

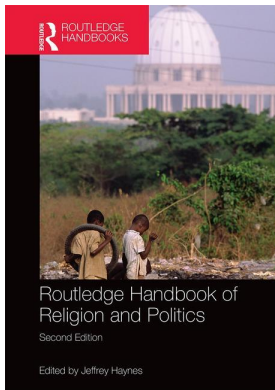
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## 1

## BUDDHISM AND POLITICS

*Peter Friedlander*

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

**The past**

There is a Buddhist tradition that when the Buddha was born it was prophesied that he could either become a *cakravartin* ('Wheel-turning monarch') and become the ruler of the world, or he would become the Buddha ('Awakened') and become the liberator of the world.<sup>1</sup> This idea of the world having a secular ruler and a spiritual leader stands at the heart of Buddhist tradition. The secular ruler establishes security and prosperity in this world and the spiritual leader, the Buddha, leads people to liberation. This notion of the two separate, but complementary, leadership roles contributes greatly towards the compatibility of Buddhist ideas on governance and modern Western conceptions of the separation between the church and state.

The modern notions of religion and politics have no direct equivalents in ancient Indian thought and both are seen as manifestations of one underlying principle: *dharma*. The meanings of the word *dharma* (Pali *dhamma*) relate to the notions of the true nature of things in themselves, and duty, virtue, and morality.<sup>2</sup> It often occurs in compounds as in *Buddha-dharma*, 'The Buddhist religion', but could equally well be thought of as translated as 'Buddhist morality' or 'the nature of things as taught by the Buddha'. Alongside this is the term *Raja-dharma* and in this compound term *dharma* gives a sense of 'the duties/morality of a king'. In each case, whether for the *raja*, the king, or for the Buddha, what matters is that each upholds an aspect of the *dharma*. *Rajñiti* is another word that relates to the notion of 'politics' in classical Indian languages. It is formed from *raja*, 'king', and *niti*, which has meanings that relate to appropriate conduct and in different contexts could be translated as morality or policy, and so *Rajñiti* can be understood as meaning 'the policies/morality/code of conduct of a king'.

Neither *Rajadharmā* nor *Rajñiti* relates to a system of representation of the people but rather to the notion of how a king should conduct himself.

Ian Harris argued in 1999 in an influential work on Buddhism and politics in Asia that the modern Western concept of the separation of religion and politics should be set aside when discussing Buddhism as it has always had a political dimension.<sup>3</sup> A traditional Buddhist description of this relationship was to speak of there being two wheels of the *dhamma*, one wheel being the wheel of *dhamma* turned by the Buddhist monastic community and the other being the wheel of secular rule turned by the king or *Cakkavatti* ('Wheel-turning monarch').<sup>4</sup>

To define religion as a system of belief would also not be in accord with traditional Buddhist views. Buddhists often refer to the three elements in Buddhism: the Buddha, the *dharma* and the *sangha*. The Buddha is the founder of the tradition. The term *dharma* covers the range of meanings discussed above and the *sangha* is the community of followers of the Buddha and the *dharma*. Richard Gombrich argued that to the modern Western model of defining religion in terms of precepts, ‘belief’ was inappropriate for pre-modern Asian traditions such as Buddhism which define themselves through practice rather than precept, and this informs how Buddhist tradition today relates to society and politics.<sup>5</sup>

Ancient Indian literature on the duties of the king emphasises the ruler's duty: the protection of the people, the maintenance of social order and the administration of justice.<sup>6</sup> Buddhist notions of kingship are informed by this and prime duties of the king include that: he should conquer without violence, maintain social justice and maintain law and order within the boundary of the kingdom so that people can be prosperous and free from danger.<sup>7</sup>

Indications of the early relationship between Buddhism and the state are found in the texts of the Pali Canon which constitute the earliest Buddhist texts to survive to the present day. Theravada Buddhists’ tradition identifies ten duties of a king, the *dasarajadhamma*, which include; liberality, morality, self sacrifice, honesty, and non-violence,<sup>8</sup> whilst the role of the *sangha* is to advise the king and to influence him so that his policies uphold values that further the *dhamma*.

Some Buddhist texts also state that Buddhists must follow the laws of the land as laid down by the king. In the *vinaya* texts (codes of monastic conduct) it is stipulated that a criminal cannot be accepted as a monk into the *sangha* and that monks and nuns cannot make use of the king’s property without making payment for it. It is explicit that Buddhists must follow the laws of the land and this even extends to the severity of the punishment for a theft by a monk being based on the punishment for the equivalent civil offence. A monk was to be expelled from the *sangha* if the amount he stole was the same as that in a civil case which would cause the king, or his official, to banish a lay person from a country.<sup>9</sup>

On how the *sangha* is to influence the king, the ideal is that the king as a willing patron of Buddhism should uphold its teachings. In the section of the Pali Canon called the *Mahavagga* there is an account of this relationship. It starts by showing how the Buddha convinces the former royal priests, the *Jatilas* of Gaya, to become his followers and then takes their place as the king’s chief spiritual advisor.<sup>10</sup> Archaeological evidence suggests that this picture is only partly true and rather than simply supplanting earlier traditions what happened was that Buddhism became one of the spiritual traditions, along with those of the Brahmins, Jains and Ajivakas which received state patronage.<sup>11</sup>

There are two models of how the state should be governed in the Pali Canon. In one model, found in the *Agganna sutta*, there is a description of how men came to be ruled by elected leaders, called the *Maha-samata*, the ‘People’s Choice’.<sup>12</sup> In the other model, as found in the *Cakkavati-Sihanada Sutta*, the rulership of the state is decided on the basis of a person being born with the marks of being a universal monarch.<sup>13</sup> In the second model there is no suggestion that the universal monarch needs the general consensus of the people to rule. Rather his rule is dependent on his upholding the *dharma* and ensuring the wealth and prosperity of the state. As long as the king rules according to *dharma* the heavens revolve according to their proper pattern, but when he deviates from the *dharma* and rules for his personal benefit then the heavens no longer follow their proper pattern and he falls from power. A possible reason for the existence of these two models is that during the time of the Buddha there were two types of state in existence. The Buddha was born in a *ganatantra* (‘village republic’) in which the leaders were elected from amongst the people on a temporary basis. However, during the Buddha’s lifetime most of the village republics were absorbed into developing kingdoms ruled by hereditary monarchs.

A significant evolution in these early ideas happened during the rule of the Emperor Asoka (c.269–243 BCE). Buddhist legends say he converted to Buddhism and then ruled according to Buddhist teachings. Contemporary scholarship has shown though that Asoka was not solely a Buddhist and he also continued to patronise other religions.<sup>14</sup> However, through the edicts he issued it can be said that the historical Asoka took it upon himself to propagate a version of the *dharma* of a king which seems heavily influenced by Buddhism.

Buddhist legends, rather than history, have been very influential in Asia. According to these legends, witnessing a Buddhist monk performing miracles converted him from a cruel and inhumane non-Buddhist ruler into a humanitarian Buddhist ruler. He then became a patron of the Buddhist monastic *sangha* and had 84,000 Buddhist monuments constructed throughout the area he governed into which he redistributed the relics of the Buddha which had been buried in ten funerary monuments, or *stupas*, on the Buddha's death. This linkage of ruler, royal patronage of the *sangha* and the building of monuments became the archetype for later Buddhist kings in South East Asia who sought to emulate his role as state patron of Buddhism.<sup>15</sup>

The historical Emperor Asoka, as opposed to the Asoka of legend, erected a number of edicts throughout his kingdom written mostly in a script called *Brahmi*, but over time people forgot how to read this script and it was not deciphered again until the early nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup> They contain a depiction of Asoka quite different from the legends. In these edicts he describes how he took to the practice of *dharma* after the slaughter involved in his conquest of Kalinga, an area of Eastern India, and how he then abandoned violence and took to the practice of *dharma* as a means of spreading his influence. The linkage between Asoka and patronage of Buddhism and monumental architecture is, however, attested in the edicts, as they describe how he went on pilgrimage to Buddhist sacred sites, where he had monuments built. His patronage of the *sangha* is also evident from the edicts as in them he warned against splits in the *sangha* and indicated that the state would intervene in such matters and expel from the monastic community those who caused such splits. Some of the edicts also say he appointed *dharma* officers to superintend the lay people. Whether this actually refers to spreading the Buddha *dharma*, as Buddhists mostly understand it nowadays, or whether it means more upholding the law, in a secular sense, is a matter for debate. The Asoka of the edicts was not really the same as the Asoka of the legends, yet both were rapidly synthesised into one in the works of popular historians of the era, such as H.G. Wells, who depicted him as a modern liberal ruler who patronised Buddhism.<sup>17</sup> Buddhists also conflated the Asoka of legend and history when it was convenient. Norman points out that in the edicts Asoka sends *dharma* emissaries to spread word of his rule, like ambassadors to neighbouring countries, but in Buddhist traditions this becomes conflated with the sending of messengers to spread the Buddha *dharma* to nearby countries.<sup>18</sup>

As Buddhism spread through Asia it also encountered cultures in which different notions of kingship were current. In each case Buddhist tradition seems to have adapted by absorbing elements of local traditions into it. In the case of central Asia, Buddhist traditions absorbed elements of the Iranian figure of the divine monarch and in the case of East Asia elements of the Chinese concept of the king as the ruler of heaven were fused with Buddhist ideas. This can be seen in the proliferation of celestial Buddhas in Himalayan and central Asian Buddhist traditions and in the development of the notion of Amitabha Buddha as the celestial ruler in Pure Land Buddhism.

A vital element in how Buddhism developed as an Asian religion was the tradition of missions to spread the *dharma* which originated in the time of the Buddha when individual monks were sent to teach Buddhism in areas too remote to be reached by the Buddha himself. There is also a complex history of the inter-relationship of Buddhist traditions in Asia. After Buddhism

was established in China, at various times monks went from there back to India in order to learn more about the teachings and the codes of monastic conduct. Likewise Sri Lankan and Burmese traditions were often involved with contacts with each other. These monastic contacts were the precursors of colonial period contacts between Buddhist traditions in Asia, and show Buddhism had a pan-Asian dimension to it in pre-colonial times.

During the colonial era profound changes took place in Buddhism and its relationship to politics. Many of these changes can be understood by studying some of the leading reformers and considering the political dimensions of their activities. The most significant Sri Lankan figure was Anagarika Dharmapala (David Hewaviratne 1864–1933) who was a lay Buddhist reformer who donned robes in 1881 and gave himself the title *Anagarika Dharmapala* ('Homeless Protector of the Dharma'). He was very involved with Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott during their visits to Sri Lanka in which they became the first Western Buddhists in 1873. He also visited Japan in 1889, and the USA, for the Parliament of Religions, in 1893 and Shanghai in 1893, as well as spending many years in India after he founded the Mahabodhi society in 1891 with the aim of reclaiming the temple at Bodhgaya from the Hindus. His role as a nationalist is now remembered in Sri Lanka as much as his being a Buddhist reformer and this points to the way in which Buddhism became a symbol in Asian states for anti-colonial rhetoric.

In the case of China similar prominent Chinese reformers and activists included Yang Wenhui (1837–1911, Pinyin: Yang Wenhui), who met Dharmapala when he came to Shanghai in 1893, and Tai Hsu (1890–1947, Pinyin: Taixu). Tai Hsu's ideas on reform of the *sangha* were influential and included the involvement of the *sangha* in community and government affairs.<sup>19</sup>

In Japan a similar reformer was Shaku Soen (1859–1919) who was a Rinzai tradition Zen monk who travelled to Sri Lanka where he lived as a Theravada monk and was a Japanese representative at the 1893 world Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Judith Snodgrass has argued that during the Meiji period there was a re-evaluation of the relationship between the Buddhist *sangha* and the state which sprang from both government efforts to harness Buddhism as a patriotic force and Buddhist efforts to engage in social and political aspects of reform.<sup>20</sup>

In *Modern Buddhism* Lopez argued that Yang and Dharmapala were prominent figures in the development of what he described as one of the 'projects of modernity' and 'Modern Buddhism' was depicted as rejecting ritual and magical elements, stressing equality over hierarchy, the universal over the local and the individual over the community.<sup>21</sup> The notion of 'Modern Buddhism' points to the ways that Buddhism had changed during the colonial period and contemporary Buddhism in Asia is the heir to not only ancient traditions, but also modern ideologies.

## The present

Estimates of the total number of Buddhists today vary between two and five hundred million.<sup>22</sup>

There are problems with such figures. For instance, in the Japanese census people can select more than one option for religion, and many people mark themselves as being both Shinto and Buddhist. This points to a problem in how categories of religious adherence are conceived of and the inability of such categories to represent the beliefs of people who follow more than one religion at a time. I will now look at the top ten countries in terms of the number of Buddhists and then at Western countries.

### *China (244,130,000 Buddhists)*

The two main issues which dominate discussions of Buddhism in China are the degree to which there is religious freedom and the treatment of the Tibetans. During the Cultural Revolution

Table 1.1 Estimates of Buddhist populations by country

China	244,130,000
Thailand	64,420,000
Japan	45,820,000
Burma (Myanmar)	38,410,000
Sri Lanka	14,450,000
Vietnam	14,380,000
Cambodia	13,690,000
South Korea	11,050,000
India	9,250,000
Malaysia	5,010,000
Rest of world	26,920,000
Total	487,530,000

period (1966–76) there was a wholesale attack on Buddhist cultures, peoples and monasteries. However, there has been an enormous resurgence of interest in Buddhism since liberalisation began in the late 1970s. By 2003 there were around 13,000 monasteries and around 180,000 monks and nuns. It is striking that though this figure included 120,000 Tibetan monks and 8,000 Theravada monks in and around Yunnan, there were only 50,000 Mahayana monks and nuns from the Han community. However, with a decline in the tradition of giving alms to monks and nuns, monasteries have had to seek new sources of income and have had to deal with being treated as focuses of the tourist industry and transformed into money-making enterprises. Partly this is because the number and strength of lay Buddhist organisations is still low and the monasteries cannot look to them for support as they would in the Buddhist countries of South East Asia. Political figures such as President Jiang Zemin (1993–2003) gave some support to the use of Buddhist morality (*de*) in the political sphere.<sup>23</sup> However, the term he used for virtue, *de*, is the same word for virtue as appears in the title of the Daoist classic the *Dao De Jing* and is not a particularly Buddhist concept. In regulations issued in 2004 religion was to be managed in such a way as to ensure it did not disrupt society or threaten the government's authority but acted to promote economic development.<sup>24</sup> A decade later in March 2014 in a speech to UNESCO, China's President Xi Jinping outlined how Buddhism had originated in India but once in China it had developed into 'Buddhism with Chinese characteristics'.<sup>25</sup> This is a significant development in Chinese state attitudes towards Buddhism as to some extent it recognises the importance of Buddhism in China. Current policies in regard to Buddhism in China reflect though a continuation of a policy of commercialisation of temples and monasteries and institutions such as the famous Shaolin temple which since 1999 has been run as a commercial enterprise by its abbot, Shi Yongxin, who until recently styled himself as the CEO monk of the temple.<sup>26</sup> The Famen temple near Xian houses the relics of the Buddha's finger and forms a focus for Buddhist pilgrimage and for commercial activity. The Famen temple also forms part of Chinese claims to be the world leader of Buddhism which were made at the World Buddhist conference at Famen temple in October 2014.<sup>27</sup>

In Tibet there have also been reverses in Chinese government policy in the last decade. There has been an active campaign to protest against Chinese control by individuals practising self-immolation in protest. This has led to Chinese authorities making efforts to suppress such protests and prevent them being publicised. In parallel with this there has been a move by the Chinese state to claim authority in religious matters for itself to the degree that it now claims to be able to identify who the next reincarnation of the Dalai Lama will be. The paradox of an

atheist state being able to identify a reincarnation is profound but is based in the end on the simple possession of a particular bowl which belonged to the Panchen Lama, which was used to draw lots indicating who was the reincarnation of the Panchen Lama and the Dalai Lama. Indeed they used this method when identifying the 14-year-old they chose as the 11th Panchen Lama in 1995, who China asserts is an alternative leader for Tibetan Buddhism. In March 2015 Chinese officials said that the Dalai Lama was ‘profaning Buddhism’ by saying he may not be reincarnated as they are now the sole body with the authority to authorise Tibetan Buddhist reincarnations.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Thailand (64,420,000 Buddhists)***

Around 95 per cent of Thais are Buddhists so all sides of the political spectrum claim Buddhist affiliations at times for their ideologies. Thaksin Shinawatra (Prime Minister 2001–2006) was a successful businessman who rose to power with the promise of economic reforms and who described his market reform concept as a form of Buddhist ‘social contract’. In a speech in 1999 on the influence of the Buddhist reformer Buddhadasa (1906–93) he said that Buddhadasa had proposed that ‘Politics is *dhamma* and *dhamma* is politics’, and claimed that what Buddhadasa, and by implication Buddhist reformers, wanted was a government of men of moral integrity, and he was himself such a person.<sup>29</sup> Kitiarsa (2006) argued that Thaksin’s downfall in 2006 was actually due to his failing to convert his power into virtue by acting like a moral Buddhist leader.<sup>30</sup>

In regards to Malay Muslim separatism in the south, Thaksin’s approach was to blame it on bandits and deny a link to militant Islam, and attempt to crack down on violence while trying to increase development funding to the area. Disputes over whether it was gangsterism, separatism, Islamic fundamentalism, or even simple opposition to Thaksin Shinawatra’s government, became endemic during this period between the Thai government and its own security forces. Thaksin Shinawatra’s reforms and his conflicts with the security forces contributed to exacerbating the issues involved which remain fundamentally the same today as they were in 2006.<sup>31</sup>

An extended period of civil unrest in Thailand led up to a military coup on 22 May 2014 led by General Prayuth. During the unrest a number of Buddhist monks, such as Buddha Issara, also took a prominent part in the anti-government protests and gave speeches on the stages set up in Bangkok as part of the movement to stop the city and topple the government of Yingluck Shinawatra.<sup>32</sup> Since the coup Prayuth, now Prime Minister Prayuth, has affirmed his support for Buddhism but also affirmed that people’s faith in Buddhism must be strengthened by cracking down on inappropriate behaviour by monks.<sup>33</sup>

### ***Japan (45,820,000 Buddhists)***

Despite the number of Buddhists in Japan many younger Japanese people identify more as secular than religious. The Komeito or ‘Clean Government Party’ is often spoken of as a Buddhist party and it was formed in 1964 by the lay Buddhist Soka Gakkai<sup>34</sup> organisation, which is itself an offshoot of the Nichiren Buddhist tradition.<sup>35</sup> In 1999 Komeito reformed and become the ‘New Komeito’ Party. The New Komeito Party on its website takes pains to point out that it is not affiliated with any religious groups and there have been no formal links between it and the Soka Gakkai apart from at the time of its foundation in 1964.<sup>36</sup> As of 2015 the Komeito Party has thirty-five members in parliament and forms along with the LDP part of the ruling coalition in Japan led by Shinzo Abe. The shift towards revoking Article 9 of Japan’s constitution on the non-use of military forces appears to have posed a strain on Komeito’s continued adherence

to the Buddhist concept of non-violence, but as of March 2015 it appears that Komeito has accepted Abe's scheme with some provisos on how it is to be interpreted.<sup>37</sup>

### ***Vietnam (14,380,000 Buddhists)***

Religious freedom, or the lack of it, is a dominant issue in the discussion of Buddhism in Vietnam. The Vietnamese government has a very fluid attitude towards Buddhism and other religions; it publicly supports religious traditions but seeks to stamp out superstitions. This means that whenever it dislikes any particular grouping it labels it a superstition and can ban it.<sup>38</sup> The leading Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn, who left Vietnam in 1966, has only been able to return once for a visit in 2005. Even then his visit was a source of considerable controversy as monks in Vietnam argued that the government was using his visit to show they were liberal in their attitude to Buddhism, whilst at the same time increasing repression of Buddhists and the 'Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam', which was banned in 1981.<sup>39</sup> These policies continue to this day and whilst events such as the Huong Pagoda Festival are celebrated as focuses of cultural tourism<sup>40</sup> Buddhist activists are imprisoned or forced into exile.<sup>41</sup>

### ***Myanmar (38,410,000 Buddhists)***

In Myanmar (formerly Burma) there has been a profound change in the relationship between Buddhism and politics since 2011 which marked the end of two decades of suppression of democracy by a military junta. This had come about in part because up until 1990 large parts of the *sangha* supported pro-democracy elements and the National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi. However, the military ignored the 1990 election which was won by the NLD and set out to suppress opposition to it in the state and in the *sangha*. This culminated in the police attacking a meeting of 7,000 monks in Mandalay to which 20,000 monks responded by boycotting the regime.<sup>42</sup> The government then set out to drive elements hostile to it from the *sangha* and sought to appropriate Buddhist rhetoric to legitimate its rule. The *mangala sutta* was promoted as a basis for government policy and the generals appeared from time to time on television in white robes, like lay Buddhists observing the eight precepts on special days.<sup>43</sup> This situation dramatically changed after the election in 2011 when under the leadership of former general, and now President, Thein Sein a liberalising approach was adopted for the governance of Myanmar. Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest and she and the NLD were allowed to take an active part in politics. As part of the liberalisation many monks who had been imprisoned for their anti-government activities were also released. A most concerning development which has taken place since 2012 has been the emergence of anti-Muslim movements within the Buddhist community. Fostered perhaps in part by a lack of the tight control exercised by the former junta, or some suggest some degree of support from some elements in the regime, anti-Muslim movements came to prominence. As a symbol of identity one group adopted the term '969' which relates to a set of key Buddhist beliefs, the nine attributes of the Buddha, the six attributes of the *dharma* and the nine attributes of the *sangha*. This was intended to be a symbol to use in distinction to the common Muslim use of the number 768 as a way to represent a phrase used at the beginning of an activity (*Bismill h al-Ra m n al-Ra m*). A prominent leader of the '969' movement is a monk, Ashin Wirathu, who has described himself as 'the Burmese bin Laden' and led an active collaboration with the BBS from Sri Lanka (see below) in opposition to what he sees as the Muslim threat to Buddhist cultures.<sup>44</sup> This led to anti-Muslim riots, often directed at Rohingya Muslim communities, which began in May 2012.<sup>45</sup>



### **Sri Lanka (14,450,000 Buddhists)**

The conflict between the Tamils and the Sinhalese dominated the relationship of Buddhism to politics in Sri Lanka from 1980 to 2009. The background to this goes back not only to Angarika Dhammapala's reforms of the nineteenth century but also to the movement towards the politicisation of the *sangha* in which Walpole Rahula was influential, but which was opposed by the early post-independence leaders such as D.S. Senanayake. Rahula, in his seminal pre-independence work of 1946 *Bhikshuvage Urumaya* ('The Heritage of the Monk'),<sup>46</sup> rejected the notion that monks could not play an active role in society and in politics and favoured the development of the role of the 'political monk'.<sup>47</sup> This has undoubtedly contributed to the situation in which a number of monks now sit in parliament. The first of these was Baddegama Samitha in 2001 and then the 'The National Heritage Party', or Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), monks held nine seats in parliament and from January 2007 to 2014 formed part of the government led by Mahinda Rajapaksa.<sup>48</sup> They are a conservative group and played a role in campaigning against conversions and were firmly against any peace process with the Tamil community. After the election of Maithripala Sirisena in January 2015 they shifted their allegiance to him and still form part of the ruling government coalition in Sri Lanka.

In Sri Lanka the greatest changes in the relationship between Buddhism and politics in the last five years have related to the emergence of Buddhist anti-Muslim violence. The first nexus of this development appeared in Sri Lanka after the defeat of the Tamil Tiger movement in 2009 when under the government of Mahinda Rajapaksha some militant Buddhist groups turned their attention towards Muslim communities and sites. Prominent amongst this is the BBS, the Bodu Bala Sena, or 'Buddhist Brigade', which has been influential in fomenting anti-Muslim violence. The BBS was founded in 2004 as a breakaway from the JHU and began to actively campaign on a number of issues from 2012 onwards, such as whether Buddhist migrant workers in Arab Countries were able to practise their religion freely. However, the most prominent event linked to the BBS and the anti-Muslim rhetoric it employs were anti-Muslim riots in June 2014 in Aluthgama.<sup>49</sup>

### **South Korea (11,050,000 Buddhists)**

Buddhism in Korea has been through a number of phases of waxing and waning in influence. In the long term this was apparent in its dominance during the Koryo dynasty (918–1392) followed by its being subject to anti-Buddhist statutes during the Choson dynasty (1392–1910). In the twentieth century Japanese imperialism led to initial liberalisation of laws on Buddhism, followed by heavy state interference in the running of the *sangha*. After 1945 Buddhism was all but wiped out in the North under the regime of Kim Il Sung but has flourished in South Korea. The tradition of government control of Buddhist monasteries and temples was further entrenched by the 1961 law on control of Buddhist property in the republic of South Korea. Under the government of Park Chung Hee from 1962 to his assassination in 1979 Buddhism was seen as supporting the regime and was supported by the regime. However, aspects of the relationship that were problematic were highlighted by issues such as the conscription of monks into the armed forces. In yet another turn in fortune the next leader, Chun Doo-hwan, was a staunch Christian who withdrew support from Buddhism and tried to attack it wherever possible. In a move reminiscent of Chinese current policies Chun turned monasteries and temples into national parks and took control of their lands and began to develop them as tourist resorts. By 1980 this led to open conflict between the *sangha* and the state. Arrests and repression of Buddhist monks continued and culminated in the popular uprisings of 1986 which led to the first democratic

elections in South Korea. There is also some history of Christian attacks on Buddhist monasteries, sites, monuments and individuals which has been going on since 1982. Christians even burned down a number of Buddhist temples in northern Seoul in 1996.<sup>50</sup> In view of the ways in which the South Korean government has taken an active part in the management of the *sangha* and its property since 1945 it is also evident that these conflicts cannot be seen in isolation from political struggles in South Korea over wealth, property and the rights of different communities.

During the office of President Lee Myung-bak (2008–2013) there was considerable tension in South Korea due to his strong Protestant beliefs causing him to appear to favour Protestant Christianity. This led to major demonstrations by over sixty thousand Buddhists and others in Seoul in 2008. However, since February 2013 under the government of President Park Geun-hye religion seems to have played a less divisive role in politics. President Park Geun-hye has been described as an atheist who has been influenced by Buddhism and Catholicism and she appears to have adopted an even-handed approach to religion.<sup>51</sup> However, some Christians have continued to agitate against Buddhism through the carrying out of a practice called *Ddangbarpgi*, singing hymns and performing Christian prayers at sites of Buddhist worship. A film of such activity by Korean Christians at the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodhgaya in 2014 created much controversy and reignited discussion of similar events from Korea itself in 2010 at the temple of Bongeunsa in Seoul and Donghwasa in Daegu City.<sup>52</sup>

### **Taiwan (9,150,000 Buddhists)**

There has been an extraordinary proliferation of new Buddhist movements in Taiwan since 1945 such as the *Fo Guang Shan*, *Tzu Chi* and *Dharma Drum Mountain* which has given rise to questions about the relationship between traditional Buddhism, business and politics. The *Fo Guang Shan* movement, also known outside of Taiwan as the ‘Buddha’s Light International Association’ (BLIA) was founded in 1967 by the Venerable Hsing Yun and has many temples around the world. These include the Nan Tien Temple in Wollongong, Australia, and the Hsi Lai Temple in California, USA. It is the largest Buddhist organisation in Taiwan and extremely wealthy. It is not surprising therefore that it should be courted by political leaders as essentially such a large organisation is a potential vote bank in any democratic system. The Venerable Hsing Yun has also at times been labelled a ‘political monk’ as he has made comments on Chinese reunification, supported the Tibetan cause and has been implicated in a scandal involving Al Gore where the BLIA Hsi Lai Buddhist Temple in California raised funds for the Al Gore campaign.<sup>53</sup> There is also considerable overlap in Taiwan itself between the government and the *sangha* and a number of religious leaders have played active roles in politics which has led to a blurring of the line between religion and politics.<sup>54</sup>

The Tzu Chi foundation has a membership of around five million in Taiwan itself and two million overseas with overseas membership growing rapidly and membership in Malaysia growing from 100,000 to one million in 2013.<sup>55</sup> However, Tzu Chi, which was founded by a nun, the Venerable Cheng Yen, could be characterised as a charitable group inspired by Buddhist ideals rather than as Buddhist organisation.<sup>56</sup> In terms of the impact of Buddhism on politics in Taiwan Schak argued that the large scale of involvement of Buddhist organisations in community building has fostered the growth of engagement with political representation in Taiwan.<sup>57</sup>

### **Cambodia (13,690,000 Buddhists)**

After the devastation of the Pol Pot regime era (1975–1979) Cambodia has seen a rebirth of Buddhism which highlights the way that Diaspora community members are able to interact with

their own countries of origin. Since 1989 when the People's Republic of Kampuchea started lifting restrictions on religions large numbers of monasteries have been rebuilt and the number of monks and nuns has increased enormously.<sup>58</sup> The *sangha* is today largely a supporter of the government and its leader Hun Sen.<sup>59</sup> Some monks also opposed the government, such as Maha Ghosananda (1929–2007), who is famous for starting in 1992 a practice he called *dhammayatra* ('peace walks'). His activities also included organising meditations by monks and nuns in 1993 with the aim of exerting pressure on the government to create a 'just constitution' for Cambodia.<sup>60</sup>

Buddhism has continued to recover in Cambodia. However, as Ian Harris (2013) pointed out there are still profound problems and the situation of Buddhism has changed from 'virtual extinction to a simulacrum of normality'.<sup>61</sup> From 1998 to the present day Cambodia has been governed by Prime Minister Hun Sen and Buddhist monastic organisations have been able to function, but there has been from time to time discontent with his rule. After an election in September 2013 large crowds including Buddhist monks protested against the results of the election and a three-day protest demonstration included an attempt by a monk, the Venerable Sok Dyna, to self-immolate in protest against the governing regime.<sup>62</sup>

### **India (9,250,000 Buddhists)**

The more than nine million Buddhists in India are a very small proportion of the total population. Despite this they are a vocal minority in certain states and Buddhism is a factor in the politics of Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. This is due to its influence amongst the *dalits*, or oppressed, peoples, also formerly known as untouchables. The *dalit* vote has been courted by various parties as numerically the lower caste and *dalit* voters often represent the majority of voters in some areas and during the 1980s a number of state governments came to power which organised coalitions of these communities to seize power from the previous ruling parties.

A proportion of the inhabitants of Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh form an Indian Buddhist community whose culture is closely related to that of Tibet. Following the Indo-Chinese war of 1962 Ladakh and the border areas of China became militarised zones and tension with China continues to this day. Due to this the politics of these Buddhist border areas of India is very sensitive to security concerns related to China. India–China relations during the period when the BJP government was in power in the 1990s were dominated by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Bajpayee taking a conciliatory line on matters related to China, and the defence minister George Fernandez taking a hard line on China-related issues. Under the Congress government from 2005 to 2014 a similar strategy operated.

During the last decade the relationship between Buddhism and politics in India has continued to be influenced by internal Indian politics and India's relations with China. Kumari Mayawati, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh from 2007 to 2012, was very supportive of Buddhists as most Indian Buddhists, like herself, come from former *dalit* communities.

Since the BJP government led by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi was elected in May 2014 it appears to have been following a policy of reaching out to Indian Buddhists and also of supporting Tibetan exiles within India and the Dalai Lama as a guest of India.

### **Western countries**

Despite the growing interest in and popularity of Buddhism in Western countries the number of Buddhists in these countries is not high, and where it is, it is mostly due to immigration from Buddhist countries. For instance, the number of people who reported that they were Buddhists in the UK census of 2011 was 248,000 people, or 0.4 per cent of the total population.<sup>63</sup> In

Australia in 2011 the number of Buddhists was about 528,977 (2.5 per cent of the population) according to the ABS.<sup>64</sup> The majority of these were immigrants from Vietnam, Cambodia or China or their children. Some estimates suggest that there are around four million Buddhists in North America (1 per cent of the population).<sup>65</sup> Despite the relatively small numbers of Buddhists in Western countries their influence is substantial as they often represent the visible face of Buddhism for Western cultures.

### **The future**

Current trends in the development of the relationship between Buddhism and politics suggest that two conflicting patterns are emerging. One is of Buddhism continuing to be associated with peace activism through Engaged Buddhism, and the other of Buddhism becoming identified with anti-Muslim Buddhist nationalism.

Attempts to foster a 'Mindful Politics' movement in the early part of the century in the US led to little progress in developing a distinctive Buddhist presence in US politics.<sup>66</sup> However the Engaged Buddhist movement has continued to develop during the last decade and taken a significant role in various forms of activism in the West. The Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh is regarded as the founder of this movement which developed out of his personal involvement in the anti-war movement in his homeland. Thich Nhat Hanh (1993) developed the idea that lay Buddhists themselves were capable of taking action to improve social conditions in the world, to campaign against war, poverty, exploitation and environmental destruction.<sup>67</sup> One of the striking features of Engaged Buddhism is that it has become a form of global Buddhist movement in which Asians living in Asia and in the West, and Westerners in the West and in Asia interact.<sup>68</sup>

Developments in China in the last decade also seem to indicate that the conflict there has now taken a new turn with Chinese efforts shifting from simply opposing the existence of religion to trying to co-opt it. Indicative of this are the 2014 claims by the atheist Chinese government to have the sole right, and ability, to recognise reincarnations of Tibetan Lamas such as the Dalai Lama.<sup>69</sup>

A second, and key, issue in the development of global Buddhist perspectives is the extent to which Buddhist traditions come into conflict with other religions and political systems. Currently, in 2015, it is clear that the most critical issue is violence by Buddhists against Muslims and the consequent cycle of Buddhist-Muslim violence. Obviously in each case it could be argued that the conflict is not really religious, but social, political and economic, but in each case the longer the conflict lasts the greater the chance that the religious label will gain an independent life as an indicator of the conflict. In the case of Sri Lanka and Myanmar the key issue seems to be related to Buddhist perceptions of themselves as being threatened by Islam which has led to Buddhist attacks on Muslims and started a new cycle of communal violence. The global impact of Buddhist anti-Muslim violence in Myanmar has also begun to be felt elsewhere in the Buddhist world and those arrested for the bombings at the Bodhgaya temple in India in July 2013 claimed they did it in revenge for Buddhist attacks on the Muslim Rohingya communities of Myanmar.

In terms of the future of Buddhism and politics there are two key factors. First, the process of globalisation is revealing that although the diverse Buddhist traditions of the world share some common goals they also are characterised by different cultural and national approaches to the realisation of the goals of Buddhism. Second, that Buddhism has now been drawn into the ambit of conflict between groups identifying as Islamic and other communities and this has given rise to Buddhist anti-Muslim violence.

## Notes

- 1 Khosla, *The historical evolution*, 32; Walshe, *Thus Have I Heard*, 205.
- 2 Rahula, 'Wrong notions of Dhammata', 181.
- 3 Harris, *Buddhism and politics*, vii.
- 4 Reynolds, 'The two wheels of Dhamma'.
- 5 Gombrich, *Precept and Practice*.
- 6 Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, 71.
- 7 Walshe, *Thus Have I Heard*, 443.
- 8 Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 84–5.
- 9 Horner, *The book of the discipline*, Vol. I., 73–4.
- 10 Horner, *The book of the discipline*, Vol. IV., 47.
- 11 Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*.
- 12 Walshe, *Thus Have I Heard*, 407–15.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 395–405.
- 14 Norman, *A Philological Approach*, 113–30.
- 15 Strong, *The Legend of King Asoka*.
- 16 Keay, *India Discovered*, 39–63.
- 17 Wells, *A Short History of the World*, 111–12.
- 18 Norman, *A Philological Approach*, 128.
- 19 Lopez, *Modern Buddhism*, 85–90.
- 20 Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism*, 115–36.
- 21 Lopez, *Modern Buddhism*, xi.
- 22 Hackett, *The Global Religious Landscape*, 2012, 32.
- 23 Yin, 'Buddhism and economic reform in mainland China'.
- 24 Miller, 'The opium of the people'.
- 25 Xi Jinping, 'Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping'.
- 26 Chen, 'China's controversial Buddhist abbot'.
- 27 Han, 'Conference of World Fellowship of Buddhists'.
- 28 McDonell, 'China accuses Dalai Lama'.
- 29 Phongpaichit and Baker, *Thaksin: The Business of Politics*, 137.
- 30 Kitiarsa, *In Defense of the Thai-Style Democracy*.
- 31 Phongpaichit and Baker, *Thaksin: The Business of Politics*, 234–9.
- 32 Lefevre, 'Thai Buddhist monk'.
- 33 'Declining faith in monks'.
- 34 Metraux, 'The Soka Gakkai'.
- 35 Hardacre, 'State and religion in Japan'.
- 36 'New Komeito's Views'.
- 37 'Coalition reaches deal'.
- 38 King, 'Thich Nhat Hanh'; Do, 'The Quest for Enlightenment'.
- 39 'UBCV Patriarch'.
- 40 'Vietnam's biggest Buddhist festival'.
- 41 Pearson, 'Abbott has a habit of honouring authoritarians'.
- 42 Mathews, 'Buddhism and the nation'.
- 43 Houtman, *Mental Culture in Burmese Crisis Politics*.
- 44 Ranga and Aneez, 'Hardline Buddhists in Myanmar'.
- 45 Thompson, 'The 969 Movement'.
- 46 Rahula, *The Heritage of the Monk*.
- 47 Malalgoda, 'Buddhism in post-independence Sri Lanka'.
- 48 'Monk's party to join'.
- 49 'Sri Lanka Muslims killed'.
- 50 Tedesco, 'Questions for Buddhist and Christian cooperation'.

- 51 Song and Ko, 'Park Geun-hye's past and future'.
- 52 Kang, 'Korean Christians stir controversy'.
- 53 Sperry, 'Gore's had 15 chances'.
- 54 Laliberte, *The Politics of Buddhist Organisations*, 42–3.
- 55 Sui, 'Meeting Taiwan's new-age Buddhists'.
- 56 Schak and Hsiao, 'Taiwan's socially engaged Buddhist groups'.
- 57 Schak, 'Community and the new Buddhism in Taiwan'.
- 58 Guthrie, 'Rebuilding Cambodian Buddhism'.
- 59 Stuart-Fox, 'Buddhism and politics in Laos', 13.
- 60 Poethig, 'The transnational in Cambodia's Dhammayatra', 204.
- 61 Harris, *Buddhism in a Dark Age*, 167.
- 62 Titthara, 'Protesting monk may be disrobed'.
- 63 'Religion in England and Wales 2011'.
- 64 '2011 Census reveals'.
- 65 'Religious composition by country'.
- 66 McLeod, *Mindful Politics*; Boyce, 'Who does God vote for?'
- 67 Hanh, *Interbeing*.
- 68 Queen, *Engaged Buddhism*.
- 69 Eaton, 'China Asserts Control'.

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