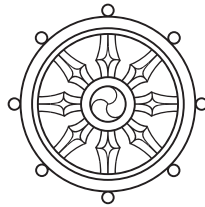


THE TEN GROUNDS SUTRA

The Daśabhūmika Sūtra

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)



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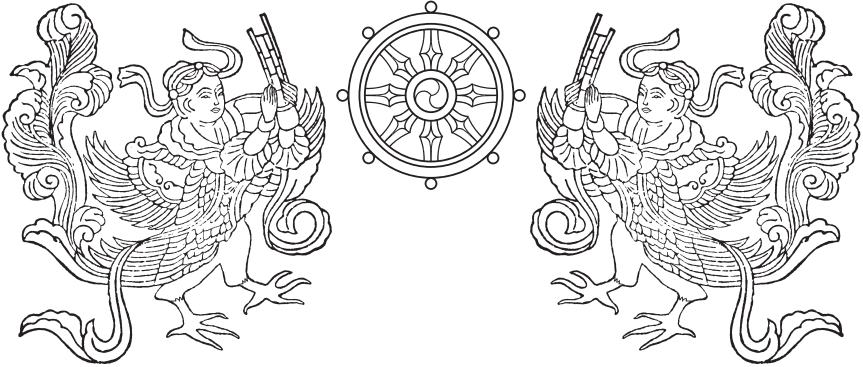
THE TEN GROUNDS SUTRA

The Daśabhūmika Sūtra

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

As Translated from Sanskrit by Tripiṭaka Master Kumārajīva
(c 410 CE)

An Annotated English Translation by Bhikshu Dharmamitra
Including the Entire P. L. Vaidya Sanskrit Text



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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

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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.

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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.

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	Śiṅśānanda (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.

GENERAL TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	6
Outlining in This Work	6
List of Abbreviations	7
Directory to Chapter Subsections	11
The Translator's Introduction	19
The Translation: The Ten Grounds Sutra	27
Chapter 1 : The Joyfulness Ground	29, 44
Chapter 2 : The Stainlessness Ground	69
Chapter 3 : The Shining Light Ground	85
Chapter 4 : The Blazing Brilliance Ground	103
Chapter 5 : The Difficult-to-Conquer Ground	115
Chapter 6 : The Direct Presence Ground	131
Chapter 7 : The Far-Reaching Ground	151
Chapter 8 : The Immovability Ground	171
Chapter 9 : The Sublime Goodness Ground	195
Chapter 10: The Dharma Cloud Ground	219
Translation Endnotes	263
Bibliography	293
Appendix: The P. L. Vaidya Sanskrit Text	295
About the Translator	453
Kalavinka Buddhist Classics: Current Title List	455

DIRECTORY TO CHAPTER SUBSECTIONS

I. THE INTRODUCTORY SECTION	29
A. THE SETTING AND AUDIENCE	29
B. THE GREAT BODHISATTVAS AND THEIR QUALITIES	29
C. THE NAMES OF THE BODHISATTVAS IN <i>ATTENDANCE</i>	30
D. VAJRAGARBHA ENTERS SAMĀDHI AND COUNTLESS BUDDHAS MANIFEST	31
E. THE BUDDHAS PRAISE HIM AND ENCOURAGE HIM TO TEACH THE TEN GROUNDS	31
F. THE BUDDHAS BESTOW QUALITIES AND ABILITIES ON VAJRAGARBHA	33
G. VAJRAGARBHA EMERGES FROM SAMĀDHI AND SPEAKS OF THE TEN GROUNDS	34
1. VAJRAGARBHA SETS FORTH THE NAMES OF THE TEN GROUNDS	34
2. VAJRAGARBHA BODHISATTVA FALLS SILENT	35
H. THE CONGREGATION IS CAUSED TO WONDER WHY THERE IS NO EXPLANATION	35
I. LIBERATION MOON BODHISATTVA'S FIRST REQUEST FOR DHARMA TEACHING	35
J. VAJRAGARBHA EXPLAINS HIS SILENCE	36
K. LIBERATION MOON BODHISATTVA'S SECOND REQUEST FOR DHARMA TEACHING	37
L. VAJRAGARBHA FURTHER EXPLAINS HIS RETICENCE TO TEACH THIS DHARMA	37
M. LIBERATION MOON BODHISATTVA'S THIRD REQUEST FOR DHARMA TEACHING	38
N. THE BODHISATTVA CONGREGATION JOINS IN REQUESTING THIS TEACHING	39
O. THE BUDDHA EMITS BRILLIANT LIGHT FROM BETWEEN HIS EYEBROWS	40
P. ALL BUDDHAS EMIT LIGHT THAT UTTERS VERSES REQUESTING DHARMA	40
Q. VAJRAGARBHA'S PRELIMINARY VERSES ON THE DIFFICULTY OF THIS EXPLANATION	42
II. THE MAIN DOCTRINAL TEACHING SECTION	44
A. THE FIRST GROUND: THE JOYFULNESS GROUND	44
1. VAJRAGARBHA LISTS THE FIRST GROUND'S QUALIFICATIONS & MOTIVATIONS	44
2. THE QUALITIES OF THE BODHISATTVA'S RESOLVE	45
3. THE CONSEQUENCES OF GENERATING THE BODHISATTVA VOW	45
4. THE BASES FOR THE FIRST GROUND BODHISATTVA'S JOYFULNESS	46
5. THE FIRST GROUND BODHISATTVA'S FIVE KINDS OF FEARLESSNESS	47
6. THE BODHISATTVA'S GROUNDS PURIFYING PRACTICES	48
7. THE BODHISATTVA'S TEN GREAT VOWS	49
8. THE MENTAL QUALITIES & FAITH ACQUIRED BY THE 1ST GROUND BODHISATTVA	54
9. THE BODHISATTVA'S REFLECTIVE CONTEMPLATION ON DHARMA AND BEINGS	55
10. THE BODHISATTVA'S RESOLVE, RENUNCIATION, AND GROUNDS PURIFICATION	56
11. THE BODHISATTVA'S SEEING AND SERVING OF COUNTLESS BUDDHAS	58
12. THE BODHISATTVA'S PRACTICE OF THE MEANS OF ATTRACTION	59
13. THE BODHISATTVA'S GROUNDS PURIFICATION COMPARED TO REFINING GOLD	59
14. THE BODHISATTVA'S ACQUISITION OF FURTHER KNOWLEDGE OF THE GROUNDS	59
15. THE BODHISATTVA'S PATH KNOWLEDGE COMPARED TO A CARAVAN GUIDE	61
16. VAJRAGARBHA'S FINAL STATEMENTS ABOUT THE 1ST GROUND BODHISATTVA	62
17. THE BODHISATTVA'S SOCIAL STATION AND DHARMA PRACTICE	62
a. THE BODHISATTVA'S MINDFULNESS	62
b. THE BODHISATTVA'S ASPIRATION TO SERVE BEINGS	62

c. THE RESULT OF THE BODHISATTVA'S LEAVING THE HOUSEHOLD LIFE	63
18. VAJRAGARBHA BODHISATTVA'S SUMMARIZING VERSES	63
B. THE SECOND GROUND: THE STAINLESSNESS GROUND	69
1. THE SECOND GROUND'S INTRODUCTORY VERSES AND DHARMA REQUEST	69
2. VAJRAGARBHA COMMENCES THE SECOND GROUND'S EXPLANATION	69
3. THE TEN RESOLUTE INTENTIONS AS BASES FOR ENTERING THE 2ND GROUND	69
4. THE BODHISATTVA'S OBSERVANCE OF TEN COURSES OF GOOD KARMIC ACTION	70
a. AVOIDANCE OF KILLING	70
b. AVOIDANCE OF TAKING WHAT IS NOT GIVEN	70
c. AVOIDANCE OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT	70
d. AVOIDANCE OF FALSE SPEECH	71
e. AVOIDANCE OF DIVISIVE SPEECH	71
f. AVOIDANCE OF HARSH SPEECH	71
g. AVOIDANCE OF FRIVOLOUS SPEECH	71
h. AVOIDANCE OF COVETOUSNESS	72
i. AVOIDANCE OF ILL WILL	72
j. AVOIDANCE OF WRONG VIEWS	72
5. THE BODHISATTVA'S REFLECTIONS ON TEN GOOD AND BAD KARMIC ACTIONS	72
a. REFLECTIONS ON THEIR GENERATION OF THE SIX REBIRTH DESTINIES	72
b. REFLECTIONS ON GENERATION OF THE FRUITS OF THE 3 VEHICLES' PATHS	73
c. REFLECTIONS ON THE 10 TRANSGRESSIONS' 10 KARMIC RETRIBUTIONS	73
d. RENUNCIATION OF 10 BAD ACTIONS & ROUSING OF 10 ALTRUISTIC MINDS	75
6. HIS REFLECTIONS ON THE PLIGHT OF BEINGS & RESOLVE TO RESCUE THEM	76
7. THE BODHISATTVA'S SEEING AND SERVING OF COUNTLESS BUDDHAS	78
8. THE BODHISATTVA'S GROUNDS PURIFICATION COMPARED TO REFINING GOLD	79
9. THE BODHISATTVA'S PRACTICE OF MEANS OF ATTRACTION AND PĀRAMITĀS	79
10. VAJRAGARBHA'S FINAL STATEMENTS ABOUT THE 2ND GROUND BODHISATTVA	79
a. THE BODHISATTVA'S STATION AND DHARMA PRACTICE	79
b. THE BODHISATTVA'S MINDFULNESS	79
c. THE BODHISATTVA'S ASPIRATION TO SERVE BEINGS	80
d. THE RESULT OF THE BODHISATTVA'S LEAVING THE HOUSEHOLD LIFE	80
11. VAJRAGARBHA BODHISATTVA'S SUMMARIZING VERSES	81
C. THE THIRD GROUND: THE SHINING LIGHT GROUND	85
1. THE THIRD GROUND'S INTRODUCTORY VERSES AND DHARMA REQUEST	85
2. VAJRAGARBHA COMMENCES THE THIRD GROUND'S EXPLANATION	86
3. THE TEN RESOLUTE INTENTIONS AS BASES FOR ENTERING THE THIRD GROUND	86
4. THE BODHISATTVA'S CONTEMPLATION OF ALL CONDITIONED DHARMAS	86
5. THE BODHISATTVA'S RENUNCIATION & QUEST FOR BUDDHA'S KNOWLEDGE	87
6. THE BODHISATTVA'S TEN SYMPATHETIC MENTAL INTENTIONS TOWARD BEINGS	88
7. THE BODHISATTVA'S GENERATION AND PRACTICE OF GREAT VIGOR	88
8. THE BODHISATTVA'S CONQUEST OF THE MEDITATIVE ABSORPTIONS	91
9. THE BODHISATTVA'S DEVELOPMENT OF THE FOUR IMMEASURABLES	92
10. THE BODHISATTVA'S DEVELOPMENT OF THE SPIRITUAL SUPERKNOWLEDGES	92
11. THE BODHISATTVA'S HEAVENLY EAR	93
12. THE BODHISATTVA'S KNOWLEDGE OF OTHERS' THOUGHTS	93

13. THE BODHISATTVA'S RECALL OF PAST LIVES	94
14. THE BODHISATTVA'S HEAVENLY EYE	94
15. THE BODHISATTVA'S VOW-DETERMINED REBIRTH APART FROM THE DHYĀNAS	95
16. THE BODHISATTVA'S SEEING AND SERVING OF COUNTLESS BUDDHAS	95
17. THE BODHISATTVA'S PURIFICATION & ITS COMPARISON TO REFINING GOLD	95
18. THE BODHISATTVA'S PRACTICE OF MEANS OF ATTRACTION AND PĀRAMITĀS	96
19. VAJRAGARBHA'S FINAL STATEMENTS ABOUT THE 3RD GROUND BODHISATTVA	96
a. THE BODHISATTVA'S STATION AND DHARMA PRACTICE	96
b. THE BODHISATTVA'S MINDFULNESS	96
c. THE BODHISATTVA'S ASPIRATION TO SERVE BEINGS	97
d. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE BODHISATTVA'S VIGOR AND VOWS	97
20. VAJRAGARBHA BODHISATTVA'S SUMMARIZING VERSES	97
D. THE FOURTH GROUND: THE BLAZING BRILLIANCE GROUND	103
1. THE FOURTH GROUND'S INTRODUCTORY VERSES AND DHARMA REQUEST	103
2. VAJRAGARBHA COMMENCES THE FOURTH GROUND'S EXPLANATION	104
3. 10 GATEWAYS TO DHARMA LIGHT AS BASES FOR ENTERING THE 4TH GROUND	104
4. 10 KNOWLEDGE-MATURING DHARMAS FOR BIRTH IN THE BUDDHAS' CLAN	104
5. THE BODHISATTVA'S PRACTICE OF THE 37 ENLIGHTENMENT FACTORS	105
a. THE FOUR STATIONS OF MINDFULNESS	105
b. THE FOUR RIGHT EFFORTS	106
c. THE FOUR BASES OF PSYCHIC POWER	106
d. THE FIVE ROOTS	106
e. THE FIVE POWERS	106
f. THE SEVEN LIMBS OF ENLIGHTENMENT	107
g. THE EIGHTFOLD PATH	107
h. THE BODHISATTVA'S TEN AIMS UNDERLYING HIS 37 FACTORS PRACTICE	107
6. THE BODHISATTVA'S LEAVING OF WRONG VIEWS, ATTACHMENTS, AND ACTIONS	108
7. MENTAL & PERSONAL QUALITIES GAINED IN PATH CULTIVATION	108
8. THE BODHISATTVA'S ACQUISITION OF TEN KINDS OF VIGOR	109
9. OTHER QUALITIES DEVELOPED IN THE BODHISATTVA'S 4TH GROUND PRACTICE	109
10. THE BODHISATTVA'S SEEING AND SERVING OF COUNTLESS BUDDHAS	109
11. THE BODHISATTVA'S PURIFICATION & ITS COMPARISON TO REFINING GOLD	110
12. THE RADIANCE OF THIS BODHISATTVA'S ROOTS LIKE THAT OF A MAÑI JEWEL	110
13. VAJRAGARBHA'S FINAL STATEMENTS ABOUT THE 4TH GROUND BODHISATTVA	110
a. THE BODHISATTVA'S STATION AND DHARMA PRACTICE	110
b. THE BODHISATTVA'S MINDFULNESS	111
c. THE BODHISATTVA'S ASPIRATION TO SERVE BEINGS	111
d. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE BODHISATTVA'S APPLICATION OF VIGOR	111
14. VAJRAGARBHA BODHISATTVA'S SUMMARIZING VERSES	111
E. THE FIFTH GROUND: THE DIFFICULT-TO-CONQUER GROUND	115
1. THE FIFTH GROUND'S INTRODUCTORY VERSES AND DHARMA REQUEST	115
2. VAJRAGARBHA BEGINS THE FIFTH GROUND'S EXPLANATION	116
3. TEN IMPARTIAL RESOLUTE INTENTIONS ENABLING FIFTH GROUND ACCESS	116
4. THE BODHISATTVAS' BASES FOR BUDDHAHOOD AND IRREVERSIBLE RESOLVE	117
5. THE BODHISATTVA'S KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTHS	117

6. THE BODHISATTVA'S RESULTANT GENERATION OF COMPASSION & KINDNESS	119
7. THE BODHISATTVA'S CONTEMPLATION OF THE CAUSALITY OF BEINGS' PLIGHT	119
8. THE BODHISATTVA'S COMPASSIONATE DEDICATION OF ROOTS OF GOODNESS	120
9. THE FIFTH GROUND BODHISATTVA'S QUALITIES AND THEIR BASES	120
10. THE METHODS USED BY THE BODHISATTVA IN HIS TEACHING OF BEINGS	122
11. THE BODHISATTVA'S ADOPTION OF AN ARRAY OF MEANS TO BENEFIT BEINGS	122
12. THE BODHISATTVA'S SEEING AND SERVING OF COUNTLESS BUDDHAS	123
13. THE BODHISATTVA'S PURIFICATION OF QUALITIES AND ROOTS OF GOODNESS	123
14. GOOD ROOTS PURIFICATION LIKE REFINING GOLD & CELESTIAL PHENOMENA	124
15. VAJRAGARBHA'S FINAL STATEMENTS ABOUT THE 5TH GROUND BODHISATTVA	124
a. THE BODHISATTVA'S STATION AND DHARMA PRACTICE	124
b. THE BODHISATTVA'S MINDFULNESS	124
c. THE BODHISATTVA'S ASPIRATION TO SERVE BEINGS	124
d. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE BODHISATTVA'S VIGOR AND VOWS	125
16. VAJRAGARBHA BODHISATTVA'S SUMMARIZING VERSES	125
F. THE SIXTH GROUND: THE DIRECT PRESENCE GROUND	131
1. THE SIXTH GROUND'S INTRODUCTORY VERSES AND DHARMA REQUEST	131
2. VAJRAGARBHA COMMENCES THE FIFTH GROUND'S EXPLANATION	133
3. THE TEN DHARMAS OF IDENTITY ENABLING ACCESS TO THE SIXTH GROUND	133
4. 6TH GROUND ENTRY, ACQUIESCENT PATIENCE, AND PRIMACY OF COMPASSION	133
5. THE BODHISATTVA'S CONTEMPLATION OF CAUSALITY IN CYCLIC EXISTENCE	134
a. CONTEMPLATION OF THE SEQUENTIAL CONTINUITY OF CAUSAL FACTORS	134
b. THE BODHISATTVA CONTEMPLATES THE DEFINITIONS OF CAUSAL LINKS	135
c. THE BODHISATTVA'S CONTEMPLATION OF MIND AS THE BASIS OF EXISTENCE	136
d. THE CONTEMPLATION OF 2 FUNCTIONS OF EACH CAUSAL CHAIN LINK	137
e. THE CONTEMPLATION OF CAUSAL CHAIN PRODUCTION AND DESTRUCTION	138
f. CONTEMPLATION OF THE 12 LINKS' ASSOCIATION WITH INSEPARABILITY.	138
g. THE TWELVE LINKS AS CONSTITUENTS OF THREE PATHS	138
h. THE TWELVE LINKS' CORRELATION WITH THE THREE PERIODS OF TIME	139
i. THE TWELVE LINKS' CORRELATION WITH THE THREE KINDS OF SUFFERING	139
j. CONTEMPLATION OF THEIR ARISING & CEASING BY CAUSES AND CONDITIONS	139
k. CONTEMPLATION OF THEIR CREATION AND DESTRUCTION OF THE BONDS	140
l. CONTEMPLATION OF "UTTER NONEXISTENCE" & "UTTER CESSATION"	140
m. A SUMMARY LISTING OF 10 CONTEMPLATIONS OF THE 12 CAUSAL FACTORS	140
6. THE BODHISATTVA'S ACQUISITION OF THE THREE GATES TO LIBERATION	140
7. THE BODHISATTVA'S COMPASSIONATE RELUCTANCE TO ENTER FINAL NIRVĀṆA	141
8. THE BODHISATTVA'S SAMĀDHIS RELATED TO THE THREE GATES TO LIBERATION	142
9. THE BODHISATTVA'S TEN TYPES OF RESOLUTE INTENTIONS	142
10. 10 CONSEQUENCES OF THE BODHISATTVA'S 10 TYPES OF RESOLUTE INTENTIONS	143
11. THE BODHISATTVA'S PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ PRACTICE AND PATIENCE ACQUISITION	143
12. THE BODHISATTVA'S SEEING AND SERVING OF COUNTLESS BUDDHAS	143
13. PURIFYING GOOD ROOTS LIKE POLISHING GOLD & MOONLIGHT'S COOLNESS	144
14. VAJRAGARBHA'S FINAL STATEMENTS ABOUT THE 6TH GROUND BODHISATTVA	144
a. THE BODHISATTVA'S STATION AND DHARMA PRACTICE	144
b. THE BODHISATTVA'S MINDFULNESS	144

c. THE BODHISATTVA'S ASPIRATION TO SERVE BEINGS	145
d. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE BODHISATTVA'S VIGOR AND VOWS	145
15. VAJRAGARBHA BODHISATTVA'S SUMMARIZING VERSES	145
G. THE SEVENTH GROUND: THE FAR-REACHING GROUND	151
1. THE SEVENTH GROUND'S INTRODUCTORY VERSES AND DHARMA REQUEST	151
2. VAJRAGARBHA COMMENCES THE SEVENTH GROUND'S EXPLANATION	152
3. TEN TYPES OF SUBLIME PRACTICE ENABLING SEVENTH GROUND ACCESS	152
4. THE BODHISATTVA'S TWENTY KINDS OF PENETRATING COMPREHENSION	154
5. HIS ADOPTION OF NON-DISCRIMINATING MIND & MEDITATIVE PRACTICE	155
6. HIS PRACTICE OF TEN PĀRAMITĀS & OTHER DHARMAS LEADING TO BODHI	156
7. VIMUKTICANDRA ASKS ABOUT THE PERFECTION OF BODHYAṄGA DHARMAS	157
8. VAJRAGARBHA ON THE PERFECTION OF BODHYAṄGAS ON ALL GROUNDS	157
9. VIMUKTICANDRA ASKS ABOUT TRANSCENDENCE OF AFFLICTIONS	158
10. VAJRAGARBHA EXPLAINS THE TRANSCENDENCE OF AFFLICTIONS	158
11. VAJRAGARBHA'S CAKRAVARTIN SAGE KING ANALOGY	158
12. THIS CONQUEST OF SAMĀDHIS & UNPRODUCED-DHARMAS PATIENCE	160
13. VIMUKTICANDRA: "DOESN'T THE 1ST GROUND SURPASS THE TWO VEHICLES?"	161
14. VAJRAGARBHA: "IN ASPIRATION, YES. BY VIRTUE OF PRACTICE, NOT YET"	161
15. VAJRAGARBHA'S ANALOGY OF A PRINCE NOT YET ASCENDED TO POWER	161
16. THIS BODHISATTVA'S UNIQUE PRACTICE & RESTRAINT FROM FINAL NIRVĀṆA	161
17. VIMUKTICANDRA: "WHEN CAN ONE ENTER THE CESSATION SAMĀDHI?"	162
18. VAJRAGARBHA: "FROM 6TH GROUND ON; NOW HE ENTERS & ARISES AT WILL"	162
19. VAJRAGARBHA LIKENS PRACTICE TO SAILING ON THE OPEN OCEAN	162
20. 10 PARADOXICAL ASPECTS OF THE 7TH GROUND BODHISATTVA'S PRACTICE	162
21. THE BODHISATTVA'S SEEING AND SERVING OF COUNTLESS BUDDHAS	163
22. GOOD ROOTS PURIFICATION LIKENED TO GOLD INLAY AND SUNLIGHT	164
23. VAJRAGARBHA'S FINAL STATEMENTS ABOUT THE 7TH GROUND BODHISATTVA	164
a. THE BODHISATTVA'S STATION AND DHARMA PRACTICE	164
b. THE BODHISATTVA'S MINDFULNESS	164
c. THE BODHISATTVA'S ASPIRATION TO SERVE BEINGS	164
d. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE BODHISATTVA'S VIGOR AND VOWS	165
24. VAJRAGARBHA BODHISATTVA'S SUMMARIZING VERSES	165
H. THE EIGHTH GROUND: THE IMMOVABILITY GROUND	171
1. THE EIGHTH GROUND'S INTRODUCTORY VERSES AND DHARMA REQUEST	171
2. VAJRAGARBHA COMMENCES THE EIGHTH GROUND'S EXPLANATION	172
3. 10 ACCOMPLISHMENTS ASSOCIATED WITH ENTERING THE 8TH GROUND	172
4. 10 TYPES OF COMPREHENSION ASSOCIATED WITH 8TH GROUND ACCESS	173
5. THE UNPRODUCED DHARMAS PATIENCE BASIS OF "PROFOUND PRACTICE"	173
6. "PROFOUND PRACTICE" LIKE A MONK WITH SUPERKNOWLEDGES & DHYĀNAS	174
7. 8TH GROUND LIKENED TO AWAKENING FROM A RIVER-FORDING DREAM	174
8. 8TH GROUND LIKENED TO THE BRAHMA WORLD'S ABSENCE OF AFFLICTIONS	174
9. THE BUDDHAS' MANIFESTATION BEFORE THE 8TH GROUND BODHISATTVA	175
10. THE BUDDHAS' PRAISE & INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE 8TH GROUND BODHISATTVA	175
11. THE IMPORTANCE OF BUDDHAS' APPEARING TO 8TH GROUND BODHISATTVAS	176
12. THE REASONS 8TH GROUND BODHISATTVA PRACTICES ARE SO MEASURELESS	177

13. THIS BODHISATTVA'S PRACTICES LIKENED TO SAILING OUT ONTO THE OCEAN	177
14. THE BODHISATTVA'S CONTEMPLATION OF BUDDHA'S ALL-KNOWLEDGE	178
15. HIS KNOWLEDGE OF WORLDS' ARISING, DETERIORATION, & DESTRUCTION	178
16. HIS KNOWLEDGE OF THE FOUR ELEMENTAL PHASES	178
17. HIS KNOWLEDGE OF ATOMS' MANIFESTATIONS IN WORLDS AND BEINGS	178
18. HIS KNOWLEDGE OF THE THREE REALMS OF EXISTENCE	179
19. HIS APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE IN ADAPTIVE BIRTHS TO TEACH BEINGS	180
20. HIS TRANSCENDENCE OF DISCRIMINATIONS & KNOWLEDGE OF 10 BODY TYPES	181
a. THE BODHISATTVA'S MANIFESTATION OF DIFFERENT BODIES FOR BEINGS	181
b. THE BODHISATTVA'S KNOWLEDGE OF BEINGS' BODIES	182
c. THE BODHISATTVA'S KNOWLEDGE OF THE BODIES OF LANDS	182
d. HIS KNOWLEDGE OF RETRIBUTION, 2-VEHICLES, AND BODHISATTVA BODIES	183
e. THE BODHISATTVA'S KNOWLEDGE OF TATHĀGATAS' BODIES	183
21. THE BODHISATTVA'S ACQUISITION OF TEN KINDS OF SOVEREIGN MASTERY	183
22. TEN CHARACTERISTIC ASPECTS OF THIS EIGHTH GROUND BODHISATTVA	184
23. TEN TYPES OF POWER IN WHICH THIS BODHISATTVA IS WELL ESTABLISHED	185
24. THE TEN NAMES OF THIS EIGHTH BODHISATTVA GROUND	185
25. ADDITIONAL 8TH GROUND BODHISATTVA QUALITIES AND PRACTICE ASPECTS	186
26. THE BODHISATTVA'S SEEING AND SERVING OF COUNTLESS BUDDHAS	187
27. THE BODHISATTVA'S FURTHER ACQUISITION OF BUDDHAS' DHARMA LIGHT	187
28. THE RADIANCE OF GOOD ROOTS LIKENED TO A SAGE KING'S ADORNMENTS	187
29. THIS BODHISATTVA'S RADIANCE LIKE THAT OF A BRAHMA HEAVEN KING	188
30. VAJRAGARBHA'S FINAL STATEMENTS ABOUT THE 8TH GROUND BODHISATTVA	188
a. THE BODHISATTVA'S STATION AND DHARMA PRACTICE	188
b. THE BODHISATTVA'S MINDFULNESS	188
c. THE BODHISATTVA'S ASPIRATION TO SERVE BEINGS	189
d. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE BODHISATTVA'S VIGOR AND VOWS	189
31. VAJRAGARBHA BODHISATTVA'S SUMMARIZING VERSES	189
I. THE NINTH GROUND: THE SUBLIME GOODNESS GROUND	195
1. THE NINTH GROUND'S INTRODUCTORY VERSES AND DHARMA REQUEST	195
2. VAJRAGARBHA COMMENCES THE NINTH GROUND'S EXPLANATION	197
3. TEN EARNESTLY PURSUED ENDEAVORS ENABLING NINTH GROUND ACCESS	197
4. THIS BODHISATTVA'S 10 TYPES OF REALITY-BASED KNOWLEDGE OF KARMA	197
5. TEN TYPES OF REALITY-BASED KNOWLEDGE OF ENTANGLING DIFFICULTIES	198
6. TEN TYPES OF REALITY-BASED KNOWLEDGE OF BEINGS' MENTAL ASPECTS	198
7. HIS REALITY-BASED KNOWLEDGE OF THE AFFLICTIONS' CHARACTERISTICS	199
8. HIS REALITY-BASED KNOWLEDGE OF CHARACTERISTICS OF KARMIC ACTIONS	200
9. HIS REALITY-BASED KNOWLEDGE OF CHARACTERISTICS OF BEINGS' FACULTIES	201
10. HIS KNOWLEDGE OF BELIEFS, SENSE REALMS, AND RESOLUTE INTENTIONS	202
11. HIS KNOWLEDGE OF LATENT TENDENCIES' CHARACTERISTICS	202
12. HIS KNOWLEDGE OF CHARACTERISTICS ASSOCIATED WITH BIRTHS	203
13. HIS KNOWLEDGE OF CHARACTERISTICS OF HABITUAL KARMIC PROPENSITIES	203
14. HIS KNOWLEDGE OF THOSE FIXED IN RIGHT, IN WRONG, OR UNFIXED	204
15. HIS KNOWLEDGE-BASED ADAPTIVE TEACHING AND LIBERATION OF BEINGS	205
16. THE BODHISATTVA'S COMMAND OF FOUR TYPES OF UNIMPEDED KNOWLEDGE	206

a. TEN PERMUTATIONS OF EXPERTISE IN THE FOUR UNIMPEDED KNOWLEDGES	206
17. HIS ACQUISITION OF DHĀRAṆĪS & FURTHER RECEIPT OF BUDDHAS' DHARMA	208
18. HIS EXPOUNDING ON DHARMA THROUGHOUT A GREAT TRICHILIOSCOS	209
19. THIS BODHISATTVA'S VARIOUS VOICE-LIKE EXPRESSIONS IN TEACHING BEINGS	209
20. HIS INDEPENDENT COMMAND OF COUNTLESS SIMULTANEOUS VOICES	210
21. THE BODHISATTVA'S VIGOR IN QUEST OF THE LIGHT OF KNOWLEDGE	211
22. THE BODHISATTVA'S SEEING AND SERVING OF COUNTLESS BUDDHAS	211
23. HIS GOOD ROOTS' PURITY LIKE THE GOLD OF A CAKRAVARTIN'S CROWN	212
24. HIS GOOD ROOTS' PURITY LIKE A BRAHMA HEAVEN KING'S RADIANCE	212
25. VAJRAGARBHA'S FINAL STATEMENTS ABOUT THE 9TH GROUND BODHISATTVA	212
a. THE BODHISATTVA'S STATION AND DHARMA PRACTICE	213
b. THE BODHISATTVA'S MINDFULNESS	213
c. THE BODHISATTVA'S ASPIRATION TO SERVE BEINGS	213
d. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE BODHISATTVA'S VIGOR AND VOWS	213
26. VAJRAGARBHA BODHISATTVA'S SUMMARIZING VERSES	213
J. THE TENTH GROUND: THE DHARMA CLOUD GROUND	219
1. THE TENTH GROUND'S INTRODUCTORY VERSES AND DHARMA REQUEST	219
2. VAJRAGARBHA COMMENCES THE TENTH GROUND'S EXPLANATION	221
3. THE CATEGORIES OF PRACTICE BEFORE ENTERING THE TENTH GROUND	221
4. THIS BODHISATTVA'S SUBSEQUENT ACQUISITION OF SAMĀDHIS	222
5. THE FINAL SAMĀDHI'S MANIFESTATION OF AN IMMENSE RADIANT LOTUS	223
6. THIS BODHISATTVA SITS ATOP A LOTUS ENCIRCLED BY RETINUE BODHISATTVAS	223
7. HIS BODY EMANATES LIGHT ILLUMINATING TEN REALMS OF BEINGS	223
8. THE LIGHT RAYS FORM A CANOPY THAT MAKES OFFERINGS TO ALL BUDDHAS	224
9. THE LIGHT RAYS CIRCLE AROUND ALL BUDDHAS AND ENTER THEIR FEET	225
10. THE 10 REGIONS' BODHISATTVAS COME, MAKE OFFERINGS & ENTER SAMĀDHI	225
11. THEY EMANATE LIGHT FROM THEIR CHESTS THAT ENTERS HIS CHEST	225
12. ALL BUDDHAS SEND FORTH LIGHT THAT ENTERS THIS BODHISATTVA'S CROWN	226
13. THIS BODHISATTVA ACQUIRES SAMĀDHIS AND ALL BUDDHAS' CONSECRATION	226
14. THE SIMILE OF THE CONSECRATION OF THE WHEEL TURNING SAGE KING'S SON	227
15. THE CAPACITIES ARISING FROM THIS BODHISATTVA'S CONSECRATION	227
16. THIS BODHISATTVA'S KNOWLEDGE OF ATTAINMENTS	227
17. THIS BODHISATTVA'S KNOWLEDGE OF TRANSFORMATION	228
18. THIS BODHISATTVA'S KNOWLEDGE OF SUSTAINING BASES	229
19. THIS BODHISATTVA'S KNOWLEDGE OF SUBTLITIES OF PRACTICE	229
20. THIS BODHISATTVA'S KNOWLEDGE OF THE TATHĀGATAS' SECRETS	230
21. THIS BODHISATTVA'S KNOWLEDGE OF THE INTERPENETRATION OF KALPAS	230
22. THIS BODHISATTVA'S KNOWING OF THE BUDDHA'S PENETRATING KNOWLEDGE	231
23. THIS BODHISATTVA'S ACQUISITION OF COUNTLESS LIBERATIONS	232
24. THIS BODHISATTVA'S SAMĀDHIS, DHĀRAṆĪS, AND SUPERKNOWLEDGES	232
25. THIS BODHISATTVA'S LIMITLESS MEMORY POWER	232
26. HIS LIMITLESS MEMORY COMPARED TO THE OCEAN'S LIMITLESS CAPACITY	232
27. VIMUKTICANDRA ASKS ABOUT THE LIMITS OF THIS BODHISATTVA'S MEMORY	233
28. VAJRAGARBHA'S ANALOGY TO DESCRIBE THIS BODHISATTVA'S MEMORY POWER	233
29. THE DHARMA CLOUD BODHISATTVA'S GREAT DHARMA RAIN	235

30. THIS BODHISATTVA'S USE OF SPIRITUAL POWERS IN TRANSFORMING WORLDS	236
31. HIS USE OF POWERS IN MANIFESTING BODIES & SUPERNATURAL PHENOMENA	236
32. THE CONGREGANTS WONDER: "WHAT MORE COULD EVEN A BUDDHA DO?"	238
33. LIBERATION MOON ASKS VAJRAGARBHA FOR AN EXPLANATION	238
34. VAJRAGARBHA ENTERS "THE NATURE OF ALL BUDDHA LANDS SAMĀDHI"	238
35. LIBERATION MOON ASKS ABOUT THIS SAMĀDHI'S NAME AND CAPACITY	239
36. HE ASKS: "WHAT MORE MIGHT A BUDDHA'S POWERS ACCOMPLISH?"	240
37. VAJRAGARBHA CONTRASTS A FEW CLUMPS OF SOIL TO ALL WORLDS	240
38. VAJRAGARBHA COMPARES MANY BODHISATTVAS' WISDOM TO ONE BUDDHA'S	241
39. THE NATURE OF THIS BODHISATTVA'S PRACTICE AND WISDOM LIGHT	241
40. THE LIGHT OF HIS WISDOM, MERIT, AND GOOD ROOTS COMPARED TO GOLD	242
41. THE RADIANCE OF THIS BODHISATTVA'S WISDOM COMPARED TO GOLD	242
42. THE BUDDHAS' ONGOING TEACHING OF THIS BODHISATTVA	242
43. VAJRAGARBHA'S FINAL STATEMENTS ABOUT A 10TH GROUND BODHISATTVA	243
a. THE BODHISATTVA'S STATION AND DHARMA PRACTICE	243
b. THE BODHISATTVA'S MINDFULNESS	243
c. THE BODHISATTVA'S ASPIRATION TO SERVE BEINGS	243
d. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE BODHISATTVA'S VIGOR AND VOWS	243
III. THE FINAL SUMMARIZING DISCUSSION OF THE TEN GROUNDS	244
A. HIS EVENTUAL ALL-KNOWLEDGE LIKENED TO RIVERS' FLOW INTO THE SEA	244
B. THE 10 GROUNDS' DIFFERENCES LIKENED TO THOSE OF 10 MOUNTAIN KINGS	244
1. THE FIRST GROUND COMPARED TO THE SNOW MOUNTAIN KING	244
2. THE SECOND GROUND COMPARED TO THE FRAGRANCE MOUNTAIN KING	245
3. THE THIRD GROUND COMPARED TO THE KHADIRA MOUNTAIN KING	245
4. THE 4TH GROUND COMPARED TO THE RISHIS-AND-ĀRYAS MOUNTAIN KING	245
5. THE FIFTH GROUND COMPARED TO THE YUGAMDHARA MOUNTAIN KING	245
6. THE SIXTH GROUND COMPARED TO THE HORSE EAR MOUNTAIN KING	246
7. THE SEVENTH GROUND COMPARED TO THE NIMINDHARA MOUNTAIN KING	246
8. THE EIGHTH GROUND COMPARED TO THE CAKRAVĀDA MOUNTAIN KING	246
9. THE NINTH GROUND COMPARED TO THE MANIFOLD SIGNS MOUNTAIN KING	246
10. THE TENTH GROUND COMPARED TO THE SUMERU MOUNTAIN KING	247
11. THE 10 GROUNDS IN ALL-KNOWLEDGE LIKENED TO MOUNTAINS IN THE SEA	247
C. THE TEN GROUNDS COMPARED TO TEN ASPECTS OF THE GREAT OCEAN	247
D. THE TEN GROUNDS COMPARED TO A LARGE MAṆI JEWEL	248
E. THE PREREQUISITE CONDITIONS FOR HEARING THE TEN GROUNDS TEACHINGS	249
F. LIBERATION MOON ASKS: "HOW MUCH MERIT BY HEARING THIS TEACHING?"	249
G. VAJRAGARBHA EXPLAINS MERIT AND IMPORTANCE OF 10 GROUNDS TEACHING	249
H. THE AUSPICIOUS SIGNS THAT OCCURRED WHEN THIS SUTRA'S TEACHING ENDED	250
I. THE TEN DIRECTIONS' BODHISATTVAS ATTEST TO THE TEACHING'S UNIVERSALITY	250
J. VAJRAGARBHA'S SUMMARIZING VERSES AUGMENTED BY THE BUDDHA'S POWERS	251

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

As a continuation of my efforts to bring forth translations of important bodhisattva path texts from the golden age of Classic Indian and Chinese Mahāyana Buddhism, I present here my English translation of *The Ten Grounds Sutra* (*Daśabhūmika-sūtra*) as translated into Chinese from Sanskrit in the early 5th century by Tripiṭaka Master Kumārajīva with the assistance of Tripiṭaka Master Buddhayaśas. The subject of this scripture is the bodhisattva's progress through ten "grounds," "planes," or "levels" of spiritual path cultivation as he ascends from his initial state as a common person ensconced in cyclic existence up to that of a fully enlightened buddha who has reached the utmost, right, and perfect enlightenment.

There is no agreement on the actual origin of this *Ten Grounds Sutra* text. According to the tradition, it was originally the "Ten Grounds" chapter of the immense *Avataṃsaka Sutra*, but later circulated independently as *The Ten Grounds Sutra*. A number of academics prefer to think that it was first an independently circulating scripture which was only later included in 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), T 283;
- Kumārajīva assisted by Buddhayaśas (c. 408–412 CE),¹ T 286;
- Buddhabhadra (c. 418–20 CE), as *Avataṃsaka Sutra* Ch. 22, T 278;
- Bodhiruci (c. 508–511 CE), embedded in Vasubhandu's commentary, T 1522;
- Śikṣānanda (c. 695–699 CE), as *Avataṃsaka Sutra* Ch. 26, T 279;
- Śīladharma (c. 790 CE), T 287.

There have been several translations of this text into English in one or another of its classical contexts, as follows:

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

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 effort is so far only a partial, consisting as it does 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 rest of the Ten Grounds chapter is still two or more years away.

Regarding this *Ten Grounds Sutra* itself, Thomas Cleary's translation, although represented as a translation of Chapter 26 of the Śikṣānanda edition of the *Avataṃsaka Sutra*, is instead apparently a loose translation of the P. L. Vaidya Sanskrit edition of the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra*.

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 (*prabhākari*);
- 4) The Ground of Blazing Brilliance (*arciṣmati*);⁴
- 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*);⁵
- 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 were a number of difficulties that I encountered in translating this sutra 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 Kumārajīva. (The challenges I encountered in translating Śikṣānanda's "Ten Grounds" chapter of the *Avataṃsaka 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 Kumārajīva's terms directly from Chinese. Relative clarity in this matter was aided somewhat by J. Rahder's *Glossary*.⁶ 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, Kumārajīva and Śikṣānanda would have very rigorously stuck with simply *zhi* (智) for “*jñāna* / knowledge” and *zhīhui* (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 *zhīhui* (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 *adhyāsaya* (usually “higher aspirations,” etc.), *āsaya* (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, I have embedded the alphabetical Sanskrit section headings of the P. L. Vaidya Sanskrit edition. These very helpful alphabetical section markers originate with Johannes Rahder who embedded them in his 1923 and 1926 editions of the *Daśabhūmika-Sūtra*.⁷ 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, it is still possible that there is room for improvement even after going through the manuscript so many

times. 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 encourage a deeper study of this text by students of the Dharma.

Bhikshu Dharmamitra

Seattle

July 4, 2019

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* (Śata-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 to 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 to 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 of 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*.)