Images of the Four Heavenly Kings in Unified Silla As the Symbol of National Defense

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ABSTRACT
This paper aims to examine the role of the Four Heavenly Kings in the Unified Silla period of Korean history. When images of the Four Heavenly Kings were first created in Unified Silla they were all enshrined in royal memorial temples. The royal memorial temples were built on the north, east, west and south sides of the Silla royal capital and images of the Four Heavenly Kings were engraved in the reliquaries found inside each temple. The fact that they were all enshrined in the royal memorial temples, especially in the stūpa, indicates that the Four Heavenly Kings had their own special function. The role of the Four Heavenly Kings in Silla was not only to protect the temple, but also, more importantly, to protect the whole nation.

Keywords
Four Heavenly Kings, Sachŏnwang Temple, royal memorial temples, Seokgu-ram Grotto, state protection

What one encounters when first entering a Buddhist temple in present-day Korea are the statues of the Four Heavenly Kings (below, FHK), who are the protecting deities of the temple. Sitting at the entrance of the temple grounds, we see them protecting the inhabitants within the temples (see Figure 1).

Although such statues adorn present-day Korean temples, serving this protective function, this contemporary status and importance of the images and iconography has a mixed history. There are no known examples of the FHK guarding the entrances of Korean temples prior to the sixteenth century.1 However there

1. The earliest example of a statue of the FHK in Korea is the one on the gate of Borim Temple, which was founded in 1515.
were images of the FHK during the Unified Silla period (676–935), so the question begged here is where were these images placed, and what was their role during the Unified Silla period?

The FHK are, as noted, guardian deities seen as defending the four heavens, those of the north, the south, the east, and the west. They are always seen dressed in armor while they grasp their weapons, in short, they are seen in a perpetual wrathful state, which within East Asian Buddhist iconography serves the function of scaring away evil forces. These deities are always shown with eyes bulging (symbolizing that they are keeping their eyes on evil) while standing on top of a yakṣa (夜叉). However, this was not the original appearance of the FHK. In India where the concept of the FHK originated, they were described as noble men without armor, as they can be seen in Figure 2, a Gandhāran stone relief, dated to the second century CE (Lim 1998, 87, 96).

In this Gandhāran relief, the FHK are depicted flanking the Buddha on each side, each raising an alms bowl towards the Buddha in the center. They each wear a turban and a shawl on their upper body, as well as an Indian dhoti on the lower body. In addition, they are seen wearing various kinds of jewelry such as necklaces and earrings, a feature which distinguishes the Indian images from

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2. In this article any reference to ‘Silla’ indicates ‘Unified Silla’. The Silla dynasty unified the Korean peninsula in 676.


4. A ‘dhoti’ is an Indian traditional lower robe.
the image of the FHK that we know today in East Asia.\(^5\) Originally their roles were more in line with other deities who reside in the heavenly realms of Indian Buddhist cosmology than with the guardians, as I have argued in a previous paper (see Lim 1998, 87). As the FHK were transmitted to East Asia along the Silk Road, their roles changed.

The concept of the FHK obviously originated in India, but it was in ancient East Asia that the concept and related imagery were popularized. Their popularity was particularly remarkable in Korea and Japan. What was the reason behind this phenomenon? My study begins with this question. Unfortunately, however, not many Unified Silla period images of the FHK still remain. Most of the remaining images from this period are classified into two different cases. First, in the earlier time period, images of the FHK decorated the outside of Buddhist reliquaries and were deposited within a pagoda. Second, as time progressed, it became more common to carve images of the FHK on the first storey of the pagoda’s surface.

As mentioned above, this study begins with the question of why images of the FHK were so popular in the Unified Silla period, and this issue distinguishes this study from previous research on the FHK.\(^6\) In order to answer the question, this

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5. As is well known, images of the FHK in India appear on stone reliefs. The relief depicts the story that, as the FHK offered their respective wooden bowls to Buddha, the Buddha combined them into one bowl (T 185 II 0479b01).

study focuses on three issues: the question of when and how the images of the FHK were introduced to Korea during the ancient Silla period, the reason why the practice of making engravings on Buddhist reliquaries or on the surface of various pagodas became popular, and the roles and meanings of the FHK in the Unified Silla period.

The earliest literature on the images of the FHK in the Silla period is found in the *Samguk yusa* (Legends and History of the Three Kingdoms), a Korean text written in Classical Chinese dating from around the thirteenth century which contains legends and biographies pertaining to early Korean history. Among the records related to images of the FHK in the *Samguk yusa*, all of them focus on the Sachŏnwang Temple (四天王寺, the Temple of the Four Heavenly Kings), founded in 679 (T 2039 I 0968b25; T 2039 II 0972a08). In the *Samguk sagi* (History of Three Kingdoms),7 probably written in about the twelfth century, and considered to be more of a factual/historical account than the *Samguk yusa*, we likewise find only two records, both of which are related to the Sachŏnwang Temple.8 The records about the Sachŏnwang Temple in the *Samguk yusa* and *Samguk sagi* explain the background of the foundation of the temple; however neither of them tell us about the statues. The only comment that specifically mentions the statues of the Heavenly Kings in the *Samguk yusa* is about a different temple — ‘the statues of the Heavenly Kings at the Yeongmyo Temple’ (T IV 1004a05). Unfortunately, neither the Yeongmyo temple nor any images associated with it are still in existence today.

Therefore, based on written records alone, the textual citations about the images at the Sachŏnwang Temple are the oldest reference. Can we infer from that that this is when they were first ‘introduced’ to Silla? Of course they could have been introduced earlier, but with no written record of that now extant. Extant written records do not provide any information other than the site and the statues of the Heavenly Kings at the Yeongmyo Temple. Therefore, it is unwise to conclude that there were any images of the FHK before 679. With materials currently available, it is problematic to suggest that the images in Silla existed earlier than the seventh century, as other scholars have done (see, for example, Shim 1996, 121–122; Kwon 2003, 48).

It is also unclear whether the images existed in China much before this. The earliest verified and datable Chinese image of the FHK is the one on the Buddhist reliquary at the Shendesi Temple (神德寺) created in 604 during the Sui Dynasty (see Figure 3).

As is commonly known, Sui Emperor Wen-ti (who reigned from 581 to 604) distributed Buddhist reliquaries three times throughout his empire, after the year 601, in order to justify his form of Buddhist sovereignty and to disseminate what he considered to be the most important of Buddhist virtues. A representative example of his efforts would be the Buddhist reliquary at the Shendesi Temple in China (Lijuwang 2005, 162–165). On this stone śarīra reliquary, whose sides are 119cm high and 103cm wide, kings are engraved on two of the four sides: the West and the North kings on one side, the South and the East kings on the other.

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7. The term ‘Three Kingdoms’ refers to the three ancient Korean kingdoms of Koguryo, Baekje, and Silla that existed prior to the period of Unified Silla.
8. *Samguk sagi* January of the nineteenth year of seventh King Munmu in the Annals of Silla; *Samguk sagi* the third year of twelfth King Gyeongmyeong in the Annals of Silla.
set of images of the FHK is the oldest known example in China, and fortunately records both the date and the respective names of the four Heavenly Kings.  

There is a possibility that the images of the FHK were introduced to Silla during this period as well, as a consequence of the activities of Sui Emperor Wen-ti. There is a Chinese record that Koguryo, Baekje, and Silla were each given a piece of śarīra in 601. The existence of such a record may indicate that during the early seventh century the three kingdoms in Korea were familiar with śarīra reliquaries with images of the FHK on their outer case (T 2103 Guanghongmingji (廣弘明集) XVII 52:217a; Joo 2003, 115).

Statues of the Four Heavenly Kings and Sŏngjŏnsawŏn (成典寺院 royal memorial temples) in the Silla period

The earliest written records related to the FHK in Silla relate to the image of them at the Yeongmyo Temple and the Sachŏnwang Temple, and given that the date of the founding of the latter is known, this fixes the date to the late seventh century. Unfortunately, neither temple remains standing today. The first verified mention of an image of the FHK in Silla is of the one casted on the Buddhist reliquary at the Gameun Temple, created around 682. Despite the fact that the Gameun Temple reliquary is the first verifiable example of the imagery, and although the other cited image of the FHK no longer exists, the Sachŏnwang Temple is still believed to be the place of origin for these images in the Silla period. King Munmu (reign 626–681)10 founded the Sachŏnwang Temple for the purpose of defeating the Chinese Tang army in 679 (T I 0968b25).11 Given that the first known temple that contained the images is known to have been constructed for a warring purpose, this suggests that the set of images of the FHK had a particular meaning, and was being used in a particular way (Lim 2011a, 245): as a spiritually-based protection mechanism, for success in war.

10. We should keep in mind that King Munmu is credited with the Unification of the Three Kingdoms.

Figure 4. Platform of the Wooden Pagodas of Sachŏnwang Temple, date 679, Gyeongju City, Korea, © Lim.
Images of the Four Heavenly Kings (FHK) are not the only images populating Buddhist temples in Korea that can be seen to serve some protective function. During the recent excavation of the Sachŏnwang Temple site, twenty-four terracotta plaques showing divine guardians were found to have been laid at the platform of each wooden pagoda (see Figure 4).  

Six statues were found placed on each side of the platform of a wooden pagoda, and they were of three types (see Figure 5). Those facing the front were in the middle, and statues on their left and right were facing the outer sides (Lim 2008, 7–37). The twenty-four divine guardians cannot be either the FHK or the Eight Classes of Divine Beings. These statues are in a place that would not be where images of the FHK would be positioned. Images of the FHK, which must have played the most important role at the Sachŏnwang Temple, would not be placed on the lowest part of the wooden pagodas. Moreover, none of the statues holds a mini-stūpa, which is an essential feature of the image of one of the FHK. Among the images of divine guardians, those of the FHK, the Eight Classes of Divine Beings, or the twelve zodiacal animal deities are identifiable by number. However, there are innumerable cases where the statues lack iconographic characteristics, such as the statues at the site of the Sachŏnwang Temple. These statues are usually in armor, sitting on a yakṣa at the lowest part of pagodas. Thus they seem as if they are the FHK. However, the number of the statues are far larger than four, often being more than 24. Furthermore, the FHK cannot be situated at the lowest part of the pagodas, which additionally proves that the statues are not the FHK. A similar case is the images of divine kings on the surface of the middle pedestal of the Giant Buddha at Fengxiansi Cave (奉先寺洞) in Chinese Longmen Grottoes (龍門石窟) completed in 645 (See Figure 6). 

At a glance, the Figure 5 images may look similar to those of the FHK, but again, they are not the FHK because none are holding a mini-stūpa and they are placed on the platform of the lowest part of the pagoda. In most cases, images of the FHK are carved not on the platform of a stone pagoda but on the surface of its first storey. The number of terra-cotta plaques represented varies depending on the availability of space. In East Asia, they are usually called Shenwang (神王 ‘Spirit King’). These images of divine kings on the platforms of the wooden pagodas protect the statues and Buddha relics enshrined in the wooden pagodas from the bottom (Lim 2008, 28–31). Given that these are not images of the FHK, do they provide us with any clue as to where the image of the FHK, who are the most important entities of the Sachŏnwang Temple, might be enshrined? According to the written records, in the case of the Sachŏnwang Temple in Japan, images of the FHK were enshrined inside the wooden pagoda or in the main Buddha Hall. This Japanese temple can be dated to 648, and despite the difference in period, things might not have been much different from the Silla time.

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12. The Sachŏnwang Temple had two wooden pagodas.
13. They are also referred to as ‘eight kinds of beings’ or ‘eight groups of followers’.
14. The Northern king (of the four heavenly kings) is always depicted holding a mini-stūpa.
15. In a separate article, I have identified the images of divine guardians on the platform of the wooden pagoda at the site of the Sachŏnwang Temple as the Divine Kings appearing in the Guanding jing (灌頂經) (Lim 2008, 28–31), and I believe that the image of the FHK, which was most important at the Sachŏnwang Temple, might be enshrined inside the Buddha Hall or the wooden pagoda.
Figure 5. Terracotta Plaques of Divine Guardians (A, B, C types) at Figure 4, © Lim.
Returning to the earliest known image of the FHK at the Gameun Temple, three years after the establishment of the Sachŏnwang Temple in 682, King Shinmun (681–692) erected twin three-storey stone pagodas on the east and west sides of the Gameun Temple in commemoration of King Munmu.¹⁶ In the third storey of these pagodas are enshrined reliquaries reported to contain śarīra relics of the historical Buddha. The reliquary in the east pagoda was discovered in 1996, and that in the west in 1957. The images of the FHK are cast on the outer case of the Buddhist reliquaries, having been created separately and then attached to the casing (see Figure 7).

¹⁶. I term the structure ‘three-storey’ in acknowledgement that the pagoda is constructed in three main layers.
The main role of these images is to protect the śarīras enshrined in the reliquaries. Unlike the images from Sachŏnwang temple, they are clearly identifiable as the FHK in that the Northern King is holding a mini-stūpa in his hand. It is notable that although the FHK are fully armored with their hands holding various weapons, they are not wearing any helmets. Although the images are merely 20cm in height, the facial expressions and carvings of the armor are highly sophisticated, making them worthy as representative images of the FHK in Silla.

Under the feet of the FHK on the reliquary casket at the Gameun Temple lie various beings (see Figure 8). They resemble animals, or oppressed yakṣas, or in some cases, human-like creatures upholding the FHK with two hands. But who are they? Modern scholars commonly simply call them ‘living creatures’. Regardless of what they really are, they have been referred to in this way because they are living beings under the feet of the FHK. They are largely divided into two groups, yakṣas and animals, with yakṣas being the more common. They have often been called ‘evil spirits’ or ‘devils’ because they were considered to be vicious spirits who were defeated by the FHK (Moon 1980, 47). However, to think of these creatures in this way is incorrect. Yakṣas under the feet of the FHK play a role of protecting the beings above them as well as more generally serving a protective function in relation to the Buddhist tradition. A prayer in the Jinguangmingjing (金光明經, the Suvarṇa-prabhāsottama-sūtra) reads:

Dear Buddha, we Four Heavenly Kings, with the five hundred yakṣas under our command, will always follow those who preach the Jinguangmingjing and protect them (T663 II 344c).

This suggests that yakṣas are not evil spirits that the FHK need to defeat but rather are subordinates to the kings and function to support them. Thus, these
yakṣas should be regarded as being deities inferior to the FHK, who are in service to them.17

As well as these figures, there are also notable cases where goats are pinned under the feet of the FHK, such as found in the Gameun Temple (Figures 7 and 8). Interestingly, it is recorded in the literature that ‘Yakṣas have thousands of different forms; sometimes they are transformed into animals such as cows, sheep, and deer’ (T 1335 Dajiyishenzhou jing (大吉義神咒經) III 0575b04). Therefore these goats under the feet of the FHK may well be a transformed form of a yakṣa (Lim 2014, 51–52).

Another example of the image of FHK engraved on a Buddhist reliquary is that on the outer side of a gilt bronze śarīra reliquary in the Nawŏlli five-storey stone pagoda in Gyeongju, created around the early eighth century (see Figure 9).18

This Buddhist reliquary has one of the FHK carved on each of the four sides. It is placed in the usual space for śarīra enshrinement and is oriented to the four directions. Only the Northern King holds a mini-stūpa, and all the other Heavenly Kings hold swords in their hands. In this instance, there are no yakṣas under their feet. In what looks like slightly later sculptures of the FHK carved on the surface of the first-storey of the stone pagoda erected around the ninth century, some stand on clouds without yakṣas but most of them have yakṣas under their feet.

In relation to the geographic position of all the images of the FHK discussed above, the images in the Gameun Temple, the Yeongmyo Temple, and the Sachŏnwang temple are each related to royal memorial temples. Such temples

17. Indeed yakṣas would appear to be the lowest class of deities, see Lim 2014, 53–54.
18. The original name of the temple is not known. It is known as the Nawŏlli temple site, named after a nearby town.
were places of worship, where individuals and families would come to pray for the wellbeing of the royal family or the state, and national rituals were performed there for such purposes. Recently it was suggested that the Bongseong Temple, one of the most important royal memorial temples, is highly likely to be the aforementioned Nawŏlli temple site (Yoon 2002, 88–92). The Nawŏlli temple site is to the north of what was the Silla royal capital and the Sachŏnwang Temple is to the south. In addition, the Yeongmyo Temple is located to the west and the Gameun Temple to the east (see Figure 10). The four royal memorial temples are connected through official roads that start from the royal capital of Silla.

If the current Nawŏlli temple site is the ancient Bongseong Temple, then we might well conclude that all of the royal memorial temples to the north, south, east, and west of Silla’s royal capital are significantly connected by images of the FHK. Though different in positions, the images of the FHK are enshrined in each of the four temples. These images, situated respectively to the north, south, east and west of the capital served as a protector not only of relics of the body of the historical Buddha, but also of this important Silla city and, furthermore, the whole territory of Unified Silla.
When images of the FHK appeared first in Silla, they were placed in a closed space inside the body of a pagoda as in the Buddhist reliquary of the Gameun Temple and then in the early eighth century at the Nawŏlli temple site. However, from the mid-eighth century, the images were exposed on the surfaces of the first storeys of the pagodas, marking the start of their popularity as votive objects. About twenty images of the FHK are known to be carved on pagodas, and the earliest ones among them are those on the surface of the first storey of the east and west three-storey stone pagodas at the site of the Wŏnwŏn Temple (see Figures 11 and 12).

Dating from between the mid to late eighth century, Wŏnwŏn is particularly meaningful in that it was situated on one of the major transportation routes of ancient Gyeongju. Wŏnwŏn was a temple dedicated for state protection founded by prominent leaders of the day (T V 1011b08). On the surface of the first storey of the east and west three-storey stone pagoda, high relief images of the FHK are carved almost all the way around, and these are regarded as outstanding pagoda sculpture reliefs. Interestingly, with the reliefs at the site of the Wŏnwŏn Temple as a starting point, the number of images of the FHK carved on the surface of pagodas gradually increased (Lim 2011a, 244–245).

19. The image of the FHK on the reliquary enshrined within the body of the stone pagoda was carved in around the mid-eighth century, and is believed to be in the same pattern as the carving of zodiac animals buried in a royal tomb on the stone circle around the tomb. It is my view that this Buddhist art mimics East Asian funerary art, rather than being an isolated category.

Turning now to look at other images of the FHK, in the Seokguam Grotto, which is part of the Bulguksa Temple complex in Gyeongju in South Korea, we can see some issues relating to their protective function that support what has been discussed in relation to the other images so far. The Seokguam Grotto is believed to have been a chapel for prayer initially. It has an arched entrance which leads to a rectangular antechamber and a narrow corridor through which access is gained to the main rotunda. In the short, narrow corridor connecting the front room and the main hall of the Seokguram grotto there are images of the FHK.
Images of the Four Heavenly Kings in Unified Silla

Two of the images face inward and the other two face outward. They are about 200cm high, excluding the halo and yakṣa. The most remarkable feature of images is the face of Western King (see Figure 15).

As can be seen in Figure 15, this is a particularly unusual carving. It is uncertain at present when and why the face was carved separately. Whatever the reason, it seems clear that originally the face of Western King must have been looking inward into the main hall of the grotto. The change must have taken place later after the completion of the Seokguram Grotto.21

The images of the FHK in Seokguram are all armored, but are not wearing any helmets. Except for the Northern King holding a mini-stūpa, all are holding swords of the same form, which is consistent with the images in the Nawŏlli five-
Figure 13. The Four Heavenly Kings, mid-eighth century, short corridor of Seokgulam, Gyeongju City, Korea, © Lim.

Figure 14. The Four Heavenly Kings of Figure 13, © Lim.
Images of the Four Heavenly Kings in Unified Silla

storey stone pagodas. Each image has a creature under its foot, and a particularly notable one is the yakṣa under the foot of Southern King (see Figure 16).

Its left arm has a snake coiled around it, with its mouth holding the tail. Here, it is likely the snake plays the role of providing dynamic force to the guardians.22 Thus, the image somewhat implies that the yakṣa being in need of powerful strength is borrowing spiritual power from the snake.23

The images of the FHK, which date from the Sachŏnwang Temple in the late seventh century, reached their zenith of artistic and religio-political expression with the Seokguram images in the mid-eighth century. As mentioned earlier, the

22. An ancient Chinese reference in the Shanhai jing (Classic of Mountains and Seas) states that kuafu (夸父 — a kind of giant in Chinese mythology) gain power by means of holding the snakes in their mouth, grabbing them or stabbing them (Yuan 1998, 195). Also, nāgas, or snake-deities are associated with the Western Heavenly King, though not the Southern one (Dīgha-nikāya III 198–199).

23. With regard to the identity of pedestal yakṣa, see: Lim 2014, 35–59.

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images of the FHK with the implication of state protection has their background in the *Jinguangming jing*. This text, however, describes the roles of the FHK but does not mention their images or forms. In contrast, the *Tuoluonijì jìng* (陀羅尼集經 Collection of Dhāraṇī Sūtra) translated during the Tang Dynasty period in 654 states clearly, ‘the Northern King holds a stūpa’ (T 901 XI 879a). Some scholars subsequently argue that the icons of the FHK are based on the *Tuoluonijì jìng* (Moon 2000, 256–257). However, this is unlikely because there had already been images of Northern King holding a mini-stūpa before 645, the example being the aforementioned stone śarīra reliquary at the Shendesi Temple built in China in 604. Furthermore, the accoutrements of the Heavenly Kings other than Northern King do not correspond with the records of the *Tuoluonijì jìng*. For instance, the accoutrements of the Gameun Temple image and those at the site of the Wŏnwŏn Temple are inconsistent with both the contents of the *Tuoluonijì jìng* and with the Seokguram images of the FHK. Only the mini-stūpa of Northern King matches the sūtra. Therefore, in my view the accoutrements in the images of the FHK in Silla did not have any regular pattern except for that of the Northern King. Still, images with one holding a mini-stūpa and the others armored with swords are commonly found, such as in the Nawŏlli Buddhist reliquaries and Seokguram.

Figure 16. *Yakṣa* of the Southern Heavenly King in Seokguram, © Lim.
Thus, this combination must have been particularly popular in East Asia during the seventh and eighth centuries (Lim 2011, 40).

The changes to beliefs and practices that provided the background for the construction of Seokguram were probably not dependent on specific sūtras like the Tuoluoniji jing to provide support for the form of sacred images. Rather, those responsible for the creation of the images must have made efforts to create their own models based on existing works or patterns. This is evidenced by the fact that the Seokguram images of the FHK were quite similar to the image at the Jingshansi Cave (敬善寺洞) of the Chinese Longmen Grottoes created in 660-665 (see Figure 17).

On the images in the Jingshansi Cave, which are often compared with the Seokguram images of the FHK, the Eastern King and Southern King are standing towards the outside of the gate. In relation to images that can be dated to the

Figure 17. The Eastern Heavenly King of Seokguram (left © Lim); Heavenly King at Jingshansi Cave, 660-665, Longmen Grottoes, China (right © New History of world Art 4, Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1997, plate 89).
Unified Silla period, the number of images of the FHK outnumbers groups of just two of these Heavenly Kings known during the same period in China. The reason for this may well be because ‘state protection’ was emphasized over ‘Buddhist protection’, therefore giving rise to the necessity to increase to four rather than two, who can then protect all four directions. For this reason, the Seokguram builder enshrined all of the FHK so that they would look both inside and outside, protecting not only the Buddhist statues but also the whole of Silla as well.

**Images of the Four Heavenly Kings in the *Jinguangming jing* and state protection.**

The *Jinguangming jing* was the most important sūtra for describing the background of the FHK. The *Jinguangming jing* states that the FHK would follow and protect wherever the preachers of the *Jinguangming jing* went, which indicates a close relationship between them and the sūtra (T 663 II 344c). For this reason, the *Jinguangming jing* is always included in Dharma discussions regarding the FHK.  

Many scholastic monks in Silla including Wonhyo (元曉 617–686) and Gyeongheung (憬興, active in 681) in the mid to late seventh century considered the *Jinguangming jing* one of their most important texts (Kim 2007, 9). Gyeongheung, especially, was a particularly influential person whom King Munmu (661–681) and King Shinmun (神文 681–691) designated as a national preceptor in both of their wills. Fascinated by the *Jinguangming jing*, Gyeongheung is believed to have written around twenty books related to the sūtra. Drawing the attention of influential commentators like Wonhyo and Gyeongheung in the late seventh century, the *Jinguangming jing* ultimately affected the making of the images of the FHK in both the Sachŏnwang and the Gameun Temple.

**Conclusion**

Images of the FHK originated in India, but they did not attract much attention there. In contrast, religious affiliation to the FHK and the making of images of them became popular in Central Asia and East Asia, especially in Silla and Japan. The ultimate purpose for the spread of these images appears to have been for state protection. As outlined and argued above, the Sachŏnwang temple in Silla,
founded in 679, was established in order to help defeat the Chinese Tang army, and the Sachŏnwang temple in Japan was also a representative temple built to surrender to Silla. Similar cases can be found in China. As also mentioned above, Sui Emperor Wen-ti sent Buddhist reliquaries, some carved with the image of the FHK, throughout the country in order to establish the authority of the imperial house and to solidify its sovereignty over the whole land.

With regard to state protection, it is interesting to examine the relationship between royal memorial temples and the image of the FHK during the middle Silla period. As commonly known, royal memorial temples were built for the purpose of defending the state and to enable the ruling sovereign to maintain absolute power. In the wooden pagodas or Buddha Halls of such temples, the images of the FHK were enshrined separately or made on Buddhist reliquaries. This shows that the FHK were firmly established as a symbol of ‘state protection’ in Silla.

This state-protection role of the image of the FHK in Silla began with the introduction of the *Jinguangming jing*, and continued until the mid to late eighth century, reaching its peak in the Seokguram images. On the walls of the short passage in Seokguram, two of the FHK are looking inside and protecting the Buddha, while the other two are looking outside to stop any invasions. After all, what were the FHK trying to defend, other than the Buddhist Land of Silla symbolized by the Buddha and bodhisattvas. In other words, the main purpose of the images of the FHK in Silla was less about keeping the temple safe but more about protecting the Buddha relics, as well as the nation itself. It was with this symbolization that the images gained much popularity in East Asia. Of course, the images’ role was not always limited to state protection. From some time later, this role diminished remarkably, and from the late period of Unified Silla (676–935), they appeared on monks’ stūpas for the protection of the monks’ śārīras or at the entrance of a temple to block evil from stepping into the temple grounds.\(^{29}\)

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*Tuoluoniji jing* (陀羅尼集經 Collection of Dhāraṇī Sūtra)


\(^{29}\) With regard to images of divine guardians on the surface of monks’ stūpas, see Kang 2006, 81–116.


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