



Fig. 5. Gilt-bronze Vairocana. Silla, 9th century. Birojeon Hall at Bulguksa Temple, Gyeongju (Kwak Dongseok 2000, Fig. 64)

Vairocana, Image of Dharmakāya in the Late Silla Dynasty

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Introduction

Sculptures of Vairocana, which in Korea were most widely produced during the late Silla period (新羅, 57 BCE–935 CE), represent the embodiment in physical Buddha form of the truth realized by all Buddhas. Vairocana is the personification of the abstract concept of truth as depicted through the likeness of a Buddha. Unlike Śākyamuni, Vairocana is not an actual historical figure: He is the manifestation of the body of the dharma, and is also known as the dharmakāya, or the truth body of the Buddha. As an expression of truth itself, Vairocana neither expands nor contracts, increases nor decreases; he undergoes no change and does not preach.

The Korean name for “Vairocana” is “Birojana” (毘盧遮那). It is a transliteration of the original Sanskrit, which means “infinite light.” This indicates that Vairocana is the Buddha who, like the sun, constantly emits the light of the ultimate truth realized by Śākyamuni onto the world of sentient beings and guides them into the world of light. With the development of Buddhism and the consequent appearance of numerous Buddhas, a need arose to organize the doctrine of the bodies of the Buddha. In the process of establishing the trikāya, or the three bodies of the Buddha—i.e., the dharma body (法身, Sk. dharmakāya), the reward body (報身, Sk. sambhogakāya), and the response body (應身, Sk. nirmāṇakāya),

Vairocana as the dharma body was designated as the lord of the universe and a key figure of Buddhism. Vairocana is the principal Buddha of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* (華嚴經, *Flower Garland Sūtra*), the *Mahāvairocana Abhisambodhi Sūtra* (大日經, *Great Illuminator Sūtra*), and the *Vajraśekhara Sūtra* (金剛頂經, *Diamond Crown Sūtra*), and occupies the central position of the Buddhist hierarchy.

While Vairocana sculptures were also created in China and India, they do not always demonstrate the *bodhisattva mudrā* (智拳印, wisdom-fist mudrā) as do the Silla examples. What does this indicate about the significance of Silla Vairocana images? While it is known that the Hwaeom (華嚴, Ch. Huayan) school of Buddhism based on the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* contributed to strengthening the absolute monarchy during the mid-Silla period, only a single Vairocana statue remains from this era. If the Hwaeom tradition did indeed play a supporting role for the Silla monarchy, numerous images of Vairocana, the principal Buddha of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, would likely have been produced, which is not the case. Moreover, the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* makes no mention of the wisdom-fist mudrā, which is the typical mudrā of late Silla images of Vairocana. Bearing in mind the wisdom-fist mudrā’s origin in the Esoteric sūtras, this essay explores the influence on late Silla Buddhism of the Esoteric tradition and the role of the Hwaeom school.

The Ideology of Vairocana and Its Place in Late Silla Buddhism

Vairocana as the God of Light

In ancient Indian texts, such as the Rigveda and the Vedic Upanishads, Vairocana is identified as an Asura (Kanaoka Shuyu 1969: 191). In other sources, Vairocana is said to have originated in the Hindu god Vishnu, the creator of heaven and earth. There is no definitive evidence supporting either case, but it does appear that Vairocana, whose prime characteristic is light, was simply linked with Vedic deities related to light. In this sense, the name “Vairocana” came to be translated in Chinese as “Bianzhao” (遍照, universal light) or “Guangming Bianzhao” (光明遍照, bright universal light). But Vairocana was more often called “Locana” (盧舍那, K. Nosana) or “Cana” (舍那, K. Sana), which are shortened Chinese transliteration of the Sanskrit name. These names reflect the nature of Vairocana as a being who resembles the sun shining the light of truth over the world, brightening the entire world and allowing all things to grow. The name and characteristics of Vairocana equate the Buddha with the sun, the origin of all life, and contain the authority to unite the world of the “truth” with the world of the “light.”

The first sūtra to mention Vairocana was the *Samyukta Āgama* (雜阿含經), which was translated into Chinese in the fifth century. Vairocana also appears in the *Brahmajāla Sūtra*, or *Brhama's Net Sūtra* (梵網經), among others, but does not appear as a leading figure until the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*. Of the three translations of this sūtra, in the earliest 60-fascicle version the Buddha is named Locana rather than Vairocana. Locana can be considered a concept that precedes the establishment of Vairocana as a key figure in the Buddhist cosmology. It is not until the 80-fascicle version translated in the late seventh century that Vairocana appears as the dharma body representing the highest truth. Although Locana and Vairocana both signify the same Buddha with the same meaning, the two began to differ with the development in the doctrine of the dharma body of the Buddha.

The characteristics of Vairocana were further expanded in late Esoteric sūtras in which the Buddha is named Mahāvairocana. “Mahā” means “big” or “great,” so “Mahāvairocana” indicates “great Vairocana.” With the characteristics of Vairocana thus further emphasized, Mahāvairocana's name has been

freely translated into “Dari Rulai” (大日如来, K. Daeil Yeorae), literally meaning “Great Sun Buddha” (Kang Heejung 1990, 26) because he is greater than any sun in the physical world and possesses exceptional powers. Locana, Vairocana, and Dari Rulai all mean “the sun” and bear the nature of the dharma body, which represents the world of truth. Such transformations in the name of Vairocana are the outcome of the intensification and amplification of the characteristics of the Buddha in line with the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Vairocana was imbued with the property of light in order to guide unenlightened sentient beings to the land of Buddha's truth. In a world divided between darkness and light, ignorance and knowledge, the practice of asceticism, accumulation of good karma, and attainment of Buddhahood can all be perceived as progress toward the world of light. This is most clearly symbolized in the wisdom-fist mudrā seen in late Silla sculptures of Vairocana. As the root of all Buddhas and embodiment of the dharma, Vairocana incorporates all Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and all Buddhas and bodhisattvas are thus derived from Vairocana. The *Brhamajāla Sūtra* states that countless Buddhas evolve out of even a single strand of hair from Vairocana, who sits on a lotus pedestal. Since the 100 billion Buddhas sitting on the lotus pedestal emerge from Vairocana, Vairocana is the primordial Buddha and origin of all Buddhas.

The Late Silla Vairocana:

Analogy for Absolute Monarchy

Records of Vairocana first appeared in the eighth century, but their amount from the late Silla period is limited. The considerable number of extant Vairocana sculptures, however, indicates that the cult of Vairocana was thriving in that period. Underlying the rapid diffusion of the Vairocana cult at the time was the policy of strengthening the authority of the throne. Since the reign of King Muyeol (武烈王, r. 654–661), Silla kings had established a more absolute monarchy. With the progress of the centralization of bureaucratic power, the authority of the monarch grew stronger and the position of the aristocrats weakened. However, in the aftermath of the struggles over the throne that occurred in the late Silla period, there was a need to seek avenues to bulwark the authority of the king, which lost much of its legitimacy.

Philosophical support for a stronger absolute

monarchy was found in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* (Kim Sanghyun 1984, 59–91). In the Hwaeom theory of interdependent origination (緣起, Skr. *pratityasamutpāda*), “one” can become “two” and “two” can double into “four” according to the chain of cause and effect through which all things in the universe are created. From the opposite perspective, all things in the universe, which are derived from the “one,” are nothing but false forms. For this reason, everything in the universe ultimately returns to the “one.” This process is called “nature arising” or “nature origination” (性起). According to the Hwaeom philosophy, everything in the universe derives from the same fundamental origin to assume false forms, so the plentitude evolves out of the one and those countless things all eventually return to the one. That is, the world is explained through the principle of “one is many, and many are one” (一即多, 多即一) (Kamata Shigeo 1988, 238–279). However, various monks adhering to the Hwaeom philosophy emphasized different elements. Some stressed the idea of many things emerging out of one and their interdependent origination, while others focused on the idea of the many returning to one and nature origination. For instance, the Chinese monk Fazang (法藏, 643–712) supported the former concept of interdependent origination, while the Silla monk Uisang (義湘, 625–702) backed the latter concept, nature origination. Under the influence of Uisang, the absolute monarchy of Silla adopted the Hwaeom tradition (Kim Doojin 1994, 1–29). In Uisang's Hwaeom theory, the countless components of the universe were compared to the populace of a kingdom, while the fundamental element serving as the basis of all was thought to be the king. It seems that the Hwaeom philosophy, which placed the Silla king at the center of the world, was favored as a religious teaching that was useful for the imposition of a centralized absolute monarchy.

The main figure in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* is Vairocana, the dharma body. As lord of the universe and the transformation body (化身) of absolute truth, Vairocana was the most fitting being for utilization by Silla kings to emphasize their status in the world. However, the fact that only a single Vairocana sculpture from the mid-Silla period remains, found at the ancient site of Seongnamsa Temple (石南寺), brings this interpretation into question. It is noteworthy that a large number of Vairocana images were in fact cre-

ated during the late Silla period when battles raged over occupancy of the throne. It can be supposed that many of these ninth-century Vairocana images were fashioned based on the Hwaeom theory in order to support the authority and legitimacy of the monarch (Moon Myungdae 1982, 55–89), and that some time was needed for the ripening of conditions for the production of Vairocana images. This idea is reinforced by the fact that temples of the Hwaeom and Seon (禪, Ch. Chan) schools dedicated to Vairocana received support from the royal court.

Production of Vairocana Images in the Ninth Century

Influence of Esoteric Buddhism and Vairocana

Images in Buddha Form with the Wisdom-fist Mudrā

In principle, Vairocana has no physical form. Neither the *Brahmajāla Sūtra* nor the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* mentions how images of Vairocana should be fashioned. The great Buddha made between 672 and 675 at Fengxian Temple (奉先寺) in Longmen, China shows iconography consistent with contemporaneous Śākyamuni images (Fig. 1). Due to the transformation Buddhas depicted on the lotus pedestal, however, we can know that the great Buddha at Fengxian

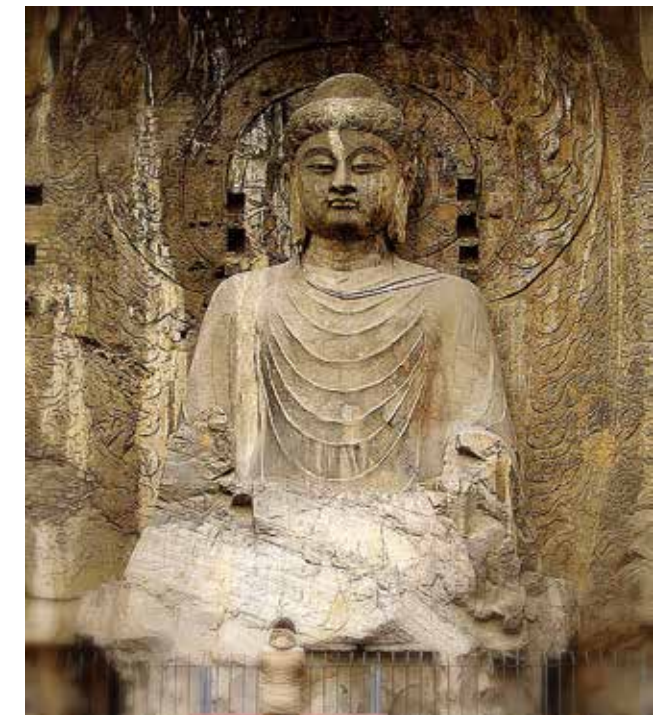


Fig. 1. Locana, Tang dynasty, 675. Fengxian Temple, Longmen, China (Author's photograph)

Temple was created based on the *Brhamajāla Sūtra* (Sasaki Aobamura 1914, 202-203). As perceptions of Vairocana refined and the study of the doctrine of the bodies of the Buddha began, Esoteric Buddhism began to provide references as well. The central figure in the Garbhādhātu Maṇḍala (服藏界曼荼羅, Womb Realm Maṇḍala) and the Vajradhātu Maṇḍala (金剛界曼荼羅, Diamond Realm Maṇḍala) is Mahāvairocana. The *Vajradhātu Maṇḍala*, in particular, depicts Mahāvairocana making the wisdom-fist *mudrā* with both hands. Therefore, while the characteristics and nature of Vairocana had already been established in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, the iconography of the images of this Buddha followed the Esoteric tradition.

All Silla sculptures of Vairocana show the wisdom-fist *mudrā*. This *mudrā* is known to be unique to Vairocana, resulting in all images exhibiting this hand gesture to be identified as Vairocana. The earliest depiction of the wisdom-fist *mudrā* appears in Esoteric scriptures such as the *Vajraśekhara Sūtra*, which was translated into Chinese in the eighth century. Described in the *Vajraśekhara Sūtra* and related texts as “the shape of the hands of wisdom guiding the way to enlightenment” and “the shape of the hands eradicating darkness among sentient beings,” it became known as the *mudrā* of Vairocana with the development of Esoteric Buddhism. In that case, how can Vairocana (毘盧遮那) of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* be distinguished from Mahāvairocana (大日如來) of Esoteric Buddhism? In the Esoteric sūtras, all Buddhas are lavishly decorated and assume the appearances of bodhisattvas. The *Ritual Procedure of Attaining Buddhahood through the Recitation of the Vajraśekhara* (金剛頂念誦成佛儀軌) clearly states that “Vairocana is round like the moon and his body is decorated. He wears a diamond crown on his head and jewels decorating his body, with hands making the wisdom-fist *mudrā* as he sits on a lion pedestal.” One illuminating example is a statue of Mahāvairocana from Indonesia (Fig. 2). Dating to the mid-eighth century, the hands are clearly making the wisdom-fist *mudrā* and the entire body is ornamented. There are also ornaments in the *jata-mukkhuta* (髮警冠), a high crown of knotted hair, and the body is decorated with lavish necklaces, bracelets, and beads. The style resembles that of Bengali sculpture from India or Javanese sculpture from central Indonesia. In India, a Pala period sculpture of a bodhisattva with hands making the wisdom-fist *mudrā*, dating to around the tenth



Fig. 2. Mahāvairocana. Indonesia, 8th century. Private Collection (National Palace Museum 1987, p. 137)

century, remains. As there are no earlier examples, the Indonesian statue is considered the oldest Mahāvairocana sculpture with the wisdom-fist *mudrā* made outside of Korea. This Indonesian image of Mahāvairocana likely bears some connection to the fact that the Indian monk Vajrabodhi (669–741), who is known as Jingangzhi (金剛智) in China and translated the *Vajraśekhara Sūtra* into Chinese, traveled to southern India and then on to the Śrīvijaya Kingdom (present-day Sumatra in Indonesia) where he resided for some time. In China today, no sculpture showing an unmistakable wisdom-fist *mudrā* remains, suggesting that Esoteric Buddhism was transmitted via maritime routes by Vajrabodhi or by the Tang (唐, 618–907) dynasty monk Yijing (義淨, 635–713), who wrote a travelogue *Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan* (南海寄歸內法傳, *Accounts of the Inner Law Sent Home from the South Sea*) while he stayed in the Śrīvijaya Kingdom on his way back to his home in Tang China from India.

In principle, Buddhas, as beings who have at-

tained Nirvāṇa, should not be ornamented in any fashion. However, in the Esoteric tradition Buddhas are depicted in bodhisattva form and thus can be freely decorated. Vairocana as depicted in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* takes Buddha form and bears no decoration, while Mahāvairocana in the *Vajraśekhara Sūtra* assumes the form of a richly ornamented bodhisattva. A Silla Buddhist image believed to represent Mahāvairocana from the *Vajraśekhara Sūtra* was found on a *śarīra* case dating to 863. This gilt-bronze *śarīra* case discovered inside a three-story stone pagoda at Donghwas Temple (桐華寺) in Daegu, South Korea features an engraving of Mahāvairocana wear-

ing a crown and making the wisdom-fist *mudrā* (Fig. 3). The four gilt-bronze plates that make up the outer *śarīra* casket indicate that the Esoteric concept of the Buddhas of the five directions had already been introduced to Silla. However, all other Silla images of Vairocana take the form of Buddhas rather than bodhisattvas since they are rooted in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* in principle, and feature the wisdom-fist *mudrā*. The borrowing of the wisdom-fist *mudrā*, which is not mentioned in the sūtra is an indication of creative license being exercised by the Silla people.

The Seongnamsa Temple Vairocana, currently preserved at Naewonsa Temple (內院寺) in Yangsan,



Fig. 3. Gilt-bronze plate inscribed with the name of Mahāvairocana, part of the *śarīra* casket of King Minae. Silla, 863. 14.2 x 15.3 cm. Daegu National Museum. (Author's photograph)

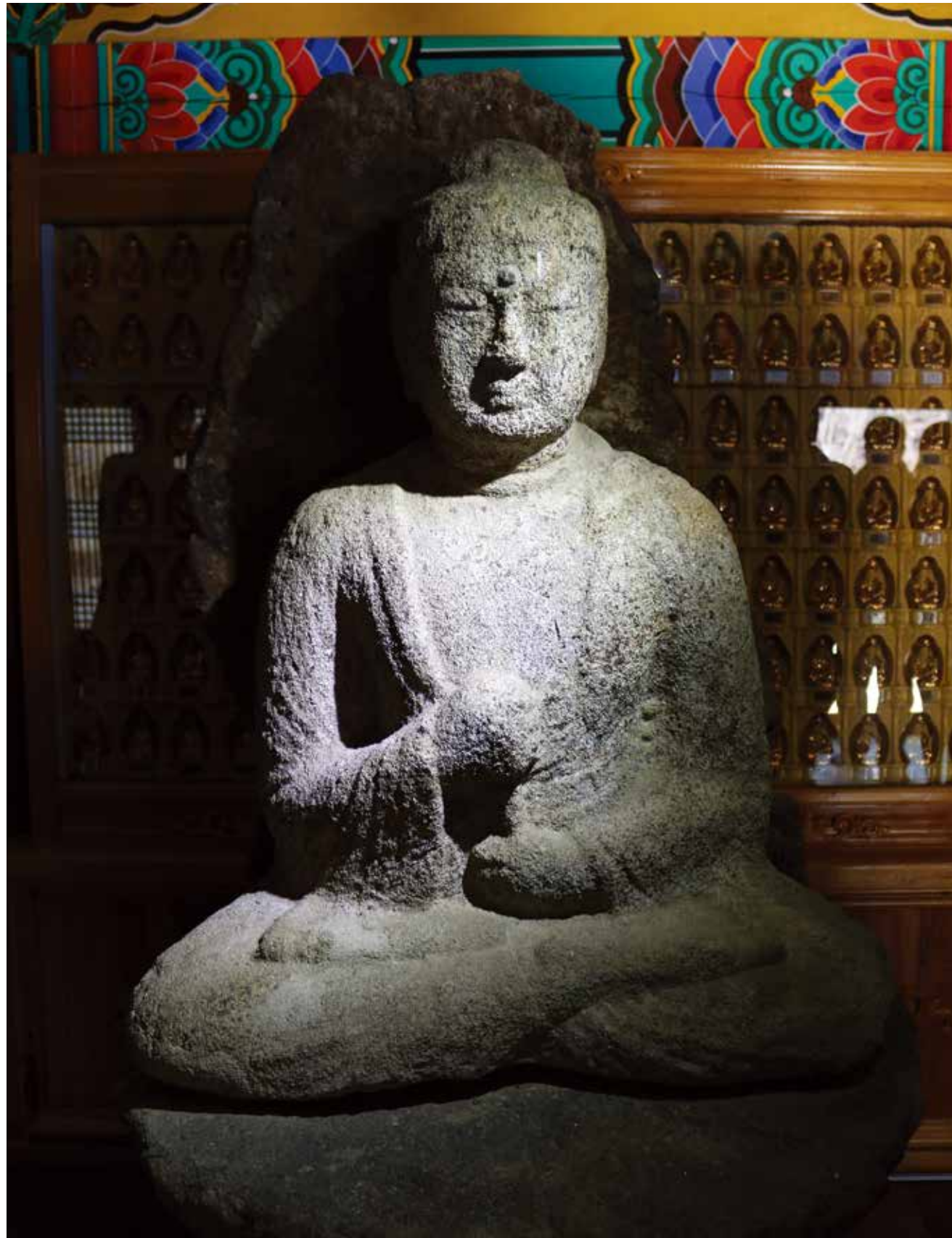


Fig. 4. Stone Vairocana from Seongnamsa Temple. Silla, 766. Naewonsa Temple, Yangsan (Photograph by Lim Youngae)

Gyeongsangnam-do Province, is the earliest Buddhist sculpture to feature the wisdom-fist mudrā, not just in Korea, but worldwide (Fig. 4). Although the sculpture itself bears no inscription, the *śarīra* reliquary found inside its pedestal is inscribed with “the second year of the Yongtai era” (永泰二年) (766), which is considered to be the year the sculpture was made (Park Gyeongwon and Jeong Wongyeong 1983, 45-63). The *śarīra* reliquary also carries an inscription regarding its manufacture, comprised of 136 Chinese characters in 15 lines along the side, and 21 Chinese characters in four lines on the bottom. Based on the contents, it appears that two monks named Beopseung (法勝, dates unknown) and Beopyeon (法緣, dates unknown) commissioned the sculpture for a *hwarang* (花郎, young Silla warrior) named Duonae (豆溫哀, dates unknown) in the second year of the Yongtai era (永泰, 756-766) during the reign of Emperor Daizong (代宗, r. 762-779) of Tang China. The inscription further identifies the sculpture as Vairocana, meaning that it is definitely Vairocana, not Mahāvairocana of the Esoteric tradition. To date, no known sculpture of Vairocana with the wisdom-fist mudrā predating 766 has been found, making the Seongnamsa sculpture the oldest such image of Vairocana. No sculptures of Vairocana in Buddha form with the wisdom-fist mudrā dating to this period have been found in India or China.

Confirmation that the iconography of Vairocana making the wisdom-fist mudrā entered Silla prior to 766 is provided by the *Avatamsaka Sūtra Illustration* dating to 754-755 in the collection of Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art. Although the central portion of the work has been damaged, the Buddha can be seen with two hands raised in front of the chest, apparently making the wisdom-fist mudrā. Here Vairocana is depicted in an ornamental bodhisattva form in the manner of Esoteric Buddhism, making this illustration the earliest example of adaptation of Esoteric Mahāvairocana iconography in a depiction of Vairocana. Hence, the Seongnamsa Vairocana was modeled on this sūtra illustration featuring Mahāvairocana.

Esoteric scriptures which describe the wisdom-fist mudrā, such as the *Vajrasekhara Sūtra*, entered Tang dynasty China in the 730s. The appearance of the wisdom-fist mudrā in the *Avatamsaka Sūtra Illustration* of 754 indicates that it did not take long for the latest Buddhist trends and information to be trans-

mitted from China to Unified Silla. The Tang monk Chengguan (澄觀, 738-839), a major figure in the Chinese Huayan school of Buddhism, played a key role in laying a philosophical basis for the adoption of Esoteric Mahāvairocana iconography in the depiction of Vairocana, originally based on the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*. While translating the sūtras into Chinese with the Esoteric monk Bukong (不空, 705-774; Skr. Amoghavajra) from Sri Lanka, he came to accept much of the Esoteric tradition and fused it into the Huayan tradition. His annotations to the 80-fascicle translation of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* were eagerly welcomed in Silla as well (An Gyeheon 1982, 83). Under the influence of this scripture, Silla adopted the iconography of Mahāvairocana from the Vajradhatu tradition in the creation of images of the Buddha Vairocana. This idea is supported by the fact that the Esoteric Buddhist sūtras translated by Bukong entered Silla in the latter half of the eighth century and that Hwaom-faith societies known as Hwaom gyeolsa (華嚴結社) were formed fusing the Hwaom and Esoteric traditions.

Production of Ninth-Century Images of Vairocana and Related Background

Esoteric Buddhism and Mahāvairocana iconography had been transmitted to Silla by the mid-eighth century at the latest, and Korean-style Vairocana images were created on this basis. It remains unclear, however, whether wisdom-fist mudrā Vairocana sculptures continued to be produced after the Seongnamsa sculpture, since no Vairocana image that can be precisely dated emerges until the mid-ninth century. It is assumed that some time was required for the newly introduced wisdom-fist mudrā to spread and be adopted into the creation of Vairocana sculptures. In the 150-year period from the latter half of the eighth century and through the tenth, some 40 known sculptures of Vairocana were produced. Most of these were made between the mid-ninth and early tenth century, hinting that the cult of Vairocana was at its strongest in the latter half of the ninth century.

The gilt-bronze seated Vairocana enshrined in the Birojeon (毘盧殿, Hall of Vairocana) at Bulguksa Temple (佛國寺) in Gyeongju, Gyeongsangbuk-do Province features imposing size and stable proportions and is clearly the product of outstanding sculptural skill. Along with the gilt-bronze seated Amitābha at Bulguksa Temple and Bronze Standing

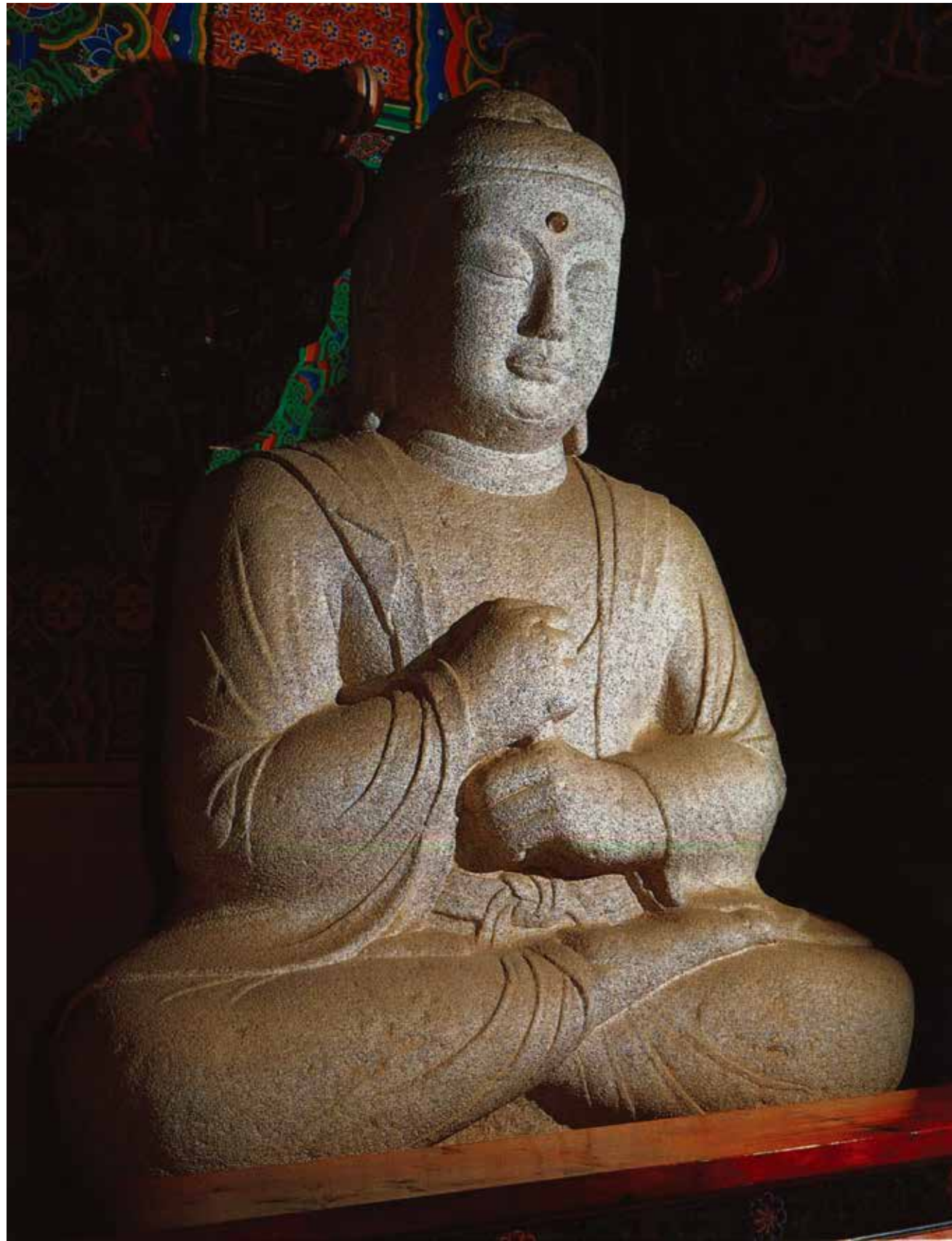


Fig. 6 Stone Vairocana, Silla, first half 9th century. Sudoam at Cheongamsa Temple, Gimcheon (Choe Songeun 2004, Fig. 83)

Bhaiṣajyaguru at Baengnyulsa Temple (栢栗寺) in Gyeongju, it is considered one of the three finest gilt-bronze Buddhist sculptures of the Silla period (Fig. 5). However, compared to the principal icon in Seokguram Grotto at Bulguksa, it offers a diminished sense of volume and motion, the midriff is longer, and the folds of the robes are rendered in a somewhat flatter manner, all of which combined seem to counter-indicate any dating of the sculpture to the mid-eighth century. While it is known that Bulguksa was erected in 754 under a commission from Kim Daeseong (金大城, c. 700–774), a high-ranking official of Silla, the Vairocana sculpture was not necessarily produced at the same time. A stylistic comparison with the Seongnamsa Vairocana, dated to 766, also supports the idea that the Bulguksa Vairocana was created some time after the construction of the temple.

Stone sculptures of Vairocana are much more common than gilt-bronze examples. Production of gilt-bronze sculpture required considerable time and money, complex processes, highly skilled craftsmen, and appropriate facilities. The stone Vairocana at Cheongamsa Temple's Sudoam Hermitage (靑巖寺 修道庵) in Gimcheon, Gyeongsangbuk-do Province was made prior to the mid-ninth century, which makes it an early Vairocana sculpture (Fig. 6) (Lee Hongjik 1964, 104). Unlike the stone Vairocana sculptures from the latter half of the century, the full, smooth face, striking volume of the body, and authoritative air generated by its imposing size indicate that it has inherited the sculptural tradition of the mid-Silla period. This sculpture must consequently have been completed by the early ninth century at the latest.

There are four Vairocana sculptures with inscriptions dating them to the mid-ninth century. The iron Vairocana at Borimsa Temple (寶林寺) in Jangheung, Jeollanam-do Province is one of the earliest examples (Fig. 7). The eight-line inscription (Fig. 8) on the back of the left arm relates that with the permission of the king the sculpture was commissioned by a military official named Kim Sujong (金遂宗, dates unknown) from Jangsa-hyeon Prefecture (today's Jangheung) in 858, the third year of the reign of King Heonan (憲安王, r. 857–860). This indicates that with the consent of the king, a regional official was permitted to commission Buddhist works using private funds, without having to rely on central government support. Borimsa Temple was established by the Gajisan



Fig. 7. Iron Vairocana. Silla, 858. Borimsa Temple, Jangheung (Kwak Dongseok 2000, Fig. 93)



Fig. 8. Inscription on the iron Vairocana at Borimsa Temple (Kwak Dongseok 2000, p. 264)

school (迦智山派), one of the “nine mountain Seon schools” (九山禪門) of Korea. The Gajisan school was founded by the Seon master Chejing (體澄, 804–880), a disciple of Doui (道義, dates unknown), who studied the southern sect of Chan Buddhism in Tang China between 784 and 821. Borimsa is therefore a Seon temple, and at the same time the first temple in Korea to be dedicated to Vairocana. The inscription on *Stele for Changseong Pagoda of Master Bojo* (普照禪師彰聖塔碑), built in 858 in honor of Chejing, relates, “Only when you understand that all sentient beings and Vairocana are essentially one can you attain the realization that the mind itself is the Buddha.”

The Chinese Chan schools demonstrated great interest in the rites and incantations of Esoteric Buddhism. Yixing (一行, 673–727), a monk of the northern Chan school, participated actively in the translation of Esoteric scriptures, including the *Mahāvairocana Abhisambodhi Sūtra*, assisting the Indian Buddhist monk Śubhakarasiṃha (637–735), known as Shanwuwei (善無畏) in China. He also compiled scriptures on Esoteric Buddhist rites. Among the Dunhuang manuscripts, a commentary on the *Siddham Chapter of the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* (楞伽經禪門悉談章, T. 85, no. 2279) provides evidence that northern Chan doctrines and incantations were used in combination. Based on *Chapter Thirty-five on Transmission of the Dharma* (付法藏品三十五, P. 3913, 2791, 3212), monks of the Baotang sect (保唐宗) of the southern Chan school linked the southern Chan doctrines with the tradition of reciting incantations (Sørensen 2011, 294–303). The Silla monk Hyeso (慧昭, 774–850) studied in Tang and practiced Esoteric Buddhism according to the doctrines of Śubhakarasiṃha. Upon his return to Korea in 830, he founded Okcheonsa Temple (玉泉寺), which is dedicated to Huineng (慧能, 638–713), the sixth patriarch of the southern Chan school (Yi Neunghwa 1918, 426–451). By the time he studied under Yunxiu (雲秀, d. 844), a disciple of Mazu Daoyi (馬祖道一, 709–788) and founder of the Hongzhou school (洪州宗) of Chan Buddhism, Hyeso would have already mastered both southern Chan and Esoteric practices. Hence, in light of the cooperation between Chan and Esoteric monks and the fusion of incantations with doctrines, the philosophical basis for enshrining Vairocana as the principal icon in Silla Seon temples seems to have been established in China and transmitted to Silla by Korean monks who studied in Tang China.

The *uṣṇīṣa* of the Borimsa Vairocana sculpture has been repaired by adding curls made of an earthen material, which makes it unusually large and high. The face with its flat nose and pronounced philtrum has a hard look and bears no traces of the suppleness seen in earlier representations. The shoulders are narrow and the chest flat, so the figure presents little sense of volume despite the natural flow of the folds of the robes. Iron, being a hard material, is difficult to work and traces of the removal of the outer mold remain on the surface of the body. In Silla, iron was not used to cast Buddhist sculptures prior to the ninth century since the necessary technology had yet to be developed. Iron has a high melting point and requires a smelting furnace and proper handling techniques. The iron Buddhas from late Silla are all large works, unlike gilt-bronze images, which are generally small in size. Among them, many were images of Vairocana and were distributed throughout the provinces. It is interesting to note that at this time a number of large iron and stone Vairocana sculptures with strong regional characteristics were produced.

The iron Vairocana Buddha from Dopiansa Temple (到彼岸寺) in Cheorwon, Gangwon-do Province, which carries an inscription stating that it was sponsored by 1,500 believers, is the only Buddhist sculpture from the Unified Silla period to be made entirely of iron, including its pedestal (Fig. 9). On the back is an inscription comprised of some 100 characters that states that in the fifth year of King Gyeongmun, believers in Cheorwon formed a Buddhist society in order to raise funds for the sculpture. While the Borimsa iron Buddha was commissioned by a single individual named Kim Sujong, the Dopiansa iron Buddha was created through the combined efforts of 1,500 people, indicating that the sculpture required a huge outlay of money and that Buddhism had become widespread to the point that such sculptures could be commissioned by a group of believers. The Buddha's face is thin, and the *uṣṇīṣa* is low. It is a realistic figure with narrowed eyes, a low nose, thick philtrum and lips rendered flatly, while the body is also flat with a minimal sense of volume. The folds are stylized and depicted in even intervals.

The stone Vairocana sculpture from Donghwasa Temple in Daegu is an important work in the history of Korean sculpture: It was created under the patronage of the Silla royal court and not only is the

date of production clear, the sculpture is also complete with a pedestal and aureole (Fig. 10). A stone *śarīra* reliquary found within the three-story stone pagoda at the temple bears the inscription “record of the stone pagoda of King Minae” (敏哀大王石塔記) which hints at the date of the sculpture and the circumstances under which it was made. It states that in 863 King Gyeongmun (景文王, r. 861–875) built a shrine and erected a pagoda and sculpture as a memorial to King Minae (閔哀王, r. 838–839), who had been treacherously killed in a power struggle. Although Donghwasa is located in Daegu, far from the Silla capital of Gyeongju, it reflects the style of the capital since it was built under royal patronage. The Vairocana sculpture presents a round face and clean-cut features; it creates the look of a typical Korean

quietly lost in meditation. It has rounded shoulders and a full chest, with arms stuck close to the body. The knees are thick but narrow, creating a sense of instability, diverging from sculptures of the mid-Silla period. Engraved on the aureole are a Buddha triad and eight individual transformation Buddhas, which are considered to be elements of Esoteric iconography (Seo Jimin 2010, 53–69). Sculptures of Vairocana similar to the Donghwasa Vairocana in terms of facial appearance, bodily proportions, and treatment of the robes are found around the Gyeongsang region. They include the stone Vairocana at Birosa Temple (毘盧寺) in Yeongju, Gyeongsangbuk-do Province and the stone Vairocana at Seonghyeolam Hermitage (聖穴庵), also in Yeongju (Fig. 12).

In the case of the stone Vairocana at Chukseosa Temple (鶯棲寺) in Bonghwa, Gyeongsangbuk-do Province, it was produced slightly later, in 867, as revealed by an inscription found on a stone *śarīra* reliquary (Fig. 13). The 16-line “stone pagoda construction record” (石塔造成記) found on the *śarīra* reliquary states that in 867, the eighth year of the Xi-



Fig. 9. Iron Vairocana. Silla, 865. Dopiansa Temple, Cheorwon (Photograph by Lim Youngae)



Fig. 10. Stone Vairocana. Silla, 863. Donghwasa Temple, Daegu (Choe Songeun 2004, Fig. 65)



Fig. 11. Stone śarīra reliquary for King Minae. Silla, 863. Height: 8.3 cm. Dongguk University Museum (Author's photograph)



Fig. 12. Stone Vairocana. Silla, latter half 9th century. Seonghyeolam Hermitage, Yeongju (Photograph by Kim Taehyeong)



Fig. 13. Stone Vairocana. Silla, 867. Chukseosa Temple, Bonghwa (Choe Songeun 2004, Fig. 67)

antong era (咸通, 860–874), Myeongdan (明端, dates unknown), the youngest sister of the monk Eonjeon (彦伝, dates unknown), built the pagoda in honor of their parents. It relates that their parents were Kim Yangjong (金亮宗, dates unknown) who served as an Ichan (伊飡, a second-rank official), and his wife, and that under the advice of the monk Hyeongeo (賢炬) at Hwangnyonsa Temple (皇龍寺) ten śarīra and a copy of the *Pure Light Dhāraṇī Sūtra* (無垢淨光大陀羅尼經) were enshrined inside the pagoda. The śarīra reliquary is similar in shape and size to the one found at Donghwasa, and the same method was used to carve the inscription. The inscription includes the character “考” (deceased) in reference to the late father Kim Yangjong, and the term “mother” (母親) for his wife. According to the inscription, Myeongdan’s family was an aristocratic family of the “true bone” (眞骨) rank living in Gyeongju. A record for the second year of the reign of King Heondeok (憲德王, r. 809–826) in the *Samguk sagi* (三國史記, *History of the Three Kingdoms*), volume 10, tells that while serving as Panjinchan (波珍飡, fourth-rank official) Kim Yangjong was appointed as Sijung (侍中, high-ranking official of Silla) but retired from the post in 811 due to illness. As there is a discrepancy of some 50 years between this date and the production date of the Chukseosa Vairocana sculpture, as well as a difference in the official titles mentioned, it cannot be decisively concluded that the Kim Yangjong in the inscription and in the *Samguk sagi* are one and the same person; however, this is not unlikely to be the case. It is clear that Kim Yangjong was a high-ranking official of aristocratic origin and it appears that his youngest daughter built a shrine for her parents in Bonghwa, where they may have owned lands granted by the state or had some other connection. Although the Vairocana sculpture was commissioned by an aristocratic family from the capital, it shows clear stylistic differences to its counterpart at Donghwasa, which was commissioned by the royal court in a similar period. Compared to the Donghwasa sculpture, the Chukseosa Vairocana sculpture has a thin and angular face and a body that is less full, with little sense of volume. The smile has disappeared from the face, leaving it with a solemn countenance, and the elongated torso appears flat. Thin robes cling to the body, revealing the outline of the chest and arms, while the folds fall in parallel lines at regular intervals and are treated in a stylized manner. Although the robes are

worn in essentially the same way in both sculptures, in the Chukseosa sculpture they are simplified and more decorative and show a floral pattern at the hem. The knot at the waist is depicted as a ring.

The last major Vairocana sculpture of the late Silla period to be discussed here is the one found at Haeinsa Temple (海印寺) in Hapcheon, Gyeongsangnam-do Province (Fig. 14). Enshrined in the temple’s Beopbojeon (法寶殿, Hall of the Dharma Jewel), it is believed to be the oldest wooden Buddhist sculpture extant in Korea based upon an ink inscription that gives its production date as 883, the third year of the Zhonghe era (中和, 881–885) of Tang Emperor Xizong (僖宗, r. 873–888). Although scholars are divided as to whether 883 refers to the year in which it was first made or to a year it underwent major repairs, it is certainly the latest clear date for any Vairocana sculpture from the Silla period. The inscription states that this life-size Buddha was made for a Gakgan (角干, official of the first rank) and his wife, which has been interpreted to refer to Queen Jinseong (眞聖王, r. 887–897) and a Gakgan official named Wihong (魏弘, dates unknown) who was purportedly her lover, although nothing is known for certain. There is no doubt, however, that the sculpture was commissioned by the royal court and that it was created by the most skilled craftsmen of the day. In this regard, it has been pointed out that from the last quarter of the ninth century, the Hwaom-faith societies were closely linked with the court (Choi Wonsik 1985, 17–23). Apart from the manner in which the robes are draped to bare the right shoulder, it shows highly similar characteristics to the stone Vairocana at Donghwasa Temple. Both sculptures were commissioned under the patronage of the royal court and are important for their demonstration of the common style of the mid- to late ninth century.

Examining the patrons of Silla Vairocana sculptures, the Seongnamsa sculpture was commissioned by a Buddhist monk; the Bulguksa, Borimsa, and Chukseosa sculptures by regional or central government officials or aristocratic families; and the Donghwasa and Haeinsa sculptures by the royal court. Aside from the Cheongamsa Vairocana, which lacks an inscription, and the Dopiansa Vairocana, which was commissioned by a society of believers, all the other sculptures were products of patronage from the royal family, aristocrats, or high officials. While court of the mid-Silla period was closely connected with the



Fig. 14. Wooden Vairocana. Silla, 833. Beopbojeon Hall at Haeinsa Temple, Hapcheon (Photograph by Joo Kyeongmi)

Hwaeom school of Buddhism and pursued a policy of strengthening autocracy by alluding to Vairocana, the dharma body and the Buddha of all Buddhas, in actuality Vairocana sculptures were not produced in great numbers at the time. The likely interpretation for this is that following the introduction of Esoteric Buddhism, which provided the background for the wisdom-fist mudrā, a period of time had to pass before people began to fully understand it.

The abovementioned Vairocana images lead us to reconsider the argument that Buddhist sculptures with strong regional features were created in the late Silla period, influenced by struggles over the throne and the emergence of powerful local gentry in the provinces known as *hojok* (豪族). In stylistic terms it is true that Buddhist sculptures from this period show some regional character, but the stone Vairocana at Donghwasa and the wooden Vairocana at Haeinsa share notable common features. Considering that both were commissioned by the court and that stone Vairocana sculptures with similar stylistic features were found nationwide, it is diffi-

cult to argue for regional distinction when it comes to Vairocana images. Apparently, in the late Silla period many Vairocana sculptures were also made in close association with the royal family. The special relationship between King Gyeongmun and the Seon monk Sucheol (秀澈和尚, d. 893) and records indicating that a burst of Vairocana or Locana statues were produced by both the Seon and Hwaeom schools show that Buddhism in Korea was just as reliant on Hwaeom thought in the late Silla period as it had been in the mid-Silla period. In terms of form, Vairocana was sometimes depicted as a Buddha making the wisdom-fist mudrā, under the influence of Esoteric Buddhism, but other times as Locana in the form of Śākyamuni. Whatever the case, both sides actively championed Vairocana, the dharma body, alluding to Hwaeom thought in pursuit of an absolute monarchy. Such efforts to strengthen the throne were expressed in sculpture not simply in the mid-Silla period, when the monarchy was indeed powerful, but in the late Silla period as well. It was in the late Silla period, rather than in the mid-Silla period when

the royal authority was stronger, that intensive efforts were made to display the authority of the throne through the dissemination of Vairocana statues.

Conclusion

The intensive production of Vairocana sculptures in the late Silla period, particularly from the mid-ninth century, was the natural outcome of changes in society and Buddhism at the time. In terms of Buddhist doctrine, the creation of Vairocana images was driven by the fusion of the Hwaeom, Seon, and Esoteric schools of Buddhism under Vairocana as the principal Buddha of the Hwaeom school. It is generally understood that Seon Buddhism provided philosophical grounds for the belief among members of the *yukdupum* class (六頭品, literally “six head rank,” the next-highest class of Silla society after the aristocracy) that they could rise to enter the ruling class. It is supposed that Vairocana also appealed to Seon believers and regional powers for this same reason. However, actual inscriptions on Vairocana sculptures or related records indicate instead a stronger connection to the royal family and officials of the central government, and the fact that Vairocana sculptures were more widely produced in late Silla compared to mid-Silla indicates a need for further research.

Monarchs of the late Silla period such as King Gyeongmun, who rose to the throne in the midst of significant political turmoil, strove to stabilize the court in their own individual ways and justify the legitimacy of their hard-earned authority. They made offerings at temples around the country and commissioned pagodas and sculptures, or invited monks to the court to lecture on or recite the sūtras. Pagodas were built to enshrine *śarīra*, miniature pagodas, and *dhāraṇī*, and Vairocana statues were created in line with the content of the *Pure Light Dhāraṇī Sūtra*. The Esoteric rite of erecting pagodas and creating sculpture and enshrining *dhāraṇī*, which is based on the aforementioned sūtra, had already spread throughout Silla from the mid-eighth century. At the time, awareness of Esoteric Buddhism was widespread and a foundation had been laid for adoption of the wisdom-fist mudrā in Vairocana sculptures.

The ninth-century trend of producing sculptures of Vairocana with the wisdom-fist mudrā is fundamentally grounded in Hwaeom philosophy, but ulti-

mately it is the result of the adoption by the Esoteric, Hwaeom, and Seon schools of Buddhism of the common doctrine of Vairocana as the principal Buddha. Although there is a tendency to explain such wisdom-fist Vairocana sculptures as a reflection of the preferences of local gentry, the mid-Silla manner of associating Vairocana with absolute royal authority found a more concrete expression in the late period through the production of Vairocana sculptures. While the inscriptions on some Vairocana sculptures clearly state that they were produced under the patronage of the royal family or high government officials in the capital, this fact alone does not prove that such sculptures were created as a means to reinforce royal authority. However, there is a lack of evidence to support the notion that the production of Vairocana sculptures reflects collusion between Buddhist temples and the local gentry, while scholars may have considered a focus on regional characteristics to be necessary in order to stress the political chaos of the time. The production of Vairocana sculptures was undertaken neither for the benefit of powerful local gentry nor as a way to strengthen absolute royal authority; it was an effort to make apparent the power of the throne through allusion to Vairocana, the dharma body. ㄸ

TRANSLATED BY CHO YOONJUNG

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