

# SMILE OF PEACE: JAYAVARMAN VII'S CONFLICT RESOLUTION TOWARD PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT IN ANGKOR ERA

Ven. Horn Ken\*

## ABSTRACT

This academic paper is conducted to explore how Khmer great kings in the past used Buddhism as a way to conflict resolution. The paper suggests that Buddhism became the dominance religion in Cambodian after the King Jayavarman VII got the crown. Before that Khmer Empire was dominated by Hinduism and one can see the explanation through the ruined temples such as Angkor Wat temple. Throughout the discussion, the paper found that King Jayavarman VII was inspired by his second queen to support and promote Buddhism across the Kingdom.

A clearevidence was the establishment of many rest houses, hospitals, schools and public workplace across the country, from North to South and from East to West direction.

Another piece of proof to show that King Jayavrman VII was the pioneer of peace and unity after devastative war caused by old-arch enemy, Champa, and religious violent conflict was the construction of Angkor Thom. The four smile faces on the top of Bayon temple represents a united conflict resolution between two dominant religions, Hindu and Buddhism.

**Keywords;** Jayavarman VII, Smile of Peace, Angkor Era, Conflict, Peace, Resolutions

## Introduction

The Angkor era under King Jayavarman VII was the Golden Age, the age of prosperity in the history of Cambodia. Its Khmer civilization was at the highest point. The king laid down his responsive and inclusive public policy to serve the whole nation. Starting from building temples to schools and

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\* Cambodia

hospitals and from the city center to the rural areas, the king worked selflessly to make sure his nation get prospered. His public policy was regarded as the prime policy and was derived from the combination of two religions – Mahayana Buddhism and Brahmanism. Through the research and excavation in Cambodia and the neighboring countries, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand by the French researcher from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were numerous evidences explaining that the King Jayavarman VII took a lot of effort to serve this nation. The remnant stones and construction from ruined temples could tell us that there were hundreds of rest houses, public works, schools and hospitals were built across the kingdom.

Before that, Khmer empire was in wars internally and externally. The kings in those days can fight against any wars such as rebellion wars, annexation of territory from small ethnic groups, or against the invasion of its neighboring nations. The king can bring peace and stability to the Kingdom easily. However, one of the ugliest wars that brought big trouble to the kings in the time was the religious war. This can't be easily ended. For many times, violent conflicts erupted because of religious issues.

A Dozen of Khmer kings fought against this intractable, nonnegotiable war and they all failed. They couldn't provide any better resolution to the conflict nor elimination one or another enemy. The kings in those days can't differentiate themselves from religion. They can't be independent. One or more king must hold this or that religion before he could be granted the crown. Due to religious influence, a post that the king was holding was instable. To make it more stable, the kings must satisfy his guru by praising one particular religion and threatening the opposition but they didn't realized such policy became a direct threat to one another religion. It offended its counterpart and that was a bad policy in action. In response, the opposition religion invested large effort to find way in order to overthrow the kings and

installed a new one they believed would take their side. Finally, religious war was nonnegotiable and brought huge headache to all kings.

### **The Reign of Jayavarman VII**

All kings were in deadly trouble when they had to provide conflict resolution to such intractable religious problem, except for one king Jayavarman VII. He was one of the most forceful and productive kings of the Khmer empire of Angkor. He expanded the empire to its greatest territorial extent. During his reign, the Cambodian kingdom spanned a huge area; extending beyond the Menam Basin to the west (the Bayon inscription mentions the existence of two statues of divinities guarding the cities of Ratchaburi and Phetburi in Thailand), as far as the seacoast of Champa to the east, as far as the city of Sukhothai (which was supervised by Khmer functionaries) in the north, all the way down to the southern sea. At the time the Khmers were trading with China, India and other countries of Asia Minor (See photo 1). The king engaged in a building program that yielded numerous temples (including Angkor Thom), highways, rest houses, and hospitals.

King Jayavarman VII was the son of King Dharanindravarman II. Following the early death of his first wife, Jayarajadevi, he married Rajendradevi, the older sister of his first wife. His second wife was responsible for the providing a Buddhist education for young girls of the palace. She was a renowned poet whose knowledge of science and philosophy was said to be without equal. One of Jayavarman VII's sons, Suryakumara, was the author of the Ta Prohm stele. According to the Preah Khan inscription, he had two more sons, Srivirakumara and Sriindrakumara by Queen Rajendradevi.

The name of Jayavarman VII was little known before 1903, at which time the Bulletin EFEO (École Française d'Extrême-Orient) published a study by Louis Finot concerning a Sanskrit inscription discovered by Georges Maspéro in the Say Fong region

of Laos (near Vientiane). This inscription proclaims an edict issued by Jayavarman VII concerning the establishment of a hospital in 1186 (Harris 2005, 19).

Georges Coedès studied numerous inscriptions including those of Ta Prohm, BanteayChhmar, the hospital edicts, Vimeanakas (Phimeanakas), Indradevi's inscription and an inscription from Mi-Son (Champa). Coedès made a comparative study of these inscriptions and scenes depicted in the bas-reliefs of the Bayon and at BanteayChhmar temple that relate to events in Jayavarman VII's reign.

In 1181, Jayavarman VII became king and established a new capital, Angkor Thom. King Jayavarman VII was greatly concerned with the wellbeing of his kingdom and wanted to turn it into an earthly paradise. The Ta Prohm inscription comments on this subject: "He found satisfaction in the nectar of his religion, the Sakyamuni Buddhism of the Greater Vehicle, within which he identified a cult of deceased relatives with the characteristics of the compassionate Bodhisattva and Prajnaparamita."

### **1. Arts and Constructions**

With regard to the arts, the king was responsible for the construction of numerous temples in the Angkor region and in other provinces. The Ta Prohm temple, constructed at Angkor in 1186 and referred to as the 'Royal Vihara', was dedicated as a Buddhist temple which housed a statue of Jayavarman VII's mother (Srirajacudamuni) represented as Prajnaparamita. Five years later, the king founded Preah Khan temple in order to house a statue of his father, Dharanindravarman II, in the likeness of Lokeshvara (also called 'Jayavarman VII'). In the centre of the JayatatakaBaray, the king erected NeakPeon temple, in which he placed a statue of Buddha the Healer and protector against illness (Bhaisajya-guru). Also in this temple he placed a statue of his father, as Jayavamesvara, and a statue of the Buddha. At the end of his reign, Jayavarman constructed the Bayon temple, which he dedicated to the Buddhist cult of the Buddha Raja instead of the traditional

Linga Raja. He was also responsible for the construction of the temples of BanteayKdei, BanteayChhmar (dedicated to his son, Sindrakumara), Banon near Battambang, WatNokor in Kompong Cham, Ta Prohm at TonleBati (Takeo Province), Ta Som, KrolKo, and the walls and gateways of Angkor Thom (Stubbs 2006, 2).

Besides these constructions, the king established a network of roads linking Angkor Thom with Champa (Vijaya-BinhDinh, Vietnam), and with Phimai (Thailand). Along these roads he erected 121 rest houses - one every 15 kilometres. These included:

From Angkor Thom to Champa.....	57 rest houses
From Angkor Thom to Phimai.....	17 rest houses
Along other routes.....	46 rest houses
At Phnom Chiso.....	1 rest house

Jayavarman VII established 102 hospitals throughout the kingdom. The inscription of Say Fong notes: “He suffered the illnesses of his subjects more than his own; because it is the pain of the public that is the pain of kings rather than their own pain.”

The 14th stanza of this same inscription says: “Through warriors (doctors) versed in the science of arms (disease) he destroys the enemies who infest his kingdom (the sick) by using his weaponry: medicine.”

### **An Approach to Religious Reconciliation**

Right after he expelled Champa invaders from the country, Jayavarman VII spent his valuable time with internal problems. One should be reminded that from the 9th to the 11th century, Angkor Wat was home to a great Hindu civilization. the leaders at Angkor were god-kings, or deva rajas. However, Hinduism lost its influence in Angkor during a period running roughly from the 1200s –1400s AD due to a new sphere of influence from Mahayana Buddhism because Buddhism puts salvation in the hands of the

individual and was more humanistic religion. As pointed out earlier, there were violent conflicts among religions – mainly Mahayana Buddhism and Brahmanism. This conflict was a deadly problem to Khmer empire in the time. It can't be easily tamed. Most of the kings couldn't bring any acceptable solution to this controversy. They rather provided a resolution that even created more division, hatred and discrimination (Lowman 2009, 5).

For very visionary leadership, Jayavarman VII laid down a credible leadership skill through his personal statement “The suffering of the citizens is the king's suffering.” With this very core value in his mind, he worked for it day and night. He turned all attention to invest for the public interests. As mentioned early, unlike previous kings that narrowly focus on his subjects in the city, Jayavarman VII expanded his policy towards the people across the country. Lowman once said in his doctoral studies about Angkorian society that ‘one innovation of King Jayavarman's rule was his populist attempt to close the distance between king and subject that had existed before,’ (Lowman 2009, 1).

Together with an exceptional assistance from his second wife, Indradevi who was believed to be a sponsor for Buddhist study, JayavarmanVII initiated a giant construction in the Angkor city, nowadays in Siem Reap province, in order to reunite the religion.

In his mind, embracing one religion and deemphasizing another can never be the best option. The same applies to peace as once said by Buddha hatred can never be ended by hatred but by love alone. Enmities never cease by enmity in this world; they only cease by non-enmity. This is an ancient law. Hence, Jayavarman VII believed that to bring integration and solidarity there must be one solution for all. This was a tough assignment for the king. However, his tremendous determination overrode an obstacle (Sophorn and Pathomarth 2012, 5).

Through history, Jayavarman VII had learned that previous kings biased to only a religion they believed in and disregarded the other they

have no idea about. The previous kings gave special treatment toward their own groups and not the others. They may build big temples or public places but only for people from their own group to use. Such discrimination and unfair treatment became the cancer and killed many Khmer for decades. The kingdom can be easily disintegrated (Zephir 1995, 8).

As King Jayavarman VII took a lesson learned from the past ruling, he had proposed a unifying solution through building Bayon temple, Angkor Thom nowadays (See the picture). How this Bayon construction healed the religious illness?

### **1. Smile of Peace – an approach to unification**

Following the example of his predecessors, the king combined religious construction and other public works with the development of the agricultural domain. For example, Angkor Thom, like other provincial temples, possessed moats, ponds and barays (the huge reservoirs of water so vital to the irrigation systems). The king joined forces with his subjects in order to tame the natural environment.

Following the tradition of his father, Jayavarman VII was a Mahayana Buddhist. Nevertheless, through his reign, Brahmanism was tolerated because his first wife had worshipped Buddha, Siva and Visnu. The king changed the royal religion from Brahmanism, which had long been the traditional religion, to Mahayana Buddhism, of which the principal divinities are Lokeshvara and Prajnaparamita. As noted already, he erected statues of Bodhisattva in honour of his ancestors.

The Bayon temple contains many towers, each with four faces of the compassionate Bodhisattva (Lokeshvara). Jayavarman VII identified himself with this Bodhisattva who spread peace throughout the world. The smiling faces of the Bayon reveal not only the king's devotion and patriotism, but also his great compassion spread in the four cardinal directions, just as Lokeshvara guides the living towards Nirvana.

The idea behind these smiling faces is that it is the symbol of respect for the two religions – Mahayana Buddhism and Brahmanism. The king held that Khmer can't

be separated. They like to live together, work together and pray together. Separating one group of people to do jobs differently would mean discrimination to them. Hence, Bayon temple was the only solution.

As one can see in the photo 1 above, there has no one hate this smiling face. They rather would be impressed and appreciate the construction. Simply, to people like us in these days wearing no faith-glasses to view this photo we feel the sign of peace, love, compassion and prosperity. However, for the Angkorian people they saw this photo differently from us. To Brahmanism, this was their Brahma Gods. The smiling face reveals the unlimited love, care and kindness from their gods. On the other hand, to Buddhism they saw this photo as symbol of the four sublime states of mind taught by Lord Buddha (Thera 1999, 14).

Therefore, Bayon temple was seen as a place for both religions. Angkorian people need not to destroy the temple and build a new one. They just went and pray for their Gods in this temple. The same thing to Mahayana Buddhism, they can come and go to visit the temple to pay their homage to Lord Buddha. After all, day and night went so long and Brahman and Buddhist began to talk to each other. Time has healed their hatred, anger, mistrust and anxiety.

For years, this temple served both religious groups until they didn't recognize that they can come together and live together peacefully. The conflict resolution was made by king Jayavarman VII brought solidarity, amity and cooperation among Angkorian people in those days. Consequently, although some say the king Jayvarman VII converted the kingdom from Brahmanism to Buddhism, it is not perfectly true. Elements of practice of both religions remain in practice in Cambodia. Perhaps, majority of the Khmer people claim they are Buddhist but one should look at their daily worship.

Up until date, these two religions have stayed deep down in the heart of the Khmer people. They might not recognize it but it is there through their everyday practice. The peaceful and conflict resolution proposed by



Jayavarman VII resulted in a hybrid religion in Cambodia nowadays. In fact, some people would say Brahmanism is the king's religion and Buddhism is for the general Cambodians. For example, the ways of worship and processing during the King Inauguration, King's wedding, and Water Festival are through Brahmanism, not Buddhism (See photo 3). One can also find this practice of Brahmanism across Cambodia such as the worship of gods in each ruined temple and many other prominent places.

In short, the smile of peace on the Bayon temple has worked as united conflict resolution to a religious war between Buddhism and Brahmanism. Finally, there is no more religious war anymore in the kingdom till date. Khmer people started to live together, integrated, learned from each other and shared each other value. The Smile of Peace has turned the battle of field of religious conflicts to the paradise of cooperation between Khmer and Khmer.

## **2. Smile of Peace in the Teaching of Buddha**

If we want peace, stability and growth in material terms, we need to have peace in the mind of the individual. How can there be real peace, stability and growth in a society or country when we have an agitated mind. It is nonsense to have a sustainable development and economic growth if the quality of the mind of the individual is corrupted, full of anger, hatred and ill-will. Hence, "first find healthy mind within ourselves before looking into the society," said Buddha.

A word of peace, stability and sustainable development has been sent from India to the world since 2500 years ago. The message is clear and self-explanatory. It remains valid till date. Everyone loves peace, stability and growth. No one wants violent conflict and war. All human beings in this planet earth seek happiness over suffering. That is a game of life. However, people use different means to reach that purpose in life. While there are vast methods towards healthy and growth, such as GDP, GNP or good governance,

suggested by the worldly scholars, this paper will examine sustainable development through a Buddhist point of views.

It is worthy of reminding that there are two undeniable truths – suffering and happiness. Suffering tends to exist before us so often than happiness. One may have a look at the first second of a new baby born. Crying and crying is his/her very first reaction to this universe. Over time, they grow older and older there are more complicated issues they have to confront, food to eat, shelter to sleep, and security to stay safe.

Although suffering happens to us a lot more than happiness, no one loves suffering. We all are working at all costs to minimize this problematic life and maximize the sphere of happiness as big as we can.

The world is in searching for an effective way to obtain a sustainable community. They have proposed numerous key principles to realize this vision, including the establishment of the millennium development goals and sustainable development goals. For those Western thinkers, a sustainable development should go through the respect of individual's rights and freedom, good governance, political and socio-economical rights etc. Somehow these proposed principles would work to a certain extent. However, in the long run it is not material development that counts but spiritual development does. In order to obtain a peaceful, stable and growth society we need to have a society that is full of loving-kindness, compassionate and integrity members. Additionally, to maintain a peaceful and stable society long last those components of loving-kindness, compassion and integrity to last long must be always there, too.

According to the teaching of Buddha, to create peace, stability and sustainable growth for both individual and society there are mainly two principles must be followed:

## **A. To Love**

Love is the sublime nobility of heart and intellect which knows, understands, and is ready to help. Love is the opposite of hatred or killing a life. Love is a prerequisite factor before we can start a happy and productive life. Love is the prime component called BrahmaviharaDhama, the Four Sublime States of Mind:

- Loving-kindness (Mettā) is good-will, universal love to wish for the happiness of all living beings.

- Compassion (Karunā) is the wish to remove the suffering of others. A compassionate one seeks opportunities to serve others expecting nothing in return.

- Sympathetic joy (Muditā) is the ability of being happy in the happiness of others and is, therefore, the opposite of jealousy, spite and envy.

- Equanimity (Upekkhā) is the balance mind toward all phenomenon: Gain and Loss, Fame and Ill-fame, Praise and Blame, Happiness and Sorrow.

As mentioned early, King Jayavarman VII had turned himself to be one of Buddhisatva and practicing the four sublime states of mind. Through a smile of four faces, one can easily notice that it is the symbol of universal or unconditional love the king or Buddhisatva wants to share. In fact, Angkorian society was blessed with these four sublime states of mind. The king Jayavarman VII had inserted all of these principles in his administration. Consequently, public works, rest houses, schools, temples, and hospital were ordered to build to serve the wellbeing of the Angkorian people.

## **B. To Live a Happy Life**

In order to live a happy life, there are four components of happiness should be emphasized.

First Happiness (Atthi-Sukha) = Enjoy economic or sufficient wealth acquired by just and righteous means. Having not enough food to eat, no proper shelter to sleep and no medical support to cure when in health

problem is not the best choice in life. Although money can't buy everything, it at least stands as a helpful tool for people to build convenient life. As long as this wealth comes from legally and morally business, sufficient economics is useful. All people should avoid the livelihood that is harmful to others and in particular the five evil professions (BhanteSaranapala 2005).

The 5 evil professions:

1. Dealing in Weapons
2. Dealing in Human beings (human trafficking)
3. Dealing in Animals: Raising animals to be slaughtered and sold in business
4. Dealing in Intoxicants: Producing and selling alcohol and intoxicants of all kinds
5. Dealing in Poisons: Producing and selling poisons

All these five professions are regarded as the worst of all jobs. All the teaching of each religion and perhaps international laws of the world organizations has forbidden such human trafficking, producing and dealing in poisons or dealing in weapons. Why these five professions are evil? Because it mainly causes death and could distinct the life of all beings. Dealing in intoxicants such as alcohol and drugs might be allowable for some society since they see the positive side of it. However, alcohol never helps human but rather destroys the mental state of mind of each individual who associates with it. Truth has been told. No one can manage to have mindfulness when alcohol is consumed.

For Buddhism, we also recognizes the usefulness of such drink but we also have a strong note that whenever this consumption has been made, human easily loses their control and becomes careless, violent and dull person.

Second Happiness (BhogaSukha) = Spend that wealth liberally on himself, his family, his friends and relatives, and on meritorious deeds, i.e., building hospital, school, temples, and/or anything beneficial for the

community. 'Money earned honestly, spent wisely and invested in the service of human kind will bring true happiness.'- DadiPrakashmani

The art of spending money is another essential factor to determine a good and peaceful life and so does a society. For most of us, having lots of money is the most preferable. However, they haven't recognized that it is not just having lots of wealth but know how to spend that money is equally important. Basically, to spend money wisely is to have a fair distribution of our wealth to our needs in life. Support the family, building house, education fees and other services are some examples of today's expenditure. The teaching of Buddha tells us to divide our wealth into four different categories.

- a. Payback to our old-debt
- b. Create a new debt
- c. Self-Support
- d. Investing in meritorious deeds

We all have parents or grandparents. What can we do with them? They are son's and daughter's god. They are the creator for all son and daughter. They work day and night to save some small money so that they can buy us foods, building us shelter, sending us to a proper school etc. As a son or daughter, we are expected to return back this debt. We should raise them back. Buy them good foods, bring them good education and serve them a comfortable life till the end.

At the same time, we soon will have a family, creating new members. As the parents of our baby boy and baby girl, we hold responsible for their new life. Hence, we are supposed to divide some wealth to support them so that they can enroll in a proper education and having good time with their teenager's and adult's life.

We can't help others if we haven't fed ourselves enough. That is why one among the four spending to support ourselves. Eat good foods,

listen to good music, exercising good sports, watching good movies and reading good books are all required tools to do so that we can have a regular self-renewal. Last but not least, leave some of part of our earned-wealth to cultivate good deeds. Investing in help others, donate to the needy children and sponsor the group of people to develop good project for their society are the best example of investing in meritorious deeds.

Third Happiness (Anana-Sukha) = To be free from debts. Do we feel happy when we owe lots of money from the bank? Of course, not. Life of free from debt is the best of all choices. The debt we owe is various ranging from gratitude to material, social and spiritual debts. Our parents had done such valuable job to raise us up. They have worked day and night to make sure that we can have a lovely family and living our lives like everyone else. Sometime they commit mistake because they want all kids to have enough foods to eat, enough money to spend and proper shelter to live on. The same with our heroes of the nations, our religious people and our neighboring friends, they all share wellbeing with us. We can't live peacefully with them. We are interdependence. We need to depend on each other. If we have to depend on one another, then we have to do good to each other. Hence, the third happiness tells us to be a gratitude person. Never forget those people and society that give us chance to live our lives like today.

Fourth Happiness (Anavajja-Sukha)= Live a faultless and pure life ((Sucarita) without committing evil in action, word, and thought. Committing evil in action such as do not killing of living beings, not stealing and avoiding sexual misconduct (unlawful sexual practice). Avoid committing evil in word such as not lying, not slander and tale-bearing, not using harsh speech and not using frivolous and meaningless talk. The practice the four principles of speech bring the harmony and peace to oneself and society as whole. Finally, a faultless and pure life should avoid the unwholesome state of mind

such as: non-covetousness, good-will, and holding right view. These three wholesome deeds shall be practiced to lighten progressively the three defilements: greed, hatred and delusion.

## **Conclusion**

What we have to admire the most is the intelligent King Jayavarman VII had employed to provide an effective resolution to the religious conflict. Smile of Peace through the construction of Bayon Temple or Angkor Thom. It is not that easy to come up with this very creative idea. As we have known, when it comes to religious faiths, it is an intractable and nonnegotiable issue. People dare to die themselves but they can't let their religion goes down. They don't even care their races or skin color or ethnic group. What they care the most is to keep their religion alive and prosper. The same thing happened to Angkorian people. Actually, they are the same Khmer but because of different religious practice they began to go against each other.

In order to save the whole nation from such disastrous war, leadership skill is very much needed. King Jayavarman VII has revealed a unique leadership skill we can learn from. King Jayavarman VII put the interests of his nation and his subjects before him. He worked for it selflessly it. This requires our next generation to do the same thing. Let's start our position or office by saying 'the suffering of my subjects is my suffering.'

It is noteworthy of noting that a smile of peace deal to resolve violent conflict is not the first time to be used. In fact, it was firstly used during Buddha's time when Lord Buddha went to help resolve a violent conflict between the Sakiyas – members of the republic from which he himself came – and the Koliyas. Both used the waters of a dammed river that ran between their territories, and when the water-level fell, the labourers of both peoples wanted the water for their own crops. They thus fell to

quarrelling and insulting each other, and when those in power heard of these insults, they prepared for war. Buddha told the two groups that please live with each other harmoniously. Killing to death is not the best choice. If do so, all of them will die and no can enjoy the water. Hence, Buddha proposed a solution so that both parties enjoy using the water peacefully. Any resolution, after all, that intends to exclude one or more party from benefiting the common interest is doom fail. – Said Buddha.

## **Recommendation**

It is essential for all Buddhist followers to come up with a resolution that has inclusiveness in nature like what has been done by Jayavarman VII. The power of creativity is deadly necessary in order to make use the great teaching from Lord Buddha. Moreover, it is always a code for all decision makers to keep them motivated by loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity whenever they adopt any public policy.

The study from King Jayavarman VII educates us that leadership skill is so important for each and everybody. Leadership skill through Buddhism is even vital for maintaining a sustainable and advanced society. Additionally, Buddhist way is one of the best methods to reach peace, prosperity and harmony. It reminds us that King Jayvarman VII already practiced this lesson and he brought peace to his kingdom. It is even important for us to not just know the theory but bring this good theory into practice.

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