

# SOP-LI: A FIFTEENTH CENTURY LAN NA BRONZE-CASTING WORKSHOP

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## Abstract

An inscription on the base of a major Buddha image from Lamphun identifies the date of casting (equivalent to 1489 CE) and the casters as the metal workers from Sop-Li village. This important Lan Na inscription is probably the first in Thailand to pinpoint a bronze casting workshop by name, location and date. The Buddha image in question displays some distinct stylistic details particular to images from the Chiang Mai/Lamphun area in the late fifteenth century. During the “golden age” of Lan Na sculpture (the last quarter of the fifteenth century to the beginning of the sixteenth) a wealth of fine Buddha images, many with inscribed dates, was cast in the northern kingdom of Lan Na, and some exceptional examples coming from the Chiang Mai/ Lamphun area. An analysis of the stylistic aspects of the 1489 Sop-Li image and a comparison of these characteristics found on other images from the same general locality, suggests that at least two other Buddha images were cast by a Sop-Li workshop.

## Common iconographic combinations for Northern Thai Buddha images

The “golden age” of Lan Na, mid-fifteenth to the early sixteenth century, was a time of enormous artistic creativity and abundance. Energized by King Tilokarat (r.1441–1487)<sup>1</sup> and continued by his grandson Yot Chiang Rai (r.1481–1495) and great-grandson Kaeo (r.1495–1526),<sup>2</sup> the arts flourished throughout the Lan Na kingdom, particularly in the Chiang Mai area. During the eighty-five years or so of this sculptural florescence, artisans produced images of iconographic and stylistic variety. However, because this was a conservative tradition, a few standard iconographic combinations were much preferred.

The vast majority of “golden age” Buddha images, indeed of images throughout Thailand, employed an iconography that depicted the Buddha as seated with a flame finial, a long shawl, the legs in *virasana* (left leg folded over right)

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<sup>1</sup> All dates given here are Common Era (CE), formerly termed Anno Domini (AD).

<sup>2</sup> Hans Pentz, *Jinakalamali Index*, 311.

with the hands in *maravijaya* (left hand in the lap, right over the knee with fingers pointing to the earth). This iconographic combination was employed for both the inscribed Buddha image created by the craftsmen from Sop-Li (Figs. 1 and 2) and the second image considered here (Fig. 3). The iconography might be proscribed by tradition but the size, material, and style for the depiction of finial, hair coils, face, body, feet, hands, and robe were often chosen by the artisan, usually in accordance with the patron's proclivities and largesse. The patrons, whether royalty, monks or laity, in many instances attempted to associate the new image with an older one of perceived spiritual power.<sup>3</sup> Such is the case here as one of the images (Fig. 3) is referred to in a major northern chronicle as "resembling the Lava-image", that is to a then-known image in the Khmer-Lopburi style.<sup>4</sup>

### Dating by inscribed Buddha images

The study of Lan Na Buddha images, despite their bewildering diversity, has been greatly facilitated by the presence since the mid-fifteenth century of hundreds of bronze images with dated inscriptions on their bases.<sup>5</sup> So far, the earliest Lan Na Buddha image with an inscribed date (1465) is a standing bronze at Wat Chiang Man in Chiang Mai.<sup>6</sup>

The Lan Na inscriptions on Buddha images are usually engraved on the front face of the base with the majority displaying the casting date alone.<sup>7</sup> When mentioned, the donors were monks, royalty and lay persons, either individually or in concert. Some inscriptions contained phrases from Pali scriptures, wishes for a good rebirth, or the transference to another individual of the merit accrued by the sponsorship.

<sup>3</sup> For more on the casting and other ceremonies concerning the Buddha image, see A.B. Griswold's *Dated Images of Northern Siam*, 47 and Donald K. Swearer, 'Hypostasizing the Buddha', 267.

<sup>4</sup> *Jintakalamali*, 146.

<sup>5</sup> Hans Penth has photographed, recorded and translated the inscriptions of all Lan Na Buddha images available to him, numbering hundreds. This material is in the Archive of Lan Na Inscriptions at the Social Research Institute, Chiang Mai University. I am very grateful to Dr Penth for access to this essential material.

<sup>6</sup> Five images from Nan have a 1427 date, although Nan was a vassal of Sukhothai at the time. Perhaps the earliest inscribed date in Thailand for a Buddha image, 1412, could be found on a *sema* stone from Wat Sorasak, Sukhothai which depicts on the obverse side an incised walking Buddha with an attendant.

<sup>7</sup> Most of the Lan Na dates can be converted to CE, especially with the advent of computer technology. A number of dating systems based on the lunar or solar calendars were employed in Lan Na including the Buddhist era (BE) currently used in Thailand, Chula Sakarat (CS), the twelve-year animal cycle, and astrological dating. For more on the latter, see J. C. Eade, *Southeast Asian Ephemeris: Solar and Planetary Positions*, 1989.

Important images with no inscribed date or no mention in a chronicle can present problems. As yet there is no test for dating bronze material.<sup>8</sup> Those physical tests that are available, such as thermoluminescence on the clay core, necessitate moving and taking a sample from the Buddha image, an action which is not usually allowed if the image is located in a monastery or sacred site.

### Identification of a workshop through a dated image

In the process of classifying the Northern Buddha image types, it appears that some stylistic details on a few important seated images from “golden age” Chiang Mai resemble stylistic details on some images from the same time period in Lamphun. Such similarities give rise to the concept of a Lamphun/Chiang Mai school or sub-group. Furthering this concept is an inscription on the base of a Lamphun Buddha image that is extremely important to the study of Northern Thai art history (Fig. 1). The inscription reads:

Inscription in Thai:

สักกราดชะ ไค 851 พระเจ้าตนนี่ ขางสบลีหาลแล  
 ศักราชได้ 851\* พระเจ้าตนนี่ ขางสบลี (เป็นผู้) หล่อแล

Romanized version using modern Royal Thai Institute spelling:

*Sakarai dai 851 phra chao ton ni chang Sop Li lo lae*

English translation: “In C.S. 851 (1489 C.E.) the craftsmen (or craftsman) of Sop-Li (village) cast this Lord (Buddha image)”.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Besides the inscriptions on bronze images, the methodology currently available to the art historian for the dating of Northern Buddha images includes analysis of pertinent chronicles (especially the *Jinakalamali*), inscriptions on stone stelae, computer analysis of problematic astrological dates, and visual technical study for casting methodology as well as scientific testing of the material through carbon 14, thermoluminescence, accelerated mass spectroscopy, X-radiography, thin section core and chemical analysis. Also helpful are the evaluation of pertinent palm-leaf inscriptions, oral histories, myths, legends, and comparative analysis of other art schools influencing the Northern tradition. For more on Lan Na dating, see Stratton, *Buddhist Sculpture*, 85–98.

<sup>9</sup> According to Dr Penth, the word *chang* does not distinguish between singular or plural, the word “village” after Sop-Li is understood and the word “Lord” here refers to a Buddha image. The inscription is in Fak Kham letters. According to the George Bradley McFarland *Thai/English Dictionary*, Stanford University Press, 1944, *chang* (ช่าง) can mean the following: “an artisan, a workman of skill.”

This is the first time in Northern Thai history, known to the author, that a specific village or community of craftsmen (workshop) is mentioned in an inscription. While donors were sometimes cited, the craftsmen usually remained anonymous. Although the craftsmen have always been prized, the old chronicles and inscriptions rarely named the individual artisan, much less a specific atelier.

In reviewing these Northern inscriptions, the title *chang* (sometimes preceding a given name) appears only three times before 1489, three times in 1489, and four times between 1490 and 1510. For the rest, the seventeenth century has none, the eighteenth century has six, the nineteenth century has three and the twentieth century has ten for a total of twenty-nine references to *chang* over seven centuries. As for the ten times *chang* is mentioned during the “golden age”, only two inscriptions refer to the sculptors/caster(s) of a Buddha image. The remaining references are not on Buddha images but in stone inscriptions.<sup>10</sup> The two mentions of *chang* (in association with a Buddha image) are the one above (Sop-Li) and a second (Nga Daeng).<sup>11</sup>

The other early Lan Na inscription referring to an individual artisan by name (Nga Daeng)<sup>12</sup> is located beside a repoussé Buddha image (one of eight) incised on the bell *stupa* at Wat Phra That Hariphunchai in Lamphun. It identifies the donor, a high-status monk, who called on the ivory craftsman “Nga Daeng”, presumably to engrave that repoussé image. There has been much discussion over the dating of these repoussé images and their inscriptions with possible circa. 1330 or 1447/8 dates.<sup>13</sup> The second date is close to that of the 1489 Sop-Li image. The fact that both inscriptions (Nga Daeng and Sop-Li) are located at Wat Phra That Hariphunchai, the most important monastery in Lamphun, shows an appreciation of the artisan in this area and might indicate the presence of a workshop in the vicinity.

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<sup>10</sup> One other early inscription on the base of a Buddha image cites a casting date of 1478. However, instead of the *chang* it mentions the Mahathera (a high status monk) as the one who did the casting (rather than acting as a donor as would be the usual case). This image with its inscription is included in Griswold, *Dated*, #4, 80. Because of the iconography (a “Phra Singh” type) the image can be identified as of Lan Na provenance but its original location is unknown. The image is now found at Wat Suthat, Bangkok.

<sup>11</sup> Penth/Ketphrom, *Index Persons/Titles*, 36–37. Dr Penth and Dr Bonnie Brereton were most helpful in identifying the *chang* listed in the *Index*.

<sup>12</sup> Some examples of the names cited in early inscriptions are *chang* Noi, Som, Thong, and Khwen. Penth/SiLao, *Index*, 36–37.

<sup>13</sup> Stratton, *Buddhist Sculpture*, 143–152 gives a summary of the problems with associated illustrations. Also see Penth, *Inscriptions and Images on the Phra Maha That in Lamphun*, AA 49 3/4 (1989) 351–69. In his *Index Persons/Titles*, Penth dates the inscription to circa 1330, which would make it very early and unique, by far the earliest inscription on a Buddha image in Thailand. In a personal communication (December 2005), Dr Penth reiterated that the ‘rounded’ style of the Sukhothai letters suggests a very early date but that a re-examination of the dating of these repoussé images might have merit.

It is important to note that Sop-Li is located at the confluence of the Ping and Li Rivers within a day's walk of Lamphun or Chiang Mai. As was custom then (and can still be seen in the North today), metal workers could cast an image at their home base, but more often would travel to monasteries in the area to make the bronze statue in situ, especially if the image were life-size or larger. A particularly skilled bronze caster might bring a number of his assistants and apprentices to the locality (usually a *wat*), to help create and cast a major image.

The fact that the Sop-Li village is mentioned in the inscription suggests a community of skilled artisans or a workshop from which the craftsmen traveled. The Sop-Li workshop must have been esteemed indeed to have its name (and not the donor's) inscribed on an important Buddha image.<sup>14</sup> The donor is the important entity because of the merit he or she believed would accrue through such sponsorship while the craftsman was only a paid workman. Possibly, the Sop-Li workmen were both donor and caster. Perhaps the artisans considered themselves too humble to have their name(s) included as donor.

### **Analysis of possible Sop-Li Buddha images**

There is a strong possibility that the Sop-Li craftsmen cast not only the Lamphun Buddha with the 1489 inscription (Figs. 1 and 2), but could have cast other images in the area.<sup>15</sup> At least one important image exhibits very similar style and iconography (Fig. 3). A newly discovered torso has many of the same stylistic features (Fig. 4). The two images and the torso are here labeled Sop-Li #1, #2 and #3. The individual Buddha image, its basic data, iconography, and style are considered first; then the details that it has in common with the other two are analyzed later.

#### **Sop-Li #1: BUDDHA WITH SOP-LI INSCRIPTION, 1489 (Figs 1 & 2)**

Sop-Li #1 is a bronze image, 130 cm in height and locally called the "Buddha with Sharp Shins" (Phra Chao Khaeng Khom). It is currently located at Wat Phra That Hariphunchai, Lamphun.

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<sup>14</sup> Efforts to find out if the current inhabitants of Sop-Li village have retained any memory of this famed ancient bronze casting workshop were abortive. According to Ajarn Vithi Panich Phant of Chiang Mai University, such exemplary craftsmen would have been taken off to Burma during its long occupation of Lan Na and other people would have been relocated to the area.

<sup>15</sup> The other possible Sop-Li images are studied in detail in *Buddhist Sculpture*, 277–281. While these images might vary in size and iconography, they show some common stylistic characteristics of the two images and torso pictured here.

The iconography is that of a seated Buddha whose legs are in *virasana* and hands in *maravijaya*. As mentioned above, this iconographic combination is by far the most common in Lan Na. The image has a flame finial (*rasmi*), a robe in open mode, a long shawl (*sanghati*), and an ovoid pedestal decorated with abstracted lotus leaves, all very typical in fifteenth century Lan Na.

The style, however, especially the exaggerated handling of the head and facial features, is relatively unusual as it shows a mixture of Lan Na, Khmer-Lopburi, U Thong, and Hariphunchai influences.

This key image is locally called “The Buddha with Sharp Shins” (Phra Chao Khaeng Khom) because of the pronounced ridges along the shin bones.<sup>16</sup> On its base is the important Sop-Li inscription of 1489.

### Sop Li #2: BUDDHA, COPY OF ‘LAVA’ IMAGE, 1483 (Fig. 3)

This colossal bronze image is 350 cm high and is also called “The Buddha with Sharp Shins” (Phra Chao Khaeng Khom) but it is also referred to as the ‘Lava’ (Lavo/Lopburi) image. Its original location was at Wat Pan Tan, Chiang Mai, while its current location since 1799 is at Wat Sri Koet, Chiang Mai.

The iconography of *virasana*, *maravijaya*, flame finial, robe in open mode, and long shawl, as well as the type of ovoid lotus-leaf pedestal is the same as that of Sop-Li #1 and standard classic Lan Na.

The style is also similar to Sop-Li #1 as it shows Lan Na, Khmer-Lopburi, U Thong and Hariphunchai influences and will be discussed in detail below.

The Sop-Li #2 image does not have an inscribed date but its casting is noted in the important Northern chronicle, the *Jinakalamali Chronicle*. In 1483, King Tilok ordered a major colossal Buddha image “resembling the Lava-image” to be cast in the compound of Wat Pa Tan in Chiang Mai.<sup>17</sup>

Having had it cast, the King brought out of his relic chamber about 500 relics together with images made of gems and of pure and natural gold and deposited them in the head of the great Buddha image.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Sakchai Saisingha has identified other Northern images with “sharp shins” in a ground-breaking article “Buddha Image with Ridged Shins in Lan Na Art,” *Silpakorn Magazine*, 33/3, Bangkok, 1989. However, apart from the 1483 and 1489 Buddha images shown here, the other images and fragments do not have the distinctive Lopburi/U Thong facial characteristics. According to Sakchai, some sandstone fragments with remnants of sharp-shinned legs are now in the Chiang Saen National Museum, and are inscribed with an equivalent 1481 date.

<sup>17</sup> *Jinakalamali*, 145–146.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

Such a large royal image, so unusual and important as to be described in the *Jinakalamali Chronicle*, must have been cast by superior craftsmen of known abilities.

This colossal image, now in Wat Sri Koet, Chiang Mai, was ordered by King Tilok during a time of good relations with Ayutthaya. The style of the image has its antecedents in the U Thong style that was current in Ayutthaya during the fifteenth century, which in turn was influenced by the Bayon style as practiced in the Khmer provincial capital of Lopburi (Lava/Lavo). Such “copies” are seldom identical in exterior form, although the images may be considered the same in essence.

Our contention is that the Sop-Li metal workers cast both these images. Iconographically they are similar with the same leg and hand position, flame finial, and robe in the open mode. Stylistically also the two images have many of the same characteristics, particularly the ridged shins and the very long fingers and feet. Both are shown as wearing a long, substantial outlined shawl terminating with a band and stylized folds beneath. Further, the hem of the undergarment (*antaravasaka*) at the waist arcs to make three points (one in the middle, two on the sides). Moreover, the ovoid pedestals are practically identical both in shape (straight fronts curving into semi-circles behind) and adornment, especially in the abstracted style of the lotus petals on the base. Pedestals in Lan Na were traditionally cast as part of the image. In contrast, the finials of Lan Na images (which in the case of Sop-Li #1 and #2 are slightly different stylistically) were cast separately and later inserted into a hole at the top of the image’s head. Thus Northern finials should not be used in comparative analysis as they could be exchanged or replaced at any time.

On studying stylistic details of the heads of Sop-Li #1 and #2 (Figs. 4 and 5), we notice that both images have the following in common: a square head with the cranium slightly bulging, spiky curls, and a prominent band at the hairline which slightly dips in the center. The pointed ears turn out significantly from the head and the interior of the ears is rendered in an abstract fashion.

The facial features on both images are also very stylized. The shapes of the eyes are alike in that the upper part of the eyelids makes a bulging smooth curvilinear surface to end in a straight line while the lower part of the eye curves to meet the upper at the elongated corners. Further, the eyebrows arch to meet over the nose which has a distinctive sharp ridge down the center. The outer parts of the nostrils are delineated in both cases by two round balls. Also, the lips on both are outlined and curve sharply upward at the corners. However, the most striking similarity between these two heads is the very square chin.

Many characteristics found on both images, but especially the Wat Phra That Hariphunchai head (Sop-Li #1), are derived from the earlier Mon Hariphunchai tradition (tenth to thirteenth centuries) located in the same area with its capital at Lamphun. A typical late Hariphunchai head (Fig. 6) shows the following simi-

larities: the spiky curls, the hair band outlined or prominent, the intense eyes, the moustache (a thin line following the upper lip and ending in wriggles extending onto the cheeks – seen only on Sop-Li #1), the bulbous lower lip and the squared chin. For the faces of the two Lan Na images just described, the Sop-Li artisan definitely paid homage to the earlier Hariphunchai tradition.

Another very important facial characteristic, found here on the images from the Lamphun/ Chiang Mai area and indeed on many Lan Na images, is the abstract rendering of the facial features (Fig. 7). As shown in the drawings, the eyebrows, eyes, nose, raised area under the nose (often bracketed with two incised lines), mouth and chin are abstracted into geometric forms. Further, a distinctive circle indents the cheeks around the mouth.

While there is solid stylistic evidence for the connection between Sop-Li #1 and #2, the third image is more of a problem as it consists only of a fragment.

### Sop-Li #3: TORSO OF A BUDDHA IMAGE (Fig. 8)

The physical characteristics remaining of this bronze Buddha image are a fragment of a torso and remnants of crossed legs. The width across the lap is approximately 127 cm. Its current location is at Wat Chet Yot, Chiang Mai. What is visible of the iconography shows that the original image was seated with the robe in open mode. It has a long shawl and traces of the top hem of the undergarment (*antaravaska*). The style is robust and powerful, similar to the torso of Sop-Li #2 of 1483.

This torso might be what remains of a third statue cast by the Sop-Li artisans. It was recently re-discovered at Wat Chet Yot, Chiang Mai. There, the master restorer/sculptor and Northern Thai art historian, Pon Sin Rattanachudech, noticed a bronze torso that had been clumsily restored with concrete. He recognized the bronze remnant as having the same strength, power, and modeling as that of King Tilok's colossal Buddha image of 1483 (Sop-Li #2) and speculated that the rest of the image was in the same *khaeng khom* or Khmer-Lopburi style. Pon Sin made a tentative measurement of approximately 127cm across the lap. As a human size would be more like 75 cm the original image was larger than life, but not colossal.

Since the photograph was taken, this torso has been incorporated into a new bronze image much resembling the 1483 Tilok example (Sop-Li #2). (Fig. 9). Now ensconced in the *wihan* of Wat Chet Yot, the *wat* where it was originally found, this newly reconstructed Buddha image has a contemporary inscription listing donors and the casting date (2006).

### Known history of the torso

According to Pon Sin, what is known about the torso is as follows: villagers found an abandoned remnant of a Buddha image in concrete and, feeling sorry for it, they brought the remnant to Wat Chet Yot. Upon righting the fragment, some of the concrete fell off and a bronze interior was revealed. Even the clumsy concrete restoration showed evidence of the *khaeng khom* style.<sup>19</sup> With care, the concrete covering was removed to reveal a magnificent torso also in the *khaeng khom* style similar to the colossal image at Wat Pan Tan. Subsequently, Pon Sin and other devotees raised money to have the torso incorporated in its entirety by skilled metal workers into a new brass image, again in the *khaeng khom* style of the original torso. Thus the bronze torso can still be seen even though it is an integral part of the new brass image. With the appropriate rituals the newly restored image was installed at Wat Chet Yot in 2007.

In trying to reconstruct the history of the image, Pon Sin noted in the *Jintakalamalai Chronicle* that King Keo (r. 1495–1526, grandson of Tilok)<sup>20</sup> some time between 1522 and 1523<sup>21</sup>

... installed at the Uposatha-hall of the Monastery of the Great Bodhi [Wat Chet Yot] with manifold ministrations and honour, the Kambodja<sup>22</sup> Image in a golden *pasada*, which was beautifully painted with divers designs and laid with purified gold.<sup>23</sup>

A footnote explains that “a *Suvannapasada* is a small house with a spired roof meant for the Buddha image and is something like a *patimagahara*. It is generally gilt and kept inside a *vihara*.”<sup>24</sup> This honorific structure is undoubtedly a *ku* (a Lan Na type of shrine which takes the place of an altar and houses a major Buddha image) and a prominent example can be seen in Lampang at Wat Phra That Lampang Luang. A *prasada* or *ku* of this sort is only used for very important sacred images. Thus we have the *Jintakalamalai* recording two such important images in the “Kambodja” or “Lava” style during the reign of Tilok and his grandson.

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<sup>19</sup>As noted above, the style is relatively rare in Lan Na but extant examples are associated with King Tilok.

<sup>20</sup>Penth, *Jinakalamalai* Index, 311.

<sup>21</sup>Penth, *Jinakalamalai* Index, 222.

<sup>22</sup>Cambodia or Khmer type.

<sup>23</sup>*Jinakalamalai*, 181.

<sup>24</sup>*Jinakalamalai*, 181, footnote 3

Pon Sin speculates the following scenario: at the time of the casting of the Wat Pa Tan colossus in the “Kamboja/Lava style”, a second smaller image in the same style was cast due to the auspicious time selected for casting the first. It has been custom to take advantage of an auspicious date to cast other images at the same time although only the most important image was recorded in the chronicle. The colossus (Sop-Li #2) was left at Wat Pa Tan because the king’s main spiritual advisor was abbot there. King Tilok had made grandiose plans for Wat Chet Yot in preparation for the Eighth Buddhist Council held in 1477 but he was not able to complete all his plans before he died. According to Pon Sin, it was custom then (and throughout Tai regnal history), for a close descendant such as a grandson, remembering the good deeds still pending of his grandfather, to bring one of them to fruition, in this case by installing the other Kamboja Buddha at Wat Chet Yot. This the grandson did with such pomp and circumstance that it was mentioned in the chronicle.

Pon Sin further speculates that after centuries under the heavy hand of Burmese suzerainty, when monasteries were abandoned, images neglected, and many bronze ones melted down for metal, the original villagers found the bronze remnant. Wanting to protect what was left of this important image, the villagers covered it with concrete in an attempt to hide it, or even, in a misguided effort, to honor and restore it.

A study of a photograph of this torso<sup>25</sup> shows elements that are indeed strikingly similar to those on the 1483 and 1489 images. The shawl initially follows the gentle curve of the *uttarasanga* then descends past the navel to the *antaravasaka*. Other similarities between the shawls are the superimposed fold creating an outline, the width, and especially the thin stylized loops of folded cloth at the terminus. Moreover, the nipples of all three images are rendered in the same way, being outlined with a simple circle. Further, the umbilicus on all three is also understated making a small unobtrusive indentation barely showing to the left or underneath the shawl. What remains of the upper hem of the undergarment (*antaravasaka*) curves in parallel horizontal lines to make three points, two on the side, one in front, in the same manner as the other two images cited above.

If indeed the torso is from the image mentioned in the chronicles, which is possible, there appears to have been at least three major bronze Buddha images from the area and the same time period which are intimately related in style and iconography. One of these was known by inscription to have been cast by the Sop-Li metalworkers.

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<sup>25</sup> Physical inspection by the author of the original bronze torso was not possible as the torso had already been incorporated into the new brass image.

## Conclusion

Outside of the identical iconography and multiple similar stylistic similarities, the most important Sop-Li attributes seen on these three images is their general quality, the luminosity of the burnished bronze, and the careful attention to detail. Not all Lan Na images are as expertly cast as these. Proof of the excellence and eminence of the Sop-Li bronze casters is the fact that they are mentioned in the 1489 inscription. These artisans must have been highly respected if their name as casters was included in the inscription.

While the related investigative material such as a study of the chronicles is helpful, the visual analysis of the Buddha images is of paramount importance: the bronze Buddha image does not change, its iconography and style remains constant to its casting origins. Whether new, old, superficially restored or moved, and whether our perceptions of the image change, the material evidence does not. In the case of these three images, the likelihood of their being a product of the Sop-Li workshop lies in the multiple stylistic similarities. Having no known recorded predecessor, the Sop-Li bronze casting workshop could be the first in Thailand to be so identified by a dated inscription.

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Fig. 1 Inscription on base of bronze Buddha image, Wat Phra That Hariphunchai, Lamphun, 1489

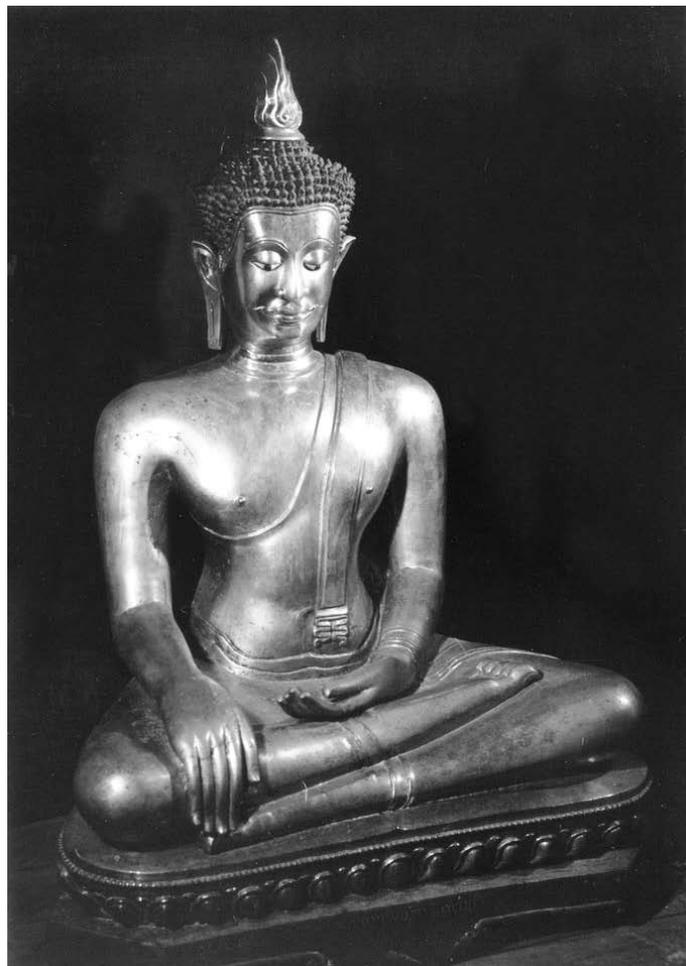


Fig. 2 'Sop-Li #1' seated bronze Buddha Image, Wat Phra That Hariphunchai, Lamphun, 1489

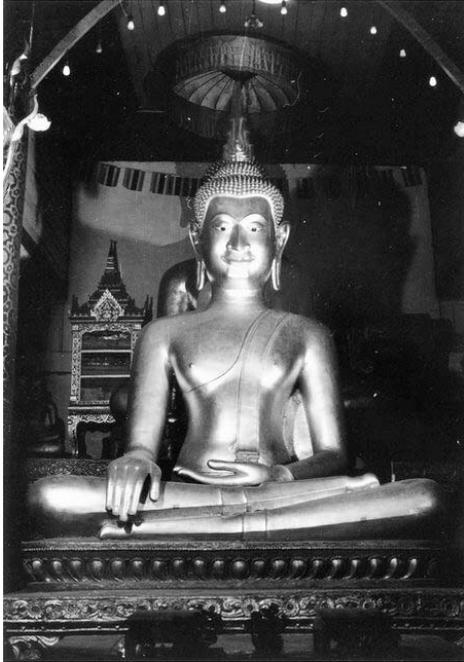


Fig. 3 'Sop-Li #2' seated bronze Buddha Image, Wat Sri Koet, Chiang Mai, 1483

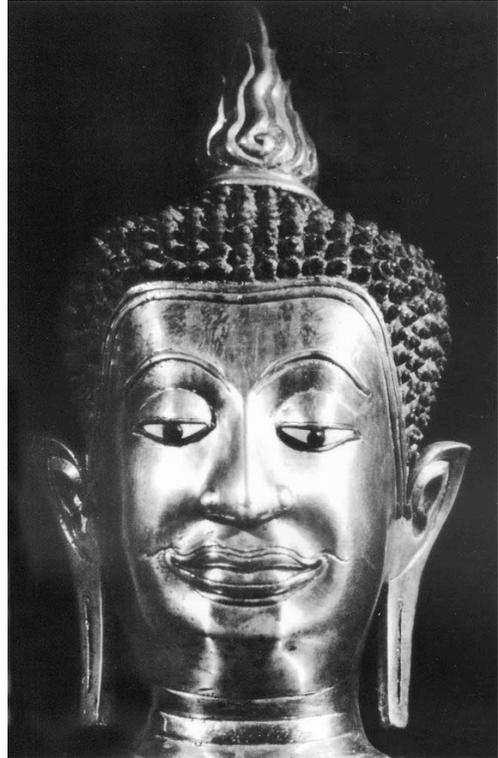


Fig. 4 Head of 'Sop-Li #1' Buddha image

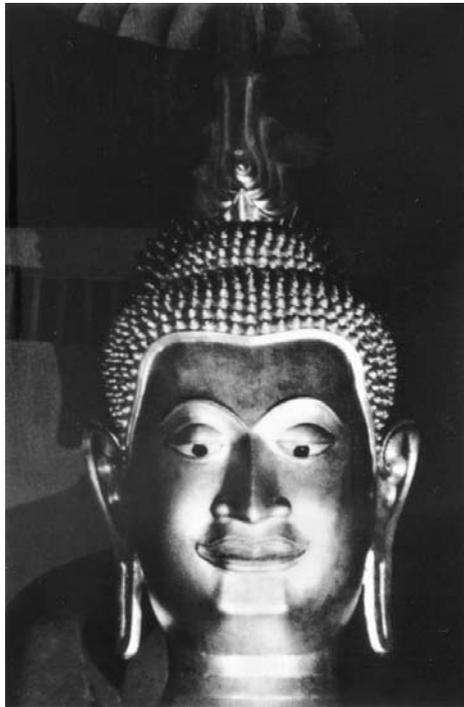


Fig. 5 Head of 'Sop-Li #2' Buddha image



Fig. 6 Head of Hariphunchai Buddha Image, Lamphun, thirteenth century

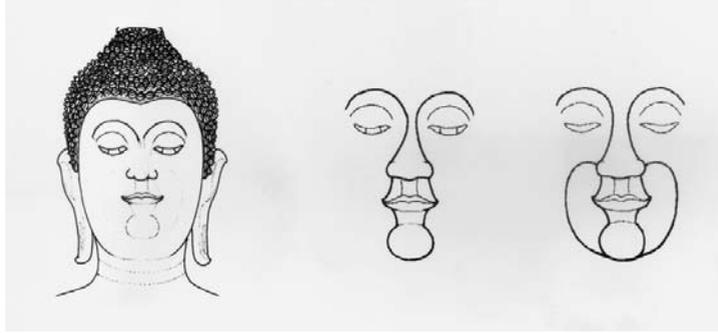


Fig. 7 Drawing of abstracted facial features of a Lan Na Buddha image



Fig. 8 'Sop-Li #3' bronze torso fragment of a seated Buddha Image, Wat Chet Yot, Chiang Mai



Fig. 9 Reconstruction of 'Sop-Li #3' brass Buddha image, Wat Chet Yot, Chiang Mai, 2006

