

# Remarks on Buddha Images with the Left Hand in *maravijaya* in Thailand and Myanmar: Recent Interpretations<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The majority of seated Buddha images created in Thailand and Myanmar have the mudra of subduing Mara, or *maravijaya*, (also known as the earth-touching pose, or *bhumisparsa*) with the right hand touching the earth and the left hand in the lap. This study originated from questions about two Buddha images with this mudra in reverse, that is, with the left hand in *maravijaya*. One such image is in the Hariphunchai National Museum, Lamphun, Thailand and the other is in the Sriksetra Archaeological Museum, Sriksetra, Myanmar. This article examines these images and explores possible reasons for this unusual reverse mudra, as well as historical connections between the two areas in which they were found. The methodology for the study consists of comparing artifacts at Sriksetra and Bagan in Myanmar with those at several Dvaravati sites in central Thailand. Buddhist iconography and beliefs, especially Vajrayana, are also considered. The study explores several explanations for the reverse mudra, but in the absence of further evidence, does not find any of them totally convincing. It recommends further research of the possibility that the Mon people in Lamphun and Pyu people in Sriksetra created this ‘local iconography.’ The role of the ancient Ari sect from Bagan should also be considered.

**Keywords:** Left-hand *maravijaya*, Vajrayana, Ari, Hariphunchai, Dvaravati, Sriksetra, Bagan

<sup>1</sup> Edited from the article, “Remarks on Buddha Images with the Left Hand in *Maravijaya* from the Hariphunchai National Museum, Lamphun and the Sriksetra Archaeological Museum, Myanmar,” presented at the 6<sup>th</sup> SSEASR Conference at the University of Kelaniya, Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, June 4-7, 2015.

## บทคัดย่อ

พระพุทธรูปปางมารวิชัยส่วนใหญ่ในประเทศไทยและประเทศพม่าล้วนแสดงปางมารวิชัยด้วยพระหัตถ์ขวา บทความขึ้นนี้เกิดขึ้นจากข้อสงสัยในพระพุทธรูปสององค์ที่แสดงปางมารวิชัยด้วยพระหัตถ์ซ้าย องค์หนึ่งอยู่ในพิพิธภัณฑ์ทางโบราณคดีที่ศรีเกษตร ประเทศพม่า บทความนี้ได้ทำการศึกษาถึงที่มาและเหตุผลที่เป็นไปได้ซึ่งก่อให้เกิดการแสดงปางที่ผิดแปลกไป เช่นนี้ รวมทั้งค้นหาความเชื่อมโยงระหว่างดินแดนทั้งสอง วิธีการศึกษาจะใช้การเปรียบเทียบโบราณวัตถุจากศรีเกษตรและพุกามในประเทศพม่า กับแหล่งโบราณคดีสมัยทราวดีแหล่งต่างๆ ในประเทศไทย รวมทั้งการศึกษาด้านประดิษฐกรรมวิทยาและคติความเชื่อในพุทธศาสนาในภัยวัชรยาน จากการสำรวจข้อมูลดังกล่าวซึ่งมีอยู่อย่างจำกัด ทำให้ไม่สามารถหาข้อสรุปที่ชัดเจนได้ อย่างไรก็ตามอาจเป็นไปได้ว่าความอยุที่ล้ำพูนและชราปูร์ที่ศรีเกษตรได้สร้างประดิษฐกรรมวิทยาท้องถิ่นของตนเองขึ้น โดยมีนิภัยอาศัยจากพุกามเป็นตัวเชื่อมโยงลัทธิดังกล่าวบนดินแดนทั้งสองเข้าด้วยกัน

**คำสำคัญ:** มารวิชัย ด้วยพระหัตถ์ซ้าย วัชรยาน นิกายอาเร หริภุญไชย ทวารวดี ศรีเกษตร พุกาม

## Introduction

The vast majority of seated Buddha images in Thailand and Myanmar have the mudra of *maravijaya* with the right hand touching (or nearly touching) the earth and the left hand in the lap. This study arose from questions about certain Buddha images with this mudra in reverse, that is, with the left hand in *maravijaya*. The primary focus is on two objects: a high-relief Buddha image in the Hariphunchai National Museum (HNM), Lamphun, Thailand (Figure 1) and another image in the Sriksetra Archaeological Museum (SAM), Sriksetra, Myanmar (Figure 2).

The Lamphun image poses additional challenges because the left hand is damaged, and some have suggested that the intended mudra is really that of meditation or *samadhi* (Sukhgata Jai-in, 2005: cat. no. 049), as seen in another Hariphunchai high-relief image in the museum (Figure 3). Generally, however, scholars identify the mudra as the left-handed *maravijaya* and assume that it results from an error on the

part of the craftsmen who created it. This image is thought to date from c. 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century in the early Hariphunchai period (Damrikul, 2004: 148-149). It was moved from Wat Phra That Hariphunchai when the HNM was built in 1979. The characteristics of this image, which has some significant damage to the face, are the following: the mudra of *maravijaya* by the left hand with the left palm on the left shin; the right palm lies face up on the right shin; the monastic robe is worn with the right shoulder open; the short flap of the upper garment (*sangati*) ends at the left hand.

Another important detail is the corona of the image. It is decorated with the *kanok phak kut*, a characteristic Thai design in decorative art resembling fern leaves (Figure 4),<sup>2</sup> which is characteristic of *kanok* found on *dharmacakra* (sculptures representing the wheel of the law) from Dvaravati sites in central Thailand.

Scholars have already accepted the Buddhist interpretation that the Dvaravati *dharmacakra* found in association with deer images represents the Buddha's First Sermon at the Deer Park at Sarnath (Coedès, 1956: 221). There is also considerable evidence that the Dvaravati *dharmacakra* was associated with the sun and that these sculptures could have had a political function, based upon their apparent simultaneous distribution over a wide geographical area (Brown, 1996: 90-93; Thammarungruang, 2006: 72-85). Phasook Indrawooth interpreted the Dvaravati *dharmacakra* as an emblem of the universal extension of rulers (*cakravartin*) through the Dharma (Indrawooth, 1999: 231; Indrawooth, 2004: 137-138). Phasook also observed that the pre-Buddhist meanings of the solar symbol (the supernal sun), the Great Awakening, and the Tree of Life,<sup>3</sup> were transferred to Dvaravati *dharmacakra* (Indrawooth, 2008: 24). The similarities between this decorative detail on the Hariphunchai image and those found on

<sup>2</sup> Tingsanchali (2010: 60-61) has termed this pattern "*kanok jom krob*," the *kanok* (a characteristic Thai design in decorative art resembling flames) lost within the frame and appearing again.

<sup>3</sup> The concept of a tree of life is a widespread theme or archetype in the world's mythologies, related to the concept of the *sacred tree* more generally, and hence in religious and philosophical traditions. In every symbolic context the Tree is central and axial. The tree is prominent among the aniconic representations of the Buddha, who is the humanized form of the Cosmic Pillar (Snodgrass, 1985: 181).

*dharmacakra* suggest that the image has historic connections with the *Chronicle of Cham Devi Wong*, according to which a Mon princess came from Lopburi to Hariphunchai in the year 750 C.E. with a large group of monks and craftsmen. The daughter of the king of Lopburi, she was invited to become the first ruler of the new city at Hariphunchai. Lopburi then was a part of the extended Mon kingdom of Dvaravati in what is now northern Thailand (Penth, 2004: 14).

Dvaravati is known through a Tang Dynasty chronicle which compiles the journal records of two Chinese Buddhist monks, Hsuan Tsang and I-Ching, who travelled to India to study Buddhism, stopping at several places in Southeast Asia along the way. Hsuan Tsang, who travelled from 629 to 645 C.E., recorded the name of a kingdom as “To-Lo-Po-Ti,” or Dvaravati. I-Ching who travelled from 671 to 693 C.E., recorded the kingdom’s name as “Tu-Ho-Po-Ti.” Another source of evidence is numerous silver coins<sup>4</sup> with 7<sup>th</sup> century Pallava letters in Sanskrit, reading “Śrīdvāravatīśvarapuṇya,”<sup>5</sup> or “the meritorious deeds of the king of Dvaravati.” These coins, for academics, are evidence that a kingdom named Dvaravati existed in central Thailand. Through archaeological excavations, at least 160 sites related to Dvaravati have been found. Seventy were found along and east of the Chao Phraya River in central Thailand. Thirty were found in northeastern Thailand. In the north, Hariphunchai and certain cities in the provinces of Lamphun, Lampang, and Chiang Mai are considered to have been Dvaravati cities, such as Wieng Mano in Hang Dong and Wieng Ta Kan in San Patong (Srisam-ang, 2009: 93-95).

Religions and beliefs are the greatest source of inspiration in arts and architecture. The study of Dvaravati arts has emphasized the

<sup>4</sup> Initially, the discoveries of the coins were limited to the area of Nakhon Pathom, U Thong and Singburi. Later more coins were discovered in Khu Bua in Ratchaburi and Dong Don in Chainat. The latest discovery was at the Khok Chang Din archaeological site in Suphanburi, where three such coins were found with other kinds of coins in a utensil (Srisam-ang, 2009: 93).

<sup>5</sup> See the following website. [https://books.google.co.th/books?id=6kDm5d3cMIYC&pg=PA136&lpg=PA136&dq=dvaravati+coins&source=bl&ots=QIC1joLqFL&sig=Yeojb7oDFDeL1CT4\\_MmjCdSr4WM&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEw1gP\\_965LPAhVKIJQKHc7aAuMQ6AEIUDAM#v=onepage&q=dvaravati%20coins&f=false](https://books.google.co.th/books?id=6kDm5d3cMIYC&pg=PA136&lpg=PA136&dq=dvaravati+coins&source=bl&ots=QIC1joLqFL&sig=Yeojb7oDFDeL1CT4_MmjCdSr4WM&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEw1gP_965LPAhVKIJQKHc7aAuMQ6AEIUDAM#v=onepage&q=dvaravati%20coins&f=false) Glover, Ian and Peter Bellwood, eds. 2004. Southeast Asia from prehistory to history. London: Routledge.

study of the development of Buddha images mainly because they were found in greater number than other objects or religious symbols. Dvaravati Buddha images can be classified into the following three periods.

Early period (c. 6<sup>th</sup> - early 7<sup>th</sup> century) - the Buddha images found during this period represent the first development of Dvaravati Buddha images in Thailand, and were influenced by Amaravati, Gupta and Late-Gupta arts from India.

Middle period (c. 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century) - Most Dvaravati Buddha images belong to this style. The Buddha images found during this period were developed according to local preferences.

Late period (c. 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century) - This style was influenced by Khmer art of the Bapuon period and early Lopburi art (Srisam-ang, 2009: 97).

The connection between Lopburi and Dvaravati was first mentioned by Jean Boisselier when he observed that the earliest works found at Wat Phra That Hariphunchai belonged unquestionably to the “Dvaravati lineage” (Boisselier, 1975: 145). Santi Leksukhum (2011: 80-84), one of Boisselier’s pupils, agrees.

It appears that another image, a damaged high-relief Buddha head in the HNM (Figure 5), could also be a representative of the Mon sculpture style in the early Hariphunchai period (Office of National Museums, 2008: 46). Or we can say that this image suggests that Lopburi (from whence came Queen Cham Dewi) probably was the primary center from which the first Hariphunchai sculptors drew their inspiration (Stratton, 2004: 108 and compare figs. 5.5-5.6).<sup>6</sup>

Although the decoration on the image’s corona indicates the Dvaravati style from central Thailand, the *maravijaya* mudra of the left hand can be compared with several objects created by the Pyu in central Myanmar. One such object in the SAM is an image in high relief (see Figure 2) which can be compared with the stone sculpture in the HNM (see Figure 1). However, it is different from those of Hariphunchai

<sup>6</sup> Krairiksh (2010: 248) suggests that this head represents the influence of Pala art from Bodh Gaya in the mid-10<sup>th</sup> to mid-11<sup>th</sup> century.

in that the outer robe covers both shoulders without the short flap of the upper garment, and the figure is flanked by two Bodhisattvas in the gesture of paying respect (*anjali*). This triad sculpture is related to another left-handed Buddha image in *maravijaya* gesture in the Be Be Gyi (Figure 6), east of the Baw Baw Gyi at Sriksatra. The high-relief figure, flanked by two disciples in *anjali*, is also surrounded by a corona with a flame edge, as seen in the votive tablet from Baw Baw Gyi (Figure 7) (Moore, 2007: 172).

Taw Sein Ko, the famous Burmese archaeologist and historian of the post-colonial period, described the Buddha of this triad as “seated on his ‘leather mat’ against an arched reredos, right leg on left, touching Earth with his left hand...” (Luce, 1985 vol. 1: 134 and vol. 2: Pl. 21 b). Surprisingly, neither Luce nor Taw Sein Ko mentioned anything unusual about the left-handed mudra. Normally its iconography should be like the triads at the four directions of the core structure in the Lemyethna temple, especially the south face triad (Figure 8) that shows the Buddha in right-handed *maravijaya* (Luce, 1985 vol. 1: 135 and vol. 2: Pl. 22 d). The two standing figures also remind us of the triad in the SAM (see Figure 2).

Burmese scholars attribute this unusual gesture, found on the stone Buddha image in the SAM, to an error on the part of the craftsmen who created it. A description of the process of making votive tablets or amulets may explain how this would have happened. Clay votive tablets are made by molds, both clay and bronze. The mold used to stamp the tablet is a reverse of the tablet itself. In this way, the hollow mold of the votive tablet of the *maravijaya* Buddha images presents the gesture with the left hand instead of the right. Examples of clay molds can be seen in both the HNM (Figure 9) and the SAM.

It should be mentioned here that both civilizations in the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century were proficient in making votive tablets by molding, as were true throughout Southeast Asia. Moreover, the craftsmen at Hariphunchai were skilled in the specialized progressive molding technique employed in making human-size clay and bronze images which were used to decorate Buddhist architecture such as cetiyas at that time. The

pyramidal Kukut Cetiya and the octagonal Suwanna Cetiya at Wat Kukut in Lamphun are well-known examples. This technique continued through the later Hariphunchai period around the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century, as evidenced by a terracotta head which is hollow in the back, now in the HNM (Damrikul, 2004: 152-154) (Figures 10-11). A Hariphunchai terracotta mold for a Buddha head in the Chiang Mai National Museum confirms that the sculpture was made by molding. The Hariphunchai bronze fragments of a standing Buddha image, consisting of the front part of a head and torso, two palms in the preaching gesture (*vitarkamudra*), and two feet (Figure 12), which may have been used to decorate the Chiang Yuen Cetiya, Lamphun (Sukhgata Jai-in, 2005: cat. no. 067), are also evidence that this skill was used with the bronze casting technique.

### **The result of a composition from other forms?**

On the other hand, is it possible that the ‘mistake’ of creating a Buddha image with the left-hand *maravijaya* gesture originated in smaller forms? The suggestion is based on a Bagan period terracotta votive tablet (Figure 13) found inside the destroyed Botataung Pagoda near the Yangon River in Yangon. This 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century votive tablet, published by Donald M. Stadtner (2011: 114), shows two standing Buddha images within double trefoil arches. Above each arch is a cetiya, with a large one in top center. We cannot clearly ascertain whether both standing images are performing the preaching (*vitarkamudra*) or the fear-dispelling gesture (*abhayamudra*). However, the figure on the left side performs the gesture with the right hand while the one on the right performs it with the left hand. The other hands of both images appear to be in the bestowing gesture (*varadamudra*) or perhaps holding the monastic robe. Hiram W. Woodward, Jr. (2003: 168) calls this the “hand-before-chest gesture.”

Gordon Hannington Luce suggested that this type of votive tablet represents, in minimal form, the Twin Miracle scene but did not explain his reasons for this interpretation (Luce, 1985 vol. 1: 163 and

vol. 2: Pl. 73b). The iconographic component by which we identify the Twin Miracle in Theravada Buddhism is the mango tree, as seen in a Dvaravati bas-relief found at Ayudhya (Krairiksh, 2010: 62, fig. 1.36). Meanwhile, the Mulasarvastivada sect has the jewelry decorated lotus supported by two nagas, as seen in the Dvaravati bas-relief in Wat Suthat Thepwararam, Bangkok (Krairiksh, 2010: 63 fig. 1.37).

Through an intensive study, we found that the Twin Miracle votive tablet from Botataung Pagoda came from the 'triad' tablet in the Bagan Period. A terracotta votive tablet of this kind was found in a cetiya at Tagaung in central Myanmar (Luce, 1970 vol. 2: Pl. 49d and vol. 3: 39-40). This corroded fragment of a votive tablet shows three figures in the three arches; two groups of small cetyiyas are the upper right and upper left part (Figure 14). The central figure is a larger Buddha image in *maravijaya* under the Bodh Gaya arch with a missing top. The image is flanked by two standing Buddha images in the arches resembling those from Botataung (see Figure 13), as in the decorated arches and pillars. If the central image in the Bodh Gaya arch is removed, we will get the tablet with double standing Buddha images in double arches, performing the gesture with the right and left hand, respectively, like the one at Botataung. Nevertheless, if this kind of votive tablet has only one standing figure, the gesture is with the right hand. A fine example (Figure 15) came from the Golden Cave Temple six miles west of Kyaukse in central Myanmar, which was excavated and restored by U Win Maung (Tanpawaddy). We can clearly see that the image in the arch is performing this gesture with the right hand. Therefore, we can say that the craftsmen should have understood the correct gesture of Buddhist iconography.

## **The Flame Motif**

Two types of votive tablet with the left hand in *maravijaya* are found at the SAM. The first type depicts the Buddha under the Bodhi tree with the left-hand in *maravijaya*. The Buddha sits on a double lotus throne (*padmasana*) enclosed by coronas that resemble flames (Figure 16). The

second type, a smaller one, is enclosed by a double line of coronas with a flame edge and a flat base (see Figure 7). According to Luce, this ‘flame-edged tablet’ came from the Baw Baw Gyi pagoda. This pagoda, built in the 6<sup>th</sup> -7<sup>th</sup> century (Boisselier, 1994: 137 fig. 1), is located outside of the southern Sriksetra wall. Luce described the votive tablet as follows: “the triple-haloed Buddha is shown seated on double lotus, left leg on right, touching earth with left hand over left knee, while his right hand holds the alms bowl in his lap” (Luce, 1985 vol. 1: 156 and vol. 2: Pl. 61 e-f). Note here that Luce did not suggest that the left-hand *maravijaya* gesture was the fault of craftsmen.

The flame motif was famous in Sriksetra and Bagan, as seen in tablets as well as mural paintings.<sup>7</sup> This motif is also found in mural painting at Bagan, for example, the north part of Thambula temple and the south wall of the passage to the shrine of the Thein-mazi pagoda (Bautze-Picron, 2003: 24-25 fig. 18, 19).<sup>8</sup>

## Summary and Discussion

The triad sculptures from Sriksetra, the Lemyethna and Be Be Gyi, as well as another object in the SAM suggest that around the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Pyu craftsmen created both the right-hand and left-hand *maravijaya* by intention, not by misinterpretation. Similarly, it would seem that two types of votive tablets with the flame edge that have the *maravijaya* mudra by the left-hand were also intentionally made, for as Skilling (2008: 248-249) argues, votive tablets are “witnesses of autonomous practices and of local ceremonies.”

<sup>7</sup> John D. LaPlante (1963: 279 fig. 16 b), who studied the pre-Pala Bodhisattva in Asia, called this flame edge of the Sriksetra second type votive tablet “the single-tailed comma-shaped flame.” He also supposed that it originated in the Early Wei Dynasty, as evidenced in the mural painting at Tung-huang, Central Asia’s Silk Road. The coronas of the bronze Maitreya sculpture in the University of Pennsylvania Museum, early Eastern Wei, circa C.E. 536, and the high relief of Sakyamuni in sandstone, 537, with two attendants in the Cleveland Museum of Art, clearly show the sources of the flame (Lee, 1970; LaPlante, 1963: 278-279).

<sup>8</sup> Stanley J. O’Connor Jr. (1974: 77) suggested that the decorated flame motif in the Bagan Period could be interpreted as the fire miracle of Savath. Claudine Bautze-Picron (2003: 24) states that “the overall presence of flames recalls the ‘six glories,’ or rays of different colours irradiating from the body of the Buddha, or the golden light pervading the universe at specific moments in the Buddha’s life, such as his birth or his awakening.”

In this way, the evidence of the left-hand *maravijaya* gesture from Sriksatra, Bagan, and Hariphunchai might suggest some of the ‘autonomous practices’ and ‘local ceremonies’ that we have to uncover. It appears that religious relationships had existed between those states since the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The cylindrical *cetiya* is important evidence. For example, the form and structure of Baw Baw Gyi (Figure 17) and Hpaya Gyi at Sriksatra can be compared with the Ku Chang pagoda (Figure 18) in Hariphunchai, which is related to the legend of Queen Cham Dewi. Evidence of journeys between Hariphunchai and Pegu easily extend to Sriksatra and Bagan, and can be found in certain texts, including the *Chronicle of Cham Dewi Wong*, which tells of Hariphunchai people emigrating to Sudhammanagara (Thaton) and Pegu because of cholera (Bodhirangsi, 2011: 246-247). A 16<sup>th</sup> century Northern Thai lyrical poem, the *Klong Mangtra Rob Chiang Mai*, details a route from Chiang Mai all the way through San Patong, Chom Thong and Mae Sariang, then crossing the Salween River to Muang Thrang (known as Hpapun nowadays) and Pegu (Sooksawasdi, 2013: 149-178). Note that San Patong is a significant junction which can easily connect to Hariphunchai through the ancient city that was called Wieng Thakan at that time.

This familiar route also could have been traveled by the Indian monk Buddhagupta, the spiritual teacher of the Tibetan monk Taranatha, as related in the latter’s history of Indian Buddhism written in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century (Ray, 1936).<sup>9</sup> The writings of Taranatha also recall the way of life of Mahayana and Vajrayana monks in Hariphunchai, or *Haribhāñja* at that time, by the monk’s name, Mahasiddha Santipada (Ray, 1936: 86-87), because in the order ‘Mahasiddha’ meant the *guru* as Anuttara Yoga Tantra in the Vajrayana sect (Sooksawasdi, 2013: 152-155).

Many centuries before the journey of Buddhagupta, the Ari sect had spread as far as Sravakayana (an old word which now means Theravada sect) (Ray, 1936: 77). Charles Duroiselle (1911: 126) identified the Ari as a sect affiliated with the Northern School of Buddhism and fully saturated with Tantrism. The mural painting of Paya-thon-zu and

<sup>9</sup> This history is also an important piece of evidence concerning the spread of Mahayana over Mainland Southeast Asia. Ray (1936: 77) refers to the region where Bagan, Pegu, and Hariphunchai are located as “Koki land,” but this term is not found in any other sources.

Nandamanya Temple in Bagan and the memoir of the Tibetan monk scholar Taranatha point to the existence of a Tantric Buddhist sect in Bagan, and perhaps in other localities in Myanmar as well (Aung-Thwin, 1985: 36-37).

Moreover, Hans Penth mentioned the appearance of the Ari in Hariphunchai in his interpretation of the Burmese chronicle, *Pagan Yazawinthit (Pukamrajawong)*, and suggested that Lamphun, or Hariphuchai, at that time may have been a renowned center of learning that attracted students even from abroad, and some disciples could have come from Burma. The Burmese chronicle also says that in 1084, when the soon-to-become King Kyanzittha of Bagan (1084-1112) assembled his troops, he had them magically blessed by a wizard who had studied in Lamphun. Penth suggested that the wizard probably was a heretic Ari monk (Penth, 2004: 18). While we don't know exactly what Penth meant by the term 'heretic Ari monk,' Woodward (1997: 115) mentioned the Ari or Ariya in Thailand as connected with Hinayana Buddhist beliefs and Krairiksh (2010: 392) later agreed. Woodward identified the 'Ari' in the 15<sup>th</sup> century inscription in Pegu as a Buddhist sect that existed there before the coming of Sri Lankan orthodoxy. He also maintained that Ari Buddhism must be defined by iconography, the centrality of which was the Buddha at the time of his victory over Mara, when he touched the earth, calling her to witness his steadfastness in the face of the attacks of Mara. Significantly, this posture, *maravijaya* or subduing Mara, had never been common in the Theravada Buddhism of Sri Lanka, but was central in the Buddhism of northern India, where (at Bodh Gaya) the Buddha's enlightenment had taken place (Woodward, 1997, 115).

Another feature of Ari Buddhist iconography was the standing Buddha with a hand on the chest. While the meaning of this posture is not known, in this and other contexts it appears to be a 'produced' Buddha, a multiplication brought about simultaneously by the belief of the faithful and the magical power of the Buddha. However, it may be a Buddha of the past — one of the twenty-four or twenty-eight Buddhas. Woodward also mentioned that the final key attribute of Ari Buddhism is a crown composed of triangular or flat leaf-like elements, which

replaced the Khmer-type crown on images of the Buddha in royal attire. These crowns were inspired by those on 11<sup>th</sup> century images of Pala India (Woodward, 1997: 115-116). We find the feature of the ‘leaf-like elements’ of the Ari on a terracotta crowned head, from Wat Pratu Li, in HNM (Figure 19). Carol Stratton, who studied Hariphunchai crowned sculptures comprehensively, clearly explains the connection between those of 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century Wiang Ta Kan with the crowned images in the Ananda Temple at Bagan and the Pala crowned Buddha images (Stratton, 2004: 121-123).

Ari artistic influence can also be seen in Hariphunchai terracotta sculpture. The wide eyes of the terracotta disciple image (Figure 20) could be interpreted as sudden awakening as defined by the tantra path. Woodward mentioned the ‘wide eyes’ as a specific characteristic of Ari Hinayana iconography (Woodward, 1997: 118). Hinayana society in Hariphunchai may be evidenced by two inscriptions of the 11<sup>th</sup> century Mon King Sappasitthi, which describe certain customs in the Theravada sect, such as the ordination of the King (Yuangcharuean, 1979: 11-17). The Theravada cult in Hariphunchai, however, probably was mixed with the Tantra sect or Vajrayana which was practiced locally.

Significant archaeological finds from excavations in Lamphun indicate a relationship with Bagan and hint at the possibility of the existence of some local ceremonies that have never been considered before. The Bodh Gaya type votive tablets, both large and small (Figure 21), from the excavation as reported in 1993, originated in Bodh Gaya in India around the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century, and later spread to Burma and Thailand. A group of well-known Hariphunchai votive tablets, Phra Prok Bodhi (Phra Rod, Phra Lue, Phra Khong, Phra Bang and Phra Peam) (Figure 22), could also have been inspired by the posture of attaining enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree from India. This Pala style of art from Nalanda, Bihar could have been transferred both directly and indirectly through Burma in the reign of King Aniruddha (1044-1077) because this type of tablet was also famous in Bagan at that time (Indrawooth, 1993: 89-90).

Another factor concerns certain archaeological finds that might possibly be interpreted as evidence of local ceremonies in Hariphunchai.

For example, objects referred to as “candlesticks” were found at the excavation site at Wat Pratu Li, Lamphun (Indrawooth, 1993: 90) (Figure 23), at Nong Honghaeng, Ban Song Kuae, Doi Hloa, Chiang Mai (Kanokmongkon, 2012: Fig. 6), and at Inburi old city, Singburi, in Central Thailand (Guillon, 1999: fig. 13). The profile of the terracotta ‘candlestick’ with an extended round base, narrow decorated central part, and wide top, resembles that of a copper lamp used as a ritual implement in Vajrayana ceremonies, which is now located in the Kathmandu Museum, Nepal (Figure 24). Thus, the question arises as to whether the “candlestick” could actually have been a ritual lamp. Similarly, other archaeological finds from Wat Pratu Li that were called ‘terracotta mortars’ (Figure 25) resemble the bowls that among the seven Vajrayana ritual implements in the museum (Figure 26).<sup>10</sup> A fine illustration of these seven ritual implements is that of Robert Béer (1999: Pl. 96) (Figure 27), who describes the function of the seven ritual implements in the ceremony of visualizing the seven bowls arranged to form the ‘seven offerings.’ These offerings were presented to deities similarly to the way in which an honored guest would have been welcomed to one’s house in ancient India.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Giuseppe Tucci, an Italian expert in Tibetan studies, gave the following details of the seven ritual implements set used in Vajrayana ceremonies. “In the ceremonies of the first Tantric class (*bya rgyud*) the *mandala* is also used. This *mandala* is called *tshom bu'i dkyil'khor*, because a heap of grain ('*bru'i tshom*) is placed on its decorated surface of each deity present in the *mandala*. In front of it seven cups made of copper or silver are placed. The first two of these (*mchod yon* and *zhal bsil*) are filled with water, the third with flowers and grain, the fourth with incense for burning (*spos*), the fifth serves as a lamp (*mar me snang gsal*), the sixth again contains water (*dri chab*) and the seventh, various kinds of food (*zhal zas*).” (Tucci, 1980: 119-121)

<sup>11</sup> The first bowl contains pure water for drinking and rinsing the mouth. The second contains water for washing the feet. The third contains fresh flowers representing the custom of presenting flowers to the guest. The fourth holds incense to please the sense of smell. The fifth holds an oil or butter lamp to represent the illumination of wisdom. The sixth contains rosewater or perfumed water for refreshing the face and breast. And the seventh bowl contains delicious food for the honored guests. The Tibetan food offering usually consists of a red or white conical sacrificial cake (*gtor ma*), made from roasted barley flour (*tsam pa*), dyes and butter (Béer, 1999: 206).

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In fact, we should not be surprised by the Hariphunchai ritual element in terracotta. Maung Tin Aung (2005: 24) also supposed that apart from bronze casting, the Mon people also differed from the Pyu in molding their terracotta. Beyond doubt, Dvaravati culture is a very superior terracotta culture, particularly in ritual objects. Aside from the lamp and bowl from Hariphunchai, the most famous evidence includes kendi, spouted pots, and sprinklers, found at many Dvaravati archaeological sites in Thailand. Examples are a spouted pot from Gu Muang ancient city, Inburi, Singburi (Figure 28) and another one from Gu Boa, Muang, Ratchaburi (Indrawooth, 1985: 21, 24 and Fig. 1, 4, 22-27, 28). A different type is the kendi from Nakorn Pathom with a cone-shaped design (Suriyarattanakorn, 1999: 43). Terracotta ritual elements were also used in Bagan. Apart from a bronze or white bronze sprinkler, or goglet, dug up at Thiripyitsaya village (Luce, 1970 vol. 2: Pl. 451 c and d and vol. 3: 210) (Figure 29) a terracotta kendi, which Luce referred to as “a hookah-shaped earthen vessel or water-goglet,” was found in a mound in Maung Paw’s field, east of Ananda Temple (Luce, 1970 vol. 2: Pl. 453a and vol. 3: 211).

This evidence suggests that certain rituals might have spread out from Vajrayana sites from India and Nepal and were reproduced by several different technologies and materials in each society. According to a recent archaeological report, the Northern Thailand kendi found at Ban Tung Hai kiln site, Wang Nue, Lampang, were continually produced until the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century and well developed in plain black glaze with no decoration (Sukhgata Jai-in, 2005: cat. no. 237). Another kendi found at Ban Wieng Yong, Lamphun, is evidence from a San Kampaeng kiln. Its decorated parallel lines represent its original Hariphunchai ware (Figure 30) which was used to decorate by parallel red painting (Sukhgata Jai-in, 2005: cat. no. 190.1).

Another account of a left-hand image is found in the Tibetan tantra in which some deities originate from Bon tradition, including the deity Nampar Gyalwa (*rnam par rgyal ba*). In the iconography of Nampar Gyalwa, a form of Tonpa Shenrub, his right hand is above his head, palm up, symbolizing his dominion over the sky, while his left

hand is in the *Sambogakaya* mudra, which resembles the *maravijaya* gesture, symbolizing his power over the earth (Figures 31 and 32). Nampar Gyalwa is called upon “to assist in subduing evil and bringing peace” (Bon-encyclopedia, 2014). Tonpa Shenrab, as Nampar Gyalwa, is described in chapter 50 of the *Ziji*, a twelve-volume, sixty-one chapter biography, in which the Chinese Emperor, Kontse Trulgyal, was building a sacred shrine for Tonpa Shenrab’s teachings on an island in the sea. The *maras*, enemies of enlightenment, brought evil beings to destroy the shrine. The emperor was distraught and cried for help from an Enlightened One to save the shrine. Tonpa Shenrab heard the cries and out of compassion, appeared immediately with a retinue of attendants. Manifesting himself in the form of Nampar Gyalwa, he sat in the meditative posture known as Victory and emanated a brilliant white light. Unable to bear the purity of the light and the formidable expression of Nampar Gyalwa, the evil ones (scorpions, snakes, crocodiles, nagas, and low beings) quickly disappeared.

Tonpa Shenrab occupies a position similar to that of Sakyamuni in Buddhism, as seen in the iconographic and biographic details mentioned above. Unfortunately, there are no available sources with which to establish his historicity, dates, racial origin, activities, or the authenticity of the enormous number of books either attributed directly to him or believed to be his words (Karmey, 1975: 175-176). According to the Bonpo, practitioners of Bon, his writings were written down after his death in much the same way as the Buddhist scriptures were assembled. It is only from later sources, in which fact and legend are woven together, that we can get any idea of his life. No pre-10<sup>th</sup> century materials have been found that might throw light on activities such as his visit to Tibet (China Buddhism Encyclopedia, 2015).

Accounts of Tonpa Shenrab’s life are found in three principal sources, entitled *Do-du* (mdo ‘dus), *Zer-mik* (gzer mig), and *Zee-jee* (gzi brjid). The first and second of the accounts are held to be *Terma* (gter ma) (various forms of hidden teachings that are key to Vajrayana or Tibetan Buddhist and Bon religious traditions) discovered by Bon Terton (gter ston) in the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century; the third is part of the

“aural lineage” (nyen jü, snyan brgyud), transmitted via successive disciples.

What we can presume here is that if the doctrine of Tonpa Shenrub in the form of Nampar Gyalwa is not older than the 10<sup>th</sup> century, his left-hand *maravijaya* gesture may not be related to the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century Srikssetra left-hand *maravijaya* gesture votive tablets discussed earlier (see Figure 7) or the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century left-hand Buddha image in the HNM (see figure 1). However, in the 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century many aspects of Vajrayana doctrine were apparent in Hariphunchai. These include the *mahasiddha* guru mentioned by Tarnath; archaeological evidence from Wat Pratu Li, such as the terracotta ritual elements (see Figure 23, 25); the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century crowned sculptures from Wiang Ta Kan, which suggest a connection with Bagan and Pala crowned Buddha images by the feather-like elements in their headdresses. Thus, it seems that left-hand mudra of Vajrayana ritual could have come with Ari monks and influenced the iconography of Hariphunchai and possibly also Srikssetra.

## Conclusion

The exact derivation of the left-hand *maravijaya* Buddha images and votive tablets mentioned in this article is still to be determined. However, our research raises the possibility that the mudra was part of a local iconography created by the Mon in Lamphun and the Pyu in Srikssetra. Nepali-Tibetan Vajrayana ideas regarding the left-hand tantric ritual called the passive *mudra* of *panchamakara*, the five-M-letters, might be the inspiration for the left-hand gesture. However we have not yet found any relationship between the Bon deity, Nampar Gyalwa, a form of Tonpa Shenrab, and the left-hand *maravijaya* images in Hariphunchai and Srikssetra which were made before the time of the Bon doctrine. Regarding the ancient Ari sect, Theravada-tantra Buddhism was active from Bagan and Hariphunchai Period, and new interpretations may also be related to the transfer of the cult. This assumption is supported by archaeological evidence found at Hariphunchai if certain

objects are interpreted as ritual implements instead of utensils. Therefore, this study concludes with the recommendation that these leads, though tenuous as they are, should be pursued in future research. Collaboration between scholars with expertise in the art and religious history of Thailand and Myanmar can lead to deeper understanding of the issues raised here.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my greatest gratitude to my great teacher who just passed away, the late Professor Emeritus Dr. Phasook Indrawooth, for her most kind academic advice and to Associate Professor Dr. Krisdawan Hongladarom for her knowledge of Tibetan Vajrayana icons. I would also like to thank Chiang Mai University for supporting my travel to present my article at the 6<sup>th</sup> SSEASR conference in Kelaniya, Sri Lanka. Finally, I would like to express my great gratitude to Dr. Bonnie Pacala Brereton without whose patient editing this article would not have been published.

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Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22



Figure 23



Figure 24



Figure 25



Figure 26

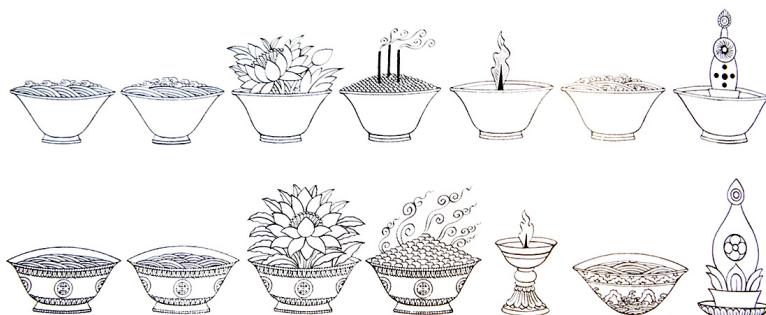


Figure 27



Figure 28



Figure 29



Figure 30



Figure 31



Figure 32

Figure 1. Stone Buddha image in left-hand *maravijaya*, 111 cm. high, 72 cm. wide, 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century, HNM, Lamphun.

Figure 2. High relief left-hand *maravijaya* Buddha image, stone, SAM, Sriksetra, Myanmar. The figure flanked by two Bodhisattvas in the gesture of paying respect (*anjali*).

Figure 3. *Samadhi* Buddha image, 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century, HNM, Lamphun.

Figure 4. Pattern of *kanok jom krob* decorates the image in left-hand *maravijaya* Fig. 1.

Figure 5. The high relief Buddha head on slab, 42 cm. high, HNM, Lamphun.

Figure 6. Triad sculpture with the left-handed Buddha image in *maravijaya* gesture, Be Be Gyi, Sriksetra, Myanmar. (Moore 2007)

Figure 7. The second type of the left-hand votive tablet, 2<sup>3/4</sup> inches high and 2 inches, enclosed by a double line of coronas with a flame edge, found at Baw Baw Gyi pagoda which built in the 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century. (Luce 1985)

Figure 8. Triad Buddha image, Lemyethna temple, flanked by standing Indra and Brahma. (Luce 1985)

Figure 9. Hollow mold of the votive tablet of the *maravijaya* Buddha images presents the gesture with the left hand instead of the right, HNM, Lamphun.

Figure 10. Hollowed terracotta monk head, 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century, HNM, Lamphun.

Figure 11. The back side of the figure no. 10.

Figure 12. The Hariphunchai bronze fragments of a standing Buddha image which may have been used to decorate the Chiang-yan Cetiya, HNM, Lamphun. (photographed by Surachai Chongchitgnam)

Figure 13. Bagan terracotta votive tablet, 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century, found inside the destroyed Botataung Pagoda, Yangon. (Stadtner 2011)

Figure 14. Terracotta votive tablet found in a cetiya at Tagaung, central Myanmar. (Luce 1970)

Figure 15. Terracotta votive tablet with a standing figure, Golden Cave Temple, six miles west of Kyaukse in central Myanmar, which restored by U Win Maung (Tanpawaddy).

Figure 16. The first type of the left-hand votive tablet with a Buddha sits on a double lotus throne (*padmasana*) enclosed by coronas which resemble flames, SAM, Sriksetra, Myanmar.

Figure 17. Baw Baw Gyi pagoda, Srikssetra, Myanmar.

Figure 18. Ku Chang pagoda, Lamphun, which related to the legend of Queen Chamdewi.

Figure 19. Terracotta crowned head with the ‘leaf-like elements,’ 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century, from Wat Pratu Li, HNM, Lamphun.

Figure 20. The ‘wide-eyes’ terracotta disciple image, 52 centimeters high, which could be interpreted as sudden awakening of the tantra path, HMM, Lamphun.

Figure 21. The Bodh Gaya type votive tablets from the excavation in Lamphun. (Indrawooth 1993)

Figure 22. Phra Prok Bhodi (Phra Rod, Phra Lue, Phra Khong, Phra Bang and Phra Peam) from the excavation in Lamphun. (Indrawooth 1993)

Figure 23. Archaeological finds called ‘candlesticks’ (or ritual implements), from the excavation site at Wat Pratu Li, Lamphun (Indrawooth 1993)

Figure 24. Copper lamp, ritual implement for Vajrayana ceremony, Kathmandu Museum, Nepal.

Figure 25. Archaeological finds called ‘terracotta mortar’ (or ritual implements), from the excavation site at Wat Pratu Li, Lamphun (Indrawooth 1993)

Figure 26. A set of seven bowls which is Vajrayana ritual implements, Kathmandu Museum, Nepal.

Figure 27. A fine illustration of the seven ritual implements, the ‘seven offerings,’ by Robert Béer (1999).

Figure 28. Dvaravati spouted pot from Gu Muang ancient city, Inburi, Singburi. (Indrawuth 1985)

Figure 29. Bronze or white bronze sprinkler, or goglet, dug up at Thiripyitsaya village, Bagan. (Luce 1970)

Figure 30. San Kampaeng kiln kendi found at Ban Wieng Yong, Lamphun. (Sukhgata Jai-in 2005).

Figure 31. Nampar Gyalwa (*rnam par rgyal ba*), a form of Bon Deity Tonpa Shenrub, his left hand is in the *Sambogakaya* form, resembles the *maravijaya* gesture. (Bon-encyclopedia, 2014)

Figure 32. Nampar Gyalwa in sculpture. (Bon-encyclopedia, 2014)