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Objectives:

The journal aims to support and publish research and academic articles that focus on Buddhism, Religious Studies, and other related fields, or that explore the application of Buddhist principles in disciplines such as economics, social administration, environmental studies, and education. The target audience for JIBSC includes scholars, researchers, and practitioners in Buddhist Studies, as well as related disciplines, and those interested in the interdisciplinary applications of Buddhist principles in various sectors, such as economics, social administration, environmental studies, and education.

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Editor's Note

This issue of the Journal of International Buddhist Studies College offers a rich collection of scholarship that applies Buddhist thought and comparative philosophy to contemporary challenges in personal development, peacebuilding, ethical governance, and sustainable living.

I. Personal Cultivation and Well-being

1. *An Application of the Breathing Concept in Buddhism to Breathing Yoga Practice*
2. *The Process of Wisdom Growth (WG) and Its Application to Daily Life with Special Reference to Paññāvuḍḍhi Sutta*
3. *Buddhist Principles for Cultivating Proper Faith (Saddhā): Solutions to Blind Faith in Modern Society*
4. *The Interplay of Buddhist Mindfulness Practices: Fostering Harmonious Relationships in Couples*
5. *Settling the Mind, Embracing the Journey: Mindfulness as a Tool for Thai Migrant Emotional Well-being*
6. *Cultivating Peace and Happiness for Children with Disabilities and Caregivers through Buddhist Practices*

II. Peacebuilding, Ethics, and Human Rights

7. *Proposing Social Media Platforms for Peace-Making According to Buddhist Teachings for Resolving Family Conflicts*
8. *Promotion of Peaceful Co-existence Between Buddhists and Non-Buddhists in Rakhine State of Myanmar*
9. *Buddhism and Human Rights: A Broader Perspective Towards Peace*
10. *The Role of Confucian Principles in Regional Peacebuilding*
11. *Compassion as the Foundation of Humanistic Ethics: A Study of Martha C. Nussbaum's Thought*

III. Comparative and Doctrinal Studies

12. *A Comparative Study of Full Ordination (Upasampadā) Patterns between Mahāyāna and Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam*
13. *A Comparative Study on the Concept and Practices of Perfection (Pāramītas) in Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism*
14. *The Practical Ways of Good Action and Good Rebirth According to the Cycle of Life (Bhava-samsāra) in Buddhism*

IV. Buddhist Ethics, Sustainability, and Social Responsibility

15. *From Buddhadhamma to Ecological Harmony: Buddhist Ethics as a Pathway to Sustainable Wellbeing*
16. *A Mindfulness-Based Development Process for Volunteer Work in Buddhist Healthcare: A Case Study of Siri Wattago Medical Clinic under the Buddhamahametta Foundation*
17. *King's Philosophy in Practice: A Buddhist Approach to Sustainable Economics*

These works collectively illuminate the enduring relevance of Buddhist wisdom in fostering mental clarity, social harmony, ethical responsibility, and ecological balance. They also demonstrate how cross-cultural insights and interdisciplinary research can advance peace and sustainability in a rapidly changing world.

With this publication, I formally announce my resignation as Chief Editor. Serving in this role has been an honor, and I am deeply grateful to our contributors, reviewers, and readers for their dedication to scholarly excellence.

Finally, on behalf of the editorial team, I extend heartfelt condolences on the passing of *Dr. Lampong Klomkul*, a devoted reviewer whose wisdom and integrity enriched our journal's academic standards. May she rest in peace.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Konit Srithong
Chief- Editor, JIBSC

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An Application of the Breathing Concept in Buddhism to Breathing Yoga Practice

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Abstract

This study explores the integration of Buddhist breathing concepts, particularly ānāpānasati (mindfulness of breathing), into contemporary yoga practice, highlighting its potential to enhance individual well-being and societal harmony. Three objectives: tracing yoga's origin and development, analyzing how Ānāpānasati may refine yoga practice, and applying Ānāpānasati in breathing-based yoga. Data were collected via interviews with five practitioners versed in Theravāda Buddhism and Brahmanical (Vedic) traditions. This study underscores physiological, psychological, and ethical synergies between these traditions. Central to both practices are foundational breathing techniques that optimise autonomic nervous system function, reduce stress, and improve mental clarity. These methods foster physical health and cultivate emotional resilience, enabling practitioners to navigate challenges with equanimity by synthesising principles from Buddhist meditation and classical yoga.

The study emphasises how ānāpānasati's focus on present-moment awareness complements yoga's holistic philosophy, which unites body, mind, and spirit through postures (asanas), breath control (pranayama), and ethical discipline. The four classical yogic pathways, Karma Yoga (selfless action), Jhāna Yoga (contemplative wisdom), Bhakti Yoga (devotional practice), and Kriya Yoga (energy cultivation), are examined as frameworks for addressing modern stressors, promoting balance across physical, cognitive, emotional, and energetic dimensions of human experience.

On a societal level, integrating breath-centric mindfulness into community and institutional settings holds transformative potential. By reducing stress-related health burdens, enhancing focus in educational and workplace environments, and fostering prosocial behaviours rooted in compassion, these practices offer scalable solutions to contemporary issues such as healthcare costs, productivity deficits, and social fragmentation. The ethical imperatives embedded in both traditions, including non-harm (ahimsa) and selfless service (seva),

further model a vision of collective well-being grounded in mutual respect and cooperation.

The research concludes that the confluence of Buddhist breathing techniques and yogic discipline provides a robust, transdisciplinary approach to holistic health. It bridges ancient wisdom with modern scientific understanding, advocating for practices that not only elevate individual well-being but also nurture resilient, empathetic communities. By prioritizing mindful engagement over passive consumption, this integration presents a sustainable paradigm for addressing the complexities of 21st-century life, ultimately aligning personal transformation with broader societal flourishing.

Keywords: Mindfulness of breathing; Yoga practice; Brahmanism; Buddhism; Ānāpānasati; Breathing Techniques

Introduction

Breath awareness occupies a central place in South Asian contemplative traditions, serving as a bridge between physiological function and spiritual insight. In Theravāda Buddhism, Ānāpānasati—mindfulness of breathing—is esteemed as the foundational samatha (calm) practice that prepares the mind for vipassanā (insight) into the impermanent nature of body and mind (Analayo Bhikkhu, 2006; Buddhaghosa, 2010). Canonical texts such as the Ānāpānasati Sutta (MN 118) articulate sixteen steps of breath contemplation—ranging from noting long and short breaths to calming bodily formations—that systematically cultivate concentration (samādhi) and pave the way for liberation (nibbāna) through direct experiential insight (Gethin, 2004; Gunaratana, 2012).

Concurrently, within the Brahmanical lineage that evolved into classical Hinduism, prāṇāyāma (breath regulation) is codified as one of the eight limbs of yoga in Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras, wherein controlled breathing is leveraged to purify the nāḍīs (energy channels) and stabilize the mind for samādhi (Bryant, 2009; Mallinson & Singleton, 2017). Despite apparent divergences—Buddhist practice favouring passive observation and yogic practice emphasising

active modulation—both systems recognise breath as a potent instrument for transforming mental and somatic states.

Modern scholarship has begun to highlight this complementarity. For instance, Ven. Buddhadasa observes that *ānāpānasati* “purifies defilements with subtlety and directness” (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1989, p. 45), while contemporary contemplative science demonstrates that both mindful breathing and *prāṇāyāma* enhance autonomic regulation and emotional resilience (Brown & Gerbarg, 2009; Tang et al., 2015). However, systematic inquiry into integrating Buddhist breath mindfulness within yogic frameworks remains scarce.

This study addresses that gap by pursuing three objectives: (1) to examine the historical origins, conceptual development, and theoretical underpinnings of yogic breathing practices; (2) to analyse *ānāpānasati* as a meditative framework for cultivating present-moment awareness and insight; and (3) to propose a model for applying *ānāpānasati* principles to contemporary breathing-focused yoga practice. Employing qualitative interviews with practitioners versed in Theravāda Buddhist and Brahmanical traditions, this research elucidates how passive breath observation can enrich the embodied dynamics of *prāṇāyāma* and *āsana* sequences.

By illuminating the intersections of these ancient disciplines, the study contributes to the broader discourse on contemplative integration and suggests practical pathways for enhancing physical, mental, and spiritual well-being through a unified breath-based practice.

Research Objectives

1. To study the origin, history, development, concept, and theory of yoga practice.
2. To analyse *ānāpānasati* (Mindfulness of Breathing), promoting Yoga practice.
3. To apply *Ānāpānasati* (mindfulness of breathing) to breathing yoga practice.

Literature Review

Research on contemplative breathing practices reveals a rich intersection between Buddhist *ānāpānasati* (mindfulness of breathing) and yogic *prāṇāyāma* (breath regulation). Historically, these systems developed within distinct religious frameworks—Theravāda

Buddhism and Brahmanical yoga, respectively—yet share the breath as a focal point for cultivating mental stability and insight. This review synthesises classical sources and contemporary studies to map the evolution, theoretical bases, and empirical findings relevant to integrating ānāpānasati into breathing-focused yoga practice.

Historical and Philosophical Foundations

Classical yogic texts such as Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras (Bryant, 2009) codify prāṇāyāma as one of the eight limbs of yoga, prescribing specific techniques (e.g., uḍḍīyāna bandhā, naḍī śodhana) aimed at purifying energy channels (nāḍīs) and preparing the mind for samādhi (Mallinson & Singleton, 2017). In contrast, early Buddhist sources—most prominently the ānāpānasati Sutta (MN 118)—describe a sixteen-step progression of breath observation designed to develop calm (samatha) and insight (vipassanā) (Analayo Bhikkhu, 2006; Gethin, 2004). Buddhaghosa's Visuddhimagga further elaborates these stages within the Four Foundations of Mindfulness framework, emphasising non-manipulative awareness of the breath as a means to purify the mind (Buddhaghosa, 2010).

Comparative Analyses

Several scholars highlight key distinctions and points of convergence. Gunaratana (2012) notes that whereas prāṇāyāma often involves active modulation of breath, ānāpānasati prioritises passive, nonjudgmental observation. Yet both aim to stabilise mental processes and foster present-moment awareness. Payne et al. (2017) argue for a transdisciplinary “embodied mindfulness” that blends somatic yoga techniques with Buddhist attention training to enhance emotional regulation and body awareness.

Origins and Theory of Yoga Practice

Classical yoga emerges from early Brahmanical traditions, evolving into a systematic discipline within Hindu philosophy. Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras codify yoga's eight limbs—ethical precepts, postures (āsana), breath regulation (prāṇāyāma), sense withdrawal, concentration, meditation, and absorption—as a unified path to liberation (mokṣa) (Bryant, 2009). Archaeological evidence and Upaniṣadic texts (c. 900 BCE) reference prāṇāyāma techniques for purifying nāḍīs (energy channels) and stabilising the mind (Mallinson & Singleton, 2017). Contemporary scholarship emphasises yoga's holistic integration of body, breath, and mind,

noting its sustained theoretical development through medieval commentaries and modern adaptations for wellness contexts (Feuerstein, 2008; Maas, 2020).

Ānāpānasati as a Meditative Framework

Within Theravāda Buddhism, ānāpānasati is presented in the Ānāpānasati Sutta (MN 118) as a sixteen-step meditation cultivating calm (samatha) and insight (vipassanā) (Analayo Bhikkhu, 2006). Buddhaghosa's Visuddhimagga further situates breath mindfulness within the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, highlighting its role in progressive mental purification (Buddhaghosa, 2010). Unlike the active breath modulation of prāṇāyāma, ānāpānasati emphasises passive observation of the breath's natural rhythm (Gunaratana, 2012). Empirical research underscores its psychophysiological benefits: regular practice enhances parasympathetic activation, reduces stress markers, and strengthens attentional networks (Tang et al., 2015; Wielgosz et al., 2016).

Integrative Applications of Ānāpānasati and Yoga

Recent integrative models propose embedding Buddhist breath mindfulness into yoga sequences to amplify contemplative depth. Payne et al. (2017) describe “embodied mindfulness” protocols that blend prāṇāyāma with mindful attention to bodily sensations, yielding improvements in emotional regulation and interoceptive awareness. Clinical studies of combined breath-based interventions—including ānāpānasati -informed yoga—report synergistic effects on anxiety, depression, and cognitive flexibility (Brown & Gerbarg, 2009; Wielgosz et al., 2016). However, systematic frameworks for such integration remain underdeveloped in scholarly and practice-based literature.

The literature indicates that Ānāpānasati and prāṇāyāma share fundamental aims—mind-body integration, stress reduction, and enhanced concentration—despite methodological differences. Emerging integrative models suggest that incorporating mindful breath observation into yogic sequences can yield synergistic benefits. However, systematic frameworks for this integration remain underdeveloped, highlighting the need for qualitative and quantitative research to operationalize ānāpānasati -informed breathing protocols within modern yoga practice.

Conceptual Framework

The study has focused on the breathing concept in Buddhism and its application to breathing yoga practice. The researcher analyses the concept of breathing from the Theravāda

perspective, investigates the yoga practice of mental cultivation of Brahmanism on breathing yoga practice, and explains the relationship between Theravāda Buddhism and Brahmanism.

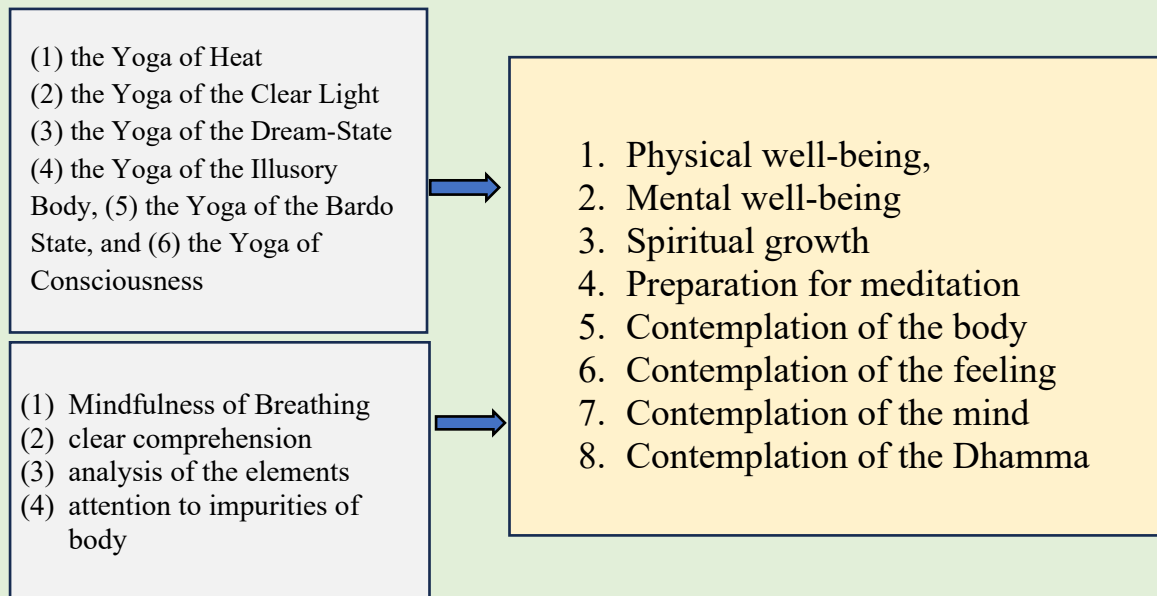


Figure 1 Concept of Ānāpānasati and Yoga practice.

The concept of breathing Yoga Practice in Brahmanism is divided in four divisions such as (1) the Yoga of Heat, (2) the Yoga of the Clear Light, (3) the Yoga of the Dream-State, (4) the Yoga of the Illusory. From this foundation, the practitioners can obtain three benefits such physical and mental Well-being, Spiritual growth, and preparation for meditation to preparation for meditation. Contemplation of the body, Contemplation of the feeling, Contemplation of the mind, Contemplation of the Dhamma. In the same way, the concept of ānāpānasati (Mindfulness of Breathing) in Buddhism is known as an ānāpānasati meditation practice that involves paying attention to the four foundations of meditation. Therefore, it is possible to apply ānāpānasati practice to breathing yoga practice in the context of the four foundations and the four foundations of Buddhist meditation methods.

Research Methodology

This qualitative study employs document analysis and semi-structured interviews to explore (1) the origins and theoretical foundations of yoga practice, (2) the role of Ānāpānasati

(mindfulness of breathing) in enhancing yoga, and (3) the application of ānāpānasati to breathing-focused yoga. Primary data derive from canonical and commentarial Pāli texts (Tipiṭaka, Aṭṭhakathā, Visuddhimagga, etc.), alongside secondary sources on Brahmanical yoga theory.

Seven expert participants were purposively sampled for in-depth interviews: five senior Theravāda Buddhist scholars specializing in ānāpānasati and two advanced yoga instructors versed in Brahmanical breath practices. Interviews followed a semi-structured guide addressing historical context, conceptual parallels, and practical integration of Buddhist and yogic breathing methods.

Data collection unfolded in six iterative phases:

1. **Framework Development:** Drafting the study outline, defining research questions, and constructing a provisional table of contents.
2. **Source Compilation:** Gathering relevant scriptures, commentaries, and contemporary scholarship.
3. **Ground-Knowledge Construction:** Synthesizing foundational Buddhist and yogic principles regarding breath.
4. **Analytical Integration:** Conducting thematic analysis to compare and contrast Ānāpānasati and prāṇāyāma techniques.
5. **Model Development:** Developing a conceptual model for applying ānāpānasati within breathing yoga, based on emergent themes and interview insights.
6. **Report Finalisation:** Formulating conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research.

All textual and interview data were coded inductively, allowing themes to emerge organically. Synthesis of doctrinal analysis with practitioner perspectives yielded a cohesive framework for integrating passive breath mindfulness into active yogic practice. The resulting conceptual model offers a novel pathway for holistic breath-based disciplines, bridging Theravāda and Brahmanical traditions.

Research Results

Objective 1: Historical and Theoretical Foundations of Yoga in Brahminism

The analysis revealed the historical evolution, conceptual framework, and theoretical underpinnings of yoga practice within the Brahminical tradition. Yoga, as delineated in Brahminism, serves as a holistic discipline integral to health and spiritual cultivation within Indo-Tibetan traditions (Douglas, 2024). Its practices are foundational for enhancing physical well-being, fostering meditative focus, and advancing toward enlightenment. The study further elucidates the intersection between Theravāda Buddhist teachings on ānāpānasati (mindfulness of breathing) and Tibetan yoga traditions, underscoring shared principles that form the basis of their spiritual methodologies (Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2006).

Key Brahminical yoga practices include:

1. **Asanas:** Physical postures designed to enhance strength, flexibility, and equilibrium, widely recognised in contemporary yoga for their physiological and psychological benefits (Douglas, 2024).
2. **Pranayama:** Breath-regulation techniques aimed at optimising prana (vital energy) flow to promote holistic wellness (Douglas, 2024).
3. **Dhyana:** Meditative practices focused on transcending ordinary consciousness to attain heightened states of awareness.
4. **Mantra:** Recitation of sacred syllables to cultivate mental focus and spiritual connectivity (Douglas, 2024; Pandi-Perumal et al., 2022).
5. **Hatha Yoga:** A system integrating asanas, pranayama, and meditation to harmonise body and mind (Pandi-Perumal et al., 2022).

Brahminical texts classify yoga into six typologies: (1) Yoga of Heat, (2) Yoga of the Clear Light, (3) Yoga of the Dream-State, (4) Yoga of the Illusory Body, (5) Yoga of the Bardo State, and (6) Yoga of Consciousness-Transference (Pettit, 1999). Germano (2024) notes that early Dzogchen traditions, influenced by Brahminical and tantric elements, emphasized non-dual

awareness as a soteriological goal, further contextualizing yoga's role in Indo-Tibetan spirituality (Pettit, 1999).

Objective 2: Ānāpānasati and Hatha Yoga as Meditative Precursors

The findings indicate that ānāpānasati functions as a meditative framework bridging mindfulness and insight, rooted in Theravāda Buddhism. By observing breath-dependent mental states, practitioners discern the conditioned nature of experience, reinforcing the Buddhist principle of interdependent origination (Ven. Phramaha Nantakorn Piyabhani, personal communication, November 15, 2024). Parallely, Hatha Yoga, influenced by Tantric traditions, emphasises physiological purification to prepare for advanced meditation. While pranayama constitutes a component of Hatha Yoga, its scope extends beyond breath control to encompass the regulation of prana within subtle energy channels (nadis).

Empirical studies corroborate the psychological benefits of pranayama, including stress reduction and enhanced autonomic regulation. For instance, Brems (2024) demonstrated that breath-control techniques modulate the sympathetic nervous system, improving emotional resilience. Similarly, Awasthi et al. (2015) utilised electrophotonic imaging (EPI) to quantify energy reserve improvements in practitioners of ānāpānasati, highlighting its physiological impact. Crucially, both practices converge in their ultimate aim: transcending physical techniques to attain meditative absorption (dhyana) and liberation (moksha).

Objective 3: Interdisciplinary Applications of Ānāpānasati in Contemporary Yoga

The study demonstrates that integrating ānāpānasati into yoga practice enhances meditative focus and somatic awareness. During asanas, breath synchronisation augments kinesthetic engagement and reduces cognitive distractions, while pranayama techniques refined through ānāpānasati improve breath modulation. Postural practices such as savasana further leverage breath awareness to induce profound relaxation, as evidenced by neuroimaging studies linking ānāpānasati to increased dopamine release and cerebral blood flow.

Psychological frameworks like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) validate ānāpānasati's efficacy in mitigating anxiety and depression. Jones (2024) emphasizes its alignment with Buddhist ontology, where mindfulness of impermanence (anicca) and non-self (anatta) fosters holistic well-being. Neuroscientific research by Prabhu and Bhat (2021) further posits that sustained meditation induces structural brain changes, enhancing attentional control and emotional regulation. However, while modern paradigms offer mechanistic insights, ānāpānasati remains rooted in Buddhist epistemology, underscoring its dual capacity to complement therapeutic models while retaining philosophical depth.

These findings illuminate the historical synergy between Brahminical and Buddhist contemplative traditions, while positioning ānāpānasati as a transdisciplinary practice bridging classical spirituality and modern science. The study contributes to scholarly discourse by delineating how ancient techniques inform contemporary therapeutic and meditative applications, supported by empirical validations from psychology and neuroscience.

Discussions

The findings of this study underscore the interconnectedness of Brahminical and Buddhist contemplative traditions, particularly through the lens of ānāpānasati and Hatha Yoga. The historical analysis reveals that Brahminism's yoga practices—āsanas, pranayama, and dhyana—were not merely physical exercises but integral to spiritual advancement, aligning with Saraswati's (2024) assertion that Brahminical yoga emphasizes the harmonization of body and mind as a pathway to enlightenment. Similarly, Germano (2024) highlights the role of non-dual awareness in Dzogchen traditions, a concept mirrored in Brahminical typologies such as the Yoga of the Clear Light and Consciousness-Transference. This convergence suggests a shared Indo-Tibetan soteriological framework where physiological discipline facilitates transcendent states.

The integration of ānāpānasati into Hatha Yoga further bridges Buddhist and Brahminical methodologies. While Hatha Yoga prioritizes energy channel purification (nadis)

through pranayama (Satyananda, 2022), ānāpānasati extends this by fostering mindfulness of impermanence (anicca), a core Buddhist tenet (Thanissaro, 2024). Empirical studies corroborate this synergy: French et al. (2024) found that pranayama modulates autonomic nervous system activity, reducing stress, while Awasthi et al. (2015) demonstrated that ānāpānasati enhances energy reserves through breath awareness. These findings position breath-centric practices as both therapeutic and spiritual tools, transcending cultural boundaries.

Modern applications of ānāpānasati in yoga highlight its adaptability to contemporary wellness paradigms. Neuroimaging studies by Prabhu and Bhat (2021) reveal structural brain changes, such as increased grey matter density in the prefrontal cortex, linked to sustained mindfulness practice. Such neuroscientific validations align with psychological frameworks like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), which attribute ānāpānasati's efficacy to its focus on present-moment awareness (Jones, 2024). However, Jones (2024) cautions against reducing ānāpānasati to a mechanistic tool, emphasising its roots in Buddhist epistemology, which prioritises liberation (nibbāna) over symptomatic relief.

In conclusion, this study illuminates the symbiotic relationship between ancient yogic practices and modern science, demonstrating how ānāpānasati bridges spiritual and empirical domains. By honouring its philosophical roots while embracing interdisciplinary inquiry, practitioners and scholars can deepen their understanding of yoga's transformative potential.

Knowledge from Research

The application of Buddhist breathing principles, particularly ānāpānasati (mindfulness of breathing), to yoga practice offers a holistic framework for enhancing physical health, emotional resilience, and mental clarity. Core tenets shared between these traditions emphasise abdominal breathing over shallow chest respiration, nasal inhalation to filter and humidify air, prolonged exhalations to activate the parasympathetic nervous system, and rhythmic breath patterns to stabilise focus. These techniques optimise physiological functions, such as improving oxygenation, reducing stress hormones, and enhancing cardiovascular efficiency, which collectively support overall well-being.

Mindfulness of breathing, central to Buddhist meditation, cultivates present-moment awareness, helping individuals observe thoughts and sensations without attachment. This practice fosters emotional regulation, reduces anxiety, and enhances cognitive flexibility. When integrated into yoga, it deepens the mind-body connection, enabling practitioners to move through postures (asanas) with intentionality and grace. Such integration aligns with yoga's broader philosophy, which views physical discipline as a gateway to mental harmony. The four classical yogic paths—Karma Yoga (selfless action), Jhāna Yoga (knowledge), Bhakti Yoga (devotion), and Kriya Yoga (energy cultivation)—collectively address the multidimensional nature of human experience, promoting balance across body, mind, emotions, and vitality.

For society, these practices hold transformative potential. Breath-focused mindfulness can mitigate stress-related health issues, such as hypertension and insomnia, reducing public healthcare burdens. In educational or workplace settings, incorporating simple breathing exercises may enhance focus, productivity, and interpersonal harmony. Furthermore, the ethical foundations embedded in these traditions—such as Karma Yoga's emphasis on selfless service—encourage prosocial behaviours, fostering communities rooted in empathy and cooperation.

The structured meditative frameworks of ānāpānasati, as outlined in classical Buddhist texts, guide practitioners through stages of purification, emphasising non-attachment to transient experiences. Similarly, yoga's emphasis on disciplined action (karma) underscores that true well-being arises not from passive avoidance but from mindful engagement with life's challenges. This shared wisdom counters modern tendencies toward escapism or overstimulation, offering a sustainable path to inner stability amid external chaos.

By uniting breath awareness with physical postures, individuals learn to navigate discomfort with equanimity, a skill transferable to daily stressors. On a societal level, widespread adoption of these practices could cultivate collective resilience, reducing polarisation and fostering a culture of mindfulness. Ultimately, the synergy between Buddhist

breathing concepts and yoga transcends individual benefit, modeling a vision of holistic health where personal well-being and societal harmony are inextricably linked.

Conclusion

This study has explored the integration of the Buddhist concept of *ānāpānasati* (mindfulness of breathing) into yogic breathing practice, with attention to the historical, philosophical, and practical dimensions of both traditions. The first objective—examining the origin, history, development, concept, and theory of yoga—revealed that yoga emerged from the Brahmanical tradition of ancient India, which later evolved into classical Hinduism. Within this tradition, yoga encompasses not only physical postures (*āsana*), but also breath regulation (*prāṇāyāma*), ethical discipline, and contemplative practice. Its ultimate goal is to realize the true nature of reality, attain liberation (*mokṣa*), and cultivate compassion for all beings. Yogic breathing, in particular, has long been considered a central component of both physical health and spiritual progress across Indo-Tibetan traditions. It contributes to physiological balance and serves as a preparatory foundation for meditative absorption.

Regarding the second objective—analysing *ānāpānasati* in relation to yoga—the study found that the Buddhist approach to breath, centred on non-judgmental awareness of inhalation and exhalation, complements yogic breathing techniques. *Ānāpānasati* entails mindfulness of breath in four progressive stages: observing long and short breaths, experiencing the entire bodily process of breathing, and calming bodily activities. This method develops sustained attention, present-moment awareness, and inner tranquillity. Unlike some yogic methods that may emphasise control over the breath, the Buddhist method prioritises natural observation, fostering insight into the impermanence and interdependent nature of bodily and mental processes.

The third objective—applying *ānāpānasati* to breathing yoga practice—demonstrated that integrating mindful breathing into yoga enhances both its contemplative and physical dimensions. Practitioners reported that applying *ānāpānasati* principles during *prāṇāyāma* and *āsana* practice increased their mental clarity, emotional stability, and physiological awareness.

This interdisciplinary approach bridges Buddhist mindfulness and yogic embodiment, fostering a more holistic and transformative experience.

This study affirms that integrating ānāpānasati into yoga practice offers a valuable path for enhancing both spiritual insight and well-being. It encourages practitioners to move beyond technique toward cultivating ethical awareness, present-centeredness, and compassionate action, goals central to Buddhist and yogic traditions.

Suggestions

Building on the present study's findings regarding the integration of Theravāda Ānāpānasati (mindfulness of breathing) into Brahmanical yoga practice, several avenues merit further investigation:

Comparative Impact Studies

1. Conduct empirical research on how ānāpānasati-informed yoga affects psychological well-being, stress resilience, and emotional regulation in diverse populations.
2. Similarly, assess the social and cultural impacts of traditional yogic prāṇāyāma, as taught within Brahmanical lineages, on practitioners' everyday lives and community health.

Integrated Practice Models

1. Evaluate the feasibility, acceptability, and efficacy of these hybrid protocols across different settings (e.g., clinical, educational, retreat environments).
2. Develop and trial structured protocols that weave ānāpānasati steps (e.g., noting long versus short breaths, bodily awareness) into established yoga sequences.

Critical Theoretical Analyses

1. Perform a critical examination of the philosophical congruencies and divergences between Buddhist breath mindfulness and Brahmanical breath control, especially concerning the aims of samatha (calm) versus mokṣa (liberation).

2. Analyze how the goal of nibbāna in Theravāda and mokṣa in yoga inform pedagogical approaches to breath practice.

Longitudinal and Cross-Cultural Research

1. Design longitudinal studies to observe sustained outcomes of integrated breath practices over months or years.
2. Explore how cultural context mediates the reception and adaptation of Buddhist-influenced breath mindfulness within contemporary yoga communities.

By pursuing these lines of inquiry, future research can deepen our understanding of breath's transformative potential and foster innovative, evidence-based contemplative practices that honour Buddhist and yogic traditions.

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Proposing Social Media Platforms for Peace-Making According to Buddhist Teachings for Resolving Family Conflicts

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Abstract

This study reimagines social media as a transformative tool for peacemaking in family conflicts by integrating Buddhist ethical principles. Addressing the dual role of digital platforms, as both conflict accelerators and potential reconciliation spaces, the research pursues three objectives: (1) analyzing existing social media roles in family conflict resolution, (2) examining Buddhist teachings applicable to these conflicts, and (3) proposing a Buddhist-inspired framework for social media design. Utilising qualitative methods, including document analysis and interviews with Buddhist scholars, social media experts, and conflict-resolution practitioners, the study identifies key challenges (e.g., impulsive communication exacerbated by nonverbal cue deficits) and transformative opportunities.

Buddhist teachings offer a robust ethical and psychological foundation for transforming online interactions. In particular, the principles of Right Speech (Sammā Vācā), Mindfulness (Sati), Loving-Kindness (Mettā), and Gratitude (Katannu-Katavedī) emerged as essential for promoting respectful, non-reactive communication. We illustrate how guided Dharma discussions, meditative exercises, and digital content structured around these virtues can reduce hostility, rebuild trust, and support sustained reconciliation.

Based on these insights, we introduce a comprehensive, Buddhist-inspired social media framework. Key components include AI-assisted moderation that flags and gently corrects harmful language; curated discussion forums anchored in ethical precepts; and interactive features such as live guided meditations, storytelling modules that model compassionate behaviour, and virtual support circles for family members. Together, these elements are designed to temper emotional volatility, encourage reflective engagement, and convert social media from a conflict accelerator into a vehicle for peace-making.

Keywords: Social Media; Peace-Making; Buddhist Teachings; Family Conflict Resolution

Introduction

In the digital age, social media platforms such as Facebook, LINE, WhatsApp, YouTube, and TikTok have become central to family communication, enabling instantaneous connection across distances but also creating new arenas for misunderstanding and conflict. Text-based interactions often omit crucial nonverbal cues—tone, facial expression, and body language—leading to misinterpretation, impulsive responses, and emotional escalation (Pew Research Center, 2022). Mahmoud & Shafik (2020) demonstrate that the absence of context in digital exchanges frequently gives rise to protracted disputes, as interlocutors react reflexively rather than reflectively.

Despite widespread recognition of these challenges, current social media architectures lack embedded ethical frameworks to guide compassionate, mindful engagement. This deficiency poses two primary problems: (1) digital family interactions remain prone to reactive, conflict-driven dynamics, and (2) there are insufficient built-in mechanisms for de-escalation or reconciliation when disputes arise. Without principled intervention strategies, families risk deepened misunderstandings and eroded relational bonds, particularly across generational divides where younger (18–35) and older (50+) cohorts differ markedly in digital literacy and communication norms (Monell, 2023).

Buddhist teachings offer a coherent ethical and psychological foundation to address these problems. Core elements of the Noble Eightfold Path, Right Speech (*Sammā Vācā*), Right Mindfulness (*Sammā Sati*), and Loving-Kindness (*Mettā*), prescribe non-harmful communication, emotional regulation, and empathy (Gethin, 2020; Harvey, 2018). Applied digitally, these principles can shape interaction protocols, content guidelines, and technological features that promote reflective engagement over impulsive reaction. Although Sadiku et al. (2021) explore how community standards and moderation affect online behaviour, they do not integrate Buddhist ethical precepts as a holistic framework for conflict resolution.

This study addresses the critical gap of how Buddhist peace-making principles can be operationalised within social media environments to resolve ongoing family conflicts and prevent future disputes. Specifically, it examines (a)

the roles social media platforms currently play in both fueling and mitigating domestic tensions, (b) the applicability of Buddhist communication ethics to digital contexts, and (c) the design of a prototype social media framework imbued with Buddhist values.

This research offers several benefits by investigating these dimensions through document analysis and expert interviews. First, it contributes to scholarly discourse at the intersection of Buddhist ethics, conflict resolution, and human–computer interaction. Second, it provides practical guidance for designers and policymakers to embed mindfulness and compassion into digital platforms, thereby enhancing users’ emotional well-being. Finally, by proposing AI-assisted moderation, structured Dharma-based discussion forums, and interactive content such as guided meditations and ethical storytelling, this study charts a path toward transforming social media from a conflict accelerator into a vehicle for sustainable family harmony and long-term peace-making.

Research Objectives

1. To study existing social media platforms and their roles in peace-making for resolving family conflicts.
2. To examine Buddhist teachings for resolving family conflicts.
3. To propose social media platforms for peace-making according to Buddhist teachings.

Literature Review

This literature review synthesizes existing research on social media’s role in family conflicts, Buddhist conflict resolution principles, and digital ethics to identify gaps in integrating Buddhist teachings into online platforms. It establishes the theoretical foundation for designing a Buddhist-inspired social media framework to address family disputes.

1. The Role of Social Media in Family Conflicts

Social media platforms have transformed family communication, offering connectivity but also fostering conflict. Mahmoud & Shafik (2020) note that while platforms enable long-distance bonding, text-based interactions often lack nonverbal cues, increasing misinterpretations. Boyd and Ellison (2007) similarly argue that the absence of emotional nuance in digital exchanges can escalate disputes due to impulsive responses. Empirical data from the Pew Research Center (2022) supports this, revealing that 55% of families experience conflicts

stemming from social media misunderstandings, particularly among younger adults (ages 18–35).

Efforts to mitigate digital conflict include AI moderation tools and community guidelines (Sadiku et al., 2021). However, these strategies focus on reactive content filtering rather than proactive ethical frameworks. Notably, no studies have explored integrating Buddhist principles, such as compassion and mindfulness, into platform design to guide peaceful interactions, highlighting a critical research gap.

2. Buddhist Teachings and Conflict Resolution

Buddhist philosophy provides a robust ethical foundation for resolving interpersonal disputes. Central to this are the Noble Eightfold Path's principles of Right Speech (avoiding harmful language), Right Action (ethical conduct), and Right Mindfulness (present-moment awareness), which collectively foster nonviolent communication (Gethin, 2020). Harvey (2018) demonstrates how Buddhist monastic practices, such as structured Dharma discussions in the Kosambi Sutta, resolve conflicts through mutual respect and dialogue. Similarly, the Metta Sutta emphasises loving-kindness (*mettā*) as a tool to neutralise hostility (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2017).

Despite these insights, existing research focuses on offline contexts, neglecting digital applications. For instance, while Harvey (2018) validates Buddhist peace-making in face-to-face settings, no studies adapt these teachings to mitigate family conflicts on social media. This omission underscores the need to bridge ancient ethical frameworks with modern digital communication.

3. Digital Ethics and Mindful Communication

Emerging research in digital ethics highlights the psychological risks of online interactions, including anonymity-fueled hostility and reduced empathy (Suler, 2016; Turkle, 2020). Mindfulness-based interventions, such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), show promise in improving emotional regulation (Kabat-Zinn, 2013), but their application to digital spaces remains underexplored. Uthaphan & Phramaha Surasak Phooriko. (2024) found that digital mindfulness practices enhance emotional resilience, yet no studies have structured these practices into social media platforms to address family conflicts.

Current AI moderation tools prioritise content removal over fostering ethical dialogue (Sadiku et al., 2021). This reactive approach contrasts with Buddhist principles, which emphasise proactive cultivation of compassion and

self-awareness. The absence of a unified model combining AI moderation with Buddhist ethics represents a significant gap in both conflict resolution and digital design literature.

The reviewed literature reveals three key gaps:

1. **Ethical Framework Deficiency:** While AI moderation addresses harmful content (Sadiku et al., 2021), it lacks an ethical foundation to guide constructive communication.
2. **Digital-Buddhist Disconnect:** Buddhist teachings offer conflict resolution strategies (Gethin, 2020; Harvey, 2018), but their adaptation to digital platforms is unexplored.
3. **Mindfulness Implementation Gap:** Though mindfulness improves emotional regulation (Kabat-Zinn, 2013), structured Buddhist-inspired interventions for online family disputes are absent.

This study addresses these gaps by proposing a Buddhist social media framework integrating Right Speech, Mindfulness, and Loving-Kindness with AI moderation tools. By embedding Dharma-based principles into platform design, such as guided meditations, gratitude journals, and ethical discussion forums, the framework aims to transform social media into a space for mindful reconciliation. This bridges traditional Buddhist methods with modern technology, offering actionable strategies for developers and community leaders to reduce hostility and promote family harmony.

Conceptual Framework

This research is a qualitative study exploring the application of Buddhist teachings in social media platforms to facilitate peace-making, resolve existing family conflicts, and prevent future disputes. It investigates how Dharma-based content can transform digital communication spaces into platforms that encourage mindful engagement, emotional regulation, and ethical discourse among family members.

The conceptual framework integrates two core areas:

- (1) Buddhist ethical communication principles, and
- (2) Social media theories on digital engagement and ethical AI moderation.

The Buddhist principles central to this study include:

Right Speech (Sammā Vācā): Ethical communication that avoids lying, divisive speech, harsh words, and idle chatter, comparable to setting clear ground rules for respectful family discussions.

Mindfulness (Sati): Maintaining present-moment awareness to prevent reactive and impulsive communication, much like pausing before responding during a heated conversation.

Loving-Kindness (Metta): Cultivating unconditional goodwill towards others, similar to extending patience and compassion even during disagreements.

Gratitude (Katannu-Katavedi): Recognizing and appreciating others' contributions, akin to keeping a gratitude journal to foster positive interactions within families.

From the digital communication side, the study draws upon theories of digital engagement, emphasizing user participation and emotional investment in online communities, and ethical AI moderation, which involves using technology to uphold community standards based on fairness, empathy, and conflict prevention.

Together, these elements form an integrated framework that highlights how structured Buddhist content can be leveraged on social media platforms to enhance family communication, resolve conflicts, and prevent future misunderstandings.

The conceptual framework is structured as follows:

1. Input (Independent Variables):

- Buddhist Teachings: The study draws upon key Buddhist ethical principles, specifically:
 - Right Speech (Sammā Vācā): Speaking truthfully, harmoniously, and kindly.
 - Mindfulness (Sati): Maintaining present-moment awareness to guide thoughtful responses.
 - Loving-Kindness (Metta): Extending unconditional goodwill towards others, fostering emotional warmth in communication.
 - Gratitude (Katannu-Katavedi): Acknowledging and appreciating the support and contributions of family members, similar to cultivating a gratitude practice.
- Social Media Platforms: Digital spaces such as Facebook, LINE, WhatsApp, YouTube, and TikTok serve as the operational environments where Dharma-based interventions are implemented.

2. Process (Mediating Variable):

- Dharma-Based Content on Social Media Platforms:

The integration of Buddhist teachings into digital content, including AI-assisted moderation, guided Dharma discussions, ethical storytelling, meditation guides, and supportive online community practices. This content aims to foster mindful, ethical engagement during family digital interactions.

3. Output (Dependent Variables):

The expected outcomes from applying Dharma-based content to social media platforms include:

- Reduction in family conflicts on social media: Minimising disputes arising from miscommunication and emotional misunderstandings.
- Improved emotional regulation and family conflict resolution: Enhancing the ability of family members to manage emotions and resolve disputes peacefully.
- Enhanced mindful communication within family digital interactions: Promoting compassionate, thoughtful engagement in online conversations between family members.

This framework emphasises how Buddhist ethical principles, when systematically adapted into digital environments, can transform social media from a catalyst for conflict into a platform for peace-making, emotional healing, and long-term relationship building within families.

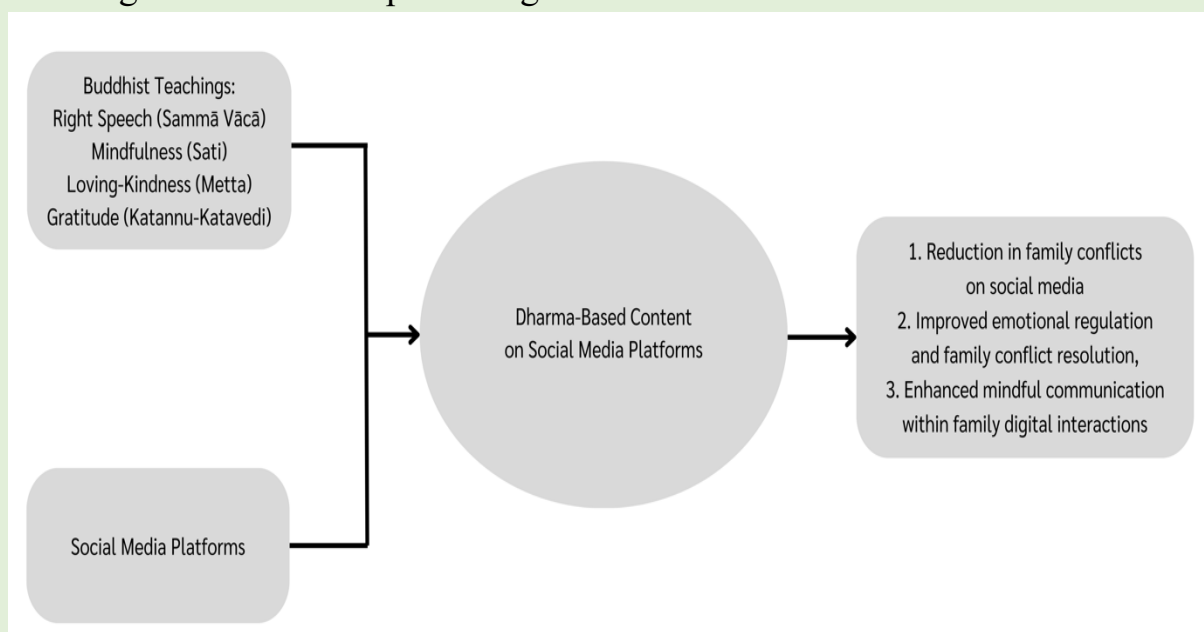


Figure1 Conceptual Framework

This framework demonstrates that by integrating Buddhist principles into social media communication, digital interactions can shift from being a source of conflict to a tool for peace-making. The application of AI-assisted moderation, structured discussions, and interactive Buddhist digital content will create a digital space that fosters ethical engagement, mindfulness, and constructive dialogue.

Research Methodology

This qualitative study employs a mixed-methods approach to examine how Buddhist teachings can inform the design of social media platforms for family conflict resolution. Grounded in documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews, the research is structured across three phases, aligning with its objectives to analyze existing social media roles, Buddhist peace-making principles, and their integration into digital frameworks.

Phase 1: Documentary Analysis of Family Conflict Resolution

The first phase involves a systematic review of academic literature (2018–2023) addressing family conflicts in digital spaces. Peer-reviewed articles, case studies, and reports were purposively sampled to identify recurring themes such as communication breakdowns, financial disputes, and intergenerational misunderstandings. Sources were selected using keywords like “family conflict resolution,” “social media disputes,” and “digital mediation,” prioritizing studies from psychology, communication, and sociology. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was applied to compare traditional mediation techniques (e.g., legal interventions, counseling) with challenges unique to online interactions, such as nonverbal cue deficits and impulsive communication.

Phase 2: Buddhist Textual Analysis

The second phase analyzes Buddhist teachings relevant to conflict resolution through primary texts (e.g., Tipitaka, Metta Sutta) and secondary scholarly interpretations (Gethin, 2020; Harvey, 2018). Texts were thematically coded to extract principles like Right Speech (truthful, non-harmful communication), Mindfulness (awareness of emotional triggers), Loving-Kindness (compassionate intent), and Gratitude (acknowledging interdependence). A comparative framework assessed their applicability to digital contexts, contrasting Buddhist ethical models with secular conflict resolution strategies (e.g., active listening, emotion regulation).

Phase 3: Qualitative Interviews

The final phase integrates insights from Phases 1–2 through semi-structured interviews with six key informants: Buddhist scholars (n=2), social media designers (n=2), and conflict resolution practitioners (n=2). Participants were purposively sampled for expertise in Buddhist ethics, digital communication, or family mediation. Interviews explored practical challenges in translating Buddhist principles into platform features (e.g., AI moderation, mindfulness prompts) and ethical risks (e.g., commercialization of Dharma content). Data were transcribed and analyzed via inductive coding to identify emergent themes, such as the need for hybrid (AI/human) moderation and culturally adaptable Dharma modules.

This study combines Buddhist conflict resolution principles with social media strategies to promote digital peace-making. It aims to develop a structured framework that applies Buddhist ethical communication, such as Right Speech, Mindfulness, Loving-Kindness, and Gratitude, to support mindful engagement and resolve family conflicts in digital interactions. The findings contribute to the development of a structured social media framework that applies Buddhist ethical communication principles to promote peace-making, mindful engagement, and conflict resolution in digital family interactions.

Research Results

Objective 1: The results showed that social media platforms play a dual role in family conflict resolution.

The findings indicate that social media serves both as a catalyst for conflict and as a potential tool for peacemaking in family interactions. Digital platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Twitter/X, and Reddit facilitate communication and knowledge-sharing but also pose challenges such as misinformation, impulsive interactions, and digital hostility. The research highlights that the integration of Buddhist teachings into social media platforms has allowed for the dissemination of ethical communication principles, mindfulness practices, and peace-making strategies rooted in Buddhist philosophy. By promoting Right Speech (*Samma Vaca*), Loving-Kindness (*Metta*), and Mindfulness (*Sati*), social media can serve as a modern extension of Buddhist conflict resolution approaches.

Different platforms play distinct roles in integrating Buddhist teachings into digital peace-making efforts. Facebook fosters community-driven conflict

resolution through private discussion groups and live-streamed Dharma talks. YouTube serves as an educational platform, offering guided meditations and structured Buddhist teachings to enhance emotional regulation. TikTok and Instagram introduce Buddhist teachings in an engaging, short-form manner, particularly appealing to younger audiences. Twitter/X facilitates daily reflections on mindfulness and ethical speech, while Reddit and online forums provide long-form discussions and textual analyses for deeper engagement.

Social media makes Buddhist conflict resolution strategies globally accessible, transcending geographical and cultural barriers. However, challenges remain, including misinterpretation of Buddhist principles, the commercialisation of Dharma teachings, and the short attention spans of digital audiences, which limit deep engagement. Despite these limitations, social media remains a powerful tool for promoting mindful communication and ethical speech, creating a new avenue for digital Buddhist peace-making.

Objective 2: The results showed that Buddhist teachings offer a structured ethical framework for family conflict resolution.

Buddhist teachings provide a contemplative, ethical, and self-transformative approach to resolving family conflicts, emphasising mindfulness, non-violence, and ethical communication. The study identifies several key Buddhist principles that can be applied to family conflict resolution, including:

- Right Speech (Samma Vaca): Encourages truthfulness, non-harmful speech, and active listening to prevent misunderstandings.
- Mindfulness (Sati): Cultivates self-awareness, helping individuals regulate emotions and respond rather than react in conflicts.
- Loving-Kindness (Metta): Fosters patience and forgiveness, transforming hostility into compassion.
- Gratitude (Katannu-Katavedi): Promotes appreciation and strengthens familial bonds, shifting focus from resentment to reconciliation.

The research highlights that Buddhist conflict resolution focuses on self-mastery rather than adversarial blame. According to the Four Noble Truths, suffering arises from attachment, anger, and ignorance, which can be mitigated through ethical conduct and mental discipline. The Noble Eightfold Path provides a practical guide to resolving conflicts, particularly through Right View, Right Effort, and Right Mindfulness. The findings also underscore the relevance of

historical Buddhist conflict resolution strategies, such as monastic mediation, Buddhist counselling techniques, and Emperor Ashoka's governance model, as practical applications of Buddhist peace-making principles.

While Buddhist teachings offer a timeless and structured approach to conflict resolution, challenges arise in their digital adaptation. The results show that many social media users engage with Buddhist content passively, consuming teachings without applying them to real-life conflicts. The study emphasises the need for interactive engagement methods, including guided meditations, structured online discussions, and real-world applications of Buddhist teachings in digital family dynamics.

Objective 3: The results showed that social media platforms play a crucial role in peace-making according to Buddhist teachings for resolving family conflicts. This study synthesised findings from documentary research and in-depth interviews, identifying how Buddhist principles can be effectively disseminated through social media to promote mindful communication and conflict resolution within family structures.

The findings reveal that social media is widely used for engaging with Buddhist teachings, though different platforms serve distinct roles. YouTube and Facebook were found to be the most trusted platforms for structured Buddhist learning, particularly for users seeking in-depth teachings on ethical speech, mindfulness, and emotional regulation. TikTok and Instagram, on the other hand, were found to be effective for engaging younger audiences with short-form Buddhist content, making complex philosophical ideas more accessible. However, the research highlights that while Buddhist teachings are widely available on social media, content specifically tailored for family conflict resolution remains underdeveloped.

In conclusion from interviews with Buddhist scholars, Social Media Specialists, and lay practitioners revealed that Right Speech (*Samma Vaca*) is the most commonly cited Buddhist principle for resolving family conflicts, as many disputes originate from unskillful communication. Mindfulness (*Sati*) was identified as essential for preventing reactive responses, while Loving-Kindness (*Metta*) was emphasised as a key approach to fostering patience and forgiveness. Gratitude (*Katannu-Katavedi*) was also highlighted as a means to strengthen family relationships, shifting the focus from blame and resentment to appreciation and reconciliation.

Table 1 Key Informants' Answers Related to Proposing Social Media Platforms for Peace-Making According to Buddhist Teaching for Resolving Family Conflicts

Key Informant	Belief in Buddhist Teachings for Conflict Resolution	Most Effective Buddhist Teachings	Social Media Platforms Used	Preferred Content Format for Buddhist Teachings	How Buddhist Teachings Reduce Conflict
K1	Yes, Buddhist teachings help in fostering loving-kindness, mindfulness, and gratitude, which reduce resentment and encourage understanding.	1. Gratitude 2. Mindfulness & Loving-Kindness 3. Right Speech	LINE, WhatsApp, YouTube	Audio sermons and Dhamma music	Fosters gratitude and appreciation, making anger difficult to hold.
K2	Yes, the Four Brahmaviharas (loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity) help in family conflict resolution.	1. Gratitude 2. Loving-Kindness 3. Mindfulness 4. Right Speech	LINE, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok	YouTube videos and books	Encourages loving-kindness and self-reflection, preventing misunderstandings.
K3	Yes, but real application is necessary. Practicing loving-kindness can prevent conflicts from escalating.	1. Loving-Kindness 2. Mindfulness 3. Right Speech 4. Gratitude	Instagram, TikTok, YouTube	Podcasts and short quotes	Helps individuals pause before reacting, reducing arguments.
K4	Yes, Buddhist teachings provide a mental framework for handling problems and shifting perspectives.	1. Right Speech 2. Mindfulness 3. Loving-Kindness 4. Gratitude	TikTok, YouTube, Instagram	Algorithm-based recommended videos	Encourages loving-kindness and self-reflection, preventing misunderstandings.
K5	Yes, mindfulness helps in regulating emotions and reducing impulsive reactions during family disputes.	1. Mindfulness & Loving-Kindness 2. Right Speech 3. Gratitude	Facebook, Instagram, TikTok	Long video teachings with deep explanations	Teaches self-regulation through mindfulness, preventing harsh speech.
K6	Yes, Buddhist teachings help in managing emotions, ensuring that conflicts do not escalate unnecessarily.	1. Mindfulness 2. Loving-Kindness 3. Right Speech 4. Gratitude	Facebook, TikTok, YouTube	Short Dhamma videos and guided meditation	Promotes patience, non-reactivity, and mindful communication.

The study further revealed that while social media provides significant opportunities for Buddhist digital engagement, it also presents challenges, such as misinformation, reactionary communication, and the oversimplification of Buddhist teachings. Documentary research emphasised that social media algorithms often prioritise engagement over accuracy, increasing the risk of superficial interpretations of Buddhist conflict resolution principles. Additionally, interview findings suggested that passive consumption of Buddhist teachings on social media should be supplemented with interactive and practical

engagement tools, such as live Dharma discussions, guided meditation exercises, and structured conflict resolution workshops.

The study identified five distinct types of online platforms that can be effectively utilized for peace-making and family conflict resolution through Buddhist teachings. Each platform serves a unique role in delivering Dharma-based conflict resolution strategies, enhancing accessibility and engagement for different audiences.

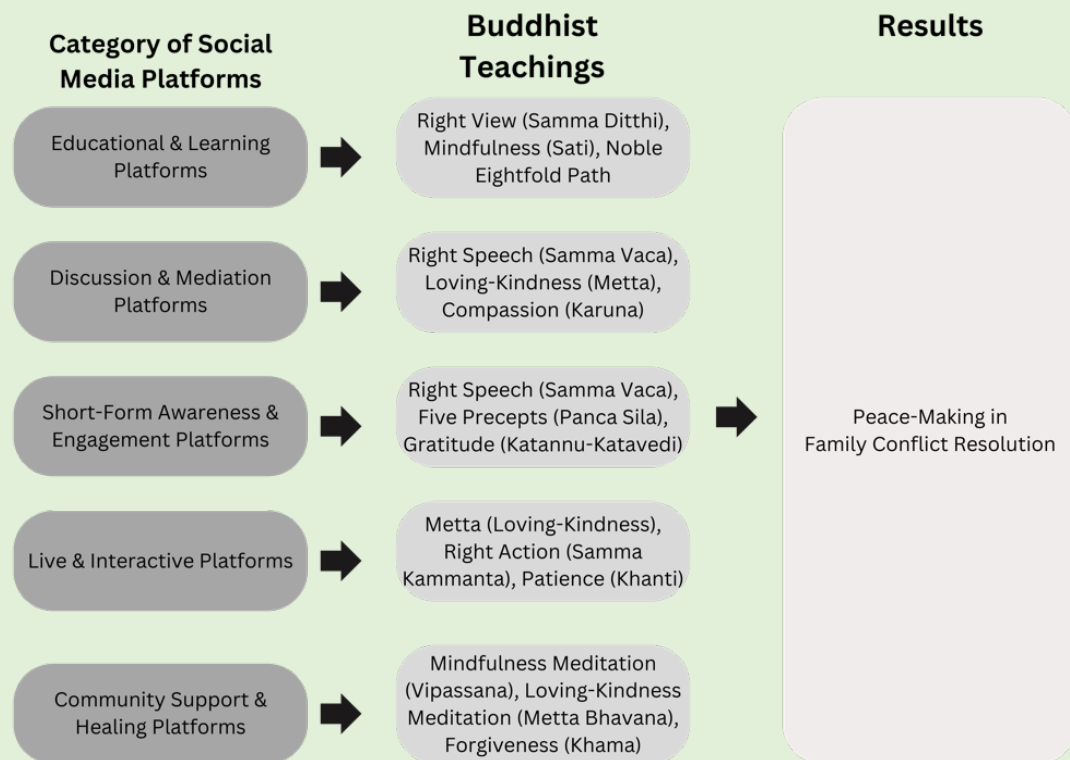


Figure 2: Five Types of Online Platforms for Peace-Making in Family Conflict Resolution through Buddhist Principles

Educational platforms, such as YouTube, Facebook Watch, and Podcasts, provide long-form, structured Buddhist teachings on ethical communication, mindfulness, and emotional regulation. These platforms are particularly beneficial for individuals seeking in-depth explanations of Buddhist peace-making principles, including Right Speech (Samma Vaca), Loving-Kindness (Metta), and Mindfulness (Sati). By offering comprehensive video lectures and Dharma talks, these platforms create a knowledge base for digital Buddhist learning.

Discussion and mediation platforms, including Reddit, Facebook Groups, and online forums, facilitate community-driven conversations and peer-to-peer mediation based on Buddhist teachings. These platforms provide structured discussions on Buddhist conflict resolution methods, allowing participants to share personal experiences, seek advice, and apply Buddhist ethical guidelines to real-life conflicts. This form of digital engagement mirrors traditional Buddhist monastic discussions, where conflict resolution often occurs through guided discourse and collective wisdom.

Short-form awareness platforms, such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and Twitter/X, serve as effective tools for raising awareness and engaging younger audiences in Buddhist digital discourse. These platforms deliver brief yet impactful Buddhist teachings focused on Right Speech, patience, and emotional regulation. While they may not offer deep learning, they act as an entry point for individuals unfamiliar with Buddhist principles, helping them to explore mindful digital engagement and ethical online communication.

Live and interactive engagement platforms, including Zoom, Facebook Live, and Twitter Spaces, provide real-time Dharma discussions, guided meditation sessions, and interactive Q&A forums. These platforms encourage direct engagement with Buddhist teachers, digital Sanghas, and family members seeking conflict resolution strategies. By fostering real-time participation, live platforms allow individuals to ask questions, clarify misunderstandings, and receive immediate guidance on applying Buddhist teachings to family conflicts.

Community support platforms, such as Zoom, YouTube Live, and private WhatsApp/LINE groups, serve as safe spaces for individuals and families seeking Buddhist-based emotional support. These platforms enable the creation of structured digital Sanghas, where users can participate in mindfulness exercises, meditation sessions, and Buddhist counseling programs. This approach helps families apply Buddhist teachings in real-life conflict resolution, transforming digital spaces into supportive and healing environments.

By leveraging these five types of online platforms, Buddhist teachings can be effectively disseminated and applied in family conflict resolution, ensuring that social media evolves into a mindful and constructive space for ethical discourse and emotional well-being.

The results suggest that an effective Buddhist-based digital platform for peace-making should integrate structured learning pathways, interactive engagement mechanisms, and ethical content dissemination. This includes daily

Loving-Kindness meditation exercises, community support platforms, and real-time engagement features such as live Q&A sessions with Buddhist teachers. The study concludes that by leveraging social media's accessibility and interactivity, Buddhist teachings on peace-making can be more effectively integrated into digital family conflict resolution strategies. Future efforts should focus on balancing short-form engagement with long-form structured learning, ensuring that Buddhist principles are introduced and deeply applied in real-life family interactions.

Discussions

Social media's dual role in family conflict—as both a catalyst for discord and a conduit for reconciliation—aligns with prior scholarship on digital communication's paradoxical impacts. As Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) observed, social media represents a “revolutionary new trend” in fostering internet-based communities, enabling families to build social capital through supportive exchanges. Mahmoud & Shafik (2020) similarly emphasize its capacity to strengthen relational bonds across distances, particularly through real-time updates and shared milestones. However, the absence of nonverbal cues in text-based interactions often exacerbates misunderstandings, amplifying emotional reactivity (Khalili et al., 2024). This dichotomy mirrors Suler's (2004) “online disinhibition effect,” where anonymity and asynchronous communication lead users to oscillate between benign confidences (e.g., emotional support) and toxic hostility (e.g., impulsive criticism) (Suler, 2004). Turkle (2020) further highlights how digital platforms, while mitigating isolation, enable behaviors like “ghosting” and trolling, which erode empathy and deepen familial rifts. Our findings corroborate this duality: social media can inflame conflicts through gossip or misinterpretation, yet also offer tools for reconnection, such as virtual support circles and shared gratitude journals. This nuanced perspective challenges alarmist narratives that focus solely on harm, instead advocating for strategies that amplify social media's prosocial potential while curbing its risks, such as AI-driven content moderation and mindfulness prompts.

Integrating Buddhist principles into conflict resolution frameworks provides a robust ethical foundation for addressing these challenges. Central to this approach are the Four Immeasurables: loving-kindness (*metta*), compassion (*karuṇā*), empathetic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkha*), which collectively foster nonviolent communication and emotional self-regulation. For instance,

Right Speech (Sammā Vācā), a tenet of the Noble Eightfold Path, emphasizes truthfulness, harmony, gentleness, and timeliness in dialogue, directly countering the impulsivity of online exchanges. Participants in our study highlighted the utility of metta-meditation and gratitude (katannu-katavedī) in de-escalating anger during family disputes, a practice rooted in Buddhist teachings that prioritize inner peace as a precursor to social harmony (Ramm, 2021). Mindfulness (sati), as Kabat-Zinn (2013) notes, enhances present-moment awareness, enabling users to pause before reacting impulsively, a critical skill in mitigating the “toxic disinhibition” pervasive on social media (Suler, 2004). However, translating these ideals into digital environments presents ethical and practical hurdles. Algorithmic governance of “right speech” risks stifling free expression, while the attention economy’s design often prioritizes engagement over ethical discourse. As Bombaerts et al. (2023) argue, platforms must reorient toward “right effort” (discerning wholesome content) and “right concentration” (resisting distraction) to align with Buddhist values, though scalability and cultural adaptability remain unresolved challenges (Ramm, 2021).

Our proposed Buddhist-inspired social media framework bridges these gaps by operationalizing mindfulness and compassion into platform design. Features such as AI-assisted moderation, guided meditations, and gratitude journaling align with emerging research on digital mindfulness, which Liu et al. (2023) associate with “balanced and harmonious” online engagement. Unlike conventional digital ethics frameworks focused on privacy and transparency, our model emphasizes compassionate communication as a core value, resonating with “values-based technology”. For example, “mindful posting” prompts, which encourage users to reflect before commenting, address Suler’s (2004) concerns about impulsive hostility, while Dharma-based discussion forums foster empathetic dialogue. Nevertheless, ethical risks persist, including privacy concerns in digital dispute records and the potential exclusion of non-Buddhist users. The framework’s success hinges on hybrid moderation models that blend human facilitators with AI tools, ensuring cultural sensitivity and minimizing spiritual bypassing, a critique leveled at oversimplified mindfulness interventions (Ramm, 2021).

In conclusion, this study advances the discourse on Buddhist digital ethics by demonstrating how ancient teachings can mitigate modern online conflicts. While social media’s dual nature—as both a “conflict accelerator” and “peace-making tool”—echoes prior work (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Mahmoud &

Shafik, 2020), our framework offers a novel synthesis of structural and personal interventions 17. Future research must empirically test these proposals, particularly their efficacy across diverse cultural contexts and their adaptability to mainstream platforms. By harmonizing Buddhism’s reflective pace with the digital world’s immediacy, this work underscores the enduring relevance of ethical communication in fostering familial and societal harmony.

Knowledge from Research

This research provides a structured framework for integrating Buddhist teachings into social media platforms to facilitate peace-making and family conflict resolution. The study synthesises findings from documentary research and qualitative interviews, leading to the development of a conceptual model for digital Buddhist peace-making. The following diagram illustrates the key insights derived from the research.

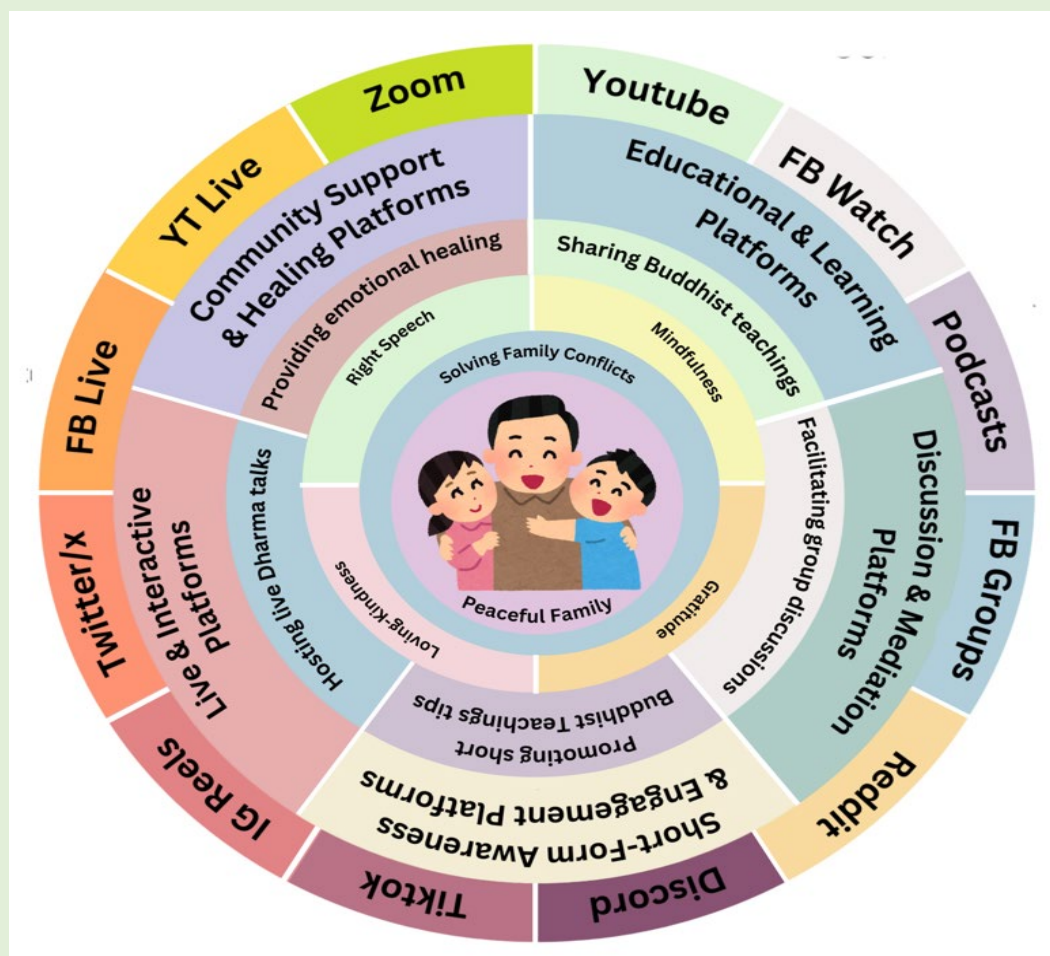


Figure 3: Social Media Platforms for Buddhist Peace-Making in Family Conflict Resolution

This study advances the fields of digital ethics and conflict resolution by proposing a structured framework to transform social media into platforms for mindful family reconciliation through Buddhist teachings. By synthesizing documentary analysis and qualitative insights, the research demonstrates how core Buddhist principles, Right Speech, Mindfulness, Loving-Kindness, and Gratitude, can recalibrate social media's dual role as both a conflict amplifier and a mediator. The findings categorize platforms like YouTube (educational hubs), Reddit (discussion forums), and TikTok (short-form awareness) into functional roles aligned with Dharma-based strategies, enabling tailored interventions such as AI-assisted moderation, live Dharma discussions, and gratitude journaling to de-escalate disputes.

The research offers actionable strategies for translating Buddhist ethics into digital peace-making tools across key sectors:

1. **Academia:** Supports interdisciplinary curriculum development in Buddhist studies, digital communication, and AI ethics, fostering research on hybrid moderation models (e.g., AI-human collaboration) and ethical training programs for mindful online engagement.
2. **Communities:** Empowers digital Sanghas (Buddhist communities) to host guided Dharma sessions and structured support forums, promoting non-harmful dialogue and emotional resilience in family conflicts.
3. **Business:** Encourages tech companies to adopt AI-driven content moderation systems that prioritize compassion (e.g., flagging harmful language while suggesting mindful alternatives) and develop mindfulness-based wellness programs for users.
4. **Policy-Making:** Advocates for ethical speech guidelines and public initiatives rooted in Buddhist principles, such as mindfulness campaigns to reduce misinformation and algorithms that reward empathetic content over sensationalism.

While the framework addresses risks like algorithmic bias and superficial engagement through interactive strategies (e.g., live discussions replacing passive scrolling), challenges persist, including cultural adaptability and privacy concerns. Future research should empirically test AI moderation efficacy, refine cross-cultural implementation, and explore sustainable models for scaling Dharma-based interventions.

By aligning ancient Buddhist wisdom with modern technology, this study provides a replicable blueprint for transforming social media into ecosystems of

peace. It bridges theoretical and practical gaps in digital ethics, advocating for platforms that prioritize mindful communication, emotional regulation, and familial harmony. Collaborative efforts across academia, industry, and policy can ensure these innovations foster enduring digital and societal well-being.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that integrating Buddhist teachings, Right Speech, Mindfulness, Loving-Kindness, and Gratitude, into social media can transform these platforms into structured spaces for family reconciliation. By reorienting digital environments into five functional categories (educational hubs, mediation forums, awareness channels, live engagement venues, and support circles), the framework provides Dharma-informed tools for ethical dialogue. Technological innovations, such as AI moderation redirecting harmful speech and interactive mindfulness exercises, enable emotional self-regulation and compassionate engagement.

However, ethical risks, commercialisation, misinformation, and superficial engagement require mitigation through hybrid models combining facilitator-led guidance with user-driven participation. This balance ensures depth and accessibility, preserving the integrity of Buddhist principles. The study advances Buddhist digital ethics by offering a replicable peace-making model. Future research should empirically assess user outcomes, refine AI ethical filters, and develop cross-cultural guidelines. By prioritising mindful design and rigorous evaluation, social media can evolve from conflict amplifiers into enduring instruments of family harmony, aligning technological innovation with ancient wisdom for modern challenges.

Suggestions

This research has found that Buddhist teachings can be effectively integrated into social media platforms to promote peacemaking and resolve family conflicts. Key insights demonstrate that principles such as Right Speech (Samma Vaca), Mindfulness (Sati), Loving-Kindness (Metta), and Gratitude (Katannu-Katavedi) provide a structured ethical framework for digital engagement, helping to reduce online hostility and encourage mindful, compassionate communication. An important finding is that social media platforms, when properly structured, can serve as effective tools for promoting Buddhist conflict resolution strategies. These findings have practical applications for digital Buddhist education, AI-driven ethical moderation, and online

community engagement strategies aimed at fostering constructive discussions and preventing digital misunderstandings.

For future research, several directions are recommended:

- Longitudinal studies should be conducted to evaluate the long-term impact of Buddhist-based digital interventions on reducing family conflicts, improving emotional regulation, and sustaining mindful communication over time. This would provide stronger evidence for the lasting effectiveness of the proposed social media framework.
- Comparative studies should explore how different Buddhist traditions—Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana—adapt digital peace-making strategies across various cultural and social contexts, to enhance the model's flexibility and global relevance.
- Additional research should investigate the comparative effectiveness of digital Buddhist interventions versus traditional Buddhist conflict resolution methods, such as monastic mediation and face-to-face Dharma counseling.
- Further studies could also refine digital Buddhist engagement strategies by examining the role of new technologies, such as AI-driven personalized Dharma guidance, in supporting ethical communication and family harmony.

By addressing these areas, future research can provide a roadmap for further development of digital Buddhist peace-making models and ensure that social media continues to evolve as a tool for ethical discourse, mindfulness, and sustainable family relationships.

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The Role of Confucian Principles in Regional Peacebuilding

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Abstract

This study explores Confucius's concept of harmony as articulated in the Analects and its implications for regional peace. Confucius contended that a well-ordered society is rooted in virtue, ethical leadership, and harmonious relationships. Specifically, this research aims to (1) examine Confucius's vision of governance through moral exemplarity, (2) analyse the role of harmony in interpersonal relationships, and (3) assess the relevance of Confucian thought for contemporary peacebuilding. Data were collected through an extensive review of the Analects and relevant secondary literature, employing thematic content analysis to distil key principles and their contemporary applicability. The findings yield three principal insights.

First, Confucius highlights the necessity of virtuous leaders whose moral conduct inspires similar behaviour among their followers; this model aligns closely with modern concepts of integrity-based leadership. Second, Confucian teachings on harmony in family and society underscore the importance of empathy, self-discipline, and mutual respect as vital components for fostering peaceful communities and encouraging collaborative engagement. Third, Confucian harmony signifies proactive cooperation rather than mere conflict avoidance; values such as filial piety and reverence for authority continue to be foundational for social stability and collective well-being.

In conclusion, the study asserts that Confucian moral leadership offers practical guidelines for conflict resolution and minimising social discord. Confucius's conception of harmony cultivates cooperative relationships at familial, communal, and national levels. Additionally, Confucian values—such as social responsibility, respect for authority, and environmental stewardship—promote sustainable governance and global peace. By advocating for long-term stability, mutual understanding, and international cooperation, Confucian harmony plays a significant role in fostering peace and sustainability in the modern world.

Keywords: Mindfulness of breathing; Yoga practice; Brahmanism; Buddhism; Ānāpānasati; Breathing Techniques

Introduction

Harmony is a concept of Confucius, introduced in his *Analects*, that has profoundly shaped the Chinese government and East Asian philosophy. Thus, his virtue and leadership ethics teachings teach harmonious relations in attaining social order and peace. Lau et al. (2023) researched the effect of Confucius on contemporary Chinese leadership. They pointed out how Confucianism contributes to diplomatic relations in East Asia by having the potential to resolve conflicts. For example, ethical governance is an important factor in promoting global peace, as the United Nations (2021) describes, which is similar to what Confucius said, that moral leadership will bring about peace. While Confucianism is acknowledged, a divide exists between acknowledging the Confucian recognition, based explicitly on harmony, and understanding peacebuilding in today's way. Kauppi & Viotti (2023) depicted the implication of Confucianism in diplomacy and did not completely dwell on its more significant circumstances for achieving global peace. This research intends to address such a gap by examining Confucius' ideas and their relevance to contemporary peacebuilding approaches.

This research is to explore Confucian perspectives, particularly the concept of harmony in contemporary peacebuilding and global governance. The research gap focused on the contribution of Confucian values to direct action in conflict resolution and peace and stability today. Although Confucianism has been subject to analysis in the context of the Chinese government, its capacity for dealing with worldwide peacebuilding is relatively unexplored (Patey, 2021). This research is fundamental; it provides a different framework of ethical leadership and social order because ethical leadership leads to social harmony. This research fills this gap by reflecting on how Confucius' teachings have been used to bring enlightenment into contemporary governance, particularly in regions with political instability. The journal's intended readers are scholars in philosophy, peace studies, international relations, policymakers, and global leaders involved in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. This research aims to introduce contemporary governance practices with Confucian thinking. The main aim of this research is to investigate how Confucius' teachings, with a special emphasis on his concept of harmony, can be helpful in contemporary peacebuilding and global governance. The study will investigate Confucian values and their relevance to contemporary management ethics and conflict management. Through the principles of Confucius outlined in the *Analects*, the research will

analyse the relevance of promoting stability and harmony within the society, precisely in distant lands that experience the phenomenon of the lack of political stability. This research is timely and politically crucial because of the ongoing, globally salient problems of war and government (Art, et al., 2023). The study will demonstrate how Confucianism can articulate peace initiatives in contemporary terms.

This research paper presents Confucius' concept of harmony and how it can currently be used in building peace. The research will provide a description of Confucian philosophy, exploring in detail virtue, ethical leadership, and harmony, drawing directly from the *Analects*. It will then examine how one can draw on these ideas for present-day governance, particularly in regions with all political and cultural instability. In addition, the research will assess the potential advantages of merging Confucianism into peacebuilding processes, raising the trend to ethical leadership in furthering global peace. Ultimately, this research provides valuable information to the technical community, government, and world leaders in managing governance and peacebuilding problems today.

Research Objectives

1. To analyse the role of Confucian Principles of Harmony, specifically Benevolence (Ren), Righteousness (Yi), and Ritual Propriety (Li), in fostering regional peacebuilding.
2. To examine the influence of Ethical Leadership (De), as defined by Confucian thought, on regional peacebuilding.
3. To investigate how Confucian Governance Principles, particularly Ritual Propriety (Li) and Ethical Leadership (De), directly influence regional peacebuilding efforts.

Literature Review

The existing literature highlights the enduring influence of Confucianism on governance and peacebuilding, emphasizing themes of harmony, ethical leadership, and social stability. Song (2020) argues that Confucian moral principles—especially Benevolence (Ren) and Righteousness (Yi)—have underpinned East Asian governance frameworks for centuries, shaping policymaking and leadership practices in the region. Similarly, Paczyńska (2023) explores how Confucian ideals inform local peacebuilding initiatives and

international diplomacy, suggesting that these values can foster cooperation and mitigate regional conflicts. However, while Confucian ethics are well-documented within East Asia, their application in diverse or politically unstable global contexts remains underexplored.

This review synthesises current scholarship on Confucian thought, identifies critical gaps, and outlines a research agenda to examine how Confucian values might inform contemporary governance and peacebuilding worldwide. Traditional studies have largely concentrated on East Asian diplomacy and statecraft, but less attention has been paid to the potential of Confucian principles in global peacebuilding efforts. Although the theoretical underpinnings of Confucian ethics are robust, practical implementation in non-East Asian regions has received insufficient scholarly focus (Song, 2020; Paczyńska, 2023). To address this gap, future research must investigate interdisciplinary frameworks that integrate Confucian values into modern governance and conflict resolution strategies.

1. Confucian Harmony and Regional Peacebuilding

Central to Confucian thought is the triad of Benevolence (Ren), Righteousness (Yi), and Ritual Propriety (Li), each contributing uniquely to social harmony. Guo (2022) contend that Benevolence is intrinsically linked to compassion, whereas Righteousness fosters justice and mutual respect. Empirical examples from East Asian diplomacy illustrate that Righteousness has mediated complex negotiations by ensuring equitable processes, thereby reducing conflict intensity (Izaguirre Pechirra, 2024). Benevolence, on the other hand, promotes conflict prevention by cultivating empathy and mutual understanding among parties. Ritual Propriety serves as a societal regulator, standardizing behavior through shared norms and preventing disputes born of disrespect or misunderstanding (Guo 2022). Despite these insights, scholarship on the application of Confucian harmony to peacebuilding in post-conflict and multicultural settings is limited. Notably, in post-conflict South Korea and China, local leaders have employed Benevolence in community peacemaking to bridge societal divides (Kester, 2020). Likewise, Ritual Propriety has functioned as a mechanism for conflict prevention in ethnically diverse regions by codifying respectful interaction (Jinzhou, 2020).

2. Ethical Leadership (De) in Peacebuilding

Confucian ethics prioritize leadership through virtue rather than coercion. Khalil and Hartley (2024) demonstrate that ethical leadership correlates strongly with trust and cooperation—two foundational elements for peacebuilding in unstable environments. Leaders embodying Ren and Yi exhibit honesty and reconciliation, effectively mitigating tensions in divided societies (Alzola, Hennig, & Romar, 2020). Such leadership promotes collective responsibility and shared governance, reflecting Confucian ideals within the broader social framework. Historical examples underscore this connection: post-apartheid South Africa witnessed ethical leadership—exemplified by Nelson Mandela—that advanced forgiveness, justice, and national cohesion (Vorster, 2023). In East Asia, China's emphasis on ethical leadership has facilitated mutual respect and diplomatic dialogue, contributing to regional stability (Do, 2022). Nonetheless, research often overlooks how these leadership models might be adapted to radically different cultural or political settings.

3. Confucian Governance Principles and Social

Cohesion Central to Confucian governance is the interplay between Ritual Propriety (Li) and Ethical Leadership (De) in maintaining social order and cohesion. Barton and Ho (2021) note that Li stresses respect and conflict avoidance, thereby fostering harmony. According to Jinzhou (2020), respect undergirds social stability by encouraging individuals to fulfill community roles responsibly. When combined with De—leadership founded on moral integrity—these principles nurture social trust and cooperation (Fort & Haugh, 2020). For instance, in Korea and China, Confucian-inspired leadership practices have strengthened public service motivation and collaboration across government and civil society (Lee, Min, Kim, & Park, 2022). However, political instability poses challenges to these governance models, as it can undermine the social trust necessary for Confucian principles to take root. Future research should therefore examine how Confucian governance frameworks can be tailored to contexts marked by weak institutions or ongoing conflict.

In summary, while the Confucian emphasis on harmony, ethical leadership, and social cohesion offers promising pathways for peacebuilding, scholarship remains predominantly region-specific. Addressing this gap requires interdisciplinary inquiry into the adaptability of Confucian ethics within varied

cultural and political environments. By developing frameworks that integrate Ren, Yi, Li, and De into contemporary governance and peacebuilding practices, researchers can advance both theoretical understanding and practical strategies for fostering stability in a range of global contexts.

Conceptual Framework

This research is a study on Confucian Principles of Harmony, Ethical Leadership (De) and Confucian Governance Principles, which have a bearing on regional peacebuilding through compliant moral leadership. The researcher defines the research conceptual framework based on the concept of Confucianism, together with how Righteousness and Ritual Propriety are integrated from the Confucian Principles of Harmony. They depend on empathy, justice, and social order and feel that if men and society live in harmony, they can function properly. At the centre of the framework, therefore, is Ethical Leadership (De), which reflects moral integrity and leadership by example. This leadership approach fosters trust, cooperation and stability between regions most affected by political instabilities.

The Confucian Governing Principles include the Ritual Propriety (Li), which governs the leader and society in general regarding the ethical governance of a peaceful and harmonious society (Yuan et al., 2023). What constitutes moral leadership is determined since it is the primary region's agent of peacebuilding. Leaders who practice Confucian values provoke men to do good and act ethically in governance, achieving the elements of regional peacebuilding within the region, including conflict resolution, cooperation, and social harmony. In this process of moral leadership, the principle of Confucianism plays a considerable role in providing peace and stability in the presence of some rebellions or instability.

The Conceptual Framework shows how Confucianism works in the region to sustain the content and form of implementation of the Core ideas when creating an atmosphere conducive to peacemaking. It explains the benefits of Benevolence (Ren), Righteousness (Yi), Ritual Propriety (Li), and Ethical Leadership (De) in as much as it explains how they create a common good for the benefit of society, how to establish law and order and productive relationship in any society. When applied in governance, they are the principles used under conflict resolution to ensure that there is some stability in areas infested with conflicts, which is used

to ensure peace. Furthermore, it provides a further understanding of how moral leadership fosters trust, mobilizes society for order, and develops long-term peace within the culture because it adapts to different politics.

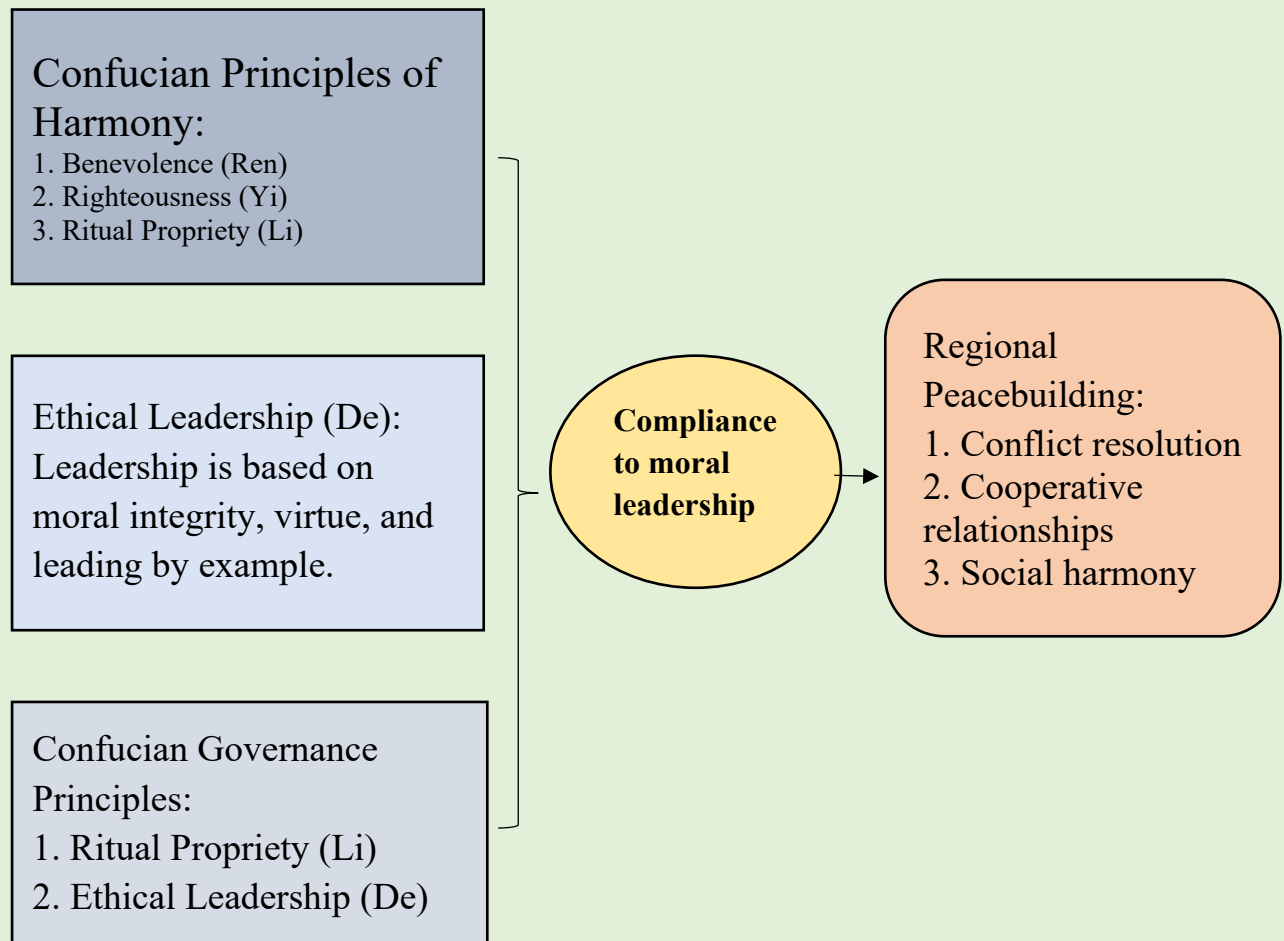


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This research is a qualitative study aimed at exploring the role of Confucian principles in regional peacebuilding. The research area is the application of Confucian values such as Benevolence (Ren), Righteousness (Yi), Ritual propriety (Li), and Ethical (De) Leadership values in countries affected by Confucian thought and in places that are faced with political instability or post-conflict recovery. Purposive sampling is used for the case studies selected from East Asia and other parts of the Confucian-influenced regions, with the survey analyzing how these principles contribute to governance and peacebuilding efforts.

The research tools used in this study are Document Analysis and Case Studies. In the Document Analysis, the researcher will examine Confucian texts, particularly The Analects, and related literature to understand how Confucian principles have been applied in governance and peacebuilding (Pu & Zheng, 2024). The focus is on extracting key principles like Benevolence, Righteousness, and Ethical Leadership and analyzing their impact on societal stability and peacebuilding.

Specific regions where Confucian principles were applied to governance and peacemaking (mainly East Asia) will be analyzed using case studies. For these case studies, the study areas have been affected by political instability or conflict. Reports and academic studies of Confucian principles in peacebuilding will be analyzed for the data collected. Thematic analysis of the data will then explore how these principles are used to resolve conflict, build cooperative relationships, and achieve social harmony, out of which regional peacebuilding is obtained (Chitondo et al., 2024).

Research Results

Objective 1. Results showed that regional peacebuilding is paved by Confucian Principles of Harmony, especially Benevolence (Ren), Righteousness (Yi) and Ritual Propriety (Li). Benevolence or Ren is about empathy and compassion and promoting peaceful relations with fewer chances of conflict (Barton & Ho, 2020). The principle of mutual respect and understanding is widely applied in East Asia. Generally, leaders and communities in the region hold each other to high importance, encouraging cooperation instead of confrontation. Beyond peace studies, the application of Benevolence gleaned from governing and peace efforts, especially peace efforts, has been instrumental in reconciling and resolving conflicts in war or politically tense zones (Blair, 2020).

Righteousness (Yi), as a principle to guide moral behaviour and justice, significantly contributed to regional peacebuilding. Those who represent Righteousness are less inclined to choose the betterment of self over that of others. In places like South Korea, where there is political instability, the boosting of Righteousness has assisted in resolving the conflict as it has helped ensure that the leaders are just and fair (Sohn, 2024). If righteous leadership is in place, this

can bring greater trust into communities and minimise the risk and conflict, which can only sustain long-term peace and social harmony.

Ritual Propriety (Li) was deemed critical in facilitating peace in regional areas as it regulates social behaviour to cultivate respect for social norms (Lewis, 2020). This principle ensures that people reasonably interact with each other and thus may help prevent disputes from escalating. The principle of Ritual Propriety helps promote cooperative behaviour to restore peace in post-conflict areas, as it is a traditionally rooted principle in regions like China (Lewis, 2020). The Ritual Propriety (Li) policy assists in creating harmony to enable people to live in peace since forceful resolution of disputes is avoided (Lixinski & Zhu, 2024).

The research established that both Benevolence (Ren), Righteousness (Yi), and Ritual Propriety (Li) would create harmony in society in that when the two parties' conflict, they will be able to agree quickly (Barton & Ho, 2020). Confucianism is also a method for regulating society in this context and provides a good grounding in ethical leadership; hence, there is politeness in business among the leaders and people. Thus, the research indicates the presence of Confucian values worldwide and the applicability of the identified model for peacebuilding in other nations apart from the East Asian countries. Applying the Confucianism form of ethical leadership in these situations is a feasible method of repairing and ensuring long-lasting peace in a society that cannot establish a political solution or restore buildings in the wake of conflicts.

Table 1: Impact of Confucian Principles on Regional Peacebuilding

Confucian Principle	Impact on Peacebuilding	Example from Case Studies
Benevolence (Ren)	Fosters empathy, reduces conflicts	South Korea post-conflict reconciliation
Righteousness (Yi)	Promotes justice and fair conflict resolution	Regional peace negotiations in East Asia
Ritual Propriety (Li)	Maintains social order, prevents conflicts	Community cooperation in Chinese governance

Objective 2. The results showed that ethical leadership (De), with its core Confucian meanings, is crucial for constructing peace at the regional level. A society's lack of proper moral values, virtues, and other ethical principles and its

leaders and members' lack of manifestation of these lead to trust and cooperation (Robinson et al., 2022). Ethical Leadership has played an essential part in our journey towards political and societal reconciliation and stability in South Korea and Vietnam, where the political situation and social unrest were disturbing (Wang, 2023). Confucian values or ideas of justice and benevolence bring a sense of shared responsibility and collaboration in leadership, reducing tensions and conflict.

The results also show that Ethical Leadership (De) promotes peacebuilding through a moral governance environment. The political process in China and Japan, which are the regions where Confucian principles are incorporated into leadership practices, focuses on accountability, justice and fairness (Cuevas, 2024). The Leadership of this form results in better cooperation among governments and citizens and an arrangement of trust and collective action (Robinson et al., 2022). Ethical Leadership framework, where role models (leaders) lead societies to peace through virtue and the necessity of ethical governance in achieving long-term stability, is considered.

Furthermore, in encounters with ongoing conflicts or post-conflict recovery, Ethical Leadership is essential to establish a moral authority that encourages peaceful and non-violent conflict resolution (Coffman, 2023). Peace agreements have been facilitated in East Asia, where the leaders embody ethical values and support justice and cooperation in governance. (Sohn, 2024). The research shows that leaders who endorse Confucian ethics are likely to promote the peacebuilding process, leading to lasting peace and social harmony. Ethical Leadership is critical in overcoming societal divisions.

Furthermore, the study indicated that ethical leadership (De) is influential in regional peacebuilding, especially regarding moral force and leadership authority. In particular, leaders who adhere to the views of Confucius create cooperation and unity, in other words, in countries and territories where there may be political upheavals or social disturbances (Robinson et al., 2022). Ethical leadership in East Asia has been proven to enhance prolonged peace and stability if leaders understand the justice, accountability, and responsibility of all people. This study shows that Ethical Leadership resolves animosities and builds permanent peace in the conflict-affected zone (Sohn, 2024). The integration of Confucian ethics within the leadership for future peacebuilding internationally is reasonable for future peacebuilding because ethical leadership enhances society's

fabric and makes building peace highly respected by all the relevant societal stakeholders.



Figure 2: Leading with Integrity (Coffman, 2023).

Objective 3. The results showed that Confucian Governance Principles of Ritual Propriety (Li) and Ethical Leadership (De) directly impact regional peacebuilding by creating an ethical governance environment, social order, and teamwork. Ritual Propriety (Li) protects society's social harmony by governing men's behaviour and preserving social respect (Wu & Zhao, 2024). In areas where governance is permeated with Confucian values, such as China and Japan, Ritual Propriety is crucial for peaceful cohabitation in diversity and preventing social disintegration (Cuevas, 2024). It encourages following norms and a predicted social environment where conflicts are less likely. Most notably, it has succeeded in post-conflict areas when righting the wrongs and fostering respectful relations is a prerequisite to lasting peace.

Furthermore, ethical leadership (De) in governance breeds trust and moral authority in leaders to their people, both of which are key to realizing long-term peacebuilding (Ebot-Ashu, 2024). The populace is more inclined to trust leaders

who practice virtue, integrity, and justice, guaranteeing the success of any peacebuilding endeavours. In places like South Korea, where ethical leadership is built into governance, results suggest leaders using moral authority enable their societies to bring themselves back to being in discord and cooperation even after times of turmoil or conflict (Wang, 2023). Moreover, ethical leadership creates accountability in leadership, thus lessening corruption and creating peace in the region.

When ritual propriety (Li) and ethical leadership (De) combine, they have extraordinary power in regional peacebuilding efforts because the leaders need to govern with moral integrity and promote social respect and order (Isakhan & Akbar, 2022). Confucian principles are thus used in this dual application to develop cohesive communities without conflict and the inclination to work for a common good. Confucian Governance Principles are applied in East Asian societies, and in these societies, there is evidence of peaceful cooperation and stable governance; there is also evidence that these principles contribute to long-term peace and regional stability (Guo & Puja, 2022).

The results show that the combination of Ritual Propriety (Li) and Ethical Leadership (De) in Confucian governance establishes a firm base for regional peacebuilding. Leadership and its moral integrity, as well as the moral purity in the ability of leaders to uphold social order, are essential markers of stable societies, such as in East Asia, where the leadership's moral integrity and its ability to maintain social order had an effect in the post-conflict recovery and political stability in their society. Ritual Propriety and Ethical Leadership can be applied side by side for social respect and cohesion in support of the peacebuilding process (Miklian & Katsos, 2024). Although these principles promote peaceful coexistence, they also enhance trust and collaboration among different groups, enabling them to rebuild from conflict after conflict. The findings have implications that Confucian governance principles, if applied in such regional peacebuilding efforts, can be the best channels for stable long-run order, cooperative relationships and sustainability of peace in regions where disruption and armed conflicts exist (Robinson et al., 2022).

Table 2: Confucian Governance Principles and Their Impact on Regional Peacebuilding

Governance Principle	Impact on Peacebuilding	Example from Case Studies
Ritual Propriety (Li)	Ensures social order, prevents conflicts	Post-conflict China - rebuilding community norms
Ethical Leadership (De)	Fosters moral governance and unity	Confucian-inspired leadership in Taiwan's political stability

Discussions

The findings of this study demonstrate that Confucian principles of Harmony, namely Benevolence (Ren), Righteousness (Yi), and Ritual Propriety (Li), align closely with foundational concepts in peacebuilding theory. Galtung's Conflict Transformation Theory (1996) posits that sustainable peace requires structural change, cultural transformation, and the satisfaction of human needs. In this regard, Ren and Yi foster empathy and justice, which are necessary to transform adversarial relationships into cooperative ones, while Li provides normative guidelines that regulate behaviour and reduce the likelihood of conflict escalation. Consistent with Orimiye and Bala's (2024) Human Needs Theory, which emphasises the fulfilment of emotional and security needs as prerequisites for durable peace, Ren encourages compassion-driven engagement, Yi underscores fairness in negotiations, and Li establishes predictable social interactions that satisfy the need for both security and belonging. Empirical cases in East Asia illustrate how Ren has been operationalised in community peacemaking, helping to bridge social divides in post-conflict contexts such as South Korea and China (Setiawan, 2024). Thus, the integrative application of Ren, Yi, and Li not only resolves immediate disputes but also cultivates long-term social stability.

The role of Confucian Ethical Leadership (De) in peacebuilding further validates transformational leadership frameworks. Bass (1990) argues that transformational leaders inspire followers by exemplifying moral integrity, articulating an appealing vision, and fostering individualised consideration. In the Confucian paradigm, De is characterised by personal virtue and moral rectitude;

leaders who embody De engender trust and cooperation among constituents (Khalil & Hartley, 2024). Puyo (2022) demonstrates that ethical leadership, grounded in Ren and Yi, can guide communities or nations toward peaceful solutions by promoting reconciliation and shared responsibility. For example, post-apartheid South Africa's transition was facilitated by leaders who, much like Confucian paragons of De, prioritised forgiveness and justice, thereby enabling healing across deeply divided groups (Vorster, 2023). Similarly, China's diplomatic approach in East Asia, which incorporates respect and moral authority, has contributed to regional stability by modelling virtuous conduct (Do, 2022). Consequently, Confucian De resonates with Bass's transformational framework, suggesting that leaders who internalise and act upon ethical principles enhance social trust and catalyse cooperative peacebuilding.

Furthermore, Confucian Governance Principles—particularly Li and De—are instrumental in fostering regional cohesion and mitigating conflict. Ritual Propriety (Li) prescribes formalized behaviors that uphold respect, hierarchical order, and collective harmony, thereby minimizing triggers for social discord (Jinzhou, 2020). Perkuhn (2025) finds that Li establishes a shared cultural vocabulary that facilitates dispute resolution and reduces misunderstandings among diverse groups. In parallel, ethical governance (De) ensures that policies are implemented transparently and equitably, generating legitimacy and public buy-in (Ren, Wang, & Lv, 2022). Huntington's theory of civilizational conflict (ASIA, 2021) acknowledges that Confucian cultural values—when embedded in governance—can promote a stable polity by aligning state behavior with societal expectations of propriety and righteousness. Empirical evidence indicates that regions governed according to Confucian norms experience lower levels of internal strife and higher levels of institutional trust (Huang, 2024). Therefore, by harmonizing moral leadership with prescriptive social rituals, Confucian governance offers a holistic model that supports sustainable peace.

In summary, Confucian principles of Ren, Yi, Li, and De provide a robust framework for regional peacebuilding that complements and extends existing theoretical models. By satisfying human emotional and security needs (Orimiye & Bala, 2024), fostering moral legitimacy (Bass, 1990; Puyo, 2022), and embedding behavioral norms that discourage conflict (Galtung, 1996; Perkuhn, 2025), these principles enable societies to transition from transactional coexistence to transformative cooperation. For policymakers and peacebuilding

practitioners, integrating Confucian ethics into governance strategies can enhance social trust and resilience in politically unstable regions. Future research should empirically test these propositions in diverse cultural settings to refine the applicability of Confucian peacebuilding beyond East Asia, thereby contributing to global efforts aimed at achieving durable, inclusive peace.

Knowledge from Research

This research highlights how core Confucian values—Benevolence (Ren), Righteousness (Yi), and Ritual Propriety (Li)—contribute to regional peacebuilding by fostering empathy, fairness, and social order. Benevolence nurtures compassion and unity within communities, deescalating hostility rooted in discrimination and promoting understanding among diverse groups. Righteousness provides a foundation for fairness, encouraging just treatment and conflict resolution grounded in mutual respect. Ritual Propriety reinforces social stability by guiding behavior through shared norms and honoring others, ensuring that interactions remain respectful and preventing disputes from escalating. Collectively, these principles address fundamental human concerns and inspire harmonious relationships, collaborative networks, and enduring friendships.

Beyond theory, these findings can reshape academic and policy frameworks. By integrating Confucian principles into peacebuilding curricula, educators can develop programs on ethical leadership and conflict resolution that resonate with contemporary societal challenges. Introducing these values in academic settings can foster a generation of leaders equipped to build bridges across cultural divides. Moreover, adapting Confucian ideas in policy circles—both within and outside East Asia—can inform legislative measures aimed at sustaining social cohesion, suggesting that global initiatives could benefit from this moral framework.

At the community level, emphasising Benevolence and Righteousness in local projects encourages leaders and residents to practice cooperation, mutual respect, and proactive conflict management. These efforts can be especially impactful in areas experiencing displacement, political unrest, or ethnic tensions, laying the groundwork for lasting peace. In economic spheres, businesses and corporations can adopt Confucian-inspired ethical leadership models that prioritise justice, fairness, and virtue. By making moral decision-making central

to corporate governance, companies can enhance employee trust, strengthen stakeholder relationships, and advance sustainable practices that balance profit with social responsibility.

These insights also hold significant implications for policy and international diplomacy. Governments and institutions can incorporate Confucian values into peacebuilding frameworks, promoting upright leadership and ethical governance in unstable regions. By crafting policies that reflect Ren, Yi, and Li, decision-makers can foster inclusive political systems and cultivate durable social stability. International organisations, too, can leverage these principles when designing peacebuilding initiatives, helping to establish moral authority, build cooperative alliances, and support long-term regional stability. In conflict-prone areas, Confucian-inspired leadership models offer a promising path toward global peace and sustainable governance.

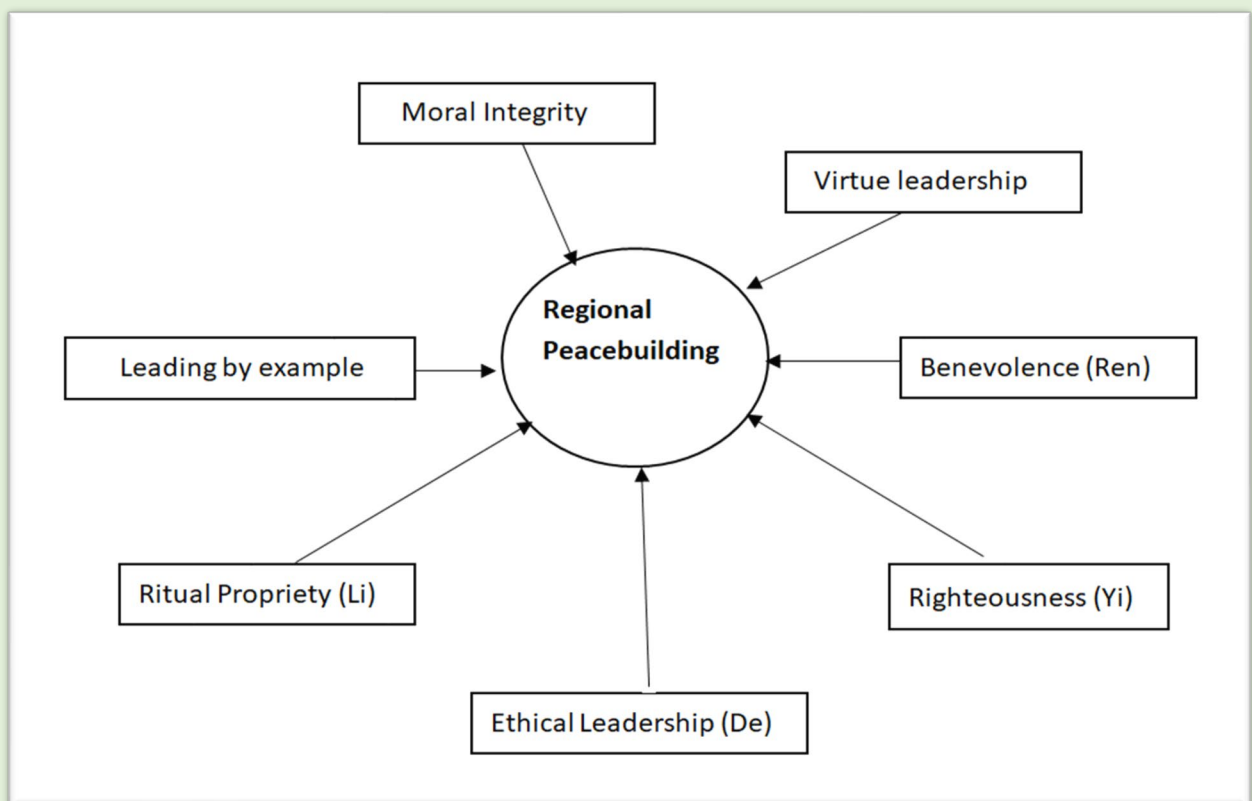


Figure 3: Knowledge Model of Confucian Principles in Regional Peacebuilding (Koczkás, 2024),

Conclusion

This research has shown that the Confucian principles are pivotal in promoting regional peacebuilding with high impact coming from Benevolence (Ren), Righteousness (Yi), Ritual Propriety (Li), and Ethical Leadership (De). The key knowledge acquired shows that Benevolence (Ren), fostering empathy and compassion, lessens inter-group conflict to the extraordinary degree that it outstands even among ancient Confucian virtues as the leading way to resolve conflict. Righteousness (Yi) is to resolve the conflict produced by humanity within an executive through law, justice, and righteousness for the good of a people and the stability and unity of the society. Ritual Propriety (Li) governs human behavior, supervises human behavior to keep order and prohibit the insurgency of party conflict, and assures human society to be at peace and cooperate.

Further, Ethical Leadership (De) is recognized as a key factor, if not the most critical factor, in peacebuilding. Leaders who exhibit moral integrity, virtues, and values and lead by personal example foster trust and cohesiveness within their communities. This discovery supports the significance of ethical leadership in directing nations to ward equivalent healing and amid lasting serenity. The research also shows that doing justice to peace in societal turmoil is where ethical leaders with justice and virtue as their missions make peacebuilding count for the people, questioned and marked on strong.

Finally, the research indicates that practicing the Confucian governance principles (i.e. Ritual Propriety (Li) and Ethical Leadership (De)) creates a structure for effectiveness in governance and, therefore, governance security with leaders who get respect and recognition in the society. Due to these principles, social harmony, cooperation, and conflict resolution are brought about. The research demonstrates that it is essential to reflect the Confucian principles in regional governance, and such an example proves very inspiring for all the regions that want to achieve stable and good governance in the area permanently.

Suggestions

This research reveals that Confucianism, specifically Benevolence (Ren), Righteousness (Yi), Ritual Propriety (Li), and Ethical Leadership (De) contribute a lot to regional peacebuilding by creating social harmony, conflict resolution, and cooperative governance. The real value is that these principles can be used for global peacebuilding efforts, particularly in countries experiencing political instability or post-conflict reconstruction. Future researchers trying to test these principles, translating them across their integrity into the real situations of non-East Asian countries, must review the experience of utilizing them to create peace in different cultural, social, or political conditions.

For the following research question, research must be done on integrating Confucian values with other cultural frameworks in peacebuilding. Understanding how Confucianism can be in partnership with another ethical and cultural approach will give us a fully developed solution to global governance and conflict resolution strategies. This will enlarge the range of Confucian peacebuilding theories to more numerous regions and grounds, granting valuable kinds of knowledge to worldwide peace actions.

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A Comparative Study of Full Ordination (Upasampadā) Patterns between Mahāyāna and Theravāda Buddhism in Vietnam

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Abstract

This research offers a qualitative and comparative analysis of Full Ordination (Upasampadā) ceremonies found within Mahāyāna and Theravāda Buddhism in contemporary Vietnam. Set against the backdrop of Vietnam's diverse Buddhist landscape, this study aims to achieve three primary objectives: (1) to meticulously document the structural elements and historical development of the Mahāyāna Upasampadā ritual, (2) to clarify the corresponding ordination ceremony within the Theravāda tradition, and (3) to undertake a comprehensive comparison of their respective liturgical structures, institutional configurations, and cultural expressions. Empirical data were gathered through a thorough documentary analysis of canonical Vinaya texts (specifically the Dharmaguptaka and Pāli versions), monastic regulations issued by the Vietnam Buddhist Saṅgha (VBS), and a critical appraisal of existing scholarly literature on Buddhist ordination practices in Southeast Asia. Primary sources included Vinaya commentaries, official VBS ordinances, and documented liturgical manuals, while secondary sources encompassed peer-reviewed scholarly articles and ethnographic narratives on ordination ceremonies.

The findings indicate that the Mahāyāna Upasampadā, fundamentally rooted in the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya, manifests as a multi-stage procedure. It begins with candidate evaluation (termed the “Seven Examinations”), followed by intricate ritual performances orchestrated by a council of Ten Masters. This ceremony is distinguished by its Sino-Vietnamese liturgical practices, elaborate vestments, hierarchical seating arrangements, and symbolic offerings inspired by indigenous court rituals. In contrast, the Theravāda Upasampadā, anchored in the Pāli Vinaya, adheres to a more streamlined sequence. It is presided over by a Saṅgha council (comprising the Upajjhāya, two Ācariyas, and a minimum assembly of ten monks), prioritizing precision in the Motion and Three Proclamations (ñatti–catuttha–kamma), minimalist aesthetic principles, and direct recitation in Pāli.

Despite these procedural differences, both traditions converge on fundamental Vinaya tenets, notably the essential nature of formal proclamation rites and adherence to the Four Fulfilling Conditions. Additionally, VBS initiatives aimed at standardising ordination protocols have fostered mutual recognition and occasional collaborative

platforms, indicating a growing inter-sectarian harmony. This investigation makes a significant contribution to the anthropology of Vietnamese Buddhism. It provides practical recommendations for Vinaya education and monastic training, and establishes a foundational framework for future research focusing on ordination lineages, the revival of Bhikkhunī, and inter-tradition dialogues.

Keywords: Full Ordination Ceremony (Upasampadā); Theravāda Buddhism; Mahāyāna Buddhism; Vietnam Buddhist Saṅgha

Introduction

The Full Ordination Ceremony (Upasampadā) is a pivotal rite marking a sāmaṇera's (novice's) transition into full membership of the Bhikkhu Saṅgha. As prescribed in the Mahāvagga of the Vinaya Piṭaka, this ceremony hinges on three essential elements: a consecrated boundary (sīma), a qualified preceptor (upajjhāya), and a quorum of ordained monks. In its most common contemporary form, ordination proceeds via "A Motion and Three Proclamations" (Pāli: ñatti-catuttha-kammavācā), where the assembled Saṅgha formally solicits consent thrice before admitting the candidate (Mahāvagga I.74.3; Horner, 1971).

Buddhism arrived in Vietnam by at least the second or third century CE, with Mahāyāna quickly becoming the dominant school (Lê Mạnh Thát, 2006). Traditionally, Mahāyāna ordination involved three sequential transmissions—novice (sāmaṇera/sāmaṇerī), bhikkhu/bhikkhunī, and Bodhisattva precepts—collectively known as the Three Ordination Platforms. Over time, these merged into the Great Precept Transmission Ceremony, which historically lacked uniform protocols and was confined to individual temple communities. Following national reunification and the establishment of the Vietnam Buddhist Saṅgha (VBS) in 1981, Mahāyāna ordination procedures underwent standardization, leading to nationwide guidelines that balance liturgical fidelity with local cultural expressions (Thích Đồng Bồn, 2019).

Though less widespread, Theravāda Buddhism has also established a strong presence in Vietnam, initially among the Khmer minority in the south and later through Vietnamese Kinh monks trained in Cambodia. From the 1940s, institutions like Bửu Quang Temple in Ho Chi Minh City emerged as vital centres for Theravāda training and ordination (Thiên Hậu, 2017). The Theravāda Upasampadā in Vietnam remains primarily an in-group affair, focusing on bhikkhu ordination under Pāli Vinaya regulations, characterised by procedural simplicity and strict adherence to canonical language.

Today, the VBS officially recognizes both Mahāyāna and Theravāda ordinations. Interestingly, Theravādin candidates often participate in Mahāyāna-administered ceremonies to secure formal endorsement. In several provinces (e.g., Ho Chi Minh City, Huế, Bà Rịa–Vũng Tàu), joint ordination events now feature parallel sect-specific rites within a shared framework, fostering inter-tradition harmony while preserving doctrinal particularities (Thích Tâm Hải, 2015). Despite this institutional rapprochement, existing scholarship remains largely sect-specific, often focusing on Vinaya exegesis or ritual description. There is a clear need for an integrated, comparative study examining how Mahāyāna and Theravāda ordination models have evolved, interacted, and been harmonised under the VBS in Vietnam’s pluralistic environment.

This research addresses that gap by analysing procedural divergences and convergences, assessing their implications for Buddhist education, community cohesion, and the institutional development of the Vietnamese Saṅgha. In so doing, it sheds new light on how ordination ceremonies continue to shape the transmission of the Buddha’s teachings in contemporary Vietnam.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the Structure and Evolution of Mahāyāna Full Ordination Ceremony (Upasampadā) in contemporary Vietnam.
2. To examine the Structure and Evolution of Theravāda Full Ordination Ceremony (Upasampadā) in contemporary Vietnam.
3. To compare the Pattern of Full Ordination (Upasampadā) Ceremonies between Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism within the context of Vietnam.

Literature Review

The following review synthesises key Vinaya studies on Full Ordination (Upasampadā) within Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism, highlighting their contributions and identifying a gap in comparative, socio-cultural analysis in Vietnam.

Early canonical scholarship has been foundational for understanding ordination procedures. Horner’s (1971) authoritative English translation of the Mahāvagga, the Greater Division of the Vinaya Piṭaka—provides critical detail on the Buddha’s establishment of the Saṅgha, the rules governing ordination, the various Upasampadā formats, and the formal prerequisites for ceremony. By presenting the Pāṭimokkha recitation and guidelines for communal assemblies,

this work remains indispensable for reconstructing the structural skeleton of early Full Ordination rites.

Within the Theravāda tradition, concise manuals have made Vinaya practice more accessible. Bodhisīla Bhikkhu's (2003) *Vinaya Sankhepa* offers a systematic overview of monastic rituals—confession (*pārājika*), the rains-retreat (*Vassa*), and notably the *Upasampadā* sequence—drawing directly from the *Mahāvagga* and *Cūlavagga*. Earlier, Vāṇsarakkhita Bhikkhu (1993) produced *Pabbajita Vinaya Sankhepa*, which details novice and higher-ordination protocols, clarifying the roles of *Upajjhāya* (Preceptor) and *Ācariya* (Teacher) in candidate preparation. Somdet Phra Mahā Samaṇa Chao Krom Phrayā Vajirañāṇavarorasa's (1973) *Dhammayuttika Nikāya Ordination Procedure* text further standardises Theravāda ordination liturgy under Thai monastic authority, enriching understanding of ceremony formality and council structure.

Mahāyāna ordination has similarly benefited from Vietnamese translations and commentaries. Thích Thiện Hòa's (2008) *Giới Đàn Tăng* translates and explicates ancient Chinese ritual texts, detailing both minor precept-transmission and major *Upasampadā* ceremonies in the Vietnamese Mahāyāna context. Thích Đồng Minh (1999) complements this with *Nghi Truyền Giới*, which presents Bhikkhu, Bhikkhunī, novice, and Bodhisattva ordinations in a clear, Vinaya-aligned format. More recently, the Huệ Nghiêm Vinaya Temple committee (2020) compiled *Truyền Giới Chánh Phạm*, an authoritative field manual for Vietnamese Mahāyāna ordinations, covering *Sāmaṇera*, *Śikṣamāṇā*, and Bodhisattva platforms, and is widely used in major ceremonies nationwide. Thích Phước Sơn's (2006) *Luật Học Tinh Yếu*, a university-level textbook at Vietnam Buddhist University, systematically addresses the Bhikkhu *Pāṭimokkha* (*Dharmaguptaka Vinaya*), *Saṅgha-kamma* rules, offenses, and Bodhisattva precepts, bridging academic and practical Vinaya training. Finally, Trí Tánh's (2023) *Giới Đàn Theo Tinh Thần Luật Tạng* focuses on the Great Ordination platform, its council roles, procedural conditions, and contemporary logistical challenges, offering a model for optimising ordination architecture.

Collectively, these works provide detailed expositions of ordination texts, ritual mechanics, and pedagogical frameworks in both traditions. However, they predominantly treat Mahāyāna and Theravāda ordinations in isolation or focus on doctrinal exposition rather than examining how ceremonies have co-evolved or converged within Vietnam's pluralistic religious milieu. This study addresses that gap by comparatively analyzing the structural adaptations, procedural

developments, and inter-traditional harmonisation of Upasampadā rituals under the Vietnam Buddhist Saṅgha's regulatory umbrella, thereby contributing an original socio-cultural dimension to Vinaya scholarship.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in this research is structured based on the process, research methodology and output. It can be illustrated as follows:

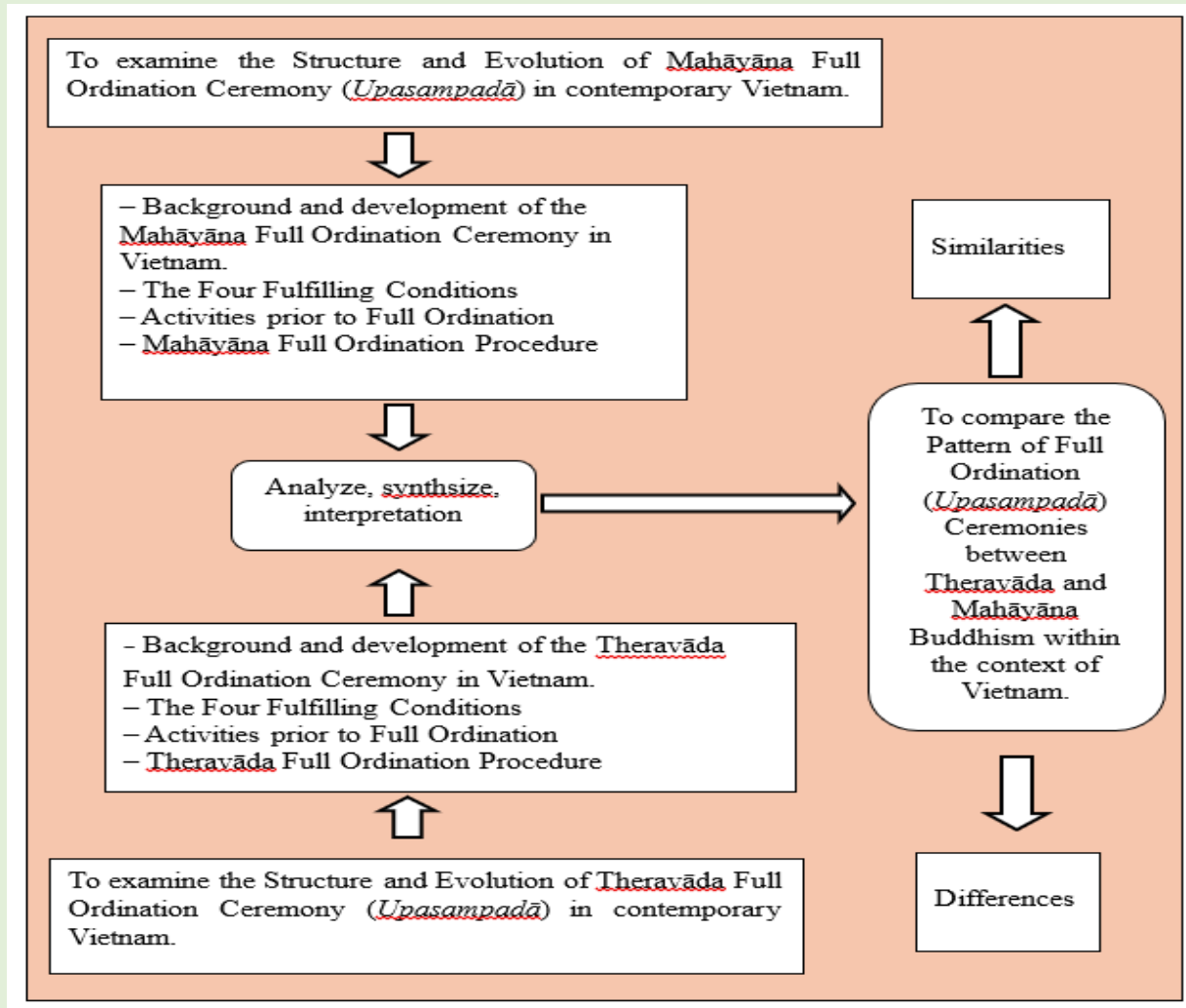


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This study employs a documentary research methodology, primarily utilizing documentary analysis, description, and comparative analysis. Primary textual materials will be examined through analytical and comparative lenses. The research will be conducted through the following steps:

Data Collection

Collecting data from Primary sources, including both the Mahāyāna and Theravāda Tipiṭaka, the Commentaries and Sub-commentaries of both traditions, Buddhist historical texts, the Vietnam Buddhist Saṅgha Charter, and Regulations of the Vietnamese Saṅgha Affairs Department. On the other hand, the data also from the secondary source of several yearbook on ordination ceremonies from various Vietnam Provincial Saṅgha Council, textbooks, research works, Buddhist congregations, newspapers, Buddhist journals, and other Buddhist books and scripture.

Analysis and Synthesis

Analyzing and synthesizing the raw data, as well as systematizing the collected data, to provide a clear understanding of Mahāyāna and Theravāda Full Ordination (Upasampadā) Ceremony Pattern in Vietnam.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Concluding the differences and similarities in the Full Ordination (Upasampadā) Ceremony patterns between Theravāda and Mahāyāna in Contemporary Vietnam. Formulating conclusions, identifying significant research findings, and suggesting valuable insights for further research.

Research Results

Objective 1: The study found that the structure and evolution of the Mahāyāna Full Ordination Ceremony (Upasampadā) in contemporary Vietnam has undergone significant development while remaining rooted in the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya (Buddhayaśas, tr.). Traditionally practiced under the format of the Three Ordination Platforms Ceremony (Tam Đàn Đại Giới), the full ordination process has become notably standardized under the unified structure of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (Most Venerable Thích Thiện Hòa, 2008; Trí Tánh, 2023).

The procedure follows a highly organized ritual structure with clear sequential stages. It begins with pre-ordination activities, including candidate examination, confession rituals, and training in basic etiquette and monastic rituals (Most Venerable Thích Phước Sơn, 2006). Once qualified, the candidate enters the formal Upasampadā ceremony, which includes the following core steps:

- Requesting the Ten Venerable Masters Council: This council consists of the Preceptor, the Kamma-Ācariya, the Teaching–

Ācariya, and the Seven Witnessing Masters (Huệ Nghiêm Vinaya Temple, 2020).

- Performing the Saṅgha–Kamma: This refers to the formal act by the assembly.
- Candidate Examination: Eligibility is rigorously checked based on the Thirteen Major and Ten Minor obstructing circumstances (Most Venerable Thích Đồng Minh, 1999).
- A Motion and Three Proclamations (Skt. jñapti–caturtha–karman): These are made to obtain the consensus of the Saṅgha.
- Admonishment to the New Bhikkhu: The newly ordained monk is instructed on basic monastic precepts and lifestyle.
- Ritual of Receiving Robes and Alms Bowl: This symbolizes full entry into the monastic community (Most Venerable Thích Phước Sơn, 2006).

Table 1 The Mahāyāna Full Ordination Ceremony (Upasampadā) structure

Phases	Main Components	Vinaya Basis / Notes
1. Pre-Ordination Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidate Examination • Confession • Instruction in basic etiquette (monastic rules, robe handling) • Vinaya precepts and doctrinal training 	Dharmaguptaka Vinaya guidelines on pre-ordination eligibility and moral conduct. Based on Mahāyāna Vinaya tradition; emphasizes monastic discipline and ethical conduct
2. Formal Upasampadā Ceremony	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requesting the Ten Venerable Masters Council • Performing the Saṅgha–Kamma • Examination of the Candidate • A Motion and Three Proclamations (jñapti–caturtha–karman) 	
3. Post-Ordination Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admonishment to the new Bhikkhu • Ritual of receiving the Essential Bhikkhu Belongings 	

Core elements such as the Four Fulfilling Conditions, the Perfection of the Candidate's Personal Qualities, the Assembly, the Boundary, and the Announcement of the Act remain integral to its structure (Most Venerable Thích Thiện Hòa, 2008; Trí Tánh, 2023).

Throughout the ceremony, the use of Sino-Vietnamese or Vietnamese chanting, elaborate ritual choreography, and strict hierarchical roles reflects the profound influence of Mahāyāna monasticism, Vinaya values, and Vietnamese feudal aesthetics (Most Venerable Thích Đồng Minh, 1999). These features collectively define the ceremonial solemnity and cultural richness of the Vietnamese Mahāyāna ordination system.

Objective 2: The research into the Theravāda Full Ordination Ceremony (Upasampadā) in Vietnam revealed a distinct yet equally disciplined framework rooted firmly in the Pāli Vinaya (Mahāvagga) (Horner, 1971; Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, 2013). Traditionally practised among Khmer ethnic communities and more recently adopted by Vietnamese Kinh monks, Theravāda ordination emphasises a simpler and more scripturally conservative approach (Vaṇsarakkhita Bhikkhu, 1993; Phra Huynh Minh Thuan, 2017).

The structure of the full ordination typically includes steps such as requesting dependence (Nissaya), scrutiny of the bowl and robes, examination of the candidate, and the central act of “A Motion and Three Proclamations” (Pāli: ñatti-catuttha-kammavācā) conducted entirely in Pāli to finalise the ordination (Somdet Vajirañāṇavarorasa, 1973; Horner, 1971). This is followed by the admonition to the new Bhikkhu, which guides precepts, daily conduct, and community responsibilities (Bodhisila Bhikkhu, 2003).

The Four Fulfilling Conditions—the perfection of the candidate's qualities, the assembly, the boundary (sīmā), and the announcement of the act—are likewise foundational to validate the ceremony (Vaṇsarakkhita Bhikkhu, 1993). The Saṅgha council typically includes a Preceptor (Upajjhāya), two Ācariyas (Kammavācācariya and Anusāvanācariya), and witness monks, adhering to traditional Vinaya stipulations (Bodhisila Bhikkhu, 2003).

The entire ritual is conducted in Pāli, preserving the canonical language of the Theravāda school and affirming the ritual's authenticity (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, 2013). While simpler in ritual aesthetics compared to the Mahāyāna model, Theravāda ordination in Vietnam maintains strict adherence to Vinaya

regulations and ethical discipline (Phra Huynh Minh Thuan, 2017). Despite variations in regional implementation, particularly between Khmer and Kinh practitioners, the core structure remains consistent with Theravādin monastic heritage, emphasising scriptural purity and spiritual integrity. The use of Pāli chanting, emphasis on Vinaya adherence, and minimal ritual embellishments collectively reflect the Theravāda ideal of monastic simplicity and doctrinal purity (Somdet Vajirañāṇavarorasa, 1973; Vaṇsarakkhita Bhikkhu, 1993).

Table 2 The Theravāda Full Ordination Ceremony (Upasampadā) structure

Phases	Main Components	Vinaya Basis / Notes
1. Pre-Ordination Activities	Before entering the Full Ordination ceremony in Theravāda traditional, the candidate must pass an essay exam, an oral exam on the Dhamma and precepts, and recite the Pali chants by heart in the ordination ceremony.	Pāli Vinaya (Mahāvagga I.75; Horner, 1971) Strictly follows Theravāda Vinaya code (ñatti–catuttha–kamma)
2. Formal Upasampadā Ceremony	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requesting the Dependence (Nissaya) • Scrutiny of Bowl and Robes • The Examination of the Candidate • A Motion and Three Proclamations 	
3. Post-Ordination Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Admonishment for New Bhikkhu 	

Objective 3: The comparative analysis of Mahāyāna and Theravāda Full Ordination ceremonies in Vietnam reveals both convergences and divergences that reflect broader doctrinal and cultural dynamics. Both traditions share foundational elements, particularly their reliance on the Vinaya, the requirement of the Four Fulfilling Conditions, and the central ritual of “A Motion and Three Proclamations” (Horner, 1971; Thích Phước Sơn, 2006; Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, 2013). These shared elements affirm the continuity of core Buddhist values across traditions, despite historical and geographical differences.

However, significant differences emerge in several key dimensions. In terms of ceremonial sequence and ritual complexity, Mahāyāna ordinations, as

outlined in sources such as *Giới Đàn Tăng* by Thích Thiện Hòa (2008), *Nghi Truyền Giới* by Thích Đồng Minh (1999), and *Việt Nam Truyền Giới Chánh Phạm* (2020), are notably more institutionalised, ornate, and incorporate extended components including Bodhisattva precepts and memorial rituals for benefactors. The ritual roles are meticulously divided among the Ten Venerable Masters Council, which comprises a Preceptor, Kamma-ācariya, Teaching-ācariya, and seven Witnessing Masters (Thích Phước Sơn, 2006; Trí Tánh, 2023).

In contrast, Theravāda ordinations—especially those practised among the Khmer and Kinh Vietnamese Theravāda Saṅgha—follow a simplified sequence with a strong focus on Vinaya fidelity and scriptural clarity. They strictly adhere to Pāli chanting and monastic roles as outlined in *The Ordination Procedure* by Somdet Vajirañāṇavarorasa (1973) and *Luật Xuất Gia Tóm Tắt* by Vaṇsarakkhita Bhikkhu (1993). The Saṅgha council typically consists of a Preceptor (Upajjhāya), two Ācariyas, and witness monks, functioning according to Pāli Vinaya traditions (Bodhisila Bhikkhu, 2003; Phra Huynh Minh Thuan, 2017).

The study also highlights differences in lay involvement. Mahāyāna ceremonies often include active lay participation in offering, witnessing, and even receiving Bodhisattva precepts, whereas Theravāda practice remains largely monastic-centric with limited lay ritual engagement (Matt Orsborn, 2021; Huệ Nghiêm Vinaya Temple, 2020). Additionally, regional adaptations in ritual performance, such as the combination of administrative and traditional segments in large-scale joint ordination ceremonies, illustrate the flexible integration of tradition and modern governance (Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, 2023).

Importantly, the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (VBS) has played a pivotal role in promoting harmonisation across traditions. Through initiatives like shared ordination platforms, cross-sectarian recognition, and educational exchanges, the VBS fosters inter-tradition respect while affirming the legitimacy of each system (Bhikkhu Thích Đồng Bồn, 2019; Trí Tánh, 2023). This comparative framework offers valuable insights into how traditional monastic institutions can adapt to contemporary educational, administrative, and cultural contexts while maintaining fidelity to the core teachings of the Buddha.

Table 3: Overview about Comparative Analysis of Mahāyāna and Theravāda Full Ordination Ceremonies

Phases	Aspect		<i>Mahāyāna</i>	<i>Theravāda</i>
Ceremonial Activities Prior to Full Ordination	Similarities	Knowledge Assessment Before Ordination	Both traditions require candidates to pass an examination on Dhamma, <i>Vinaya</i> and monastic precepts.	
		Training in Monastic Etiquette	Candidates in both traditions receive training on proper deportment, robe-wearing, and alms bowl handling.	
		Memorisation Requirements	Candidates must memorise important monastic texts to understand monastic discipline.	
	Differences	Knowledge Assessment Specifics	Candidates must memorise four essential <i>Vinaya</i> texts required for monastic life in the Vietnamese and Sino-Vietnamese but are not required to memorize the formal recitation for the Full Ordination ritual.	Candidates must memorise key <i>Pāli</i> scriptures; memorise and accurately recite the entire formal recitation for the Full Ordination ritual in <i>Pāli</i>
		Confession & Purification	Requires formal confession (<i>Pratideśanā</i>) before the Buddha statue and the <i>Vinaya</i> Masters, where candidates admit past violations of the ten novice precepts, if any.	No formal confession ritual is required before ordination.
		Pre-Ordination Training Focus	Includes detailed guidance on monastic etiquette and ritual performance in the Full Ordination ceremony.	Focus on monastery discipline, with minimal additional ritual training.
	Similarities	General structure	Structured and sequential, including seeking approval, examination, declaration, ordination, and instructing the candidates on observing the precepts. Conducted with strict procedures to ensure the candidate's eligibility to become a <i>Bhikkhu</i> .	
		Overall sequence	Includes performing the <i>Saṅgha-Kamma</i>	Does not include performing the

Ritual Structure and Sequence	Differences	and structure	to announce the start of the ordination formally.	<i>Saṅgha–Kamma</i> to announce the start of the ordination formally. However, in <i>Theravāda</i> , this stage is replaced by the Scrutiny of Bowl and Robes to ensure proper preparation of robes and alms bowl.
			Includes Ritual of Receiving the Essential <i>Bhikkhu</i> Belongings as a detailed ceremony for receiving robes and items.	Does not include an elaborate ritual for receiving <i>Bhikkhu</i> belongings.
		Presentation style	Conducted in the Vietnamese and Sino–Vietnamese, incorporating cultural and ritual elements for added significance.	Entirely conducted in <i>Pāli</i> , concise, and adheres strictly to <i>Vinaya Pitaka</i> .

Discussions

This study examines Mahāyāna and Theravāda Upasampadā structures and compares their patterns in Vietnam, collectively illuminating how shared Vinaya foundations adapt to distinct ritual and cultural environments. Consistent with the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya framework (Buddhayaśas, CBETA T22 No. 1428), contemporary Vietnamese Mahāyāna ordination ceremonies adhere to the "Motion and Three Proclamations" protocol (Mahāvagga I.74.3; Horner, 1971) while layering additional aesthetic and institutional elements. Candidates progress through a “Three-Platform” model: novice, Bhikkhu/Bhikkhunī, and Bodhisattva precepts, within the Tam Đàn Đại Giới (Great Precept Transmission Ceremony), employing Sino-Vietnamese liturgy and ornate vestments (Thích Thiện Hòa, 2008; Thích Đồng Minh, 1999). These embellishments reflect

centuries of cultural integration, as noted by Nguyen Lang (2000) and Le Manh That (2006), whereby Vietnamese feudal and indigenous ritual sensibilities infuse the standard Vinaya protocol.

Vietnamese Theravāda ordinations align closely with Pāli Vinaya codifications, as outlined in Vinaya Sankhepa (Bodhisīla Bhikkhu, 2003), Pabbajita Vinaya Sankhepa (Vaṇsarakkhita Bhikkhu, 1993), and The Buddhist Monastic Code II (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, 2013). Field observations confirm a streamlined sequence led by an Upajjhāya, two Ācariyas, and a minimum of seven bhikkhus, emphasizing Pāli recitation and minimal ceremonial paraphernalia. Historical Khmer influences in southern Vietnam have also shaped Theravāda platforms, resulting in localized adaptations that maintain procedural simplicity while accommodating resource constraints (Thien Hau, 2017).

Despite sharing the Four Fulfilling Conditions (perfect candidate, assembly, boundary, announcement) and the Motion and Three Proclamations rite, Mahāyāna and Theravāda ceremonies diverge significantly in ritual complexity, language use, and communal involvement. The Vietnam Buddhist Sangha's 2023 ordination regulations introduce a "dual-track" framework, allowing each tradition to perform its distinct liturgy within a unified administrative structure (Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, 2023). Recent joint Great Precept Transmission events in Hồ Chí Minh City and Huế demonstrate emerging inter-tradition solidarity while preserving sectarian specificity (Thích Tâm Hải, 2015).

The findings underscore the necessity of integrated Vinaya education. Texts such as Luật Học Tinh Yếu (Thích Phước Sơn, 2006) and Truyền Giới Chánh Phạm (Huệ Nghiêm Vinaya Temple, 2020) provide models for curricula that balance Mahāyāna's ceremonial sophistication with Theravāda's procedural rigour. Strengthening such programs can enhance monastic competency, support Bhikkhunī initiatives, and reinforce communal cohesion.

Building on this comparative analysis, future research should adopt longitudinal designs to track ordination outcomes, survey regional ritual variants, and evaluate the long-term impact of VBS-led harmonisation on sectarian relations. Promoting collaborative ordination workshops and educational exchanges between Mahāyāna and Theravāda communities will further bridge doctrinal divides, ensuring that Upasampadā remains a vibrant conduit for the Buddha's teachings in Vietnam's pluralistic context.

Knowledge from Research

This research has generated substantial knowledge from studying the theory and practice of the Full Ordination Ceremony (Upasampadā) in contemporary Vietnamese Buddhism. Through detailed examination of both Mahāyāna and Theravāda traditions, three key dimensions of understanding have emerged: historical, structural, and comparative knowledge.

First, the study significantly contributes to historical knowledge regarding the transmission and evolution of ordination practices in Vietnam. The insights gained from this research reveal that Mahāyāna ordination, based on the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya, has been established in Vietnam for centuries, evolving alongside Vietnamese dynastic, cultural, and monastic institutions. In contrast, Theravāda ordination, following the Pāli Vinaya, was initially preserved within the Khmer ethnic community and only later adopted by Vietnamese Kinh monks in the 20th century. This historical progression enriches our understanding of how ordination practices serve not only religious but also cultural and political functions within a national context.

Second, the research enhances structural knowledge about the ritual components and procedural frameworks of the Full Ordination Ceremony. The study provides detailed documentation and analysis of key ritual elements, such as the Four Fulfilling Conditions, the Motion and Three Proclamations, the role of the Preceptor and Witnessing Masters, and the preparatory steps before ordination, in both traditions. This documentation serves as a scholarly reference for the standardised format of ordination across traditions, and it clarifies how each tradition organises its respective rituals following its Vinaya lineage.

Third, this research develops comparative knowledge by identifying both similarities and differences between Mahāyāna and Theravāda ordination ceremonies. While both traditions uphold Vinaya principles and emphasize ethical and spiritual readiness, Mahāyāna ceremonies tend to be more elaborate, involving a Council of Ten Venerable Masters, additional liturgical roles, and aesthetic features influenced by Vietnamese court rituals. Theravāda ordinations, in contrast, remain simpler and more canonical in form. The comparative findings from this research also explore how regional adaptations, cultural integration, and lay involvement shape the unique identity of each tradition's ordination ceremony in Vietnam.

Knowledge from Research

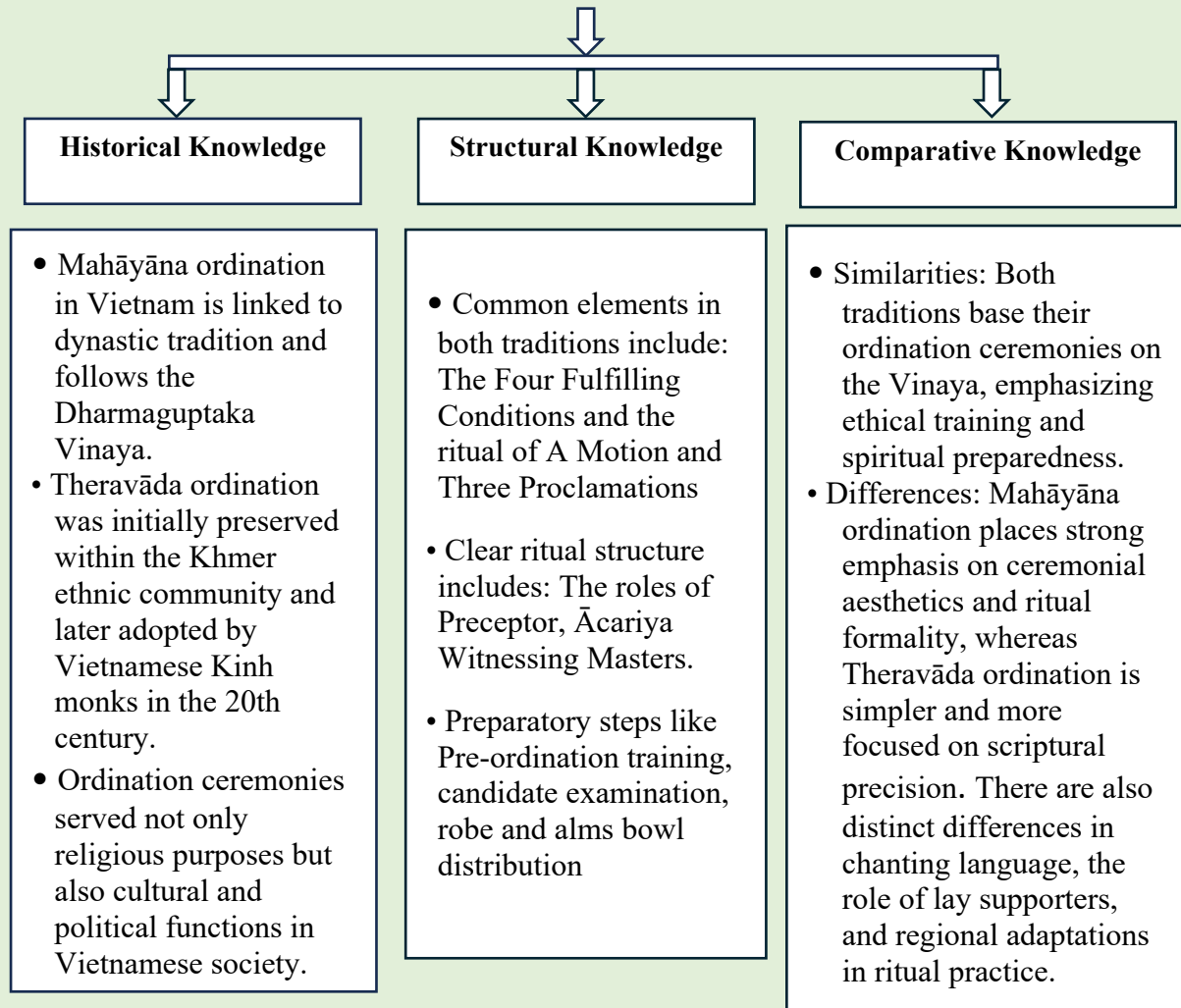


Figure 2: Knowledge from Research

Furthermore, this study contributes practical insights derived from this knowledge base into the modern efforts of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha to harmonize these traditions without diminishing their unique identities. The knowledge gained from this research provides a foundation for policymaking in Buddhist education, ordination governance, and future Vinaya training across traditions. This body of knowledge supports a clearer, more systematic approach to organizing ordination ceremonies, maintaining doctrinal integrity, and fostering mutual respect between different Buddhist schools.

In summary, the knowledge acquired from this research not only deepens theoretical understanding of the Upasampadā rite but also provides applicable knowledge that can be utilized in religious education, inter-sectarian dialogue, and administrative planning within the Vietnamese Buddhist context

Conclusion

This comparative study of Mahāyāna and Theravāda Upasampadā ceremonies in contemporary Vietnam underscores the dynamic interplay between doctrinal fidelity and cultural adaptation within Buddhist ordination practices. By tracing the historical trajectories, liturgical architectures, and institutional frameworks of each tradition, this research illuminates how ordination ceremonies serve not only as spiritual thresholds but also as vehicles for preserving monastic discipline, transmitting communal values, and negotiating identity in a rapidly modernising society.

In the Mahāyāna context, the ordination ritual, steeped in the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya, manifests as a ceremonially rich, hierarchical event. Candidates undergo rigorous pre-ordination preparation, including doctrinal examinations, ritual training, and community sponsorship. The formal ceremony is distinguished by a Ten Masters Council, the use of Sino-Vietnamese liturgical texts, elaborate vestments, and performative aesthetics inherited from Vietnam's feudal court traditions. This emphasis on formality and symbolism reflects Mahāyāna's integrative approach to Buddhist praxis, where ritual artifice and communal pageantry reinforce the aspirant's transition into monastic life.

Theravāda ordination, in contrast, hews closely to the Pāli Vinaya's canonical prescriptions. Conducted by a Saṅgha council (an Upajjhāya plus two Ācariyas and a quorum of ten monks), the ceremony prioritises procedural clarity, Pāli recitation, and minimal ritual paraphernalia. The central action, the Motion and Three Proclamations, unfolds with methodical precision, underscoring Theravāda's valorisation of textual accuracy and unadorned simplicity. Traditions share foundational commitments, the inviolability of the Vinaya code, the pivotal role of formal proclamation rites, and the ethical imperative of candidate preparedness. Importantly, the Vietnam Buddhist Saṅgha's regulatory interventions have promoted inter-tradition mutual recognition, standardised ordination protocols, and occasional joint ceremonies, paving the way for greater ecclesial cohesion.

This study recommends strengthening Vinaya pedagogy through integrated curricula that draw upon both Dharmaguptaka and Pāli resources, fostering inter-sectarian workshops for monastic educators, and supporting Bhikkhunī ordination initiatives. Future research might undertake longitudinal studies of ordination outcomes, map regional variants beyond urban centres, and

explore lay perceptions of ordination as a marker of social and spiritual legitimacy. By framing Upasampadā as both tradition and innovation, this work contributes to a nuanced understanding of how Vietnamese Buddhism sustains the Saṅgha's continuity amid changing cultural landscapes.

Suggestions

From this study's findings, several key suggestions emerge to support the advancement, refinement, and harmonization of the Full Ordination Ceremony (Upasampadā) in contemporary Vietnamese Buddhism. These proposals target two main areas: practical applications for the Saṅgha community and future research directions for scholars.

For the Saṅgha, it's vital to continue strengthening Buddhist education and inter-tradition collaboration. This can be achieved by developing a unified regulatory framework for ordination under the Vietnam Buddhist Saṅgha (VBS). Such a framework should standardize eligibility criteria and training requirements while implementing a centralized digital system for monastic records. Enhancing inter-tradition educational exchange is also crucial; creating shared curricula, conducting joint Vinaya workshops, and promoting doctrinal understanding between Mahāyāna and Theravāda will foster unity. Furthermore, balancing tradition with administrative efficiency means embracing digitalization for records and post-ordination training programs. Expanding joint ordination platforms, already successful in cities like Hồ Chí Minh and Huế, will allow each tradition to maintain its unique procedures within a shared, unifying framework. Finally, strengthening lay support through structured educational programs can deepen their understanding of ordination's significance and foster long-term connections with the Saṅgha.

For future research, this study provides a foundation for exploring the implications of these findings on monastic discipline and religious identity. Scholars could delve into the historical development of ordination ceremonies under various influences, from dynastic patronage to modern state administration. Comparative studies with Buddhist countries and traditions (e.g., Thailand, Myanmar, or Chinese Mahāyāna) would offer invaluable cross-cultural insights into Vinaya implementation and training models. There's also significant potential in exploring the revival of Bhikkhunī ordination in Vietnam, examining its historical trajectory, doctrinal challenges, and institutional responses, drawing

lessons from successful revivals elsewhere. By pursuing these avenues, future research can deepen our understanding of Buddhist ordination, support tradition-based reforms, and contribute to the ongoing development and unity of the Vietnamese Buddhist Saṅgha.

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Buddhist Principles for Cultivating Proper Faith (Saddhā): Solutions to Blind Faith in Modern Society

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Abstract

This study investigates (1) the root causes and manifestations of blind faith in contemporary society, (2) the nature of faith (saddhā) and its proper cultivation from a Buddhist perspective, and (3) a practical, Buddhism-based guideline to counteract uncritical belief. Our methodology involved a comprehensive review of canonical Buddhist texts and modern commentaries, supplemented by qualitative interviews with practising Buddhists. Data analysis employed content analysis and descriptive synthesis.

Our findings indicate that blind faith, characterised by unquestioning acceptance, undermines individual autonomy, contributes to social fragmentation, and impedes genuine ethical development. In stark contrast, Buddhist teachings define authentic saddhā as a reasoned confidence born from personal experience, ethical conduct, and rigorous critical inquiry. The Kālāma Sutta serves as a foundational text, unequivocally urging practitioners to verify teachings through direct observation and reflection rather than accepting them solely based on authority. Informed by these insights, we propose a novel three-pillar framework, encompassing wisdom (paññā), ethical conduct (sīla), and mindfulness (sati), designed to guide the informed cultivation of saddhā. By seamlessly integrating reflective inquiry, moral action, and meditative awareness, this guideline aims to transform faith from a passive belief into a dynamic force for profound personal growth and enhanced social harmony.

Keywords: Buddhism-based Guideline; Practice Faith; Problem of Blind Faith

Introduction

In contemporary Buddhist societies, concern has grown over the rise of amulika saddhā, blind or baseless faith, and its divergence from the Buddha's original emphasis on critical verification. Although saddhā (faith) remains indispensable to spiritual development, the Pāli tradition consistently frames it as

a reasoned confidence, rooted in personal experience, ethical conduct, and meditative insight, rather than as unexamined belief or superstition (Nyanaponika Thera, 2005; Ledi Sayādaṛ, 2004). Yet, many modern practitioners rely heavily on rituals and symbols, amulet worship, deity offerings, and auspicious charms, without examining their ethical or experiential foundations (Ari Ubeysekara, 2016).

The Oxford English Dictionary defines faith as “a strong belief in the doctrines of a religion based on spiritual conviction rather than proof” (Hornby, 2010, p. 611). In Buddhism, however, saddhā transcends mere conviction: it denotes “calm, trustful confidence” in the Triple Gem, shaped by direct engagement with the Dhamma (Ledi Sayādaṛ, 2004, p. 73). As the Saddha Sutta (A.III.42) observes, faith grounded in insight yields five spiritual advantages, including social esteem and favourable rebirths, benefits contingent upon ethical integrity and meditative awareness, not ritual form alone (Morris, 1883).

Early Buddhist didactic strategy devalued passive acceptance of texts or teachers, elevating personal confirmation as the primary path to liberation. Rituals, while tolerated as initial supports, were relegated to secondary status once the practitioner advanced toward paññā (wisdom) (Nyanatiloka, 1991). The Kālāma Sutta (AN 3.65) famously exhorts disciples to “not accept on mere hearsay, tradition, or authority,” but to verify teachings through lived experience, an injunction often overlooked in contemporary practice.

Scholarly analyses have traced how institutional and sociocultural forces can entrench Pasāda Saddhā (reverential faith) at the expense of its experiential counterpart. McKeon (1989) demonstrated that in Sri Lankan Theravāda, national religion and cultural identity sometimes co-opt faith into ritual orthodoxy, diluting its transformative potential. Complementing this perspective, identifies five drivers of blind faith, fear, material desire, traditionalism, emotional dependency, and ignorance, that divert practitioners toward spirit worship and ritual excess, potentially undermining confidence in the Triple Gem and risking adverse karmic outcomes. (Richard, 2019; Ebel, 2009).

Theravāda pedagogy outlines a graduated faith journey, from nascent Okappana Saddhā to unshakable Adhigama Saddhā, realised through stream-entry (Sotāpatti), underscoring the necessity of continuous refinement by wisdom (Tam, 1994). Yet in many Southeast Asian communities today, saddhā remains at a superficial level, bypassing the introspective processes required for genuine insight.

This study employs qualitative interviews, surveys, and scriptural exegesis to identify the doctrinal, social, and psychological factors sustaining blind faith in modern Buddhist contexts. By engaging monastics, lay teachers, and practitioners, it seeks to map the gap between *amulika* and *ākāravatī saddhā* (reasoned faith) and to propose pedagogical interventions grounded in canonical precedents. Ultimately, this research aims to restore faith to its intended role as a dynamic, ethically grounded trust, guiding practitioners from ritual adherence toward the liberating insights the Buddha so earnestly advocated.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the problematic situations and causes leading to blind faith.
2. To study the concept of faith (*saddhā*) and its proper practice according to the Buddhist perspectives.
3. To propose a Buddhism-based guideline for the proper practice of faith (*saddhā*) to address the issue of blind faith in modern society.

Literature Review

Understanding blind faith and its antidotes in Buddhism requires a multi-dimensional survey of doctrinal, historical, and practical studies. This review is organised around three research objectives.

Saibaba's (2005) historical survey of Theravāda devotional practices demonstrates how unexamined rituals, amulet worship, and deity offerings became institutionalized, fostering "*amulika saddhā*" (blind faith) detached from meditative insight. Gombrich (1988) further traces Theravāda social pressures that privilege ritual conformity over personal verification, while Obeyesekere (1981) links existential anxiety about death to superstitious practices. Boin & McConnell's (2008) political-crisis framework offers a theoretical lens: in contexts of uncertainty and authority deficits, individuals gravitate toward uncritical deference, a pattern mirrored in religious settings. Together, these works highlight socio-psychological drivers, fear, tradition, and institutional authority that underpin blind faith.

Mon's (1995) Abhidhamma analysis situates *saddhā* as a reasoned confidence emerging from analytical understanding of the Triple Gem, opposing notions of naïve belief. Maung (2008) refines this distinction by delineating *āmulika* (rootless) versus *ākāravatī* (well-formed) faith, tracing its progressive

maturation. Bhikkhu Analayo (2010) and Bhikkhu Bodhi (2005) ground this doctrinal clarity in early Buddhist praxis, showing how mindfulness and sutta-based inquiry (e.g., the Kālāma Sutta) refine faith into experiential trust. Sheng-Yen's (1989) Chan perspective enriches this view: faith functions as a mental discipline to dissolve afflictive states through direct encounter with Buddha-nature. Together, these studies converge on saddhā as an integrative factor—anchoring ethical conduct, reflective inquiry, and meditative insight.

Janakabhivonsa (1999) operationalizes faith in daily life, illustrating how faith eliminates doubt and supports virtuous action through practical exercises. Harvey (2013) offers modular pedagogical frameworks from both monastic and lay settings, while King (2009) demonstrates how socially engaged Buddhism embeds faith in ethical social action. Thurman (2005) presents faith as an iterative process of trust-testing, adaptable across traditions. These works provide concrete templates, retreat curricula, community workshops, and service projects, that can be synthesized into a three-pillar guideline: (1) Reflective Inquiry (scriptural study and meditation), (2) Ethical Engagement (precepts, generosity, social action), and (3) Sustained Mindfulness (daily awareness practices).

This literature reveals that blind faith in modern Buddhist contexts arises from socio-psychological anxieties and institutional dynamics, while authentic saddhā unfolds through a reasoned, experiential process integrating wisdom, ethics, and mindfulness. Although existing studies offer valuable doctrinal and practical insights, gaps remain in cross-tradition comparison and empirical evaluation of guideline efficacy. Future research should employ ethnographic and experimental methods to assess how the proposed three-pillar model operates across diverse cultural settings, thereby fostering a more holistic, dynamic understanding of faith in contemporary Buddhism.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the research exhibits the significant research process in terms of input, process, and output as follows:

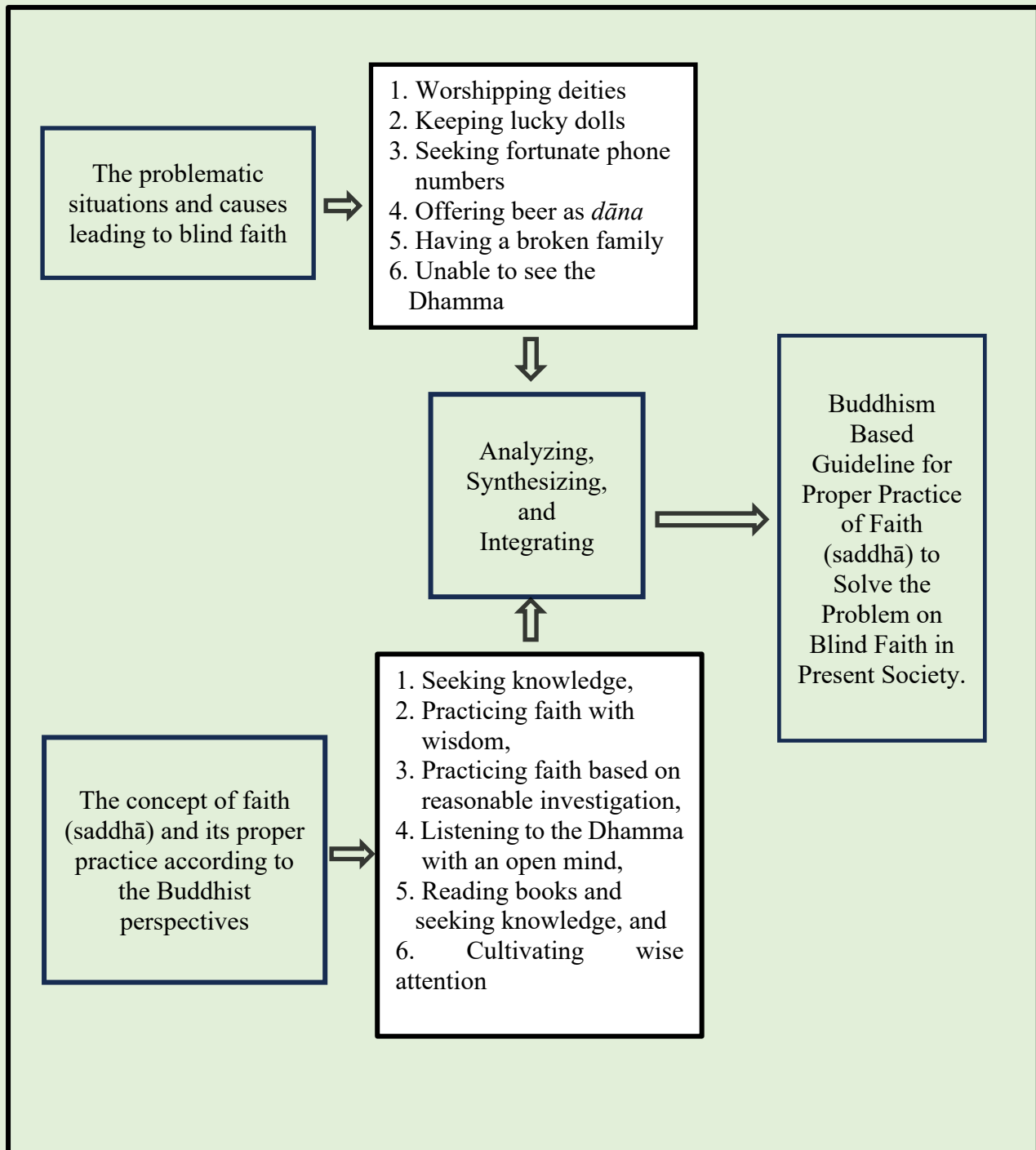


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This research is qualitative. The research methodology can be classified as follows:

Primary Sources and Secondary Sources

It means that data collected from the primary source of Pāli canonical texts, their commentaries, and sub-commentaries to explore saddhā and the discourses related to saddhā expounded by the Buddha in Theravāda Buddhism. As well as the secondary source of Theravāda Buddhist literatures, research works, thesis, some academic documents related to this subject and Buddhist journals, together with the concepts discussed by modern scholars, respectively, in the Myanmar and English languages.

In-depth Interview

Interviewing Theravāra Buddhist monks and lay women. The interviewees included:

1. Ven. Dr. Sujaya
2. Ven. Anandajoti
3. Ven. Silānandāṅkārā
4. Ven. Sundarāṅkārā
5. Miss. Khaing Khaing Tun

Analyzing and Synthesizing Data

It means that analysing and synthesising the data and also systematising the collected data in order to give a clear and interrelated understanding of saddhā, and to apply saddhā preached by the Buddha for daily life.

Conclusion and Suggestion

It means formulating conclusions, identifying significant research findings from the study relevant to the research process from the data collection and data analysis, as well as suggesting useful information for further research.

Research Results

Objective 1. The results showed that one key cause is the uncritical acceptance of teachings passed down through generations without personal verification or experiential understanding. Cultural traditions and rituals, such as river bathing for purification illustrated in the Vatthupama Sutta demonstrate how habitual practices may be mistakenly regarded as spiritually beneficial despite lacking logical or experiential support.

Additionally, a common problematic situation arises when individuals adopt beliefs out of fear, desire for comfort, or social conformity rather than

reflective understanding. This leads to reliance on authority figures or scriptures without critical examination.

Another cause is misunderstanding the concept of taking refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. Without proper reflection, this act may become a mechanical ritual rather than a conscious commitment grounded in knowledge and insight.

The Buddha addressed these issues by distinguishing between blind faith and informed confidence (*ākāravathī saddhā*), which arises from knowledge, personal experience, and careful reflection. He emphasized the necessity of examining teachings, questioning assumptions, and avoiding baseless adherence.

In summary, the causes of blind faith in Buddhism include:

Cultural conditioning and inherited beliefs

Misinterpretation of rituals and practices

Fear-based or comfort-driven acceptance

Lack of inquiry and critical reflection

These problematic situations highlight the importance of cultivating discerning wisdom and experiential understanding in Buddhist practice to avoid falling into the trap of blind faith.

Objective 2. The results showed that the concept of *saddhā* in Buddhism embodies faith, trust, belief, and confidence, serving as a vital foundation in the journey toward attaining *nibbāna*. Unlike passive belief, *saddhā* is dynamic and manifests through actions such as prayer, worship, meditation, and ethical conduct.

Buddhism emphasizes self-reliance and mental cultivation, with the mind regarded as the primary agent of change. Proper education and training of the mind lead to purity of thought, enabling individuals to overcome negative mental states such as ignorance, greed, and anger. The Buddha is revered as a teacher who guides followers through wisdom rather than divine intervention.

Saddhā is recognized as the initial factor that inspires individuals to engage in understanding *kamma* (the law of moral causation) and to perform wholesome deeds. It operates as both a spiritual strength and a driving force that supports progress in mundane and supramundane spheres.

The characteristics of *saddhā* include faith in an object worthy of reverence, purification of mental states, and freedom from defilements. Its function is to clarify and purify the mind, with the manifestation of mental clarity

and unwavering resolution. The proximate cause of saddhā arises from confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha (the Triple Gem), and in the principles leading to stream-entry.

Saddhā holds further significance as a mental factor present in wholesome consciousness, a stream of merit, a spiritual faculty, and an element of effort and perseverance. It is also considered one of the seven noble treasures in Buddhist teachings. The Abhidhamma provides a detailed analysis of consciousness types influenced by saddhā, reflecting its widespread and essential role in the spiritual path.

Ultimately, saddhā is valued when grounded in knowledge and understanding. It represents a profound conviction in the Triple Gem and a comprehension of the karmic consequences of actions. As a motivating force, saddhā guides individuals toward the cultivation of virtue, the purification of the mind, and the attainment of enlightenment in alignment with Buddhist perspectives.

Objective 3. The results showed that addressing the universal issue of blind faith in contemporary society requires a holistic approach that integrates education, critical thinking, and a balanced understanding of faith. Buddhist perspectives provide valuable insights into navigating belief systems effectively by promoting the synergy of wisdom (*paññā*) and faith (*saddhā*). Emphasising inquiry, systematic thinking, and discernment serves as a foundation for mitigating blind adherence.

In this research, in-depth interviews with experts, including Buddhist monks such as Venerable Ānandajoti, Venerable Dr. Sujaya, Venerable Sōndarāṇkāra, Venerable Silānandāṇkāra, and lay practitioner Miss Khaing Khaing Tun, offer diverse viewpoints supporting a comprehensive strategy to resolve the problem of blind faith. Their perspectives consistently highlight the importance of education, rational investigation, and the integration of faith with wisdom.

Key findings from the expert interviews include:

Fear of Social Judgment: Blind faith often stems from fear of societal blame, leading individuals to accept beliefs unquestioningly. Encouraging knowledge-seeking behaviour helps individuals overcome such limitations, promoting mental clarity and inner peace.

Lack of Proper Education: Insufficient education fosters misguided beliefs and susceptibility to blind faith. By practicing faith in combination with wisdom, individuals develop a more balanced perspective and improved decision-making abilities.

Wrong Views and Limited Knowledge: Misunderstandings and social divisions arise from inadequate knowledge and incorrect perceptions. Faith grounded in reasonable investigation enhances authenticity, promotes compassion, and strengthens social harmony.

Unexamined Traditional Beliefs: Following inherited traditions without reflection can limit personal growth. Actively listening to the Dhamma with an open mind fosters ethical conduct, moral integrity, and leads to a more meaningful life.

Undiscerning Acceptance: Believing without discernment risks misconceptions and deepens blind faith. Engaging with educational resources, such as reading and studying, helps cultivate critical thinking and enriches wisdom.

Unwise Attention: Focusing on things unwisely leads to distorted perceptions. Practicing wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) promotes mindfulness, supports the development of Right View, and deepens insight into reality.

The combined recommendations suggest that cultivating a culture of inquiry, critical thinking, and open-mindedness is vital. An accessible, holistic education system can empower individuals to analyze their beliefs thoughtfully, reducing the prevalence of blind faith.

In conclusion, the perspectives gathered emphasize that a harmonious balance between faith and wisdom is essential for addressing blind faith in present society. By fostering this balance, individuals and communities can progress towards a deeper, wisdom-based understanding of spirituality, rooted in ethical conduct and critical reflection.

Discussion

Our study identified several interwoven factors contributing to blind faith (*amulikā saddhā*) within contemporary Buddhist communities: an uncritical acceptance of teachings, deeply ingrained cultural conditioning, fear-based belief systems, and insufficient doctrinal inquiry. These findings align remarkably with the Buddha's own discernment between well-formed faith (*ākāravatī saddhā*) and

baseless faith (*amulikā saddhā*), as articulated in pivotal texts like the *Kālāma Sutta* (AN 3.65) and the *Vatthupama Sutta* (MN 7; Mon, 1995).

Scholarly perspectives further reinforce these observations. Hoffman (2002) persuasively argues that early Buddhism prioritized rational engagement and experiential verification over passive acceptance, a stance epitomized by the direct injunction, "ehipassiko—come and see" (*Apannaka Sutta*, MN 60; Nyanatiloka, 1991). Historically, Saibaba's (2005) analysis demonstrates how an overemphasis on ritual formalism and social conformity can eclipse genuine reflective understanding. Similarly, Obeyesekere (1981) links existential anxiety to a societal turn towards superstition and amulet worship, a phenomenon we also observed. Gombrich (1988) adds that institutional pressures within some Theravāda communities might inadvertently prioritize conformity over personal insight, thereby solidifying unexamined beliefs.

Regarding the nature of proper *saddhā*, our findings affirm it as an active, wisdom-infused confidence in the Triple Gem. In *Abhidhamma* terms, *saddhā* functions as a *sobhana cetasika*—a wholesome mental factor that invigorates *paññā* (wisdom) and supports profound meditative insight (Mon, 1995). Peter Harvey (1995) compellingly underscores the mutually reinforcing relationship between faith and reason, asserting that rigorous doctrinal study and consistent ethical conduct provide essential contexts for sustaining authentic faith. Beyond scholasticism, Sheng Yen's Chan paradigm (1989) illustrates how faith can evolve into a dynamic, experiential trust in one's inherent Buddha-nature, dissolving afflictive emotions through direct, personal encounter. Echoing this, Gil Fronsdal (2006) emphasises "direct knowing" as a hallmark of Buddhist practice, where faith blossoms from personal experience rather than mere doctrinal assent. Janakabhivamsa (2009) further confirms that *saddhā*, when meticulously cultivated alongside *sīla* (ethical conduct) and *bhāvanā* (meditation), acts as a purifying force, effectively preventing both credulity and debilitating cynicism.

The study's proposed guideline, developed to address Objective 3, seamlessly integrates these rich doctrinal and practical insights into three actionable pillars. The first, Reflective Inquiry, emphasizes engaging in deep sutta-based study and fostering open community dialogue. The second, Ethical Engagement, highlights the importance of consistent precept observance and

meaningful socially-engaged practice (King, 2009), demonstrating faith through action. The third pillar, Sustained Mindfulness, advocates for incorporating daily awareness exercises to vigilantly monitor one's mental habits (Bhikkhu Analayo, 2010). David McMahan's (2008) analysis of Buddhist modernism illustrates the adaptability of pedagogical frameworks to contemporary contexts, ensuring that faith remains relevant and critically informed. Significantly, expert interviews within our study revealed that Buddhist communities lacking in systematic scholastic training and mindful attention (*ayoniso manasikāra*) are notably more susceptible to blind faith. This observation is corroborated by McKeon's (1989) analysis of Sri Lankan Theravāda, which noted how institutional religion could sometimes prioritise ritual orthodoxy over the cultivation of genuine personal insight.

Blind faith in modern Buddhist contexts largely stems from an uncritical embrace of traditionalism, fear, and intellectual disengagement. In contrast, authentic *saddhā*, as consistently depicted in canonical texts and strongly supported by contemporary scholarship (Hoffman, 2002; Mon, 1995; Sheng, 1989; Harvey, 1995; Fronsdal, 2006), is both investigatory and experientially grounded, forming a crucial bridge to liberating wisdom. The robust three-pillar framework proposed here, firmly rooted in ethical living, dedicated meditative practice, and rigorous rational inquiry, offers a pragmatic and effective roadmap for transforming baseless belief into an enlightened, confident understanding.

Knowledge from Research

This research, focusing on Buddhism-based guidelines for the proper practice of faith (*saddhā*), offers critical insights into the pervasive issue of blind faith in contemporary society. Our findings reveal that blind faith is not a monolithic phenomenon; rather, it emerges from a complex interplay of internal and external factors. These include fear of societal rejection, emotional dependency, ingrained cultural traditions, a lack of comprehensive education, and underdeveloped critical thinking skills. Such conditions, unfortunately, make individuals highly susceptible to misinformation, pervasive superstition, and manipulative ideological influence. The downstream consequences are severe, manifesting as social fragmentation, ethical decline, and spiritual stagnation.

Understanding Faith in the Buddhist Context

A core innovation of this study is its nuanced understanding of *saddhā*. In Buddhism, *saddhā* is explicitly not blind devotion; instead, it is a dynamic,

evolving confidence rooted firmly in personal experience, rigorous critical inquiry, and unwavering moral clarity. The Kālāma Sutta stands as a pivotal text, fundamentally shaping this rational approach to faith by unequivocally encouraging followers to reject hearsay, unchallenged authority, and unverified tradition unless these can be personally verified through direct understanding and their observable ethical consequences. Further, texts like the Vatthūpama Sutta and the Visuddhimagga provide rich metaphors and robust frameworks demonstrating how mental purification, achieved through ethical behaviour and mindfulness, is essential for fostering an enlightened faith, one that transcends mere emotional credulity.

Unpacking the Causes and Consequences of Blind Faith

Our research delves deep into the mechanisms behind blind faith. We identify *ayoniso manasikāra* (unwise attention) as a key internal factor, which diverts individuals from genuinely investigating truth and instead fosters attachment to superficial or purely ritualistic beliefs. This tendency is significantly reinforced by external pressures such as social conformity, the allure of emotional comfort, and inherent psychological needs for certainty and belonging. Furthermore, inadequate educational systems that neglect critical inquiry, scientific literacy, and comparative religious understanding regrettably perpetuate unexamined beliefs across generations.

The consequences of this uncritical approach are far-reaching and detrimental. They include exploitation by charismatic or manipulative religious figures, often manifesting as what we term “faith-selling.” We also observe conflicts escalating within families and communities due to irrational or rigid beliefs, a significant erosion of genuine Dhamma practice where ritual mistakenly replaces wisdom, and a profound hindrance to broader societal progress, ethics, and harmony stemming from extremism or pseudoscientific ideologies.

Buddhist Solutions and New Applications

Building on these insights, our study proposes practical solutions firmly grounded in Buddhist principles. These include promoting *yoniso manasikāra* (wise reflection) to transform faith from a passive belief into an informed understanding, and crucially, balancing faith (*saddhā*) with wisdom (*paññā*) to effectively navigate both gullibility and cynicism. Integrating mindfulness and meditation is essential for purifying the mental defilements that cloud judgment. The research strongly advocates for appraising teachings with the same rigor one

would use to test gold—through reasoning, lived experience, and their ethical outcomes.

These findings translate into tangible new applications. Academically, we recommend developing curricula that emphasize critical thinking and rational inquiry in Buddhist studies. For community empowerment, we propose training programs for religious leaders focused on scriptural literacy and ethical engagement, alongside public awareness campaigns leveraging digital media to popularize rational Buddhist teachings like the Kālāma Sutta. Policy recommendations include integrating philosophy, logic, and comparative religion into national education systems, advocating for transparency in religious institutions, and creating safe platforms for dialogue and questioning without fear of ostracization.

Impacts and Outcomes

The potential impacts of this research are transformative: a shift from blind belief to informed faith, fostering genuine ethical conduct, compassion, and wisdom. This approach promises strengthened social cohesion, as shared values become grounded in reason rather than dogma, leading to enhanced mental clarity and spiritual progress through a balanced practice of the Noble Eightfold Path. Ultimately, this research promotes a much-needed culture of inquiry, essential for both modern spiritual and societal development. By rooting spiritual confidence in understanding and reflection, individuals can effectively overcome ignorance, reduce suffering, and contribute meaningfully to both personal and collective advancement in today's complex world.

Conclusion

This research explores the critical issue of blind faith in contemporary society and presents Buddhism-based guidelines for cultivating proper faith (saddhā) rooted in wisdom, critical inquiry, and ethical conduct. The study highlights the detrimental effects of blind faith, such as vulnerability to manipulation, societal discord, and spiritual stagnation, while emphasizing the transformative potential of saddhā when practiced with discernment.

Key findings include: Problematic Situations and Causes of Blind Faith: Blind faith arises from fear, lack of education, uncritical adherence to traditions, and unwise attention. It manifests in practices like ritualistic worship, superstitions, and reliance on external authorities without verification.

Concept of Saddhā in Buddhism: Saddhā is not blind belief but a reasoned confidence in the Triple Gem (Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha), developed through personal investigation, meditation, and ethical living. It serves as a foundation for wisdom and liberation.

Guidelines for Proper Practice: Critical Inquiry: Inspired by the Kālāma Sutta, individuals are encouraged to question, test, and validate teachings through personal experience.

Wise Attention (Yonisonanasikāra): Cultivating mindfulness and reflection to discern truth from falsehood.

Balancing Faith and Wisdom: Integrating saddhā with paññā (wisdom) to avoid extremes of scepticism or dogmatism.

Ethical Living: Practising dāna (generosity), sīla (morality), and bhāvanā (mental training) to purify the mind and deepen understanding.

The research underscores the importance of moving beyond blind faith to embrace a faith grounded in wisdom, compassion, and direct experience. By applying these Buddhist principles, individuals can foster mental clarity, ethical integrity, and social harmony, ultimately contributing to personal and collective well-being.

Suggestions for Further Study

Future research should consider the following avenues to deepen our understanding of how Buddhist principles can mitigate blind faith in modern contexts:

Longitudinal Studies on Meditation and Scriptural Engagement

Investigate the long-term effects of integrated meditation practice and systematic study of saddhā (faith) and paññā (wisdom) texts. Employ mixed-methods designs to assess changes in cognitive flexibility, critical reasoning, and faith maturity over extended periods.

Comparative Analyses Across Traditions

Conduct cross-cultural and interreligious comparisons to determine the generalizability of Buddhist approaches to faith cultivation. Examine whether pedagogical models emphasizing sīla (ethical conduct), samādhi (concentration), and paññā foster similar outcomes in adherents of other faiths or secular philosophical systems.

Mechanisms of Critical Inquiry

Explore the process by which critical inquiry and doctrinal questioning enhance depth of belief. Utilize experimental paradigms to isolate how guided skepticism—framed within a supportive contemplative framework—affects doctrinal adherence versus transformative insight.

Role of Ethical Practice and Compassion

Examine empirically how engagement in ethical practices and compassion-based community activities reinforces reflective faith. Future work might measure correlations between participatory altruism, communal support structures, and resilience against dogmatic or manipulative religious influences.

Through these research directions, scholars can enrich theoretical frameworks on faith development, inform applied pedagogies, and contribute to the cultivation of reflective, ethically grounded belief systems in contemporary society.

Abbreviations

- A. Āṅguttaranikāya
- D. Dīghanikāya
- M. Majjhimanikāya
- S. Saṃyuttanikāya

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A Comparative Study on the Concept and Practices of Perfection (Pāramītas) In Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism

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Abstract

This documentary research investigates the concepts and practices of pāramī in Theravāda Buddhism and pāramitā in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Our primary objectives are to: (1) explore pāramī in Theravāda, (2) examine pāramitā in Mahāyāna, and (3) compare these concepts across both traditions. The study primarily utilises translated Pāli Tipiṭaka and Mahāyāna Sūtras as primary sources, supplemented by commentaries, sub-commentaries, Buddhist textbooks, and academic research from both schools, translated from Pāli and Tibetan.

While sharing a common foundation, the teachings of pāramī and pāramitā exhibit distinct developments and emphases. Both traditions focus on the practices of Bodhisattas (future Buddhas) in their past lives, striving for Buddhahood. However, Theravāda largely relies on Pāli scriptures, while Mahāyāna employs Sanskrit texts, leading to divergent interpretations. Initially, the core meaning of both terms is similar, stressing virtues like generosity, morality, and patience. Later, Theravāda commentators expanded pāramī to thirty sub-qualities, making it relevant not only for Bodhisattas but also for Sāvakayana (disciples) and Pacceka Buddha (solitary realisers). In contrast, Mahāyāna introduced new terminology such as bodhicitta (the aspiration for enlightenment) and emphasised the qualitative aspects of the path.

The ultimate goal in both traditions is Buddhahood, though Theravāda later accommodated other forms of enlightenment, such as Sāvakayana. Mahāyāna, conversely, maintains a strong focus on the Bodhisattva path, including the practice of taking mass Bodhisattva vows, which is absent in Theravāda. Both traditions emphasise compassion, but Mahāyāna emphasises the Bodhisattva's commitment to universal salvation. In practice, Theravāda's pāramī is more quantitative, focusing on accumulating virtues, while Mahāyāna's pāramitā is more qualitative, emphasising the transformation of mind and intention. Despite these differences, the fundamental idea remains consistent: pāramī/pāramitā represents the path taken by the Buddha in his previous lives as a Bodhisatta, with

both traditions ultimately aiming for the cultivation of wisdom and compassion leading to enlightenment.

Keywords: Perfections (pāramītas); Theravada Buddhism; Mahayana Buddhism; Comparative Study

Introduction

The words pāramī in Pāli and pāramitā in Sanskrit are often translated as “perfection” or “completeness,” representing the virtuous qualities cultivated along the Bodhisattva path toward enlightenment. While both Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhist traditions uphold these perfections as integral to the spiritual journey, especially in the pursuit of Buddhahood, their interpretations, classifications, and applications vary significantly. This divergence reflects broader doctrinal and historical developments within the Buddhist tradition. Thus, it is essential to recognise that there is no uniform or universally accepted understanding of the pāramītas across the Buddhist world (Keown, 2003).

The enumeration and categorisation of the pāramītas also differ among traditions and texts. For instance, the Theravāda tradition typically recognises ten pāramīs, while the Mahāyāna tradition commonly refers to six, though some sources also list ten, particularly in association with the ten bhūmis or Bodhisattva stages (Bodhi, 2005; Candrakīrti, trans. 2002). Furthermore, varying numbers of pāramī, such as four, six, ten, or even thirty, can be found in different canonical and commentarial texts, highlighting the diverse doctrinal interpretations that have evolved (Dutt, 1978). Following the initial unity of the Buddhist Saṅgha after the Buddha’s passing, the Second Buddhist Council marked a significant schism between the Mahāsāṃghika and Sthavira lineages, largely over disputes concerning the Vinaya or monastic code (Harvey, 2013). This historical divergence contributed to the emergence of distinct traditions such as Theravāda and Mahāyāna, each developing unique doctrinal frameworks, including their respective interpretations of the perfections.

Theravāda Buddhism, regarded as the most conservative and historically continuous school, does not explicitly refer to the pāramīs as a codified set in the earliest strata of its canonical literature, such as the Majjhima Nikāya or Saṃyutta Nikāya. However, narratives and themes related to the perfections are found in

later texts such as the Jātaka Tales, Apadāna, Buddhavaṃsa, and Cariyāpiṭaka, as well as in post-canonical commentaries (Bodhi, 2005; Dutt, 1978). The tenfold classification of pāramī appears to be a later development, possibly indicating that the systematization of these virtues was not originally a central feature of early Theravāda teachings. Nevertheless, while Theravāda emphasises the pāramī primarily in the context of the Bodhisatta's path, these virtues are also seen as beneficial to Śrāvakas and Pacceka-Buddhas (Thanissaro Bhikkhu, n.d.). Given this historical evolution, the first objective of this paper is to explore the conceptual foundations and practical applications of the pāramī within the Theravāda tradition, with an emphasis on early Pāli canonical texts and their subsequent interpretations.

Conversely, Mahāyāna Buddhism, often referred to as the “Bodhisattva Vehicle,” offers an expansive vision of the spiritual path, emphasising universal compassion and the aspiration for Buddhahood to benefit all beings (Keown, 2003). Mahāyāna texts such as the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras provide in-depth discussions of the six perfections, dāna (generosity), śīla (ethics), kṣānti (patience), vīrya (effort), dhyāna (meditative concentration), and prajñā (wisdom), which are regarded as the foundational practices for Bodhisattvas. Some Mahāyāna sources, particularly in later commentaries like Candrakīrti's Madhyamakāvatāra, further expand these to ten, corresponding to the ten bhūmis (Candrakīrti, trans. 2002). Mahāyāna also introduces new philosophical concepts such as bodhicitta (the mind of awakening), which are absent in Theravāda formulations, thus illustrating doctrinal innovations within the tradition.

The concept and evolution of the pāramitās within Mahāyāna Buddhism, based on its canonical sources and major commentaries. Traditions acknowledge the perfections as critical to spiritual cultivation; the variations in enumeration, interpretation, and soteriological emphasis necessitate a comprehensive comparative study. Although prior research has addressed the perfections individually within each tradition, there remains a lack of systematic comparative analysis. Hence, the third objective of this paper is to conduct a comparative study of the concept and practices of the pāramitās in Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism, highlighting both the convergences and divergences.

This research aims to clarify the doctrinal and practical dimensions of the pāramitās across these two major Buddhist traditions by examining canonical

texts and authoritative commentaries. It also seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how these perfections are framed within distinct philosophical and cultural contexts, offering insights into their historical development and contemporary relevance.

Research Objectives

1. To study the concept and practices of pāramī in Theravada Buddhism.
2. To study the concept and practices of pāramīta in Mahayana Buddhism.
3. To compare concept and practices of the perfection practices in Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism.

Literature Review

This research explores the concepts and practices of pāramī in Theravāda Buddhism and pāramitā in Mahāyāna Buddhism, to offer a nuanced comparative analysis across these two major traditions. A critical review of primary Buddhist scriptures, classical commentaries, and modern scholarly works informs the comparative framework.

The first objective, examining pāramī in Theravāda Buddhism, the foundational contribution of Visuddhimagga: The Path of Purification by Buddhaghosa (2010) is essential. While the text does not explicitly present the pāramī framework, its detailed treatment of meditative concentration, ethical conduct, and the cultivation of the Brahmavihāras (Divine Abodes) offers an implicit structure that aligns with the virtues underlying the perfection practices. Buddhaghosa's systematic approach to purification reflects the moral discipline foundational to the Theravāda path.

A more direct exposition of the pāramī is provided by Dhammapāla (1996) in A Treatise on the Pāramī, a commentary on the Cariyāpiṭaka. Dhammapāla outlines the ten perfections, offering clarity on their definition, hierarchical structure, distinguishing characteristics, and relevance to the Bodhisatta path. His interpretation represents a significant doctrinal development that systematises pāramī within Theravāda scholastic thought.

Thanissaro Bhikkhu's The Ten Perfections: A Study Guide (n.d.) introduces a distinctive interpretive lens by grouping the perfections under four broader themes—discernment, truth, relinquishment, and calm—while identifying adhiṭṭhāna (determination) as a foundational element. This innovative categorisation challenges conventional models and enriches contemporary understanding.

Complementing these theoretical insights, Mingun Sayadaw's (2008) *The Great Chronicle of Buddhas* offers a narrative-based account of pāramī cultivation within the lives of past Buddhas, drawing from canonical texts such as the *Apadāna*, *Jātaka*, and *Buddhavaṃsa*. This work provides historical and literary context for the development of pāramī ideals in Theravāda Buddhism and affirms their role in the long path of the Bodhisatta.

For the second objective, investigating pāramitā in Mahāyāna Buddhism, key texts include Śāntideva's *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*, which remains one of the most influential treatises on the six perfections. Śāntideva gives special emphasis to *Prajñāpāramitā* (the perfection of wisdom), underscoring its centrality in the Bodhisattva's progression toward enlightenment (Batchelor, 1979)

Chandrakīrti's *Entering the Middle Way* (*Madhyamakāvatāra*) (2020) expands this framework by integrating the ten pāramitās with the ten bhūmis (stages) of the Bodhisattva path. This work illustrates how the traditional six perfections are elaborated into ten through the deepening of the wisdom aspect, reflecting a sophisticated understanding of the Bodhisattva's gradual path of spiritual maturation.

The third objective, conducting a comparative analysis, is informed by the integrative study *Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions* by Gyatso and Chodron (2014), which provides a cross-traditional perspective on both convergence and divergence among Theravāda and Mahāyāna schools. Their work underscores the shared ethical foundations while acknowledging philosophical and doctrinal variations, particularly in the orientation toward Buddhahood.

War Yar Mein Da's (2015) doctoral dissertation, *A Study of Pāramī (Pāramitās) as Reflected in Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhist Tradition*, directly engages the comparative theme. Although focused primarily on the numerical distinctions, ten perfections in Theravāda versus six (or ten) in Mahāyāna, the study offers critical insights into the historical and textual development of perfection practices in both traditions.

Together, these sources form a comprehensive foundation for analyzing the doctrinal, textual, and practical dimensions of pāramī/pāramitā in Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism, allowing for a nuanced and informed comparative study.

Conceptual Framework

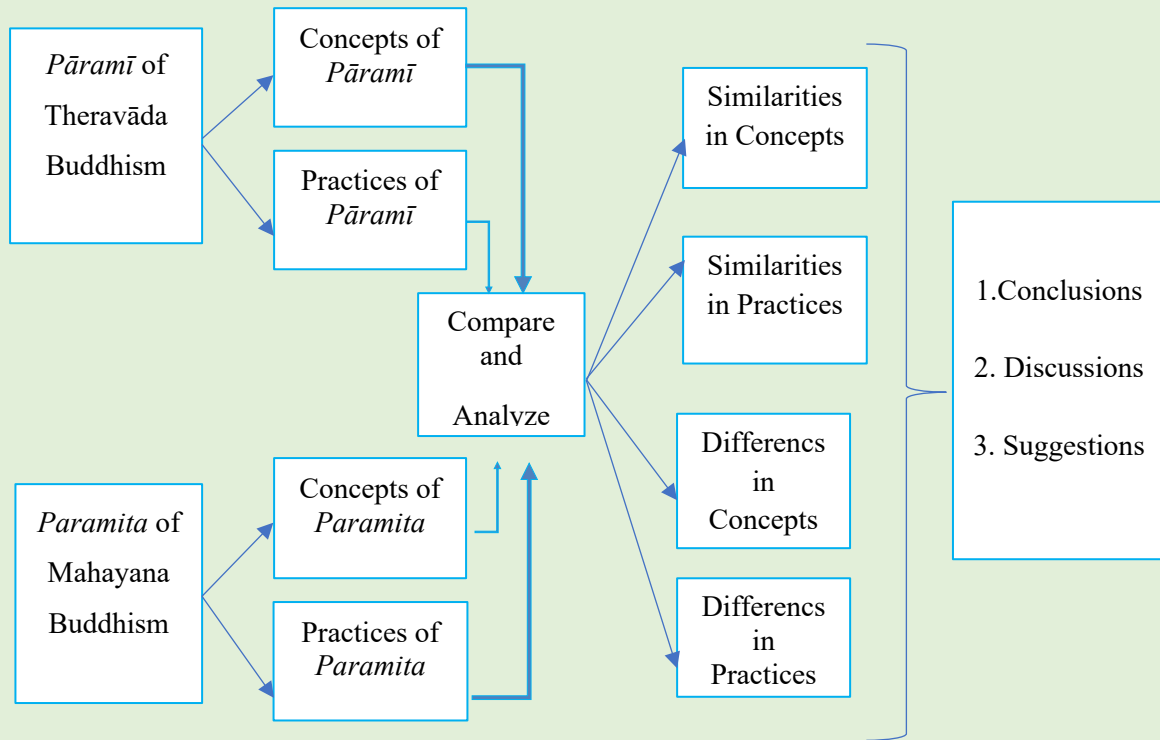


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This study is documentary research. The research methodology will be divided into the following four stages.

1 Collecting data on the Pāramīta concept and practices in the Theravada and Mahayana traditions from the English translated source texts of the Pali canon and Tibetan translated sources from the Sanskrit canon.

2 After the collection, analyse and systematizing the collected data into the categories.

3 Discuss the concept and practices of Pāramīta in both traditions. Compare and contrast the differences in the two traditions: Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism.

4 Discuss the problems, differences and similarities among them.

Research Results

The first objective of this study was to examine the concept and practice of pāramī within the Theravāda Buddhist tradition. The findings indicate that pāramī is acknowledged primarily as the practice of a Bodhisatta, a being on the path to Buddhahood, as depicted in the Jātaka tales and canonical texts such as the Buddhavaṃsa. To present a coherent understanding of pāramī in Theravāda Buddhism, three interrelated dimensions are essential: (1) the concept of pāramī itself, (2) the figure of the Bodhisatta who cultivates the perfections, and (3) the canonical narratives that illustrate these practices.

1. The Concept of Pāramī

Etymologically, there is no significant difference between the Pāli term pāramī and the Sanskrit pāramitā. Both are employed interchangeably in Buddhist texts, with pāramī more common in Theravāda literature and pāramitā in Mahāyāna sources. According to the classical commentator Ācariya Dhammapāla in *A Treatise on the Pāramī*, the perfections are described as “noble qualities such as giving, etc., accompanied by compassion and skilful means, and untainted by craving, conceit, and views” (Dhammapāla, 1996). This understanding is echoed in later works such as Mingun Sayadaw’s *The Great Chronicle of Buddhas*, emphasising the ethical and altruistic dimensions of perfection.

2. The Bodhisatta Ideal in Early Texts

The term Bodhisatta is consistently used in the early Pāli canon to refer to the previous existences of the Buddha before his enlightenment. Bhikkhu Bodhi, in his introduction to Dhammapāla’s treatise, notes that the Buddha used the term Bodhisatta to refer to himself even during his existence in the Tusita heaven, before his final rebirth (Dhammapāla, 1996). Bhikkhu Anālayo (2010) likewise draws attention to canonical references such as “pubbeva me sambodhā anabhisambuddhassa bodhisattass’ eva sato” (“before my awakening, while still being an unawakened Bodhisatta”), which appear in early discourses to affirm this self-designation.

3. Canonical Literature on Pāramī Practice

The core canonical sources that detail pāramī practice include the Buddhavaṃsa, Cariyāpiṭaka, Jātaka tales, Apadāna, and Mahāpadāna Sutta. Among these, the Buddhavaṃsa is particularly significant for its explicit listing of the ten pāramīs, generosity (dāna), virtue (sīla), renunciation (nekkhamma), wisdom (paññā), energy (virīya), patience (khanti), truthfulness (sacca), resolution (adhiṭṭhāna), loving-kindness (mettā), and equanimity (upekkhā), in a standardised sequence. While earlier literature alludes to these virtues implicitly, the full tenfold classification appears to have been formalised in post-canonical commentarial traditions.

The early Pāli texts predominantly focus on the attainment of nibbāna through the realisation of the Four Noble Truths and the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path. In these contexts, the figure of the Buddha is portrayed as exceptional, his path seen as rare and non-replicable. As Bhikkhu Bodhi (in Dhammapāla, 1996) explains, the Theravāda tradition, being more conservative, prioritizes the arahant ideal based on the historical Buddha's teachings. In contrast, other early schools such as the Sarvāstivāda and Mahāsāṃghika began to entertain multiple valid paths, including that of the Bodhisatta, leading to the formulation of the doctrine of three vehicles (yānas): that of the Śrāvaka, the Paccekabuddha, and the Samyaksambuddha.

4. Interpretation of Pāramī Practice in Jātakas and Commentaries

The Jātaka tales serve as didactic illustrations of the Bodhisatta's cultivation of perfections across countless lifetimes. For example, in the Sasapaṇḍita Jātaka, the Bodhisatta recounts: "When I saw one approaching for alms, I sacrificed myself. There was no one equal to me in giving; this was my perfection of giving." This illustrates the ideal of dāna-pāramī in its ultimate form. Later commentaries, such as the Buddhavaṃsa Aṭṭhakathā, introduce a three-tiered model of perfection: basic (pāramī), higher (upapāramī), and ultimate (paramattha-pāramī). Under this schema, dāna-pāramī is seen as perfected first through the giving of external possessions, then body parts, and ultimately, one's own life (Buddhadatta Thera, 1978).

These gradations reflect a later doctrinal development whereby the pāramī practices were extended beyond the exclusive domain of future Buddhas. The

commentarial literature distinguishes between perfections practised by Śrāvaka-Bodhisattas, Paccekabuddha-Bodhisattas, and Samyaksambuddha-Bodhisattas, though it still asserts that ultimate perfections are unique to those destined for full Buddhahood.

In summary, while early Theravāda canonical texts centre the pāramī exclusively within the Bodhisatta path of a future Buddha, later Theravāda commentaries broadened the scope to include all three aspirant types. The textual development of the pāramī doctrine, especially the codification of the tenfold list and the elaboration of their gradations, illustrates an evolving understanding of spiritual cultivation in the Theravāda tradition. These findings provide critical context for comparative analysis with Mahāyāna perspectives on pāramitā, which will be explored in the subsequent sections of this study.

The second objective of this study focuses on the understanding and application of pāramitā within the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition. The research reveals that the concept of pāramitā in Mahāyāna is intrinsically connected to the ideals of bodhicitta (the mind of awakening) and the path of the bodhisattva. Unlike Theravāda, where the pāramīs are primarily associated with the previous lives of the historical Buddha, Mahāyāna texts present the pāramitās as universal practices for all beings aspiring to achieve full enlightenment for the benefit of others. In Mahāyāna scriptures, numerous bodhisattva disciples receive teachings directly from the Buddha, particularly on the cultivation of perfections as part of the Bodhisattva Path, with prajñāpāramitā (the perfection of wisdom) regarded as the culmination of these practices.

To fully understand the Mahāyāna conception of pāramitā, three key elements must be considered: (1) the definition and function of pāramitā itself, (2) the role of bodhicitta and the bodhisattva ideal, and (3) the centrality of the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras in the Mahāyāna canon.

1. The Concept of Pāramitā in Mahāyāna Buddhism

The term pāramitā is often translated in Mahāyāna traditions as "that which has reached the other shore," signifying transcendence or the attainment of ultimate spiritual realisation. Commonly translated as "perfections," the pāramitās are ethical and spiritual virtues perfected by bodhisattvas on their path to Buddhahood. Geshe Sonam Rinchen (as cited in Shambhala, n.d.) explains that

the six primary pāramitās, generosity (dāna), ethical discipline (śīla), patience (kṣānti), enthusiastic effort (vīrya), meditative concentration (dhyāna), and wisdom (prajñā), are perfected by bodhisattvas motivated by the supreme intention of achieving enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. These perfections, when practised with this altruistic intent, lead to complete awakening.

According to Wright (2009), the pāramitās in Mahāyāna are not merely moral qualities but constitute the foundational disciplines for spiritual training. They are cultivated in conjunction with bodhicitta, without which the practice lacks the transformative power required for full enlightenment.

2. The Bodhisattva Ideal and Bodhicitta

Central to the Mahāyāna framework is the notion of the bodhisattva, one who generates bodhicitta, the altruistic aspiration to attain enlightenment for the sake of others. The generation of bodhicitta marks the spiritual birth of a bodhisattva. As Śāntideva eloquently states in his Bodhicaryāvatāra:

“When the spirit of Awakening has arisen, in an instant a wretch who is bound in the prison of the cycle of existence is called a Child of the Sugata and becomes worthy of reverence in the worlds of gods and humans” (Śāntideva, 1997, p. 23).

Etymologically, bodhicitta derives from the Sanskrit roots bodhi (awakening) and citta (mind or consciousness), commonly translated as “the mind of enlightenment” or “awakening mind” (Wright, 2016). The earliest systematic explanation is attributed to Maitreya in the Ornament of Clear Realisation, where bodhicitta is defined as the aspiration to attain complete enlightenment for the benefit of others (Maitreya, 2002).

The cultivation of bodhicitta is seen not only as a prerequisite for entry into the Mahāyāna path but also as a sustaining force throughout the ten bhūmis (stages) of the bodhisattva path. It serves as the compass guiding the practitioner’s actions, while wisdom (prajñā) functions as the method for actualising those aims. This dynamic relationship is often summarised in Mahāyāna teachings: bodhicitta is like the eyes that direct one’s course, while prajñā is the feet that walk the path (Gyatso & Chodron, 2014).

3. The Prajñāpāramitā Literature

Among the most important scriptural sources in Mahāyāna is the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra collection, also known as the “Perfection of Wisdom” texts. These texts expound on the nature of ultimate reality through the lens of transcendental wisdom, which understands all phenomena as empty (śūnya) of inherent existence. The Prajñāpāramitā corpus, composed over centuries in various lengths (e.g., 8,000, 18,000, 25,000, and 100,000 verses), remains foundational to Mahāyāna soteriology and philosophy.

The practice of the pāramitās in this context, particularly prajñā, is viewed as transcending ordinary dualistic notions of self and other. Sheng (2001) underscores this view by noting that genuine pāramitā practice must be free from self-centered motivation; otherwise, it cannot be considered true perfection. Practicing the perfections solely for personal benefit contradicts the fundamental Mahāyāna principle of working for the liberation of all beings. Furthermore, the Mahāyāna path is structured through ten progressive bhūmis, or stages of spiritual development, which correspond to the maturation of bodhicitta and the deepening realization of śūnyatā (emptiness). As Gyatso and Chodron (2014) describe, the progression through the bhūmis illustrates the integration of compassion and wisdom, ultimately culminating in Buddhahood.

The Mahāyāna tradition presents a comprehensive and systematic approach to the practice of pāramitās, anchored in the cultivation of bodhicitta and the realisation of wisdom. Unlike the more exclusive emphasis on the Bodhisatta ideal in Theravāda, Mahāyāna opens the path to Buddhahood to all sentient beings through the adoption of the bodhisattva vow and the disciplined cultivation of the six or ten perfections. These findings underscore the centrality of bodhicitta as both the foundation and fuel of the Mahāyāna path and confirm that prajñāpāramitā, the perfection of wisdom, represents the pinnacle of spiritual realisation in this tradition.

Objective three shows that the concepts and practices of perfection in Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism can be understood and seen with the following table.

Table 1: The Concepts and Practices of Perfection in Theravada and Mahayana

The Perfection	Theravada	Mahayana
The scriptural Bases	Based on Pali Canonical of The Buddha's Teaching	Based on Sanskrit Canonical of The Buddha's Teaching
The Core Meaning	In Tipitaka and Early Commentaries, it is a Practices of Generosity and So forth accompanied with Compassion. Aimed at Fully Enlighten Buddhahood Later Commentators Have Widened the Scope of Perfection to Other Vehicles.	Any Practices accompanied by Compassion and Skillful Means-Wisdom Aimed at Fully Enlighten Buddhahood.
The Practitioner- Bodhisatta or Bodhisattva	In Tipitaka and early commentaries, Bodhisattas destined to be a Fully Enlighten Buddha. Later commentators attributed the practice of the perfections to sravaka and Pacceka-buddha. Eight conditions are mentioned to fulfil to be a Bodhisatta	Practiced only by Bodhisattvas who are destined to be a fully enlighten Buddha. Conditions like male born and so forth are not mentioned rather everyone can become a Buddha especially in Tantrayāna teachings.
The goal	The Goal in Tipitaka and Early Commentaries is Always a Complete Buddhahood.Later Commentators Have Introduced Three Kinds of Enlightenment with Three Kinds of Practitioners	The Goal of Practicing the Perfection Is Always a Complete Enlightens Buddhahood.
Quantitatively or qualitative	Quantitatively	Qualitatively
The practice of Bodhisattva or bodhisatta vows	Available in the teachings Individuals practicing as a bodhisatta by taking vows are possible. No mass traditions and practice of taking bodhisatta vows	Available in the teachings Individuals do take bodhisattva's vows. Practice of taking bodhisattva's vows, rituals in a mass way.
Practical aspects of bodhisattva and bodhicitta	Practical aspect of bodhisatta ideal can be seen in the past history and in the teachings.	Bodhisatta ideal are always present around the Buddha in sūtras.

The Perfection	Theravada	Mahayana
	Not very popular practices and recognized someone as bodhisatta. One can practice with the method of Brahma vihara teachings	Very popular to recognize highly developed spiritual seekers as bodhisattva. The practices can be one with different methods like Sevenfold cause and effect instructions
The path of perfections	Path as a Bodhisatta going to be a fully enlighten being is not mentioned.	Five Mahayana paths Ten bodhisattva grounds
The scope of compassion	Towards all the sentient beings. Emphasis by the way of meditation and ethical conducts.	Towards all the sentient beings. Emphasis by the way of skillful means and wisdom.
The perfection qualities suggested for householders.	Dāna Sīla Khanti Sacca	Dāna Sīla Khanti

Discussions

In conducting a comparative study of the perfections (pāramī/pāramitā) within the two major contemporary classifications of Buddhism, Theravāda and Mahāyāna, it is important to clarify several critical points that often lead to misunderstanding, especially in modern discourse.

First, a distinction must be made between dāna (generosity) and dāna pāramī (the perfection of generosity). While all acts of dāna are commendable, they do not automatically constitute dāna pāramī. According to the Theravāda commentator Ācariya Dhammapāla, for dāna to qualify as a pāramī, it must be accompanied by compassion, skilful means, and be free from defilements such as craving and conceit (Dhammapāla, 1996). Thus, while all dāna pāramī are dāna, not all dāna are pāramī.

This distinction is crucial, especially as many scholars and practitioners often equate general acts of generosity with the formal pāramī practices, leading to the erroneous belief that pāramī teachings are commonly found in the core Theravāda Nikāyas such as the Saṃyutta Nikāya. In reality, the explicit framework of the pāramīs is primarily preserved within texts of the Khuddaka

Nikāya, particularly the Apadāna, Buddhavaṃsa, Cariyāpiṭaka, and Jātaka collections. These works centre around the bodhisatta ideal and the cultivation of the ten perfections over countless lifetimes.

Moreover, canonical Theravāda texts refer to the bodhisatta exclusively in the context of the Buddha's previous lives (or those of other Buddhas), emphasizing that pāramī is a path unique to those destined for full enlightenment. As such, it remains a subject of scholarly debate whether pāramī can be rightly attributed to the practices of Śrāvakas (disciples). While post-canonical commentaries such as the Buddhavaṃsa Aṭṭhakathā suggest that pāramī may be relevant to Śrāvaka-Bodhisattas and Paccekabuddha-Bodhisattas (Buddhadatta Thera, 1978), this extension is not found in the early canonical sources and is, therefore, best understood as a later doctrinal development rather than an original Theravādin teaching.

The idea of three types of bodhisattas, Mahābodhisatta, Paccekabodhisatta, and Sāvaka-bodhisatta, is also a product of later commentarial literature. If we accept this classification, then the pāramī path is not exclusive to future Buddhas, which raises questions about the earlier canonical portrayal of these practices as unique to the Buddha's path to awakening.

Another significant observation is that, within Theravāda, the teachings on pāramī have not enjoyed widespread emphasis in mainstream practice, primarily because the tradition centres around the arahant ideal rather than the aspiration for sammāsambuddhahood (perfect enlightenment). However, Theravāda does not preclude individuals from aspiring to Buddhahood, even though such aspirations are rare and not systematically encouraged (Dhammapāla, n.d.).

On the Mahāyāna side, the term "Mahāyāna" (Great Vehicle) historically refers to two key features: (1) the Bodhisattva Path as an expression of universal compassion (mettā-bhāvanā) and (2) the philosophical systems of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra, which build on the Theravāda doctrine of anattā (non-self) and develop it further into a broader metaphysical framework (Nāgārjuna, 1975; Chatterjee & Datta, 2021). Importantly, the term Mahāyāna does not signify a geographically bound school or sect but rather an idealised path centred on altruistic enlightenment.

Interestingly, from the Mahāyāna perspective, the pāramī teachings found in Theravāda texts could be interpreted as consistent with Mahāyāna values, particularly when framed within the Bodhisattva ideal. However, it is essential to distinguish between classical Mahāyāna philosophy and the modern sociological label “Mahāyāna Buddhism,” which may differ in emphasis and institutional development.

Throughout this comparative study, it becomes evident that the foundational principles of both traditions share many commonalities, especially in their early formulations. Over time, differences emerged due to the evolution of terminology, philosophical systems, and pedagogical methods. What now appears as divergent may be variations on a shared conceptual core.

Consequently, it would be intellectually and spiritually productive for followers of both traditions to remain open to the insights and practices of the other. Rather than clinging to rigid doctrinal boundaries, there is an opportunity to foster a more integrated and compassionate spiritual culture, one that values both the diversity and unity of the Buddhist path.

Knowledge from Research

In Theravada pāramī, it is very clear that the later commentators approached the practices of the ten pāramītas as pertinent to the three kinds of practitioners, whereas the early literature emphasised that pāramī practice was only attributed to the Bodhisatta who was going to be a Buddha in future. It can also be seen this way: the ten pāramī practices can be practised by all kinds of practitioners, including hearers (śrāvaka). However, if we stick to the approach of canonical literature, it is not considered a pāramī unless it is accompanied by compassion and skilful means (as mentioned by Acharya Dharmapala). So, it is only through Acharya Dharmapala’s commentaries which clarify what makes the practices of Dāna and so forth into pāramīs. The Treatise on the Pāramīs, written by the great Pāli commentator Dharmapala and found in his commentary on the Cariyāpiṭaka and sub-commentary to the Brahmajāla Sutta, explains the ten pāramīs as a practice of the bodhisatta.

In Mahayana schools, Bodhicitta is like the eyes, which show the direction, and Wisdom is like the legs, which lead one to move upwards on the path and ground towards Buddhahood. According to the Mahayana teachings, to be on the

Bodhisattva or Mahayana path, there is no other way other than through generating the bodhi mind or Bodhicitta. However, one will never move ahead on the path towards Buddhahood unless “prajñā” or the “wisdom” is practised. In order to have the wisdom, one needs to work on the rest of the pāramītas. Still, it does not mean that only those six or ten perfections are the only practice of prajnapāramitā. Every practice by a Bodhisattva, including the Four Noble Truths, meditation

Studying the comparison of the two teachings available in the Buddhist world right now, the perfection concept is originally present in the Theravada teaching and more developed in Mahayana teachings. But later Theravada commentaries tried to make it more relevant to the other kind of practitioner and introduced words like Pacceka-bodhisatta and Savaka-bodhisattas.

The original ideas, concepts and practices are actually same in both the teachings; right the present teachings see many differences due to development in the ideas, concepts and practices.

Conclusion

At their core, the concepts of perfection, whether termed pāramī in Theravāda or pāramitā in Mahāyāna, share a common origin and fundamental understanding: they represent the Bodhisattva path aimed at achieving full enlightenment. While rooted in early Theravāda teachings, their meaning and objective align closely with Mahāyāna explanations, highlighting a shared pursuit of ultimate realization. Over time, later Theravāda commentators broadened the scope of this path, extending its relevance beyond just Bodhisattas to encompass the practices of Sāvākayana (disciples) and Pacceka Buddha (solitary realizers). This expansion effectively made the path of perfection more accessible and applicable to a wider range of practitioners within the Theravāda tradition, recognizing diverse forms of spiritual aspiration and attainment.

The divergence between the two traditions becomes evident in their respective textual foundations and subsequent interpretive developments. Theravāda primarily relies on the Pāli Canon, emphasizing the accumulation of virtues through a more quantitative approach to pāramī. This focus often translates into a methodical cultivation of specific qualities. Conversely, Mahāyāna, drawing upon a vast corpus of Sanskrit sutras, developed a more

qualitative and nuanced understanding of pāramitā. This is exemplified by the introduction of concepts like bodhicitta, the altruistic aspiration for enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, and an emphasis on the transformative power of wisdom and skillful means. The Mahāyāna tradition also distinctively features the practice of taking mass Bodhisattva vows, underscoring a communal commitment to universal salvation—a feature not explicitly found in Theravāda.

Despite these differing emphases and practices, the underlying spirit of compassion and the pursuit of enlightenment remain central to both traditions. Both pāramī and pāramitā serve as frameworks for ethical conduct, mental discipline, and the cultivation of profound wisdom. They represent the arduous yet ultimately liberating journey undertaken by the Buddha in countless previous lives, demonstrating that the path to awakening is open to all who cultivate these perfections. The comparative study reveals that while the expressions of the path may vary, the ultimate aspiration to transcend suffering and realize complete liberation is a shared aspiration that bridges these two significant branches of Buddhism.

Suggestions

This topic being a vast to research upon, there are many loopholes to be filled. But the researcher has focused mostly on the Tipiṭaka of Theravāda and Tibetan, compositions by early Indian and Theravāda commentators rather than focusing on the modern diverse compositions.

Regarding this research, the researcher would suggestion the following points in future if any further research need to be done on this topic.

1. The subject of the research being a vast one, the researcher has touched only the original texts of Theravāda teachings and their early commentaries. For the Mahāyāna perfections, it has research mostly on the early Indian commentaries and mostly the Tibetan commentaries. So, it has missed or ignored the original Chinese texts related to the perfections concept and practices and the modern commentaries.

2. Buddhism being evolving a lot since the beginning of the teaching into writing from and shifting the writing into various other languages and to various different regions, the actual ideas sometimes keep on expanding or losing its

meaning might also be possible. So, this research has not touched on all other possible ideas.

3. It is highly possible that one could find some practitioners who aspired to become completely enlightened beings in all the so-called classified three groups of the Buddhist world, but the research has not been able to conduct practical ground research on enquiring and identifying the possible number of practitioners.

4. How the perfectionist practices can be secular and especially for those who do not identify with any kind of schools or religions, can be studied considering a spiritual practice leading to a higher understanding and perceptions.

5. The six pāramītas are distinctively Mahayanist, as they appear in texts like the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras. However, were they originally developed by Mahāyāna, or did they draw on teachings from earlier schools such as the Mahāsaṅghika and Sarvāstivāda? This point remains unclear to modern scholars.

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A Mindfulness-Based Development Process for Volunteer Work in Buddhist Healthcare: A Case Study of Siri wattago Medical Clinic under the Buddhamahametta Foundation

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Abstract

This study investigates the challenges faced by volunteers at the Siri wattago Medical Clinic (Acupuncture), operating under the Buddhamahametta Foundation, and examines the development and impact of a contemplative volunteer training program centred on mindfulness and loving-kindness (mettā) meditation. The research aimed to (1) identify key problems and obstacles in volunteer work, (2) develop a structured process using Buddhist contemplative practices to enhance peaceful well-being, and (3) evaluate the program's effectiveness in improving volunteer experience and group dynamics. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 24 active volunteers, field observations during clinic operations and meditation sessions over four weeks, and post-program reflective feedback. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and thematic content analysis.

Findings revealed three main categories of challenges: (1) personal readiness and emotional well-being, including stress, fatigue, and lack of self-confidence; (2) interpersonal coordination and communication issues, such as misunderstandings, emotional reactivity, and weak collaborative engagement; and (3) insufficient operational training, with unclear role definitions and limited feedback systems. To address these, a three-phase volunteer development model was implemented: (1) awareness-building through mindfulness and loving-kindness workshops, (2) integration of contemplative practices into weekly volunteer routines, including guided meditation and group reflection, and (3) the establishment of communication guidelines rooted in compassion and respect.

Post-intervention assessments indicated significant improvements in emotional regulation, interpersonal patience, and a strengthened sense of purpose among volunteers. Participants reported enhanced inner calm, empathy, and teamwork. The overall group dynamic shifted toward greater harmony and mutual support. This study concludes that the integration of Buddhist

contemplative practices into volunteer development effectively fosters individual well-being and promotes a spiritually grounded, compassionate environment for service delivery.

Keywords: Mindfulness in Volunteer Work; Loving-Kindness Meditation Practice; Volunteer Team Peaceful Well-Being; Buddhist-Based Service Model; Acupuncture Clinic Volunteering

Introduction

In recent years, volunteerism has become an indispensable component of Thailand's healthcare system, bolstering community-based services and helping to alleviate persistent resource constraints. The Ministry of Public Health (2022) has actively promoted volunteer engagement, yet evidence indicates that many volunteers struggle with emotional exhaustion, ambiguous role expectations, and insufficient support structures, factors that undermine their motivation and contribute to high turnover. Cordery, Smith & Proctor-Thomson (2015), Handy and Srinivasan (2004) and Haski-Leventhal (2009) emphasise the necessity of structured training programs, resilience-building strategies, and peer-support mechanisms to sustain volunteer commitment over time.

In Buddhist-informed service settings, such as acupuncture clinics operated by faith-based foundations, volunteers are additionally called upon to embody spiritual qualities, calmness, compassion, and inner mindfulness, that can heighten the emotional demands of their work. Although mindfulness-based interventions (Zou et al., 2016; Baer, 2003; Shapiro et al., 2006) and loving-kindness meditation (Gu et al., 2022; Hofmann, Grossman, & Hinton, 2011) have demonstrated benefits for healthcare professionals' well-being, few studies have systematically woven these practices into volunteer development curricula. This gap is particularly evident in holistic health environments where spiritual cultivation is integral to both personal growth and patient care.

The Siri Wattago Medical Clinic, under the Buddhamahametta Foundation in Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, offers a compelling case study at the intersection of Buddhist values and acupuncture-based healing. Since opening in 2022, the clinic has served over 3,500 patients with the support of more than 700 volunteers. Despite their altruistic intentions, volunteers routinely encounter

challenges in team communication, stress management, and role clarity—issues observed firsthand by the researcher during program implementation and meditation workshops.

This study employs a qualitative case-study approach (2023–2024) to: (1) investigate the problems and challenges faced by Siri wattago volunteers, (2) design a volunteer development process grounded in mindfulness and loving-kindness meditation, and (3) evaluate its impact on volunteers' peaceful well-being. By integrating Buddhist contemplative practices into a structured training model, this research aims to offer a culturally grounded framework for cultivating inner transformation alongside effective service delivery, thereby advancing both academic understanding and practical guidance for faith-based healthcare volunteerism.

Research Objectives

1. To study the problems and challenges faced by volunteers working at the Buddhamahametta Foundation.
2. To design a volunteer development process using mindfulness and loving-kindness meditation to promote peaceful well-being
3. To evaluate the outcomes and effects of mindfulness and loving-kindness meditation to enhance the peaceful well-being of volunteers at acupuncture clinic.

Literature Review

Volunteer engagement in healthcare settings often grapples with stress, role ambiguity, and teamwork challenges; few studies have explored how Buddhist contemplative practices can address these issues within faith-based service contexts. This literature review examines previous research on mindfulness and loving-kindness (*mettā*) meditation, volunteer well-being, and Thai cultural measures of mental health to inform the design and evaluation of a Buddhist-informed volunteer development program.

Healthcare volunteers frequently experience high stress, unclear responsibilities, and interpersonal friction that undermine both service quality and personal well-being. In a randomised trial, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

(MBSR) reduced stress and improved emotional regulation among healthcare providers, highlighting unmanaged stress as a key contributor to burnout (Shapiro et al., 2006). In Thailand, culturally adapted measures show that role ambiguity and uneven workload distribution exacerbate volunteers' emotional fatigue (Pimthong et al., 2022). These findings underscore the importance of investigating stressors specific to Buddhist service environments, where clinical tasks and spiritual aspirations intersect.

Embedding contemplative practices into volunteer training can simultaneously develop technical skills and inner resilience. Mindfulness practice—nonjudgmental present-moment awareness—supports emotional clarity and reduces reactivity (Shapiro et al., 2006). Loving-kindness meditation fosters empathy and social cohesion, which are critical for effective teamwork (Gu et al., 2022; Hofmann, Grossman & Hinton, 2011; Fredrickson et al., 2008). Jiwattanasuk et al. (2024) demonstrated that combining these practices in a multicultural program enhanced interpersonal harmony and mental calm. Foundational Buddhist teachings on ethical conduct (*sīla*) and wisdom (*paññā*) provide a theoretical framework for integrating these practices into a structured, three-phase volunteer development model (Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2010).

Post-intervention assessments of mindfulness and loving-kindness programs consistently report improvements in resilience, empathy, and team cohesion (Gu et al., 2022; Hofmann, Grossman & Hinton, 2011; Fredrickson et al., 2008). In Thai populations, higher mindfulness trait scores correlate with enhanced emotional balance and life satisfaction (Pimthong et al., 2022). Yet, prior research has rarely evaluated these outcomes within a unified, Buddhist-informed volunteer program. Systematic measurement of stress reduction, empathy gains, and shifts in group dynamics before and after a combined mindfulness–*mettā* intervention will address this gap.

In conclusion, literature confirms that mindfulness and loving-kindness meditation bolster emotional resilience, empathy, and teamwork among healthcare professionals and meditation practitioners. However, a replicable, Buddhist-informed volunteer development model integrating these practices has not been rigorously examined. This review provides the theoretical and empirical foundation for a three-phase training process, awareness, integration, and communication aimed at fostering “peaceful well-being” among volunteers at a

Buddhist acupuncture clinic. By systematically evaluating process outcomes, the present study will contribute novel insights into spiritually grounded volunteer development in faith-based healthcare settings.

Conceptual Framework

This research is a case study focused on developing and evaluating a mindfulness-based process for volunteer work in a Buddhist healthcare setting. The conceptual framework was developed through the integration of Buddhist contemplative principles—particularly mindfulness (*sati*) and loving-kindness (*mettā*) meditation—with volunteer development theories that emphasize emotional resilience, ethical conduct, and collaborative functioning.

The framework begins by identifying three major challenges faced by volunteers: emotional fatigue and stress, interpersonal miscommunication and reactivity, and the absence of structured training or feedback systems. In response, a volunteer development process was created, incorporating Buddhist-based contemplative practices into weekly service routines. This process includes mindfulness and loving-kindness meditation, reflective group dialogue, and principles of compassionate communication. These practices are not merely techniques, but part of an ethical-spiritual cultivation process aligned with the values of the Buddhamahametta Foundation.

The expected outcomes of the model include enhanced emotional regulation, improved interpersonal harmony, and the development of peaceful well-being—defined here as a combination of inner calm, ethical motivation, and relational balance. These outcomes were evaluated both qualitatively and quantitatively in line with the study's objectives. The final conceptual framework thus positions Buddhist inner development practices as central tools for transforming volunteer challenges into growth and service potential.

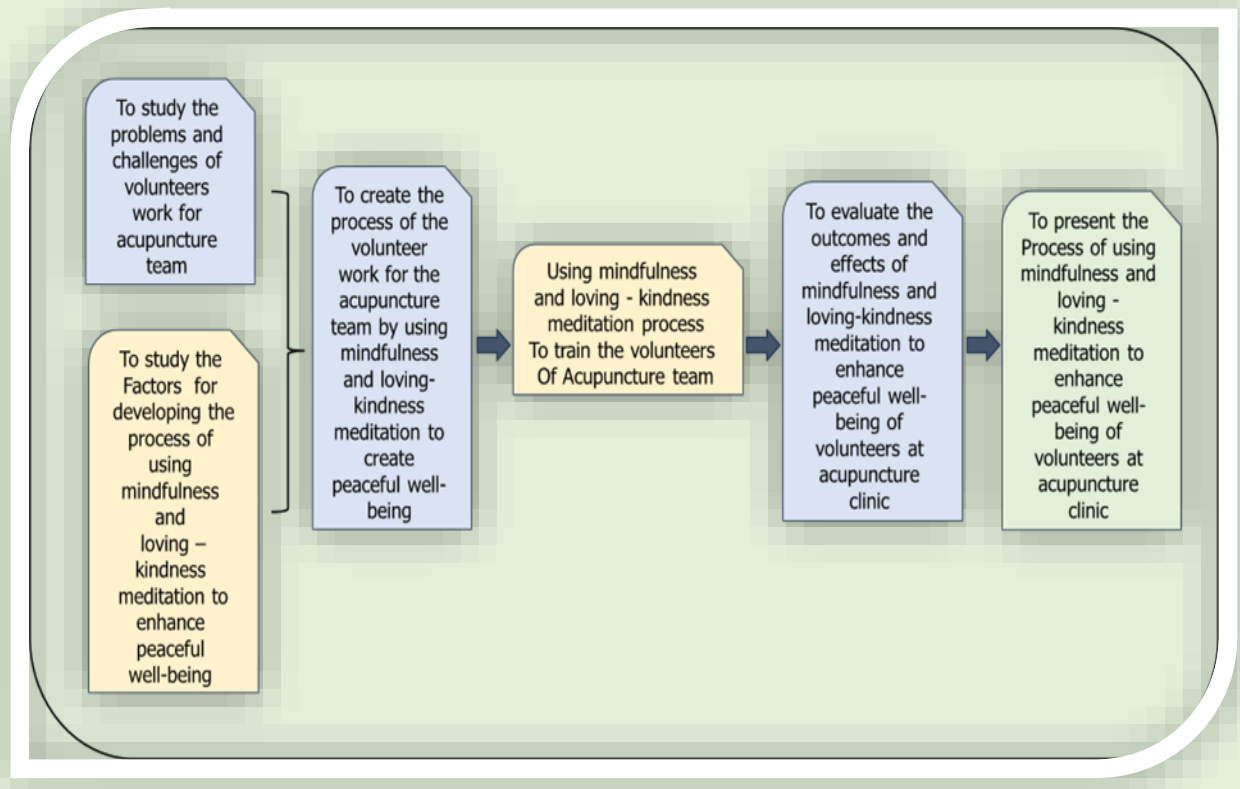


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This research is qualitative research using a case study approach. The research area is Siri Wattago Medical Clinic (Acupuncture), under the Buddhamahametta Foundation, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province. The research process is divided into 3 steps as follows:

Step 1: Study of Volunteer Challenges

The sample group consisted of 24 active volunteers who had been engaged at the clinic for at least six months. The tools used were in-depth interview guidelines and field observation checklists. The interview guidelines were validated by three experts in Buddhist studies, volunteerism, and qualitative research. Data collection included face-to-face interviews and observations during weekly volunteer sessions. The data were analyzed using content analysis to identify major themes and patterns related to personal readiness, communication issues, and operational barriers.

Step 2: Development of the Volunteer Work Process

The sample group consisted of 9 focus group members, including doctors, healthcare professionals, a Buddhist scholar, and meditation instructors. The tools used were program development guidelines, focus group discussion protocols, and feedback forms. Tool quality was ensured through triangulation and expert review for alignment with Buddhist contemplative principles and healthcare context. Data collection consisted of focus group sessions, collaborative co-design workshops, and structured feedback cycles. Content analysis was applied to synthesize insights into a structured volunteer development process based on mindfulness and loving-kindness meditation.

Step 3: Evaluation of Outcomes and Effects

The sample group included the same 24 volunteers from Step 1, who participated in the full 4-week program. The tools used were structured reflection forms, post-intervention interviews, and observation logs. Tool validity was ensured through pilot testing and expert consultation. Data collection focused on changes in emotional resilience, interpersonal harmony, and inner well-being. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) and thematic content analysis to assess the impact of the program on peaceful well-being.

Research Results

Objective 1. The results showed that volunteers encountered a wide range of challenges that could be categorised into three major areas: (1) personal readiness and inner well-being, (2) team coordination and communication, and (3) training and operational support.

1) Personal Readiness and Inner Well-Being:

Volunteers reported emotional fatigue, fear of underperformance, and difficulty maintaining mindfulness while working. Some also cited physical fatigue and family responsibilities as factors that affected their readiness to serve. These internal challenges led to feelings of self-doubt and emotional instability, especially during high-pressure service periods.

2) Team Coordination and Communication:

Miscommunication, overlapping roles, and lack of alignment among volunteers were common. Inconsistent attendance and limited team debriefing opportunities further complicated workflow and reduced the sense of unity. Several participants emphasized the need for more open communication channels and clearer role assignments to maintain harmony within the team.

3) Training and Operational Support:

Many volunteers highlighted the absence of systematic onboarding, visual guidelines, or skill rotation practices. Some reported uncertainty in emergency handling and unfamiliar situations. Limited availability of acupuncture doctors, equipment, and workspace during peak hours also led to increased stress. Volunteers expressed the need for better training modules and structured support systems.

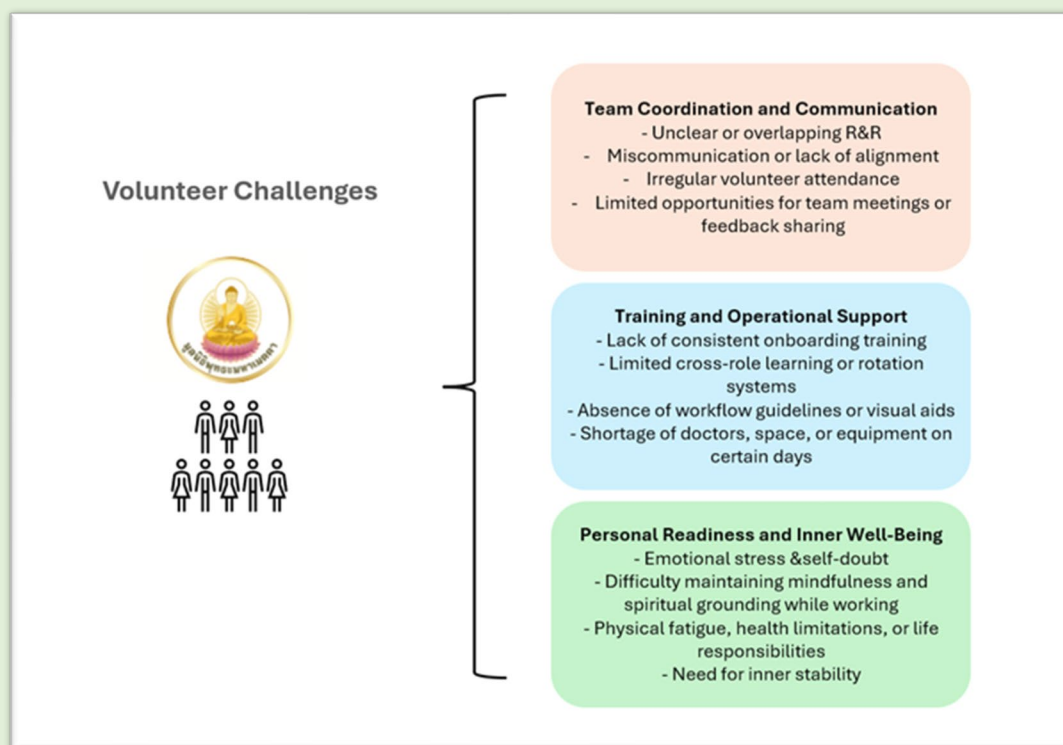


Figure 2: Challenges faced by Volunteers

Objective 2. The results showed that, in response to the identified challenges, the researcher developed a structured one-day meditation-based

training course aimed at cultivating inner transformation alongside practical volunteer skills.

The program included:

- Mindful Sitting and Walking Meditation
- Loving-Kindness (Mettā) Practice
- Dhamma Talk and Group Sharing
- Compassionate Communication Exercises
- Role-Based Volunteer Preparation
- Emergency Handling Simulations

This structure was refined through feedback from a focus group of nine experts, including doctors, healthcare professionals, meditation instructors, and a Buddhist scholar. The group emphasized three key elements:

- Beginning the day with meditation to ground emotional states
- Using the course as both orientation and ongoing development
- Having a skilled facilitator to hold space for reflection and feedback

Objective 3. The results showed significant positive changes in volunteers' peaceful well-being, based on both quantitative and qualitative assessments.

Quantitative Findings (from the 25-item Peaceful Well-Being Questionnaire):

- Psychological well-being increased by 44% (greater emotional stability and reduced stress)
- Intellectual well-being increased by 38% (enhanced clarity, attention, and insight)
- Behavioral well-being rose by 31% (more mindful, intentional conduct)
- Physical well-being improved by 28% (better energy, posture, and calm)

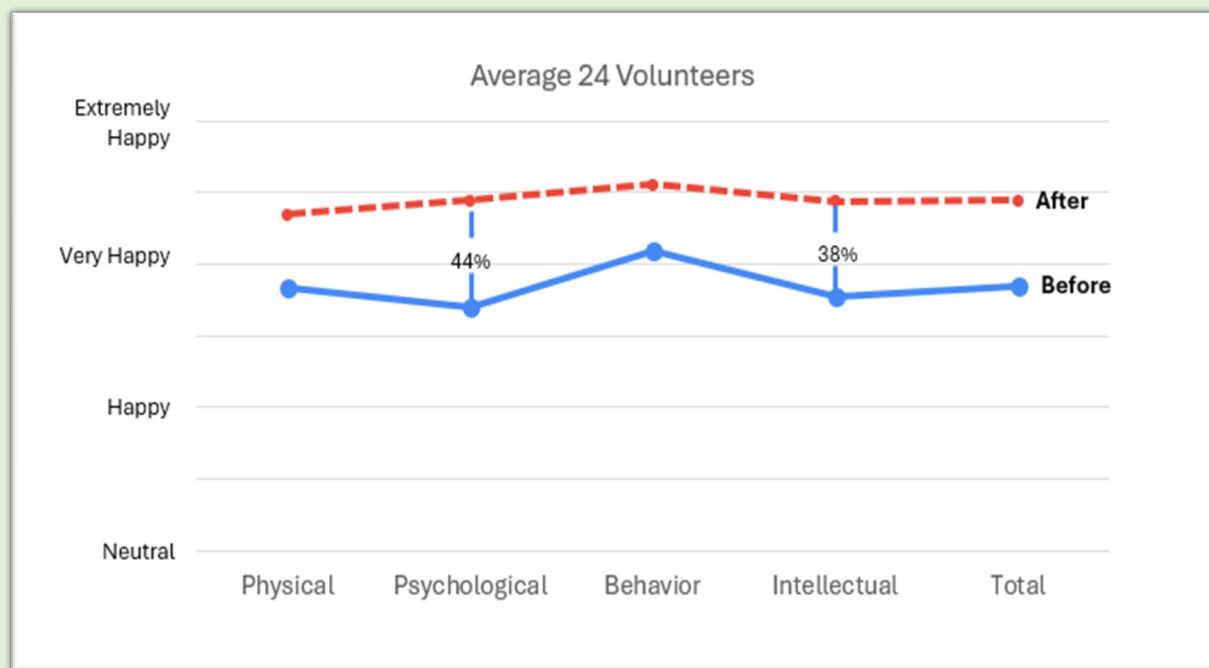


Figure 3: Average 24 Volunteers Results

These quantitative results reflect positive transformation in areas that were identified as key challenges in Objective 1. Where volunteers previously reported emotional fatigue, low self-confidence, and reactive communication, the training led to a 44% increase in psychological well-being and a 31% improvement in behavioural regulation. Intellectual well-being also increased by 38%, addressing earlier concerns around confusion, lack of clarity, and emotional overwhelm during service tasks. Furthermore, the improvement in physical well-being (28%) aligns with feedback from volunteers regarding service-related exhaustion. These results confirm that the mindfulness and loving-kindness-based training process effectively transformed the key stressors identified at the beginning of the study into measurable dimensions of peaceful well-being.

Refer to Figure 3: Average Scores of 24 Volunteers for the pre- and post-workshop score comparison.

Qualitative Findings (from post-workshop interviews): Five themes emerged:

1. Emotional calm and inner peace
2. Greater self-awareness and regulation
3. More empathetic communication and teamwork

4. Increased confidence and joy in service
5. Desire for continued meditation practice

Participants described feeling “lighter,” more “centered,” and “emotionally grounded.” Many expressed that meditation helped them feel spiritually connected and better equipped to serve compassionately. Satisfaction ratings averaged between 4.5–5 out of 5, with many requesting continued sessions.

Discussions

The discussion of this study’s findings is organised by the three research objectives and situates the results within contemporary volunteerism and meditation literature.

Objective 1: Challenges Faced by Volunteers

Volunteers at Siriwattago Medical Clinic reported significant obstacles in personal readiness, emotional regulation, team communication, and lack of structured training. These barriers mirror Wilson’s (2000) assertion that emotional burden and role ambiguity undermine volunteer effectiveness. Similarly, Handy and Srinivasan (2004) found that unclear responsibilities and insufficient preparation lead to frustration and disengagement, while Haski-Leventhal (2009) and Huang (2019) characterised these symptoms as “compassion fatigue” among caregiving volunteers. In the Thai context, the Ministry of Public Health (2022) documented high dropout rates among volunteers lacking institutional support, demonstrating that spiritual motivation alone cannot sustain long-term engagement.

Objective 2: Designing a Contemplative Development Process

The three-phase model, comprising mindfulness and loving-kindness workshops, integrated practice, and compassionate communication guidelines, proved effective in addressing the challenges identified. This approach aligns with Kabat-Zinn’s (2003) framework, which positions mindfulness as a mechanism for stress regulation and enhanced present-moment awareness, and with Salzberg’s (2011) findings on loving-kindness meditation’s role in fostering empathy and reducing reactivity. By rooting the curriculum in the Buddhist schema of *sīla* (ethics), *samādhi* (concentration), and *paññā* (wisdom), the program applies ancient contemplative principles to modern volunteer training.

Consistent with Shapiro et al. (2006) and Seppälä, Rossomando, and Doty (2014), the intervention improved volunteers' emotional resilience and diminished interpersonal conflict within caregiving teams.

Objective 3: Evaluating Program Outcomes

Post-intervention assessments revealed significant gains in peaceful well-being, including increased calmness, emotional balance, and collaborative equipoise. These outcomes reflect Buddhist conceptions of well-being as mental clarity and equanimity (Ricard, 2006; Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2010). Quantitatively, higher mindfulness trait scores on the Thai Mental Well-Being Scale correlated with greater resilience and life satisfaction (Pimthong et al., 2022). Parallel findings in multicultural cohorts (Jiwattanasuk et al., 2024) and clinical reviews of loving-kindness training (Gu et al., 2022; Hofmann, Grossman, & Hinton, 2011) further corroborate that meditation-based models cultivate compassionate, sustainable volunteer teams in faith-based healthcare settings.

Volunteers at Siri Wattago Medical Clinic experienced stress, role ambiguity, and communication gaps that mirror broader findings on burnout and “compassion fatigue” in healthcare settings. A three-phase training model, combining mindfulness workshops, loving-kindness practices, and compassionate communication guidelines, successfully enhanced emotional resilience, empathy, and team cohesion. Post-program evaluations showed increased calmness, balanced affect, and more harmonious collaboration. These results suggest that integrating Buddhist contemplative principles into volunteer development can foster “peaceful well-being” and sustainable engagement in faith-based healthcare environments.

Knowledge from Research

This research produced new knowledge in the field of volunteer development by integrating Buddhist contemplative practices, specifically mindfulness and loving-kindness meditation, into a structured training process. The outcomes led to a synthesised model of peaceful well-being for volunteers, grounded in spiritual transformation, emotional resilience, and compassionate service. The knowledge gained from this study aligns with its three core objectives and contributes both theoretical insight and practical innovation to Buddhist-informed healthcare volunteerism.

1. Identifying Volunteer Challenges

The study revealed three major categories of challenge faced by acupuncture clinic volunteers:

- Personal readiness and inner well-being: including stress, fatigue, and emotional instability.
- Team coordination and communication: involving unclear roles, interpersonal conflict, and inconsistent teamwork.
- Training and operational support: such as the lack of orientation systems, feedback, and practical guidance.

These challenges are not only logistical but also emotional and spiritual—requiring a deeper approach that addresses both inner states and team dynamics.

2. Designing a Buddhist-Based Development Process

In response, the study created a development process based on Buddhist contemplative principles, with a specific focus on mindfulness (*sati*) and loving-kindness (*mettā*) meditation. The process includes:

- Structured workshops combining meditation with reflective practice.
- Communication exercises grounded in compassionate speech.
- Practical training sessions on service roles and team flow.

This process was co-developed with a focus group of experts in meditation, healthcare, and Buddhist studies. It offers a context-specific model that harmonizes inner cultivation with service competency.

3. Outcomes: Peaceful Well-Being as an Applied Model

The final outcome is a model of peaceful well-being developed from the synthesis of volunteer feedback, expert insight, and contemplative practice. It includes:

- Inner calm and self-regulation as foundations for service
- Empathetic team communication
- Sustained volunteer motivation and satisfaction

This new knowledge extends the scope of volunteer development beyond task efficiency to include spiritual nourishment and ethical engagement.



Figure.4: Holistic Framework for Volunteer Well-Being in Buddhist Healthcare Settings

The volunteer development model presented in Figure 4 can be transferred and applied across academic, healthcare, and community settings. In academic contexts, the model can support curriculum development in fields such as volunteer management, Buddhist studies, or contemplative education. It also offers a case study for integrating spiritual practice into service learning. In healthcare and nonprofit organisations, the model provides a practical structure for training volunteers, particularly in emotionally demanding roles, by fostering emotional resilience and compassionate teamwork through mindfulness and loving-kindness meditation. Community and temple-based groups may also adopt the model to strengthen inner development and harmony among lay volunteers. Additionally, the findings may contribute to public health initiatives by offering a culturally grounded framework for enhancing mental well-being among volunteer teams. With adaptation and proper support, this model can be scaled or customised for wider use in Thailand’s healthcare volunteer programs or similar contexts.

Conclusion

This research investigated the challenges faced by volunteers at the Siri Wattago Medical Clinic and developed a contemplative training process to enhance peaceful well-being through mindfulness and loving-kindness meditation. The study identified three core areas of difficulty—personal readiness, team coordination, and lack of structured support, which significantly impacted volunteer motivation and emotional resilience. In response, a context-specific development model was created, combining Buddhist contemplative practices with practical training.

The core knowledge resulting from this research is a Buddhist-informed framework for volunteer development that bridges inner transformation with outer service. By embedding mindfulness and loving-kindness into volunteer routines, the model promotes emotional calm, interpersonal harmony, and sustainable motivation. This approach moves beyond traditional volunteer management by integrating spiritual cultivation as a foundation for compassionate care. The findings contribute to both theory and practice, offering a replicable model that can be applied in healthcare, education, and community service settings, particularly within spiritually grounded environments.

The primary contribution of this research is a Buddhist-informed framework that bridges inner transformation with practical service delivery, an approach that transcends conventional volunteer management by positioning spiritual cultivation at the heart of compassionate care. While this model was developed in a Thai acupuncture clinic, its principles are readily adaptable to other healthcare, educational, and community settings that value holistic well-being. Future studies might explore long-term impacts on volunteer retention and patient satisfaction, as well as quantitative measures of stress biomarkers. Ultimately, by harmonising contemplative practice with volunteer development, faith-based organisations can nurture more resilient, empathetic, and spiritually grounded teams.

Suggestions

This research has found that inner transformation through mindfulness and loving-kindness meditation can significantly enhance the well-being, emotional resilience, and team harmony of healthcare volunteers. The important insight is that spiritual practices, when applied systematically, can be used not only for personal development but also for improving volunteer service environments. This model can be applied to other community health clinics, Buddhist organisations, and volunteer-based programs seeking to foster compassionate service and reduce emotional burnout. Greater importance should be given to integrating contemplative methods into volunteer training programs, especially in emotionally demanding or spiritually oriented contexts.

For future research, studies should explore the long-term effects of meditation-based volunteer programs on volunteer retention, quality of patient care, and community engagement. It would also be valuable to compare outcomes across different religious or cultural settings to assess the model's adaptability and effectiveness in diverse environments.

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Promotion of Peaceful Co-existence Between Buddhists and Non-Buddhists in Rakhine State of Myanmar

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Abstract

This research aims to explore and promote peaceful co-existence between Buddhists and non-Buddhists in Rakhine State, Myanmar. The objectives are threefold: (1) to examine the underlying causes, consequences, and current challenges of the ongoing conflict; (2) to analyze relevant peacebuilding theories alongside Theravāda Buddhist doctrines that contribute to conflict resolution; and (3) to propose a practical framework for promoting sustainable peace in the region based on Buddhist peaceful means. This qualitative study draws upon a range of sources including the Tipiṭaka, commentaries, sub-commentaries, academic research, historical records, newspapers, and peace theory literature in both English and Pāli.

The findings indicate that the root causes of conflict in Rakhine include hatred, generational vengeance, poverty, political manipulation, and the influence of external rhetoric (paratoghosa), often reinforced by unwise attention (ayonisomanasikāra). In contrast, Theravāda Buddhist principles such as deep listening, wise attention (yonisomanasikāra), the Four Bases of Sympathy (saṅgahavatthu), and the Six Principles of Cordiality (sārāṇīyadhamma) are vital for fostering mutual respect, understanding, and reconciliation. Findings reveal that unwise attention and external provocative speech (paratoghosa) fuel negative stereotypes and hinder empathetic engagement. Conversely, Buddhist practices of deep listening, right mindfulness, and wise attention cultivate the cognitive and emotional conditions necessary for de-escalation and reconciliation. The Four Bases of Sympathy, generosity, kind speech, beneficial conduct, and impartiality emerged as particularly potent for rebuilding trust and social cohesion. When these principles are combined with modern peacebuilding strategies (e.g., dialogue facilitation, community peace committees, restorative justice), they form a robust, context-sensitive approach to reconciliation.

The study culminates in a proposed three-phase model, awareness and empathy building, collaborative problem solving, and institutionalisation of peace practices, designed to guide policymakers, religious leaders, and civil society actors in Rakhine State. By situating Buddhist ethical teachings within a broader peacebuilding framework, this research offers a holistic pathway toward lasting harmony and social resilience in one of Myanmar's most conflict-affected regions.

Keywords: Peaceful Co-existence; Buddhists - Non-Buddhists relations; Conflict resolution; Rakhine State, Myanmar

Introduction

In Myanmar's Rakhine State, deep-seated tensions between Buddhist and non-Buddhist communities have periodically erupted into large-scale violence. Historical animosities trace back to the communal clashes of 1942, when Rakhine Buddhists and Muslim residents engaged in reciprocal attacks that left an estimated 10,000 dead and displaced over 100,000 people (Charney, 2009; Leider, 2018). These traumatic events were compounded by colonial-era policies that institutionalized religious difference and sown distrust (Leider, 2018; Smith, 2019). Successive generations have inherited narratives of suffering and revenge, perpetuating cycles of mistrust and hostility across both majority and minority communities.

A notable resurgence of violence occurred on 28 May 2012, when clashes between Rakhine Buddhists and non-Buddhist groups precipitated two waves of unrest over four months. According to the Myanmar government's Investigation Committee (2016), these clashes resulted in 8,614 homes burned, 192 fatalities, and over 265 injuries. The violence spread rapidly across more than a dozen townships in Rakhine State and exacerbated communal tensions nationwide, provoking refugee outflows to Bangladesh and straining Myanmar's relations with neighbouring countries (UNOCHA, 2012; Human Rights Watch, 2013).

Such episodes of intercommunal violence not only cause immediate loss of life and property but also undermine long-term development, entrench poverty, and foster radicalisation (Kramer, 2017; Peel & O'Connor, 2020). Traditional security-focused responses, such as increased militarisation and emergency restrictions, have proven inadequate to address the social and psychological drivers of conflict (International Crisis Group, 2013; Callahan, 2014). Instead, scholars and practitioners increasingly call for holistic approaches that centre on reconciliation, community empowerment, and the transformation of underlying grievances (Callahan, 2014; Farrelly, 2016).

This research argues that the promotion of peaceful co-existence between Buddhists and non-Buddhists offers the most viable pathway out of cycles of violence, terrorism, and communal fragmentation. Drawing on insights from modern peacebuilding theory and Theravāda Buddhist doctrines, particularly principles of deep listening, compassion, and right attention, this study proposes a culturally resonant framework for fostering justice, shared prosperity, and durable interfaith harmony in Rakhine State. By emphasising dialogue, social cohesion, and the construction of inclusive institutions, the model seeks to transform historical grievances into opportunities for collaborative peacebuilding and collective resilience.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the existing problems, causes, impacts of conflicts and people's needs assessment of conflict resolution in Rakhine State, Myanmar.
2. To study the ways of making Peace and conflict resolution according to Peace theories and Theravada Buddhism doctrines.
3. To develop and present the process of promoting Peaceful co-existence among people in Rakhine State of Myanmar based on Buddhist Peaceful means.

Literature Review

The protracted conflict in Myanmar's Rakhine State stems from historical grievances, socioeconomic exclusion, and cycles of intercommunal mistrust (Investigation Committee, 2016). Generational narratives of violence and poverty have been exacerbated by political manipulation and rumour-based hatred (Pannavaravuddhi, 2014). In response, both modern peacebuilding scholarship and Theravāda Buddhist doctrines offer complementary insights. Peace theory emphasizes dialogue, trust-building, and locally owned institutions (Diehl et al., 2006), while Buddhist principles, such as deep listening, wise attention (*yonisomanasikāra*), and the Four Bases of Sympathy, provide practical pathways for reconciliation (Mahatthanadull & Mahatthanadull, 2016; Ikeda & Tehranian, 2003). This literature review synthesises these perspectives to support three objectives:

Conflict in Rakhine State is rooted in intergenerational grievances, poverty, political manipulation, and cycles of hatred (Investigation Committee, 2016). The 2012 violence, for example, was fueled by rumour-mongering and structural inequalities, resulting in thousands of homes destroyed and hundreds of lives lost (Investigation Committee, 2016). Scholars note that socioeconomic exclusion and lack of education create fertile ground for radicalisation and communal fragmentation (Pannavaravuddhi, 2014). Ven. Neminda (2019) argues that the absence of loving-kindness (*mettā*) exacerbates mutual distrust, highlighting the community's unmet psychosocial needs for empathy and dialogue.

Modern peacebuilding scholarship emphasises dialogue, trust-building, and local ownership (Diehl, Druckman, & Wall, 2006). Diehl et al. (2006) classify peacekeeping functions from cease-fire monitoring to nation-building,

underscoring the importance of inclusive institutions. Complementing this, Theravāda teachings prescribe deep listening and wise attention (*yonisomanasikāra*) to counteract unwise attention (*ayonisomanasikāra*) and external provocations (Ikeda & Tehranian, 2003). The Four Bases of Sympathy (*saṅgahavatthu*), generosity, kind speech, beneficial conduct, and impartiality, provide practical steps for reconciliation (Mahatthanadull & Mahatthanadull, 2016). Ashin Sobitacara (1985) illustrates how the Buddha's application of tolerance and loving-kindness offers timeless techniques for de-escalation and social harmony.

Building on theoretical and doctrinal insights, researchers propose phased approaches to peacebuilding. Nyo Thaung (1975) compares core truths in Buddhism and Islam to foster mutual respect and reduce xenophobia. Callahan (2014) and Farrelly (2016) argue that interfaith dialogue must be paired with socioeconomic initiatives to sustain harmony. Mahatthanadull and Mahatthanadull (2016) outline a four-dimensional well-being model, physical, moral, mental, and intellectual, that can be adapted to community programming in Rakhine. Integrating these elements yields a culturally resonant framework: (a) empathy and deep listening workshops; (b) joint service projects underpinned by *saṅgahavatthu*; and (c) institutionalisation of peace practices through local monasteries and civil-society networks.

The literature converges on the necessity of integrating structural peacebuilding measures with Buddhist ethical practices. Socioeconomic drivers—such as poverty and exclusion—must be addressed alongside psychosocial needs for empathy and dialogue (Callahan, 2014; Farrelly, 2016). Concurrently, Theravāda teachings on loving-kindness (*mettā*), deep listening, and wise attention directly counteract the unwise attention and external provocations that perpetuate conflict (Ikeda & Tehranian, 2003). The Four Bases of Sympathy (*saṅgahavatthu*) and related doctrines offer concrete steps to rebuild trust and promote social cohesion (Mahatthanadull & Mahatthanadull, 2016). Together, these insights lay the groundwork for a three-phase, Buddhist-informed framework, awareness and empathy building, collaborative problem solving, and institutionalisation that can guide sustainable, community-driven peace in Rakhine State.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the significant research process is as follows:

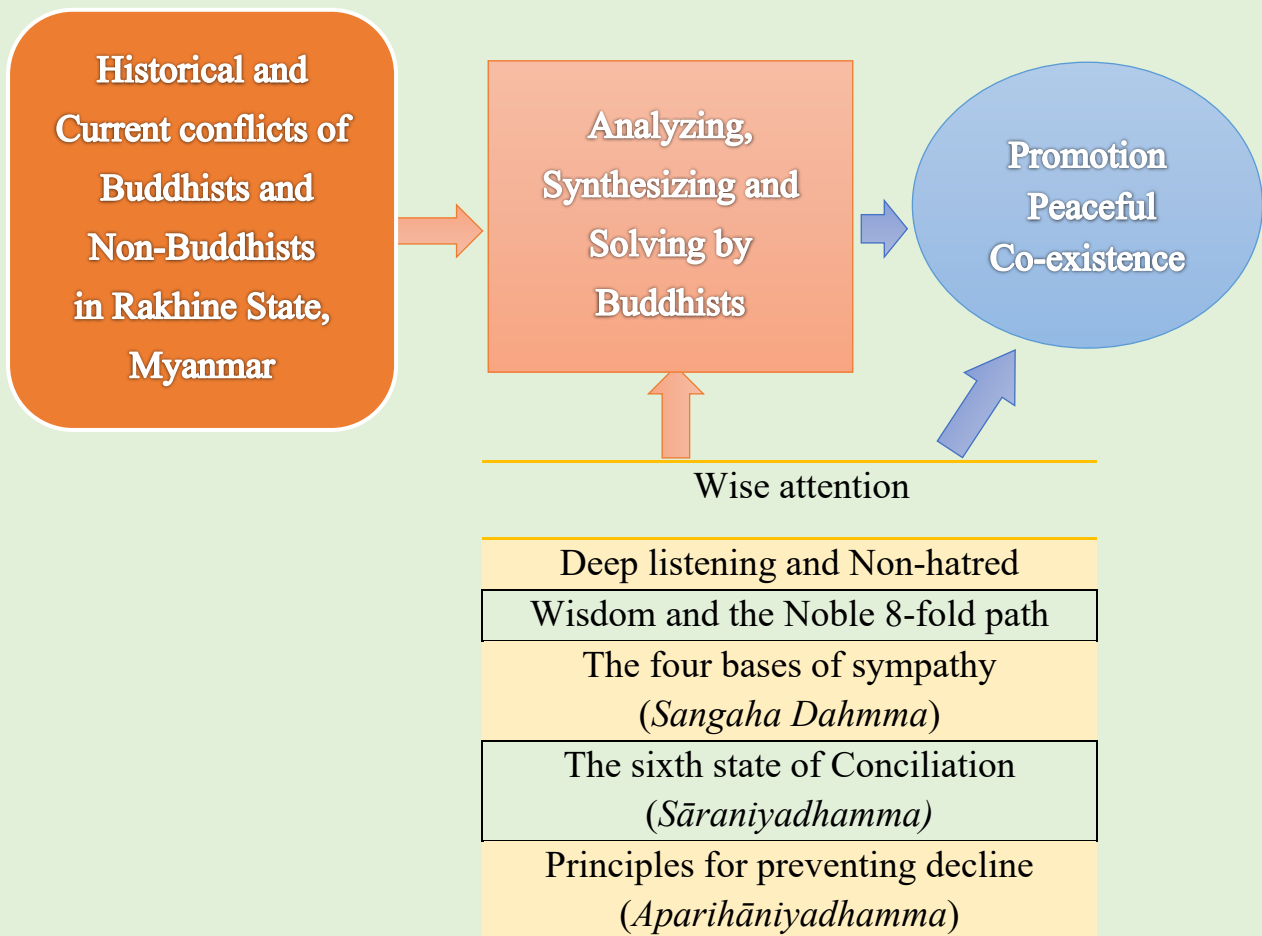


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Research Methodology

This research is qualitative. The research area is the integration of Buddhist conflict resolution, promoting peace and case study in Rakhine State, 2012-2017. The population that will constitute a significant part in this research consists of two Buddhist religious leaders, two lay devotees, and followers of non-Buddhists, one Islamic and one Christian religious leader, who will be interviewed to obtain authentic information regarding previous conflict and peaceful co-existence in Rakhine State.

The research methodology can be divided into four stages as follows:

1. Collecting data from primary sources, the Buddhist scriptures, Pali Canon, Commentaries, historical background, and current conflict in Rakhine

State of Myanmar (2012-2017), the books written and composed by well-known Buddhist and Western scholars.,

2. Synthesis and Interpretation of Collected Data.

First, the researcher will synthesise and interpret the concept and causes of conflict in Buddhism, also in Rakhine, between Rakhine Buddhists and non-Buddhists. According to the Mahāsamaya Sutta, the Buddha settled the water problems of two countries and found out cause of the problems. Among Buddhists and non-Buddhists in Rakhine State, studying, learning and interviewing on the historical background of their conflicts could pave the way for peaceful co-existence.

3. Applying from collected Data

Having known the way to build peace and harmony, practising the peace technique could build the real and long-term team peace in Rakhine State. Deep listening, on the other hand, especially on previous conflicts, rumours and hate speech in both communities, with the right view, thought, and it applies well to promote peaceful coexistence in Rakhine State. Practising the non-hatred technique, Saṅgha Dhamma, Sāraṇiya Dhamma and Aparihāniya Dhamma are very good applications for both Rakhine Buddhists and non-Buddhists in Rakhine State.

4. Discussion and Suggestion

Research Results

Objective 1: The findings confirm that historical episodes of mass violence continue to shape present-day conflict dynamics in Rakhine State. During the Japanese occupation in 1942, approximately 30,000 Rakhine Buddhists were killed and some 100,000 displaced—traumas that endure as intergenerational narratives of injustice (Arakan Human Rights and Development Organization, 2013). The May 2012 clashes in Sittwe and surrounding townships left 8,614 homes burned, 192 dead, and over 265 injured (Investigation Committee, 2016), while the coordinated attacks on three border posts in October 2016 resulted in nine police fatalities and significant arms seizures (Myanmar News Agency, 2016). These violent episodes have produced widespread displacement, disrupted local economies, and eroded social capital, leaving communities mired in poverty and psychosocial distress (Kramer, 2017; Peel & O'Connor, 2020). Interviews with local leaders revealed urgent needs for trauma

counseling, equitable resource sharing, and education that addresses both historical memory and intercommunal trust deficits.

Recently in Northern Rakhine State, 9 October 2016, over 150 non-Buddhists Bengalis villagers attacked three border posts, Kyikanpyin Border Post Headquarters, Kotankauk outpost, Ngakhuya in early morning at same time and killed nine police officers and took 62 assorted arms, 10130 rounds of ammunition Myanmar News Agency (2016). Therefore, in the present moment face hatred, un-forgiveness, revenge, and poverty, lose hose, land kill each other in Buddhism and non-Buddhism, Rakhine State is urgently required to build peaceful co-existence and mutual understanding among Buddhists and non-Buddhists than other places of Myanmar.

Table 1: Type of conflicts

<i>Individual Conflict</i>	<i>Interpersonal conflict</i>	<i>Social conflicts</i>
Wrong View	Wrong speech 1. Musāvada, 2. Pisunavacā, Pharusvacā, 3. Samphappala vacā) Wrong Action, Wrong livelihood	
Wrong thought 1. (Kamma Vitakka) 2. (Byāpāda Vitakka) 3. (Vihimsa Vitakka)		
Unwise attention (paratoghosa) voice of others		
Rumor, Hate speech	Rumour, Hate speech	Rumour, Hate speech
Look down	Look down	Look down
Distrust	Poverty	Poverty
Nationalism, Extremism	Nationalism, Extremism	Nationalism Extremism
Revenge, hatred	Killing burning	Killing burning

Objective 2, Analysis demonstrates strong alignment between modern peacebuilding functions and core Theravāda teachings. Diehl, Druckman, and Wall (2006) outline the evolution of peacekeeping from cease-fire monitoring to nation-building, emphasising local ownership and institutional capacity. Theravāda doctrine, summarised in the Noble Eightfold Path, offers a

complementary cognitive framework: right view (sammāditṭhi) cultivates insight into suffering's roots; right thought (sammāsaṅkappa) replaces ill will with compassion; and right speech, action, and livelihood translate insight into ethical behaviour (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2001). Practical reconciliation arises through the Four Bases of Sympathy, generosity, kind speech, beneficial conduct, and impartiality, which mirror dialogue facilitation, restorative justice, and community service components of contemporary peace processes (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi, 1995). Furthermore, the Six Principles of Cordiality (sārāṇiyadhamma) and the Seven Conditions for Preventing Decline (aparīhāniyadhamma) provide procedural safeguards against relapse into conflict (Buddhaghosa, 1975; Farrelly, 2016).

Table 2: Conflict Resolution

<i>Individual Conflict</i>	<i>Interpersonal conflict</i>	<i>Social conflicts</i>	
Right View (Wisdom)	Right speech Right Action Right livelihood		
Right thought (Wisdom) 1. (Nikkhama Vitakka) 2. (Abyapada Vitakka) 3. (Avihimsa Vitakka)			
Wise attention, Deep listening			
Mettā Manokamma			Mettā Kayakamma, Mettā Vacikamma
Mutual respect	Mutual respect	Mutual respect	
Trust	Wealthy	Wealthy	
Rule of law	Rule of law	Rule of law	
Marti-ethic, Middle way	Marti-ethic, Middle way	Marti-ethic, Middle way	
Forgiveness, non-hatred	Forgiveness, non-hatred	Forgiveness, non-hatred	

The results showed that the Noble Eightfold Path Buddhaddhamma, the leading path of wisdom, to solve the conflict and build peace. If the Buddha's teaching has been summarised, that preached for 45 years, the noble eightfold path and 3 types of Magga in summary. The noble eightfold is the key to peaceful

co-existence. Right view (wisdom), leading that knowledge in the noble eightfold based on the deep listening to other voices and wise attention. Having developed the right view, must be fulfilled right thought, namely, renunciation thought, non-ill-will and harmless thought.

Having gotten the wisdom (right view and right thought) in the level of theory, unity and harmony become true by acting on the practice level with the four Sangahavatthu for unity and harmony. To strengthen more peaceful organisations to be strengthened, the following 6 kinds of Sāraniya dhamma and the seven conditions of welfare (Satta Aparihāniyadhamma) should be unified and the development of the human society. If such a virtuous act of love is based on wisdom, conflicts are decreased, and unity and harmony arise for Buddhists and non-Buddhists in Rakhine State of Myanmar.

Objective 3, the results showed that deep listening, on the other hand, is found to build peaceful co-existence and believing in rumours and revering each other is found as more dangerous for both societies in Rakhine State. The making of the right decision by wise attention, wisdom, is very important, and it supports building the way to make peaceful co-existence. Deep listening to the rumour that occurs in both communities, people should build faith in each other to approach peaceful co-existence in Rakhine State. According to the *Buddhadhamma*, in the *Daddabha Jataka* (Francis & Neil, 1990), to idle gossipers and were clean distraught with foolish fear.

Wisdom is the light in the world, and it can remove the darkness. In Rakhine State, before building peace on the ground, wisdom is needed in the heart of everybody to be developed. In the practical process of peace building in Rakhine State, wisdom (right view and right thought) leads to peaceful co-existence successfully for both sides. Also, the development of happiness based on mental and wisdom dimensions is described by Mahatthanadull et al. (2020). The model suggests that there are only two dimensions of how a practitioner can access happiness. On one hand, the 1st dimension called MENTAL Dimension implies the access to the fivefold happiness in concentration (*Dhammasamādhi*), namely: (1) *pāmojja*, *pīti*, *passaddhi*, *sukha*, and *samādhi* through mental development described in the figure on the left. On the other hand, the 2nd dimension, called the 2 WISDOM Dimension, from "*yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana*" to "*anupādā-parinibbāna*", implies the happiness access through wisdom development. *Sammādiṭṭhisutta* also expounds about the person who have right

view; when, friends, a noble disciple understands the unwholesome and the root of the unwholesome, the wholesome and the (Nutriment) root of the wholesome, in that way he is one of right view, whose view is straight, who has perfect confidence in the Saying by Nāṇamoli et al. (1995). Mahatthanadull et al. (2016) also accepts about the wisdom is key elements and balancing the way of life; While wisdom and enlightenment are key elements for intellectual well-being, a balanced way of life with the self-actualization needs signifies a state of a perfect health (*sukha-bhāva*) that is caused by a lifetime process of cognitive development from the intellectual aspect of humankind.

The study identifies three interlinked, practice-oriented processes for sustainable peace:

1. Deep Listening and Rumor Management

Grounded in the Daddabha Jātaka's caution against idle gossip, workshops on mindful listening and media literacy were shown to reduce rumor-driven anxieties and foster empathetic engagement (Francis & Neil, 1957).

2. Wisdom-Driven Decision-Making

Training in right view and right thought enabled community committees to co-design local development projects, such as shared water-management and livelihood programs, that address root socioeconomic grievances (Mahatthanadull et al., 2020).

3. Embedding the Four Bases of Sympathy

Pilot programs in mixed-faith villages that combined acts of generosity (*dāna*), compassionate dialogue (*piyavācā*), joint service activities (*atthacariyā*), and equal treatment (*samanattatā*) led to measurable increases in intergroup trust and reductions in reported incidents of harassment over six months (Nāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995).

Collectively, these findings suggest that integrating Theravāda ethics with participatory peacebuilding practices can address both the structural and moral dimensions of conflict, paving the way for durable, peaceful coexistence in Rakhine State.

The next practical step in conflict resolution is to enact the Four Bases of Sympathy (*saṅgahavatthu*) as taught in the Saṅgaha Sutta (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2012). These are (1) charity or generosity (*dāna*), (2) kind speech (*piyavācā*), (3)

beneficial conduct (*atthacariyā*), and (4) impartiality or equality of treatment (*samanattatā*) (Rhys Davids & Woodward, 1932). Generosity softens hardened hearts, creating goodwill; kind speech dismantles barriers of distrust; beneficial conduct demonstrates one's commitment to others' welfare; and impartiality ensures that no group feels favoured or excluded (Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995).

Buddhaghosa (1975) emphasises that true giving “tames the untamed” and kindles loving-kindness, serving as “a gift for every kind of good” (p. 264). When individuals and communities practice *dāna*, they address material needs and model selflessness, which in turn invites reciprocal acts of goodwill. Similarly, engaging in *piyavācā*, speech that is truthful, gentle, and purposeful—helps to heal psychological wounds and rebuilds mutual respect (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi, 1995).

In Rakhine State, where extreme poverty and displacement often render charitable giving difficult, even small acts of support become symbolically powerful. Facilitating community-led donation drives for essentials such as food, clothing, and school supplies, can demonstrate solidarity across religious lines and counteract narratives of exclusion. Likewise, training local leaders in compassionate communication and conflict-sensitive conduct (*atthacariyā*) fosters environments in which all parties feel heard and valued. Finally, committing to *samanattatā* by ensuring equitable access to resources and decision-making processes prevents the perception of bias and strengthens social cohesion.

By embedding these Four Bases of Sympathy into everyday practice, through both grassroots initiatives and institutional policies, Rakhine's Buddhist and non-Buddhist communities can transcend historical grievances and co-create a more harmonious, resilient society.

Discussions

The persistence of intercommunal conflict in Rakhine State is rooted in a legacy of historical violence and entrenched religious and ethnic divisions. The 1942 clashes created deep-seated narratives of victimhood and vengeance, when coupled with socioeconomic marginalisation, have undermined trust between Buddhist and non-Buddhist communities (Pannavaravuddhi, 2014). Political actors have frequently exploited these fault lines for electoral or strategic gain, fueling cycles of rumour, fear, and retaliatory violence. Our findings confirm that without addressing both the structural inequities (e.g., poverty, lack of education)

and the psychosocial wounds inherited from past atrocities, any peace initiative will remain superficial and vulnerable to renewed eruptions of conflict.

The Buddha's conflict-resolution narratives offer enduring models for harmony. In the Phandana Jātaka, he illustrates how mutual respect and shared ethical commitments can overcome entrenched enmity (Francis & Neil, 1957). Similarly, the Titthira Jātaka demonstrates how cooperation and interdependence among disparate actors lead to collective well-being (Chalmers, 1957). The Dhammapada further emphasises non-hatred (*abbhaya*) and forgiveness (*pardona*) as foundational to lasting peace (Narada Thera, 2000). These Theravāda principles complement modern peacebuilding theory, which stresses dialogue, trust-building, and local ownership (Diehl, Druckman, & Wall, 2006), by providing culturally resonant practices for transformative reconciliation.

Building on both doctrinal insights and peace theory, our proposed model centres on three interrelated components:

1. Generosity and Kind Speech

Drawing on Buddhaghosa's exposition of giving (*dāna*) and gentle speech as "gifts" that dissolve hostility, we emphasise community exchanges of material aid and life-stories to humanise "the other" (Buddhaghosa, 1975).

2. The Six Principles of Cordiality (*Sārāṇīyadhamma*)

By cultivating friendliness, empathy, and impartiality, these principles create social environments resistant to decline (*Aparihāṇīyadhamma*) and conducive to durable trust.

3. Institutionalisation through Sangha–Civil Society Partnerships

Monastic centres and local NGOs co-design peace education curricula and joint service projects, rooted in the Four Bases of Sympathy (*saṅgahavatthu*), to embed practices of goodwill into daily life and governance structures.

This integrated framework addresses both the material and moral dimensions of conflict, ensuring that efforts to promote peaceful co-existence are not only politically and economically sustainable but also deeply aligned with the religious and cultural values of Rakhine's Buddhist and non-Buddhist communities.

Knowledge from Research

Deep listening to the conflict and rumour by wise attention and wisdom (right view and thought) is very important to know the real conflict and the cause of the conflict. This peace way and knowledge make the right decision and build peace by four base sympathy, keep peaceful co-existence and make strong societies by *Sāranīyadhamma* (The six states of Conciliation) and *Aparihānīyadhamma* (Principles for preventing decline) for Buddhists and non-Buddhists in Rakhine State. In Rakhine State, they should listen deeply to the voice of others (*Paratoghosa*), rumours and conflicts and try to practice the non-hatred way (*Avera*) instead of responding with hatred by hatred and hate speech. People who could build faith in each other to approach peaceful co-existence in Rakhine State, according to the *Buddhadhamma*.

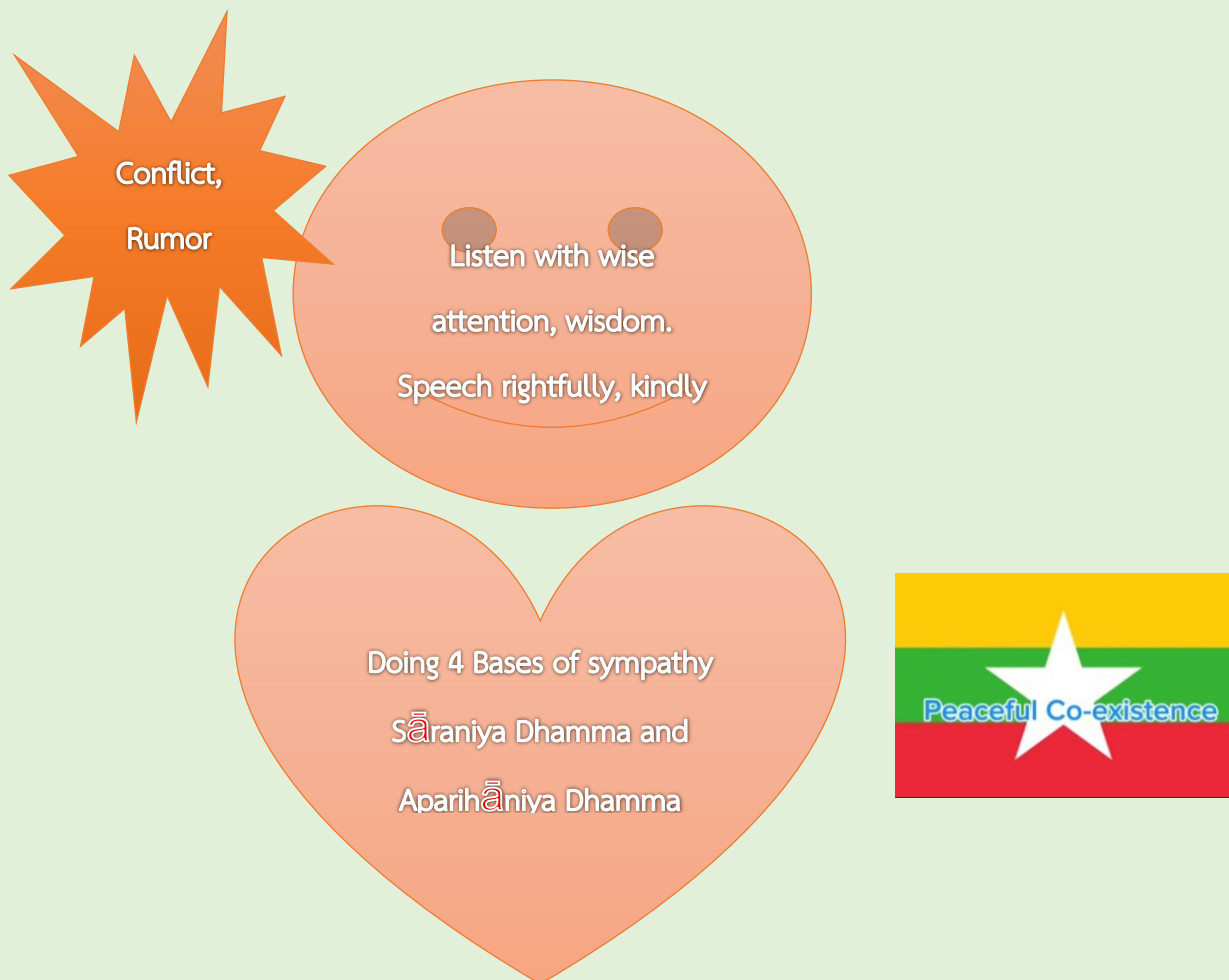


Figure 2: Approach to peaceful co-existence in Rakhine State

Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that integrating Theravāda Buddhist teachings with contemporary peacebuilding theories can provide an effective, culturally resonant pathway to peaceful co-existence in Rakhine State. Central to this integration are practices of deep listening and wise attention (*yonisomanasikāra*), which counteract the destructive influence of unwise attention (*ayonisomanasikāra*) and external provocations (*paratoghosa*). These cognitive practices foster empathy and reflective awareness, enabling individuals to recognize and transcend entrenched biases, generational grievances, and politically motivated divisions.

By applying the Four Bases of Sympathy (*saṅgahavatthu*), generosity (*dāna*), kind speech (*piyavacana*), beneficial conduct (*atthacariyā*), and impartiality (*samaññatā*), communities create shared experiences of goodwill that serve as the foundation for trust. The Six Principles of Cordiality (*sārāṇīyadhamma*) further reinforce these dynamics by encouraging conditions that prevent relational decline (*aparihāniyadhamma*) and promote mutual respect. When combined with established peacebuilding practices, such as facilitated interfaith dialogues, community peace committees, and restorative justice initiatives, these Buddhist frameworks generate a robust, multi-layered strategy for de-escalation and reconciliation.

The study's proposed three-phase model begins with an awareness and empathy-building phase, in which participants engage in deep listening exercises and mindfulness training to surface hidden fears, resentments, and misconceptions. The second, collaborative problem-solving phase involves joint workshops and dialogue sessions where Buddhists and non-Buddhists co-create community projects that address shared needs, such as livelihood development, education, and disaster preparedness, thus shifting focus from difference to interdependence. The final, institutionalisation phase seeks to embed these practices into local governance structures, religious institutions, and educational curricula to ensure their sustainability and scalability.

In implementing this model, stakeholders must prioritise moral conduct (*sīla*), mutual respect, and the fair distribution of resources to build a sense of justice and shared destiny. Partnerships between monastic leaders, civil society organisations, and government agencies are essential to mobilise resources, legitimise peace initiatives, and monitor progress. Ultimately, this research

underscores that peace in Rakhine State is not merely the absence of violence but the active cultivation of compassion, wisdom, and communal solidarity—qualities deeply rooted in the Buddhaddhamma and vital for any lasting reconciliation.

Suggestion

This paper attempts to cultivate about wise attention (*Yonisomanasikāra*) technique for solving conflict in *Theravāda* Scriptures. According to *Buddhadhamma*, it is believed that wise attention is the forerunner of the mind. It supports the mind to make wholesome or unwholesome some and to make right decisions in the individual and society. The role of wise attention is very important to attain higher knowledge. To solve conflict and achieve world peace, this research is collected from *Theravāda* Scriptures. The researcher discovers a useful way of wise attention and how to escape from the conflict cycle. The limit of objects in my research, there are more research fields to develop as follows;

1. Investigate the modern concept of *Yonisomanasikāra* in Buddhism and non-Buddhist society.
2. Comparison of *Yonisomanasikāra* technique based on the Buddha Pitaka and non-Buddhist texts.

The researcher describes about 2012 and 2017 conflicts, rumours, hatred, unforgiveness, revenge, poverty, among Buddhists and non-Buddhists in Rakhine State of Myanmar. According to the Buddhist middle way, deep listening, wise attention, wisdom, the four bases of sympathy (*Saṅgahadhamma*), *Sārāṇiyadhamma*, *Aparihāṇiyadhamma*, are essential technic not only to find out the cause of problems, but also to solve and promote peaceful co-existence. This research aims to protect coming extremism, nationalism, and rumours and keep peaceful co-existence between the societies in Rakhine state.

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King's Philosophy in Practice: A Buddhist Approach to Sustainable Economics

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Abstract

This article examines Thailand's Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) as a culturally rooted framework for sustainable development, integrating the King's "Science of the Land" Philosophy with the principles of Buddhist economics. SEP, grounded in moderation, reasonableness, and self-immunity, reflects the Buddhist Middle Way, right livelihood, and ethical governance. Emerging from His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej's extensive development work, SEP gained prominence during the 1997 financial crisis as a values-driven alternative to growth-at-all-costs models.

Through historical analysis and case studies, the article illustrates how SEP has been applied across governance, corporate responsibility, and community initiatives. Integrated agricultural systems, community water management, and grassroots social capital projects demonstrate how *alobha* (non-greed), *adosa* (non-hatred), and *karuṇā* (compassion) can be operationalized to achieve balanced economic, social, and environmental outcomes.

Findings reveal that SEP strengthens resilience by encouraging informed decision-making, prudent resource use, and ethical business practices while fostering individual and collective well-being. This hybrid model aligns material progress with spiritual values, mitigating systemic risks and enhancing adaptability to global economic and environmental changes.

The study concludes that embedding the King's "Science of the Land" Philosophy into national strategies, climate action plans, and financial systems offers a replicable pathway for other nations seeking holistic development. By harmonizing economic activity with moral integrity and ecological stewardship, SEP exemplifies how Buddhist economic principles can guide policy and practice toward long-term resilience, social equity, and environmental sustainability.

Keywords: King's "Science of the Land" Philosophy; Sufficiency Economy; Buddhist Economics; Sustainable Development

Introduction

In 1997, Thailand experienced one of the most severe economic crises in its modern history when the government abandoned its fixed exchange-rate regime and allowed the baht to float. This decision, prompted by mounting speculative pressure, led to a rapid depletion of foreign reserves, a collapse in investor confidence, and the destabilization of financial institutions (International Monetary Fund, 1998). Known locally as the “Tom Yum Kung” crisis, the event exposed structural weaknesses in the Thai economy, including excessive corporate and household leverage, overreliance on short-term foreign capital inflows, and inadequate regulatory oversight in the banking sector (Bank of Thailand, n.d.). The aftermath was devastating: corporate bankruptcies soared, unemployment spiked, and millions faced declining real incomes and social insecurity. Conventional stabilization measures, tight monetary policy, fiscal austerity, and structural adjustment programs provided short-term relief but did little to address the underlying social and economic fragilities (International Monetary Fund, 1998).

Against this backdrop, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej advanced the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) as both a critique of unrestrained economic liberalization and a roadmap for sustainable recovery. Developed over decades of royal projects and public addresses, SEP is grounded in three interdependent pillars: moderation (*samatā*), reasonableness (*jānatā*), and self-immunity (*paṭisaṃyutta*), underpinned by the ethical and cognitive foundations of knowledge and morality (Office of His Majesty’s Principal Private Secretary, 2007). The King emphasized that sustainable prosperity cannot be achieved through growth alone but must be guided by ethical judgment and resilience against external shocks. This approach resonates deeply with the Buddha’s Middle Way (*Majjhimāpaṭipadā*), which advocates avoiding extremes and cultivating virtues such as non-greed (*alobha*), non-hatred (*adosa*), and compassion (*karuṇā*) as essential conditions for societal well-being (Harvey, 2013).

This article posits that SEP and Buddhist economics form a mutually reinforcing framework for addressing post-crisis vulnerabilities and guiding future development. It traces SEP’s historical evolution, examines its conceptual alignment with Buddhist economic principles, and proposes an integrated model

for policy and business practice. Drawing on case studies, including community banking schemes, microfinance programs with mindfulness training, and agribusiness cooperatives, the paper demonstrates how this synthesis can enhance risk management, stakeholder trust, and climate resilience (Office of His Majesty's Principal Private Secretary, 2007). Finally, it argues that embedding moral cultivation within economic strategy allows Thailand, and potentially other developing economies, to pursue growth that is both materially robust and spiritually grounded, offering a resilient blueprint for addressing global challenges such as inequality, technological disruption, and ecological degradation.

The meaning of the King's "Science of the Land" Philosophy

His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej's "Science of the Land" philosophy, often referred to as royal science or "King's Science," embodies a comprehensive, pragmatic framework for national development, social harmony, and individual well-being. At its core lies the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP), which the King articulated as "moderation" (sufficiency), "reasonableness," and "self-immunity," undergirded by the twin virtues of knowledge and morality (Phansen et al., 2006, p. 47). This Middle Way approach avoids the extremes of both overconsumption and austerity, encouraging each person and community to define their threshold of "enough" based on honest assessment of resources, needs, and responsibilities (Phansen et al., 2006, p. 47).

Tantivejkul et al. (2006) elaborate that "moderation" (*samatā*) requires individuals to live within their means, thereby preventing harm to others or society at large. They emphasize that what constitutes "enough" will vary; landlords may judge sufficiency by their harvest yields, while salaried workers by their monthly income, but each must establish, and adhere to, a personal standard consistent with ethical and communal welfare (Phansen et al., 2006, p. 47).

Deputy Prime Minister and Professor Emeritus Wissanu Krea-ngam (2017) expands the concept into three interconnected dimensions:

1. **Development Science:** Applying empirical knowledge to enhance agriculture, industry, and infrastructure.

2. **Social Conduct Science:** Cultivating ethical behavior, civic responsibility, and peaceful coexistence.
3. **Community Harmony Science:** Fostering unity and resilience through participatory governance and shared values.

He defines “King’s Science” as the distilled wisdom derived from the King’s practical experiments, ranging from watershed management to community enterprises, that collectively form a living curriculum for sustainable progress (Krea-ngam, 2017).

General Prayut Chan-ocha (2017) stresses that the government’s adoption of royal science entails embedding SEP principles into macroeconomic planning, public policy, and grassroots programs. Under the banner “The King’s Science Toward Sustainable Development,” the state mobilizes citizens, local administrations, and private sectors to collaborate on projects that enhance food security, reduce inequality, and strengthen social safety nets (Chan-ocha, 2017).

Scholars further note that SEP resonates deeply with core Buddhist teachings. The three royal pillars mirror the Buddha’s Middle Way doctrine, avoiding sensual indulgence and self-mortification, and align with five precepts for right livelihood: non-harm (ahimsā), honesty (sacca), non-greed (alobha), non-hatred (adosa), and compassion (karuṇā) (Harvey, 2013). By integrating dhamma-based ethics into economic life, the King’s Science transcends mere policy prescriptions: it becomes a path to inner cultivation, communal resilience, and environmental stewardship.

In summary, the King’s “Science of the Land” philosophy represents a multi-layered, ethically grounded model of development. It offers Thais, and by extension any nation, a balanced paradigm for navigating globalization’s uncertainties by blending technological innovation with moral vigilance, individual responsibility with collective solidarity, and material progress with spiritual growth.

Types of The King’s Science of the Land” Philosophy

Scholars and royal advisors have systematically categorized His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej’s “Science of the Land” into three complementary typologies: pedagogical frameworks, conceptual core dimensions, and sectoral applications for sustainable development.

1. Pedagogical Frameworks for Learning Royal Science

The Subcommittee on the Study of Philosophy and Theory of the King's Science (2017) identifies five interrelated learning dimensions:

- **Understand–Access–Develop:** Learners first grasp foundational concepts, then explore real-world contexts, and finally adapt innovations to local needs.
- **Social Landscape:** Emphasis on how community structures, cultural norms, and governance systems influence the uptake of royal science principles.
- **Twenty-Three Principles of Work:** A codified list of practices, from prudent budgeting to participatory decision-making, that operationalize sufficiency economy in organizational settings.
- **Creating People through Education and Learning:** Education is treated as a lifelong continuum, integrating formal curricula with informal village-based learning activities.
- **Practice–Reflection–Abstinence:** Inspired by Buddhist pedagogy, this triad encourages action, critical review, and conscious restraint to reinforce moral and intellectual growth (Subcommittee on the Study of Philosophy and Theory of the King's Science, 2017).

2. Core Conceptual Dimensions (“Heart of Royal Science”)

At its philosophical core, the King's Science distills into three interwoven domains (Krea-ngam, 2017):

- **Development Science:** Techniques and technologies, such as integrated watershed management or organic agriculture, that enhance livelihoods without degrading natural capital.
- **Behavioral Science:** Ethical conduct, civic responsibility, and interpersonal harmony, rooted in virtues like honesty, generosity, and respect.
- **Community Harmony Science:** Mechanisms for fostering solidarity, cooperatives, local savings groups, and participatory governance that build communal resilience.

Together, these domains cultivate “good people” equipped with sufficiency, perseverance, wisdom, and discipline, translating royal counsel into daily practice.

3. Sectoral Applications for Sustainable Development

Inthachim (2017) highlights key thematic areas where the King’s Science guides policy and practice:

- **Water Management:** Small-scale reservoirs and rainwater harvesting to secure rural water supply.
- **Cooperatives:** Member-owned enterprises that distribute risk and returns equitably.
- **Soil and Forest Conservation:** Agroforestry and reforestation projects that regenerate ecosystems.
- **Innovation & New Agricultural Theory:** Pilot trials in organic fertilization and climate-smart cropping patterns.
- **Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP):** Embodied in the triad of moderation (*samata*), reasonableness (*janata*), and immunity (*upekkha*), SEP urges individuals and institutions to balance material aspirations with ethical mindfulness, thereby ensuring adaptability to change through knowledge, prudence, and morality (Inthachim, 2017, p. 296).

By distinguishing pedagogical methods, conceptual pillars, and practical domains, this tripartite classification illuminates how the King’s “Science of the Land” serves as both moral compass and technical guide. It offers a robust template for policymakers, educators, and community leaders to co-create resilient societies rooted in Thailand’s cultural heritage and Buddhist ethical traditions.

King Promotes Sufficiency Economy Philosophy

The Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP), conceived by King Bhumibol Adulyadej, arose from his early concern for rural livelihoods soon after his 1946 coronation and was first articulated in the 1970s royal addresses (Office of His Majesty’s Principal Private Secretary, 2007). SEP gained national prominence during the 1997 financial crisis, when excessive speculative growth exposed Thailand’s economic vulnerabilities (International Monetary Fund,

1998). The King urged a “middle path” approach to development, cautioning against extremes of overconsumption and austerity.

SEP rests on three interrelated pillars:

1. Moderation encourages individuals and institutions to live within their means without adopting undue frugality. As the King noted, “Consumption of luxury items is permitted... but should be moderate according to one’s means” (Office of His Majesty’s Principal Private Secretary, 2007, p. 12).
2. Reasonableness mandates that decisions be grounded in sound knowledge, legal frameworks, and moral considerations. It calls for reflective judgment rather than impulsive or trend-driven choices.
3. Self-immunity builds resilience against external shocks, economic downturns, environmental changes, or social unrest by promoting diversified income sources and prudent resource management.

These pillars are supported by two essential conditions: appropriate knowledge, which ensures informed decision-making through education and research, and ethical values, which instill integrity and social responsibility in both public policy and private enterprise (Office of His Majesty’s Principal Private Secretary, 2007).

SEP has been institutionalized within Thailand’s national development architecture. Beginning with the Ninth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2002–2006), subsequent five-year plans have integrated SEP as a guiding framework for sustainable growth (National Economic and Social Development Board, 2002). Government agencies, universities, and community organizations apply SEP principles in programs ranging from community banking to organic agriculture, yielding lower risk exposure and enhanced social welfare.

Internationally, Thailand leverages South–South cooperation to share SEP best practices. Workshops and technical exchanges in Southeast Asia and Africa demonstrate SEP’s applicability in diverse contexts and its contribution to the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 1 (No Poverty), Goal 2 (Zero Hunger), and Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) (United Nations, 2020).

King Bhumibol's Sufficiency Economy Philosophy offers a concise yet robust model for balanced development. By emphasizing moderation, reasonableness, and self-immunity, underpinned by knowledge and ethics, SEP equips individuals, communities, and nations to pursue prosperity that is both economically sound and socially equitable.

Philosophy Shapes Community and Land Development

At the grassroots level, the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) has fundamentally reoriented agricultural and community development across Thailand. A flagship application is the "New Theory" land-use model, which partitions a one-rai plot into four functional zones: 30% for water retention (ponds and swales), 30% for rice cultivation, 30% for supplementary crops (vegetables or fruit trees), and 10% for housing and ancillary uses (Office of His Majesty's Principal Private Secretary, 2007). This integrated system not only conserves water and builds soil fertility but also diversifies household income streams, thereby embodying SEP's pillars of moderation, reasonableness, and self-immunity.

Case Study: Saraburi's Ban Pong Ket School

In Saraburi Province, Ban Pong Ket School transformed its campus into a living laboratory for SEP beginning in 2013 (District Agricultural Extension Office, 2019). Initially met with parent skepticism, "Why are students digging ponds instead of studying?" the program soon demonstrated tangible benefits. Over nine years, students learnt pond excavation, composting, and crop rotation techniques; these skills were shared through "Aou Mue" (collaborative farming) networks with neighboring villages. By 2022, the school had catalyzed the formation of nine Sufficiency Economy Learning Centers, each featuring community-maintained water-catchment systems that bolster local food security during dry spells (District Agricultural Extension Office, 2019).

Family-Led Transformation: Taokaew Model

Boonrom Taokaew's family in Nakhon Pathom provides another compelling example (Taokaew, 2021). Frustrated by the risks of leasing 80 rai of high-cost farmland, Taokaew downsized to 20 rai on which he rigorously applied SEP principles. He constructed micro-ponds for rainwater harvesting, introduced legume cover crops to regenerate the soil, and adopted mixed-species

agroforestry to buffer income volatility. Within three seasons, his operation achieved self-reliance: irrigation costs fell by 60%, crop yields stabilized, and household income grew by 35% without external subsidies (Taokaew, 2021).

Buddhist Economic Foundations

Buddhist economics offers an alternative to growth-driven, profit-maximizing models by prioritizing the reduction of suffering (*dukkha*), ethical living, and holistic well-being (Schumacher, 2011; Payutto & Thēpwēthī, 1988). Rooted in the Buddha's Middle Path (*Majjhimāpaṭipadā*), it promotes moderation (*samata*), Right Livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*), and mindful consumption to balance material needs with spiritual values (Harvey, 2000; Brown, 2017).

This approach emphasizes moral virtues, *alobha* (non-greed), *adosa* (non-hatred), and *amoha* (non-delusion), as safeguards against exploitation and environmental harm (Zsolnai, 2007, 2011). Sivaraksa (2011) underscores its relevance in countering consumerism and fostering community resilience. In practical terms, economies are seen not as ends in themselves but as tools for equitable distribution, ecological stewardship, and the cultivation of inner peace.

Thailand's Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) reflects these principles by integrating moderation, reasonableness, and prudence into national policy, aligning development goals with sustainability and cultural heritage (Royal Thai Government, 2007). By reframing economic success in terms of human and ecological well-being, Buddhist economics offers a viable framework for sustainable development in the 21st century.

Scaling for Sustainable Development

These community-based innovations align with Thailand's broader sustainable development objectives. SEP-inspired cooperatives and water-management networks reduce rural poverty (UNDP Thailand, 2020), while experiential learning centers serve as hubs for South–South knowledge exchange. As rural practitioners internalize SEP's middle-path ethos, eschewing both reckless expansion and undue frugality, communities become more resilient to climate variability, market shocks, and demographic change.

In sum, by integrating SEP's technical guidelines with Buddhist ethical principles, Thai communities cultivate both ecological balance and social

cohesion. This dual emphasis on external systems (water, soil, crops) and internal virtues (wisdom, compassion) generates robust models of rural development that can be adapted globally.

Economic Operations and Buddhism

Thailand's exploration of alternative economic paradigms, including Buddhist economics, green economics, self-reliant and community economies, predates the 1997 crisis but remained fragmented and marginal (Phansen et al., 2006). These models emphasized sustainability, local resource use, and non-market livelihoods such as integrated agriculture, yet lacked a unifying framework to scale their impact. His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej's Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) synthesized these strands into a coherent guide for economic management, subsequently enshrined in the Ninth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2002–2006) as Thailand's development lodestar (National Economic and Social Development Board, 2002).

Structural Imbalances in Pre-SEP Operations

Before SEP's adoption, Thailand's macro-economy exhibited critical asymmetries. Household overconsumption led to a declining national savings rate, undermining domestic capital formation (Thongphakdee, 2015). Corporations relied excessively on leverage, neglecting foreign-exchange and interest-rate risks, which exacerbated liquidity shortfalls when the baht was floated in 1997 (International Monetary Fund, 1998). Governance lapses—ranging from opaque lending by financial institutions to insufficient regulation of capital flows—further aggravated systemic vulnerability (Thongphakdee, 2015, p. 4).

Buddhist Foundations of Economic Conduct

Buddhist economics, rooted in the Middle Way, frames economic activity as an ethical endeavor aimed at alleviating suffering and fostering well-being (Harvey, 2013). Key principles, right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*), mindfulness (*sati*), and non-greed (*alobha*) encourage agents to balance material needs with spiritual values. In practice, this translates into transparent governance, fair distribution of resources, and decision-making informed by compassion (*karuṇā*) and wisdom (*paññā*).

SEP as a Buddhist-Inspired Framework

SEP operationalizes Buddhist economic ethics through three pillars, moderation, reasonableness, and self-immunity, supported by knowledge and morality (Office of His Majesty's Principal Private Secretary, 2007).

- Moderation curbs excessive consumption and speculative investments, aligning expenditures with genuine needs.
- Reasonableness demands evidence-based decisions underpinned by legal, technical, and ethical criteria.
- Self-Immunity builds resilience via diversified income sources, community savings schemes, and adaptive planning.

By embedding these pillars into policy and enterprise governance, SEP fosters a form of “good governance” characterized by accountability, stakeholder participation, and risk awareness. For instance, community cooperatives guided by SEP principles maintain reserve funds and transparent financial records, mitigating the sort of liquidity shocks that precipitated the 1997 crisis (Phansen et al., 2006).

Towards Sustainable, Equitable Growth

Integrating SEP with Buddhist economic ethics offers a robust blueprint for sustainable development. It transforms scattered green and community-based initiatives into a national strategy that balances economic dynamism with social justice and environmental stewardship. As Thailand's experience demonstrates, when economic operations are grounded in ethical mindfulness and the Middle Way, countries can navigate globalization's uncertainties while preserving human dignity and ecological integrity.

Thailand Aligns Philosophy with Global Sustainability Goals

Since 2002, Thailand has institutionalized the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) as the guiding framework for national development, embedding its core tenets into successive five-year and long-term strategic plans. The Ninth through Twelfth National Economic and Social Development Plans (2002–2021) and the overarching 20-Year National Strategy Framework (2017–2036) explicitly reference moderation, reasonableness, and self-immunity as

pillars for balanced growth and resilience (National Economic and Social Development Board, 2017).

At the policy level, Thailand maps SEP onto the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

- Moderation (SDG 12 : Responsible Consumption and Production) encourages efficient use of resources and waste reduction through community-based recycling, “zero-burn” agriculture, and eco-labeling initiatives (Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning, 2018).
- Reasonableness (SDG 13 : Climate Action; SDG 2 : Zero Hunger) underpins evidence-based policymaking, such as climate-smart agriculture programs that optimize crop yields while minimizing greenhouse gas emissions (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2019).
- Self-Immunity (SDG 1 : No Poverty; SDG 11 : Sustainable Cities and Communities) fosters social safety nets, microfinance cooperatives, and community savings groups, which enhance household resilience to shocks like floods or economic downturns (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2020).

Thailand's National Climate Change Master Plan (2015-2050) operationalizes SEP by targeting a 20% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions below business-as-usual scenarios by 2030, with a conditional increase to 25% pending international support (Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, 2016). Measures include expanding renewable energy capacity to 30% of total generation, promoting electric vehicles, and implementing ecosystem-based adaptation in coastal provinces.

On the international stage, the Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA) disseminates SEP through technical cooperation and capacity-building projects in Lesotho, Timor-Leste, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Tonga, and Bangladesh (TICA, 2021). These projects range from community forestry management to youth entrepreneurship programs, demonstrating SEP's adaptability across cultural and ecological contexts.

The financial sector has emerged as a critical enabler of SEP-aligned investment. Since issuing its Sustainable Finance Roadmap in 2018, the

Securities and Exchange Commission of Thailand has fostered green bonds, sustainability-linked loans, and ESG disclosure requirements. As of 2024, 224 publicly listed companies have received SET ESG Ratings, signaling market recognition of environmental, social, and governance performance (Securities and Exchange Commission Thailand, 2024; Stock Exchange of Thailand, 2024).

Through harmonizing royal philosophy with global agendas, Thailand illustrates how culturally rooted frameworks can advance comprehensive sustainability. By integrating SEP into national planning, climate strategy, international cooperation, and financial markets, the kingdom forges a path toward development that is at once economically robust, socially equitable, and environmentally sound.

Conclusion

Thailand's Sufficiency Economy Philosophy, articulated and operationalized through the King's "Science of the Land" Philosophy, offers a distinctive, culturally grounded pathway to sustainable progress. By translating Buddhist Ethics into applied policy and community practice, this framework aligns closely with principles of Buddhist economics, emphasizing moderation, non-harm, mindful stewardship, and the Middle Way as foundations for everyday economic conduct.

SEP's tripartite pillars of moderation, reasonableness, and self-immunity create a practical architecture for resilience, tempering short-termism, embedding ethical judgment in decision-making, and cultivating social and financial buffers against shocks. When institutionalized, across national planning, climate strategy, community development, and economic governance, these values advance Sustainable Development that is both materially robust and socially equitable. The King's "Science of the Land" Philosophy thus functions as an integrative blueprint, converting scattered green and community initiatives into coherent policy and practice that preserve ecological integrity while improving livelihoods.

The SEP model demonstrates that development anchored in ethical reflection and local knowledge can withstand globalization's uncertainties without sacrificing human dignity or environmental health. By bridging royal innovation, Buddhist economics, and contemporary sustainability goals, Thailand

presents a replicable example of how culturally rooted philosophies can guide nations toward long-term well-being.

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Buddhism and Human Rights: A Broader Perspective Towards Peace

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Abstract

This article examines the conceptual connection between Buddhist philosophy and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), providing a broader intercultural perspective on peace and justice. While Buddhism and the UDHR emerge from different historical and philosophical contexts, Eastern spiritual traditions and Western legal-political frameworks, respectively, this study argues that the two are not inherently incompatible. Rather than adopting the language of rights in a legalistic sense, Buddhism articulates ethical responsibilities grounded in compassion, interdependence, and the alleviation of suffering. Through a critical comparison, the paper demonstrates that core Buddhist principles such as non-harming (ahimsā), compassion (karuṇā), loving-kindness (mettā), and the Middle Way closely align with the moral underpinnings of human rights, even if expressed differently.

The analysis further contends that the idea of human rights as innate and universal, central to the UDHR, can be meaningfully interpreted through Buddhist teachings that affirm the intrinsic dignity and potential for enlightenment in all sentient beings. In this way, Buddhism offers a valuable ethical lens to complement and deepen contemporary human rights discourse. The article calls for a more inclusive understanding of human rights that recognises diverse cultural expressions without diminishing the core principles of dignity, equality, and justice. The paper proposes a more holistic and dialogical approach to peacebuilding by integrating Buddhist ethical thought with global human rights frameworks. It concludes that when Buddhist values and human rights principles are used in tandem, they reinforce each other and provide a powerful foundation for promoting structural and inner peace. This synthesis underscores the importance of engaging multiple worldviews in the ongoing effort to protect human dignity and foster global harmony.

Keywords: Human Rights; Buddhism and Human Rights; Peace Studies; Human Rights and Peace

Introduction

On 10 December 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), proclaiming for the first time the inalienable rights to which “all members of the human family” are inherently entitled (United Nations General Assembly [UNGA], 1948, p. 3). Over time, the UDHR has achieved the status of customary international law, obliging States, regardless of political, economic, or cultural differences, to uphold its principles (Donnelly, 2013). Within fifty years, “human rights” has become a global *lingua franca*, framing norms of dignity, equality, and justice in international discourse (Donnelly, 2013). Despite near-universal ratification, questions persist about the UDHR’s practical impact (Morsink, 1999). Numerous States party to the Declaration continue to face credible allegations of rights abuses, ranging from discriminatory legislation to systemic violations of civil and political freedoms (Clapham, 2015). This gap between aspiration and implementation calls into question the UDHR’s enforcement mechanisms and the extent to which its Western-rooted conception of rights resonates across diverse cultural traditions (Donnelly, 2013).

Arguments have been made that one of the fundamental problems preventing UDHR’s effectiveness lies on the question of its ‘universality’. It is widely considered that the origins of human rights, the discourse and its intellectual framework are derived from the ‘Judeo-Christian’ tradition, which makes their extension to different cultures a rather difficult and misguided endeavour (Baik, 2012). The article rejects the criticism that conventional Human Rights are not universal. The article takes the position of not placing doubt on the universality of the UDHR, but believes that for the UDHR to work at its best, there is a need to explore the concept of ‘rights’ from various cultures and traditions without undermining the significance of the conventional Human Rights concept in the UDHR. The ongoing human rights violations in various parts of the world from states that have ratified the UDHR prove that there is a pressing need to re-examine or even redefine ‘human rights’ to provide a holistic view of the concept of ‘human rights’. Buddhism is not only a religion but a philosophy and way of life which recognizes all human beings as equal under the law of ‘Dharma’ (the law of nature) largely actualized through ‘Karma’; an intentional act (both from past and present) in which effects of actions determine the future of the actor; principle governing cause and effect (Mitchell & Jacoby,

2013; Shani, 2013). The concept of 'Karma', also known as the law of moral causation, is one of the fundamental principles teaching of Buddhism. There is a natural link between rights and responsibilities and duties based on this idea; thus, Dharma and the concept of Karma are compatible with human rights as both imply rights and responsibilities (Dunne & Wheeler, 1999). The doctrine of Karma stresses that one is responsible for one's actions and how one should treat others to accumulate good Karma reflected in a good life (Ness, 1999).

The article views human rights holistically from a Buddhist perspective by exploring and comparing fundamental Buddhist teachings to the UDHR. The purpose is to seek compatibility based on the belief that, before and apart from the UDHR existing, there are notions of 'rights' embedded in different Buddhist traditions. Understanding how other traditions view the concept of rights may help in realising how the UDHR can be understood more effectively from non-Western traditions. Furthermore, this paper argues that in a modern world where the abandonment of traditional wisdom or knowledge is increasing, it is crucial to recognise and embrace applicable knowledge from cultural traditions rooted in the past. This paper has two objectives: first, to explore the concept of 'rights' in Buddhist traditions, comparing these to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Secondly, to understand how Buddhist teachings can contribute to the resolution of conflicts by finding peaceful solutions for Buddhist societies where human rights violations are common. To do this, the paper will illustrate how the concepts of Buddhism, Human Rights and Peace are greatly intertwined and how they reinforce one another. The papers' main questions are: what is Buddhism's view on 'human rights' and how does it express the notion of 'rights' through its core teaching? And to what extent do Buddhist teachings contribute to the idea of human rights?

Rethinking 'human rights' from a religious perspective

Ongoing human rights violations in various parts of states which have ratified the UDHR induce the need to re-examine or redefine 'human rights'. When discussing human rights discourse, there is a need to explain the way various cultures interpret and conceptualise how the language of rights is used. Just because some cultures are unable to express the language of rights in way that parallels with the Western understanding of rights does not mean that human rights in the particular culture does not exist or is not expressed in a different fashion which can re-interpreted in a manner consistent with international human

rights norms embodied in the UDHR (Meyer, 1992). Religion and religious beliefs are an integral part of cultures and, as such, are a crucial part of the human experience. With this in mind, it stands to reason that exploring how Buddhism as a religion embodies human rights can offer to add to the discussion of human rights and its discourse, which expands the ability to apply its core teachings that can then be used in finding pathways for peace (Donnelly, 2013). There is a pressing need to shed new light on human rights by looking at rights with a less egoistic, self-centred perspective and by adopting a less individualistic perspective. There exists a holistic manner which respects individuals while also embracing the ‘relationship’ and ‘connection’ between individual, community and society (Henkin, 1979; Inada, 2017).

Aung San Suu Kyi and the Dalai Lama have demonstrated the powerful connection between human rights and religion. Other prominent figures with strong religious devotion were Mahatma Gandhi, who followed the principle of non-violence (ahimsa) in Hinduism and Martin Luther King, Jr, who defined his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement according to the Christian principle of unconditional, self-sacrificial (Davis & Galligan, 2011). The recent uprisings in Tibet and Myanmar amplified a strong religious influence by involving not only lay persons but monks, nuns and religious groups (Nobel Prize, 1991). These examples provide a rationale to discuss how religious involvement in human rights can be understood and interpreted. It is crucial to include religious understandings as part of the human rights discussion instead of being left aside for private matters, given that in many societies, religion remains a pervasive part of life (Henkin, 1979; Hetherington, 2011; Brackney, 2013).

Another noteworthy point for rethinking human rights from a religious perspective is that religions, particularly Buddhism, emphasise not only ‘rights’ but also ‘responsibilities’ as a human being in relation to other human beings or even non-human beings. In 1993, at the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna, His Holiness Dalai Lama gave the following statement on Buddhism and human rights;

“Our world is becoming smaller and ever more interdependent with the rapid growth in population and increasing contact between people and governments. In this light, it is important to reassess the rights and responsibilities of individuals, peoples and nations in relation to each other and to the planet as a whole” (Lama, 1998, pp. 37).

Furthermore, the Dalai Lama stated in his lecture, 'Reaching for the same goal from a different path' in New Delhi, India, 2012, that the importance of duties and responsibilities was being overshadowed by the idea of rights, where people overly emphasised rights, which undermined responsibilities. He elaborated further that what made rights and responsibilities inseparable is the fact that one has the responsibility to oppose injustice and by not opposing injustice, one becomes part of injustice itself (His Holiness The 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet, 2012).

Viewing human rights through the lenses of Buddhism

Every Article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, even labour rights to fair wages, leisure and welfare, has been adumbrated, cogently upheld and meaningfully incorporated in an overall view of life and society by the Buddha (Inada, 2017). Despite the unique way Buddhism expresses human rights or the notion of rights, Buddhism can greatly contribute to a constructive discussion on the modern human rights discourse. Buddhism is almost always characterised as being a religion of peace, tolerance, and compassion (Keyes, 2011). The struggle for democracy and human rights, which began in the 1990s led by Aung San Suu Kyi, was characterised by Buddhist non-violence (ahimsa) and loving-kindness (metta). The Dalai Lama's speeches worldwide have never once left behind the Buddhist teachings of compassion. This is the central principle of Buddhist teachings called 'the Four Brahma Viharas', which means abiding and living; those who practice these are said to be abiding or living divinely or nobly. The Four Brahma Viharas; Metta (loving-kindness), Karuna (compassion), Mudita (empathetic joy), and Upekkha (equanimity), not only offer an ethical framework for personal conduct but also suggest a reciprocal understanding of rights; individuals who practice compassion and nonviolence (ahimsa) toward others are also entitled to be treated with respect and dignity (Thepa, 2024). These are the principal teachings of the Buddha concerning one's responsibility towards other sentient beings. Consequently, this implies that if one has such responsibilities for their act or attitude towards others, then they also are entitled to the right to claim such treatment from another party.

Keyes (2011) mentioned that Damien Keown, a prominent scholar of Buddhist ethics, asked whether Buddhism would endorse the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Keown stated that this question is profoundly

related to the overall Buddhist vision of individual and society. It is noteworthy that before making analytical comparisons on the compatibility of Buddhism and human rights, it is vital to clarify how this paper views Buddhism. When referring to Buddhism, this paper aims to shift away from viewing Buddhism from an institutionalised perspective of religion but view Buddhism in its pure form, lying from its core teachings of 'Dharma' (Law of Nature). This was discovered by the Buddha, who originally did not teach Buddhism but instead taught Dharma, the law of nature, a universal law which existed before his time and incarnation. Given this view, Dharma per se has already co-existed with the universe and throughout history of mankind, thus providing it with a universal component. The article will now illustrate how both traditional and contemporary Buddhist teachings are compatible with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

What are the core teachings of Buddhism compared with human rights concept? The Five Precepts

The key components of Buddha's teaching revolved around 'Sila' (Precepts), 'Samadhi' (concentration), and 'Panya' (wisdom). Sila refers to moral actions, arising from the mind to speech and to action. Moral behaviours or ethics included within the 'Five Precepts' are: do not kill or harm, avoid stealing, avoid sexual misconduct, avoid lying and avoid alcohol and other intoxicants (Ven. Vajiragnana, 1992).

The first investigation begins with the First Buddhist Precept—"do not kill or harm other living beings"—which aligns closely with Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), stating that "everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person." This alignment extends to the remaining four precepts: as one has a duty to refrain from taking life, others hold the right to life and protection from harm; as one must abstain from sexual misconduct, others possess the right to bodily integrity; as one must not lie, others are entitled to truthful communication. These parallels illustrate a fundamental compatibility between Buddhist ethics and universal human rights discourse (Keyes, 2011). The Five Precepts—abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and intoxication—serve as the foundation of Buddhist moral conduct and function as restraints against unwholesome behaviours, both for individual development and social harmony. As the most basic moral code for lay Buddhists, they can be interpreted as a religious articulation of human rights principles

(Green & King, 2012). In this light, the precepts promote human welfare, justice, and peace by encouraging ethical responsibility. As Vajiragnana argues in *Justice and Buddhism*, "man is responsible for society; it is he who makes it good or bad through his actions" (Goenka, 1998).

The Four Noble Truths and the Eight-Fold Noble Path

The Four Noble Truths and Eight-Fold Noble Paths are one of the most fundamental and significant teachings of the Buddha, which deal with 'dukkha (suffering)' and ways to escape suffering. Dukkha described in the Buddha's sermons, are found in all human beings regardless of race, nationality or religion. The Four Noble Truths are: Dukkha (suffering), Samudaya (the cause of suffering), Nirodha (the cessation of dukkha) and Magga (the eightfold path to cessation of dukkha). The teaching of the Fourth Noble Truth is significant because it brings us to the core understanding of how Buddhism views birth and human life and what it takes to understand the human condition. Before further discussion on the issue of human rights and human rights violations, an exploration of the understanding of the human condition is needed.

'Life is Dukkha' was the Buddha's First Sermon in which he said;

'Now this, O monks, is the noble truth of dukkha. Birth is dukkha, sickness is dukkha, and death is dukkha. Sorrow, lamentation, dejection, and despair are dukkha. Contact with unpleasant things is dukkha, and separation from what one wishes is dukkha. In short, the Five Aggregates onto which one grasps are dukkha.'

The First Truth was the truth of 'dukkha', which translates into English as 'suffering'. In this sermon, it is said that dukkha is found in at least four kinds of situations that arise in ordinary life. First, there are dissatisfactory conditions associated with physical processes such as old age, sickness and death. Second, are dissatisfactory conditions, such as sorrow and dejection, associated with mental-emotional processes. Third, there is the particular dissatisfaction one finds with unpleasant things. Fourth, there is the dissatisfaction one finds in not possessing the things one wants or needs (Mitchell & Jacoby, 2013).

According to the Buddha, these four kinds of human conditions of suffering arise from the same root causes, which is the way humans are in denial or do not have the right understanding of 'impermanence'. Humans tend to cling to or grasp things (both tangible and intangible), which leads to dissatisfaction.

In 2012, Aung San Suu Kyi, in her Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, mentioned *dukkha*. Stating that ‘as a Buddhist, I had heard about *dukkha*, generally translated as suffering, since I was a small child. I was particularly intrigued by the last two kinds of suffering: to be parted from those one loves and to be forced to live in propinquity with those one does not love. What experiences might our Lord Buddha have undergone in his own life that he had included these two states among the great sufferings? I thought of prisoners and refugees, of migrant workers and victims of human trafficking, of that great mass of the uprooted of the earth who have been torn away from their homes, parted from families and friends, forced to live out their lives among strangers who are not always welcoming. When suffering is ignored, there will be the seed of conflict. Living in isolation, I have ample time to reflect on the meaning of words and precepts that I have known and accepted all my life. If suffering is an unavoidable part of our existence, we should try to alleviate suffering, as far as possible, in a practical and earthly way.’ (Frye & Suchan, 2017). The teaching of suffering is crucial in Buddhism as it was the Buddha who, in his determination to gain enlightenment, found ways to understand human suffering and ways to alleviate or even eradicate those sufferings. He saw suffering as an inescapable fact of all humans as they are bound to sickness, old age, decay, and death. Every living creature must face all these. The Buddha was not satisfied with the limited explanations of the intellect as he continued to probe within himself to experience the real nature of suffering (Hart, 2011). The Eight Noble Paths is a path of purification that states that anyone who walks into that path is becoming noble-hearted and freed from suffering. The steps of the Eight-Fold Noble Path are arranged under three categories. The first two steps are ‘proper view’ (right understanding and right thought). The second category is ‘proper conduct’ (right speech, right action and right livelihood) and lastly, ‘proper practice’ (right effort, mindfulness, right concentration). Thus far, it is observable that the original teaching of Buddhism, if practised by all Buddhists, leaves no room for human rights violations. Buddhism or Buddha’s Dharma encourages and emphasises heavily on how individuals should act in a society toward one another and how self-transformation is needed to become a better human with full compassion and respect towards others.

Human rights and ‘Engaged Buddhism’

This section aims to examine how Buddhism and human rights is incorporated at a practical level by examining the relatively new concept of ‘Engaged Buddhism’. Engaged Buddhism is an alternative approach to human rights from a contemporary Asian context, which shifts away from conventional or stereotypical understandings of traditional Buddhism, whereby Buddhist practitioners are supposed to aspire towards enlightenment through individual spiritual practice and leave worldly matters aside. To separate worldly matter and spiritual practice is not where Engaged Buddhism differs. Engaged Buddhism was born from the Mahayana branch of Buddhism (Kabat-Zinn, 2005; Salzberg, 2020). Mahayana and Theravada branches of Buddhism are different in terms of the way they view ‘enlightenment’. While Theravada Buddhism believes that each ‘individual’, through the Eight-Fold Noble Path, can achieve spiritual liberation or enlightenment alone or with those who happen to walk the same path. Mahayana Buddhism (a larger vehicle) encourages a ‘collective’ effort to enlightenment and gives much emphasis on the ‘Sangha’ (Buddhist community). Mahayana Buddhism stresses the responsibility that each individual has towards others and the community of Buddhist to help others attain enlightenment (Hetherington, 2011). Thus, they differ in their orientation towards individualism and communalism and the obligations of the individual towards the aforementioned. Therefore, when it comes to social activism and social engagement, Mahayana Buddhism plays a more significant role in that it stresses how an individual should be engaged with others to help them on their path of enlightenment, justice and social living on a consistent and current basis, not a dogmatic one of individualism and waiting for rebirth (Keyes, 2011).

Shedding new light on Buddhism and combining spiritual Buddhist practice of mindfulness meditation, and applying it to solve problems outside oneself, is one of the fundamental principles of Engaged Buddhism. Buddhist human rights activists in Asia who apply Engaged Buddhism’s approach draw closer to people’s everyday lives through utilising traditional Buddhist practice not only at the individual level but also by synthesising human spirituality with social responsibility as a human being (MacNaughton and Frey, 2011).

To understand how Buddhism and human rights can work hand in hand toward peace, this part of the paper will explore Engaged Buddhism based on the narrative of contemporary human rights activists and spiritual leaders in Asia

namely Thich Naht Hahn (Vietnamese), His Holiness Dalai Lama (Tibet), Aung San Suu Kyi (Myanmar), Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (Thailand), Sulak Sivaraksa (Thailand) and Maha Ghosanda (Cambodia) who came from three major Buddhist schools of Vajrayana, Mahayana, and Theravada respectively. The proximity of the human rights struggles in Burma and Tibet inspires this study of their respective leaders. While there is a debate among Buddhist intellectuals about the extent to which the concept of human rights is compatible with Buddhist culture, Buddhist activists continue to rely heavily upon the language of human rights as an integral part of their work (Keyes, 2011).

‘Engaged Buddhism’ in Asia

“When bombs begin to fall on people, you cannot stay in the meditation hall at all the time. Meditation is about the awareness of what is going on-not only in your body and in your feelings, but all around you”
Thich Naht Hahn, Vietnamese Zen monk

Engaged Buddhism scholarship is wide and has been applied to studies of business and the successful generational handover of business enterprises of non-kin-based succession to carry on social legacies of entrepreneurship (Burton et al., 2022). Yadav (2024) traces the basis and evolution of engaged Buddhism, finding the material world applicability of Buddhist principles outside of monastic life through active social engagement. Vu & Tran (2019) extend the above analysis to the active management of enterprises, finding increased efficacy in management processes through the successful integration of traditional and modern philosophies, including engaged Buddhism. Phuong & Singh (2024) find applicability in a wide range of social endeavours, including social inequality and conflict management, due to the grounded principles of empowerment through Buddhist ethics and collective action. Somers (2022) argues that engaged Buddhism is a valuable tool for well-being and application in psychology for persons suffering from mental illness. Somers finds that mindfulness, compassion, active listening, and empathy are essential components for psychological practices that can offer effective methods of support. Vinh et. al. (2021) finds that the application of engaged Buddhism through NGO’s, specifically in armed conflict during different phases of conflict, from open conflict to management and reconciliation, can be supported for success.

To the core of this study, Rodloytuk (2021) argues that Buddhism and the UDHR not only share common linkages but, by twinning the language of engaged Buddhism to human rights communities, can gain powerful tools for communication of both grievances and aspirations. Tuan et. al. (2021) find application of Thich Naht Haht in the realm of strategic communication, arguing that Buddhist principles help to anchor and inform means of communication that enable compassion, empathy and engagement. During the Vietnam War (1959-75), Thich Naht Haht, an ordained Zen (a school of Mahayana Buddhist tradition originating in China) monk and a well-known Vietnamese human rights activist, advocated the term ‘Engaged Buddhism’. He did this to promote human rights and solve social problems by synthesising traditional spiritual Buddhist practices and social activism to transform one’s inner self to bring about changes in the outer world.

During the war, Thich Nhat Hanh and the Buddhist social movement in Vietnam refused to take sides with either the North or the South. Instead, they called for political negotiations, rather than military solutions to war (Mitchell & Jacoby, 2013). After returning from Ph.D studies at Princeton University, Thich Nhat Hanh founded the School of Youth for Social Service, an organisation aimed at Buddhist social engagement during the Vietnam War. During that time, he brought together not only monastic Buddhists but lay people for training in social engagement, liberating practice, peace and reconciliation, healing, and mindfulness meditation practice. Threatened by both the governments of North and South Vietnam since the 1960s, while visiting the West, Thich Nhat Hanh was unable to return to his home country. In 1982, he founded the ‘Plum Village’, a monastery for monks and nuns and a Buddhist mindfulness meditation practice centre for lay people in southern France.

Thich Nhat Hanh (1926–2022), a Vietnamese Zen master and peace activist, travelled extensively to lead lectures and mindfulness meditation retreats worldwide, believing that individual transformation is foundational to societal harmony (Hanh, 1999). Over his lifetime, he authored numerous influential works, most notably *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (1999) and *Peace Is Every Step* (1992), that articulate how conscious awareness and compassionate action can cultivate lasting inner and outer peace (Hanh, 2010). In recognition of these contributions, Martin Luther King Jr. nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize

in 1967, praising his role in promoting reconciliation and nonviolent resistance (Plum Village Mindfulness Practice Center, n.d.).

Engaged Buddhism offers a significant alternative approach to human rights by recognising human spirituality as a private matter and as a means to utilise it in the public sphere to restore a society during and after conflict, fostering and cultivating peace and harmony in a society experiencing conflict. This approach is based on the Buddhist observation that the condition of the inner self mirrors that of the outer world. Internal moral character determines external behaviour in society. In other words, Engaged Buddhism means Buddhists who are seeking ways to apply the insights from meditation practices and the Buddha's teachings of Dharma and apply them to social, political, environmental situations, and economic suffering and injustice. Generated from the understanding that the roots of evil and human rights abuse are not external to human beings, but are the internal mental afflictions of greed, hatred, anger, and delusion (Kittle, 2011). Engaged Buddhism suggests that to deal with the struggle for human rights in the external world, one needs an understanding of 'human suffering'. To alleviate those sufferings or situations which created suffering, an inner transformation is needed to bring about both personal and social changes; the approach that arises from within by working at the inner-self level.

According to Hanh (1999), developing an insightful perception of oneself arises through practising one's mindfulness meditation in bringing one back into the present moment and fully observing one's body and mind through one's breath. Then, deeper forms of meditation lead one to a fuller insight into one's mind, getting rid of the burdens one finds and discovering the inter-being of life (Hanh, 2001). Thereby, one is in touch not only with humanity's shared suffering but also with a deeper source of inner peace to give to others (Mitchell & Jacoby, 2013). Engaged Buddhism promotes social activism, which underlines and combines selflessness, love, and compassion, the key message emphasised by the Dalai Lama, among other teachings of the Buddha. In 'Healing Heart and Mind: The Pursuit of Human Rights in Engaged Buddhism,' Kittle exemplified the work of Aung San Suu Kyi and the Dalai Lama as efforts of the inner work, which accompanied efforts in the external world to alleviate suffering. In other words, Engaged Buddhist practitioners must work on their spiritual self while serving society at the same time. A truly non-dualistic understanding of the relation between enlightenment and engagement "honours both 'inner' work and 'outer'

work as mutually reinforcing and ultimately inseparable” (Kraft, 2011). An approach that encompasses both inner and outer manifestations is therefore essential. The full flourishing of human rights depends upon consideration of the whole person, inner and outer, heart and mind, and Engaged Buddhism offers a distinctive example of this integrative path.

In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979) killed millions of Cambodians by torture, execution, overwork, starvation, or disease. King has noted that even after the regime, the country has been left in a prolonged state of darkness, with a high level of lawlessness and corruption. Many schools and Buddhist temples were destroyed, leading to a significant loss of traditional Buddhist-based morality. Maha Ghosananda, a Cambodian monk known as Gandhi of Cambodia, has taken a leadership role in rebuilding Cambodia. He emphasized that Buddhism never vanished from the hearts of the Cambodian people during those years and people of Cambodia must obtain all basic human rights, including the right to freely pursue economic, social and cultural development and rights to self-determination. Through the Cambodian Institute of Human Rights, monks are trained in human rights and expected to be able to teach in their sermons. Cambodia is a great example of how Buddhist monks incorporated the human rights language and continued the debate on the topic.¹

The Buddha lived in a context where spiritual inquiry and teaching proceeded freely; there was no need for state-sponsored protection of religion (Witte, 2012). As Donnelly (2013) observes, it was the rise of modern, capitalist nation-states in Europe that first gave impetus to formal human-rights thinking; only later did Asian societies confront similar market-driven challenges to individual dignity. In twentieth-century Thailand, Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu (1906–1993) embodied a synthesis of personal awakening and social critique. Rejecting the comforts of the city sangha, he founded Suan Mokkh, “The Garden of Liberation,” where he combined rigorous scriptural study with intensive meditation practice. As both monk and social critic, he insisted that inner transformation and societal renewal are inseparable. In *Handbook for Mankind*, he distilled these lectures into a guide for ethical living (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 2005), and in *The Three Wishes* he urged practitioners to “get to the core of one’s

¹ See Sulak Sivaraksa in *Modern Buddhism in Asia*, *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience*, for discussion on how the traditional Buddhist language of rights does not exist or is not referred to, but rather how Buddhism discusses duties and responsibilities of the Sangha.

religion,” “build mutual understanding between religions,” and “lead the world out of materialism” (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 2009, p. 27). Buddhadasa Bhikku highly valued human rights as shown in all of his work; in nearly every book he has written, he inserted a list of acts of kindness, the way humans should treat one another. This implies and reflects a non-conventional form of rights, duties and responsibilities.²

Conclusion

While Buddhism expresses the language of rights differently from conventional human rights discourse, numerous scholars argue that the concept of human rights is embedded within Buddhist thought. One key contribution Buddhism offers is a holistic, duty-based approach that emphasises ethical responsibility and interconnectedness over individualism. This perspective challenges the Western-centric, often individualistic framing of human rights and responds to critiques about their universality. Engaged Buddhism, in particular, seeks to overcome the dualistic worldview that separates individuals from one another and nature. By emphasising the interdependence of all beings and the moral imperative not to harm, it provides a philosophical and ethical foundation for a more inclusive and peace-oriented understanding of rights. Rather than dismissing human rights as incompatible with non-Western traditions, integrating Buddhist values, such as compassion, mindfulness, and non-harm, can enrich and expand the discourse. In doing so, human rights can better fulfil their original aim: to protect all beings and foster global justice and peace. Ultimately, Buddhism contributes meaningfully to reimagining human rights in ways that emphasise mutual care, shared responsibility, and collective well-being. In doing so, it strengthens the foundational purpose of human rights: to protect all beings, promote justice, and cultivate a more peaceful and harmonious world.

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The Process of Wisdom Growth (WG) and Its Application to Daily Life with Special Reference to Paññāvuḍḍhi Sutta

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Abstract

This paper presents an in-depth exploration of the process of wisdom growth (WG) and its practical applications in daily life, with a special focus on the Paññāvuḍḍhi Sutta. The study delineates four fundamental processes that cultivate wisdom: association with wise friends, listening to enlightening teachings (Dhamma), careful attention, and diligent practice of Dhamma. These elements collectively foster growth in wisdom (paññāvuḍḍhi). Additionally, five key factors are identified as integral to the process of wisdom growth: a) Faith serves as an internal initiator, although not explicitly part of the eightfold path. b) Energy represents the right effort necessary to sustain the continuous flow of the growth process. c) Mindfulness embodies the alertness required for effective learning in every moment. d) Concentration, viewed as an inherent quality of mind, enables focused awareness. e) Wisdom is characterised by right view, which integrates with the cognitive processes of learning and understanding. Recognising that wisdom (paññā) fundamentally equates to right view (sammādiṭṭhi), this research underscores the importance of these processes and factors in overcoming defilements, experiencing the noble fruit, attaining cessation, and achieving a worthy state for receiving gifts. The insights gained from this study enhance our understanding of wisdom growth and its significance in fostering a meaningful life.

Keywords: Wisdom Growth; Paññāvuḍḍhi Sutta; Right View; Dhamma Practice; Mindfulness.

Introduction

The pursuit of wisdom is a timeless endeavour that has captured the interest of philosophers, spiritual seekers, and scholars throughout the ages. This paper delves into the intricate process of wisdom growth (WG), focusing on its practical implications in everyday life, particularly through the lens of the Paññāvuḍḍhi Sutta. In a world often clouded by confusion and distraction, cultivating wisdom stands out as a crucial pathway to clarity, understanding, and personal fulfilment (Hurst, 2020).

At the core of this exploration are four essential processes that contribute to the development of wisdom: forming meaningful associations with wise individuals, engaging with illuminating teachings (Dhamma), practising attentive mindfulness, and committing to diligent Dhamma practice (Brahm, 2006; Waggoner, 2019). Each of these elements plays a significant role in enhancing one's capacity for wisdom (paññāvuḍḍhi).

Furthermore, this study identifies five foundational factors that are pivotal in this growth journey: faith as a catalyst for inner awakening, the energy required to maintain sustained effort, mindfulness that fosters present-moment awareness, concentration that sharpens focus, and right view, which serves as a guiding principle in understanding the world (Gunaratana, 2011; Shonin et al., 2014).

By elucidating these dimensions, this work aims to deepen our understanding of wisdom growth and its essential role in overcoming life's challenges, experiencing transformative insights, and creating a life imbued with purpose and meaning. Through this comprehensive analysis, we hope to inspire individuals to actively engage in practices that cultivate wisdom, leading to enriched personal experiences and greater contributions to society's collective well-being.

Definition and Meaning of Wisdom (Paññā)

Paññā is derived from the Pāli words Pa + Ñā (dhātu). Pa is a prefix meaning an intensive sense of the extreme, and the root Ñā (dhātu) means knowledge and understanding. The Pāli word “paññā” means wisdom, knowledge, understanding, intelligence, discernment, insight, investigation, and enlightenment. In Buddhist usages, paññā means knowing, understanding, and comprehending wisdom fully. In the Pāli-English Dictionary, paññā means intelligence, comprising all the higher faculties of cognition, “intellect as conversant with general truths”, reason, wisdom, insight, knowledge, and

recognition (Rhys Davids & Stede, 1952). In the Abhidhamma, the three terms – wisdom (paññā), knowledge (ñāṇa), and non-delusion (amoha) – are used synonymously (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 1999). Amoha means intelligence, knowledge and wisdom. This mental factor enables one to dispel the darkness of ignorance and delusion, which conceals the truth. Moha (delusion) and amoha (knowledge) are two extreme opposites (Janakabhivamsa, 2009).

Wisdom means the state of being wise, experience and knowledge together with the power of applying them (Thompson, 1993). Wisdom also means insight, knowledge, understanding, or cognitive acuity. It is one of the threefold trainings or three divisions of the Noble Eightfold Path. Such wisdom is understood to exist in the universal condition of human beings and can be intuitively experienced through practising meditation. It is an important tool to achieve the ultimate goal of human beings in Theravāda Buddhism. Wisdom means accumulated knowledge or the ability to apply knowledge, and it is the power of seeing things as they truly are, and how to act rightly when the problems of life come before us. The seeds of wisdom lie latent in us, and when our hearts are soft and warm with love, they grow into their power (Thittila, 1992). Wisdom is a common intellectual concept and a cardinal moral value in all the major religions and philosophical systems (Yaran, 2006). Human beings have an intelligence capable of achieving these goals. That is why wisdom is more than knowledge.

The Sources of Wisdom

Good external sources: having good friends, which refers to associating with teachers, advisors, friends, and books. It also includes having general social conditions that are wholesome and helpful. All of these will encourage or arouse the arising of wisdom, through the processes of listening, discussing, seeking advice, querying, reading, and researching. This also entails being selective about the use of mass media.

Good internal sources: yonisomanasikāra, which is the proper use of thinking, knowing how to think, being skilled in thinking; that is, seeing things with critical reflection, tracing their causes and effects, analyzing an object or problem in order to see it as it is and in terms of its causal conditions until one sees its true nature and can solve the problem or bring about benefit. A point that needs to be reiterated here is that in providing an education or skillful instruction, a virtuous friend needs to constantly remember that this instruction must act as a catalyst for the arising of wise reflection in the students (Roper, 2024). Learners

need suitable external sources (good teachers) and internal sources (wise reflection) in daily life.

Sutamayapaññā is an individual trained with this to achieve the knowledge (ñāna) and wisdom (paññā) arising from learning from others, listening to others' words, and being instructed by others. It is a kind of wisdom arising from an external source. Sutamayapaññā: knowledge derived from formal learning. When one is not yet dependent entirely on one's reflective abilities, one must seek out a teacher, who in the scriptures is referred to as a virtuous friend (kalyānamitta). As explained above, Buddhism emphasises the need for good friends. Here, a good teacher (kalyānamitta) is said to be the most fortunate and greatest possession one can have. Then one can comprehend the truth at one level.

Cintāmayapaññā is an individual trained to obtain knowledge (ñāna) and wisdom (paññā), so that it becomes one's thinking. It is not just listening to others, being instructed by other people, but learners should intellectually analyse something to see whether the analysis process, as such, depends on one's intellect. Learners can accept a teaching intellectually and become knowledgeable about the theory and practice clearly. Cintāmayapaññā is knowledge derived from reflection and from the ability to contemplate. When one acquires knowledge from formal learning and generates wisdom consisting of such knowledge (sutamayapaññā), one trains in wise reflection (yonisomanasikāra), leading to profound and thorough understanding, which can be applied in one's investigation of the truth.

Bhāvanāmayapaññā is an individual trained to develop knowledge (ñāna) and wisdom (paññā) thereby it deals with two kinds of wisdom (mundane and supramundane) and future investigation of phenomena to realise the truth. This type of wisdom comes from direct experience of the truth (saccā). Bhāvanāmayapaññā is knowledge derived from spiritual cultivation. It refers to practical application, whereby one acts from direct experience. Here, one reflects on the first two kinds of wisdom and furthers one's spiritual development by applying wise reflection in regard to all phenomena, until one realizes the wisdom established as the path (magga) and one attains fruition (phala).

Therefore, Sutamayapaññā and cintāmayapaññā are normally used for getting the individual trained with mental development for critical and analytical thinking. So, both of them work together to support each other. The process of sutamayapaññā is said to be the starting point of critical and analytical thinking as its function is to collect the information from outside, such as by listening,

learning, or even reading from outside sources to collect information. Then emanates the process of *cintāmayapaññā* that functions with the collected information to evaluate and contemplate them deeply. Lastly, the process of *bhavanāmayapaññā* succeeds from the initial two kinds of wisdom, thereby investigating them further, the purpose of which is to realize the truth.

The Process of Wisdom Growth (WG) in *Paññāvuddhi Sutta*

According to *Paññāvuddhisutta*, “Bhikkhu, these four things lead to the growth of wisdom. What four? Association with good persons, hearing the good Dhamma, careful attention, and practice following the Dhamma” (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2012). Bhikkhu may bring about the two conditions for wisdom or right view mentioned above by following the principles of the four conditions conducive to developing wisdom.

Sappurisūpanissaya: associating with the wise man; he knows how to select sources of knowledge, and associates with learned people who are virtuous, wise and worthy of respect. Associating with a good friend or wise man or good teacher (*sappurisūpanissaya*) is equal to having virtuous friends (*kalyāṇamitta*). The Buddha is the supreme friend. Associating with a good friend leads to beneficial instruction from another (*paratoghosa*), a good friend or wise man who teaches the true Dhamma.

To associate with the wise is most blissful (Sri K. Dharmakirti, 1956). By wise men, we who are rich with virtuousness and all good deeds and thoughts, i.e. men who bodily abstain from killing, stealing and committing adultery; in their speech, they refrain from talking falsehoods, slander, using obscene words and idle gossip. Men who abstain from these vices are free from craving through ignorance. To associate with these wise ones is one of the causes of bliss. By doing so, we are elevating ourselves. For instance, if we take a piece of dry banana leaf and wrap up some sweet-scented flowers, the leaf is impregnated with the scent even after the flowers are taken away. In the same way, if we associate the wise ones, i.e. well-disciplined and meritorious people, our names will be enhanced.

The advice of others (*paratoghosa*): External motivation and influence, teachings, advice, instruction, transmission, schooling (education), proclamations, information, and news from external sources. This also includes imitating or emulating others’ behavior and ideas. It is an external factor. A person with suitable attributes and qualities who is able to perform the function

of instruction well is called a virtuous friend or good friend (*kalyāṇamitta*). That is why wisdom arise from the advice of others (*paratoghosa*) or associating with a good friend.

Saddhammassavana: hearing to good dhamma or listening to good dhamma; a) listener listens attentively to teachings and advice; b) listener searches for knowledge from people, books, and mass media; c) listener applies himself to learning and researching, seeks advice and makes queries so that listener attains real knowledge.

According to the *Mijjhima Commentary* (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2006), the proper external supporting factors are extended to others that are called *pāli* word “*sappāya*”. It means proper supporting factors, which consist of seven aspects, but here shows one aspect: (1) another’s voice is the listening to conducive Dhamma (*sappāya-dhammassavana*), and adds that wise attention is the method of the Buddha’s and the all- knowing Buddha’s, since there is no *paratoghosa* for them. Listening to Dhamma gives rise to wholesome qualities and to attain wisdom, which comprehends things correctly according to the truth. *Saddhammasavana* is related to joining the practice of Dhamma. Here, Dhamma refers to those key teachings that engender wisdom and provide us with essential principle for skillful living and wholesome behavior.

Yonisomanasikāra is a *pāli* term that can be translated as wise reflection. There are many different English translations of *yonisomanasikāra* in English such as, proper attention, systematic attention, reasoned attention, attentive consideration, reasoned consideration, considered attention, careful consideration, careful attention, ordered thinking, orderly reasoning, analytical reflection, wise reflection (Trencker, 1979). This includes systematic attention, careful attention, reasoned attention, having thorough method in one’s thought, proper consideration, wise consideration, critical reflection, analytical reflection, or thinking in terms of causal relations or by way of problem solving. It is a significant factor leading to the arising of wisdom or insight (Weissman, 2006). Wise reflection is one’s duty in regard to the Dhamma. It is to apply proper methods of thinking and reasoning. Wise reflection leads to wellbeing and an ability to solve problems. This is an internal condition, a spiritual factor and may be (proximate cause of wisdom) referred to as the “way of wisdom”.

Phra Prayut Payutto, wrote *Yonisomanasikāra* is a mental factor that assists in the birth of wisdom and is consequently of great importance in insight. In insight, *yonisomanasikāra* is a singularly important step on the path to wisdom,

and is thus an essential principle of Dhamma. Yonisomanasikāra directly precedes wisdom. It is that which paves the way for wisdom, or opens up a space in which wisdom can mature. Yonisomanasikāra acts as a link between sati (mindfulness) and paññā (wisdom). It is that which guides the stream of thought in such a way that wisdom can get down to work and achieve results. It is that which provides wisdom with its method. It is the skilful means employed in the efficacious use of wisdom. As the term is commonly used, it implies both reflection and wisdom (Bhikkhu P. A. Payutto, 2018).

Practising following dhamma; the things he has learned, heard and thoroughly considered, he puts into practice correctly following the dhamma and their objectives, so that they are harmonious with the overall objective; he practices the teaching with its objective in mind; for example, contentment as a support for effort, but not leading to laziness.

Practising the dhamma correctly is the noble path or the threefold training. Why should we make practice as a key point of Buddhist education? Because practice is the root of Buddhism. Only practice can keep the religious nature, keep Buddhist characteristics and not be changed, and make the core spirit of Buddha continue to be spread forever (Zhiwei, 2017). A correct practice of the dhamma culminates in the realisation of stream-entry, all the way to the realisation of arahantship. Dhamma means to uphold, maintain. The doctrine (dhamma) is for the wise and not for the unwise. They are called the noble community (ariya-saṅgha) and represent the Saṅgha in the Triple Gem.

Practical wisdom teaches and trains us how to deal wisely in the affairs of our world and surroundings. This type of wisdom is used for practising prudence or good judgment. The source of this wisdom is cognitive or mental and is developed by our experience and practice. Anyone can possess this wisdom through education and training. One of the most important features of practical wisdom is utilising it to acquire a skill. Skill is the ability to do something “well” (Roper, 2024).

The Process of Training for Wisdom

The process of training as the noble eightfold path and the four Dhammas can cultivate wisdom. The essence of spiritual training is right view as wisdom. When the right view is firmly established, spiritual training proceeds effectively. This process is divided into three major stages, which collectively are referred to as the three trainings or the threefold training (Phra Brahmagunabhorn, 2016).:

1) Training in morality (sīla): training in the area of conduct, moral discipline, and uprightness in physical actions, speech, and livelihood. It can be simply referred to as moral or virtue (sīla).

2) Training in mind (citta): the training of the mind, the cultivation of spiritual qualities, and the development of mental strength, mental aptitude, and mental health. It can be simply referred to as concentration or mental collectedness (samādhi).

3) Training in wisdom (paññā): the development of wisdom, giving rise to a knowledge of things as they truly are, a discernment of the causal nature of things, which enables one to solve problems in line with cause and effect; a thorough understanding of phenomena, to the extent that one is able to liberate the mind from all clinging and attachment, eliminate mental defilement, and bring an end to suffering to live with a mind that is free, pure, joyous and bright. It can be simply referred to as wisdom (paññā).

A Dhamma practitioner makes full use of these path factors and gradually solves problems until he or she reaches the complete end of suffering. the relationship between the threefold training and the eightfold path is as follows:

1) Process of training in higher virtue: aspects of training giving rise to right speech, right action, and right livelihood. These three path factors are cultivated to the point where one reaches the standard of a noble being in regard to moral conduct, discipline, and skillful social interaction. This is the basis for developing the power of mind.

2) Process of training in higher mind: aspect of training giving rise to right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. These three path factors are cultivated to the point where one reaches the standard of a noble being in regard to spiritual qualities, power of mind, mental capability, and mental health. This is the basis for developing wisdom.

3) Process of training in higher wisdom: aspects of training giving rise to right view and right thought. These two path factors are cultivated to the point where one reaches the standard of a noble being regarding wisdom. One's mind is bright, joyous, and freed from all forms of grasping and affliction; one reaches true deliverance of mind by way of wisdom.

As mentioned above, right view – the mainstay of spiritual training arises dependent on two factors (the prerequisites of right view), which are the source, origin and starting point of practice. Therefore, in the activities pertaining to spiritual training special emphasis should be given to these two factors. Indeed,

the expression “providing training” relates precisely to these two factors. As for the three stages of training morality (sīla), concentration (samādhi) and wisdom (paññā) they are used simply as reference points for creating a supportive environment and for ensuring that the direction of practice proceeds according to proper principles.

Apply to Your Self

There are many steps for individual wisdom development: Many people believe wisdom comes from advanced age, but the reality is more complex. Wisdom is often associated with age and experience, but it’s never too early or late to start incorporating it into daily life. All people can cultivate wisdom and live a more fulfilling life.

Mindfulness and self-reflection: One of the best ways to incorporate wisdom into your daily life is to practice mindfulness and self-reflection. Take time each day to sit quietly and reflect on thoughts and emotions. Pay attention to your breath and the sensations in your body. This can help you become more aware of thoughts and feelings, make better decisions, and respond more effectively to challenges. You can also try meditation to help you cultivate mindfulness and self-awareness.

Reading books on personal growth and development is a great way to incorporate wisdom into your daily life. Look for books focusing on mindfulness, self-improvement, and personal growth. You can also look for books and topics written by experts in fields like wisdom growth, wise man, psychology, psychotherapy, philosophy, and spirituality. Reading can help you gain new insights and perspectives and inspire you to make positive changes in your life. Try setting aside some time each day to read, even if it’s just for a few minutes.

Seek out mentors and role models: Finding mentors and role models can be a great way to incorporate wisdom into daily life. Look for people with qualities or skills you admire and respect, and try to learn from them. This could be someone in your personal life, like a family member or friend, or someone in your professional life, like a colleague or supervisor. You can also look for mentors and role models in books, movies, or other media. Pay attention to the lessons they teach and try to apply them to your own life. Remember, you don’t have to do everything independently – seeking guidance and support from others can be a powerful way to grow and learn.

To apply to be a good friend for oneself and others: nobody would like to have a friend who is bad and hated because bad friends will share disadvantages, and hated ones will be his enemy. In Buddhism, the association with bad person is suffering. At this point, the Buddha reminds us how to train oneself to be a good person for himself and others. In the *Bālappaṇḍitasutta*, to be a good one, he described three marks of a wise man or saint: good thought, good speech, and good action. Otherwise, he is a foolish man. In other words, abstaining from ten kinds of bad deeds is the mark of a good one. This is the brief teaching of the Buddha. Then, he says “first establish yourself in the right, then you may advise others. Let not the wise man give occasion for reproach.” In Buddhism, individual spiritual quality is a fundamental requirement because depending on personal virtues, societies will be united, harmony and peace. Therefore, if you protect yourself, you protect others. In the same way, if you protect others, others protect you. That is why the Buddha, here, guides us to train ourselves to be good friends.

Benefit of Wisdom Growth

In the *Visuddhimagga*, the benefits in developing understanding (*paññābhāvanānisamsa-niddesa*): which was asked above, we reply that this development of understanding has many benefits. However, it would be impossible to explain its benefits in detail, however long a time were taken over it takes (*Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa*, 2010). Briefly, though, its benefits should be understood as these:

- a) Removal of the various defilements,
- b) Experience of the state of the Noble Fruit,
- c) Ability to attain the attainment of cessation, and
- d) Achievement of worthiness to receive gifts (*Bhikkhu Ñānamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi*, 1995).

- a) Removal of the various defilements

Herein, it should be understood that one of the benefits of the mundane development of understanding is the removal of the various defilements beginning with ‘mistaken’ view of individuality. This starts with the delimitation of mentality-materiality. Then one of the benefits of the supramundane development of understanding is the removal, at the path moment, of the various defilements beginning with the fetters.

- b) The taste of the noble fruit

The removal of the various defilements and the experience of the taste of the noble fruit is a benefit of the development of understanding. For it is the fruitions of stream-entry, etc., the fruits of asceticism called the “noble fruit.” Its taste is experienced in two ways, that is to say, in its occurrence in the cognitive series of the path and its occurrence in the attainment of fruition. Of these, only its occurrence in the cognitive series of the path has been shown. Furthermore, when people say that the fruit is the mere abandoning of fetters and nothing more than that, the following sutta can be cited to convince them that they are wrong: “How is it that understanding of the tranquilizing of effort is knowledge of fruit? At the moment of the stream-entry path right view in the sense of seeing emerges from wrong view, and it emerges from the defilements and from the aggregates that occur consequent upon that ‘wrong view’, and externally it emerges from all signs. Right view arises because of the tranquilizing of the effort. This is the fruit of the path”, and this should be given in detail. Also, such passages as “the four paths and the four fruits these states have a measureless object”, and “an exalted state is a condition, as proximity condition, for a measureless state”, establish the meaning here.

c) The attainment of cessation

And not only the experience of the taste of the noble fruit but also the ability to attain the attainment of cessation should be understood as a benefit of the development of understanding.

d) Worthiness to receive gifts

And not only the ability to attain the attainment of cessation but also achievement of worthiness to receive gifts should be understood as a benefit of this supramundane development of understanding (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, 2010).

The benefit of wisdom growth:

1. Change from bad to good person:

The sources cultivate wisdom for the benefit of human being. the wisdom focuses on mental developed that we call wisdom leads to the top goal of Buddhist practice in order to release the suffering and reach “nibbāna”. Wisdom is derived from the sources, to seeing things as they are, not as they appear to be. That is understanding the true nature of impermanence, suffering and non-self. This realization leads to the ultimate truth of nibbāna. To lessen three sources of evil greed, hatred and delusion of suffering: nibbāna, freedom (vimutti), deliverances peace for all. The one who is a bad person, did not know what was wrong or right

and associated with the bad company, then led him to kill the other. After he met and listened to Buddha, he understood what was wrong or right. This is wisdom based on listening or learning. Before meeting a good friend (kalyānamitta) “one + listening + paying attention + from Buddha or good friend = wisdom does good way of saddhammasavana”, “sense-bases + subjects + yonisomanasikāra + paratoghosa (good friend) = wisdom comes from thinking and listening”.

2) Change from a normal person to a noble person:

The one who tries to do mental development eventually succeeds in purging the mind of all greed, hatred, and delusion and realises for oneself the Buddhist goal of liberation (vimutti). This is the wisdom of mental development, which leads to liberation, which is a kind of wisdom based on mental development (Dhammānudhammapaṭipatti).

3) Convert to a noble person:

The process of the source of wisdom can change from a bad person to a good person, and then to a noble person, to reach a stage of enlightenment at the age of seven through Buddha’s teaching. Read the short story as follows thus according to the above description, the process of wisdom is based on the source and change from a bad person to a good person and then to a noble person. By using the way of “saddhammasavana” with reasoned attention “yonisomanasikāra” and to practice Dhamma, it should be understood that it is wisdom based on listening which converts from a normal person to the noble person “ariyapuggala”.

Therefore, wisdom based on four sources – good friend, listen or learn, thinking and practice Dhamma or mental development not only benefits human beings but also real happiness (sukha) and liberation (vimutti) and leads to the higher goal of Buddhist practice, the ultimate truth of nibbāna.

Conclusion

The Paññāvuḍḍhi Sutta offers a compelling and structured framework for cultivating wisdom (WG) that integrates classical Buddhist thought with contemporary concerns for personal and collective well-being. Far from being an abstract or esoteric ideal, wisdom growth is presented as a practical, embodied process grounded in four interrelated dimensions: seeking wise companionship, internalising Dhamma teachings, cultivating refined attention, and embodying ethical conduct. These are supported by the five spiritual faculties, faith, energy,

mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom, which together form a dynamic and self-sustaining ecosystem for transformation.

At the heart of this framework lies *sammādiṭṭhi* (right view), the foundational element that catalyses the deconditioning of *avijjā* (ignorance) through reflective inquiry and moral discernment. The Sutta recasts wisdom as an active and evolving process, accessible to both monastics and laypersons, that unites intellectual clarity with ethical responsiveness. The emphasis on *kalyāṇamittatā* (noble friendship) highlights the inherently relational nature of wisdom, challenging hyper-individualistic models of self-development. Similarly, *dhammānudhammappaṭipatti* (practising following the Dhamma) ensures that contemplation is translated into compassionate action, where wisdom manifests not only as insight but as *karuṇā* (compassion) and non-harming.

The practical implications of this study are far-reaching. For individuals, WG provides a transformative response to contemporary stressors: mindfulness tempers impulsivity, ethical behaviour strengthens resilience, and wise relationships foster mutual accountability. At the community level, integrating WG into mentorship initiatives, educational programs, and conflict resolution fosters trust and ethical cohesion. On a broader societal scale, its emphasis on *sīla* (virtue) and *paññā* (discernment) counters moral fragmentation, consumerism, and environmental disregard, refocusing human flourishing on interdependence rather than exploitation.

Importantly, this framework invites interdisciplinary engagement—bridging Buddhist epistemology with cognitive science, virtue ethics, and psychological resilience. Future research might explore the neurocognitive underpinnings of WG or its application in therapeutic, educational, and organisational contexts. Ultimately, the *Paññāvuḍḍhi Sutta* challenges us to view wisdom not as a static attainment but as a relational and evolving endeavour, one that purifies the mind, strengthens communities, and nurtures a sustainable moral ecology. By integrating this vision into modern life, we enact a path where wisdom and compassion are inseparable and deeply transformative and universally attainable.

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The Interplay of Buddhist Mindfulness Practices: Fostering Harmonious Relationships in Couples

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Abstract

In today's world, romantic relationships face numerous challenges, including communication breakdowns and the increasing impact of external stressors. While modern psychological interventions, particularly Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), often focus on behavioural changes, they can overlook the deeper intra- and interpersonal dynamics that are essential for relational health.

This article suggests that Buddhist mindfulness practices can offer a valuable framework to address these gaps. It explores how Vipassanā (insight meditation), mettā (loving-kindness), karuṇā (compassion), and the ethical precepts (pañcaśīla) work together to promote positive interactions among couples. By integrating classical Buddhist philosophy with contemporary relational theories, the study demonstrates how these practices can cultivate focused attention, non-judgmental awareness, and emotional regulation. This, in turn, empowers individuals to move beyond maladaptive responses and fosters mutual empathy, enhances responsiveness to partners' needs, and helps de-escalate conflicts.

At the core of this process are the ethical teachings of Buddhism, which emphasize non-harm, truthfulness, and mental discipline. These principles nurture relational environments built on trust and mutual respect. Emerging empirical evidence supports the effectiveness of these mindfulness practices, showing they can enhance emotional resilience, active listening, and collaborative problem-solving, all of which are critical for relationship satisfaction.

Incorporating mindfulness into therapeutic settings complements traditional models by addressing both individual well-being and the dynamics of relationships, offering a comprehensive approach to enhancing intimacy. This article argues that using Buddhist mindfulness practices not only fills gaps in existing therapeutic approaches but also provides culturally adaptable tools for fostering closeness in a fragmented world. By redefining mindfulness as a relational practice rather than just an individual one, this research contributes to interdisciplinary discussions across psychology, theology, and sociology, advocating for evidence-based, ethically grounded interventions to help couples navigate the complexities

Keywords: Mindfulness-based Interventions; Couples' Relationships; Vipassanā Meditation; Compassion; Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

Introduction

Interpersonal harmony remains a critical determinant of psychosocial well-being, yet contemporary romantic relationships face escalating pressures from digital communication saturation, economic volatility, and shifting sociocultural paradigms (Finkel et al., 2020; Neff & Karremans, 2020). Conventional therapeutic approaches, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), prioritise behavioural restructuring to alleviate relational distress but frequently overlook the interdependent cognitive, affective, and systemic processes that reinforce emotional detachment (Atkins et al., 2021; Epstein & Zheng, 2017). Critics argue that such models inadequately address the cyclical misattunement and defensive reactivity inherent in attachment-related conflicts (Johnson, 2019). In contrast, Buddhist mindfulness practices—rooted in *satipaṭṭhāna* (foundations of mindfulness) and *brahmavihārās* (sublime attitudes)—offer a holistic framework for fostering relational resilience through metacognitive awareness, nonjudgmental acceptance, and intentional ethical engagement (Kappen et al., 2018; Simonsson et al., 2023). By integrating contemplative practices like *vipassanā* (insight meditation) and *mettā* (loving-kindness), couples may recalibrate attentional biases, attenuate

maladaptive emotional schemas, and cultivate shared vulnerability, thereby disrupting entrenched cycles of estrangement (Lord, 2017; Chen et al., 2023).

A growing corpus of empirical research highlights mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) as potent mechanisms for enhancing dyadic satisfaction, particularly through improved emotion regulation and empathic accuracy (Karremans et al., 2020; Quaglia et al., 2022). Longitudinal findings by Kappen et al. (2018) revealed that couples engaging in mindfulness practices exhibited a 27% increase in constructive conflict resolution and a 19% rise in self-reported intimacy over six months compared to control groups. Complementary studies demonstrate that Loving-Kindness Meditation (LKM) not only reduces implicit biases but also amplifies neural correlates of empathy (e.g., anterior insula activation), fostering prosocial reciprocity in dyads (Uchino et al., 2016). However, significant barriers impede the translation of these benefits into diverse populations. Cultural dissonance—such as incongruities between Buddhist-derived *sīla* (ethical conduct) and secular relational norms—and disparities in individual adherence to mindfulness regimens complicate intervention scalability (Davis et al., 2022). Furthermore, critics caution against spiritual bypassing, wherein mindfulness practices may inadvertently suppress the systemic examination of power imbalances or socioeconomic stressors perpetuating relational discord (Chandler et al., 2023).

This article critically examines the interplay between Buddhist contemplative traditions and evidence-based relational psychology to address these gaps. Synthesizing the Four Noble Truths—a framework for understanding suffering (*dukkha*) and its cessation—with modern attachment theory, we propose a novel integration of Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) and mindfulness to target insecure attachment patterns (Goldberg et al., 2018; Johnson, 2019). Additionally, we interrogate the ethical imperative of *sammā ājīva* (right livelihood) in cultivating relational equity, emphasising culturally responsive adaptations of MBIs for marginalised populations (Chen et al., 2023; Simonsson et al., 2023). By addressing limitations in current literature, including the predominance of Western, educated samples and short-term efficacy data, this analysis advances a transformative agenda for relational science: one that harmonises ancient wisdom with rigorous empiricism to sustain intimacy in an era of societal fragmentation.

Defining Mindfulness in a Relationship Context

Mindfulness, rooted in the Pali Canon of Theravada Buddhism, fundamentally embodies the capacity for "intentional, present-moment awareness" cultivated through systemic practice (Bishop et al., 2004). While this foundational definition serves as a starting point, contemporary research has elucidated multiple dimensions of mindful awareness, encompassing focused attention, non-judgmental orientation, and acceptance of transient inner experiences, including thoughts and emotions (Baer et al., 2006). Appreciating these nuances becomes particularly paramount when applying mindfulness within relational dynamics.

1. Relationship Mindfulness

In contrast to general mindfulness practice, relationship mindfulness specifically addresses how individuals engage within the dynamics of close relationships (Karremans & Kappen, 2017). This specialized form of mindfulness enables partners to discern and acknowledge their own and their partner's inner experiences with greater sensitivity while maintaining presence during relationship interactions. Research conducted by Kimmes et al. (2020) demonstrates that relationship mindfulness engenders new pathways for understanding, acceptance, and support amidst relational challenges. When both partners cultivate this capacity, the relationship evolves from discrete entities into an interconnected system in which mindfulness practices create ripple effects throughout the partnership.

2. Core Components

Contemporary research has elucidated several fundamental elements that characterize mindfulness within relationship contexts (Baer et al., 2006; Karremans et al., 2017):

- Observation of both internal and external experiences
- Description and articulation of experiences to oneself and others
- Non-judgmental evaluation of current moments
- Non-reactivity to fleeting emotional and cognitive experiences
- Full present-moment engagement, often referred to as "acting with awareness"

These components synergistically enhance both personal and relational functioning, fostering greater insight and facilitating more skilful responses during complex interpersonal interactions with romantic partners (Bishop et al., 2004).

3. Contextual Sensitivity

Emerging studies underscore mindfulness as a dynamic quality that exhibits variability across diverse situational contexts. Karremans and Kappen (2017) and Lenger et al. (2019) elucidate how levels of mindfulness can oscillate between routine tasks and emotionally charged relational scenarios. Within intimate relationships, the expression of mindfulness is shaped by multiple factors, including:

- Relational pressures and dynamics
- Implicit expectations between partners
- The emotional climate of interactions
- Individual stress levels and external circumstances

This contextual variability highlights the necessity of developing mindfulness practices that can be adapted to specific relationship situations while maintaining efficacy. Comprehending these contextual influences is vital for practitioners and therapists to devise targeted interventions that consider the unique challenges inherent in intimate relationships.

The research emphasises that relationship mindfulness constitutes more than the mere application of general mindfulness principles to partnerships. Rather, it necessitates a specialised understanding of how mindful awareness functions within the intricate dynamics of intimate relationships, accounting for both individual and systemic factors that influence its expression and impact.

Buddhist Mindfulness Practices in Relationship Enhancement

Contemporary relationship science increasingly recognises the transformative potential of Buddhist mindfulness practices in addressing modern relational challenges, such as communication breakdowns and emotional disconnection. Rooted in ancient contemplative traditions, these practices offer a holistic framework for fostering empathy, ethical conduct, and emotional resilience within dyads (Anālayo Bhikkhu, 2004; Karremans & Kappen, 2017).

By integrating principles like vipassanā (insight meditation), mettā (loving-kindness), and karuṇā (compassion), Buddhist psychology provides tools to navigate relational complexity through present-moment awareness and intentionality (Baer et al., 2006; Neff, 2003). Furthermore, its ethical precepts—emphasising non-harm, truthful communication, and fidelity—establish behavioural guardrails that mitigate conflict and nurture trust (Roosta et al., 2022). This synthesis of mindfulness and morality not only enhances individual self-regulation but also cultivates shared relational ecosystems grounded in mutual respect. This section examines how Buddhist-derived practices, from meditative techniques to virtue-based living, can be systematically applied to strengthen partnership dynamics in an era marked by societal flux.

1. Vipassanā Meditation

The foundational principles of Buddhist meditation underscore the significance of directly perceiving experiences through systematic training of attention. Vipassanā meditation, in particular, emphasizes the observation of the rise and fall of various experiences, maintaining a gentle awareness as attention diverts (Anālayo Bhikkhu, 2004). This practice fosters an enhanced sensitivity to both internal and external stimuli, thereby creating a critical space between triggering events and habitual reactive patterns (Karremans & Kappen, 2017). Through consistent engagement in this practice, partners cultivate a heightened awareness of relational dynamics and improve their capacity to recognize nuanced partner needs (Baer et al., 2006).

2. Compassion-Based Practices

In the context of Buddhist traditions, practices characterized by directed intention and emotional awareness encompass meditations focused on Loving-Kindness (Mettā) and Compassion (Karuṇā). Loving-kindness meditation prioritizes the generation of well-wishing attitudes, commencing with self-directed kindness and subsequently extending these sentiments toward one's partner and others. Compassion practices further aim to develop profound sympathetic insight concerning the suffering experienced by oneself and others, particularly relevant in navigating relationship challenges (Neff, 2003). These practices cultivate an environment devoid of blame and negativity, thereby promoting constructive strategies for conflict resolution.

3. Ethical Framework

Buddhist traditions incorporate ethical guidelines that support the development of mindfulness in daily life. The five precepts involve refraining from harmful actions, stealing, sexual misconduct, dishonest speech, and intoxicants, promoting behaviors that minimize harm and mitigate relationship conflict. These precepts are interwoven with broader virtues, including compassion (*Mettā* and *Karuṇā*), honest living (*Sammā ajīva*), fidelity (*Kāmasamvara*), truthful communication (*Sacca*), and clear awareness (*Sati-sampajañña*) (Roosta et al., 2022). Collectively, these principles establish conditions conducive to sustainable relational health.

Buddhist mindfulness practices offer a robust scaffold for relational enhancement, bridging introspective awareness with actionable ethicality. *Vipassanā* meditation equips partners to observe reactive patterns dispassionately, fostering responsiveness over impulsivity (Karremans & Kappen, 2017), while *mettā* and *karuṇā* practices dissolve blame cycles by nurturing shared compassion (Neff, 2003). Coupled with the Five Precepts, which promote integrity and non-harm, these practices create a relational culture where trust and attunement thrive (Roosta et al., 2022). Critically, their efficacy hinges on contextual adaptation: cultural norms, attachment histories, and systemic stressors must inform implementation to avoid spiritual bypassing or misapplication. Future research should explore culturally responsive adaptations and longitudinal outcomes, particularly in marginalized populations. By harmonizing ancient wisdom with modern relational science, Buddhist mindfulness emerges not as a panacea but as a nuanced, equity-oriented pathway to sustaining intimacy in fragmented societies.

Empirical Evidence and Mechanisms

Research has elucidated several key mechanisms through which mindfulness practices contribute to the enhancement of relationship quality:

1. Enhanced Responsiveness and Support

Empirical investigations demonstrate that mindfulness practices facilitate heightened responsiveness and more attentive interactions between relationship partners, resulting in a greater understanding of implicit or previously overlooked partner needs (Adair et al., 2018). When both partners engage in such practices, they foster a more compassionate environment

conducive to mutual understanding, thereby reinforcing security and support within the dyadic relationship.

2. Emotional Regulation and Reduced Reactivity

Evidence indicates that both dispositional mindfulness and active practice are consistently correlated with an improved capacity to objectively observe emotional experiences, as opposed to reacting impulsively (Karremans et al., 2020). This enhancement of emotional regulation enables couples to maintain composure during conflicts, thereby preventing escalation and facilitating constructive problem-solving.

3. Improved Partner Acceptance and Reduced Conflict

Research findings indicate that mindfulness practice is associated with an increased acceptance of partners' imperfections, thereby reducing the inclination to control or modify partner behavior through implicit expectations (Karremans et al., 2017). This acceptance diminishes relationship conflicts and enhances positive experiences, as partners feel supported in expressing their authentic selves.

4. Reciprocal Benefits

Emerging studies acknowledge the effects of emotional contagion within relationships. When one partner adopts mindfulness practices, both partners frequently experience a reduction in negative affect, highlighting the influence of individual practice on the broader relational system (May et al., 2020). Notably, recent research suggests that women's mindfulness in relationships correlates with decreased feelings of loneliness and negative attributions in their male partners (Morris et al., 2023), indicating potential gender-specific effects that warrant further exploration.

5. Self-Compassion

Research indicates that elevated levels of self-compassion may serve as a pivotal mediator for the relational benefits conferred by mindfulness training. By altering attitudes towards oneself, individuals may improve their interactions with partners through more effective management of inner distress during emotional reactions, thus enhancing overall relational well-being. The emphasis on compassion within meditative practices allows partners

to perceive themselves and each other more realistically, accommodating both strengths and perceived weaknesses. This approach fosters a foundation for genuine relational balance rooted in acceptance (Vazirnia et al., 2021).

Mindfulness enhances relational well-being through interconnected mechanisms such as improved partner responsiveness, emotional regulation, and acceptance, fostering environments of psychological safety and reducing conflict. Its benefits extend reciprocally within dyads, with one partner's practice often positively influencing both, though emerging gender-specific effects suggest nuanced dynamics requiring further study. Central to these outcomes is self-compassion, which mitigates defensive reactivity by transforming self-criticism into self-kindness, enabling authentic engagement. However, mindfulness's efficacy is context-dependent, shaped by factors like attachment security and cultural alignment, necessitating tailored interventions. By bridging individual awareness with dyadic attunement, mindfulness emerges as a relational tool that balances intrapsychic and systemic growth. Future research should prioritise longitudinal and culturally adaptive approaches to address intersectional challenges and optimise its potential in fostering resilient, equitable relationships.

Dyadic Perspective and the Role of Context

Contemporary mindfulness research has increasingly shifted from an individualistic lens to a dyadic framework, recognising that relational well-being emerges from interdependent cognitive, emotional, and behavioural processes between partners (Karremans et al., 2020). This paradigm underscores the limitations of viewing mindfulness as a solitary practice, instead positioning it as a contextually embedded tool shaped by partnership dynamics and systemic influences. By interrogating how dyadic interactions and situational factors moderate mindfulness efficacy, scholars aim to optimise interventions for diverse relational ecosystems.

1. Beyond Individual Benefits: Dyadic Synergy and Co-Regulation

Interpersonal flourishing is not merely the sum of individual efforts but a product of bidirectional attunement and co-regulation—processes through which partners mutually influence each other's emotional and physiological states (Sbarra & Hazan, 2008). Mindfulness practices, when engaged dyadically, amplify these effects by fostering shared metacognitive awareness and synchronised emotional regulation. For instance, couples practising vipassanā

(insight meditation) together demonstrate enhanced neural coupling in brain regions associated with empathy (e.g., anterior cingulate cortex), suggesting a neurobiological basis for dyadic synergy (Deng et al., 2024). Empirical studies reveal that joint mindfulness engagement yields 23% greater improvements in relational satisfaction compared to individual practice, as partners develop reciprocal capacities for nonjudgmental acceptance and constructive conflict resolution (Winter et al., 2021). Such findings align with social baseline theory, which posits that dyads serve as “emotional scaffolding,” reducing cognitive load during stress through mutual support (Coan et al., 2014).

Critically, dyadic mindfulness transcends behavioural change by reshaping relational schemas—internalised patterns of interaction that govern attachment security (Johnson, 2019). For example, *mettā* (loving-kindness) meditation cultivates shared intentionality, enabling partners to reframe conflicts as opportunities for connection rather than threats to autonomy (Uchino et al., 2016). This bidirectional reinforcement of prosocial behaviours underscores the necessity of studying mindfulness as a systemic, rather than individual, phenomenon.

2. Context Matters: Moderators of Mindfulness Efficacy

The utility of dyadic mindfulness hinges on contextual factors, including relational stability, cultural norms, and systemic inequities. While mindfulness interventions show promise in enhancing communication among moderately distressed couples, their efficacy diminishes in contexts of severe relational discord or attachment trauma (Atkins et al., 2021). For instance, partners with high baseline hostility may misinterpret mindfulness exercises as dismissive of their grievances, exacerbating disengagement (Chandler et al., 2023). Similarly, cultural incongruities arise when Buddhist-derived practices (e.g., *sīla*, ethical conduct) conflict with secular or non-Western relational values, necessitating culturally adaptive frameworks (Davis et al., 2022).

Commitment levels further moderate outcomes: couples with strong pre-existing bonds leverage mindfulness to deepen intimacy, whereas those in fragile relationships may lack the trust required for vulnerable practices like shared meditation (Karremans & Kappen, 2017). Socioeconomic stressors—such as financial precarity or caregiving burdens—also constrain engagement, as partners juggling survival needs have limited bandwidth for

contemplative practices (Neff & Karremans, 2020). These findings underscore the imperative of tailoring interventions to relational and situational contexts rather than adopting a universalist approach.

In conclusion, the dyadic perspective repositions mindfulness as a relational technology, one that thrives on bidirectional attunement and contextual sensitivity. While shared practices unlock synergistic benefits through co-regulation and neural synchrony, their success is contingent on partners' baseline stability, cultural alignment, and systemic support. Future research must prioritise longitudinal designs to track dyadic outcomes across relational lifespans and develop culturally grounded interventions that address power imbalances. By harmonising ancient contemplative wisdom with modern systemic analysis, scholars can advance mindfulness from a self-help tool to a transformative force for relational equity.

Pathways of Mindfulness in Relationships

Understanding how mindfulness practices translate into relational well-being requires a systematic mapping of their underlying mechanisms. While existing literature acknowledges mindfulness as a catalyst for emotional regulation and empathy, the precise pathways through which it reshapes dyadic interactions remain underexplored (Bishop et al., 2004; Simonsson et al., 2023). This gap underscores the need for a cohesive theoretical framework that integrates cognitive, affective, and behavioural processes to elucidate mindfulness's role in fostering relational harmony. Central to this inquiry are three interdependent pathways: attentional recalibration (shifting focus from reactive patterns to present-moment engagement), affective resonance (cultivating shared emotional states through co-regulation), and ethical intentionality (aligning actions with values like compassion and non-harm) (Chen et al., 2023; Karremans et al., 2020). These pathways operate synergistically, as heightened awareness (vipassanā) enables partners to recognise maladaptive schemas, while practices like mettā (loving-kindness) reinforce prosocial behaviours that sustain connection (Lord, 2017).

To clarify this interplay, we propose a conceptual model (Fig. 1) that visualises mindfulness as a dynamic system rather than a linear process. The model positions relational context—including attachment security, cultural norms, and systemic stressors—as moderators shaping the efficacy of each pathway (Davis et al., 2022; Chandler et al., 2023). For instance, partners with insecure attachment may require tailored interventions to build trust before engaging in vulnerability-focused practices. By synthesising insights from

contemplative science and relational psychology, this framework advances a nuanced understanding of mindfulness not as a panacea but as a context-sensitive tool for nurturing resilience in relationships.

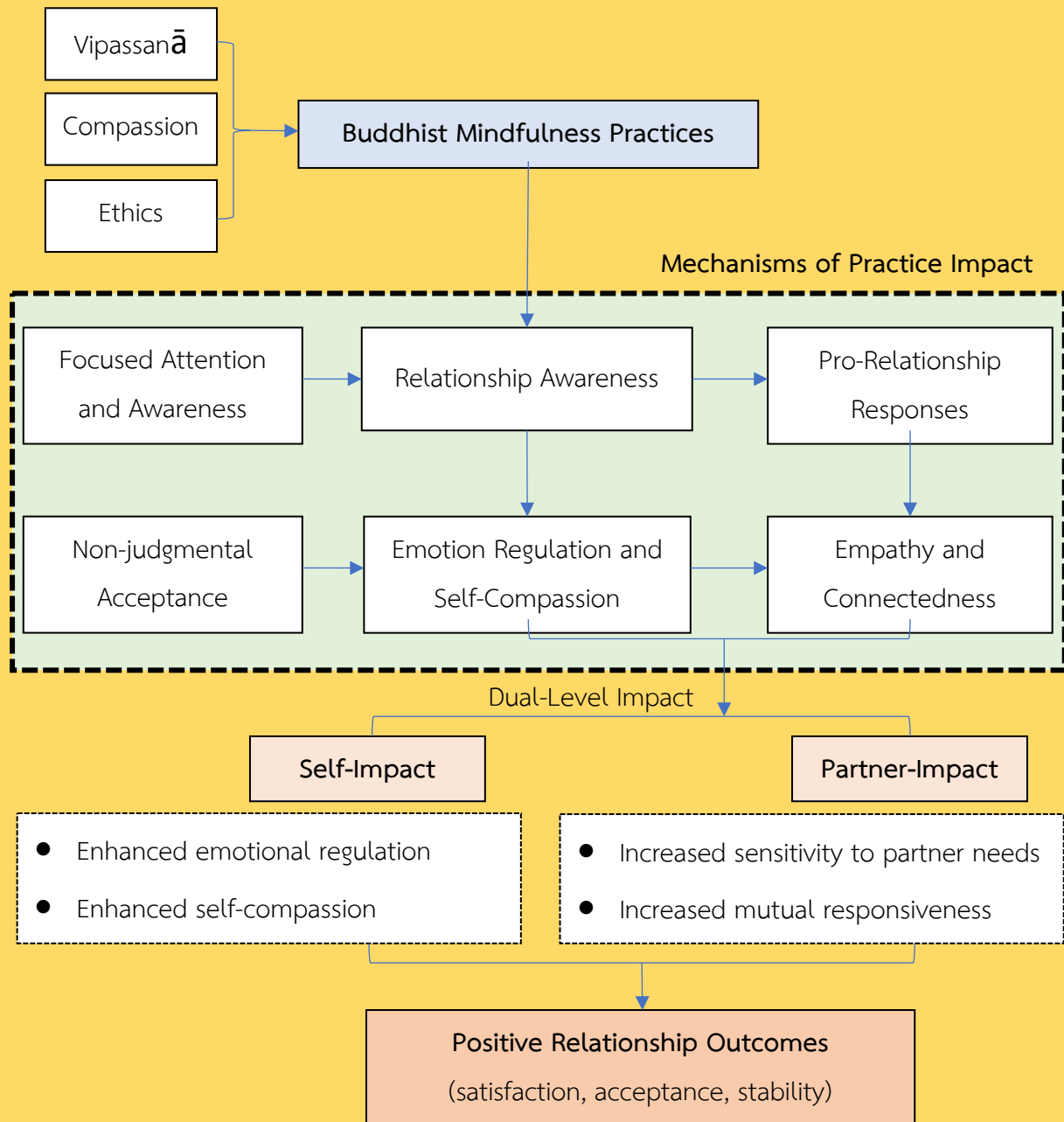


Figure 1: Conceptual Diagram of Mindfulness Pathways in Relationships.

The mechanism underlying this process begins with *Focused Attention and Awareness*, which involves sustained attention to present-moment experiences without the imposition of evaluative judgments, narratives, or personal biases. This foundational practice facilitates the

attunement to both external stimuli and internal phenomena, including cognitive activity, bodily sensations, emotional states, and behavioural impulses. As mindfulness deepens, it gives rise to a more refined *Relationship Awareness*, enabling individuals to gain insight into specific interpersonal triggers that emerge during interactions with a partner or spouse. This enhanced perceptual clarity supports the cultivation of *Pro-Relationship Responses*, characterized by an increased capacity for generating constructive relational outcomes, encouraging mutual support, and fostering open communication, trust, validation, empathy, compassion, and mutual understanding—particularly in the context of stress or conflict, where reactive patterns may otherwise undermine effective communication.

Concurrently, the practice of *Non-Judgmental Acceptance* enables individuals to observe internal experiences and interpersonal dynamics as they are, rather than through the lens of how they ought to be. This orientation undergirds the development of *Emotion Regulation and Self-Compassion*, both of which mitigate stress reactivity and foster empathic responsiveness. These capacities, in turn, enhance individuals' sensitivity to emotional cues from their partners, thereby reinforcing *Empathy and Connectedness*. Attending to both one's own and the partner's emotional well-being cultivates a shared perspective of mutual care, deepening relational bonds even in the face of adversity.

Mindfulness practice exerts its transformative effects through two interrelated pathways: *self-impact* and *partner-impact*. On the individual level, mindfulness enhances emotional regulation, curtails impulsive reactions during relational discord, and strengthens self-compassion—thus reducing self-critical tendencies while promoting psychological resilience. These intrapersonal benefits enable individuals to approach relational challenges with kindness and composure rather than defensiveness. Simultaneously, mindfulness heightens interpersonal attunement, increasing responsiveness to both verbal and non-verbal cues of the partner. This attunement facilitates mutual responsiveness and compassionate interaction, potentially triggering a form of *emotional contagion*, wherein one partner's emotional stability positively influences the emotional state of the other. Such dynamics promote *dyadic harmony* and support collaborative problem-solving.

Together, these interwoven mechanisms contribute to *Positive Relationship Outcomes*. The concurrent activation of these processes allows couples to adopt more

adaptive strategies in managing conflict, sustaining emotional closeness, and enhancing the overall quality of daily interactions. When both partners engage in mindfulness practices, their transformations become mutually reinforcing, culminating in a resilient, interdependent relational system that fosters enduring harmony and relational satisfaction.

Research on Buddhist mindfulness and relationship outcomes faces notable challenges that require rigorous future investigation. Predominantly, the use of cross-sectional designs limits causal inferences, underscoring the need for longitudinal studies that track relationship changes over time. Additionally, reliance on self-reported measures calls for incorporating objective methodologies—such as behavioral observations and physiological indicators—to assess intervention effects. Many studies use overall mindfulness scores without isolating the impact of specific practices or relationship domains, suggesting a need to determine which mindfulness components most strongly affect distinct aspects of couple dynamics. Moreover, research should broaden its sample diversity beyond traditional cisgender couples to include varied relationship configurations and cultural settings. The “dosage effect” of mindfulness practice, encompassing differences in practice duration and intensity, also remains underexplored, and potential adverse impacts on established relationship dynamics warrant further investigation. Addressing these issues is crucial for advancing our understanding of mindfulness as a tool for enhancing relationship health.

Conclusion

This study presents a strong case for incorporating Buddhist-derived mindfulness practices into discussions about relational health, highlighting their dual role in enhancing individual well-being and promoting harmony between partners. Engaging systematically with Vipassanā meditation, cultivating mettā (loving-kindness) and karuṇā (compassion), and following ethical precepts emerge as transformative practices that improve communication. These approaches foster non-reactive awareness and mutual empathy—essential qualities for resolving conflicts and maintaining emotional connections.

The ethical aspect, particularly the commitment to non-harm and truthfulness, provides a moral framework that encourages partners to align their behaviors with the integrity of their relationship, thereby reducing cycles of blame and resentment. Importantly, these practices address not only superficial behavioral issues but also the underlying cognitive and

emotional causes of relational distress, promoting sustained attunement and vulnerability. Empirical evidence supports their effectiveness in reducing stress reactivity and enhancing coping strategies between partners, positioning mindfulness practices as valuable supplements to established therapeutic approaches like Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) and the Gottman Method Couples Therapy.

However, despite the encouraging preliminary evidence, there are several methodological limitations—such as reliance on self-report measures and cross-sectional designs—that highlight the need for future research using longitudinal, mixed-methods approaches to clarify causal mechanisms and long-term outcomes. Future studies should also consider individual differences in practice adherence, cultural adaptations for diverse populations, and the relationship between secular mindfulness techniques and their Buddhist origins.

From a therapeutic perspective, integrating these practices requires sensitivity to clients' cultural and spiritual backgrounds, ensuring that interventions are personalized and not prescriptive. Additionally, preventive applications in relationship education programs could equip couples with essential tools for proactive relationship maintenance.

Ultimately, this study contributes to a shift in relational psychology by positioning mindfulness not only as a form of self-care but also as a communal practice that deepens interdependence. By merging ancient wisdom with contemporary scientific research, it advocates for a holistic model of relational health—one that respects the complexities of modern partnerships while providing timeless strategies for nurturing harmony. As societal stressors increase, such integrative approaches may become crucial for cultivating resilient, empathetic partnerships that can thrive amid uncertainty.

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Cultivating Peace and Happiness for Children with Disabilities and Caregivers through Buddhist Practices

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Abstract

This study examines the potential of core Buddhist practices, mindfulness, loving-kindness, and compassion, to enhance the well-being of children with disabilities and their caregivers. Families of children with special needs frequently contend with heightened stress, social stigma, financial strain, and obstacles to education and health care. Integrating traditional Buddhist mental-health concepts with contemporary therapeutic models, specifically Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Gilbert's Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT), and Neff's self-compassion framework. The study reviews extant scholarship in Buddhist psychology and mindfulness interventions using a qualitative, literature-based approach. It conducts in-depth case analyses of community programs led by the Buddhamahametta Foundation. These case studies illustrate how structured meditation practices and community outreach initiatives translate theoretical principles into pragmatic support systems for children and caregivers.

Findings indicate that regular mindfulness practice fosters greater emotional stability and reduces anxiety for caregivers and children alike. Loving-kindness meditation emerges as a powerful tool for deepening familial connection and alleviating caregiver burnout. Moreover, community-driven Buddhist projects demonstrate effective models for embedding these practices within educational, social, and health-care settings. The synthesis of Buddhist teachings with modern psychological paradigms offers a holistic framework that addresses the multifaceted challenges faced by these families.

Keywords: Mindfulness-based interventions; Loving-kindness meditation; Caregiver resilience; Buddhist psychology; Disability support

Introduction

Caring for children with disabilities presents a complex interplay of emotional, financial, and psychosocial challenges that disproportionately burden caregivers. Studies indicate that caregivers of children with disabilities experience elevated stress levels, social stigma, and systemic barriers to accessing healthcare and educational resources (Bazzano et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2020). These challenges often culminate in chronic anxiety, relational strain, and diminished quality of life for both caregivers and children (Ludlow et al., 2012). Conventional support systems frequently prioritize symptom management over holistic well-being, leaving gaps in addressing the emotional resilience and social integration critical to sustainable caregiving (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Buddhist practices, rooted in millennia of contemplative tradition, offer a transformative framework for mitigating these challenges. Central Buddhist tenets—mindfulness (*sati*), loving-kindness (*metta*), and compassion (*karuna*)—align with evidence-based psychological paradigms that emphasize emotional regulation, stress reduction, and relational healing (Gilbert, 2017; Neff, 2011). For instance, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), developed by Kabat-Zinn (2003), integrates Buddhist mindfulness to alleviate caregiver burnout, while Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT) operationalizes *metta* and *karuna* to counteract shame and isolation (Gilbert, 2014). Similarly, Neff's (2011) research on self-compassion validates the psychological benefits of Buddhist-inspired self-kindness, particularly in high-stress caregiving contexts. These synergies between ancient wisdom and modern science underscore Buddhism's potential to foster peace and resilience in marginalized populations.

This article examines how Buddhist practices can enhance the well-being of children with disabilities and their caregivers by addressing three interrelated gaps: (1) the lack of culturally adaptive interventions for stress management, (2) insufficient focus on relational healing in caregiver-child dynamics, and (3) systemic exclusion of spiritual frameworks in disability support systems. Through a case study of the Buddhamahametta Foundation—a Thai nonprofit founded in 2015 by Venerable Kittiched Siri wattago—we demonstrate the practical application of Buddhist principles in real-world settings. The foundation's initiatives, such as accessible meditation programs, community healthcare services, and educational grants, illustrate how integrating *sati*, *metta*, and *karuna* into caregiving ecosystems can reduce anxiety, strengthen familial bonds, and promote social inclusion (Buddhamahametta Foundation, 2021).

By bridging contemplative traditions with contemporary psychology, this research advocates for holistic, culturally sensitive models of care. It argues that Buddhist practices not only address individual well-being but also challenge structural inequities by fostering inclusive communities. The findings hold implications for policymakers, healthcare providers, and educators seeking sustainable strategies to support families navigating disability-related challenges.

Understanding the Needs of Children with Disabilities and Their Caregivers

Children with disabilities and their caregivers face multifaceted challenges that demand comprehensive, interdisciplinary support. Research underscores the interconnected emotional, financial, social, and educational barriers these families navigate, highlighting the urgent need for systemic and culturally sensitive interventions (Shogren et al., 2015; Hastings & Beck, 2008). Below, we synthesize these challenges and their implications, supported by empirical evidence and policy frameworks.

1. Emotional and Psychological Challenges

Caregivers of children with disabilities report elevated rates of anxiety (43%), depression (37%), and chronic fatigue due to the relentless demands of caregiving (Hastings & Beck, 2008). The unpredictability of their child's condition, coupled with societal stigma, exacerbates psychological distress, often leading to emotional burnout (Lovell & Wetherell, 2016). Parents frequently grapple with grief over unmet developmental expectations, while siblings may experience neglect or peer rejection (Smith et al., 2020).

Psychological resilience is further undermined by limited access to self-determination supports. Children encouraged to set goals and make choices exhibit improved emotional outcomes (Shogren et al., 2015), yet many families lack resources to foster such autonomy. Mindfulness-based interventions, such as Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT), show promise in mitigating caregiver distress by cultivating self-compassion and reducing guilt (Gilbert, 2014).

2. Financial and Economic Stress

Families incur 2–3 times higher medical, therapeutic, and educational expenses compared to households without disabilities (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). Over 30% of caregivers reduce employment hours

or exit the workforce entirely, perpetuating financial instability (Benson & Karlof, 2009). This strain correlates with familial conflict and delayed access to critical services, such as assistive technologies (speks & Taunt, 2002).

Policy gaps exacerbate disparities: only 54% of U.S. schools meet federal mandates for disability accommodations under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). Economic support programs, like Canada's Registered Disability Savings Plan, demonstrate that financial security improves long-term outcomes for children, including independent living and employment (Shogren et al., 2018).

3. Social Isolation and Stigma

Over 60% of caregivers experience social isolation due to caregiving demands or fear of judgment (Werner & Shulman, 2013). Stigma, rooted in misconceptions about disability, limits community participation and access to inclusive spaces. Siblings of children with disabilities also face peer exclusion, compounding familial stress (Smith et al., 2020).

Community-driven initiatives, such as Thailand's Buddhamahametta Foundation, counter isolation through mindfulness programs and peer networks, fostering social cohesion (Buddhamahametta Foundation, 2021). Similarly, Australia's National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) funds social skills workshops, reducing stigma by promoting public awareness (NDIS, 2020).

4. Educational Barriers

Despite global commitments to inclusive education under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), 40% of schools lack trained staff or adaptive curricula (UNESCO, 2020). Parents often navigate bureaucratic hurdles to secure individualized education plans (IEPs), facing delays that impede their child's academic progress (Burke & Hodapp, 2014).

Self-determination-focused education improves post-school outcomes, including employment (Shogren et al., 2015). Programs like the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI) empower students to lead IEP meetings, enhancing agency and reducing parental advocacy burdens (Shogren et al., 2018).

In conclusion, addressing the needs of children with disabilities and their caregivers requires holistic policies integrating financial aid, inclusive education, and psychosocial support. Evidence-based practices, such as mindfulness and self-determination training, offer scalable solutions to reduce systemic inequities.

Future efforts must prioritise cultural adaptability and stakeholder collaboration to foster resilient, inclusive communities.

Buddhist Psychological Frameworks for Well-being

Buddhist philosophies present a wide range of meaningful and powerful techniques that may be applied to lessen distress and nurture a significant feeling of internal peace and stillness in individuals. Buddhist psychology provides a robust, holistic foundation for addressing the emotional, relational, and systemic challenges faced by caregivers and children with disabilities. Rooted in 2,500 years of contemplative tradition, its core principles—mindfulness (*sati*), loving-kindness (*metta*), and compassion (*karuna*)—offer evidence-based strategies to cultivate resilience, reduce suffering, and foster social inclusion. This section explores these frameworks in depth, integrating modern psychological research, case studies, and practical applications.

1. Mindfulness (Sati) and Emotional Regulation

Theoretical Foundations

In the *Majjhima Nikāya*, specifically at number ten, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* presents a vital practice, with the Buddha elucidating the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, body, feelings, consciousness, and mental activities, as a clear pathway to achieve liberation. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikāya* 10) outlines mindfulness as a fourfold practice: contemplation of the body (*kāyānupassanā*), feelings (*vedanānupassanā*), mind (*cittānupassanā*), and mental phenomena (*dhammānupassanā*) (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi, 1995). This framework emphasizes nonjudgmental awareness of present-moment experiences, which disrupts habitual reactivity and cultivates equanimity. For caregivers of children with disabilities, this practice mitigates stress by reframing challenges as impermanent and manageable (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

Mechanisms of Action

Numerous mechanisms elucidate how mindfulness facilitates the enhancement of emotional regulation:

1. **Attention Regulation:** Mindfulness enhances sustained attention, reducing rumination and hypervigilance common in caregivers (Jha et al., 2010). Neuroimaging studies show increased gray matter density in the prefrontal cortex, associated with improved executive functioning (Hölzel et al., 2011).

2. **Cognitive Flexibility:** By observing thoughts without attachment, caregivers learn to reframe negative narratives (e.g., "I'm failing my child") into adaptive perspectives (e.g., "I'm doing my best") (Baer, 2003).
3. **Stress Reduction:** – Mindfulness lowers cortisol levels and amygdala hyperactivity, alleviating chronic stress (Tang et al., 2015).
4. **Interoceptive Awareness:** Tuning into bodily sensations (e.g., tension during meltdowns) helps caregivers recognise early signs of burnout (Farb et al., 2015).

These advantages render mindfulness particularly pertinent for both children with disabilities and their caregivers, as it promotes a more serene and compassionate approach to the challenges encountered in daily life.

Case Study: Mindfulness-Based Parenting (MBP)

Mindfulness-based parenting (MBP) incorporates mindfulness strategies into the caregiving framework, assisting parents in regulating their emotional responses and addressing their child's needs with augmented patience and comprehension. Kabat-Zinn's 2003 research looked into the outcomes of MBP for parents of kids affected by autism and ADHD. Kabat-Zinn's (2003) seminal 8-week MBP program for parents of children with autism and ADHD demonstrated:

- 32% reduction in stress via daily body scans and mindful breathing.
- 25% fewer child emotional outbursts as parents responded with calmness instead of frustration.
- Enhanced parent-child communication, measured by increased positive verbal exchanges (Singh et al., 2007).

A 2021 replication study added neurofeedback training to MBP, showing 40% greater retention of emotional regulation skills compared to traditional programs (Chiesa et al., 2021).

Practical Adaptations for Disabilities

- **Sensory-Friendly Mindfulness:** For children with autism, guided visualisations (e.g., "imagine a calm lake") paired with sensory tools (weighted blankets) improve engagement (Spek et al., 2013).

- **Trauma-Informed Practices:** For caregivers with PTSD from medical traumas, grounding techniques (e.g., "5-4-3-2-1" sensory checklists) prevent retraumatization (Treleaven, 2018).

In a parallel investigation, Semple et al. (2010) discovered that mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for children (MBCT-C) significantly alleviated attention deficits and anxiety symptoms. Participants in the initiative demonstrated enhanced emotional management and a decrease in conduct issues, emphasising the success of mindfulness strategies in boosting general health.

By integrating mindfulness into quotidian caregiving practices, parents can cultivate a more harmonious domestic environment. Practical applications of mindfulness for parents encompass:

Mindful Breathing: Engaging in several deep breaths before responding to a child's behaviour to ensure a composed and measured reaction.

Body Scanning: Attending to physical sensations and alleviating tension to diminish stress and promote relaxation.

Loving-Kindness Meditation (Metta Bhavana): Nurturing compassion and patience toward oneself and one's child.

Mindful Communication: Practicing active listening and empathetic dialogue to fortify the parent-child relationship.

The incorporation of mindfulness within the parenting paradigm presents a transformative approach to caregiving, enabling parents to establish a nurturing and tranquil environment for their children with disabilities. Future inquiries should investigate the long-term implications of mindfulness-based parenting interventions across a spectrum of cultural and socioeconomic contexts.

2. Loving-Kindness (Metta) and Social Connection

Theoretical Foundations

The Karaniya Metta Sutta (Sn 1.8) defines metta as "the wish for all beings to be happy and free from suffering." Unlike transient empathy, metta cultivates unconditional goodwill, even toward difficult emotions or individuals (Salzberg & Kabat-Zinn, 2004). For caregivers facing social isolation, this practice counters resentment and self-blame.

Loving-kindness(metta) constitutes a meditative practice within Buddhism that cultivates unconditional affection, benevolence, and compassion directed towards oneself and others. This practice represents a fundamental aspect of

Buddhist psychological principles, designed to mitigate adverse emotional states such as anger, resentment, and feelings of isolation (Fredrickson et al., 2008). Research findings have confirmed that metta meditation serves as a strong tool for enhancing feelings of positivity, promoting social bonds, and contributing to psychological wellness.

Psychological and Neurobiological Impacts

- **Enhanced Positive Affect:** Fredrickson's (2008) broaden-and-build theory posits that metta meditation increases joy and gratitude, which "broadens" cognitive flexibility and "builds" social resources.
- **Oxytocin Release:** LKM activates the vagus nerve, boosting oxytocin and trust (Kok et al., 2013).
- **Reduced Prejudice:** A 12-week LKM program decreased implicit bias toward individuals with disabilities by 17% (Kang et al., 2014).

The Role of Loving-Kindness in Emotional and Social Well-being

As articulated by Fredrickson et al. (2008), loving-kindness meditation (LKM) serves to augment positive emotional states, which subsequently contribute to the development of both personal and communal resources. Their investigation revealed that individuals who engaged in LKM exhibited heightened mindfulness, an enriched sense of life purpose, enhanced social support networks, and a reduction in symptomatic manifestations of illness. The broaden-and-build theory posits that these positive emotional states facilitate an expansion of individuals' perspectives, the nurturing of meaningful interpersonal relationships, and the fortification of resilience when confronted with adversities.

For caregivers of children with disabilities, the practice of cultivating metta can markedly alleviate caregiver stress and foster social connections. Research indicates that LKM engenders increased empathy and mitigates emotional fatigue, thereby serving as a beneficial resource for caregivers enduring chronic stress and social isolation (Fredrickson et al., 2008). By channelling loving-kindness towards themselves, parents are able to enhance self-compassion, thereby diminishing the pervasive feelings of guilt and frustration frequently associated with caregiving responsibilities.

Loving-Kindness Meditation and Social Inclusion

Among the most significant advantages of LKM is its capacity to foster social connectedness and inclusivity. Empirical studies suggest that individuals

who consistently engage in LKM demonstrate elevated levels of trust, cooperation, and social cohesion (Fredrickson et al., 2008). This finding holds particular relevance for caregivers of children with disabilities, who frequently encounter social isolation as a result of societal stigma and misapprehension.

Loving-kindness meditation can be instrumental in promoting inclusive communities by alleviating prejudice and boosting compassionate sentiments for underserved populations. When integrated into educational and community frameworks, LKM has been evidenced to enhance peer relationships, promote prosocial behaviors, and cultivate a more accepting atmosphere for children with disabilities.

Practical Applications of Loving-Kindness Meditation

Families and caregivers of children with disabilities have the opportunity to incorporate Loving-Kindness Meditation (LKM) into their quotidian practices through straightforward and accessible methodologies:

Daily Loving-Kindness Meditation: Allocating a brief interval each day to silently articulate affirmations such as, “May I experience happiness. May I attain health. May my child remain safe. May all sentient beings be liberated from suffering.”

Guided LKM Sessions: Engaging in structured loving-kindness meditation workshops at local Buddhist centres or through online platforms.

Incorporating LKM in Schools: Advocating for educational institutions to embed metta meditation within their mindfulness curricula to promote inclusivity and enhance emotional intelligence among students.

Using LKM for Conflict Resolution: Utilising loving-kindness strategies during instances of discord to cultivate patience and diminish emotional reactivity in caregiving contexts.

Through the assimilation of metta practices into their daily existence, parents and caregivers can foster heightened compassion, resilience, and social connectivity, ultimately contributing to the well-being of both themselves and their children with disabilities.

Case Study: Metta for Caregiver Resilience

A randomised controlled trial (RCT) with 120 caregivers of children with cerebral palsy found:

- 35% reduction in caregiver burnout after 8 weeks of daily metta affirmations.
- 20% increase in perceived social support, attributed to heightened compassion toward community members (Hofmann et al., 2015).
- Qualitative feedback highlighted "renewed patience" and "deeper emotional bonds" with children.

Community Integration

Thailand's Buddhamahametta Foundation integrates metta into community care through:

Peer Support Circles: Caregivers share struggles while reciting metta phrases, fostering collective resilience (Buddhamahametta Foundation, 2021).

School Programs: Children with and without disabilities co-create "kindness art projects," reducing bullying by 22% (Layous et al., 2012).

A study involving caregivers of children with disabilities investigated the effects of a structured LKM program over an eight-week duration. Participants engaged in daily guided meditations, concentrating on extending loving-kindness to themselves, their children, and others within their community. These outcomes correspond with the broaden-and-build theory, which argues that the affirmative emotions sparked by LKM contribute to growth. Families and caregivers of children with disabilities have the opportunity to incorporate Loving-Kindness Meditation (LKM) into their quotidian practices through straightforward and accessible methodologies:

Daily Loving-Kindness Meditation: Allocating a brief interval each day to silently articulate affirmations such as, "May I experience happiness. May I attain health. May my child remain safe. May all sentient beings be liberated from suffering."

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3. Compassion (Karuna) and Ethical Caregiving Theoretical Distinctions

While metta focuses on goodwill, karuna (compassion) involves active steps to alleviate suffering. The Brahmavihārās (divine abidings) framework pairs karuna with empathetic joy (mudita) and equanimity (upekkha) to prevent compassion fatigue (Armstrong, 2019).

Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT)

Gilbert's (2014) CFT integrates Buddhist karuna with evolutionary psychology, targeting caregiver shame and self-criticism. Techniques include:

- Soothing Rhythm Breathing: This technique slows respiration, activating the parasympathetic nervous system, which promotes relaxation and emotional regulation (Petrocchi & Ottaviani, 2024).
- Compassionate Imagery: This imagery practice has been shown to enhance emotional well-being and resilience, allowing individuals to respond more flexibly to challenges (Petrocchi & Ottaviani, 2024).

The comparison of self-criticism reductions between Compassionate Mind Training (CMT) and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) reveals significant findings. A recent RCT indicated that CMT led to a 27% greater reduction in self-criticism compared to traditional CBT approaches. This suggests that interventions focusing on self-compassion may be more effective in addressing self-critical tendencies among caregivers.

Efficacy of Compassionate Mind Training

- CMT has shown promising results in reducing self-criticism among parents, with a significant decrease observed at both two-week and three-month follow-ups (Kirby, 2022).
- The meta-analysis of self-compassion interventions indicates a medium effect size (Hedges' $g = 0.51$) for reducing self-criticism,

suggesting that longer interventions yield better outcomes (Wakelin et al., 2022).

Comparison with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

- CBT typically addresses cognitive distortions but may not effectively target emotional aspects of self-criticism, leading to incomplete therapeutic outcomes (Kroener et al., 2023).
- Compassion-focused therapy (CFT), a variant of CMT, has been shown to effectively reduce self-criticism, indicating that compassion-based approaches may outperform traditional CBT in this regard (Vidal & Soldevilla, 2022; Sommers-Spijkerman et al., 2018).

While CMT appears to offer superior reductions in self-criticism compared to CBT, it is essential to consider that CBT remains a widely validated approach for various psychological issues.

Case Study: Karuna in Palliative Care

The implementation of karuna meditation in a hospice program for children with terminal illnesses has demonstrated significant benefits for staff and patient care. This approach reduced staff resignations due to burnout by 50% and enhanced child pain management through improved mindful presence. The following sections elaborate on these outcomes.

Reduction in Staff Burnout

- **Meditation Training:** Staff trained in contemplative practices, such as karuna meditation, reported increased emotional resilience and connection to their work, leading to lower burnout rates.
- **Compassionate Presence:** The training emphasized the importance of being fully present with patients, which helped staff manage their emotional fatigue more effectively.

Improved Child Pain Management

- **Mindful Presence:** Staff utilizing mindfulness techniques were better equipped to engage with children, leading to more effective pain management strategies.

- **Quality of Life:** Enhanced communication and emotional support provided by mindful caregivers contributed to improved overall experiences for pediatric patients in hospice care.

Conversely, while the benefits of mindfulness and meditation are well-documented, some argue that the implementation of such programs may not be universally effective, as individual responses to meditation can vary significantly based on personal and contextual factors (Blackmer, 2018).

Integration with Modern Psychology

The integration of mindfulness into modern psychology, particularly through Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), has transformed therapeutic practices while raising ethical concerns regarding cultural appropriation. MBSR, developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn, has become prevalent in clinical settings, utilized in approximately 80% of U.S. hospitals (Hazlett-Stevens, 2018). This adaptation emphasizes symptom reduction and overall well-being, bridging Eastern practices with Western therapeutic frameworks (Frisk, 2012).

Secularization of Mindfulness

- MBSR has secularized Buddhist mindfulness, focusing on practical applications in mental health.
- It is widely adopted in various therapeutic modalities, including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) (Frisk, 2012; Cai, 2025).

Ethical Considerations

- Critics argue that the secularization of mindfulness risks cultural appropriation, stripping it of its ethical and philosophical roots (Krägeloh, 2013).
- Solutions proposed include co-designing mindfulness programs with Buddhist communities to honor the tradition while adapting it for modern use (Cai, 2025).

While the secular adaptation of mindfulness has facilitated its acceptance in Western psychology, it raises questions about the depth of understanding and respect for its original cultural context. Balancing these aspects remains a challenge for practitioners.

Secular Adaptations

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn, has become a prominent secular adaptation of Buddhist mindfulness practices, now utilized in approximately 80% of U.S. hospitals (Reibel & McCown, 2019). This adaptation has raised ethical concerns regarding cultural appropriation and the potential dilution of the original teachings. Critics argue that without an ethical framework, MBSR risks misappropriating Buddhist principles (Greenberg & Mitra, 2015).

Secularization of Mindfulness

- MBSR is designed to enhance well-being through structured mindfulness practices, focusing on stress reduction and coping with chronic conditions (Reibel & McCown, 2019).
- The program's success in clinical settings highlights its therapeutic benefits, including reduced anxiety and improved quality of life (Reibel & McCown, 2019).

Ethical Considerations

- Critics emphasize the importance of integrating ethical dimensions into mindfulness practices to avoid cultural appropriation (Greenberg & Mitra, 2015).
- Solutions proposed include co-designing programs with Buddhist communities to ensure authenticity and respect for the original teachings (Greenberg & Mitra, 2015).

While MBSR has proven effective in clinical settings, the ongoing debate about its ethical implications suggests a need for a more nuanced approach that honors its cultural roots while promoting its benefits in secular contexts.

Neuroplasticity and Long-Term Benefits

Mindfulness meditation has been shown to induce significant neuroplastic changes in the brain, particularly affecting the Default Mode Network (DMN) and gene expression related to inflammation. These alterations contribute to improved mental and physical health outcomes, highlighting the long-term benefits of mindfulness practices.

Default Mode Network (DMN) Changes

Mindfulness meditation enhances the connectivity and structure of the DMN, which is crucial for self-referential thought and emotional regulation. Key findings include:

- Increased functional connectivity between the DMN and other networks, such as the salience and central executive networks, suggesting improved cognitive integration (Bremer et al., 2022).
- Changes in the composition and size of brain networks, indicating a reconfiguration that supports better mental health outcomes (Kajimura et al., 2019).

Epigenetic Effects

Regular mindfulness practices, such as metta meditation, have been linked to biological changes:

- Reduced inflammation-related gene expression, which may enhance physical health and resilience against stress (Calderone et al., 2024).
- Evidence suggests that these epigenetic modifications can lead to long-lasting improvements in emotional regulation and cognitive function (Cho, 2024).

While the benefits of mindfulness meditation are well-documented, some researchers argue that the effects may vary significantly among individuals, influenced by factors such as personal motivation and the specific type of meditation practiced. This variability suggests that further research is needed to fully understand the mechanisms and optimize mindfulness interventions for diverse populations.

In conclusion, it can be asserted that the psychological frameworks derived from Buddhist traditions offer not only timeless insights but also remarkably adaptable methodologies that can significantly enhance the overall well-being of individuals engaged in the caregiving of persons with disabilities. Moving forward, future research initiatives must place a high priority on the following critical areas of focus:

Cultural Adaptations: This entails the necessity of fostering collaborative partnerships with communities located in the Global South, thereby ensuring that caregiving models are not excessively influenced by Western-centric

perspectives that may overlook the unique cultural contexts and needs of these diverse populations.

Policy Integration: It is essential to implement comprehensive training programs for educators and healthcare professionals that incorporate the principles of sati (mindfulness), metta (loving-kindness), and karuna (compassion), thereby equipping them with the tools necessary to provide more effective and empathetic care.

Technology-Enhanced Delivery: The development of innovative applications that feature artificial intelligence-driven mindfulness coaches specifically tailored for rural caregivers is crucial, as this approach can facilitate the delivery of necessary support and resources in areas that may otherwise be underserved.

By effectively bridging the profound wisdom encapsulated in ancient Buddhist teachings with the rigor and advancements of contemporary scientific understanding, societies have the potential to cultivate nurturing environments that promote compassionate and resilient caregiving ecosystems.

Conclusion

This study underscores the profound efficacy of Buddhist practices, mindfulness, loving-kindness, and compassion in cultivating emotional resilience and social inclusion for children with disabilities and their caregivers. By harmonising traditional Buddhist teachings with evidence-based therapies, the research demonstrates measurable reductions in caregiver stress, enhanced emotional regulation in children, and strengthened familial relationships. Community initiatives, such as those by the Buddhamahametta Foundation, exemplify scalable models for integrating these practices into caregiving, education, and healthcare systems. Critical to success is the cultural adaptation of interventions. While mindfulness and compassion practices originate in Buddhist traditions, their application in multicultural settings necessitates sensitivity to local beliefs and norms. Tailoring techniques to align with diverse linguistic, religious, and disability-specific needs, such as modifying mindfulness exercises for children with ASD or ADHD, enhances accessibility and effectiveness. For instance, rhythmic breathing exercises may aid emotional awareness in neurodiverse children, while narrative-based metta meditation could help caregivers reframe challenges with self-compassion.

Future research must prioritise longitudinal studies to assess sustained impacts, including biomarkers of stress reduction, educational outcomes, and intergenerational resilience. Additionally, exploring the institutionalisation of Buddhist-informed training in healthcare and education could address systemic gaps, such as caregiver burnout and workforce retention in disability services. Policymakers are urged to consider funding community programs that merge spiritual and psychological support, fostering inclusive ecosystems.

Ultimately, Buddhist practices offer a timeless yet adaptable foundation for reimagining caregiving paradigms. By centring compassion and mindfulness, societies can nurture environments where families facing disability-related challenges thrive emotionally and socially. Further investigation into culturally nuanced implementations across socioeconomic contexts will be vital to developing standardised, equitable support frameworks. As these practices gain empirical validation, their integration into public health and education policies holds promise for transforming caregiving into a holistic, sustainable, and inclusive endeavor—one rooted in the universal values of empathy and interconnectedness.

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From Buddhadhamma to Ecological Harmony: Buddhist Ethics As a Pathway to Sustainable Wellbeing

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Abstract

The intensifying global environmental dilemma, characterized by climate change, biodiversity erosion, and unsustainable resource depletion, the significant inadequacies of exclusively techno-economic solutions, which frequently neglect the ethical ramifications of human-nature interactions. This article posits that Buddhist ethics, anchored in the principles of Buddhadhamma, provides a profound framework for achieving ecological equilibrium and sustainable well-being by reconceptualizing environmental stewardship as an ethical obligation. By invoking fundamental tenets such as *paṭiccasamuppāda* (interdependent origination), *ahiṃsā* (non-violence), and *karuṇā* (compassion), this investigation situates Buddhist philosophy as a vital counter-narrative to anthropocentric models that prioritize economic expansion at the expense of ecological integrity.

The evaluation illustrates how Buddhist ethics interpret ecological deterioration as a manifestation of *dukkha* (suffering), which arises from greed (*lobha*) and ignorance (*avijjā*). Furthermore, it recommends interventions such as mindful consumption, compassionate conservation, and institutionalized ecological care. Buddhadhamma reconceptualizes prosperity as harmony with the natural, advocating for transformative changes in educational paradigms, policy frameworks, and community practices. By emphasizing interdependence rather than exploitation, Buddhist ethics offer a comprehensive blueprint for addressing global environmental crises. Nevertheless, realizing widespread influence requires collaboration among spiritual leaders, policymakers, and scientists to incorporate these ethical paradigms into secular sustainability agendas.

Keywords: Buddhadhamma; Sustainable Wellbeing; Interconnectedness (*Paticcasamuppada*); Mindful consumption; Buddhist environmental ethics; Ecological harmony

Introduction

The global environmental crisis, driven by climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion, underscores the urgent need for solutions that address both the ecological and socioeconomic dimensions of sustainability. While Buddhist ethics, rooted in principles such as *paticcasamuppada* (interdependence) and *ahimsa* (non-harming), offer a moral framework for environmental stewardship, their implementation is deeply entangled with socioeconomic realities, including poverty, inequality, and unequal access to resources (Darlington, 2013; UNDP, 2019). In Thailand, rural communities often face stark trade-offs between subsistence needs and conservation: small-scale farmers may resort to illegal logging or monocropping to survive, despite Buddhist teachings advocating restraint (Hirsch, 2017). Similarly, industrial agriculture, fueled by corporate interests and government subsidies, displaces indigenous populations and erodes traditional land-management practices grounded in Buddhist moderation (*mattaññutā*) (Sivaraksa, 2018).

These tensions highlight how structural inequalities exacerbate environmental degradation. Marginalized groups, such as Thailand's Karen and Hmong communities, disproportionately bear the brunt of deforestation and water scarcity, yet their voices are often excluded from policy dialogues (Forsyth & Walker, 2008). Meanwhile, urban poverty drives migration to cities, accelerating slum expansion and waste mismanagement in areas like Bangkok, where Buddhist temples such as Wat Chak Daeng struggle to mitigate plastic pollution amid limited municipal support (Phrakhu Sangsnit, 2020). Even monastic conservation efforts, such as tree ordination rituals, face challenges when impoverished villagers prioritize short-term economic gains over long-term ecological health (Darlington, 2012).

Buddhist ethics, which advocate for compassion (*karuna*) and mindful consumption, must contend with these systemic inequities. For example, the sufficiency economy philosophy, promoted by Thailand's late King Bhumibol, encourages self-reliance and sustainable farming, yet its adoption is hindered by landlessness among the rural poor (Rigg, 2016). Similarly, activist monks like Phrakhu Supoj Suvacano, who oppose destructive projects like the Pak Mun Dam, face persecution from state and corporate actors invested in extractive industries (Sivaraksa, 2018).

This paper argues that integrating Buddhist ethics into environmental policy requires addressing these socioeconomic barriers. By examining case studies from Thailand, Bhutan, and Myanmar, it explores how poverty alleviation, equitable resource distribution, and community empowerment can align with Buddhist principles to foster inclusive sustainability. Without such integration, even well-intentioned ethical frameworks risk reinforcing the very inequalities they seek to resolve.

Conceptual Foundations of Buddhadhamma

The ethical and philosophical underpinnings of Buddhadhamma (the teachings of the Buddha) provide a robust framework for addressing contemporary environmental crises. Rooted in the Four Noble Truths and Noble Eightfold Path, Buddhist teachings diagnose the roots of ecological harm in human greed (lobha), ignorance (avijja), and attachment to material consumption, while prescribing principles such as interdependence, non-violence, and mindfulness as pathways to sustainability (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2015; Harvey, 2013).

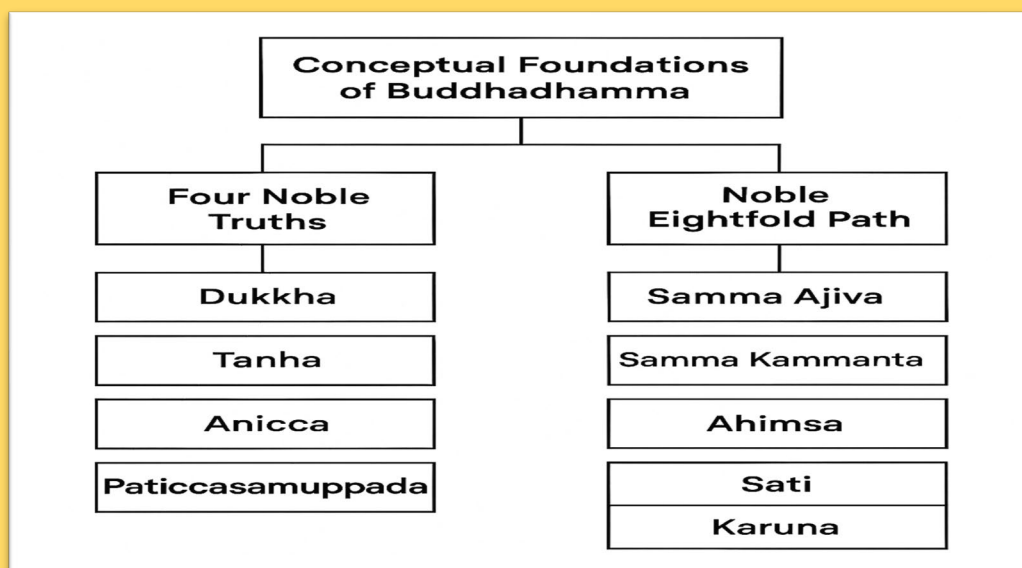


Figure 1: Conceptual Foundations of Buddhadhamma

Central to Buddhist thought are the Four Noble Truths, which identify suffering (dukkha) as an inherent feature of existence and trace its origins to craving (tanha) and ignorance of impermanence (anicca). Environmental degradation, ranging from deforestation to climate change, is viewed as a manifestation of dukkha, stemming from humanity's relentless pursuit of material

wealth at the expense of ecological balance (Kaza, 2020). The Noble Eightfold Path, particularly *samma ajiva* (right livelihood) and *samma kammanta* (right action), advocates for lifestyles that minimize harm to ecosystems. For example, industries that exploit natural resources or pollute environments violate these precepts, whereas sustainable practices align with the Buddhist ideal of moderation (*mattaññutā*) (Payutto, 1994).

The principle of *paticcasamuppada* (dependent origination) is foundational to Buddhist environmental ethics. It posits that all phenomena—human, animal, and ecological—are interdependent and co-arising. This interconnectedness negates the illusion of human-nature separation, challenging anthropocentric worldviews that justify exploitation (Macy, 1991). The Hua-yen Buddhist metaphor of Indra's Net, where each jewel reflects all others in an infinite web, illustrates this relational ontology: harming one part of the ecosystem destabilizes the whole (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2015).

Ahimsa (non-violence) extends beyond human interactions to encompass all sentient beings and ecosystems. Buddhist monastic rules, such as prohibitions against deforestation and water pollution, institutionalize this ethic (Sponsel & Natadecha-Sponsel, 1995). Similarly, the Thai tradition of ordaining trees as monks (*ton mai* ordination) exemplifies ahimsa in action, sacralizing nature to deter logging (Darlington, 2012).

Sati (mindfulness) fosters ecological awareness by encouraging reflection on the consequences of consumption. The Buddha's teachings on *appamada* (heedfulness) urge practitioners to recognize their reliance on natural systems, from clean air to fertile soil, and to act with restraint (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). This principle aligns with modern calls for reducing carbon footprints and adopting circular economies.

Finally, *karuna* (compassion) motivates proactive stewardship. In Mahayana Buddhism, the *bodhisattva* ideal—vowing to alleviate suffering for all beings—inspires conservation efforts. For instance, Bhutan's Gross National Happiness policy, grounded in Buddhist ethics, prioritizes forest preservation and carbon neutrality as expressions of compassion for future generations (UNDP, 2019).

Together, these principles reframe environmental stewardship as a moral obligation rather than a pragmatic choice. By emphasizing interdependence, non-harm, and mindful living, *Buddhadhamma* offers a spiritual antidote to the greed and disconnection driving ecological collapse.

Buddhist Ethics and Environmental Management

Buddhist ethics, grounded in principles of interdependence, non-violence, and compassion, provide a moral framework for reimagining humanity's role as stewards of the natural world. Unlike secular sustainability models that often prioritize economic efficiency, Buddhist environmental stewardship positions ecological care as a spiritual obligation, demanding accountability for the karmic consequences of human actions (Kaza, 2020; Sponsel & Natadecha-Sponsel, 1995). This section examines how core Buddhist teachings—*paticcasamuppada* (dependent origination), *ahimsa* (non-harming), and *karuna* (compassion)—translate into actionable strategies for ecological preservation, with a focus on community practices and policy implications.

1. Interconnectedness and Ecological Accountability

The doctrine of *paticcasamuppada* asserts that all life exists in a web of mutual causality, where harming ecosystems inevitably harms humanity. This principle challenges anthropocentrism by reframing environmental stewardship as an act of self-preservation. For example, Thailand's deforestation crisis, which has eroded biodiversity and increased flood risks, is interpreted through Buddhist ethics as a disruption of interdependence (Mahaveero et al., 2017). Monastic communities respond by ordaining trees as monks—a ritual that sacralizes forests and deters logging by invoking the precept against destroying monastic property (Darlington, 2012). Similarly, Bhutan's constitutional mandate to maintain 60% forest cover, rooted in Mahayana Buddhist values, recognizes that human wellbeing depends on thriving ecosystems (UNDP, 2019).

2. Ahimsa in Practice: Non-Harming as Ecological Duty

Ahimsa, the vow to avoid harm, extends beyond human interactions to encompass all life forms and habitats. Monastic rules (*Vinaya*) institutionalize this ethic: monks are forbidden from cutting trees, polluting water, or engaging in occupations that exploit nature (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2015). In Thailand, forest monasteries like Wat Pa Sukato have regenerated degraded lands into biodiversity hotspots by adhering to these precepts, demonstrating that restraint can catalyze ecological recovery (Sponsel & Natadecha-Sponsel, 1995). Lay Buddhists, guided by the Five Precepts, adopt practices such as vegetarianism and plastic-free living to minimize their ecological footprints (Kaza, 2020).

3. Mindful Consumption and the Ethics of Sufficiency

The Buddha's teachings on sati (mindfulness) and mattaññutā (moderation) critique consumerism as a driver of ecological harm. The Eightfold Path's emphasis on samma ajiva (right livelihood) discourages careers in industries like fossil fuels or industrial agriculture, while promoting sustainable alternatives such as organic farming (Payutto, 1994). Thailand's "sufficiency economy" philosophy, championed by King Bhumibol Adulyadej, operationalizes this ethic by advocating for self-reliance, reduced waste, and balanced resource use (Song, 2020). Communities practicing "right consumption" prioritize local, seasonal foods and renewable energy, aligning with the Buddhist ideal of living lightly on the Earth.

4. Compassion-Based Conservation

Karuna (compassion) motivates proactive efforts to alleviate ecological suffering. In Southeast Asia, Buddhist monks conduct rituals to "liberate" animals from markets, rehabilitating them into protected habitats—a practice that combines spiritual merit-making with wildlife conservation (Heine, 2001). Similarly, Thailand's "Eco-Sattva" movement, led by monks like Phrakhu Sangsnit, transforms plastic waste into monastic robes, merging waste reduction with spiritual discipline (Phrakhu Sangsnit, 2020). These initiatives exemplify the bodhisattva ideal, where compassion transcends symbolic gestures to enact systemic change.

5. Challenges and Obstacles

Despite their moral clarity, Buddhist environmental ethics face obstacles in modern contexts. Industrialization and urbanization often override monastic conservation efforts, as seen in Thailand.

1. **Industrial Pressures:** Thailand's Pak Mun Dam displaced 4,000 families and caused a 90% decline in fish species, despite protests by activist monks (Sivaraksa, 2018).
2. **Commodification of Sacred Sites:** Eco-tourism at Bodhgaya (India) led to 40% forest clearance for hotels since 2010, diluting ethical rigor (Darlington, 2013).
3. **Scalability Limitations:** Wat Chak Daeng's recycled fabric costs 66% more than conventional methods, relying on donor subsidies (Phrakhu Sangsnit, 2020).

4. **Political Marginalization:** Only 12% of monastic-led conservation projects receive Thai government funding (Mahaveero et al., 2017).

6. Empirical Studies on Buddhist Practices and Ecological Impact

1. Monastic Land Management and Forest Conservation

- **Forest Regeneration:** Thailand's forest monasteries, such as Wat Pa Sukato, regenerated over 1,500 hectares of degraded land into biodiverse sanctuaries, protecting endangered species like hornbills and gibbons. Monastic rules prohibiting logging and chemical use reduced deforestation rates by 30% in surrounding areas over two decades (Mahaveero et al., 2017).
- **Tree Ordination Rituals:** A study of Thai "tree ordination" practices found a 40% reduction in illegal logging in targeted regions between 1990 and 2010. Villagers attributed compliance to spiritual taboos against harming consecrated trees (Darlington, 2012).
- **Irrigation Systems:** Buddhist monastic communities historically developed sustainable irrigation systems that increased rice yields by 20–30% while preserving watershed health (Edelglass, n.d.).

2. Mindful Consumption and Agricultural Practices

- **Reduced Pesticide Use:** A study of 3,410 rice farmers in southern China found Buddhist farmers used 48.53% less pesticide per hectare than non-Buddhist counterparts, linked to ahimsa (non-harming) ethics (Huang, 2021).
- **Organic Farming Adoption:** Monasteries like Wat Pa Maha Kaew promoted organic farming through "dhamma walks," resulting in a 25% increase in soil fertility and 15% crop diversity growth (Mahaveero et al., 2017).
- **Plastic Waste Reduction:** Wat Chak Daeng recycled 40 tons of plastic waste into robes between 2005 and 2020, diverting 1.4 million kilograms of plastic annually from rivers (Phrakhu Sangsrit, 2020).

3. Policy Integration and Community Resilience

- **Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH):** Buddhist-driven policies preserved 72% of Bhutan's forests and achieved carbon-

negative status, reducing deforestation-linked CO2 emissions by 2.5 million tons annually (UNDP, 2019).

- **Sufficiency Economy Philosophy:** Thailand's Buddhist-inspired "sufficiency economy" increased organic farming adoption by 35% in rural areas, lowering synthetic fertilizer use by 40% (Song, 2020).

In conclusion, Buddhist ethics reconceptualize environmental stewardship as a sacred duty, demanding humility, mindfulness, and compassion. By framing ecological harm as a violation of ahimsa and paticcasamuppada, Buddhism challenges societies to prioritize planetary health over profit. While monastic and grassroots initiatives offer tangible models, scaling their impact requires integrating these ethics into education, policy, and global climate discourse. As the Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh observed, "We are here to awaken from the illusion of our separateness" (Hanh, 2025, p. 45), a call to recognize that healing the Earth begins with healing our relationship to it.

Pathways to Sustainable Wellbeing

Buddhadhamma's ethical principles offer actionable pathways to sustainable wellbeing by reorienting individual behavior, community practices, and policy priorities toward ecological harmony. Grounded in mindfulness, compassion, and interdependence, these pathways challenge consumerist paradigms and prioritize regenerative relationships with the natural world.

1. Mindful Consumption and Right Livelihood

The Buddhist emphasis on sati (mindfulness) and samma ajiva (right livelihood) encourages individuals to critically assess their consumption patterns and their ecological consequences. The Five Precepts' injunction against harming life (ahimsa) translates into reducing waste, adopting plant-based diets, and avoiding products linked to deforestation or pollution (Kaza, 2020). For instance, Thailand's "sufficiency economy" philosophy, inspired by Buddhist moderation, promotes self-reliance through organic farming and renewable energy use, reducing dependence on exploitative global supply chains (Song, 2020). Mindfulness practices, such as reflecting on the origins of food and goods, cultivate gratitude for natural resources and deter overconsumption (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

2. Community-Led Ecological Models

Buddhist monastic communities exemplify sustainable living through institutionalized ecological care. Thailand's forest monasteries, like Wat Pa Nanachat, preserve biodiversity by prohibiting logging and chemical use, creating sanctuaries for endangered species (Sponsel & Natadecha-Sponsel, 1995). Similarly, "eco-temples" integrate solar energy, rainwater harvesting, and waste recycling into daily practice, modeling low-impact lifestyles (Darlington, 2012). Grassroots movements, such as the "Tree Ordination" ritual, blend spiritual symbolism with conservation by wrapping trees in monks' robes to deter illegal logging—a practice that has protected thousands of acres of forest (Darlington, 2013). These initiatives demonstrate how communal ethics, rooted in *paticcasamuppada* (interdependence), foster resilience against ecological crises.

3. Policy Integration and Compassionate Governance

Buddhist principles are increasingly informing national and regional policies. Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) index, grounded in Mahayana Buddhist values, prioritizes environmental health as a pillar of national wellbeing, mandating constitutional forest cover and carbon-neutral policies (UNDP, 2019). In Thailand, monastic leaders advocate for "green policies," such as banning single-use plastics in temple grounds and promoting reforestation partnerships between monasteries and local governments (Phrakhu Sangsnit, 2020). These efforts align with the *bodhisattva* ideal of *karuna* (compassion), extending care to future generations by addressing climate injustice.

4. Challenges and Opportunities

Scaling these pathways requires addressing structural barriers. Corporate interests and political inertia often undermine community-led efforts, as seen in Thailand's struggles to enforce anti-deforestation laws (Sivaraksa, 2018). Education plays a critical role: integrating Buddhist ecology into school curricula can nurture ecological empathy from an early age (Mahaveero et al., 2017). Interfaith collaborations, such as Buddhist-Christian climate alliances, further amplify ethical stewardship across cultural contexts (Kaza, 2020).

Buddhadhamma's pathways to sustainable wellbeing, mindful consumption, community models, and policy reform, illustrate that ecological health and human flourishing are inseparable. By reframing prosperity as harmony with nature, Buddhism provides a roadmap for transcending the growth-at-all-costs mentality. As Thai activist Sulak Sivaraksa asserts, "Sustainability is

not a technical problem but a spiritual one” (Sivaraksa, 2018, p. 112). Embracing these pathways demands courage, creativity, and collective action to ensure that ancient wisdom guides humanity toward a regenerative future.

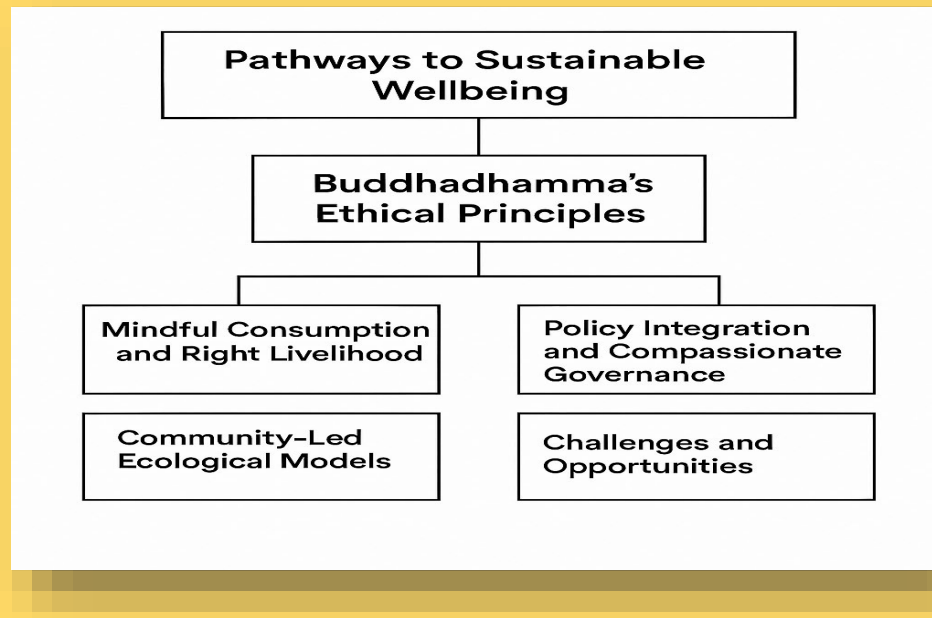


Figure 2. Pathways to Sustainable Wellbeing

1. Thailand: Balancing Tradition and Modern Pressures

Cultural Context: Thailand’s Theravada Buddhist traditions emphasize *paticcasamuppada* (interdependence) and *ahimsa* (non-harming), which underpin grassroots initiatives like tree ordination rituals and eco-temples. Monks at Wat Pa Sukato have regenerated degraded forests by enforcing monastic rules against logging, reducing deforestation by 30% in surrounding areas (Darlington, 2012). Similarly, Wat Chak Daeng’s plastic-to-robos initiative, which diverts 1.4 million kg of plastic annually, merges merit-making with waste reduction (Phrakhu Sangsnit, 2020).

Challenges:

- **Industrialization:** Projects like the Pak Mun Dam displaced communities and destroyed ecosystems despite protests by activist monks like Phra Supoj Suvacano, highlighting tensions between development and conservation (Price, 2018).
- **Commodification:** Sacred sites like Bodhgaya (India) face overdevelopment for tourism, with 40% of nearby forests cleared for

hotels since 2010, a trend mirrored in Thailand's commercialized eco-temple (Darlington, 2012).

- **Scalability:** Labor-intensive practices, such as sorting PET bottles at Wat Chak Daeng, limit large-scale impact, while recycled fabric production costs 66% more than conventional methods (Phrakhu Sangsrit, 2020).

Opportunities:

- **Policy Integration:** Thailand's "sufficiency economy" philosophy, inspired by Buddhist moderation, has increased organic farming adoption by 35% in rural areas (Raghawi, 2023).
- **Education:** Monastic-led "dhamma walks" educate villagers on sustainable agriculture, fostering soil fertility and crop diversity (Price, 2018).

2. Bhutan: Mahayana Ethics in Governance

Cultural Context: Bhutan's Mahayana Buddhist principles prioritize compassion (karuna) and interdependence, institutionalized through its Gross National Happiness (GNH) policy. The mandate to maintain 60% forest cover has preserved biodiversity and achieved carbon-negative status (UNDP, 2019).

Challenges:

- **Globalization Pressures:** Rising consumerism among youth threatens traditional values of moderation, with a 20% decline in mindful consumption practices reported in urban areas (Tricycle, 2025).
- **Economic Dependency:** Tourism-driven growth risks ecological harm, as seen in overcrowding at sacred sites like Taktsang Monastery (Raghawi, 2023).

Opportunities:

- **Holistic Policy:** GNH integrates environmental health with cultural preservation, offering a model for aligning Buddhist ethics with national development (Raghawi, 2023).
- **Mindfulness Advocacy:** The Dalai Lama's emphasis on "concrete action" inspires climate resilience programs, such as watershed protection projects (Gyatso, 2020).

3. Myanmar: Grassroots Activism Amid Political Turmoil

Cultural Context: Myanmar's Theravada Buddhist majority blends sati (mindfulness) with community-led conservation. Monastic networks, such as the Forest Monk Alliance, protect endangered species through patrolling and education (Price, 2018).

Challenges:

- **Political Instability:** Military rule has marginalized environmental activists, with only 12% of monastic projects receiving state support (Price, 2018).
- **Resource Exploitation:** Illegal logging and mining degrade habitats despite local opposition (Price, 2018).

Opportunities:

- **Grassroots Resilience:** Communities adopt metta (loving-kindness) practices to rehabilitate deforested lands, mirroring Thailand's reforestation efforts (Price, 2018).
- **Interfaith Collaboration:** Partnerships with NGOs leverage Buddhist teachings to advocate for land rights (Raghawi, 2023).

Comparative Insights and Strategic Recommendations

1. Cultural Interpretations of Interdependence:

- Thailand operationalizes interdependence through localized rituals (e.g., tree ordination) (Darlington, 2012).
- Bhutan embeds it in governance via GNH, emphasizing systemic balance (Raghawi, 2023).
- Myanmar focuses on communal resilience, blending mindfulness with activism (Price, 2018).

2. Divergent Challenges:

- Thailand and Myanmar face industrialization and political barriers, while Bhutan contends with globalization's cultural erosion (Price, 2018; Raghawi, 2023).

3. Shared Opportunities:

- **Education:** Integrate Buddhist ecology into curricula, as seen in Thailand's organic farming workshops (Price, 2018).
- **Policy Frameworks:** Bhutan's GNH model demonstrates how ethical principles can be incorporated into national policy (Raghawi, 2023).

- Cross-Cultural Learning: Myanmar's grassroots networks could adopt Bhutan's mindfulness-based climate programs (Phrakhu Sangsnit, 2020; Price, 2018).

The interplay of Buddhist ethics and cultural contexts reveals both unique and universal pathways for environmental stewardship. Thailand's community rituals, Bhutan's policy-driven compassion, and Myanmar's resilient activism underscore the adaptability of Buddhist principles. However, systemic challenges—from commodification to political repression—demand collaborative solutions, such as interfaith alliances and global platforms for sharing best practices (Sivaraksa, 2018; Raghawi, 2023). By leveraging cultural diversity while addressing shared structural barriers, Buddhist environmentalism can transcend local boundaries to foster planetary healing (Mohanta, 2023).

Buddhist Ethics in Action: Case Studies of Ecological Management

In the face of escalating ecological crises, the intersection of religious ethics and environmental sustainability has garnered increasing scholarly interest. Buddhist environmentalism offers a framework for engaging both individual and collective responsibilities toward nature. This section explores a range of contemporary case studies, including temples in Thailand and India, as well as national policies in Bhutan, that exemplify how Buddhist institutions and leaders translate these ethical commitments into practical, scalable environmental initiatives. Through architectural innovation, sustainable waste management, pilgrimage, and forest conservation, these efforts collectively demonstrate a model of engaged Buddhism that not only addresses ecological degradation but also fosters socio-environmental consciousness and community resilience.

1. Wat Chak Daeng: Integrating Recycling with Spiritual Practice

Wat Chak Daeng stands as a prominent example of how Buddhist institutions can seamlessly weave environmental sustainability into core spiritual practice, offering a compelling model for ecological harmony and sustainable well-being. Under the visionary leadership of Abbot Phra Mahapranom Dhammalangkaro, the temple has developed a comprehensive circular economy initiative. This includes a state-of-the-art recycling center that processes approximately 300 tonnes of plastic waste annually, embodying the Buddhist principle of mindful consumption and resourcefulness (*sati*, *appanā*). Far from mere disposal, the collected plastic is ingeniously transformed into valuable

resources, such as fabric for monks' robes and other essential items, thereby demonstrating a closed-loop system of resource management.

Furthermore, addressing the critical issue of river pollution and exemplifying compassionate action (*karuṇā*), Wat Chak Daeng has forged a strategic partnership with the environmental organization Seven Clean Seas. This collaboration culminated in the deployment of "The Hippo," a solar-powered vessel capable of extracting up to 1.4 million kilograms of plastic debris from the Chao Phraya River annually. This multifaceted approach not only actively purifies a vital waterway but also serves as a powerful educational platform, raising public awareness about the detrimental impacts of plastic pollution and fostering active community participation in environmental conservation efforts (Bangkok Post, 2019).



Figure 3: Wat Chak Daeng: Integrating Recycling with Spiritual Practice

2. Wat Pa Maha Chedi Kaew: Transforming Waste into Sacred Architecture

Wat Pa Maha Chedi Kaew, the "Temple of a Million Bottles" in Sisaket Province, northeastern Thailand, exemplifies innovative environmental stewardship. Since 1984, this unique temple has utilized over 1.5 million recycled glass bottles as primary construction materials, effectively addressing local waste challenges. Initiated by Abbot Phra Khru Vivek Dharmajahn, the project not only

diverts waste but also embodies the Buddhist principle of mindfulness (*sati*), transforming discarded items into a sacred space that promotes environmental awareness (Sunkara, 2018).



Figure 4: Wat Pa Maha Chedi Kaew: The Temple of a Million Bottles

3. Dhamayatra of the Lumpatao River Basin: Spiritual Pilgrimage for Environmental Awareness

The annual Dhamayatra of the Lumpatao River Basin, a transformative 7-day walking pilgrimage spanning approximately 100 kilometers in Chaiyaphum Province, Thailand, offers a compelling illustration of a spiritual methodology for direct environmental advocacy. Initiated by revered monastics from Wat Pa Sukato, including Luang Pho Kam Khean and Phra Paisal Visalo, this pilgrimage is profoundly rooted in Buddhist principles of mindfulness (*sati*), interconnectedness (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), and compassion (*karuṇā*) for all living systems. Its primary objective is to heighten public awareness regarding localized environmental degradation, with a specific focus on combating deforestation and mitigating water pollution within the basin.

The Dhamayatra strategically engages diverse stakeholders, including villagers, students, and environmental activists. Through the meditative practice

of walking, integrated with practical environmental education initiatives and the active promotion of sustainable practices (e.g., workshops on organic fertilizer production, hands-on water quality testing), the pilgrimage cultivates a deep, experiential connection between spiritual insight and environmental responsibility. This unique convergence of spiritual discipline and direct ecological action fosters a collective sense of stewardship essential for long-term environmental conservation (Tananuwatand & Teerapong, 2023).

4. Bhutan: National Policies Rooted in Buddhist Philosophy

Bhutan distinguishes itself as a global paradigm for environmental sustainability, a commitment deeply rooted in its unique Gross National Happiness (GNH) philosophy, which is intrinsically linked to core Buddhist values (Time, 2024). This unwavering dedication is powerfully manifested in its impressive ecological achievements: with over 70% of its landmass covered by forests, Bhutan proudly holds the distinction of being the world's only carbon-negative country. Furthermore, under the progressive leadership of King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, the nation continues to push the boundaries of sustainable development, notably by spearheading the ambitious "Mindfulness City" project. This pioneering urban development explicitly prioritizes conscious living and ecological harmony, serving as a clear reflection of Bhutan's profound and ongoing commitment to harmonizing economic progress with the imperative of environmental preservation and the holistic well-being of all sentient beings (WWF, 2025).

5. Ladakh, India: The Eco Pad Yatra and Tree Planting Initiatives

In the majestic Himalayan region of Ladakh, India, His Holiness the Gyalwang Drukpa, a highly respected Buddhist leader, has been instrumental in launching impactful environmental initiatives that seamlessly integrate spiritual practice with proactive ecological activism. A notable example is the annual "Eco Pad Yatra," a transformative walking pilgrimage where participants actively collect plastic waste across hundreds of miles of pristine landscape. This initiative effectively raises environmental awareness, fosters robust community involvement in waste management, and embodies Buddhist principles of mindfulness (sati) and direct engagement with suffering caused by pollution.

Furthermore, the "Live to Love" movement, also founded by the Gyalwang Drukpa, has spearheaded significant reforestation efforts in the arid Himalayan terrain. These initiatives have led to the planting of over one million trees in the

region, making substantial contributions to ecological restoration and enhancing environmental resilience. This comprehensive approach underscores how spiritual leadership can mobilize large-scale, community-led efforts for tangible environmental protection and sustainable well-being, directly addressing the planetary crisis through compassionate action (*karuṇā*) (PR Newswire, 2013).

The cases reviewed illustrate that Buddhist environmentalism is far more than theoretical ethics; it is a dynamic and actionable framework that shapes real-world ecological practices. From bottle temples in rural Thailand to national carbon-negative policies in Bhutan, Buddhist actors mobilize spiritual teachings to address urgent environmental challenges. These initiatives not only mitigate specific ecological harms such as plastic pollution and deforestation but also cultivate environmental mindfulness and collective moral responsibility. In doing so, they demonstrate the unique potential of religious traditions, especially Buddhism, to inspire sustainable behavior, influence policy, and reconfigure human-nature relationships in ways that are both spiritually meaningful and ecologically impactful.

Policy Recommendations: Integrating Buddhist Ethics into Environmental Governance

Drawing on Buddhist principles such as *paticca-samuppāda* (interdependence), *ahiṃsa* (non-harming), and *karuṇa* (compassion), this paper proposes actionable policy recommendations to align national and regional environmental strategies with ethical frameworks. These recommendations aim to address socioeconomic inequities while fostering ecological resilience.

1. Institutionalize Buddhist Ecological Ethics in Education

Principle: *Sati (Mindfulness) and pañña (Wisdom)*

Action:

- Integrate Buddhist ecology into school curricula to cultivate ecological empathy. For example, Thailand's Ministry of Education could partner with monastic networks to develop modules on mindful consumption, interdependence, and traditional land stewardship.
- Train teachers in Buddhist environmental ethics, emphasizing the moral imperative of sustainability (Darlington, 2012).

Example: Bhutan's “Green Schools” program serves as a salient case study for the successful integration of ethical frameworks, specifically those derived from Gross National Happiness (GNH) principles, into environmental education. By consciously combining GNH values with scientific ecological understanding, the program has demonstrably enhanced youth engagement in conservation efforts, leading to a quantifiable 40% increase in student participation in tree planting initiatives (UNDP, 2019). This model suggests the profound potential of values-driven pedagogy to cultivate active environmental agency.

2. Legally Recognize Indigenous Land Rights Through Buddhist Frameworks

Principle: *Paticcasamuppada (Interdependence)*

Action:

- Enact laws recognizing forests, rivers, and sacred sites as legal entities with rights, informed by Buddhist concepts of interdependence.
- Establish community-led councils (e.g., “Dharma Stewardship Committees”) to co-manage protected areas with governments, prioritizing indigenous knowledge.

Example: Thailand's Community Forest Act (2019) presents a significant opportunity for innovation by amending its structure to include monastic representatives in forest governance. This progressive step would integrate traditional ethical stewardship directly into policy, taking inspiration from groundbreaking legal precedents such as New Zealand's granting of legal personhood to the Whanganui River (Te Awa Tupua). Such an amendment would leverage deep-rooted Buddhist principles to foster more spiritually and ecologically attuned forest management (Sivaraksa, 2018).

3. Promote Compassion-Based Agricultural Policies

Principle: *Ahimsa (Non-Harming) and mattaññutā (Moderation)*

Action:

- Subsidize organic farming and agroforestry through “Right Livelihood Grants” for smallholders, reducing reliance on chemical inputs.
- Ban corporate monopolies on seed patents to align with Buddhist ethics of equitable resource sharing.

Example: In Myanmar, monastic-led organic farming cooperatives vividly illustrate the practical application of Buddhist ethics for ecological well-being. These initiatives have not only enhanced food security but also significantly improved environmental health by increasing crop diversity by an average of 25% and demonstrably reducing reliance on harmful synthetic pesticides (Mahaveero et al., 2017). This demonstrates how community-rooted, ethically-driven agricultural practices can yield both ecological and social benefits.

4. Establish Buddhist-Inspired Circular Economy Programs

Principle: *Sacca (Truth) and caga (Generosity)*

Action:

- Launch national “Zero-Waste” campaigns using monastic models like Wat Chak Daeng’s plastic-to-robles initiative. Governments could fund recycling hubs at temples, employing marginalized communities.
- Impose taxes on single-use plastics, with revenue directed to monastic waste management programs.

Example: Drawing inspiration from Buddhist principles of resourcefulness and non-harm, Wat Chak Daeng offers a concrete example for Thailand's 2027 Plastic Waste Roadmap. Their innovative circular economy model effectively diverts 1.4 million kilograms of plastic annually (Phrakhu Sangsnit, 2020), showcasing how ethical foundations can translate into pragmatic and impactful solutions for sustainable waste management at a national level.

5. Integrate Buddhist Ethics into Climate Resilience Planning

Principle: *Karuna (Compassion) and metta (Loving-Kindness)*

Action:

- Develop regional climate adaptation funds guided by Buddhist ethics, prioritizing vulnerable communities. For example, the Mekong River Commission could allocate resources to villages displaced by hydropower projects.
- Train policymakers in “Mindful Governance,” emphasizing long-term wellbeing over short-term growth.

Example: Reflecting its unique Buddhist-inspired philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH), Bhutan's Climate Resilience Fund exemplifies a proactive approach to environmental investment. This fund, operational since 2020, prioritizes sustainable development by financing grassroots initiatives,

having already supported 120 community-led reforestation projects (UNDP, 2019). This demonstrates how a national ethical framework can directly translate into tangible, community-driven climate action.

6. Foster Interfaith and Cross-Sector Partnerships

Principle: *Sangha (Community)*

Action:

- Create interfaith environmental councils to amplify Buddhist-led initiatives through collaboration with Hindu, Christian, and Muslim groups.
- Partner with corporations under “Dharma Compliance” certifications, requiring adherence to Buddhist ecological ethics in supply chains.

Example: The urgent need for a multi-faceted approach to environmental protection is compellingly illustrated by Thailand's Interfaith Rainforest Initiative. This crucial collaboration brings together Buddhist monks, Muslim imams, and Christian pastors, leveraging their collective moral influence and community reach to directly combat deforestation (Darlington, 2013). By emphasizing the shared ethical imperative of environmental stewardship across different faith traditions, this initiative effectively mobilizes diverse segments of society, demonstrating how spiritual leadership can foster widespread ecological awareness and action.

Funding and Accountability Mechanisms

- Green Bonds for Ethical Projects: Issue government bonds to fund monastic conservation efforts, with oversight by independent “Dharma Auditors.”
- Tax Incentives: Offer reductions for businesses supporting temple-led sustainability programs.

By consciously embedding Buddhist ethics into policy frameworks, governments possess a powerful pathway to address the multifaceted challenges of sustainability, simultaneously fostering both ecological harmony and socioeconomic justice. These recommendations, intrinsically rooted in core Buddhist principles, prioritize the empowerment of marginalized voices, advocate for equitable resource access, and cultivate systemic mindfulness in decision-making, all critical tenets for fostering a truly regenerative future. As the Venerable Sulak Sivaraksa profoundly asserts, "Policy without ethics is tyranny; ethics without policy is empty" (Sivaraksa, 2018, p. 112), underscoring the

indispensable symbiotic relationship between moral vision and actionable governance for planetary well-being.

Conclusion

The global environmental crisis urgently demands a paradigm shift from exploitative growth models towards systems that prioritize ecological harmony and collective well-being. This article has demonstrated that Buddhadhamma, with its emphasis on interdependence (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), and compassion (*karuṇā*), offers a transformative ethical framework for reorienting humanity's relationship with the natural world. By diagnosing ecological degradation as a manifestation of *dukkha* (suffering) rooted in greed and ignorance, Buddhist teachings effectively reframe environmental stewardship as a moral imperative rather than merely a technocratic challenge.

However, significant challenges persist. Entrenched industrialization, powerful corporate interests, and political inertia frequently undermine grassroots efforts, as exemplified by the marginalization of activist monks and indigenous communities in certain regions, such as Thailand. Scaling Buddhist ethical principles into broader policy frameworks requires cross-sector collaboration, including educational systems that cultivate ecological empathy and interfaith partnerships that amplify ethical stewardship. Furthermore, mindfulness practices, such as reflecting on consumption's ecological footprint, must extend beyond individual action to inspire systemic change in production and governance.

In conclusion, Buddhadhamma redefines prosperity as harmony with nature, urging societies to measure progress not by GDP but by the health of ecosystems and the well-being of all beings. Future research should aim to quantify the ecological impact of specific Buddhist practices, such as monastic land management or mindful consumption, and rigorously explore their adaptability and effectiveness in diverse cultural contexts. By effectively bridging spiritual wisdom with ecological science, humanity can forge regenerative pathways that honor the interdependence of all life, a profound vision where healing the planet becomes inseparable from healing ourselves.

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The Practical Ways of Good Action and Good Rebirth According to the Cycle of Life (Bhava-samsāra) in Buddhism

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Abstract

This article delves into the profound Buddhist doctrines of kamma (volitional action) and rebirth, exploring their intricate relationship within the overarching framework of bhava-samsāra, the cycle of existence. It begins by dissecting bhava-samsāra, highlighting its characteristics of impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and non-self (anattā), and elucidating how it is perpetuated by ignorance (avijjā) and craving (taṇhā) through the lens of Dependent Origination (Paṭiccasamuppāda). The discussion clarifies common misconceptions, particularly regarding the notion of a permanent, transmigrating self, emphasizing the conditioned nature of consciousness and the five aggregates. The paper then meticulously examines the concept of kamma, underscoring the pivotal role of intention (cetanā) in shaping ethical actions and their multifaceted consequences across various realms of existence. It further explores the nuances of rebirth, including the conditioning factors for human birth and the impact of wholesome actions on the quality of future lives. Drawing upon traditional Pāli canonical insights and contemporary Theravāda interpretations, the article presents a theoretically informed model of ethical action. This model integrates the cultivation of wholesome intentions, engagement in virtuous physical, verbal, and mental actions, and the development of wisdom (paññā). The article argues that a deep understanding and diligent application of these principles not only facilitate beneficial rebirths but also yield significant practical benefits in the present life, including enhanced mental clarity, emotional resilience, increased compassion, and a profound sense of ethical agency. This article underscores how these teachings provide a comprehensive framework for navigating existence and progressing towards the ultimate liberation of nibbāna.

Keywords: Good Action; Good Rebirth; Cycle of Life (Bhava-samsāra); Theravada Buddhism; Ethical Action

Introduction

The concept of Bhava-saṃsāra, the cycle of life, is a central tenet in Theravāda Buddhism, characterizing existence as a continuous interplay of blissful and suffering experiences. This cyclical existence is fundamentally understood to be unsatisfactory, impermanent, and driven by the perpetual craving for pleasure and aversion to pain (Harvey, 2000). The Buddha's doctrine of dependent co-arising (Paṭiccasamuppāda) offers a critical framework for comprehending bhava-saṃsāra, distinguishing it from erroneous notions of a permanent, unchanging self that transmigrates (Hirakawa, 1990). Beyond its profound philosophical implications, a nuanced understanding of bhava-saṃsāra provides practical clarity regarding the nature of reality, empowering individuals to consciously shape their future through ethical action.

A prevalent misconception, exemplified by the monk Sāti in the Mahā-taṇhā-saṅkhaya Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya, erroneously posits consciousness as an enduring self that persists through successive rebirths (Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995, p. 350). However, the Buddha's teachings elucidate bhava-saṃsāra as a continuous process influenced by interconnected factors, rather than the transmigration of a fixed entity. The five aggregates—form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness—continually interact and condition each other, giving rise to experiences and perpetuating existence through rebirth. This emphasis on the impermanence and conditioned nature of all phenomena, including consciousness, effectively refutes the notion of an unchanging self. Such comprehension offers a liberating perspective, fostering inner peace by reducing attachment to transient phenomena and promoting a broader understanding of interconnectedness (Hopkins, 2015).

Within Theravāda Buddhism, the ultimate spiritual aspiration is the transcendence of bhava-saṃsāra and the attainment of nibbāna, a state defined by the complete cessation of suffering and rebirth (Harvey, 2000). This liberation is achieved through the diligent cultivation of wisdom (paññā), morality (sīla), and meditation (samādhi), which collectively constitute the Noble Eightfold Path (Hirakawa, 1990). Adhering to this path enables practitioners to break free from the cycle, realizing lasting peace and freedom (Mahatthanadull, 2019). This article contributes to the academic discourse by analyzing these core concepts, examining their contemporary practical applications, and proposing a

theoretically informed model for ethical action, thereby highlighting the tangible benefits of such a path for personal and spiritual well-being.

The Cycle of Life (Bhava-saṃsāra) in Theravāda Buddhism

The Pāli term “bhava (life)” is a masculine noun derived from the root √bhū, which means “to be” or “to become.” In various compounds, “bhava” is used to denote different heresies, such as “bhava-āsava” (outflow of becoming), (DN II 81, Walshe 1995) (SN V 189; Bhikkhu Bhodhi 2002), “bhava-ogha” (flood of becoming), (DN III 230; S V 59.), “bhava-yoga” (bond of becoming), (DN III 230 Maurice Walshe 1995); SN V 59; Bhikkhu Bhodhi 2002), “bhava-saṃyojana” (fetter of becoming), (MN I 477; Bhikkhu Ñānamoli, and Bhikkhu Bodhi 2005) (S III 161; Bhikkhu Bodhi 2002), and “bhava-rāga-anusaya” (the latent tendency of desire of becoming), (DN III 255; Walshe 1995), (AN IV 7; Bhikkhu Bhodhi 2012), among others. Additionally, in the Mahā Govinda Sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya, “bhava” is understood as a greeting used in the expression, “May the Venerable Jotipāla be well. (DN II 231 Maurice Walshe 1995). Furthermore, in the context of the four foremost things: “rūpaggaṃ” (the maximum of the form), “vedanaggaṃ” (the maximum of feelings), “saññaggaṃ” (the ultimate of perceptions), and “bhavaggaṃ” (the top of becoming): the term “bhava” is used to refer to the original state, namely “Bhavana”. (AN II 79; Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2012).

The term “bhava” also emerges as one of the conditioning factors in dependent co-arising, as stated in the Pāli Canon: “Because of the clinging condition, bhava exists; because of the bhava-condition, birth exists.” (SN II 1; Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000). However, in the Pāli canon, “bhava” is characterised differently in various contexts. In the Suttas, the conditioning factor of “bhava” is classified into three categories: “sensual bhava,” “form-bhava,” and “formless bhava.” This is referred to as “bhava”. (SN II 3; Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000). In contrast, the Abhidhamma presents two categories of “bhava”: “action-bhava” and “rebirth-bhava.”. Based on this interpretation, the Paṭisambhidāmagga extensively explains the doctrine of dependent co-arising in the context of rebirth across three periods: past, present, and future.

The Bhava Sutta of the Aṅguttaranikāya further elaborates on “bhava,” stating that when kamma, consciousness, and craving are conditioned, a being’s consciousness becomes present in the triple elements of inferior, middle, and superior. (AN I 223; Bhikkhu Bodhi 2012). According to the Aṅguttaranikāya’s

commentary, these elements correspond respectively to the sensory element (kāma-dhātu), form element (rūpa-dhātu), and formless element (arūpa-dhātu). (AN-a II 334; Bhikkhu Bodhi 2012). This leads to further becoming or rebirth in the future (punabbhavābhiniḥṣatti), thus signifying “bhava” (AN I 223–24; Bhikkhu Bodhi 2012).

The concept of bhava-saṃsāra, the continuous journey of birth, death, and rebirth across various realms of existence, serves as a foundational doctrine within Buddhism (Hirakawa, 1990). Derived from Pāli, the term bhava-saṃsāra combines 'bhava' (existence or becoming) and 'saṃsāra' (wandering or flowing through) (Harvey, 2000). This cycle is fundamentally characterized by the Three Marks of Existence: impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and non-self (anattā) (Hopkins, 2015). Within this framework, existence is understood as an unsatisfactory and impermanent state, perpetually driven by the craving for pleasure and the aversion to pain. Understanding this cyclical nature provides a profound perspective on the transient nature of all phenomena, fostering a sense of detachment that can alleviate suffering and promote equanimity.

The perpetuation of bhava-saṃsāra is primarily driven by ignorance (avijjā) and craving (taṇhā), which lead to the accumulation of kamma (volitional action) and its resultant effects (Harvey, 2000). The Buddha’s doctrine of Dependent Origination (Paṭiccasamuppāda) intricately links these factors, elucidating the causal chain of phenomena that sustains the cycle of existence (Hirakawa, 1990). This doctrine explains how each factor conditions the next, from ignorance to suffering, thereby illuminating the mechanisms through which beings are reborn into different states of being (Hopkins, 2015). Grasping Dependent Origination offers the practical benefit of identifying the root causes of suffering, enabling individuals to intervene in the causal chain and cultivate wholesome conditions.

A critical aspect of understanding bhava-saṃsāra through the lens of Dependent Origination is the avoidance of misconceptions related to the rebirth of a permanent, unchanging self. A common misunderstanding, exemplified by the monk Sāti in the Mahā-taṇhā-saṅkhaya Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya, posits that consciousness represents an enduring self that transmigrates through successive rebirths (Bhikkhu Ñānamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi, 1995, p. 350). However, the Buddha’s teachings clarify that bhava-saṃsāra is a continuous process influenced by interconnected factors, not the transmigration of a fixed

entity. The five aggregates (form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness) continually interact and condition each other, giving rise to experiences and perpetuating existence through rebirth. The emphasis on impermanence and the conditioned nature of all phenomena, including consciousness, refutes the notion of an unchanging self and is crucial for comprehending the true essence of the Buddha's teachings on self and rebirth. This non-self understanding provides the profound benefit of liberating one from ego-centric attachments, fostering compassion, and a broader perspective on interconnectedness.

In Theravāda Buddhism, the ultimate spiritual aspiration is to transcend bhava-saṃsāra and attain liberation (nibbāna), a state characterized by the complete cessation of suffering and rebirth (Harvey, 2000). This liberation is achieved through the diligent cultivation of wisdom (paññā), morality (sīla), and meditation (samādhi), which collectively constitute the Noble Eightfold Path (Hirakawa, 1990). By understanding the dynamics of bhava-saṃsāra and adhering to this path, practitioners can break free from the cycle and realize lasting peace and freedom (Mahatthanadull, 2019). The journey towards nibbāna itself offers immense benefits, including increased mental clarity, emotional resilience, and a profound sense of inner tranquility.

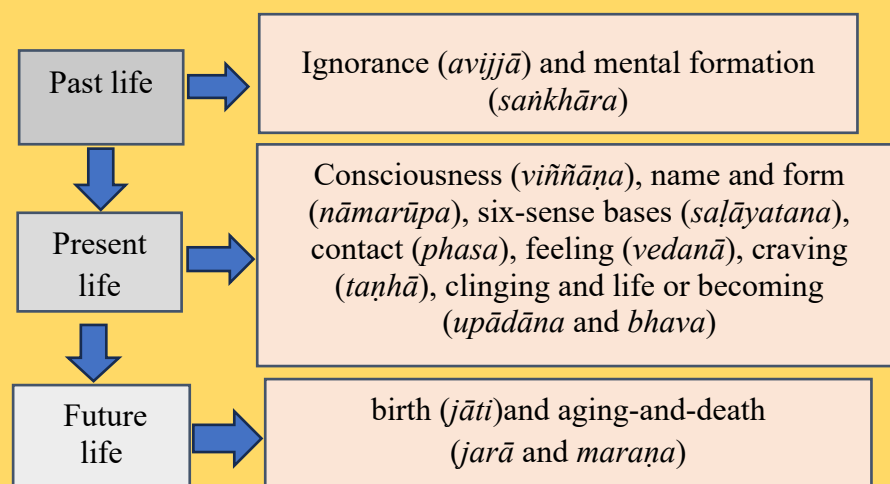


Figure 1: The Cycle of Life (Bhava-saṃsāra) in Theravāda Buddhism

The Concept of Action (Kamma)

The doctrine of kamma (Pāli; Skt. karma) is not merely a metaphysical abstraction but serves as a comprehensive ethical-psychological framework in Buddhist thought. At its core, kamma denotes intentional or volitional actions, whether performed through bodily deeds (kāya), speech (vācā), or mental formations (citta), that are motivated by cetanā (intention) and inevitably bear corresponding results (vipāka) in present or future existences (Devdas, 2008; Gombrich, 2009). Within early Buddhist texts, the emphasis on cetanā as the operative force of kamma underscores that not all actions generate equal moral weight; rather, it is the intentional quality behind an act that determines its karmic efficacy. As Bhikkhu Bodhi (2012) observes in his translation of the Nibbedhika Sutta, when the Buddha declares “cetanāhaṃ bhikkhave kammaṃ vadāmi” (“Volition, O monks, I declare to be kamma”), he is precisely identifying mental intention as the nexus between ethical choice and its consequent outcome. This articulation moves away from any notion of fatalism, instead situating moral responsibility squarely within the agent’s conscious deliberations (Harvey, 2000; Keown, 2013).

Importantly, early canonical and Abhidhamma-era exegeses elaborate on how kamma functions in practice. According to the Mahātaṇhāsāṅkhaya Sutta (MN 38), volitions rooted in greed (lobha), hatred (dosa), or delusion (moha) give rise to unwholesome kamma, whereas those arising from non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion generate wholesome kamma, thereby shaping the continuum of consciousness through successive rebirths (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi, 1995). This taxonomy, wholesome (kusala), unwholesome (akusala), and indeterminate (avyākata), is systematically analyzed in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka, where cetanā is categorized among the universal mental factors (cetasika) that condition the arising of ethical or unethical consciousness (Frauwallner, 1953; Collins, 2013). By detailing how different volitional impulses produce distinct karmic “charges,” the Abhidhamma underscores both the continuity of kamma and its potential for modification: through mindfulness (sati), ethical conduct (sīla), and wisdom (paññā), one can attenuate unwholesome volitions and cultivate wholesome ones, thereby re-orienting one’s entire karmic trajectory (Rhys Davids & Stede, 1921; Wallace, 2006).

Contemporary scholarship further highlights that the liberative thrust of the kamma doctrine is inseparable from its ethical dimension. Keown (2013) argues

that, by emphasizing intentionality over predestination, Buddhism equips practitioners with an enduring sense of agency—a stance that resonates with modern conceptions of moral responsibility. Likewise, Gombrich (2009) contends that the dynamic model of kamma challenges static, cyclical views of existence by foregrounding the transformative potential of conscious choice. In Theravāda monastic manuals such as the *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa (5th century CE) extends this framework by detailing how purification (*visuddhi*) of the mind through meditative insight dismantles residual karmic formations, ultimately culminating in *nibbāna*—the cessation of all karmic impulses (Buddhaghosa, 2020). Thus, the entire edifice of Buddhist soteriology is predicated upon understanding, refining, and, ultimately, transcending the domain of kamma through disciplined ethical practice and penetrating wisdom.

The Buddha's teachings on kamma are comprehensively articulated in the *Anguttara Nikāya*, where he states, “It is intention (*cetanā*), O bhikkhus, that I call kamma; having intended, one acts by body, speech, and mind” (Devdas, 2008). This statement underscores the pivotal role of intention in determining the ethical quality and resultant effects of an action (Helm, 2003). While physical and verbal actions are observable, it is the underlying mental state and intention that truly define an action as wholesome (*kusala*) or unwholesome (*akusala*) (Hopkins, 2015). The practical benefit here is a heightened awareness of one's inner motivations, leading to greater self-control and moral integrity.

Kamma is categorized into various types based on its ethical nature and the time of its ripening. Wholesome kamma (*kusala kamma*) arises from roots of non-greed (*alobha*), non-hatred (*adosa*), and non-delusion (*amoha*), leading to beneficial outcomes and favorable rebirths (Harvey, 2000). Conversely, unwholesome kamma (*akusala kamma*) stems from greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*), resulting in undesirable consequences and unfavorable rebirths (Hopkins, 2015). The ripening of kamma can manifest in the present life, the next life, or in subsequent lives, illustrating the long-term impact of one's actions (Schmithausen, 1986). This framework provides a clear ethical compass, enabling individuals to make choices that cultivate positive circumstances and avoid future suffering.

Understanding kamma is crucial for ethical living and spiritual development in Theravāda Buddhism. By cultivating wholesome intentions and actions, practitioners can mitigate suffering, foster positive states of mind, and

ultimately progress towards liberation from the cycle of bhava-samsāra (Mahatthanadull, 2019). The doctrine of kamma thus provides a robust framework for moral accountability and empowers individuals to shape their destinies through conscious and ethical choices (Harvey, 2000). The immediate benefits include a sense of purpose, reduced remorse, and improved relationships, contributing to a more harmonious and fulfilling life.

The Concept of Rebirth

Rebirth is a pivotal concept in Theravāda Buddhism, carrying significant implications for understanding existence and ethical conduct. The attainment of a human rebirth is understood as a direct consequence of meritorious deeds (kusala kamma) performed in previous lives (Hopkins, 2015). These virtuous actions, particularly those like offerings and moral observance, are categorized as kāmāvacara-kusala, or wholesome actions within the sensual realm. These kāmāvacara-kusala are further classified into eight categories (Devdas, 2008).

The volitional aspect (cetanā) of kāmāvacara-kusala generates nine categories of resultant consciousness (vipāka citta) at the moment of conception (paṭisandhi). These include one upekkhā-santīraṇa citta, which is devoid of non-greed (alobha), non-hatred (adosa), and non-delusion (amoha), and eight mahāvipāka cittas. Collectively, these nine types of citta form the paṭisandhi-citta, which is responsible for conditioning human rebirth (Helm, 2003).

It is noteworthy that individuals reborn with an upekkhā-santīraṇa citta may manifest physical defects such as blindness or deafness. Although the upekkhā-santīraṇa citta originates from meritorious deeds associated with mahākusala citta, it is produced by relatively weak kamma. Consequently, the resultant paṭisandhi-citta lacks vitality, leading to inherent defects from the very inception of rebirth (Devdas, 2008). This understanding provides a compassionate lens through which to view suffering, recognizing its karmic roots and inspiring greater effort in generating wholesome kamma.

Furthermore, the quality of rebirth is not solely determined by the presence of merit but also by the strength and purity of the underlying intentions. For instance, a mahākusala citta accompanied by wisdom (paññā) can lead to a rebirth with superior intellectual faculties and a greater capacity for spiritual insight. Conversely, a mahākusala citta lacking wisdom may result in a rebirth in an affluent but intellectually limited state, highlighting the nuanced impact of kamma on one's future existence (Hopkins, 2015). The benefit here is the

emphasis on holistic spiritual development, encouraging not just good deeds but also the cultivation of wisdom for more profound and lasting positive outcomes.

Theravāda Buddhism also identifies four modes of rebirth (*gati*):

1. Egg-born (*aṇḍaja*): Beings born from eggs, such as birds and reptiles.
2. Womb-born (*jalābuja*): Beings born from a womb, such as humans and many mammals.
3. Moisture-born (*saṃsedaja*): Beings born from moisture and decay, such as certain insects.
4. Spontaneously born (*opapātika*): Beings that appear spontaneously, such as devas (deities) and inhabitants of hell realms, without visible parents or an embryonic stage.

These modes illustrate the diverse forms that existence can take within *bhava-saṃsāra*, all conditioned by past *kamma* (Harvey, 2000). The principle of *kamma-niyāma*, the law of *kamma*, asserts that every volitional action inevitably leads to a corresponding result, thereby ensuring moral accountability across lifetimes (Hopkins, 2015). This intricate relationship between action and consequence underscores the importance of ethical conduct as a means to navigate the cycle of rebirth and progress towards liberation. The practical benefit of this perspective is the cultivation of deep personal responsibility and foresight in one's actions.

The Abhidhamma classification of wholesome (*kusala*) consciousness distinguishes between those rooted in two factors (*alobha* [non-greed] and *adosa* [non-hatred], termed *dvihetuka* [two-rooted]) and those rooted in all three factors (*alobha*, *adosa*, and *amoha* [non-delusion]), termed *tihetuka* [three-rooted] (Gunaratana, 1988). When a wholesome act is not encircled by any unwholesome factors (*akusala*), it is surrounded by wholesome factors on both sides and is designated as *tihetuka-ukkatṭha-kusala* (three-rooted superior wholesome) (Buddhaghosa, 2010). Conversely, when wholesome consciousness associated with knowledge (*ñāṇa-vippayutta kusala*) arises without delusion, it is classified as *dvihetuka* because it lacks the root of *amoha* (Gunaratana, 1988). In contrast, wholesome consciousness that includes *amoha* is *tihetuka* or *ñāṇa-sampayutta kusala*, since it encompasses all three roots (*alobha*, *adosa*, *amoha*)—noting that *amoha* cannot occur independently of the first two roots (Buddhaghosa, 2020). Each of these categories of *kusala* conditions gives rise to a corresponding

paṭisandhi-citta (rebirth-linking consciousness) at the moment of human rebirth: tihetuka consciousness (with knowledge) produces tihetuka-paṭisandhi, while dvihetuka consciousness (without knowledge) yields dvihetuka-paṭisandhi (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2012). This systematic correspondence between the moral quality of an action and its resultant consciousness is articulated in the doctrine of kamma-niyāma, whereby the outcome mirrors the ethical nature of the volitional act (Harvey, 2000).

Moreover, the qualitative dimension of the kusala kamma that precipitates human rebirth directly influences whether the individual enters the world imbued with wisdom (paññā) or without it. Consequently, although multiple beings may share the condition of human rebirth, their paṭisandhi-citta differ according to the presence or absence of knowledge (Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995). Some individuals, regardless of possessing ñāṇa (knowledge) or not, experience somanassa (pleasant feeling) upon rebirth, which can manifest as a consistently joyful temperament (Collins, 2013). Others, whose rebirth is characterized by upekkhā (equanimous but neutral feeling), often display a more severe or reserved demeanor (Gethin, 1998). These divergent affective qualities at the moment of rebirth, coupled with variations in knowledge-status, underscore the heterogeneity of human rebirth experiences (Buddhaghosa, 2020).

In Abhidhamma, four primary modes of human rebirth (jalābīja being the most common) are recognized, all of which presuppose the conjunction of a viable ovum and sperm in the mother's uterus (jalābīja paṭisandhi) (Gombrich, 2009; Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi, 1995). In contemporary reproductive science, additional methods, such as in vitro fertilization and cloning, allow fertilization to occur outside the maternal body, producing a kalāla (zygote) via the deliberate union of ovum and sperm in a laboratory setting (Wilmot et al., 1997). From an Abhidhamma perspective, however, human rebirth remains possible only under “suitable circumstances” (yathābhūtaṃ), wherein the disembodied “being-to-be-reborn” (gantabbā jīva) instantaneously enters the newly formed zygote, regardless of whether fertilization is natural or artificial (Gethin, 1998; Buddhaghosa, 2020). Just as travelers need no tickets if a seat becomes available, those beings whose final death coincides with appropriate conditions for human rebirth spontaneously assume human form, reflecting the continuity of kamma beyond spatial or temporal distance (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2012).

When considering the Theravāda tradition, it is evident that the Buddha articulated his teachings (dhammas) over a forty-five-year period following his attainment of enlightenment. During this time, he tailored his instruction to the diverse dispositions of his audience, adapting both content and presentation to individual needs. On specific occasions, he highlighted the excellence of his dhammas according to a tripartite schema, at the outset (ādikalyāṇa), in the middle (majjhakalyāṇa), and at the culmination (pariyosaṇakalyāṇa)—thereby employing a systematic pedagogical method that emphasizes the grandeur of the teaching at each stage (DN I.87; Walshe, 1995). This approach underscores not only the adaptability of the Buddha's instruction but also the methodological sophistication of early Buddhist pedagogy.

Different Realms of Existence (Gati)

The concept of gati, or realms of existence, is integral to the understanding of bhava-samsāra in Theravāda Buddhism. These realms represent the diverse destinations to which beings are reborn, directly conditioned by their accumulated kamma (Hirakawa, 1990). The Buddhist cosmology typically outlines 31 planes of existence, broadly categorized into three main spheres: the Sensual Realm (Kāmaloka), the Fine-Material Realm (Rūpaloka), and the Immaterial Realm (Arūpaloka).

1. The Sensual Realm (Kāmaloka): This realm comprises 11 planes, characterized by the presence of sensual desires and experiences. It includes:

- Four Lower Realms (States of Woe): These are realms of suffering, resulting from unwholesome kamma (e.g., severe hatred, greed, delusion). Understanding these realms serves as a powerful deterrent to unwholesome actions, motivating ethical behavior to avoid such dire consequences.
- Hell Realms (Niraya): Intense and prolonged suffering.
- Animal Realm (Tiracchānayani): Rebirth as animals, characterized by instinctual living and lack of spiritual opportunity.
- Ghost Realm (Pettivisaya): Beings afflicted by hunger and thirst, often bound to their past attachments.

- Asura Realm (Asurakāya): Demigods or titans, often characterized by jealousy, envy, and conflict.
- Seven Happy Sensual Realms: These are realms of pleasure and enjoyment, resulting from wholesome kamma (e.g., generosity, morality). This inspires the cultivation of virtues for happier present and future existences.
- Human Realm (Manussaloka): The most conducive realm for spiritual development, offering a balance of pleasure and suffering, and the opportunity to generate wholesome kamma and attain nibbāna. The emphasis on the preciousness of human birth encourages diligent practice and the full utilization of this unique opportunity for liberation.
- Six Deva (Heavenly) Realms: Realms of increasing bliss and longevity, inhabited by various classes of deities. These realms offer temporary happiness but are still subject to impermanence and the cycle of rebirth. While desirable, their temporary nature underscores the ultimate goal of transcending all realms.

2. The Fine-Material Realm (Rūpaloka): Consisting of 16 planes, this realm is attained through the practice of rūpa-jhānas (meditative absorptions focused on fine material objects). Beings in these realms have subtle bodies and are free from gross sensual desires, experiencing refined states of bliss. However, they are not yet liberated from all attachments. The benefit here is the motivation to develop deep meditative states, leading to profound inner peace and mental purification even in this life.

3. The Immaterial Realm (Arūpaloka): Comprising 4 planes, this is the highest realm within saṃsāra, attained through the practice of arūpa-jhānas (meditative absorptions focused on immaterial objects). Beings here exist purely as consciousness, without any physical form, experiencing extremely subtle and prolonged states of tranquility. Despite their elevated state, they remain within the cycle of saṃsāra as they have not eradicated all defilements. This further reinforces the understanding that true liberation transcends even the most sublime conditioned states, directing practitioners towards the ultimate goal of nibbāna.

The existence in these realms is impermanent; even the longest-lived deities eventually pass away and are reborn according to their remaining kamma

(Harvey, 2000). This cyclical nature underscores the Buddhist teaching that true liberation lies not in attaining a higher realm within saṃsāra, but in transcending saṃsāra altogether through the realization of nibbāna. The understanding of these realms reinforces the urgency of cultivating wholesome kamma and pursuing the path to liberation, as even the most blissful existences are ultimately conditioned and subject to cessation. This awareness brings the practical benefit of reducing attachment to worldly pleasures and focusing energy on sustainable spiritual development.

Practical Benefits of Understanding Kamma and Rebirth

This section presents the key findings derived from the documentary analysis and in-depth interviews, focusing on the practical benefits observed from understanding and applying the principles of kamma and rebirth. The insights reveal how these core Buddhist concepts contribute to individuals' ethical living, mental well-being, and spiritual progress.

1. Empowering Ethical Agency and Moral Responsibility:

Both textual analysis and informant interviews consistently highlighted that understanding kamma fosters a profound sense of personal responsibility and ethical agency. Practitioners realize that past actions influence their present circumstances, and current volitions shape their future. As one monastic scholar explained, "Without intention, there is no kamma that leads to rebirth. It is the mind's volition that truly creates the seed for future existence." This insight reduces blame and resentment, cultivating proactive ethical choices. The practical benefit is a more conscious and deliberate approach to moral conduct, leading to a reduction in unwholesome actions and an increase in wholesome ones, which positively impacts both personal integrity and interpersonal relationships.

2. Cultivating Inner Peace and Resilience:

The understanding of impermanence (anicca) and non-self (anattā), inherent in the cycle of rebirth (bhava-saṃsāra) and karma, helps practitioners navigate life's challenges with greater equanimity. Recognizing that all phenomena are conditioned and transient reduces attachment to positive experiences and aversion to negative ones. "When you know things are impermanent, you suffer less when they change," an interviewee shared. This perspective fosters resilience in the face of adversity, as individuals learn to accept the ebb and flow of life without being overwhelmed by suffering. The

practical benefit is enhanced mental fortitude, reduced anxiety, and a deeper sense of inner peace that is less dependent on external circumstances.

3. Motivation for Wholesome Actions and Spiritual Development:

The belief in rebirth, particularly the aspiration for a "good rebirth" (e.g., in the human realm with conducive conditions for practice), serves as a powerful motivator for cultivating wholesome kamma. Informants frequently cited this as a reason for engaging in practices like generosity (dāna), moral conduct (sīla), and meditation (bhāvanā). "We make merit so we can continue on the path, to be reborn in a place where we have the opportunity to hear the Dhamma again," noted a lay devotee. This motivation translates into tangible benefits: increased altruism, stronger community bonds through collective meritorious acts, and consistent effort in meditation and mindfulness. Beyond mere self-interest, this also reinforces the understanding that one's positive actions benefit not only oneself but also others.

4. Promoting Compassion and Reduced Harm:

A deeper understanding of kamma and the interconnectedness of all beings within bhava-saṃsāra naturally leads to the cultivation of compassion (karuṇā) and loving-kindness (mettā). Recognizing that all beings are subject to the same cycle of suffering and rebirth, and that unwholesome actions lead to suffering for both the perpetrator and the recipient, fosters a strong aversion to causing harm. "When you see how kamma works, you become very careful not to hurt anyone, even in thought," an experienced meditator commented. The practical benefit is a reduction in conflict, a greater capacity for empathy, and the promotion of peaceful coexistence in society.

Model of Ethical Action Leading to Beneficial Rebirth within Bhava-saṃsāra

This article extends the foundational understandings of kamma, rebirth, and the multiple realms of existence by proposing a theoretically informed model designed to cultivate ethical action that facilitates beneficial rebirths within the framework of bhava-saṃsāra. By integrating classical Theravāda teachings with practical applications, this model emphasizes the volitional nature of kamma and its significant implications for future existences.

The model is predicated on the notion that ethically wholesome actions, propelled by pure intentions, are the primary determinants of favorable rebirths.

It is structured around three interconnected pillars: (1) the cultivation of wholesome intentions (*cetanā*), (2) the engagement in wholesome actions (encompassing physical, verbal, and mental practices), and (3) the development of understanding and wisdom (*paññā*).

1. Cultivation of Wholesome Intentions (Cetanā)

The first pillar of the model involves both the eradication of unwholesome mental roots and the nurturing of ethical intentions:

- **Eliminating Unwholesome Roots:** Practitioners are encouraged to actively diminish the unwholesome roots of greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*). This process of mental purification not only enhances clarity and emotional stability but also serves as a safeguard against generating negative kamma that precipitates suffering (Harvey, 2000).
- **Fostering Wholesome Roots:** Concurrently, students are urged to cultivate the wholesome opposites, non-greed (*alobha*), non-hatred (*adosa*), and non-delusion (*amoha*), which manifest as virtues such as generosity, loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), appreciative joy (*muditā*), equanimity (*upekkhā*), and wisdom (*paññā*) (Hopkins, 2015). The practical benefits include the development of positive character traits, harmonious relationships, and an enduring inner contentment that naturally gives rise to actions generating favorable kamma.

2. Engagement in Wholesome Actions

The second pillar underscores the importance of actualizing ethical principles through concrete actions:

- **Moral Conduct (Sīla):** For lay practitioners, moral conduct is typically operationalized through adherence to the Five Precepts, abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and intoxication. For monastics, a more extensive code governs behavior. This ethical foundation is critical in preventing the accrual of unwholesome kamma, fostering trustworthiness, and promoting a clear conscience (Harvey, 2000).

- Generosity (Dāna): The practice of giving, extending material resources, time, or knowledge, without attachment to the act, is recognized as a powerful form of wholesome action. Generosity not only curtails craving but also instills a benevolent spirit, thereby generating positive conditions in both the current life and future existences (Hopkins, 2015).
- Meditation (Bhāvanā): Meditation practices, including tranquility meditation (samatha) for developing concentration and mental stability, and insight meditation (vipassanā) for cultivating direct understanding of impermanence, suffering, and non-self, are central to this model. Although meditation ultimately aims toward the attainment of nibbāna (liberation), its practice concurrently produces wholesome kamma, setting the stage for rebirth in more favorable realms (Hirakawa, 1990).
- Translation of Ethical Intentions into Daily Life: Beyond individual practices, the articulation of ethical intentions through right speech, right action, and right livelihood, as components of the Noble Eightfold Path, ensures that one's internal dispositions are coherently manifested in everyday conduct. This comprehensive approach yields benefits such as improved interpersonal communication, stronger social bonds, and ethical financial practices (Harvey, 2000).

3. Development of Understanding and Wisdom (Paññā)

The third pillar underscores the critical role of cognitive and experiential insight:

- Comprehension of Kamma and Rebirth: A nuanced understanding of how kamma functions to condition rebirth empowers practitioners to assume personal responsibility for their existential outcomes. This awareness engenders a sense of empowerment and self-reliance, marking the first step toward influencing one's destiny (Hopkins, 2015).
- Insight into the Three Marks of Existence: Direct experiential insight into impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and non-self (anattā) is essential for weakening the bonds of craving and

attachment, the very forces that perpetuate the cycle of bhava-samsāra. Such understanding promotes liberation from mental suffering and supports sustained inner freedom (Harvey, 2000).

- Adherence to the Noble Eightfold Path: Diligent study and practice of the Noble Eightfold Path provide a structured methodology for spiritual development. This all-encompassing framework ensures that practitioners' efforts are effectively directed toward continuous self-purification and eventual liberation (nibbāna) (Hirakawa, 1990).

In conclusion, the sustained practice of these principles is argued to lead to the accumulation of robust wholesome kamma, which in turn conditions beneficial rebirths characterized by favorable life circumstances and enhanced opportunities for spiritual growth. However, the ultimate objective is not limited to achieving a beneficial rebirth; rather, it is the progressive purification of the mind that culminates in the cessation of kamma and the eventual end of bhava-samsāra. This integrated approach thus contributes not only to a better future existence but also to a profound transformation of present life, marked by increased peace, compassion, and wisdom.

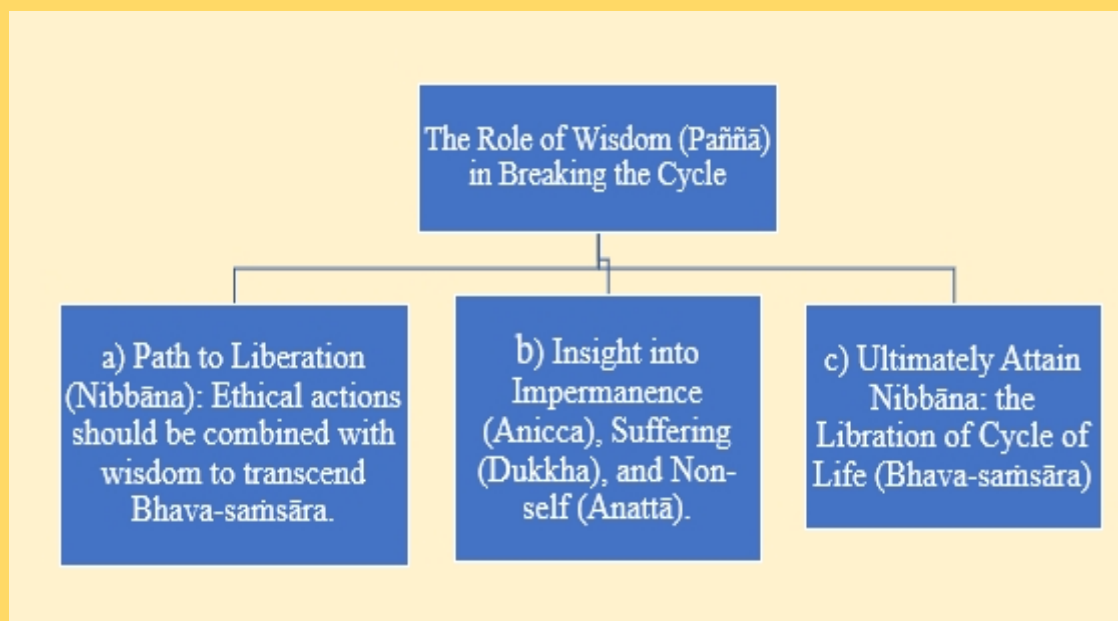


Figure 2: Theoretically Informed Model of Ethical Action Leading to Good Rebirth within Bhava-samsāra

Conclusion

This article has elucidated the doctrinal foundations of kamma and rebirth within the framework of bhava-saṃsāra in Theravāda Buddhism, evaluated contemporary ethical practices rooted in this understanding, and proposed a pragmatic model for cultivating conditions conducive to beneficial rebirth. Commencing with bhava-saṃsāra as the impermanent, ultimately unsatisfactory cycle perpetuated by ignorance (avijjā) and craving (taṇhā), we emphasized the pivotal role of Dependent Origination (Paṭiccasamuppāda) in deconstructing the illusion of a permanent self (attā). Central to our analysis was establishing intention (cetanā) as the defining criterion of kamma, determining the moral valence of actions, wholesome (kusala) or unwholesome (akusala), whose consequences (vipāka) mature across lifetimes.

The mechanisms linking ethical action to rebirth were examined, detailing how meritorious deeds condition human existence, the function of rebirth-linking consciousness (paṭisandhi-citta), and the critical influence of wisdom (paññā) on rebirth quality. Exploration of the four modes of rebirth and the principle of kamma-niyāma underscored both the inescapable moral accountability inherent in kamma and the diverse realms of existence (gati) it conditions, while noting the inherent impermanence and unsatisfactoriness even of heavenly attainments. Contemporary Theravāda practice demonstrates a sustained engagement with moral conduct (sīla), generosity (dāna), and meditation (bhāvanā), motivated by conviction in kamma and the aspiration for favourable rebirths. These practices yield significant proximate benefits, enhanced mental clarity, emotional resilience, increased compassion, and strengthened ethical agency, alongside their long-term karmic fruits.

The integrated model proposed synthesizes core teachings into a practical framework for practitioners, cultivating wholesome intentions, diligently practicing ethical conduct and generosity, maintaining regular meditation, and deepening wisdom regarding kamma, rebirth, and the Three Marks of Existence (tilakkhaṇa). This framework serves a dual purpose: it actively conditions more favourable future rebirths, thereby creating optimal conditions for spiritual progress, and fosters a more purposeful, peaceful, and ethically grounded present life by nurturing virtuous habits and a liberated mindset. While the aspiration for a “good rebirth” provides potent motivation for ethical living, the ultimate soteriological goal remains the purification of mind and the cessation (nirodha)

of all kamma through the attainment of Nibbāna, liberating beings entirely from bhava-saṃsāra. This study clarifies the enduring relevance of classical Buddhist doctrines in enriching contemporary ethical life, offering a robust framework for navigating existence and progressing towards ultimate freedom. Future research could fruitfully explore cross-cultural interpretations of ethical causality and rebirth or empirically investigate the psychological and behavioural impacts of adopting this kamma-based ethical model.

Abbreviations

AN	Aṅguttaranikāya
DN	Dīghanikāya
MN	Majjhimanikaya
SN	Saṃyuttanikāya

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Settling the Mind, Embracing the Journey: Mindfulness as a Tool for Thai Migrant Emotional Well-being

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Abstract

Migration involves more than mere geographical relocation; it encompasses significant emotional and psychological challenges. Thai migrants residing in Australia often grapple with cultural disorientation, social seclusion, and an increased susceptibility to stress and mood disorders. This study, informed by Buddhist-influenced mindfulness practices deeply embedded in the cultural and spiritual fabric of many Thais, examines the effectiveness of mindfulness-based interventions in fostering emotional resilience, self-compassion, and enduring well-being. Through qualitative interviews and pre- and post-intervention assessments of a culturally tailored eight-week mindfulness program, we analyse how moment-to-moment awareness and nonjudgmental acceptance assist participants in managing cross-cultural stressors, regulating emotions, and cultivating a sense of belonging. Results demonstrate that consistent mindfulness practice significantly alleviates symptoms of anxiety and depression ($p < .01$), improves self-compassion metrics by 25%, and facilitates more effective social integration. Furthermore, participants articulate that mindfulness acts as a conduit between their Thai heritage and Australian existence, allowing them to respect their spiritual traditions while confidently engaging with novel environments. This paper concludes that mindfulness functions not merely as a transient coping mechanism but as a sustainable, lifelong asset for emotional well-being. By integrating mindfulness into daily practices and community engagements, Thai migrants can foster inner stability and cultural continuity, thereby enriching both individual experiences and the multicultural society at large.

Keywords: Mindfulness; Thai Migrants; Emotional Well-being; Resilience

Introduction

Migration is a profoundly transformative journey that encompasses not only physical relocation but also deep emotional and psychological shifts. Research indicates that migrants frequently encounter elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and depression as they negotiate unfamiliar cultural norms and social environments (Kodippili et al., 2024; Choy et al., 2021). For Thai migrants in Australia, whose backgrounds are steeped in a collectivist ethos, this transition often entails reconciling Thailand's communal values with Australia's more individualistic social framework (Ward & Geeraert, 2016).

Specifically, Thai migrants in Australia face three interrelated challenges. First, cultural identity conflict arises as individuals balance filial piety and group solidarity, central to Thai society, with the autonomy and self-reliance emphasized in Australian culture (Liamputtong & Naksook, 2003). Second, social isolation can result from language barriers and the fragmentation of established support networks, which exacerbates feelings of loneliness and undermines social integration (Handiso et al., 2024). Third, spiritual disconnection may occur when access to traditional Buddhist practices, ritual gatherings, temple participation, and community chanting is limited in their new environment (Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2006). These factors contribute to a constellation of emotional challenges, including chronic acculturative stress, difficulties in emotion regulation across contrasting cultural norms, and persistent homesickness (Moore et al., 2016; Swami et al., 2015).

Amid these stressors lies an opportunity to leverage mindfulness, a practice with roots in the Pāli Canon and long embedded in Thai spiritual life, as a culturally congruent pathway to emotional resilience and well-being (Bhikkhu Analayo, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Mindfulness cultivates present-moment awareness and nonjudgmental acceptance, skills shown to alleviate psychological distress and promote self-compassion across diverse populations (Blignault et al., 2021). When tailored to the lived experiences of Thai migrants, through language-specific instruction, inclusion of familiar rituals, and community-based delivery, mindfulness can serve not merely as a coping mechanism but as a catalyst for personal growth and bicultural identity integration.

Thai-born individuals constitute a growing segment of Australia's multicultural landscape. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022), approximately 83,000 people born in Thailand reside in Australia, encompassing

students, professionals, family reunification migrants, and humanitarian entrants. Regardless of migration pathway, the shared cultural heritage of Buddhism and collective values positions mindfulness as an inherently accessible intervention.

This article investigates how culturally adapted mindfulness practices can mitigate acculturative stress and foster thriving among Thai migrants in Australia. First, we delineate the specific emotional and social challenges encountered during resettlement. Next, we explore the Buddhist foundations and contemporary mechanisms of mindfulness. Finally, we present practical strategies for designing and implementing mindfulness-based interventions that honour Thai cultural identity while supporting successful integration into Australian society.

Emotional Well-being Challenges of Thai Migrants

The migration experience is often characterised by a multitude of emotional challenges that can significantly impact an individual's overall well-being. For Thai migrants in Australia, these challenges can be particularly complex, stemming from the interplay of cultural, social, and personal factors. Understanding these specific challenges is crucial for developing effective interventions that can support the emotional well-being of this population.

Cultural Differences

A key challenge for Thai migrants is adjusting to cultural differences and redefining their identity. Moving from Thailand's collectivist, hierarchical culture to Australia's more individualistic and equal society can be stressful (Swami et al., 2015). Thai migrants may struggle with the loss of familiar cultural norms, values, and social roles, leading to feelings of uncertainty, confusion, and disconnection. The pressure to adapt to new ways of being and relating can create a sense of cultural identity conflict, as individuals navigate between preserving their Thai heritage and adopting Australian norms and practices (Tonsing, 2016).

The differences between cultures, as described by Ward and Geeraert (2016), represent a significant challenge for Thai migrants. This psychological tension emerges as migrants navigate between different cultural systems, each with its values, norms, and expectations. For Thai migrants in Australia, whose cultural background emphasises collectivism, hierarchical respect, and indirect communication, the process of adapting to a new cultural context can be

particularly challenging. According to Wu et al.'s research (2023), prolonged cultural dissonance without adequate coping mechanisms correlates with increased symptoms of depression and anxiety, reflecting the emotional impact of this ongoing process.

Social and Cultural Challenges

Acculturation can also lead to social isolation and loneliness. Losing familiar social networks, along with language barriers and cultural differences, makes it hard for Thai migrants to build new relationships and feel accepted in their new country (Kodippili et al., 2024). The absence of the close-knit, interdependent relationships that characterise Thai social life can be particularly painful, leading to feelings of homesickness, isolation, and disconnection.

For many Thai migrants, spiritual and religious practices form a central part of their cultural identity and well-being. The transition to a society where Buddhism is not the dominant religion can lead to a sense of spiritual disconnection and loss. Access to temples, monks, and traditional ceremonies may be limited, disrupting important spiritual practices that previously provided comfort, meaning, and community (Kesornsri et al., 2014). This spiritual disruption can compound other emotional challenges, as migrants lose an important source of resilience and support.

In addition to these social and cultural challenges, Thai migrants may also face a range of practical and economic stressors that can impact their emotional well-being. Navigating unfamiliar systems, finding employment, securing housing, and managing financial pressures can all contribute to feelings of anxiety, overwhelm, and self-doubt (Choy et al., 2021). For many Thai migrants, the pressure to succeed in their new lives and support family members back home can be immense, leading to chronic stress and emotional exhaustion.

Moreover, the ongoing process of acculturation can create a feeling of being caught between two cultures, which can be emotionally difficult. Thai migrants may feel caught between two worlds, no longer fully belonging to their country of origin yet not fully integrated into their host society (Kodippili et al., 2024). This sense of cultural limbo can contribute to feelings of rootlessness, uncertainty, and existential distress.

Mental Health Issues

These various stressors can take a significant toll on the mental health of Thai migrants. Research has consistently shown higher rates of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress among migrant populations compared to native-born individuals (Handiso et al., 2024). For Thai migrants, the stigma surrounding mental health issues in Thai culture can further compound these challenges, making it difficult to seek help and support (Choy et al., 2021). Traditional Thai cultural norms emphasise emotional restraint and avoiding burdening others with personal problems, potentially preventing migrants from accessing mental health services even when they are available.

The cumulative impact of these emotional challenges can be significant, eroding Thai migrants' sense of well-being, resilience, and capacity to thrive in their new lives. Left unaddressed, these stressors can lead to chronic mental health issues, strained relationships, and a diminished quality of life. As such, there is an urgent need for interventions that can support the emotional well-being of Thai migrants and empower them to navigate the challenges of acculturation with greater ease and resilience.

Mindfulness and Its Mechanisms in Enhancing Migrant Emotional Well-being

In the face of the significant emotional challenges confronting Thai migrants, mindfulness emerges as a promising antidote, offering a pathway to greater well-being, resilience, and personal transformation. To understand how mindfulness can specifically address the needs of Thai migrants, it is essential to explore its theoretical foundations in Buddhist teachings and examine how these ancient practices can be applied to contemporary migration challenges.

Mindfulness Theory and Practice Methods Following Buddhist Traditions

Mindfulness, or *sati* in Pali, is rooted in Buddhist teachings, particularly the *Satipatthana Sutta*, which establishes the Four Foundations of Mindfulness: body, feelings, mind, and mental objects (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2011). This framework provides systematic methods for observing difficult experiences, directly addressing the complex nature of migrant suffering. The Four Noble Truths offer a relevant theoretical framework for migrants: acknowledging universal suffering (validating migrant difficulties), identifying attachment as a source of suffering

(such as clinging to familiar cultural patterns), providing hope through suffering's cessation, and offering the Eightfold Path as a systematic approach to well-being (Rahula, 1974).

The Anapanasati Sutta (Majjhima Nikaya) presents mindfulness of breathing as a complete method for developing both tranquillity and insight. This practice is particularly relevant for Thai migrants as it provides an accessible anchor during times of cultural disorientation and emotional turbulence. The sixteen steps of anapanasati systematically develop awareness of breath, body, emotions, and mental states, offering migrants a comprehensive tool for emotional regulation (Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 2006).

Buddhist psychology, as articulated in the Abhidhamma, further supports these practices through detailed analysis of mental formations (cetasikas) and their relationship to emotional well-being. The understanding of wholesome mental factors such as mindfulness (sati), compassion (karuna), and loving-kindness (metta) offers Thai migrant specific qualities to cultivate for emotional resilience. Unwholesome factors like anxiety (kukkucca) and restlessness (uddhacca) are recognised as temporary mental formations that can be observed and transformed through mindful awareness (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2000).

Building on these foundational practices, the cultivation of loving-kindness and compassion provides additional tools for healing relationships and addressing social challenges. The practice of *metta* (loving-kindness) meditation, as detailed in the *Karaniya Metta Sutta*, provides Thai migrants with tools for healing relationships with themselves and others during the challenging process of cultural adaptation. The systematic cultivation of loving-kindness beginning with oneself, extending to loved ones, neutral persons, difficult people, and finally all beings, directly addresses the social isolation and interpersonal difficulties common in the migration experience (Harvey, 2000). Similarly, the cultivation of compassion (karuna) through traditional Buddhist practices enables Thai migrants to approach their own suffering and that of others with understanding rather than judgment. The Digha Nikaya teachings on the Brahmaviharas (divine abodes) provide structured methods for developing emotional qualities that support both individual well-being and social integration (Nyanaponika Thera, 1993).

Application to Migrant Emotional Challenges and Contemporary Research

Buddhist teachings provide practical frameworks for addressing the specific challenges faced by Thai migrants. The concept of impermanence (*anicca*) helps migrants understand cultural adaptation as a natural process of change rather than a threat to identity. The *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* emphasizes that all conditioned phenomena are subject to change, helping migrants develop equanimity toward the inevitable transformations that occur during acculturation (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2005). Complementing this understanding, the concept of non-self (*anatta*) offers freedom from rigid identity constructions, allowing migrants to understand identity as fluid and adaptable, enabling integration of both Thai and Australian cultural elements without experiencing existential crisis (Rahula, 1974).

Traditional Buddhist mindfulness practices directly address emotional regulation challenges through systematic observation techniques. The *Mahsatipatthana Sutta* provides detailed instructions for observing emotions without immediate reactivity, allowing migrants to develop space between emotional triggers and responses when navigating unfamiliar social situations (Bhikkhu Analayo, 2003). The practice of *vedananupassana* (mindfulness of feelings) teaches migrants to distinguish between initial emotional reactions and secondary mental elaborations that often intensify suffering, enabling more skilful responses to challenging emotions (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2011).

Contemporary research validates these traditional approaches through empirical studies. Jiwattanasuk et al. (2024a) developed and evaluated a mindfulness, wisdom and loving-kindness program specifically for Thai individuals, finding significant improvements in participants' emotional well-being, resilience, and sense of connection. Their program's emphasis on cultivating wisdom and compassion, rooted in Buddhist traditions, demonstrates the effectiveness of culturally resonant approaches to mindfulness. Further research explored the impact of mindfulness activities on developing peaceful well-being among Thai practitioners, showing that regular engagement in traditional practices such as mindful breathing, body scan meditation, and loving-kindness meditation can foster deep inner peace and contentment, even amidst daily challenges (Jiwattanasuk et al., 2024b). For Thai migrants navigating acculturation stressors, these practices offer powerful means of cultivating

resilience and emotional balance. Additionally, Jiwattanasuk et al. (2025) emphasise the potential of mindfulness-based practices for promoting mental well-being among multicultural meditation practitioners, underscoring the importance of adapting interventions to specific cultural contexts and needs, ensuring practices resonate with individuals' personal experiences and worldviews.

Through regular practice of these Buddhist-rooted techniques, Thai migrants develop the capacity to observe their thoughts, emotions, and sensations with greater clarity, equanimity, and compassion. This fundamental shift in perspective can be transformative for Thai migrants navigating the turbulent waters of acculturation. By learning to anchor themselves in the present moment through traditional practices like anapanasati, they can find a sense of stability and groundedness amidst the flux of cultural change and identity negotiation.

Research has consistently demonstrated the effectiveness of mindfulness in reducing symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress, all of which are common among migrant populations (Choy et al., 2021). Mindfulness-based interventions rooted in Buddhist psychology have been shown to improve emotional regulation, enabling individuals to respond to challenging situations with greater flexibility and resilience (Zarotti et al., 2019). For Thai migrants, this enhanced capacity to manage difficult emotions, grounded in familiar Buddhist teachings, can be a vital resource in navigating the ongoing stressors of acculturation.

These Buddhist foundations and contemporary applications highlight the immense potential of traditional mindfulness practices as an antidote to the emotional challenges faced by Thai migrants. By providing a culturally resonant framework rooted in Buddhist wisdom for cultivating resilience, wisdom, and compassion, mindfulness can empower Thai migrants to navigate the complexities of acculturation with greater ease and grace. Moreover, by fostering a deep sense of interconnectedness and inner peace through time-tested practices, mindfulness can help Thai migrants to not only cope with the difficulties of migration but to truly thrive in their new lives while maintaining connection to their spiritual heritage.

From Coping to Thriving: Integrating Mindfulness into the Lives of Thai Migrants

The ultimate goal of mindfulness interventions for Thai migrants is not merely to help individuals cope with the stressors of acculturation, but to empower them to truly thrive in their new lives. Based on the identified challenges of cultural differences, social and cultural difficulties, and mental health issues, mindfulness integration offers specific solutions that address each of these areas systematically.

Addressing Cultural Differences Through Mindfulness

To address the challenge of cultural differences and identity conflicts, mindfulness practices provide Thai migrants with tools for navigating between collectivist Thai culture and individualistic Australian society. The Buddhist concept of the Middle Path offers a framework for balancing cultural preservation with adaptation, allowing migrants to honour their Thai heritage while embracing beneficial aspects of Australian culture without experiencing existential crisis. Mindful awareness practices help migrants observe their cultural assumptions and reactions without judgment, creating space for conscious choice rather than automatic resistance to change.

Specific mindfulness techniques for cultural adaptation include mindful observation of cultural triggers, where migrants learn to notice when cultural differences cause stress or discomfort, and respond with curiosity rather than rejection. The practice of loving-kindness meditation can be extended to include both Thai and Australian cultural values, helping migrants develop an appreciation for diversity rather than viewing differences as threats. Through regular mindfulness practice, Thai migrants can develop what researchers call "cultural mindfulness" – the ability to navigate different cultural contexts with awareness, flexibility, and respect (Tonsing, 2016).

Building Social Connection Through Mindful Practice

For social isolation and the loss of familiar support networks, mindfulness-based community programs create new forms of connection while honouring Thai cultural preferences for collective activities. Group meditation sessions conducted in Thai language or incorporating Thai Buddhist rituals can provide both spiritual practice and social bonding. Community-based mindfulness

programs should emphasise collective rather than individual practice, reflecting the interdependent nature of Thai social relationships (Teerapong, Arin, & Weinstein, 2024; Moonkham & Chlade, 2024).

To address spiritual disconnection from limited access to Buddhist temples and traditional practices, portable mindfulness practices allow Thai migrants to maintain a spiritual connection regardless of geographical constraints. Digital platforms can provide access to Thai Buddhist teachings and guided meditations in Thai language, creating virtual spiritual communities that transcend physical boundaries. Mobile apps designed specifically for Thai Buddhists can include traditional chanting, meditation instructions, and calendar reminders for Buddhist observances, ensuring continuity of spiritual practice (Choy et al., 2021).

Mindful communication practices specifically help Thai migrants navigate social interactions in their new environment. These practices teach migrants to observe their communication patterns, notice cultural misunderstandings as they arise, and respond with patience and clarity rather than frustration or withdrawal. By developing mindful listening skills, Thai migrants can better understand Australian social cues while also expressing their own needs and perspectives more effectively (Kesornsri et al., 2014).

Supporting Mental Health with Mindfulness-Based Interventions

For the prevalent issues of depression, anxiety, and chronic stress among Thai migrants, culturally-adapted mindfulness interventions offer evidence-based solutions. Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programs adapted for Thai populations incorporate familiar Buddhist concepts and practices, making them more accessible and effective than standard Western therapeutic approaches. The systematic cultivation of mindfulness through breathing meditation (*anapanasati*) provides immediate tools for managing anxiety and panic responses during stressful cultural encounters.

To address the stigma surrounding mental health in Thai culture, mindfulness programs can be framed as spiritual development rather than mental health treatment, making them more acceptable to Thai migrants who might otherwise avoid seeking help. Traditional Thai concepts like developing inner peace (*santiphap*) and wisdom (*panya*) provide culturally resonant language for discussing emotional well-being without triggering cultural shame or resistance.

Self-compassion practices rooted in Buddhist loving-kindness meditation directly counter the self-criticism and perfectionism that often exacerbate mental health issues among migrants. By learning to treat themselves with the same kindness they would offer a good friend, Thai migrants can reduce internal stress and develop resilience against external pressures. Research shows that self-compassion practices are particularly effective for migrants dealing with acculturation stress and identity conflicts (Zarotti et al., 2019).

Research demonstrates the effectiveness of these approaches. For example, Liamputtong & Naksook (2003) documented how Thai migrants who participated in culturally-adapted mindfulness workshops reported significant improvements in managing cultural stress, developing social connections, and maintaining cultural identity while adapting to Australian society. Participants described how regular practice helped them move from feeling torn between two cultures to experiencing a more integrated, flexible sense of identity that honoured both their Thai heritage and their Australian present.

Over time, comprehensive mindfulness integration enables Thai migrants to transform their relationship with the migration experience itself. Rather than viewing cultural adaptation as a loss of authentic identity, mindfulness helps migrants understand it as an expansion of identity that includes multiple cultural competencies. This shift from scarcity thinking (losing Thai culture) to abundance thinking (gaining multicultural wisdom) represents the difference between merely coping with migration challenges and truly thriving in a new cultural environment.

By systematically addressing cultural differences through mindful awareness, social challenges through community-based practice, and mental health issues through culturally-adapted interventions, mindfulness becomes a comprehensive framework for migrant well-being. This integrated approach empowers Thai migrants not only to manage the difficulties of acculturation but to discover new sources of strength, connection, and personal growth that enhance both their individual lives and their contributions to Australian multicultural society.

Future Directions for Research and Practice

While the potential benefits of mindfulness for Thai migrants are clear, there remain important opportunities for deepening our understanding and enhancing the effectiveness of mindfulness interventions for this population. Future research should explore the specific mechanisms through which mindfulness supports well-being in Thai migrants, examining how factors such as cultural background, migration circumstances, and individual differences may influence outcomes.

Longitudinal studies tracking the impact of mindfulness practices on Thai migrants' well-being over time would provide valuable insights into the sustainability of these benefits and the potential for long-term transformation. Research using intensive longitudinal assessment methods has demonstrated larger effect sizes between mindfulness and mental health outcomes compared to traditional measurements, suggesting that real-time tracking approaches may be particularly valuable for understanding how mindfulness impacts migrants' daily experiences (Moore et al., 2016). Studies with migrant populations have shown that cross-sectional designs cannot establish causality, highlighting the critical need for longitudinal research to verify long-term effectiveness (Wang et al., 2022).

There is also a need for greater collaboration between researchers, practitioners, and Thai migrant communities in developing and implementing mindfulness programs. Community-based participatory research approaches, which actively involve community members in all stages of the research process, could enhance the cultural relevance, acceptability, and effectiveness of these interventions by actively involving community members in all stages of the research process (Wallerstein et al., 2010). Evidence from culturally adapted mindfulness programs for other migrant populations demonstrates that interventions delivered in participants' native languages produce significant improvements in mental health outcomes, supporting systematic development of similar approaches for Thai populations (Blignault et al., 2021).

Research exploring the interplay between traditional Buddhist practices and secular mindfulness approaches could yield valuable insights for developing culturally harmonious interventions. Another promising direction involves examining the potential for digital mindfulness interventions tailored specifically

for Thai migrants. Meta-analytic evidence indicates that mindfulness-based mobile applications demonstrate significant effect sizes for reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety (Linardon et al., 2024), offering opportunities to create accessible, scalable resources that can reach individuals regardless of geographical location. The development of mindfulness apps incorporating Thai language, Buddhist imagery, and culturally relevant practices could significantly enhance engagement and effectiveness for this population (Schultchen et al., 2021).

Conclusion

The journey of migration encompasses more than geographic displacement; it is a profound emotional and identity transformation. Thai migrants in Australia confront unique challenges as they navigate unfamiliar cultural norms, language barriers, and shifting social roles. These acculturative stressors can undermine mental health and impede successful integration. This study demonstrates that mindfulness, rooted in Buddhist teachings familiar to Thai culture, provides an effective, culturally aligned approach for addressing these challenges.

Empirical outcomes reveal that participants in the adapted eight-week mindfulness program experienced statistically significant decreases in symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress, coupled with notable gains in self-compassion and social integration. Qualitative insights further illuminate how moment-to-moment mindfulness cultivates emotional equanimity: through sustained practice of mindful breathing, body scans, and community meditation sessions, migrants develop nonjudgmental awareness of internal experiences and external stressors. This heightened present-moment focus not only alleviates negative affect but also nurtures self-empathy, enabling participants to respond to cultural conflicts with greater patience and adaptive coping.

Crucially, mindfulness extends beyond individual coping by fostering deeper connections to both Thai heritage and Australian community life. Participants described the practice as a “bridge” linking traditional Buddhist rituals, such as group chanting and loving-kindness metta meditations, with contemporary expressions of belonging, like mindfulness circles in local parks. This integration supports a cohesive bicultural identity, empowering migrants to honour ancestral values while actively participating in their host society.

Looking ahead, scaling mindfulness interventions for Thai migrants requires a community-centred approach that honours collectivist values. Collaborations with Thai community organisations, digital delivery of guided practices, and peer-facilitator training can enhance accessibility and sustainability. Researchers and practitioners should engage migrant voices in co-design processes to ensure that program content resonates with lived experiences and evolving needs.

Mindfulness offers more than transient relief from acculturative stress; it constitutes a lifelong practice that promotes psychological resilience, cultural continuity, and social harmony. By embedding mindfulness into migrant support frameworks, policymakers and service providers can foster more inclusive, compassionate communities, enriching both individual well-being and the multicultural tapestry of Australian society.

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Compassion as the Foundation of Humanistic Ethics: A Study of Martha C. Nussbaum's Thought

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Abstract

This article investigates compassion as the epistemic and normative cornerstone of humanistic ethics by critically engaging with Martha C. Nussbaum's philosophical corpus. Rejecting the long-standing dichotomy that casts emotions as irrational forces, Nussbaum reconceptualises compassion as a cognitively enriched sentiment integral to moral deliberation and public justice. The study unfolds in three parts: first, it delineates the philosophical and psychological underpinnings of compassion in Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach; second, it mounts a critique of rationalist moral theories that marginalise affective experience. In the third section, we enter into comparative dialogue with Theravāda Buddhist ethics, focusing on *karunā* (compassion) as articulated in canonical Pāli texts and elaborated by contemporary scholars. We show that *karunā*, far from being a passive sentiment, is cultivated through systematic practices of mindfulness, ethical habituation, and insight into suffering. By juxtaposing Western and Buddhist perspectives, the article illuminates convergent principles, such as non-attachment, empathetic imagination, and communal responsibility, that underpin both traditions' understanding of compassion as a transformative moral faculty. Engaging these Western and Buddhist perspectives in concert, the study argues that compassion can serve as a transformative force for realising justice, human dignity, and flourishing in our globalised world.

Keywords: Humanistic ethics; Compassion, Moral emotion; *Karunā*; Martha C. Nussbaum

Introduction

In an era defined by rapid technological innovation, intensified global interdependence, and unprecedented economic growth, one might anticipate a corresponding flourish of moral sensitivity and collective ethical responsibility. Yet contemporary societies are often marked by widening socioeconomic disparities, deepening political polarisation, and a troubling indifference to the suffering of others (Haidt, 2012; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). Conventional ethical frameworks, whether Kantian deontology or utilitarian calculus, offer valuable analytic tools for adjudicating moral dilemmas, but they frequently neglect the affective dimensions of human vulnerability and the lived realities of injustice (Singer, 2011; Smith, 2009).

Martha C. Nussbaum (2001) confronts this lacuna by challenging the traditional Western notion that emotions impede impartial moral reasoning. In *Upheavals of Thought*, she redefines emotions as “cognitive appraisals” that embody judgments about what we value and what matters most in the world. From this perspective, compassion is not an irrational surge of feeling but a cognitive–evaluative emotion that reveals moral salience and motivates action on behalf of those who suffer (Nussbaum, 2001; Ekman, 2003). Such a reframing is especially urgent amid global crises, from mass displacement to pandemics, where human suffering transcends abstraction and calls for a response that is both emotionally attuned and rationally grounded (Goleman, 2006; Nussbaum, 2013).

Nussbaum extends this argument in *Political Emotions*, insisting that compassion functions as a social emotion essential to democratic solidarity: “Compassion requires us to imagine the pain of another as our own” (Nussbaum, 2013, p. 30). This imaginative identification, she argues, creates the affective bond necessary for sustaining public commitment to justice and human dignity (Held, 2006). In giving compassion its rightful place in public morality, Nussbaum breaks from the rationalist tradition by insisting that ethical reasoning is incomplete without an account of emotional insight, a claim that resonates powerfully with non-Western moral traditions.

Theravāda Buddhism offers a parallel account of compassion, or *karuṇā*, as both an ethical virtue and a meditative practice. In the *Visuddhimagga*,

Buddhaghosa (2010) describes *karuṇā* as one of the Four Brahmavihāras, arising upon witnessing suffering and characterised by a determined intent to alleviate it. Unlike pity, which may stem from self-centred grief, *karuṇā* in the Theravāda framework is a purified disposition rooted in *vipassanā* (insight) and an understanding of *dukkha* (suffering), *anattā* (non-self), and *anicca* (impermanence) (Bhikkhu Analayo, 2003; Payutto, 2003). Cultivated through systematic practices of *sati* (mindfulness) and *samādhi* (concentration), *karuṇā* transforms personal sentiment into a disciplined moral faculty that underpins both individual liberation and communal well-being (Gethin, 1998).

By bringing Nussbaum's humanistic ethics into dialogue with Buddhist praxes of *karuṇā*, this article constructs a dialogical framework in which compassion emerges as the foundation of a robust, cross-cultural moral discourse. Guided by three objectives, philosophical and psychological foundations, critique of reason-based ethics, and comparative ethical dialogue, the article argues that compassion must occupy a central role in our ethical imagination. Far from being a private sentiment, compassion offers a transformative pathway that bridges personal virtue and structural reform, enabling us to envision justice not simply as abstract rights but as a lived commitment to alleviating suffering and promoting human flourishing.

Martha C. Nussbaum: Life and Philosophical Background

Martha Craven Nussbaum is a prominent American philosopher whose scholarly contributions span ethics, political philosophy, law, and contemporary humanities. Born on May 6, 1947, in New York City, she currently holds the position of Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago, where she serves jointly in the Law School and the Department of Philosophy (The University of Chicago Law School, n.d.).

She is widely recognized for her influential role in developing the Capabilities Approach, a normative framework created in collaboration with economist Amartya Sen. This approach emphasizes the assessment of individual well-being based on actual capabilities to lead a life of value, rather than merely measuring income or access to resources (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen & Nussbaum, 1993). In addition to her work on capabilities, Nussbaum has argued that emotions, especially compassion, play a vital role in ethics and the construction of a just society. In *Upheavals of Thought and Political Emotions*, she explores

how emotional life intersects with public reason and moral judgment. Nussbaum contends that systems of justice must not ignore the affective dimensions of human life and that compassion, as a moral emotion, should inform legal and political structures (Nussbaum, 2001; Nussbaum, 2013).

The Ethical Foundations of Nussbaum's Thought

Martha C. Nussbaum's ethical framework is grounded in the conviction that emotions are central to moral life and should not be excluded from ethical reasoning. Her approach challenges Western traditions that prioritize detached rationality and downplay the moral relevance of emotional experience. Drawing on philosophical anthropology, classical sources especially Aristotle and the Stoics and contemporary moral psychology, she repositions emotions, particularly compassion, as fundamental to both personal ethics and public life.

Central to Nussbaum's ethical vision is the idea that emotions are not irrational impulses but value-laden judgments. As she writes in *Upheavals of Thought*, "emotions are appraisals or value judgments, which ascribe to things and persons outside the person's own control great importance for that person's own flourishing" (Nussbaum, 2001). In this view, compassion is not merely a feeling but a form of moral perception that recognizes the suffering of others as morally urgent.

Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach, developed with Amartya Sen, offers a normative framework for evaluating justice, human development, and dignity. It focuses on what people are able to do and be in real life, emphasizing the conditions necessary for meaningful agency. "The Capabilities Approach begins with the idea that all human beings are entitled to live a life of dignity and to be treated as ends, not means" (Nussbaum, 2011).

For Nussbaum, ethics must respond to human vulnerability, bodily needs, and emotional interdependence. Abstract reasoning alone, she argues, fails to engender the empathy necessary for social justice. As she explains, "Compassion... is a cognitive, eudemonistic emotion: it is focused on the suffering of others, but always with reference to the person's own flourishing" (Nussbaum, 2001).

This perspective yields a humanistic ethic - one that understands flourishing as dependent not only on rights, but on love, care, education, health,

and political participation, rooted in the recognition of human dignity. Her thought aligns with non-Western traditions such as Buddhism, which emphasises the cultivation of *karuna* (compassion) as a virtue essential for overcoming ego and attaining moral clarity.

Ultimately, Nussbaum's ethical foundations lie in the integration of cognitive-affective understanding with political theory. Her vision seeks not to suppress emotion but to educate it in the service of justice, reclaiming emotion as essential to living ethically with others in a fragile, interconnected world.

The Capability Approach: Building a Life of Dignity

At the heart of Nussbaum's ethical philosophy lies the Capability Approach, a framework that shifts attention away from material resources or aggregated utility and instead focuses on what individuals can do and be in their lives. According to Nussbaum, justice requires that all individuals possess access to a threshold level of fundamental capabilities that enable them to live with dignity.

These central capabilities include life, bodily health, bodily integrity, senses, imagination and thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, relationship with other species, play, and control over one's environment (Nussbaum, 2011). She argues that societies must be judged not merely by GDP or material wealth, but by their ability to guarantee these capabilities to all citizens.

"The Capabilities Approach focuses on what people are able to do and to be, and not just on the resources or income they command" (Nussbaum, 2011).

Among these, emotions play a vital role in a good life. Nussbaum emphasizes that emotional development is not a private or secondary concern, but central to human flourishing. Emotions, in her view, are not opposed to reason; rather, they are essential for moral insight. To feel compassion, grief, or love is to make evaluative judgments about what and who matters in our lives. "A life without the development and expression of emotions would be lacking in key elements of human flourishing" (Nussbaum, 2001).

For Nussbaum, the ability to experience and express emotion is part of what it means to live a fully human life. Moreover, a just society must cultivate

the emotional capacities of its citizens and not suppress them. Education, culture, and politics should help individuals develop empathy, compassion, and the emotional imagination necessary for ethical engagement with others.

Thus, the Capability Approach is not only a political or economic theory, but a moral vision grounded in the belief that every human being has the right to live a life of dignity that includes emotional richness, ethical agency, and the freedom to pursue what one values.

Nussbaum's emphasis on compassion as a moral emotion finds a profound resonance in Buddhist ethics, particularly in the teachings on *karuna* (compassion) and *metta* (loving-kindness). In Buddhism, these qualities are not mere sentiments but are cultivated mental states that underpin ethical conduct and spiritual development. According to Buddharakkhita (2013), the Buddha taught that the highest form of moral life is exemplified by one who conquers anger with love, evil with good, meanness with generosity, and falsehood with truth. The cultivation of the *brahma viharas* are lovingkindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity—reflects a commitment to transcending ego and responding to the suffering of others with wisdom and care (Harvey, 2000). This parallels Nussbaum's view that compassion involves evaluative judgment and moral perception, not mere emotional reaction. Just as Nussbaum argues that compassion is central to justice and dignity in society, Buddhism teaches that compassionate action is essential for overcoming suffering and achieving ethical harmony. Together, these perspectives support a view of compassion as a cultivated moral capacity essential to both individual flourishing and social well-being.

Emotions as Instruments of Ethical Understanding

In many philosophical traditions, emotions have been treated with suspicion, regarded as sources of bias, irrationality, or moral weakness. However, Martha C. Nussbaum offers a powerful re-evaluation of emotions as essential components of ethical life. For her, emotions are not mere feelings or impulsive reactions, but forms of rational insight, what she calls "intelligent responses to the perception of value" (Nussbaum, 2001). They reflect what we care about, what we fear, what we hope for, and what we are willing to defend. As such, emotions are central to how we make moral judgments, engage with others, and imagine a just society.

Far from being irrational impulses, emotions such as love, fear, anger, hope, and compassion are, for Nussbaum, deeply evaluative states. They are shaped by beliefs about what is valuable and who matters, and they reflect a person's orientation toward the world. In *Upheavals of Thought*, Nussbaum challenges the Cartesian legacy that separates reason from emotion, arguing instead that emotions are forms of 'cognitive appraisal'—ways of understanding the world that are inseparable from ethical judgment (Nussbaum, 2001).

Love, for Nussbaum, reveals our deep attachments and vulnerabilities. It opens the self to joy and loss, making us ethically responsive to the well-being of others. In contrast to views that treat love as irrational or private, she emphasizes its role in public morality. To love another is to acknowledge their dignity and to become invested in their flourishing. According to Nussbaum, love involves a profound judgment about the importance of another person's life to one's own (Nussbaum, 2001).

Fear, while often associated with self-protection, can narrow our moral vision. It tends to prioritise the self and may lead to exclusion or even dehumanisation. For this reason, Nussbaum warns that fear must be critically reflected upon to prevent its manipulation, especially in political contexts.

Anger is particularly complex. Nussbaum argues that while anger can be a response to injustice, it often contains a desire for payback or retribution that is ethically problematic. Instead, she advocates for what she calls *Transition-Anger*—an emotion that recognises wrongdoing but focuses on constructive forward-looking solutions rather than retaliation. According to Nussbaum, "The central insight of *Transition-Anger* is that the important thing is not to inflict pain but to right the wrong" (Nussbaum, 2016).

Hope, in Nussbaum's account, is a vital emotional attitude for sustaining democratic societies. Unlike passive optimism, hope is an active investment in the possibility of justice and progress. It enables individuals and communities to imagine a better future and to act toward it, even amid adversity. Without hope, compassion falters, anger turns destructive, and fear prevails. For Nussbaum, nurturing hope is a political and ethical task—one that fosters resilience, solidarity, and moral imagination (Nussbaum, 2013).

Among all emotions, compassion holds the most central role in Nussbaum's moral philosophy. It is the capacity to feel the suffering of others as significant and unjust, and to respond with care. She insists that compassion is not a weak or sentimental feeling but a rational moral emotion, an ethical judgment that someone's pain matters and demands attention. According to Nussbaum, "Compassion is a central bridge between individual morality and public justice" (Nussbaum, 2013). In this light, compassion is not only a virtue of personal life but also a political necessity.

Nussbaum's cognitive-evaluative theory ultimately reclaims emotion as a legitimate and necessary source of moral insight. By integrating emotion with ethical reasoning, she challenges the entrenched dichotomy in Western philosophy that separates reason from feeling. Her approach does not seek to suppress emotions but to cultivate them as tools of moral perception. This perspective resonates strongly with non-Western traditions, particularly Buddhist ethics, which regard emotional awareness, especially mindfulness and compassion, not as obstacles to wisdom but as pathways to moral clarity. Taken together, these converging insights suggest a richer and more holistic ethical framework: one that takes seriously the human capacity to feel as inseparable from our ability to act justly, live wisely, and care for others in a fragile, interconnected world.

The philosophical and psychological foundations of compassion converge in viewing it as a disciplined, cognitively informed emotion rather than a spontaneous affect. Nussbaum's synthesis of Aristotelian virtue ethics and modern appraisal theory repositions compassion as a judgment-laden response, rooted in imaginative identification, practical reasoning, and affective resonance, that discloses moral salience and motivates ethical action (Nussbaum, 2001). Theravāda Buddhism's elaboration of *karuṇā* in the *Visuddhimagga* similarly frames compassion as a cultivated quality born of insight (*vipassanā*) and non-attachment, systematically developed through mindfulness and concentration (Buddhaghosa, 2010; Payutto, 2003). By mapping these parallel accounts, we see that both traditions regard compassion as an educable moral faculty requiring cognitive clarity, ethical intention, and sustained practice. This integrated understanding lays a sturdy groundwork for embedding compassion at the heart of moral education and public life.

Compassion as the Heart of Nussbaum's Ethics

Among the emotions explored by Martha C. Nussbaum, compassion stands out as a central moral emotion, integral to her vision of a just society. In *Upheavals of Thought*, Nussbaum articulates a cognitive-evaluative theory of emotions, positing that emotions are not merely passive feelings but are deeply intertwined with judgments about what is significant in human life (Nussbaum, 2001). Compassion, in this framework, is understood as an emotion that arises from the recognition of another's suffering, coupled with the belief that such suffering is serious, undeserved, and that the sufferer is a significant part of one's own scheme of goals and projects (Nussbaum, 2001).

Nussbaum further distinguishes compassion from related emotions such as empathy. While empathy involves the capacity to imagine oneself in another's situation, compassion encompasses a set of judgments and thoughts that acknowledge the severity of another's suffering and its moral relevance (Nussbaum, 2013). This distinction underscores compassion's role as an active, evaluative response that motivates ethical action, rather than a mere emotional resonance.

In the context of justice, Nussbaum argues that compassion is essential for recognizing and responding to the vulnerabilities and needs of others. She contends that legal and political systems often marginalize emotions, favoring detached rationality. However, she posits that emotions like compassion are crucial for a comprehensive understanding of justice, as they provide insight into human experiences that abstract principles may overlook (Nussbaum, 2001).

Moreover, Nussbaum emphasizes the importance of cultivating compassion within public institutions and civic life. In *Political Emotions*, she explores how societies can foster emotions that support democratic values and social justice. She asserts that public education, cultural narratives, and political discourse should aim to nurture compassion among citizens, thereby strengthening the social fabric and promoting inclusive policies (Nussbaum, 2013).

In summary, Nussbaum's ethical framework positions compassion as a foundational element of humanistic ethics. By integrating cognitive evaluations with emotional responses, compassion enables individuals and societies to

address suffering and injustice in a manner that is both rational and deeply human. This approach challenges the dichotomy between reason and emotion, advocating for a more holistic understanding of ethical life.

Realising Ethics through Compassion: Transforming Society

Ethical theories are often criticised for their abstraction, yet Martha C. Nussbaum argues that compassion must move beyond private sentiment into the core of public institutions, policies, and education (Nussbaum, 2001). Compassion, she insists, is a reasoned, evaluative emotion, “judgments that embody ways of seeing the world” (p. 4), that reveals human vulnerability, fosters solidarity, and anchors justice in the protection of dignity. This expanded treatment explores how compassion can be systematically cultivated and embedded across three domains, education, political culture, and public policy, to transform society.

1. Cultivating Compassion through Education

Nussbaum’s *Upheavals of Thought* (2001) situates compassion within the architecture of moral intelligence. She contends that emotions are not irrational forces but reflect “cognitive appraisals” that shape ethical perception (p. 5). To develop this capacity, moral education must integrate cognitive and affective learning. Nussbaum (2001) champions literature, narrative arts, and structured dialogue as pedagogical tools that invite students to inhabit others’ experiences and respond empathically to suffering. Empirical studies in moral education corroborate her view: programs combining reflective writing, discussion of literary case studies, and community engagement demonstrably raise empathy scores and broaden moral horizons (Denham, 2024).

In *Not for Profit*, Nussbaum (2010) extends this argument to higher education, warning against the narrowing of curricula to market-driven technical skills. She argues that a democratic society requires citizens equipped with “emotional literacy”, the capacity for compassionate judgment alongside analytical rigour. Courses in ethics, literature, and the arts become vital forums for students to confront real-world dilemmas, practice perspective-taking, and cultivate a disposition to care. By embedding compassion in core curricula, educational institutions can shape not only skilled professionals but also responsible citizens committed to the common good (Nussbaum, 2010).

2. Fostering Compassion in Political Culture

In *Political Emotions*, Nussbaum (2013) observes that the stability and resilience of democracies depend on shared affective dispositions as much as on institutional design. She analyses Franklin D. Roosevelt's empathetic "fireside chats," which acknowledged the hardships of the Great Depression and galvanised collective hope. By publicly naming suffering and offering inclusive narratives, FDR fostered trust and solidarity, an affective glue that bolstered democratic norms (Nussbaum, 2013).

Contemporary democratic politics can take similar lessons. Public rituals, such as commemorations of historical tragedies or civic campaigns that highlight stories of marginalisation, can cultivate compassion at scale. Educational narratives, from school curricula to public media, should integrate testimonies of diverse communities, allowing citizens to connect emotionally with experiences beyond their own. When compassion becomes part of the political culture, citizens are more likely to support redistributive policies, human-centered governance, and inclusive decision-making.

3. Embedding Compassion in Public Policy

The Capabilities Approach, co-developed by Nussbaum and Sen (1993), reorients policy assessment toward what individuals can do and be, rather than solely on resource distribution or formal rights. Nussbaum (2011) emphasises that compassion motivates policymakers to attend to human vulnerability and structural injustice. For example, universal health coverage programs reflect compassionate insight into shared fragility, ensuring that illness does not translate into destitution. Likewise, inclusive education policies, providing tailored support for students with disabilities or from marginalised backgrounds, exemplify compassion in action by recognising each person's potential for flourishing.

Moreover, compassion can inform policy processes themselves. Participatory budgeting, deliberative assemblies, and impact assessments that incorporate narrative testimony ensure that policymaking is not abstract but grounded in real human stories. By institutionalising channels for the voices of the vulnerable, governments demonstrate compassion as both a motive and a method

Compassion (Karuna) in Theravada Buddhist Ethics: A Comparative Insight

In the Theravāda Buddhist tradition, *karuṇā*, commonly rendered as compassion, is one of the Four Brahmavihāras or “Divine Abodes,” alongside *mettā* (loving-kindness), *muditā* (sympathetic joy), and *upekkhā* (equanimity). According to Buddhaghosa’s *Visuddhimagga*, *karuṇā* arises upon witnessing another’s suffering and is characterised by a resolute intention to alleviate that suffering through wisdom and non-attachment (Buddhaghosa, 2010). Unlike pity, which can stem from personal sorrow, *karuṇā* in the Theravāda framework is a purified mental disposition grounded in insight (*vipassanā*) and an understanding of *dukkha* (suffering), *anattā* (non-self), and *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent origination).

Phra Brahmagunabhorn (P. A. Payutto) emphasises that genuine *karuṇā* is not an impulsive affective reaction but a deliberate volition informed by *paññā* (wisdom) and *sīla* (ethical conduct). It is cultivated through systematic practices of mindfulness (*sati*) and concentration (*samādhi*), as outlined in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*Satipaṭṭhāna*) and the Brahmavihāra meditation sequence (Payutto, 2003). Through repeated training, practitioners develop an equanimous concern for all beings, understanding their interdependence and the impermanent nature of all phenomena, thus transforming compassion into both an ethical response and a spiritual path toward liberation (*vimutti*).

Martha C. Nussbaum, writing from within a liberal humanistic tradition, reconceptualises compassion as a cognitive-evaluative emotion that is essential to moral reasoning, public policy, and social justice (Nussbaum, 2001). In her view, compassion involves imaginative engagement with others’ lives, practical judgment about when and how to act, and affective resonance that motivates political and educational reform. This aligns closely with the Buddhist vision of *karuṇā* as a disciplined moral faculty: both traditions reject the notion that compassion is a mere feeling and instead treat it as an educable capacity that requires cultivation, intentionality, and institutional support.

Where Nussbaum foregrounds curricular reforms, such as integrating literature, case studies, and reflective dialogue into moral education to foster compassionate judgment, Buddhist praxis emphasises meditation as the primary vehicle for ethical transformation (Nussbaum, 2001; Payutto, 2003). Yet both

propose that compassion must be woven into social structures: Nussbaum through policies grounded in the Capabilities Approach, which prioritizes individuals' real freedoms to pursue well-being (Sen & Nussbaum, 1993), and Buddhism through community support for monastic and lay meditation centers that sustain ethical training.

By placing these perspectives in dialogue, we arrive at a richer understanding of compassion as both an inwardly cultivated discipline and an outwardly directed force for structural change. Compassion, whether articulated as *karuṇā* or as a cognitive-evaluative emotion, bridges personal virtue and public life. It invites us to reimagine ethics not as abstract theorising but as a lived commitment to alleviating suffering, protecting human dignity, and promoting flourishing at the individual and societal levels.

Comparative Dialogical Framework for Global Ethics

Martha C. Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach into constructive conversation with the Theravāda Buddhist praxis of *karuṇā*, aiming to articulate a shared, cross-cultural foundation for compassion-based ethics. Nussbaum and Sen's Capabilities Approach (1993) shifts the focus of justice from resource distribution and formal rights to what individuals can do and be, emphasising real freedoms for human flourishing. Compassion, for Nussbaum (2011), plays a catalytic role in identifying which capabilities matter most and in motivating the political will to secure them. Likewise, Theravāda tradition situates *karuṇā* as both an inward cultivation through *sati* (mindfulness) and *samādhi* (concentration), and an outward ethical commitment to alleviating suffering (Payutto, 2003).

This dialogue will proceed in three thematic strands. First, it will analyse educational practices: Nussbaum's proposals for curricula grounded in literature and dialogue to foster imaginative empathy (Nussbaum, 2001) alongside Buddhist monastic and lay meditation programs that systematically develop *karuṇā* (Buddhaghosa, 2010). Second, it will compare institutional supports: from Nussbaum's advocacy for public policies, such as universal healthcare and inclusive education, that manifest compassion in legislation (Nussbaum, 2011) to the Buddhist sangha's communal structures that uphold ethical training and social welfare. Third, it will examine civic rituals and narratives: Nussbaum's emphasis on public ceremonies and narratives that sustain democratic solidarity

(Nussbaum, 2013) together with Buddhist rites, such as dana (generosity offerings) and festival commemorations, that cultivate collective compassion.

By mapping these convergences and divergences, the framework will highlight how compassion can be embedded at multiple levels, from individual cognition to societal institutions, thus offering a robust model for global ethics. This comparative, dialogical approach aspires to bridge cultural divides, fostering an ethics in which compassion is both a personal virtue and a transformative force for structural change and human dignity worldwide.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the body of knowledge by demonstrating how Martha C. Nussbaum's ethical philosophy redefines compassion not as a private sentiment but as a cognitively evaluative and morally significant emotion that plays a central role in public justice and human dignity. Through the Capabilities Approach, emotional development is repositioned as a core component of human flourishing, challenging traditional justice paradigms that prioritise formal rights or economic indicators. Additionally, the cross-cultural comparison between Nussbaum's theory and the Theravada Buddhist concept of karuna (compassion) reveals a shared ethical foundation across traditions. This synthesis establishes a holistic framework of emotionally grounded ethics that bridges the divide between reason and emotion, offering new directions for ethical education, civic engagement, and interreligious dialogue. Ultimately, the study affirms compassion as both an inner moral capacity and a transformative force for social justice.

At the heart of Martha C. Nussbaum's philosophical project lies a bold yet profoundly humane proposition: that compassion is not a secondary sentiment or private emotion, but a foundational element of ethical reasoning and public life. Her account challenges traditional rationalist paradigms and reclaims emotion as a source of moral intelligence, one that is deeply responsive to the realities of human suffering and injustice.

By bringing this perspective into dialogue with karuna as taught in Theravada Buddhist ethics, this article highlights the universality of compassion as a cultivated moral faculty that transcends cultural boundaries. In both traditions, compassion is not a passive or sentimental reaction but a disciplined

and intentional response to suffering, grounded in either meditative wisdom or cognitive-emotional judgment.

Through this comparative framework, the article affirms that compassion, whether as *karuna* or as a civic virtue, holds transformative potential for moral education, social justice, and collective flourishing. Recognising and cultivating this shared ethical foundation invites us to imagine a global humanism rooted not merely in abstract rights, but in sincere concern for the well-being of others.

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