



ข้อสังเกตว่าด้วยพระพุทธศาสนา กับธรรมาภิบาล

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บทความนี้ได้นำเสนอแนวคิดเรื่อง good governance ในภาษาอังกฤษที่สำนักราชบัณฑิตยสถานบัญญัติศัพท์ให้ว่า ‘ธรรมาภิบาล’ มาเปรียบเทียบกับแนวคิดทางพระพุทธศาสนา ในการนำเสนอบทความ ผู้วิจัยได้เสนอคำใหม่ที่พบในพระไตรปิฎกภาษาบาลีโดยตรงที่มีความหมายสอดคล้องกับภาษาอังกฤษเดิมมากกว่าคำว่า ‘ธรรมาภิบาล’ คำดังกล่าวนั้นคือ ‘ธรรมประศาสน์’ ดังนั้น คำว่า good governance ในภาษาอังกฤษจึงควรแปลว่า ‘นโยบายธรรมประศาสน์’ หลังจากให้ศัพท์ที่น่าจะเหมาะสมกว่าแล้ว บทความนี้ได้เปรียบเทียบแนวคิดของ good governance กับหลักธรรมในพระพุทธศาสนา พบว่าพระพุทธเจ้าได้ทรงสอนหลักธรรมสำหรับการปกครองหรือบริหารจัดการที่ดีเอาไว้แล้วอย่างสมบูรณ์แล้วในพระไตรปิฎก

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Notes on Buddhism and 'Good Governance'*

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1. Introduction

While a number of sermons by Buddhist monks and articles by Thai Buddhist scholars have addressed the issue of how the state should be run according to Buddhist teachings, a thorough comparison has never been made between the ideal of 'good governance' and the teachings of Buddhism.¹ The phrase 'good governance' became popular in Thailand when the country suffered enormously due to the downturn in Asian economies in 1997, and the government was in urgent need of financial support to recover the situation. The IMF and World Bank, which the then Prime Minister approached, set up their aid and loans on the condition that the Thai government had to ensure that 'good governance' was undertaken in governing the country.² From this time, the phrase attracted the attention of Thai linguists on a wide scale, and there were many discussions among them to find out the proper definition of the phrase and a proper Thai translation.

Theerayuth Boonmee, a leading social scientist of Thammasat University, invented a Thai word of Pāli origin, '*dhammaratṭha*'³, to translate 'good governance' into Thai. This translation was based on his understanding of 'good governance' as being a concept that is used mainly to refer to the righteous



administration of a particular country. Thus, in Pāli, the word ‘*dhamma*’ (‘*dharma*’ in Sanskrit) means ‘righteousness’ or ‘law’, and ‘*raṭṭha*’ means ‘country’. However, several scholars were not satisfied with his translation, no matter how often the word he produced appeared in the media. This is because the word ‘good governance’ in English can be used in business sectors as well as with reference to the governance of a nation. Finally, the Royal Institute of Thailand officially invented the Thai word of Pāli origin, ‘*dhammābhipāla*’ (*dhamma*[virtue/ law/righteousness] + *abhipāla* [protection] in Pāli) [= *dharmābhipāla* in Sanskrit]. Thus, today the word, which is widely used in the Thai language for ‘good governance’, is ‘*dhammāphibān*’⁴

Even though the newly-invented *dhammābhipāla* could mean ‘good governance’, I argue that this newly invented word does not correspond exactly to the original word, which is used for ‘good governance’ in Pāli and Sanskrit. I think the better Pāli word for ‘good governance’ in English is ‘*dhammappasāsana*’ (*dharmaprasāsana*⁵ in Skt), a *Tappurisa* compound, which comes from two words: *dhamma* (virtue/law/ righteous) + *pasāsana* (governance); or ‘*dhammappasāsanopāya*’ (*dhamma*+*pasāsana*+*upāya* [Skt.=*dharmaprasāsana*+*upāya*].⁶ The word *pasāsana* in Pāli or *prasāsana* in Skt. (derived from the prefix *pa*+*√sās*⁷ or *pra*+*√sās*⁸ [govern or order]) is equivalent to ‘governance’ in English, so the word *dhammappasāsana*’ (Skt=*dharmaprasāsana*) translates exactly as ‘an administration or governance with the dhamma’, while the word ‘*dhammappasāsanopāya*’ (*dhamma* +*pasāsana*+*upāya* [Skt.=*dharmaprasāsana*+*upāya*]) means ‘the policy or means of governing with righteousness (*dhamma*)’.

2. The Meaning of ‘Good Governance’

The phrase ‘good governance’ may be literally defined as the system of ‘good control’, ‘good administration’ or ‘good management’, which is universally accepted by all as an ideology for running a government, an organisation or a firm. As explained widely,⁹ the ‘good governance’ can be defined in terms of eight major characteristics: participation; adherence to the rule of law; transparency; responsiveness; a consensus oriented approach; equity and inclusiveness; effectiveness and efficiency; and accountability.

‘Participation’ is a cornerstone of good governance. It means an allowance of all men and women to take part in decision-making. This participation could be either direct or through legitimate intermediate institutions or representatives. Adherence to the ‘rule of law’ means that good governance has to enforce the law fairly and impartially. The law must also offer full protection of human rights. ‘Transparency’ means that when a good governor takes any decision, it must follow rules and regulations, and that enough information is provided for the people who are affected by his decisions and their enforcement to investigate the process of his decision-making.

‘Responsiveness’ means that the government must try to serve all the people in the country without prejudice. For example, the government must not rule the country for the sake of those people who support its party while excluding others. A ‘consensus oriented’ approach means that all the decisions which will affect the community at large must be undertaken or enforced only after a broad consensus has been reached within the community. Equity and inclusiveness means that the government must ensure that all the people in the society have a stake in it, and none are excluded from the decisions of the government. In other words, everyone in the society must be treated fairly, and they all must receive the benefits or advantages in the process of running the country without any exclusion. Effectiveness and efficiency means that all of the policies undertaken by the government must meet the needs of the people in the society as planned. In other words, they can solve a particular problem or offer particular facilities to the general public in an effective way. Accountability refers to the responsibility to the general public while various policies are being undertaken of the government itself, civil servants or politicians. In short, the government is accountable to the general public who will be affected by its policies. The website of the ESCAP provides the following chart, showing the eight characteristics of ‘good governance’ thus:¹⁰



In short, every democratic government which wants to undertake the policy of sustainable development has to rule the country with all of these characteristics of 'good governance'. Otherwise, the International financial institutions such as IMF and World Bank will not provide any loans or financial aid. We can say that a truly democratic government cannot exist, unless the government's policies are undertaken following the principles of 'good governance'. Election is simply a legitimate means to find a suitable person, through the will of the majority, to run the country. It does not mean that the elected candidate can act in a corrupt way once in office, engaging in acts such as nepotism, cronyism, bribery, extortion, patronage, graft and embezzlement for illegitimate private gains.

3. The Concept of 'Good Governance' in Buddhism

Before we discuss the concept of 'good governance' in Buddhism in general, and, in Thailand, in particular, I find it necessary to trace back the idea of 'governance' popular in India before and after the Buddha's lifetime, since the political ideology in India which was imported to Thailand comes from both Buddhism and Hinduism. We have to stress right from the beginning that the political ideals found in Thailand now are made

up of a combination of Buddhist and Hindu philosophies, along with the ideals of the modern democratic system. These three lines of thought form what is called the mainstream democratic theory in Thailand. Buddhism was born and taught amidst the brahmanical society in which the religious and philosophical ideology of Vedism was predominant, and when Buddhism arose, India was ruled by the Absolute Monarchical system, in which the king became all-powerful monarch. The most significant difference between a Hindu and Buddhist king lies in the virtues the king possesses. In other words, since the king has the supreme power over the land, and his words themselves are the law, the difference between a Hindu or Buddhist king rests on how the king exercises his power and authorities upon his subjects. I find it important to touch on the political thoughts in both Buddhism and Hinduism here.

The idea of kingship of modern Hinduism goes back to its earliest teaching in its early texts, the corpus of the Ṛgveda. The RV 10.20.12, known as the Creation Hymn, mentions the four castes for the first time and provides the legitimate rights for the *kṣatriya* to rule the country. The text says: *brāhmaṇo 'sya mukham āsīd, bāhū rājanyaḥ kṛtaḥ; ūrū tad asya yad vaiśyaḥ; padbhyām śūdro ajāyata* '[From] His mouth was [made] the *brāhmaṇa*, his arms were made the warrior; his thighs were made the *vaiśyaḥ* and from his feet the *śūdra* class was born.' The Brahmins, who claim to have come directly from the mouth of God, were made responsible for teaching the other three classes. They claim to have spiritual power and authority from God to teach. The king, known during the Ṛgvedic period as *rājanya*, or later also as *kṣatriya*, was responsible for governing the country. From this was developed what is known as the Divine Right of Kings (*devarājā* in Pāli and Sanskrit), in which the king is subject to no early authority, because he receives the right to rule the country from the supreme God himself. God, in short, bestows earthly power to the king to rule, and nobody can question this authority. From time to time, in order to strengthen his authority, the king has to perform several rites and rituals, particularly animal sacrifices to please God.

In fact, the sacrifices, which are aimed at enhancing the king's power and sovereignty over neighbouring countries, known in



Sanskrit as *yajña*, are many.¹¹ Among the most well known ones is the *rājasūya* (royal consecration), which is performed when the King comes back home after he has conquered other kingdoms. The defeated kings are brought to participate in this ceremony in order to accept their defeat and to honour the winning King as an emperor. One of the prominent sacrifices made in honour of God is certainly the horse-sacrifice (*aśvamedha* in Sanskrit),¹² which is supposed to be performed by only the King. It is lucidly described in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*,¹³ one of the prose texts which describe the Vedic ritual and which is associated with the *Śukla Yajurveda*. Apart from these two sacrifices, sometimes *puruṣamedha* or *naramedha* (human-sacrifice) are also performed. In marked contrast to the horse-sacrifice, this human-sacrifice could be performed by people of all classes. The victims were killed in order to please the Gods.

The Bṛh.U. 1.4.11,¹⁴ which was composed before the rise of Buddhism, states: ‘Verily, in the beginning this world was *brahman*, one only. That being one did not flourish. He created further an excellent form, the *kṣatra* power, even those who are *kṣatra* among the gods, Indra, Varuṇa, Soma, Rudra, Parjanya, Yama, Mṛtyu, Iśāna. Therefore, there is nothing higher than the *kṣatriya*. Therefore at the *rājasūya* sacrifice, the Brahmins sit below the *kṣatriya*.’¹⁵

The idea of *rājadharmā* was developed further during the Purāic period (c.CE 300-1200) when several Vedic deities were ignored and new ones were brought into prominence. The Vedic Rudra changed to be known as Śiva, whose cult of worshipping the *liṅga* or phallus, may be traced back to the pre-Vedic civilization.¹⁶ Apart from Śiva, Viṣṇu and Brahmā are equally praised in the corpus of the Purāṇa texts, even though today Brahmā is comparatively less popular since few temples were built for worshipping him in modern India. When a Hindu king rules the country, it depends very much on which God he personally worships. If he worships Śiva as Supreme God, he is believed to be the incarnation of the God himself. The same applies to kings who believe in Gods Viṣṇu and Brahmā. Even though initially the three Gods were independently worshiped by different religious Hindu groups, later the three were combined as One, forming what is called the Hindu *Trimūrti* or the Hindu triad, and they are described

as having different responsibilities: Brahmā as the creator, Viṣṇu the maintainer or preserver, and Śiva the destroyer or transformer.

We do not have sufficient evidence to prove the exact time when Hinduism was brought to South-East Asia, or when what G.Coedès refers to as ‘indianisation’¹⁷ took place in the region. However, the cult of the ‘god-king’ was certainly strongly established there in the early 9th century by Jayavarman II, the founder of the Khmer empire of Ankor, which ruled much of South-East Asia for more than six hundred years. It is clear that several groups of Indian people migrated to South-East Asia in different waves, bringing with them different sects of Hinduism and Buddhism. Even though the peoples in the areas worshiped their kings as the direct descendants from God, the names of their Supreme God were varied, depending on what religious sect they were affiliated to. They could be the followers of Śaivism, Vaiṣṇavism, Smartism and Śaktism. For Buddhism, we have also found elements of both Theravāda, Mahāyāna and Tantric traditions in the region. As for the royal duties or responsibilities (*dharma*) of a good Hindu King, it is clearly described in details in the *Dharmasūtras* thus:

‘To a king pertains, in addition, the protection of all creatures, as Also meting out just publishment. He should support Brahmins who are Vedic scholars, non-brahmins who are unable to work, those who are exempt from taxes, and novice students. He should also take measures to ensure victory, especially when danger threatens; travel about in a chariot armed with a bow; and stand firm in battle without fleeing. He commits no sin if he kills someone in battle, except the following: those who have lost their horses, charioteers, or arms; those who join their hand in supplication or have disheveled hair; those who are fleeing or hunkering down; those who have climbed on to a ledge or a tree; messengers; and those who say they are cows or Brahmins. If another Kṣatriya depends on the king for his livelihood, he too must participate in the king’s undertakings. The victor should take the booty of battle,



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but the mounts go to the king, as well as a choice portion of the booty unless it has been won in single combat. Everything else, however, the king should distribute equitably among his men.¹⁸

Other virtues of a good Hindu King is explained in the same Sanskrit text thus:

‘The King rules over all except Brahmins. He should be correct in his actions and speech and trained in the triple Veda and logic. Let him be upright, keep his senses under control, surround himself with men of quality, and adopt sound policies. He should be impartial towards his subjects and work for their welfare. As he sits on a high seat, all except Brahmins should pay him homage seated at a lower level, and even Brahmins should honour him. He should watch over the social classes and the orders of life in conformity with their rules, and those who stray he should guide back to their respective duties. For the King, it is stated, takes a share of their merits. He should appoint as his personal priest a Brahmin who is learned, born in a good family, eloquent, handsome, mature, and virtuous; who lives according to the rules; and who is austere. He should undertake rites only with his support, for a *kṣatriya*, when he is supported by a Brahmin, it is said, prospers and never falters. He should also pay heed to what his astrologers and augurs tell him, for according to some his welfare depends also on that. In the fire within the assembly hall he should perform rites to secure prosperity in connection with a propitiation, festive day, military expedition, long life, or auspiciousness, as well as rites to stir enmity, to subdue or slay his enemies, or to bring them to their knees. His officiating priests shall carry out the other rites as prescribed.’¹⁹

The concept of the Hindu god-king is clearly addressed in the Manusmṛti Text. The text (Manu vii,8) says thus: *mahatī devatā hy eṣā nararūpeṇa tiṣṭhati*²⁰ ‘The king is a great deity in human form’. The same text (Manu, vii,3-7) goes on to say: ‘When Brahman created the king, he took eternal particles of Indra, of the Wind, of Yama (the god of justice and of the dead), of the sun, of Fire, of Varuṇa, of the Moon, and of Kubera (the god of wealth).’ The *Nārada Dharmasāstra* (xviii,54) states: ‘There are eight sacred objects which must be revered, worshiped, and circumambulated sun-wise: a Brahmin, a cow, fire, gold, *ghi* (clarified butter), the sun, the waters and a king as the eighth.’²¹

In marked contrast to the concept of the god-king in Hinduism, Buddhism places an emphasis on the *dhammarājā* (righteous king, or the king who rules the country with righteousness) instead. To Buddhism, it is the past deeds that make a person a king. Everyone who maintains good conduct and performs various other virtuous actions can be born as king in the next life if he wishes so. To Buddhism, a king is similar to all other human beings in that he is born in this world following his past deeds. He is a human being, and is never regarded as incarnation of One and Supreme God. At J I, 132, the Pāli text mentions the word *sammūtidēva*, as referring to a king. The word actually means simply ‘the conventional god’ or ‘god in the public opinion’, not the god by birth at all. More importantly, once he ascends to the throne, it does not mean that he will be respected or worshiped by all peoples wholeheartedly without obstructions or opponents who may plot to overthrow him. To guarantee that he will be widely accepted and revered by his subjects for many years, the Buddha states that he must strictly follow various virtues as mentioned by him on various occasions in the Pāli Canonical texts. In the *Aggañña Sutta* of the *Dīghanikāya* (D III,80 ff), the Buddha stresses that the evolution of the society of human beings came about as a result of necessity, and not from any divine forces. The *rājā* or *kattiya* are selected on account of their righteousness and ability. People have freedom to choose the most virtuous and able man to be their leader. He may be overthrown from the status of kingship if



he is later shown to be immoral and incapable. This means that the virtues of a king are important.

At J V,378, the Buddha clearly states that a good king has to follow strictly the ten *rājadhamma* (Ten Royal Virtues or Qualities), namely *dāna* (generosity or sharing with his subjects), *sīla* (observation of the precepts or morality), *pariccāga* (sacrificing himself for the many), *ājjava* (honesty), *maddava* (gentleness), *tapa* (taking strenuous effort through austerity), *akkodha* (keeping cool and not expressing his anger at all times), *avihimsā* (upholding the policy of non-violence), *khanti* (patience), and *avirodhana* (never transgressing righteousness by imposing obstructions upon those whose views he personally does not like, i.e. he must not overlook the good law and the traditions handed down from generation to generation in the country).

Apart from this, at D,II,196; D,III,223 the king in his capacity as the ruler of the country must not have any partiality or slanted views against his subjects. He must spread the Four Sublime States of Mind towards all people: loving kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), appreciative gladness (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*) towards all living creatures, animals and humans alike. At D III,182,288, the king who rules the country must try to avoid in every way possible the Four Biases or Prejudices (*agati*) against his subjects, no matter where they live and what colour skin they may have, namely, *chandāgati* (biases because of like), *dosāgati* (biases because of dislike), *mohāgati* (biases because of delusion or stupidity) and *bhayāgati* (biases because of fear). This means he must, equally and fairly, take care of every subject in his kingdom.

The Buddha also teaches the doctrine of democracy. We can see in the *Vinaya* (Vin II,84;IV,207) that for settling disputes within the monastic order, the Buddha has laid down seven principles (*adhikaraṇasamatha*), one of which is the *yebhuyyasika* method, which means ‘making the decision in accordance with the vote of the majority’. At D III, 220;A I,147;III,33; S IV,275, the Buddha teaches that there are three kinds of *adhipateyya* (supremacy) in the world: *attādhipateyya* (supremacy of oneself), which means putting oneself or one’s own ideas as the prime important; *lokādhipateyya*

(supremacy of the world), which means putting the world or the voices of the majority of the assembly as the prime important; and *dhammādhigateyya* (putting the righteousness as the prime important), which means putting the truth or righteousness as most important of all. A good governor must not be swayed by the majority vote, if their vote goes against truth or righteousness. Of the three, *lokādhigateyya* is equivalent to the modern democratic system of our times. Here, we can see that the vote of the majority is sometimes questionable, and that the Buddha teaches us to strictly adhere to the principles or law or righteousness instead.

The *Samyuttanikāya* (S,I,76) tells a story that a king named Pasenadi performed one of the Hindu Great Sacrifices (*yajña* in Skt and *yañña* in Pāli), in which he ordered to be killed five hundreds of bull, five hundreds of male bullocks, five hundreds of female bullocks, five hundreds of goats, and five hundreds of rams, in order to establish himself as a universal monarch. The passage in the Pāli Canon, along with its commentary, explains various kinds of animal and human sacrifices (*puruṣamedha* or *naramedha*)²² of Vedic origin performed during the Buddha’s lifetime.

Upon knowing of this sacrifice, the Buddha rejects all these rituals outright. The *Kūṭadanta Sutta* (D I,127 ff) shows that the Buddha condemns all the animal sacrifices as inefficacious. On the other hand, the Buddha praises all other sacrifices in which no living being is injured, all the labour is voluntary, and no regrets are felt at any stage of performing them. Several sacrifices which are mentioned in the Pāli Canon are traceable to Vedic texts, which were presumed to be the revelation from God. In the *Tevijja Sutta* (D I,235-53), the Buddha explains that the three Vedas were written by human beings, and no authors of the text ever saw Brahmā the Creator face-to-face. Those ancient Brahmins, the Buddha states, are not able to point out the way to union with the Supreme God, because none of them, including their predecessors even to the seventh generation or pupils, ever saw the Brahmā themselves.

At D III,61, the Buddha addresses the duties or virtues of an authentic universal king (*cakkavattivatta*), or the virtues that makes a simple king a universal one. First, the king must rule the country with righteousness. Note that here the phrase in the Pāli Canon used by the



Buddha repeats the word *dhamma* several times: *dhammaṃ yeva nissāya dhammaṃ sakkaronto dhammaṃ garukaronto dhammaṃ mānento dhammā puḷento dhammaṃ apacāyamaṇo dhammaddhajo dhammaketu dhammādhigateyyo*), which means that the universal king must follow the right principles or righteousness, and stick to it strictly. Second, the Pāli text runs: *dhammikaṃ rakkhāvaraṇa-guttiṃ samvidahassu*, which means the king must protect all the people living in his country with the right principles and upholds justice all the times. Third, the Pāli text states thus: *mā ca te tāta vijite adhammakāro pavattittha*, which means he must not let immorality spoil his kingdom. Note that the word ‘*adhamma*’ could mean any sort of corruption, injustice, immoral activity, etc. which causes his subjects to deviate from the path of morality. Fourth, the text says: *ye ca te tāta vijite adhanā assu, tesaṇ ca dhanam anuppadajjeyyāsi*, which means that he must provide financial aid or funds to those who are in need of it to improve their quality of life. Fifth, he must approach, from time to time, learned and virtuous recluses or Brahmins in order to get better understanding of *dhamma* for the advancement of his moral practices.

When the characteristics of ‘good governance’ are compared with the virtues of a good King as explained in Buddhism, we can see that there are many similarities. ‘Participation’ in modern good governance corresponds to what is called in Buddhism ‘the avoidance the four *agatis* (prejudices because of like, dislike, delusion or stupidity and fear), because the King of the Buddhist *dhammarājā* system must base himself on the merit system, allowing the representatives of his peoples of all colours, ranks, etc. to help him rule the country in one way or another. Everyone with good quality must be provided a chance to work for the king. ‘Rule of Law’ is equivalent to the king’s observation of *sīla* (morality), which could refer to the law or the constitutions as well as other rules and regulations in the country throughout his reign. ‘Transparency’ corresponds to *ājjava* (honesty), *avirodhana* or *avirodha* (absence of obstruction) and even *sīla* (morality), because the king must be honest and rule the country following the righteous principles; he must not suppress others who do not agree with him sometimes, and he must not transgress the law, constitutions or rules

and regulations himself. We have to bear in mind that the word *sīla* is, according to A,v,281, divided into three aspects (*sucaritas*), namely *kāyasucarita* (good conduct in action), *vacīsucarita* (good conduct in speech) and *manosu- carita* (good conduct in mind).²³ ‘Responsiveness’ is equal to loving-kindness (*mettā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) towards all subjects without any prejudices or biases. The king must see the suffering of the poor or underprivileged people in the society as his own. ‘A consensus-Oriented Approach’ is the same as what is called in Pāli *yebhuyyasikā*, which means that the king must not exercise his power at will (which would fall within the category of *attādhīpateyya*, i.e holding one’s own opinions as supreme). He must make decisions which affect the people in the kingdom in accordance with the vote of the majority. It could also mean that he must be honest (*ājjava*) enough to accept others’ viewpoints, must be tolerant to what he does not like (*akkodha*), must be patient (*khanti*), must not impose obstructions upon others (*avirodha* or *avirodhana*), and usually listens to that which the majority votes for (*lokhādhīpateyya*).

‘Effectiveness and efficiency’ corresponds to self-sacrifice (*pariccāga*) because the king has to sacrifice his own personal happiness for the sake of others and works hard for the happiness and welfare of the many instead. He must be patient (*khanti*) and maintain a good temperament no matter how difficult his jobs and responsibilities are, and he must strive for the betterment of his kingdom by abandoning personal luxuries and self-indulgences, and living a simple, moderate life (*tapa*) as an example to his subjects. Literally, the word *tapa* means the mortification of the flesh. ‘Accountability’ corresponds to honesty (*ājjava*), moral integrity (*sīla*), and patience (*khanti*). With these virtues, the king must not impose any obstructions against others, simply because he does not agree with them, and he must not do something against the good traditions and culture in the country too (*avirodhana*).

A question may be raised: has there been any king in the world who has followed the Buddhist ideology of kingship strictly? The answer is ‘Yes, there is’. In Indian history, King Aśoka the Great²⁴ is reputed as having followed it strictly. Apart from supporting Buddhist monks in various ways as a good Buddhist



should do, the king appointed his officers for propagating Buddhism among the general public. These officers were known as *dharmamahāmātras*. Buddhist tradition says he built 84,000 *stūpas* throughout his empire over the sacred relics of the Buddha. In addition, he observed the first Buddhist precept. Thus, in his first Rock-Edict the king clearly states: *hidā no kicchi jive ālabhitu pajohitaviye*.²⁵ ‘Here no living being must be killed and sacrificed’. He is also portrayed as having tried to be a vegetarian by minimizing the killing of animals for his food. The text lucidly says: ‘Formerly in the kitchen of King Devānāmpriya Priyadarśin many hundred thousands of animals were killed daily for curry. But now, when this rescript on morality is caused to be written, then only three lives are being killed viz., two peacocks and one deer, but even this deer not regularly. Even these three shall not be killed in future.’²⁶

Before 1975, which saw the change in Thai politics from an absolute monarchy to a democracy, Thailand was governed by the system of the Absolute Monarchy, in which the King had absolute power over his subjects. The status of kingship was highly respected and worshipped because of his strong adherence to the kingly virtues as described by Theravāda Buddhism. When the Sukhothai Kingdom was founded in 1238, King Śri Indrāditya, the first king, who ruled the country from 1249-1257, adhered to the principles of kingly virtues known as *rājadhamma* in Pāli (or *rājadharma* in Sanskrit) and so also did his successors. The predominant religion during this period was Theravāda Buddhism, which was one of the main heritages from the former Dvārāvātī kingdom, even though elements of worshipping Hindu gods - namely, Viṣṇu, Brahmā, Indra, Śiva - are also found. It is evident that King Ramkhamhaeng invited Theravāda monks from Nakhorn Sri Thammarat to spread Buddhism at Sukhothai. The kings, as paternalistic leaders and pious Buddhists, took care of their subjects as if they were their own sons and daughters without any prejudices. Thus they tried to solve the problems of their subjects in every way possible. To give an example, the Inscription No.1 of Sukhothai states that King Ramkhamhaeng was described as having come to hear the petition of his subjects, who came to ring the bell in front of the palace gate to summon him on a daily basis. All the kings themselves were then

called ‘*dhammarājā*’ (righteous king) on account of their following the Buddhist kingly virtues strictly. The king of this period was the role model and highly revered as the father by his subjects.

When the Sukhothai was invaded by armies of Ayutthaya and the country had Ayutthaya as the new capital (since 1351), with King Ramadhibodi I or King U-Thong as its first king, the idea of kingship changed from the Buddhist patrocacy in which the king is considered a *bodhisattva* to the Hindu *cakravartin* concept, in which the King was considered an incarnation of either Śiva or Viṣṇu. Hinduism, Mahāyāna and Tantric Buddhism were all supported by the King of Ayutthaya, along with Theravāda Buddhism, since the Ayutthaya King tried to model their civilization on the Khmer Kingdom which was flourishing at that time in South-East Asia.²⁷ The idea of Kingship in Ayutthaya was thus a combination of the Buddhist paternalistic system and the Hindu *devarājā* (God-king) concept, which was the popular belief in the Khmer empire of the magnificent Angkor Wat, which flourished around the 9th century until the fifteenth century.

Since Ayutthaya was burnt down to the ground by the Burmese troops in 1767, the idea of kingship remained a combination of the Hindu divine King cult and the Buddhist paternalistic system. Even though the Siamese king was then called *Phra Chao Phaendin* (Supreme Lord of the Land), and had the absolute power with his words as the law of the country, no Hindu great sacrifices were evident. When King Rama IV or King Mongkut (1804-1868) ascended to the throne, he reduced, wherever possible, the Hindu influences on the royal court and replaced them with the Buddhist ideas instead. Perhaps, since then the Siamese Kings have embraced the Buddhist paternalistic system more closely and have been considered a simple human being who are endowed with kingly virtues rather than an incarnation of Supreme God.

Since 1932, when the system of ruling the country in Thailand changed from an absolute monarchy to a democratic system, the Thai king, standing as the symbol of the country, has been constitutionally above politics: the house representatives who are elected by the majority of votes from all parts of the country govern the country instead. The kingly virtues as described in the Pāli Canonical Texts of



Theravāda Buddhism, which were adhered to by the kings of the past, are now neglected by MPs. Most modern Thais with progressive minds look at Western politicians as their role models, while considering the virtues of the King in the Absolute Monarchical system to be obsolete. The king, who is endowed with various ruling virtues, is replaced by MPs, whose virtues are not clearly defined; if they are elected, they are accepted as having legitimacy to run the country. A large number of people in modern Thailand are not seriously interested in investigating whether MPs are engaged in corrupt practices. According to Winston Churchill, the democratic system is the least evil of the systems of government in the world. However, since it allows room for the potential of corruption, it will be worse if politicians neither adhere to the virtues of the ruling class (*rājadharmā*) as explained by the Buddha, nor follow the principles of good governance as widely known nowadays.

4. Conclusion

Buddhism does not favour any particular political system for the governing of a country. Instead, it lays a great emphasis on the virtues which should be displayed by the ruling class, *rājā* in the Absolute Monarchical System, or MPs in the democratic system of modern times. The Buddha clearly states that of the three kinds of *adhipateyya*, *dhammādhipeyya* (holding the righteousness as the principle) is the best. Sometimes, the ruling class has to look beyond the majority votes and stick to the principles of righteousness. From the foregoing discussions, we can see that what is called ‘good governance’ is, in fact, nothing new to Buddhism at all. Within the Buddha’s teachings, principles which are similar to what is called ‘good governance’ in the West, are found in abundance, and these have been taught by Buddhism for more than two thousands and five hundred years. They are older than the principles of ‘good governance’ proposed by the United Nations. Because the King under the system of the Absolute Monarchy has all the powers at hand, the Buddha has laid down several principles for becoming a good king to make sure that his powers will be exercised fairly and rightly. We have to bear in mind, however, that

rājā simply means ‘ruler’, therefore the *rājadhamma* also means simply as ‘the virtues of a ruler’.

It is unfortunate that since the governing system of Thailand was changed from the Absolute Monarchical System to the Democratic System in 1932, the Buddhist virtues for rulers, which have been taught in Thailand since the establishment of the Thai Kingdom, have been neglected. As a result, there is a great deal of political unrest and turmoil in contemporary Thailand. Political conflicts occur when injustice and corruption prevail. Problems in Thai politics emerge when politicians are not fully aware of the virtues of a good ruler and play politics for personal gain rather than for the welfare and happiness of the masses. The word ‘good governance’ has been brought into prominence in Thai society because Thai politicians lack moral integrity. After scrutinizing its definition and application, every Buddhist scholar will not fail to see the similarities between the principles which embody what is called ‘good governance’ in the West and the teaching of Lord Buddha, which has been transmitted for more than two thousand years. It can even be said that if modern Thai politicians follow the Buddhist teaching strictly, they will adhere to the principles of ‘good governance’ automatically.

‘Good governance’ is an ideal formulated in the West when the Western people wanted to see how a good government in a civilized country should govern a country. What they have formulated, however, is in conformity with the ideas taught by the Buddha more than 2500 years ago. It is well-known among the media that former Prime Minister of Thailand, Thaksin Chinnawatra, paid for the red-shirted protesters on the streets and reportedly claimed that ‘what he has done’ is for ‘the true democracy’. Having explored the meaning of good governance, which is supposed to be a tool for a good democratic statesman, I argue that no true democracy will be achieved as long as MPs continue to lack moral integrity, and the country remains full of political corruption. True democracy cannot be possible without MPs’ strict adherence to the principles of ‘good governance’ or Buddhist *rājadhamma*, *a sine qua non*.



Abbreviations

Unless otherwise stated, references to the Pāli Texts are to the PTS editions

A	=	Āṅguttara Nikāya
D	=	Dīghanikāya
J	=	Jātaka
S	=	Samyutta Nikāya
Skt.	=	Sanskrit
ERE	=	Encyclopaedia of Religions and Ethics
PTSD	=	Dictionary of the Pāli Text Society
RFFPDSL	=	The Roots Verb-Forms and Primary Derivatives of the Sanskrit Language.
RV	=	The Ṛgveda, edited by Theodor Aufrecht
ŚB	=	The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa
WR	=	Wörterbuck zum Rigveda by Hermann Grassmann

Endnotes

- * I would like to thank Prof. Richard Gomgrich and David Azzopardi, Graduate Teaching Fellow of School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London for reading this paper and giving useful suggestions. However, if there are any inaccuracies, I must bear responsibility for them alone.
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- ¹ The most significant one, perhaps, is the 2004 work of Phra Phromgunaporn (P.A.Payutto), which summarises the necessary virtues of a good king from the Buddhist perspective. See pp.27-30.
- ² Bowornsakdi Uwanoo (1998-1999: 5).
- ³ ธรรมรัฐ in Thai. Quoted in Bowornsakdi Uwanoo (1998-1999: 5 [footnote]).
- ⁴ ธรรมภิบาล in Thai.
- ⁵ นโยบายธรรมประศาสน์ in Thai.
- ⁶ ธรรมประศาสน์นโยบาย in Thai
- ⁷ PTSD, p.446: *pasāsati* (pa+√śās) 1. to teach, instruct, 2. to rule, reign, govern. See an example in D II,257: '*purimañ ca disaṃ rājā Dhataratṭho pasāsati* 'And King Dhataratṭha who rules (govern) the eastern direction'. In this context, it is clear that the word *pasāsati* is used in the sense of 'governs' or 'rules'.
- ⁸ RFFPDSL, p.172.
- ⁹ See the website of the United Nations Economics and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) on 'What is Good Governance?'. Sometimes, the eight characteristics of 'good governance' are summarized into six. See Bowornsakdi Uwanoo (1998-1999: 13-15).

- ¹⁰ Good governance, [website] <http://www.unescap.org/pdd/prs/ProjectActivities/Ongoing/gg/governance.asp> accessed 12 April 2009.
- ¹¹ Taittiriya Āraṇyaka 2.10 mentions the Five Great Sacrifices, namely: *devayajña* (offering *ahutis* to *devas*), *pitryajña* (offering libations to ancestors), *bhutayajña* (offering *bali* or food to all (departed) creatures), *manuṣyayajña* (feeding guests), *brahmayajña* (reciting of *brahman* (the stanzas) of the Vedas, namely the *Rigveda*, the *Yajurveda*, the *Sāmaveda* and the *Atharvaveda*). See also Klaus K.Klostermaier (1994:156 ff).
- ¹² For details see Subhash Kak (2004).
- ¹³ The word *Aśvamedha* is mentioned in the ṚV 162-3, ṚV 1.6.1,2. Cf. ŚB 13.2.2.1.
- ¹⁴ See also Brh.U.1.4.14;1.4.15.
- ¹⁵ The Sanskrit text says: *brahma vā idam agra āsī, ekam eva; tad ekam san na vyabhavat. tac chreyo rūpam atyasrjata kṣatram, yānya etāni devatrā kṣatrām, indro varuṇaḥ somo rudraḥ parjanya yamo mṛtyu āśāna iti. Tasmāt kṣatrāt param nāsti, tasmāt brāhmaṇaḥ kṣatriyam adhasiād upāsate rājasūye.*
- ¹⁶ O’Flaherty (1975:137).
- ¹⁷ G. Coedès stated that the ‘indianisation’ of South-East Asian countries probably took place around the beginning of the common era. See G. Coedès (1968:15 [Chapter II]).
- ¹⁸ All the translations from the original Sanskrit text were done by Patrick Olivelle. See Patrick Olivelle (1999: 94).
- ¹⁹ Patrick Olivelle (1999: 96-7).
- ²⁰ Quoted in ERE, 7:720.
- ²¹ Quoted in ERE, 7:720.
- ²² S I,76: *assamedham purisamedham sammāpāsam vājapeyyam niraggalam mahārambhā na te honti mahapphalā.*
- ²³ D III,52,96,111,169,215. The three kinds of *kāyasucarita* are: refraining from taking life of all beings, refraining from stealing, refraining from improper sexual behaviours. The four kinds of *vacīsucarita* are: refraining from telling lies, refraining from speech which provokes anger and discord, refraining from coarse speech and refraining from talking nonsensically and pointlessly. The three kinds of *manosucarita* are: *alobha* (not coveting others’ belongings), *adosa* (not thinking of harming others), and *sammādhiṭṭhi* (right understanding [of all things as they really are]).
- ²⁴ See a concise summary of his contributions to Buddhism in Louis Renou and Jean Filliozat (2000: 497-501).
- ²⁵ Nalinaksha Dutt (1956: 415-6).
- ²⁶ The text in the First Rock-Edict (as edited by Nalinaksha Dutt 1956: 415-6) runs as follows: *pule mahānasasi Devānāmpiyasā Piyadasisā lājine anudivasam bahuni pāta-sahasāni alambhiyisu supathāye. se idāni yadā iyam dhamma-lipi lekhitā tadā timni yevā pānāni alabhiyamti duve majulā eke mige se pichū mige no dhruve, etāni pi chu iti pānāni no alābhiyisamti.*
- ²⁷ It is recorded that the first King of the Ayutthaya kingdom, U-Thong, sent a royal letter to King of Varanasi in India asking him to select some Brahmins of *ubhatosujāti* (born from parents who are Brahmin by birth on both sides) and send to Ayutthaya in order to lead his coronation ceremony following the



Hindu belief, as exactly practiced in India. King of Varanasi, then, sent 8 Hindu brahmins to Ayutthaya. See Phra Ratchapongsawadarn Krungkao (the Chronicle of Ancient Capital City) by Luang Phrasert Aksarnniti (1972:58-9).

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