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A Model of Sangha's Affairs Development and Management in Creative Approach

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ABSTRACT: This study aimed to (1) examine the current state of Sangha administration in Thailand, (2) analyze approaches for strengthening Sangha administration through creative governance, and (3) develop a creative governance model for sustainable Sangha administration. A qualitative research design was employed using documentary analysis and in-depth interviews with 21 key informants selected for their expertise in Buddhist monastic administration. Data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. The findings reveal that Sangha administration operates through a hierarchical structure at national, regional, provincial, district, and subdistrict levels and encompasses six core administrative domains: ecclesiastical governance, Buddhist education, educational welfare, Buddhist propagation, infrastructure and temple development, and public welfare services. Sustainable administration is enhanced through the integration of Pāpaṇika-dhamma, Sāraṇīya-dhamma, and Aparihāṇīya-dhamma, which promote ethical leadership, participatory governance, organizational effectiveness, and institutional resilience. Based on these findings, the study proposes a creative governance model aligned with the responsibilities of the Sangha Supreme Council, emphasizing leadership development, digital transformation, educational opportunity, technology-supported Buddhist dissemination, collaborative resource management, and community-oriented public service. These elements are synthesized into the New Sangha Model, comprising six interrelated dimensions: equity, opportunity expansion, digital transformation, collaborative networking, strategic resource management, and volunteer-oriented public service. The model offers a contemporary framework for enhancing the effectiveness, adaptability, and long-term sustainability of Sangha administration amid evolving social conditions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Religious institutions are increasingly expected to preserve their spiritual traditions while responding effectively to rapid social, technological, and organizational change. This challenge is particularly evident in the administration of the Thai Sangha, which plays a central role in preserving Buddhist teachings, promoting education, providing public welfare, and supporting community development throughout Thailand. Consequently, contemporary Sangha administration requires governance approaches that integrate traditional Buddhist values with innovative administrative practices.

Historically, the Buddhist monastic community operated through a system of collective responsibility founded on the Vinaya, where leadership was based on moral integrity, knowledge of the Dhamma-Vinaya, and spiritual competence rather than bureaucratic authority [1,2] In modern Thailand, however, Sangha administration has evolved into a formal governance system operating within the constitutional framework of the Thai state under the Sangha Act B.E. 2505 (1962) and its subsequent

amendments [3,4]. The Thai Sangha administers more than 42,000 temples, approximately 207,000 monks, and 33,000 novices, serving a nation in which over 92% of the population identifies as Buddhist [5,6]. This institutional scale requires governance systems capable of ensuring organizational effectiveness while maintaining the ethical and disciplinary foundations of Buddhism.

The Supreme Sangha Council organizes Sangha administration into six statutory domains: ecclesiastical governance, Buddhist education, educational welfare, Buddhist propagation, temple infrastructure and facilities management, and public welfare services [6]. These responsibilities collectively support religious preservation, education, social welfare, and community engagement. However, increasing digital transformation, demographic change, and public expectations require administrators to possess strategic leadership, collaborative capability, digital literacy, and adaptive management skills that extend beyond conventional bureaucratic administration [7,8].

Buddhist teachings provide an important ethical foundation for strengthening contemporary governance. In particular, *Pāpaṇika-dhamma* (Three Principles of Successful Administration), *Sāraṇīya-dhamma* (Six Principles of Harmonious Living), and *Aparihāniya-dhamma* (Seven Conditions of Non-decline) emphasize strategic leadership, harmonious collaboration, participatory decision-making, and institutional sustainability [9,10,11]. Although these principles have been widely discussed within Buddhist scholarship, relatively few studies have integrated them into a comprehensive governance framework capable of addressing the contemporary administrative challenges of the Thai Sangha.

The Bangkok Metropolitan Region, comprising Bangkok, Nakhon Pathom, Nonthaburi, and Pathum Thani, provides an appropriate context for investigating these issues because it contains more than 1,400 Buddhist temples operating within rapidly changing urban environments characterized by technological advancement, educational reform, and increasing community service demands [12]. These conditions highlight the need for governance models that strengthen institutional adaptability while preserving Buddhist ethical values.

Despite the importance of Sangha administration, previous research has primarily examined legal structures, Buddhist doctrine, or individual administrative functions, with limited attention to developing an integrated governance framework that synthesizes Buddhist principles with contemporary organizational management across all six domains of Sangha administration [6,7,8]. This gap limits both theoretical understanding and practical guidance for enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of the Thai Sangha.

To address this gap, the present study develops the New Sangha Model, an integrated framework for Sangha administration based on creative governance and Buddhist principles. The model synthesizes empirical evidence into six strategic governance dimensions—equity, opportunity expansion, digital transformation, collaborative networking, strategic resource management, and volunteer-oriented public service—to strengthen organizational effectiveness, institutional resilience, and sustainable Sangha administration. Accordingly, this study aims to (1) examine the current state of Sangha administration, (2) analyze the development of Sangha administration through creative governance, and (3) develop the New Sangha Model as an integrated governance framework for sustainable Sangha administration in contemporary Thailand.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Governance Challenges in Contemporary Religious Organizations

Religious organizations worldwide are increasingly expected to preserve their spiritual traditions while responding effectively to rapid technological, social, and institutional change. Similar to public organizations and nonprofit institutions, religious organizations are now required to demonstrate transparency, accountability, organizational adaptability, and social responsiveness while maintaining their doctrinal integrity [13]. Consequently, governance has become an important theoretical lens for understanding how religious institutions sustain organizational effectiveness under changing societal conditions.

Within this context, creative governance has emerged as an approach that extends beyond conventional administrative practice by emphasizing innovation, collaborative leadership, knowledge integration, stakeholder participation, and organizational learning [14]. Rather than focusing solely on administrative efficiency, creative governance seeks to develop institutions capable of adapting to emerging societal challenges while preserving their core values and organizational identity. Although this perspective has been widely discussed in public administration and organizational management, its application within Buddhist monastic administration remains relatively underdeveloped.

The Thai Sangha represents one of the world's largest Buddhist monastic institutions and provides an important context for examining how traditional religious governance can be integrated with contemporary administrative approaches.

2.2 Sangha Administration in the Thai Context

Historically, the Buddhist monastic community established during the Buddha's lifetime was not organized as a bureaucratic institution. Instead, the Sangha functioned as a self-governing community in which all monks shared collective responsibility for maintaining discipline and resolving communal matters according to the Vinaya. Leadership emerged from moral authority, doctrinal competence, and adherence to Buddhist discipline rather than formal administrative hierarchy [15]. The Buddha emphasized careful ordination, continuous learning of the Dhamma-Vinaya, and collective responsibility as the foundation for sustaining the Buddhist community.

Over time, the expansion of Buddhism and the increasing complexity of religious institutions necessitated more formal administrative structures. In Thailand, Sangha administration has evolved into a legally recognized governance system operating under the constitutional framework of the Thai state while maintaining its doctrinal foundation in the Vinaya. The Sangha Act B.E. 2505 (1962), together with subsequent amendments in 1992 and 2017 [3], establishes the institutional authority of the Sangha Supreme Council, which oversees national Sangha administration through regulations consistent with both state legislation and Buddhist disciplinary principles.

Thailand currently has more than 42,000 Buddhist temples, over 207,000 monks, and approximately 33,000 novices serving a population in which more than ninety percent identify as Buddhists [16]. This organizational scale makes Sangha administration one of the largest religious governance systems in the Buddhist world and highlights the need for effective administrative models capable of responding to contemporary social transformation.

2.3 Theoretical Perspectives on Sangha Administration

The perspective of organizational theory, administration involves coordinating people, resources, institutional structures, and organizational objectives to achieve collective goals. Governance theory further argues that organizational effectiveness depends not only on hierarchical authority but also on collaboration, participation, institutional trust, and adaptive leadership [18].

Within Buddhist traditions, however, governance is fundamentally value-based. Administrative authority is inseparable from ethical responsibility and spiritual development. Consequently, Sangha administration cannot be understood solely through conventional management theories because its primary purpose extends beyond organizational efficiency to include the preservation of the Buddha's teachings, monastic discipline, and public confidence in Buddhism [19].

The administration of the Thai Sangha therefore reflects a unique integration of institutional governance and Buddhist principles. Three doctrinal frameworks are particularly significant.

First, Pāpaṇika-dhamma [9] provides principles of successful administration through foresight, organizational competence, and responsible decision-making.

Second, Sāraṇīya-dhamma [10], establishes the ethical foundation for harmonious organizational relationships through mutual respect, cooperation, equality, and shared responsibility.

Third, Aparihāniya-dhamma [11] provides principles for organizational sustainability by emphasizing participation, consultation, adherence to established rules, and collective commitment to institutional continuity.

Together, these Buddhist principles provide a normative governance framework that aligns closely with contemporary concepts of collaborative governance, organizational resilience, ethical leadership, and sustainable institutional development. Nevertheless, previous studies have generally examined these principles independently rather than integrating them into a comprehensive governance model for modern Sangha administration.

2.4 Six Domains of Sangha Administration

According to the administrative framework established by the Sangha Supreme Council, contemporary Sangha administration consists of six interrelated domains [6]:

2.4.1. Ecclesiastical governance, responsible for monastic leadership, organizational discipline, and administrative supervision.

2.4.2 Buddhist education, responsible for doctrinal education and monastic academic development.

2.4.3 Educational welfare, responsible for expanding educational opportunities through scholarships, schools, and community learning.

2.4.4 Buddhist propagation, responsible for communicating Buddhist teachings through both traditional and digital media.

2.4.5 Temple infrastructure and facilities management, responsible for maintaining temples as sustainable religious and community spaces.

2.4.6 Public welfare services, responsible for humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and community development.

2.4.7 These six domains collectively represent the institutional responsibilities through which the Thai Sangha fulfills both its religious mission and its broader social role.

2.5 Theoretical Contribution: The New Sangha Model

To address these theoretical and practical gaps, this study proposes the New Sangha Model as an integrated framework for strengthening Sangha administration through creative governance. The model conceptualizes effective Sangha administration as the interaction between the six institutional domains established by the Sangha Supreme Council and six strategic governance dimensions derived from empirical findings; equity, opportunity expansion, digital transformation, collaborative networking, strategic resource management, and volunteer-oriented public service.

Unlike previous descriptive frameworks, the New Sangha Model positions creative governance as the mechanism that translates Buddhist principles into contemporary administrative practice. The model therefore extends existing governance theory by demonstrating how value-based religious institutions can simultaneously preserve doctrinal authenticity while adapting to rapidly changing social environments.

3. OBJECTIVES

This study aims to (1) examine the current state of Sangha administration, (2) analyze the development of Sangha administration through creative governance, and (3) develop and validate the New Sangha Model as an integrated framework for sustainable Sangha administration in contemporary Thailand.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design [20] to develop the New Sangha Model for strengthening Sangha administration through creative governance. A qualitative approach was selected because the study sought to explore the experiences, perspectives, and administrative practices of key stakeholders responsible for the governance of the Thai Sangha, while also identifying the underlying Buddhist principles that inform contemporary administrative practice.

The study adopted an interpretive qualitative approach, integrating documentary research with in-depth interviews. Documentary analysis provided the theoretical and institutional foundations of Sangha administration, whereas interviews generated empirical evidence regarding administrative challenges, governance practices, and future development strategies. The integration of these data sources enabled the development of a theoretically informed and empirically grounded governance model.

4.2 Research Setting

Fieldwork was conducted in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region, comprising Bangkok, Nakhon Pathom, Nonthaburi, and Pathum Thani provinces. These provinces were selected purposively because they constitute the administrative center of the Thai Sangha and contain a high concentration of Buddhist temples operating under the supervision of the Sangha Supreme Council.

The study area represents one of the most complex administrative environments within the Thai Sangha, characterized by rapid urbanization, technological transformation, and increasing public expectations regarding religious institutions. Consequently,

the selected provinces provide an appropriate empirical context for examining the development of Sangha administration through creative governance.

4.3 Documentary Research

Documentary research was conducted to establish the conceptual and theoretical foundation of the study. Primary documentary sources included the Tipiṭaka, Aṭṭhakathā (Commentaries), and relevant Buddhist texts concerning monastic administration and governance. Secondary sources consisted of academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, official documents issued by the Sangha Supreme Council, and publications of the National Office of Buddhism.

The documentary review focused on three areas: the historical and institutional development of Sangha administration; governance theories and contemporary approaches to creative governance; and Buddhist principles relevant to organizational administration, including Pāpaṇika-dhamma, Sāraṇīya-dhamma, and Aparihāniya-dhamma.

These sources informed both the interview protocol and the preliminary conceptual framework.

4.4 Participants and Key informants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that all informants possessed substantial experience in one or more domains of Sangha administration.

A total of 21 key informants participated in the study. The participants represented four areas of expertise: Ecclesiastical governance (n = 6), Buddhist propagation (n = 5), Educational welfare and public welfare services (n = 5), Temple infrastructure and facilities management (n = 5). All participants had direct experience in Sangha administration, Buddhist education, community development, or religious governance, enabling them to provide rich and contextually informed perspectives regarding the development of the Thai Sangha.

4.5 Research Instrument

The primary research instrument was a semi-structured interview guide developed from the documentary review and the study's conceptual framework.

Table 1. Semi-Structured Interview guide

Domain	Interview Questions	Purpose / Construct
Current State of Sangha Administration	1. In your opinion, what are the major strengths and weaknesses of the current Sangha administration? Which areas require improvement?	Assess perceptions of the current administrative system and identify organizational challenges.
Creative Governance	2. What characteristics define creative governance in Sangha administration? How should creative governance be promoted? Please provide examples.	Explore concepts, practices, and strategies related to creative governance.
Application of Buddhist Principles	3. How can Buddhist principles be applied to strengthen Sangha administration and creative governance?	Examine the practical application of Buddhist principles in organizational management.
	3.1 Pāpaṇika-dhamma (Three Principles of Successful Administration): How can vision (<i>cakkebumā</i>), managerial competence (<i>vidhuro</i>), and networking/resource support (<i>nissayasampanno</i>) improve Sangha administration?	Strategic leadership and administrative capability.
	3.2 Aparihāniya-dhamma (Seven Conditions of Non-decline): How can these principles	Institutional sustainability and resilience.

	promote sustainable governance and organizational continuity?	
	3.3 Sāraṇīya-dhamma (Six Principles of Harmonious Living): How can these principles strengthen cooperation and organizational harmony?	Collaborative governance and organizational cohesion.
	3.4 Saṅgahavatthu (Four Bases of Social Solidarity): How can generosity, kind speech, beneficial conduct, and impartiality strengthen relationships among monks and communities?	Stakeholder engagement and social cohesion.
Ecclesiastical Governance	4. How should creative governance be developed in the area of ecclesiastical governance?	Governance and leadership.
Buddhist Education	5. How should creative governance be developed in Buddhist education?	Educational development and knowledge management.
Educational Welfare	6. How should creative governance be developed in educational welfare?	Educational opportunity and community support.
Buddhist Propagation	7. How should creative governance be developed in Buddhist propagation?	Communication, innovation, and public engagement.
Temple Infrastructure and Facilities Management	8. How should creative governance be developed in temple infrastructure and facilities management?	Resource management and sustainable development.
Public Welfare Services	9. How should creative governance be developed in public welfare services?	Community service and social welfare.

Source: Developed by the authors based on the documentary review, the conceptual framework, and relevant Buddhist governance literature.

The interview protocol explored participants' perspectives on: the current state of Sangha administration; challenges affecting administrative effectiveness; applications of Buddhist principles in governance; opportunities for strengthening creative governance; future directions for developing the six administrative domains of the Thai Sangha.

To establish content validity, the interview guide was evaluated by three experts specializing in Buddhist studies, Sangha administration, and qualitative research. Their recommendations were incorporated before field implementation.

4.6 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted in three sequential phases.

Phase 1: Documentary Analysis

Relevant literature, legislation, policy documents, and Buddhist canonical texts were reviewed to establish the theoretical framework and identify major issues related to Sangha administration.

Phase 2: In-depth Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with all 21 key informants. Interviews were conducted face-to-face after obtaining informed consent. With participants' permission, all interviews were audio-recorded and supplemented by detailed field notes.

Phase 3: Expert Validation

Preliminary findings were synthesized into an initial conceptual model and presented to an expert discussion group for critical review. Feedback from this validation process was incorporated into the refinement of the New Sangha Model, thereby enhancing the credibility and practical applicability of the proposed framework.

Trustworthiness

To enhance the rigor of the qualitative findings, the study adopted the criteria proposed [21]. Credibility was strengthened through methodological triangulation by integrating documentary analysis, in-depth interviews, and expert validation. Transferability was supported through detailed descriptions of the research setting, participant characteristics, and organizational context. Dependability was enhanced by maintaining a systematic research protocol, including interview procedures, coding decisions, and analytical documentation. Confirmability was established by continuously comparing empirical findings with documentary evidence and maintaining an audit trail throughout the analytical process.

4.7 Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis [22]. The analytical process consisted of five stages: transcription of interview recordings; repeated reading of transcripts to achieve data familiarization; open coding to identify meaningful concepts; categorization of codes into broader themes representing patterns of Sangha administration and creative governance; and synthesis of themes with documentary findings to construct the New Sangha Model.

Documentary evidence was analyzed using qualitative content analysis, allowing theoretical concepts to be compared and integrated with the empirical findings [23]. The iterative comparison between documentary and interview data facilitated the development of a conceptual model grounded in both Buddhist scholarship and administrative practice.

4.8 Development Process of the New Sangha Model

The development of the New Sangha Model followed an iterative qualitative process.

Step 1: Review documentary evidence on Sangha administration, governance theory, and relevant Buddhist principles.

Step 2: Conduct in-depth interviews with 21 key informants representing the six administrative domains of the Thai Sangha.

Step 3: Perform inductive thematic analysis to identify recurring governance patterns.

Step 4: Integrate empirical themes with governance theory and Buddhist principles.

Step 5: Validate and refine the proposed model through expert discussion before producing the final conceptual framework.

This systematic process ensured that the New Sangha Model was both empirically grounded and theoretically informed, providing an integrated framework for strengthening Sangha administration through creative governance.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Current State of Sangha Administration

The documentary analysis and in-depth interviews indicate that the current system of Sangha administration in Thailand is founded upon the integration of the Vinaya with the national legal framework established under the Sangha Act and administered by the Sangha Supreme Council. Participants consistently emphasized that this dual governance structure enables the Thai Sangha to preserve its religious identity while responding to contemporary administrative requirements.

The governance structure is organized as a hierarchical administrative system comprising central, regional, provincial, district, subdistrict, and temple levels. Administrative authority is delegated through successive ecclesiastical offices, including regional ecclesiastical governors, provincial ecclesiastical governors, district ecclesiastical governors, subdistrict ecclesiastical governors, and abbots, while overall policy direction remains under the authority of the Sangha Supreme Council.

Across documentary and interview data, participants identified six interconnected domains of Sangha administration that collectively define the institutional responsibilities of the Thai Sangha: Ecclesiastical governance, Buddhist education, Educational welfare, Buddhist propagation, Temple infrastructure and facilities management, Public welfare services.

Although participants regarded the existing administrative structure as stable and well institutionalized, they also acknowledged emerging challenges associated with rapid social transformation, technological change, increasing public expectations, and organizational complexity. Consequently, many informants emphasized the need to strengthen administrative flexibility through creative governance while maintaining the ethical foundations prescribed by Buddhist discipline.

5.2 Buddhist Principles Supporting Creative Governance in Sangha Administration

Analysis of the interview data revealed a strong consensus that effective Sangha administration should integrate organizational administration with Buddhist principles rather than relying exclusively on legal or bureaucratic mechanisms. Three interrelated Buddhist principles consistently emerged as the ethical foundation of creative governance.

First, participants identified Pāpaṇika-dhamma as the strategic leadership dimension of Sangha administration. The three principles—Cakkhumā (strategic vision), Vidhūro (managerial competence), and Nissayasampanno (networking and resource capability)—were interpreted as essential competencies for ecclesiastical leaders responsible for organizational planning, decision-making, and institutional development.

Second, Sāraṇiya-dhamma was viewed as the principal mechanism for strengthening collaboration and organizational cohesion. Participants emphasized that mutual respect, ethical communication, shared responsibility, and collective decision-making contribute to trust among monks and improve organizational effectiveness across administrative levels.

Third, Aparihāniya-dhamma was consistently associated with institutional sustainability. Informants explained that regular consultation, adherence to established regulations, respect for senior leadership, preservation of religious traditions, and protection of the Sangha collectively promote organizational continuity while enabling gradual institutional adaptation.

The findings demonstrate that these three sets of Buddhist principles function not only as religious teachings but also as governance mechanisms supporting ethical leadership, organizational resilience, collaborative administration, and sustainable institutional development.

5.3 Development of the New Sangha Model

The principal finding of this study is the development of the New Sangha Model, an integrated framework for strengthening Sangha administration through creative governance. The model emerged through the synthesis of documentary analysis, interview findings, and expert validation.

Unlike the conventional administrative framework, which primarily emphasizes organizational structure and regulatory compliance, the New Sangha Model incorporates innovation, adaptive leadership, stakeholder participation, digital transformation, and Buddhist ethical principles into a unified governance framework.

The model consists of six mutually reinforcing dimensions corresponding to the six administrative responsibilities of the Thai Sangha.

5.3.1 Ecclesiastical Governance

Participants emphasized that effective ecclesiastical governance requires ethical leadership, transparency, and participatory decision-making. Creative governance is reflected in the appointment of competent monastic leaders, opportunities for participation by monks and local communities, and the application of Buddhist principles to administrative decision-making. Leadership development and continuous learning were also regarded as essential for organizational sustainability.

5.3.2 Buddhist Education

Participants reported that Buddhist education has increasingly adapted to changing social conditions through curriculum modernization and the integration of digital learning technologies. The findings suggest that creative governance supports educational innovation while maintaining doctrinal authenticity, enabling monastic education to respond more effectively to contemporary educational needs.

5.3.3 Educational Welfare

The findings indicate that educational welfare extends beyond monastic education to include scholarships, educational assistance, and institutional support for disadvantaged populations. Participants emphasized that expanding educational opportunities reflects the Buddhist principle of compassion while promoting equitable access to education throughout society.

5.3.4 Buddhist Propagation

Participants consistently identified technological innovation as a defining characteristic of contemporary Buddhist propagation. Digital media, online learning platforms, and social communication technologies have substantially expanded opportunities for disseminating Buddhist teachings to diverse age groups and geographic communities. Creative governance therefore enables more adaptive and inclusive approaches to religious communication.

5.3.5 Temple Infrastructure and Facilities Management

The findings demonstrate that temple infrastructure and facilities management has evolved beyond traditional maintenance activities toward comprehensive environmental management. Participants emphasized the importance of developing temples as accessible, peaceful, and sustainable community spaces while preserving historical and religious heritage through collaboration with governmental and community organizations.

5.3.6 Public Welfare Services

Participants emphasized that public welfare services represent one of the most visible expressions of the social role of the Thai Sangha. Activities include disaster relief, humanitarian assistance, poverty alleviation, community development, and support for remote and underserved populations. These activities illustrate how creative governance strengthens collaboration between religious institutions, local communities, and public organizations to address contemporary social challenges.

5.4 The New Sangha Model: An Integrated Framework for Creative Governance

The synthesis of all findings resulted in the development of the New Sangha Model, which represents the study's original theoretical contribution. The model conceptualizes Sangha administration as an integrated system in which creative governance is supported by Buddhist principles and operationalized across the six administrative domains established by the Sangha Supreme Council.

The model identifies six strategic governance capabilities that collectively strengthen institutional effectiveness:

Equity – promoting fairness, ethical leadership, and participatory governance.

Opportunity Expansion – increasing equitable access to Buddhist education and educational welfare.

Digital Transformation – integrating digital technologies into administration, education, and Buddhist propagation.

Collaborative Networking – strengthening partnerships among monasteries, communities, government agencies, and civil society.

Strategic Resource Management – enhancing the sustainable management of human, financial, and physical resources.

Volunteer-Oriented Public Service – reinforcing compassion-driven public welfare services and community engagement.

Table 2. The New Sangha Model: Six Dimensions of Creative Sangha

Dimension	Core Focus
1. Equity	Promotes fairness, ethical leadership, transparency, and participatory governance.
2. Opportunity Expansion	Expands equitable access to Buddhist education, lifelong learning, and educational welfare.
3. Digital Transformation	Integrates digital technologies into administration, education, communication, and Buddhist propagation.
4. Collaborative Networking	Strengthens partnerships among monasteries, communities, government agencies, educational institutions, and civil society.
5. Strategic Resource Management	Enhances the sustainable management of human, financial, knowledge, and physical resources.
6. Volunteer-Oriented Public Service	Reinforces compassion-based volunteerism, social responsibility, community engagement, and public welfare.

THE NEW SANGHA MODEL

Collaborative Governance for Social Community

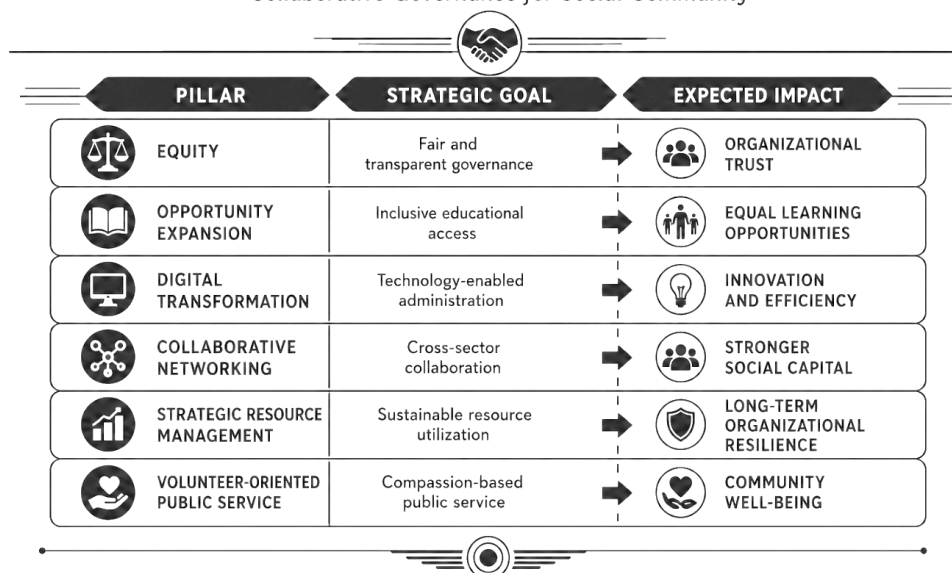


Figure 1. The New Sangha Model: Pillar Strategic Goal Expected Impact

These six capabilities operate across all domains of Sangha

administration, demonstrating that creative governance is not merely an administrative technique but an integrated governance philosophy grounded in Buddhist principles. Consequently, the New Sangha Model provides a comprehensive framework for the sustainable development of the Thai Sangha while extending governance theory through the integration of religious ethics, organizational innovation, and institutional adaptability.

6. DISCUSSION

This study developed a Model for the Development of Sangha Administration through Creative Governance within the Thai Sangha. The findings contribute to the expanding literature on religious governance by demonstrating that effective Sangha administration requires more than hierarchical authority or legal compliance. Rather, sustainable organizational development depends on integrating Buddhist principles, adaptive leadership, collaborative governance, and organizational innovation. This perspective aligns with contemporary studies arguing that governance effectiveness emerges from the interaction between ethical legitimacy, institutional learning, and collaborative leadership rather than administrative authority alone [13,14,18]. Accordingly, the proposed New Sangha Model provides an integrated governance framework that connects traditional Buddhist ethics with contemporary administrative practices while remaining consistent with the institutional structure of the Thai Sangha [3].

6.1 Sangha Administration as an Adaptive Governance System

The findings reveal that the current system of Sangha administration operates through a centralized governance structure under the authority of the Supreme Sangha Council while administrative responsibilities are decentralized across regional, provincial, district, subdistrict, and temple levels, as prescribed in the Sangha Act and ecclesiastical regulations [3,18]. Although this institutional arrangement provides organizational stability and administrative consistency, participants consistently emphasized that rapidly changing social conditions require greater organizational flexibility, innovation, and responsiveness.

These findings are consistent with adaptive governance theory, which suggests that resilient institutions balance organizational stability with continuous adaptation and collaborative decision-making [14,18]. Similar observations have been reported in studies of religious governance, where organizational effectiveness depends not only on formal authority but also on stakeholder participation, ethical leadership, and institutional legitimacy [13]. Within the Thai context, previous studies have likewise

demonstrated that Sangha administration increasingly requires collaborative management approaches to address social welfare, community development, and public engagement [6,7].

Furthermore, the findings suggest that sustainable Sangha administration depends upon strengthening creative governance while preserving the disciplinary foundations established by the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, which has historically provided the constitutional framework for monastic governance and collective decision-making [1,2]. Consequently, unlike conventional administrative perspectives that emphasize organizational control, this study conceptualizes Sangha administration as an adaptive governance system in which institutional continuity and organizational innovation coexist through the practical application of Buddhist principles.

6.2 Buddhist Principles as Strategic Governance Capabilities

One of the most significant findings is that participants consistently interpreted Buddhist principles as practical governance mechanisms rather than merely religious doctrines. This finding supports recent scholarship arguing that Buddhist philosophy provides applicable frameworks for leadership, organizational ethics, and sustainable governance in contemporary institutions [15].

The findings indicate that *Pāpaṇika-dhamma* functions as a strategic leadership framework emphasizing vision (*cakkhumā*), managerial competence (*vidhuro*), and effective organizational networking (*nissayasampanno*) as described in the *Pāpaṇika Sutta* (AN 3.20) [9]. Likewise, *Sāraṇiya-dhamma* promotes collaborative governance through mutual respect, ethical communication, shared responsibility, and organizational cohesion, reflecting the principles presented in the *Sāmagāma Sutta* (MN 104) [10]. *Aparihāniya-dhamma*, meanwhile, strengthens institutional sustainability by encouraging participatory decision-making, respect for established regulations, organizational unity, and continuity, consistent with the teachings of the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* (DN 16) [11].

These findings extend previous studies of Buddhist administration, which have primarily described these doctrines as ethical teachings without fully explaining their organizational functions [7,15]. Instead, the present study reconceptualizes these Buddhist principles as strategic governance capabilities that enhance leadership effectiveness, institutional resilience, collaborative administration, and sustainable organizational development. This interpretation is also consistent with contemporary research emphasizing the integration of Buddhist wisdom with sustainable governance and organizational innovation [8].

Moreover, the findings demonstrate that these governance principles remain highly relevant to current Sangha administration, particularly in supporting social welfare, environmental stewardship, digital transformation, and community engagement, which are increasingly emphasized in national Buddhist policy and temple management guidelines [16,24,25]. Therefore, this study bridges Buddhist philosophy and contemporary governance theory by demonstrating that classical Buddhist ethics can be operationalized as strategic organizational capabilities that strengthen institutional adaptability while preserving the ethical identity of the Thai Sangha.

6.3 Creative Governance Across the Six Domains of Sangha Administration

Another important contribution of this study is the identification of creative governance as an integrative mechanism operating across the six statutory domains of Sangha administration prescribed by the Supreme Sangha Council of Thailand. While the Sangha Act and related ecclesiastical regulations formally classify these domains into separate administrative responsibilities, the present findings indicate that they function as interdependent components of a unified governance system rather than isolated institutional functions [3,26].

The findings demonstrate that ecclesiastical governance provides ethical leadership, institutional legitimacy, and strategic direction grounded in the disciplinary framework of the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, which has historically served as the constitutional foundation of monastic administration [1,2]. This ethical foundation strengthens organizational accountability while maintaining the doctrinal integrity of the Sangha. Consistent with Buddhist governance principles, institutional leadership is strengthened through the application of *Pāpaṇika-dhamma*, *Sāraṇiya-dhamma*, and *Aparihāniya-dhamma*, which collectively promote strategic leadership, collaborative administration, and sustainable institutional development (AN 3.20; MN 104; DN 16) [10,11].

Similarly, Buddhist education was found to strengthen organizational knowledge, leadership development, and the cultivation of ethical competencies among monks, supporting previous studies that identify Buddhist education as a mechanism for developing wisdom, virtue, and organizational capacity in the twenty-first century [8]. Educational welfare further expands equitable learning opportunities for monastic and lay communities, reinforcing the Sangha's social responsibility through inclusive educational services [7].

The study also highlights the growing importance of digital transformation within Buddhist propagation. Participants emphasized that digital technologies have expanded opportunities for religious communication, public engagement, and knowledge dissemination, thereby increasing the accessibility of Buddhist teachings to diverse audiences. This finding supports recent research demonstrating that innovative leadership and digital governance significantly enhance organizational adaptability, communication effectiveness, and collaborative networks in public institutions [14]. It also reflects the strategic direction outlined in Thailand's digital transformation policies for temple administration [25].

Furthermore, temple infrastructure and facilities management were interpreted not merely as physical asset management but as strategic mechanisms for preserving religious heritage, promoting environmental sustainability, and improving accessibility for local communities. These findings are consistent with studies emphasizing the role of Buddhist temples as social commons and sustainable community institutions that integrate environmental stewardship with religious functions [12,24].

Finally, the findings indicate that public welfare services represent the practical application of Buddhist compassion through community development, humanitarian assistance, healthcare support, and social welfare initiatives. This interpretation corresponds with recent evidence demonstrating the expanding public welfare roles of Dhammaduta monks and the increasing contribution of Buddhist institutions to community well-being and healthcare services in contemporary Thai society [6]. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that creative governance extends beyond administrative innovation to encompass organizational learning, digital transformation, collaborative partnerships, ethical leadership, sustainable resource management, and community engagement, thereby strengthening the adaptive capacity of the Thai Sangha.

6.4 Theoretical Contribution: The New Sangha Model

The principal theoretical contribution of this study is the development of the New Sangha Model, which advances existing scholarship on Buddhist governance in several significant respects.

First, the model integrates governance theory with classical Buddhist principles, demonstrating that Buddhist ethical doctrines can function as strategic governance resources rather than solely as moral teachings. This finding extends previous research that has primarily interpreted Buddhist principles within ethical or philosophical contexts [8,15] by showing how they can be operationalized as organizational capabilities that strengthen leadership effectiveness, institutional resilience, collaborative governance, and sustainable organizational development. The governance functions identified in this study are directly supported by canonical Buddhist teachings, particularly *Pāpaṇika-dhamma*, *Sāraṇīya-dhamma*, and *Aparihāṇiya-dhamma*, which collectively emphasize strategic leadership, harmonious collaboration, participatory decision-making, and institutional continuity (AN 3.20; MN 104; DN 16; Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2012; Bodhi, 1995; Walshe, 1995).

Second, the proposed model reconceptualizes the six statutory responsibilities of Sangha administration as an integrated governance system instead of viewing them as independent administrative functions. This systems perspective is consistent with adaptive governance theory, which emphasizes that organizational effectiveness emerges from interactions among institutional structures, stakeholder collaboration, organizational learning, and continuous adaptation rather than isolated administrative processes [13,14,18]. Within the Thai context, this finding also complements previous studies of Sangha administration and public welfare management by providing a broader governance perspective that links religious administration with community development and social sustainability [6,7].

Third, the model identifies six strategic governance capabilities—Equity, Opportunity Expansion, Digital Transformation, Collaborative Networking, Strategic Resource Management, and Volunteer-Oriented Public Service—that collectively explain how creative governance enhances institutional sustainability within the Thai Sangha. These capabilities extend beyond traditional bureaucratic administration by integrating ethical leadership, organizational innovation, stakeholder participation, and public value creation. Such findings align with contemporary governance literature, which argues that sustainable

organizations increasingly depend upon adaptive leadership, collaborative networks, knowledge management, and innovation-oriented governance to respond effectively to complex social challenges [13,14,18].

Overall, this study extends previous research on Sangha administration, which has largely focused on legal structures, monastic discipline, or individual administrative functions [1,3,26], by proposing a comprehensive governance framework that integrates Buddhist philosophy, adaptive governance, and organizational management. Consequently, the New Sangha Model represents a significant conceptual advancement in both religious governance and public administration, demonstrating how Buddhist institutions can preserve doctrinal authenticity while simultaneously fostering innovation, organizational resilience, and sustainable development in response to rapidly changing social environments. This integrated perspective also provides a transferable governance framework that may inform the management of other faith-based and value-driven organizations seeking to balance tradition with contemporary organizational transformation.

6.5 Practical Implications

The findings have important implications for policy and practice within the Thai Sangha. For the Sangha Supreme Council, the New Sangha Model offers a strategic framework for strengthening organizational effectiveness while maintaining fidelity to the Vinaya and the institutional traditions of the Thai Sangha. Ecclesiastical leaders, the model highlights the importance of developing leadership competencies that combine ethical integrity, strategic thinking, collaborative decision-making, and digital literacy. Buddhist educational institutions, the findings support curriculum modernization through the integration of leadership development, governance studies, and digital technologies while maintaining the ethical foundations of Buddhist education.

More broadly, the model may also provide guidance for other faith-based organizations seeking to balance organizational innovation with enduring religious values.

6.5.1 Implications for Governance Theory

Beyond its practical significance, this study contributes to governance scholarship by extending existing theories of collaborative and adaptive governance into the context of religious organizations.

While contemporary governance theory has predominantly evolved within public administration and corporate management, the present findings demonstrate that governance in religious institutions is fundamentally shaped by ethical authority, spiritual legitimacy, and moral leadership. The New Sangha Model therefore broadens governance theory by illustrating how Buddhist principles can function as institutional resources that strengthen organizational resilience, social legitimacy, and sustainable development.

Accordingly, the study positions creative governance as an integrative governance paradigm that combines ethical values, organizational innovation, stakeholder participation, and institutional adaptability within the context of Sangha administration.

6.5.2 Theoretical Advancement

Unlike previous studies that primarily examined individual dimensions of Sangha administration or described Buddhist principles as ethical guidelines, this study develops the New Sangha Model, an integrated governance framework that synthesizes Buddhist principles, creative governance, and the six institutional domains of Sangha administration. This model advances governance theory by demonstrating how religious ethics can be operationalized as strategic governance capabilities that enhance organizational adaptability, institutional sustainability, and public value creation. Consequently, the New Sangha Model provides both a theoretical contribution to governance scholarship and a practical framework for strengthening the future development of the Thai Sangha.

6.5.3 Body of Knowledge: The New Sangha Model

The principal contribution of this study is the development of the New Sangha Model, an integrated conceptual framework that advances the understanding of Sangha administration through creative governance. Unlike conventional approaches that primarily emphasize organizational hierarchy, legal authority, or the six administrative functions independently, the proposed model demonstrates how effective Sangha administration emerges through the integration of Buddhist principles, adaptive governance, technological innovation, and collaborative organizational practices.

The model was developed through the synthesis of documentary analysis, in-depth interviews with key informants, and expert validation. The findings indicate that creative governance within the Thai Sangha is not merely an administrative technique but a dynamic process of organizational learning, ethical leadership, innovation, and continuous institutional adaptation grounded in Buddhist principles.

The New Sangha Model identifies six strategic governance capabilities that collectively strengthen the sustainable development of Sangha administration:

Equity – Ethical leadership, participatory decision-making, transparency, and fairness constitute the foundation of effective ecclesiastical governance, strengthening organizational trust and institutional legitimacy.

Opportunity Expansion – The expansion of educational opportunities through Buddhist education and educational welfare promotes equitable access to learning for monks, novices, and the wider community, thereby strengthening human capital within the Thai Sangha.

Digital Transformation – The integration of digital technologies into administration, education, communication, and Buddhist propagation enhances organizational adaptability, improves knowledge dissemination, and expands public engagement in the digital era.

Collaborative Networking – Partnerships among monasteries, local communities, governmental agencies, educational institutions, and civil society organizations strengthen organizational capacity, resource sharing, and sustainable governance.

Strategic Resource Management – Effective management of human resources, financial resources, temple assets, and temple infrastructure and facilities management improves organizational efficiency while preserving religious heritage and institutional sustainability.

Volunteer-Oriented Public Service – Compassion-based service, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and community engagement reinforce the social responsibility of the Thai Sangha through comprehensive public welfare services, reflecting the practical application of Buddhist principles in contemporary society.

6.5.4 Theoretical Contribution

The New Sangha Model extends existing governance theory by demonstrating that creative governance in religious organizations is achieved through the integration of ethical leadership, organizational innovation, collaborative governance, and institutional adaptability within a Buddhist framework. Rather than viewing Buddhist principles solely as moral doctrines, this study conceptualizes them as strategic governance capabilities that directly enhance organizational effectiveness and sustainable institutional development.

Furthermore, the model reconceptualizes the six statutory domains of Sangha administration established by the Sangha Supreme Council as interconnected governance functions operating within a unified administrative ecosystem. This integrated perspective provides a new theoretical explanation of how religious organizations can simultaneously preserve doctrinal authenticity while adapting to rapid social and technological change.

Consequently, the New Sangha Model contributes to the literature on religious governance, public administration, and organizational management by offering a transferable framework for strengthening institutional resilience, ethical governance, and sustainable organizational development in Buddhist monastic institutions.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings suggest that the New Sangha Model provides a practical framework for strengthening Sangha administration through creative governance while maintaining the ethical foundations of the Thai Sangha. At the policy level, the Sangha Supreme Council should incorporate the model into leadership development programs for ecclesiastical administrators, emphasizing digital competency, collaborative governance, strategic resource management, and the application of Buddhist principles across the six domains of Sangha administration: Ecclesiastical governance, Buddhist education, Educational welfare, Buddhist propagation, Temple infrastructure and facilities management, and Public welfare services. Strengthening partnerships among temples, local communities, government agencies, educational institutions, and civil society organizations would further enhance institutional capacity and social impact.

The study also has broader implications for religious governance by demonstrating that ethical values and organizational innovation can be integrated within a coherent governance framework. The New Sangha Model may therefore serve as a transferable reference for other Buddhist organizations seeking sustainable institutional development in rapidly changing social contexts.

Future research should quantitatively validate the proposed model using larger samples across different regions of Thailand and examine its applicability in other Buddhist traditions and international contexts. Comparative and mixed-methods studies would further refine the model and strengthen its theoretical and practical generalizability.

Author Contributions

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All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this study.

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Ethical Approval

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles for research involving human participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), Mahamakut Buddhist University, Thailand (Approval No. 0099/2567). Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, and participant confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process.

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