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Buddhist Social Philosophy

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Buddhist Social Philosophy

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Abstract

The systematic and functional framework presented by the Buddha to shape social relations in response to the emerging needs and political culture of the rising 'new middle class.' This framework aimed to temper the growing spirit of individualism prevalent in the society by advocating for a more ethical and humane characterization of the individual's place in the community. The Buddha's philosophy encompassed a concern for others and an acceptance of differences, including positive attitudes toward social distinctions such as 'race' or caste. This inclusive thinking extended to Buddhist attitudes toward other religions, demonstrating a willingness to accept diverse faiths in the context of religious pluralism. In acknowledging every form of rival religious belief as possessing some degree of truth, the Buddha exemplified a stance that sought harmony and understanding amidst the religious diversity of the time.

Keywords: Buddhist; Social; Philosophy

Introduction

Buddhism, beyond its profound spiritual teachings, presents a distinctive social philosophy that responds intricately to the evolving dynamics of society. Rooted in a systematic and functional framework, this philosophy emerges as a response to the burgeoning needs and political culture of the rising 'new middle class' during the time of the Buddha. As the social milieu underwent transformative shifts, marked by the ascendance of a politically influential middle class, the Buddha embarked on the task of shaping a pattern of social relations attuned to these changing demands (Thapar 2002; Swaris 1999). Central to the Buddha's mission was the recognition and restraint of the escalating spirit of individualism pervading this evolving social climate. In crafting a more ethical and humane characterization of the individual's role in society, the Buddha aimed to temper the forces of isolationism and self-centeredness. This endeavor encompassed a broader ethical framework that went beyond individual concerns and embraced a profound concern for others.

A distinctive feature of Buddhist social philosophy lies in its acceptance of differences and a positive attitude toward social differentiations such as 'race' or caste, as evidenced by the works of Malalasekera and Jayatilleke (1958). The Buddha's teachings, while emphasizing unity, acknowledged the richness inherent in diversity, urging a more inclusive approach to social relationships. This inclusive thinking extended to the realm of religion, showcasing a remarkable willingness within Buddhist attitudes to embrace other faiths. Confronted with

the religious pluralism of the times, the Buddha exemplified an open-minded perspective, readily acknowledging "every form of [rival religious beliefs] as a possessor of some degree of Truth" (Pratt, 1928). This attitudinal openness reflected a commitment to understanding and coexistence, transcending religious boundaries in an era characterized by diverse spiritual beliefs.

As we delve into the nuances of Buddhist social philosophy, this exploration seeks to unravel the intricacies of its systematic framework and shed light on its enduring relevance in fostering ethical, humane, and inclusive social relations. This exploration delves into the essence of Buddhist social philosophy, examining how the Buddha sought to address the growing individualism within the evolving social climate by advocating for a more ethical and humane characterization of the individual's place in society. Notably, this encompassed a profound concern for others and an acceptance of differences, including positive attitudes towards social differentiations such as 'race' or caste and a remarkable willingness to embrace other religions amidst the religious pluralism of the times.

Objective

The objective of this study is to comprehensively analyze and understand the systematic and functional framework embedded in Buddhist social philosophy. By investigating how this framework was tailored to suit the needs and demands of the new social milieu, particularly the political culture of the rising 'new middle class,' the study aims to unravel the nuances of the Buddha's approach.

Governance and the State: A Buddhist Perspective

Buddhism (Pali: buddhasasana with spring's Sasna, Sanskrit: buddhasasana Buddhist) religion with Buddha as a prophet. Preaching enlightenment as Buddha himself taught as an important doctrine, Buddhist monks formed a community of religious leaders to educate and seek adherence to the teachings of the Buddha.

Many of the crucial features of the Buddhist approach to social philosophy and political governance derive from the principles and practices governing the organization of the monastic community (the sangha). A distinctive feature of the monastic community, over and above the social and moral dimension of Buddhist practice, was its rules and procedures for the management of the monastic community. The monastic community was governed and regulated by a well-formulated code of conduct or the Vinaya, which formed an integral part of the Buddhist Compendium, enumerating the rules and procedures governing the structure and functioning of the monastic community.

According to this mode of governance, the brotherhood of monks (sangha and later nuns) was established on 'democratic foundations with a constitution and code of law governing their conduct' (Jayatilleke 1967). The day-to-day affairs of the sangha were governed by a liberal culture of equalitarian inter-personal relations. There was no formal hierarchy or dynastic favoritism in the monastic order. It was not social status but other characteristics such as the seniority of a monk, determined by the date of ordination. That

guided inter-personal relations within the community. The Buddha's son when ordained as a monk took his place in the monastic community according to seniority.

The monastic code of conduct stipulates that the individual life of a monk is immersed in a Brotherhood a community of persons ideally seeking liberation from greed, hatred, delusion, folly, conceit, and ignorance and living in communal harmony, with communal property and a bare minimum of one's private material possessions. In addition to pursuing the spiritual needs of the monastic order, the monastic code specifically indicates that the sangha has a responsibility towards the wider society of lay persons who cater or assist the community in meeting their daily needs. In short, there was a deep sense of social responsibility, caring, and compassion underlying the mutually constituted relationship between the monks and lay followers. This form of monastic governance contained many features of statecraft present in the self-governing confederacies and republic rather than the large monarchical kingdoms of the North, such as Kosala and Magadha. Whereas the monarchical kingdoms were guided by Brahmanic notions of a divinely sanctioned superior class of rulers, the self-governing confederacies had much in common with the logic of the humanistic Buddhist ethic. For instance, it is reported that on one occasion the Buddha exhorted the citizens of the republic of Licchavis or Vajjis of Vasili who were threatened by a rampaging aggressive monarch (Ajatasatru) from one of the large kingdoms to act prudently and skillfully using more democratic forms of conflict resolution. The Buddha suggested to the republics that if they wished to maintain their independence they should strengthen their more democratic forms of governance. These include holding regular and frequent assemblies to discuss affairs of state collectively with each other, endeavoring to carry out the day-to-day tasks of governance in harmony, and paying due heed to established practices and customs (Mishra 2004). This normative code of conduct included the primacy attached to human freedoms and the equality of all human beings was more characteristic of governance in the self-governing confederacies. The principle of equality in Buddhism applied equally to the relationship between the ruler and the ruled and was a governing principle in matters of statecraft.

The Kalama Sutta or the Charter of Free Inquiry (Tilawka, 2021) drew pointed attention to the importance of rational thought, which preceded the European Enlightenment by many centuries. This also led to the Buddha being labeled in some quarters as a 'skeptic' for adopting a non-dogmatic cautious attitude governed by reason. Some like Batchelor (1997), characterize Buddhism as an agnostic faith, and Sen (2005) even regards agnosticism as a 'foundational characteristic of Buddhism.' This form of governance was conducive to maintaining a plurality of discourse, more akin to the Socratic method of dialogue than the prevalent prescriptive doctrinaire approach of the Brahmanical code. The underlying logic and rationale of governance were that it was a form of 'deliberative democracy' which was participatory and permitted accommodating differences of opinion and even dissent without imposing majoritarian decision-making principles. Irreconcilable dissent as that which occurred at meetings of the several Councils of the monastic fraternity (e.g., at the Third Council during the reign of Asoka) led to an amicable agreement to differ and the formation of different sects.

However, this 'radical egalitarianism' (Swaris, 1999) and the idea of equality in a universal community became somewhat problematic concerning the issue of gender equity that arose on the question of the ordination of women as nuns. This was most apparent when the Buddha took some time in agreeing to admit women into the monastic order, and, had to be persuaded by Ananda, one of his trusted disciples. He agreed to their reasoned arguments but with some conditions attached, namely, that nuns will agree to abide by additional rules which did not apply to the order of monks. In accepting 'women as spiritual equals,' the Buddha, while not discounting the fact that their social role was culturally prescribed, still provided women with avenues of self-expression. The fact that 'the Buddha is often seen as the most enlightened classical philosopher on the role of women' (Coomaraswamy, 1984: 80), testifies to the Buddha's pragmatism in his willingness to entertain and consider rationally dissenting points of view more generally on such questions as the role of women in the monastic order. This flows from the Buddhist philosophical stance that 'thought is not an absolute command or necessity but a pragmatic call to recognize the empirical existence and adopt solutions to whatever problems associated with it' (Kalupahana, 1995: 45) in accord with the moral code. Here again, we note the remarkable commonality between the modes of governance of the monastic community and the self-governing republics.

Furthermore, the liberal and humane culture of the clan republics was mutually supportive of the monastic community as they were more inclined to a 'democratic' non-authoritarian style of governance, characterized by such features as regard for majority opinions in decision making, regular meetings to conduct affairs of state, etc. There is no doubt that the more liberal political culture of the gana sanghas or tribal republics was central in formulating the nature and character of the monastic community as a social organization. Overall there is no doubt that this model of governance was attuned to the needs of peace and harmony in a small community to maintain long-term stability and continuity as a well-knit social organization.

To this end, the Buddha gave pride of place to communal deliberation, face-to-face negotiation, regular meetings of the community, and encouragement to engage in free and frank discussion. Given the value placed on reason and rational thought, the consensus was to be achieved by a process of reasoned choice rather than a blind belief in a prescriptive code. There was a consensus in collective decision-making arrived at in accord with the 'Constitution' of the Community, its code of conduct rules, conventions, and form of practice. At least within the monastic community, a strong ethos of debate and discussion amongst equals was recognized. In an oft-quoted text (the Kalama Sutta), the Buddha advises those with doubts about the truth to discover the truth themselves by a process of the Asoka Model of Statecraft the Buddhist model of monastic governance was destined to have a profound impact on social and political thought in Asia, especially in Buddhist countries like Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand. This legacy was transmitted through Emperor Asoka with his core Buddhist ideas, principles, and practices being the template for formulating his unique form of political governance embodying a code of secular law. The rationale for Emperor Asoka's model of governance, though primarily inspired by Buddhist practices, also bore the impact of the historical legacy of modes of governance inherited mainly from the self-governing confederacies or tribal republics. These democratic principles of governance, for instance, were enunciated in the Vajjian constitution and included a detailed exposition of the

structure, and mode of operation of the Vajjian judicial system. At the time of the Ashoka Empire Buddhism was not just a religious belief system but also 'a social and intellectual movement influencing many aspects of social life' (Thapar 2002: 200). Asoka's concept of the Dhamma often used as

"A synonym for Buddhism ... was aimed at creating an attitude of mind in which the ethical behavior of one person towards another was primary and was based on a recognition of the dimity of human beings. (Thapar, 2002: 201)

These influences were also evident much later in the social and political climate of India particularly during the Mauryan era (321-185 BCE). As a consequence, the ideals of democracy manifest in Buddhist social and political philosophy were seen as the best form of governance to the extent that it generated 'principles of statecraft denoting a democratic welfare state' (Jayatilleke 1967: 81), mainly embodied in terms of a specific understanding of kingship. Contrary to the prevailing idea of a divinely ordained monarch, the idea of a king as a chosen leader, it was argued, has arisen historically as a social contract. Accordingly, the people by mutual agreement selected one person as the 'the king' in the hope that he could be relied on to maintain law and order, and social harmony.

In conclusion, the monastic community's inclination towards a 'democratic' non-authoritarian style of governance, characterized by communal deliberation and face-to-face negotiation, reflects a distinctive model that prioritizes peace, harmony, and long-term stability. Rooted in the liberal political culture of the gana sanghas or tribal republics, this governance approach within the monastic community underscores the importance of consensus achieved through reasoned choice. The influence of this monastic model extended beyond the confines of the monastic community, finding resonance in Emperor Asoka's governance. Asoka's adoption of Buddhist ideas, principles, and practices shaped a unique form of political governance, embodying a code of secular law. The democratic principles inherent in Buddhist social and political philosophy, particularly the idea of a chosen leader and the social contract, left a profound impact on political thought in Asia.

The Buddhist view of kingship

The Buddhist view of kingship, particularly the duties and responsibilities of a chosen ruler was governed by the notion of the social contract, one that was propounded long before Hobbes and other western expositions. The Buddhist idea of 'social contract' proposed an evolutionary view of society as opposed to the Brahmanical view of a divinely ordained monarch and also society. These views were spelled out in the Discourse on Genesis (Agganna Sutta) (Harris, 1989b), and were described in the following terms:

When the earth had been formed and vegetation of low, then higher grade, had evolved, till at length the earth brought forth an abundance of cereals, there developed agricultural life, and human families and households came into existence. As households came into existence, food began to be stored, the land came to be divided among individual owners and boundaries had to be set up, thus giving rise to rights of property. Now someone of greedy disposition would encroach upon another's property. The rest would take him to

task and charge him with trespass. Thus strife and injustice entered into the life of humans, necessitating the institution of protective and punitive measures till at length a ruler was chosen by the people's consent (Samata) to maintain justice, the rest giving their support to him, that is to say, like law-abiding citizens. (Wijesekera, 1962: 6)

What is emphasized in this concept of kingship was 'a democratic conception of state and law' (Jayatilleke 1967) based on the principle of equality. Thus, the king is a 'Great Elect,' (Maha Sammata) i.e., chosen by the people as a whole and authorized to rule. This is also based on the assumption of the equality of man and that the king is only *primus inter pares*, and exercises authority only under the social contract. The duties of a compassionate ruler set out in the Discourse entitled Cakkavati Sihananda or the Universal Monarch, specify ten virtues that constitute the essential elements of the Buddhist ethic and social philosophy. Accordingly, a king is generous, has his senses under control, ready to make sacrifices, straightforward in dealings, gentle and kind, able to suffer for the people's sake, free from anger and resentment, he is compassionate to all, tolerant, and very approachable. (Jayatilleke 1967: 59)

This Discourse recommends that a ruler fashions his conduct as an enlightened altruist on the grounds of self-interest and expediency. These ten virtues which formed the basics of legislation depicts an 'ideal type' characterization of the 'monarch' or 'ruler' who was expected to act with a sense of moral righteousness, and for which in return the people agreed to give the king 'a portion of rice' for fulfilling his duties and obligations. In the absence of constitutional checks and safeguards against the arbitrary exercise of power, public opinion alone was the only safeguard against a wicked ruler or tyrant who acts unrighteous. One example cited in texts of how public opinion operates was that of a king who proposes to sacrifice his throne rather than allow his son to atone for his transgressions.

However, the people rejected this and demanded that the son be banished from the kingdom. And the king's response was to act in accord with 'the people's will.' In another instance, a Queen who demanded that she be given absolute authority by her husband, the king, was denied this request because the King was not 'an absolute Lord.' This again serves to underline the fact that the exercise of the power and authority associated with kingship is constrained by public opinion, the voice of the people. The duties associated with a monarch denote a highly principled and at the same time eminently reasonable and sensible way of resolving complex problems which included guidelines for fashioning acceptable social relations (Kalupahana, 1995; Guruge 2012). Kingship, no doubt, was limited by one's capacity to act within the guidelines of the teaching, the dhamma, i.e., the principles of moral righteousness. Accordingly, the maintenance of the normative order the code of righteousness, was seen as a prime requirement of a good ruler. What made the exercise of power, political power and authority, legitimate lay in the ability of the person exercising this authority to act skillfully in striving to uphold the principles of compassion, equity, and justice. These principles were enshrined in the moral code of righteousness and were equally applicable to a lay person as well as an administrator, be he a monarch or lesser official. In this regard, there are many examples in later Buddhist Mahayana texts such as the Mahavastu, of the specific advice given to rulers. For instance, the Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna¹⁵ (circa 150 - 250 CE) in his advice to the Satavahana dynasty enjoins the monarch

to actively support the work of doctors, set up hostels and rest houses, eliminate high taxes, care for victims of natural disasters and keep profits low (Mishra 2005). This affirms that the norms of compassionate justice enshrined in the Buddhist ethical and moral order provide no rational basis for a ruthless culture of greed and selfishness characteristic of some perverse forms of individualism or unadulterated forms of 'laissez fair thinking. Considering that the welfare of the community of monks was heavily reliant on the goodwill and patronage of the kings or the governing authorities of the self-governing republics, there emerged a skillfully engineered reciprocity in the relationship between Buddhism and the State. This was well reflected in the patronage and support the Buddha received from key personalities of the self-governing republics and also from some of the kingdoms such as the rich influential merchant Anathapindaka. Here again, this serves to draw pointed attention to the inherent pragmatic and utilitarian attitudes of the Buddha in dealing with mundane matters subject to the proviso that these did not infringe the broad parameters of the ethical code.

According to the democracy as we know it was born in ancient Greece and the word is derived from "demos" which means the people, and "Kratos" which means power. Democracy devolves ultimate power to the people and not to an elite group of powerful rulers. Recent definitions of democracy are perhaps exemplified by United States President Abraham Lincoln who concisely captured the essence of democracy as a government of the people, by the people, for the people (that) shall not perish from the land earth. Lincoln's definition includes three key ingredients: 1) a government of the people; 2) government by the people, 3) government for the people. The emphasis is clearly on ultimate control by the people, not an elite cadre (Veerasai et al, 1999). Also found Many famous political scientists define a democratic regime as varied as Harold Laski, is the essence of democracy. The desire of human beings to respect and maintain their importance. Including equality between individuals in the economy Politics (Cheuathong, 2015). It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried. Lord Bryson's democratic means. The government took a majority of the people support the principle in essence, the idea is that the decision by a majority. Magneto IFOR Democracy is the form of government and way of life. Democracy, both sides will need to act together the essence of democracy. This opinion focuses on the meaning of democracy as well as the style and philosophy of government in the lives of the common man A. The form of government in which the regime is based on the principles of sovereignty of the people. Democracy Hearing comments from the public. And ruled by a majority vote. C.E. Merriam; The concepts and practices geared towards the welfare of the common people. The common intention of the people as a guide Sukom Nuansakul and Wisit Tawesage define the meaning of democracy as that form of government based on the sovereignty of the people, whether it is a presidential democracy.), or parliament democracy is the ultimate authority to determine dominance in public, it's a total democracy. In Thailand the word "democracy" may be split into two words are public, which means that the people and the sovereign, which means that the maximum power of the earth. When combined, so mean. The supremacy of the rule of the people or the public. This is unclear because Thailand is a constitutional monarchy like Britain where the monarchy is respected by the people but has limited political power – they are moral, cultural, and spiritual guides but in Britain, the power lies with the politicians and the military. In Britain, the military would never take over.

In conclusion, the Buddhist view of kingship, emphasizing a 'social contract' and a king as a 'Great Elect,' demonstrated a democratic conception of state and law. The ruler's duties, guided by compassion, equity, and justice, presented an ethical and humane approach to governance. This Buddhist perspective on kingship, as reflected in the Discourses, anticipated later Western notions of social contract theory. Moreover, the reciprocal relationship between Buddhism and the State, based on pragmatic and utilitarian attitudes, showcased a skillfully engineered reciprocity. The welfare of the monastic community depended on the goodwill and patronage of rulers, fostering a symbiotic relationship that aligned with the broad ethical code. While the term 'democracy' may have originated in ancient Greece, the essence of democratic principles, such as government of the people, by the people, and for the people, found resonance in Buddhist social and political philosophy. The emphasis on ultimate control by the people, equality, and decision-making through majority vote aligns with key democratic principles. In essence, the democratic ideals present in Buddhist social philosophy, manifested in both the monastic community and political governance, offer a unique perspective that transcends cultural and temporal boundaries. The enduring legacy of these principles continues to influence political thought and governance, exemplifying a timeless commitment to ethical conduct, compassion, and the well-being of society.

Engaged Buddhism and Spiritual Leader

Buddhism is certainly relevant to world affairs today, as the popularity of spiritual leaders such as the Dalai Lama and Thich Nath Hanh in the West attests. Buddhadasa and Sulak Sivaraksa in Thailand, albeit not as well-known in the West, are nevertheless major public figures in their own countries. The fact that the governments in their land of birth bitterly contest their religious authority on the ground that they are "seditious" or "separatist" only attests further to their political relevance. Other Buddhist leaders besides them, such as Chin Kong, Cheng Yan, and Hsing Yun in the Chinese world, and Daisaku Ikeda in Japan, are not contested by their governments, but they nonetheless exert a moral influence that can have deep political implications because their statements on morality and proper behavior, as well as their philanthropic activities, makes them major social actors. Moreover, through the use of mass media, such religious leaders can reach followers all over the world.

Although these spiritual leaders have expressed their views on a wide variety of issues of relevance to contemporary affairs, the remedies they propose vary and even contrast with each other. Hence, there is a world of difference between the activist inclinations of the Buddhist leaders loosely identified with the trend of "engaged Buddhism" such as Sulak Sivaraksa and the Dalai Lama (King), on the one hand, and those of "humanistic Buddhism" to whom most Chinese and Taiwanese Buddhists relate. Whereas the former advocate an active involvement to address systemic issues of social justice, the latter promote individual acts of charity and moral cultivation. In these conditions, it should not surprise us that there exists no canonical Buddhist perspective on politics and public affairs that would be universally respected by all adherents to that tradition. Many voices speak to articulate and interpret the Buddha's views for the resolution of contemporary problems, but there is no consensus, and very little of this reflection engages with the political realities that Buddhists the world over must cope with, whether it is in issues such as public health, social security,

inter-ethnic relations, sustainable development, and the preservation of the global commons for the next generations.

Buddhism as a philosophy of democracy laid down democratic principles as follows, (Wangfaikaw, 2011)

1. Before his death Buddha laid down the principles for living in the book we call "The Book of Discipline".

2. Buddhism advocates the "middle way" which is the policy of sufficiency advocated by his Royal highness where greed is shunned and poverty is seen as a situation to be remedied.

3. Buddha saw the problems caused by the caste system where people were condemned because of their birthright and taught that the scavenger was as worthy of respect as anyone. This is a true principle of democracy

4. Buddhist monks have rights under discipline. Such as local priests will be entitled to the distribution of pre-Buddhist visitors. The temple priests were entitled to the distribution of the respective years. Receive Katin and benefit in seeking a four-month winter robe equality. There is much more freedom to go to the temple of any discrimination of any meditation.

5. The division of powers Thera adult acting administrative groups. The canonical discipline Buddha himself ordained as a Buddhist monk, who then commanded the investigations discipline. The case decided by the disciplinary function of the law is unfair discipline.

So it can be argued that Buddhism is not a direct study of political science but that the teachings of Buddhism on morality and behavior have a significant impact upon political decisions because they are deeply rooted in the norms and values of Thai society and form a code of behavior that bonds different segments of society together and helps maintain social cohesion.

1) Popular Sovereignty to show the public the real power in the ruling. People to express themselves, which is owned by the authority designated male guardian. And their representatives including the power to withdraw in the event of power illegally. Through the election of the people liberated secret and thoroughly. The exact timing is not mentioned in the Buddhist principle of Adhipateyya three main reasons. Is to be a big main Attadhipateyya It is the world's largest and the Lokadhipateyya The main thrust is fairly large. Buddhism, which focuses primarily on Dhamadhipateyya as a form of governance best.

2) Liberty means a person can do. Or refrain from doing anything you want. As long as the act or refrain from actions that do not violate the rights and freedoms of others that are protected by law, and not be contrary to public order or public morality by religion. So what are the penalties for breaching religious norms are you saying there are two justice systems-

one legitimized by the state and the other “unofficial” Buddhist law— recent scams by monks suggest this may be the attitudes by some. Defined rights and duties in the discipline as clearly defined roles and disciplines in the Yattikam. Buddhist monks are made of square paragraphs or more, including a prayer Pratimook Sanghakam and Krankatin action with 10 or more disciplines.

3) Equality is the confidence that in a democracy. If human equality is likely, although there can be a different matter. Human beings can live better together. Thus, equality means the basic equality in the same society with equality under the law is the same in religion. It can be seen clearly in the equality of caste, race, caste, whether as an individual, where it can be ordained in Buddhism. And in respect of the rainy season. Regardless of whether any caste, race or the equivalent in respect of the Triple Gem

4) Rule of Law scheme is intended to give protection to the rights and fundamental freedoms of the people is important so parents will use any power. When a law authorizing it. In the Buddhist Vinaya, this is a legal practice discipline to live together in peace. The aim is to have a group of people for a peace force to protect the people, to the entrenchment of the Sattatham (faith in Buddhist teaching).

5) Majority Rule in a democracy is to govern in the public interest, so any decision whether to impose a male guardian. Or decision of the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary. Must hold a majority basis. In Buddhism, it uses a simple majority A judge granted the Keratin has to be asked whether the priests. A monk or a Buddhist deserves. The last monk at a Buddhist deserve. If a monk uttered verbally agreed together, "Amen" If a monk made any discipline. The decision was called "Jessica's Eipui" is suspended by a majority vote. The allegation and suspension Buddhist majority. The meeting made various consortiums must be unanimous. If a grievance with the veto (Veto) even when only a single monk protests.

Buddhism undeniably holds relevance in contemporary world affairs, as evidenced by the global popularity of spiritual leaders like the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh. Figures like Buddhadasa and Sulak Sivaraksa in Thailand, though contested by their governments, highlight the political significance of Buddhist leaders. The moral influence exerted by leaders such as Chin Kong, Cheng Yan, and Hsing Yun in the Chinese world, as well as Daisaku Ikeda in Japan, underscores the broader social impact of Buddhist figures. However, the diverse perspectives within Buddhism, ranging from "engaged Buddhism" advocating systemic change to "humanistic Buddhism" focusing on individual acts of charity, lead to a lack of a universally respected canonical Buddhist perspective on politics. The absence of consensus reflects the multifaceted nature of Buddhism's responses to contemporary issues like public health, social security, inter-ethnic relations, sustainable development, and global commons preservation. Buddhism, as a philosophy of democracy, lays down democratic principles rooted in the teachings of Buddha. These principles include popular sovereignty, liberty, equality, the rule of law, and majority rule. Buddhism's impact on political decisions in Thai society is profound, shaping norms and values that contribute to social cohesion. Supsin, J., & Suktam, W. (2017) mentions that Buddhist principles of governance emphasize fairness, compassion, and collective decision-making, evident in the monastic community's democratic ethos. The ideals of democracy embedded in Buddhist teachings resonate with contemporary

democratic principles, reflecting a timeless commitment to ethical conduct and societal well-being. In essence, while Buddhism may not be a direct study of political science, its teachings on morality and behavior significantly influence political decisions, fostering a code of behavior that binds diverse segments of society and contributes to maintaining social harmony. The democratic principles within Buddhism, when applied to governance, offer valuable insights for fostering a just and compassionate society.

Conclusion

The exploration of Buddhist social philosophy unveils a profound and enduring framework that transcends temporal and cultural boundaries. Rooted in the teachings of the Buddha and crafted to meet the demands of a shifting societal landscape, this philosophy stands as a beacon of wisdom, guiding individuals towards ethical, humane, and inclusive social relations. The systematic and functional framework of Buddhist social philosophy, designed during the time of the Buddha, reflects a strategic response to the challenges posed by the rising 'new middle class' and the prevailing political culture. At its core, the philosophy seeks to address the growing spirit of individualism by proposing an ethical and humane characterization of the individual's place in society. This endeavor includes a remarkable concern for others and an acceptance of differences, fostering positive attitudes towards social differentiations like 'race' or caste.

One of the distinctive features of Buddhist social philosophy lies in its openness to diverse belief systems. Confronted with religious pluralism, the Buddha's philosophy embraced an inclusive perspective, readily acknowledging 'every form of [rival religious beliefs] as a possessor of some degree of Truth.' This acceptance extends beyond the boundaries of Buddhism, demonstrating a willingness to coexist with other faiths. As we reflect on the implications of Buddhist social philosophy, its relevance resonates in contemporary society. The emphasis on ethical conduct, empathy, and inclusivity provides a timeless guide for navigating the complexities of human interactions. Moreover, the philosophy's acknowledgment of diversity and its proactive stance on accepting differences contribute to the building of harmonious and understanding communities. In essence, the study of Buddhist social philosophy invites individuals to contemplate the profound teachings of the Buddha, fostering a deeper understanding of humanity and encouraging the cultivation of virtues that transcend societal divisions. As we embrace the principles embedded in this philosophy, we find a path towards creating a world where compassion, understanding, and mutual respect form the cornerstone of our shared existence.

Declaration of Interests

I, Ashin Thuzana, declare that I have no financial or personal interests that could compromise the integrity. This research is undertaken with a commitment to academic excellence and the pursuit of knowledge, devoid of any external influences.

Ethical Considerations

In the course of my research, I adhere to the highest ethical standards, ensuring that all activities comply with the principles of honesty, transparency, and respect for individuals'

rights and privacy. The ethical guidelines set forth by the university and relevant regulatory bodies are strictly followed, including obtaining informed consent from participants involved in any research studies.

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Definition of Conflicts of Interest

A conflict of interest can arise when personal or financial considerations may unduly influence the research. In the context of my work at the College of Arts, Commerce & Law, I affirm that there are no conflicts of interest that could compromise the integrity, objectivity, or impartiality of the research. Any potential conflicts, if identified, will be promptly disclosed to maintain transparency and uphold ethical standards.

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