

PROGNOSTICATION
IN CHINESE BUDDHIST HISTORICAL TEXTS
THE *GĀOSĒNG ZHUÀN* AND THE *XÙ GĀOSĒNG ZHUÀN*

YANG GANG* AND CHRISTOPH ANDERL**

*Institute for Popular Chinese Culture Studies (中國俗文化研究所) of Sichuan University and
Centre for Buddhist Studies at Ghent University
No. 29 Wangjiang Road, Wuhou District, Chengdu 610064, P. R. China
e-mail: Gang.Yang@ugent.be

**Ghent University, Department of Languages and Cultures
Blandijnberg 2, 9000 Ghent, Belgium
e-mail: Christoph.Anderl@ugent.be

This paper explores topics and techniques of prognostication as recorded in medieval Buddhist historical literature, with an emphasis on the *Gāosēng zhuàn* 高僧傳 (GSZ) and *Xù gāosēng zhuàn* 續高僧傳 (XGSZ). The paper first provides a short survey of how prognostication is treated in Chinese Buddhist translated texts. In these ‘canonical’ sources there is clear ambiguity over the use of supernatural powers: on the one hand, such practices are criticised as non-Buddhist or even heterodox; on the other, narratives on Śākyamuni’s former and present lives as well as accounts of other buddhas, bodhisattvas, and the Buddha’s disciples abound with descriptions of their special abilities, including knowledge of the future. In contrast, the GSZ and XGSZ display a clear standpoint concerning mantic practices and include them as integral aspects of monastics’ lives. The two texts articulate that the ability to predict the future and other supernatural powers are natural by-products of spiritual progress in the Buddhist context. This paper discusses the incorporation of various aspects of the Indian and Chinese traditions in monastics’ biographies, and investigates the inclusion of revelations of future events (for example, in dreams) and mantic techniques in these texts. In addition, it traces parallels to developments in non-Buddhist literature and outlines some significant differences between the GSZ and the XGSZ.

Key words: Buddhist mantic practices; prognostication; divination techniques; Buddhist history texts; *Gāosēng zhuàn*; *Xù gāosēng zhuàn*.

1. Introduction

In recent years, prognostication in China has become a subject of increased Western scholarly interest, resulting in several important publications.¹ However, whereas

¹ See e.g. the articles collected in Chemla, Harper and Kalinowski 1999 and, more recently, Lackner 2018. For a comparison between ancient Chinese and ancient Greek divination practices,

previous research has focused primarily on traditional Chinese divination methods, in this paper we will investigate practices described in two of the most important compilations of medieval Buddhist biographies: the *Gāosēng zhuàn* 高僧傳 ('Records of eminent monks'; hereafter GSZ),² compiled by Huijiǎo 慧皎 (497–554) during the Liáng 梁 Dynasty (502–557); and its successor work, the *Xù gāosēng zhuàn* 續高僧傳 ('Continued records of eminent monks'; hereafter XGSZ),³ compiled by the famous Táng monk and Vinaya specialist Dào xuān 道宣 (596–667). Together, these two texts contain hagiographies of eminent monks who lived between the end of the Hàn 漢 Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) and the beginning of the Táng 唐 Dynasty (618–907), and as such they constitute the most important sources of biographical information on Buddhist monastics of the period.

This paper will investigate the various methods of prognostication that are recorded in these works and explore how they were incorporated into the monks' biographical entries. Mantic techniques were of great significance in the cultural repertoires of both ancient India and ancient China, and the compilers⁴ of Buddhist biographies were familiar with both the canonical Buddhist texts (i.e. Buddhist texts translated or compiled based on Indic language material) and the Chinese methods of

see Raphals 2013. For divination texts among the Dūnhuáng manuscripts, see Kalinowski 2003 and Kroll 2018.

² T50, no2059. The Taishō edition includes biographies of 257 people, plus a supplement of another 242. The work is divided into fourteen fascicles and ten sections based on a categorisation of monastics. In addition, there is a preface contained in Fascicle 14. The ten categories of monastics are: *yì jīng* 譯經 ('translators'); *yì jiě* 義解 ('commentators'); *shén yì* 神異 ('miracle workers'); *xí chán* 習禪 ('meditation practitioners'); *míng lǜ* 明律 ('Vinaya experts'); *wáng shēn* 亡身 ('self-immolators/those engaged in ascetic practices'); *sòng jīng* 誦經 ('specialists in reading and reciting the scriptures'); *xīng fú* 興福 ('those generating merit'); *jīng shī* 經師 ('*sūtra* lecture masters'); and *chàng dǎo* 唱導 ('monks engaged in preaching and conversion'). For a discussion of the GSZ in Western scholarship, see Wright 1954 and Kieschnick 1997.

³ T50, no2060. The sequel to the GSZ, the XGSZ follows the structure of its predecessor in terms of categorisation, although the titles of the categories are sometimes altered. The earliest monks to feature in the XGSZ lived at the beginning of the Liáng 梁 Dynasty, and the latest temporal reference is to the nineteenth year of the *zhēnguān* 貞觀 era (645) of Emperor Tàizōng of the Táng 唐太宗. Hence, the work covers a period of 144 years. It includes 340 main biographical entries and 160 appended entries. In addition to the edited version in the Taishō collection (30 fascicles), there are 31- and 40-fascicle versions, which contain some variations in both the content and the number of monks recorded. The current Taishō editions are by no means the earliest versions of the GSZ and the XGSZ. The textual history of the latter text is especially complicated. Whereas the extant preface mentions 340 biographies and 160 appended entries, the Korean Kōryō version (高麗藏) features 414 main and 201 appended biographies. The text seems to have remained relatively stable after the Sòng, with a total of 485 main and 219 appended biographies. For convenience, we will focus exclusively on the Taishō version in this paper. For details of the various editions, see Atsushi 1990 (tr. in Shi Zhàohui 1992: 202–203, 218) and Chén 2005: 22–29; on case studies, see also Chen 2016, Shinohara 1994 and Yang 2004.

⁴ We use the term 'compilers' rather than 'authors' as the GSZ and the XGSZ are primarily collections of existing biographical/hagiographical material written by numerous authors and deriving from a variety of sources, including stele inscriptions and tales of the marvellous (see Kieschnick 1997: 50). This is clearly stated in the GSZ and the XGSZ themselves (GSZ, p418c18–21; XGSZ, p425b16–20).

divination. As will be shown below, the compilers of the GSZ and XGSZ drew on both of these traditions when integrating references to divination within their works.

2. Prognostications in Texts Translated from Indic Languages: A Short Overview

2.1. Agents and Topics of Prognostication

2.1.1. Predictions in Accounts of the Buddha's Life

One famous Buddhist prediction that appears in a variety of sources relates to events that took place immediately after the Buddha's birth. For example, according to the *Fó běnxíng jīng* 佛本行經,⁵ King Śuddhodana, Śākyamuni's father, asked a Brahmin (in some scriptures identified as Asita-ṛṣi) to inspect his son's physiognomy in order to determine his future. The priest recognised all thirty-two marks of a superior man, so he predicted one of two paths for the infant: he would either become a great *cakravartin* (i.e. a powerful 'wheel-turning king') or he would renounce worldly life and become an enlightened sage. Another example of prognostication in canonical Buddhist literature is a passage in the *Fó běnxíng jíjīng* 佛本行集經 (T3, no190) in which Māya's dream of a six-tusked white elephant entering her womb is interpreted as foretelling the birth of a saintly person.

Occasionally, in the literature, Śākyamuni himself announces an important future event, such as his impending death and subsequent attainment of *nirvāṇa* in the *Móhēmóyē jīng* 摩訶摩耶經 (**Mahāmāya sūtra*):⁶ 'Excellent, Pāpīyas! [You] should know that after three months I shall enter *nirvāṇa*' (善哉，波旬！當知如來却後三月入於涅槃；CBETA: T12, no383, p1011a4–5).

Of course, such references to divination/prediction in the Chinese Buddhist canonical literature stand in stark contrast to Vinaya injunctions against the practice.⁷

2.1.2. Predictions of Future Attainments and the Spread of the Dharma

Predictions play an important role in a variety of Buddhist texts. For instance, the *jātaka* literature contains many references to 'future events', most notably predictions of future buddhahood (*shòuji* 授記, see below) and the fates of close disciples of Śākyamuni. As the frame narratives of the *jātakas* are often the Buddha's sermons (i.e. the 'relative present'), these predictions tend to be projected into the past and

⁵ *Sūtra on the Past Activities of the Buddha* (T4, no193; translated by Bǎoyún 寶雲 in the middle of the 5th century). This text is one of the richest sources on the Buddha's life, and two chapters include references to prophecies: Chapter 5 provides an account of a Brahmin physiognomising the Buddha as a baby, and Chapter 6 deals with the prophecies of the ascetic and mantic specialist Asita, Āyí 阿夷.

⁶ The translation of this text is traditionally attributed to Tánjǐng 曇景 (479–502), but it may have been compiled in China (see Utsuo 1954).

⁷ On this issue, see Strickmann 2005: 78–81.

appear in accounts of the Buddha's practices during previous lives (i.e. the 'relative past'). As such, many of them are verified during the sermon, for instance, by identifying the protagonists in the narrative with the disciples who are currently listening to the Buddha.

With respect to the spread of Śākyamuni's teaching, the *Dàoxíng bōrě jīng* 道行般若經 (*Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā sūtra*; T8, no224) states:

After the passing away of the Tathāgata, this *prajñāpāramitā* ('perfection of wisdom') will exist in southern India; after having been studied there, it will be transmitted from southern India to western India; after having been studied there, it will be transmitted from western India to northern India.

但薩阿竭去後，是般若波羅蜜當在南天竺，其有學已，從南天竺當轉至西天竺，其有學已，當從西天竺轉至到北天竺。

(CBETA: T8, no224, p446a29–b3)

Similarly, the arrival of the bodhisattva Nāgārjuna is predicted in the *Lankāvatāra sūtra*:

After the Tathāgata has been extinct, there will be a person in the future. Mahāmāti, listen carefully, a person will maintain my teaching. In a great southern country,⁸ there is a monk of great virtue by the name of Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva, and he will be able to destroy the [false] views about existence and non-existence.

如來滅度後，未來當有人。大慧汝諦聽，有人持我法，於南大國中，有大德比丘，名龍樹菩薩，能破有無見。

(CBETA: T16, no671, p569a22–26)

2.1.3. Techniques and Agents of Prognostication in Texts of Indic Origin

A survey of translations of Indic sources reveals that predictions played an important role in Buddhist narratives. Several techniques can be distinguished, including prophecies based on physical features (i.e. physiognomising, such as the interpretation of the thirty-two marks of a great man), people's names (*xiàng míng* 相名),⁹ the interpretation of dreams (*zhàn mèng* 占夢)—most notably Māya's dream of a white elephant—and the study of stars and planets. In the following example, taken from the *Mishāsāibù héxì wūfēnlǜ* 彌沙塞部和醯五分律,¹⁰ the diviner is a Brahmin who interprets astral constellations:

⁸ *Nán dàguó* 南大國 is synonymous with *Nán Zhūguó* 南竺國 (Skr. *dakṣiṇā patha*), i.e. southern India (see Hirakawa 1997: 220).

⁹ For example, the *Shísòng lǜ* 十誦律 (*Daśa-bhāṇavāra-vinaya*), a Vinaya text of the Sarvāstivāda School, has the following passage: '[As for] the Brahmins' method of interpreting fetures, if a name is auspicious, then there will be good fortune (lit. "delight")' (婆羅門相法，名吉則喜; CBETA, T23, no1435, p99c14).

¹⁰ T22, no1421; Skr. *Mahīśāsaka-vinaya*.

At that time there was a [Brahmin] fortune-teller who told King Bimbisāra: ‘Soon there will (*dāng* 當) be an inauspicious star appearing; Your Majesty should bathe in the water of a certain spring in order to be spared from¹¹ disaster. If Your Majesty does not do so, then this will result in either the loss of your country or mourning over Your Majesty’s life [i.e. the king’s death].’

時有相師，語瓶沙王言：『尋當有一不吉星出，王應在某泉水中浴，以穰其災。若不爾者，或致失國，或憂身命！』

(CBETA: T22, no1421, p66a04–06)

Generally, in the accounts in translated sources, the prophecies/prognostications are provided either by a buddha (usually when predicting the future buddhahood of others) or by a member of the highest caste (i.e. a Brahmin). In the *Zhōng dé jīng* 種德經 (contained within the *Cháng āhán jīng* 長阿含經), during a conversation with Śākyamuni, a Brahmin suggests that one of the caste’s key characteristics is an ability to foretell the future:

As for the five attributes achieved by our Brahmins, what we say is of utmost honesty, without any falseness. What are those five [attributes]? Firstly, our parents of the seven preceding generations were all ‘genuine’ [*zhēnzhèng* 真正; i.e. members of the Brahmin caste], and were not slandered by other people; secondly, we can recite and are well versed in the Vedic teachings¹² in three parts, and we can fully discern [i.e. explain in detail] the classical scriptures, and we have deep insight in the subtleties of worldly [i.e. non-Vedic] classics; furthermore, *we excel in the method of prognosticating the features a great person, and clearly investigate auspicious and inauspicious features, sacrifices, and rituals*; thirdly, our facial attributes are handsome [symmetrical]; fourthly, our observation of the prohibitions is fully sufficient [i.e. perfected]; fifthly, our wisdom is penetrating. These are the five [attributes].

¹¹ The use of *ráng* 穰 is interesting here. The original meaning is ‘stalks of grain’ and, by extension, ‘abundant; prosperous’. As such, the word refers to something ‘auspicious’. Here, it seems to indicate that the ‘disaster’ (*zāi* 災) is neutralised (by something auspicious). However, we suspect that 穰 should be read as *rǎng* 攘, referring to apotropaic methods of averting disaster by utilising the influence of heavenly bodies. See e.g. the Táng Dynasty *Qīyào rǎngzāi jué* 七曜攘災決 (Secrets of seven-planet apotropaism), a Buddhist astrological manual comprising Chinese, Indian, Iranian, Sogdian, and Near Eastern elements that was used to interpret the effects of the *nakṣatra* (*mìngsù* 命宿; i.e. the stellar constellation at the time of one’s birth). See Jeffrey Kotyk and Iain Sinclair’s detailed analysis of this text in DDB: <http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?q=%E4%B8%83%E6%9B%9C%E6%94%98%E7%81%BD%E6%B1%BA>. The *Qīyào rǎngzāi jué* also prescribes certain actions that should be performed to counter inauspicious effects.

¹² In Buddhist texts, *yìxué* 異學 often refers to unspecified ‘non-Buddhist teachings’. However, here it specifically refers to the Brahmins’ Vedic scriptures. The expression *sānbù jiùdiǎn* 三部舊典 is used in a parallel passage in the *Cháng āhán jīng* (CBETA: T1, no1, p82a) in reference to the ‘ancient classics in three parts’ (i.e. the corpus of Vedic scriptures).

我婆羅門成就五法，所言至誠，無有虛妄。云何為五？一者婆羅門七世已來父母真正，不為他人之所輕毀；二者異學三部諷誦通利，種種經書盡能分別，世典幽微靡不綜練，又能善於大人相法、明察吉凶、祭祀儀禮；三者顏貌端正；四者持戒具足；五者智慧通達。是為五。

(*Cháng āhán jīng*, CBETA: T1, no1, p95c28–96a7; emphasis added)

Buddhist texts occasionally juxtapose Brahmin prognostications with those of the Buddha, with the former's erroneous predictions invariably trumped by the latter's correct prophecies.¹³ Moreover, there are accounts of unethical Brahmins using predictions in order to swindle the gullible.¹⁴

In addition to the Buddha's ability to foretell buddhahood and other accomplishments, some of his disciples are similarly credited with a capacity to predict the future. For instance, they might employ the 'divine eye' (*tiānyǎn* 天眼) they have attained due to their spiritual progress to determine the whereabouts or fate of certain people:

With the power of their divine eyes they surveyed the sentient beings, their passing away here and being [re]born there, their being born here from there, the span of their lives, whether their facial appearance is beautiful or ugly, the receiving of retribution based on their deeds, good and bad rebirth destinations, they have knowledge of all this.

以天眼力，觀於眾生。死此生彼，從彼生此，壽命長短，顏色好醜，隨行受報，善惡之趣，皆悉知見。

(CBETA: T1, no1, p44a27–29)

The Mahāyāna scriptures abound with references to the supernatural deeds of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and disciples of the Buddha. In addition to descriptions of the special powers they have developed through their insight, there are many accounts of their use of 'skilful means' (*upāya*)—i.e. magic—to promote Buddhism or save sentient beings.

2.1.4. Some Notes on Terminology

Despite the critical evaluation of prognostication practices in many Buddhist texts (see below), Chinese translated Buddhist literature includes numerous references to predicting the future as well as interpreting bodily features (*xiàng* 相), natural phenomena, and so on. One important term is *shòuji* 授記 (lit. 'to bestow a record'; i.e. a 'guarantee' of future enlightenment and attainment of buddhahood; rendering Skr. *vyākaraṇa*),¹⁵ which often appears in translated Buddhist literature—including *āgama*

¹³ See e.g. the *Guówáng bù lí xiān ní shí mèng jīng* 國王不黎先泥十夢經, as quoted in the *Fǎyuàn zhūlín*'s 法苑珠林 chapter on dreams (T53, no2122, p535a–c).

¹⁴ For an example from the *jātakas*, see the discussion in Ohnuma 2017: 73.

¹⁵ There are also several phonetic renderings into Chinese of this term. These guarantees of future attainment are so important that they constitute one of the sections in the traditional twelve-fold division of the Buddhist canon (*shí-èr bù jīng* 十二部經).

literature¹⁶—usually in reference to predictions of future buddhahood or some other prospective accomplishment. Another term, *xuánjì* 懸記,¹⁷ is more difficult to define. It is sometimes used specifically in reference to the Buddha's predictions of future events, but it tends to appear only in Buddhist texts composed in China—as opposed to translated literature—and also has the more general meaning of 'to prophesy'. Several other terms that appear in the canonical scriptures are explained below.

2.2. Criticism of Prognostication Techniques in the Buddhist Canon

The Buddhist canonical texts are highly critical of Brahmin prognostication and divination practices.¹⁸ In Buddhist philosophy, the emphasis is on phenomena arising due to primary and secondary causes. Moreover, crucially, the future is dependent on one's actions in the present. So, the assumption of a determined course of events projected into the future is by default problematic.¹⁹ This may be one of the reasons why 'traditional' prognostication techniques are routinely condemned and associated with non-Buddhists (i.e. Brahmins). For example, the following passage from the *Fó kāijiě fànzhì Ābá jīng* 佛開解梵志阿闍經 (Sūtra on Buddha's enlightening of the Brahmin Ambaṭṭha),²⁰ contained in the *āgamas*, denounces various prognostication practices:

[*Śrāmaṇeras*] should not study physiognomising [*xiàng* 相; i.e. prognostication based on bodily/physical features] concerning [the birth of] sons or daughters, becoming poor or rich, esteemed or humble; or whether

¹⁶ For example, the *Zēngyī āhán jīng* 增一阿含經 contains an account of the past Buddha Dingguāng informing the Brahmin Chāoshù 超術 that he will be reborn as Śākyamuni Buddha. (On this Brahmin, see CBETA, T2, no125, p597c18ff.) Similarly, the *Janeśa-sūtra* (*Shénishā jīng* 闍尼沙經), which forms part of the *Dīrghāgama* (*Cháng āhán jīng*), includes a passage in which the Buddha predicts that Chancellor Qiéqiélúo 伽伽羅 (Skr. *Gagara?) and twelve others will ascend to a heavenly realm after their deaths. Elsewhere in the same text, he announces that fifty people will attain the stage of *sakṛd-āgāmin* (*sītūóhán* 斯陀含; 'once-returner') after their deaths, while another five hundred will attain the level of *srotāpanna* (*xūtūóhuán* 須陀洹; 'stream-enterer'). Such examples are commonplace.

¹⁷ There are various ways to interpret the semantics of *xuán* (lit. 'suspend') in this term. It can mean 'far away', and as such may refer to an event in the distant future; alternatively, it may mean 'publicly announce' (i.e. proclaim future buddhahood).

¹⁸ For a thorough study of key passages in the Buddhist canon (with an emphasis on the Vinaya literature), see Guggenmos 2018.

¹⁹ However, as Kotyk 2018 has recently noted, astrological determinism is an integral part of Buddhism. Buddhists in India, with few exceptions, believed that time was conditioned by astrological circumstances, and that future developments could be forecast through astrology, in contrast to the assumption that Buddhists ought to believe in a chain of causality based on the theory of karma.

²⁰ This text (parallel to the Pāli *Ambaṭṭha sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*) was supposedly translated by Zhī Qiān 支謙 in the first half of the 3rd century and is thought to reflect early Buddhist thought. However, this attribution is far from certain. For instance, Nattier 2008 does not include the text among the earliest Chinese Buddhist translations.

there are features or no features. Furthermore, [*śrāmaṇeras* should not] interpret the behaviour of the six domestic animals.²¹ [*Śrāmaṇeras* should not] engage in divination (*kǎozhàn* 考占) concerning extraordinary events such as flooding, droughts, or natural disasters, as well as years of plenty or hardship. *Śrāmaṇeras* should not observe above (*yǎngguān* 仰觀) the celestial cycles and numbers [i.e. astrological signs],²² and should not calculate the phases of (*tuībù* 推步) waxing and waning, and the eclipses of the sun and moon, falling stars, irregular appearances, the collapse of mountains, earthquakes, and the [prevalence of] wind and rain during the seasons; all of that should not be known [i.e. prognosticated].

不得學相男、女，貧、富，貴、賤，有相無相，及相六畜儀形之狀。不得考占水旱災變、歲之豐儉。沙門不得仰觀曆數，推步日月盈虛薄蝕，星殞，變見，山崩，地動，歲中風雨，一不得知。
(CBETA: T1, no20, p261c5–9)

Likewise, the *Vinaya in Four Divisions* (**Dharmaguptaka-vinaya*; *Sifēn lǜ* 四分律) displays a very critical attitude towards all prognostications and predictions, defining them as practices of ‘non-believers’ (*wàidào* 外道) and people who do not live

²¹ *Liùchù* 六畜 is a traditional Chinese term for domestic animals (sometimes specifically for horses, cows, goats, pigs, dogs, and chickens). It is often contrasted to the ‘six kinds of beasts’ or the ‘six kinds of birds’ (cf. *Zhōulǐ* 周禮: 庖人掌共六畜、六獸、六禽，辨其名物; *Shisān jīng zhùshū*: 661). Because of the significance of domestic animals, it was important to predict their ‘futures’ on the basis of their physical characteristics. The *Hànshū* 漢書 (Chapter *Yì wén zhì* 藝文志, p1775) mentions a text with the title *Xiàng liùchù* 相六畜 (Physiognomising the Six Domestic Animals) in thirty-eight fascicles (see Raphals 2008–2009: 91, Note 157). There seems to be no corresponding term in an Indic language, and the translator Zhīqiān 支謙 used an expression with which his Chinese readership would be familiar. Although the term itself is drawn from the Chinese cultural sphere, the technique of prognosticating the futures of animals is also attested in translated literature. For example, the *Gēnběn shuō yīqiè yǒubù pínàiyé* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶 (*Mūla-sarvāstivāda-vinaya-vibhaṅga*) mentions several types of prognostication in a narrative on the abilities of a young boy: ‘As for the eight kinds of techniques, he excelled in physiognomising the following: treasures, garments, residences, cows, elephants, horses, men and women’ (於八種術善能占相：所謂相寶、相衣、相宅、相牛、相象、相馬、相男、相女; CBETA: T23, no1442, p629a9–10; emphasis added). However, there is no concrete description of these techniques, and we do not know if they were similar to those practised in China.

²² Thus, *śrāmaṇeras* should not engage in practices that are associated with Brahmins. The fact that astrology was related to the Brahmins may also be deduced from the titles of the following (no longer extant) works listed in the *Suīshū* 隋書 (Chapter *Jīngjì zhì* 經籍志, pp. 1019 and 1026): *Pólómén tiānwén jīng* 婆羅門天文經 (Scripture on the astral practices of the Brahmins), in 21 fascicles; *Pólómén Jiéqiè xiānrén tiānwén shuō* 婆羅門竭伽仙人天文說 (Astral teachings of Brahmin Sage *Garga; on this text, see Kawai and Közen 1995), in 30 fascicles; *Pólómén suànfǎ* 婆羅門算法 (The method of [calendar] calculations of the Brahmins), in 3 fascicles; *Pólómén yīnyáng suànlǐ* 婆羅門陰陽算曆 (The scripture of Yīnyáng and [calendar] calculations of the Brahmins), in 1 fascicle; and *Pólómén suànjīng* 婆羅門算經 (The scripture of [calendar] calculations of the Brahmins), in 3 fascicles. However, Kotyk 2017a: 66–67 points out that these references in the *Suīshū* do not necessarily reflect the routine association of astrological practices with Brahmins; rather, 婆羅門 should be interpreted as a more general reference to ‘India’.

correctly. The following passage lists a number of mantic techniques that run counter to following the Buddhist path:

Non-Buddhist *śrāmaṇera*, brahmins eat the alms of those of other faiths [e.g. Buddhist believers], [and] obstruct the methods of the [correct] path [i.e. the Buddha-dharma], and they do not earn their livelihood properly, they examine the good and bad features of the appearance of men and women in order to predict their future.²³ They prognosticate on the features of various domestic animals in order to seek profit; [Buddhist believers] eradicate these various [Brahmin] methods of obstructing the [correct] path.

如餘沙門、婆羅門，食他信施，行妨道法，邪命自活，瞻相男女好惡，相種種畜生，以求利養，斷除如是種種妨道法。

(CBETA: T22, no1428, p963b10–13)

Some chant the books on differentiating between death and life; some chant the books on classifying the dreams, some determine the features of the hands [i.e. read palms] or the shoulders, some recite the questions to Heaven and men,²⁴ some chant the books on differentiating between the sounds of birds and beasts. [Buddhist believers] eradicate these various [Brahmin] methods of obstructing the [correct] path.²⁵

或誦別死生書；或誦別夢書；或相手相肩；或誦天人問；或誦別鳥獸音聲書，除斷如是妨道法。

(CBETA: T22, no1428, p963b19–27)

When they prognosticate on the features of Heaven, some say it will rain, some say it will not. Some say that the grain will be expensive, some say it will be cheap. Some claim there will be many sicknesses, some say there will be few. Some say there will be dreadfulness, some say there will be peace. Some state that the earth will shake, some say comets will appear. Some say there will be an eclipse of the moon, some state there will not be. Some say there will be an eclipse of the sun, some state there will not be. Some claim there will be an eclipse of a star, some say there will not be. Some state that the eclipse of the moon is

²³ *Zhàn xiàng* 瞻相 is usually written as 占相. The term *zhàn xiàng*, which occurs frequently in Buddhist texts, refers to prognostication based on the features of people, things, or natural phenomena. It is often encountered in narratives relating to the newborn Śākyamuni, whose marks of a great man are inspected and interpreted. On the practice of physiognomy, see Despeux 2003.

²⁴ Based on the passage in another text, this is probably a reference to ‘books on astrology’ (*tiānwén shū* 天文書, mentioned in the *Cháng āhán jīng*; CBETA: T1, no1, p84c3). Thus, our text is likely corrupted here.

²⁵ A similar passage from the *Ambaṭṭa Sutta* (T1, no1, p84b15–c13) is translated as: ‘Oder sie rezitieren Bücher zur Unterscheidung von Leben und Sterben, sie lesen Bücher über Träume, sie lesen aus der Hand. Sie lesen Bücher über Astrologie oder über alle Laute’ (Meisig 1987: 253). See also Guggenmos 2018: 194.

a such-and-such good response, some say it is a such-and-such bad response. As for [the interpretations of] the eclipses of the sun and the stars, they are also as such. [Buddhist believers] eradicate these various [Brahmin] methods of obstructing the [correct] path.

瞻相天時，或言當雨，或言不雨；或言穀貴，或言穀賤；或言多病，或言少病；或言恐怖，或言安隱；或言地動，或言彗星現；或言月蝕，或言不蝕；或言日蝕，或言不蝕；或言星蝕，或言不蝕；或言月蝕有如是好報有如是惡報，日蝕星蝕亦如是，除斷如是邪命法。

(CBETA: T22, no1428, p963b27–c6)

Meanwhile, in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, prognostication practices are criticised because they do not conform to the doctrine of the emptiness of all intrinsic features (*zìxiàng* 自相). For example, the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā sūtra* (*Dà bōrě bōluómíduō jīng* 大般若波羅蜜多經; T5, no220) defines an advanced bodhisattva as someone who ‘knows that all intrinsic features of all phenomena are empty, and within the emptiness of all self-features one cannot discern any features’ (知一切法自相皆空，自相空中不見有相; CBETA: T6, no220, p674b25–26). Therefore, it is futile to try to ‘interpret the features’ (*xiàng* 相) of things, and one should not

physiognomise whether life will be long or short, whether there will be riches and [high] positions, [whether a child will be] male or female, [or try to predict] all kinds of good and evil matters; one should also not foretell (*xuánjì* 懸記) coldness or heat, bounty or poverty, good or bad auspicious signs, good and evil, [and by so doing] confuse the sentient beings.

占相壽量長短、財位、男女諸善惡事，亦不懸記寒熱、豐儉、吉凶、好惡，惑亂有情。

(CBETA: T6, no220, p674b21–23)

In addition, the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra* (*Dà bānniépán jīng* 大般涅槃經) states that engaging in various kinds of prognostication might engender societal criticism. Therefore, ‘a bodhisattva mahāsattva should put an end to the world’s criticism of the prohibitions’ (菩薩摩訶薩息世譏嫌戒; CBETA: T12, no374, p433a20) and monastics should avoid all mantic practices. This text also provides a detailed list of (heterodox) prognostication techniques (終不瞻相手、足、面目，不以爪鏡、芝草、楊枝、鉢盂、髑髏而作卜筮; CBETA: T12, no374, p433a14–15). Several of these techniques are mentioned in a passage on the forty-eight minor prohibitions in the *Fànwǎng jīng* 梵網經:

[As for the methods of using] the ‘fingernail-mirror’, milfoil grass, branches of the willow, bowls, and skulls for prognosticating, one should not employ any of them; [...] if one employs them, then one commits a minor offence.

爪鏡、蒼草、楊枝、鉢盂、鬮腰而作卜筮，一一不得作(……)若故作者，犯輕垢罪。

(CBETA: T24, no1484, p1007b18–20)²⁶

The *zhuǎ jìng* 爪鏡 ('fingernail-mirror') method is described in a Táng Dynasty commentary on the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra* as 'smearing medicine [i.e. ointment] on the [palm of the] hands [to produce a reflective surface] and cast a spell on it; then one is able to see whether [a matter] will be auspicious or inauspicious' (爪鏡者，以藥塗爪呪之，能見吉凶; *Nièpán jīng shū sī jì* 涅槃經疏私記; CBETA: X37, no661, p214c4). The method is also mentioned in the *Tiāntái púsà jièshū* 天台菩薩戒疏, where it is stated that it was used by 'magicians from the Western countries' (西國術師; CBETA: T40, no1812, p595c16). As such, it is not considered a traditional Chinese technique.²⁷

Divination by milfoil grass (*Achillea millefolium*; in other sources *zhīcǎo* 芝草, *Zoysia pungens*) seemed to involve casting a spell or incantation on the plant, then providing a prediction on the basis of that.

Indian monastics used branches of the willow (*yáng* 楊) to cleanse the mouth and the body. In a commentary on the *Brahmajāla sūtra*, the *Fànwǎng púsà jiè jīng yìshū fā yīn* 梵網菩薩戒經義疏發隱 (CBETA: X38, no679), this practice is explained as follows: a priest casts a spell over a willow or camphor branch and thereby invokes the plant's spirit. Another commentary, the *Fànwǎng púsà jiè zhù* 梵網菩薩戒注 (CBETA: X38, no691), provides a more detailed explanation: a figure in the shape of a person is carved from a piece of willow or camphor, a spell is cast on the branch, and this summons a spirit who has the power to predict a person's or an undertaking's future prospects. Yet another account appears in a work by the Qīng Dynasty scholar Yuán Dòng 袁棟, the *Shū yīn cóng shuō* 書隱叢說 (*Xù xiū sīkù quánshū*, Vol. 1137, p. 574): a miniature model of a person is carved from the wood of one of the aforementioned trees and a spell is cast that causes a gifted and intelligent child to die. The child's soul is then captured within the carved piece of wood and urged to make prognostications.²⁸

²⁶ For a comprehensive discussion of the various mantic practices and their classification in the Buddhist canon, as well as possible parallels in Pāli literature, see Guggenmos 2018. For a discussion on Vinaya monks and astral practices, see Kotyk 2017b.

²⁷ The technique is also referenced in the *Bīqūnī zhuàn* 比丘尼傳 (T50, no2063, p935a7–25), specifically in the biography of the nun Ān Lingshǒu 安令首: 'Chong [the nun's father] consulted Buddhatunga about the matter. Buddhatunga said to him, "Go back home and keep a pure fast for three days, and then come again". Chong obeyed him. Buddhatunga mixed some red paste with sesame oil, rubbed it into the palm of Chong's right hand, and asked him to look at it. He saw a Buddhist monk with features resembling his daughter's preaching the Dharma to a great assembly. He described this to Buddhatunga, who said, "That was your daughter's previous incarnation: she was a monk working for the benefit of others. Such was her former life. If you comply with her wish, she will bring glory and exaltation to all the six relations of your family and make you rich and noble; and she may reach the other shore across the great sea of the suffering of rebirth"' (Li and Dalia 2006: 74).

²⁸ There are also occasional references to the use of willow branches in divination in works of Esoteric Buddhism (cf. *Tuólúóní jī jīng* 陀羅尼集經; CBETA: T18, no901, p888a8–12).

The use of alms bowls (*bōyú* 鉢盂) in divination is also considered a ‘Western’ practice. It involved casting a spell that enabled the diviner to foretell the future simply by looking into their bowl. The *Fànwǎng púsà jiè jīng shūzhù* states:

[As for the] the alms bowl, non-Buddhists of the Western countries apply a spell (*zhòu* 呪) to all kinds of utensils, letting people prognosticate auspicious and inauspicious [events] in them; here, the alms bowl is mentioned and this is such a utensil. In this region [i.e. China] one can also apply a spell to a cup/bowl (*wǎn* 碗) in order to prognosticate; all [vessels] are like this [i.e. potentially have this function].

鉢盂，西土外道呪一切器物令人於中卜吉凶，此以鉢盂為言，即器也。此方亦有呪水碗以下者，皆此類。

(CBETA: X38, no678, p118b22–24)

Finally, the Buddhist scriptures mention two methods of extracting information from skulls. The first technique—which was associated with India—involved tapping the skull and making predictions based on the sound.²⁹ By contrast, the second method was rooted in traditional Chinese practices: ‘One takes the skull of a recently deceased person and ceremoniously casts a spell on it; then one is able to listen to the skull and report disasters and fortunate events’ (取新亡髑髏祭鍊禁呪，能從人耳報災祥也; *Fànwǎng púsà jiè jīng yishū fā yīn* 梵網菩薩戒經義疏發隱; CBETA: X38, no679, p202a9–10). It seems that the soul or spirit of the deceased person played some sort of role here.³⁰

Based on this short survey of prognostication in Chinese Buddhist translated literature, we may conclude that many divination techniques and topics (such as predicting an ordinary person’s fate or a ruler’s future prospects) were regarded as heterodox and attributed to non-Buddhists (especially Brahmins), whereas prognostication performed by Buddhists usually focused on religious subjects, especially a person’s prospective enlightenment and buddhahood. In general, mantic practices that were unrelated to Buddhist topics were criticised and often defined as heterodox.

3. Predictions in the GSZ and XGSZ

We will now investigate the presentation of topics and methods of prognostication in two highly influential historical works—the GSZ and XGSZ—which had a significant impact on how the ideal qualities of eminent monks were defined in the Chinese context. In contrast to the translated Buddhist literature discussed above, these texts display an unambiguous attitude towards mantic practices, leaving the reader in no doubt that mastery of prognostication and other supernatural powers are essential characteristics of eminent monks. These powers are rarely mediated by a spirit or

²⁹ Cf. *Móhē zhǐguān* 摩訶止觀 (CBETA: T46, no1911, p101a1–2).

³⁰ For an early example of a skull ‘becoming alive’ and representing the spirit of the deceased person, see *Zhuāngzǐ* 莊子 18 (Guō and Wáng 1961: 617–619).

a divination/mantic specialist; rather, they are directly communicated by the monastic himself. (Occasionally, information about a future event is revealed first in a dream,³¹ either explicitly or encoded in a ‘riddle’.) Hence, the monk gains knowledge of future events and attains supernatural powers (*shéntōng* 神通) through arduous Buddhist practice. The process that leads to the attainment of these special powers sometimes forms part of the narrative, so the reader is told both *why* and *how* a particular monastic gained his supernatural prowess. For instance, the entry on Sēnghuì 僧慧 (408–486/487) reads as follows:

At that time there was furthermore Huiyuǎn 慧遠 from the Chángshā Monastery of Jiānglíng. He was the attendant of the monk Huiyin 慧印 there. When [Hui]yin saw that he [i.e. Huiyuǎn] had faith, he urged him to renounce [his] home. [Huiyuǎn] then made an effort in the practice of *pratyutpanna*,³² and after years of austerity, he then acquired supernatural powers,³³ and was able to duplicate his body when he accepted invitations [i.e. he could be at two locations at the same time], and he *predicted* periods of *flourishing or decline*, among other things.

時江陵長沙寺，又有釋慧遠者。本沙門慧印之蒼頭也。印見其有信，因為出家。仍行般舟之業，數歲勤苦，遂有神異，能分身赴請，及預記興亡等。

(GSZ, p393c17–20; emphasis added)

Another example is the biography of Buddhahadra,³⁴ who reportedly travelled by ship to China. At the start of his voyage, he correctly predicted a change in the direction of the wind, an encounter with pirates, and other ominous events. This foreknowledge is attributed to the fact that he was a ‘non-returner’ (Skr. *ānāgamin*), so he had been *endowed* (*jùzú* 具足) with the gift of premonition.³⁵

Taking this into account, how does one explain the special powers of monks who were not especially virtuous or even broke the precepts? One such monk was Bǎozhì 保誌 (418–514) who ‘did not settle at any specific place, ate at improper times, and had hair several inches long’ (居止無定，飲食無時，髮長數寸; GSZ,

³¹ Of course, prognostication based on dreams is a cross-cultural phenomenon (see Stevens 1997). This also plays an important role in the GSZ and XGSZ. Even more significantly, in these sources, future events are often *explicitly* revealed in dreams and so do not necessarily need reinterpretation. For a detailed discussion of monastic dream interpretation in the GSZ and XGSZ (with a specific focus on hermeneutics), see Jensen 2018: 119–123.

³² This probably refers to the practice of reaching *pánzhōu sānmèi* 般舟三昧, a contemplation in which one visualises being together with the present Buddha (*pánzhōu* means ‘present’).

³³ *Shényì* 神異 (lit. ‘divine anomaly’).

³⁴ Fótúóbátuólúó 佛馱跋陀羅 (358/359–429), a famous translator as well as a Vinaya and meditation master.

³⁵ See, e.g. the *Chánmi yàofǎ jīng* 禪祕要法經: ‘When one successively cultivates and attains the four fruits of a *śrāmaṇera*, “three insights” and the “six supernatural powers” will all be provided’ (次第修得四沙門果，三明、六通皆悉具足; CBETA: T15, no613, p244a29).

p394a18). As such, he fell far short of the monastic ideal.³⁶ Nevertheless, he was able to predict the future. The GSZ attempts to resolve this apparent paradox by stating that he gained this ability through vigorous practice in *previous* lives. So, despite his unorthodox behaviour during his current lifetime, he displayed great confidence at the time of his death, announcing: ‘I, the bodhisattva, am about to leave’ (菩薩將去; GSZ, p394c22)! He is also said to ‘have exposed his true form [to his disciples], with a glow like the one of bodhisattva statues’ (為其現真形，光相如菩薩像焉; GSZ, p394c19). Hence, he revealed his true nature to his followers based on his previous achievements.

Although this ‘self-power’ based on strict adherence to Buddhist practice is the most important factor in the acquisition of prognostication (and other supernatural gifts), the GSZ and XGSZ sometimes credit other agents, such as ghosts, mediums, and deities, with similar abilities. In addition, predictions are often accompanied by other unusual and supernatural occurrences.³⁷

3.1. Topics of Predictions

3.1.1. Predictions relating to the Lives of Eminent Monks

Important events in monks’ lives are the most prominent topic of prognostication in the GSZ and XGSZ. These texts contain numerous predictions relating to individual monks’ gestation, birth, death, and rebirth, in addition to narratives concerning key achievements in their lives, spiritual attainment, and enlightenment.

3.1.1.1. Gestation and Birth

The narratives concerning the conception and birth of Śākyamuni are elaborately described in the Buddhist literature in order to show that he was a superior being from the very beginning. They include his mother’s dream of a white elephant, his entry into the womb, his birth from his mother’s side, and other stories. Likewise, the Chinese Buddhist biographies of eminent monks abound with descriptions of unusual events that either preceded or coincided with their birth.

A mother’s dream often foretells an auspicious birth.³⁸ For instance, in Xuāngāo’s 玄高 (402–444) entry, his mother dreams of ‘Indian monks (*fānsēng* 梵僧) who scatter flowers, filling the room’ (梵僧散華滿室; GSZ, p397a8), while the mother of Huìyuè 慧約 (452–535) dreams of a ‘tall person lifting up a golden image and causing her to swallow it’ (長人擎金像令吞之; XGSZ, p468b23–24). The mother of Huìyǒng 慧勇 sees ‘herself climbing up a Buddha-*stūpa*, getting hold of

³⁶ On ‘deviant’ monastics, see the discussion of ‘meat-eating, wine-drinking monks’ in Kieschnick 1997: 51–63.

³⁷ On the Chinese worldview that ‘supernatural’ occurrences form part of the natural world, see the discussions in Campana 1996: 205–272 and Sharf 2002: 77–133.

³⁸ For a detailed discussion of the logic and poetics of conception dreams in the GSZ and the XGSZ, see Jensen 2018: 149–219.

two golden bodhisattvas' (身登佛塔，獲二金菩薩; XGSZ, p478a24), while Zhiyǎn's 智琰 mother 'ascends the pagoda of Tōngxuán monastery,³⁹ climbs up the sign of the wheel,⁴⁰ and takes a seat there' (夢升通玄寺塔，登相輪而坐; XGSZ, p531c4–5). Finally, Lingrui's 靈睿 mother dreams of an 'alms bowl made of the seven treasures dropping down from a tree and flying into her mouth' (七寶鉢於樹顛飛來入口; XGSZ, p539c15). Such accounts, replete with Buddhist symbols, occur frequently in Buddhist historical texts.

Specific elements of Chinese culture are also sometimes woven into the dreams, such as in the dream of the mother of Tándi 曇諦 (347–411). She meets a monk who 'entrusted her with a fly-whisk and two iron-engraved paperweights' (寄一塵尾并鐵鏤書鎮二枚; GSZ, p370c26–27). A fly-whisk is also mentioned in Zhiwén's 智文 mother's dream: 'An Indian monk took a branch from a pine tree and gave it to her, saying, "If you thereafter give birth to a boy, bestow a fly-whisk on him"' (梵僧把松枝而授，曰：『尔後誕男，與為塵尾』; XGSZ, p609b8–9). The *zhūwěi* 塵尾 ('fly-whisk') featured prominently in *qīngtán* 清談 ('pure talk') debates at the imperial court during the Six Dynasties period.⁴¹

Zhizàng's 智藏 (458–522) mother dreamed that 'meteors fell on the ground, she grabbed and swallowed the debris; because of this, she fell pregnant and gave birth to [Zhi]zàng; at a young age, he was already very bright' (眾星墜地取而吞之，因而有娠焉，及生藏也，少而聰敏; GSZ, p465c11–12). Meanwhile, the mother of Cizàng 慈藏 (?–?) dreamed of 'a star falling down and entering her, and because of that she became pregnant' (星墜入懷，因即有娠; XGSZ, p639a16).⁴²

Other signs—such as changes in the mother's mental or physical disposition—could also predict the birth of an eminent monk. For example, during her pregnancy with the famous translator Kumārajīva (344–413), his mother reportedly had 'extraordinary realisations'⁴³ (自覺神悟超解，有倍常曰; GSZ, p330a19). Similarly, when

³⁹ This monastery (now Bàoēn-sì 報恩寺) is situated in present-day Sūzhōu City, Jiāngsū Province. Its history can be traced back to the Three Kingdoms period, when it was established by Emperor Sūnquán 孫權 of the Kingdom of Wú 吳 in honour of his wet nurse (see *Jiājīng Wúyì zhì* 嘉靖吳邑志 16, in *Tiānyī gé cáng Míng-dài fāngzhì xuānkān xùbiān*: 1153).

⁴⁰ This refers to a sign in the form of a wheel or a circle that was placed on top of a pagoda. A wheel sign on the feet of a *cakravartin* was also one of the marks of a great man. See Jensen 2018: 197–201.

⁴¹ When answering a question, a debater would raise his fly-whisk. When unable to answer, or to admit defeat, he would lower his whisk (see Assandri 2009: 25). Before long, the implement also started to feature in Buddhist rituals. By the end of the Táng, it signified the power of Chán masters, who would brandish fly-whisks when addressing the assembly or teaching students. On the sexual imagery of Zhiwén's mother's dream and its thematic relationship with other conception dreams in the GSZ and the XGSZ, see Jensen 2018: 197–201.

⁴² Secular Chinese historical texts also address the topic of astral bodies causing pregnancy. For instance, see *Shǐjì* 史記, fasc. 49 (p1975), which records that the mother of Emperor Wū of Hàn (漢武帝) dreamed that the sun entered her and thereafter she gave birth to her son. For the significance of this astral imagery in the GSZ and the XGSZ, see Jensen 2018: 186–193. For additional examples from roughly the same historical period, see Lippiello 2001. For a later discussion of this oneritic imagery in Chinese historical texts, see Strassberg 2008: 108–114.

⁴³ The motif of psychological change in the mind of the mother probably originated in an account of the birth of Śākyamuni's famous disciple Śāriputra. The *Dà zhìdù lùn* 大智度論 (*Mahā-*

Fǎláng 法朗 (507–581) dwelled in his mother’s womb, her ‘four limbs felt “light and unreal”, different from regular days, and because of that she abstained from the various flavours of the five pungent roots’ (四體輕虛，有異恒日，五辛雜味，因此悉斷; XGSZ, p477b5–6). The theme of abstaining from the five pungent roots (*wūxīn* 五辛)⁴⁴ during pregnancy is also found in the biographies of Huibi 慧璧, Língui, Huijin 慧璣 (401–485), and Kōngzàng 空藏.

Supernatural phenomena during and after birth often indicate the arrival of an extraordinary person. For instance, ‘clouds and vapours filled the room’ (見雲氣滿室; XGSZ, p463c14–15) at the moment of Fǎyún’s 法雲 (467–529) birth. Similarly, the entry on Zhītō 智脫 (541–607) relates: ‘In the beginning, on the evening of his birth, a divine light radiated through the room, and during a period of ten days, a dried-up spring gushed forth by itself’ (初誕之夕，神光照室，旬日之間，枯泉自涌; XGSZ, p498c3–4). The XGSZ offers an explanation of such phenomena in the following story:

His mother, Ms. Zhāng, on the first day of her pregnancy, ascended the pagoda of the Tōngxuán Monastery in a dream, and in the distance she saw emptiness approaching (*yuǎn shì lín xū* 遠視臨虛). However, she never showed any expression of fear. *The superior omens (shèng zhào 勝兆) of attaining the way and transcending life are the supreme mysterious features of a teacher of men.*

母氏張夫人，初懷孕日，夢升通玄寺塔，登相輪而坐。遠視臨虛，曾無懼色。斯乃得道超生之勝兆，人師無上之奇徵。
(Zhiyǎn 智琰 entry, XGSZ, p531c6; emphasis added)

Hence, there was no need for a mantic specialist to interpret these auspicious phenomena,⁴⁵ because they were, by default, indications of the advent of a saintly person (even prior to his enlightenment) in the world.

prajñāpāramitā-sāstra, attributed to Nāgārjuna) states: ‘Because of this child, the mother was also [highly] intelligent and had great skills in debates. When the younger brother Jūchíluó 拘鄰羅 engaged in dispute with his elder sister [i.e. the mother of Śāriputra], each time he was outwitted and proven inferior to her. Thus, he knew that the child she was bearing certainly had great wisdom’ 以其子故，母亦聰明，大能論議。其弟拘鄰羅，與姊談論，每屈不如，知所懷子，必大智慧 (CBETA: T25, no1509, p137c11–13).

⁴⁴ There are various lists of these items, but the term usually refers to roots of the onion family (e.g. leeks, scallions, garlic, chives, etc.). These roots were thought to arouse the minds of practitioners, causing passion and distracting them from their spiritual quest. See, e.g. the *Fànwǎng jīng* 梵網經, which lists *dàsuàn* 大蒜, *gécōng* 草葱, *cicōng* 慈葱, *láncōng* 蘭葱, and *xīngqú* 興蘗 (CBETA: T24, no1484, p1005b14–16); or the *Púsà jièyì shū* 菩薩戒義疏, which lists *suàn* 蒜, *cōng* 葱, *xīngqú* 興蘗, *jiū* 韭, and *xiè* 薤 (CBETA: T40, no1811, p575a25–26).

⁴⁵ See Jensen 2018: 119–123 on the distinction between dream interpretation and dream exhortation in the GSZ and the XGSZ. See also the discussion on early medieval Chinese omens and omenology in Lippiello 2001: 25–79.

3.1.1.2. Supernatural Phenomena relating to Death

In Buddhist hagiographical sources, eminent monks are frequently portrayed as being in complete control of the time and circumstances of their death. They are rarely caught by surprise and often announce their passing well ahead of time. This is well illustrated in the GSZ's biography of Dàoли 道立 (?-?):

Later, he followed [Dào]ān and entered the Pass, and lived concealed on Mt. Fùzhōu,⁴⁶ dwelling in solitude on a mountain peak of Mt. Fùzhōu, not receiving any offerings. Whenever he was immersed in contemplation and entered meditation, he would not arise for an entire period of seven days; and he had already practised that for several years. Later, in the beginning of summer, he suddenly left the mountain and gathered (*jiūjí* 鳩集) an assembly of monks to lecture them personally on the Great Chapter [i.e. *Mahāprajñāpāramitā sūtra*]. When someone enquired about the reason for this, he answered: 'It is possible for me to stay until autumn arrives, and I wish to eliminate the unrefined [i.e. impurities] that I [still] harbour.'⁴⁷ Several days after he had performed a repentance ritual (*zìzì* 自恣),⁴⁷ he *finally passed away without sickness*. The people of his time referred to him as somebody who *knew his fate* [destiny].

後隨安入關，隱覆舟山，巖居獨處，不受供養。每潛思入禪，輒七日不起，如此者數矣。後夏初忽出山，鳩集眾僧，自為講大品。或問其故，答云：『我止可至秋，為欲令所懷粗訖耳。』自恣後數日，果無疾而終。時人謂知命者矣。

(GSZ, p356b20–24; emphasis added)

According to this passage, Dàoли had foreknowledge of his impending death (as is indicated by the term *zhī mìng* 知命 in this context) and therefore left the mountain to address unfinished business.

In addition to eminent monks' prior knowledge of the exact moment of their passing, there are countless references to supernatural phenomena at the time of death. This theme appears frequently in the GSZ and XGSZ, with death signalled by unusual odours (*yì xiāng* 異香) filling the room, unusual sounds, bright lights or colour changes, strange behaviour among animals, earthquakes, strong winds, the sudden disintegration of an item (e.g. a monk's bowl, a carriage axle, a tree branch, a flagpole, etc.), meteor showers, dry rivers and ponds, and so on. Furthermore, the impending death is often foretold in dreams in which Indian monks, Buddhist assemblies, Buddhist statues, or heavenly creatures or deities either welcome the dying monk

⁴⁶ Several mountains in China share the name Fùzhōu-shān 覆舟山. However, in this instance, this may be an error. The mountain in question is more likely to be Fùchē-shān 覆車山, which is situated approximately 30 *lǐ* southeast of Lántián in modern-day Xī'ān City (see *Lèi biān Cháng'ān zhī*: 166).

⁴⁷ Repentance rituals were usually performed after the end of the summer retreat.

or lead him to a Pure Land. Several of these phenomena frequently occur simultaneously to indicate the monk's passing.

3.1.1.3. Knowledge of One's Place of Future Rebirth

In the GSZ and XGSZ, there are often correlations between the appearance of auspicious signs prior to death and the destination of rebirth. For example, the biography of Huitōng 慧通 states:

He was constantly praying for the Pure Land, and he wished to rest his soul in that land.⁴⁸ When he was slightly ill, he envisioned in his meditation a man approaching; his appearance was very handsome, and he told [Hui]tōng: 'The excellent time⁴⁹ has arrived [i.e. to die and be reborn in a Pure Land].' In an instant he saw [in his contemplation] the nimbus⁵⁰ of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life [i.e. Amitāyus] radiating. Because of this, [Hui]tōng awoke from his state of *dhyaṇa* and gave a full account of what he had seen to his fellow students. After telling them, he transformed [i.e. died].

常祈心安養，而欲栖神彼國。微疾乃於禪中見一人來，形甚端嚴，語通言：『良時至矣。』須臾見無量壽佛光相暉然。通因覺禪。具告同學所見，言訖便化。

(GSZ, p398c9–13)

In this story, there is a clear relationship between Huitōng's *wish* to be reborn in Amitabha's paradise and his *vision* prior to passing away. Similarly, Zhituō's 智脫 (541–607) biography records:

Before passing away, he dreamed of a youth who held a lotus flower in his hand, saying: 'Śakra Devānām-Indra has sent me here to request you to lecture [for him].' On the day when his life was about to end, he saw this sign [apparition] once more.

未亡之前，夢一童子，手執蓮華云：『天帝釋遣來請講。』臨終之日，又見此相。

(XGSZ, p499b23–24)

Interestingly, there are also instances of monks engaging in vigorous practice and consequently receiving predictions of future rebirth, but ultimately experiencing 'last-minute' changes. For example, Línggàn 靈幹 (535–612) seemingly passed away after suffering a severe illness. However, his disciples were reluctant to bury him, because his heart still felt warm. Indeed, the eminent monk eventually woke up⁵¹ and informed

⁴⁸ *Ānyāng* 安養 and *bǐ guó* 彼國 are alternative terms for the Pure Land of Amitabha.

⁴⁹ On *liáng shí* 良時, see Nakamura 1975: 1447b.

⁵⁰ *Guāngxìàng* 光相 (Skr. *avabhāsa*) is the light that emanates from the body of a buddha.

⁵¹ On this trope in medieval Chinese hagiography and miracle tales, see Campamy 1990: 91–125.

his devotees that he had visited Tuṣita Heaven and encountered the famous Dharma master Huiyuǎn 慧遠 (334–416), who had informed him that he was destined to be reborn there, too. However, Línggàn had declined Huiyuǎn's 'offer', because his main focus of devotion and study was the *Avatamsaka sūtra*, so he wished to be reborn in the Lotus Treasure World (*liánhuá zàng shìjiè* 蓮華藏世界—the Pure Land that is described in this *sūtra*). Later, he lost consciousness again and saw himself sitting on a wheel-shaped flower that was floating on water. On the basis of this auspicious omen, the original prediction of rebirth in Tuṣita Heaven was 'corrected' to the Lotus Treasure World (XGSZ, p518b14–c27).⁵²

3.1.1.4. Achievements in a Monk's Life

In addition to prophecies relating to the birth or death of eminent monks, the GSZ and XGSZ both contain predictions of monastics' spiritual accomplishments, such as enlightenment, and other personal achievements. For example, the biography of Dào-héng 道恒 (346–417), a disciple of the famous translator Kumārajīva, includes the following forecast:

Dào-héng was a person from Lántián. At the age of nine, he was playing on the road when the hermit Zhāngzhōng saw him and said: 'This young boy has the features of an extraordinary person (*chūrén* 出人);⁵³ if he remains in worldly life, he will certainly have the achievement of assisting the task of the government; if he resorts to the Way, he will certainly have the ability to reveal the Buddha-dharma. I regret that I am already old and will not be able to witness this.'

釋道恒，藍田人。年九歲戲于路，隱士張忠見而嗟曰：『此小兒有出人之相，在俗必有輔政之功；處道必能光顯佛法。恨吾老矣，不得見之。』

(GSZ, p364b23–26)

This passage clearly alludes to predictions that were made following the birth of Śākyamuni,⁵⁴ such as whether he would choose to pursue a position of great worldly

⁵² In addition to the three cases cited above, the GSZ contains accounts of predictions of rebirth in a Pure Land for Sēngjì 僧濟 (?–?), Zhú Sēngxiǎn 竺僧顯 (222–321/322), Fǎlín 法琳 (572–640), and Huijin. The XGSZ records similar predictions for Shānzhòu 善耆 (550–620), Dào-jìé 道傑 (573–627), Dào'áng 道昂, Míngshàn 明瞻 (565–633), and others. Moreover, there are details of predictions of Xuánzàng's 玄奘 (602–664) rebirth in Tuṣita Heaven, Zhēnyù's 真玉 (?–?) in the Pure Lotus Buddha Land (*jìng liánhuá fógúó* 淨蓮華佛國), and Língruì's 靈睿 (565–647/648) at the palace of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva in the Southern Sea. There are also predictions of rebirth in the realm of the gods (*tiāndào* 天道) for Huìshào 慧紹 (424–451/452) in the GSZ, and for Bǎoyì 寶意 (367–431), Bǎoqiáng 寶瓊 (504–584), and Tányàn 曇衍 (503–581) in the XGSZ. Finally, the latter text includes a prediction that the monk Huìléng 慧稜 (?–?) will be reborn at the court of King Yama in the netherworld.

⁵³ A person whose capabilities exceed those of ordinary people.

⁵⁴ On a similar prediction associated with the childhood of the famous monk Zhìyǐ 智顓, see Shinohara 1992: 118. This topic is also addressed in Jensen 2018: 208–215.

power or become an enlightened saint. It is also significant because it involves a ‘non-Buddhist’ medium—the hermit Zhāngzhōng (隱士張忠), who was a Daoist practitioner of considerable renown.⁵⁵ Non-Buddhist mediums and physiognomists appear several times in the GSZ and XGSZ, although their prognostications sometimes prove incorrect and have to be revised. It seems that the compilers of the Buddhist historical works used this device to underline the superiority of Buddhist prognostication over non-Buddhist/Daoist fortune-telling.⁵⁶

Bàoqióng’s 寶瓊 (504–584) outstanding monastic career is predicted when he is still a young monk:

In the beginning, when [Bào]qióng entered the capital, he was about to approach the Dharma-seat [i.e. the place where monks gather to practise], but since nobody recognised him, he was not allowed to dwell in the monks’ quarters. Thereupon he asked the superintendent Huichāo if he might lodge at the Nánjiàn Monastery; [Hui]chāo listened to him, but did not allow it. [When] seeing him, [however,] he said in surprise: ‘This young talent will carry on my current position, and the Dharma-gate [i.e. the teaching] will be entrusted to him. How could I venture⁵⁷ not [to let him stay] in the monks’ quarters?’

初，瓊入京，將臨法席，既無人識，不許房居。乃求僧正慧超寄南澗住，超聞未許。見而駭曰：『此少俊當紹吾今位，法門所託，何慮無房。』

(XGSZ, p479b22–26)

As we have seen, it was assumed that famous monastics had foreknowledge of the time and circumstances of their own death. In addition, the GSZ and XGSZ contain several accounts of monks trying to exert control over their future destination of re-birth. Moreover, predictions relating to those destinations could be modified in order to correlate more closely with a monk’s religious achievements and preferences during his lifetime.

3.1.1.5. Enlightenment and Spiritual Progress

The attainment of enlightenment and future buddhahood is the most important topic of prediction in translated Buddhist texts, where it is usually expressed as *shòuji* (see above). However, as such predictions are typically made by a buddha (in Indic Buddhist literature, usually by either Śākyamuni himself or—especially in the *jātaka* narratives—a previous buddha), this term scarcely features in either the GSZ or the XGSZ. Indeed, it appears only once, in the entry on the monk Tánróng 曇榮 (555–639):

⁵⁵ On Zhāngzhōng, see, e.g. *Sāndòng qúnxiān lù* 三洞群仙錄, fasc. 10 (道士張忠，永嘉之初隱于泰山。服氣食芝，穴地窟爲室，弟子亦穴居，其教以形不以言，朝廷累召，所賜不受).

⁵⁶ More generally on this issue and the widespread belief in spirit mediums in medieval China, see Campamy 2012: 40 and Jensen 2018: 334–355.

⁵⁷ Iriya and Koga 1991: 16-P29.

[Tán]róng practised in the Fǎzhù Monastery of the provincial capital the ‘method of vast [universal] repentance’ (*fāngděng huifǎ* 方等悔法).⁵⁸ On the 4th day of the 7th month, there was a certain Sēngding of that monastery who was very energetic in the practice of the prohibitions, and he saw a bright light in the place of religious practice [*dào chǎng* 道場,⁵⁹ probably, here, a simple reference to the monastery], originating from within a five-coloured [rainbow] with the seven buddhas [of the past] in the middle, [all of them equipped with] extraordinary auspicious signs. [One of the buddhas] addressed Sēngding and said the following: ‘I am Vipāsyin Tathāgata [i.e. one of the former seven buddhas], not attached to anything, and of perfect universal enlightenment.⁶⁰ Since you already have extinguished your sins, I came here to witness for you, but since I am not your original teacher, I will not make the prediction of buddhahood to you (*shòuji*).’ The other six buddhas uttered the same words to him. The last buddha told him the following: ‘I am your original teacher Śākyamuni, and since your sins have been extinguished, I came here to make this prediction to you. Tánróng is the good cause that you have extinguishing your sins, and he will be a buddha called Pūníng 普寧佛 in the “Good Aeon” [i.e. Skr. *bhadra-kalpa*]; your bodily vessel is [likewise] pure and thereafter you will [also] become a buddha by the name of Pūmíng 普明.’

榮於州治法住寺行方等悔法。至七月十四日，有本寺沙門僧定者，戒行精固，於道場內見大光明，五色間起，從上而下，中有七佛，相好非常，語僧定云：『我是毗婆尸如來，無所著、至真、等正覺。以汝罪銷，故來為證，然非本師，不與授記。』如是六佛，皆同此詞。最後一佛云：『我是汝本師釋迦摩尼也，為汝罪銷，故來授記。曇榮是汝滅罪良緣，於賢劫中名普寧佛。汝身器清淨，後當作佛，名為普明。』

(XGSZ, p589b28–c8)

Here, then, Sēngding’s devoted Vinaya and repentance practice, under the tutelage of Tánróng, results in a prediction of buddhahood for both monks from Śākyamuni himself. This probably reflects the view of the compiler of the XGSZ, who himself was a renowned Vinaya specialist. However, it is the only occasion when Śākyamuni (or any other buddha) makes such a pronouncement in the text.

⁵⁸ A more common term for this practice is *fāngděng chànhuī* 方等懺悔, which comprises a meditation during which the practitioner focuses on the hindrances caused by the six sense organs.

⁵⁹ On the term *dào chǎng*, see DDB (<http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?q=%E9%81%93%E5%A0%B4>).

⁶⁰ *Zhìhēn děng zhèngjué* 至真等正覺 usually refers to the enlightenment of an arhat (Skr. *arhan sammā sambuddhaḥ*) or a buddha.

There is no specific forecast of buddhahood in Qiúnàbámó's 求那跋摩⁶¹ biography, although his entry does include a prediction that he will attain a stage of spiritual development that will enable him to follow the path to buddhahood in the future. In this case, the predictor is not a fellow monk, but rather a prognostication specialist who makes a prediction that is similar to the one given to Śākyamuni after his birth. Interestingly, the passage ends with Qiúnàbāmó's personal evaluation of his spiritual progress:

When he reached the age of eighteen, a prognostication specialist (*xiànggōng* 相公) saw him and said the following: 'At the age of 30 you will rule a country [i.e. Kashmir] and become an honoured person facing south [i.e. a king/emperor]; [but,] if you do not yearn for worldly fame, you will attain the saintly fruit [i.e. enlightenment]' [...] On the 18th day of the 9th month of that year, he had not yet finished his mid-day meal when he got up and returned to his room, his disciples following behind. Thereupon, he passed away at the age of 65. Before his death he had in advance composed a commemorative text in 36 lines, explaining himself his life events (*yīnyuán* 因緣) and mentioning that he had already attained the 'second fruit' (*èrguǒ* 二果).⁶²

至年十八相公見而謂曰：『君年三十當撫臨大國，南面稱尊；若不樂世榮；當獲聖果。』……其年九月二十八日，中食未畢，先起還閣，其弟子後至，奄然已終，春秋六十有五。未終之前預造遺文偈頌三十六行，自說因緣，云已證二果。

(GSZ, p340a25–27; p341b9–13)

As we have seen, then, the GSZ and XGSZ contain many predictions relating to key events in eminent monastics' lives, including their spiritual accomplishments. Indeed, a monk's progress on the Buddhist path is often clearly defined, and—as exemplified above—may even culminate in a prediction of buddhahood.

3.1.2. Predictions relating to the Fate and Significance of Buddhism

3.1.2.1. The Flourishing and Decline of Buddhism and the Buddhist Teachings

From the Northern and Southern Dynasties (and especially Northern Wèi) period onwards, anxiety over the decline or even disappearance of the Dharma (*mòfǎ* 末法) became a recurring theme in Buddhist discourse. This is also reflected in the GSZ and XGSZ, in which predictions relating to the future of Buddhism are incorporated within a number of the monks' biographies: in the GSZ, Hui'ān 慧安 (354–424), Tánshǐ 曇始 (?–?), Xuángāo 玄高 (402–444), and Sēngzhōu 僧周 (?–?); and in the

⁶¹ The Kashmiri monk *Guṇavarman (367–431) who translated key Vinaya texts during the Liu Sòng 劉宋 period (420–479). He was also a member of the Kashmiri royal family and as such a potential successor to the throne.

⁶² That is, he had attained the realisation that would make him a 'once-returner'.

XGSZ, Huisī 慧思 (515–577/578), Huizhǔ 慧主 (541–629/630), Dàomì 道密 (564–659), Shétísīnā 闍提斯那 (?560–?656), Míngdàn 明誕 (?560–?656), and Sēngmíng 僧明 (?–?). The narrative is especially dramatic in the case of Xuángāo, who passes away but is then summoned back from the dead by his disciples and asked to make a prediction on the future of the Dharma. After acknowledging that the teaching is on the wane, he declares: ‘After you [his disciples] have died, the Dharma will flourish again’ (汝等死後，法當更興; GSZ, p398a22).⁶³

Occasionally, the prognostication does not concern the Buddhist teaching in its entirety, but rather the development of specific Buddhist schools of thought. One example is the ‘Consciousness Only’ (*wéishí* 唯識) thought that was promoted by the translator Paramārtha (Zhēndì 真諦; 499–569). According to the XGSZ, his philosophy and the scriptures he translated were initially disregarded and even criticised by court officials during the Chén 陳 Dynasty (557–589). Nevertheless:

Paramārtha pointed with his finger to the northwest and said: ‘In this region there is a great country, which is neither close by nor far away; after we have passed away, [my teaching] shall flourish and spread there. But we will not witness its rise, and this I regard as greatly regrettable [lit. “to make a great sigh”].’

諦以手指西北曰：『此方有大國，非近非遠，吾等沒後，當盛弘之。但不覩其興，以為太息耳。』⁶⁴

(XGSZ, p430c11–13)

Predictions based on the main tenets of Buddhist teaching feature in a number of the biographies. For instance, Bóyuǎn’s 帛遠 (206?–305?) entry in the GSZ contains explicit references to the power of one’s actions (*yè* 業; ‘karma’) and the way in which good and bad deeds determine one’s destiny:

[Bóyuǎn]⁶⁵ unexpectedly addressed the followers of the path and the disciples, saying: ‘In a few days, the [karmic] response [to my actions] will arrive.’⁶⁶ Then he took his leave [...] The following morning, he visited the high official [Zhāng]fū and talked to him, then suddenly disagreed with one of the official’s suggestions, and the official issued a punishment. The entire assembly was bewildered and sighed in regret.

⁶³ The Emperor Tàì Wǔ 太武 of the Northern Wèi ordered Xuángāo’s execution in 444. Prior to his death, on several occasions the monk reportedly predicted the persecution of China’s Buddhists between 446 and 452 and the consequent decline of the Buddhist Dharma (see GSZ, p398a1–8; and *Lidài sānbǎo jì* 歷代三寶記; CBETA: T49, no2034, p85a27–b3). For more on Xuángāo, see Lai 2003: 143–161.

⁶⁴ According to the XGSZ, Paramārtha’s teaching only gained popularity during the Sui Dynasty, when it was promoted by the monk Tánqiān 曇遷 (542–607), among others. Tánqiān fled to the south during the Northern Wèi suppression of Buddhism, came into contact with Paramārtha’s *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* (*Shè dàshèng lùn* 攝大乘論), and eventually settled in Cháng’ān in 587.

⁶⁵ This monk is also known as the ‘Dharma Patriarch Bó’ (Bó fǎzǔ 帛法祖).

⁶⁶ Here, *duì* 對 is used in the sense of *bào yīng* 報應: that is, retribution for actions performed during one’s lifetime. Indirectly, this indicates his impending death.

Dharma Patriarch [Bó] (帛法祖) said: ‘As for my encountering this final response to my actions, those from the previous lives are already concluded, and are not today’s matter.’ He then called out for the Buddhas of the Ten Directions, and said: ‘As for the causes of the sins of my previous rebirths, I would like to finish their karmic effect [by being killed now].⁶⁷ And I vow that from now on, I will regard [Zhāng]fū as a good friend [i.e. teacher], and not let him receive the sin of killing me.’ Consequently, he was whipped 50 times and died immediately.

忽語道人及弟子云：『我數日對當至。』便辭別。……明晨詣輔共語，忽忤輔意，輔使收之行罰。眾咸怪惋。祖曰：『我來此畢對，此宿命久結，非今事也。』乃呼十方佛：『祖前身罪緣，歡喜畢對。願從此以後，與輔為善知識，無令受殺人之罪。』遂便鞭之五十，奄然命終。

(GSZ, p327a28–b6)

In another story featuring the monk Zhizàng 智藏 (458–522), there is an account of a woman who excelled in physiognomising.⁶⁸ She predicted that Zhizàng’s

brightness and rhetorical skills will spread throughout his generation, and his fame will circulate around the world. But, unfortunately, his lifespan will not be long, and he will reach only the age of 31.

聰辯蓋世，天下流名。但恨年命不長，可至三十一矣。

(XGSZ, p466a24–26)

On hearing this, Zhizàng

exhausted his energy to practise the Way, and took the great vows [of a bodhisattva]; satisfied with that, he did not try to go out of the gate [i.e. did not engage in teaching others]. He then explored the canon of scriptures, and attained the adamant wisdom [i.e. the *Diamond Prajñā-pāramitā sūtra*], which he memorised and recited, and revered until the end of his life.

竭精修道，發大誓願，足不出門。遂探經藏，得金剛般若，受持讀誦，畢命奉之。

(XGSZ, p466a26–28)

As a result of his reverence to and study of this scripture, Zhizàng escaped the fate of dying at a young age and finally passed away at 65. This passage neatly illustrates the power of Buddhist scriptures because Zhizàng’s engagement with a single text ultimately modifies a prognostication relating to his lifespan.

⁶⁷ That is, Bó uses the official to end the negative karmic influence of his former lives. As a consequence, Zhāngfū, despite killing Bó, will not receive any negative retribution for the deed.

⁶⁸ See Campamy 2012: 40 and Jensen 2018: 334–355 on non-Buddhist diviners, such as spirit mediums and physiognomists, in Buddhist historical literature.

3.1.2.2. Buddhist Material Culture

Predictions concerning Buddhist scriptures, monasteries, and images feature regularly in the GSZ and XGSZ. For example, in Fǎyì's 法意 (?-?) biography, there is a prediction of the destruction and restoration of the Yánxián 延賢 Monastery:⁶⁹

[Fǎyì built the Yánxián Monastery.] Later, [the monk] Bēidù left and came to this monastery, saying: 'This place will soon experience all kinds of anomalies; afterwards, this should change for the better; the place [i.e. the location of the monastery] is facing the "heavenly halls" [i.e. probably, an easterly direction],⁷⁰ [and] it is easy to perform meritorious actions here.' And unexpectedly [the monastery] was [indeed] burned by wild fires. Later, Qí Xié, Zhāng Yīn, and others relied on the guidance of Bēidù, as is recorded in the *Biography of [Bēi]dù*,⁷¹ and they went together with [Fǎ]yì to the mountains and wished to restore [the monastery].

後杯度去來此寺，云：『此處尋有諸變，後時當好，地對天堂，易為福業。』俄為野火所燒。後齊諧及張寅等，藉杯度之旨，語在度傳，乃與意共行山地，更欲修立。

(GSZ, p411a26–29)

Predictions relating to the restoration or rebuilding of monasteries are also found in the entries for Huìlì 慧力 (?-?; GSZ, p410a17–b10), Chán Master Fótuó 佛陀 (439–531; XGSZ, p551b10–13), Ācārya Cén (Cén *shé* 岑闍梨; ?-?; XGSZ, p661a4–11), and others.

Dàoji's 道積 (568–636) biography includes a reference to a large but unfinished statue of the Buddha. After receiving a request to complete the statue, the monk has a dream.⁷²

⁶⁹ This famous monastery is located in Jiānkāng 建康 (modern-day Nánjīng 南京), the capital of the Eastern Jin and the Southern Dynasties. It was founded at the beginning of the 5th century and continued to prosper until the end of the Southern Dynasties period (see *Náncháo sì kǎo* 南朝寺考; CBETA, B14, no86, p650a10–651a1).

⁷⁰ *Dì duì tiāntāng* 地對天堂 probably has a geographical meaning here, with *tiāntāng* ('heavenly hall') not referring to a structure in the imperial palace, but more generally to an auspicious location in geomancy. According to the *Dìlǐ xīnshū* 地理新書, it may denote an easterly direction. However, this interpretation is based on later sources (e.g. *Xū xiū sù kù quánshū*, cè 1054: 89) and may not necessarily reflect the intention of the compiler of the GSZ. As such, the precise meaning of the passage remains uncertain.

⁷¹ In Bēidù's biography, he tells Qí Xié and the others: 'In this year there will be a major disaster, you should ardently cultivate meritorious deeds. The monk Fǎyì is a man of great virtue, you should go to him and rebuild the destroyed monastery in order to avert disaster' (年當大凶，可勉修福業。法意道人甚有德，可往就其修立故寺，以禳災禍也; GSZ, p392a25–27).

⁷² For a discussion of this episode that explores the dream imagery from the standpoint of traditional Chinese oneiromancy, see Jensen 2018: 208.

The evening he received the request, he dreamed that there were two lions at the side of a precipice, and next to a large statue they spit out precious pearls one after the other, continuing without interruption.

受請之夕，寢夢崖傍見二師子，於大像側連吐明珠，相續不絕。
(XGSZ, p696b3–4)

Dàoji interprets his dream as follows:

The king of hunting [i.e. the lion] is sovereign [i.e. independent]; this expresses that the Dharma is flowing without impediment; the precious pearls gushing forth by themselves is a metaphor for the donations being inexhaustible. The mysterious activity is secretly revealed[, which means that] there will be success this time.

狩王自在，則表法流無滯；寶珠自涌，又喻財施不窮。冥運潛開，功成斯在。

(XGSZ, p696b5–6)

As these examples clearly show, predictions could be made about material objects and Buddhist institutions as well as human destinies and accomplishments.

3.1.3. *Predictions relating to Chinese Topics and Methods—Involvement with Politics and the State*

Initially, at least, Buddhism was a foreign religion in China, so practitioners had to rely on support from the secular powers in order to gain acceptance and spread the teaching. The relationship between Buddhists and the state intensified during the Northern and Southern Dynasties period, so, understandably, the GSZ and XGSZ contain many predictions relating to the fortunes of rulers and their realms. In Kumārajīva's biography, for example, there is a passage on Lǚ Guāng 呂光 (338–399), an emperor of the Later Liáng 後涼 Dynasty. The famous translator warns the King of Kucha that Lǚ Guāng is about to invade his kingdom and recommends submission to his powerful army:

‘The fortunes of the state are about to decline, and there will be a strong enemy coming from the east in a few days, and you should receive them respectfully, do not resist their vanguard.’ [Bái]chún did not heed his advice and fought the army, and [Lǚ]guāng subsequently destroyed Kucha and killed [Bái]chún.

『國運衰矣，當有勍敵日下人從東方來，宜恭承之，勿抗其鋒。』
純不從而戰，光遂破龜茲殺純。

(GSZ, p331b29–c1)

The entry for Hui'ān 慧安 (a monk who was active during the 4th century) includes a prediction that the Early Qín 秦 Dynasty (351–394) of the Fú 苻 family will flourish. Hui'ān obtained a staff originally owned by an Indian monk that was inscribed with

Indic letters. No one was able to decipher the inscription until it was shown to Kumārajīva, who translated it as follows:

Originally born in Śālavana of India. When there is disorder in the southern region, ‘*cǎo fù*’ 草付 will rise, and later ensure that the teaching of the Dào [here: Buddhism] of Kumārajīva will prosper.

本生天竺娑羅林。南方喪亂草付興，後得羅什道教隆。

(GSZ, p370a27–28)

If one combines the upper part of the character 草 (i.e. the ‘grass radical’) with the character 付, the resulting character is Fù 苻—a reference to the founder of the Early Qin Dynasty, Fù Jiàn 苻健 (317–355), who adopted the title Gāozǔ 高祖 on becoming emperor. As such, Kumārajīva predicts the family’s rise to power and, consequently, the dissemination of his own teachings.

Huiyi’s 慧義 (372–444/445) biography addresses Liú Yù’s 劉裕 (363–422) founding of the Liú Sòng 劉宋 Dynasty (420–479), which superseded the Jin 晉 Dynasty. In this entry, a monk by the name of Fāchēng 法稱 (?–?) from Jizhōu 冀州 informs his student Pǔyán 普嚴 that he has recently encountered a benevolent spirit:

The spirit of Mt. Sòng said the following: ‘In Jiāngdōng there is a general Liú who will certainly receive the Mandate of Heaven; I take 32 jade rings⁷³ and one plate of *zhēn* gold as a token of faith [in this prediction].’

嵩高靈神云：『江東有劉將軍，應受天命，吾以三十二璧、鎮金一餅，為信。』

(GSZ, p368c6)

Further references to the establishment of new dynasties include Sēnghán 僧含 (416–484) foretelling General Liú Jùn’s 劉駿 (430–464) accession to the throne⁷⁴ (GSZ, p370b25–28) and Fāshī 法施 (586–701) predicting that General Xiāoxī 蕭銑 (583–621) will become the King of Bālíng 巴陵 (in the eastern part of Sichuān; XGSZ, p663c27–28). There are also several predictions pertaining to revolts and wars.⁷⁵

In addition to predictions relating to the personal destinies of monks and secular rulers, prognostications of events that will affect whole regions, such as natural disasters, feature prominently in the GSZ and XGSZ. For instance, Zhú Fāhui’s

⁷³ The figure 32 probably hints at the duration of the dynasty.

⁷⁴ Liú Jùn ruled as Emperor Xiào Wǔ 孝武 of the Sòng 宋.

⁷⁵ The GSZ contains predictions of revolts in the entries for Kumārajīva, Guṇabhadra (394–468), Xuáncháng 玄暢 (416–484), Fótúchéng 佛圖澄 (?–348/349), Bǎozhì 保誌 (418–515), and Fàyuàn 法願 (414–500/501). The XGSZ has similar predictions in the entries for Zhuānmíng 轉明 (?–?), Jiǎyì 賈逸 (518–610), and others. On predictions relating to impending wars, see, e.g. the GSZ entries for Kumārajīva, Fótúchéng, and Fājīn 法進 (?–?).

竺法慧 (287?–344?) biography includes a prediction of a major flood occurring as a consequence of his death.⁷⁶

‘Three days after my death, there will be violent rainfalls.’ When that time came, there was indeed flooding; at the city gate the water stood one *zhàng* deep, and the inhabitants were floating and submerged in it, and many of them died.

『吾死後三日，天當暴雨。』至期果洪注，城門水深一丈，居民漂沒，多有死者。

(GSZ, p389b4–5)

Likewise, we are told that a series of natural disasters followed Hui’àn’s 慧岸 (533–623) death. However, it is unclear whether the monk’s foreknowledge of these disasters prompted him to commit suicide, or whether they were triggered by his passing:

In the 6th year of the Wǔdé era (623), [Hui’ān] suddenly repeatedly cried bitterly and was unable to control himself, saying: ‘Who could tolerate seeing such things?’ Based on that, he submerged himself in a lake and sought death, but the [members of the] assembly attempted to enter the lake in order to save him. However, [Hui’ān] sat on the bottom of the lake and had already passed away [when they reached him]. In the year he died, there was a severe drought and no harvest, and those who died due to epidemics were numerous.

武德六年，輒復悲泣不能自禁，曰：『誰能見煩惱？』因沒水求死，眾人爭入水接之，乃端坐水底已卒。卒後，其年亢旱不收，疫死眾矣。

(GSZ, p664a16–18)

Hence, the death of a famous monk can resonate throughout the cosmos and cause nature to ‘mourn’ and initiate potentially dangerous and sometimes even disastrous consequences for those left behind. This correlates perfectly with contemporary thinking relating to the demise of high-ranking laypeople, such as emperors. It is probably no coincidence that the compilers of the Buddhist history texts drew on these notions to emphasise the significance of eminent monastics.

3.2. Traditional Chinese Prognostication Methods in the GSZ and XGSZ

3.2.1. Prognostication Based on the Zhōuyì 周易

In general, as the previous examples have demonstrated, there is no mention of mantic techniques when the GSZ and XGSZ introduce the subject of prognostication. Rather, the texts tend to present predictions as ‘by-products’ of eminent monastics’ outstanding

⁷⁶ This correlates with ancient Chinese beliefs relating to the stimulus–response cosmology. On the notion of the ‘readable cosmos’ as a trope in early Chinese historiography, see Li 2007.

virtue and insight, which grant them a superior form of knowledge. That said, there are occasional references to specific techniques.

One type of prognostication is based on the *Zhōuyì* 周易 (i.e. the *Yījīng* 易經; *Book of Changes*),⁷⁷ which in its current form consists of two parts. The *jīng* 經 part consists of 64 hexagrams (*guà* 卦) and 384 lines (*yáo* 爻). Each hexagram has a name, an image, a divinatory explanation of the hexagram itself, and another explanation of the lines attached to it. The so-called ‘commentary’ (*zhuàn* 傳) section, which is traditionally attributed to Confucius’s disciples, contains further comments on the hexagrams and lines. During divination, the practitioner should

first use milfoil stalks in order to seek a number (*shù* 數), and obtain a number in order to determine the lines (*yáo*), and multiple lines then form a hexagram (*guà*); based on the hexagram, a ‘sentence’ (*cí* 辭) is produced.

先用蓍以求數，得數以定爻，累爻而成卦，因卦以生辭。
(*Zhōuyì zhèngyì* 周易正義, *Shísān jīng zhùshū*: 13)⁷⁸

References to milfoil divination occur quite frequently in the GSZ and XGSZ. For instance, in the biography of Zhú Fātài 竺法汰 (320–387/388),⁷⁹ two of his disciples are said to have received ‘extensive training in the meaning of the *sūtras*, while also excelling in the *Lǎozǐ* and *Yījīng*’ (汰弟子曇一、曇二，並博練經義，又善老易; GSZ, p355a13–14). Similarly, Fāyuàn’s 法願 (414–500/501)

family originally served the spirits, and he himself practised drumming and dancing [i.e. shamanistic rituals], various worldly skills, prognostication with milfoil stalks (*shīyáo* 蓍爻), and physiognomising; all [of his skills] were utterly remarkable.

家本事神，身習鼓舞，世間雜技，及蓍爻、占相，皆備盡其妙。
(XGSZ, p417a1–2)

Nevertheless, milfoil prognostication is only ever mentioned in a generic way, and neither text elaborates on the theme.

⁷⁷ *Zhōuyì jijiě*; on that work, see, e.g. Karcher 2002 and Davis 2012.

⁷⁸ Specifically, one should take fifty stalks of milfoil, then, after a threefold calculation process, one can determine the nature of the lines (whether they are *yīn* or *yáng*). One hexagram consists of six broken (*yīn yáo* 陰爻) or unbroken (*yáng yáo* 陽爻) lines, so the calculation has to be performed six times in order to arrive at a hexagram. The auspiciousness or inauspiciousness of an event is determined on the basis of one’s interpretation of the ‘sentence’ associated with the hexagram and the lines.

⁷⁹ Zhú Fātài was active during the Eastern Jin period (second half of the 4th century). Originally a fellow student of the famous Dào’ān 道安, he became a specialist in early Chinese *prajñā* philosophy (GSZ, p354b29, 354c21–23).

3.2.2. Physiognomising (*xiàng*)

Physiognomising, which involves making predictions on the basis of a person's features (*xiàng rén shù* 相人術), seems to have been a common practice in medieval India (see above) and China. There are certainly ample references to the technique in pre-Buddhist Chinese sources.⁸⁰ However, whereas passages relating to *xiàng rén* 相人 ('physiognomising persons') in the Buddhist translated literature tend to focus strictly on physical features, the Chinese sources suggest that the colour of the face, the voice,⁸¹ and even aspects of a person's behaviour, character, and mental state could also be taken into account when making predictions. There are several references to monastics employing physiognomising techniques in the GSZ and XGSZ.⁸²

3.2.3. Topomancy

Topomancy—that is, prognosticating on the basis of the physical environment or particular topographical features—had been practised in China since time immemorial. For example, the *Zhōuyì* 周易 states:

In ancient times, when Páo Xī ruled the world as king, he looked up to observe the patterns in Heaven, and he looked down to observe the rules on Earth; he observed the patterns of birds and beasts, and how these fitted with the Earth [...] Subsequently, he created the Eight Trigrams.

古者包牺氏之王天下也，仰则观象于天，俯则观法于地，观鸟兽之文，与地之宜。……於是始作八卦。

(*Shīsān jīng zhùshū*: 86)

It was thought that the natural environment played a crucial role in the well-being of its inhabitants, and that it could determine the success or failure of their endeavours. From the Hàn Dynasty onwards, topomancy focused on foretelling fortune or misfortune on the basis of the location and architectural features of a person's home. For example, the *Lùnhéng* 論衡 (Chapter *Sì huì* 四諱) insists that a western orientation is inauspicious.⁸³

⁸⁰ See, e.g. *Zuǒzhuàn* 左傳, which records the official Shūfū 叔服 physiognomising the two sons of Gōngsūn Áo 公孫敖 (*Shīsān jīng zhùshū*: 1836).

⁸¹ Cf. *Xúnzǐ*: 'When [he] physiognomised the bodily features (*xíngzhuàng* 形狀) and facial colour/features (*yánsè* 顏色) of a person in order to know whether their fortune would be good or bad, auspicious or inauspicious' (相人之形狀、顏色而知其吉凶、妖祥; *Xúnzǐ* 荀子; Chapter *Fēi xiàng* 非相; *Xúnzǐ jǐjiè*: 72). The *Xiàng shū* 相書 mentions physiognomising of the eyes, nose, ears, and other parts of the body. In addition, prognostications could be made based on a person's way of walking, the timbre of his voice, and so on (*Míng kānběn Yimén guāngdù, cè* 9).

⁸² See, e.g. the biography of Zhiming 智命 (529–621; XGSZ, p683a15).

⁸³ *Lùnhéng jiàoshì*: 968. In the *Zhájīng* 宅經 (Classic of residences), edited by Zhōu Lǚjìng 周履靖 during the Míng Dynasty, this idea is rationalised as follows: 'Therefore, the residence is the "origin" of a person. A person makes a residence his home, and if his dwelling there is peaceful, then the [subsequent] generations of his family will be prosperous; if it is not peaceful, then his clan will decline. The same is true for graves in terms of their situation at rivers and on mountains.'

Our historical sources suggest that many monks excelled in the art of topomancy. In the GSZ and XGSZ, topomantic prognostication centres on identifying underlying patterns in the local ecosystem. For instance, in Jingyuān's 彭淵 (543–611) biography, his teacher Lingyù 靈裕 (517–605) attempts to identify a topographically auspicious location for a new temple:

[Líng]yù prognosticated (*bǔ* 卜) the northwestern hill, and called it 'blissful land'. It is not only that the group of mountain hermits [i.e. monks] will succeed each other; it will also mean that the donations will not decline. [Jíng]yuān then directly followed his advice. This is the very foundation of the monastery today. More than 50 years have passed since that time [when the monastery was constructed]. Some inauspicious years have occurred during this period; however, donations to the monastery have continued without interruption.

裕卜西南坡阜，是稱福地。非唯山眾相續，亦使供擬無虧。淵即從焉，今之寺墟是也。自爾迄今五十餘載，凶年或及，而寺供無絕。

(XGSZ, p511c18–21)

In Dào biàn's 道辯 (?–?) biography, an unidentified person asks the monk to choose a suitable place for his grave, whereupon Dào biàn

inspected the hills and plains, and, pointing at one location, said: '[You should] install your grave mound here, [as this will cause your descendants to] have sufficient food and riches.'

巡歷峴原，示其所，曰：『此中安墓，足食豐財。』

(XGSZ, p662b23–24)

3.2.4. Observing Celestial Phenomena

In the GSZ and XGSZ, a number of monks make significant predictions after observing celestial, meteorological, or atmospheric phenomena.⁸⁴ For example, Ān Shìgāo 安世高 (GSZ, p323a26), Kumārajīva (GSZ, p330c10), Kāng Sēnghuì 康僧會 (GSZ, p325a16–17), Guṇābhadrā (GSZ, p344a7), Sēnghán (GSZ, p370b14–15), Tánkējiāluó 曇柯迦羅 (*Dharmakāla; GSZ, p324c17–18), Tánguāng 曇光 (GSZ, p416b15–16), Sēngfàn 僧範 (XGSZ, p483b21–22), and Shàn huì 善慧 (XGSZ, p688b8) are all credited with this ability. When Dào biàn notices that the moon is approaching the Well Constellation (*jǐng sù* 井宿),⁸⁵ he says: 'There is an event in the Western Chū;

故宅者，人之本。人以宅為家，居若安，即家代昌吉；若不安，即門族衰微。墳墓川岡、並同茲說。(Yīngyīn Wényuān gé Sikù quánshū, cè 808: 8).

⁸⁴ These phenomena also play an important role in non-Buddhist literature (see e.g. Chapter *Yìwén zhì* 藝文志 in the *Hànshū*: 1763–1765).

⁸⁵ The Well Constellation, also known as the 'Eastern Well' (*dōngjǐng* 東井), one of the seven constellations of the south, is often associated with floods in traditional Chinese astronomy/astrology (see e.g. *Shìjì*: 1302). For astrology and divination in ancient China, see Cullen 2011

one should inform monastics and laypeople that they should prepare for flooding’ (于時月臨井宿，便云：『事在西楚，可告道俗，宜營水備』；XGSZ, p662c12–13). Furthermore, he predicts that the Hàn River will rise rapidly and inundate the city of Xiāng, and that the dry moat (*huáng* 隍) under the city wall (*chéng* 城) will soon be full of water.

In another passage, we learn that meritorious deeds can overturn the pernicious influence of celestial phenomena. The Emperor Jiǎnwén 簡文 (320–372) of the Eastern Jin 晉 Dynasty (265–420) asks Zhú Fǎkuàng 竺法曠 (327–402) about some seemingly ominous stars and is told that practising virtuous government will transform impending disaster into good fortune (GSZ, p356c21–24).

Monks also foretell the future through observation of atmospheric phenomena, such as clouds and wind. Kumārajīva, for example, predicts a rebellion after feeling an inauspicious wind (不祥之風，當有姦叛；GSZ, p331c17–18). This technique was deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture.⁸⁶

3.2.5. Selecting Appropriate Times

In China, the timing of important events and actions had long been viewed as critical for their success. The *Lùnhéng* explains this concept in detail:

When commencing a project, moving home, engaging in rituals, funerals, work tasks, assuming office, marrying, if one does not select an auspicious day, and does not avoid the [inauspicious] spirits of the year and spirits of the month, then one will encounter demons and meet spirits, and during these turbulent times [i.e. when men and spirits meet], one will be hurt by them. Therefore, one will meet with disease or generate misfortune, get entangled with the law and be indicted with a crime, to the extent of being killed and [seeing] one’s family exterminated; all [because] one does not value caution and makes the mistake to have contact [with spirits] during the taboo days.

起功、移徙、祭祀、喪葬、行作、入官、嫁娶，不擇吉日，不避歲、月，觸鬼逢神，忌時相害。故發病生禍，結法入罪，至於死亡，殫家滅門，皆不重慎，犯觸忌諱，之所致也。

(*Lùnhéng jiàoshì*: 1008)

Therefore, it was deemed imperative to consult a *lipǔ* 歷譜 (‘calendar chart’) prior to scheduling any major event or undertaking. There is an early reference to a *lipǔ* in the *Hànshū* (Chapter *Yìwén zhì* 藝文志):

As for [using] the calendar chart, [one] arranges the four seasons in the right order, confirms the solar terms of equinox and solstice, and calcu-

and 2017, and Pankenier 2013. For Buddhist astrology during the Táng Dynasty, see Kotyk 2017a. For the relationship between Indian/Iranian and Chinese astrological techniques, see Mak 2014 and 2015, and Kotyk 2018.

⁸⁶ See Chapter Chūnguān zōngbó 春官宗伯 in *Zhōulǐ* (*Shīsān jīng zhùshū*: 819–820).

lates the confluence of the sun, the moon, and the five stars [of Metal, Wood, Water, Fire, and Earth] in order to investigate the effect of cold and heat and of death and life. Therefore, the sagely king carefully calculates the calendric numbers in order to fix the regulation of the colours of the vestment of the Three Reigns (*sān tǒng* 三統), and in order to investigate the confluence of the five stars, the sun, and the moon. Grievance over inauspicious failures and joy over auspicious successes [as well as] the art [of predicting them] all come out of this [i.e. selecting times according to the calendar chart].

歷譜者，序四時之位，正分、至之節，會日月五星之辰，以考寒暑殺生之實。故聖王必正歷數，以定三統服色之制⁸⁷；又以探知五星日月之會，凶阨之患，吉隆之喜，其術皆出焉。

(*Hànshū*, *juàn* 30: 1767)

The GSZ and XGSZ contain occasional references to monastics' ability to select auspicious dates.⁸⁸ For instance, Qiúnàpídi 求那毘地 (*Guṇavṛddhi; 403–502)⁸⁹ reportedly excelled in this technique (GSZ, p345a27), as did Shànghuī (497–569; XGSZ, p688b8) and Fǎyùn 法運 (567–627; XGSZ, p664a20).

3.2.6. Manipulating the Cosmic Board (*shizhàn* 式占)

Along with predictions based on milfoil, manipulation of the *shizhàn* 式占 ('cosmic board') was one of the main methods of prognostication in medieval China.⁹⁰ However, this was not a uniform technique; rather, a square board that symbolically represented the cosmos was manipulated and interpreted in a variety of ways.

It seems that *shizhàn* prognostication was closely related to astronomical and calendrical divination methods. Typically, the upper part (*yuánpán* 圓盤) of the board depicted Heaven, with the Great Dipper in the centre, surrounded by the twenty-eight stellar constellations and the spirits of the twelve months. The Earth was depicted in the centre of the lower part (*fāngpán* 方盤), surrounded by the Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches (*tiāngān dìzhī* 天干地支) that were related to the calendrical system.

⁸⁷ *Sāntǒng* 三統 is a term based on Dǒng Zhòngshū's 董仲舒 (179–104 BCE) philosophy. It denotes the three months that can be determined by the initial month of a year (*zhèngyuè* 正月) according to the Chinese lunar calendar. In Dǒng's system, specific seasons, colours, and other features can be correlated with the respective months. Each new dynasty has to determine the appropriate beginning of the year.

⁸⁸ The Northern Chán monk Yīxíng 一行 (683–727) played a crucial role in propagating the *lipǔ* in Chinese Buddhism. He composed several works on calendric sciences, especially after coming into contact with the Indian Esoteric Buddhist master Śubhakarasiṃha, and constructed a device to measure the movement of the stars. For more information, see Jeffrey Kotyk and Michael Radich's entry for *lipǔ* in the DDB and the *Xīn Táng shū*: 1548.

⁸⁹ A monk from southern India who translated Buddhist texts in the Nánjīng area towards the end of the 5th century. For more information, see Chavannes 1962: Vol. 2, 14–149.

⁹⁰ See Steavu 2018 for a study and schematic illustrations (pp. 200 and 203) of the *shi* board in the context of medieval Taoism and Buddhism. See also Li 1993 and Harper 1979.

The *Shiji* (p3218), compiled in the 2nd century BCE, mentions the *shizhàn*, and it was clearly still a common device more than half a millennium later, as the XGSZ credits several monks—including Lingyòu 靈祐 (XGSZ, p497c24–28) and Ānlín 安廩 (XGSZ, p480b9)—with mastering its use for divination purposes. However, it does not feature in any specific stories.

3.2.7. Consulting Apocryphal Texts

The GSZ and XGSZ mention the *túwěi* 圖緯 (‘charts and wefts’)⁹¹ technique on several occasions. This term seems to be synonymous with *chènwěi* 讖緯 and *túchèn* 圖讖, and usually refers to the so-called ‘apocryphal texts’. Scholars of these texts frequently made predictions based on their interpretations of them. The ideas contained within the apocrypha were attributed to Confucius himself, so they possessed great authority. The GSZ and XGSZ report that some Buddhist monks were adept at using the texts to predict the future. Tánkējīaluó (*Dharmkāla; ?–?), an Indian Vinaya specialist who arrived in Luòyáng in the middle of the 3rd century, supposedly

excelled in the four types of Vedic literature and [predictions based on] wind, clouds, stars, and the apocrypha; as for a change of fortune, there was none he did not know thoroughly.

善學四圍陀論。風雲星宿圖讖運變莫不該綜。

(GSZ, p324c17–18; emphasis added)

Meanwhile, several other entries include more generic references to these skills in order to illustrate the supernatural talents of the monk in question. For instance, Kumārajīva reportedly had ‘exhaustive [knowledge of] *yīn* and *yáng*,⁹² the stars, and calculations’⁹³ (陰陽、星、算莫不必盡; GSZ, p330c10), while Qiúnàpídi is credited with ‘understanding *yīn* and *yáng*’ (明解陰陽; GSZ, p345a27), and Dào’ān had a comprehensive grasp of ‘*yīn* and *yáng* and the calendar calculations’ (陰陽、算數、亦皆能通; GSZ; p352c15–16). A monk is sometimes even accorded equal respect

⁹¹ This term also appears in the *Hòu Hànshū* (p3037); see Cullen 2017: 229, 313. On *chèn-wěi* ‘apocrypha’ and related terms, and their significance in late imperial China, Cullen writes: ‘Typically, such texts were taken as embodying an esoteric tradition that Confucius and his successors had not seen fit to include in the received classics, but had handed down by other means. Modern scholarship holds that such texts were not in fact ancient, but originated around the beginning of the Common Era, probably in the period of political and ideological conflict from the end of Western Han, through the rule Wang Mang, to the early Eastern Han. Their titles are usually based on those of the received classics, and their contents may contain references to the calendar, heavenly bodies, or matters relevant to astronomical systems, as well as words of prophecy that were clearly meant as references to current events’ (Cullen 2017: 229). On prognostication in the *wěishū* 偽書 literature, see also Nielsen 2018.

⁹² *Yīn* and *yáng*, the two primordial forces in the cosmos, are often mentioned in the context of prognostication. If they are not in harmony, disaster might ensue. The hexagrams of the *Yijing/Zhōuyì* can be divided into those belonging to *yīn* and those associated with *yáng*.

⁹³ Here, *suàn* and *suànshù* are used as generic terms for a variety of techniques involving calculations (e.g. astronomical, calendric, or those relating to *bù* 卜 prognostication).

for his prognostication skills and his knowledge of the Buddhist texts, as in the following passage on Fǎ'ài 法愛 (?-?): 'He understood the *sūtras* and the *śāstras*, and the art of calculation' (解經論兼數術; GSZ, p376c3).

3.2.8. Prognostication Based on the Sound, Shape, and Meaning of Chinese Characters

Whereas predictions in texts translated from Indic sources are quite straightforward, they were sometimes transformed into 'riddles' or word games in the Chinese context, frequently based on particular features of the Chinese writing system and the methods of indicating the sound and meaning of specific characters.⁹⁴ As such, the meaning may be 'hidden' and must be retrieved by tracing the mechanisms through which it was encoded.

The Chinese language itself, especially in its written form, was sometimes used to predict the future. For example, during a revolt of the Pí 郿 people in Yìzhōu 益州 Province, the monk Sēngdù 僧度 was asked to predict the rebellion's chances of success:

[Sēngdù] took his brush and wrote down two characters, 州度. The insurgents said with delight: 'The province (*zhōu* 州) will be passed over (*dù* 度) to us, this is certainly auspicious!'

(XGSZ, p657b26–28)

The revolt was crushed, yet Sēngdù's prediction was accurate. The fault lay with the rebels, as they interpreted 州度 *semantically* rather than *phonetically*. In Early Middle Chinese 州 is read as *təuw*, and 度 can be read as either *do^h* or *dak*. When interpreted as *fānqiè* 反切,⁹⁵ one takes the initial /tɕ/ and combines it with the rime part *ak*, resulting in *tɕ(i)ak*, which is near-homophonous to *teiak* 斫 ('break; cut off'). When using the phrase as reversed *fānqiè* (= 度州), the result would be *tuw*, which is very close to the reading *təw* ('head'). (Indeed, the readings might have been identical in the local dialect.) As such, the phrase is 'properly' interpreted as 斫頭 ('to cut off the head').⁹⁶

In the previous example, the focus is on playing with conventions for expressing the reading of a character (*fānqiè*), but in other instances the specific *meaning* of a character is ignored and rather interpreted as a homophonous or near-homophonous word.⁹⁷ Or, occasionally, an omen is misinterpreted on the basis of (false) *resemblance*.

⁹⁴ This form of wordplay in the prognostication literature has considerable antiquity. For some cross-cultural examples (drawn from the context of oneiromancy), see Noegel 2007.

⁹⁵ The *fānqiè* system was used from the 4th century to indicate the reading of Chinese characters. The reading was given by combining two characters, with the first representing the initial (*shēngmǔ* 聲母) and the second the remaining part (the so-called rhyme part, *yùnmǔ* 韻母 + tone).

⁹⁶ This form of interpretation can be traced back at least as far as the *Zuōzhuàn*, as discussed at length in Li 2007.

⁹⁷ The use of phonetic loan characters was an important feature of the pre-modern Chinese writing system throughout its history, particularly in less formal or vernacular writing.

For instance, the biography of Língyù (518–605), a proponent of the Dilùn 地論 School, contains the following passage:

The foundations of the hall in which Xuē Zhòu⁹⁸ was residing suddenly turned into jade. [Xuē] Zhòu interpreted this as a good omen and provided a vegetarian meal in order to celebrate it. [However,] [Líng]yù said: ‘This [is not jade but] glass [*liúli* 琉璃; i.e. a cheap material], and it is appropriate to be careful and caution against it; it is advisable to pray to avert [the inauspicious] with good fortune.’ [Xuē] Zhòu did not heed his words and afterwards Yáng Liáng⁹⁹ launched a rebellion; the matters [of the omen and the rebellion] were related to each other by cause and effect, and [Xuē Zhòu] was consequently banished to a remote area.

薛胄所住堂礎忽變為玉。胄謂為善徵也，設齋慶之。裕曰：『斯琉璃耳，宜慎之戒之，可禳之以福。』胄不從其言，後楊諒起逆，事有相緣，乃流之邊裔。

(XGSZ, p496c15–19)

Similarly, in Fótúchéng’s (?–348) biography:

[Shí]hǔ used to sleep during the daytime, and in his dream he saw a flock of sheep carrying fish on their shoulders while coming from the northeast [i.e. the homeland of the Xiānbēi]. On waking, he consulted with [Fótú]chéng [who said]: ‘This is not auspicious, the Xiānbēi will come into possession of the Central Plain!’

虎嘗晝寢，夢見群羊負魚從東北來，寤以訪澄。澄曰：『不祥也，鮮卑其有中原乎。』

(GSZ, p386b1–3)

In making his prediction, Fótúchéng combines the characters for *yáng* 羊 (‘sheep’) and *yú* 魚 (‘fish’) from Shíhǔ’s dream in the compound character *xiān* 鮮, as in Xiānbēi 鮮卑 (*S[a]r-pe)—a Nomadic tribe that invaded northern China and eventually established the Northern Wèi 北魏 Dynasty (386–534).

Bǎozhì’s biography includes a story of an official by the name of Húxié 胡諧 falling ill (GSZ, p394b10–13). Asked to cure the official, Bǎozhì writes the two characters *míng qū* 明屈 on a piece of paper. Húxié’s fellow officials are unable to interpret this message (which semantically makes no sense), and Húxié passes away the next day. Bǎozhì then reveals the hidden message and informs the officials that 明屈 should have been interpreted as: 明日將死 (‘He is going to die tomorrow’). While the original meaning of 屈 is ‘bent, crooked’, Bǎozhì ‘decomposes’ the character into its two structural parts *shī* 尸 and *chū* 出 (i.e. ‘a corpse emerges’).

⁹⁸ Xuē Zhòu 薛胄 (?–?) was a high-ranking Sui Dynasty official.

⁹⁹ Yáng Liáng 楊諒 (575–605) was the fifth son of the Emperor Yáng Jiān 楊堅 of the Sui Dynasty.

An even more complex example of ‘character analysis’ occurs in Kumārajīva’s biography. At the moment when the Emperor Lǚ Zuǎn 呂纂 (?–401) of the Liáng 涼 Dynasty is about to beat Kumārajīva in a board game (*bóyì* 博奕), he jokingly exclaims: 斫胡奴頭 (‘Cutting off the head of the barbarian slave!’)—an allusion to the fact that Kumārajīva hails from Central Asia and as such is considered a ‘barbarian’. However, Kumārajīva is seemingly not in a joking mood and reinterprets this phrase as a prediction of the emperor’s fate:

One cannot cut off the head of the barbarian slave, but the barbarian slave (胡奴) will cut off the head of a person [i.e. Lǚ Zuǎn].

不能斫胡奴頭，胡奴將斫人頭。

(GSZ, p332a12–13)

No one understood this statement at the time, but Lǚ Zuǎn was eventually beheaded by Lǚ Zhào 呂超, who had launched a revolt against the emperor. The style name of Lǚ Zhào was Húnù 胡奴’ (lit. ‘barbarian slave’).

3.3. *Unorthodox Prognostication Methods*

In addition to the mainstream prognostication techniques outlined above, the GSZ and XGSZ very occasionally mention highly specialised methods. For example, we learn that Kumārajīva used an unusual technique to determine whether a patient would recover from an illness:

With a multi-coloured silken thread, he would make a rope, join [the two ends] together, and ignite it until it had burned to ashes. Then he would throw it into the water [and observe whether] the ashes appeared on [the surface]; if it still had the shape of a rope, then the sickness could not be cured.

以五色絲作繩，結之燒為灰末，投水中，灰若出水，還成繩者，病不可愈。

(GSZ, p957c27–28)

Other unusual methods in the historical records include Fótúchéng 佛圖澄 forecasting the auspiciousness of events by listening to the pealing of bells (GSZ, p383b23–24) and Bǎoyì 鮑昱 making predictions after turning one hundred shells (GSZ, p345a17). In the entry for the Indian translator Dámójiǔduō 達摩笈多 (Dharmagupta; ?–619), we learn that a monk from Guǎngzhōu consulted a scripture with the title *Zhànchá shàn’è yè bào jīng* 占察善惡業報經 (T17, no839)¹⁰⁰ and predicted events by tossing two small leather plaques embossed with the characters *shàn* 善 (‘good > auspicious’)

¹⁰⁰ This scripture is traditionally attributed to the Indian monk Pútídēng 菩提燈 (*Bodhidīpa), who was active in China from the end of the 6th to the beginning of the 7th century. However, the text was probably composed in China.

and 惡 ('bad > inauspicious').¹⁰¹ However, this method was considered heterodox and was prohibited by the government (XGSZ, p435c27–436a1).

Finally, a few monks are depicted as behaving in peculiar or even foolish ways. For example, Fǎxíng 法行 shoots bamboo arrows at the walls of Dāngyáng 當陽 after predicting that bandits will attack the city. However, the citizens misunderstand his hidden message and are consequently massacred by the intruders (XGSZ, p658b1–12).

Conclusions

The GSZ and XGSZ are important sources for analysing the significance of prognostication/foreknowledge in Buddhist history texts, and the way in which these abilities were integrated into the biographies of eminent Chinese medieval monks. This paper has also compared aspects of mantic practices recorded in the Chinese Buddhist history texts with the Chinese Buddhist translated literature and the 'Indian' view on prognostication they reflect. Furthermore, it has investigated examples of indigenous Chinese prognostication techniques in the GSZ and XGSZ, and highlighted some differences between the two texts.

Foremost among the various prognostication topics in the Buddhist history texts are the most significant life events of monks, including their gestation, birth, youth and education, and death. Interestingly, there are significant differences between the GSZ and the XGSZ with regard to recording events before, during, and after a monastic's birth. Whereas the former text contains only three narratives on birth events, its sequel features no fewer than twenty-nine. This probably reflects contrasting degrees of interest in the subject in the eras when the two texts were written. Indeed, identical tendencies are evident in contemporaneous secular history texts. For example, little attention is paid to the births of important people in *Sòng shū* 宋書 or the *Nán-Qí shū* 南齊書¹⁰² (composed around the same time as the GSZ), whereas the *Liáng shū* 梁書, *Chén shū* 陳書, and *Nán shǐ* 南史¹⁰³ (all of which, like the XGSZ, were written during the Táng period) include frequent references to such events.

In contrast to birth events, the subject of death (and rebirth destinations) plays a significant role in both of the Buddhist history texts. Overall, 122 prognostication narratives relate to the end of a monk's life. This is hardly surprising, since the moment when an eminent monk dies is viewed as the culmination of his earthly efforts and a direct outcome of his spiritual practice. These narratives may be divided into two main types: the monk's own foreknowledge of his impending death; and accounts of unusual events preceding or coinciding with his passing. The former passages

¹⁰¹ See Zhuāng 1999: 39. For an English translation of the entire passage, see Ng 2007: 88.

¹⁰² Edited during the Liáng Dynasty.

¹⁰³ The *Nán shǐ* records special events accompanying the birth of almost every emperor. For example, the text reports unusual lights filling the room and 'sweet dew' (*gānlù* 甘露) descending when Liú Yù (r. 420–422) of the Sòng and Liú Jùn 劉駿 were born, and similarly unusual natural phenomena coinciding with the birth of the Emperor Tàizǔ 太祖 of the Qí 齊 (see *Nán shǐ*: 1, 55, 88, 97).

were probably included for didactic reasons: such accounts ‘proved’ that the monk in question had attained a high degree of spiritual insight, knowledge of the past and future, and other special powers as a result of his practice.

The number of narratives relating to strange phenomena either presaging or coinciding with a monk’s demise increased significantly from the GSZ (sixteen accounts) to the XGSZ (sixty-nine accounts). Here, once again, the increased emphasis in the later text may reflect the interests of the target audience. The monks’ spiritual accomplishments are presented as so significant that the environment (including nature) participates in their ‘resonance’ (*gānyìng* 感應).¹⁰⁴ This notion is traditionally Chinese, but it also echoes nature’s (specifically plants’, animals’, and spirits’) interactions with the Bodhisattva (i.e. Buddha in his former lives) in the *jātaka* and *avadāna* narratives. Accounts of these events in the history texts also had the important function of emphasising that Buddhist monastics possessed greater spiritual power than their Confucian or Daoist counterparts. This sectarian/propagandist feature is especially prominent in Dào Xuān’s work, which was written at a time when Buddho–Daoist competition (see Company 2012: 273–364) was reaching new heights and Buddhists were facing frequent attacks from Confucian scholars. The compiler’s clear intention was to protect the Dharma by focusing on the exemplary features and special powers of Buddhist monastics (*hù fǎ* 護法).

Whereas both texts contain frequent references to eminent monks’ foreknowledge and ‘signs’ relating to important events in their lives, there are far fewer accounts of monastics using specific prognostication techniques: only fourteen in the GSZ, and only thirteen in the XGSZ. In the earlier text, seven of the fourteen prognosticating monks fall within the ‘translators’ category. This may be explained by the fact that the GSZ includes biographies of relatively early translators, many of whom originated from outside China (primarily Central Asia). In the early period of Chinese Buddhism, before the doctrinal framework, monastic regulations, and institutions had been firmly established, the local audience might have been most interested in the supernatural aspects of the ‘new cult’, including special techniques (*shù* 術) of predicting the future. Hence, the compiler of the GSZ probably drew on earlier legends and records concerning the early translators.¹⁰⁵

Although Dào Xuān was a Vinaya monk and the foremost authority on the *Sifēn lǜ* 四分律,¹⁰⁶ there is no explicit or even implicit criticism of monastics’ use of supernatural powers and prognostication techniques in the XGSZ.¹⁰⁷ This suggests that possessing and practising special powers had become an inherent feature of the image of

¹⁰⁴ One example is trees turning white when Sēngchē 僧徹 was on the verge of death (XGSZ, p595c13).

¹⁰⁵ Kieschnick 1997: 84–87 discusses the tendency of these texts to ascribe thaumaturgical powers to foreign monks.

¹⁰⁶ The Vinaya literature frequently criticizes monks’ use of special powers.

¹⁰⁷ Dào Xuān’s fascination with other supernatural powers, in addition to prognostication/divination, is evident in his accounts of famous monks taming wild beasts, causing dry springs to gush again, communicating with and controlling spirits, reading minds, and causing inexplicable phenomena to occur—to name just a few.

the ideal monk by the early Táng. At most, and only occasionally, we may detect certain ambivalence on the part of Dào Xuān in his treatment of the topic.

Another important aspect of the Buddhist histories is their inclusion of specifically Chinese methods of prognostication, even though these are usually mentioned only in generic terms. The focus on aspects of the Chinese language and script is particularly noteworthy. Such predictions were not straightforward, but rather ‘hidden’ in riddle-like phrases or convoluted arrangements of Chinese characters. These ‘games’ that played with the sounds, meanings, and orthographical forms of Chinese words may be traced all the way back to the early Hàn Dynasty—or even earlier—and thereafter they appeared in numerous variations and forms in both secular and religious texts. In later works, the phenomenon is sometimes termed *chèn* 讖, which the *Sikù quánshū zǒngmù* 四庫全書總目 defines as ‘composing “hidden/secret words” in a wily way in order to predict the auspicious or inauspicious’ (讖者，詭為隱語，預決吉凶; *Yǐngyìn Wényuān gé Sikù quánshū*, cè 1: 158). In China, these *yīnyǔ* probably became popular because they enabled secular writers to express politically sensitive messages discreetly.¹⁰⁸ Buddhist writers may well have appreciated the benefits of adopting a similar approach.

Somewhat paradoxically, although the GSZ and XGSZ criticise ‘Brahmins’ for practising aberrant forms of prognostication, they suggest that similar special powers (*sānmíng liùtōng* 三明六通) are natural by-products of rigorous self-cultivation and the attainment of spiritual insight. Hence, the ability to predict the future is ‘self-generated’ and usually does not have to be mediated by another thaumaturge or a spirit (although, in some biographies, spiritual beings do provide monks with information about future events). Indeed, in contrast to traditional Chinese views on spirits (*shén* 神)—which cast them transcending the mundane world and being generally superior to human beings¹⁰⁹—the Buddhist historical texts downplay their significance and stress the supremacy of human rebirth, even over existence as a deity (*tiān* 天).

As for the subjects and types of prognostication that feature in the GSZ and XGSZ, the texts present an interesting combination of Indian and Chinese elements. The emphasis on events relating to birth, spiritual attainment, and death was certainly inspired by narratives of Śākyamuni Buddha himself. However, as we have seen, supernatural occurrences at moments of birth and death occasionally feature in non-Buddhist sources, too. Whereas the revelation of future events in dreams is a recurring

¹⁰⁸ An example is the phrase ‘卯金修德為天子’ in the *Hòu Hànshū* (p22). In this phrase, *mǎo jīn* 卯金 makes no sense at the level of a surface reading. However, these two characters are structural parts of the graph *liú* 劉. As such, the prediction that Liú Xiù 劉秀 will become emperor is expressed indirectly.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. the famous passage in the *Mòzǐ* (祭祀上帝，鬼、神，而求祈禱於天; p294). Secular historical records frequently include accounts of prayers being said to spirits/supernatural beings to secure their assistance in averting disaster and securing prosperity. Such accounts are very rare in the Buddhist historical texts. By contrast, there is an emphasis on eminent monks’ ability to mediate between the human world and the spirits because of their superior knowledge, and they are even sometimes credited with warding off malignant demons. For a number of interesting examples, see the long biography of Sēngchóu 僧稠 in XGSZ, p553b25–555b25.

topic in the Buddhist history texts,¹¹⁰ this type of foreknowledge is clearly a cross-cultural phenomenon. Naturally, the agents and objects in the dreams described in the GSZ and XGSZ often have specific Buddhist references. Other techniques that feature in the two texts were widely practised in both Indian/Central Asian and Chinese contexts, such as physiognomising (with some differences concerning the objects to be investigated) and prognostications based on astronomical and atmospheric phenomena. Once again, details of these practices (e.g. the constellations involved or the geographical areas affected) have more specific cultural references.

A few of the techniques described in the GSZ and XGSZ—such as Kumārajīva's predictions of recovery from disease based on his observation of burned silk threads, Ān Shìgāo's interpretations of birds' and animals' calls, and prognostication based on counting shells—are unknown in pre-Buddhist Chinese sources. Hence, it might be surmised that they originated in Central Asia.¹¹¹ Traditional Chinese techniques are easier to identify due to their clear cultural references, including prognostications based on the *Zhōuyì*, the cosmic board, the apocryphal texts, and the Chinese language and script.

More generally, this analysis has highlighted the great significance accorded to prognostication—as well as an array of other supernatural powers—in monastic biographies. Clearly, by the time that the GSZ and XGSZ were composed, these qualities were viewed as essential characteristics of eminent monks.

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¹¹⁰ Of course, revelations in dreams also comprise an important topic in early non-Buddhist Chinese literature; see e.g. Chén 1995. On the relationship between dreams, divination, and statecraft, see Brennan 1993.

¹¹¹ The case for this conjecture is strongest with respect to the latter technique, as historical records reveal that Central Asian traders used shells as currency up to the Táng Dynasty; see e.g. *Jiù Táng shū*: 5307.

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