

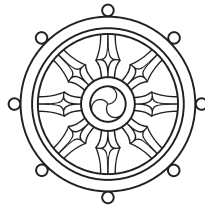
# THE TEN BODHISATTVA GROUNDS

*The Avataṃsaka Sūtra*

Chapter 26

To refrain from doing any manner of evil,  
 to respectfully perform all varieties of good,  
 and to purify one's own mind—  
 This is the teaching of all buddhas.

The Ekottara Āgama Sūtra  
 (T02 n.125 p.551a 13–14)



#### **A NOTE ON THE PROPER CARE OF DHARMA MATERIALS**

Traditional Buddhist cultures treat books on Dharma as sacred. Hence it is considered disrespectful to place them in a low position, to read them when lying down, or to place them where they might be damaged by food or drink.

# THE TEN BODHISATTVA GROUNDS

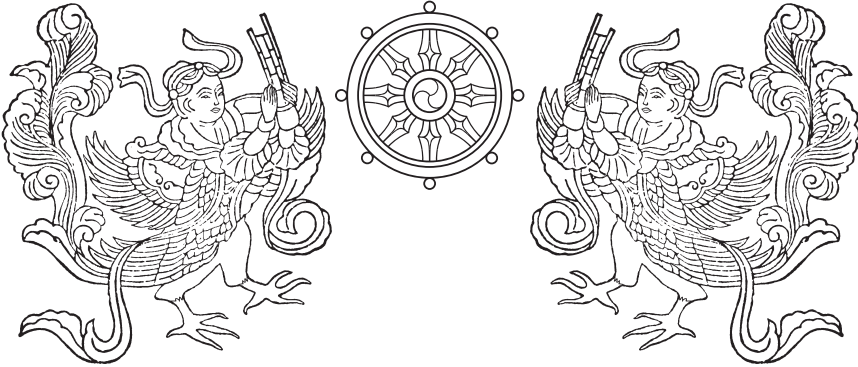
## *The Avataṃsaka Sūtra*

### Chapter 26

#### *The Ten Highest Levels of Practice On the Bodhisattva's Path to Buddhahood*

As Translated From Sanskrit by Tripiṭaka Master Śikṣānanda  
(699 CE)

An Annotated English Translation by Bhikshu Dharmamitra  
A Trilingual Edition (Chinese / English / Sanskrit)



**KALAVINKA PRESS**  
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON  
[WWW.KALAVINKAPRESS.ORG](http://WWW.KALAVINKAPRESS.ORG)

**KALAVINKA PRESS**  
**8603 39TH AVE SW**  
**SEATTLE, WA 98136 USA**  
**(WWW.KALAVINKAPRESS.ORG)**

Kalavinka Press is associated with the Kalavinka Dharma Association, a non-profit organized exclusively for religious educational purposes as allowed within the meaning of section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code. Kalavinka Dharma Association was founded in 1990 and gained formal approval in 2004 by the United States Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization to which all donations are tax deductible.

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Edition: 10GSIK-SA-1019-1.0-Chinese/English/Sanskrit

Kalavinka Buddhist Classics Book 12a

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ISBN: 978-1-935413-13-4

Library of Congress Control Number: 2019029482

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Names: Śikṣānanda, 652-710, transla | Dharmamitra, Bhikshu, transla

Title: The Ten Bodhisattva grounds : the Avataṃsaka Sūtra, chapter 26 : the ten highest levels of practice on the Bodhisattva's path to Buddhahood / as translated from Sanskrit by Tripiṭaka Master Śikṣānanda (699 ce) ; an annotated English translation by Bhikshu Dharmamitra.

Description: A trilingual edition (Chinese/English/Sanskrit) | Seattle, Washington : Kalavinka Press, 2019. | Series: Kalavinka Buddhist classics; book 12a | Includes bibliographical references. | Summary: "The Ten Bodhisattva Grounds" is an annotated English Translation by Bhikshu Dharmamitra of Tripitaka Master Śikṣānanda's circa 699 ce Sanskrit-to-Chinese translation of the Avataṃsaka Sūtra, Chapter 26. This text describes in great detail the ten highest levels of bodhisattva practice on the path to buddhahood as taught in that sutra. This trilingual edition (English / Chinese / Sanskrit) includes the facing-page simplified and traditional Chinese texts along with the entire appended P. L. Vaidya Sanskrit text. The Sanskrit section headings are inset in all three languages for easy mutual correlation between the three texts"-- Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019029482 | ISBN 9781935413134 (paperback)

Subjects: LCSH: Tripiṭaka. Sūtrapiṭaka. Avataṃsakasūtra.--Criticism, interpretation,

Classification: LCC BQ1622.A1 D43 2019 | DDC 294.3/823--dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2019029482>

Kalavinka Press books are printed on acid-free paper.  
 Cover and interior designed by Bhikshu Dharmamitra.  
 Printed in the United States of America

## **DEDICATION**

Dedicated to the memory of the selfless and marvelous life of the Venerable Dhyāna Master Hsuan Hua, the Guiyang Ch'an Patriarch and the very personification of the bodhisattva's six perfections.

**DHYĀNA MASTER HSUAN HUA**

宣化禪師

**1918–1995**

### ABOUT THE CHINESE TEXT

This translation is supplemented by inclusion of Chinese source text on verso pages in both traditional (above) and simplified (below) scripts. For the traditional character version variant readings from other canonical editions are found as an appendix in the back of the book and, where I have incorporated those variants into the translation, they are usually signaled with an endnote along with my rationale for making the emendation. The traditional-character Chinese text and its variant readings are from the April, 2004 version of the Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association's digital edition of the Taisho Buddhist canon. The simplified-character Chinese text is as downloaded from the online Qianlong Chinese Buddhist Canon on July 23, 2018 (<http://www.qldzj.com/>).

Those following the translation in the traditional Chinese version should be aware that the original Taisho scripture punctuation contained in this 2004 edition is not traceable to original editions, is not reliable, and is probably best ignored altogether. (In any case, accurate reading of Classical Chinese should never depend on a previous editor's punctuation.)

### ABOUT THE SANSKRIT TEXT

The Sanskrit text is included as an appendix in the back of the book. Use of the digital Sanskrit text is by the kind permission of Dr. Miroj Shakya, Project Director of the Digital Sanskrit Buddhist Canon. The Sanskrit text itself is the edition edited by P. L. Vaidya and published by The Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit learning.

To ease the reader's correlation of the Sanskrit texts with both the English translation and the facing-page Chinese, J. Rahder's alphabetical section headings are embedded in curly braces within all versions of the text (Chinese, English, and Sanskrit).

### OUTLINING IN THIS WORK

The ten chapter titles in this work are from the Taisho Chinese text. All other outline headings originate with the translator. Buddhist canonical texts are often so structurally dense that they are best navigated with the aid of at least a simple outline structure such as I have supplied here.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The accuracy and readability of this translation have been greatly improved by many corrections, preview comments, and editorial suggestions generously contributed by Bhikkhu Bodhi, Feng Ling, and Nicholas Weeks.

Expenses incurred in bringing forth this publication were underwritten by generous donations from Craig and Karen Neyman, Madalena Lew, Shuyu Yang, Jiajing Li, Kam Chung Wong, Loritta Chan, David Fox, Upasaka Guo Ke, Yuen-Lin Tan, the BDK English Tripiṭaka Project, and others. Sponsorship of Adobe Indesign book layout was provided by Anagarika Mahendra.

Use of the digital Sanskrit texts is by the kind permission of Dr. Miroj Shakya, Project Coordinator of the Digital Sanskrit Buddhist Canon Project.

Were it not for the ongoing material support provided by my late guru's Dharma Realm Buddhist Association and the serene translation studio provided by Seattle's Bodhi Dhamma Center, creation of this translation would have been impossible.

Additionally, it would have been impossible for me to produce this translation without the Dharma teachings and personal inspiration provided to me by my late guru, the awesomely wise and compassionate Dhyāna Master Hsuan Hua, the Guiyang Ch'an patriarch, Dharma teacher, and exegete.

Finally, I owe an immense debt of gratitude to the members of the liver care and transplant teams at Seattle's University of Washington Medical Center who cured me of liver cancer in 2010 and gave me a liver transplant several months later. In particular, if it weren't for over a decade of wonderfully attentive and compassionate care by Dr. Renuka Bhattacharya, medical director of UW's liver transplant program, the kindness and skill in three major surgeries by my transplant surgeon, Dr. Jorge Reyes, and the marvelous generosity of an anonymous liver donor, I would have died a half dozen years ago and thus never could have completed the scriptural translations I have produced in the last eight years.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya
BB	Buddhabhadra (T278)
BCSD	Hirakawa's <i>Buddhist Chinese-Sanskrit Dictionary</i>
BDK	Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai English Tripiṭaka
BHSD	Edgerton's <i>Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary</i>
BR	Bodhiruci (T1522)
CBETA	Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association's digital edition of the Taisho Chinese Buddhist canon.
DN	<i>Dīgha Nikāya</i>
DR	Dharmarakṣa (T278)
DSBC	Digital Sanskrit Buddhist Canon's digitized edition of <i>Daśabhūmikasūtram</i> , edited by P. L. Vaidya.
HH	Venerable Hsuan Hua
KB	Kumārajīva assisted by Buddhayaśas (T286)
KJ	Kumārajīva
LTX	Li Tongxuan (李通玄)
MDPL	<i>Materials for a Dictionary of the Prajñāpāramitā Literature</i>
MLDB	<i>The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima nikāya</i>
Mppu	<i>Mahāprajñāpāramitā upadeśa</i>
MW	Monier Williams' <i>A Sanskrit-English Dictionary</i>
N	Nāgārjuna
PDB	Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism
QL	Qing Liang (唐清涼山大華嚴寺沙門澄觀)
QLSC	Qing Liang's <i>Huayan Shuchao</i> (大方廣佛華嚴經疏鈔會本. L130 no. 1557)
SYMG	The Song, Yuan, Ming, Gong editions of the Chinese Buddhist canon.
SA	Śikṣānanda (T279)
SD	Śīladharma (T287)
T	Taisho Chinese Buddhist Canon via CBETA (Version 2004. ed.) Taipei)
VB	Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi
XHYJL	<i>Xin huayanjing lun</i> (新華嚴經論 – T36, no. 1739) by Li Tongxuan.



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## TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Continuing my focus on translating bodhisattva path texts important in the history of Classic Indian and Chinese Mahāyana Buddhism, I present here my English translation of “The Ten Grounds” chapter of the *Greatly Expansive Buddha's Flower Adornment Sutra* (*Mahāvaiṣṭya-buddha-avatamsaka-sūtra*) as translated by Tripiṭaka Master Śikṣānanda some time between 695 and 699 CE. The subject of this six-fascicle 26<sup>th</sup> chapter, “The Ten Grounds,” is the bodhisattva's ascent through ten “grounds,” “planes,” or “levels” of spiritual path cultivation transited by the bodhisattva as he progresses from the state of a common person toward that of a fully enlightened buddha.

There have been two relatively complete Chinese translations of the *Avatamsaka Sutra* itself from Sanskrit, the first of which was an edition in 34 chapters and 60 fascicles completed by Tripiṭaka Master Buddhahadra in 421 (T 278) and the second of which was an edition in 39 chapters and 80 fascicles completed by Tripiṭaka Master Śikṣānanda in 699 (T 280). My reasons for drawing this “Ten Grounds” chapter from the Śikṣānanda edition rather than the Buddhahadra edition were two-fold. First, the Śikṣānanda edition is more complete and, outside of Japan, it has generally now regarded as the “standard” edition ever since the middle of the Tang Dynasty. Secondly, I had already been introduced to the Śikṣānanda edition by my guru, the Venerable Hsuan Hua, this in the context of his lectures on it which started in San Francisco in 1970 or '71.

In order to encourage a better understanding of these ten bodhisattva grounds and the bodhisattva path in general, I have also translated three other closely related works:

Kumārajīva's 4-fascicle *Ten Grounds Sutra* (T 286);

Nāgārjuna's 17-fascicle *Treatise on the Ten Grounds* (T 1521);

Śikṣānanda's 80-fascicle *Flower Adornment Sutra* (T 279).

The first two of these three related works are Kalavinka Press publications. Even though I finished the first draft of my *Flower Adornment Sutra* translation in early 2014, due to the inevitable delay imposed by editing, revising, and incorporating recommended improvements from colleagues, it could easily be a few more years before I release it to publication.

Regarding this “Ten Grounds” text itself, because it also circulated as an independent scripture known as the *Ten Grounds Sutra* (*Daśabhūmika-sūtra*), it does not exist only as a chapter of the *Avataṃsaka Sutra*. There is no real consensus on whether this text was, per the tradition, originally integral to the *Avataṃsaka Sutra* or was instead an independently circulating scripture later incorporated into the *Avataṃsaka Sutra*. In any case, in addition to the later Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Mongolian editions of this text, there are six relatively early surviving Chinese editions as follows:

- Dharmarakṣa (c. 297 CE), T 283;
- Kumārajīva assisted by Buddhayaśas (c. 408–412 CE),<sup>1</sup> T 286;
- Buddhabhadra (c. 418–20 CE), as *Avataṃsaka Sutra* Ch. 22, T 278;
- Bodhiruci (c. 508–511 CE), in Vasubhandu’s commentary, T 1522;
- Śikṣānanda (c. 695–699 CE), as *Avataṃsaka Sutra* Ch. 26, T 279;
- Śīladharma (c. 790 CE), T 287.

In English, there have been several translations, as follows:

- Megumu Honda from the Sanskrit of the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra*;<sup>2</sup>
- Buddhist Text Translation Society (partial) of the Śikṣānanda edition’s Chapter 26;
- Thomas Cleary, supposedly (but not really) from Śikṣānanda’s edition of the *Avataṃsaka Sutra*, this in Ch. 26 of his *Flower Ornament Scripture*.<sup>3</sup>

The Megumu Honda translation was done in 1961–62 when he was still a student at Yale, and, although perhaps useful for beginning students of Sanskrit, its utility is diminished by the author’s early difficulties with both Sanskrit and English.

The BTTS translation is so far only a partial translation consisting of a translation of the first four of the ten grounds. I have been advised by a member of that translation team that, as of July, 2018, the tentative publication date for the remainder of the BTTS translation is still 2 or more years away.

Regarding this “Ten Grounds Chapter” itself, Thomas Cleary’s translation is represented as a translation from the Chinese of the Śikṣānanda edition of the *Avataṃsaka Sutra*. However, it is no such thing. His translation of Chapter 26 which he calls “The Ten Stages” chapter appears to instead be a loose translation of the P. L. Vaidya Sanskrit edition of the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra*. Hence his supposed translation of this chapter has little if any relation to Śikṣānanda’s Chinese edition of the *Avataṃsaka Sutra*.

Although there are other schemas describing the levels of cultivation through which one passes in cultivating the bodhisattva path, the “ten grounds” arrangement described in this text is really quite standard for the Classic Indian Mahāyana tradition. As listed in the introductory section of this chapter, these ten levels of progress along the bodhisattva path are as follows:

- 1) The Ground of Joyfulness (*pramuditā*);
- 2) The Ground of Stainlessness (*vimalā*);
- 3) The Ground of Shining Light (*prabhākārī*);
- 4) The Ground of Blazing Brilliance (*arciṣmatī*);<sup>4</sup>
- 5) The Difficult-to-Conquer Ground (*sudurjayā*);
- 6) The Ground of Direct Presence (*abhimukhī*);
- 7) The Far-Reaching Ground (*dūraṃgamā*);
- 8) The Ground of Immovability (*acalā*);
- 9) The Ground of Excellent Intelligence (*sādhumatī*);<sup>5</sup>
- 10) The Ground of the Dharma Cloud (*dharma-megha*).

Each of these grounds is correlated with the practice of one of these ten perfections:

- The perfection of giving (*dāna-pāramitā*);
- The perfection of moral virtue (*śīla-pāramitā*);
- The perfection of patience (*kṣānti-pāramitā*);
- The perfection of vigor (*vīrya-pāramitā*);
- The perfection of *dhyāna* meditation (*dhyāna-pāramitā*);
- The perfection of wisdom (*prajñā-pāramitā*);
- The perfection of skillful means (*upāya-pāramitā*);
- The perfection of vows (*prañidhāna-pāramitā*);
- The perfection of powers (*bala-pāramitā*);
- The perfection of knowledge (*jñāna-pāramitā*).

There are also other correlations between particular grounds and important bodhisattva skills and capacities. Examples include:

- The four means of attraction on the first four grounds;
- The thirty-seven enlightenment factors on the fourth ground;
- The four truths on the fifth ground;
- The twelve links of conditioned arising on the sixth ground;
- The unproduced-dharmas patience on the eighth ground;
- The four unimpeded knowledges on the ninth ground.

According to this text, as the bodhisattva moves from one level to another in his cultivation of the ten grounds, he sees more and more buddhas, manifests more and more bodhisattva transformation bodies attended by bodhisattva retinues, and appears as a bodhisattva king in higher and higher stations of existence. This bodhisattva kingship phenomenon begins with his appearance as a king over the continent of Jambudvīpa on the first ground after which he appears as a king over all four continents on the second ground, appears as a king of the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven on the third ground, and so forth, finally culminating with his appearance as a king of the Akaniṣṭha Heaven on the tenth ground.

There are a few technical difficulties that I encountered in translating this text from Chinese, most of which involve ambiguities in meaning introduced by the limitations of Chinese language in accurately reflecting Sanskrit technical term nuances. This problem is well evidenced by the particular Chinese-language technical term translations chosen by Śikṣānanda. (The challenges I encountered in translating Kumārajīva's *Ten Grounds Sutra* were nearly identical.)

Fortunately, because I could consult the surviving Sanskrit edition, it was for the most part possible to trace the antecedent Sanskrit terms and then choose somewhat more accurate English technical term translations than would have resulted from simply trying to translate Śikṣānanda's terms directly from Chinese. Relative clarity in this matter was aided somewhat by J. Rahder's *Glossary*.<sup>6</sup> Even though the P. L. Vaidya Sanskrit edition dates from roughly a millennium after the Śikṣānanda and Kumārajīva editions, I think it is still mostly valid to rely on it for this purpose because, even as aspects of meaning at the sentence and paragraph level of the Sanskrit manuscript morph over time with each recopying or transcription from memory, technical terms still tend to remain unchanged. The same cannot be said for the actual text of the scripture because we can readily observe very obvious differences between the Sanskrit edition and the very early Śikṣānanda and Kumārajīva editions.

The first and most obvious problem is the difficulty which the Chinese translations have in reliably reflecting the difference between technical terms such as *jñāna* (knowledge, cognition, etc.) and *prajñā* (wisdom). In an ideal translation world, Śikṣānanda and Kumārajīva would have very rigorously stuck with simply *zhi* (智)



for “*jñāna* / knowledge” and *zhihui* (智慧) for “*prajñā* / wisdom,” but this is not the case, especially in the translation of verse lines where the need for extreme economy in composing Chinese 5- or 7-character verse lines where it often became necessary to shorten *zhihui* (智慧) to simply *zhi* (智), thereby accidentally obscuring for the Chinese reader the difference between “wisdom” and “knowledge.” I found that this problem was fairly easily overcome through consulting the Sanskrit.

Other technical terms which initially produced difficulties due to the widely varying and sometimes deceptive Chinese translations were *adhyāśaya* (usually “higher aspirations,” etc.), *āśaya* (usually “intentions,” “resolute intentions,” “dispositions,” “inclinations,” etc.), and *adhimukti* (usually “resolute beliefs,” “resolute faith,” “convictions,” etc.). Had I not closely tracked the Sanskrit text, it would have been nearly impossible to accurately translate these terms and preserve their distinctions.

Due to the particular need of specialists and advanced students to closely track and distinguish technical terms and other issues such as these, at least in the multilingual editions of my translation, I am including under the same cover not only the facing-page Chinese simplified and traditional texts, but also (in the back of the book) the Sanskrit text.

Use of the digital Sanskrit text is by the kind permission of Dr. Miroj Shakya, Project Coordinator of the Digital Sanskrit Buddhist Canon Project. The Sanskrit text itself is the edition edited by P. L. Vaidya and published by The Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit learning. To ease the reader’s correlation of the Sanskrit text with both the English translation and the facing-page Chinese, I have embedded the alphabetical Sanskrit section headings within all versions of the text (Chinese, English, and Sanskrit).

These very helpful alphabetical section markers originate with Johannes Rahder who embedded them in his 1923 and 1926 editions of the *Daśabhūmika-Sūtra*.<sup>7</sup> In all cases I have placed these alphabetical section headings within the texts in bolded reduced-font “curly brackets” or “braces” as follows: {A}, {B}, {AA}, etc.

In bringing forth this translation, I making no claims to absolute accuracy. Though I have been assisted by critical comments from about a half dozen colleagues and have gone through the manuscript many times, there is probably room for improvement. I hope

that readers who notice errors or infelicities will favor me with constructive email criticism via the Kalavinka website. I hope that this edition will at least serve to encourage a deeper study of this text by students of the Dharma.

Bhikshu Dharmamitra

Seattle,

July 9, 2018

## Introduction Endnotes

1. Citing Kusugai, Richard Robinson (*Early Mādhyamika in India and China*, p. 76) says that Kumārajīva is said to have “procrastinated about starting work on the *Daśabhūmika* until Buddhayaśas joined him in the undertaking.” Buddhayaśas arrived in Chang’an in 408, so the translation must date from around that time.
2. Sinor, D., Raghu Vira, Honda, Megumu, & Permanent International Altaistic Conference. (1968). *Studies in South, East, and Central Asia : Presented as a memorial volume to the late Professor Raghu Vira* (Śāta-piṭaka series ; v. 74). New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture.
3. Cleary, T. (1984). *The Flower Ornament Scripture : A Translation of the Avatamsaka Sutra*. Boulder : [New York]: Shambhala Publications ; Distributed in the U.S. by Random House.
4. SA,SD, and Prajñā all translate the name of this *bhūmi* as “the Ground of Blazing Intelligence” (焰慧地). This appears to be the result of an error arising from misinterpreting the Sanskrit name (*arciṣmatī*) by mistaking a suffix indicating possession (-*mat* modified to agree with the feminine noun *bhūmi* to become -*matī*) for a completely unrelated word that means “intelligence,” “intellect,” “mind” (*matī*). (BB, BR, KB, and the Tibetan all recognize -*matī* as a possessive suffix and hence accord with the Sanskrit meaning.) I have chosen to “bridge” the problem by translating the name of this ground as “the Ground of Blazing Brilliance” in order to allow both meanings the be reflected in the word “blazing” and thus more or less accurately translate both the (seemingly erroneous) SA translation and the correct meaning of the Sanskrit.
5. There seem to be two distinctly different understandings of the meaning of this ground:  
DR, SA, BB, BR, SD, and Prajñā all translate the name of this *bhūmi* as “the Ground of Excellent Intelligence” (善慧地). DR translates that same meaning slightly differently: (善哉意). The Tibetan translation also corresponds to this with “the Ground of Excellent Insight” (*legs pa'i blo gros*). Strictly speaking, one could infer that most of these renderings appear be the result of an error arising from misinterpreting the Sanskrit name (*sādhumatī*) by mistaking a suffix indicating possession (-*mat* modified to agree with the feminine noun *bhūmi* to become -*matī*) for a completely unrelated word that means “intelligence,” “intellect,” or “mind” (*matī*).

Of all the Chinese and Tibetan translators, it appears that the Kumārajīva-Buddhayaśas translation team may have been the only one to render the name of this *bhūmi* more or less in accordance with the above-referenced “strictly correct” interpretation of the Sanskrit term as “the Ground of Sublime Goodness” (妙善地). The KB edition only employs the possibly erroneous Chinese and Tibetan default rendering once (in its initial listing of the ten bodhisattva grounds), but otherwise accords with the strictly grammatically correct interpretation of the term throughout its detailed discussion of the ninth *bhūmi* itself.

6. Glossary of the Sanskrit, Tibetan, Mongolian, and Chinese Versions of the *Daśabhūmika-Sūtra*. Compiled by J. Rahder. (Buddhica, Documents et Travaux pour l’Étude du Bouddhisme publiés sous la direction de J. Przyluski; Deuxième Série; Documents—Tome I). Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1928.
7. On page vii in his Introduction to his *Glossary of the Sanskrit, Tibetan, Mongolian and Chinese Versions of the Daśabhūmika-Sūtra*, Rahder says, “capital letters between brackets refer to the sections of the chapters as indicated in my edition (1926).” (They are also present in his 1923 edition of the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* that was published together with the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* with only the minor oversight of having left out “A” and “B” at the very beginning of the first *bhūmi*.)