, briefly mentioned above in the course of discussing the significance of the term *samādhi* in some Mahāyāna *sūtras*, describes the gaining of a *samādhi* of seeing the Buddhas of the ten directions. This could well be a reference to the **Pratyutpannasamādhi*.⁵³ In what follows, I explore the relationship that this reference suggests between the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* and the member of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* textual family translated by Lokakṣema and his team, the 道行般若經 (T 224), to which I simply refer as “the *Prajñāpāramitā*.”

Before exploring the narrative context of the reference to the *samādhi* of seeing the Buddhas of the ten directions, I need to say a few words about my approach to the tale of the bodhisattva Sadāprarudita within which this reference occurs. Without in any way intending to deny that the *Prajñāpāramitā* translated by Lokakṣema and his collaborators would be the

⁴⁹ See in more detail Anālayo 2022b: 2159f.

⁵⁰ T 418 at T XIII 918c20: 於夢中間是三昧.

⁵¹ T 418 at T XIII 918c24: 若曹當疾取是三昧, 無得忘失.

⁵² For example, the listing of factors supportive of this *samādhi* given in T 418 at T XIII 906a25 refers to making a Buddha image (see also T XIII 906b9), which could fruitfully be related to a reference in EĀ 3.1 at T II 554a20 to contemplating such an image as part of the purpose of cultivating recollection of the Buddha; see Harrison 1978a: 38 and Anālayo 2025a: 86. Another topic would be the role of the Buddha’s physical marks in T 418, which could conveniently be related to the trajectory evident in relation to these marks, studied in Anālayo 2017. These are just two examples out of the many more topics that could in principle be explored.

⁵³ Karashima 2011: 479,1 (= T 224 at T VIII 472a19): 即得見十方諸佛三昧; see Harrison 1978a: 47f.

result of a gradual textual growth, in its received form the Sadāprarudita tale is an integral part of the text. This impression receives support from the proposal of a chiasmic structure underlying the *Prajñāpāramitā* as a whole by Orsborn (2012).⁵⁴ Besides, as I tried to show in Anālayo (2025b), the Sadāprarudita tale contains rather profound instructions and complements the more doctrinally oriented discussions in the previous chapters of the *Prajñāpāramitā* by making the quest for its teaching come alive. In a way, the Sadāprarudita tale can be seen as offering a fitting culmination of the teaching trajectory underlying the *Prajñāpāramitā* as a whole.⁵⁵

The tale itself is situated at a time when the previous Buddha had long passed away and his dispensation was no longer in existence. In this setting, Sadāprarudita exemplifies unswerving dedication to the quest for *Prajñāpāramitā*. The tale portrays his gradual spiritual maturation, where Sadāprarudita first receives the instruction to search for the great Dharma in a dream and then a revelation of the name of a Buddha in another dream. Then he hears a celestial voice that identifies the great Dharma as *Prajñāpāramitā* and tells him to search for it—this happens while he is awake, so he can ask how to go about that—and then he has a vision of a magically created Buddha. This magically created Buddha gives him teachings, upon hearing of which he is overjoyed and gains the *samādhi* of seeing the Buddhas of the ten directions. After some further narrative developments, leading to him receiving teachings from the eminent lay bodhisattva Dharmodgata, Sadāprarudita receives a prediction of his future Buddhahood from the Buddhas of the ten directions.⁵⁶

In this narrative setting, the two visions of the Buddhas of the ten directions have rather crucial confirmatory roles to play in the spiritual maturation of a bodhisattva who lives at a time when no Buddha is alive in that world. Needless to say, such a depiction is directly relevant to the bodhisattvas in the audience of the tale, who share with Sadāprarudita the predicament that no Buddha is living in the same world but have the advantage over him that at least the dispensation of Śākyamuni is still in existence.

The second of these two encounters with the Buddhas of the ten directions results in the prediction of Sadāprarudita's future attainment of Buddhahood, the importance of which probably does not require any further discussion. When Sadāprarudita first encounters the Buddhas of the ten directions, these praise and encourage him, revealing that they heard the *Prajñāpāramitā* and gained omniscience because they also acted with similarly wholehearted dedication; in fact, they also experienced the same *samādhi*.⁵⁷ The encouragement received in this way serves Sadāprarudita well, as he is in for some challenging adventures, during which he has to prove his wholehearted dedication.

⁵⁴. Although, as pointed out by Walser 2018: 133, structural integrity does not necessarily reflect the earliest stage of composition.

⁵⁵. My position in this respect differs from the assessment of the Sadāprarudita narrative proposed by Conze 1952/2008: 170: “The almost turgid devotionism of these chapters is very unlike the lucid rationality which marks the sober and highly intellectual discussions between the Lord and his disciples in the first chapter of the *Aṣṭa*°.” Although there is indeed a difference in style and mode of presentation, there are also significant elements of continuity that are easily overlooked if this tale is dismissed too quickly.

⁵⁶. Karashima 2011: 530,12 (= T 224 at T VIII 477b10): 十方無央數佛 ... 是時, 諸佛授薩陀波倫菩薩決當作佛時: 汝却後當來世作佛, 名迦摩迦提陀頗羅耶怛薩阿竭, 阿羅訶, 三耶三佛。

⁵⁷. Karashima 2011: 479,2 (= T 224 at T VIII 472a20): 善哉, 善哉, 善男子, 我曹本為菩薩時, 用精進故, 得聞般若波羅蜜, 便成就得薩芸若 ... 我曹爾時亦復得是三昧。

Now, after emerging from the *samādhi* of seeing the Buddhas of the ten directions for the first time, Sadāprarudita wonders where those Buddhas came from and where they went.⁵⁸ This question occupies him so much that he poses it when finally meeting his teacher Dharmodgata who—in keeping with the main teachings of the *Prajñāpāramitā*—explains that Buddhas, just like space, do not come from anywhere or go anywhere.⁵⁹ The question as such fits its narrative setting very well. The overwhelming experience of seeing the Buddhas of the ten directions in *samādhi* can well be expected to stimulate puzzlement about where they came from and where they went to, perhaps even with an underlying wish—though this is not explicitly indicated in the narrative—of finding out how to have such a vision again. After all, the *samādhi* happened spontaneously after the encounter with the magically created Buddha and thus in a way that is not easily repeated. Moreover, although the teachings Sadāprarudita received from the magically created Buddha cover the topic of not arising from anywhere, this is not explicitly applied to the nature of Buddhas.⁶⁰ Given that this should to all appearances be considered his first encounter with this type of teachings, it is perhaps not surprising if this indication did not suffice for Sadāprarudita to realize on his own that the same also applies to the Buddhas he has encountered in *samādhi*.

Besides sharing a reference to what does appear to be the same type of *samādhi*, the *Prajñāpāramitā* and the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* also share the inquiry into where the Buddhas experienced in this way came from (in the latter case combined with the question where oneself went to). In the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*, however, this is part of a teaching given by the Buddha to Bhadrāpāla. Śākyamuni first affirms that, if one wishes to see a Buddha, one will see him; on seeing him, one can ask questions. On receiving answers, one then reflects on where the Buddha came from and where oneself went to, realizing that the Buddha did not come from anywhere and oneself did not go anywhere.⁶¹

In the respective narrative settings, Bhadrāpāla features as someone much better acquainted with emptiness teachings than Sadāprarudita. Already in his first inquiry that starts off the actual discourse, Bhadrāpāla expressed the wish to have a mind without attachment that, just like empty space, is not established anywhere.⁶² Other desirable items in his list are that all thoughts are like an echo, in that they neither come (from somewhere) nor go (to somewhere), and that what is perceived and cognized is like emptiness.⁶³ In other words, Bhadrāpāla functions in the narrative context as someone who would probably not require the clarification that Buddhas do not come from somewhere; in fact, he does not ask such a question, as both question and answer are part of the Buddha's teaching. In the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*, this then leads on to the important conclusion that the whole

^{58.} Karashima 2011: 481,4 (= T 224 at T VIII 472a26): 薩陀波倫菩薩從三昧覺, 作是念: 諸佛本從何所來, 去至何所? Harrison 1978a: 46 already noted the similarity between this question and the one found in T 418 at T XIII 905c27 (see below note 61).

^{59.} Karashima 2011: 502,1 (= T 224 at T VIII 473c9): 空本無所從來, 去亦無所至。佛亦如是。

^{60.} Karashima 2011: 470,7 (= T 224 at T VIII 471b28): 諸經法如泥洹無有異, 無所從生, 無形。

^{61.} T 418 at T XIII 905c27: 作是念: 佛從何所來? 我為到何所? 自念: 佛無所從來, 我亦無所至。As noted by Harrison 1990: 42n22, a reference to this reflection can be found in the **Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa*, T 1509 at T XXV 276b8; see also Lamotte 1976: 1930.

^{62.} T 418 at T XIII 903b21: 不著心, 如虛空, 無所止。

^{63.} T 418 at T XIII 903c16: 所念悉得如響, 亦不來, 亦不去 ... 便所想識如空 (adopting the 宋, 元, 明, and 知 variant 響 instead of 嚮).

world with its three realms is just constructed by the mind.⁶⁴ This clarification takes the teachings on the illusory nature of dharmas found in the *Prajñāpāramitā* to their logical conclusion, in a way. As noted by Harrison (1998/2018: 5), this passage “contains hints of the early unfolding of the Yogācāra,” and thus clearly goes further than the position taken in the *Prajñāpāramitā*.

III.2 Intertextuality

Given that versions of both the *Prajñāpāramitā* and the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* are extant among the Gāndhārī manuscripts of the so-called Split Collection and thus must have been in existence in the same area,⁶⁵ it seems fair to envisage that they could have influenced each other. Some form of influence seems indeed likely in the case of the present episode, as the independent arising of two versions of this specific inquiry related to this particular *samādhi* seems less probable. If there is a direction of influence, then, as far as I can see, it would more probably be from the *Prajñāpāramitā* to the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*.⁶⁶ The arising of this type of inquiry has a more natural placing in the context of the tale of Sadāprarudita, where it also performs a larger function in the narrative as a whole, as it leads on to Sadāprarudita posing this question to Dharmodgata. Its occurrence in the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*, in turn, could be meant to serve as the occasion for articulating a more mature reply to this query, namely by way of revealing that everything in the three realms is a product of the mind. In short, to consider the inquiry in the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* to be a reflection of, or influenced by, the inquiry in the *Prajñāpāramitā* would make good sense of its occurrences in both texts.

The suggestion that in this instance the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* offers a more mature reply than the *Prajñāpāramitā* would concord with a general pattern, which in what follows I explore with the help of a few selected examples. An example related to the Sadāprarudita tale concerns the trope of making a gift of parts or the whole of one’s body. In the *Prajñāpāramitā* this takes the form of depicting Sadāprarudita willing to give away his own blood, flesh, marrow, and heart to a brahmin who has requested these.⁶⁷ However, this brahmin is Śakra in disguise, and the audience witnessing the description of the attempted gift of the body has previously been informed that Śakra has come and taken on this disguise

⁶⁴ T 418 at T XIII 905c29: 自念: 三處—欲處, 色處, 無想處—是三處意所為耳。

⁶⁵ See Falk and Karashima 2012 and 2013, and Harrison, Lenz, and Salomon 2018 for the respective manuscripts; for the dating of the *Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript see Falk 2011: 20.

⁶⁶ My proposal differs from the position taken by Zhao 2020: 257, who considers the Sadāprarudita story to be influenced by the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*. As far as I can see, the main argument appears to be that “it is more reasonable to suggest that the narrative was composed according to a meditation practice than the reverse.” This is indeed reasonable, but the conclusion drawn based on this premise does not necessarily hold, as sufficient room needs to be granted to the alternative possibility that the meditation practice under discussion was already in existence before both texts reached their present form. As pointed out in a general comment by Harrison 1993: 139f, Lokakṣema’s translations must be reflecting a long period of prior developments. It follows that we need to allow room for the possibility of prior developments that could have affected both texts. From this perspective, it may well be that a *samādhi* was already in existence in some form and this then became a component of an extended narrative in T 224. Since in this context the *samādhi* is just mentioned without further explanations, the resultant lack of information could in turn have stimulated a more extensive treatment of this *samādhi* in its own right. Although differing in this respect, I would like to acknowledge that I am indebted to the study by Zhao 2020 for having already identified parallelisms between the two texts that are relevant to my present exploration.

⁶⁷ Karashima 2011: 485,6 (= T 224 at T VIII 472b26).

with the intention of testing Sadāprarudita. This conforms to a recurrent feature in such tales, which ensures that the audience knows a happy end can be expected.⁶⁸ In other words, there are clear indications in the *Prajñāpāramitā* that the description of Sadāprarudita starting to dismember his own body in order to give away his blood and flesh, etc., should be heard or read with the anticipation that in some way he will emerge unharmed. This is indeed what happens, once he has passed Śakra’s test.

A more literal interpretation of what is basically the same trope emerges when the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* explicitly encourages always cutting off the flesh of one’s own body and giving it to one’s teacher.⁶⁹ This instruction occurs in the context of recommendations to serve and make various material offerings to one’s teacher; it is followed by again emphasizing the importance of serving the teacher. In other words, this injunction lacks any indication that could prevent taking it literally. The idea of making a gift of the body has indeed been taken literally in later traditions, such as in the form of setting on fire parts or even the whole of one’s own body.⁷⁰

Another topic is that of dreams, which in the *Prajñāpāramitā* also have a revelatory function, as evident in the Sadāprarudita tale, but elsewhere their lack of reality can alternatively serve to illustrate the empty nature of dharmas.⁷¹ It is only with the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* that these two types of usage are bridged, achieved through the dexterous description of a hungry person dreaming of food and, on waking up with an empty stomach, coming to a realization of emptiness sufficiently profound to result in becoming an irreversible bodhisattva.

Yet another topic is the intervention by Māra in obstructing the future Śākyamuni’s attempt to learn this *samādhi*. This is the only time in the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* that he plays an active role, as otherwise references to him are of a more symbolic type, such as by way of mentioning the net of Māra, for example.⁷² Whereas his posing an actual threat is thus confined to the distant past, in the *Prajñāpāramitā* Māra tries to disturb the assembly listening to the Buddha presently teaching the *Prajñāpāramitā*, with a substantial portion of that teaching warning of various ways in which Māra will try his best to obstruct those dedicated to the *Prajñāpāramitā* in the future.⁷³ These passages are found outside of the Sadāprarudita tale and, given the probability that the *Prajñāpāramitā* extant as T 224 is the result of a gradual growth, the testimony provided by such passages is weaker compared to

^{68.} See Ohnuma 2007: 64–66.

^{69.} T 418 at T XIII 919a2: 常當自割其肌供養於善師. This occurs in close proximity to the tale of Śākyamuni’s former life as a king, mentioned above, where a dream experience sufficed for him to renounce the throne and dedicate himself wholeheartedly—albeit without success—to acquiring this *samādhi*. Zhao 2020: 265 notes that “the Buddha in his previous life heard about the meditation *pratyutpannasamādhi* in a dream, and went in search of it. This same structure is found in [the] episode ... in which Sadāprarudita’s search for the *prajñāpāramitā* was prompted by a dream.” Moreover, “in both texts the goal of the search is to meet with an individual, whether a monk knowledgeable about *pratyutpannasamādhi* or the bodhisattva Dharmodgata who preaches the *prajñāpāramitā*. Finally, the search is hindered by Māra” in both cases.

^{70.} See, e.g., Benn 2007 and on an *Āgama* precedent Anālayo 2012.

^{71.} See, e.g., Karashima 2011: 288,1 (= T 224 at T VIII 452c6): 諸法空, 諸法如夢.

^{72.} See, e.g., T 418 at T XIII 910a22.

^{73.} See Karashima 2011: 82,6 (= T 224 at T VIII 434a2) for Māra’s attempt to disturb the actual teaching occasion and the long exposition in chapter 9, starting Karashima 2011: 232,6 (= T 224 at T VIII 446c21), for his various future interferences (“future” from the perspective of the Buddha’s revelation of the *Prajñāpāramitā* in the narrative present).

material found in the same tale, Nevertheless, the *Prajñāpāramitā* clearly evinces an outlook where challenges exemplified by Māra are a continuous concern, whereas in the case of the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* these are seen, at least as far as Māra's direct interventions are concerned, as something that fortunately is a matter of the past.

Another topic is the perennial need to ensure that bodhisattvas do not succumb to the attraction of becoming an arhat or a Pratyekabuddha. At the stage in the evolution of the bodhisattva ideal that is relevant to the two texts under discussion, there is nevertheless sufficient room for *śrāvakas* to progress to the goal of their choice. In keeping with this attitude, the *Prajñāpāramitā* and the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* report that some among their respective audiences hearing the Buddha's respective teachings became arhats.⁷⁴ However, only in the *Prajñāpāramitā* does one such instance involve a group of bodhisattvas who attain arhat-ship and thereby terminate their career as future Buddhas.⁷⁵ This episode makes the challenge of keeping bodhisattvas on their proper course come alive, whereby such concerns become substantially more pressing.

The impression that the *Prajñāpāramitā* may be operating from a more pronounced expectation of having to face various challenges receives further support on comparing the main cast adopted in the two texts. The first chapter of the *Prajñāpāramitā* has as its primary protagonists, besides Śākyamuni of course, the arhats Śāriputra and Subhūti, with Pūrṇa Maitrāyaṇīputra also chiming in. With the second chapter celestials join the assembly, and from then on Śakra plays a lively part in several discussions; Ānanda also participates starting with the third chapter. In *Āgama* literature, Śakra and Ānanda feature as stream-enterers and thus as irreversibly destined to become arhats sooner or later.⁷⁶ With the *Sadāprarudita* tale the cast of course changes, as the narrative is set at a time when the dispensation of the previous Buddha has disappeared. For this reason, the main protagonists are lay bodhisattvas.

The introduction to the *Prajñāpāramitā* reports that numerous bodhisattvas were in attendance, mentioning by name Maitreya and Mañjuśrī.⁷⁷ However, out of all these only Maitreya occasionally participates in the actual discussions. As the future Buddha, he is of course well-known in *Āgama* literature, and even as a bodhisattva he occurs in a *Madhyamāgama* discourse in which he receives his prediction of future Buddhahood from Śākyamuni.⁷⁸ In this way, despite the chief topic being a bodhisattva's cultivation of *Prajñāpāramitā*, the main speakers (except for the Buddha) are monastics who are arhats or on the path to becoming arhats. This reflects the degree to which the *Prajñāpāramitā* adopts as much as possible a standard cast when presenting its novel perspective. Silk (2003: 173f) offers the following relevant assessment in general:

It is well known that one of the strategies that the authors of Mahāyāna scriptures employed ... to persuade their audience of the continuity and coherence of their compositions with the

⁷⁴ Karashima 2011, 273,4 and 295,10 (= T 224 at T VIII 451a12 and 453b29) as well as T 418 at T XIII 919b19.

⁷⁵ Karashima 2011, 295,11 (= T 224 at T VIII 453c2): 六十新學菩薩皆得阿羅漢道.

⁷⁶ Śakra: DN 21 at DN II 288,21, Waldschmidt 1932: 111,5, DĀ 14 at T I 66a2, T 15 at T I 250a23, MĀ 134 at T I 638c1, and T 203 at T IV 477c16. Ānanda: SN 22.83 at SN III 106,2 and SĀ 261 at T II 66b3.

⁷⁷ Harrison 2000: 165 reasons that the reference to Mañjuśrī here "has all the appearance of an interpolation."

⁷⁸ MĀ 66 at T I 511a14: 彌勒! 汝於未來久遠人壽八萬歲時, 當得作佛, 名彌勒如來; see also the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, Pradhan 1967: 471,12.

prevailing corpus of scripture was to place the newly composed discourses in a familiar setting. At least in the case of the earlier Mahāyāna scriptures now accessible to us ... the setting is always one familiar from the earlier literature, and much of the audience and many of the interlocutors [are] the same ... The placement of a new discourse in familiar surroundings signals the audience that it should attribute to this material the same authority and authenticity it attributes to the previously familiar discourses set in the same environment.

A considerably more prominent role for bodhisattvas manifests instead with the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*, where these are the main protagonists out of a vast assembly that the Buddha has brought together through his supernormal powers.⁷⁹ A large host of celestials are present from the outset—rather than joining the assembly later as in the *Prajñāpāramitā*—as are several named lay bodhisattvas who have each come with a large following from various major towns in ancient India to be present on this august occasion.⁸⁰

In contrast to the prominence given to Bhadrupāla in particular as well as to other lay bodhisattvas, the only active role taken in the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* by Śāriputra and Mahāmaudgalyāyana is to rejoice at the end of the teaching.⁸¹ Besides rejoicing at the end, Ānanda also has the role of reacting to the Buddha displaying a smile by requesting an elucidation of its significance, in keeping with a standard procedure already found in *Āgama* literature.⁸² Even this much, however, is put into perspective by the narrative context. The Buddha has just offered a prediction regarding the future disappearance and later reappearance of “this *samādhi*,” which here must mean the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*. The bodhisattva Bhadrupāla and another lay bodhisattva proclaim that they will together preserve and uphold it, followed by other named lay bodhisattvas making a similar pledge, followed by five hundred unnamed people, monastic and lay, male and female, also promising that they will preserve it. It is at this point that the Buddha smiles, which motivates Ānanda’s inquiry into the reason for this smile. In other words, the context shows that, even though Ānanda is clearly present—as evident from his inquiry—he no longer plays his traditional role of being the custodian of the Buddha’s teaching. In contrast, in the *Prajñāpāramitā* the Buddha even twice entrusts the text to Ānanda’s custody,⁸³ in keeping with his traditional role. Although elsewhere in the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* the Buddha explicitly acknowledges Ānanda’s wisdom and his ability in retention of the *sūtras* as soon as he has

^{79.} The Buddha’s ability to have such an influence on members of his audience, albeit on a smaller scale, can also be seen in SN 22.80 at SN III 92,29. According to the preceding narrative denouement, the Buddha had dismissed monastics that had been in his presence but then realized that newly ordained monastics in particular need to be able to see him (a realization Brahmā confirms). Hence, the Buddha performs a supernormal feat so that the monastics approach him individually and with a timid attitude. The parallel SĀ 272 at T II 72a3 reports that the Buddha displayed subtle signs so that the monastics dared to approach him, without an explicit reference to his use of supernormal means (SN 22.80 mentions his *iddhābhisankhāra*).

^{80.} Harrison 1990: xxvii notes that the *nidāna* describes “the assembling of the Buddha’s audience in the Veṇuvana outside Rājagṛha; pride of place is given to eight *bodhisattvas*, who arrive each from one of the eight major cities of the Buddha’s world ... [t]his neat narrative device serves both to confer a kind of universal validity on the *sūtra*’s teachings and to earmark them as especially significant for laypeople.” Harrison 1990: 7n7 additionally points out that the *sūtra* “was composed either in a milieu in which the contribution of Buddhist laypeople was thought to be of great importance or, at the very least, by someone who sought to accord the laity a higher status.”

^{81.} T 418 at T XIII 919c2.

^{82.} T 418 at T XIII 911a24; on the Buddha’s smile in *Āgama* literature see Anālayo 2023: 14–17.

^{83.} Karashima 2011: 441,6 and 533,6 (= T 224 at T VIII 468c10 and 477b23).

heard them,⁸⁴ it is clear that his services as the custodian of the Dharma are no longer needed. His inquiry about the Buddha's smile in a way accentuates that he is present when others take over his main duty of ensuring the preservation of the teachings. All of this seems to reflect a sense of self-confidence underlying the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* that differs from the more evident struggle for authentication, and at times even defensiveness, that appears to be an undercurrent in the *Prajñāpāramitā*.

The same impression continues in relation to the famous episode of Dīpaṃkara's prediction of Śākyamuni's future Buddhahood. The Perfection of Wisdom follows the traditional form of presentation.⁸⁵ The **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*, however, reflects a sufficiently strong degree of boldness to use this episode to promote itself, by reporting that Śākyamuni heard about and took up "this *samādhi*," which lead to a visionary encounter with the Buddhas of the ten directions who then predicted his future attainment of Buddhahood.⁸⁶ Harrison (1990: xxx) comments that "the traditional story [is] being considerably altered by the important place occupied in it by the *pratyutpannasamādhi* (17A-B). Thus a kind of lineage is established for the teaching."

With the above survey I do not intend to propose some sort of mono-directional relationship of influence between the two texts under discussion. The practice described in the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* and the formation of the *sūtra* itself quite obviously reflect a complex range of influences, which cannot be reduced to its relationship to one other text—that would be absurd. Nevertheless, it seems fair to propose that in several respects the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* seems to take over from where the *Prajñāpāramitā* left off. The proposed perspective may perhaps explain the prominent undercurrent of references to emptiness in the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*. Harrison (1998/2018: 5) notes that such an undercurrent is no longer evident in the larger and smaller *Sukhāvataīvyūha-sūtras* and the so-called *Amitāyurdhyāna-sūtra*, which "approach their subject with a certain 'realism': Amitābha and Sukhāvātī are presented for all intents and purposes as if they actually exist."⁸⁷ In contrast, "the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi-sūtra* is scrupulous about setting the experiences of the meditator against the yardstick of *śūnyatā*, 'emptiness,' so that no attachment arises." If the recurrent references to emptiness in the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* should indeed be a dimension of its intertextual relationship to the *Prajñāpāramitā*, it would not be surprising if this component of its presentation were to fade away among some of the ensuing formulations of Pure Land practice.⁸⁸

⁸⁴. T 418 at T XIII 906c11: 佛言: 如我比丘阿難點慧, 聞經即受持。

⁸⁵. Karashima 2011: 58,2 (= T 224 at T VIII 431a6).

⁸⁶. T 418 at T XIII 915c11: 聞是三昧, 即受持是三昧, 見十方無央數佛, 悉從聞經, 悉受持。爾時, 諸佛悉語我言: 却後無央數劫, 汝當作佛名釋迦文。

⁸⁷. A faint echo of emptiness rhetoric appears to be still evident in relation to the jeweled location where Amitābha gives his teachings as described in the 阿彌陀三耶三佛薩樓佛檀過度人道經, T 362 at T XII 303c28, which takes the form of indicating that one does not know whence these jewels came from nor do they depart toward anywhere: 不知所從來 ... 亦無所從去. On T 362 probably being a translation by Lokakṣema see Harrison 1998: 556f and Nattier 2008: 86f; and on 從 in the translation usage of Lokakṣema and his team (as evident in T 224) Karashima 2010: 94.

⁸⁸. Harrison 1990: 254n37 points out that the abridgement of T 418 found in the Taishō edition in the form of T 417 reflects "the abridger's lack of interest in those parts of the *PraS* [= **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*] which deal with *śūnyatā* and related concepts. Such passages have been excised wholesale."

According to the information provided by Sēngyòu (僧祐) in his scriptural catalogue 出三藏記集, the two translations into Chinese were undertaken by the same translation team and completed on the same day.⁸⁹ Independent of whether both translations were indeed finalized on the same day or else the same date was chosen for presenting the completion of both to the public, the form of presentation chosen in this way is intriguing. In principle, it would seem more natural to translate one text after the other. This is especially the case for what marks the beginning of translation activities involving Lokakṣema, which would make it perhaps desirable to complete one text and then reconsider the approach to be adopted for future translations, based on how the finalized text was received by its target audience. Why instead translate these two works in tandem?

Now, from the perspective of the audience/readership of the *Prajñāpāramitā* hearing or reading the Sadāprarudita tale, the question could easily arise: What is this *samādhi* of seeing the Buddhas of the ten directions; is there a way to cultivate it? Given its evident importance in the gradual spiritual maturation of Sadāprarudita, and given that the Buddhas of the ten directions revealed that they also experienced this *samādhi*, it is almost inescapable for this question to arise. If I am correct in assuming that such a reaction would have been a natural response for members of ancient audiences being taught the *Prajñāpāramitā*, then the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* indeed steps in where the former left off, namely by offering detailed instructions on how to cultivate this *samādhi*. From this viewpoint, it makes total sense for Lokakṣema and his team to translate these two texts together so as to enable the Chinese audience to follow the proposed trajectory from an encounter with the profound teachings of the *Prajñāpāramitā* to the cultivation of the *samādhi* that enables seeing the Buddhas of the ten directions, the two *sūtras* in combination serving as a fitting introduction of early Mahāyāna thought and practice to its new home in China.

Conclusion

The nature of the term *samādhi* is such that it can accommodate meditation/concentration proper alongside various supportive conditions for its cultivation, hence the employment of “fuzzy self-reference” in the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* by referring to ‘this *samādhi*’ can cover both the actual practice and the text itself that provides guidance for such practice.

The **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* presents a meditative approach that builds on, but at the same time goes well beyond, recollection of the Buddha. It indicates that, based on wholehearted dedication to and reliance on the power of a Buddha—such as Amitābha—a direct meeting can be achieved, and teachings be received. Without needing to gain concentrative expertise, this much can happen either in the waking state or else while dreaming, which emerges as an important potential source of revelation and inspiration for those on the path to Buddhahood.

The central idea of the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* in the form of a meditative encounter with the Buddhas of the ten direction features also in the *Prajñāpāramitā* in the context of a tale involving the bodhisattva Sadāprarudita. His puzzlement at where these Buddhas came from receives a mature reply in the indication in the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-*

⁸⁹. T 2145 at T LV 47c5 and 48c10; see Harrison 1993: 142 and 146. On ceremonial dimensions that can influence the choice of the day for presenting to the public the completion of a translation into Chinese see Hureau 2006.

sūtra that the whole world with its three realms is constructed by the mind. The common element evident in this way appears to be part of an intertextual relationship between these two texts, where several instances point to the **Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* taking over from where the *Prajñāpāramitā* left off. Although such instances are best viewed as part of a complex network of various conditions impacting the evolution of these two texts, which cannot be forced into a monocausal perspective, the indications that emerges in this way could provide a meaningful background to the report that Lokakṣema and his team completed the two translations, now extant as T 224 and T 418, at the same time.

Limitations

In research publications in the field of psychology, it is a standard procedure to conclude an article by noting limitations of the study,⁹⁰ and I think the same practice is appropriate for me here. One limitation is that I am only studying a single version of a single text from a single perspective, and even that much I have not done in a truly comprehensive manner. It follows that what I present has only a limited scope.

Another limitation is that my scholarly expertise is mainly in the study of early Buddhist texts, and by embarking on the present topic I am somewhat like a one-eyed traveler in a foreign land. I am one-eyed since my ignorance of Japanese prevents me from benefitting from the important research contributions published in that language. My hope is that by choosing the present journal to publish my findings, in addition to honoring the memory of the late Karashima Seishi, this will serve to attract the attention of my Japanese colleagues in the hope that they would point out if I overlooked their work. I am also a traveler in a foreign land because my knowledge of Mahāyāna is limited. This has the advantage of enabling me to approach the text studied here from a distinct perspective, namely from the viewpoint of *Āgama* literature and without being influenced by later traditions. At the same time, however, it has the disadvantage that I may at times miss the correct path as I travel through unfamiliar territory. Nevertheless, the potential of reading early Mahāyāna *sūtras* from the viewpoint of *Āgama* literature is to my mind such that it is worth the risk of exposing myself to criticism for having possibly overlooked an important aspect.

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Abbreviations

AN	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>
Ap	<i>Apadāna</i>
D	Derge edition
DĀ	<i>Dīrgha-āgama</i> (T 1)
DN	<i>Dīrgha-nikāya</i>
EĀ	<i>Ekottarika-āgama</i> (T 125)
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i> (T 26)
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>

⁹⁰. See in more detail Ross and Bibler Zaidi 2019.

Mp	<i>Manorathapūraṇī</i>
P	Peking edition
PTS	Pali Text Society
SĀ	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 99)
SHT	Sanskrithandschriften aus den Turfanfunden
SN	<i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>
Sn	<i>Sutta-nipāta</i>
T	Taishō edition (Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association)
Up	<i>Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā</i>
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>

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