Buddhist Sects in Lān Nā from the Reign of King Tilōk to that of Phayā Käo (1441-1525): Studies of Dated Bronze Buddha Images in Chiang Mai*

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Abstract

Southeast Asia has long been known for vital cultural forms that are both resilient and able to blend well with those from outside the region, especially those that fit well with local social conditions, customs, and beliefs. This syncretism occurred in the case of Buddhism in Lān Nā during its period of prosperity from the reign of King Tilōk to that of Phayā Käo (1441-1525). Although traditionally these beliefs were thought to have derived from the Theravāda sect of Buddhism of Wat Suan Dòk and Wat Pā Däng (along with various local beliefs), in reality the Lankan Theravāda Buddhism of Lān Nā assimilated and blended Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna beliefs to such an extent that the two traditions became one. Further, the influence of Northern Buddhist art traditions can be detected in some features of Lān Nā Buddha images as well as in relevant rituals and customs. Actually, Lankan Buddhist art itself was derived party from Mahāyāna beliefs in earlier times.

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The research consisted of a multi-disciplinary study incorporating Buddhist history and a comparison of Lān Nā Buddha image features and bronze casting techniques with those of their counterparts in Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Tibet. The study also compares the characteristics of the *Mahā Puruṣa Lakṣaṇa*, the "Great Man," as found in Mahāyāna and Theravāda texts, religious philosophies, and beliefs. Also included in the study are relevant customs and rituals such as consecrating Buddha images and placing Buddhist relics inside them.

The study found that in the prosperous period of Theravāda Buddhism in Lān Nā, some Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna beliefs and rituals were so well assimilated that their history and origin cannot be traced.

Key Words: Buddha image; Phra Singh; Golden Age of Lān Nā; Theravāda; Mahāyāna; Vajrayāna; syncretism

The Golden Age of Lān Nā

Hans Penth (1937-2009) aptly defined the 'Golden Age of Lān Nā' as the period when Lān Nā was completed through the powerful military of Chiang Mai and its satellite towns, the philosophical prosperity of Buddhist monks, the impartiality of law and order, the skillfulness of craftsmen, and the progress in irrigation and agriculture (Penth, 1983: 26-27). Because of these factors, Chiang Mai became the center of politics and culture in what is now Northern Thailand from the time of Phayā Kue Nā to that of Phayā Käo (1355 to 1525). The peak of the period occurred, during the reigns of King Tilōk and Phayā Käo (1441-1525).

Chiang Mai's prosperity was also facilitated by Buddhist activities, such as merit making, which united the different elements of society – kings and queens, the royal court, noblemen, craftsmen, ordinary lay people, and monks. Consequently, many monasteries were built not only in Chiang Mai but also throughout Lān Nā. Moreover, a great number of Buddha images were created for each monastery as evidenced by the number of inscriptions on the images' pedestals referring to donors. Land and crops were traditionally dedicated for the monasteries' maintenance and lay people sometimes offered their relatives as attendants to important Buddha images. Northern Thai Buddhists would offer food and drink to the image as if it were the Lord Buddha himself. At that time, and also now, after an image is consecrated, it is believed to be a Buddha, imbued with life.

The Ari sect and the evidence of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism in Lān Nā

During the Golden Age of Chiang Mai, Lān Nā monks would be ordained at or make pilgrimages to Sri Lanka and Bagan, which were renowned centers of Theravāda Buddhism. The Chiang Rai Inscription 4 (CR. 4) dating from 1498 or 1499 C.E. found at Wat Rattanavanārām in what is currently Phayao Province (*Inscriptional History of Phayao* 1995: 224-227), relates the journeys of Chiang Mai monks to Sri Lanka in the 15th century. Among them were the revered monks Mahā Dhammagambhīra

and Mahā Medhankara, who founded the Pā Däng sect in Chiang Mai (*Jinakālamālī* 1967: 119-123) and Phra Yānakitti Thera, King Tilōk's teacher. Similarly, Bagan Inscription 764, dating from early 1393, gives details of the pilgrimage of a revered monk Chiang Mai, Mahāsāmī Mahā Thera, who is said to have been the teacher of a Chiang Mai king who must have been Sèn Müang Mā (1385-1401) as referred to in the *Jinakālamālī*. He conveyed some golden decorated lotuses and donated money to the Shwe-zigon on three occasions (Luce, G.H. and Ba Shin, 1961: 332).

Some texts and lyrical Northern Thai poems, such as *Chāmadevī Wong* and *Glong Mangtrā Rob Chiang Mai*, furnish details about a Lān Nā – Pegu route. This route, which took three months to cover by walking (Na Nakorn 1979: (8)), ran through Chom Thong and Mae Sarieng, and crossed the Salween River to Muang Thrang (nowadays known as Papun) located on the west bank of the Salween in Myanmar. The Mon people who migrated from Hariphunchai to Pegu in former times followed this route, as did the Bagan ascetic Mang Lung Lwang, sent by Ayudhyan King Borommatrailōk in 1465 to be a secret agent in Tilōk's court (Wyatt and Wichienkeeo 1998: 97-99).

This familiar route also must have been traveled by the Indian monk Buddhagupta, spiritual teacher of the Tibetan monk Tāranātha, as related in the latter's history of Indian Buddhism written in the 16th-17th centuries (Chattopadhyaya 1990). Buddhagupta was a great traveller; he visited many places in India and Burma, the islands of the southeastern seas, and even Africa, with a view to find traces of Buddhism and Buddhist remains. He also went to Tibet where Tāranātha later recorded his visit in a Tibetan short biographical note. The life and travels of Buddhagupta have been incorporated in a biography written in Tibetan by Tāranātha under the title *Sans rgyas sbas pa* (Ray 1936: 84). It is important as a source of geographical information regarding numerous places in India, Burma, Africa, and several islands of the Archipelago. This 'history' is also an important piece of evidence concerning the spread of Mahāyāna over Mainland Southeast Asia, especially to what is referred to as Koki land,

a region that consisted of many important ancient cities: Rakhine, Bagan, Pegu, Haripuñjaya, Angkor, for example. Buddhagupta's evidence, written by Tāranātha, seems to suggest that the Mahāyāna sect had by this time lost its influence in Bagan, but not in Haribhañja and Balgu where he heard "as far as possible the law of secret mantras" (Ray 1936: 87).

Even though Nihar-ranjan Ray was uncertain whether or not 'Balgu' should be Pegu, he agreed with Giusseppe Tucci (1931: 683-702) that 'Haribhañja' must be Hariphunchai (Lamphun) in Northern Thailand. The way of life of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna monks at that time can be detected by the two monks mentioned; first, the Mahāsiddha Santipada and second, the paṇḍita Parhetanandaghossa. We can identify the *guru* as Anuttara Yōga Tantra, teacher in the Vajrayāna sect by his order 'Mahāsiddha' while the lay paṇḍita Parhetanandaghossa was probably a Vajrajārya, teacher in Vajrayāna but not exactly monk because he lived as a lay person, as found at Newar temples called Bāhās (Bāhīs) in Katmandu and Patan, Nepal (Figure 1). The Newar Vajrajārya would live as a lay scholar – or 'paṇḍita,' with his family but made a living by conducting the Mantra ceremony for people.

Figure 1 A vajrajārya at Swayambhunarth Stūpa in Katmandu, Nepal. The Newar vajrajārya used to live as a lay scholar with his family but made a living by conducting the mantra ceremony for people. (Author's photograph)

Many centuries before the journey of Buddhagupta in Koki land, the Ari sect had spread as far as Śrāvakayāna (an old word that now means Theravāda sect). The mural paintings of Paya-thon-zu and Nandamanya Temple in Bagan and the evidence of the Tibetan monk scholar Tāranātha point to the existence of a Tantric Buddhist sect in Bagan, and perhaps in other localities in Myanmar as well (Aung-Twin 1985: 36-37). This sect was probably that of the Ari, or Samanakuttaka, another name of the Ari referred to in the *Sasanavamsa*, who had their principal center on Mt. Popa near Bagan. Charles Duroiselle identified the Ari or Ariya, a name derived from the word Arya (noble), as a sect affiliated with the Northern School of Buddhism and fully saturated with Tantrism (Duroiselle 1911: 126).

The 1476 Kalyanī Inscription of the Mon King, Dhammazedi, refers to the Aris by the word 'ariyarahanta'(ariyarahanta pakkhabhikku sangha), the monastic sect of the noble arhants, respected as descendants of Sona and Uttara Thera from the Asokan period (Woodward 2003: 168). In fact, there is a large amount of evidence of the Aris in a Burmese chronicle**,** *Hmannan Yazawin*, also known as *The Glass Palace Chronicle*, from the Bagan period. An example is a Tantra ceremony called the flower of virginity, a ceremony of presenting a daughter or son to the acāriya before giving them in marriage, resembling the ceremony in Angkor, referred to as *chen-t'an* by Chou Ta-Kuan in 1296 (Chou Ta-Kuan 1993: 18-19). *Hmannan* also mentions the close relationship between the Aris and the King of Sagaing in 1315. It appears that many of the Aris lived around Pinya, Ava, and Sagaing at that time and were patronized by their kings (Duroiselle 1911: 92-93).

Even without evidence of the Aris in Lān Nā texts or inscriptions, the role of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna artistic expressions can be detected in Hariphunchai sculpture. An example is a terracotta crowned head in the Hariphunchai National Museum, Lamphun. (Stratton 2004: 121, figs. 5.61 a and b) (Figure 2 a and b), which seems closely related to those of the Pāla style of art in Bengal and Bihar around the 11th century. Another terracotta piece was found at Wat Pratu Li, Lamphun. It is a head of a male figure with arched eyebrows and large protruding eyes, wearing a crown with five leaf

ornaments which normally are found in Bagan art of the 12th - 13th centuries (Department of Fine Arts 2009: 245 fig. 70). Carol Stratton like Hans Penth (2004: fig.11), found the same kind of crowned decoration on four repoussée bronze Buddha images at Wieng Tha Karn, Lamphun, a satellite center which was flourishing at that time (Stratton 2004: 122, fig. 5.62).

Figure 2 a and b. Crowned head of the Buddha converting King Jambūpati, or Jambūpati himself, or another royal devotee. Stucco, late 11th - early 12th C. (Stratton 2004)

Stratton's identification of a subcategory which she calls the 'wide-eyed type' Phra Singh (Stratton 2004: 174-176, figs. 7.32 and 7.34) is similar to A.B. Griswold's categories of 'stiff' (Figure 3) and 'supple' types (Figure 4). Griswold believed that the Phra Singh group of Lān Nā originated from the Pāla images which were inspired by Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna ideology that passed through Bagan (Griswold 1957: 33-34).

Figure 3 Example of a 'stiff' type of Phra Singh Buddha image, 1470, at Wat Phrachao Meng Rai, Chiang Mai. (Author's photograph)

Figure 4 Example of a 'supple' type of Phra Singh, Wat Nong Phan-ngern, San Pa Tong, Chiang Mai, identified as Phra Singh 1473-74 in Wat Pha Khao, Chiang Mai. (Author's photograph)

The wide-eyed Phra Singh group may relate to the influence of Vajrayāna Buddhism at that time. Although Stratton (2004: 176) mentions that the type is possibly a Sri Lankan prototype from the early years of the Kandyan Period (1469-1815), the similarity of the 'wide-eyes' of Phra Singh in Chiang Mai and a Hariphunchai terracotta figure of a Buddha disciple (Figure 5) could also be interpreted as examples of the concept of sudden awakening. This concept was first mentioned by Piriya Krairiksh (1985: 137). Hiram Woodward (1997: 118) later mentioned the 'wide-eyes' as a specific characteristic of Ari or Ariya iconography. This idea, if it is true, should be a significant manifestation of the Ari sect in Hariphunchai as well. For the Vajrayāna sect of Tantric Buddhism, as well as the Ari, the goal of awakening (enlightenment) is the most important ideology. The eyes of those who suddenly attain enlightenment this way could be very different from the eyes of other images, both of Hindu gods' and the Buddha, which are half opened as if in meditation.

Figure 5 Buddha disciple, terracotta, ca. 12th - 13th C., Chiang Mai National Museum. (Chalor Karianthong's photograph)

King Tilōk, the Crowned Buddha image, and *Chakravātin*

In the Golden Age of Lān Nā, 15th-16th centuries, political, social, and religious contests intensified between the ideology of secular kingship and that of the *Chakravātin* or universal monarchy. The ordination of King Tilōk for a short period at Wat Pā Däng, Chiang Mai, a practice similar to that of King Lüthai (Mahādhammarāja I) of Sukhothai and King Borommatrailōk of Ayudhya certainly reflected the challenge. The socio-political context is also shown in the crowned Buddha image at that time representing the Buddha over-awing Jambūpati, related in the familiar *Jambūpati Sūtra*. A study by Niyada Laosunthon (1999: 201-202) found that the story came from a Tibetan text, *the Sūtra of the Wise and the Foolish* (*mdo bdzans blun*). This again confirms the role of the Northern School ideology in Theravāda culture. The cult of the universal monarch is also clearly shown in a crowned

Buddha image that was ordered cast by Tilōk in 1465-66 (Figure 6). Surasak Sisam-ang (2008: 71-73) remarks on the relationship between the image and the royal name "Siridhammajakrapatdi-tilōkrajadhiraj." At the same time Tilōk celebrated his new royal house, after destroying the revered tree of Chiang Mai at Ban Sri Phum because of a trick played by the Bagan ascetic Mang Lung Lwang as related in *The Chiang Mai Chronicle* (Wyatt and Wichienkeeo 1998: 97-99). According to the chronicle, Borommatrailōk sent the Burmese monk, Mang Lung Lwang, to Chiang Mai to trick Tilōk into believing that he could extend his life and become a *Chakravātin* if he removed the revered banyan tree at Ban Si Phum which was believed to protect the city. This incident took place together with the casting of a royal crowned image and building a new royal house. Sisam-ang also notes the resemblance between Tilōk's crowned Buddha image and the Vajrayāna Aksōbhaya image (Figure 7) found at Pa-hto-tha-mya temple in Bagan and interprets it to mean that the cult of the universal monarch was the newly promulgated ideology of Tilōk. In addition, we can find a resemblance in their monastic robes with those of Nepalese and also Tibetan images as shown in the monastic robes of the Aksōbhaya, Tibetan-Nepalese style, in the National Museum of Nepal, Chhauni (Figure 8).

Figure 6 Crowned Buddha image at Wat Benchamabophit, Bangkok, made by King Tilōk of Chiang Mai in 1465-66. (Sisam-ang 2012)

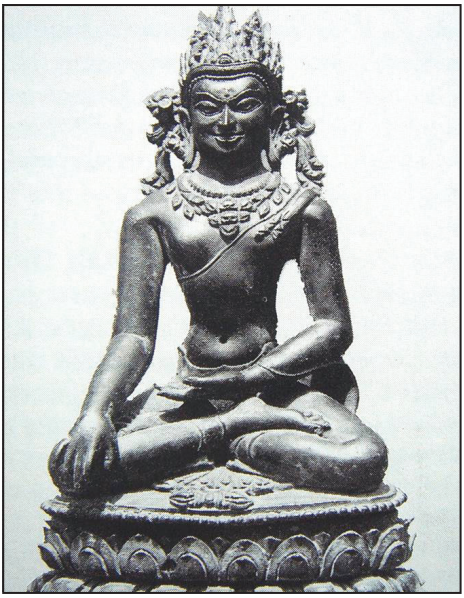

Figure 7 Dhayānibuddha Aksōbhaya image found at Pa-hto-tha-mya temple in Bagan. (Strachan 1989)

Figure 8 Aksōbhaya image, bronze, Tibetan-Nepalese style, National Museum of Nepal, Chhauni. (Author's photograph)

The cult of the crowned Buddha image in the 16th century can be studied from the casting of the *Mahākyain Pharas* (Royal Oath Buddha), also known as the *Nantet Phara* (Coronation Buddha). This image is mentioned in a Rakhine palm leaf manuscript entitled *Buddha Abhiṣeka Mangala*, which was transcribed in 1543 (San Tha Aung 1997: 53-56). The manuscript gives details of the coronation ceremony in which the image in full royal regalia must be raised above the Rakhine King while he circumambulates a holy pagoda three times. Again the influence of Northern Buddhism revealed in these crowned Rakhine images (Figure 9) led Pamela Gutman to suggest that the influence of Sino-Tibetan art from the Chinese Yuan and Ming Dynasties came from monks who traveled between monasteries in Rakhine, Tibet, and Bengal (Gutman 2011: 146-153).

Figure 9 A crowned Buddha image, Rakhine style, 17th - 18th C., Bangkok National Museum. (Author's photograph)

Comparison of Chiang Mai and Nepal-Tibet Buddha Images

Actually the linkage between Northern and Southern Buddhism can be detected in Lān Nā Buddha images. From this study we find that the iconography of some Chiang Mai bronze Buddha images dating from the Golden Age resembles that of images in Nepal and Tibet. The first similarity is the high conical *uṣṇīṣa* found on two Phra Singh images kept in Wat Benchamabophit, cast in 1484-85, (Figure 10) and on another cast in 1486, now in the Bangkok National Museum. The style of these tall *uṣṇīṣas* must have come from that of a Tibetan Buddha image's *uṣṇīṣa* (Figure 11). This feature, the tall *uṣṇīṣa,* can be interpreted as the first *Mahāpuruṣa Lakṣaṇa*, or characteristics of a Great Man, *Uṣṇīśīraṣa*, mentioned in the Mahāyāna manuscript *Lalitvistara*. Second, the curled fingers of the right hand in the gesture of subduing Māra (*Maravijaya*) of some Chiang Mai Phra Singh images are similar to those of Tibetan images. An example can be seen in the image at Wat Nong Phan-ngern, Chiang Mai, cast in 1473-74 (see Figure 4).

Figure 10 Phra Singh 1484-85, Wat Benjamaborpit, Bangkok, with a high conical *uṣṇīṣa.* (Krairiksh's photograph)

Figure 11 Phra Shākyamunī Buddha image, West Tibetan style, mid 11th - 12th C. (Rhie and Thurman 1991)

Note here that the fingers on the hands of this group of 'Lion Lord' images are of natural length and quite realistic, clearly different from the fingers mentioned in the Theravāda manuscript *Pathomsombōdhi* which are definitely of equal length. Marilin Rhie and Robert Thurman (1991: 74-75) explain this feature as follows: "Shākyamunī touches the earth with the tip of the middle finger of his right hand, responding to the devil Māra's challenge to his right to enlightenment." And, "He calls upon Mother Earth herself to bear witness to his long evolutionary struggle, over billions of lifetimes, to come to this moment."

Surprisingly, while Lān Nā texts, like those of Sukhothai, always mention that the discipline of the Lanka Wong sect was accepted as being from Sri Lanka at that time, we seldom find Lān Nā images with Sri Lankan proportions. It seems that the Sri Lankan proportions for seated images, *caturamāṇa* (Figure 12), were never brought to Lān Nā, just as the preferred Sri Lankan meditation gesture was less favored in Lān Nā than the subduing Māra gesture. Further, from our study we find the skill of Sri Lankan craftsmen was in stone carving rather than in bronze casting. While

we find splendid Sri Lankan life size or larger images in stone, it is difficult to find bronze images such as those of Lān Nā and Nepal-Tibet. Sri Lankan proportions were not adopted; instead three varieties of Lān Nā seated image proportions were followed among Lān Nā craftsmen, even though their familiarity is fading today. In a manuscript discovered in Lampang, names are attached to these three types. The most squat is the *nigrodhalakkhaṇa*, "banyan characteristics." Next is the *gajalakkhaṇa*, "elephant characteristics," and the thirdly is the *sīhalakkhaṇa*, "lion characteristics" (Woodward Jr. 1997: 23).

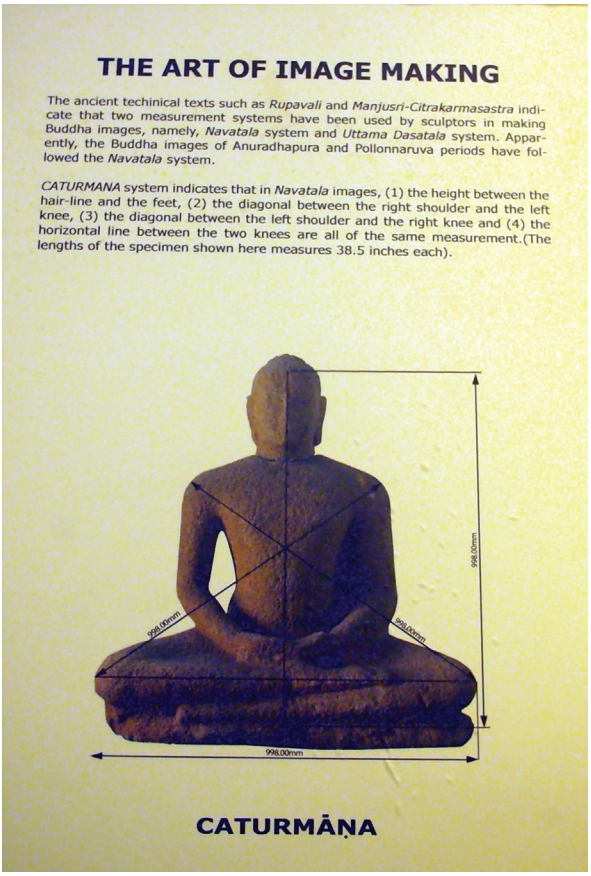

Figure 12 Sri Lankan proportions for seated images, *caturmāṇa*. (Author's photograph)

On the other hand, another concrete piece of evidence that affirms an ancient connection between Lān Nā and Nepal-Tibet craftsmanship is the Lān Nā casting technique, which involves many pieces that are joined together with traditional rivets called *swae.* We also find that some heads from both traditions in the 15th -16th centuries were cast hollow. In this case their *uṣṇīṣa as* could be opened to place relics or propitious objects inside (Figure 13). In some Lān Nā image the *uṣṇīṣa* was cleverly adjusted to facilitate inserting a relic, such as the Phra Singh image cast in 1482 now in the museum of Wat Phra That Hariphunchai, Lamphun (Figure 14). The placing of 500 relics and crystals, as well as golden and silver Buddha images in the head of the Lawapura Buddha image (Figure 15) by Tilōk in 1483, as mentioned in the *Jinakālamālī*, can explain the cult of relic worship that was certainly related to the above-mentioned techniques of casting. From the field study in 2000 we found that the *uṣṇīṣa* of this Lawapura image was separately cast and could also be opened. According to the study by Juhyung Rhi (2005: 169-211), inserting relics in the *uṣṇīṣa* of images began with the first Buddha image in the Gandhāra style of art in India and later spread to Bengal and Sri Lanka. The possibility here is that the cult was taken to Sri Lanka first by the Mahāyāna sect of Abhayagīrī monastery in the Anuradhapura period, 103 BCE., and later absorbed by the Mahāvihāra monastery.

Figure 13 Buddha image, Chiang Mai style, 15th - 16th C., Wat Nam Hu, Pai, Mae Hongson, hollow cast head with *uṣṇīṣa* that can be opened to insert relics or other propitious objects. (Author's photograph)

Figure 14 The *uṣṇīṣa* of the Phra Singh 1482, adjusted to insert relics, Wat Phra That Hariphunchai Museum, Lamphun. (Author's photograph)

Figure 15 Lawapura Buddha image, Wat Si Koet, Chiang Mai; 500 relics and crystal, golden, and silver Buddha images were placed in the head by Tilōk in 1483 as mentioned in the *Jinakālamālī*. (Author's photograph)

The Consecration of a Buddha Image

Sri Lankan Buddhists, like the Nepalese, Tibetan, and Thai, believe that only consecrated images can be worshiped (von Schroeder 2001: 29). The Sri Lankan *netra pinkama* ceremony (eye ritual) is similar to the *khai ta phrajao* (eye opening) in Lān Nā. This ceremony can be carried out for wooden, stone, and bronze, and even stucco Buddha images.

If we compared the Tibetan consecration ceremony, we can understand the concept of transformation of an 'inert' image into a live one from Nepal and Tibet to Lān Nā. Northern Thai people today are familiar with the ceremony of inserting a Buddha heart (Figure 16) and unbaked

brick or golden or silver plate with inscriptions or *yantras* into the new images. The study of Phra Jatupon and Phra Supachai (2009: 6-7), suggests that the *Yantra Pajjota* (Figure 17) used in Lān Nā consecration ceremonies may have originated in the Suan Dök sect from the reign of Tilōk. A rare handbook for the placing of the Buddha heart, from Wat Tung Kha, Lampang Province, shows an illustration of the Buddha heart with lungs and internal organs (Figure 18). This handwritten manuscript of Gruba Yasalee also gives details about auspicious times and elements needed for the ceremony. We can reasonably conclude that this physical concept, 'the Buddha heart,' had been adapted from the Tibetan consecration, *Rab gnas cho ga* or *Rab gnas*, that *gzung*, *mantras* and *dhārāṇīs* (incantations), which must be inserted into an image, stupa or kalaśa (holy vase). Although Yael Bentor (1992: 1-12) gave details of the four kinds of *gzung*, we found a different one. From the explanation of Lama Ngawang Sangpo, a high monk of Tharlam Monastery at Boudhanath Stupa, Kathmandu, the six kinds of *gzungs* (Figure 19) that should be inserted include *Shuktor gzung* for the upper part of image, *Den gzung* for the neck, *Thuk gzung* inside the chest, *Chhya Ghung Ma gzung* for the side of the *Thunk gzung*, *Dhyosal gzung* for the pedestal, and *Nyechun phomo gzung* for the pedestal cover (Bista 2010). He also informed us that it is considered very auspicious to insert Buddha relics, *ring bsrel*, inside the head of the images if possible; but actually the relics of very high level gurus have been used.

Gennady Leonov (1992: 100-110) defined "relics" in the context of the consecration rite as not only remnants of deceased lamas or objects connected with an historical event or person, but also as a term designating all types of objects inserted. In *Tibetan Religious Art* (1977: 32) L. Sh. Dabyab explains that Tibetans inserted 'relics' – meaning objects that were 'suitable and available' – inside a sculpture. We also find that gems and jewels were auspicious items that used to be placed in the head; an example is the Lawapura image into whose head King Tilōk inserted such items. The *Karunapundrika-sūtra*, cited by Rhi (2005: 201), makes mention of gems, especially *manīvaidūrya*, like *manī* or the jewel of *Chakravātin*, that

are of high importance as Buddha relics. This phenomenon must have been familiar to Lān Nā people who from ancient times have made Buddha images from "*kaeo*," crystal, or other precious stones. Even the Emerald Buddha image had to be made by this ideology of the Golden Age. It is possibly that monks who traveled between Nepal-Tibet and Lān Nā invented the Buddha image consecration ceremony practiced in Lān Nā.

Figure 16 *Huajai Phrachao* (Buddha heart), silver repousse technique at Wua Lai Silpa, Chiang Mai. (Author's photograph)

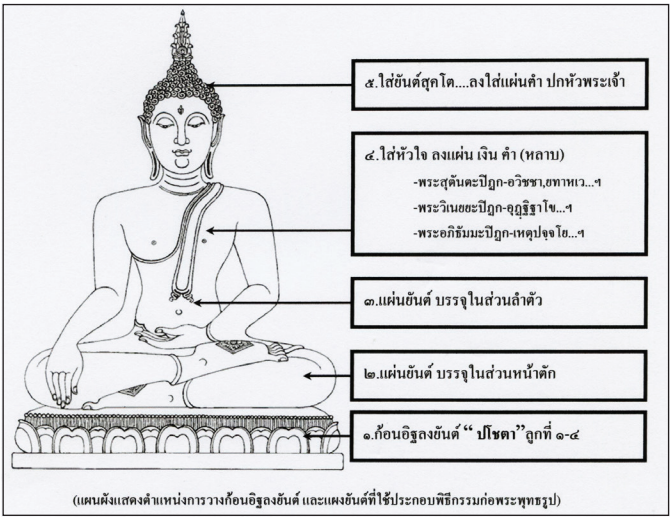

Figure 17 *Yantra Pajjota* used in the consecration of an image may have originated in the Suan Dok sect, from the reign of Tilōk. (Phra Jatuporn and Phra Suphachai 2009)

Figure 18 Handbook of placing Buddha heart from Wat Tung Kha, Lampang, shows illustrations of the Buddha heart with lungs and internal organs. (Author's photograph)

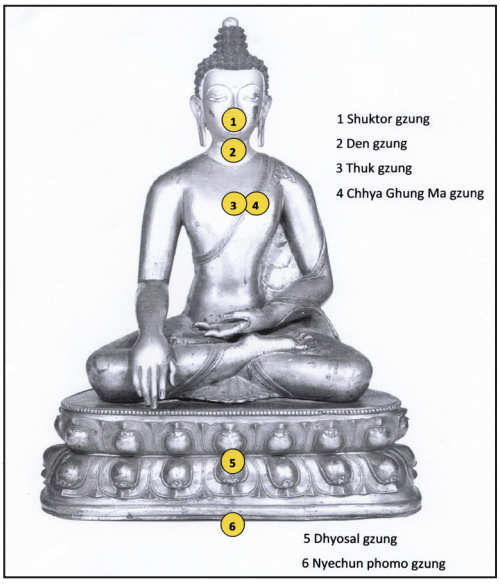

Figure 19 The six kinds of *gzungs* that should be inserted, explained by Lama Ngawang Sangpo, Tharlam Monastery at Boudhanath Stupa, Kathmandu, Nepal. (Author's photograph)

***Srog-shing*: the tree of life**

Our study agrees with Donald Swearer (2004) that the Buddha image consecration ceremony represents the transformation of an image of Shākyamunī Buddha into a living being. In Lān Nā monasteries, as those in the Northeast, there are young boys called *khayom* whose parents bring them there to be educated, they also have to attend to the Buddha image in the temple by presenting food and water every day as if to a human being (Ketphrom 1995). The Tibetans also insert *srog-shing*, the tree of life, or central axis, into the image. The *srog-shing* that is presented by the Lama Takya of Trikal Maitreya Buddha Vihara at Kadhmandu (Figure 20) is, as Leonov (1992: 104) mentions, "usually is a thin wooden stick, square at the bottom and narrowing to the top. Its length is usually two-thirds of the total height of the sculpture. *Bija* (mystic syllables) are depicted on its plain sides." In fact the stick is also rolled with five colored threads depicting each of the *bijas* symbols of five Dhyāni Buddhas of Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna Buddhism. This is also interpreted as a way of making the image come alive because the five Dhyāni Buddhas are also symbols of the five *skandhas* (aggregates): Vairocana (*vijñāna* / consciousness), Akṣobhya (*rūpa* / body), Ratnasambhava (*vedanā* / sensation), Amitābha (*Samjñā* / perception) and Amokhasiddhi (*Saṃskāra* / intention). *Srog-shing* then means rebirth of the Buddha Lord by the law of *Pratiyasamutpāda* or its causes and elements of birth, death and rebirth from *saṃsāra*. This belief conforms to Rhi's statement about the complicated relationship between relics and the *Tathākatawigaṛha* (Buddha image) in the form of Dharma (Rhi 2005: 169-211). In this way the image can teach the Dharma as if it were the Lord Buddha himself. The communication between the Shākyamunī, the image, and the people is complete as if the Buddha were present.

Figure 20 *Srog-shing*, tree of life or central axis, presented by lama Takya of Trikal Maitreya Buddha Vihara at Kadhmandu, Nepal. (Author's photograph)

The *ye dharmā* and the Phra Singh stanza

Another important dharma related to the image is the *ye dharmā* inscription that can be found on votive tablets and clay *stūpikas* throughout Southeast Asia dating from around the 12th century. The stanza is also very famous in Tibet. Peter Skilling's article, "Buddhist sealings and the ye dharmā stanza" (2008: 503-525), explains that the *sāvaka-bhāsita* stanza spoken by Asvajit**,** one of the five monks close to the Lord Buddha, was as effective as if spoken by the Lord Buddha (*Buddha-bhāsita*) himself because it had the full force of the 'Buddha's-words' (Buddhavacana). He also states that beyond the *Vinaya* context, and outside of the *Tripitakas* of the old schools, the stanza occurs in several independent sūtras, including those of the Mahāyāna and in at least one Tantra. Discourses of the stanza in Northern Buddhism were held from that time. In the *Pratiyasamutpāda-nāma-mahāyāna-sūtra* the stanza is preached by the Buddha in the Trayastriṃśa Heaven. In the *Mahā-Vairocana-Abhisambōdhi Tantra* the verse is incorporated into the text spoken by Vairocana to Vajrapāṇi (Hodge 2003: 413-414, cited by Skilling). Phasook Indrawooth (2008: 50-51) also remarks that the *Pratityasamutpāda* was very important in Vallabhi,

the center of Buddhism in West India from the 6th - 7th centuries. I-Ching mentioned the significance of *Pratityasamutpāda* as Buddha relics because when stūpas or images were made of gold, silver, copper, iron, clay, brick or stone, it was commonly believed that relics or dharma should be inserted within for great merit to the donors. For this reason, the Buddha images can be both *uddesikacetiya*, an indicative reminder, and *dharmmacetiya*, a doctrinal reminder, as seen from the Tibetan consecration that '*dharma*,' *mantra* and *dhāraṇī* should be inserted. We found a 1549 inscription from Phitsanulok, the dharmakāya inscription (Department of Fine Arts 1984: 277-281), that detailed all important *dharmas* needed for *nibbāna* that are explained by the parts of a Buddha image; the head is like *sabbaññutañāṇa* (the knowledge of omniscience), the forehead is like *catutthañāṇa* (the fourth knowledge), the nose is like *gotarabhūñāṇa* (the knowledge of one who destroys the lineage), the fingers are like the ten *anussatikammaṭṭhāna* (the meditation of recollection), etc. This kind of *dharmakāya* is also spoken of in some Lān Nā scriptures such as that of Grūbā Kong at Tha Wang Pha, Nan Province, "the Dharmakāya written into Buddha images and cetiyas."

During the Golden Age of Lān Nā, a stanza known as the Phra Singh's heart stanza was established as a brief summary of the four noble truths. The stanza, *samani dunima samadu sanidu*, actually is found on pedestals of certain bronze Buddha images in Chiang Mai, both the Phra Singh group and Chiang Mai group. The oldest inscription with the stanza (Figure 21) is found on the pedestal of a standing Buddha holding an alms bowl (Figure 22) in Wat Chiang Man, Chiang Mai, cast in 1465 (Penth 1976: 55-56). Later this classic Lān Nā stanza came to be known as *Pathamang* (the first) stanza or *Pathamang Si Dan* (four corners of *Pathamang*) of magic cloths or manuscripts (Figure 23). Although the main subject is the same, further magic is added for everyday life events, such as advancement, security, being favored by chiefs or women, etc. We can conclude here that the local stanza in the North, which is not found in any other part of Thailand, must again reflect some Tibetan beliefs and practices of Esoteric Buddhism in the Lān Nā Buddhist society of the Golden Age.

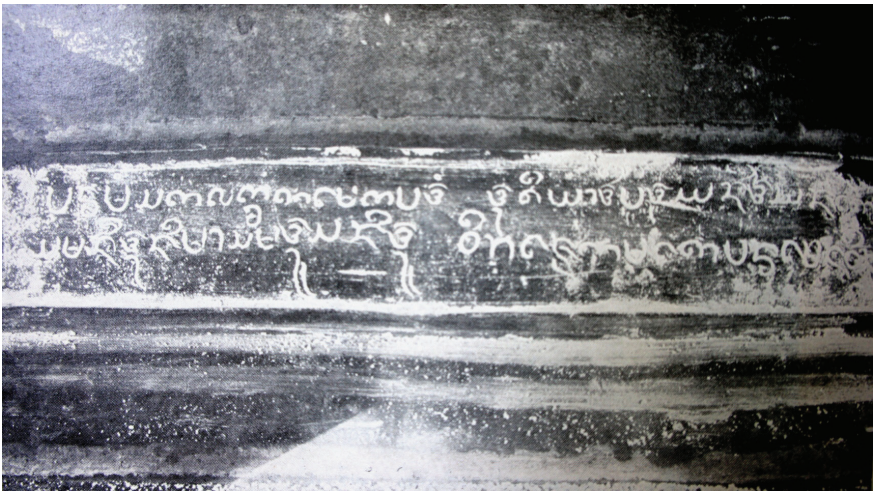

Figure 21 The oldest inscription of Phra Singh's heart stanza on the pedestal of a standing Buddha image with a bowl at Wat Chiang Man, Chiang Mai, and cast in 1465. (Penth 1976)

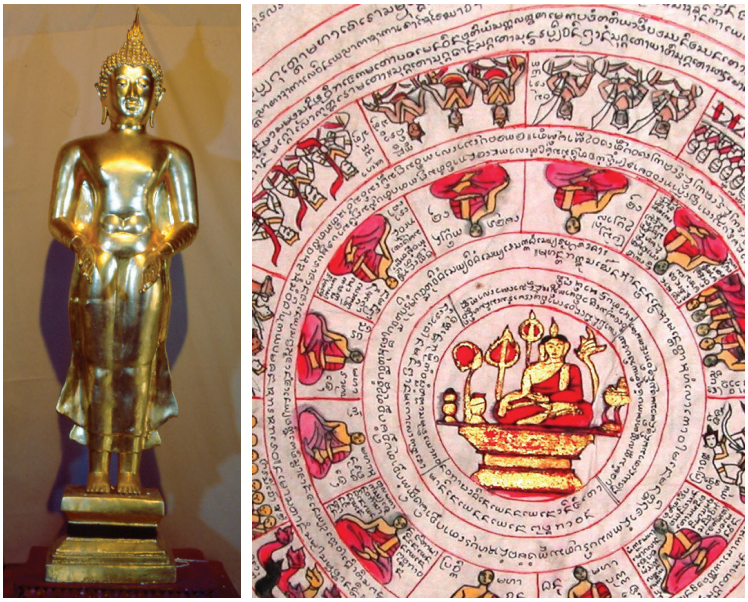

Figure 22 The standing Buddha image with a bowl at Wat Chiang Man. (Author's photograph)

Figure 23 Later Lān Nā stanza known as *Pathamang* or *Pathamang Si Dan* of a magic cloth. (Belonging to Srilao Ketprom)

Conclusion

This study finds that there are a number of reasons to believe that in the period when Buddhism was prosperous, Lān Nā sculpture was influenced by the Pāla-style Buddha images from Bengal-Bihar, Orissa, and Tibet. This style is based on Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna beliefs, which because of their complexity makes it difficult to identify the specific origins. The role of Tibetan art is found in the well-known iconographic characteristics of the Phra Singh Buddha image: a round face with arched eyebrows and a prominent chin, a stout body with a well-developed chest, the short end of the monastic robe terminating in a notched design on the left shoulder, the gesture of subduing Māra, the crossed-leg seated posture, and the base decorated with two rows of lotus petals and stamen. Moreover, Tibetan influence can also be detected in the stylistic handling of the "subduing Mara image" in the Chiang Mai style, especially the fingers. Several characteristics of a "Great Man," such as the high conical *uṣṇīṣa*, found in the Lān Nā style Buddha images during its prosperous era, can also be found on Nepal-Tibetan Buddha images. Further, the practice of inserting relics inside the *uṣṇīṣa* of some bronze Buddha images of this period also reflects a similar Nepal-Tibetan custom. Another practice was placing the Buddha heart, made of silver, inside the Lān Nā Buddha images, a practice that continues until today, and that could be related to the Tibetan custom of *Rub Gnas* where *gzung* (mantras) and *srog shing* (central axis) are placed inside Buddha images. This similarity includes the belief about paying respect to the Buddha images as *uddesikacetiya* and *dharmacetiya*. King Tilōk, as a great king of that period, used the Buddhist tradition of supporting Buddhism and kingship to expand his power. This resulted in strengthening the Mangrai Dynasty, which lasted until the reign of Phayā Käo, for a total of around 84 years. The record of the Tibetan monk Tāranātha confirms the existence of Buddhist society, both Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna and Theravāda, in the city of Hariphunchai. The Phra Singh images from this time confirm both the role and the route of the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna sects that had successfully blended into the culture and artistic traditions of Lān Nā during

its Golden Age. At its height, Lān Nā was like a river which received from many sources but continued to flow along its own way.

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