
The Process of Controlling Human Temperament According to Theravada Buddhism

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Abstract

This documentary study examines the Theravāda Buddhist concept of temperament (*carita*) and proposes a practical, Abhidhamma-informed process for regulating temperament in contemporary life. The study pursues three objectives: (1) to clarify the concept and typology of *carita* in Theravāda sources; (2) to synthesize canonical and commentarial guidance with contemporary perspectives on emotional and behavioural regulation; and (3) to propose an actionable process for controlling unwholesome temperaments and strengthening wholesome dispositions. Data were drawn primarily from Pāli commentarial literature, especially the *Visuddhimagga*'s discussion of the six temperaments, supported by standard Abhidhamma manuals and relevant scholarly works; supplementary insights from expert interviews with Buddhist scholars were used to triangulate interpretations. Findings indicate that the six *carita* types, *rāga*, *dosa*, *moha*, *saddhā*, *buddhi*, and *vitakka*, function as trainable tendencies shaped by past conditioning (*vāsanā/kamma*) and present cognitive–affective habits. Interpreting *carita* through the Abhidhamma analysis of consciousness (*citta*) and mental factors (*cetasika*) provides a fine-grained account of how reactivity and regulation arise and can be redirected. The proposed process emphasizes (i) self-assessment, (ii) ethical restraint and the four right efforts, (iii) selecting meditation objects suited to temperament, and (iv) iterative reflection, mindfulness cultivation, and *kalyāṇamitta* support. The model aligns with contemporary accounts that link temperament to reactivity and emotion regulation, while contributing a distinctly Buddhist framework oriented toward liberation and sustainable well-being.

Keywords: Theravāda Buddhism; Carita; Abhidhamma; Temperament; Emotion regulation; Mindfulness

Introduction

In Theravāda Buddhism, *carita* (temperament) denotes a dominant pattern of inclination that shapes how a person perceives, evaluates, and responds to experience. Rather than functioning as a purely descriptive personality label, *carita* is deployed as a pragmatic diagnostic tool for instruction and training. The *Visuddhimagga* articulates a widely used sixfold typology, *rāga* (lustful), *dosa* (hateful), *moha* (deluded), *saddhā* (faithful), *buddhi* (intelligent), and *vitakka* (discursive/speculative), to support individualized guidance in ethics (*sīla*) and meditation (*bhāvanā*), including the selection of meditation themes and appropriate corrective practices (Buddhaghosa, 2010).

Theravāda exegetical traditions further explain individual differences in temperament through accumulated conditioning, including past *kamma* and habitual dispositions (*vāsanā*), which may predispose individuals toward particular affective and cognitive patterns (Janakābhivamsa, 1999; Sīlānandābhivamsa, 2012). Importantly, temperament is not treated as a fixed essence. It is understood as a workable tendency shaped by causes and conditions and therefore amenable to refinement through deliberate cultivation of the path factors—virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). From this perspective, transformation is not merely symptom management; it is the re-training of unwholesome habits toward skilful conduct, composure, and insight.

In contemporary contexts, difficulties in emotion regulation and maladaptive behavioural patterns, such as addictive behaviours, chronic anger, or impulsive decision-making, are often framed in terms of temperament, self-regulation, and learned coping across development. Psychological approaches emphasize the interaction between emotional reactivity and regulatory capacity, highlighting how patterns become stable through reinforcement and social learning (Campos et al., 2004; Goldsmith & Campos, 1982). This article argues that *Abhidhamma* analysis offers a compatible yet distinctively ethical and contemplative vocabulary for understanding these dynamics, specifying the mental factors and conditional processes through which temperaments arise and can be redirected.

Accordingly, this article clarifies the Theravāda framework for *carita*, synthesizes relevant *Abhidhamma* and contemporary insights, and proposes a structured process for regulating temperament that can inform Buddhist practice, education, and applied well-being interventions.

In Theravāda Buddhism, *carita* (temperament) refers to a predominant pattern of inclination that shapes a person's attitudes, conduct, and responses to experience. The *Visuddhimagga* presents a widely used sixfold typology, *rāga*

(lustful), dosa (hateful), moha (deluded), saddhā (faithful), buddhi (intelligent), and vitakka (discursive/speculative), to support individualized training in ethics and meditation (Buddhaghosa, 2010).

Research Objectives

1. To examine the concept of human temperament (carita) according to Theravāda Buddhism.
2. To study approaches for controlling carita in Abhidhamma and in selected contemporary frameworks of emotional and behavioural regulation.
3. To propose a process model for controlling and transforming carita according to Theravāda Buddhism.

Literature Review

Theravāda commentarial sources provide the core typology for temperament-based training. The Visuddhimagga explains how different meditation subjects are suitable for different temperaments, thereby linking psychological disposition with method selection in practice (Buddhaghosa, 2010).

Modern Abhidhamma expositions translate these categories into analytic terms by relating temperament to the dynamics of consciousness (citta) and associated mental factors (cetasika). Janakābhivamsa (1999) outlines the six caritas and emphasizes that individuals may exhibit one dominant temperament or a mixed profile. Sīlānandābhivamsa (2012) further highlights the role of past kamma in shaping current tendencies and recommends deliberate cultivation of wholesome mental qualities.

Bhikkhu Bodhi (1999) provides a systematic Abhidhamma framework that supports observation of temperament through the analysis of mental factors and the causal conditions that give rise to wholesome and unwholesome states. Such analysis supports interventions that target the three unwholesome roots, lobha, dosa, and moha, through ethical restraint and meditative development.

Mon (2015) offers an accessible explanation of lobha (greed) and its behavioural consequences, stressing that craving tends to proliferate rather than become permanently satisfied, which supports the need for systematic training in restraint and insight.

Contemporary psychological literature typically defines temperament as constitutionally influenced individual differences in emotional reactivity and self-regulation. Goldsmith and Campos (1982) conceptualize temperament as early-observable patterns of emotional expression and regulation, while Campos et al. (2004) argue that emotion and emotion regulation are deeply intertwined rather than separable constructs. In clinical application, cognitive-behavioral frameworks provide practical tools for addressing anger and maladaptive behavioral patterns when reactivity becomes intense or persistent (Reilly & Shopshire, 2019).

Recent integrative work also frames temperament as a foundational “building block” of personality, shaped by both biological predispositions and environmental modulation (Delgado et al., 2022). In a Buddhist studies context, Linphoo et al. (2023) explicitly connect the six temperaments to applied mindfulness and ethical cultivation, suggesting that temperament can be modified through Abhidhamma-informed training.

For Buddhist psychology and well-being promotion in Southeast Asian contexts, Mahatthanadull and Mahatthanadull (2019) discuss holistic well-being promotion through integrated practice and ethical living. Carson and Langer (2006) further emphasize the role of mindfulness and self-acceptance in reducing emotional difficulties such as uncontrolled anger and depression.

Finally, Endo (2002) discusses *vāsanā* as a form of residual impression from past actions and highlights its relevance to understanding habitual tendencies, a conceptual bridge for explaining how temperament is both conditioned and workable within Theravāda soteriology.

Conceptual Framework

This study adopts an input–process–output framing. Inputs include (a) Theravāda textual sources on *carita*, (b) Abhidhamma analyses of mind (*citta*) and mental factors (*cetasika*), and (c) selected contemporary frameworks on temperament and emotion regulation. The process involves documentary analysis and interpretive synthesis, supported by expert interviews. Outputs are (i) a clarified conceptual map of the six temperaments, (ii) an integrated account of causes and impacts, and (iii) a proposed, practice-oriented process model for controlling and transforming *carita*.

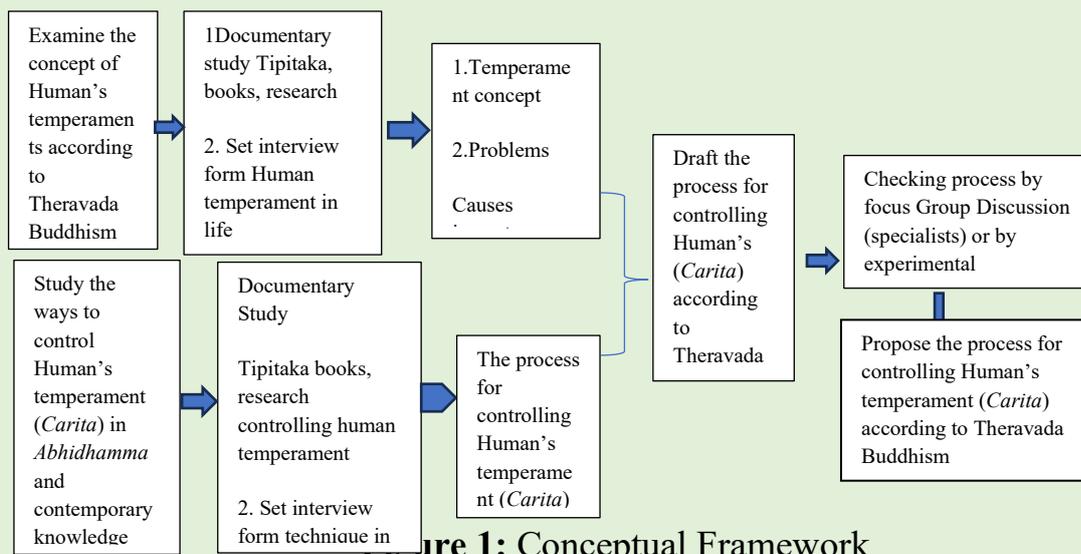


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

This study adopts an input–process–output framing. Inputs include (a) Theravāda textual sources on carita, (b) Abhidhamma analyses of mind (citta) and mental factors (cetasika), and (c) selected contemporary frameworks on temperament and emotion regulation. The process involves documentary analysis and interpretive synthesis, supported by expert interviews. Outputs are (i) a clarified conceptual map of the six temperaments, (ii) an integrated account of causes and impacts, and (iii) a proposed, practice-oriented process model for controlling and transforming carita.

Research Methodology

This article employs documentary research as the primary method. Primary data consist of relevant Theravāda commentarial and Abhidhamma literature, while secondary data include peer-reviewed articles and applied psychology manuals relevant to temperament and behavioural regulation. In addition, in-depth interviews with Buddhist scholars were used as supplementary data to support interpretive triangulation.

Research Results

Objective 1. This research found that the understanding of human nature and the paths to spiritual development, which are well-developed in Theravāda Buddhism, are strongly shaped by the concept of temperaments. These temperaments, identified as Caritas, provided valuable insights into the diverse psychological dispositions that individuals possess. Through clarifying these

temperaments, practitioners gain a profound understanding of their minds and the obstacles they may face on their spiritual journey. The term “Carita” refers to the various types of temperaments or mental characteristics that shape an individual’s behaviour, thoughts, and emotions. It is important to note that these temperaments are not fixed traits but rather tendencies that can be transformed and refined through conscious effort and practice.

Theravāda Buddhism recognizes six primary temperaments that individuals can embody. These temperaments are classified based on their dominant qualities and inclinations. They are Rāga Carita (lustful temperament), Dosa Carita (hatred temperament), Moha Carita (deluded temperament), Saddhā Carita (faithful temperament), Buddhi Carita (intelligent temperament), and Vitakka Carita (speculative temperament). Each of these temperaments possesses unique characteristics that profoundly influence how individuals perceive the world, relate to others, and respond to their experiences. Understanding these temperaments provides valuable insights into one’s own tendencies, enabling individuals to actively cultivate positive qualities while overcoming negative traits.

Objective 2. The concept of temperaments (Caritas) from the Abhidhamma perspective explores strategies for governing human temperament through this ancient Buddhist approach. As previously established, temperament refers to the dominant nature observed in human behavioural patterns and is inextricably linked to the mind (Citta) and its mental aspects (Cetasika). The Visuddhimagga describes six sorts of temperaments, offering light on the many ways in which people express their natural tendencies. Understanding these temperaments is essential because they influence how people perceive and interact with their surroundings.

Furthermore, this research has combined old wisdom with modern understanding by examining theories of emotional, behavioural, and psychological management. These contemporary frameworks offer useful insights and tactics for managing temperament, regulating emotions, and encouraging positive behaviour in a variety of circumstances.

Objective 3. Finally, strives to provide a comprehensive explanation of human temperament, as well as efficient methods for controlling and improving it, by combining Abhidhamma teachings with contemporary information.

Recognizing the complexities of temperament and the interdependence of thought and behaviour creates opportunities for personal growth, emotional intelligence, and harmonious relationships, all of which coincide with the ultimate objective of fostering knowledge and compassion in the quest for inner peace and well-being.

This objective provides a comprehensive approach to temperament regulation based on Theravada teachings, emphasizing self-awareness, self-evaluation, self-acceptance, ethical behaviour, mindfulness techniques, and meditation as essential components of human growth and spiritual development. Integrating these lessons into daily life enables individuals to cultivate inner calm, resilience, and long-term control over their temperament, leading to a more rewarding and peaceful life. Therefore, now is the practice of *Sīla*, *Samādhi*, and *Paññā* for deliverance from Tree Roots. May all beings be able to practice the ways to remove the tree roots. The Middle Way, called the Noble Path, fully and rightly comprehends the Four Noble Truths. One who can practice tranquillity meditation and insight meditation and attain the end of the tree roots and peace, where *Nibbāna* is very soon.

Finally, this research examines "The Process of Controlling Human Temperaments According to Theravada Buddhism," drawing on a deep exploration of Theravāda Buddhism and Abhidhamma, specifically the six temperaments. Its primary goal is to understand the impact of various temperaments in today's world. The study has aimed to provide a comprehensive perspective by thoroughly examining original Buddhist scriptures, commentaries, additional literature, and contemporary social media data. This study seeks to provide significant insights into the efficient management of human temperament by delving into these ancient teachings and linking them to the present reality. Finally, it hopes to add effectively to the current discussion about emotional regulation and human development.

Discussions

The Theravāda carita framework functions as a pragmatic typology for individualized training. Its strength lies in linking diagnosis (recognizing one's dominant tendencies) with prescription (selecting methods suited to those tendencies). Interpreted through the Abhidhamma categories, temperament

becomes an analyzable stream of conditioned mental events rather than a fixed essence of personality (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 1999).

Compared with developmental and clinical psychology, temperament is emphasized as reflecting both biologically influenced reactivity and modifiable regulatory capacities. Goldsmith and Campos (1982) highlight early patterns of emotional expression, while Campos et al. (2004) stress that emotion and its regulation are co-constitutive. The proposed Buddhist process aligns with these insights but adds ethical intentionality (wholesome vs. unwholesome states) and a contemplative training regimen designed for long-term transformation.

Delgado et al. (2022) frame temperament as a foundational building block of personality that can be shaped by the environment and interventions. In this article, the Theravāda notion of *vāsanā* offers a doctrinally grounded account of how habitual tendencies persist across time while remaining workable through systematic practice (Endo, 2002). This supports integrative applications in Buddhist education and well-being programs, especially when combined with practical mindfulness and self-acceptance approaches (Carson & Langer, 2006).

A limitation of the present article is that the proposed process model is primarily derived from a documentary synthesis. Future empirical work could operationalize temperament assessment and test outcomes of temperament-matched interventions in specific settings (temples, schools, clinics, and workplaces).

Knowledge from Research

These six temperaments categorize the primary mental tendencies that shape human behaviour and response. Each temperament influences a person's approach to life, shaping their reactions to situations, and is often used in meditation practices for self-awareness and mindfulness. Here's a summary of each:

1. **Lustful Temperament (Rāga-carita):** People with this temperament are drawn to pleasure, sensuality, and attachment. They tend to seek enjoyment and may become easily attached to people, experiences, or objects that bring them satisfaction. This attachment, however, can sometimes lead to clinging or craving, hindering spiritual growth.

2. **Hateful Temperament (Dosa-carita):** This temperament is marked by a tendency towards anger, irritation, and aversion. People with a hateful temperament often focus on the faults or negatives in situations or individuals. They can be critical or confrontational, but they can also be precise and determined when balanced with mindfulness.
3. **Deluded Temperament (Moha-carita):** Those with a deluded temperament may exhibit confusion, ignorance, or lack of clarity. They often struggle to make clear decisions and may feel overwhelmed or indecisive. This temperament is associated with a scattered or unfocused mind, which can lead to misunderstandings.
4. **Faithful Temperament (Saddhā-carita):** Individuals with a faithful temperament are naturally inclined towards trust, confidence, and devotion. They easily develop faith in people, teachings, or practices, making them optimistic and hopeful. While their trust can sometimes make them overly idealistic, it fosters openness and resilience.
5. **Intelligent Temperament (Buddhi-carita):** This temperament is associated with wisdom, insight, and clarity of thought. People with an intelligent temperament are analytical, reflective, and capable of deep understanding. They are inclined toward learning and introspection, which can aid in developing wisdom.
6. **Discursive or Speculative Temperament (Vitakka-carita):** Those with a speculative temperament have an active, questioning mind that frequently considers various possibilities. They are thoughtful and often introspective, sometimes inclined towards overthinking or doubt. This can lead them to be cautious or sceptical, but can also deepen their mindfulness if balanced.



Figure 3: Describing six types of Temperament

Conclusion

This article clarifies the Theravāda Buddhist concept of carita and shows that the six temperaments are best understood not as fixed traits but as modifiable tendencies shaped by conditioning (*kamma*, *vāsanā*) and reinforced through present mental habits. Drawing on the *Visuddhimagga* typology and expanding it through *Abhidhamma* analysis, the study reframes temperament as a dynamic configuration of wholesome and unwholesome mental factors that can be identified, regulated, and gradually transformed through systematic training. In parallel, selected contemporary perspectives on temperament and emotion regulation help situate this framework within modern discussions of reactivity, self-regulation, and learned coping, while also highlighting the distinctive Theravāda emphasis on ethical intentionality and contemplative development.

On this basis, the article proposes a practical four-phase process for controlling and transforming temperament. First, self-assessment enables practitioners to recognize dominant affective–cognitive tendencies and their characteristic triggers, thereby reducing misapplication of techniques and unrealistic self-expectations. Second, ethical restraint and right effort strengthen the regulatory “infrastructure” of practice by interrupting habitual unwholesome

reactions at the level of conduct and intention, creating the conditions for steadier attention and clearer reflection. Third, temperament-suited meditation applies Visuddhimagga guidance on individualized practice, aligning meditation objects and corrective strategies with each carita to support balanced concentration and insight. Fourth, sustained mindfulness consolidates change through repeated observation of arising states, non-identification, and the gradual weakening of reactive patterns, supported by kalyāṇamitta (spiritual friendship) and communal accountability, which sustain motivation and provide corrective feedback.

The proposed model contributes a theoretically grounded yet practice-oriented framework to Buddhist psychology and applied well-being initiatives. It offers a structured pathway for educators, meditation instructors, and community-based programs to support individualized transformation while remaining consistent with core Theravāda aims: the reduction of unwholesome states, the cultivation of wholesome qualities, and the progressive development of liberation-oriented wisdom.

Recommendations for Further Research

1. Develop and validate a temperament (carita) self-assessment instrument aligned with Theravāda categories and contemporary psychometrics.
2. Evaluate temperament-matched meditation and ethics training programs (e.g., mettā-based protocols for dosa-carita) in applied settings.
3. Examine how right speech and right livelihood practices function as behavioural regulation mechanisms for specific temperaments.
4. Study the role of kalyāṇamitta (supportive community) in sustaining long-term temperament change and relapse prevention.

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