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# MAHĀYĀNA IN THE EKOTTARIKA-ĀGAMA

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## Abstract

With the present paper I survey passages in the *Ekottarika-āgama* that reflect Mahāyāna thought, followed by a more a detailed study of one of these instances, which involves an occurrence of the term Hīnayāna.

**Key Words** Mahāyāna, Ekottarika-āgama, Buddhist Literature

## Introduction

In what follows, I examine passages in the *Ekottarika-āgama* that show the influence of Mahāyāna notions.<sup>1</sup> This *Ekottarika-āgama*, now extant as entry no. 125 in the Taishō edition, was translated in the year 384 of the present era by Zhú Fóniàn (竺佛念), based on a text recited by Dharmanandin.<sup>2</sup> Its school affiliation has been the

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<sup>1</sup> I already drew attention to some of the late passages discussed below in Anālayo 2009b.

<sup>2</sup> Regarding the suggestion in some later catalogues that the translator was rather Gautama Saṅghadeva, Matsumura 1989: 364 notes that already Unebe in 1970 had observed that the translation terminology of T 125 indicates that this work was translated by Zhu Fonian, with which Matsumura 1989: 367 concurs; for similar conclusions cf. also Legittimo 2005: 3 note 7, Anālayo 2006: 146, and Nattier 2007: 195 note 48; cf. also Park 2012: 203.

subject of on-going discussion among scholars, a Mahāsāṃghika affiliation being the most often proposed hypothesis.<sup>3</sup>

While the term Mahāyāna can carry a range of meanings,<sup>4</sup> what I intend with “Mahāyāna” in the present context is predominantly along the lines of the expression *bodhisattvayāna*, sometimes used in early Mahāyāna texts as an equivalent to the term Mahāyāna. Besides occurrences of explicit *yāna* terminology – Mahāyāna, Hīnayāna, and references to the three *yānas* – *Ekottarika-āgama* passages that reflect the existence of the developed bodhisattva ideal as a viable path in general would thus fall within the scope of my definition.<sup>5</sup> I also consider references to Maitreya as a bodhisattva and the co-existence of more than one Buddha, found in different Buddha fields, as relevant to my present purpose.

My approach thus differs to some extent from Lamotte, who considers a reference to the diamond concentration in an *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse as reflecting Mahāyāna influence.<sup>6</sup> The passage in question describes how Śāriputra, seated in this type of concentration, remains unhurt when a *yakṣa* hits him on the head. A parallel to this

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Mayeda 1985: 102f and for recent contributions Pāsādika 2010, Kuan 2012, Kuan 2013a, Kuan 2013b, and Kuan 2013c.

<sup>4</sup> Cf., e.g., the discussion in Silk 2002.

<sup>5</sup> While in Anālayo 2010a I argue that the beginnings of what eventually was to become the bodhisattva ideal can be found already in the early discourses, these beginnings are distinctly different from passages in the *Ekottarika-āgama* that reflect the existence of the full-fledged *bodhisattvayāna*.

<sup>6</sup> In relation to EĀ 48.6 at T II 793a13, Lamotte 1967: 114 comments that according to this passage “Śāriputra était entre dans la Concentration du Diamant (*vajrasamādhi*), concentration ignorée des anciennes Écritures, mais figurant dans la liste des 108 ou 118 *samādhi* dressée par les *Prajñāpāramitā* ... en faisant intervenir cette concentration, le Sūtra de Śāriputra trahit sa dépendance à l’endroit des Sūtra du Grand Véhicule.” Kuan 2013b: 140–149 similarly sees this passage as reflecting Mahāyāna thought.

tale in the *Udāna* speaks simply of him having entered “a certain concentration”.<sup>7</sup> Parallels in the two *Samyukta-āgama* translations do not mention his concentrative attainment, but report that the Buddha spoke a stanza in relation to this event, highlighting that Śāriputra’s mind was solidly established like a firm rock or that his mind was like a great mountain.<sup>8</sup>

In the *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse in question, the expression “diamond concentration”, 金剛三昧, occurs not only in the Śāriputra episode, but also in the description of another monk who remained unhurt by a fire while being in this concentration.<sup>9</sup> In most parallel versions, the monk in question has entered the cessation attainment.<sup>10</sup>

The expression “diamond concentration” would seem to be a natural way of describing the attainment of cessation as a condition in which one cannot be hurt.<sup>11</sup> The notion that a diamond is harder than any other stone is reflected in a discourse in the *Aṅguttara-*

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<sup>7</sup> Ud 4.4 at Ud 39,22: *aññataraṃ samādhiṃ samāpajjitvā*.

<sup>8</sup> SĀ 1330 T II 367b26: 心如剛石堅住 and SĀ2 329 at T II 485b16: 心如大山.

<sup>9</sup> EĀ 48.6 at T II 793b21.

<sup>10</sup> MN 50 at MN I 333,19, MĀ 131 at T I 620c22, T 66 at T I 864c19 and D 4094 *ju* 75b3 or Q 5595 *tu* 85a7 (cf. the reference to the cessation attainment in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, Pradhan 1967: 75,3). Another parallel, T 67 at T I 867a28, only reports that the monk was in an unspecified concentration attainment.

<sup>11</sup> In relation to another such story in *Vism* 706,13, where a monk who has entered cessation remains unhurt by a fire that has broken out around him, Griffith 1986/1991: 12 comments that “external events, no matter how dramatic, could have no effect upon him”, which seems to be indeed a central feature associated with this attainment. Thus when Kuan 2013b: 148 comments on the description given in EĀ 48.6 that “this *samādhi* is endowed with specific magical potency, an empowerment typical of the Mahāyāna meditative traditions”, it needs to be added that this magical potency seems to be associated with the attainment of cessation already in early Buddhist texts and is also reflected in the Theravāda commentarial tradition.

*nikāya*, where the motif of the indestructibility of a diamond serves to qualify the eradication of all influxes accomplished by an arahant.<sup>12</sup> Thus references to the “diamond concentration” in the *Ekottarika-āgama* may simply be intending to convey the indestructibility with which one who has attained cessation was held to be endowed.<sup>13</sup> The fact that similar ideas can be found in *Prajñāpāramitā* does not make the idea as such an instance of Mahāyāna thought.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> AN 3.25 at AN I 124,20, a passage already noted by Frauwallner 1971: 96; cf. also the *Puggalapaññatti*, Pp 30,20 and for further references Anālayo 2011a: 301f note 180 and Martini 2011: 178 note 131.

<sup>13</sup> Besides EĀ 48.6, the expression 金剛三昧 also occurs in the list of outstanding monks in EĀ 4.9 at T II 558b29, and in a listing of various concentrations in EĀ 42.4 at T II 753b13. Both instances are compatible with a reading of this expression as a referent to the attainment of cessation.

<sup>14</sup> Lamotte 1967: 114 gives references to a *samādhi* qualified as *vajropama*, “like a diamond”, in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, Dutt 1934: 142,12 and 199,3, and to a *samādhi* called *vajra* in the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, Ghoṣa 1902: 826,13 and 1416,1, which the second instance further explains to be such that on staying in it one will not be destroyed, *vajro nāma samādhiḥ, yatra samādhou shivā na bhidyate*. The expression *vajropama* in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* corresponds to the qualification *vajrūpama* used in AN 3.25. As noted by Kuan 2013b: 145 note 26, the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* passage would convey the senses that one cannot be destroyed or harmed. I find it difficult to follow Kuan 2013b: 145, however, when he considers this to be a “new way instead of referring to the final stage of the path to liberation”. The problem I see is that AN 3.25 does not speak of any *samādhi*, but only compares the irreversibility of the destruction of the influxes to a diamond. It seems to me that this motif would lend itself equally well either to being applied in a physical sense to the cessation *samādhi*, or else to refer to a *samādhi* that leads to arahant-ship, without any need of positing one of these two lines of developments as the earlier one. In fact, considering the application of this motif to the attainment of cessation a “new way” in contrast to the Abhidharma usage, reflected in the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, Dhs 226,1, or the *Jñānaprasthāna*, T 1544 at T XXVI 922b22 (an idea also reflected in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, Pradhan 1967: 364,15), would require establishing that these texts are substantially earlier than the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* and *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*.

My usage of the term Mahāyāna in the present paper also differs from a position taken by Kuan and Mizuno,<sup>15</sup> who consider the description of the making of a Buddha image by King Udayana in the *Ekottarika-āgama* as a distinct Mahāyāna element.<sup>16</sup>

Yet Rowland, in his discussion of the invention of the Buddha image, does not consider the *Ekottarika-āgama* tale to be evidence of Mahāyāna influence.<sup>17</sup> Similarly Soper, who in his study of literary evidence for early Buddhist art in China shows clear awareness of the intrusion of Mahāyāna elements in the *Ekottarika-āgama*,<sup>18</sup> does not reckon the tale of the Udayana statue as being itself distinctly Mahāyāna. The same is the case for the detailed study of the Udayana tale and its development by Carter. In spite of her being clearly aware of the fact that the *Ekottarika-āgama* contains Mahāyāna elements,<sup>19</sup> she does not consider this tale to be distinctly

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<sup>15</sup> This position is taken by Kuan 2013b: 150–163, based on Mizuno 1996: 436; my ignorance of Japanese prevents me from consulting Mizuno myself.

<sup>16</sup> EĀ 36.5 T II 706a12; for a study of the fate of what was believed to have been the Buddha statue made at the behest of Udayana cf. Terentyev 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Rowland 1948: 185, instead of proposing a relationship to the Mahāyāna, suggests that “the legend may have been invented to support the religious policy of Kanishka, which included the introduction of the Buddha image”.

<sup>18</sup> Soper 1959: 259 comments that “the Chinese translation of the *Ekottarāgama* ... goes beyond any of the other sermon collections in fanciful elaboration. It is full of marvellous tales ... the details found are frequently those of early Mahāyāna; obviously the Sanskrit original was re-worked and greatly altered at a relatively late date.” Soper 1959: 260 then continues that “one other aspect of the lateness of the *Ekottarāgama* that helps to explain the Udyāna story is its occasionally shown interest in images.” That is, he clearly considers the interest in images to be something apart from the Mahāyāna influences he describes earlier.

<sup>19</sup> In the course of her discussion of the passage in EĀ 36.5, Carter 1990: 6 notes that “the *Ekottarāgama* appears to be an elaborate Mahayanist[ic] rendering of the Pali *Āṅguttara-nikāya*”, following the indication made by Nakamura 1980/1999: 39 that the *Ekottarika-āgama* preserved in Chinese translation, “which mentions the ... Mahāyāna, dharmakāya, and deprecates Hīnayāna, must have been composed after the rise of Mahāyāna, probably in the 2nd or 3rd century A.D.”

Mahāyāna. Bareau, who elsewhere in his writings highlights the existence of Mahāyāna passages in the *Ekottarika-āgama*,<sup>20</sup> does not deem this passage as pertaining to the same category. In his partial translation and study of the *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse in question, Bareau explicitly makes the point that the tale of King Udayana having a Buddha image made is evidently late, but it is not an instance of Mahāyāna influence.<sup>21</sup> In sum, these scholars, who have studied this tale in detail, do not consider it to be in any way representative of Mahāyāna ideas.

The making of a Buddha image by King Aśoka is reported in texts like the *Mahāvamsa* and the *Samantapāsādhika*.<sup>22</sup> Such a report would not naturally fall under the category of being evidence for Mahāyāna influence. Instead, the making of a Buddha image appears to be such a general feature of the Indian Buddhist traditions of the Middle Period that it would be difficult to sustain the position that it is of Mahāyāna origin. In his study of inscriptional data for

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<sup>20</sup> Bareau 1987: 34 points out that “l’*Ekottara-āgama* contient, ici et là, des éléments nettement mahāyānistes qui furent insérés assez tard dans le texte ancien de ce recueil.”

<sup>21</sup> In a footnote to his translation of the part of the discourse where King Udayana brings the Buddha image to the Buddha, apparently in order to get the Buddha’s approval, found in EĀ 36.5 at T II 708a27, Bareau 1997: 28 note 25 comments that “il s’agit très probablement, ici aussi, d’additions tardives, bien que l’inspiration n’en soit pas mahāyāniste.”

<sup>22</sup> Mhv 5.94, translated by Geiger 1912: 34, and Sp I 44,5 report that the king carried out an *akkhipājā* for the image for seven days, which makes it clear that the tale is about an actual Buddha image being consecrated; for a study of the consecration of Buddha images cf. Swearer 2004/2007; on early Buddha images in Sri Lanka cf., e.g., Wikramagamage 2005.

the early image cult, Schopen does in fact not find evidence for associating this cult with the Mahāyāna.<sup>23</sup>

In sum, it seems to me that references to the diamond concentration and to the making of a Buddha image in the *Ekottarika-āgama* need not be seen as the result of Mahāyāna influence merely because these elements feature in some Mahāyāna texts. It can be problematic to employ the term Mahāyāna as such a broad rubric that it includes even topics like diamond concentration and the making of a Buddha statue; this is exemplified, for instance, in the example of Subhūti. On adopting a wide definition of Mahāyāna, his prominent role as an interlocutor of the Buddha in *Prajñāpāramitā* literature could be considered a distinct Mahāyāna element. Yet it would make little sense to consider a Pāli discourse in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya*, where Subhuti appears as an interlocutor of the Buddha,<sup>24</sup> as being for this reason in some way influenced by the Mahāyāna.

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<sup>23</sup> After a survey of relevant inscriptions, Schopen 2001/2005: 115 notes that “there is still nothing identifiably Mahāyāna in any of these records dealing with the early image cult. None of these inscriptions, for example, makes any reference or allusion to ‘la résolution de devenir des Bouddhas’, which should be the single most important and defining characteristic of any early Mahāyāna.” Schopen 2001/2005: 116 then even goes so far as to conclude that “the impression left by these inscriptional records [is] that the early Mahāyāna was neither involved with nor even interested in the early cult of images.” Kuan 2013b: 160, however, attributes the absence of inscriptional references to the fact that the members of the early Mahāyāna were still part of the various *nikāyas*, and then p. 161 proposes, based on textual evidence, that “the Mahāyānists may have been the first to allow or even advocate the making of ‘Buddha’ (not ‘Bodhisattva’) images.”

<sup>24</sup> AN 11.15 at AN V 337,12. Besides his role as a protagonist in this discourse, Subhūti also occurs in the listing of eminent disciples, AN 1.14.2 at AN I 24,8f and its parallel EĀ 4.8 at T II 558b16; he is referred to in MN 139 at MN III 237,15 and its parallel MĀ 169 at T I 703c8; he is described as sitting in meditation in Ud 6.7 at Ud 71,3; and he speaks a stanza in Th 1.



Thus for my discussion of Mahāyāna elements in the *Ekottarika-āgama*, I adopt a more stringent definition of the term Mahāyāna that does not include practices like the diamond concentration and to the making of a Buddha image under its rubric.

### Mahāyāna Passages

An instance that does fall within the category of what I would consider as being directly related to Mahāyāna ideas is an occurrence of the term Hīnayāna, which I will be discussing in more detail later on in this paper. The discourse in question, found among the Fours of the *Ekottarika-āgama*, expounds four unthinkable matters in relation to the Tathāgata which, as the Buddha explains to Śāriputra, Hīnayānists are unable to understand.<sup>25</sup> In the beginning part of this discourse, Śāriputra discourses on the four *pratisamvids* to the monks, followed by referring to various other sets of fours, which would have earned the discourse a placing among the Fours.<sup>26</sup> The discourse gives the impression that its beginning parts, as well as perhaps the bare reference to the four unthinkables, could stem from an early discourse or earlier discourses by Śāriputra on sets of four. These appear to have been subsequently reworked into the discourse as it now appears, in the course of which elements that reflect Mahāyāna thought became part of the text.<sup>27</sup> As a result of this apparent development, the Buddha himself is shown to employ

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<sup>25</sup> EĀ 26.9 at T II 640a4: 如來有四不可思議事, 非小乘所能知。

<sup>26</sup> EĀ 26.9 at T II 639a25. The respective *uddāna* at T II 643a24 refers to Śāriputra and thus gives the impression that some instruction by Śāriputra would have been the original nucleus of the discourse.

<sup>27</sup> Another Mahāyāna element in EĀ 26.9 can be found at T II 639c25, according to which a former Buddha in the distant past had established innumerable beings in the practice of the three vehicles and in the *avaivartika* stage, 立無量衆生在三乘行, 有在不退轉地住者。

the derogatory expression Hīnayāna – an entertaining element in a text that the ancient Chinese audience would have considered to be a Hīnayāna scripture – and Śāriputra appears almost in the role of being a disciple of the Mahāyāna.<sup>28</sup>

While the Hīnayāna occurs only in this discourse, the employment of yāna terminology can be found in several *Ekottarika-āgama* discourses. One such instance reports how Mahākāśyapa, on being told by the Buddha to give up his undertaking of the ascetic practices, refuses to comply. The *Ekottarika-āgama* actually has two versions of this tale, found in the Chapter on Ones and the Chapter on Sevens,<sup>29</sup> which show some narrative differences.<sup>30</sup> The discourse on Mahākāśyapa's refusal found among the Ones concludes with the Buddha praising the undertaking of the ascetic

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<sup>28</sup> According to Migot 1952: 486–491, this is precisely the role of Śāriputra in several Mahāyāna texts.

<sup>29</sup> EĀ 12.6 at T II 570a23 and EĀ 41.5 at T II 746a21. Other parallels are SN 16.5 at SN II 202,6, SĀ 1141 at T II 301c7 and SĀ2 116 at T II 416b8. A study of EĀ 12.6 is at present under preparation. EĀ 12.6 is allocated to the Ones, which could be related to the indication at the outset of the discourse at T II 570a25 that Mahākāśyapa took only one meal in a single session, 一處一坐; in the case of EĀ 41.5 a rationale for inclusion among the Sevens could be a reference at T II 746b23 to monks of the future who give up seven kinds of practices, 七種之法.

<sup>30</sup> The two versions are in fact located at two different places, as EĀ 12.6 at T II 570a23 takes place in the Squirrels' Feeding Ground in the Bamboo Grove at Rājagrha, while EĀ 41.5 at T II 746a21 has as its venue Anāthapiṇḍada's Park, Jeta's Grove, at Śrāvastī. EĀ 12.6 at T II 570b6 differs from its parallels by reporting that Mahākāśyapa explained his refusal by indicating that he would have become a Pratyekabuddha if the Buddha had not reached full awakening. EĀ 41.5 at T II 746b9 and 746c13 differs from the other parallels to SN 16.5 by recording the Buddha predicting what will happen a thousand years after his death and requesting that Mahākāśyapa remains in the world until the coming of the Buddha Maitreya; on this notion cf., e.g., Deeg 1999. This may well be why Kuan 2012: 187 comments that EĀ 41.5 "is too different to be counted as a parallel" to EĀ 12.6, SN 16.5, SĀ 1141 and SĀ2 116.

practices as leading to stream-entry, once-return, non-return and the awakening of the three vehicles.<sup>31</sup> This praise gives the impression that what originally may have only been a listing of the four stages of awakening might have been changed, with the reference to the *arhat* being replaced by a reference to the three vehicles. Such references to the three vehicles are frequently found among discourses in the *Ekottarika-āgama*.<sup>32</sup>

The three vehicles occur also in a discourse that describes various aspects of keeping the observance day, when the faithful lay disciple temporarily adopts the type of conduct observed always by arhats, such as celibacy, etc. One of these various forms of conduct concerns not using eight types of special seats that are not used by arhats. Three of these seats are the “Buddha seat”, the “Pratyekabuddha seat” and the “arhat seat”.<sup>33</sup> The listings of seats in the parallel versions have no comparable reference,<sup>34</sup> giving the impression that the seats of those who follow the three vehicles could be an addition to the *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse. This apparent addition seems to have been done without proper examination of the context, with the result that the discourse describes arhat seats that arhats do not use.

The *Ekottarika-āgama* also reports an instruction by the Buddha that the monks should have an attitude of gratitude and benevolence for those who give them alms. The instruction is then followed by a

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<sup>31</sup> EĀ 12.6 at T II 570b16: 成須陀洹, 斯陀含, 阿那含, 三乘之道。

<sup>32</sup> EĀ 1 at T II 550b29, EĀ 3.3 at T II 554c27, EĀ 24.6 at T II 625c15, EĀ 26.9 at T II 639c25, EĀ 32.1 at T II 674a7, EĀ 43.2 at T II 757a13, EĀ 45.5 at T II 773a23, EĀ 48.3 at T II 788c26 and EĀ 48.5 at T II 792b12.

<sup>33</sup> EĀ 24.6 at T II 625c5: 佛座, 辟支佛座, 阿羅漢座 ... 阿羅漢不在此八種座; a reference to the 三乘 is then found a few lines below, T II 625c15. It is unclear to me what these three seats might be referring to.

<sup>34</sup> AN 3.70 at AN I 212,24, MĀ 202 at T I 771a3, T 87 at T I 911b7, T 88 at T I 912b27 and T 89 at T I 913b15.

set of stanzas. One of the stanzas indicates that through giving one will accomplish Buddhahood and be endowed with the thirty-two marks.<sup>35</sup>

In the early discourses found in the other *Āgamas* and in the Pāli *Nikāyas* the function of the thirty-two marks is to provide visible evidence for contemporary brahmins to verify the Buddha's claim to awakening. Thus, from the perspective of these discourses, concern with the thirty-two marks is something characteristic of brahmins who are not yet followers of the Buddha and who need some aid that accords with their notions of spiritual accomplishment in order to gain sufficient faith to approach the Buddha and hear his teachings.<sup>36</sup> The idea that a disciple of the Buddha would aspire to have the same marks as part of a wish to accomplish Buddhahood is a later development that reflects a developed bodhisattva ideal.

Another discourse addressed to Anāthapiṇḍada takes up the topic of giving and culminates in the Buddha praising the eminent householder for giving to all equally and thus with the mental attitude of a bodhisattva.<sup>37</sup> Behind this praise also stands an already developed notion of the path of a bodhisattva and of the proper kind of attitude with which a lay bodhisattva should undertake the practice

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<sup>35</sup> EĀ 10.3 at T II 564b16: 布施成佛道，三十二相具。The *uddāna* related to this discourse confirms that the main topic was recollecting [with gratitude] the alms [one has received], T II 566a22: 念檀 (adopting the variant 檀 instead of 壇), which is the topic taken up by the Buddha in the initial question that sets the direction for the rest of the discourse, EĀ 10.3 at T II 564a19: 當雲何觀檀越施主?

<sup>36</sup> Cf. in more detail Anālayo 2011a: 529.

<sup>37</sup> EĀ 10.5 at T II 565a20: 善哉，善哉，長者，汝乃以菩薩心，專精一意而廣惠施；the *uddāna* at T II 566a22 just notes that the present text is one of two discourses on *dāna*, 施. Eulogies of giving with the attitude of a bodhisattva can also be found in EĀ 48.5 at T II 792c17 (a discourse which also mentions the three vehicles, T II 792b12f and 792c9, and which concludes by reporting that the householder protagonist of the discourse attained stream-entry by just looking at the Buddha, T II 792c28) and in EĀ 52.6 at T II 826b25.

of giving. The *Ekottarika-āgama* is not concerned only with lay bodhisattvas, however, as the path of a monastic bodhisattva stands in the background of another discourse. This discourse highlights great compassion as the power of the Buddha, followed by exhorting the monks that they should also cultivate great compassion.<sup>38</sup> The bodhisattva path in general then manifests in another discourse in the *Ekottarika-āgama*, according to which one of the deeds that a Buddha will necessarily accomplish is to make beings cultivate the *bodhicitta*.<sup>39</sup>

A term reflecting a mature stage of the bodhisattva ideal can be found among the Twos of the *Ekottarika-āgama*. The discourse in question begins by praising the caring for one's father and mother and concludes with an injunction to the monks that they should train in always recalling their filial duty and in caring for their father and mother.<sup>40</sup> This final instruction gives the impression that the reason why this discourse came to be placed among the Chapter on Twos was because it referred to these two, namely one's father and mother. This does not hold for the preceding section of the discourse, however, since after the initial instruction to care for

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<sup>38</sup> EĀ 38.1 at T II 717b25: 是故，比丘，常念修行此大慈悲，如是，諸比丘，當作是學。The parallel AN 8.27 at AN IV 223,16 does not refer to compassion at all, let alone “great compassion”, a notion not found in the Pāli discourses, but only in later Pāli literature, cf., e.g., Paṭis I 126,17, where this refers to a quality of the Buddha, not to something his disciples should cultivate.

<sup>39</sup> EĀ 35.2 at T II 699a7: 未發菩薩意，使發菩薩心 and EĀ 36.5 at T II 703b18: 未發菩薩心，令發菩薩意; EĀ 24.5 at T II 622c14 speaks of guiding worldlings so that they become established in the practice of a bodhisattva, 導凡夫人立菩薩行。In each discourse this is one of five aspects that accompany the appearance of a Tathāgata in the world; for a comparable listing of five such aspects in the *Mahāvastu*, cf. Senart 1882: 51,3. EĀ 35.2 then concludes with the Buddha enjoining the monks that, for this reason, they should have an attitude of *maitrī* towards the Tathāgata.

<sup>40</sup> EĀ 20.10 at T II 601a7: 諸比丘，常念孝順供養父母，如是，諸比丘，當作是學。

one's parents the discourse presents as an alternative the caring for an *ekajātipratibaddha* bodhisattva, that is, a bodhisattva who is only one lifetime away from becoming a Buddha.<sup>41</sup> Since this concept does not occur in the final instruction, it could well be that this concept was subsequently added to an original treatment that really was only concerned with the topic of caring for one's parents..

The notion of the bodhisattva's path to Buddhahood stands also at the background to a discourse found among the Fours. In reply to a question by the bodhisattva Maitreya, the Buddha expounds four things to be undertaken by a bodhisattva *mahāsattva* for the purpose of accomplishing the six *pāramitās*.<sup>42</sup> Here the ideas inherent in the above-mentioned discourse to Anāthapiṇḍada find a more explicit formulation, with the difference that this appears to be a discourse on its own right, not a case of a reworking of an earlier discourse.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> EĀ 20.10 at T II 601a4: 若復供養一生補處菩薩. In regard to the present instance, Huyên-vi and Pāsādika 2002: 49 note 4 comment that "here, as in numerous other places, there is ample evidence in EĀ for Mahāyāna influence". Another occurrence of the same concept in the abbreviated rendering 補處菩薩 makes its appearance in EĀ 42.3 at T II 749c15; for a Sanskrit fragment parallel cf. Waldschmidt 1948/1967: 148.

<sup>42</sup> EĀ 27.5 at T II 645b3, which has already been noted as one of several instances of "definite Mahāyānist influences" by Harrison 1997: 280.

<sup>43</sup> At times Maitreya does, however, occur as part of what looks as if it could be the result of a reworking of an early discourse. An example is the listing of the eight thoughts of a great man in EĀ 42.6, which at T II 754b17 illustrates the quality of making an effort with the example of Maitreya bodhisattva's striving for thirty aeons in order to become a Buddha. The parallels AN 8.30 at AN IV 234,7 and MĀ 74 at T I 541c24 instead explain the quality of energy by describing the effort to overcome what is unwholesome and develop what is wholesome, cf. also T 46 at T I 836a24. This makes it quite possible that the reference to Maitreya in EĀ 42.6 is the result of a reworking of the discourse; in fact, the other seven qualities do not receive a detailed illustration in EĀ 42.6 comparable to the passage on Maitreya. Another instance where Maitreya occurs as an illustration of making an effort is EĀ 20.6 at T II 600a20.

A case that gives the impression that an early discourse has been expanded with later material can be found among the Sixes. In this case, the first part of the discourse appears to be a product of later times. The discourse begins with the Buddha seated on a golden lotus flower with a stalk made of the seven jewels.<sup>44</sup> After some narrative episodes, Mahāmaudgalyāyana eventually visits another Buddha in a different Buddha field.<sup>45</sup> He then leads five hundred monks from that other realm to Śākyamuni Buddha, who gives them a teaching. This teaching is a basic exposition of the six elements and the six sense-spheres that culminates in the eradication of the fetters and underlying tendencies and the attainment of Nirvāṇa.<sup>46</sup> The Buddha then asks Mahāmaudgalyāyana to lead the five hundred monks back to their realm and the discourse concludes with the Buddha praising Mahāmaudgalyāyana for being foremost among his disciples in supernatural power.<sup>47</sup>

Besides narrative details like the Buddha being seated on a golden lotus, the existence of another Buddha is an obvious

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<sup>44</sup> EĀ 37.2 at T II 709a2: 世尊坐金蓮華，七寶爲莖。

<sup>45</sup> EĀ 37.2 at T II 709c28.

<sup>46</sup> EĀ 37.2 at T II 710b13.

<sup>47</sup> EĀ 37.2 at T II 710c2.

indication for a late stage in the development of Buddhist thought.<sup>48</sup> In contrast to these late elements, the instruction given to the five hundred monks reads like any other early discourse and thus might have been the text that was originally found in this section of the *Ekottarika-āgama*.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Early Buddhist doctrine holds that only one Buddha at a time can be found in the world; cf., e.g., MN 115 at MN III 65,14 and its parallels MĀ 181 at T I 724a1, T 776 at T XVII 713b18, T 1537 at T XXVI 502b14, D 297 *sha* 300a7 or Q 963 *lu* 329a4, D 4094 *ju* 188b3 or Q 5595 *tu* 215b2. Another reference to this impossibility can be found in DN 19 at DN II 225,3 and its parallels DĀ 3 at T I 31a15 and the *Mahāvastu*, Senart 1897: 199,10; further occurrences can be found in DN 28 at DN III 114,23 and its parallel DĀ 18 at T I 79a7, as well as in AN 1.15 at AN I 27,36. According to Guang Xing 2005: 62, however, “contemporaneous Buddhas’ are mentioned many times in the extant Chinese translations of the *Āgamas* such as the *Dirgha*, the *Samyukta* and the *Ekottara*”, page 205 note 49 giving the following references in support of his suggestion: “\**Dirghāgama*: T1, 76c, 163b, 255b; \**Samyuktāgama*: T2, 131a, 322a, 410a; \**Ekottarāgama*, T2, 708c-710a, 773a”. While the first of the two references to the Ekottarika-āgama given by him is to EĀ 37.2, the discourse under discussion at present, a perusal of the other references brings to light that they do not support the claim made: DĀ 18 at T I 76c20, T 18 at T I 255b9, SĀ 498 at T II 131a1, SĀ 1188 at T II 322a22, and SĀ2 101 at T II 410a20 refer to “Buddhas of past, future, and present” with the expressions 過去, 未來, 現在諸佛; or 過去, 當來, 今現在諸佛; or 過去等正覺, 及未來諸佛, 現在佛; or 三世諸佛. The same expression is found in their parallels DN 28 at DN III 100,23 and SN 47.12 at SN V 160,15: *atītānāgatapaccuppannesu ... sammāsambuddhesu*, while SN 6.2 at SN I 140,11 takes the form: *ye ca atītā* (C<sup>c</sup>: *cabbhatītā*) *sambuddhā*, *ye ca buddhā anāgatā*, *yo cetarahi sambuddho* (singular!). A similar reference in T 5 at T I 163b8 to 過去, 當來, 現在諸佛 has no counterpart in the corresponding part of DN 16 at DN II 93,11; nevertheless the point made in T 5 is simply that all beings are mortal, even Buddhas of past, future and present times). EĀ 45.5 at T II 773a25 also just speaks of Buddhas of the three times, 三世諸佛, although its lateness is evident in the fact that it proclaims they all teach the three *yānas*, 盡當說三乘之法. None of these references to Buddhas of the three times implies a substantial difference in doctrinal outlook compared to the Pāli discourses. EĀ 37.2 is the only one out of these passages that does reflect the notion that Buddhas can exist simultaneously.

<sup>49</sup> EĀ 37.2 at T II 709a17 reports a contest in supernatural powers between Śāriputra and Mahāmaudgalyāyana, a tale that is quoted in T 2121 at T LIII 73a29. T 2121 at T LIII 73c1 indicates that at the time of quotation this story was found in the 27th fascicle of the *Ekottarika-āgama*, whereas now EĀ 37.2 is in the 29<sup>th</sup> fascicle; for a study of such quotations from the *Ekottarika-āgama* in T 2121 cf. Su 2013.



The selected passages surveyed so far are at times far removed from early Buddhism.<sup>50</sup> A setting where the Buddha expounds the course of action to be taken by a bodhisattva is something foreign to the early discourses, which also do not yet know the notion of needing to accomplish certain qualities reckoned as *pāramitā*.<sup>51</sup> Besides, in the early discourses the person qualified as a bodhisattva is usually Śākyamuni Buddha in the time preceding his awakening, not any of his contemporaries.<sup>52</sup> Thus a setting where the Buddha addresses a bodhisattva is a foreign element in early Buddhist thought.

Lateness is also fairly evident in the way the protagonists in the above surveyed instances are described. Thus Anāthapiṇḍada has become a good lay bodhisattva, Śāriputra receives teachings that are beyond the ken of Hīnayānists and Mahāmaudgalyāyana teleports monks from another Buddha field so that they can receive teachings from Śākyamuni Buddha, who makes others cultivate the *bodhicitta*, tells his monks to care for the *ekajātīpratibaddha* bodhisattva, and also teaches the six *pāramitās* to the bodhisattva Maitreya. The same change of perspective involves Ānanda as well, whom the introduction to the *Ekottarika-āgama* depicts as reflecting that those who have no faith in the practice of bodhisattvas are fools.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> On the probable date of closure of the discourses in the four Pāli *Nikāyas*, as far as doctrinal developments are concerned, cf. Anālayo 2012a.

<sup>51</sup> For a survey of different listings of these qualities cf., e.g., Har Dayal 1932/1970: 165–269.

<sup>52</sup> On the beginning stages in the evolution of the Maitreya motif cf. Anālayo 2010a: 95–113.

<sup>53</sup> EĀ 1 at T II 550a29: 阿難自陳有是念：菩薩之行愚不信。The present quote, as well as the one below, show a stylistic feature noted by Nattier 2012: 10, where the introduction throughout uses “seven-character verse; elsewhere Zhu Fonian uses five-character verse, with rare instances in four characters.”

The introduction in fact already has most of the Mahāyāna concepts mentioned above. Besides an occurrence of Maitreya, who has come down from heaven to applaud Ānanda's recitation at the first *saṅgīti*,<sup>54</sup> one can find references to the six *pāramitās*,<sup>55</sup> to the three vehicles,<sup>56</sup> to the wish of becoming a Buddha like Śākyamuni,<sup>57</sup> to bodhisattvas, and to the Mahāyāna.<sup>58</sup> Particularly telling is a passage in the introduction where the *mahāsattva* Maitreya tells the bodhisattvas of the present auspicious aeon that they should encourage all *kulaputras* and *kuladhītās* to memorize and recite the teaching of the *Ekottarika* and spread it widely so that gods and men will receive it respectfully. Once this has been said, devas, humans, *gandharvas*, *asuras*, *garuḍas*, *mahoragas*, and *kiṃnaras* each declare that they will afford complete protection to the good man or good woman who memorizes and recites the teachings of the *Ekottarika* and spreads them widely, so that they will not be discontinued.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> EĀ 1 at T II 550a10: 彌勒稱善快哉說。

<sup>55</sup> The six *pāramitās* are listed at EĀ 1 at T II 550a13, followed by a more detailed exposition of their significance.

<sup>56</sup> EĀ 1 at T II 550b29 refers to the three *yānas*, 三乘, and at T II 551a20 lists the teachings of each *yāna* individually, 佛之教, 及辟支佛, 聲聞之教。

<sup>57</sup> EĀ 1 at T II 552b10: 若欲成佛者, 猶如釋迦文。

<sup>58</sup> EĀ 1 at T II 550a12: 菩薩發意趣大乘。Two more reference to the Mahāyāna can be found in the introduction at T II 550b4 and 550c10; one reference occurs outside of the introduction in EĀ 19.8 at T II 595b13. Together with the reference to the Hīnayāna mentioned above, these occurrences testify to a fully developed stage in the formation of Mahāyāna self-identity and polemics.

<sup>59</sup> EĀ 1 at T II 550c23: 是時, 彌勒大士告賢劫中諸菩薩等: 卿等勸勵諸族姓子, 族姓女, 諷誦受持增一尊法, 廣演流布, 使天人奉行, 說是語時, 諸天, 世人, 乾沓和, 阿須倫, 伽留羅, 摩休勒, 甄陀羅等, 各各白言: 我等盡共擁護是善男子, 善女人, 諷誦受持增一尊法, 廣演流布, 終不中絕 (adopting the variant 摩休勒 instead of 摩睺勒).

The similarities between this passage and the way Mahāyāna texts tend to ensure their own preservation is striking.<sup>60</sup> In this way, this passage exemplifies an agenda evident throughout the introduction to present the *Ekottarika-āgama* as something so special that its transmission to future generations has been recommended to bodhisattvas by none less than Maitreya, the one who is about to become the next Buddha. Such a transmission then can safely be expected to take place under the benevolent protection of a range of various extraordinary beings.

In sum, the *Ekottarika-āgama* shows clear signs of having integrated material of a Mahāyāna orientation. While a full study of all the passages mentioned above is not possible within the confines of an article, in what follows I will examine one example, namely the reference to the Hīnayāna.

Before examining this reference, however, I would like to note that the *Ekottarika-āgama* at times contains presentations that appear to be earlier than their Theravāda canonical counterparts.<sup>61</sup> In other words, my presentation is not meant to give the impression that the *Ekottarika-āgama* is late in its entirety.

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<sup>60</sup> Nattier 2012: 13 notes similarities between the reference in the above quoted passage to the promise of protection to the good man or good woman who memorizes and recites the *Ekottarika-āgama*, 我等 ... 護是善男子, 善女人, 諷誦, and a similar passage in Mokṣala's Larger *Prajñāpāramitā*, T 221 at T VIII 43c9: 我等當護是善男子, 善女人 ... 諷誦. Another similarity between these two works, noted by Nattier 2012: 14, concerns Ānanda's advising Uttara to memorize and recite the *Ekottarika-āgama* well, EĀ 1 at T II 551a1: 囑累汝, 善諷誦 (adopting a variant without 於), where in T 221 at T VIII 105a3 Ānanda is told in similar terms to preserve this text, 囑累汝 ... 善諷誦.

<sup>61</sup> Kuan 2009: 172 explains that the *Ekottarika-āgama* "is profoundly influenced by the Mahāyāna, but it nevertheless contains very old sources, some of which may be more original than their parallels in other recensions"; cf. also Bareau 1987: 36f. For a few case studies where *Ekottarika-āgama* discourse have preserved presentations that seem to be earlier than their Pāli discourse parallels cf. Anālayo 2006, Anālayo 2009a, Anālayo 2010b, Anālayo 2011b and Anālayo 2011c.

## A Reference to the Hīnayāna

The passage that employs the term Hīnayāna reads as follows:

“Śāriputra, you should know that there are four unthinkable things of the Tathāgata that the Hīnayānistis are unable to understand. What are the four? The world element is unthinkable, living beings are unthinkable, *nāgas* are unthinkable, and the domain of the field of a Buddha is unthinkable. Thus, Śāriputra, there are four unthinkables.”<sup>62</sup>

That the domain of a Buddha and his knowledge are beyond being comprehended by others is a recurrent theme in Buddhist texts. According to the *Sampasādanīya-sutta* and its *Dirgha-āgama* and *Samyukta-āgama* parallels, Śāriputra had to admit that the virtue, wisdom and liberation of past, present and future Buddhas were beyond his ken.<sup>63</sup> As the *Cūlahatthipadopama-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel clarify, to know the Buddha’s wisdom one would have to be his equal.<sup>64</sup>

The same theme continues in Mahāyāna works such as, for example, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, according to which the Buddha informed Śāriputra that the knowledge of a Buddha is profound, difficult to understand, and difficult to comprehend.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Éá 26.9 at T II 640a4: 舍利弗當知，如來有四不可思議事，非小乘所能知，雲何爲四？世界不可思議 (adopting a variant that adds 界 after 世)，衆生不可思議，龍不可思議，佛土境界不可思議，是謂，舍利弗，有四不可思議。

<sup>63</sup> DN 28 at DN III 99,15, DĀ 18 at T I 76c6 and SĀ 498 at T II 130c15.

<sup>64</sup> MN 27 at MN I 175,23 and MĀ 146 at T I 656b1.

<sup>65</sup> Kern and Nanjio 1884/1992: 29,1: *atha khalu bhagavān ... āyusmantam śāriputramāmantrayate sma: gambhīram śāriputra durdr̥ṣaṃ duranubodham buddhajñānam.*

This indication is followed by clarifying that such knowledge is beyond the ken of arahants as well as of bodhisattvas.<sup>66</sup> The *Suvarṇabhāsottama-sūtra* proclaims that the domain of a Buddha is unthinkable,<sup>67</sup> and Tathāgatas are without equal, similar to the reasoning proposed in the *Cūlahatthipadopama-sutta* and its parallel. The *Suvarṇabhāsottama-sūtra* then declares that all beings are indeed unable to know the infinite qualities of a Buddha.<sup>68</sup> Again, according to the *Sukhāvātīvyūha* only a Buddha can understand the qualities of a Buddha, unlike devas, *nāgas*, *asuras*, *yakṣas*, disciples or even Pratyekabuddhas.<sup>69</sup>

Rawlinson (1977: 8f) distinguishes between the idea in these passages that all beings are unable to know the qualities or domain of a Buddha and what he identifies as a later development, where the possibility of such knowledge is attributed to bodhisattvas. An example noted by him is the *Rāṣṭrapālāpariprcchā*, which reports

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<sup>66</sup> Stanza 2.8 in Kern and Nanjio 1884/1992: 31,7: *ye cāpi te lokavidusya śrāvakāḥ kṛtādhikārāḥ sugatānuvarṇitāḥ, kṣīṇāsṛavā antimadehadhārīṇo na teṣa viṣayo 'sti jināna jñāne*, which thus indicates that the knowledge of the Victor is beyond the domain of the disciples of the Knower of the World, who have done their duty and are praised by the Well-gone One, who have eradicated the influxes and bear their last body. Stanza 2.17 in Kern and Nanjio 1884/1992: 32,11: *avivartikā ye bhavi bodhisattvā analpakā yathariva gaṅgavālikāḥ, ananyacittāśca vicintayeyusteṣāṃ pi cāsmiṇ viṣayo na vidyate*, which in continuous reference to this knowledge proclaims that it does not fall into the domain of irreversible bodhisattvas as many as the sand in the Ganges who might [try to] examine it with a mind free from distraction.

<sup>67</sup> Stanza 2.23, Nobel 1937: 17,13: *acintyaṃ buddhaviṣayam asamāś ca tathāgatāḥ*.

<sup>68</sup> Stanza 3.68, Nobel 1937: 36,9: *buddhasya guṇā hy anantā, na śakya jñātum khalu sarvasattvaiḥ*.

<sup>69</sup> Fujita 2011: 77,1: *buddho hi buddhasya guṇā prajānate na devanāgāsurayakṣaśrāvakāḥ pratyekabuddhāna pi ko gatīpatho*.

that a particular bodhisattva was indeed able to know the domain and the knowledge of the Buddha.<sup>70</sup>

The *Ekottarika-āgama* passage quoted above reflects a development in this direction, since the specification that Hīnayānists are unable to understand qualities related to the Tathāgata would imply that those who are not Hīnayānists stand a chance of understanding them. That is, this reference to the Hīnayāna appears to belong to a stage of development that is not yet attested in the passages mentioned above from the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, the *Suvarṇabhāsottama-sūtra* and the *Sukhāvativyūha*. This is a significant indication that the *Ekottarika-āgama* passage testifies to a developed stage of doctrinal evolution of Mahāyāna thought. In fact, already the very occurrence of the term Hīnayāna on its own is a clear sign of lateness.<sup>71</sup>

Elsewhere in the same section of Fours in the *Ekottarika-āgama*, in which the above passage is found, another discourse takes up the four unthinkableables in nearly the same terms.<sup>72</sup> After indicating that the Buddha was staying at Jeta's Grove, where he addressed the monks, the relevant passage runs as follows:

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<sup>70</sup> Finot 1901: 4,9: *atha khalu prāmodyarājo bodhisattvo mahāsattvo ... acintyaṃ buddhagocaramanuvicārayamānaḥ, sarvadharmadhātuprasṛtaṃ tathāgatajñānamanucintayamānaḥ, asamasamaṃ buddhaviṣayaṃ sampaśyamānaḥ*, according to which the bodhisattva Prāmodyarāja, the great being was considering the inconceivable range of the Buddha, reflecting on the knowledge of the Tathāgata which spreads over the entire Dharma element, and inspecting the unequalled domain of the Buddha.

<sup>71</sup> Harrison 1987: 80 notes that in early Chinese translations of Mahāyāna discourses the term *hīnayāna* occurs only rarely.

<sup>72</sup> EĀ 29.6 at T II 657a19: 有四事終不可思議 (adopting the variant 議 instead of 惟). 云何爲四? 衆生不可思議, 世界不可思議, 龍國不可思議, 佛國境界不可思議, 所以然者? 不由此處得至滅盡涅槃.

“There are four things that are after all unthinkable. What are the four? Living beings are unthinkable, the world element is unthinkable, the field of nāgas is unthinkable, and the sphere of the field of a Buddha is unthinkable. The reason is that this is of no use for progress to the complete cessation of Nirvāṇa.”

The discourse then continues by providing a more detailed exposition of the four unthinkables.<sup>73</sup> According to a parallel to this discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, thinking about the four unthinkables will even lead to madness:<sup>74</sup>

“Monks, there are these four unthinkables, which one should not think about; thinking about them one will partake of madness or frustration. What are the four?”

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<sup>73</sup> In relation to the fourth unthinkable, EĀ 29.6 at T II 657b20 brings up the topic of the life span of a Tathāgata: 如來壽爲短耶? 此亦不可思議. This is the topic that immediately precedes the reference to the Hīnayāna in EĀ 26.9 at T II 640a3: 然復衆生不能知如來壽命長短. The exposition on the four unthinkables recurs also in the 分別功德論, which shows awareness of the formulation in EĀ 26.9, as in relation to the fourth unthinkable T 1507 at T XXV 31b14 mentions the inability in this respect of the two *yānas*, 二乘所不能思議. As already pointed out by Mori 1970: 456, after the completed translation of the *Ekottarika-āgama*, “the commentary was done later consulting the former’s translation already made for their mutual concord”. Nattier 2012: 15 comments that T 1507 “originally thought to be a translation of a commentary on an Ekottarikāgama ... appears, at this point, to be a commentary on T125 itself”; cf. also Anālayo 2013: 36 note 108 and 40 note 114 for instances corroborating that T 1507, in the form it is now extant, reflects a version of T 125 that already had incorporated passages that appear to be later additions.

<sup>74</sup> AN 4.77 at AN II 80,13: *cattār’imāni, bhikkhave, acinteyyāni, na cintetabbāni; yāni* (following B<sup>e</sup>, C<sup>e</sup> and S<sup>e</sup> against E<sup>e</sup>: *yānici*) *cintento ummādassa vighātassa bhāgī assa. katamāni cattārī? buddhānaṃ, bhikkhave, buddhavisayo acinteyyo, na cintetabbo; yaṃ cintento ummādassa vighātassa bhāgī assa. jhāyissa, bhikkhave, jhānavisayo acinteyyo, na cintetabbo; yaṃ cintento ummādassa vighātassa bhāgī assa. kammaṇipāko, bhikkhave, acinteyyo, na cintetabbo; yaṃ cintento ummādassa vighātassa bhāgī assa. lokacintā, bhikkhave, acinteyyā, na cintetabbā; yaṃ cintento ummādassa vighātassa bhāgī assa. imāni kho, bhikkhave, cattārī acinteyyāni, na cintetabbāni; yāni cintento ummādassa vighātassa bhāgī assā ‘ti.*

“Monks, the Buddha-domain of Buddhas is unthinkable, which one should not think about; thinking about it one will partake of madness or frustration. Monks, the domain of absorption of one who is meditating is unthinkable, which one should not think about; thinking about it one will partake of madness or frustration. Monks, the result of karma is unthinkable, which one should not think about; thinking about it one will partake of madness or frustration. Monks, thinkings about the world are unthinkable, which one should not think about; thinking about them one will partake of madness or frustration.

“Monks, these are the four unthinkables, which one should not think about; thinking about them one will partake of madness or frustration.”

Another parallel is found in Śamathadeva’s compendium of discourse quotations from the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, preserved in Tibetan translation:<sup>75</sup>

“As for these four unthinkable topics, thinking about them will lead to madness, confusion and an agitated mind. What are the four? Thinking about the self, thinking about the world, the ripening of the deeds of beings, and the Buddha-field of Buddhas.”

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<sup>75</sup> D 4094 ju 100a4 or Q 5595 tu 114b2: *bzhi po 'di ni bsam gyis mi khyab pa'i gnas te, bsam par byed na smyo bar 'gyur zhing mgo rmongs pa dang sems g.yengs ba thob par 'gyur ro. bzhi gang zhe na? bdag bsams pa dang, 'jig rten bsam pa dang, sems can gyi las kyi rnam par smin pa dang, sangs rgyas rnam kyi sangs rgyas kyi yul lo.* The passage provides the canonical context for the following quote in *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 2.62, Pradhan 99,10: *acintyo hi buddhānāṃ buddhaviṣaya*; cf. also Pāsādika 1989: 46 (§138).



In addition to the three parallels translated above, a discourse in the *Samyukta-āgama* takes up one of the four unthinkableables mentioned in the other versions. This discourse indicates that thinking about the world will not result in wisdom and awakening, and does not accord with Nirvāṇa.<sup>76</sup>

Judging from these discourses the point of setting out the four unthinkableables was to demarcate topics not fit for reflection, as thinking about them would not lead to Nirvāṇa or could even result in madness.<sup>77</sup> With the *Ekottarika-āgama* passage on the Hīnayāna, however, the four unthinkableables become something worthy of reflection for those who are not adherents of the Hīnayāna.

According to a standard pattern typical for orally transmitted discourses and found repeatedly in the Pāli discourses and their *Āgama* parallels, an introductory statement of the type “there are so and so many of such and such a quality” (e.g., “there are four unthinkableables”) will be followed by a detailed explanation, after which the introductory statement will be repeated in a similarly worded

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<sup>76</sup> SĀ 407 at T II 109a3 indicates that thinking about the world does not [result] in enriching one’s purposes, does not [result] in enriching the Dharma, does not [result] in enriching the holy life, does not [result] in wisdom, does not [result] in awakening and does not concord with Nirvāṇa, 世間思惟非義饒益，非法饒益，非梵行饒益，非智，非覺，不順涅槃。

<sup>77</sup> The notion of a particular topic leading to going mad and becoming mentally disturbed acquires a somewhat different dimension in a passage in the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā*, Harrison and Watanabe 2006: 132, where such effects are associated with the attempt to describe the quantity of merit to be acquired. Harrison 2006: 152 note 79 comments that “the likely point here ... seems to be that it is those beings who are to take up the Vaj in the last days who would become unhinged by their excitement at the prospect of their future gains if they were to be spelled out in full.” In other words, while in the discourse passages quoted above the notion of going mad serves a warning, in the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā* passage it functions as an encouragement.

concluding statement of the type “these are the so and so many of such and such a quality” (e.g., “these are the four unthinkableables”).<sup>78</sup> In the passage under discussion, however, the concluding statement does not repeat the full introductory statement. Placing the two side by side, the introductory and concluding statements read:

“Śāriputra, you should know that there are four unthinkable matters of the Tathāgata that the Hīnayānists are unable to understand.”

“Thus, Śāriputra, there are four unthinkableables.”

The conclusion does not relate the four unthinkableables to the Tathāgata, nor does it mention the Hīnayāna. This makes it probable that the Hīnayāna remark was added in a written medium. Had such an addition happened during the oral transmission of the *Ekottarika-āgama*, prior to its translation, it can safely be assumed that both statements would have been affected. Since during oral transmission the reciter(s) would naturally tend to repeat the full statement just recited earlier, the conclusion would have read like this: “Śāriputra, these are the four unthinkable matters of the Tathāgata that the Hīnayānists are unable to understand.”

The impression that an addition took place in the written Chinese medium could be further supported with the help of the part of the discourse that immediately follows, where a recapitulation of the Buddha’s exposition by Śāriputra reads as follows: “Indeed, Blessed One, there are four unthinkableables”, 如是，世尊，有四不可思議。<sup>79</sup> In comparison, the Buddha’s original statement that “there are four unthinkable matters of the Tathāgata that the Hīnayānists

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<sup>78</sup> This pattern is so much standard that variations can be a sign of transmission errors; for a case study cf. Anālayo 2012b: 134-137.

<sup>79</sup> EĀ 26.9 at T II 640a8.

are unable to understand” reads as follows: 如來有四不可思議事，非小乘所能知。<sup>80</sup> Removing the punctuation from the Chinese and thus leaving the bare text in the way it would have been in the original, brings to light the following parallelism:

世尊有四不可思議  
如來有四不可思議

Keeping in mind that a copyist or reviser can be expected to read an entire paragraph before copying it character by character, it seems to me possible that the formulation 世尊有四不可思議 led to the addition of 如來 to 有四不可思議. This would then have been followed by adding 事非小乘所能知 to arrive at the formulation 如來有四不可思議事，非小乘所能知.

While it is of course impossible to be sure what really happened, this hypothesis would explain the coming into being of the puzzling statement that relates the four unthinkables to the Tathāgata, even though only one of these can truly be considered a quality of the Tathāgata. While the four unthinkables listed in the *Ekottarika-āgama* – the world element, living beings, *nāgas* and the domain of a Buddha – make sense as a list of topics unfit for reflection, only the last of these four could be reckoned an unthinkable matter of the Tathāgata. The other three are not qualities of the Tathāgata. This gives the impression that the original passage would have just listed the four unthinkables, to which the idea that these are in some way related to the Tathāgata and thus something the Hīnayānists are unable to understand was added subsequently.

If my hypothesis about the coming into being of this formulation should be correct, then such an expansion of the text would have taken place in the Chinese medium, as the juxtaposition of the two passages above shows. In contrast, it would be rather improbable

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<sup>80</sup> EĀ 26.9 at T II 640a4.

for the same to happen in an Indic original, where the fact that the Buddha is addressed in the vocative would not naturally give rise to the idea to relate the term *tathāgata* (如來) directly to the four unthinkableables.

In sum, it seems to me that the above indications make it fairly probable that the reference to the Hīnayāna is an addition to the discourse that took place in China. This suggestion is in fact nothing new. In what to my knowledge is the first discussion of this particular passage in Western scholarship, such a conclusion has already been suggested by Deeg, who commented that the degrading of the Hīnayāna in the present passage in the *Ekottarika-āgama* is probably a Chinese interpolation.<sup>81</sup>

### The Introduction to the *Ekottarika-āgama*

The introduction to the *Ekottarika-āgama* already provides a canonical placing for Mahāyāna texts on their own in the *Kṣudraka* collection.<sup>82</sup> Thus there would be little need to continue adding Mahāyāna ideas to the *Ekottarika-āgama* just in order to give them canonical status. Now a theme quite prominent in the introduction is the need to ensure the transmission of the *Ekottarika-āgama*. The recurrent emphasis on the great value of the *Ekottarika-āgama* and on the importance of it being remembered and recited employs strategies similar to other Mahāyāna texts to ensure their own transmission.

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<sup>81</sup> Deeg 2006: 112: “daher haben wir es hier wohl mit einer chinesischen Interpolation zu tun”.

<sup>82</sup> EĀ 1 at T II 550c10; which brings to mind the conception of a *bodhisattvapiṭaka*, on which cf. Pagel 1995.

When viewed from the perspective of fourth and fifth century China, the translation efforts during these times clearly document that Mahāyāna texts were seen as highly interesting and worthy of any effort at translation and study. Considered against this background, the addenda of Mahāyāna ideas to the *Ekottarika-āgama* would make sense as an attempt to enhance the value of the *Ekottarika-āgama* in the contemporary Chinese setting, making it more probable that this collection would be considered worthwhile the effort of being copied and passed on.<sup>83</sup>

As already pointed out by Nattier (2012: 9), the Mahāyāna elements in the *Ekottarika-āgama* “are not evenly distributed throughout the āgama ... they are especially prominent in the introductory portion of the text.” This pattern can be exemplified by a digital search for occurrences of key terminology in the collection. The table below lists occurrences of the term bodhisattva, 菩薩 (except for instances where this refers to the pre-awakening period of a specific Buddha), and references to the three vehicles, 三乘, including also references to the Mahāyāna or the Hīnayāna, 大乘 or 小乘.<sup>84</sup> The references are placed in the right side column, while the left side column indicates the fascicle in which they are found (fascicles without any occurrence are not included). In each case, I give only the first reference for a particular column (a, b, or c) of

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<sup>83</sup> The same would hold in general for places where Buddhism had recently arrived and where the Mahāyāna was predominant. Since according to Dao’an’s introduction to the *Ekottarika-āgama*, T II 549a10 (cf. also T 2059 at T L 328b19), the reciter of the *Ekottarika-āgama*, Dharmanandin, came from Central Asia, a scenario of this type could also have had an impact on the collection previous to its arrival in China; on the predominance of Mahāyāna in Southern Central Asia cf. Martini 2013

<sup>84</sup> Regarding references to the Mahāyāna, it is noteworthy that the same term, 大乘, also occurs once in the *Dirgha-āgama* by the same translator Zhú Fóniàn (竺佛念), DĀ 2 at T I 12c28, a version of the *Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra*, where it forms part of a stanza that has no counterpart in the parallel versions; cf. Waldschmidt 1944: 65.

each term, leaving out repetitions of the same term within the same column in order to provide a survey that is not too influenced by repetitive occurrences within the same paragraph.

Table: Survey of References to the Bodhisattva Ideal and the *Yāna* Conception in T 125

1	549c09: 菩薩, 550a12: 大乘, 550a12: 菩薩, 550b04: 大乘, 550b29: 三乘, 550c10: 大乘, 550c24: 菩薩
2	554c27: 三乘
4	565a20: 菩薩, 565c18: 菩薩
5	570b16: 三乘
10	595b13: 大乘
11	599a07: 菩薩, 600b12: 菩薩, 601a04: 菩薩
15	622c14: 菩薩
16	625c15: 三乘
18	639c25: 三乘, 640a04: 小乘
19	645b01: 菩薩
24	674a07: 三乘
27	699a07: 菩薩
28	703b19: 菩薩
32	723a18: 菩薩, 723b25: 菩薩
36	749c16: 菩薩
38	757a13: 三乘
41	773a23: 三乘
44	787c06: 菩薩, 788c26: 三乘
45	792b12: 三乘, 792c09: 三乘, 792c17: 菩薩
51	826b25: 菩薩

In the above table the highest frequency of occurrences of the selected terms are located in the introduction found in the first fascicle of the *Ekottarika-āgama*. While the distribution of Mahāyāna ideas over the *Ekottarika-āgama* obviously needs more detailed research and the above is just meant to give a first impression, the occurrence of key terms related to the bodhisattva path and the *yāna* conception is particularly prominent in the introductory section. A prominence of Mahāyāna notions in the introduction would make sense as part of an attempt to enhance the value of the collection and make sure it will be passed on, as such an attempt would naturally focus on the first part to be encountered by the reader who is about to form an opinion of the value and interest of the collection.<sup>85</sup>

Such a scenario would concord with my finding published in another paper that a whole discourse appears to have been added to the *Ekottarika-āgama* in China.<sup>86</sup> In view of this precedent, it seems possible that some of the more evolved Mahāyāna ideas among the passages surveyed in this paper also made their way into the *Ekottarika-āgama* collection only in China.

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<sup>85</sup> While obviously more research on this introduction is required before being able to reach some degree of certainty about its nature, for the time being a possible scenario would be that this text has as its nucleus a commentarial exposition similar to what is found at the outset of the commentary on the *Dīgha-nikāya*, Sv I 2,10. This commentarial gloss provides some background to the canonical collection on which it comments with the help of an account of the first *saṅgīti*, a topic also taken up in the introduction to the *Ekottarika-āgama*. Dharmanandin, being a reciter of the *Ekottarika-āgama* collection, may well have memorized such basic information, in which case it would have been natural to include this as an introduction at the time of translation. This introduction may then have been ‘improved’ upon during a later revision by way of integrating Mahāyāna material. Legittimo 2012: 361 comments that the “‘first introductory chapter’ is highly particular ... as if it had been added to the collection to make it attractive and / or to promote it.”

<sup>86</sup> Anālayo 2013.

## Conclusion

A perusal of the *Ekottarika-āgama* brings to light several passages that show the influence of Mahāyāna notions, in the sense of employing *yāna* terminology, reflecting the existence of the developed bodhisattva ideal as a viable path in general, referring to Maitreya as a bodhisattva and testifying to the notion that more than one Buddha can live at the same time, albeit in different Buddha fields. Closer inspection of one passage that employs the term Hīnayāna makes it fairly probable that this passage became part of the *Ekottarika-āgama* only in China.

## Abbreviations

AN	<i>Aṅguttara-nikāya</i>
C <sup>e</sup>	Ceylonese ed.
D	Derge edition
DĀ	<i>Dirgha-āgama</i> (T 1)
Dhs	<i>Dhammasaṅgaṇī</i>
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
EĀ	<i>Ekottarika-āgama</i> (T 125)
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i> (T 26)
Mhv	<i>Mahāvamsa</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
Paṭis	<i>Paṭisambhidāmagga</i>
Pp	<i>Puggala-paññatti</i>
Q	Peking edition
SĀ	<i>Saṃyukta-āgama</i> (T 99)
SĀ <sup>2</sup>	<i>partial Saṃyukta-āgama</i> (T 100)
SN	<i>Saṃyutta-nikāya</i>
Sp	<i>Samantapāsādikā</i>
Sv	<i>Sumaṅgalavilāsini</i>
T	Taishō edition (CBETA)
Th	<i>Theragāthā</i>
Ud	<i>Udāna</i>
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>



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