Abhidharmakosa Study Materials

Introductory

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Abhidharma Historical Overview

The teachings given by Shakyamuni Buddha appear to have still been in a process of collection and elaboration when different sects and schools started to form. In the midst of this process, Abhidharma teachings started to develop. Once the discourse collections were established, Abhidharma became the primary medium through which the teachings of Buddhism developed for hundreds of years. The main schools of Mahayana Buddhism in India were both a reaction to (Madhyamaka), and a continued development of (Yogacara), Abhidharma teachings (particularly the Abhidharma teachings of the Sarvastivada and other schools of Buddhism in North India).

**Forces driving the Abhidharma approach:**
- developing an authoritative formulation of teachings (to prevent schism and dispute)
- formulating a self-consistent interpretation (from the conflicting & variant teachings ammassed in the Sutras)
- consolidating the unwieldy Sutra & Abhidharma literature into manageable summaries (easier to learn, transmit, teach)
- working out unresolved, unanswered & unanticipated questions and problems (filling the doctrinal void)
- developing a comprehensive approach to doctrine (towards a unified, coherent, all-encompassing system)
- incorporating new insights & discoveries spinning off from the Abhidharma approach itself and from meditation
- encyclopedic tendency to gather all perspectives, approaches, controversies, etc.
- staying current with Indian religious developments (increasing scholasticism tested in public debate)
- resolving disputes as variant resolutions to the above forces led to divergent positions within Buddhism
- and at a micro-level: collecting, classifying, elucidating, elaborating, abstracting, unifying, explaining, etc.

**Origins of the Abhidharma approach:** the Samyutta Nikaya (Pali)/Samyukta Agama (Sanskrit) in particular organizes the discourses in terms of doctrinal categories. Many of the categories developed in this collection would continue as fundamental organizing principles in Abhidharma explications. Also, discourses such as the Samgiti Sutta (DN 33) and the Dasuttara Sutta (DN 34), are seen as proto-Abhidharma in their attempts at a comprehensive and organized collection of all the significant teachings of the Buddha.

**Meaning of Abhidharma:** Abhi has two basic meanings: firstly, “higher”, “supreme”, “excellent” (this meaning is favored in the Theravadin tradition), and secondly, “facing”, “envisaging”, “regarding” (this meaning is favored in the North Indian tradition including the Sarvastivada). Dharma in this context usually refers to the teachings or doctrine, but can also refer to truth, law, precept, nirvana, and in terms of “dharma theory”, a truly real event or force. Abhidharma appears infrequently in the discourses. In one instance, it appears to refer to a one-on-one conversation or debate on a point of doctrine. The early appearances of the term Abhidharma are sometimes paired with Abhinivaya. See Abhidharmakosa Chapter 1 karika 2 for Vasubandhu’s definition of Abhidharma.

**Three broad phases in the development of Abhidharma literature:** covers a wide range of development

I. Mainly involves sutra commentary and arrangement of sutra quotations according to a set of categories (texts including Sarvastivada Sangiti-Paryaya & Dharma-Skandha & Theravada Vibhanga & Puggala-Pannatti). The collection of teachings enumerated in the Samgiti Sutta were somewhat indiscriminate collections of teaching lists arranged numerically – that is, a wide variety of teachings were combined and organized superficially based on the number of terms in each list. This was an important aid to memorization but not conducive to substantive explication of doctrine.

II. A more abstract approach develops which incorporates new categories (texts here include the remaining Sarvastivada and Theravada canonical texts). Lists of terms drawn from the sutras are formed and combined with each other through various modes of analysis. There were two basic kinds of lists: first a list of dharmas classifying phenomena (skandhas, ayatanas, dhatus, etc), and second, a list of attributes usually formulated in dyads and triads and sometimes quads (samskrtas/asamskrtas, kusala/akusala/ayavakta, etc). Also, especially in the Sarvastivada Vijnanakaya and the Theravada Kathavatthu, there is extensive presentation of divergent views. Polemic stances impel the development of new interpretive approaches and techniques of refutation. These texts were compiled ~4th – 1st c. B.C.E.

III. Development of commentaries on canonical Abhidharma texts and the development of summary digest or exegetical manuals (sometimes in reaction to the excesses of the commentaries). The approach becomes increasingly systematic aiming at a comprehensive and coherent formulation encapsulating the entire teaching. In the Theravada, this includes the Athasalini (commentary on the Dhama-Sangani), Visudhdhimagga and the Abhidhammattha-Sangaha. In the Sarvastivada, this includes the Maha-Vibhasa (a massive compilation of teachings structured as a commentary on the Jnana-Prasthanas), Abhidharma-Pratyadaya texts, Abhidharmakosa-sabhasyas, and commentaries on the Kosa. In this stage, the sutra teachings are viewed as needing definitive interpretation, which only the Abhidharma texts can provide.

Of the early schools (there were over 20), only the Abhidharma literatures of the Theravadins and the Sarvastivadins have been preserved. Only the Theravadins preserved a complete discourse literature. Isolated Agamas of multiple schools survive in Chinese translation and some Sanskrit fragments. The two Abhidharma traditions appear to have some common roots but developed quite differently with geographic separation. There is one further major Abhidharma text that has been preserved in Chinese translation which is neither Theravada nor Sarvastivada: the Sariputtarabhidharma (believed by some scholars to be Dharmagupta). The Sarvastivada usually attribute authors to their canonical Abhidharma texts.
South India & Sri Lanka – Theravada
In Pali.
Three-part Canon: Nikaya, Abhidhamma, Vinaya
Discourses consist of 5 Nikaya (collections)

Phases I & II:
Abhidhamma-pitaka: Seven texts:
1. Dhamma-Sangani *– “Enumeration of Factors”
2. Vibhanga *– “Analysis”
3. Dhutakatha *– “Discussion of Elements”
4. Puggala-Pannatti *– “Designation of Persons”
5. Katha-Vatthu *– “Points of Discussion” (compiled by Moggaliputta Tissa) (3rd-2nd c. BCE)
6. Yamaka – “Pairs”
7. Patthana – “Foundational Conditions”
(of these, 1. Dhamma-Sangani & 7. Patthana are usually regarded as the most important)
(Theravada holds that Shakyamuni taught the Abhidharma to his mother Queen Maya and other Devas in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three and then repeated these teachings to Shariputra.)

Note: the Abhidharma texts above were translated by Xuangzang (and his team) except for: T1538: Fa-hu & Wei-chung (incomplete, the Tibetan canon also contains a partial translation, complete text has not been found); T1541: Gunabadra & Bodhiyasas; T1543: Sanghadeva, Chu Fo-nien & Dharmapriya

To some extent, the Abhidharma texts and the Theravada both contain seven texts but they are quite different. Lines connect texts from the two collections that appear to trace back to a common root text/material. Frauwallner also notes a potential connection between chapter 6 of the Prakaranapada and chapters 3 & 4 of the Dhamma-Sangani.

Phase III Theravada post-canonical:
Athisalini *– “The Expositor”
(very important commentary on the Dhamma-Sangani – attributed spuriously to Buddhaghosa)
Visuddhimagga *– “The Path of Freedom” by Upatissa
Visuddhimagga * – “The Path of Purification” by Buddhaghosa (5th c.)
Abhidhammattha-Sangaha *– “Compendium of Abhidhamma” by Anuruddha (10th-11th c.)
Abhidharmakosa itself of course) I found to be Dhammajoti’s Sarvastivada Abhidharma. Other very helpful publications include: Sarvastivada Buddhist Scholasticism by Willemen, Dessein & Cox, Studies in Abhidharmakosa Literature and the Origins of Buddhist Philosophical Systems by Frauwallner, The Central Conception of Buddhism and the Meaning of the Word Dharma by Stcherbatsky and “From Category To Ontology: The Changing Role Of Dharma In Sarvastivada Abhidharma” by Cox.]

Sarvastivada Canonical Abhidharma Texts

Sarvastivada Post-canonical Abhidharma Texts

Contemporary Sarvastivada and General Abhidharma Studies
“A Map of Consciousness, the 75 Dharmas of the Sarvastivadins,” S. Bevan, Gesar, Fall, 1977

A History of Indian Buddhism, Akira Hirakawa (Paul Groner trans), 1990.
Buddhist Thought in India, Edward Conze,1962.
Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies, ed Karl Potter, Volumes VII, VIII & IX (covering Buddhist Philosophy to 600 CE). (Includes many entries on Abhidharma texts (including the Kosa & related texts) and relevant introductory essays.)
Nagarjuna’s “Seventy Stanzas”, David Komito, Snow Lion Publications, 1987 (overview of Buddhist psychology in intro).
Sarvastivada Abhidharma, by Bhikkhu KL Dhammajoti, 2009. (An excellent and ground-breaking treatment of Sarvastivada Abhidharma doctrine. I found this the most helpful in studying Abhidharmakosa (especially Ch II, IV, V, VI & VII.). Not currently available from Amazon, etc., ordering information can be found here: http://ibc.ac.th/en/dhammajoti/sarvastivada
Sarvastivada Buddhist Scholasticism by Charles Willemen, Bart Dessein & Collett Cox, 1998. (Good scholarly overview of Sarvastivada history, doctrine and texts.)
Studies in Abhidharma Literature and the Origins of Buddhist Philosophical Systems by Erich Frauwallner, 1995. (A very good overview of Abhidharma literature in general, with some illuminating analysis of Sarvastivada teachings (including Abhidharmakosa) but a bit disparaging of Theravada Abhidharma texts.)
Systems of Buddhist Thought, S. Yamakami, University of Calcutta, 1912. Online at: http://www.archive.org/details/buddhisticthought00yanguoft
The development of prajna in Buddhism from early Buddhism to the Prajnaparamita system: With special reference to the Sarvastivada tradition by Qing, Fa Ph.D., University of Calgary (Canada), 2001.
The Psychological Attitude of Early Buddhist Philosophy, Lama Govinda, 1937.
Abhidharmakosa Editions & Translations

Abhidharmakosa (阿毘達磨倶舍論) Sanskrit edition ed. Pradhan, 1967. (The Sanskrit was discovered ~1933 in Tibet. Just the karika in roman and devanagari script):


Complete text in Sanskrit & 2 Chinese translations (Paramartha & Xuanzang): http://www.mldc.cn/sanskritweb/etext.htm

(These pages appeared a bit mangled in Firefox, but looked fine in Chrome & Internet Explorer, 4/23/10)


The Abhidharmakosabhasya, Acarya Vasubandhu's Autocommentary to His Treasury of Higher Learning, Translated from the Sanskrit by Artemus B Engle. Institute for Advanced Studies of World Religions [Unpublished microfilm]. (I have seen references to this but have not been able to access it.)

Abhidharmakosa Karika Study, compiled by Korin, 2010. (Includes the Sanskrit, Chinese and English translations of the karika with excerpts and summaries of the Bhasya content. Prepared as a study resource and as a companion to these Study Materials for those who do not have access to a published edition of the Abhidharmakosa.)

Abhidharmakosa Chapter I:

Vasubandhu On “Aggregates, Spheres, And Components”: Being Chapter One Of The “Abhidharmakosa” by Hall, Bruce Cameron Ph.D., Harvard University, 1983. (Good translation of Ch I from the Sanskrit with some helpful footnotes) (the Karika Study includes Hall’s translation of the Karika from Ch I.)

“Abhidharmakosakarika,“ by N. Aiyaswami Sastri, Indian Historical Quarterly, IHQ 29 (1953). 29.2, pp. 111-120 and 29.3, pp. 242-259 (A translation of just the karika (included in the Karika Study) with notes from Yasomitra’s commentary.)

“Allahdhiarmakosha” at http://abhidharmakosa.blogspot.com/ by Namdrol Malcolm Smith. (Translation from the Tibetan, karika 1-29, with audio commentary podcasts, which may not be online anymore)

Abhidharmakosa Chapters I & II:

The Abhidharmakosa of Vasubandhu trans Subhadra Jha, 1983. (Translation of both the Sanskrit and Poussin’s French of just chapters I & II. Valuable piece of scholarship. The translation from the Sanskrit of the karika of Ch II is included in the Karika Study)

[Chapters I & II include an overview of the dharmas. Also see:]

Gateway to Knowledge by Mipham Rinpoche Vol I, trans Erik Pema Kunsang,1997

Meditation on Emptiness, Jeffrey Hopkins, 1983. (pp. 213-274 for a variant exposition of the dharmas)

Abhidharmakosa Chapter Ch II:

Disputed Dharmas: Early Buddhist Theories of Existence, by Collett Cox, 1995.(Includes a study and translation of Sanghabhadra’s assault (from the Nyayanusara) on Vasubandhu’s refutations of the Viprayukta-samskaras in Ch II)

There are a number of studies of the Yogacara exposition of the mental states (51 caitya). See below: Abhidharmasamuccaya, Shastra on the Door to Understanding the Hundred Dharmas, Buddhist Psychology, Meditation on Emptiness, Mind in Buddhist Psychology, and The Mind and its Functions. Also see Theravada studies of the mental states (cetasika): Abhidhammattha-Sangaha, Abhidhama Studies, Cetasika, and Unlimiting Mind.

Abhidharmakosa Chapter Ch III:


Formal Study Course: 11 classes with extensive supplemental written materials (includes translation of isolated karika (which are included in the Karika Study)): http://www.acidharma.org/aci/online/course8.html


Overview of Theravada cosmology: http://www.accessstoinsight.org/ptf/dhamma/sagga/loka.html
Abhidharmakosa Chapter IV:
Karman in Indian philosophy and Vasubandhu's Exposition by Sako, Toshio Ph.D., Columbia University, 1996. (Includes a translation of the first section of chapter IV (K1-12) from Sanskrit with a subcommentary by Sthiramati. The translation of the karika is included in the Karika Study.)

Excerpts from Illumination of the Path to Freedom, being an Explanation of the Holy Treasure House of Higher Knowledge
First Dalai Lama, Gyalwa Gendun Drup: http://aciprelease.org/r6web/webdata/selected_texts_english/S05525_part_E.pdf
Formal Study Course: 11 classes with supplemental written materials (includes translation of isolated karika (which are included in the Karika Study)): http://www.acidharma.org/aci/online/course5.html

Karma-siddhi-prakarana is another (probably later) exposition of karma by Vasubandhu. See translations below: Karmasiddhi Prakarana: Lamotte/Pruden, & Seven Works of Vasubandhu: Anacker.
Vasubandhu On The "Avijnapti-Rupa": A Study In Fifth-Century Abhidharma Buddhism By Dowling, Thomas Lee Ph.D., Columbia University, 1976. (Includes translation of karika & bhasya of K1-22 from Sanskrit (included in the Karika Study))

Abhidharmakosa Chapter VI: Of interest (no direct commentary):

Abhidharmakosa Chapter VIII: Of interest (no direct commentary):
Practicing the Jhanas: Traditional Concentration Meditation as Presented by the Venerable Pa Auk Sayadaw, Stephen Snyder, 2009
The Experience of Samadhi: An In-depth Exploration of Buddhist Meditation, Richard Shankman, 2008.

Abhidharmakosa Chapter IX:
Indian Buddhist Theories of Persons, Vasubandhu’s “Refutation of the Theory of Self”, trans & study by James Duerlinger, 2003. (Translation of Ch IX from the Sanskrit, with extensive commentary.)
Reason’s Traces: Identity and Interpretation in Indian & Tibetan Buddhist Thought, Matthew Kapstein, 2001 (Translation of Ch IX: pp.347-375, from the Sanskrit)
Soul Theory of the Buddhists, trans Th Stcherbatsky, 1920. (Translation of Ch. IX from the Tibetan)
(Also of interest: The Literature of the Personalists of Early Buddhism, Bhikkhu Thich Thien Chau, 1996.)

Abhidharmakosa – Commentary, Analysis, Etc.
"Elucidating the Path to Liberation: A study of the commentary on the "Abhidharmakosa" by the first Dalai Lama by Patt, David Ph.D., The University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1993. (Includes translation of the First Dalai Lama’s commentary on Ch I-V of the Abhidharmakosa. Good introduction also. I checked with the author and he had not undertaken the translation of the last three chapters.)


Abhidharmakosa (A Study with a New Perspective), by Lata Bapat, 1994. (Not recommended)
Analytical Study of the Abhidharmakosa, by Sukomal Chaudhury, 1976. (Comprehensive overview of the contents but does not go deep into the teachings in terms of their significance or their extensive interrelationships as a system.)
Early Buddhist Philosophy by Verdu, Alfonso, 1985
Frogs in the Custard: An Exploration of the View and Practice of Abhidharma, Steven Goodman, 2010? (forthcoming, based on the Abhidharmakosa). A set of lectures (30 hours) with the same author and title is available for purchase: http://zamamerica.stores.yahoo.net/frincuxofvi.html

Index to the Abhidharmakosabhaya, A. Hirakawa, 1973. (The introduction is very good.)
Indian Buddhism, A Survey with Bibliographical Notes, by Hajime Nakamura, 1980, pp 104-112 and see index.
Philosophy and Psychology of the Abhidharma, H. Guenther, 1957. (references to Yasomitra’s commentary on the Kosa)
Some Psychological Aspects of Early Buddhist Philosophy based on Abhidharmakosa of Vasubandhu by Aruna Haldar
Summary of the Abhidharmadipa, Padmanab Jaini (Undated photocopy in Tassajara library, 142 pages, w/ related articles).
The Central Conception of Buddhism and the Meaning of the Word Dharma, by Th Stcherbatsky, 1923 (Makes a number of excellent points in its analysis of dharmas using the Abhidharmakosa as its basic source text.)

The role of intention in perception according to Vasubandhu's “Abhidharmakosabhāsya”: The background to Buddhist soteriology by Steenburg, David John Frederick M.A., The University of Manitoba (Canada), 1987.

The Universe in a Single Atom, H.H. the Dalai Lama, 2005 (pg 55 & 80 mention the atomic theory & cosmology of AKB Ch. 3 and state that these presentations should be “modified” in light of modern scientific discoveries & understanding.)


Abhidharmakosa and Yogacara:
Abhidharma Samuccaya: The Compendium of Higher Teaching (Philosophy), by Asanga, French trans by Walpola Rahula, English trans by Sara Boin-Webb, 2001. (This Yogacara Abhidharma text is much studied in Tibetan Buddhism. Major portions of it can be viewed as a Yogacara adaptation of Sarvastivadin Abhidharma and the Abhidharmakosa.)

Buddhist Phenomenology: (Yogacara Buddhism and the Ch'eng Wei-shih lun) by Dan Lusthaus, 2002.

Shastra on the Door to Understanding the Hundred Dharmas, trans by BTTS, commentary by Hsuan Hua, 1983.

The Sautrantika theory of seeds (bijā) revisited: With special reference to the ideological continuity between Vasubandhu's theory of seeds and its Srilata/Darstantika precedents by Park, Changhwan Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley, 2007. (Along with Dhammajoti, this work refutes Kritzer's position by finding Darstantika precedents for the Sautrantika views expressed in the Abhidharmakosa.)

The Yogacara Dharma List: A Study Of The Abhidharmasamuccaya And Its Commentary, Abhidharmasamuccayabhāsya by Oliver, Curtis Forrest Ph.D., University of Toronto (Canada), 1982. (Includes some discussion as well of the 75-dharma list attributed to the Abhidharmakosa.)

Vasubandhu and the Yogacarabhumi: Yogacara Elements in the Abhidharmakosabhāsya, by Robert Kritzer, 2005 (Argues that Vasubandhu draws what he calls “Sautrantika” positions from the seminal Yogacara compilation, the Yogacarabhumi. Lays out all the positions in the Abhidharmakosa Samghabhadrā identifies as Sautrantika.)


Vasubandhu


Karmasiddhi Prakarana: The Treatise on Action by Vasubandhu, Etienne Lamotte, English translation by Leo Pruden, Asian Humanities Press, 1988. (This work can be seen as Vasubandhu’s response to some of the Vaibhasika criticisms of the seed theory. It is notable as a development of the theories put forth in the Abhidharmakosa with the addition of introducing Alaya-vijnana (quoting the Mahayana Samdhinirmocana Sutra).)

Seven Works of Vasubandhu, Stefan Anacker, Motilal Banarsidass, 1984. (Works by Vasubandhu particularly relevant to Kosa study are the Pancaskandha-Prakarana, Karmasiddhi-prakarana, Vimsatika-karika & Trimsika-karika, the first two as transitional works between the Vasubandhu the Sarvastivadin/Sautrantika and Vasubandhu the Yogacarin. The latter two full-blown Yogacara works also show Vasubandhu attending to themes or points that he also brings up in Abhidharmakosa. The introduction includes a nice piece on Vasubandhu’s life.)


In the Zen tradition, Vasubandhu is recognized as the 21st ancestor of the Zen lineage in India. See Cases 22 & 23 in the Denkoroku: The Record of Transmitting the Light trans Francis Cook, 1991 and Transmission of Light, trans Thomas Cleary, 1990. Also, see Vasubandhu’s entry in the Dentoroku: The Transmission of the Lamp: Early Masters, trans Sohaku Ogata, 1990, pp. 38-42. Vasubandhu is the 4th of the 9 doshi bows during the morning ritual of reciting the names of the Buddhas and ancestors. Dogen quotes the Abhidharmakosa and the Mahavibhāsa a few times in Shobogenzo.

Theravada Canonical Abhidharma Texts:


Theravada Post-canonical Abhidhamma Texts:


Contemporary Theravada Abhidhamma Studies:

http://www.buddhanet.net/budsas/ebuds/ebust064.htm


Abhidhamma Studies, Nyanaponika Thera, 1965 Edition. (Good essays but it’s view of Sarvastivada is a bit thin).


Guide Through the Abhidhamma Pitaka, Nyanatiloka Mahathera, 1971. (Good overview of the main teachings and analytical methodologies of the 7 canonical Theravada Abhidharma texts.)


Swallowing the River Ganges, by Matthew Flickstein, 2001 (Good epitome of the main practice points of Buddhaghosa's Visuddhimagga.)

Tree of Enlightenment by Peter Santina (Part 4), online at: http://www.ecst.csuchico.edu/~dsantina/tree/


Tibetan Abhidharma (mostly Yogacara, Dignaga and Dharmakirti, but some Madhyamaka):

Buddhist Psychology, by Tashi Tsering, 2006. (Good overview of mind and mental factors and Buddhist epistemology with some innovative constructions.)

Gateway to Knowledge by Mipham Rinpoche Vol I, trans Erik Pema Kunsang1997 (Concise exposition of Abhidharma emphasizing the Abhidharmasamuccaya presentation but making reference to the Abhidharmakosa.)

Glimpses of Abhidharma, by Chogyam Trungpa, 1975. (An informal study structured around the five skandhas.

In presentations of the four tenet systems, the first presents a kind of generic interpretation of Vaibhasika Sarvastivada. See: Cutting Through Appearances, Maps of the Profound, Appearance and Reality, Relative Truth Ultimate Truth, etc.

Map of the Mind by Norman Fischer (and more…) online at:

Meditation on Emptiness, Jeffrey Hopkins, 1983. (see especially pp. 213-274 for a variant exposition of the dharmas)


Two Views of Mind: Abhidharma and Neuroscience, by Christopher deCharms, 1997. (What Abhidharma and brain science have to offer each other from the Gelugpa presentation of the Sautrantika tenet system (Dignaga & Dharmakirti).)

Note: There are other books, many articles and sections of books, dissertations, etc. not included here. See the massive bibliography from Karl Potter, ed. Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies, Vol I at: http://faculty.washington.edu/kpotter/ckeyt/b.htm (Theravada [AB] at the top, Sarvastivada below at {SV})

Sanskrit / Pali / Chinese Resources:

Monier-Williams Sanskrit Dictionary:
http://doc.thanhsiang.org/Online_Dic/MW_Sanskrit/index1.html
http://faculty.washington.edu/prem/mw/

Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary (Franklin Edgerton):
http://doc.thanhsiang.org/Online_Dic/Buddhist_Hybrid_Sanskrit_Dictionary/index1.html

Pali-English Dictionary (T. W. Rhys Davids):

A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms by William Edward Soothill:
http://www.acmuller.net/soothill/soothill-hodous.html

Digital Dictionary of Buddhism:
http://www.buddhism-dict.net/ddb/

Cologne Digital Sanskrit Lexicon:
http://webapps.uni-koeln.de/tamil/

Buddhist Dictionary: Manual of Buddhist Terms and Doctrines (Nyanatiloka):
http://www.kusala.org/udharma2/dictionary/bdindex.html
http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/palidict.pdf

English-Vietnamese (with Sanskrit) Buddhist Dictionary:
Regarding Vasubandhu

There is not full agreement, but Vasubandhu probably lived around 400-480 C.E.; some scholars place him in the 4th c. Paramartha’s (499-569) biography of Vasubandhu is the earliest source for information (and myth) regarding Vasubandhu. Frauwallner famously argued for two Vasubandhu’s: one the author of the Abhidharmakosa who lived in the 5th c., and the other the Yogacarin who lived in the 4th c. After much debate and consideration of evidence, the general consensus now seems to be that there actually was just one Vasubandhu who composed both the Abhidharmakosa and the Yogacara texts. Frauwallner has apparently withdrawn his proposal.

Vasubandhu was born in Purusapura, present-day Peshawar, in what was then the Kingdom of Gandhara. His older brother was Asanga (regarded, with Vasubandhu, as a founder of Yogacara). According to the Tibetan tradition, they were half-brothers. Apparently Vasubandhu was his given name which he kept through his life as a monk. Vasubandhu entered the Sarvastivadin order prominent in Gandhara at that time. He was a bright student and made an extensive study of the Vaibhasika teaching. His teachers in Gandhara were Buddhmitra and Manoratha. He started to have doubts about the Vaibhasika system and decided to travel to Kasmir, the center of Vaibhasika learning, to work deeper into this system. In Kasmir for four years, he studied under Sanghabhadra’s teacher, Skandhila. He frequently voiced refutations of key points of the Vaibhasika doctrine. Skandhila apparently saw into Vasubandhu’s potential and advised him to return to Gandhara for his own safety.

Upon his return, Vasubandhu lived in a small private house in the middle of Purusapura, supporting himself by giving public lectures on the Vaibhasika system. At the close of each day’s lecture, Vasubandhu composed a summary verse. Paramartha states: “Each verse was engraved on a copper plate. This he hung on the head of an intoxicated elephant, and, beating a drum made the following proclamation: 'Is there anyone who can refute the principles set forth in this treatise? Let him who is competent to do so come forth!" In time, Vasubandhu composed around 600 verses giving a comprehensive outline of the entire Vaibhasika doctrine. This was the karika of the Abhidharmakosa. Vasubandhu sent this text to his old teachers in Kasmir. The Kasmirian masters were quite pleased with Vasubandhu’s brilliant epitome, but they were some questions about the frequent use of terms such as “kila” (“it is claimed” or “according to them”) and “ity ahuh” (“so they say”) which seemed to express some skepticism towards the doctrines quoted and thus asked him to write a commentary on the verses. When the Kasmirians received the Abhidharmakosabhasyam, in which Vasubandhu criticizes a number of pivotal Vaibhasika positions, they were enraged, as attested by the original title of Samghabhadra’s commentary on the Abhidharmakosa, “Hailstones on the Kosa,” venting: “that man whose theories have the coherence of the cries of a mad deaf-mute in a fever-dream.” The Abhidharmakosa however prevailed and was very highly regarded, even by the Mahayana schools (which regarded the Sarvastivada and the Abhidharmakosa as Hinayana). In the first half of the 7th c., the Kosasastra was so widely studied in India that one commentator noted, “even parrots recited the Kosa to one another.”

Vasubandhu thus achieved notoriety as a fairly young man. He travelled some and settled for sometime in Ayodhya. He was for some time uninterested in, and perhaps even repelled by, the Mahayana pursuits of his brother Asanga. Asanga decided to try and convert his brother. There are differing accounts of this event. In one version, Asanga sent a letter to Vasubandhu requesting his company as he was sick and close to end. When Vasubandhu arrived, Asanga asked him to recite Mahayana sutras to him for comfort. By the time Vasubandhu finished reciting the sutras for Asanga, he was converted. However, Vasubandhu’s Pancaskandha-Prakarana, and Karmastidhi-prakarana suggest a more gradual transformation. (A completely different notion of the intent and origin of the Abhidharmakosa places it after Vasubandhu’s conversion to the Mahayana as a kind of confession in atonement for denigrating the Hinayana.)

Vasubandhu participated part in a number of major debates, both against Buddhists of other schools and non-Buddhists. Losing a major debate could involve forced conversions or banishment. Victory could bring great wealth and Vasubandhu was said to have used his winnings for building monasteries, hospitals, and schools. Late in life, he wrote the important
Yogacara treatises, *Vimsatika* (Twenty Verses) and *Trimsika* (Thirty Verses). At some point in his later years, it is said that Sanghabhadra sought him out and challenged Vasubandhu to defend the *Abhidharmakosa*. He declined pleading lack of interest (he had evolved quite a bit since the Kosa) and old age (this account consistently appears very near the end of Vasubandhu’s life). In some accounts, Vasubandhu, hearing that Sanghabhadra was coming to debate him, fled, excusing himself in one version by saying there was no-one in the area who could adequately judge the debate, and in another version, because he thought it was unwise to confront Sanghabhadra (who in this last account had been his Vaibhasika teacher).

The Tibetan scholar Buston reports that while Vasubandhu was in the north, he went to visit a monk named Handu. Handu was inebriated, and carrying an immense pot of wine on his shoulder. Vasubandhu upon seeing this cried, "Alas! The Doctrine will go to ruin", recited the Usnisa-vijaya-dhārani in reverse order, and died. According to Taranatha, however, Vasubandhu was prompted to recite the dhārani in reverse order when he saw a monk ploughing in his monastic robes.

[Statue of Vasubandhu at Kofukuji]

**Reflection on the composition of the Abhidharmakosabhāsya**

The story above explains a striking feature of the Abhidharmakosa – whereas the verses expound the Vaibhasika system, the commentary often refutes it. However, it seems doubtful that the verses were composed first in their entirety as a stand-alone work. Certain verses are incoherent without interlineal commentary. Also, Vasubandhu is clearly basing his work on the earlier Hrdaya texts which consisted of verse and auto-commentary. The verses in these works seem to be offered as a mnemonic device to help students retain the essential points and structure of the system as a whole. As such, the verses are like a skeleton or rough frame of the text. The actual system is explicated by the verses and commentary together. The verses hint at dissension from the Vaibhasika orthodoxy. Perhaps as Vasubandhu composed the text, his own hesitations regarding the Vaibhasika system deepened until the commentary took a turn from explication to actually refuting many of the essential Sarvastivadin tenets. Such a process may have unfolded over the course of a number of years.

**Mahayana Portents in the Abhidharmakosa**

There are a few places where Vasubandhu expresses a deep appreciation of the path of the bodhisattva which can be seen as portents of his later full-fledged conversion to the Mahayana. In Chapter III, K93d-94a bhasya, Vasubandhu discusses the extremely long path to Buddhahood and praises this path as superior for its compassionate heart and in K94c states that Pratyekabuddhas do not teach others because they lack courage and fear being distracted by entering into human relationships. In Chapter IV, K108-125 Vasubandhu discusses the Bodhisattva path including the 6 paramitas, including a detailed analysis of *dana-paramita*, the completion of giving. In Chapter VII, K28-33 discuss the 18 dharmas unique to the Buddhas, including an extensive analysis of how great compassion differs from ordinary compassion and K43 includes an extensive discussion of the perfections, or excellences, of the Buddhas. The Kosa itself begins with a verse in praise of the Buddha (Ch I, K1). Vasubandhu also explores the question of why Sakyamuni opted to be born from a womb (Ch III, K9), how the Buddha attains extinction (Ch II, K44), Buddha omniscience (Ch II, K62), the Buddha’s great purity of action and knowledge (Ch III, K17), whether two Buddhas can exist in the same universe (Ch III, K95-96), the superior marks of the Buddha (Ch III, K97), the mind of the Buddhas (Ch IV, K12), taking refuge in the Buddha (Ch IV, K32), the path of the Buddha (Ch VI, K23-24), Buddha giving up of bliss (Ch VI, K59), the relative faculties of the Buddhas (Ch VI, K62), faith in the Buddha (Ch VI, K73-75), the Buddha’s knowledge of other’s minds (Ch VII, K6), nature and extent of the Buddha’s acquisition and exercise of powers, knowledges, etc. (Ch VII, K41-55), and the Buddhas as authoritative in the interpretation of the dharma (Ch VIII, K40). Other passages extoll the value of preaching the dharma (Ch IV, K118, Ch VII, K47, Ch VIII, K39).

**Note on Studying the Abhidharmakosa:** The Abhidharmakosa appears to have been composed for Abhidharmikas, that is, full time Abhidharma specialists. It imposes a strong foundation in the teachings. It is not suitable as an introductory text. Even with a foundation in the Sutra literature and Abhidharma teachings, the Kosa is quite long and very dense. Vasubandhu seems to be quite averse to repetition (sometimes the reader needs to connect the dots, e.g. Ch V only discusses the klesa not already introduced in Ch II’s explication of mental states, or the exposition of the Truths in Ch I and VI). The Kosa offers a highly organized and (relatively) concise presentation of a vast store of teachings, and also problematizes a set doctrinal tenets central to the Sarvastivada. In my own course of study, I read through the text once to get a sense of the whole. Then I read as much as I could on Abhidharma in general (from the bibliography above). Then I went through the Kosa again slowly, and also memorized the Karika, while teaching a class on the Kosa and preparing these Study Materials. Trungpa, the Dalai Lama & Geshe Michael Roach all mention memorization of the karika as a standard approach to studying the text. I found memorizing the karika very helpful and illuminating. Shi Hui Feng 釋慧峰 (MB Orsborn) relayed in an email: “If you really want to get into the Kosa, then you'll have to get into the Mahavibhasa. If you want to get into the Mahavibhasa, then apart from Sanskrit, obviously, you'll find Chinese is a requisite, too.” I was not able to do this. Clearly it would help to clarify what Vasubandhu is summarizing and, at times, arguing against, as a number of points are not fully worked out, left unexplained, assume familiarity with the debate/issue, etc.
Abhidharma Methodology

Abhidharma methodology includes a number of aspects of which the following play an important role in the Kosa:

Dharmas: This is the analysis of what is happening into a collection of distinct forces. See the section on Dharma Theory below and also the study of the 75 Dharmas in the study materials for Chapter 2. The dharmas are explicated in abstract in Chapters 1 and 2 and more concretely (in terms of the processes of suffering and liberation) in Chapters 3-8.

Causes and Conditions: This is the study of how dharmas function. The abstract presentation is made in Chapter 2 (also see the Hetu-Pratyaya-Phala Study in the study materials). The study of causes and conditions unfolds in a more concrete manner in the analysis of 12-fold dependent co-arising in Chapter 3 and the analysis of various groups of dharmas in terms of results (in Chapter 4, K85-95, for example).

Attributes: This includes various categories (often dyads & triads, but also quads, etc) into which the dharmas are analyzed. For some, see the section below: “Some Basic Categories of Abhidharma Thought.” In the Abhidharmakosa, the most important categories are introduced in K4-8 of Chapter 1 (see Chapter 1 Study). The second half of Chapter 1 carries out an extensive attribute study of the dhatus. A similar study of the indriyas is carried out in Chapter 2. Other attribute studies occur through the text (on the citta-viprayukta dharmas in Ch II, the 37 limbs of awakening in Ch VI, the 10 Knowledges in Ch VII, etc.). The categories of analysis themselves are treated at various points (see the Attribute Studies in the Supplemental Materials). Analysis in terms of attributes serve to emphasize certain fundamental categories, illustrate how the dharmas or factors in a given analysis are distinct from each other and generally work towards a sense of how all the pieces of the system work together. In working out the interrelations of the system in such a detailed manner, points of disagreement are highlighted.

Argumentation: Debate is a major aspect of Abhidharma methodology. A variety of positions on a number of controversies are presented in the Kosa. Two primary forms of argumentation are employed: arguments from reason and appeals to scripture (which often coincide as appeals to scripture almost always involve interpretation).

Major Doctrinal Controversies in the Abhidharmakosa:

Ch I:  - Which organs exist in Rupadhautu? (K30)
        - What sees – the eye or consciousness? (K42) *

Ch II: - Do mental factors co-exist in a moment of consciousness? (K32) (also see related debate in Ch III: K32) *
        - Are the dharmas not associated with mind actual forces or mere designations? (K35-47) *
        - Are the unconditioned dharmas actual forces or mere designations? (K55) *

Ch III: - Is there an intermediate existence between one life and the next? (K12)
        - What is contact (sparsa)? (K30) *
        - Can Buddhas appear simultaneously in the universe(s)? (K96)

Ch IV: - How is everything momentary? (K3)
        - Is shape a distinct thing? (K3) *
        - Is avijnapti (non-informative matter) an actual force or mere designation? (K4) *

Ch V:  - Are anusaya latent defilements or defilements themselves? (K2) *
        - Do the dharmas exist in the three time periods? (K27) *

Ch VI: - Are there really agreeable experiences (what is the meaning of truth of suffering)? (K3)
        - Can arhats fall away from being arhats? (K58) *

Ch VII: - What is the nature of a defiled mind? (K11)

Ch VIII: - Is samadhi (concentration) an actual force or mere designation? (K1) *
        - Is there a subtle rupa (materiality) in Arupadhautu? (K3)
        - What is the definition of happiness in the dhyanas? (K9) *

Ch IX: - Is there a person (pudgala) neither the same nor different from the 5 skandhas?

* = disputations of Sarvastivada positions. The Sarvastivadins hold that the eye sees, that numerous mental factors co-exist in a single moment of consciousness, that the dharmas not associated with mind, the unconditioned dharmas, contact, shape, avijnapti and samadhi are all real distinct forces (established by their own-being), that anusayas are manifest defilements, that the dharmas exist in the three time periods and that arhats who are not immovable can fall away from being arhats. These positions are all called into question in the Kosa.

There are in addition to the controversies outlined above, numerous minor controversies discussed throughout the Kosa.
Dharma Theory

Dharma is a term with wide-ranging meanings and as Abhidharma developed, its function was expanded with meanings and connotations which were to some extent unprecedented. The notion of the dharmas, and thus the dharma theory itself, evolved with the development of new analytical approaches and innovative doctrines. In the course of these developments, lists of dharmas tended to consolidate as stricter methods of analysis weeded out repetition and redundancy, while the development of new teachings led them also to expand as they accommodated new concepts (e.g. viprayukta-samskaras).

Abhidharmakosa I.3 expresses the central role of dharma-pravicara (discernment of dharmas) in the process of liberation from suffering: “Apart from the discernment of the dharmas, there is no means to extinguish the defilements, and it is by reason of the defilements that the world wanders in the ocean of existence.” The study and clear discernment of the dharmas is the Abhidharma way of studying the self and forgetting the self. Dharma theory is essentially a form of meditation. The discernment of dharmas has two basic modes. One is an evaluative analysis clearly distinguishing what is conducive to awakening and thus to be cultivated and what is conducive to cyclic suffering and thus to be abandoned. The second is a descriptive analysis of ordinary experience in order to reveal its true structure and thereby release all attachment to the supposition of a self. Conze states: “[Dharmas are] elementary constituents of emancipating cognition.”

In the fully developed form of the later Sarvastivada, dharmas are real distinct types of forces (in and of experience).

a) Dharmas are distinct – they cannot be reduced to each other. Note however that they are not separate as they do not function in isolation. The samskṛta dharmas are conditioned so they have parts and aspects. Many conditions give rise to one dharma which functions in various ways. They are irreducible only in the sense that reducing them further strips them of their distinct quality. AKB I.18: “A dharma is included in its own nature because it is distinct from the nature of others.”

b) Dharma are forces, functions or efficacies – Dharmas are not things or substances. They are dynamic events rather than static entities. The only way samskṛta dharmas exist is as conditioned and conditioning forces. To exist is to cause and be caused. No dharma has only one cause and all dharmas have multiple causal functions within the Sarvastivada analysis of causation. Dharmas have no existence aside from their causal role. For the Sarvastivadins, denying the reality of the dharmas amounts to denying the reality of dependent co-arising. Collett Cox: “They [dharmas] represent causally significant points within the complex web of experienced activities, but points that can only be determined relationally and that can only be defined dynamically. These relational distinctions that define dharmas are not considered arbitrary, but rather are ‘true’ or express ‘the way things really are’ in the sense that they articulate the fundamental causal structures implicit within all experience.” Note: strictly speaking, unconditioned (asamskṛta) dharmas have neither cause nor result, nevertheless, they do have a function which is their characteristic nature establishing their existence as distinct dharmas.

c) Dharmas are tendencies or classes or abstractions or types – A dharma subsumes a plurality of phenomena. The phenomena that can be classed under a given dharma can vary in degree or intensity as well as quality or kind. Dharmas in some pure form do not appear as such. They are types: a given dharma is “typical” of an array of many different phenomena all of the same type. Dharmas constitute fundamental regularities underlying and structuring what is happening.

d) Dharmas are real – Real in the sense that dharmas are established by their own nature as being truly distinct force-tendencies. Dharmas are real in that they have ultimate existence in contrast to composite entities, such as the self, a pot, common-sense things, etc. which only have conventional existence. Conventional entities depend on designation for their existence, dharmas do not. AKB I.2: “Dharma is that which bears (dharana) self-(or unique) characteristics.” Intrinsic nature is able to “uphold” or “bear” its own identity. These definitions play on the root of dharma: dhṛ (–to hold).

MOMENTARINESS (KSANIKA) (see Ch IV, K2 Bhasya): A close corollary of dharma theory and an important factor in its development is “momentariness”, a radical interpretation of impermanence by which dharmas flash into existence for a single instant (ksana) and then immediately pass away. Nothing about anything is substantial, fixed & unchanging from one moment to the next. An individual person, in such a context, not possessing self-existence, but still evincing some form of continuity, is referred to as a “series” (santati or santana), that is, a flux or continuum of dharmas, “an unceasing flow of simple ultimates, called ‘dharmas’, which can be defined as (1) multiple, (2) momentary, (3) impersonal, (4) mutually conditioned events” (Conze). There are various attempts to define the extent of these instants: 6,499,099,980 per day (or 75,211 per second) in the Mahavibhāsas, and in the Abhidharmakosas, 6,480,000 per day (or 75 per second, see AKB III.88). Regardless of their duration, instants were universally held to be discrete and uniform, which leads to a number of problems.

A set of significant related terms arises in dharma theory:

Svabhava – “own-being” or “intrinsic nature”: true distinct classes/categories of events established by inclusion (samgraha).
Dravya – “substance”: the ontological status of manifesting dharmas as real & discrete, established by their function.
Svalaksana – “specific or own-characteristic”: the feature which uniquely distinguishes a dharma (see 75 Dharmas in Ch II).
Samanya-laksana – “common characteristic”: shared by many dharmas (impermanence, not-self..., see 16 Aspects in Ch VI).
Samgraha – “subsumption or inclusion”: study of intrinsic nature, analytic tool by which dharmas are classified and established as truly distinct. (The basic mode of using the skandhas, etc. in practice to study and be intimate with one’s life.)
Samprayoga – “association or conjunction”: studying the dynamic interaction of dharmas by analysis of which mental factors are consonant: which dharmas always, sometimes, never, etc. arise with such-and-such dharmas, in various conditions.
**Sarvastiva: Everything Exists**

At its basis, the doctrine of Sarvastiva, that everything exists, seems to have been a simple affirmation of cause and effect: past dharmas exist, as present dharmas arise based on them, and future dharmas will give rise to them. However, as this position came to be examined in Abhidharma disputations, a set implications and elaborations unfolded as to what it really meant. Opposed to the Sarvasti thesis was a group of schools collected under the designation, Vibhajyavada (including the Mahasasika, Dharmagupta and later, the Sautrantika). The Vibhajyavada held that only present dharmas exist. Past dharmas have existed, futures dharmas will come into existence, but only present dharmas really exist. Vibhajyavada positions sometimes also include the position that past karma that has not yet come to fruition exists.

Sarvastiva eventually came to be articulated as affirming that past, present and future dharmas all truly exist. Some of the main arguments for Sarvastiva include (from Cox): (1) when a cause precedes its effect as in Karmic causation, the past cause must exist in order to provide an existent cause for the arising of a present effect; (2) the existence of past causes or future effects can be inferred from the occurrence of their effects or causes in the present; and (3) perceptual consciousness, meditative states, memory, and so forth, require an existent object-support. Vasubandhu quotes and then refutes four arguments for Sarvastiva in chapter 5 of the Kosa.

But what does it really mean to assert that everything exists? How is it that everything does not all happen at once? The Sarvastivada response basically confirms the above dharma theory notion that existence is causal efficacy. There is then a distinction of a specific kind of causal efficacy which dharmas only exert when they are presently manifesting, “karitra” (activity). Other forms of efficacy can be exerted by a dharma in the three times, in concert with other cooperating causes and conditions. Sarvastiva, and other Sarvastivadin doctrines (such as the notion of acquisition (prapti)), can also be seen as a practical attempt to insert some non-momentary reality into the relentless momentariness of the dharma theory.

Sarvastiva seems to have been based in a responsible attitude toward the past and future that some practitioner’s may have obscured in emphasizing the reality of present moment. The Sarvastivada denied the existence of time as a separate container that dharmas happen within. The past is past dharmas and the future is future dharmas. As Sarvastiva came to be developed as a doctrine of existence, however, it became problematic. Vasubandhu and others had substantial objections to Sarvastiva and associated resolutions to a number of key questions and problems. The Sautrantika (and Yogacara) resolution to many of these problems with a “seed (bija) theory” would prove to be far more influential in the long run.

**Some Basic Categories of Abhidharma Thought** (see also Attribute Studies in Supplemental Materials)

- **Sasrava** – With-outflow, impure, stained, conducive to the growth of the defilements, influenced by ignorance.
- **Anasrava** – Outflow-free, pure, unstained, tending toward appeasement of the defilements under the influence of wisdom.

This is the first category introduced in the Abhidharmakosa. It is pivotal and can be hard to understand. Abhidharmakosa: “Dharmas are either with-outflow or outflow-free. The conditioned, with the exception of the noble path, are with-outflows, for therein the outflows grow concordantly. It is true that the outflows are born taking the nirodha- and marga-satya as objects, but they do not grow concordantly therein; thus it does not follow that the two are of the nature of being with-outflow.” In other words, everything in our life, with the exception of the path, is sasrava, meaning that it either is produced by, produces, or is itself, ignorance and the defilements based on ignorance. This is then one of the fundamental undertakings of the discernment of dharmas: clearly discerning sasravalanasrava dharmas. This distinction amounts to the distinction between enlightened (anasrava) & unenlightened (sasrava).

- **Samskṛta** – Conditioned, compounded, made, constructed. With the exception of the path, impure (sasrava). A dharma is said to be conditioned if it has arising and ceasing, cause and effect, and acquires the characteristics of the conditioned. Conditioned dharmas are momentary.

- **Asamskṛta** – Unconditioned, uncompounded, unmade, constructed. Always pure (anasrava). A dharma is said to be unconditioned if it has no arising and ceasing, no cause and effect, and acquires the characteristics of the unconditioned. Unconditioned dharmas have no activity. They are totally beyond temporal process, but they do have a function.

- **Kusala** – Skillful, tending towards integration and balance, beneficial, good, wholesome.
- **Akusala** – Unskillful, tending towards disintegration and imbalance, detrimental, evil, unwholesome.
- **Avyakrtā** – (Morally) non-defined, neither beneficial nor unbeneficial, neutral, indeterminate, of indistinct nature.

This classification concerns the moral causal order in terms of karma (action) of body, speech and mind (discussed in Ch IV) as well as the collections of mental factors (discussed in Ch II).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sasrava</strong></td>
<td>Impure – tending to defilement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kusala</strong></td>
<td>Leads to higher birth, conducive to liberation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Akusala</strong></td>
<td>Leads to bondage and lower birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avyakrtā</strong></td>
<td>Leads to bondage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anasrava</strong></td>
<td>Pure – releases the defilements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kusala</strong></td>
<td>Leads to liberation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Akusala</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avyakrtā</strong></td>
<td>Does not obstruct liberation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kusala karma is helpful and necessary but in itself not fundamentally liberating as long as it is sasrava. In addition to kusala action, there needs to be realization: the development of “pure prajna” (=Abhidharma, AKI.2). Sasrava thus has a greater scope than akusala.

- **Samprayuktā** – Conjoined, associated. Refers to the collections of mental factors that arise with any given mind.
- **Viprayuktā** – Disjoined, disassociated. Refers to formations (samskara) not strictly material or mental. (see 75 Dharmas, Ch II)
Abhidharmakosa – Basic Structure, Outline, etc.

**BASIC STRUCTURE and CONTENT:**
The *Abhidharmakosa* consists of nine chapters. The first eight chapters are built around 598 root-verses (karika) embedded in auto-commentary (bhasya). The Pradhan Sanskrit edition has 598 slokas whereas the Gokhale Sanskrit edition has 600 slokas (adding one each to Ch V (71 sloka) and Ch VI (80 sloka)). The 2 karikas added in the Gokhale edition appear to be karikas composed as part of the Bhasya clarification. A sloka is a Sanskrit verse consisting of two sixteen-syllable lines of two eight-syllable padas each. In Xuanzang’s Chinese translation, typically 1 sloka = four 5-character phrases (except for the opening 3 & closing 4 slokas, which are in a different meter: the Chinese here consists of four 7-kanji phrases). Xuanzang’s translation of just the Karika (T1560), totals 608 sloka (see table). Xuanzang’s Kosabhasya translation (T1558) has a still different total.

This structure is based on the *Samprayuktabhidharma-hrdaya* by Dharmatrata, which consists 596 karika with auto-commentary. The *Kosa* barrows phrases, and at times, entire verses, from the *Samprayuktabhidharma-hrdaya*. The *Samprayuktabhidharma-hrdaya* is itself based on two earlier *Hrdaya* (heart or essence) texts by Dharmasri and Upasanta (which were smaller works both containing around 250 verses). Vasubandhu adapted the overall organization from the *Samprayuktabhidharma-hrdaya* as well which consists of 11 chapters. Vasubandhu kept the first 7 chapters of this work, inserted a new chapter after chapter 2 (renamed Indriya (faculties) from Samskara (formations)) on the World (which has no corresponding chapter in Dharmatrata), and integrated the content of Dharmatrata’s final 4 chapters (Sutra, Miscellany, Investigations, Discussion) into the other 8 chapters. Chapter 9 of the *Abhidharmakosa* appears to have been added later as an appendix. Of this series of comprehensive manuals of doctrine, the *Kosa* is regarded as the most organized & coherent.

**Karika (Chapters 1-8):**
- Based mostly on the *Mahavibhasa*, the karika present the Vaibhasika system (condensing ~10,000 pages into 600 verses).
- The verses aim at an organized encapsulation of a comprehensive approach to the entire teaching.
- The verses are very concise and apparently designed to be memorized. (Composed for Abhidharmikas, basically in code.)
- The verses hint at some dissension from the Vaibhasika position (*kila*: “according to the school”)

**Bhasya (Chapters 1-8):**
- The bhasya explains and expands upon the teachings expressed in a very concise form, or merely referred to, in the karika.
- The bhasya also quotes and discusses arrays divergent positions on certain points (and often presumes that the relevance and significance of the debate is clear to its audience).
- The bhasya presents arguments (and counter-arguments, etc) on many controversial points of doctrine.
- The bhasya refutes key Vaibhasika doctrines, sometimes aligning itself as Sautrantika, but not always.

NOTE: It is good to keep in mind that the agenda of Bhasya is to some extent distinct from the Karika. The Bhasya refutes certain positions that then continue to re-emerge in the Karika – as the Karika represents a single coherent flow of Vaibhasika doctrine.

**Chapter 9:**
- The karika at the end of chapter 8 formally close the *Abhidharmakosa*. Chapter 9 appears to have been added later.
- It is not clear if it was written before, during or after the composition of the *Kosa*. The Bhasya includes two references to the 9th chapter: Ch IV, K73a-b (pg 650) and Ch V, K27b-c (pg 818).
- It differs from the rest of the text both in terms of its structure: it does not consist of verses with commentary,
- and content: it does not present, explicate or refute Vaibhasika views, but rather, refutes views of a person and soul.

**SCHOOLS:**
**Sarvastivada:**
One of the earliest and most important Abhidharma schools. Sarva means “all” & asti means “exists”.
They held that all dharmas, past, present and future, exist (see below). Across North India.

**Vaibhasika:**
A sub-sect of the Sarvastivada, centered in Kashmir.
Based on the positions of the *Mahavibhasa*, “The Great Commentary”. Strong tendency towards establishing a set of orthodox position with little toleration of divergent views.

**Darstantika:**
Heterodox Sarvastivada teachings centered in Gandhara. Sautranika evolved from the Darstantika.

**Sautrntika:**
Their name is interpreted by some as indicating they upheld the Sutras against the Abhidharma. However, they did engage in Abhidharma, but did not necessarily recognize an Abhidharma-pitaka. They may have simply been a force of criticism. Only a few references to Sautrntika before the *Kosa.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ch #</th>
<th>Chapter Titles</th>
<th># of karika: Sanskrit (Xuanzang)</th>
<th>Traditional Analysis</th>
<th>Overview of Contents by Chapter (each chapter is rather complex and thoroughly conceived coherent flow)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td><em>Dhatu-nirdesa</em></td>
<td>48 (47) [76 pgs (= karika+ bhasya in Pruden)]</td>
<td>Foundation Dharmas: The Reals (General Presentation of pure and impure dharmas) Basic Principles</td>
<td>1. Basic classifications of the Dharmas: Skandhas, Ayatanas, Dhatus. Definition of terms. Key categories introduced: conditioned/unconditioned, pure/impure, etc. The various categorizations of the dhatus in K29-48 can be seen as a kind of integral summary of all the subjects to be discussed in terms of how they subsume the dhatus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td><em>Indriya-nirdesa</em></td>
<td>73 (74) [173 pgs]</td>
<td>Function. Showing the function (kriya) of the dharmas (emphasizing how dharmas function and arise)</td>
<td>2. Psychology of Samsara and Nirvana: continues the analysis of Ch I with the faculties, and then moving to the caitta (mental factors). The Pancavastu scheme is covertly completed with the inclusion of the Vipravyukta-samskaras (disjoined conditionings). Also includes the Sarvastivadin theory of causation based on 6 causes, 4 conditions &amp; 5 results.</td>
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<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td><em>Loka-nirdesa</em></td>
<td>102 (100) [131 pgs]</td>
<td>Result. Effect. Manifestation. The World and transmigration as the outcome of sasrava dharmas (the who, where and how of affliction)</td>
<td>3. Cosmology. Describes a) worlds or realms of sentient beings (sattva-loka) and b) world as container or receptacle in which beings live (bhajana-loka). Different classifications of the realms of beings, mechanism of rebirth, modes of birth, differences in beings, the measurement of matter and time, kalpas and the creation &amp; destruction of worlds. Also includes an analysis of 12-fold dependent co-arising.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td><em>Karma-nirdesa</em></td>
<td>127 (131) [154 pgs]</td>
<td>Cause. Immediate Cause. Action as the cause of the world and repeated existences (what makes affliction part a)</td>
<td>4. Defines and enumerates many classifications of karma: in terms of body, speech &amp; mind, informative &amp; non-informative (avijnapti – treated extensively in terms of discipline, non-discipline, etc), determinate &amp; indeterminate, karmic result, etc. Includes discussions of the 10 karmapatha (courses of action), bodhisattva practices, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td><em>Anusaya-nirdesa</em></td>
<td>70 (69) [102 pgs]</td>
<td>Condition. Underlying Condition. Defilements as the condition for repeated existences (what makes affliction part b)</td>
<td>5. Extensive analysis of the defilements in terms of their varieties, functions and abandonment. Focuses on the anusayas (lists of 6,7,10,98) &amp; klesa (defilements), and then goes on to discuss: fetters (samyojana), bondages (bandhana), envelopments (paryavasthana), outflows (asrava), floods (ogha), yokes (yoga), clingings (upadana), corporeal ties (kaya-grantha) and hindrances (nivarana).</td>
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<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td><em>Pudgala-marga-nirdesa</em></td>
<td>79 (83) [146 pgs]</td>
<td>Result. Effect. Manifestation. The path and the Noble Ones as an effect of anasrava or Nirvana (the who, where and how of purification)</td>
<td>6. Discusses the Four Noble Truths and describes the stages of the Path of Preparation, the Path of Seeing, the Path of Cultivation &amp; the Path Beyond Training. Different classifications of trainees and arhats are discussed and the 37 bodhipaksha (limbs or wings of awakening).</td>
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<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td><em>Jnana-nirdesa</em></td>
<td>56 (61) [94 pgs]</td>
<td>Cause. Immediate Cause. The knowledges as the cause of anasrava or Nirvana (what makes for purification)</td>
<td>7. 10 Knowledges are analyzed in terms of their characteristics, aspects, classifications. Also discusses: 18 qualities unique to a Buddha (10 powers, 4 assurances, 3 applications of mindfulness &amp; great compassion), 6 supernormal knowledges, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td><em>Samapatti-nirdesa</em></td>
<td>43 (43) [68 pgs]</td>
<td>Condition. Underlying Condition. Meditative equipoise as the condition of ansrava or Nirvana (what provides a basis for the knowledges)</td>
<td>8. Analyzes 4 rupa-dhyanas &amp; 4 arupya-dhyanas, preparatory absorb-tions, 3 samadhis (emptiness, signless, wishless), 4 immeasurables (goodwill, compassion, joy, equanimity), 8 deliverances, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>IX</td>
<td><em>Pudgala-viniscaya</em></td>
<td>n/a [some say 16] [43 pgs]</td>
<td>Appendix (This chapter appears to have been added later and does not really have a place in the above structure.)</td>
<td>9. Using arguments by reason and citation of Sutras, and responding to counter-arguments, the text refute theories of a person (pudgala) and soul (atman) attributed to the Vatsiputriya (Buddhist school of the Pudgalavadin), as well as Samkhya and Vaisesika (significant non-Buddhist schools of Indian thought).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On the Basic Organization of the Abhidharmakosa (see the Table above)

The Kosa is often split into 3 parts: Chapters I and II laying out fundamental principles (dharmaś (dhatus & indriyās) and how they function (causes & conditions)) in terms of pure and impure dharmas (which must be clearly discerned. Ch I, K3: “Apart from the discernment of the dharmas, there is no means to extinguish the defilements, and it is by reason of the defilements that the world wanders in the ocean of existence”; K4 introduces the organizing category of pure (anasrava) and impure (sasrava)). Chapters III, IV and V unfold the impure dharmas in terms of result (Ch III, World), cause (Ch IV, Karma) and condition (Ch V, Defilements). The World is the result of Karma (Ch IV, K1: “The variety of the world arises from action”) and the defilements are the underlying condition (which do not cause the world, but without which, Karma could not cause the world, Ch V, K1: “The roots of existence, that is, of rebirth or of action, are the anuśayas”). This basic structure of impure dharmas is reflected in the description of the basic process of samsara in Ch III, K19: “In conformity with its projecting cause the series grows gradually, and, by virtue of the defilements (Ch V) and actions (Ch IV, K1) it goes again to another world [Ch III]” (see also the analysis of Dependent Co-arising on p. 51). This same structure is then reflected in the next three chapters which unfold pure dharmas also in terms of result (Ch VI, The Path & the Saints), cause (Ch VII, Knowledges) and condition (Ch VIII, Meditation). Ch VI, K1, offers clear transition from the impure dharmas of Chapters III-V to their destruction and the cultivation of pure dharmas in Chapters VI-VIII: “It has been said that the defilements are abandoned through Seeing the Truths and through Meditation. The Path of Meditation is of two types; the Path of Seeing is pure.” Once again, the Knowledges are the cause of the path, but they can only function as such with the underlying condition of meditation (which in and of itself cannot produce the path).

Errors & Problems in the Pruden Translation

Scholars have pointed out a number of problems with Pruden’s work (“Leo Pruden translated the French version into English, though some errors were introduced” – Lusthaus, Buddhist Phenomenology, pg 565). 1) He states that he has referred to the Sanskrit, but he seems to have actually relied almost completely on Poussin’s French translation of the Chinese (see for example, Ch I, K45, “and also because it is ‘its own’” in comparison with the translations by Jha, Sastri & Hall). 2) He changes some of Poussin’s interpretations incorrectly. 3) He sometimes mistranslates Poussin’s French (specifically misinterpreting double negatives as single negatives). 4) The publication contains a number of typos. 5) Pruden’s introduction introduces a number of historical and interpretive inaccuracies (as reviewed by Collett Cox in the Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 1990, LVIII pp 137-141).

However, by and large, it is quite usable, if handled with caution, even if not completely reliable (as some errors substantially change the meaning of the passage). A number of the errors I located in the published version are absent in an early unpublished manuscript of Pruden’s translation (located in the library of Green Dragon Temple) These errors thus appear to have been introduced in the preparation of the manuscript for publication, which attempted to eliminate some of the extensive use of Sanskrit terminology in the draft translation. Here are some errors I found, most of which were not in the manuscript:

Ch II, K65: “The primary elements are the cause of the derived elements in two ways…” should read: “The primary elements are the cause of the primary elements in two ways…”

Ch II, K69: “Six types of mind can arise after such a (defiled-neutral) mind…” should read: “Six types of mind can arise after such a (undefiled-neutral) mind…”

Ch III, K81: “In Arupyadhatu, a lifespan of a thousand kalpas…” should read: “In Arupyadhatu, a lifespan of twenty thousand kalpas…”

Ch III, K88: “sixteen tatksanas make one lava…” should read: “sixty tatksanas make one lava…”

Ch IV, K27: “There is undisclipline for a day and night,” should read: “There is not undisclipline for a day and a night.”

Ch IV, K93: “Dharmas susceptible of being…constitute three results, two results, one result of action susceptible of being abandoned through Seeing the Truths…” should read: “Dharmas susceptible of being…constitute three results, four results, one result of action susceptible of being abandoned through Seeing the Truths…”

Ch IV, K108: “…and he does not desist (anivṛt)…” should read: “…and he does not desist (avivṛt).”

Ch V, K19a Bhaya: “Now suffering does exist in these two spheres…” should read: “Now suffering does not exist in these two spheres…”

Ch V, K55: “The view of negation with dissatisfaction and sensation…” should read: “The view of negation with dissatisfaction and satisfaction.”

Ch V, K29: “the dharmas in Kamadhatu are the sphere of three consciousnesses of this sphere…” should read: “the dharmas in Kamadhatu are the domain (or object) of three consciousnesses of this sphere…”

Ch VII, K10: “because of the aspect of their Truth…” should read “because of the aspects of their Truth.”

Ch VII, K11a-b Bhaya: “The knowledge of the mind of another, in its impure part…” should read: “The knowledge of the mind of another, in its pure part…”
In addition to errors, there are also some questionable translation choices:

**Pure, undefiled, etc.:** In earlier chapters, “pure” is usually a translation of *anasrava*. However, in Chapter VIII, “pure” is used to translate *suddha* which in this context is actually not *anasrava* (*suddha* here refers to absorption that is good and worldy). And while *anasrava* is generally translated by “pure” in earlier chapters (e.g. Ch I, K4 & K31; Ch V, K14; Ch VI, K17, Ch VII, K2, etc.), here in Chapter VIII it is translated as “undefiled.” This connects to another conflation as “undefiled” has been used to translate *aklista* (Ch I, K40; Ch II, K39; Ch III, K4; Ch IV, K98), as well as *anivrta* (Ch II, K66-73).

Similarly, *amala* is translated as “clean” (Ch II, K9), “pure” (Ch I, K2) and “immaculate” (Ch VIII, K25); “bad” is used to translate *asubha* (Ch II, K54) and *akusala* (Ch II, K29 & K66-73), and *akusala* is also translated as “evil” (Ch IV, K9); *sasrava* is translated as “impure” (Ch I, K4), “defiled” (Ch VIII, K27) and “canker” (Ch V, K35-37) and “defiled” also translates *klesa* (Ch II, K26-27, etc.) and *nivrta* (Ch II, K66-73).

Although Vasubandhu may sometimes use these terms as synonyms for each other (for example, *amala & anasrava*), using the same term, “pure”, to translate *anasrava* and *suddha* is problematic, as is using “undefiled” for *anasrava* and *anivrta*. Given the subtle and not-so-subtle distinctions between these sets of terms, consistent, careful and distinct translation choices would be helpful, especially given the precise, systematic, detailed and technical nature of the Kosa. There are a number of other such inconsistencies in the translation of terms in the Pruden translation (using the same English word to translate different Sanskrit words and translating the same Sanskrit term with different English terms).

Another set of problematic translation choices concerns various renditions of *upeksa*, a multivalent term that as a passive sensation (*vedana*), refers to a neutral or intermediate sensation, but as a wholesome mental factor (*kusala-mahabhumi*), refers to equanimity as an active aspect of consciousness. Pruden translates *upeksa* in the context of sensation as “indifference” (Ch II, K8) and “equanimity” (Ch II, K8, K17). As a *kusala-mahabhumi*, *upeksa* is translated as “indifference” (Ch II, K25), as an absorption factor, *upeksa* is translated as “equanimity” (Ch VIII, K8) and as the 4th immeasurable (*apramana*), *upeksa* is also translated as “equanimity” (Ch VIII, K29). I think it would be preferable to find two appropriate translations of *upeksa* and consistently apply them according to the context. Related to *upeksa* as neutral sensation, *adukkhasukha* is various translated as “neither-painful-nor-pleasant” (Ch I, K14), “neither agreeable nor disagreeable” (Ch IV, K47), “neither suffering nor happiness” (Ch VIII, K8), and also as “equanimity” (Ch VIII, K8).

I had heard that there may be problems with the translations of *rupa*, another multivalent term. *Rupa* as the first *skandha* refers to material form or physical matter in general, as the object of the eye-organ, it refers specifically to visible matter, and in the context of the three realms (*dhatu*), *rupa* refers to a subtle materiality of meditation realms based on the transcending of worldly desires (*kamalKamadhatu*). Generally, Pruden translates these three meanings of *rupa* fairly consistently as matter, visible matter, and Rupadhatu (left untranslated) respectively. I did a quick review and I could not spot any problematic renderings.

A number of specific translation choices may also be problematic. Some passages and sections of the Kosa rely on the interpretation of what is at stake in the exposition or argument. It would seem that much work remains to be done. Poussin’s scholarship, though dated, is highly regarded. However, he did not have access to a Sanskrit edition of the text, which is now available.

In these study materials, I have often stuck with Pruden’s translation choices for the sake of clarity in relation to the text, but sometimes, especially when incorporating material from other sources, I have used alternate translations of terms. I have tried to include the Sanskrit as well to avoid adding further confusion. At some point, I would like to go through this study and work on the translation of terminology to make it consistent. I would also like to make a glossary of Sanskrit terms of the Kosa in order to clarify some of these translation problems, and also because Pruden has left quite a few terms in the Sanskrit (sometimes providing a translation the first time the term appears, sometimes not).