

Political Concepts in Early Buddhism:

A Conceptual Analysis of Power, Governance, Legitimacy, and Social Order

Phra Chayanon Jantapoon¹, Phra Chaiyan Seehanad²

PhD Research Scholar in Public Administration, Department of Political Science,
Faculty of Social Sciences, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India

chayanonbee1994@gmail.com, chaiyan1537@gmail.com

Abstract

This article examines the political concepts embedded in Early Buddhist teachings, with particular attention to the notions of power, governance, political legitimacy, and social order. Rather than presenting Buddhism as a theory of the state comparable to modern political science, this study argues that the Pāli Canon contains a coherent moral-political framework that can be interpreted through these four political concepts. The analysis is based on documentary research drawing upon the Tipiṭaka, classical Buddhist literature, and relevant scholarship in political science and Buddhist studies.

The findings reveal that although Buddhism does not present a theory of the state or a formal political system comparable to modern political science, the Buddhist scriptures contain significant political concepts. Power is grounded in moral virtue and public acceptance rather than coercion; governance emphasizes the well-being of society through the application of Dhamma; political legitimacy is derived from righteous conduct and the recognition of the people; and social order is maintained through moral cultivation, shared norms, and cooperation among members of society rather than the use of force. The study further indicates that Dhamma serves as the common foundation of these political concepts, providing a framework for understanding social administration based on justice, moral leadership, and peaceful coexistence. These findings contribute to broadening the study of Buddhism from a political science perspective and offer an alternative conceptual framework for contemporary social and political governance.

Keywords: Political Concepts; Buddhism; Power; Governance; Political Legitimacy; Social Order

1. Introduction

Human coexistence in both monastic and lay communities inevitably involves the possibility of conflict because individuals remain influenced by greed, hatred, and delusion. Consequently, societies require commonly accepted norms and institutions to regulate behavior, maintain public order, and enable peaceful coexistence.

The regulation of social behavior and the maintenance of order are fundamental concerns of political science. Beyond the study of the state and political institutions, political science also examines power, governance, political legitimacy, and the mechanisms through which societies achieve stability and cooperation.

From this perspective, Early Buddhist teachings contain important ideas concerning social order and human coexistence. Although Buddhism does not propose a formal theory of the state comparable to those of modern political science, it offers principles concerning the ethical exercise of authority, the regulation of conduct, and the promotion of public welfare and social harmony.

Early Buddhism generally refers to the teachings preserved in the early Buddhist canon, which are widely regarded as reflecting the Buddha's earliest teachings. While

these discourses have traditionally been studied from philosophical, ethical, and religious perspectives, comparatively little attention has been given to their interpretation through the framework of political thought, particularly in relation to power, governance, political legitimacy, and social order.

Although previous studies have examined concepts such as the Dhammarāja, the Ten Royal Virtues, and the relationship between Buddhism and the state, few have analyzed these teachings as an integrated framework of political concepts. This article addresses that gap by examining political concepts in Early Buddhism through four interrelated dimensions: power, governance, political legitimacy, and social order.

2. Political Science Conceptual Framework

The analysis of political phenomena and social order requires a conceptual framework drawn from political science. Political science examines the state, political institutions, governance, power, and the mechanisms through which societies regulate behavior, manage conflict, and maintain social order (Heywood, 2013). Accordingly, its scope extends beyond the study of government to

encompass the broader processes that enable coexistence in complex societies.

In political science, concepts serve as analytical tools for interpreting political phenomena. Within the context of this study, political concepts refer to the analytical framework used to examine Buddhist teachings through four interrelated dimensions: power, governance, political legitimacy, and social order. These concepts provide the basis for analyzing how Buddhist teachings contribute to the regulation of human behavior, the maintenance of social order, and the maintenance of peaceful coexistence. Among these, power occupies a central position in political science because it shapes relationships among individuals, groups, and institutions. Politics is fundamentally concerned with the acquisition, exercise, and distribution of power; therefore, understanding power provides the essential foundation for political analysis.

In general, power can be understood as the capacity of an individual or a group to influence the decisions or behavior of others within society. Max Weber defined power as the ability of an individual or group to impose its will upon others, even when those others are unwilling to comply. According to Weber, “power is the ability to exercise one’s will over others.” This definition highlights the capacity of actors to shape the actions of others regardless of resistance, making power a central concept for understanding political relationships and the functioning of political systems.¹ In contrast, Robert A. Dahl viewed power as a relational concept between individuals. According to Dahl, one person exercises power over another when he or she is able to induce the other person to do something that the latter would not otherwise have done in the absence of such influence. As Dahl explains, “power is domination of one person over another, where one person can get another person to do something that he would not otherwise do.”² From this perspective, power extends beyond legal authority or state institutions to include social influence, institutional power, and moral authority, all of which shape individual behavior and contribute to social organization, the establishment of norms, and the maintenance of social order. Lukes conceptualizes power as operating in three dimensions: decision-making power, exercised through formal political processes; non-decision-making power, which determines which issues enter or are excluded from the political agenda; and ideological power, which shapes

beliefs, values, and perceptions, leading individuals to accept existing social and political arrangements without recognizing the mechanisms that sustain them. This three-dimensional conception of power demonstrates that power extends beyond overt political actions or legal authority. It also operates through agenda setting and the shaping of consciousness, thereby influencing how individuals perceive reality and respond to existing social and political structures.³

2.1 The Concept of Governance Governance is a fundamental concept in political science and public administration, referring to the processes through which decisions are made, policies are implemented, and social order is maintained. In a broader sense, governance extends beyond the activities of the state to include the roles of various institutions and organizations in shaping public policy, coordinating collective action, and guiding societal development. In academic literature, the concept of governance is generally conceptualized as the process of governing society through the collective decision-making of multiple institutions. As Bradway and Shah (2009, p. 242) define it, governance is “the formulation and execution of collective action at the local level.”⁴

Furthermore, governance refers to the collaborative processes through which public issues are addressed and managed. It encompasses the roles of state institutions, private-sector organizations, and civil society organizations in working together to achieve shared societal objectives. Such collaboration includes activities such as the formulation of public policy, the management of public resources, and the development of partnerships among diverse organizations to promote the effective governance and sustainable development of society.⁵ From this perspective, the concept of governance suggests that social order is not established solely through the authority of the state. Rather, it emerges from the interactions and collaborative relationships among various institutions within society, all of which play important roles in shaping rules, coordinating collective action, and determining the direction of social development.

2.2 The Concept of Social Order Social order is a fundamental concept in political science and social sciences, used to describe a condition in which society is able to

¹ Max Weber as cited in Vaishnavi Singh, “Concept of Power and Authority,” *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities* 4, no. 4 (2021): p. 2334.

² Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 202–203.

³ Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 24–29.

⁴ Broadway, Robin and Anwar Shah, *Fiscal Federalism: Principles and Practice of Multilevel Governance*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 242.

⁵ “Government and Governance,” *Working Paper 044: Governance*, p.1.

function in an orderly and stable manner, characterized by relatively enduring patterns of relationships among its members. The concept is concerned with the various processes and mechanisms through which the behavior of individuals and groups is regulated by rules, norms, and social institutions. In political science, social order is commonly understood as a structure of social cooperation that enables members of society to coexist without descending into chaos or severe conflict. Such a structure may be established through political institutions, legal systems, or shared systems of values that define and reinforce socially acceptable and unacceptable forms of behavior. However, political theorists have argued that there is no single model of political or social order. Rather, social order can be explained from multiple theoretical perspectives. Traditional approaches generally maintain that political order is established through a hierarchical structure of authority, in which the state or governing authority occupies a central position in formulating rules and regulating society through a top-down process. In contrast, pluralist perspectives argue that social order emerges from cooperation and interactions among individuals and social groups. From this viewpoint, order develops through a bottom-up process, shaped by networks of social relationships and the interactions of various organizations and institutions within society. Accordingly, social order should not be regarded solely as the product of state authority. Rather, it is the outcome of continuous interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions that collectively establish the structures of cooperation and the norms governing social life. The concept of social order therefore plays a crucial role in explaining how political systems maintain social stability while accommodating the diversity of interests that exist within society.

Collectively, these teachings indicate that Buddhism conceptualizes social order as a self-regulating moral system in which social stability is achieved through internalized ethical discipline rather than external coercive control.

2.3 The Concept of Political Legitimacy The concept of political legitimacy is one of the fundamental concepts in political science, as it concerns the acceptance of the authority of political leaders and institutions by the people. In general, political legitimacy refers to the condition in

which political authority is recognized as rightful, appropriate, and deserving of obedience by members of society.⁶ (Heywood, 2013). However, political legitimacy differs from legality. While the exercise of authority may conform to legal rules and procedures, it may nevertheless lack political legitimacy if it is not accepted by the public or if it is perceived as lacking sufficient moral or normative justification.⁷

In political theory, Max Weber argued that legitimacy is a fundamental condition for the stability and endurance of political authority. According to Weber, political authority may be recognized and accepted by society through three distinct forms of legitimacy: traditional legitimacy, which is based on established customs and traditions; charismatic legitimacy, which derives from the exceptional qualities and personal authority of a leader; and legal-rational legitimacy, which rests upon the acceptance of legal rules, formal procedures, and rationally established institutions.⁸

Contemporary political scientists likewise argue that political legitimacy is closely associated with the effectiveness of governance and the capacity of the state to respond to the needs of its citizens. In other words, when a government governs effectively and upholds justice within society, its authority is more likely to be regarded as legitimate and to gain the acceptance and support of the public.⁹ (Beetham, 1991). Accordingly, political legitimacy constitutes a fundamental condition for the stability and durability of political authority. Legitimacy enables state authority to be recognized and accepted by the public, thereby reducing the need to rely on coercion to maintain political order and the stability of the political system.

3. Political Concepts in Buddhist Teachings

Although the primary objective of Buddhist teachings is the cultivation of the mind and the attainment of liberation from suffering, numerous passages in the Tipiṭaka and other Buddhist scriptures reflect ideas concerning social order, the exercise of power, and the legitimacy of political authority. These ideas may be fruitfully examined through the analytical framework of political science, particularly with regard to the concepts of power, governance, and political legitimacy, which constitute fundamental components of political systems in all societies.

⁶ Andrew Heywood, *Politics*, 4th ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 74–76.

⁷ Likhit Dhiravegin, *Thai Politics: Selected Aspects of Development and Change* (Bangkok: Ramkhamhaeng University Press, 2006), pp. 45–47.

⁸ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 212–301.

⁹ David Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power* (London: Macmillan Education, 1991), pp. 15–27.

3.1 The Concept of Power in Buddhist Teachings When considered within the framework of political science, power is generally defined as the capacity of an individual or an institution to influence the behavior of others or to shape the direction of society. From the perspective of Buddhist teachings, however, the concept of power is not confined to physical force or coercive authority. Rather, it is fundamentally grounded in moral virtue, self-cultivation, and the recognition and acceptance of others. In other words, genuine power arises from ethical conduct in body, speech, and mind. Those who are firmly established in moral virtue naturally earn the respect and trust of others, enabling them to serve as role models and to guide others through the power of their character rather than through coercion.¹⁰

This perspective is consistent with Buddhist teachings, which emphasize self-cultivation as the foundation of leadership. As the Buddha teaches: “One should first establish oneself in what is proper; only then should one instruct others. A wise person who acts in this way remains free from reproach.” Likewise: “As one instructs others, so should one act oneself. Having well trained oneself, one should then train others.” These teachings demonstrate that the exercise of authority begins with the cultivation of one's own moral character. Accordingly, genuine power is grounded not in coercion but in ethical conduct and personal integrity, through which leaders earn the respect and voluntary acceptance of others.¹¹

Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P. A. Payutto): 2000) explains that, in Buddhism, power is not primarily understood as the exercise of coercive authority but rather as authority grounded in Dhamma (the moral and ethical principles of the Buddha's teachings). According to this perspective, individuals who possess moral virtue naturally earn the voluntary recognition and respect of others. Consequently, authority derived from moral virtue is more enduring, legitimate, and beneficial to society than authority sustained through coercion or force.¹²

The Buddhist conception of power is also reflected in important canonical texts, particularly the Aggañña Sutta, which describes the origin of the state and political leadership in human society. According to the discourse, when conflict and social disorder emerged, the people

collectively selected an individual to restore peace and maintain social order. This individual was given the title Mahāsammata, meaning “the Great Elect” or “the One Chosen by the Many,” signifying a ruler who derives authority from the consent and recognition of the people. This account illustrates that, from the perspective of Buddhist teachings, the foundation of political authority lies primarily in social acceptance and collective consent, rather than in coercion or the exercise of force.

Furthermore, Buddhist teachings present the ideal of the ruler as a Dhammarāja (*Dhammarāja*), that is, a ruler who exercises authority in accordance with Dhamma (the moral law or righteous principles). This ideal is clearly articulated in the Cakkavatti Sihanāda Sutta, which teaches that a good ruler must govern according to Dhamma, administer justice impartially, and ensure the welfare of all members of society. Conversely, when a ruler neglects the principles of Dhamma, social decline and disorder inevitably follow. This teaching underscores the Buddhist view that political authority derives its legitimacy not merely from the possession of power but from the righteous and ethical exercise of that power for the well-being of society.¹³ According to several Thai scholars, the Buddhist conception of power emphasizes moral authority rather than coercion. Genuine authority arises from social recognition and the ruler's adherence to Dhamma, making legitimacy dependent on moral virtue and righteous conduct rather than the use of force. In this view, power is the capacity to influence through justice, ethical conduct, and the voluntary acceptance of society. Because such authority is grounded in virtue rather than domination, it fosters public trust and serves the well-being of the people, thereby promoting peace, justice, and social harmony.

3.2 The Concept of Governance in Buddhist Teachings the Buddhist concept of governance emphasizes the exercise of political authority in accordance with Dhamma for the welfare of the people. Although Buddhism does not prescribe a formal model of the state or government, it provides ethical principles concerning the responsibilities of rulers, the administration of society, and the maintenance of peace, justice, and social order. Accordingly, governance is understood not merely as the exercise of authority but as a moral responsibility grounded in justice, compassion, and public welfare.

¹⁰ Phrakhrū Wannawithun, *Buddhism and Political Administration*, 2nd ed. (Phayao: Master of Arts Program in Buddhism, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Phayao Campus, 2018), p. 78.

¹¹ Phrakhrū Wannawithun, *Buddhism and Political Administration*, p. 78.

¹² Phra Dhammapitaka (P. A. Payutto), *Buddhadhamma* (Bangkok: Buddhadhamma Foundation, 2000).

¹³ Phra Dhammapitaka (P. A. Payutto), *Buddhadhamma* (Bangkok: Buddhadhamma Foundation, 2000).

A central expression of this ideal is the Ten Royal Virtues (Dasa-rāja-dhamma), which define the ethical qualities of an ideal ruler. These virtues consist of dāna (generosity), sīla (moral conduct), pariccāga (self-sacrifice), ājjava (honesty and integrity), maddava (gentleness), tapa (self-discipline), akkodha (non-anger), avihimsā (non-violence), khanti (patience and forbearance), and aviroduhana (uprightness and adherence to righteousness). Collectively, they establish an ethical framework for political leadership, emphasizing that the legitimacy and effectiveness of governance depend on moral integrity, self-restraint, justice, and commitment to public welfare.

Buddhist teachings further elaborate this conception through the Four Principles of Royal Beneficence (Rāja-saṅgahavattu), which emphasize sound economic stewardship (Sassamedha), effective human resource development (Purisamedha), social cohesion (Sammāpāsa), and wise communication (Vājapeyya). In addition, the Cakkavatti-vatta prescribes the duties of an ideal ruler, including the impartial administration of justice, protection of the people, assistance to the disadvantaged, and consultation with wise advisors. Together, these principles demonstrate that good governance extends beyond legal authority to encompass ethical leadership, public trust, and social solidarity.

Taken together, these teachings present governance as an ethical responsibility founded on the ruler's moral character, commitment to public welfare, and righteous exercise of authority. By integrating the Ten Royal Virtues, the Four Principles of Royal Beneficence, and the Cakkavatti-vatta, Buddhist political thought portrays governance as a means of promoting peace, justice, and the common good through the ethical exercise of political authority.

3.3 The Concept of Political Legitimacy in Buddhist Teachings Political legitimacy is a fundamental concept in political science that explains why people accept the authority of those who govern them. Legitimacy refers not merely to legality or conformity with the law, but to the extent to which political authority is perceived by the public as rightful, appropriate, and deserving of obedience.¹⁴ In Max Weber's theory, legitimacy constitutes an essential condition for the stability and endurance of political authority. Weber identifies three forms of legitimacy:

traditional legitimacy, charismatic legitimacy, and legal-rational legitimacy.¹⁵ However, when examined from the perspective of Buddhist teachings, the concept of political legitimacy possesses distinctive characteristics. Rather than being founded upon hereditary status, dynastic succession, or coercive authority, legitimacy is grounded in the acceptance of the people and the ruler's adherence to Dhamma.

This principle is clearly illustrated in the *Aggañña Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya*, *Pāṭika Vagga*), which describes the origin of human society and political authority. According to the discourse, as greed, theft, falsehood, and social conflict emerged among human beings, the people collectively agreed to appoint an individual to adjudicate disputes and preserve peace and social order. This individual was given the title Mahāsammata, meaning “the One Chosen by the People” or “the Great Elect.” This account demonstrates that the authority of a ruler originates from the collective consent and recognition of the people, rather than from divine right, hereditary privilege, or supernatural authority.

Although a ruler may initially gain the acceptance of the people, Buddhist teachings maintain that political legitimacy can be sustained only when authority is exercised in accordance with Dhamma. This principle is clearly articulated in the Cakkavatti Sīhanāda Sutta (*Dīgha Nikāya*, *Mahāvagga*), which explains that when rulers neglect Dhamma, fail to care for the welfare of their people, or do not alleviate poverty, society gradually declines. As a consequence, theft, violence, and other forms of crime progressively increase, leading to social disorder.

This perspective is consistent with the doctrine of the Ten Royal Virtues (Dasa-rāja-dhamma), which prescribes that rulers should embody moral qualities such as Dāna (generosity), Sīla (moral conduct), Ājjava (honesty and integrity), Avihimsā (non-violence), and Avirodhana (uprightness and adherence to righteousness), thereby cultivating the trust and confidence of the people¹⁶. In other words, legitimacy is not something acquired once and for all upon assuming political office; rather, it must be continuously maintained through the consistent practice of Dhamma and ethical governance.¹⁷

When compared with Max Weber's theory of legitimacy, it becomes evident that Buddhist political thought places greater emphasis on moral legitimacy than

¹⁴ Andrew Heywood, *Politics*, 4th ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 74–76; David Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power* (London: Macmillan Education, 1991), pp. 15–27.

¹⁵ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 212–301.

¹⁶ Michael, “10 Royal Virtues of a Good Leader (Dasa-rājadhamma),” *Cattāri Brahmvihāra*, April 16, 2025, accessed July 7, 2026, Cattāri Brahmvihāra

¹⁷ Phrakhrū Wannawitthun, *Buddhism and Political Administration*, pp. 1120–123.

on legal legitimacy. A ruler gains public acceptance not merely by occupying political office but by governing in accordance with Dhamma and exercising authority for the welfare of the people. This perspective is also consistent with the argument advanced by Beetham (1991), who maintains that legitimacy depends upon a shared societal belief that the exercise of power is appropriate, just, and morally justified.¹⁸

Accordingly, political legitimacy in Buddhism consists of three essential elements: (1) the acceptance and consent of the people; (2) the exercise of authority in accordance with Dhamma; and (3) the continuous cultivation and maintenance of the ruler's moral virtue. Together, these elements enable political authority to gain voluntary public recognition and reduce the need to rely upon coercion in maintaining political order and social stability.

Social order is a fundamental concept in political science and sociology, as it concerns the rules, patterns, and norms that enable members of society to coexist peacefully and harmoniously. In political science, social order is regarded as a crucial mechanism for maintaining social stability and minimizing conflict among members of society through political institutions, legal systems, and shared values that are collectively accepted by the community.¹⁹ From a sociological perspective, Chalio Ruksrujiphimon defines social order as the process by which members of society collectively establish rules and patterns of conduct to guide behavior in different situations, times, and social roles. These shared rules enable individuals to anticipate one another's behavior, thereby fostering social order, predictability, and stability in communal life²⁰ from the perspective of Buddhist teachings, however, social order is not founded primarily upon coercion or punitive sanctions. Rather, it is grounded in the cultivation of moral character, enabling individuals to exercise self-regulation and voluntarily adhere to shared norms. Buddhism maintains that when members of society cultivate moral discipline (*sīla*), mindfulness (*sati*), and wisdom (*paññā*), they naturally behave toward one another in appropriate and ethical ways. As a result, social peace and order arise without the need for extensive external coercion or authoritarian control²¹

One of the principal teachings reflecting this conception is the Four Bases of Social Solidarity (*Saṅgahavatthu* 4), comprising *Dāna* (generosity), *Piyavācā* (kind and courteous speech), *Atthacariyā* (conduct beneficial to others), and *Samānattatā* (impartiality and equal treatment). These principles promote generosity, cooperation, mutual respect, and equality among members of society. Consequently, they reduce social conflict, foster trust, and strengthen interpersonal relationships, thereby contributing to a stable and harmonious social order.²²

Similarly, the Six Principles of Cordiality (*Sāraṇīyadhamma* 6) promote unity and social cohesion by encouraging goodwill in body, speech, and mind, the sharing of benefits, the collective observance of moral discipline, and the cultivation of shared right views. These principles demonstrate that social order is sustained primarily through mutual respect, shared moral values, and voluntary cooperation, rather than through external coercive authority.²³

With regard to the governance of society, the Seven Conditions of Welfare (*Aparihāniyadhamma* 7), taught by the Buddha to the Vajji confederacy, emphasize that the prosperity and stability of society depend upon regular consultation and deliberation, respect for established rules and institutions, deference to elders, and the protection of virtuous individuals.²⁴ These principles closely parallel the contemporary concept of good governance, which emphasizes participation, transparency, accountability, and collaborative decision-making in public affairs.

Beyond its teachings for society at large, Buddhism also establishes the Vinaya as a comprehensive mechanism for regulating the Saṅgha, which may be regarded as a distinct social institution. The Vinaya prescribes a common code of conduct for monks in order to preserve the purity, unity, and stability of the monastic community. Its disciplinary system emphasizes acknowledgment of wrongdoing, self-correction, reconciliation, and the preservation of communal harmony, rather than punishment as a means of social control.

From a political science perspective, these teachings present a model of social order that differs fundamentally from state-centered theories. Rather than relying primarily on legal enforcement or coercive authority, Buddhism understands social order as arising

¹⁸ David Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power* (London: Macmillan Education, 1991), pp. 15–27.

¹⁹ Beetham, David. *The Legitimation of Power*. London: Macmillan Education, 1991.

²⁰ Chalio Ruksrujiphimon, *Sociology* (Bangkok: Ramkhamhaeng University Press, 2000), p. 29.

²¹ Phra Brahmagunabhorn (P. A. Payutto), *Buddhadhamma* (Bangkok: Buddhadhamma Foundation, 2003)

²² Apinyawat Phosan, *Fundamentals of Buddhism* (Bangkok: PIM TAN JAI, 2023), pp. 503–506.

²³ *Thai Tipiṭaka*, Vol. 22, *Sāraṇīyadhamma* (The Six Principles of Cordiality).

²⁴ *Thai Tipiṭaka*, Vol. 1, *Vinaya Piṭaka*.

from moral cultivation, social cooperation, and the voluntary acceptance of ethical principles grounded in Dhamma. This process begins with the moral development of the individual and extends to the family, community, and society as a whole. Accordingly, peace and social stability are sustained through virtue, shared norms, and cooperative relationships rather than coercive power, providing the foundation for harmonious and sustainable coexistence. Although Buddhism does not prescribe a model of the state or a political system comparable to those of modern political science, the teachings preserved in the Tipiṭaka embody fundamental political concepts, including power, governance, political legitimacy, and social order, which may be interpreted as a coherent political science framework. A principal finding of this study is that Buddhism advances the concept of moral power, whereby authority derives from moral virtue rather than physical force, coercion, or political status. In this view, authority is sustained through the recognition and voluntary acceptance of the people. This conception differs from the perspectives of Weber (1978) and Dahl (1961), who define power primarily in terms of the capacity to influence the behavior of others, while converging with their theories in recognizing that enduring authority ultimately depends on public acceptance.²⁵ With regard to governance, Buddhism places less emphasis on the institutional structure of the state than on the moral character of rulers. This perspective is articulated through doctrines such as the Ten Royal Virtues (*Dasa-rāja-dhamma*), the Four Principles of Royal Beneficence (*Rāja-saṅgahavatthu 4*), and the Duties of the Universal Monarch (*Cakkavatti-vatta*).² Consequently, governance is understood primarily as the ethical administration of society for the welfare and happiness of the people, rather than as the exercise of political authority for the preservation of state power.

Regarding political legitimacy, Buddhism maintains that rulers derive legitimacy from both the acceptance of the people and their adherence to Dhamma. This principle is clearly illustrated in the *Aggañña Sutta* and the *Cakkavatti Sihanāda Sutta*, where the legitimacy of political authority depends upon public recognition and righteous conduct.²⁶ This perspective closely corresponds to David Beetham's conception of political legitimacy, which emphasizes that legitimacy rests upon the shared belief that the exercise of authority is appropriate, just, and morally

acceptable, rather than upon legal authority alone.²⁷ With respect to social order, the findings indicate that Buddhism promotes social order through moral cultivation, cooperation, and the voluntary acceptance of shared ethical principles rather than coercive state authority. Social order is therefore understood as an internal moral order grounded in self-discipline and ethical development, rather than an external order maintained primarily through law or force. Taken together, these findings suggest that the Buddhist concepts of power, governance, political legitimacy, and social order form a coherent political framework unified by the principle of Dhamma. Although Buddhism does not formulate a theory of the state comparable to those of modern political science, this study demonstrates that its teachings can be systematically interpreted through a political science framework centered on these four interrelated concepts. In this framework, moral virtue constitutes the foundation of political authority and governance, offering an alternative perspective that emphasizes ethical leadership over coercive power. By highlighting this dimension, the study broadens the scope of Buddhist political thought and provides a basis for future research on the relationship between religion, politics, and governance in contemporary societies.

4. Conclusion

This article has examined political concepts in Early Buddhism through the analytical framework of power, governance, political legitimacy, and social order. Although Buddhism does not propose a formal theory of the state or government comparable to modern political science, the findings demonstrate that the Tipiṭaka contains coherent political ideas that can be systematically interpreted within a contemporary political science framework.

The analysis shows that Buddhist political thought conceives power as moral authority grounded in virtue and public acceptance; governance as the ethical exercise of authority for the welfare of society; political legitimacy as arising from the ruler's adherence to Dhamma; and social order as sustained through moral cultivation, cooperation, and justice rather than coercion. Together, these concepts reveal Dhamma as the normative foundation linking authority, governance, legitimacy, and social order.

These findings suggest that Early Buddhism offers a distinctive model of ethical governance in which political

²⁵ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 53; Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 202–203.

²⁶ *Dīgha Nikāya, Aggañña Sutta* (DN 27) and *Cakkavatti Sihanāda Sutta* (DN 26), in Maurice Walshe, trans., *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A*

Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), pp. 395–420.

²⁷ David Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power* (London: Macmillan Education, 1991), pp. 15–25.

authority derives from moral responsibility rather than force. As such, Buddhist political thought provides an alternative conceptual perspective for political science and contributes to contemporary discussions on governance, justice, social harmony, and sustainable coexistence.

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