

The story of Kṣitigarbha was first described in the *Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva Pūrvapraṇidhāna Sūtra*, one of the most popular Mahayana sutras. This sutra is said to have been spoken by the Buddha towards the end of his life to the beings of the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven as a mark of gratitude and remembrance for his beloved mother, Maya. The *Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva Pūrvapraṇidhāna Sūtra*

begins, "Thus have I heard. Once the Buddha was abiding in Trayastrimsas Heaven in order to expound the Dharma to his mother."^[1]

The *Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva Pūrvapraṇidhāna Sūtra* was first translated from Sanskrit into Chinese between 695-700 CE, during the Tang dynasty, by the Tripitaka master Śikṣānanda,^[2] a Buddhist monk from Khotan who also provided a new translation of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* and the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*. However, some scholars have suspected that instead of being translated, this text may have originated in China, since no Sanskrit manuscripts of this text have been found. Part of the reason for suspicion is that the text advocates filial piety, which was stereotypically associated with Chinese culture. It stated that Kṣitigarbha practised filial piety as a mortal, which eventually led to making great vows to save all sentient beings. Since then, other scholars such as Gregory Schopen have pointed out that Indian Buddhism also had traditions of filial piety.^[3] Currently there is no definitive evidence indicating either an Indian or Chinese origin for the text.

In the *Kṣitigarbha Sūtra*, the Buddha states that in the distant past eons, Kṣitigarbha was a maiden of the Brahmin caste by the

name of *Sacred Girl*.^{[4][5]} This maiden was deeply troubled upon the death of her mother - who had often been slanderous towards the Three Jewels. To save her mother from the great tortures of hell, the girl sold whatever she had and used the money to buy offerings that she offered daily to the Buddha of her time, known as the Buddha of the Flower of Meditation and Enlightenment. She prayed fervently that her mother be spared the pains of hell and appealed to the Buddha for help.^[6]

While she was pleading for help at the temple, she heard the Buddha telling her to go home, sit down, and recite his name if she wanted to know where her mother was. She did as she was told and her consciousness was transported to a Hell realm, where she met a guardian who informed her that through her fervent prayers and pious offerings, her mother had accumulated much merit and had already ascended to heaven. Sacred Girl was greatly relieved and would have been extremely happy, but the sight of the suffering she had seen in Hell touched her heart. She vowed to do her best to relieve beings of their suffering in her future lives for kalpas.^[6]

As a Buddhist monk

There is a legend about how Kṣitigarbha manifested himself in China and chose his bodhimaṇḍa to be Mount Jiuhua, one of the Four Sacred Mountains of China.

During the reign of Emperor Ming of Han, Buddhism started to flourish, reaching its peak in the Tang and eventually spreading to Korea. At the time, monks and scholars arrived from those countries to seek the dharma in China. One of these pilgrims was a former prince from Silla named Kim Gyo-gak, who became a monk under the Chinese name Dizang "Kṣitigarbha," pronounced *Jijang* in Korean.^[7] He went to Mount Jiuhua in present-day Anhui. After ascending, he decided to build a hut in a deep mountain area so that he could cultivate the dharma.

According to records, Jijang was bitten by a poisonous snake but he did not move, thus letting the snake go. A woman happened to pass by and gave the monk medicines to cure him of the venom, as well as a spring on her son's behalf. For a few years, Jijang continued to meditate in his hut, until one day, a scholar named Chu-Ke led a group of friends and family to visit the mountain. Noticing the monk meditating in the hut, they went and took a look at his condition. They had noticed that his bowl did not contain any food, and that his hair had grown back.

Taking pity on the monk, Chu-Ke decided to build a temple as an offering to him. The whole group descended the mountain immediately to discuss plans to build the temple. Mount Jiuhua was also property of a wealthy person called Elder Wen-Ke, who obliged to build a temple on his mountain. Therefore, Wen-Ke and the group ascended the mountain once more and asked Jijang how much land he needed.



Kṣitigarbha (or in Japanese, Jizo) statue at Mt. Osore, a location said to resemble children's limbo in Japanese Buddhist tradition. There, Jizo is said to appear to rescue the children from the limbo and its iron club-welding demons. Because of this, Jizo statues are often adorned with bibs, kerchiefs (pictured) and haori. In Jizo's right hand, he carries a khakkhara monk staff, and in his left, a wish-fulfilling jewel.

Full title	
Traditional Chinese	大願地藏菩薩
Simplified Chinese	大願地藏菩薩
Literal meaning	Bodhisattva King Kṣitigarbha of the Great Vow
Transcriptions	
Standard Mandarin	
Hanyu Pinyin	Dàyuàn Dìzàng Púsà
Wade-Giles	Ta ⁴ -yüan ⁴ Ti ⁴ -tsang ⁴ P'u ² -sa ⁴
Yue: Cantonese	
Jyutping	Daai ⁶ -jyün ⁶ Dei ⁶ -zong ⁶ Pou ⁴ -saat ³
Tibetan name	
Tibetan	སུ་ཡི་སྒྲིང་པོ་
Transcriptions	
Wylie	Sayi Snyingpo
Vietnamese name	
Vietnamese	<i>Địa Tạng, Địa Tạng Vương bồ tát, Địa Tạng bồ tát, Đại Nguyện Địa Tạng bồ tát</i>
Hán-Nôm	地藏, 地藏王菩薩, 地藏菩薩, 大願地藏菩薩
Thai name	
Thai	พระกษิติครรภโพธิสัตว์
RTGS	<i>Phra Kasiti Khappha Phothisat</i>
Korean name	
Hangul	지장, 지장보살
Hanja	地藏, 地藏菩薩
Transcriptions	
Revised Romanization	<i>Jijang, Jijangbosal</i>
Mongolian name	
Mongolian	Сайенинбу
Japanese name	
Kanji	地藏; 地藏菩薩; 地藏王菩薩

Jijang replied that he needed a piece of land that could be covered fully by his *kasaya*. Initially believing that a piece of sash could not provide enough land to build a temple, they were surprised when Jijang threw the kasaya in the air, and the robe expanded in size, covering the entire mountain. Elder Wen-Ke had then decided to renounce the entire mountain to Jijang, and became his protector. Sometime later, Wen-Ke's son also left secular life to become a monk.

Jijang lived in Mount Jiuhua for 75 years before passing away at the age of 99. Three years after his *nirvana*, his tomb was opened, only to reveal that the body *had not decayed*. Because Jijang led his wayplace with much difficulty, most people had the intuition to believe that he was indeed an incarnation of Kṣitigarbha.

Jijang's well-preserved, dehydrated body may still be viewed today at the monastery he built on Mount Jiuhua.

Iconography

Traditional iconography

In Buddhist iconography, Kṣitigarbha is typically depicted with a shaven head, dressed in a monk's simple robes (unlike most other bodhisattvas, who are dressed like Indian royalty). In his left hand, Kṣitigarbha holds a *cintamani*; in his right hand, he holds a staff (called *shakujo* 錫杖 in Japanese), which is used to alert insects and small animals of his approach, so that he will not accidentally harm them. This staff is traditionally carried by Buddhist monks. In the Chinese tradition, Kṣitigarbha is sometimes depicted wearing a crown like the one worn by *Vairocana*. His image is similar to that of the fictional character *Tang Sanzang* from the classical novel *Journey to the West*, so observers sometimes mistake Kṣitigarbha for the latter.

Like other bodhisattvas, Kṣitigarbha usually is seen standing on a lotus base, symbolising his release from *rebirth*. Kṣitigarbha's face and head are also idealised, featuring the *third eye*, elongated ears and the other standard attributes of a *buddha*.

Iconography in Japan

Tōsen-ji in *Katsushika*, *Tokyo*, contains the "Bound Jizō" of *Ōoka Tadasuke* fame, dating from the *Edo period*. When petitions are requested before Jizō, the petitioner ties a rope about the statue. When the wish is granted, the petitioner unties the rope. At the new year, the ropes of the ungranted wishes are cut by the temple priest.

The vandalism of a Jizō statue is the central theme of *The Locker*, a 2004 Japanese horror and thriller film directed by *Kei Horie*.

Kṣitigarbha as Lord of the Six Ways

Another category of iconographic depiction is Kṣitigarbha as the Lord of the Six Ways, an allegorical representation of the Six Paths of Rebirth of the *Desire realm* (rebirth into hell, or as pretas, animals, asuras, men, and devas). The Six Paths are often depicted as six rays or beams radiating from the bodhisattva and accompanied by figurative representations of the Six Paths. Many of these depictions in China can be found in *Shaanxi* province, perhaps a result of Sanjie Jiao worship in the area.^[8] A Japanese variation of this depiction is the Six Jizo, six full sculptural manifestations of the bodhisattva. An example of this can be found in Konjiki-dō, the ‘Hall of Gold,’ in the *Chūson-ji* temple.

In Buddhist traditions

In China

Mount Jiuhua in *Anhui* is regarded as Kṣitigarbha's *bodhimaṇḍa*. It is one of the Four Sacred Buddhism Mountains in China, and at one time housed more than 300 temples. Today, 95 of these are open to the public. The mountain is a popular destination for pilgrims offering dedications to Kṣitigarbha.

In some areas, the admixture of traditional religions has led to Kṣitigarbha being also regarded as a *Taoist* deity, albeit his duties differ to what Kṣitigarbha does.

In Japan

In Japan, Kṣitigarbha, known as *Jizō*, or respectfully as *Ojizō-sama*, is one of the most loved of all Japanese divinities. His statues are a common sight, especially by roadsides and in graveyards. Traditionally, he is seen as the guardian of children, and in particular, children who died before their parents. He has been worshipped as the guardian of the souls of *mizuko*, the souls of stillborn, *miscarried*, or *aborted*

Transcriptions	
Romanization Jizō; Jizō Bosatsu; Jizō-ō Bosatsu	
Sanskrit name	
Sanskrit	क्षितिगर्भ / <i>Kṣitigarbha</i>



Kṣitigarbha painting, Goryeo, late 14th century



Korean painting of Kṣitigarbha as supreme ruler of the Underworld, late 18th century

fetuses in the ritual of *mizuko kuyō* (水子供養 "offering to water children"). In Japanese mythology, it is said that the souls of children who die before their parents are unable to cross the mythical *Sanzu River* on their way to the afterlife because they have not had the chance to accumulate enough good deeds and because they have made the parents suffer. It is believed that Jizō saves these souls from having to pile stones eternally on the bank of the river as penance, by hiding them from demons in his robe, and letting them hear *mantras*.

Jizō statues are sometimes accompanied by a little pile of stones and pebbles, put there by people in the hope that it would shorten the time children have to suffer in the underworld. (The act is derived from the tradition of building *stupas* as an act of merit-making.) The statues can sometimes be seen wearing tiny children's clothing or bibs, or with toys, put there by grieving parents to help their lost ones and hoping that Jizō would specially protect them. Sometimes the offerings are put there by parents to thank *Ṣiṭigarbha* for saving their children from a serious illness. His features are commonly made more baby-like to resemble the children he protects.

As *Ṣiṭigarbha* is seen as the saviour of souls who have to suffer in the underworld, his statues are common in cemeteries. He is also believed to be one of the protective deities of travellers, the *dōsojin*, and roadside statues of Jizō are a common sight in Japan. Firefighters are also believed to be under his protection.

In Southeast Asia

In *Theravada Buddhism*, the story of a *bhikkhu* named *Phra Malai* with similar qualities to *Ṣiṭigarbha* is well known throughout *Southeast Asia*, especially in *Thailand* and *Laos*. Legend has it that he was an *arhat* from *Sri Lanka* who achieved great supernatural powers through his own merit and meditation. He is also honoured as a successor to *Mahāmoggallāna*, the Buddha's disciple foremost for his supernatural attainments. In the story, this pious and compassionate monk descends to *Hell* to give teachings & comfort the suffering hell-beings there. He also learns how the hell-beings are punished according to their sins in the different hells.^[9]

Mantra

In *Shingon Buddhism* and other schools of *Chinese Esoteric Buddhism*, the mantra of *Ṣiṭigarbha* comes from the "Treasury of Mantras" section of the *Mahāvairocana Tantra*. The effect of this mantra is producing the "*Samadhi Realm of Adamantine Indestructible Conduct*." This mantra is the following:^[10]

namaḥ samantabuddhānāṃ, ha ha ha, sutanu svāhā^[10]

Chinese: 唵，哈哈，温三摩地梭哈 / 唵，哈哈，温三摩地梭哈; pinyin: *wēng, hā hā hā, wēnsān módi suōhā*

Other mantras

- Mantra of Eliminating Fixed Karma:

ॐ प्रमर्दने स्वाहा - om pramardane svāhā

In Chinese, this mantra is called *miè dìngyè zhēnyán* (灭定业真言/滅定業真言) in pinyin. It reads:



Painting of *Ṣiṭigarbha* as the Lord of the Six Ways from Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang

Chinese: 唵鉢囉末鄰陀寧娑婆訶 / 唵鉢囉末鄰陀寧娑婆訶; pinyin: *wēng bōluó mòlín tuóníng suōpōhē*

- In Chinese Buddhism, the following mantra is associated with *Ṣiṭigarbha*:

Chinese: 南无地藏王菩萨 / 南無地藏王菩薩; pinyin: *námó dìzàng wáng púsà*

- In Korean Buddhism, the following mantra is associated with *Ṣiṭigarbha*:

namo jijang bosal

- In Tibetan Buddhism, the following mantra is associated with *Ṣiṭigarbha*:

om kṣiṭigarbha bodhisattva yaḥ

- In *Shingon Buddhism*, a mantra used in public religious services is:^[11]



Hōryū-ji



Jizō bodhisattva statue at Mibudera temple in Japan, depicted with children and bibs.

on kakaka bisanmaei sowaka オン カカカ ビサンマエイ ソワカ

■ In Sanskrit:

ॐ ह ह ह विस्मये स्वाहा om ha ha ha vismaye svāhā

Om! Ha ha ha! O wondrous one! svāhā!

Haiku & Senryū

falling freely
tears and rain
on the garden Jizo (anonym)

蛞蝓に口を吸われた石地藏

*Namekuji-ni
kuchi-o suwareta
ishi-jizō*

The stone image of Jizo
kissed on the mouth
by a slug
(part of a [Senryū](#))

雀の子地藏の袖にかくれけり

*Suzume no ko
Jizō no sode ni
kakurekeri*

The young sparrows
return into Jizo's sleeve
for sanctuary
(haiku by [Issa](#) 1814)

なでしこや地藏菩薩の跡先に

*Nadeshiko ya
Jizō Bosatsu no
ato saki ni*

Blooming pinks
behind and in front
of Saint Jizo
(haiku by [Issa](#))

秋の暮辻の地藏に油さす

*Aki-no kure
tsuji-no Jizō-ni
abura sasu*

In autumn dusk
at the wayside shrine for the Jizo image
I pour more votive oil
(haiku by [Buson](#))

In works of Lafcadio Hearn

The Legend of the Humming of the Sai-no-Kawara, by [Lafcadio Hearn](#):



Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva statue
depicted with a crown



Statue of Phra Malai from the
Phra Malai Manuscript of
Thailand, c. 1860-1880



Statue of Jizō in the Toi gold
mine, Shizuoka Prefecture,
Japan.

But lo! the teacher Jizô appears,
All gently he comes, and says to the weeping infants:
"Be not afraid, dears! be never fearful!
Poor little souls, your lives were brief indeed!
Too soon you were forced to make the weary journey to the Meido,
The long journey to the region of the dead!
Trust to me! I am your father and mother in the Meido,
Father of all children in the region of the dead."
And he folds the skirt of his shining robe about them;
So graciously takes he pity on the infants.
To those who cannot walk he stretches forth his strong shakujô,
And he pets the little ones, caresses them, takes them to his loving bosom.
So graciously he takes pity on the infants.
Namo Jizo Bosatsu!



Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha in Hsiang-Te Temple, Taiwan

In popular culture

- In *Super Mario Bros. 3*, the "Tanooki Suit" power-up enables the player to temporarily transform into a stone statue of Kṣitigarbha.

See also

- *Mizuko kuyô*
- *Butsu Zone*, a *manga* in which Kṣitigarbha is a main character
- Ākāśagarbha
- *Intercession*
- *Intercession of Christ*
- *Harrowing of Hell (Christianity)*

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External links

- Jizo Bodhisattva - Photo Dictionary of Japanese Buddhism (<http://www.onmarkproductions.com/html/jizo1.shtml>)
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