

Sarvastivada

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The traditions of [Tibetan Buddhism](#) traditionally follow the [Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya](#)

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The **Sarvāstivāda** ([Sanskrit](#); [Chinese](#): 說一切有部; [pinyin](#): *Shuō Yīqièyǒu Bù*) was one of the [early Buddhist schools](#) established around the reign of [Asoka](#) (third century BCE).^[1] It was particularly known as an [Abhidharma](#) tradition, with a unique set of seven Abhidharma works.^[2]

The Sarvāstivādins were one of the most influential Buddhist monastic groups, flourishing throughout North India (especially [Kashmir](#)) and [Central Asia](#) until

the 7th century.^[1] The orthodox Kashmiri branch of the school composed the large and encyclopedic *[Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra](#)* during the reign of [Kanishka](#) (c. 127 – 150 CE).^[2] Because of this, orthodox Sarvāstivādins who upheld the doctrines in the *[Mahāvibhāṣa](#)* were called *Vaibhāṣikas*.^[2]

The Sarvāstivādins are believed to have given rise to the [Mūlasarvāstivāda](#) sect as well as the [Sautrāntika](#)s tradition, although the relationship between these groups has not yet been fully determined.



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Name



Copper-plate inscription mentioning the Sarvastivadas, in the year 134 of the [Azes era](#), i.e. 84 CE, [Kalawan](#), [Taxila](#).^[3]

Sarvāstivāda is a [Sanskrit](#) term that can be glossed as: "the theory of all exists". The Sarvāstivāda argued that all [dharmas](#) exist in the past, present and future, the "three times". [Vasubandhu](#)'s *Abhidharmakośakārikā* states, "He who affirms the existence of the dharmas of the three time periods [past, present and future] is held to be a Sarvāstivādin."^[4]

Although there is some dispute over how the word "Sarvāstivāda" is to be analyzed, the general consensus is that it is to be [parsed](#) into three parts: *sarva* "all" or "every" + *asti* "exist" + *vada* "speak", "say" or "theory". This equates perfectly with the Chinese term, *Shuōyīqièyǒu bù* ([Chinese](#): 說一切有部),^[5] which is literally "the sect that speaks of the existence of everything," as used by [Xuanzang](#) and other translators.

The Sarvāstivāda was also known by other names, particularly *hetuvada* and *yuktivada*. Hetuvada comes from *hetu* - 'cause', which indicates their emphasis on causation and conditionality. Yuktivada comes from *yukti* - 'reason' or even 'logic', which shows their use of rational argument and syllogism.

Origination and history



Fragment of a Buddha stela in the name of a "[Kshatrapa](#) lady" named *Naṃda* ([𑀭𑀸𑀓𑀸𑀓𑀾𑀢𑀺𑀓](#) *Naṃdaye Kshatrapa*), from the [Art of Mathura](#).^{[6][7][8]} The stela is

dedicated to the [Bodhisattva](#) "for the welfare and happiness of all sentient beings for the acceptance of the Sarvastivadas". [Northern Satraps](#) period, 1st century CE. ^{[6][9]}



A [stupa](#) from the [Mohra Muradu](#) ruins, [Taxila](#), where Sarvastivada groups are known to have lived by the end of the first century BCE. ^[10]

According to Charles Prebish, "there is a great deal of mystery surrounding the rise and early development of the Sarvāstivādin school." ^[11]

In Central Asia, several Buddhist monastic groups were historically prevalent. According to some accounts, the Sarvāstivādin emerged from the [Sthavira nikāya](#), a small group of conservatives, who split from the reformist majority Mahāsāṃghikas at the Second Buddhist council. According to this account, they were expelled from Magadha, and moved to northwestern India where they developed into the Sarvāstivādin school. ^[11]

A number of scholars have identified three distinct major phases of missionary activity seen in the history of [Buddhism in Central Asia](#), which are associated with respectively the [Dharmaguptaka](#), Sarvāstivāda, and the Mūlasarvāstivāda, ^[12] and the origins of the Sarvastivada have also been related to Asoka sending [Majjhantika](#) (Sanskrit: [Madhyāntika](#)) on a mission to [Gandhara](#), which had an early presence of the Sarvastivada. ^[11] The Sarvāstivādin in turn are believed to have given rise to the [Mūlasarvāstivāda](#) sect, although the relationship between these two groups has not yet been fully determined. According to Prebish, "this episode corresponds well with one Sarvāstivādin tradition stating that Madhyantika converted the city of Kashmir, which seems to have close ties with Gandhara." ^[11]

A third tradition says that a community of Sarvāstivādin monks was established at [Mathura](#) by the patriarch [Upagupta](#). ^[11] In the Sarvāstivādin tradition [Upagupta](#)

is said to have been the fifth patriarch after Mahākaśyapa, Ānanda, Madhyāntika, and Śāṅkavāsin, and in the Ch'an tradition he is regarded as the fourth.

Early history – Kanishka

The Sarvāstivāda enjoyed the patronage of [Kanishka](#) (c. 127 – 150 CE) of the [Kushan Empire](#), during which time they were greatly strengthened, and became one of the dominant sects of Buddhism for the next thousand years,^[11] flourishing throughout Northwest India, North India, and [Central Asia](#)

When the Sarvāstivāda school held a synod in Kashmir during the reign of [Kanishka II](#) (c. 158–176), the [Gandharan](#) most important text, the Astagrantha of Katyayaniputra was rewritten in Sanskrit making necessary revisions. This revised text was now known as [Jñānaprasthāna](#) "Course of Knowledge". Though the Gandharan Astagrantha had many vibhaṣas (commentaries), the new [Kashmiri](#) Astagrantha i.e. the *Jñānaprasthāna* had a Sanskrit [Mahāvibhaṣa](#), compiled by the Kashmir Sarvāstivāda synod.^[12] The *Jñānaprasthāna* and its Mahāvibhaṣa, which took more than a generation to complete, were then declared the Vaibhāṣika orthodoxy, said to be "Buddha's word", *Buddhabhāṣita*.

This new Vaibhāṣika orthodoxy, however, was not readily accepted by the Gandharan Sarvāstivādins, though gradually they adapted their views to the new Kashmiri orthodoxy. The Gandharan Sarvāstivādins used the same vinaya from [Mathura](#). As a matter of fact, their abhidharma was meant for meditative practices. They made use of the *Hṛdaya*, a manual for attaining [arhatship](#). However, the long Gandharan Vinaya was abridged to a Sanskrit *Dashabhanavara* in the Kashmir synod by removing the [avadanas](#) and [Jātaka tales](#), stories, and illustrations. After the declaration of the [vaibhāṣika](#) orthodoxy, the Gandharan non-vaibhāṣika Sarvāstivādins, the majority, were called [Sautrāntikas](#) "those who uphold the sūtras".

Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika subschools

The Sarvāstivāda comprised two subschools, the [Vaibhāṣika](#) and the [Sautrāntika](#). Pioneering work on the subject was undertaken by Ch. Willemen in 1975, and more recently in 2006 (*Abhidharmahrdaya*) and in 2008 in the Journal of the International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies (Tokyo). The Vaibhāṣika was formed by adherents of the [Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra](#), comprising the orthodox Kashmiri branch of the Sarvāstivāda school. The Vaibhāṣika-Sarvāstivāda, which had by far the most "comprehensive edifice of doctrinal systematics" of the [early Buddhist schools](#),^[13] was widely influential in India and beyond.^[14] In contrast to the Vaibhāṣikas, the [Sautrāntika](#) Sarvāstivādins did not uphold the [Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra](#), but rather emphasized the Buddhist sūtras. The name *Sautrāntika* means "those who uphold the sūtras."

Mūlasarvāstivādins

Main article: [Mulasarvastivada](#)

A number of theories have been posited by academics as to how the two are related, which [Bhikkhu Sujato](#) summaries as follows:

The uncertainty around this school has led to a number of hypotheses. Frauwallner' s theory holds that the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya is the disciplinary code of an early Buddhist community based in [Mathura](#), which was quite independent in its establishment as a monastic community from the Sarvāstivādins of Kaśmīr (although of course this does not mean that they were different in terms of doctrine). Lamotte, opposing Frauwallner, asserts that the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya was a late Kaśmīr compilation made to complete the Sarvāstivādin Vinaya. Warder suggests that the Mūlasarvāstivādins were a later development of the Sarvāstivāda, whose main innovations were literary, the compilation of the large Vinaya and the Saddharmasmṛtyupasthāna Sūtra, which kept the early doctrines but brought the style up to date with contemporary literary developments. Enomoto pulls the rug out from all these theories by asserting that Sarvāstivādin and Mūlasarvāstivādin are really the same. Meanwhile, Willemen, Dessein, and Cox have developed the theory that the Sautrantikas, a branch or tendency within the Sarvāstivādin group of schools, emerged in Gandhāra and Bactria around 200 CE. Although they were the earlier group, they temporarily lost ground to the Kaśmīr Vaibhāṣika school due to the political influence of Kaṇiṣka. In later years the Sautrantikas became known as Mūlasarvāstivādins and regained the ascendancy. I have elsewhere given my reasons for disagreeing with the theories of Enomoto and Willemen et al. Neither Warder nor Lamotte give sufficient evidence to back up their theories. We are left with Frauwallner' s theory, which in this respect has stood the test of time. ^[15]

The Kasmira orthodoxy, the Vaibhāṣikas disappeared in the later part of the 7th century. Subsequently, the old Gandharan Sarvāstivādins, the non-Vaibhāṣika Sautrantikas, were named Mūlasarvāstivādins, who then at a later date went to Tibet. It has been suggested that the minority Vaibhāṣikas were absorbed into the majority Sautrantika Sarvāstivādins as a possible result of the latter' s adaptations.

Moreover, *Mishrakabhidharmahrdaya*, a title which means that 'sautrantika views were mixed with Vaibhāṣika views' was composed by Dharmatrata in the 4th century in Gandharan area. Vasubandhu (ca.350–430), a native from Purusapura in Gandhara, composed his Kosa based on this text and the Astagrantha. While in Kasmira, he wrote his karikas which were well received there but he faced intense opposition, notably from Samghabhadra, a leading Sarvāstivāda pundit, when he composed his bhasya. By his bhasya, Vasubandhu made it clear to the

Vaibhāṣikas that he was a sautrantika, which is why he was fiercely opposed by the Sarvāstivāda vaibhasikas in Kasmira.

In reply to Vasubhandhu's bhasya, Samghabhadra wrote a text, the Nyāyanusara 'according to reason'. This work is presently only extant in Chinese (from Xuanzang's translation and little is known of it in English).

Orthodox Vaibhāṣika doctrines



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All exists (*sarvām asti*)

The name Sarvāstivāda literally means "all exists" (*sarvām asti*), referring to their doctrine that all [dharmas](#), past present and future, all exist.^[2] This doctrine has been described as an [eternalist theory of time](#).^[16] According to Westerhoff, one reason they had for holding this theory was that moments of consciousness are intentional (are about something) and thus if there are no past entities which exist, thoughts about them would be objectless and could not exist.^[17] Another argument is that to account for past actions (karma) which have effects at a later time. If an act of karma no longer exists, it is difficult, argues the Vaibhāṣika, to see how they can have fruits in the present or future.^[17] Finally, past, present and future are mutually interdependent ideas. If past and future are non-existent, argued the Vaibhāṣikas, how can one make sense of the existence of the present?^[17]

In the *Samyukta-abhidharma-hrdaya*, a fourth century Gandharan Sarvāstivāda text, the core Sarvāstivāda theory is defended thus:

"If there were no past and future, then there would be no present period of time; if there were no present period of time, there would also be no conditioned factors (samskṛta dharma). That is why there are the three periods of time (trikāla). Do not state that there is a mistake. When stating that [the fact that] what is remote is past and that what will exist is future, does not exist, and that there only is the present, this is not right. Why? Because there is retribution (vipaka) of action. The World-honored One has been saying: "There is action and there is retribution". It is not the case that this action and retribution are both present. When action is present, it should be known that retribution is future; when retribution is present, it should be known that action is already past. [...] As has been said: "If there are no such five faculties as faith (sṛaddhendriya), I say that this is the generation of worldlings (prthagjana)". When the seeker (saikṣa) is the one who is bound by envelopers (paryavasthāna), such five faculties as faith are not present; because the path is not together with defilement ([kleśa](#)). That is why it should be known that there is past and future. If it were different, noble persons (āryapudgala) would have to be worldlings."^[18]

While the Vaibhāṣikas held that dharmas of the three times all exist, they held that only present dharmas have "efficacy" (*karitra*), thus they were able to explain how the present seems to function differently than the past or future.^[19]

Among the different Sarvāstivāda thinkers, there were different ideas on how this theory was to be understood. [Vasubandhu's Abhidharmakośa](#) describes four main theses on *sarvām asti*:

There are four types of Sarvāstivādins accordingly as they teach a difference in existence (*bhavanīyathatva*), a difference in characteristic (*lakṣanānyathatva*), a

difference in condition (*avasthanyathatva*), and mutual difference (*anyonyathatva*).^[20]

The positions are further outlined by [Vasubandhu](#) as follows:^[20]

1. "The Bhadanta [Dharmatrata](#) defends *bhavanyathatva*, that is, he affirms that the three time periods, past, present, and future, are differentiated by their non-identity of existence (bhava). When a dharma goes from one time period to another its nature is not modified, but its existence is."
2. "The Bhadanta Ghosaka defends *laksananyathatva*, that is, the time periods differ through the difference in their characteristics. A dharma goes through the time periods. When it is past, it is endowed with past characteristics (*laksana*), but it is not deprived of its present and future characteristics..." [and so on with present and future]
3. "The Bhadanta Vasumitra defends *avasthanyathatva*, that is, the time periods differ through the difference of condition (*avastha*). A dharma, going through the time periods, having taken up a certain condition, becomes different through the difference of its condition, not through a difference in its substance. Example: a token placed on the square of ones, is called one; placed on the square of tens, ten; and placed on the square of hundreds, one hundred."
4. "The Bhadanta Buddhadeva defends *anyonyathatva*, that is, the time periods are established through their mutual relationships. A dharma, going throughout the time periods, takes different names through different relationships, that is, it is called past, future, or present, through a relationship with what precedes and with what follows. For example, the same woman is both a daughter and a mother."

In the [Abhidharmakosha](#) Vasubandhu argues that "the best system is that of Vasumitra".^[21] The *Samyukta-abhidharma-hrdaya* agrees.^[22] Later Sarvāstivāda takes a combination of the first and third theses as its model. It was on this basis that the school's doctrines were defended in the face of growing external, and sometimes even internal, criticism.

The doctrines of Sarvāstivāda were not confined to 'all exists', but also include the theory of momentariness (*ksanika*), conjoining (*samprayukta*) and simultaneity (*sahabhu*), conditionality (*hetu* and *pratyaya*), the culmination of the spiritual path (*marga*), and others. These doctrines are all inter-connected and it is the principle of 'all exists' that is the axial doctrine holding the larger movement together when the precise details of other doctrines are at stake.

Kṣaṇavada

Orthodox Sarvāstivāda also defended the theory of moments (*kṣaṇavada*). This doctrine held that dharmas last only for a moment, this measure of time is the

smallest measure of time possible, it is described in the *Samyukta-abhidharma-hrdaya* as:

The smallest [period of] time is one *kṣaṇa*. Time is extremely small with one instant. That is why a *kṣaṇa* is said to be the limitation in time. Concerning the measure of a *kṣaṇa*, some say that it is as a powerful man who, looking around hurriedly, observes the multitude of stars: according to the going of time, one star is one *kṣaṇa*. Moreover, some say that it is as a powerful man who, during a long time, snaps with the fingers: sixty-four *kṣaṇas* pass! Moreover, some say that it is as a powerful man who cuts thin silk thread of Kasi with a very sharp knife: cutting one thread is one *kṣaṇa*. Moreover, some say that the World-honored One did not pronounce [the word] *kṣaṇa*.^[23]

Svabhāva

In order to explain how it is possible for a dharma to remain the same and yet also undergo change as it moves through the three times, the Vaibhāṣika held that dharmas have a constant essence (*svabhāva*) which persists through the three times.^[24] The term was also identified as a unique mark or own characteristic (*svalaksana*) that differentiated a dharma and remained unchangeable throughout its existence.^[24] According to Vaibhāṣikas, *svabhavas* are those things that exist substantially (*dravyasat*) as opposed to those things which are made up of aggregations of dharmas and thus only have a nominal existence (*prajñaptisat*).^[24]

The Three Vehicles

Regarding divisions of practice, the Vaibhāṣika Sarvāstivādins are known to have employed the outlook of Buddhist practice as consisting of the Three Vehicles:^[25]

1. [Śrāvakayāna](#)
2. [Pratyekabuddhayāna](#)
3. Bodhisattvayāna

Views on the Buddha

Sarvāstivādins viewed the Buddha's physical body (Skt. *rūpakāya*) as being impure and improper for taking refuge in, and they instead regarded taking refuge in the Buddha as taking refuge in the [Dharmakāya](#) of the Buddha.^[26]

Some people say that to take refuge in the Buddha is to take refuge in the body of the Tathāgata, which comprises head, neck, stomach, back, hands and feet. It is explained that the body, born of father and mother, is composed of defiled *dharmas*, and therefore is not a source of refuge. The refuge is the Buddha's

fully accomplished qualities (*aśaikṣadharmāḥ*) which comprise *bodhi* and the *dharmakāya*.^[26]

Views on arhats

According to [A.K. Warder](#), the Sarvāstivādins held the same position as the [Mahāsāṃghika](#) branch regarding [arhats](#), considering them to be imperfect and fallible.^[27] In the Sarvāstivādin *Nāgadatta Sūtra*, the [Mahīśāsaka](#) view of women is criticized in a narrative about a bhikṣuṇī named Nāgadatta. Here, the demon [Māra](#) takes the form of her father, and tries to convince her to work toward the lower stage of an arhat, rather than that of a fully enlightened buddha (Skt. [samyaksambuddha](#)).^[28]

Māra therefore took the disguise of Nāgadatta's father and said thus to Nāgadatta: "Your thought is too serious. [Buddhahood](#) is too difficult to attain. It takes a hundred thousand nayutas of [koṭis](#) of [kalpas](#) to become a Buddha. Since few people attain Buddhahood in this world, why don't you attain Arhatship? For the experience of Arhatship is the same as that of [nirvāṇa](#); moreover, it is easy to attain Arhatship...."^[28]

In her reply, Nāgadatta rejects arhatship as a lower path, saying, "A Buddha's wisdom is like empty space of the ten-quarters, which can enlighten innumerable people. But an Arhat's wisdom is inferior."^[28]

Views on bodhisattvas

Regarding divisions of practice, the *Mahāvibhāṣā* is known to employ the outlook of Buddhist practice as consisting of the Three Vehicles.^[25] The Sarvāstivādins also did not hold that it was impossible, or even impractical to strive to become a fully enlightened buddha (Skt. *samyaksambuddha*), and therefore they admitted the path of a [bodhisattva](#) as a valid one.^[23] References to Bodhisattvayāna and the practice of the Six [Pāramitās](#) are commonly found in Sarvāstivāda works as well.^[29]

The *Mahāvibhāṣā* of the Vaibhāṣika Sarvāstivādins includes a schema of four pāramitās: generosity (*dāna*), discipline ([śīla](#)), energy (*vīrya*), and wisdom ([prajñā](#)), and it says that the four pāramitās and six pāramitās are essentially equivalent.^[30]

Foreign teachers hold that there are six *pāramitās*, adding patience (*kṣānti*) and meditation ([dhyāna](#)). But the teachers of [Kaśmīra](#) say that the last two are included in the first four. Patience is included in discipline and meditation in intuitive knowledge; they are accomplished upon completion of discipline and wisdom.^[30]

Canon

Vinaya

The [Dharmaguptaka](#) are known to have rejected the authority of the Sarvāstivāda [prātimokṣa](#) rules on the grounds that the original teachings of the Buddha had been lost. ^[31]

The complete Sarvāstivāda Vinaya is extant in the [Chinese Buddhist canon](#). In its early history, the Sarvāstivāda Vinaya was the most common vinaya tradition in China. However, [Chinese Buddhism](#) later settled on the [Dharmaguptaka](#) Vinaya. In the 7th century, Yijing wrote that in eastern China, most people followed the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya, while the Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya was used in earlier times in [Guanzhong](#) (the region around [Chang'an](#)), and that the Sarvāstivāda Vinaya was prominent in the [Yangzi River](#) area and further south. ^[32] In the 7th century, the existence of multiple Vinaya lineages throughout China was criticized by prominent Vinaya masters such as Yijing and Dao'an (654–717). In the early 8th century, Daoan gained the support of [Emperor Zhongzong of Tang](#), and an imperial edict was issued that the saṃgha in China should use only the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya for ordination. ^[33]

Āgamas

Scholars at present have "a nearly complete collection of sūtras from the Sarvāstivāda school" ^[34] thanks to a recent discovery in Afghanistan of roughly two-thirds of the Dīrgha Āgama in Sanskrit. The [Madhyama Āgama](#) (T26, Chinese trans. Gotama Saṅghadeva) and Saṃyukta Āgama (T99, Chinese trans. Guṇabhadra) have long been available in Chinese translation. The Sarvāstivāda is therefore the only early school besides the Theravada for which we have a roughly complete sutra collection, although unlike the Theravada it has not all been preserved in the original language.

Abhidharma

During the first century, the Sarvāstivāda abhidharma primarily consisted of the *Abhidharmahrdaya* authored by Dharmashresthin, a native from Tokharistan, and the *Ashtagrantha* authored/compiled by Katyayaniputra. Both texts were translated by Saṃghadeva in 391 AD and in 183 AD. respectively, but they were not completed until 390 in Southern China.

The Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma consists of seven texts. The texts of the Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma are:

- [*Jñānaprasthāna*](#) ("Foundation of Knowledge") (T. 1543–1544)
- [*Prakaranapāda*](#) ("Exposition") (T. 1541–1542)
- [*Vi jñānakāya*](#) ("Body of Consciousness") (T. 1539)
- [*Dharmaskandha*](#) ("Aggregation of Dharmas") (T. 1537)
- [*Prajñaptiśāstra*](#) ("Treatise on Designations") (T. 1538)
- [*Dhātukāya*](#) ("Body of Elements") (T. 1540)
- [*Saṅgītiparyāya*](#) ("Discourses on Gathering Together") (T. 1536)

Following these, are the texts that became the authority of the Vaibhāṣika:

- [*Mahāvibhāṣā*](#) ("Great Commentary" on the *Jñānaprasthāna*) (T. 1545)

All of these works have been translated into Chinese, and are now part of the [Chinese Buddhist canon](#). In the Chinese context, the word *abhidharma* refers to the Sarvāstivāda abhidharma, although at a minimum the Dharmaguptaka, [Pudgalavada](#) and [Theravada](#) also had abhidharmas.

Appearance and language

Appearance

Between 148 and 170 CE, the [Parthian](#) monk [An Shigao](#) came to China and translated a work which described the color of monastic robes (Skt. [*kāṣāya*](#)) utilized in five major Indian Buddhist sects, called *Da Biqiu Sanqian Weiyi* (大比丘三千威儀).^[35] Another text translated at a later date, the *Śāriputraparipṛcchā*, contains a very similar passage with nearly the same information.^[35] In the earlier source, the Sarvāstivāda are described as wearing dark red robes, while the [Dharmaguptas](#) are described as wearing black robes.^[36] However, in the corresponding passage found in the later *Śāriputraparipṛcchā*, the Sarvāstivāda are described as wearing black robes and the Dharmaguptas as wearing dark red robes.^[36] In traditions of [Tibetan Buddhism](#), which follow the [Mūlasarvāstivāda](#) Vinaya, red robes are regarded as characteristic of their tradition.^[37]

Language

During the first century BCE, in the Gandharan cultural area (consisting of [Oddiyana](#), [Gandhara](#) and [Bactria](#), [Tokharistan](#), across the [Khyber Pass](#)), the [Sthaviriyas](#) used the [Gāndhārī language](#) to write their literature using the [Kharosthi](#).

The Tibetan historian [Buton Rinchen Drub](#) wrote that the [Mahāsāṃghikas](#) used Prākṛit, the Sarvāstivādins used Sanskrit, the Sthavira nikāya used [Paiśācī](#), and the [Sammitīya](#) used [Apabhramśa](#).^[38]

Influence

Relationship to Mahāyāna

The Sarvāstivādins of [Kāśmīra](#) held the *Mahāvibhāṣā Śāstra* as authoritative, and thus were given the moniker of being Vaibhāṣikas. The *Mahāvibhāṣā* is thought to have been authored around 150 CE, around the time of [Kaniska](#) (127 – 151 CE) of the [Kuṣāṇa Empire](#).^[39] This massive treatise of Abhidharma (200 fascicles in Chinese) contains a great deal of material with what appear to be strong affinities to [Mahāyāna](#) doctrines.^[40] The *Mahāvibhāṣā* is also said to illustrate the accommodations reached between the [Hīnayāna](#) and Mahāyāna traditions, as well as the means by which Mahāyāna doctrines would become accepted.^[41] The *Mahāvibhāṣā* also defines the [Mahāyāna sūtras](#) and the role in their Buddhist canon. Here they are described as *Vaipulya* doctrines, with “Vaipulya” being a commonly used synonym for Mahāyāna. The *Mahāvibhāṣā* reads:

What is the Vaipulya? It is said to be all the sūtras corresponding to elaborations on the meanings of the exceedingly profound dharmas.^[42]

According to a number of scholars, Mahāyāna Buddhism flourished during the time of the Kuṣāṇa Empire, and this is illustrated in the form of Mahāyāna influence on the *Mahāvibhāṣā Śāstra*.^[43] The *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* also records that Kaniṣka presided over the establishment of [Prajñāpāramitā](#) doctrines in the northwest of India.^[44] [Étienne Lamotte](#) has also pointed out that a Sarvāstivāda master is known to have stated that the Mahāyāna Prajñā sūtras were to be found amongst their Vaipulya sūtras.^[42] According to Paul Williams, the similarly massive [Mahāprajñāpāramitāupadeśa](#) also has a clear association with the Vaibhāṣika Sarvāstivādins.^[45]

Tibetan Buddhism

The Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika subschools are both classified in the [Tibetan tenets system](#) as the two tenets of the [Hinayana](#), ignoring other early Indian Buddhist schools, which were not known to the Tibetans.

Chinese meditation

Sarvāstivādin meditation teachers also worked on the [Dhyāna sutras](#) (Chinese: 禪經), a group of early Buddhist meditation texts which were translated into Chinese and became influential in the development of Chinese Buddhist meditation methods.

See also

- [Tibetan Buddhism tenets system](#)

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Further reading

- For a critical examination of the Sarvāstivādin interpretation of the [*Samyuktagama*](#), see [David Kalupahana](#), *Causality: The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*.^[1]
- For a Sautrantika refutation of the Sarvāstivādin use of the *Samyuktagama*, see Theodore Stcherbatsky, *The Central Conception of Buddhism and the Meaning of the Word Dharma*.^[2]

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Topics in [Buddhism](#)

1.

- [Kalupahana 1975](#), pp. 76–78.
- 2. • Theodore Stcherbatsky, *The Central Conception of Buddhism and the Meaning of the Word Dharma*. Asian Educational Services, 2003, page 76. This is a reprint of a much earlier work and the analysis is now quite dated; the first appendix however contains translations of polemical materials.

[Categories](#):

- [Nikaya schools](#)
- [Sthaviravāda](#)
- [Early Buddhist schools](#)
- [Sarvāstivāda](#)