Buddhist Governance: Navigating Today's Role of Saṅgha and Dhammarājā, with Special Reference to Cambodia

PISITH SAN, RAGNAR NURKSE DEPARTMENT OF INNOVATION AND GOVERNANCE, TALLINN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, ESTONIA

Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between the monastic *saṅgha* and the Buddhist king as the *dhammarājā* in the context of good governance in the contemporary world, with a specific focus on the Cambodian perspective. Through an examination of the historical and philosophical foundations of Buddhist governance, it argues for the enduring relevance and applicability of these principles in today's diverse societies. A second line of argument explores how the *saṅgha* assembly, as a collective entity, contributes to the establishment of a just and harmonious society.

Keywords: Buddhist governance, *Saṅgha, Dhammarājā, dhammādhipateyya, Dhammocracy, Pārami*, Cambodia

1. Introduction

Buddhist governance, rooted in the teachings, values, and historical development of Buddhism, presents a distinctive perspective on statecraft. Beyond a spiritual path, Buddhism encompasses a community and social structure. Emphasizing the ethics of compassion and non-violence, Buddhist governance as a theory seeks to foster harmonious coexistence among diverse communities while prioritizing personal well-being. Though Buddhist governance lacks a blueprint (which is both an advantage and a disadvantage), its underlying principles can guide ethical leadership and social justice.

Buddhist governance is historically formed around the concept of a just ruler or *dhammarājā*. The *dhammarājā* is a king or a ruler who governs his subjects in a righteous way, based on the model of *dhammocracy* grounded in the principles of the *dharma*[1] and its pursuit. The term "dhammocracy" was first introduced and translated from the Pali term "dhammādhipateyya" by Monychenda to distinguish the model of Buddhist governance from the concept of democracy. The *dhammocratic* model is considered an ideal approach to governing the state and society according to Buddhism. It revolves around the principle of *dharma,* in contrast to being grounded in majority rule (democracy) or the authority of a select few (autocracy). The main role of *dhammarājā* is to embrace the principle of *dharma* and to guide his subjects

1 *Dharma*, a Sanskrit term, and *Dhamma,* its Pali equivalent, are employed interchangeably and with equal significance throughout the entire article.

to realize the true *dharma* as he is responsible for their well-being and happiness, both materially and spiritually.

The word *dhamma* is a Pali word (*dharma* in Sanskrit). It comes from the Sanskrit root "*dhr*", i.e., "holding things together" – "*dharma* is the way in which one maintains everything" (see Rocher 1978 and Rocher and Lariviere 2012). The term *dhamma* carries multiple meanings and interpretations, dependent on the context.[2] Rahula (1974, 58) points out that, "there is no term in Buddhist terminology wider than *dhamma* … there is nothing in this universe or outside, good or bad, conditioned or non-conditioned, relative or absolute, which is not included in this term." However, in the context of this paper, the term *dhamma* specifically refers to the principles of Buddhism, particularly to the teachings of the Buddha (*buddhavacana*). The teachings of the Buddha are categorized into two primary groups: *dhamma*, signifying doctrine, and *vinaya*, signifying discipline (Payutto 2002). *Dhamma* and *vinaya* are regarded as the core of Buddhism. Prior to his passing, the Buddha made it clear to his attendant, Venerable Ānanda, in Mahāparinibbāna Sutta: The Discourse about the Great Emancipation (DN 16 – Bhikkhu Thanissaro 2013b), "Whatever *Dhamma* & *Vinaya* I have pointed out & formulated for you, that will be your Teacher when I am gone."

Alongside the ideal kingship of the *dhammarājā,* the *saṅgha* community is upheld as an exemplary governing body within Buddhism. The *saṅgha* community is a fundamentally Buddhist institution comprising ordained monks and nuns who dedicate their lives to spiritual practice, study, and service – and in fact, as Habermas has recently reminded us, the first monastic community ever (2019, 379). As an integral part of the Buddhist tradition, the *saṅgha* plays a crucial role in preserving and propagating the teachings of the Buddha. Buddhist society is therefore centered around the *saṅgha*.

This paper focuses on who can determine what brings happiness to individuals if not themselves and how the Buddhist model of a dhammocratic approach can enable this. It therefore looks at the role of the Buddhist king as the *dhammarājā* – who creates a space in which his subjects can understand the true dharma. Additionally, the study investigates the contemporary relationship between the *saṅgha* and the *dhammarājā,* specifically emphasizing that the Buddhism practiced in Cambodia is mainly Theravada, thus making the Cambodian case an example of a Theravada case. By examining Buddhist governance, the aspiration is to develop a more compassionate, equitable, and sustainable approach to governance, always realizing the aspects of potentiality and ideal theory that such a venture must necessarily possess.

This paper analyzes the intersection of religion and governance, which has recently been made prominent again (Ongaro and Tantardini 2023a, 2023b), focusing specifically on Buddhism as a world religion (Habermas 2019) and its relevance in and for secular contexts, especially in the global-Western world. The paper aims to conceptualize Buddhist principles relevant to modern governance, with a notable focus on Cambodia as a case study, where the saṅgha and the *dhammarājā* hold constitutional significance in the 21st century – being, in fact, the only remaining Buddhist kingdom. Therefore, the study focuses on examining

2 According to Vedic literature, *dhamma* was a natural, eternal, and immutable law revealed by *brahma,* the self-existent being, to *manu,* a semi-divine being who is regarded as the first king of humanity, and *manu,* in turn, transmitted it to the ancient Sages, who made it known to mankind through abridged versions called *dhammasāstra* or treatises on *dhamma* (see Lingat 1950, 10 and Mérieau 2018, 285-286). Buddhism does not view the concept of *dhamma* as a direct divine-given rule, as in Hinduism; instead, Buddhism regards *dhamma* as the truth and the natural law.

Buddhist governance within the specific context of Cambodia, considering the religious foundations and beliefs that shape it. This approach deviates from recent more traditional Public Administration and Social Science approaches, delving into religious sources for a comprehensive, internal understanding.

To gain insight into the context of Khmer *saṅgha* and Buddhist kingship, parts of this paper draw upon the works of Hansen (2007), Harris (2001a, 2001b, 2005), Kent (2006, 2008), and particularly the approach of Monychenda (1998, 1999, 2008, 2022), widely recognized as a leader in Cambodia's socially engaged Buddhist movement and one of the leading Khmer Buddhist scholars – some would argue the leading one. From 1985 to 1992, Monychenda directed the Khmer Buddhist Research Center at Site Two Refugee Camp on the Thai-Khmer border, exploring the role of Buddhism in Khmer society and its potential to prevent further tragedies in Cambodia such as the Khmer Rouge regime. In 1990, he founded Buddhism for Development (NGO), promoting socially engaged Buddhism in Cambodia. His socially engaged Buddhist movement reflects his perspective that Buddhism should not be limited or separated from secular affairs. He acknowledges the potential role of Buddhism in Khmer society, particularly within the *saṅgha,* in keeping people informed about the social, political, and economic circumstances, and in making efforts to restore the deteriorating social order by teaching people and leaders how to apply the *dhamma* to their daily lives. Monychenda (1999, 2008) recognizes the significance of the *dhammika* ruler in contemporary Khmer development and suggests that if each person were to emulate this idea, politics could be re-enchanted like the Khmer Empire under the leadership of Jayavarman VII.

To delve into the question of Buddhism and governance from a canonical textual perspective, the paper relies on the Sutta and Vinaya texts, which were initially translated from the Pali texts by Francis and Neil (1879), Rhys Davids and Oldenberg (1881), Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids (1921), Bhikkhu Ānandajoti (2008a, 2008b), Bhikkhu Narada (2013), Bhikkhu Thanissaro (2013a, 2013b, 2013c), Vajira and Story (2013), and Bhikkhu Sujato (2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d, 2018e, 2018f, 2018g, 2018h). Methodologically, this paper argues from the Buddhist perspective, specifically that of a Khmer Theravada monk, while recognizing the imperatives of religious studies and social science. It places a clear emphasis on its own positionality. Since the paper is built on the argument regarding the role of the Theravada *saṅgha* institution in the Cambodian context, it provides the author with the strength to delve deeply into the argument from an insider's perspective. However, the author's affiliation with the Theravada *saṅgha* institution might limit his ability to critically examine it from an outsider's perspective.

2. Theory: The Synergy between *Saṅgha* Governance and the *Dhammarājā* in Buddhist Societies

In Southeast Asian culture, the power of the *saṅgha* is closely tied to politics, creating a merger of the monastic *saṅgha* community, kingship, and polity (Edwards 2007). This merger centers around the three jewels of Buddhism: Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. The king, as *dhammarājā,* safeguards the *dharma* and monastic *saṅgha,* symbolizing their interdependence (Edwards 2007). The king mediates between the worldly realm and an ordered society, while monks mediate between the world and liberation or emancipation from delusions and earthly desires that lead to the attainment of freedom.

In Khmer society, traditionally, the *saṅgha* and *dhammarājā* concepts play integral roles in shaping the social and political landscape. The interactions between these two aspects create a unique synergy that ideally contributes to the establishment of just and compassionate governance based on Buddhist principles.

At its core, the *saṅgha* represents the institutional structure that governs the monastic community within Buddhism. The *saṅgha,* comprising both the *bhikkhu* (male ordained-order) and *bhikkhuni* (female ordained-order) communities, plays a crucial role in preserving and propagating the teachings of the Buddha. Both *saṅghas'* members dedicate themselves to studying, interpreting, and disseminating Buddhist scriptures, philosophy, and traditions, ensuring the continuity of the *dharma* across generations.

The governance of the *saṅgha* is guided by a set of rules and a well-formulated code of conduct known as the *vinaya,* which provides ethical and disciplinary frameworks for the monastic community (Jayasuriya 2008). In principle, there is no formal hierarchy or favoritism in the *saṅgha* community, but there is the characteristic of seniority of a monk, determined by the date of ordination, that guides interpersonal relations within the community (Jayasuriya 2008). The decision-making process within the *saṅgha* community is theoretically characterized by a consensus-based approach, where decisions are made collectively through open discussions and, when necessary, majority voting. This participatory approach ensures that all members have a voice and are actively involved in the governance process (Moore 2016).

Parallel to *saṅgha* governance, the concept of *dhammarājā* emerges as an ideal kingship model that governs society in accordance with the principles of *dharma.* Monychenda (2008, 314), the director of Cambodia's non-governmental organization "Buddhism for Development", coined the term "dhammocracy" to convey his compelling argument that today's leaders must dutifully adhere to the moral teachings of the Buddha. He observes that Cambodians nurture the hope of security through the governance of virtuous and just rulers, commonly referred to as *dhammarājā* or *dhammik*. Dhammik is a vernacularization of the Pali phrase *dhammika dhammarājā*, meaning a righteous king. It has been argued in Khmer Buddhist society that *dhammik* would usher in a new golden age of justice and *dharma,* paving the way for the arrival of the next Buddha (Hansen 2007, 56).

Drechsler (2016, 5) points out that the role of the *dhammarājā* extends beyond being a just ruler in alignment with the *dharma.* Instead, the *dhammarājā* assumes the vital responsibility of guiding and empowering his subjects to realize their *dharma.* The *dhammarājā* embodies justice, benevolence, and ethical leadership and is responsible for the well-being and happiness of the people, both materially and spiritually. While historically associated with ancient Buddhist kingdoms, the idea of *dhammarājā* remains relevant in contemporary discussions on responsible governance, because it emphasizes the importance of moral integrity, compassion, and the pursuit of social welfare in political leadership that arguably are never out of date, and certainly not today.

The synergy between *saṅgha* and *dhammarājā* kingship becomes manifest in their (partial) shared principles and objectives. Both aim to promote the well-being and happiness of individuals and society as a whole. The *Saṅgha*, through its dedicated study, practice, and service, seeks the liberation of all sentient beings from suffering and supports the dissemination of the *dharma* to the public. The *dhammarājā*, on the other hand, governs with wisdom and

compassion, upholding the principles of justice, equality, and ethical conduct, providing the framework within which the *dharma* can be pursued and liberation ideally reached.

The *saṅgha* community and the *dhammarājā* are therefore interconnected and mutually reinforcing. The *saṅgha,* as the custodian of Buddhist teachings and values, provides moral guidance and support to the *dhammarājā* in governing the country. The monastic *saṅgha* community actively engages with the laypeople, including the rulers, through spiritual counseling, rituals, and education, influencing their decision-making processes and fostering ethical leadership.

Simultaneously, the *dhammarājā* looks to the *saṅgha* as a moral authority and guidance source. The monastic community exemplifies the ideals of renunciation, self-discipline, and service to others, serving as a moral compass for the ruler. The *dhammarājā,* inspired by the *saṅgha*'s commitment to the pursuit of truth and liberation from suffering, should govern with compassion, empathy, and a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of all beings.

This possible synergy between *saṅgha* and *dhammarājā* contributes to establishing a just and compassionate society rooted in Buddhist values. By incorporating the teachings of the Buddha into governance practices, leaders can create an environment that fosters social harmony, equality, and the well-being of all individuals.

2.1 *Saṅgha* governing body

The *saṅgha* is a fundamental institution within Buddhism, comprising *bhikkhu saṅgha* (male-ordained community) and *bhikkhuni saṅgha* (female-ordained community) who have renounced worldly attachments and committed themselves to the pursuit of spiritual awakening by living a dedicated life of spiritual practice, study, and service. The term "*saṅgha*" is a Pali word meaning an "assembly", "association", "community" or "order" and is most commonly used to refer to an order of Buddhist monks or nuns (Buswell 2014).

The *saṅgha* originated during the time of the historical Gautama Buddha over 2,600 years ago. Shortly after his enlightenment, the Buddha established the system of governance among the *saṅgha,* introducing a revolutionary paradigm that was in direct contrast to the autocratic ruling systems then prevalent in India (and elsewhere). The *saṅgha* is governed by a set of rules and guidelines known as the *vinaya*, which provides ethical and disciplinary guidelines for the monastic community. While these rules differ slightly from one Buddhist tradition and school to the next, they are generally based on the principles of the *dharma*. During the early period of his enlightenment, the Buddha was the only one who could confer full ordination; however, due to the increasing numbers of people who wanted to join the *saṅgha* community, the Buddha decentralized his authority to an *upajjhāya,* a spiritual preceptor who has been ordained as a monk (*bhikkhu*) for at least ten years.

The primary objective of entering the *saṅgha* community is to liberate oneself from worldly dissatisfaction, which can be achieved through the pursuit of either *vipassanādhura*, which involves the practice of meditation, or *gandhadhura*, which entails the study of scriptures. However, the newly ordained monks must adhere to their spiritual guidance for a minimum of five years before embarking on their own journeys elsewhere, as in principle, the *upajjhāya* occupies the highest position in the monastic community.

Although the *upajjhāya* holds the highest position, there is no absolute power over the decision-making process in the *saṅgha* community. The decision-making process must be open to all *saṅgha* members regardless of their seniority. Recruiting or giving a higher ordination (*upasampadā*) to a new *saṅgha* member requires no less than ten *saṅgha* members, with the exception of bordering regions (*paccanta-gāma*), where the Buddha allows the higher ordination to be held in the meeting of four *saṅgha* members (Dutt 1924, 147; Dickson 1963, 14). If one *saṅgha* member is very sick and unable to join the meeting in person, he must remain outside the boundary of the monastery, or he may send his consent through another, which is called *chanda*, as a sign of pre-agreement with the decision made by the monastic community. Any decision made without even one monk's presence is invalid (Dutt 1924, 146). In response to the severity of a given issue in the *saṅgha* community, the decision-making process needs to be held through the proper performance of *saṅgha-kamma* (the *saṅgha's* formal act). *saṅgha-kamma* is employed for various purposes, such as reaching agreements, making decisions, or taking actions within the *saṅgha* assembly, which comprises the following prerequisites (Dutt 1924, 125):

1. The presence of the proper number of competent *saṅgha* members (*sammagga saṅgha*)
2. The conveyance of all absentee ballots (*chanda*)
3. The motion being proposed (*ñatti*)
4. The proper proclamation of the proposed act (*kammavācā*)

In the recruitment of any new members, the *saṅgha* community embraces the bottom-up approach that is contrary to top-down or authoritarian approaches; it therefore works toward inclusivity through consensus decision-making (Dutt 1924; Jinananda 1961; Prebish 2018; Monychenda 2022). In the process of joining the *saṅgha* community, the candidate seeks the approval of the chief of the *saṅgha* community. Subsequently, two mentors are appointed by the *upajjhāya* to assess the candidate's background. Once the investigation is completed, the mentors verbally propose the candidate's ordination three times to the assembly of *saṅgha*. In the absence of objections, silence is expected from all present. However, if an objection arises, it necessitates a vocal expression, and the process will be repeated until a consensus is reached. Likewise, appointing individuals to positions of responsibility, such as inventory manager, requires the endorsement of the members residing in the temple. Moreover, these appointments are bound by a stringent legal process, as stipulated in the sacred scriptures (Monychenda 1998, 10).

Although liberating oneself from worldly attachment is a primary objective of joining the *saṅgha* community, helping others escape from miseries and bringing happiness to all sentient beings is also regarded as an ideal way the Buddha assigns to the *saṅgha* members, as focusing solely on oneself would not suffice. After entering the *saṅgha* community, each member bears three responsibilities: a) learning the *dharma*, b) practicing the dharma, and c) spreading the *dharma* to the public. As stated in the mission statement of the Dutiyamārapāsa Sutta (SN 4.5 – Bhikkhu Bodhi 2000), the Buddha advises his *saṅgha* members to disseminate the *dharma* to the public as follows:

> Wander forth, O bhikkhus, for the welfare of the multitude, for the happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare, and happiness of devas and humans. Let not two go the same way. Teach, O bhikkhus, the Dhamma that is good in the beginning, good in the middle, good in the end, with the right meaning and phrasing. Reveal the perfectly complete and purified holy life. There are beings with little dust in their eyes who are falling away because they do not hear the Dhamma. There will be those who will understand the Dhamma. I too, bhikkhus, will go to Senanigama in Uruvela in order to teach the Dhamma.

Monastic life is set up as a ruling system in which leaders are chosen for their qualities and with the approval of the *saṅgha* assembly. Each *saṅgha* member is required to participate in maintaining the stability of the rule of law of the monastery, i.e., participating every two weeks in a ceremony known as *uposatha* (bi-weekly meeting) in the monastery to review compliance with the *pātimokkha* (monastic code). In the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta (DN 16 – Bhikkhu Thanissaro 2013b), the Buddha lists seven conditions that will maintain the unity and solidarity of the *saṅgha* community. The first two are these: "(1) As long as the bhikkhus meet often, meet a great deal, their growth can be expected, not their decline. (2) As long as the bhikkhus meet in unity, adjourn from their meetings in unity, and conduct Community business in unity, their growth can be expected, not their decline."

The *uposatha* observance was formulated to fulfill these purposes, serving as a bi-weekly opportunity for the *saṅgha* assembly to gather, update their membership rolls, address issues, and reaffirm their common adherence to *vinaya* rules (Bhikkhu Thanissaro 2013c, 1098). Performing *uposatha* with an incomplete or divided *saṅgha* assembly is regarded as an offense of wrong-doing according to the *vinaya* rules. Therefore, the first duty is to convey consent and purity, known as *chandapārisuddhi*, on behalf of a *saṅgha* member who cannot attend the *uposatha* observance. In the Mahāvagga (Rhys Davids and Oldenberg 1881, 274-275), the Buddha instructed that a sick *saṅgha* member, unable to participate in the uposatha ceremony, should convey his consent and purity through another bhikkhu to those attending the *uposatha.* In the Suddhika-pācittiya: Requiring of a transgression for purification, any *saṅgha* member who witnesses another member's transgression but fails to report it to the *saṅgha* community is likewise considered to be committing an offense *(pācittiya)* (Rhys Davids and Oldenberg 1881, 33; Bhikkhu Ñāṇatusita 2014, 174).

The purity of the *saṅgha* assembly is considered a key factor in conducting the *uposatha* ceremony. As mentioned in the Uposatha Sutta (Ud 5.5 – Bhikkhu Thanissaro 2012), when Venerable Ānanda requested the Buddha to recite the *pātimokkha* to the *saṅgha* assembly on the Uposatha Day, the Buddha refused because the gathering was not pure (Bhikkhu Ānandajot 2008b). To ensure the assembly was pure enough to conduct the formal ceremony, there was a specific intention during the ceremony to provide a platform for a guilty monk to confess his offense. The process of confession can be undertaken in two ways: either by following the *pārisuddhi uposatha,* a brief ceremony of confession without recitation of the whole *pātimokkha* rules, or by following the *sutt-uddesa uposatha,* a ceremony for confession that includes the recitation of the entire *pātimokkha* rules (see Bhikkhu Ariyesako and Bhikkhu Nirodho 2003, 21-25; Dhammasami 2019, 60). This practice is essential because the ceremony obligates each monk to inform the community if they are unable to adhere to the rules, which in turn leads to subsequent actions taken by the *saṅgha* community (Dutt 1924).

In sum, the *saṅgha* in Buddhism lives together as a community, pursuing liberation by adhering to the rules and regulations set forth by the Buddha to maintain continuity and unity within the *saṅgha* assembly. Unity, purity, and integrity are regarded as key factors in preserving the *saṅgha* institution. Democracy or a consensus-based approach is used to make decisions, reach agreements, and act within the *saṅgha* assembly through *saṅghakamma* performances. While the primary purpose of joining the *saṅgha* is to liberate oneself from worldly attachments, the *saṅgha* typically remains connected to lay society because their daily basic needs rely on it, and they also have duties as *dhammadūta,* the *dhamma* messengers, to disseminate and teach the principles of *dhamma* to lay society.

2.2 The *Dhammarājā*

Dhammarājā is often portrayed as a cosmic and ethical king, embodying the principles of righteousness and moral governance. Rooted in Buddhist texts, this perspective envisions *dhammarājā* as a virtuous ruler whose reign is characterized by justice, compassion, and adherence to the *dhamma*. However, the concept of *dhammarājā,* with its multifaceted implications, resonates differently across various perspectives. There are at least three distinct viewpoints regarding the *dhammarājā*: the concept of *dhammarājā* from the Pali text perspective, the historical perspective, and the contemporary perspective.

2.2.1 The *Dhammarājā* from the Pali Literature Perspective

The concept of the ideal kingship in Buddhist literature emerged in response to the perceived decline of *dharma* and general social disorder. In these circumstances, the king assumed the role of a mediator, facilitating the restoration of social order by reinforcing the *dharma* practice within his realm. This concept finds further elaboration in canonical texts and various other Buddhist writings, providing a comprehensive exploration of the model of just governance within Buddhism. The Aggaññ a Sutta (DN 27 – Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids 1921; Bhikkhu Sujato 2018c), a discourse in which the Buddha explains the origin and evolution of human beings, illustrates a peak of social disorder triggered by greed. This disorder results in the division of rice fields, theft of one another's plots, and engagement in dishonesty, censure, and punishment following the disappearance of spontaneous rice growth.

In response to this social turmoil, the Sutta describes how humans gathered together, saying, "From our evil deeds, sirs, becoming manifest, inasmuch as stealing, censure, lying, punishment have become known, what if we were to select a certain being, who should be wrathful when indignation is right, who should censure that which should rightly be censured and should banish him who deserves to be banished? But we will give him in return a proportion of the rice" (Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids 1921, 93). Then they selected from among themselves "the handsomest, the best favoured, the most attractive, the most capable" individual being and invited him to be their king with a promise of contributing a proportion of the rice (Rhys Davids and Rhys David 1921; Bhikkhu Sujato 2018c).

The Sutta introduces an "elective and contractual theory of kingship", where the people choose their king, and the king's compensation comes in the form of a rice tax. Tambiah (1976, 13) points out that this theory combines the notion of "elective and contractual kingship" with

the idea that the chosen king is exceptional among men – most handsome in the physical form and most perfect in conduct. The characteristics of the king, as described in the Sutta, earn him the titles "*mahā sammata*" for being "the great elect", "*rājā*" for "charming others by the Norm" (*dhamma*), and "*khattiya*", signifying the "lord of the fields" (Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids 1921; Tambiah 1976; Bhikkhu Sujato 2018c). The king is, in essence, "chosen" in two distinct senses of the word, both as an elective leader and as an exceptional individual that is recognized via the former election. This particular aspect deepens our comprehension of the moral and physical attributes tied to kingship, which are subsequently explored in greater detail in other Buddhist texts.

Among the many qualities of the leader described in the Sutta, "*rājā*", or the ability to "charm others by the Norm" (*dharma*), is the key quality that highlights the role of the king in making his subjects happy by guiding the principle of the *dharma* back to the right trajectory. In this context, it can be argued that the concept of "*rājā*" of the "*dhamma*" or "*dhammarājā*", a righteous or just king who rules in accordance with the principles of *dharma*, emerged as a response to the urgent need to apply the principle of *dharma* in governing the state.

Regarding governing the state, Buddhism diverges significantly from the previous Indian Kautilyan, let alone from, shall we say, global-Western Machiavellian thoughts. From a Buddhist standpoint, aggression, war, and violence are entirely incompatible with the principles of good governance (Vijitha 2016). Buddhism introduces the concept of the "*cakkavattin*" (*cakravartin* in Sanskrit), often referred to as the "Wheel-Turning Monarch", alongside the term "*dhammarājā*", as they represent the epitome of just and righteous governance (*rājā cakkavattī dhammiko dhammarājā*), embodying the pinnacle of moral virtue within the Buddhist ethos as further aspects of the good monarch. Nivat (1947) has argued that the Buddhist ideal of the Wheel-Turning Monarch is to be detected even in many Hindu court ceremonies, which are essentially (and until today) Brahmanic. However, when we look into both Pali texts, Dhammarājā Sutta (AN 5.133 – Bhikkhu Sujato 2018e) and Cakkavatti Sutta (DN 26 – Bhikkhu Bodhi 2012), the Buddha describes the role and principle of *dhammarājā* and *cakkavattin* kingship in the same manner:

> Here, bhikkhu, a wheel-turning monarch, a righteous king who rules by the Dhamma, relying just on the Dhamma, honoring, respecting, and venerating the Dhamma, taking the Dhamma as his standard, banner, and authority, provides righteous protection, shelter, and guard for the people in his court. Again, a wheel-turning monarch, a righteous king who rules by the Dhamma, relying just on the Dhamma, honoring, respecting, and venerating the Dhamma, taking the Dhamma as his standard, banner, and authority, provides righteous protection, shelter, and guard for his khattiya vassals, his army, brahmins and householders, the people of town and countryside, ascetics and brahmins, and the animals and birds. Having provided such righteous protection, shelter, and guard for all these beings, that wheel-turning monarch, a righteous king who rules by the Dhamma, turns the wheel solely through the Dhamma, a wheel that cannot be turned back by any hostile human being.

The Buddha strongly stresses that social disorder and natural disasters will be caused by a ruler who does not rule in accordance with the principles of *dhamma.* As mentioned in the Adhammika Sutta (AN 4.70 – Bhikkhu Sujato 2018f), the Buddha explains how the bad example set by unrighteous rulers can influence their governance, ministers, *brahmins*, householders, and their subjects as a whole, ultimately leading to social disorder and natural disasters.

Regarding the social order, the Buddha described three governing models: autocracy (*attādhipateyya*), democracy (*lokādhipateyya*), and *dhammocracy* (*dhammādhipateyya*) (Monychenda 2008, 314). Among the three models, the Buddha embraced the model of dhammādhipateyya – a form of governance centered on the *dharma*. "*Dharma*" has, as we saw already, many meanings, but in this context, it refers to the teachings of the Buddha, which are presented as universal or natural laws. These laws were not created by Buddha, they function independently with or without his presence, but the Buddha revealed these laws and recommended that we examine them and act accordingly – not relying on blind faith but guided by a process of rational human assessment (Long 2021, 36).

The system of governing the state based on the *dharma* begins with the establishment of the righteous state, ruled by the consent of the governed with policy consistent with the *dharma* (Long 2021, 44). Long (2021) asserts that a political system structured in harmony with these core truths holds the potential to minimize the manifest forms of suffering experienced by all members of society. This effect would be most pronounced among the least fortunate, whose visible sufferings are most acute, and simultaneously foster a constructive role in an individual's pursuit of higher forms of well-being.

2.2.2 The *Dhammarājā* from a Historical Perspective

From a historical standpoint, *Dhammarājā* is seen as a historical king who sought to uphold the *dharma*, prevent its decline and establish a just and harmonious society based on Buddhist principles. The concept of *dhammarājā* has been applied to view the reign of Ashoka (c. 304-232 BCE), the most significant Indian Emperor in history, and Jayavarman VII (c. 1122-1218), the most notable ruler of the Khmer Empire (Drechsler 2019). Ashoka, after his conversion to Buddhism, became a paradigmatic ruler who embraced the principles of non-violence, compassion, and moral conduct in his governance. Ashoka earned the title of a great *dhammarājā* through his commitment to upholding the *dharma.* His contributions include the construction of 84,000 stupas dedicated to Buddhism across India, the defense of Buddhism by expelling 80,000 heretics from the monastic order, and the dissemination of the Buddha's teachings through the dispatch of missionaries to the far reaches of his empire – and beyond (Larsson 2021). Ashoka's state policy was influenced by the inherited Brahmanical Arthasastra of Kautilya (Kulke 2014). In the Mahāvaṃsa, the historical chronicle of Sri Lanka, Ashoka was called *chandāshoka* in ancient times due to his evil deeds during the Kalinga War, but later, he gave up the expansion of might via military means and expanded the might of the *dhamma,* just as the Buddha himself "turned the wheel of *dhamma*", and as a result, he came to be known as *dhammāshoka* (Changkhwanyuen 2003).

Throughout history, several Buddhist kings in Asia projected themselves as an Ashoka-like Wheel-Turning Monarch or "*cakravartin*" (Boisselier 1990; Lahiri 2015, 5). The name of Ashoka, as Wells (1920, 371) states, "shines, and shines almost alone, a star. From the Volga to Japan, his name is still honoured. China, Tibet, and even India, though it has left his doctrine, preserve the tradition of his greatness." Tambiah (1973) points out that the Ashokan ethos emphasizes the state's commitment to welfare and prosperity as a precondition to support the monastic institutions, alleviate the suffering of his subjects, and realize the moral law *(dhamma)* in society as a whole. He argues that the Ashokan ethos continues to serve as a charter in

contemporary times, stimulating and legitimizing twentieth-century politics, especially in Buddhist countries. This implies that the principles associated with Ashoka's governance have transcended time, continuing to shape political thought and actions, and reminding contemporary leaders that the legitimacy of being a great leader does not come from cruelty but from ethical and peaceful means.

Following a path similar to that of Ashoka, Jayavarman VII, the Emperor of the Khmer Empire, initially had a state ideology strongly influenced by the inherited Hindu *Devarājā* cult, but after his conversion to Buddhism, Jayavarman VII applied Buddhist principles to his state policy and adopted the new concept of *Buddharājā* or *Bodhisattva,* looking on himself as "the living Buddha" or "the Buddha-to-be" to govern the state, ultimately leading it to its pinnacle (Briggs 1951; Cœdès 1963; Kulke 2014).

The religious principle of Jayavarman VII is based on the spirit of benevolence in Buddhism and is expressed as benefiting others or rescuing people. As stated in the Say-Fong inscription (K. 368 – Honda 1965, 410), a statement which reminds us of Ashoka's *dhamma* ethics, Jayavarma VII puts the well-being of his subjects first, "(Once) a person has a physical disease, his (i.e., king's) mental disease is far more painful. For the suffering of people, is the suffering of masters, not (only) the suffering of people (themselves)."

When considering the Buddhist influence on Jayavarman's social policy and state ideology, the most significant aspect is his construction of 123 rest houses (Dharmasālā)[3] and 102 hospitals (Ārogyasālā), each meticulously documented with lists of personnel and provisions, serving the needs of pilgrims and providing medical care across the empire, as recorded in the Say-Fong inscription (K. 368 – Honda 1965) and the Ta Prohm inscription (K. 273 – Cœdès 1906). Jayavarman VII built a well-supplied, country-wide hospital network that, as stated in the inscriptions, was accessible and provided without discrimination to all four castes, i.e., Brahmin (priest), Kshatryia (king), Vaishya (merchants), Sudra (commoners or peasants) (Chhem 2005; Sharrock and Jacques 2017).

2.2.3 The *Dhammarājā* from the contemporary Khmer view

The *dhammarājā* from the contemporary Khmer view is a mix of myth and reality. In Cambodia, when confronted with challenging circumstances, especially under the rule of immoral leaders, Khmer people look back to the glorious history of the Khmer Empire under the wise leadership especially of Jayavarman VII. Within the purview of the Khmer Buddhists, Jayavarman VII embodied the essence of a *dhammika* – a vernacularization of the Pali term *dhammika dhammarājā,* signifying a righteous king. The concept of *dhammika* embodies justice, benevolence, and ethical leadership, providing a model for good governance (Vijitha 2016).

The term *dhammik* gained prominence during the late nineteenth century when the nation was under French colonization (1863-1953), and the Khmer people were in search of a

3 Regarding the rest houses, the Sanskrit inscription uses the term "*upakārya*", which translates to "staging posts with fire" or "*vahneḥ*" and "*vahnigrhāṇi*", both meaning "house of fire" (Maxwell 2007, 43). Finot (1925, 421-422) interpreted these structures as "*dharmasālā*", considering them religious hostels along pilgrimage routes due to the presence of Lokeśvara Bodhisattva, offering protection against dangers. Although the term "*dharmasālā*" does not appear in the inscription, it has become widely used to refer to these rest houses. In a first-hand account of Khmer civilization by Chou Ta-Kuan (1992, p. 65), a Chinese envoy who resided in Angkor from 1296 to 1297, the Khmer referred to these resting places along the highways as "*sen-mu*" (Khmer, *samnak*).

Messiah, to borrow a term from another religion (or two), to rescue them. A prophetic text called *put-domneay* circulated among the Khmer commoners, predicting a decline in the *dhamma,* which was linked to an unrighteous ruler. This ruler's errors of judgment fostered the proliferation of poverty, violence, and immoral behavior, ultimately reducing the average human lifespan to just a few years. The text also propagated the belief that within the midst of the social turmoil that gave rise to catastrophic death and destruction, a righteous ruler known as a *dhammik* was expected to emerge. This *dhammik* would usher in a new golden age of justice and *dharma,* thus paving the way for the arrival of the next Buddha (Hansen 2007, 55-56).

One can assume that some politicians and rebel leaders have capitalized on this belief to enhance their influence and pursue legitimacy, with the aim of getting the power to rule the country. In the late nineteenth century, several Khmer rebel leaders claimed to be *neak mean bon,* people possessing great merit, or *dhammika* rulers who could save people from suffering and safeguard the *dharma* (Hansen 2007, 60). Even after two centuries, the hope of encountering the "Khmer Messiah" continues in Cambodia. A rather shrill example for utilizing this is that on 23 August 2022, Khem Veasna, a leader of the fringe League for Democracy Party (LDP), who self-proclaimed himself as *prom reaksa lok* or "The universe safeguarding *brahma*" – the highest form of life in the universe according to Hindu/Buddhist mythology – made a series of apocalyptic predictions on his Facebook page (Sovinda et al. 2022). Veasna claimed that he could rescue those who follow him in the event of an apocalypse. Veasna's doomsday prophecy prompted his supporters to leave their everyday lives behind and travel from across the country to Siem Reap province, northwestern Cambodia. Some of his followers even traveled from as far as South Korea, Japan, and Thailand to seek refuge from the apocalypse (Samean 2022), which obviously did not take place.

The basis for the Khmer ideal of the *dhammika* ruler on principles is found in various Buddhist *sutras,* particularly those in which the Buddha discussed a leader's qualities, roles, and responsibilities. From the Khmer perspective, the *dhammika* is someone who adheres to the tenfold royal duties of the king[4] and possesses supernatural power to safeguard their subjects from adversaries (Monychenda 2008, 313-314). However, Monychenda (2008) argues that Khmer people focus too much on the tenfold duties of the king, which deal with the individual behavior of the leader, and fail to look at the Buddha's teachings about the *system* of governing the state. He (1999, 32-34) argues that the term "*dhammika* ruler" is essentially a title for an individual who believes in *dhammocracy,* holds respect for *dharma,* loves *dharma,* considers *dharma* as the guiding principle of life, and honors *dharma* as the "flagship".

Drechsler (2019, 234) asserts that "a classic role of the Buddhist king is that of the *dhammarājā,* of which one aspect of great relevance here (this is a highly complex subject both historically and theoretically) is that of facilitator of his subjects' attainment of happiness, with the optimal goal of enlightenment. The *dhammarājā* is, then, not (only) the one who rules according to the dhamma, but he who guides or enables his subjects to realize the(ir) *dhamma* – anywhere between nudging them thither or creating a space within which this is possible."

4 The ten royal duties of a righteous king *(Dasa-rājadhamma)*, is mentioned in the Nandiyamiga Jātaka (385) of Khuddaka Nikāya, translated from the Pali text by Francis and Neil (1879). This Jātaka tale illustrates the story of the Nandiya Bodhisattva, advising the Kosala King: "Great king, it is good for a king to rule a kingdom by forsaking the ways of wrongdoing, not offending against the ten kingly virtues and acting with just righteousness … Alms, morals, charity, justice and penitence, peace, mildness, mercy, meekness, patience."

3. The Interplay of Religion, Power, and Legitimacy in Cambodia

Like many other countries around the world, Cambodia has been a place where religion has been morally positioned as a *buddhacakr* (the wheel of *dharma*), symbolizing spiritual power, alongside *āṇācakr* (the wheel of authority), representing temporal power (Harris 2001a). Cambodians regard these two powers as a pair of chariot wheels propelling the nation forward (Kent 2006). It can be argued that from the Khmer point of view, if the charioteer (*sārathi*) or the ruler (*dhammarājā*) fails to maintain a balance between the wheels, allowing one to move faster than the other, the chariot will malfunction, or the nation will be destabilized.

Traditionally, temporal power resides in the *veang* (royal palace), while spiritual power is stored in the *wat* (Buddhist temple). Monychenda (2008) argues that the *veang* embodies worldly power for the king, royal family, and ruling class, believed to be the reincarnations of *deva* (gods/angels) or individuals with great past merit, responsible for governing and alleviating the people's suffering. In contrast, the *wat* is where the *saṅgha* preserves ethical teachings, guiding people morally and leading them to liberation from worldly suffering (saṃsāra). Monychenda (2008) has claimed that in some respects, the *veang* represents city-based power and wealth, while the *wat* symbolizes village prosperity. As Harris (2001b) argues, the two strongest institutions in Cambodia have traditionally been the *saṅgha* and the monarchy; these two institutions always relied on each other either for political or religious survival.

The *saṅgha* and the monarchy effectively legitimize the traditional concept of a "righteous ruler". Following the Khmer reformed constitution of 1993, the monarchy is elective, and the succession is determined by the Royal Council of the Throne (Bektimirova 2002). This council comprises the president of the National Assembly (who, in the king's absence, assumes the role of head of state), the prime minister, the supreme patriarch of both Khmer *saṅgha* orders[5], and the first and second vice-presidents of the National Assembly (Frost 1994, 88). The reinstatement of the monarchy after the fall of the Khmer Rouge terror regime that had dissolved it, itself indirectly attests to the distinct value of Buddhism deeply rooted in Khmer political tradition. The monarchical principle remains inherently entwined with the Buddhist worldview, wherein, as we have argued, the notion of the "*dhammika* ruler" holds significant importance (Bektimirova 2002).

While King Norodom Sihamoni's role is largely ceremonial, given the constitutional quality of the Buddhist monarchy, he still plays a vital part in the construction of Khmer national identity (Chachavalpongpun 2013). Some would argue that his role is somehow overshadowed by the absolute power of Samdech Hun Sen, the former Prime Minister of Cambodia, who occasionally acted as the guardian of the monarchy, suggesting the duty of the king to remain above politics and not intervene to mediate a political solution (Norén-Nilsson 2016).

As mentioned earlier, in the Khmer context, some part of power is perceived as residing in religious institutions, and gaining access to this power is essential for political survival. From

5 The Khmer Theravadin *saṅgha* orders are divided into two groups: Mahānikāya Order, which represents the local majority of *saṅgha,* and Dhammayuttikanikāya Order, a minority group of *saṅgha,* influenced by the reformed Dhammayut Order of King Mongkut (1804–1868) of Siam (see Promta 1999 and Na-Rangsi 2002). Dhammayuttika Order was first introduced into Cambodia in 1855 by King Norodom through the efforts of Venerable Mahā Pan (1824–1894), the first Supreme Patriarch of the Dhammayut order in Cambodia, who had spent several years in Thailand studying the newly reformed Buddhism of King Mongkut (San 2018). Each group is governed by its respective Supreme Patriarch (see Jotaññāno 1961, 41-42; Harris 2005, 236-238; Lawrence 2022, 220-221).

a long historical point of view, Khmer rulers have actively patronized and embraced either Brahmanism or Buddhism to legitimize their authority. The concept of an ideal kingship, such as *devarāja, buddharāja* and *dhammarājā* is connected or derived from Hinduism and Buddhism, showing how religious institutions play a significant role in shaping state policies by reminding or expecting the state rulers to fulfill their duties as ruling monarch by adhering to ethical principles (see Cœdès 1975, 175; Goss 2017, 6).

King Jayavarman II (c. 770-850), the founder of the Khmer Empire, established the *devarāja* cult, translating to "god-king" (Mabbett 1969). In ancient Cambodia, the King was closely associated with Hindu gods, either Shiva or Vishnu, embodied by the *siva-liṅga* statue. Harihara, a concept merging Vishnu and Shiva, emerged in Indian and Khmer art, symbolizing divine attributes on either side (Lavy 2003). This fusion aimed to connect the divine and human realms (Wales 1995, 29). The debate arises on whether *devarāja* deifies the King as a god or metaphorically illustrates divine qualities. Filliozat (1966, 102) argues against *devarāja* identifying the King as a god, asserting it designates Siva himself.

Saveros (1998, 663), an expert in Khmer linguistics and civilization, further argues that the term *devarāja* has never been a part of the Khmer vocabulary. She points out that the term appears once in the renowned Sdok Kak Thom inscription (K. 235), which sparked speculations on divine kingship in Cambodia. She addresses that instead of identifying the Khmer king as the god-king, the inscription stipulates the king's duty to worship the *kamrateṅ jagat ta rāja*, translated into Sanskrit as *devarāja*.

While Cambodia has assimilated various Sanskrit terms such as *rāja*, *adhirāja*, *mahārāja*, *rājasiṅha*, and *rājādhirāja* to designate her chief, ruler, or king, Saveros (1998, 657-659) states that ancient Khmer epigraphy offers three distinct terms referring to these individuals:

1. *Sdac*, derived from "*dac*", meaning "to detach from a whole, to separate from it, to be superior".
2. *Kamrateṅ*, derived from "*teṅ*" meaning "manifest, most prominent, best".
3. *Kuruṅ*, derived from "*ruṅ*" meaning "large, broad, tall, high", and applied to a "chief or king."

Among these three terms, she highlights *kamrateṅ*[6] as a sacred term employed in Khmer society to refer to both "the god" and "the king," with two different suffixes: *jagat* (cosmos/world) and *phdai krom* (below/under/earth). *Kamrateṅ jagat* is a hybrid compound, combining Khmer and Sanskrit, literally meaning "the lord of the heavenly kingdom". At this point, one cannot help but compare it with *kamrateṅ phdai krom*, which means "the lord of the earthly kingdom", because they are almost superimposed. In other words, k*amrateṅ jagat* is perceived as the ruler of the macrocosm in Khmer belief, while *kamrateṅ phdai krom* symbolizes the ruler of the microcosm. These terms embody the dual facets of the entire universe, distinct yet complementary.

6 The term "Kamrateṅ" is also used to refer to a highly respected Buddhist monk. For instance, inscription (K. 177) at Angkor, dated 1437 A.D., provides information about a prominent monk named Brah Kamrateṅ Añ Laṅkā, who came from Chanbori, which was part of the Khmer territory. He pursued studies in grammar and dhamma at Angkor, eventually attaining the position of Mahādhammakathika, denoting a Great Lecturer in Buddhism and a distinguished royal scholar. He then received an invitation from a king to deliver Buddhist sermons to princes and princesses at the royal palace (Saveros 1981).

With the transition from Hinduism to Buddhism, particularly in Theravada Buddhism, deities and Hindu gods were not recognized and were reduced to the status of spirits serving the Buddha or demi-gods governing inferior heavens (Wales 1995, 31). The perception of an ideal king under Buddhism is evident in the fact that he is considered a *bodhisattva*, *cakravartin*, or *dhammarājā* (Wales 1995; Vijitha 2016; Moore 2016). Most post-Angkorean kings and rulers chose to spend time as monks to establish their legitimacy as ideal Buddhist rulers. This practice aimed to fulfill the ten perfections (*pārami*), granting them the ability to tap into spiritual power and showcase their influence and merit through the prosperity of the pagodas they endorsed (Guthrie 2002).

In social science literature, scholars have employed Weber's concept of charisma (Weber 1988) to elucidate diverse social movements led by charismatic figures. Similarly, within the study of Buddhist movements guided by charismatic leaders, the term "charisma" is often equated with "*pārami*", despite the absence of a direct Pali term or Buddhist equivalent for the Greek term "charisma" as it is employed in Christian contexts or contemporary sociology (Pisith 2018, 204).

However, having a claim to power does not automatically grant them moral legitimacy. To establish moral legitimacy, one must exercise power in a manner aligned with Khmer religious concepts of righteousness and proper worldviews (Kent 2006, 350-351). In Buddhism, *pārami* is regarded as a sacred force involving the cultivation of virtues to a state of sublime perfection. This process fosters a pathway of purification that ultimately aligns with the pursuit of enlightenment. Acquiring *Pārami* involves engaging in virtuous acts, such as donating to pagodas or offering the monastic *saṅgha* community alms. Contemporary politicians also seek to align themselves with the members of the monastic *saṅgha* due to the trust people have in them (Monychenda 2008, 312).

This practice is regarded as crucial for attaining the status of being a good king, a respected member of the royal family, or a capable leader. It is worth noting that the current king of Cambodia was ordained twice in Paris; Prince Norodom Ranariddh, the first Prime Minister of Cambodia from 1993 to 1997, was ordained for one week in India; and Sam Rainsy, a leader of the main opposition party in Cambodia, had at least a one-week ordination stint in Cambodia. Hun Sen, Cambodia's current Prime Minister's direct predecessor, on the other hand, has never been a monk, but he frequently referred to his past as a temple boy (Monychenda 2008, 312). His son and successor, Samdech Hun Manet, spent a brief period of time as a monk to honor his late grandmother, following the Khmer Buddhist tradition of paying respects to deceased family members (Kamnottra 2020).

Despite facing criticism of the election and doubts about the legitimacy of Manet's candidacy for premiership from the Western world, Manet received support from China, which stated that the election was free and fair (Strangio 2023). Alongside this, various institutions and prominent figures aligned with the ruling party publicly endorsed Manet's candidacy. Notably, the Supreme *Saṅgha* Council of Cambodia, traditionally expected to maintain neutrality, also joined this wave of support, issuing an endorsement for Manet's premiership candidacy (Sirivadh 2021). Some would argue that the Supreme *Saṅgha* Council has a strong association with the ruling party or is controlled by them. However, the endorsement from the Supreme *Saṅgha* Council shows how the integration of the *saṅgha* into the political structure and the

recognition of Buddhism as the state religion play significant roles in granting the state the authority to limit the sovereignty of the *saṅgha* by positioning its role as the protector of the Buddha's *dharma* (Bechert 1973).

4. A Normative Discussion: The Buddha and His Teachings Again

The relationship between religion and governance has long been a subject of profound interest and significance, as noted by scholars like Ongaro and Tantardini (2023a, 2023b) within the realm of Public Administration. These two spheres' interaction has shaped societies, norms, and power structures throughout history. One particular religious tradition that has garnered significant attention is Buddhism. Its uniqueness as a world religion, as highlighted by Habermas (Habermas 2019; Foshay 2009; San et al. 2023), extends beyond its spiritual and philosophical aspects. Buddhism's global reach and emergence as a prominent faith within predominantly secular societies, such as the Western world, adds to its intrigue (McMahan 2020).

While Buddhism is commonly viewed as an apolitical and introspective tradition (Weber 1988), its potential influence on society, particularly on governance, cannot be overlooked. The apparent detachment from political matters, particularly in the contemporary context, has led to uncertainties regarding the role of Buddhism in governance. This paradoxical nature raises questions about the ways in which Buddhist principles and institutions intersect with the mechanisms of political control and decision-making. Within Buddhism, three key relationships take center stage:

4.1 The *Saṅgha*-Laity Relationship with an Intersection of the Role of *Dhammarājā* as a Dharma Protector and Promoter

In the *saṅgha*-laity relationship, the *dhammarājā* assumes the role of *dharma* protector and promoter, creating a conducive environment to foster a healthy and mutually beneficial connection between the two parties. Acting as the protector and promoter of the *dharma,* the *dhammarājā* serves to unify and facilitate these two integral components. Like how the Buddha guides even the most unfortunate towards the path to enlightenment, the duty of the *rājā*, the king, or more abstractly, the state, lies in providing means of sustenance and security to all its citizens, for as all monks are like sons to the Buddha, all citizens of the state are like sons to the ruler (Zimmermann 2006). Without the state's role in providing for the citizens, the *saṅgha*, which lives off the secular world, also perishes.

As the Buddha would show paths towards enlightenment to all beings regardless of their capacity to understand to move forward on their path, the state has to provide for the sustenance and security of even the poorest of its citizens, showing them the path towards the upliftment of their lives. The state is primarily responsible for fulfilling the citizens' basic needs since one cannot meditate on an empty stomach. Providing this level of access to all citizens, regardless of their economic status, is the primary responsibility of the state, and it is also one of the highest implications of Buddhist thinking when it comes to economic governance (Long 2021, 39-40). People should see a path towards how a dignified life without

hunger can be attained, a roof over the head, and a sense of security for the future (Long 2021, 39). How the state provides need not be in unison for everyone – like how the Buddha or monks use *upāya-kauśalya* to teach depending on who is on the receiving end (Keown 1992). What the capability of the respective person is to cultivate the understanding of the *dharma* is similar to how the state must have varied provisions based on the differences and not assume equality or even aim for it. The needs of the old are different from those of the young, and women may require different priorities compared to men, depending on space and time.

The role of the state has two dimensions, too, with the duty of the *rāja* not only being about the material sustenance of the subjects but also enabling his subjects to realize the dhamma. Even in contemporary times, Buddhist monarchies, although they have almost vanished, have shown the concept's applicability (Drechsler 2020).

Even with a *dhammarājā* ruling it, the idea that every state can provide equally for all its citizens or become immediately equal in economic standing to those more prosperous is more of a utopian thought than a vision with practicality; the classically Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan's tendency to compare itself with Switzerland and Singapore while still being a "Least Developed Country" (see Drechsler 2020) is a point in case. Not all countries are equally able, and if one ruminates on the implications of the Buddhist law of karmic causality as well as of simple geospatiality, they can practically never be, and as such, nor are their goals the same, nor the means available to reach these goals. The state, then, has the responsibility to set the goals and choose the ethical means that best suit their context, not just generally but specifically concerning the groups and subgroups of its citizens.

4.2 The *Saṅgha*-Laity Symbiotic but Direct Relationship

The relationship between the *saṅgha* and the laity is symbiotic. The role of the *saṅgha* to the secular world is that of a guide or an advisor to teach them the dharma and guide them toward the path of enlightenment. In the context of its historical development and contemporary practice, Buddhism is primarily based on the activities of the *saṅgha*, who functioned as literati, preserving a substantial body of literature and higher studies, including historical and other non-religious writings, and also played a crucial role in providing fundamental education to villagers (Bechert 1973).

The *saṅgha* depends on the laity to provide the means of subsistence to the *saṅgha*. The survival of the *saṅgha* depends on the laity. Thus, the *saṅgha* is also responsible for advising or at least well-wishing for worldly matters concerning trade, commerce, agriculture, law, and security. In Sigālovāda Sutta, (DN 31 – Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids 1921; Bhikkhu Narada 2013; Bhikkhu Sujato 2018d), a discourse that discusses the advice of the Buddha to Sigāla, the Buddha mentions the mutual relationship between the laity and the *saṅgha*. Based on the discourse, to promote and encourage the dharma practice of the *saṅgha*, the laity should respect the *saṅgha* through kind actions, kind words, kind thoughts, keeping their houses open for them, and supporting them with basic requisites.

In return, the *saṅgha* should bear in mind that they have an obligation to care and show compassion to the lay people by restraining them from doing evil deeds, persuading them

to perform wholesome deeds, thinking compassionately, teaching them what they have not learned, clarifying what they have already learned and showing them the path to the heavenly state.

4.3 The Independent Relationship between the "Ruler" of the Citizens and the "Leader" of the *Saṅgha* members

In the context of the 21st century, it is noteworthy that Cambodia stands as a unique example where Buddhism, the monarchy, and the *saṅgha* have been constitutionally recognized, as stated in Cambodia's 1993 Constitution (Lawrence 2022). In several Buddhist discourses, the *saṅgha* plays a significant role in helping the *dhammarājā* govern his subjects in accordance with the principle of *dharma.* As mentioned in the Aggañña Sutta (DN 27 – Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids 1921; Bhikku Sujato 2018c), the Buddha suggests that *saṅgha* members should serve as advisors to righteous rulers. However, the Buddha also emphasizes that the *saṅgha* should abstain from direct involvement in political affairs. The *sutta* also notes that the king must adhere to the moral instructions of the *dharma* to maintain legitimacy, promote peace, foster prosperity, and secure the survival of his kingdom.

The Buddha, through upāya-kauśalya (skillful means), teaches the dharma to beings with varied capacities to understand it, showing their unique path toward enlightenment (Keown 1992). Similarly, the *saṅgha* is also present to guide the *rājas* or the rulers of states. Kūṭadanta Sutta (DN 5) and Cakkavattisihanāda Sutta (DN 26) are just two of several examples where Buddhist scriptures directly address matters of the secular world, focusing on issues of poverty and crime and the need for economic upliftment (Rahula 1974).

While the close connections between the state and the Khmer *saṅgha* may offer mutual benefits in terms of political legitimacy and security, the state's absolute authority over the *saṅgha's* leaders may raise questions about the *saṅgha's* integrity (Kent 2008; Lawrence 2022). It can be argued that the loss of these principles would limit the sovereignty of the *saṅgha,* making them unable to make the right decision and to fulfill their role as moral advisors and exemplars for the ruler in governing the state in accordance with the *dharma.* To ensure the *saṅgha* community remains committed to the neutrality principle and can contribute to truly good governance, the state must create a healthy environment for them. Through this, the *saṅgha* can fully embrace their role of offering moral guidance and telling what is just *(dharma)* and unjust *(adharma)* for the state.

Turning the focus again to the Cambodian context, the endeavor must be to comprehend what Buddhist governance in the key Khmer example would look like. This exploration delves into theoretical constructs and the practical manifestations of these ideas within Cambodia's societal and state structures. While the framework for Buddhist governance in Cambodia must be rooted in an understanding of local customs, beliefs, and historical trajectories, it is crucial to emphasize the core element of the *dhammarājā,* particularly their commitment to embracing the *dhammocracy* (*dhammādhipateyya*). Given that the concept of genuinely good governance and a just ruler in Buddhism revolves around the ruler's alignment with the *dharma*, understanding what *dharma* represents in the contemporary world is a key factor for both the *saṅgha* and the *dhammarājā* in order to evaluate their actions.

5. Conclusion

This paper has tried to explore the relationship between the *saṅgha* and the *dhammarājā* in contemporary governance, with special reference to Cambodia. It has discussed the multifaceted responsibilities of the *dhammarājā* and examined various aspects of Buddhist governance. The emphasis of the *saṅgha* on communal living, ethical conduct, and *dhammocratic* principles indeed offers valuable insights for effective leadership, decision-making, and conflict resolution. Additionally, the notion of *dhammarājā* as a ruler guided by Buddhist principles serves as a model for responsible governance, prioritizing social welfare, equality, and human rights, even well beyond a monarchical system. By incorporating Buddhist values into governance, leaders can ideally better navigate challenges, foster social cohesion, and promote a just society. Ultimately, the teachings of the *saṅgha* and the ideals of the *dhammarājā* provide valuable guidance for ethical leadership, community building, and the pursuit of a fair, inclusive, and compassionate society.

Funding

Pisith San acknowledges that this article is part of COSMOLOCALISM, a research project funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 802512).

References

Bechert, H. 1973. "Sangha, State, Society, 'Nation': Persistence of Traditions in 'Post-Traditional' Buddhist Societies." *Daedalus* 102(1) , 85-95. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/20024110.pdf.

Bektimirova, N. 2002. "The Religious Situation in Cambodia in the 1990s." *Religion, State & Society* 30(1), 63-72. https://doi.org/10.1080/09637490220127639.

Bhikkhu Ānandajoti. 2008a. *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*: *The Discourse about the Great Emancipation.* Available at https://suttacentral.net/dn16/en/anandajoti?lang=en&reference=none&highlight=false (last accessed October 2023).

Bhikkhu Ānandajoti. 2008b. *Uposatha Sutta*: *The Discourse about the Observance.* Available at https://suttacentral.net/ud5.5/en/anandajoti?lang=en&reference=none&highlight=false (last accessed October 2023).

Bhikkhu Ariyesako and Bhikkhu Nirodho (eds). 2003. *A Bhikkhu Manual.* 2nd edn. Hertfordshire, United Kingdom: Amaravati Publications. https://www.dhammatalks.net/Articles/Bhikkhu_Manual-Vinaya_Notes.pdf.

Bhikkhu Bodhi. 2000. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*: *A Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya.* Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Bhikkhu Bodhi. 2012. *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*: *A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya.* Boston: Wisdom Publications.

Bhikkhu Ñāṇatusita. 2014. *Analysis of the Bhikkhu Patimokkha.* Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society. https://www.bps.lk/olib/bp/bp626s_Nyanatusita_Analysis-of-Bhikkhu-Patimokkha.pdf.

Bhikkhu Sujato. 2018a. *Cakkavatti Sutta*: *The Wheel-Turning Monarch.* Available at https://suttacentral.net/dn26/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=plain&reference=none&notes=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin (last accessed October 2023).

Bhikkhu Sujato. 2018b. *Uposatha Sutta*: *Sabbath.* Available at https://suttacentral.net/an3.70/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=plain&reference=none&notes=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin (last accessed October 2023).

Bhikkhu Sujato. 2018c. *Aggaññasutta*: *The Origin of the World (DN 27).* Available at https://suttacentral.net/dn27/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=plain&reference=none&notes=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin (last accessed October 2023)

Bhikkhu Sujato. 2018d. *Siṅgālasutta*: *Advice to Sigālaka.* Available at https://suttacentral.net/dn31/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=plain&reference=none&notes=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin (last accessed October 2023).

Bhikkhu Sujato. 2018e. *Dhammarājā Sutta*: *A Principled King.* Available at https://suttacentral.net/an5.133/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=plain&reference=none&notes=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin (last accessed October 2023)

Bhikkhu Sujato. 2018f. *Adhammika Sutta*: *Unprincipled.* Available at https://suttacentral.net/an4.70/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=plain&reference=none&notes=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin (last accessed October 2023)

Bhikkhu Sujato. 2018g. *Mahāparinibbānasutta*: *The Great Discourse on the Buddha's Extinguishment.* Available at https://suttacentral.net/dn16/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=plain&reference=none&notes=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin (last accessed October 2023).

Bhikkhu Sujato. 2018h. *Dutiyamārapāsasutta*: *Māra's Snares*. 2nd edn. Available at https://suttacentral.net/sn4.5/en/sujato?lang=en&layout=plain&reference=none&notes=asterisk&highlight=false&script=latin (last accessed October 2023).

Bhikkhu Thanissaro. 2012. *Uposatha Sutta*: *Uposatha (Ud 5.5).* Available at https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/ud/ud.5.05.than.html (last accessed October 2023).

Bhikkhu Thanissaro. 2013a. *Cakkavatti Sutta*: *The Wheel-turning Emperor.* Available at https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.26.0.than.html (last accessed October 2023).

Bhikkhu Thanissaro. 2013b. *Maha-parinibbana Sutta*: *The Great Discourse on the Total Unbinding (DN 16).* Available at http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.16.5-6.than.html (last accessed October 2023)

Bhikkhu Thanissaro. 2013c. *The Buddhist Monastic Code I and II*: *The Khandhaka Rules Translated and Explained.* Available at https://www.dhammatalks.org/Archive/Writings/Ebooks/BMC1&2_220701.pdf (last accessed February 2024).

Boisselier, J. 1990. "The Symbolism of Neak Pean and Its Importance for the Angkorian Monarchy." *SPAFA Digest SPAFA Digest (1980-1990)* 11(3), 6-11. https://spafajournal.org/index.php/spafadigest/article/view/546.

Briggs, L.P. 1951. "The Ancient Khmer Empire." *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 41(1), 228-229. https://archive.org/details/lawrence-palmer-briggs-the-ancient-khmer-empire.

Buswell, R.E. 2014. *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Chachavalpongpun, P. 2013. "Monarchies in Southeast Asia." *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia,* 13, 1-6. https://kyotoreview.org/issue-13/monarchies-in-southeast-asia/.

Changkhwanyuen, P. 2003. "Dhammic Socialism: Political Thought of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu." *The Chulalongkorn Journal of Buddhist Studies* 2(1), 12-45. https://so06.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/cjbs/article/view/244852.

Chhem, R.K. 2005. "Bhaisajyaguru and Tantric Medicine in Jayavarman VII Hospitals." *Siksacakr* 7, 8-18.

Cœdès, G. 1906. "La stèle de Ta-Prohm." *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* 6(1), 44-86. https://doi.org/10.3406/befeo.1906.4251.

Cœdès, G. 1963. *Angkor*: *An Introduction.* Edited by E.F. Gardiner and G. Bliss. Oxford-New York-Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.

Cœdès, G. 1975. *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia.* Canberra: Australian National University Press.

Cœdès, G. 1992. *Articles sur le pays khmer* (Vol. II). Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient.

Dhammasami, K. 2019. *Buddhism, Education and Politics in Burma and Thailand*: *From the Seventeenth Century to the Present.* London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Dickson, J.F. 1963. *Ordination in Theravada Buddhism.* Edited by T. Piyadassi. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society.

Drechsler, W. 2016. "The Reality and Diversity of Buddhist Economics (With Case Studies of Thailand, Bhutan and Yogyakarta)." *TUT Ragnar Nurkse Department of Innovation and Governance* 69, 1-35.

Drechsler, W. 2019. "Kings and Indicators: Options for Governing without Numbers." *Science, Numbers and Politics* 78, 226-262.

Drechsler, W. 2020). "Buddhist Economics for Pandemic Times: A Review of Buddhist Economics. An Enlightened Approach to the Dismal Science." *Journal of Global Buddhism* 21, 103-109. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4031003.

Dutt, S. 1924. *Early Buddhist Monachism*: *600 BC-100 BC.* London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd.

Edwards, P. 2007. *Cambodge*: *The Cultivation of a Nation 1860-1945.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Filliozat, J. 1966. "New Researches on the Relations between India and Cambodia." *Indica* 3(2), 95-106.

Finot, L. 1925. "Dharmaçâlâs au Cambodge." *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 25(3/4), 417-422. https://doi.org/10.3406/befeo.1925.3060.

Foshay, R. 2009. "Tension on the Left: Buddhist Ethics and Postmodernism in Habermas and Wilber." *Journal of Integral Theory & Practice* 4(3), 127-140. https://www.academia.edu/3478736/Tension_on_the_Left_Buddhist_Ethics_and_Postmodernism_in_Habermas_and_Wilber.

Francis, H.T. and R.A. Neil. 1879. *The Jātaka*: *Stories of the Buddha's Former Births* (Vol. III). Edited by E.B. Cowell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Frost, F. 1994. "Cambodia: From UNTAC to Royal Government." In D. Singh (ed.) *Southeast Asian Affairs.* Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 79-101. https://doi.org/10.1355/9789812306845-008.

Goss, F.B. 2017. "Literature in Gold: The Significance of the Use of the Rama Story on Thai Lacquerware Cabinets." *Rian Thai*: *International Journal of Thai Studies* 10(2), 1-25. http://www.rianthaijournal.org/2019/01/11/literature-in-gold-the-significance-of-the-use-of-the-rama-story-on-thai-lacquerware-scripture-cabinets/.

Guthrie, E. 2002. "Buddhist Temples and Cambodian Politics." In J.L. Vijgen, *People and the 1998 National Elections in Cambodia* 44. Phnom Penh: Experts for Community Research, 59-73.

Habermas, J. 2019. *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie 1*: *Die okzidentale Konstellation von Glauben und Wissen.* Berlin: Suhrkamp.

Hansen, A.R. 2007. *How to Behave*: *Buddhism and Modernity in Colonial Cambodia, 1860-1930.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Harris, I. 2001a. *Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth Century Asia.* New York: Continuum.

Harris, I. 2001b. "Buddhist Sangha Groupings in Cambodia." *Buddhist Studies Review* 18(1), 73-105. https://www.templenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Ian-Harris-Buddhist-Sangha-Groupings-in-Cambodia-BSR-2001.pdf.

Harris, I. 2005. *Cambodian Buddhism*: *History and Practice.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Honda, M. 1965. "The Say-Fong Inscription of Jayavarman VII." *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies (Indogaku Bukkyogaku Kenkyu)* 14(1), 417-405. https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/ibk1952/14/1/14_1_417/_pdf.

Jayasuriya, L. 2008. "Buddhism, Politics, and Statecraft." *International Journal of Buddhist Thought & Culture* 11, 41-74. https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=235d4aeabbd60e48dadc14e746188f4609328305.

Jinananda, B. 1961. *Upasampadājñaptiḥ*: *Critically Edited with Notes and Introduction.* Patna, India: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Inst.

Jotaññāṇo, C.N. 1961. "The Governing of the Buddhist Order in Cambodia." Translated by K. Kyléng. *La Lumiere Bouddhique* 1, 26-48.

Kamnottra. 2020. *Stop Being Confused! Dr. Hun Manet, When He was a Monk, was Named "Samanera Chandadhammo" and had Samdech Preah Pothivong Am Lim Heng as his Preceptor*. Available at https://kamnottra.com/archives/13338 (last accessed August 2023).

Kasetsiri, C. 2012. "The Future of Monarchy in Cambodia." *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia* 13, https://kyotoreview.org/issue-13/the-future-of-monarchy-in-cambodia/.

Kent, A. 2006. "Reconfiguring Security: Buddhism and Moral Legitimacy in Cambodia." *Security Dialogue* 37(3), 343-361. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010606069179.

Kent, A. 2008. "Peace, Power and Pagodas in Present-day Cambodia." *Contemporary Buddhism* 9(1), 77-97. https://doi.org/10.1080/14639940802312717.

Keown, D. 1992. *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics.* New York: St. Martin's Press.

Kulke, H. 2014. "From Aśoka to Jayavarman VII: Some Reflections on the Relationship between Buddhism and the State in India and Southeast Asia." In T. Sen (ed.). *Buddhism Across Asia*: *Networks of Material, Intellectual and Cultural Exchange* (Vol. 1, Nalanda-Sriwijaya Research Series). ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, pp. 327-346. https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/buddhism-across-asia/from-asoka-to-jayavarman-vii-some-reflections-on-the-relationship-between-buddhism-and-the-state-in-india-and-southeast-asia/0057D7DB063389F77B7D14BC09FB6A43.

Lahiri, N. 2015. *Ashoka in Ancient India.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Larsson, T. 2021. "The Ambiguous Allure of Ashoka: Buddhist Kingship as Precedent, Potentiality, and Pitfall for Covenantal Pluralism in Thailand." *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 19(2), 72-87. https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2021.1917118.

Lavy, P.A. 2003. "As in Heaven, So on Earth: The Politics of Visnu, Śiva and Harihara Images in Preangkorian Khmer Civilisation." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 34(1), 21-39. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20072473.

Lawrence, B. 2022. "Reconstituting the Divided Sangha." In T. Ginsburg and B. Schonthal (eds). *Buddhism and Comparative Constitutional Law*. Cambridge University Press, 220-238. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009286022.015.

Lingat, R. 1950. "Evolution of the Conception of Law in Burma and Siam." *Journal of the Siam Society* 38(1), 9-31. https://thesiamsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/1950/03/JSS_038_1c_Lingat_EvolutionOfTheConceptionOfLawInBurmaAndSiam.pdf.

Long, W. 2021. *A Buddhist Approach to International Relations*: *Radical Interdependence.* Atlanta: Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-68042-8.

Mabbett, I.W. 1969. "Devarāja." *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 10(2), 202-223. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20067742.

Matsuura, F. 2014. "Kingship and Social Integration in Angkor." *Modern Asian Studies Review* 5, 86-88.

Maxwell, T.S. 2007. "The Stele Inscription of Preah Khan, Angkor: Text with Translation and Commentary." *Udaya*: *Journal of Khmer Studies* 8, 1-113. https://www.yosothor.org/uploads/images/Udaya/UDAYA_ISSUES/Udaya_08/01_Thomas%20SMaxwell_UDAYA08.pdf.

McCarthy, S. and K. Un. 2017. "The Evolution of Rule of Law in Cambodia." *Democratization* 24(1), 100-118. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2015.1103736.

McMahan, D. 2020. "Buddhism and Global Secularisms." In J.S. Harding (ed.). *Buddhism in the Global Eye*: *Beyond East and West*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 42-55.

Mérieau, E. 2018. "Buddhist Constitutionalism in Thailand: When Rājadhammā Supersedes the Constitution." *Asian Journal of Comparative Law* 13(2), 283-305. https://doi.org/10.1017/asjcl.2018.16.

Monychenda, H. 1998. *Buddhism and the Making Democracy in Cambodia.* Phnom Penh: Cambodian Buddhist Council.

Monychenda, H. 1999. *Preahbat Dhammik.* 3rd edn. Phnom Penh: Buddhism for Development.

Monychenda, H. 2008. "In Search of the Dhammika Ruler." In A. Kent and D. Chandler (eds). *People of Virtue*: *Reconfiguring Religion, Power and Moral Order in Cambodia Today*. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press, 310-318.

Monychenda, H. 2022. "Step By Step: From Cambodia Toward ASEAN." In M. Indrawan, J. Luzar, H. Hanna and T. Mayer (eds). *Civic Engagement in Asia*: *Transformative Learning for a Sustainable Future*. Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 237-248. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-9384-7_22.

Moore, M.J. 2016. *Buddhism and Political Theory.* Oxford University Press.

Narada, T. 2012. *The Buddha and His Teachings.* Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society.

Narada, T. 2013. *Sigalovada Sutta: The Discourse to Sigala.* Available at http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.31.0.nara.html (last accessed October 2023).

Na-Rangsi, S. 2002. "Administration of the Thai Sangha: Past, Present and Future." *The Chulalongkorn Journal of Buddhist Studies* 1(2), 1-28.

Nivat, D. 1947. "The Old Siamese Conception of the Monarchy." *Journal of Siam Society* 36(2), 91-104.

Norén-Nilsson, A. 2016. "The Demise of Cambodian Royalism and the Legacy of Sihanouk." *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 31(1), 1-36. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2477978.

Ongaro, E. and M. Tantardini. 2023a. "Religion, Spirituality, Faith and Public Administration: A Literature Review and Outlook." *Public Policy and Administration* 0(0), 1-25. https://doi.org/10.1177/09520767221146866.

Ongaro, E. and M. Tantardini. 2023b. "Debate: Why the Religious Factor has been Forgotten in PA Studies? (And how to Remedy it)." *Public Money & Management* 44(1), 7-8. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540962.2023.2264054.

Payutto, P.A. 2002. "The Pali Canon: What a Buddhist Must Know." Translated by S. Chanawangsa. *Journal of Humanities* 4, 1-70. https://www.buddhistelibrary.org/en/albums/userpics/10005/the_pali_canon_what_a_buddhist_must_know~0.pdf.

Pisith, N. 2018. "Constructing the Charisma of Khruba (Venerable Monks) in Contemporary Thai Society." *Southeast Asian Studies* 7(2), 199-236. https://doi.org/10.20495/seas.7.2_199.

Prebish, C.S. 2018. "The Vinaya." In D. Cozort and J.M. Shields (eds). *The Oxford Handbook of Buddhist Ethics*. Oxford University Press, 96-115.

Promta, S. 1999. "Buddhism and Science in Thai Society." *Manusya: Journal of Humanities* 2(2), 88-105. http://www.manusya.journals.chula.ac.th/articles/buddhism-and-science-in-thai-society/.

Rahula, W. 1974. *What the Buddha Taught.* Revised edn. New York: Grove Press.

Rhys Davids, T.W. and H. Oldenberg. 1881. *Vinaya Texts: Translation from the Pāli.* Oxford: The Clarendon Press.

Rhys Davids, T.W. and C. Rhys Davids. 1921. "Dialogues of the Buddha (Part III)." In T.W. Rhys Davids (eds). *Sacred Books of the Buddhists* (Vol. IV). London: Oxford University Press, 53-94, 168-184.

Rocher, L. 1978. "Hindu Conceptions of Law." *Hastings Law Journal* 29, 1283-1306. https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/hastlj29&div=57&g_sent=1&casa_token=&collection=journals.

Rocher, L. and R. Lariviere. 2012. "Hindu Conceptions of Law." In J.D. Davis (ed.). *Studies in Hindu Law and Dharmasastra (Cultural, Historical and Textual Studies of South Asian Religions*. Anthem Press, 39-58. https://doi.org/10.7135/UPO9780857285782.005.

Samean, L. 2022. *PM Calls for Tolerance of "Doomsday" Trip Faithful*. Available at https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/pm-calls-tolerance-doomsday-trip-faithful (last accessed August 2023).

San, P. 2018. "Cambodian Buddhists' Response to the French Protectorate." *eJournal of Buddhist Research Studies* 4, 64-85. http://research.thanhsiang.org/2018vol4.

San, P., W. Drechsler and S. Shakya. 2023. "Buddhism, Wealth, and Privilege: Ambedkar and Habermas." *Religions* 14(8), 1057. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14081057.

Saveros, P. 1981. "Inscriptions Khmeres K. 144 et K. 177, K. 39 et K. 27." *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* 70, 101-120. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43731261.

Saveros, P. 1998. "Dieux et rois dans la pensée khmère ancienne." *Journal Asiatique* 286(2), 653-669. https://doi.org/10.2143/JA.286.2.556500.

Schumacher, E.F. 1973. *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered.* London: HarperPerennial.

Sharrock, P. and C. Jacques. 2017. "A Cambodian King's Twelfth-Century Network of Hospitals." In C.P. Salguero (ed.). *Buddhism and Medicine: An Anthology of Premodern*. New York Chichester, West S: Columbia University Press, 226-232. https://doi.org/10.7312/salg17994-026.

Sirivadh, H. 2021. *The Supreme Saṅgha Council of Cambodia Supports Hun Manet as the Future Prime Minister*. Available at https://eacnews.asia/home/details/6209 (last accessed August 2023).

Sovinda, P., K. Manghout, E. Bunly and R. Sokvy. 2022. *Khem Veasna: The Cult Leader and the Destruction of Cambodian Families*. Available at https://www.phnompenhpost.com/opinion/khem-veasna-cult-leader-and-destruction-cambodian-families (last accessed August 2023).

Strangio, S. 2023. *China's FM Wang Pledges Support for New Cambodian Leadership*. Available at https://thediplomat.com/2023/08/chinas-fm-wang-pledges-support-for-new-cambodian-leadership/ (last accessed August 2023).

Ta-Kuan, C. 1992. *The Customs of Cambodia*. 2nd edn. Translated by P. Pelliot and J.D.A. Paul. Bangkok: Siam Society.

Tambiah, S. 1976. "From Rajadharma (the King's 'Whole Duty') to Dharmaraja (the 'Righteous Ruler')." In S. Tambiah (ed.). *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand Against a Historical Background*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 9-18. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511558184.002.

Tambiah, S.J. 1973. "Buddhism and This-Worldly Activity." *Modern Asian Studies* 7(01), 1-20. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X00004364.

Tan, P. 2009. "The Body in Buddhism: The Matter of the Mind: A Psychological Investigation." *Sutta Discovery* 26(6), 47-93. https://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/29.6a-The-body-in-Buddhism-piya.pdf.

Vajira, S. and F. Story. 2013. *Maha-parinibbana Sutta: Last Days of the Buddha (DN 16).* Available at http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.16.1-6.vaji.html (last accessed February 2024).

Vandeluxe, Y. 2016. "The Historical Development of Cambodia's Constitutions." In P.K. Hor (ed.). *Cambodian Constitutional Law*. Phnom Penh: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 53-67.

Vickery, M. 1985. "The Reign of Sūryavarman I and Royal Factionalism at Angkor." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 16(2), 226-244. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463400008420.

Vijitha, M. 2016. "Buddhist Notion on Good Governance." *Conference Proceedings in Management, Social Sciences and Humanities*. Sri Lanka: 9th International Research Conference-KDU, 250-253. http://ir.kdu.ac.lk/bitstream/handle/345/1265/FMSH-030.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

Wales, H.G. 1995. *Siamese State Ceremonies: Their History and Function with Supplementary Notes.* London: Routledge.

Wallner, J. 2008. "Legitimacy and Public Policy: Seeing Beyond Effectiveness, Efficiency, and Performance." *Policy Studies Journal* 36(3), 421-443.

Weber, M. 1988. *The Sociology of Religion*. 2nd edn. Translated by E. Fischoff. Boston: Beacon Press.

Wells, H.G. 1920. *The Outline of History: Being a Plain History of Life and Mankind* (Vol. I). Edited by E. Barker, H.H. Johnston, E.R. Lankester and G. Murray. New York: The Macmillan Company.

Zimmermann, M. 2006. "Only a Fool Becomes a King: Buddhist Stances on Punishment." In H. H. Chiew and P. Pierce (eds.). *Buddhism and Violence*. Lumbini International Research Institute, 213-242. https://www.buddhismuskunde.uni-hamburg.de/pdf/5-personen/zimmermann/only-a-fool-becomes-a-king.pdf.

Pisith San is a Buddhist monk and a doctoral candidate at the Ragnar Nurkse Department of Innovation and Governance, TalTech, Estonia. Pisith received his Bachelor's degree from the International Theravada Buddhist Missionary University in Myanmar in 2016 and a Master's degree from the International Buddhist College in Thailand in 2018. He has previous work experience with Buddhism for Development, a non-governmental organization in Cambodia, and has also served as a lecturer at Preah Sihanoukraja Buddhist University in Cambodia. His primary research interests revolve around Buddhist Economics and Governance, Non-Western Public Administration, and the Commons. Pisith is a core member of Cosmolocalism, a research project funded by the European Research Council under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 802512).