

## Kumārajīva(344-413) and *Abhidharma*.

When one mentions the word *abhidharma* in a Chinese context, one immediately thinks of sarvāstivāda *abhidharma*. But even though the sarvāstivādins were the most influential school in the Gandhāran cultural area—certainly in Bactria—during the first centuries A.D., reality was more complex.

The Gandhāran cultural area (*Jibin*) is where Chinese Buddhism mainly originates. Even Kumārajīva, who believed in madhyamaka ideas, had studied in India's northwestern area. Nāgārjuna's madhyamaka group, *zhongguan pai*, was formed in Andhra, in a mahāsāṃghika environment, but its ideas were transmitted from the northwestern area by Kumārajīva.

The text which gives us Kumārajīva's knowledge about *abhidharmic* traditions in his time, is the *Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa*, *Taishō* ed. XXV 1509. This text, which only exists in Chinese, is most likely composed by Kumārajīva himself, attributing it to his spiritual master Nāgārjuna. Kumārajīva arrived in Chang'an on February 8 th., 402 A.D., and he immediately started composing his *magnum opus*, wanting to convert China to madhyamaka. The text was completed on February 1 st., 406 A.D.. Kumārajīva informs us there was a *sthāvirīya abhidharma*, mainly sarvāstivāda, going back to Śāriputra. It consisted of a body and six parts. The Gandhārans had the *Aṣṭagranthaśāstra* (and many *Vibhāṣās*) and six more texts. The Kāśmīris had the *Jñānaprasthānaśāstra* (and a new *Mahāvibhāṣā*) and six more texts. The mahāsāṃghikas did not have *śāstras* in an *abhidharmapiṭaka*, but *upadeśas* in a *Peṭaka*. These last texts ultimately came from Mahākātyāyana. *Upadeśas* systematically develop methods for interpretation. Mahākātyāyana is called a “moulder of guide-lines”. *Śāstras*, on the other hand, give a systematic analysis of factors, *dharma*s.

Reference: Willemsen, Charles. 2008. "Kumārajīva's 'Explanatory Discourse' about Abhidharmic Literature". *Journal of the International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies* 12, 37-83 (156-110).

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