A RECONSIDERATION OF GILT-BRONZE BUDDHAS OF THE THREE KINGDOMS PERIOD IN KOREA, FOCUSING ON THE STANDING BUDDHA HOLDING A JEWEL IN ITS RIGHT HAND

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Many images of gilt-bronze standing Buddhas (Sks., tathāgata) in a rather unnatural posture, bent awkwardly at the waist with right shoulder exposed and holding a jewel in its right hand were produced in the first half of the seventh century in Silla. These images are peculiar to Silla and are not seen in other countries in the same period. On the basis of the hand-held attributes, the Buddhas have been called images of Baisajyaguru, but considering the period of the first appearance of the Baisajyaguru iconography and the fact that the works hold a jewel in their right hands, it is unlikely that they were meant to be Baisajyaguru.

There are no extant images that might be directly compared to this unique iconographic type, but given the accounts that the main Buddha of the Abhayagiri in Sri Lanka held a jewel in its right hand, and that in each of these works the right shoulder is exposed, an attribute linked closely to the Buddhism of South Asia, it is clear that their origin is in the cultural sphere of Southern Asian Buddhism. In other words, it may be assumed that Silla, plying the sea routes to Southern Asia, carried out cultural intercourse with the South and that this Buddhist iconographic type was influenced by South Asian Buddhism but created in Silla. It can also be surmised that the image is that of Shakamuni.