

[BDK Symposium> Translating the Abhidharmakośa](#)

Discussion published by Camila Minutti on Tuesday, October 4, 2022

Dear all,

The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Program in Buddhism and Contemporary Society is delighted to host a virtual BDK symposium, entitled:

The Challenges and Joys of Translating the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* (*Apidamo jushe lun*) from Chinese into English

Saturday, October 15th, 17:00 (5 PM) Pacific Standard Time

[\[Full event details here\]](#) | [\[Register Here\]](#)

About this event:

The *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* is one of the most influential treatises in Indian Buddhism and the most well researched non-Mahayana treatise in East Asia. We are working on an English translation of the Chinese text that Xuanzang (玄奘, 602–664 BCE) and his team translated as part of the national project during the Tang Dynasty. While there exists a French translation by Louis de la Vallee Poussin (1869-1938), and English translations based on it, we are not aware of any complete English translation directly from the Chinese text. Translators from Italy, Thailand, Taiwan, and the United States will share the challenges and joys of their work. Their work is part of the ongoing English Tripitaka Translation Project of the Society for the Promotion of Buddhism (BDK Japan and BDK America), which seeks to translate 139 major texts from the Chinese Buddhist Canon.

Panelists:

Kenneth Tanaka, Professor Emeritus, Musashino University, Tokyo

Introducing The BDK English Tripitaka Translation Project

In January 1982, Dr. Yehan Numata, the founder of Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai (BDK or Society for the Promotion of Buddhism), initiated the monumental project of translating the Taishō edition of the Chinese Buddhist Canon. Initially 139 texts were chosen to make up the first series of the project. Translations are carried out by specialists from around the world as in the case of the present *Abhidharmakośa* text. As of today, the project has completed about 70 percent of the 7,185 Taishō pages of the texts selected. All the translated texts can be downloaded free of charge in their pdf format from the BDK website.

Bibek P. Sharma, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Mahidol University, Thailand

Introduction to *Abhidharmakośa*: Author, Chapters, its Place in Abhidharma Literature and

Subsequent Indian Commentarial Tradition

The features of the Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (hereafter AKBh), its style, structure, etc., are not entirely novel. The features of this seminal work lead us to a long Abhidharma commentarial "tradition" (*paramparā*) in use among the Sarvāstivādin Buddhist school. This presentation particularly focuses on the Abhidharma literature among Sarvāstivādins, the post AKBh sub-commentarial works, and the commentarial dexterity required to reveal the meaning of the root text. Yaśomitra, author of the only surviving Sanskrit commentary, the *Sphuṭārthā Abhidharmakośavyākhyā* (hereafter AKVy), resorts to various methods to elucidate Vasubandhu's intended meaning. One of the features of his commentarial policy is the application of Sanskrit *vyākaraṇa* to elucidate and justify Vasubandhu's usage of grammar. These commentarial nuances as demonstrated in sub-commentaries such as the AKVy are crucial to understand the Sanskrit root texts and to translate them into modern languages.

Jeffrey Kotyk, Research Associate, University of Bologna

Abhidharmakośa as Reflection of Cosmology in Earlier Āgama and Nikāya Buddhism.

The world of Mt. Meru and the Four Continents is the foundational worldview of the Buddhists in ancient India and it remained largely unchanged in later centuries. This talk will discuss how the *Abhidharmakośa* builds upon and reflects the cosmology of earlier Buddhist literature, including the physical layout of the world as well as the numerous levels of beings (humans, devas, asuras, etc.) who inhabit it, to show that Vasubandhu inherited this vision of the universe and in large part faithfully reproduced it, albeit with some minor differences.

Bruce C. Williams , C. V. Starr East Asian Library, University of California, Berkeley, retired.

The Puzzle of Xuanzang's Non-Mahayana Abhidharma Corpus

Among Xuanzang's translations there is a virtually complete corpus of the important Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma texts, the only non-Mahāyāna texts that he translated. Why? The answer may lie not in its non-Mahāyāna affiliations, but rather in the role of Abhidharma as a shared framework of debate among Indian Buddhists, non-Mahāyāna and Mahāyāna (e.g., Yogācāra) alike. This would account for the shared terminology, lists, categories and certain issues between the Sarvāstivāda and Yogācāra. Yogācāra also shares the gradualist Sarvāstivāda paradigm, especially on issues related to the 'Path.' This may suggest, in part, the importance of Saṃghabhadra's *Nyāyānusāra* as a rejoinder to the critiques in Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. Vasubandhu's work is the lynchpin that connects all these: it is a concise summary of the mature Sarvāstivādin position on the one hand; on the other its Sautrāntika criticisms either put it on a trajectory towards some of the mature Yogācāra positions of Asanga's *Yogācārabhūmiśāstra* or emphasize the gradualist filiations between the Yogācāra and Sarvāstivāda. Aspects of the 'Path of Seeing' may be taken as an example.

Ching Keng, Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, National Taiwan University

The Transmission of the Abhidharma Sources by Xuanzang and His Disciples

This paper aims to provide a brief survey of the reception of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* in China,

mostly mediated by Xuanzang's Chinese translations of Abhidharma sources and commentaries on the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* by Xuanzang's disciples. In addition, Xuanzang also translated the main works of the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma sources, together with Saṃghabhadra's *Nyāyānusāra*, which often criticized the positions held by the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. I will provide a few examples about how these Chinese sources may help us better understand key Abhidharma notions and debates in the hope of drawing more attention to the value of the Chinese Abhidharma sources.

Weijen Teng, Associate Professor, Department of Buddhist Studies, Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts

A Comparison of Xuanzang and Paramartha's Translations of Grammatical Elements in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*

The study of medieval Chinese translations of Buddhist Indic texts usually focuses on semantic and syntactic aspects of the translations because they reflect how the meanings of the original texts could be understood by the translator and help evaluate the (mis)understanding of their readers. In this study, I examine Chinese Buddhist translations differently by focusing on Xuanzang and Paramartha's translations of the Sanskrit grammatical elements found in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* and examining whether their differences affect the understanding of the text by both translators as well as readers. The grammatical elements to be studied in this paper include, but are not limited to, verb tenses, case-endings (*vibhakti*), and compounds (*samāsa*).

Sponsored by UBC's Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Program in Buddhism and Contemporary Society and the Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai (Society for the Promotion of Buddhism).

Register for the event [\[here\]](#) or copy and paste the following link into your web browser:

https://ubc.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_OfGihiPOTIGhUMpVks1N1w