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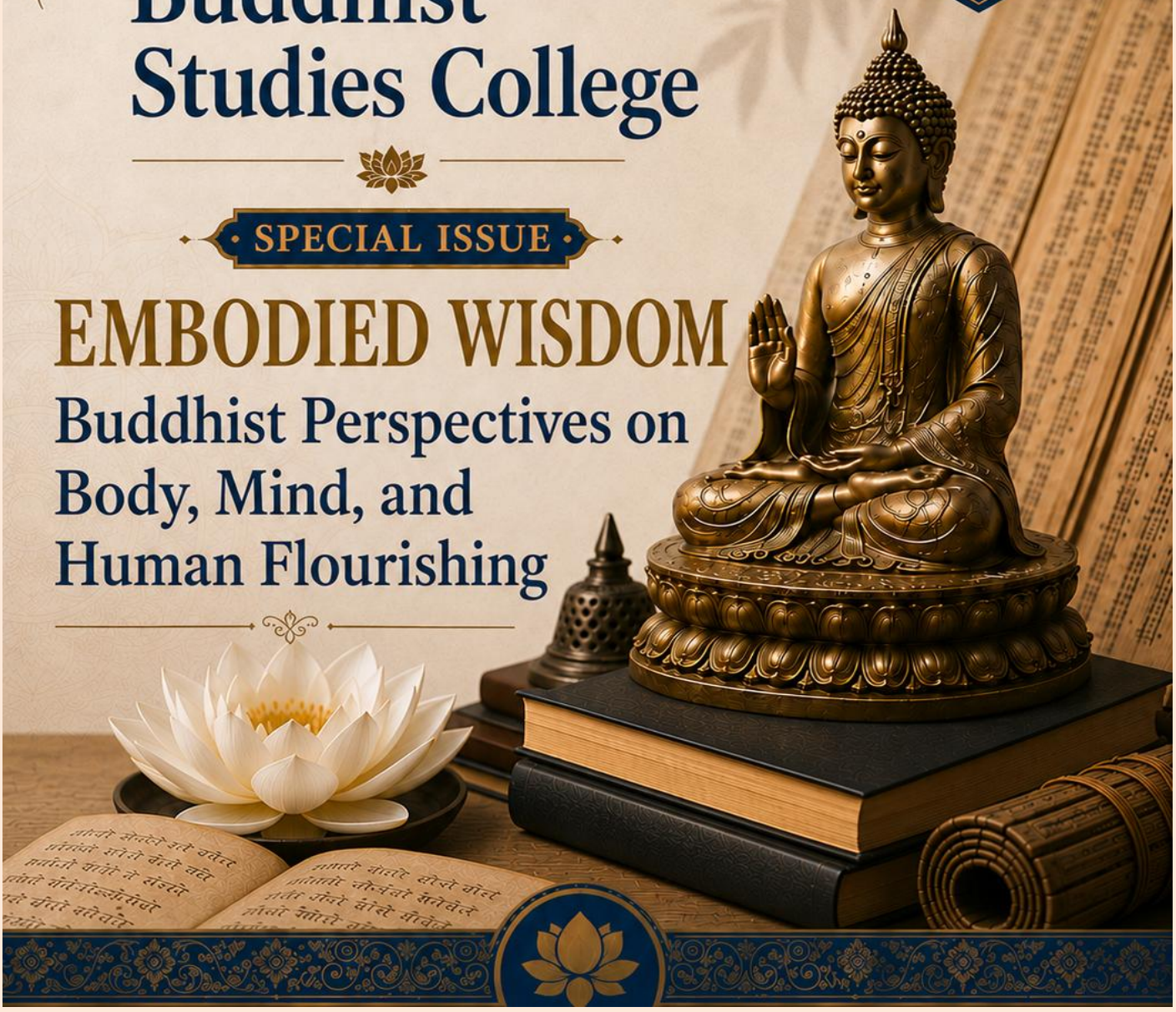
EMBODIED WISDOM

Buddhist Perspectives on Body, Mind, and Human Flourishing



Journal of International Buddhist Studies College

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Objectives

The *Journal of International Buddhist Studies College* aims to support and publish research articles and academic articles focusing on Buddhism, Religious Studies, and related fields. The journal also welcomes studies that explore the application of Buddhist principles in interdisciplinary areas such as economics, social administration, environmental studies, education, peace studies, well-being studies, and other relevant disciplines.

The target audience of JIBSC includes scholars, researchers, practitioners, and graduate students in Buddhist Studies and related fields, as well as those interested in the interdisciplinary application of Buddhist principles in contemporary academic and social contexts.

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- **No. 2:** May–August
- **No. 3:** September–December (Special Issue)

Editor's Note

We are pleased to present Vol. 12 No. 3 (September–December 2026), Special Issue, of the Journal of International Buddhist Studies College (JIBSC), themed "*Embodied Wisdom: Buddhist Perspectives on Body, Mind, and Human Flourishing*."

This special issue brings together a diverse range of scholarly contributions that reflect the continuing development of Buddhist studies across doctrinal, contemplative, psychological, ethical, educational, and social dimensions. Although the articles approach their subjects from different disciplinary and cultural perspectives, they share a common concern with how Buddhist thought and practice can illuminate the conditions of human life in a rapidly changing world.

The theme of embodied wisdom is especially significant as technological acceleration, social uncertainty, psychological pressure, and shifting patterns of human interaction reshape contemporary experience. Buddhist traditions remind us that wisdom is not merely intellectual understanding. We cultivate it through attentive awareness, ethical conduct, insight, compassion, and the capacity to respond appropriately to changing conditions. In this respect, Buddhist scholarship continues to offer important resources for reflecting on well-being, responsibility, relationships, and meaningful human flourishing.

This issue also demonstrates the value of interdisciplinary dialogue. Contemporary Buddhist studies increasingly engages with psychology, education, healthcare, social development, digital culture, and other fields. Such engagement creates opportunities for Buddhist scholarship to contribute to wider academic conversations while also requiring careful attention to doctrinal accuracy, methodological rigor, and ethical context.

On behalf of the Editorial Board, I sincerely thank all authors who contributed their research and scholarship to this special issue. We are equally grateful to the reviewers, whose careful evaluations and constructive recommendations helped strengthen the published articles. We also thank the editorial and production teams for their commitment throughout the review, revision, and publication processes.

As JIBSC continues to develop, readers and contributors should also note an important publication change beginning in **2027**. The journal will move from its current publication schedule to **a quarterly publication cycle**, **with four issues per year.** This change is intended to support more regular publication, improve the timeliness of scholarly communication, and accommodate the growing volume and diversity of submissions while maintaining the journal's standards of academic quality and peer review.

We hope that this special issue will encourage further research, critical reflection, and constructive dialogue on the relationship between Buddhist wisdom and contemporary human concerns. More importantly, we hope that the scholarship presented here will contribute not only to academic knowledge but also to a deeper understanding of how wisdom, compassion, and ethical responsibility may continue to guide human life in an increasingly complex world.

Asst. Prof. Dr.Ven. Phramaha Nantakorn Piyabhani

Editor-in-Chief
Journal of International Buddhist Studies College (JIBSC)

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Developing a Process for Observing the Five Precepts to Enhance Emotional Well-being Among Working Adults at Buddhamahametta Foundation

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Abstract

This study developed and preliminarily evaluated a Buddhist-Inspired Media Innovation Process (BIMIP) for enhancing digital mental well-being among working adults in digitally intensive environments. The objectives were to examine the emotional well-being challenges associated with digital overwhelm, to develop a contemplative media process grounded in Buddhist principles, and to evaluate its preliminary effects on emotional well-being.

A mixed-methods developmental design was employed in three phases: documentary and qualitative exploration, process development with expert validation, and implementation of a 14-day contemplative media intervention with 26 working adults. Quantitative data were collected through pre- and post-intervention emotional well-being assessments, while qualitative data were gathered from reflective journals and participant reflections.

The findings indicate that working adults experienced digital fatigue, cognitive overload, emotional tension, fragmented attention, and a diminished sense of meaning in their daily work lives. The developed BIMIP consists of three interconnected stages: Grounding the Mind, Softening Emotional Tension, and Reconnecting with Meaning. The process integrates mindfulness, loving-kindness, compassion, and wise attention through guided audio practices, contemplative narratives, and reflective micro-learning media. Pre-post descriptive results and qualitative reflections suggested improvements in emotional awareness, inner stability, reflective capacity, and perceived meaning. The study presents a structured framework that links Buddhist contemplative wisdom with media innovation to support emotional well-being in contemporary digital environments. Because the study used a small sample, a short intervention period, and no control group, its findings should be interpreted as preliminary.

Keywords: Emotional well-being; Contemplative media; Buddhist psychology; Mindfulness; Media innovation; Working adults

Introduction

Digital technologies have transformed contemporary work by accelerating communication, expanding access to information, and enabling flexible collaboration. These benefits, however, are accompanied by continuous connectivity, frequent task-switching, information overload, prolonged screen exposure, and blurred boundaries between work and personal life. Collectively, these conditions may generate digital overwhelm or technostress, expressed through cognitive fatigue, fragmented attention, emotional tension, and reduced opportunities for recovery (Bondanini et al., 2020; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). The World Health Organization (2019) identifies burnout as an occupational phenomenon arising from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. Digital mental well-being has therefore become an important concern for organizations seeking to sustain employee health, engagement, and constructive relationships.

Buddhist psychology offers a relevant conceptual foundation because it examines how attention, intention, emotion, and habitual reactions shape human experience. Early Buddhist teachings emphasize wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) as a means of preventing and abandoning unwholesome states (M I 6–12), the disciplined examination of wholesome and unwholesome thought as a basis for mental cultivation (M I 114–117; Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu & Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1995), the development of loving-kindness (*mettā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) as foundations for non-hostile relationships (D I 250–251; Walshe, 1995), and mindfulness of body, feelings, mind, and phenomena in relation to their arising and cessation (S V 184; Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000). These principles have informed contemporary mindfulness- and compassion-based approaches (Germer & Neff, 2013; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Research suggests that contemplative training can strengthen emotional regulation, attentional balance, resilience, and psychological flourishing (Dahl et al., 2020; Wallace & Shapiro, 2006). A systematic review of workplace interventions likewise reported generally beneficial effects of mindfulness-based programs on employee health, although methodological heterogeneity limits firm conclusions (Michaelsen et al., 2023).

Digital media may provide a scalable means of translating contemplative principles into brief practices suitable for demanding work routines. Guided

audio, contemplative narratives, compassion-oriented content, and reflective micro-learning can create accessible opportunities for intentional pause, emotional awareness, and meaning-oriented reflection. Evidence from a randomized clinical trial indicates that a brief digital mindfulness program can reduce perceived stress, job strain, and burnout while improving work engagement and general well-being (Radin et al., 2025). Nevertheless, most digital interventions remain grounded in generalized mindfulness or clinical models, while limited research has systematically integrated Buddhist contemplative principles, ethical reflection, and media innovation within a coherent process for working adults.

Addressing this gap is also relevant to Peace Studies, in which inner stability and reflective awareness may support compassionate communication and constructive social interaction. Accordingly, this study develops and preliminarily evaluates the Buddhist-Inspired Media Innovation Process (BIMIP), a 14-day intervention organized around Grounding the Mind, Softening Emotional Tension, and Reconnecting with Meaning. The study examines digital well-being challenges, develops the process through theoretical synthesis and expert validation, and explores preliminary changes in participants' emotional well-being following implementation.

Research Objectives

1. To study concepts, theories, and emotional well-being challenges related to digital overwhelm among working adults.

2. To develop a Buddhist-Inspired Media Innovation Process (BIMIP) based on Buddhist contemplative principles for promoting emotional well-being.

3. To evaluate the preliminary effectiveness of BIMIP in enhancing emotional well-being among working adults.

Literature Review

Digital intensification has reshaped contemporary work by increasing connectivity, speed, and flexibility while also creating new psychological burdens. Continuous notifications, information overload, frequent task-switching, and blurred work–life boundaries are central features of technostress and may contribute to fatigue, reduced concentration, emotional strain, and

burnout (Bondanini et al., 2020; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). The World Health Organization (2019) identifies burnout as an occupational phenomenon associated with unmanaged chronic workplace stress. These conditions indicate that employee well-being must be understood not only in terms of productivity but also in relation to attentional recovery, emotional regulation, and the capacity to sustain meaning in work.

Buddhist psychology offers a complementary framework for addressing these concerns. Wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) supports the recognition and abandonment of unwholesome mental states (M I 6–12), while mindfulness (*sati*) cultivates systematic awareness of body, feelings, mind, and phenomena (S V 184; Anālayo, 2003). The disciplined examination of wholesome and unwholesome thought further supports mental cultivation (M I 114–117). Loving-kindness (*mettā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) provide an ethical and relational basis for reducing hostility and fostering non-reactive interpersonal engagement (D I 250–251). Contemporary research similarly links mindfulness and compassion practices with emotional regulation, psychological flexibility, resilience, and well-being (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Germer & Neff, 2013; Wallace & Shapiro, 2006).

Workplace and digital intervention studies suggest that contemplative practices can be adapted for modern professional settings. Systematic evidence indicates that mindfulness-based workplace programs generally produce beneficial outcomes, although methodological heterogeneity and variation in intervention quality remain important limitations (Michaelsen et al., 2023). Digital delivery may increase accessibility through guided audio, brief reflective exercises, and self-paced engagement. Radin et al. (2025), for example, found that a brief digital meditation intervention reduced stress, burnout, and job strain while improving engagement and general well-being.

Nevertheless, existing studies often emphasize generalized mindfulness or stress reduction rather than integrating attentional training, compassion, ethical reflection, and meaning reconstruction within a unified media process. This gap supports the development of BIMIP as a structured model linking Buddhist contemplative principles with media innovation for emotionally demanding digital work environments.

Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods developmental design to develop and preliminarily evaluate the Buddhist-Inspired Media Innovation Process (BIMIP). The design combined documentary review, qualitative exploration, expert validation, field implementation, pre-post descriptive comparison, and thematic analysis. This approach was appropriate because the study aimed to construct a practice-oriented process and examine its preliminary usefulness rather than test a fully established clinical intervention (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Phase 1 involved documentary research and qualitative exploration. Literature on Buddhist psychology, mindfulness, compassion, emotional regulation, digital well-being, and workplace stress was reviewed to identify relevant conceptual foundations. Preliminary qualitative insights from working adults were used to clarify common emotional challenges in digitally intensive environments, including cognitive overload, emotional fatigue, fragmented attention, and difficulty maintaining reflective balance.

Phase 2 involved process development and expert validation. The preliminary BIMIP structure was reviewed by experts in Buddhist studies, contemplative practice, media innovation, and research methodology. The review focused on conceptual coherence, content relevance, clarity of language, alignment between objectives and process components, and feasibility for working adults. Focus group consultation was also used to refine the sequence and accessibility of the contemplative media elements.

Phase 3 involved a 14-day contemplative media intervention with 26 working adults aged 25 to 60 years. Participants engaged with brief daily media experiences designed to support emotional grounding, softening of mental tension, and reflective reconnection with personal meaning and intention. Media components included guided reflective audio, contemplative narratives, and micro-learning prompts. The short duration of each daily activity was intended to make the process feasible within realistic working schedules.

Quantitative data were collected using the Emotional Well-Being Questionnaire (EWBQ), administered before and after the 14-day intervention. Qualitative data were collected through reflective journaling and selected follow-up reflections. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive pre-post

comparisons, while qualitative reflections were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns in perceived emotional change, practical applicability, and participant experience.

The study has several methodological limitations. The sample size was small, the implementation period was brief, and there was no control or comparison group. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as preliminary evidence of feasibility and perceived benefit rather than conclusive proof of effectiveness. Future research should employ larger samples, validated measures, control conditions, and longer follow-up periods.

Research Results

Objective 1: Concepts, Contexts, and Emotional Challenges in Contemporary Digital Working Environments

The findings from documentary research and qualitative exploration indicate that working adults in digitally intensive environments experience a range of challenges to emotional well-being. Continuous communication demands, frequent task-switching, persistent digital notifications, and pressure for rapid responsiveness contribute to cognitive overload and reduced opportunities for psychological recovery during the workday.

Participants described difficulties maintaining attentional clarity when managing multiple communication channels and professional responsibilities. Emotional tension often accumulated gradually when individuals lacked structured opportunities for reflective pause. Some participants reported continuing to work in a state of cognitive acceleration, which reduced clarity of thought and weakened sensitivity in communication with colleagues.

The findings also indicate that digital overwhelm is not only an individual psychological issue but also an interpersonal and organizational concern. When stress accumulates without adequate reflection, individuals may become more reactive, less patient, and less able to engage in constructive dialogue. These patterns demonstrate the need for brief, accessible, and non-intrusive practices that support attentional stabilization, emotional awareness, and meaning-oriented reflection within daily work routines.

Table 1. Emotional well-being challenges identified among working adults

Theme	Description
Emotional pressure	Stress associated with performance expectations and work demands
Cognitive overload	Fragmented attention caused by digitally intensive work environments
Interpersonal tension	Communication difficulties and emotional reactivity among colleagues
Ethical ambiguity	Uncertainty in decision-making under pressure
Reduced sense of meaning	Difficulty connecting daily work with personal values and purpose

Objective 2: Development of the Buddhist-Inspired Media Innovation Process

Based on the synthesis of theoretical foundations and qualitative insights, the Buddhist-Inspired Media Innovation Process (BIMIP) was developed as a structured contemplative media framework for working adults. The process translates Buddhist contemplative principles into accessible media-based experiences that can be used within ordinary professional routines.

The BIMIP framework consists of three interrelated dimensions. The first dimension, Grounding the Mind, supports attentional stability through brief guided contemplative media that invite awareness of present-moment experience. This dimension is intended to reduce cognitive fragmentation and create intentional pauses within daily work cycles. The second dimension, Softening Emotional Tension, cultivates emotional balance through loving-kindness and compassion. It encourages a gentle, non-judgmental relationship with internal experience and supports more patient interpersonal responses. The third dimension, Reconnecting with Meaning, strengthens reflective awareness of values, purpose, and intention, helping participants relate daily work to a deeper sense of contribution.

Expert validation and focus group consultation contributed to the refinement of the process structure, language, sequencing, and media format. Experts emphasized the need to maintain the integrity of Buddhist contemplative

principles while ensuring accessibility for participants without prior meditation experience. The resulting process integrates contemplative practice with media design in a way that supports brief but consistent daily engagement.

Table 2. Core components of the Buddhist-Inspired Media Innovation Process

Component	Buddhist principle	Psychological mechanism	Media translation
Grounding the Mind	Mindfulness (sati)	Attention stabilization	Guided audio practice
Softening Emotional Tension	Loving-kindness (mettā) and compassion (karuṇā)	Emotional regulation	Compassion-based media
Reconnecting with Meaning	Wise attention (yoniso manasikāra)	Meaning reconstruction	Reflective storytelling media

Objective 3: Preliminary Evaluation of BIMIP

The preliminary evaluation of BIMIP was conducted through a 14-day contemplative media intervention with 26 working adults. Descriptive pre-post comparison of EWBQ scores indicated improvement across multiple dimensions of emotional well-being. Because the study did not include a control group, these changes should be interpreted cautiously as preliminary indications rather than definitive evidence of effectiveness.

Qualitative reflections supported the quantitative findings by showing participants' subjective experiences of emotional change. Many participants reported increased awareness of internal emotional states and an improved ability to observe thoughts and feelings without immediate reaction. Some participants described greater mental spaciousness during daily work activities, which helped them respond more calmly to professional challenges. Others reported increased patience in communication and greater sensitivity to the emotional dimensions of workplace interaction.

Participants also noted that the short duration of daily engagement made the process practical. The brief, media-based format allowed participants to integrate contemplative practice into existing routines without requiring major lifestyle adjustments. This feasibility is an important finding because working adults often require emotional well-being practices that are accessible, flexible, and sustainable within digitally demanding contexts.

Discussion

The findings suggest that the Buddhist-Inspired Media Innovation Process (BIMIP) may support emotional well-being among working adults in digitally intensive environments. Following the 14-day intervention, participants reported greater emotional awareness, improved inner stability, and stronger reflective capacity. These outcomes are consistent with research showing that mindfulness-based approaches can strengthen attentional control, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being (Baer, 2003; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Wallace & Shapiro, 2006). More recent evidence likewise indicates that workplace mindfulness interventions generally produce beneficial health-related outcomes, although effect sizes and study quality vary (Michaelsen et al., 2023). The present findings should therefore be interpreted as preliminary rather than conclusive.

The reported improvement in emotional awareness may be explained by the cultivation of mindfulness (*sati*), which encourages observation of thoughts and feelings without immediate reaction. This interpretation accords with Anālayo Bhikkhu (2003), who presents mindfulness as a systematic means of examining bodily, affective, and mental processes, and with Brown and Ryan (2003), who associate mindful awareness with enhanced self-regulation and well-being. BIMIP extends this literature by translating mindfulness into brief guided audio and reflective media practices rather than relying exclusively on formal meditation. This adaptation may be particularly relevant for working adults facing time constraints and ongoing digital demands.

Participants' reports of reduced reactivity, increased patience, and more considerate workplace communication may also be understood in terms of loving-kindness (*mettā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*). Compassion-oriented practice can change how individuals relate to distress by replacing harsh self-judgment and defensive reactions with greater acceptance and psychological flexibility (Germer & Neff, 2013). Meta-analytic evidence further indicates that self-compassion interventions can improve psychosocial outcomes, although methodological limitations remain (Ferrari et al., 2019). In BIMIP, these principles appear to function not merely as soothing emotional techniques but as relational capacities that support less reactive and more constructive interaction.

A further contribution concerns meaning reconstruction. Participants described a stronger sense of purpose and more reflective engagement with work

and daily life. This finding is consistent with Ryff's (1989) account of purpose in life as a central dimension of psychological well-being and with Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory, which proposes that positive emotional states help develop enduring personal resources. Whereas earlier interventions often emphasized stress reduction or formal practice (Baer, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 1994), BIMIP combines attentional grounding, emotional softening, and meaning-oriented reflection within short-form media. Recent randomized evidence that digital meditation can reduce employee stress, burnout, and job strain supports the plausibility of this delivery format (Radin et al., 2025).

Overall, BIMIP offers a process-based contribution that links Buddhist contemplative principles to attentional stabilization, emotional regulation, and meaning reconstruction. However, the small sample size, short duration, self-reported outcomes, and absence of a control group preclude causal inference. Larger controlled studies with validated measures and follow-up assessment are required.

The New Body of Knowledge

The principal body of knowledge generated by this study is the Buddhist-Inspired Media Innovation Process (BIMIP), a structured framework that explains how Buddhist contemplative principles can be translated into brief media-based practices to support emotional well-being among working adults in digitally intensive environments. Rather than presenting mindfulness as an isolated technique, BIMIP integrates attentional training, emotional cultivation, ethical reflection, and meaning-oriented awareness within a progressive process suitable for everyday professional life.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the framework consists of three interconnected stages. The first stage, *Grounding the Mind*, applies mindfulness (*sati*) to stabilize attention and reduce cognitive fragmentation. Through guided audio practices and brief reflective pauses, participants are encouraged to recognize thoughts, emotions, and bodily states before reacting to workplace demands. The second stage, *Softening Emotional Tension*, applies loving-kindness (*mettā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) to support emotional regulation and constructive interpersonal responses. Compassion-oriented media encourage participants to relate to personal difficulty and workplace tension with greater patience, understanding, and non-reactivity. The third stage, *Reconnecting with Meaning*, applies wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) to help individuals interpret work and

daily experience in relation to personal values, ethical intention, and purposeful contribution.

The new contribution of BIMIP lies in the identification of three corresponding psychological mechanisms: attentional stabilization, emotional regulation, and meaning reconstruction. These mechanisms explain how contemplative principles may operate through media engagement to strengthen emotional awareness, inner stability, reflective capacity, and meaningful involvement in daily life. The framework therefore moves beyond the simple delivery of meditation content by organizing contemplative media as a developmental sequence.

BIMIP also incorporates ethical reflection through a contemporary interpretation of the Five Precepts, expressed as respect for life, resources, relationships, truth, and clarity of mind. This ethical dimension distinguishes the framework from digital well-being interventions that focus primarily on stress reduction or individual coping.

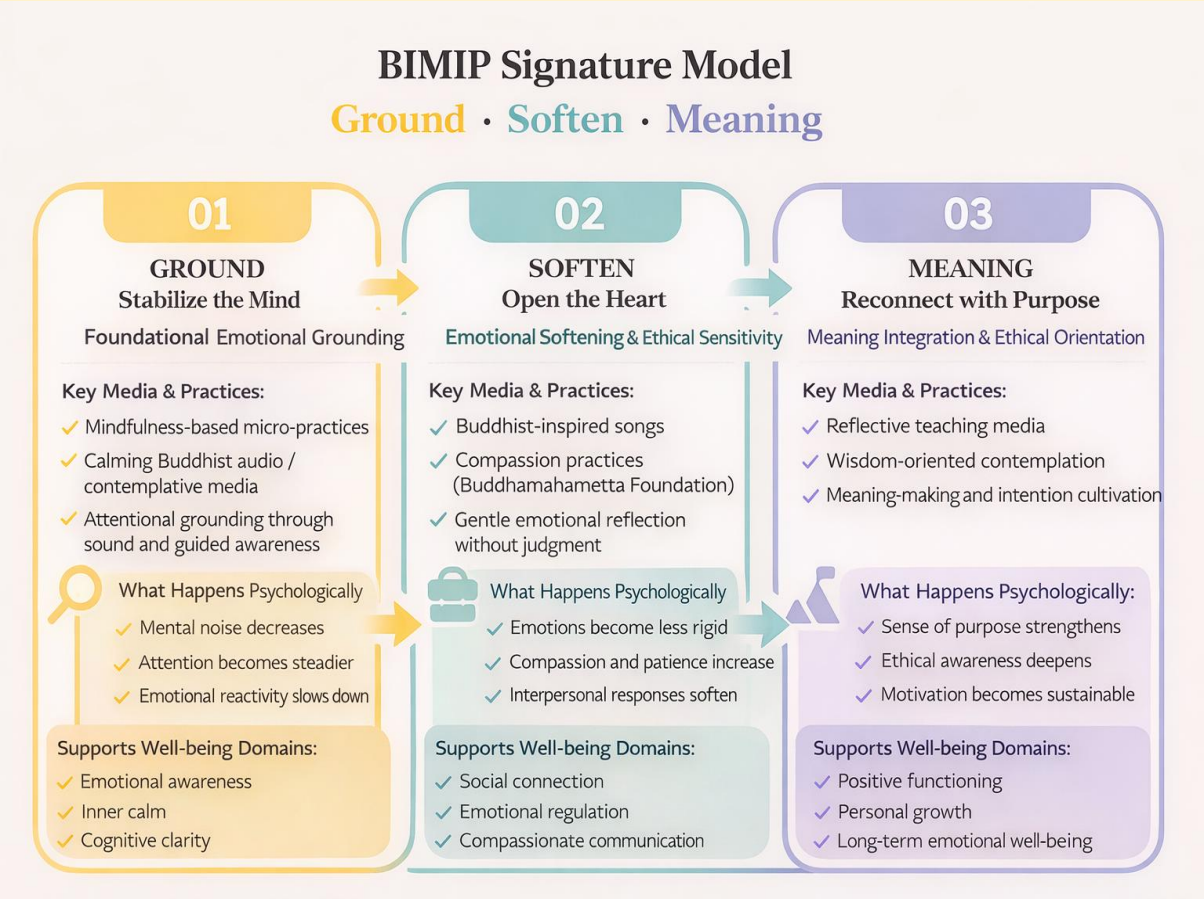

Figure 1. The Buddhist-Inspired Media Innovation Process (BIMIP) for Emotional Well-Being in Digitally Intensive Work Environments

Overall, BIMIP contributes a process-based model connecting Buddhist psychology, media innovation, and emotional well-being. Although further empirical validation is required, the framework provides a conceptual foundation for future applications in organizational well-being programs, education, professional development, and digital mental health interventions.

Conclusion

This study developed and preliminarily evaluated the Buddhist-Inspired Media Innovation Process (BIMIP) as an accessible approach to supporting emotional well-being among working adults in digitally intensive environments. The findings indicate that continuous digital engagement, frequent task-switching, performance pressure, and blurred work–life boundaries may contribute to cognitive overload, emotional fatigue, fragmented attention, interpersonal tension, and a diminished sense of meaning in professional life.

In response to these challenges, BIMIP was structured around three interconnected stages: Grounding the Mind, Softening Emotional Tension, and Reconnecting with Meaning. The process translates mindfulness (sati), loving-kindness (mettā), compassion (karuṇā), and wise attention (yoniso manasikāra) into brief media-based practices that can be incorporated into everyday routines. Through guided audio reflections, compassion-oriented content, contemplative narratives, and reflective micro-learning activities, the process addresses attentional, emotional, and meaning-related dimensions of well-being.

The preliminary implementation findings suggest that participants experienced greater awareness of thoughts and emotions, improved capacity to pause before reacting, increased emotional stability, more compassionate interpersonal responses, and a stronger sense of meaning in daily activities. The brief and flexible format also appeared feasible for working adults who had limited time and varying levels of prior contemplative experience. These findings indicate that digital media, when intentionally designed, may function not only as a source of information or distraction but also as a medium for reflection, emotional regulation, and inner development.

The principal contribution of the study is the development of a process-based framework that links Buddhist contemplative principles to three psychological mechanisms: attentional stabilization, emotional regulation, and meaning reconstruction. This framework extends existing mindfulness-based approaches

by integrating compassion, ethical reflection, and meaning-oriented engagement within a structured media innovation process.

Nevertheless, the results should be interpreted with caution because the study involved a small sample size, a short intervention period, self-reported outcomes, and no comparison or control group. The study therefore provides preliminary evidence of feasibility and potential benefit rather than conclusive evidence of effectiveness. Future research should employ larger and more diverse samples, validated measurement instruments, control-group designs, longer follow-up periods, and more rigorous qualitative procedures. With further empirical validation, BIMIP may be adapted for organizational well-being programs, educational settings, digital mental health initiatives, and professional development contexts seeking to promote emotional balance, compassionate communication, and meaningful engagement.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should strengthen the empirical validation of the Buddhist-Inspired Media Innovation Process (BIMIP) through larger and more diverse participant samples. Studies involving employees from different occupational sectors, age groups, cultural backgrounds, and levels of digital exposure would help determine the broader applicability of the framework. Particular attention should be given to high-stress professions, such as healthcare, education, information technology, and social services, where digital overload and emotional strain are especially pronounced.

More rigorous research designs are also needed. Randomized controlled trials should compare BIMIP with alternative interventions, such as conventional mindfulness programs, general digital well-being education, or no-intervention control groups. Future studies should employ validated psychological measures, report reliability and effect sizes, and include follow-up assessments to examine whether improvements in emotional awareness, regulation, and meaning are sustained over time.

Research should also investigate the relative contribution of each BIMIP component. Comparative studies could examine whether guided audio, contemplative storytelling, compassion-oriented media, or reflective micro-learning produce different outcomes. This would help identify which formats are most effective for particular users and contexts.

In addition, future research should explore engagement patterns, adherence, and user experience. Digital analytics, interviews, and diary methods may clarify how frequency, duration, timing, and preferred media format influence outcomes. Longitudinal and mixed-methods studies could further examine how Buddhist ethical reflection, mindfulness, compassion, and meaning reconstruction interact over time. Such research would provide a stronger foundation for adapting BIMIP to organizational well-being programs, educational settings, and digital mental health initiatives.

Tipitaka Abbreviations

M = Majjhima Nikāya
D = Dīgha Nikāya
S = Saṃyutta Nikāya

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Asoka's Dhamma Policies and Buddhist Peaceful Means: A Conceptual Framework for Sustainable Peace in Contemporary Societies

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Abstract

This qualitative documentary study examined sustainable peace through selected Buddhist peaceful means, Asoka's Dhamma policies, and their possible relevance to contemporary peacebuilding. The study pursued three objectives: to analyze the Buddhist ethical and psychological foundations of sustainable peace; to examine Asoka's Dhamma policies as a historical model of ethical governance; and to synthesize these perspectives into a conceptual framework for contemporary societies. Data were drawn from selected discourses in the Pāli Canon, English translations of Asoka's rock and pillar edicts, and relevant scholarship in Buddhist ethics, ancient Indian history, and peace studies. The materials were examined through thematic coding, contextual comparison, and integrative synthesis. The findings indicate that Buddhist peaceful means emphasize inner cultivation and social responsibility through generosity (dāna), loving-kindness (mettā), wisdom (paññā), non-harming, and communal principles such as the aparihāniya-dhamma. Asoka's edicts illustrate a complementary institutional dimension expressed through Dhamma-vijaya, interreligious respect, moral exhortation, welfare administration, restraint in the use of violence, and the appointment of Dhamma-mahāmattas. The study proposes an integrated Buddhist–Asokan peacebuilding framework in which bottom-up ethical cultivation and top-down welfare-oriented governance operate as mutually reinforcing conditions for positive and sustainable peace. Because the study is documentary and interpretive, the framework should be regarded as a conceptual contribution rather than an empirically validated policy model. Comparative and field-based research is required to assess its feasibility across different political, cultural, and institutional settings.

Keywords: Sustainable Peace; Buddhist Peaceful Means; Asoka's Dhamma Policies; Dhammavijaya; Ethical Governance.

Introduction

Sustainable peace remains a major global concern in a period marked by armed conflict, political polarization, social inequality, displacement, and declining trust in public institutions. Contemporary peace research distinguishes negative peace, understood as the absence of direct violence, from positive peace, which requires the reduction of structural violence and the development of just and resilient social conditions (Galtung, 1969). Recent global assessments likewise show that peacefulness is shaped not only by warfare but also by social safety, institutional quality, inequality, and societies' capacity to manage conflict without violence (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024). These conditions indicate that durable peace cannot be secured solely through ceasefires, military deterrence, or elite political agreements.

Buddhist traditions provide an ethical and psychological approach to peace that begins with the transformation of intention, emotion, and conduct. The Noble Eightfold Path links right understanding, ethical discipline, mental cultivation, and wisdom, thereby treating personal and social suffering as mutually conditioned rather than separate domains (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1994, 2000, 2005). Within this framework, generosity (dāna) counters possessiveness and exclusion; loving-kindness (mettā) and compassion reduce hostility and indifference; and wisdom (paññā) enables recognition of causality, impermanence, and interdependence. Buddhist ethics therefore contributes to peacebuilding by addressing dispositions that sustain interpersonal and collective conflict (Gowans, 2015; Hanh, 1998).

The aparihāniya-dhamma, or conditions conducive to non-decline, also offers a communal perspective. Its emphasis on regular assembly, concord, respect for agreed norms, and protection of vulnerable members may be interpreted as an ethical resource for participatory governance and social cohesion. Such principles should not be equated directly with modern democratic institutions; however, they provide a normative basis for consultation, responsibility, and collective restraint. In this sense, Buddhist peaceful means connect inner peace with the quality of social relationships and institutions.

The reign of Emperor Asoka in the third century BCE provides an important historical case in which moral language was incorporated into imperial administration. The rock and pillar edicts describe remorse after the Kalinga campaign, preference for Dhamma-vijaya or conquest through Dhamma, respect among religious communities, welfare measures for humans and animals, restraint in punishment, and the appointment of Dhamma-mahāmattas to attend to moral and social welfare (Dhammika, 1993). Historical scholarship cautions against portraying Asoka as a modern pacifist or treating his Dhamma as identical

with Buddhist doctrine. Nevertheless, the edicts demonstrate a significant effort to legitimate political authority through moral persuasion, public welfare, and restraint rather than military expansion alone (Lahiri, 2015; Thapar, 1997).

Existing studies commonly examine Buddhist ethics, Asokan history, and peace theory as separate fields. Consequently, limited attention has been given to a systematic framework linking the cultivation of nonviolent dispositions with institutional structures that support welfare, pluralism, and accountable governance. This study addresses that gap by bringing selected Buddhist peaceful means into dialogue with Asoka's Dhamma policies. It does not propose the direct transplantation of an ancient imperial model into modern states. Rather, it identifies ethically relevant principles and organizes them into a conceptual framework for further analysis, policy dialogue, and empirical research on sustainable peace.

Research Objectives

1. To study the concept of sustainable peace based on Buddhist peaceful means.
2. To study Asoka's Dhamma policies as a historical model of ethical governance and peacebuilding.
3. To synthesize Buddhist peaceful means and Asoka's Dhamma policies into a conceptual framework for sustainable peace in contemporary societies.

Literature Review

The body of literature concerning Buddhist peaceful means and Ashokan governance highlights a profound synergy between spiritual ethics and political administration. Fundamental texts like Bhikkhu Bodhi's The Connected Discourses of the Buddha (2000) and Walpola Rahula's What the Buddha Taught (1959) establish the scriptural foundations of this study. These seminal works emphasize that sustainable peace is not merely the absence of war but is deeply rooted in ethical conduct, non-violence (ahisa), and the psychological resolution of conflict. Complementing these, Buddhaghosa's (1975) *Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)* serves as a practical manual for mental cultivation, illustrating how inner tranquility, achieved through mindfulness and meditation, is a prerequisite for communal harmony. This internalist approach to peace suggests that societal stability is an extension of the individual's moral and mental discipline.

Historical scholarship shifts this focus from personal ethics to the broader realm of state policy. Ven. S. Dhammika's The Edicts of King Asoka (1993) provides primary archaeological evidence of how these Buddhist values were institutionalized during the Mauryan Empire. Asoka's edicts, carved into rocks and pillars across the Indian subcontinent, reveal a governance model predicated on religious tolerance, extensive social welfare, and the revolutionary concept of "Conquest by Dhamma" (Dhamma-vijaya). Unlike traditional conquest, which relies on coercion, Dhamma-vijaya seeks to unify people through the shared recognition of moral truth and administrative compassion.

Furthering this historical perspective, Romila Thapar (1997) and Nayanjot Lahiri (2015) offer critical analyses of these policies, demonstrating how Asoka utilized ethical leadership to unify an ethnically and culturally diverse empire. Their research shows that Asoka's administrative reforms—such as the appointment of Dhamma-Mahamatras (special welfare officers) and the establishment of public medical facilities for both humans and animals—translated abstract moral principles into concrete social stability. These scholars argue that Asoka's "Dhamma" was not a conversion tool but a sophisticated civic ethic designed to foster social responsibility and reduce systemic violence.

The reviewed literature suggests that the integration of Buddhist peaceful means—specifically Dana (generosity), Metta (loving-kindness), and Paññā (wisdom)—with Ashokan governance creates a comprehensive framework for peacebuilding. While ancient in origin, these principles address universal human concerns like social justice, environmental stewardship, and ethical responsibility. Scholars collectively affirm that bridging spiritual ethics with political application provides a humane roadmap for addressing contemporary global crises. Ultimately, this body of work demonstrates that moral leadership, when grounded in compassion and the Aparihaniya-dhamma (principles of communal welfare), offers a viable path toward a harmonious and sustainable future for modern society, proving that ancient wisdom remains relevant to the political structures of the twenty-first century.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework follows an input–process–output structure. The inputs comprise selected Buddhist texts, Asoka's rock and pillar edicts, and relevant historical and peacebuilding scholarship. The analytical process consists of documentary analysis, thematic coding, contextual comparison, and

integrative synthesis. The output is an integrated Buddhist–Asokan peacebuilding framework that connects inner ethical cultivation to welfare-oriented, pluralistic governance. Figure 1 summarizes this conceptual structure.

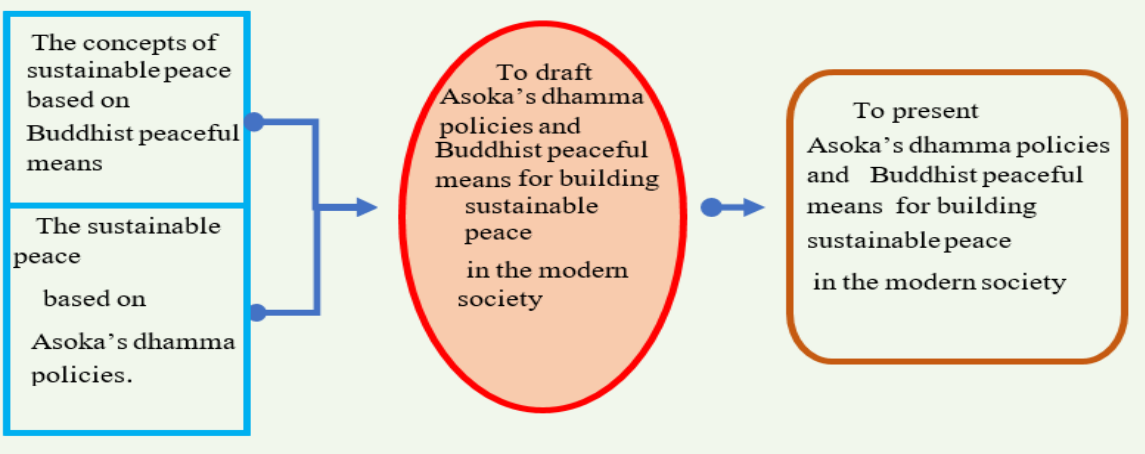

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative documentary research design. Documentary analysis was appropriate because the research objectives concerned the interpretation and synthesis of Buddhist teachings, Asoka's edicts, historical scholarship, and contemporary peacebuilding concepts. The study did not involve human participants, surveys, experiments, or statistical analysis.

Sources and Selection Criteria

Primary sources included selected discourses from the Pāli Canon and English translations of Asoka's rock and pillar edicts. These materials were selected because they contain teachings and policies directly relevant to non-harming, loving-kindness, generosity, wisdom, communal welfare, religious respect, public administration, and Dhamma-vijaya.

Secondary sources included scholarly books and peer-reviewed literature in Buddhist ethics, Mauryan history, and peace studies. Sources were selected purposively according to four criteria: direct relevance to the research objectives, recognized scholarly or institutional provenance, contribution to the interpretation of primary materials, and usefulness for comparative analysis. Contemporary reports were used only to contextualize the continuing importance

of sustainable peace and were not treated as evidence validating the proposed model.

Data Collection and Analysis

Relevant passages were identified and organized under preliminary categories, including inner peace, non-harming, loving-kindness, generosity, wisdom, communal consultation, religious respect, welfare administration, moral authority, and Dhamma-vijaya. The materials were then coded thematically to identify recurring principles and relationships.

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, Buddhist and Asokan materials were interpreted within their respective textual and historical contexts. Second, themes from the two bodies of material were compared with concepts from peace studies, particularly positive peace and structural conditions of violence. Third, the themes were synthesized into an input–process–output–outcome model. Interpretive claims were checked against multiple sources to reduce dependence on a single translation or historical account.

Methodological Scope and Limitations

The study is conceptual and interpretive. It does not establish causal relationships or demonstrate that Asokan policies can be transferred directly to contemporary political systems. The analysis is also limited by its dependence on selected English translations, the incomplete historical record, and the researcher's thematic interpretation. These limitations require cautious use of the findings and support the need for comparative, field-based, and policy-oriented research.

Research Results

The findings are presented according to the three research objectives. Because the study is documentary, the results represent an interpretive synthesis of selected texts and scholarship rather than empirical measurement of contemporary peace outcomes.

Objective 1. The analysis indicates that Buddhist peaceful means conceptualize sustainable peace as an interaction between inner cultivation, ethical conduct, and social responsibility. Inner peace is not treated as withdrawal from social problems; rather, it provides the psychological basis for restraint,

dialogue, and non-harming action. This interpretation is consistent with Buddhist teachings that connect intention, speech, conduct, and wisdom within an integrated path of practice (Bodhi, 1994, 2000, 2005).

Four clusters of principles were especially relevant. First, mettā and compassion counter hostility and the construction of an "enemy image." Second, dāna promotes generosity and sharing, thereby challenging possessiveness and indifference to material suffering. Third, paññā supports understanding of causality and interdependence, enabling actors to consider the broader consequences of decisions. Fourth, the aparihāniya-dhamma emphasizes regular consultation, concord, respect for shared norms, and collective responsibility. Together, these principles offer an ethical foundation for positive peace, although they do not replace legal, economic, or institutional reforms.

The principal finding for Objective 1 is therefore that Buddhist peaceful means operate across personal and social levels. They seek to reduce the mental conditions that sustain violence while encouraging forms of conduct and communal organization conducive to trust and cooperation.

*Objective 2***.** The analysis of Asoka's edicts identified five recurring policy dimensions: restraint in violence, respect among religious communities, moral exhortation, welfare-oriented administration, and Dhamma-vijaya. These dimensions reveal an effort to connect imperial authority with public moral responsibility (Dhammika, 1993).

Asoka's response to the Kalinga conflict is significant because the edicts express remorse regarding human suffering and articulate a preference for conquest through Dhamma. This preference did not abolish imperial authority or coercive capacity, but it represented an important reorientation toward persuasion, restraint, and welfare. The edicts' concern for medical provisions, wells, roadside planting, humane administration, and the welfare of different groups further indicates that peace was understood in relation to material and institutional conditions, not merely the absence of rebellion.

The appointment of Dhamma-mahāmattas illustrates an administrative mechanism for extending moral and welfare concerns across the empire. Likewise, Asoka's encouragement of restraint in speech and respect for other traditions provides a historical precedent for managing religious diversity through mutual regard rather than sectarian domination. Historical scholarship, nevertheless, cautions that these policies must be understood within Mauryan

imperial conditions and should not be idealized as equivalent to modern human rights or democratic institutions (Lahiri, 2015; Thapar, 1997).

Table 1. Objective, focus, and key finding

Objective	Focus Area	Key Findings & Components
Objective 1	Buddhist Peaceful Means	Personal & Social Ethics: Focuses on Mettā (loving-kindness) and Paññā (wisdom) for inner peace, alongside Dāna (generosity) and Aparihāniya Dhamma to ensure social justice and communal unity.
Objective 2	Asoka's Dhamma Policies	Ethical Governance: Institutionalizes Non-violence (*Ahimsa*) as a state policy and promotes Religious Tolerance to maintain harmony in a pluralistic society, transitioning from war to righteousness.
Objective 3	Integrated Model for Modernity	Sustainable Peacebuilding: Blends BPM's spiritual values with ADP's structural policies. It creates a "Bottom-Up" (individual) and "Top-Down" (state) approach to transition from a culture of power to a culture of peace.

Objective 3. The synthesis produced a dual-level framework combining bottom-up ethical cultivation with top-down institutional responsibility. At the bottom-up level, mindfulness, loving-kindness, generosity, and wisdom support emotional regulation, nonviolent communication, social trust, and responsible participation. At the top-down level, welfare-oriented governance, interreligious respect, accountable oversight, inclusive consultation, and restraint in the use of force create institutional conditions that can reduce structural violence.

The framework does not assume that inner cultivation alone can resolve systemic injustice or that public policy alone can eliminate hostility. Sustainable peace requires interaction between persons, communities, and institutions. Individual virtues become socially consequential when supported by fair structures, while institutions become more legitimate when leaders and citizens cultivate restraint, empathy, and responsibility.

Table 2. Summary of Findings by Research Objective

Objective	Analytical Focus	Principal Finding
1	Buddhist peaceful means	Inner cultivation and communal ethics provide complementary foundations for positive peace.
2	Asoka's Dhamma policies	Dhamma-vijaya, interreligious respect, welfare, and moral administration illustrate ethical governance.
3	Integrated framework	Bottom-up cultivation and top-down institutional responsibility jointly support sustainable peace.

Discussions

Buddhist Peaceful Means and the Internal Foundations of Positive Peace

The findings support a conception of peace that extends beyond the cessation of direct violence. Galtung's distinction between negative and positive peace is useful because Buddhist peaceful means address dispositions and relationships that may persist even after overt conflict has ended (Galtung, 1969). Mettā, compassion, generosity, and wisdom contribute to peace by challenging hostility, exclusion, and self-centered decision-making. Their significance lies in cultivating capacities for restraint and reconciliation rather than functioning as technical substitutes for negotiation, law, or institutional reform.

The aparihāniya-dhamma adds a social dimension by emphasizing regular assembly, concord, and respect for shared procedures. These principles correspond with contemporary concerns regarding inclusive dialogue and social trust, although any application must account for differences between ancient communities and modern pluralistic societies. Buddhist peaceful means are therefore most appropriately interpreted as normative and educational resources within a broader peacebuilding strategy.

Asoka's Dhamma Policies as a Historically Situated Model

Asoka's edicts demonstrate that moral language can shape public administration and political legitimacy. Dhamma-vijaya, welfare measures, religious respect, and the appointment of Dhamma-mahāmattas show an effort to institutionalize restraint and responsibility (Dhammika, 1993). This historical

example is relevant because it counters the assumption that state power must rely primarily on fear, conquest, or punitive control.

Nevertheless, Asoka's governance should not be romanticized. He remained an emperor governing a large and hierarchical state, and the edicts do not provide evidence of a modern democratic or rights-based order. Thapar (1997) and Lahiri (2015) therefore support a contextual reading in which Asoka's Dhamma is understood as a broad civic ethic adapted to imperial diversity. Its contemporary value lies in the principles of moral accountability, restraint, welfare, and intergroup respect rather than in direct institutional imitation.

Integrating Bottom-Up and Top-Down Peacebuilding

The study's central theoretical contribution is the integration of personal cultivation and institutional responsibility. Many approaches to peacebuilding emphasize either individual attitudes or structural reform. The proposed framework treats these dimensions as interdependent. Ethical institutions may reduce violence and inequality, but their effectiveness depends partly on the conduct of leaders and citizens. Conversely, individual compassion cannot compensate for unjust policies, exclusionary institutions, or material deprivation.

This dual perspective is especially relevant to contemporary polarization. Restraint in speech, mindful communication, and respect for religious or ideological difference may reduce escalation at interpersonal and digital levels. At the same time, public welfare, independent oversight, inclusive consultation, and equitable access to basic services address structural conditions that contribute to insecurity. The model therefore links ethical culture with institutional design while recognizing that both require adaptation to local political and legal contexts.

Limitations and Implications

The documentary design limits the conclusions that can be drawn. The study cannot demonstrate that the proposed framework produces measurable reductions in violence or improvements in governance. It also relies on selected translations and interpretive scholarship, and it may underrepresent competing historical readings of Asoka. The concepts of Buddhist peaceful means and sustainable peace are broad and may be interpreted differently across traditions and societies.

Accordingly, the framework should be used as a hypothesis-generating and educational model. Its value lies in organizing ethical and institutional dimensions that can inform comparative research, curriculum development,

leadership education, and policy dialogue. Empirical evaluation is necessary before claims are made regarding

Knowledge from Research

This study develops a conceptual framework that integrates Emperor Asoka's Dhamma policies with Buddhist peaceful means to explain how sustainable peace may be cultivated in contemporary societies. Its central contribution is a shift from reactive conflict management to a preventive, structural approach to peacebuilding. Rather than treating peace as the temporary absence of violence, the framework understands it as the deliberate outcome of ethical leadership, inclusive governance, social justice, and inner transformation.

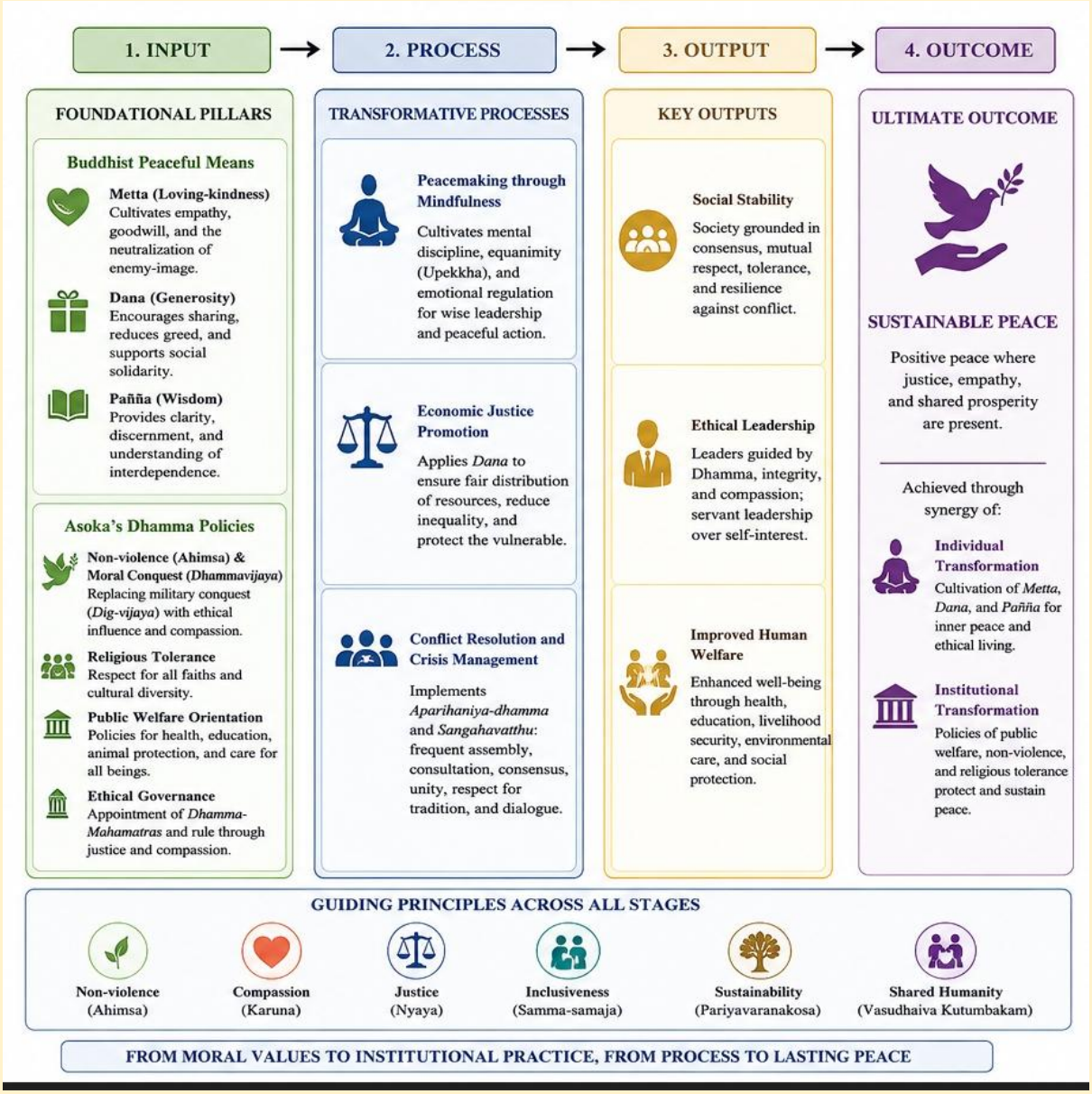

Figure 1. The Asokan–Buddhist Sustainable Peace Framework: From Ethical Foundations to Sustainable Peace

As *Figure 1*, the framework is organized into four interrelated stages*: Input, Process, Output, and Outcome*. The input stage consists of two complementary foundations. The first is *Buddhist peaceful means*, represented by loving-kindness (*mettā*), generosity (*dāna*), wisdom (*paññā*), non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), equanimity (*upekkhā*), and ethical restraint. These principles function as moral and psychological resources for reducing hostility, regulating reactive emotions, and strengthening awareness of human interdependence. The second foundation is *Asoka's Dhamma policies*, including religious tolerance, public welfare, moral administration, non-violent governance, and conquest through Dhamma (*dhammavijaya*). Together, these inputs connect individual ethical cultivation with institutional responsibility.

The process stage explains how these principles may be translated into contemporary peacebuilding practices. First, *mindful peacemaking* supports emotional regulation, careful judgment, and non-reactive leadership in situations of conflict. Second, *economic justice and public welfare* address structural conditions that contribute to instability, including inequality, exclusion, and unequal access to essential services. Third, *participatory conflict resolution* draws on the *Aparihāniya-dhamma* and *Saṅgahavatthu* to emphasize frequent consultation, consensus-building, respectful dialogue, generosity, constructive speech, and cooperative action. Fourth, *ethical governance and institutional accountability* reflect Asoka's use of Dhamma officials and welfare-oriented administration as historical models for protecting vulnerable groups and promoting public responsibility.

These processes generate three principal outputs. The first is *social stability*, characterized by mutual respect, religious coexistence, reduced polarization, and stronger social trust. The second is *ethical leadership*, in which political authority is exercised through service, integrity, restraint, and responsibility rather than coercion. The third is *improved human welfare*, reflected in equitable access to healthcare, education, environmental protection, and social support. These outputs indicate that peace is sustained not only through political agreements but also through institutions that protect dignity and reduce structural injustice.

The final outcome is *sustainable peace*, understood as positive peace grounded in justice, empathy, shared responsibility, and human flourishing. The framework argues that this outcome depends on the interaction between two levels of transformation. At the personal level, individuals cultivate loving-kindness, wisdom, compassion, and self-restraint. At the institutional level, governments adopt policies that promote welfare, tolerance, participation, and non-violence. Neither level is sufficient in isolation. Inner peace without

structural justice remains socially limited, while institutional reform without ethical transformation may become procedural and fragile.

The framework also offers relevance for contemporary challenges such as digital polarization, ideological conflict, religious intolerance, and global inequality. In digital environments, Buddhist restraint in speech and the consultative principles of the *Aparihāniya-dhamma* can support civil dialogue, truth-seeking, and responsible communication. In public administration, Asoka's Dhamma-oriented governance suggests that state legitimacy may be strengthened when citizens experience fairness, welfare, and respect rather than fear and coercion.

The new body of knowledge generated by this study is therefore the Asokan–Buddhist Sustainable Peace Framework, which links ethical inputs, transformative processes, social outputs, and long-term peace outcomes. Its distinctive contribution lies in combining personal moral cultivation with institutional peacebuilding. The framework redefines political power as the capacity to protect, serve, and inspire, and it reinterprets conquest as the expansion of ethical influence rather than territorial domination. In this way, Asoka's administrative legacy and Buddhist peaceful means provide a coherent conceptual foundation for building more humane, resilient, and sustainable societies.

Conclusion

This study examined Buddhist peaceful means and Asoka's Dhamma policies as complementary resources for conceptualizing sustainable peace in contemporary societies. The documentary analysis indicates that Buddhist teachings contribute an internal and relational foundation through non-harming, loving-kindness, generosity, wisdom, and communal responsibility. Asoka's edicts contribute a historically situated institutional dimension through Dhamma-vijaya, interreligious respect, moral exhortation, welfare measures, and administrative concern for diverse groups.

The study's principal contribution is an integrated framework in which bottom-up ethical cultivation and top-down institutional responsibility operate together. Sustainable peace cannot be reduced either to individual tranquility or to state policy. It requires persons capable of restraint, empathy, and responsible participation, as well as institutions that protect welfare, manage diversity, limit violence, and support inclusive dialogue. The framework therefore connects Buddhist ethical education with the structural concerns of positive peace.

The findings do not demonstrate that Asoka's policies can be directly transferred to modern states or that Buddhist practice alone can resolve contemporary conflict. The model is conceptual, based on selected texts and historical interpretations, and must be adapted to constitutional, cultural, and political contexts. Its contribution is to clarify principles that may enrich peacebuilding theory and generate questions for empirical research.

Future studies should examine the model through comparative case studies, interviews with policymakers and peace practitioners, community-based research, and the evaluation of educational or leadership programs. Such research should assess feasibility, ethical safeguards, pluralistic applicability, and measurable outcomes. Under these conditions, Buddhist peaceful means and Asoka's Dhamma policies may provide valuable, but necessarily complementary, resources for the continuing pursuit of just and sustainable peace.

Suggestions

For policymakers and public institutions.

The principles identified in this study may inform dialogue on ethical leadership, interreligious respect, public welfare, nonviolent communication, and accountable oversight. They should be adapted through constitutional and evidence-informed processes rather than adopted as religious state policy.

For Buddhist institutions and educators.

Peace education should connect meditation and moral cultivation with social responsibility, pluralism, structural injustice, and practical conflict-resolution skills. Programs should avoid presenting inner peace as sufficient when communities face discrimination, violence, or material deprivation.

For civil society and peace practitioners.

Loving-kindness, restraint in speech, consultation, and generosity may be incorporated into mediation, community dialogue, and reconciliation initiatives when culturally appropriate. Such applications should include participants from diverse religious and nonreligious backgrounds.

For future research.

Empirical studies should test the framework through comparative cases, interviews, surveys, participatory research, and longitudinal

evaluation. Research should examine how the model interacts with human-rights standards, democratic accountability, social inequality, digital polarization, and culturally diverse understandings of peace.

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Developing a Process for Observing the Five Precepts to Enhance Emotional Well-being Among Working Adults at Buddhamahametta Foundation

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Abstract

This study developed and evaluated a structured process for integrating the Five Precepts into daily reflective practice to support emotional well-being among working adults. The study had three objectives: to examine emotional well-being challenges in contemporary work settings; to interpret the Five Precepts as a practical framework for ethical awareness and emotional regulation; and to develop and preliminarily evaluate a 14-day audio-guided reflective process. A mixed-methods developmental design was conducted in three phases comprising documentary and qualitative exploration, process development and expert review, and field implementation. The intervention consisted of daily audio-guided reflections lasting approximately four to six minutes. Quantitative data were collected using the 17-item Emotional Well-Being Questionnaire (EWBQ), which assesses emotional awareness and positivity, social connection and support, meaningful engagement, and accomplishment and growth. Qualitative data were obtained through follow-up interviews and reflective accounts. Descriptive pretest-posttest comparisons indicated higher posttest scores across the four EWBQ domains, while qualitative findings suggested greater awareness of the relationship among intention, emotion, speech, and action. Participants described pausing before reacting, communicating more carefully, and considering the effects of their behavior on colleagues and family members. They also regarded the short audio format as feasible within ordinary work routines. The study proposes the Five Precepts Reflective Process Model, in which ethical reflection is linked to heightened awareness, improved emotional regulation, and more constructive interpersonal conduct. Because the manuscript does not yet report the sample size, instrument psychometrics, exact quantitative results, or a comparison group, the findings should be interpreted as preliminary evidence of feasibility and perceived benefit rather than proof of effectiveness.

Keywords: Five Precepts; Buddhist ethics; Emotional well-being; Ethical awareness; Reflective practice; Working adults

Introduction

Rapid technological advancement, accelerated communication, and rising performance expectations have substantially transformed contemporary working environments. Working adults are increasingly required to manage complex responsibilities, respond quickly to organizational demands, and maintain effective interpersonal relationships under persistent time pressure. Although work can provide identity, social participation, and personal meaning, sustained occupational demands may contribute to emotional strain, reduced attentional clarity, communication difficulties, and weakened adaptive decision-making. Emotional well-being is therefore an essential dimension of sustainable professional functioning rather than merely the absence of stress or psychological disorder.

Emotional well-being encompasses the ability to recognize and regulate emotional responses, maintain supportive relationships, engage meaningfully in daily responsibilities, and experience continued personal growth. Diener (2000) emphasizes subjective evaluations of positive and negative affect, while Ryff (1989) identifies purpose, positive relationships, autonomy, and personal development as central dimensions of psychological well-being. Keyes (2002) further distinguishes flourishing from the simple absence of mental illness, and Seligman (2011) highlights engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment as important components of well-being. In contemporary workplaces, these capacities may be challenged by chronic stress, interpersonal conflict, information overload, and digitally mediated work demands (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; World Health Organization, 2022). Technological intensification may also contribute to technostress, emotional exhaustion, and declining job satisfaction when individuals lack sufficient opportunities for psychological recovery (Bondanini et al., 2020; Tarafdar et al., 2015).

Research on mindfulness and reflective awareness suggests that individuals can strengthen emotional regulation by learning to observe thoughts, feelings, and behavioral impulses before responding automatically. Mindfulness-based approaches have been associated with improved self-regulation, reduced emotional reactivity, and enhanced psychological well-being (Baer, 2003; Brown

& Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Compassion and self-compassion may further support emotional stability by reducing harsh self-judgment and encouraging more balanced responses to personal difficulty (Neff, 2003). Wallace and Shapiro (2006) similarly argue that attentional, emotional, and motivational balance are interconnected foundations of human flourishing. Evidence from workplace interventions also indicates that mindfulness-informed programs may produce beneficial outcomes, although effectiveness varies according to intervention design and methodological quality (Michaelsen et al., 2023).

Buddhist ethics contributes an additional dimension by emphasizing the relationship among intention, conduct, consequence, and mental well-being. The Five Precepts—non-harming, respect for others' resources, responsibility in relationships, truthful communication, and clarity of mind—provide practical guidance for regulating behavior and cultivating interpersonal responsibility (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2010; Hanh, 1998). Rather than functioning solely as religious prohibitions, the precepts may be understood as voluntary training principles that encourage awareness, restraint, integrity, and sensitivity toward the effects of one's actions. Ethical reflection may therefore complement mindfulness by helping individuals examine not only their internal emotional states but also the relational consequences of speech and behavior (Dalai Lama, 1999; Goleman, 2003).

Despite substantial research on mindfulness and psychological well-being, limited attention has been given to the Five Precepts as a structured reflective intervention for working adults. Existing studies frequently emphasize meditation practice or theoretical Buddhist ethics without translating ethical principles into brief, replicable practices suitable for contemporary work routines. This study addresses that gap by developing and preliminarily evaluating a 14-day audio-guided reflective process based on the Five Precepts among working adults at the Buddhamahametta Foundation. It examines the feasibility of the process and explores preliminary changes in emotional awareness, social connection, meaningful engagement, a sense of accomplishment, and personal growth.

Research Objectives

1. To examine concepts, contexts, problems, and needs related to emotional well-being among working adults in contemporary work environments.

2. To analyze the Five Precepts as a framework for ethical awareness, behavioral responsibility, and emotional regulation in daily life.
3. To develop and evaluate a structured Five Precepts Reflective Process for supporting emotional well-being among working adults.

Literature Review

Emotional well-being is commonly understood as a multidimensional condition involving positive affect, emotional awareness, meaningful engagement, supportive relationships, and a sense of personal growth. Diener (2000) emphasizes individuals' subjective evaluations of life satisfaction and affective experience, while Ryff (1989) identifies purpose, personal growth, autonomy, and positive relationships as central dimensions of psychological well-being. Keyes (2002) extends this perspective by distinguishing flourishing from the mere absence of mental illness, and Seligman (2011) similarly highlights engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment as foundations of human flourishing. For working adults, these dimensions are especially relevant because occupational pressure, interpersonal demands, and rapid organizational change may disrupt emotional balance and weaken constructive decision-making.

Mindfulness-based research provides one pathway for strengthening emotional regulation. Mindfulness involves sustained and non-judgmental awareness of present experience and has been associated with improved self-regulation, reduced automatic reactivity, and enhanced psychological well-being (Baer, 2003; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Nyanaponika Thera (1972) presents mindful awareness as disciplined observation of mental and bodily processes, while Siegel (2007) links reflective awareness with emotional integration and interpersonal attunement. Compassion-related research further suggests that a kind and non-condemning orientation toward personal difficulty can reduce defensive reactions and promote healthier emotional functioning (Neff, 2003). Wallace and Shapiro (2006) likewise argue that attentional, emotional, and motivational balance are mutually reinforcing dimensions of well-being.

Within Buddhist ethics, the Five Precepts provide a practical framework for regulating conduct through non-harming, respect for others' property, responsibility in relationships, truthful communication, and clarity of mind. These principles are not merely prohibitions; they cultivate intention, accountability, and sensitivity to the consequences of behavior (Bodhi Bhikkhu,

2010; Hanh, 1998). Ethical discipline may therefore support emotional well-being by reducing internal conflict, strengthening consistency between values and conduct, and improving interpersonal trust. The Dalai Lama (1999) similarly emphasizes universal ethical responsibility, while Goleman (2003) highlights the importance of emotional awareness in transforming destructive mental states.

Despite these converging perspectives, existing research has focused more extensively on mindfulness and general psychological well-being than on the Five Precepts as a structured reflective intervention for working adults. Limited research has examined how brief, audio-guided ethical reflection can operationalize these principles within contemporary work routines. This gap supports the development of a practical process linking ethical awareness, emotional regulation, and emotional well-being.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework proposes that the Five Precepts–based intervention supports emotional well-being through a sequential reflective pathway rather than through ethical instruction alone. The Five Precepts constitute the ethical foundation of the model: non-harming, respect for resources, responsibility in relationships, truthful communication, and clarity of mind. These principles direct attention toward the moral quality of intention and the interpersonal consequences of everyday conduct (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2010; Hanh, 1998).

Ethical awareness is positioned as the first proximal process. Through reflection on intention, action, and consequence, participants are expected to recognize how habitual responses influence both their emotional states and others' well-being. The 14-day audio-guided reflective practice operationalizes this awareness through brief daily situations and prompts that can be integrated into working routines. Reflective awareness is expected to create a pause between emotional activation and behavioral response, thereby supporting reduced impulsivity, greater perspective-taking, and more deliberate communication (Baer, 2003; Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Emotional regulation is understood as the immediate psychological process that connects ethical reflection with emotional well-being. Improved regulation may enable participants to respond to pressure with greater clarity, patience, and behavioral consistency. The anticipated outcomes correspond to the four domains

measured by the Emotional Well-Being Questionnaire: Emotional Awareness and Positivity, Social Connection and Support, Meaningful Engagement, and Accomplishment and Growth. These domains reflect both affective and eudaimonic accounts of well-being (Diener, 2000; Keyes, 2002; Ryff, 1989).

Because the present study does not test statistical mediation or establish causality, the arrows in Figure 1 represent a proposed developmental pathway, not confirmed causal relationships. The framework guides the intervention design, alignment of the research instrument, and interpretation of the preliminary findings.

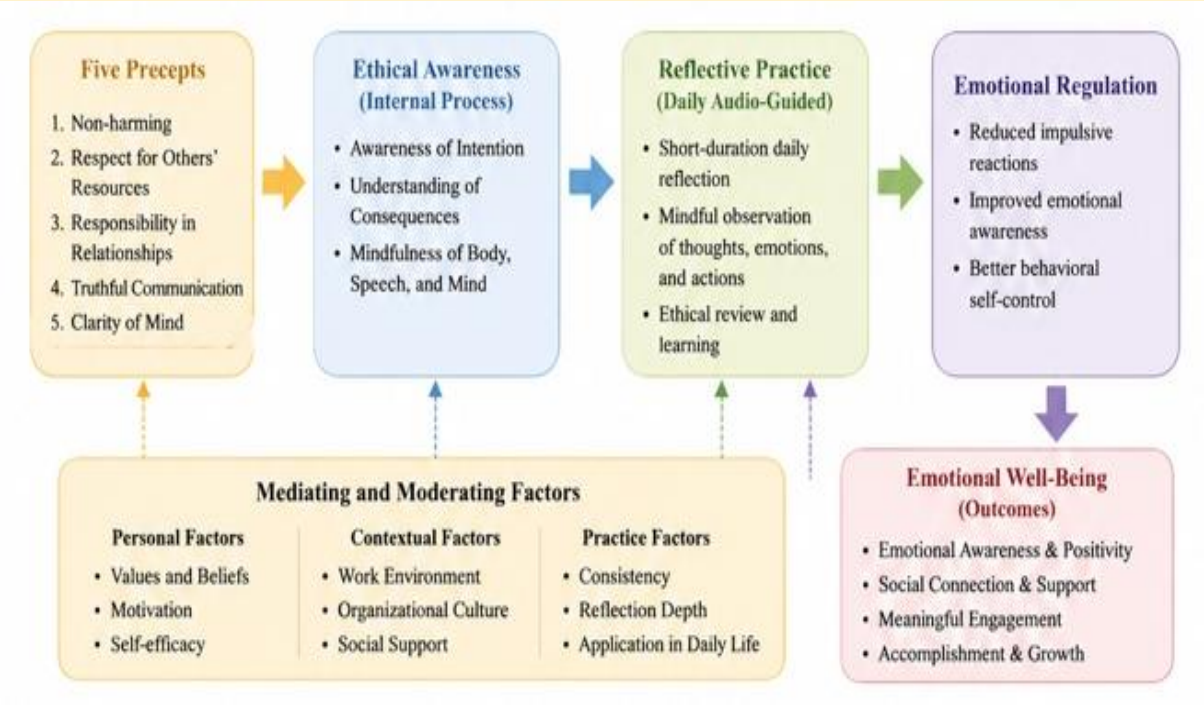

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Five Precepts Reflective Process for Emotional Well-Being

Research Methodology

The study employed a sequential mixed-methods developmental design combining documentary review, qualitative exploration, intervention development, expert review, field implementation, descriptive pretest-posttest assessment, and qualitative follow-up. This design was appropriate because the study sought to construct a contextually relevant process and examine its preliminary feasibility and perceived benefits rather than test a fully established clinical intervention (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Phase 1: Conceptual and Contextual Exploration

Phase 1 examined emotional well-being, Buddhist ethical principles, reflective practice, behavioral regulation, and contemporary workplace challenges. Documentary analysis was used to identify concepts relevant to emotional awareness, interpersonal responsibility, and the practical interpretation of the Five Precepts. Qualitative interviews with working adults explored common experiences of workload pressure, communication difficulty, value conflict, emotional reactivity, and limited time for sustained contemplative practice. The findings informed the content, language, and delivery format of the intervention

Phase 2: Development and Expert Review of the Reflective Process

Phase 2 translated the Five Precepts into a 14-day sequence of short audio-guided reflections lasting approximately four to six minutes per day. The sessions used recognizable situations from work and family life to prompt reflection on intention, action, consequence, speech, relationship boundaries, fairness, and clarity of mind. The intervention was designed to be brief enough for daily use while maintaining a coherent developmental progression from ethical recognition to reflective application.

Experts in Buddhist studies and research methodology reviewed the process for conceptual accuracy, clarity, sequence, relevance, and practical suitability. Their feedback was used to refine the wording of the audio scripts, the order of themes, and the relationship between the Five Precepts and the proposed emotional-development mechanisms.

Phase 3: Implementation and Preliminary Evaluation

During Phase 3, working adult participants completed the 14-day audio-guided reflective process. Each session encouraged nonjudgmental observation of intention, emotion, speech, conduct, and relational impact. Participants were asked to relate the reflection to ordinary events rather than treat the exercise as an abstract doctrinal lesson. The brief format was intended to support adherence within realistic work schedules.

Measures

The Emotional Well-Being Questionnaire (EWBQ) contained 17 items rated on a five-point Likert scale and assessed four domains: (1) Emotional

Awareness and Positivity, (2) Social Connection and Support, (3) Meaningful Engagement, and (4) Accomplishment and Growth. It was administered before the intervention and again on Day 14. Follow-up interviews and reflective accounts were used to examine participants' interpretations of the process and perceived changes in emotional and interpersonal functioning.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively by comparing pretest and posttest scores for the four EWBQ domains. Qualitative material was analyzed inductively to identify recurring patterns in ethical awareness, emotional regulation, communication, relational responsibility, and the feasibility of daily practice. The two strands were then interpreted together to determine whether the reported score patterns were consistent with participants' descriptions of change.

Ethical Considerations

Participation should be voluntary, based on informed consent, and accompanied by safeguards for confidentiality and withdrawal. Because the intervention concerns ethical conduct and emotional experience, participants should also be informed that the activity is educational and reflective, not a substitute for psychological or medical care.

Research Results

The research results are presented according to the three research objectives in order to demonstrate the development of knowledge from conceptual understanding toward the creation of a practical process for observing the Five Precepts to enhance emotional well-being among working adults.

1. *Concepts, Contexts, Problems, and Needs Related to Emotional Well-being Among Working Adults*

The findings indicate that working adults encounter multiple emotional and ethical challenges in contemporary working environments. Rapid changes in organizational structures, performance expectations, and communication patterns require individuals to continuously adapt their behavior and decision-making processes. Participants reported experiencing emotional pressure arising from workload responsibility, time limitations, interpersonal expectations, and the need to maintain professional performance standards. These factors influence

emotional balance and may affect the ability to maintain constructive relationships in the workplace.

Participants frequently described situations involving internal conflict between personal values and external expectations. Some individuals experienced difficulty managing emotional reactions in communication, particularly in situations involving disagreement, misunderstanding, or perceived unfairness. Emotional responses such as frustration, anxiety, and self-doubt were described as influencing decision-making processes and interpersonal interaction. The findings suggest that emotional well-being is closely related to the ability to maintain awareness of intention and to regulate responses in challenging situations.

In addition, participants indicated a need for practical guidance to support emotional balance without requiring an extensive time commitment. Many working adults reported limited availability for long-duration training programs due to professional responsibilities. The findings suggest that short-duration reflective practice integrated into daily routines may provide a feasible approach to supporting gradual emotional development. Participants expressed openness to learning approaches that emphasize practical application over theoretical instruction alone.

The results indicate that emotional well-being is influenced not only by external conditions but also by internal processes related to awareness, intention, and interpretation of experience. Participants demonstrated interest in approaches that support constructive reflection on daily experiences, particularly those that encourage greater sensitivity toward the impact of one's actions on oneself and others.

2. The Five Precepts as a Framework for Ethical Awareness and Emotional Regulation

The findings demonstrate that the Five Precepts can function as a framework supporting awareness of intention, communication, and interpersonal responsibility in daily life. Participants reported that reflection on the principles of non-harming, respect for others' resources, responsibility in relationships, truthful communication, and clarity of mind encouraged greater consideration of the consequences of their actions. The Five Precepts were perceived not as restrictive rules but as supportive reference points guiding thoughtful behavior and emotional balance.

Reflection on non-harming was associated with increased sensitivity toward the emotional impact of speech and behavior. Participants described becoming more aware of how their communication style affects others' feelings, leading to greater caution in expressing disagreement or criticism. This awareness contributed to more constructive interaction patterns and reduced interpersonal tension.

Respect for others' resources was interpreted as encouraging responsibility, fairness, and transparency in professional contexts. Participants reported increased attentiveness to ethical considerations in decision-making situations involving shared responsibility and organizational resources. This awareness contributed to greater confidence in maintaining professional integrity.

Responsibility in relationships was associated with increased awareness of interpersonal boundaries and mutual respect. Participants reflected on the importance of maintaining clarity of intention in communication, particularly in situations involving collaboration and teamwork. Truthful communication supported greater consistency between intention and expression, reducing emotional discomfort associated with miscommunication or misunderstanding.

Clarity of mind was described as supporting increased awareness of emotional impulses and behavioral tendencies. Participants reported that reflection on clarity of mind encouraged more careful consideration of actions, contributing to improved emotional regulation and reduced impulsive reaction.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the Five Precepts provide a practical framework for fostering awareness of intention, behavioral responsibility, emotional regulation, and constructive interpersonal interaction in contemporary daily life. Participants perceived ethical reflection as contributing to emotional stability, thoughtful decision-making, and more harmonious relationships with others.

3. Development and Evaluation of the Five Precepts Reflective Process

The research developed a structured reflective process consisting of a 14-day sequence of short-duration audio-guided reflections designed to support gradual ethical awareness. The process translated the Five Precepts into relatable daily-life situations, allowing participants to observe the relationship between intention, action, and emotional consequence. The reflective structure

encouraged participants to consider how everyday decisions influence both personal emotional experience and interpersonal relationships.

Participants engaged in daily reflections lasting approximately four to six minutes, enabling the integration of ethical awareness into regular professional routines. The short-duration structure supported continuity of practice and reduced perceived burden associated with longer training formats. Participants reported that the brief format facilitated consistent engagement and allowed reflection to occur naturally within daily activities.

Quantitative findings from the Emotional Well-Being Questionnaire (EWBQ) indicate observable increases across the four domains of emotional well-being following participation in the reflective process. Improvements were observed in Emotional Awareness and Positivity, Social Connection and Support, Meaningful Engagement, and Accomplishment and Growth. The findings suggest that reflective engagement with the Five Precepts may contribute to enhanced emotional awareness and a greater sense of constructive participation in daily activities.

Qualitative interviews indicate that participants experienced gradual development in their perception of everyday situations. Several participants described increased awareness of the relationship between intention and emotional outcome, leading to greater consideration before responding in challenging situations. Participants also reported increased appreciation for the role of ethical awareness in supporting interpersonal harmony and personal sense of meaning.

The findings demonstrate that the Five Precepts reflective process can serve as a practical developmental framework that supports emotional awareness and ethical sensitivity in contemporary working life. The structured reflective format allows individuals to gradually develop consistency between intention, action, and emotional understanding, contributing to improved emotional balance and constructive relational interaction.

Discussion

The findings indicate that a structured Five Precepts reflective process may support emotional well-being among working adults by strengthening ethical awareness, emotional regulation, and interpersonal responsibility. Participants reported greater awareness of the relationship among intention, emotion, speech,

and action, as well as an increased ability to pause before responding in stressful situations. These changes are consistent with mindfulness research showing that non-judgmental awareness can reduce automatic reactivity and strengthen self-regulation (Baer, 2003; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). They also support Wallace and Shapiro's (2006) view that attentional and emotional balance are mutually reinforcing foundations of well-being.

The findings related to the first objective show that emotional difficulties in the workplace arise not only from workload and time pressure but also from interpersonal expectations, value conflicts, and uncertainty in decision-making. This interpretation is compatible with multidimensional accounts of well-being that emphasize positive relationships, purpose, engagement, and personal growth rather than the mere absence of distress (Diener, 2000; Keyes, 2002; Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2011). Participants' descriptions suggest that emotional strain becomes more manageable when individuals can examine their reactions and reconnect daily conduct with personal values.

The second objective demonstrated that the Five Precepts can be interpreted as a practical framework for contemporary ethical and emotional development. Non-harming encouraged sensitivity to the effects of speech and behavior; respect for resources supported fairness and responsibility; responsibility in relationships strengthened interpersonal boundaries; truthful communication promoted consistency between intention and expression; and clarity of mind encouraged awareness of impulses. This interpretation accords with Buddhist accounts of ethical conduct as training that supports restraint, responsibility, and mental clarity (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2010; Hanh, 1998). It also reflects broader ethical perspectives emphasizing compassion, accountability, and the transformation of destructive emotions (Dalai Lama, 1999; Goleman, 2003).

The third objective showed that the 14-day audio-guided format was practical for participants with limited time. Brief daily reflection appeared to help participants integrate ethical awareness into ordinary work and family situations. Reports of increased patience, more respectful communication, and reduced impulsivity are also compatible with research on self-compassion, which suggests that a less judgmental stance toward difficulty can support healthier emotional responses (Neff, 2003). However, these findings should not be interpreted as proof of effectiveness.

The study's principal contribution is its integration of Buddhist ethical principles with a brief, structured reflective practice. Rather than treating the Five Precepts solely as religious rules, the process operationalizes them as daily prompts linking intention, consequence, emotional regulation, and relational conduct. Nevertheless, the small sample, short intervention period, self-reported outcomes, and absence of a control group limit causal inference. Larger controlled studies using validated measures and follow-up assessments are therefore required.

The New Body of Knowledge

The new body of knowledge generated by this research identifies a developmental mechanism by which observing the Five Precepts enhances emotional well-being among working adults. The findings demonstrate that the Five Precepts operate not merely as moral guidelines but as a reflective framework that promotes ethical awareness in everyday life. Through structured daily reflection, individuals become more aware of the relationship between intention, action, and emotional consequences, leading to greater behavioral responsibility and interpersonal sensitivity.

The research further reveals that ethical awareness serves as a mediating process linking observance of the Five Precepts to emotional well-being. Increased awareness of intention and behavioral consequences contributes to improved emotional regulation, more constructive interpersonal interaction, and greater consistency between personal values and daily conduct. These developments collectively support emotional balance, meaningful engagement, and positive social relationships.

Based on these findings, the study proposes the Five Precepts Reflective Process Model, in which observance of the Five Precepts, when integrated through short-duration reflective practice, leads to ethical awareness, emotional regulation, and enhanced emotional well-being. This model provides a practical and replicable framework for applying Buddhist ethical principles within contemporary professional settings and contributes a new conceptual understanding of how ethical reflection supports psychological well-being in everyday life.

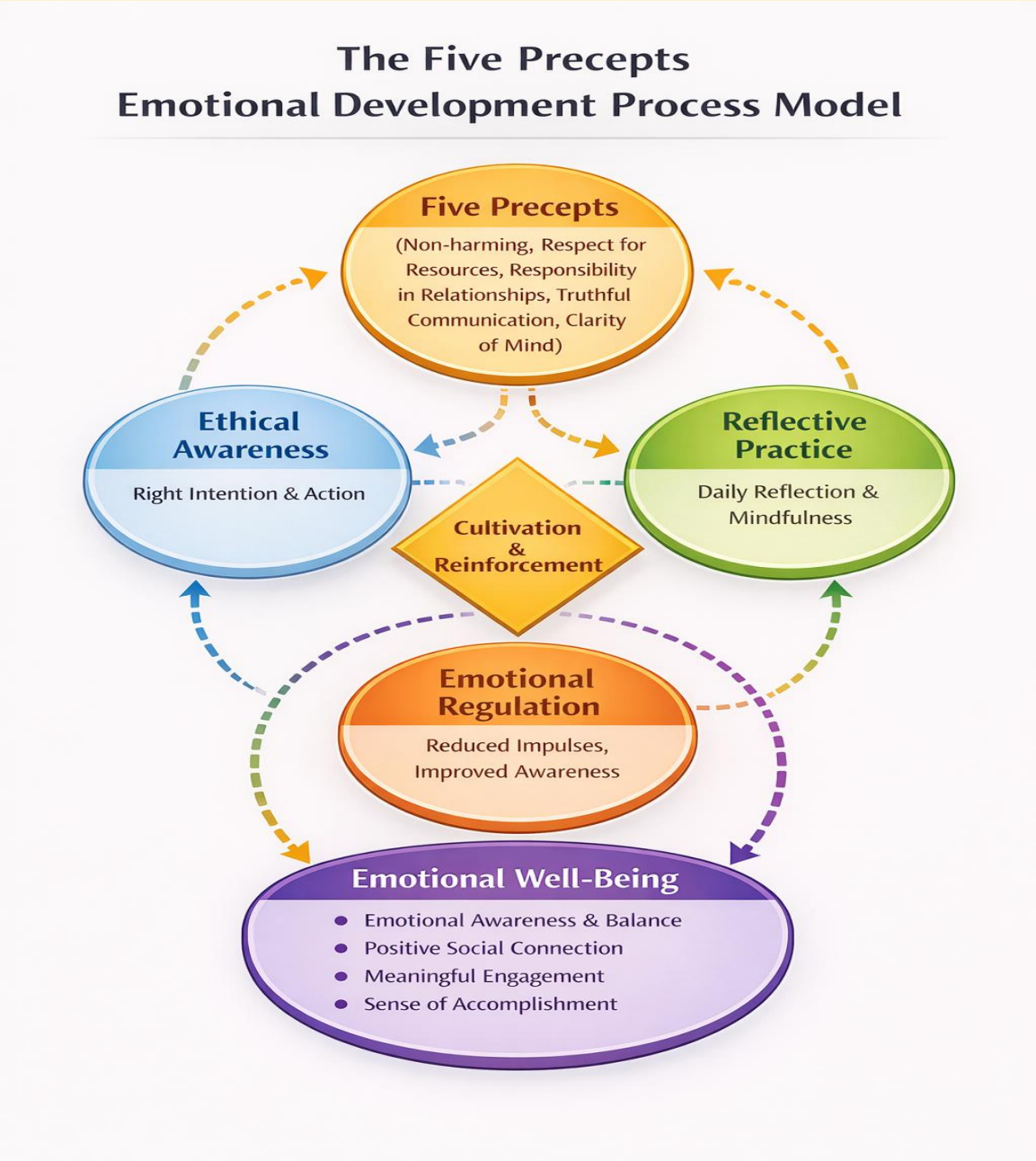

Figure 2. The Five Precepts Emotional Development Process Model

Conclusion

This study developed and preliminarily evaluated a 14-day audio-guided process that translated the Five Precepts into short reflective practices for working adults. The process addressed non-harming, respect for resources, responsibility in relationships, truthful communication, and clarity of mind through ordinary situations involving emotion, speech, judgment, and interpersonal consequence.

The qualitative findings suggest that participants became more attentive to the relationship among intention, emotional response, action, and relational

impact. They described pausing before reacting, communicating more carefully, and considering the effects of their conduct on others. Descriptive EWBQ comparisons were reported as showing higher posttest scores across four domains of emotional well-being, but exact statistics and psychometric information are required before the magnitude or reliability of these changes can be assessed.

The principal contribution of the research is the Five Precepts Emotional Development Process Model. The model proposes that ethical principles become psychologically relevant through reflective practice, heightened ethical awareness, and improved emotional regulation. Its value lies in connecting Buddhist moral cultivation with concrete patterns of decision-making and communication rather than treating the precepts as abstract rules.

The findings remain preliminary. The study lacks the methodological detail and comparative evidence necessary to establish effectiveness or causal mechanisms. Before publication, the authors must report the sample, recruitment, ethics approval, instrument development and reliability, exact quantitative results, qualitative procedures, adherence, and limitations. Subsequent research should use validated measures, control or comparison conditions, diverse occupational samples, and follow-up assessment. Under these conditions, the Five Precepts Reflective Process may provide a promising framework for examining how ethical awareness and contemplative reflection jointly support emotional and relational well-being in contemporary work life.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should strengthen the empirical evaluation of the Five Precepts Reflective Process through larger and more diverse samples. Participants should be recruited from different occupational sectors, age groups, organizational levels, and cultural backgrounds to determine whether the process is applicable beyond the present research setting. Particular attention should be given to high-stress professions, including healthcare, education, social services, and information technology.

More rigorous research designs are also required. Randomized controlled trials should compare the Five Precepts Reflective Process with conventional mindfulness programs, general well-being education, or no-intervention control groups. Future studies should employ validated psychological instruments, report reliability coefficients and effect sizes, and include follow-up assessments to

examine whether changes in emotional awareness, regulation, relationships, and meaningful engagement are sustained over time.

Further research should also investigate the mechanisms through which ethical reflection influences emotional well-being. Mediation analysis may clarify whether ethical awareness, behavioral self-regulation, compassion, or consistency between values and actions explains the observed outcomes. Component-based studies could compare the relative contribution of each precept and determine whether particular principles are more relevant to specific emotional or interpersonal challenges.

Qualitative inquiry should be expanded through in-depth interviews, reflective diaries, and workplace observations to capture how participants apply the precepts in real situations. Future studies should also examine adherence, engagement, and preferred audio formats. Such evidence would support refinement of the intervention and its adaptation for organizational training, professional development, and broader well-being programs.

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The Development Process of the Practice of Gratitude to the Buddha to Enhance Emotional Well-Being for Working Professionals

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Abstract

This study developed and evaluated a 14-day Buddhānussati-based gratitude practice program designed to support emotional well-being among working professionals. The objectives were to examine participants' emotional and spiritual needs, construct a structured practice protocol, and explore preliminary changes following implementation. A mixed-methods research-and-development design was conducted in three phases: a qualitative needs assessment; program development and validation by 9 experts; and a one-group pretest–posttest implementation with 17 working professionals. Quantitative data were collected using the PERMA-Profiler, while qualitative data were obtained through semistructured interviews and participant reflections. The needs assessment identified emotional fatigue, cognitive overload, social isolation, performance anxiety, and a diminished sense of meaning. In response, the program adopted a sequential structure: forgiveness and khama-kamma reflection, recollection of the Buddha's qualities through Buddhānussati and Dhamma Kita (melodic Dhamma chanting), and integration into daily routines. Descriptive results showed that the overall well-being mean increased from 4.21 before the program to 4.43 after the program. The largest mean changes occurred in Positive Emotion (+0.35) and Meaning (+0.25), followed by Emotional Regulation (+0.23) and Relationships (+0.18). Participants also reported greater calm, attentional stability, relational awareness, and purpose. Because the study used a small purposive sample, self-reported outcomes, a short intervention period, and no control group or inferential analysis, the findings indicate feasibility and potential benefit rather than established effectiveness. The study contributes a preliminary applied model linking forgiveness, Buddhist recollection, gratitude, and brief workplace-compatible contemplative practice.

Keywords: Buddhānussati; Gratitude; Emotional Well-being; Working Professionals; Mental Immunity; Dhamma Kita

Introduction

Contemporary working life is characterized by rapid technological change, continuous communication, high performance expectations, and increasingly blurred boundaries between occupational and personal time. Although employment can provide identity, social connection, and meaning, unmanaged psychosocial demands may contribute to stress, emotional exhaustion, reduced attentional clarity, and interpersonal difficulty. International guidance consequently treats mental health at work as both an organizational responsibility and an individual well-being concern (World Health Organization, 2022). For working professionals, emotional well-being involves more than the absence of distress; it includes positive emotion, engagement, supportive relationships, meaning, accomplishment, and the capacity to regulate responses under pressure (Butler & Kern, 2016; Seligman, 2011).

Positive psychology research identifies gratitude as a cognitive-affective orientation that directs attention toward benefits, sources of support, and valued aspects of experience. Experimental and meta-analytic findings indicate that structured gratitude activities can improve well-being, although effects are typically modest and depend on the population, intervention format, and outcome assessed (Cregg & Cheavens, 2021; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Wood et al., 2010). Spiritual gratitude may also be associated with meaning and spiritual well-being when appreciation is directed toward a transcendent source or moral ideal (Rosmarin et al., 2011; Mills et al., 2015). These findings support the use of gratitude as a reflective practice but do not justify assuming that all gratitude interventions produce lasting psychological change.

Mindfulness and related contemplative practices provide a complementary mechanism. By strengthening present-moment awareness and reducing automatic reactivity, mindfulness may support emotional regulation and reduce exhaustion in workplace contexts (Baer, 2003; Hülsheger et al., 2013; Lomas et al., 2018). Forgiveness-oriented interventions may likewise reduce persistent anger, guilt, and resentment, thereby creating greater readiness for constructive emotional engagement (Wade et al., 2014). From a Buddhist perspective, ethical restraint, wise attention, gratitude, and recollection are not isolated techniques but mutually supportive aspects of mental cultivation. Buddhānussati, or recollection of the Buddha, directs attention toward qualities regarded as worthy of confidence and emulation, while gratitude is presented as a rare and valuable personal quality in the early Buddhist discourses (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012).

Despite increasing research on gratitude, mindfulness, and workplace well-being, limited empirical attention has been given to a structured program that combines forgiveness, Buddhānussati, and melodic Dhamma chanting in a brief format suitable for working professionals. The present study addresses this gap by developing and preliminarily evaluating a 14-day program organized around the "cleansing," "cultivating," and "stabilizing" phases. Rather than claiming clinical efficacy, the study examines the program's conceptual coherence, feasibility, and preliminary association with changes in self-reported well-being and participant experience.

Research Objectives

1. To study the problems and circumstances of working professionals
2. To study the development process of the practice of gratitude to the Buddha and its effects on emotional well-being for working professionals.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of the developed Buddhānussati and forgiveness practice program on the emotional well-being of participating working professionals.

Literature Review

Gratitude, Spirituality, and Emotional Well-Being

Gratitude is commonly conceptualized as both a temporary emotional response and a broader disposition to recognize benefits received from people, circumstances, or transcendent sources. Emmons and McCullough (2003) demonstrated that systematic attention to blessings can influence positive affect and subjective well-being. Subsequent reviews and meta-analyses have found generally beneficial but heterogeneous effects, indicating that gratitude practices should be evaluated according to intervention intensity, comparison conditions, and participant characteristics (Cregg & Cheavens, 2021; Wood et al., 2010). Gratitude is therefore better treated as a potentially useful process than as a universally effective intervention.

Spiritual forms of gratitude may extend beyond positive appraisal by connecting experience to meaning, moral orientation, and perceived relationship with a sacred source. Mills et al. (2015) found that gratitude was associated with spiritual well-being in a clinical population, while Watkins et al. (2021) examined gratitude directed toward God as a distinctive religious orientation. Although

such findings cannot be transferred automatically across religious traditions, they support the proposition that gratitude anchored in a spiritual framework may differ experientially from secular gratitude exercises. Within Buddhist traditions, gratitude and appreciation are associated with recognition of benefit, moral sensitivity, and respect for worthy persons (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012).

Mindfulness, Forgiveness, and Workplace Well-Being

Mindfulness-based interventions cultivate receptive awareness of present experience and have been widely adapted for clinical, educational, and occupational settings. Reviews indicate that mindfulness programs can reduce psychological stress and support well-being, although study quality and effect sizes vary (Baer, 2003; Goyal et al., 2014). In the workplace, mindfulness has been associated with lower emotional exhaustion and improved job satisfaction through emotion-regulation processes (Hülsheger et al., 2013). A systematic review and meta-analysis likewise reported beneficial workplace outcomes while emphasizing heterogeneity in program content and research design (Lomas et al., 2018).

Forgiveness is relevant when emotional distress is sustained by perceived injury, guilt, hostility, or unresolved relational conflict. Meta-analytic evidence suggests that structured forgiveness interventions can reduce negative affect and improve psychological outcomes (Wade et al., 2014). Forgiveness should not be interpreted as excusing harm or removing accountability; rather, it may involve a deliberate reduction in retaliatory motivation and persistent resentment. This distinction is important for the present program, which positions forgiveness and khama-kamma reflection as preparatory practices intended to reduce emotional obstruction before gratitude-oriented recollection.

Buddhānussati, Positive Emotion, and Meaning

Buddhānussati is the recollection of the Buddha through sustained attention to qualities traditionally summarized in the formula of the Buddha's virtues. In applied terms, this practice may function as attentional redirection toward a stable moral and spiritual exemplar. Such redirection is conceptually compatible with broaden-and-build theory, which proposes that positive emotions can expand momentary thought–action repertoires and contribute to enduring personal resources (Fredrickson, 2001). Loving-kindness practice has similarly been associated with increases in positive emotion and psychosocial resources over time (Fredrickson et al., 2008). These parallels should be

understood as conceptual correspondences rather than claims that Buddhist constructs and positive psychological constructs are equivalent.

The use of melodic chanting adds a sensory and cultural dimension to the intervention. Research on contemplative and rhythmic practices suggests that auditory structure can facilitate sustained attention and emotional engagement, but the physiological mechanisms and comparative advantages of Dhamma Kita specifically remain insufficiently established. Accordingly, the present study treats melodic chanting as a program component whose acceptability and perceived usefulness require empirical assessment, not as a proven method for autonomic regulation. The central research gap is therefore the absence of a clearly specified, workplace-compatible program that sequences forgiveness, Buddhānussati, and brief daily integration and then examines both quantitative and qualitative outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

This study utilizes a four-stage developmental approach grounded in applied Buddhist psychology to alter the emotional landscape of modern workers. The Analysis and Synthesis phase outlines the specific emotional challenges faced by working professionals and the strategies needed to mitigate them. The study combines modern delivery methods with traditional spiritual practices. The Program Development stage carefully establishes a protocol that aligns with professionals' usual workflows and accounts for the current environment. It also draws attention to cultural metaphors that show involvement and pragmatism. The second part of the paradigm stresses the importance of empirical validation and careful evaluation for long-term use. This phase evaluates the intervention's efficacy in alleviating stress and rumination while fostering positive affect and prosocial behavior. The Final Model Presentation introduces the "Model of Gratitude to Buddha Practice" as a robust foundation for enduring psychological well-being. This adaptable framework is suitable for professional training, public health initiatives, and individual practice. It integrates traditional self-reflection with a systematic growth cycle to offer a sustainable solution for emotional resilience and "Luminous Mind" in the contemporary workplace.

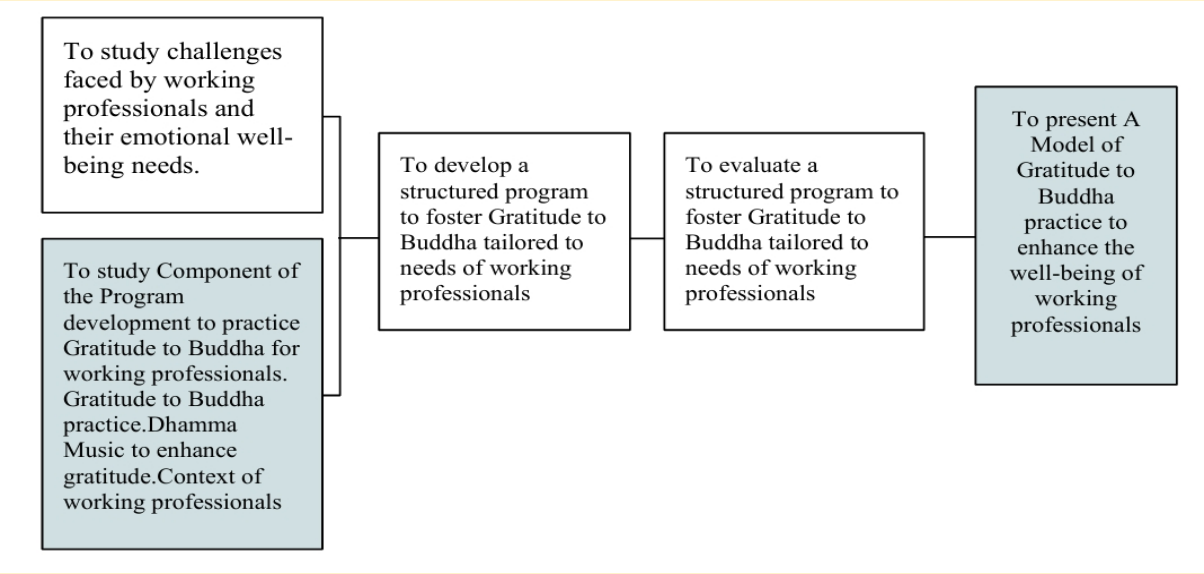

Figure 1: Conceptual Frameworks

Research Methodology

The study employed a rigorous Mixed-Methods Research (MMR) approach following a three-phase Research and Development (R&D) scheme. This combination method allows the use of both qualitative and quantitative data in three ways to provide a full picture of the proposed intervention plan. The study is structured in a series of steps that together form a path from theoretical research to concrete proof.

Phase I: Needs Assessment and Qualitative Exploration

The initial phase will consist of qualitative semi-structured interviews with seventeen carefully selected Buddhist scholars and mental health practitioners to understand the specific emotional, cognitive, and spiritual needs of working professionals. The cohort was assessed to identify the major institutional stressors and psychological deficits contributing to employee burnout. The qualitative reflections underwent rigorous thematic analysis to identify key themes that informed the structural design of the practice intervention.

Phase II: Program Development and Expert Validation

In the second step, the structured intervention model was initially designed and underwent a rigorous content validation process. To ensure the draft protocol was theoretically correct, morally acceptable, and usable in high-stress work environments, it was given to a group of nine prominent scholars and practitioners

(N=9) in the fields of Buddhist studies, clinical psychology, and new mindfulness frameworks. The experts who validated the "Cleansing-before-Cultivating" method examined its construction and confirmed that Forgiveness should be the first step before developing spiritual gratitude through Buddhānussati. The nine experts' qualitative feedback and Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) suggestions were carefully examined and synthesized. This led to the development of the 14-day micro-practice protocol and to the conclusion that Dhamma Kita (melodic chanting) is the most effective way for modern corporate professionals to relax their autonomic nervous systems.

Phase III: Experimental Evaluation and Ethical Safeguards

The last stage was the evaluation of the developed program's effectiveness using a pre-test-post-test quasi-experimental design with 17 working professionals who exhibited high levels of stress at baseline. The main quantitative tool was the PERMA-Profiler assessment, which measures structural dimensions of human flourishing, and structured qualitative interviews were used to collect participant reflections. Quantitative data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, specifically the Mean and Standard Deviation, to map emotional changes, and thematic and content analysis was used to assess qualitative feedback.

Ethical safeguards and protection of human subjects: This research was conducted in full compliance with institutional ethical standards. All working professionals who participated gave written informed consent prior to the start of the 14-day intervention period. Participants were clearly advised of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the data collection process by anonymizing individual identities using key codes (KP 1 to KP 17). Thus, this multi-step methodological framework provides an empirical, evidence-based structure that demonstrates the structured model's utility as a practical, non-ritualistic method for enhancing psychological health and emotional stability in contemporary corporate contexts.

Research Results

Objective 1: To study the problems and circumstances of working professionals.

The empirical study of the main objective demonstrated a significant well-being deficit among modern working professionals, reflected in constant

emotional fatigue, cognitive overload, and a significant decrease in satisfaction with everyday life. Quantitative and qualitative data indicated a high-stress baseline, directly correlating with the Buddhist psychological state of mental agitation and restlessness, named Uddhacca-kukkucca. The source of this alarming baseline condition is largely the unending digital connectivity, whimsical institutional demands, and burdensome professional responsibilities that push employees towards cognitive fragmentation and deep-seated internal insecurity. Based on the multi-dimensional PERMA framework, the study's results show that participants exhibited a significant lack across all structural dimensions, with a critical lack of Positive Emotion and Meaning (Seligman, 2011). This systemic deficit highlights a profound psychic disconnect between the participants' daily corporate responsibilities and their fundamental personal values. To provide a structured and transparent overview of these baseline vulnerability patterns, the primary emotional and situational challenges identified during the needs assessment phase were systematically organized. Table 1.1 presents the structural breakdown of these workplace difficulties, with representative qualitative evidence from the key informants (KP 1 to KP 17) to provide a sense of the real-world professional experiences underpinning the quantitative metrics.

Table 1. PERMA-Based Structural Breakdown of Emotional and Workplace Challenges

PERMA Dimension	Primary Theme (Challenges)	% of Informants (N=17)	Representative Quote from Key Informants
P – Positive Emotion	Emotional Exhaustion and Stress	80%	"I feel stressed every day; there's no space for joy after work." — KP 2
E – Engagement	Burnout & Lack of Flow	65%	"My mind wanders to my to-do list even when I'm trying to rest." — KP 11
R – Relationships	Social Isolation	70%	"Working so hard makes me feel lonely; I've lost touch with my support system." — KP 4
M – Meaning	Lack of Purpose	60%	"I just work for money now. I feel like my life lacks a deeper spiritual goal." — KP 17
A – Accomplishment	Anxiety & Perfectionism	55%	"Even with success, I worry about failure and societal expectations." — KP 15

The diagnostic results also revealed a lack of internal psychological defenses within the workforce. Specifically, there was a progressive decline in participants' Sati (mindfulness) and attentional control under conditions of

decision-making pressure and heavy workloads (Smith, 2020). This cognitive vulnerability often results in overactivation of threat responses and chronic rumination, which exacerbate feelings of isolation and hopelessness (Wei et al., 2025). An important and relevant finding from this baseline needs analysis is that modern professionals showed a clear preference for devotional practice over and above secular mindfulness practice. Roughly 70% of respondents reported feeling greater, more immediate internal peace and psychological stability when their cognitive focus was explicitly anchored to a clear external object of faith (Saddhā) than when engaging in unguided present-moment observation (Watkins et al., 2021).

As a result, the empirical data collected in this phase reconfirm the immediate practical need for a sustainable "Spiritual Anchor." This anchor must be presented as a modern, non-ritualistic micro-practice that serves as a highly accessible, portable refuge in volatile corporate environments (Jiwattanasuk, 2022; Satitpatanaphan, 2025). This baseline assessment provides empirical justification for the next phase of the study, confirming that the proposed intervention must successfully integrate traditional spiritual devotion with modern temporal efficiency. It is a highly effective way to transform stressful professional routines into a sustainable state of psychological resilience and emotional well-being. It translates the historical spiritual security into a functional asset in the corporate setting.

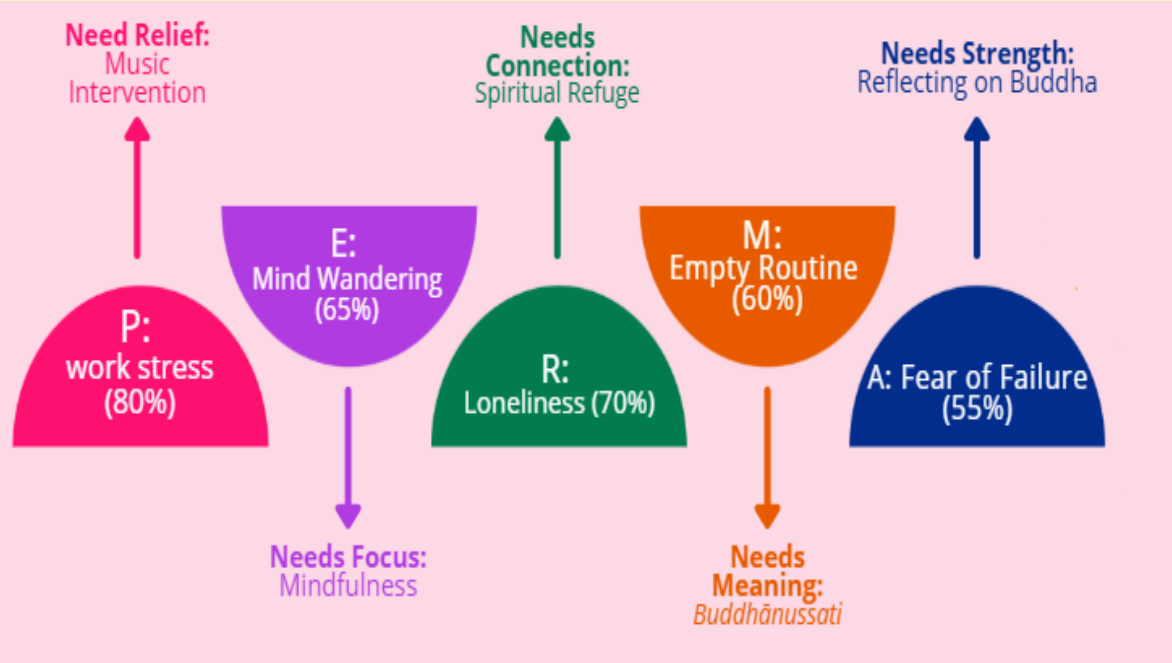

Figure 2: Identifying the Needs of Working Professionals

Objective No. 2: To Study the Components and Develop a Structured Gratitude to Buddha Program

The intervention was designed to be tested for real-world effectiveness in a quasi-experimental research setting with a strict 14-day micro-practice protocol. The course was carefully sequenced into developmental segments to fit the limited time available in busy professional schedules (Satitpatanaphan, 2025).

The course targeted the important first three days of mental clarity, including formal forgiveness methods and structured karma apologies to effectively address workplace guilt, interpersonal conflicts and recurring cognitive issues (Fredrickson, 2001). Between days 4-10, the importance of contemplation was revealed, now that the emotional foundation was in place. In this case, the focus was on a systematic collection of the Buddha's qualities (Buddhānussati) interwoven with calming, sensory-enhancing elements of Dhamma Kita (melodic chanting). This combination was specifically intended to promote parasympathetic dominance and to calm mental unrest (Jiwattanasuk, 2022; Weder, 2022). The final section, concerning Days 11–14, focused on the continued incorporation and stabilization of these practices and instructed individuals to concentrate on building up long-term psychological resources and developing eudaimonic resilience to effectively ward off occupational burnout (Anālayo, 2021; Seligman, 2011).

Table 2. Thematic Analysis of Emotional Well-being Challenges with Qualitative Evidence

PERMA Dimension	Challenge (N=17)	Design Strategy
P: Positive Emotion	80% Exhaustion	Dhamma Kita Music
E: Engagement	65% Distraction	Audio Guided Focus
R: Relationships	70% Social Isolation	Forgiveness Practice
M: Meaning	60% Lack of Purpose	*Buddhānussati*
A: Accomplishment	55% Performance Anxiety	14-Day Micro-practice

The working professional group (N=17) who had a confirmed baseline of high stress and severe emotional exhaustion in their respective corporate sectors were purposefully chosen for the experimental stage (Satitpatanaphan, 2025). They were a dense group, demographically and professionally, highly educated, mid-career, in high-pressure operational settings. As for the distribution of vocations, the majority of the sample comprises full-time corporate and company

employees (around 70%) and independent business owners and specialized management professionals, who face high institutional demands and daily decision-making pressures (Smith, 2020). Geographically, all participants were active working professionals in urban corporate sectors, with an age distribution primarily clustered around mid-career milestones, which directly correlates with heightened risks of vocational stagnation and structural burnout. Using this distinctive professional profile, the study collected a substantial dataset to evaluate the potential of a structured approach to spiritual gratitude to convert professional emotional exhaustion into sustainable psychological well-being by implementing a short 5- to 10-minute daily schedule.

It was a fundamental result from a panel of nine recognized experts during the content validation phase. It was found that the integration of Forgiveness (Khama-kamma) and Karma Apology is the mandatory and indispensable introductory component of the developed model. The validating experts pointed out that spiritual gratitude and positive emotional states can only be developed successfully if practitioners first systematically cleanse their internal cognitive space of residual ill will, hidden hostility, and workplace rivalries. This expert perspective is strongly supported by Fredrickson's (2001) positive psychology framework, which holds that the strategic deployment of positive psychological interventions can be optimized only when the preceding negative emotional obstructions and affective barriers are resolved. Without this initial mental clearing phase, residual anger, guilt, and resentment act as defensive cognitive blocks that actively block the generation of meditative joy, appreciative satisfaction, and sustainable emotional resilience in high-stress corporate environments.

When this inner emotional basis is decluttered, the developed program is offered to be introduced into the practice of Dhamma Kita (melodic chanting) as a novel sensory-enhanced anchor to help modern-day professionals who are dealing with heavy workloads and extensive cognitive noise. This rhythmic auditory stimulation is designed to capture sensory attention, stabilize the autonomic nervous system, and promote an effective shift toward parasympathetic dominance. Supporting this mechanism are neurobiological data reviewed by Weder (2022) that demonstrate that a switch in cognitive focus from professional threat states to reflective appreciation modulates neural networks, providing practitioners from diverse and multicultural backgrounds with an accessible and culturally adaptive way to deepen concentration.

The 14-day intervention protocol uses the traditional understanding of consecutive practice, called Anupada, to ensure the sustainability of this inner growth. This sequence of steps is intended to ease and guide the transition from a hard, high-stress work life to a mode of contemplation, of peace and quietness of the mind. Anālayo Bhikkhu (2021) describes systematic, gradual meditation practices to strengthen lasting habits and overcome mental blocks. It adapts the old contemplative practices into a quick daily micro-practice, without any ritual, that easily fits the fast pace of our modern digital lives. This approach helps busy people sharpen their focus, build their mental resilience, and cultivate a radiant mind amid the pressures of modern life.



Figure 3: Developed practice program 14days

Objective No. 3: To Evaluate the Effectiveness of the Gratitude to Buddha Program

The empirical evaluation for the third objective provides clear evidence that the 14-Day Buddhānussati and Forgiveness Practice protocol provides promising improvements on the emotional well-being and psychological resilience of the participating working professionals. Multi-dimensional PERMA-Profiler instrument quantitative tracking showed the cohort's Overall Well-being score improved from a pre-test Mean of 4.21 to a post-test Mean of 4.43. This positive variance is a functional shift from a stable 'High' well-being baseline to the 'Highest' overall well-being category in line with the established

assessment criteria. This quantifiable change indicates that even a short, systematically focused spiritual micro-practice can be effective in helping the professional mind shift from high-stress baselines to states of sustainable calm, thereby facilitating the recovery of the Pabhassara-citta (Luminous Mind) amidst intense institutional demands.

To interpret these quantitative shifts accurately, the mean score ranges were evaluated using standardized psychological interpretation levels. Table 3. Specific mean score cut-offs for assessing participants' subjective well-being states throughout the intervention period.

Table 3. Mean Score Interpretation Levels for Participant Well-Being

Mean Score Range	Interpretation Level (Well-being)
4.21 – 5.00	Highest
3.41 – 4.20	High
2.61 – 3.40	Moderate
1.81 – 2.60	Low
1.00-1.80	Lowest

According to these criteria, the pre-test and post-test differences were assessed for each structural pillar of the PERMA model. The complete statistical analysis is given in Table 4. The exact mean changes ( ) for each dimension after the 14-day protocol are given in Table 4.

The most notable enhancements were observed in Positive Emotion (+0.35) and Meaning (+0.25), providing considerable empirical support for the Broaden-and-Build Theory of Gratitude. Through the practice of Buddhānussati, participants effectively developed lasting spiritual and emotional reserves that alleviated emotional fatigue and addressed the "meaning gap" recognized in the initial phase. The increase in Emotional Regulation (+0.23) also indicates that the practice serves as a Mental Buffer, strengthening Mindfulness and Concentration. This helps people deal with too much information and not react as strongly to things that happen at work. Lastly, the increase in Relationships (+0.18) shows that the first two parts of Forgiveness and Karma Apology worked to reduce hostility between people, create positive relationships, and show that 14 days is enough time to start building habits that last and improve mental health.

Table 4. Statistical Evaluation and Pre-Test versus Post-Test Variations across PERMA Dimensions

Well-being Dimension	Pre-test Mean	Interpretation	Post-test Mean	Interpretation	Change (Δ)
P – Positive Emotion	4.13	High	4.48	Highest	+0.35
E – Engagement	4.31	Highest	4.41	Highest	+0.10
R – Relationships	4.13	High	4.31	Highest	+0.18
M – Meaning	4.31	Highest	4.56	Highest	+0.25
A – Accomplishment	4.22	Highest	4.34	Highest	+0.12
Emotional Regulation	4.22	Highest	4.45	Highest	+0.23
Overall Well-being	4.21	Highest	4.43	Highest	+0.22

The largest effects were found for Meaning (+0.25) and Positive Emotion (+0.35) after 14 days of intervention. The pattern is consistent with the evidence and in line with the broaden-and-build hypothesis of gratitude (Fredrickson, 2001). This theory holds that immediate gratitude increases intelligence and provides more mental resources in the long run. Through systematic Buddhānussati, participants' attention could be shifted from egocentric, work-related stresses to more elevated spiritual qualities. Emmons and McCullough (2003) and Watkins et al. (2021) found that this helped individuals avoid burnout in the workplace and find meaning in their work.

The 0.23-point increase in Emotional Regulation also indicates that the multi-part program serves as a mental cushion, strengthening Sati (mindfulness) and attentional control (Hülsheger et al., 2013). As Wei et al. (2025) suggested, this cognitive reinforcement helps corporate workers to deal with information overload and makes them relax when they face sudden stimuli in the workplace. Finally, the increase in the Relationships dimension (+0.18) shows that the early stages of Forgiveness (Khama-kamma) and Karma Apology successfully decreased hostility among people and eliminated guilt (Satitpatanaphan, 2021). This structural change improves relations among those working in high-stress environments. This suggests that a well-defined 14-day sequence is sufficient to

kick-start positive habits and build long-term mental resilience in today's professionals (Anālayo Bhikkhu, 2021; Smith, 2020).

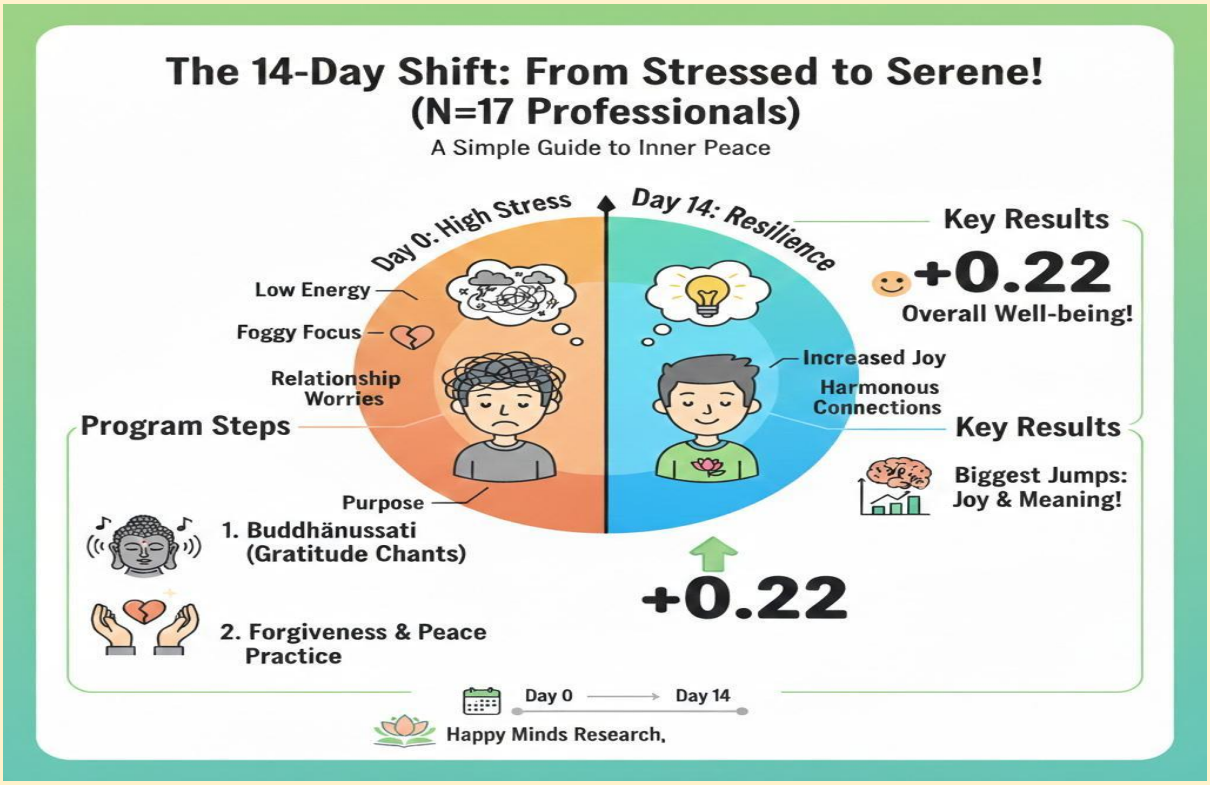

Figure 4: The result of 14-Day Buddhānussati & Forgiveness Practice

Discussion

The findings suggest that the proposed "Cleansing-before-Cultivating" sequence may serve as a useful preparatory framework for emotional development. Participants reported that forgiveness and karmic-apology practices helped them acknowledge guilt, resentment, and interpersonal tension before undertaking *Buddhānussati*. This interpretation is compatible with *sammā-saṅkappa* (Right Intention), particularly the cultivation of non-ill will. Nevertheless, because the study evaluated the complete intervention rather than testing its components separately, it cannot establish whether forgiveness was a necessary precondition for gratitude or independently produced the observed changes.

The largest descriptive improvements occurred in Positive Emotion (+0.35) and Meaning (+0.25). Recollection of the Buddha's nine qualities (*Nava-guṇa*) may have redirected attention from occupational stressors toward an admired spiritual exemplar, supporting cognitive reappraisal and purposeful engagement. This interpretation is consistent with the broaden-and-build theory,

according to which positive emotions may broaden thought–action repertoires and contribute to psychological resources (Fredrickson, 2001). It also accords with evidence that gratitude practice can improve well-being and reduce work-related stress (Cheng et al., 2015; Emmons & McCullough, 2003). The study's term "Spiritual Anchor" should therefore be understood as a proposed explanatory construct rather than a validated psychological measure.

Dhamma Kita, or melodic chanting, may have made contemplative practice more accessible to participants who experienced restlessness or difficulty with silent meditation. Preliminary research has found that brief rhythmic chanting can influence heart-rate variability and support relaxation (Inbaraj et al., 2022). However, the present study collected no physiological data and did not compare chanting with silent practice. It therefore cannot conclude that *Dhamma Kita* stabilized the autonomic nervous system or was superior to other contemplative formats.

Finally, the 14-day intervention appears sufficient to demonstrate feasibility, engagement, and short-term perceived improvement, but not enduring habit formation or "Mental Immunity." Habit research indicates that automaticity typically develops over longer and variable periods; one randomized study reported a median of 59 days among participants who successfully formed habits (Keller et al., 2021). Accordingly, the results should be treated as preliminary. Controlled studies with larger sample sizes, validated measures, component comparisons, and longer follow-up periods are required before claims of effectiveness, sustained resilience, or workplace scalability can be justified.

Knowledge from research

The principal knowledge generated by this study is a structured process that explains how Buddhānussati may be adapted as a brief contemplative practice for working professionals experiencing emotional strain, cognitive overload, and diminished meaning at work. The findings suggest that recollection of the Buddha's virtues can serve as a "Spiritual Anchor," redirecting attention from immediate occupational pressures toward qualities associated with wisdom, compassion, purity, and purposeful conduct. This shift may support emotional stability and strengthen participants' sense of meaning in their daily professional lives.

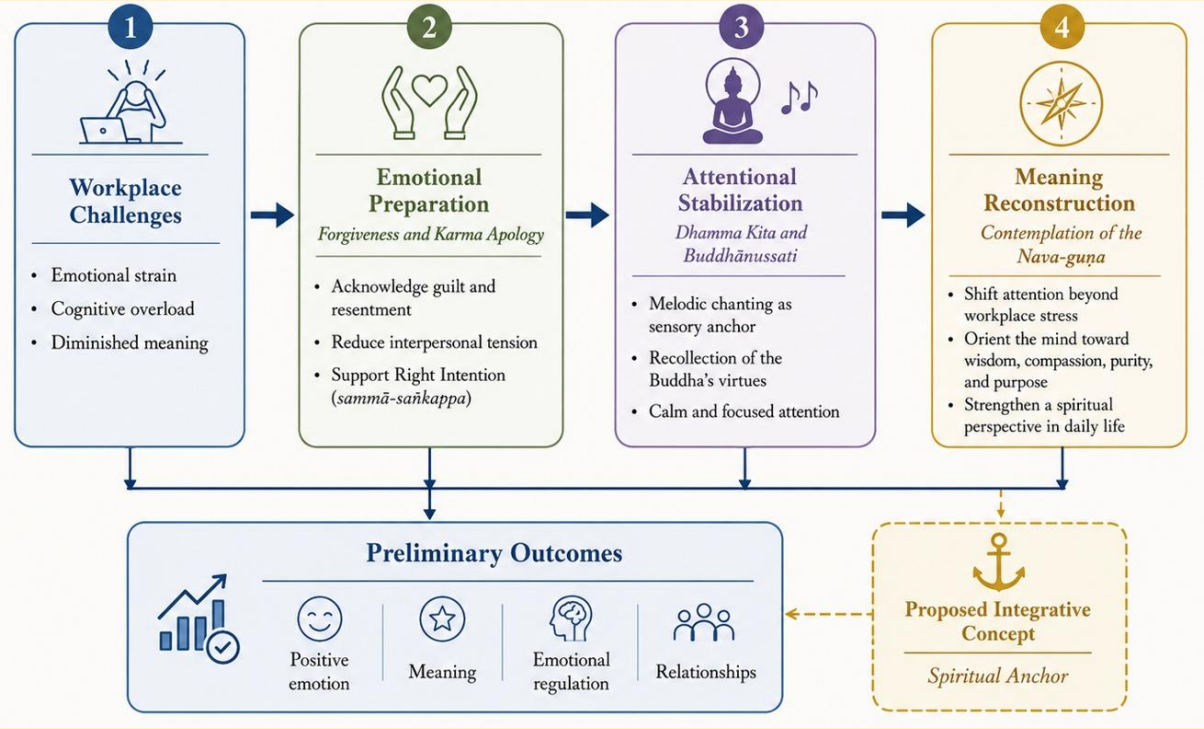

Figure 5. Buddhānussati Spiritual Anchor Model for Emotional Well-Being among Working Professionals

A second contribution is the proposed *Cleansing-before-Cultivating* sequence. The model begins with forgiveness and karmic-apology practices intended to help participants acknowledge guilt, resentment, interpersonal conflict, and unresolved emotional tension before engaging in gratitude-based recollection. This sequence is grounded in the Buddhist principle of *sammā-saṅkappa* (Right Intention), particularly the cultivation of non-ill will. The findings indicate that preparatory reflection may foster a more receptive psychological state conducive to cultivating gratitude, appreciative joy, and respectful interpersonal engagement. However, because the study did not test each intervention component separately, this sequence should be regarded as a proposed developmental mechanism rather than a confirmed causal pathway.

The study also identifies *Dhamma Kita*—melodic chanting—as an accessible delivery format for contemplative practice. Rhythmic audio may help working professionals sustain attention and engage with *Buddhānussati* more readily than through unguided silent practice. By focusing on the *Nava-guṇa*, or Nine Virtues of the Buddha, participants were encouraged to reframe stressful experiences through a spiritually meaningful perspective. The brief daily format further demonstrated the practical feasibility of integrating contemplative practice into demanding work schedules.

Taken together, these elements form the *Buddhānussati Spiritual Anchor Model*, consisting of three interconnected processes: emotional preparation through forgiveness, attentional stabilization through melodic recollection, and meaning reconstruction through contemplation of the Buddha's virtues. Improvements in positive emotion, meaning, emotional regulation, and relationships provide preliminary support for this framework. Nevertheless, concepts such as "Mental Immunity" and *pabhassara-citta* should be understood as interpretive Buddhist constructs rather than directly measured clinical outcomes. Further controlled research is required to confirm the model's mechanisms and long-term effects.

Conclusion

This study developed and preliminarily evaluated a 14-day Buddhānussati-based gratitude practice program for working professionals. The program responded to reported challenges involving emotional fatigue, distraction, social isolation, performance anxiety, and reduced meaning. Its distinctive structure placed forgiveness and khama-kamma reflection before guided Buddhānussati and Dhamma Kita, followed by a period of integration into daily routines.

Descriptive results showed increases across the reported well-being dimensions, with the largest mean changes in Positive Emotion and Meaning. Participant reflections also suggested that the program was manageable, emotionally supportive, and relevant to workplace experience. These findings support the feasibility of translating Buddhist contemplative principles into brief, accessible practices for contemporary professionals.

The evidence remains preliminary. The small purposive sample, high baseline scores, reliance on self-report, short duration, lack of a control group, and absence of inferential statistics preclude causal or clinical claims. The program should therefore be described as a promising developmental framework rather than a proven intervention. Its strongest contribution is the Cleansing–Cultivating–Stabilizing Model, which offers a testable structure for future research on forgiveness, Buddhist recollection, gratitude, and emotional well-being.

Suggestions

Future research should expand the longitudinal scope and methodological diversity of this study to validate the long-term sustainability of the Mental Immunity effect. While the 14-day protocol was sufficient for initial habit formation, additional research over six to twelve months is necessary to assess the robustness of the Spiritual Anchor during significant life transitions or organizational crises. Comparative studies may also investigate the efficacy of the Cleansing-before-Cultivating sequence across various cultural and religious contexts. For example, they could see if secular forgiveness practices work just as well when combined with different types of contemplative gratitude. Employing neuroimaging techniques (e.g., fMRI) or physiological indicators, such as heart rate variability (HRV), would provide objective biological evidence of how Dhamma Kita stabilizes the autonomic nervous system in high-stress populations.

To prevent employee burnout, human resources and company leaders should incorporate this Micro-practice strategy into their wellness initiatives. This 14-day structured approach seamlessly integrates into professionals' daily lives, enabling businesses under significant stress to implement it effectively. Experience Tranquility Breaks incorporates sensory-rich techniques such as singing, designed to help employees unwind after making significant decisions. By fostering Meaning and Positive Emotion through gratitude-based programs, leaders can enhance employee engagement, reduce hostility among coworkers, and cultivate a more harmonious workplace.

Mental health specialists and public health authorities are advised to use this integrated framework as a transdiagnostic tool to bolster emotional resilience among vulnerable groups. The effectiveness of the Forgiveness and Karma Apology preliminary phase suggests that clinical interventions for depression and anxiety could be significantly enhanced by addressing residual guilt and animosity before the application of positive psychology techniques. Additionally, the creation of digital health platforms, such as AI-driven applications or virtual reality environments that integrate the Nava-guṇa cognitive reframing framework, can improve accessibility for individuals in remote or underserved regions. By positioning the Luminous Mind model as a form of "Emotional Hygiene," public health initiatives can empower individuals to maintain their own

mental security and psychological flourishing in an increasingly fragmented digital world.

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A Psychological Study in Dealing with Conceit (Māna) According to Theravāda Buddhism

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Abstract

This qualitative documentary study examines conceit (māna) as a psychological and ethical problem within Theravāda Buddhism. It aims to investigate the nature and causes of conceit, analyze relevant Buddhist teachings, and formulate a practice-oriented framework for its management and eventual eradication. Primary sources included selected texts from the Sutta and Abhidhamma Piṭakas, together with authoritative commentaries and English translations. Secondary sources comprised scholarly works on Theravāda psychology, the five aggregates, insight meditation, and Buddhist approaches to mental cultivation.

The findings indicate that māna is not limited to overt arrogance but functions as a persistent process of self-referential measurement. It appears through comparisons in which individuals regard themselves as superior, equal, or inferior to others. From the Abhidhamma perspective, conceit is associated with greed-rooted consciousness and is sustained by ignorance, attachment, unwise attention, and identification with the five aggregates. Importantly, conceit must be distinguished from identity view (sakkāya-diṭṭhi): although identity view is abandoned at stream-entry, the subtle conceit "I am" (asmimāna) persists until Arahantship.

The study proposes a two-level framework for dealing with conceit. At the worldly level, ethical restraint, humility, mindfulness, loving-kindness, and wise attention can regulate its behavioral and emotional manifestations. At the supramundane level, insight into impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self progressively uproots the basis of self-comparison. The resulting framework demonstrates that Theravāda Buddhism addresses conceit through both practical self-regulation and radical transformation of self-identification. This model offers a conceptual foundation for Buddhist education, contemplative practice, conflict

reduction, and further interdisciplinary research on ego, social comparison, and psychological well-being.

Keywords: Conceit (Māna); Buddhist psychology; Wise attention; Non-self; Social comparison; Mental cultivation

Introduction

Conceit is a persistent psychological tendency that influences how individuals perceive themselves, evaluate others, and respond to social experience. It may be expressed openly through arrogance and domination, but it may also appear in subtler forms, including competitiveness, defensiveness, shame, resentment, and feelings of inferiority. These different expressions share a common structure: the mind continuously measures itself against other people. In contemporary societies shaped by competition, social visibility, organizational ranking, and digital comparison, this tendency can contribute to emotional insecurity, strained relationships, and recurring conflict.

Theravāda Buddhist psychology identifies conceit (māna) as more than an undesirable personality trait. It is a defilement that sustains attachment to identity and perpetuates suffering. The Abhidhamma associates māna with greed-rooted states of consciousness and describes it through terms such as elevation, haughtiness, self-exaltation, and the raising of the mind's banner (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012b). Its central psychological activity is comparison: "I am better," "I am equal," or "I am inferior." Inferiority is therefore not necessarily the opposite of conceit. It remains a form of conceit when experience continues to be organized around an objectified and measured "I."

A doctrinal distinction is necessary. Conceit should not be treated as identical to personality view or identity view (sakkāya-diṭṭhi). Identity view refers to the explicit belief that one or more of the five aggregates constitute a permanent self. This view is eradicated at stream-entry. Nevertheless, the residual tendency to experience "I am" (asmimāna) remains in advanced practitioners and is completely eliminated only with Arahantship (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000). Conceit is consequently more persistent than a consciously held theory of self. It operates affectively and habitually even after erroneous views have been intellectually or spiritually weakened.

The psychological significance of māna lies in its capacity to transform conditioned attributes, such as knowledge, status, appearance, achievement, morality, or religious experience, into grounds for self-evaluation. Such appropriation may produce pride when comparison is favorable, envy or hostility

when status is threatened, and shame or withdrawal when comparison is unfavorable. Theravāda Buddhism therefore treats conceit as both an intrapersonal and interpersonal problem.

This study examines the canonical and commentarial understanding of māna and develops a structured framework for dealing with it. It distinguishes between worldly practices that regulate conceit and supramundane insight that eradicates its underlying basis. By integrating doctrinal analysis with a psychological interpretation of attention, comparison, and self-identification, the study seeks to demonstrate the contemporary relevance of Theravāda teachings for emotional balance, ethical relationships, and liberation from compulsive self-measurement.

Research Objectives

1. To study the nature and causes of conceit (māna) according to Theravāda Buddhist scriptures.
2. To investigate the practical methods for managing conceit at both worldly and supramundane levels.
3. To propose a psychological model based on wise attention (yonisomanasikāra) and non-self (anattā) to reduce conceit in daily life.

Literature Review

Conceit in the Sutta and Abhidhamma Traditions

Early Buddhist texts portray conceit as a deeply embedded tendency connected with self-identification and comparison. The discourses repeatedly criticize the tendency to regard oneself as superior, equal, or inferior because all three judgments sustain attachment to the notion "I am" (Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu & Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1995). The Saṃyutta Nikāya further distinguishes the residual conceit "I am" from the explicit identity view, showing that subtle self-reference can persist even when coarse beliefs in a permanent self have been abandoned (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000).

The Abhidhamma provides a more analytical classification. Māna is treated as an unwholesome mental factor associated with certain forms of greed-rooted consciousness. It functions through elevation, comparison, and appropriation of personal qualities or experiences (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012b; Janakabhivamsa, 2009). This classification demonstrates that conceit is not merely an occasional emotion but a conditioned mental process arising when experience is interpreted through attachment and self-reference.

Conceit, the Aggregates, and Self-Construction

The five aggregates provide the principal framework for understanding how conceit is constructed. Form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness are conditioned processes rather than a permanent identity. When these processes are appropriated as "mine," "I," or "myself," they become foundations for attachment and comparison (Boisvert, 2006; Rāhula, 1974). Ñāṇananda Bhikkhu (1971) similarly explains that conceptual proliferation transforms conventional distinctions into rigid structures of identity. Conceit is therefore sustained not only by external social conditions but also by internal processes of naming, appropriation, and measurement.

Buddhaghosa (2010) situates the overcoming of such identification within the gradual cultivation of morality, concentration, and wisdom. Although ethical discipline can restrain arrogant conduct, it does not alone eliminate the latent tendency toward self-comparison. Complete transformation requires direct insight into the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless nature of conditioned phenomena.

Practical Approaches to Managing Conceit

Theravāda sources describe several practices relevant to regulating conceit. Ethical restraint reduces harmful speech and behavior, while humility (nivāta) weakens the impulse toward self-display. Mindfulness enables practitioners to recognize conceited thoughts without immediately acting upon them. Loving-kindness counters hostility and competition, and wise attention (yonisomanasikāra) examines the causes and consequences of self-referential thinking (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2010).

Insight meditation provides the deeper transformative mechanism. Through sustained observation of arising and passing phenomena, the practitioner gradually recognizes that no stable owner or controller can be found within the aggregates (Mahāsi Sayādaw, 1994; Ñāṇananda Bhikkhu, 2005). The literature nevertheless tends to discuss conceit either doctrinally or within broader accounts of meditation. A clear model differentiating its behavioral regulation from its supramundane eradication remains underdeveloped. The present study addresses this gap by organizing the relevant teachings into a two-level psychological framework.

Conceptual Framework

This study employs an *Input–Process–Outcome framework* to explain how conceit (*māna*) arises, how it may be regulated in daily life, and how its

underlying basis may ultimately be eradicated within Theravāda Buddhist psychology. The framework is derived from documentary analysis of the Pāḷi Canon, Abhidhamma literature, commentarial explanations, and modern scholarly interpretations of Buddhist psychology.

The *input dimension* concerns the psychological structure and causal conditions of conceit. *Māna* is understood as a self-referential process through which individuals compare themselves with others as superior, equal, or inferior. These three forms of comparison arise when conditioned phenomena—such as status, knowledge, appearance, wealth, morality, or spiritual attainment—are appropriated as "I" or "mine." The framework therefore identifies ignorance (*avijjā*), craving (*taṇhā*), unwise attention (*ayonisomanasikāra*), and attachment to the five aggregates as the principal conditions sustaining conceit (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000, 2012b; Boisvert, 2006).

The *process dimension* consists of two levels of intervention. At the worldly level (*lokiya*), ethical restraint (*sīla*), mindfulness (*sati*), humility (*nivāta*), loving-kindness (*mettā*), and wise attention (*yonisomanasikāra*) are used to recognize and regulate pride, defensiveness, rivalry, shame, and inferiority. Wise attention functions as the central cognitive mechanism because it redirects reflection from personal comparison toward causality, impermanence, and the conditioned nature of the attributes being evaluated (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2010).

At the supramundane level (*lokuttara*), insight meditation (*vipassanā*) examines the five aggregates through the three characteristics of impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*). This process weakens identification with the aggregates and progressively uproots the residual conceit "I am" (*asmimāna*) (Buddhaghosa, 2010; Mahāsi Sayādaw, 1994).

The *outcome dimension* includes two corresponding results. At the practical level, the framework anticipates reduced emotional reactivity, interpersonal conflict, competitiveness, and defensive self-evaluation. At the liberative level, sustained insight culminates in the complete eradication of conceit at Arahantship. The framework therefore distinguishes clearly between the management of conceit and its final cessation.

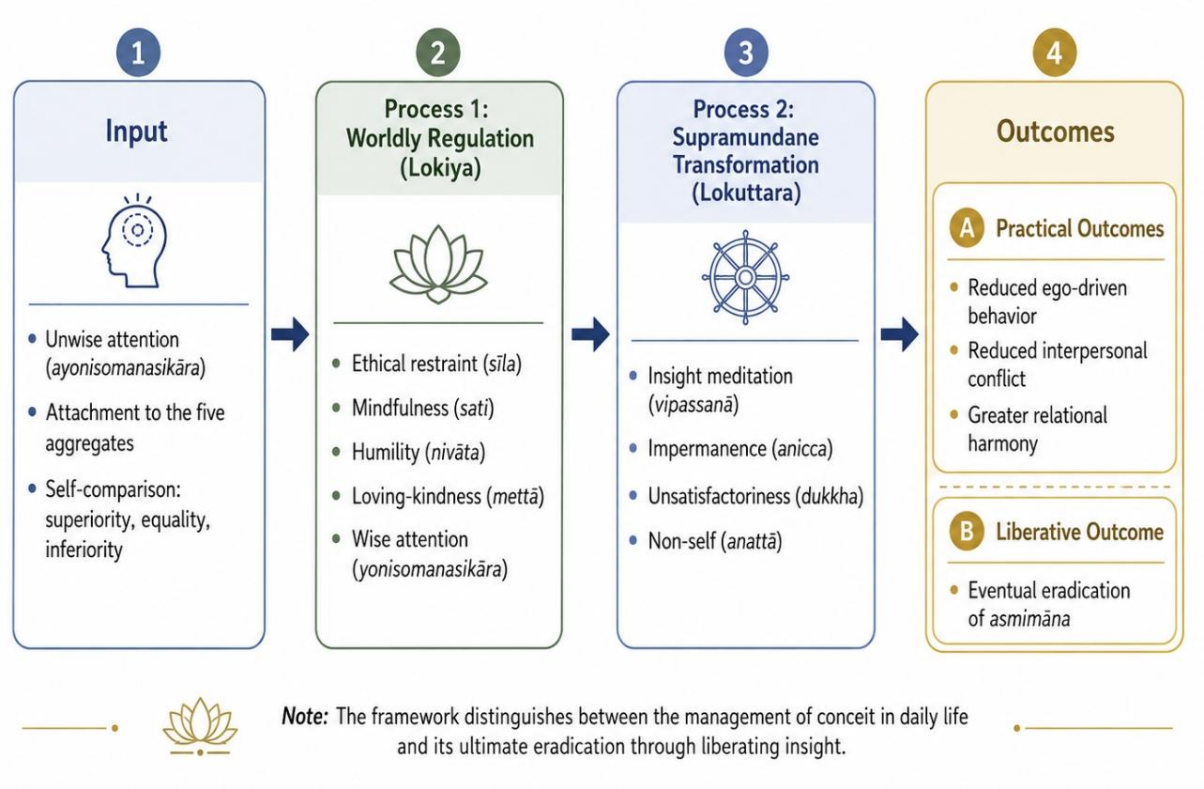

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Managing and Uprooting Conceit in Theravāda Buddhist Psychology

Research Methodology

This study employed a *qualitative documentary research design* to investigate the nature, causes, management, and eradication of conceit (*māna*) according to Theravāda Buddhism. Documentary research was appropriate because the study sought to interpret doctrinal and psychological concepts contained in canonical, commentarial, and scholarly texts rather than to measure participants' behavior or test an intervention empirically.

Data Sources

The documentary materials were divided into primary and secondary sources. Primary sources consisted of selected passages from the Pāḷi Canon, particularly the Sutta and Abhidhamma Piṭakas, together with relevant commentaries and subcommentaries. Particular attention was given to texts discussing *māna*, *asmimāna*, *mānānusaya*, the five aggregates, the higher fetters, wise attention, non-self, and the

stages of liberation. Authoritative English translations published by Wisdom Publications, the Buddhist Publication Society, and the Pali Text Society were used where appropriate (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000, 2012a, 2012b; Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu & Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1995).

Secondary sources included academic books, peer-reviewed articles, dissertations, and modern studies of Buddhist psychology, Abhidhamma, the five aggregates, insight meditation, self-construction, and mental cultivation (Boisvert, 2006; Buddhaghosa, 2010; Janakabhivamsa, 2009; Ñāṇananda Bhikkhu, 1971).

Data Collection

Relevant materials were identified through doctrinal and conceptual keywords, including *māna*, *asmimāna*, *mānānusaya*, *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, *ayonisomanasikāra*, *yonisomanasikāra*, *pañcakkhandha*, *anattā*, and *vipassanā*. Passages were selected when they directly addressed the definition, classification, causes, consequences, regulation, or eradication of conceit.

Data Analysis

The study used qualitative content analysis and interpretive synthesis. First, the selected passages were coded into three analytical categories: the nature and causes of conceit, practical methods for managing it, and the conditions required for its complete eradication. Second, similarities and distinctions among canonical, Abhidhamma, and commentarial explanations were compared. Third, the findings were organized into a two-level psychological model distinguishing worldly regulation from supramundane liberation.

To strengthen interpretive rigor, doctrinal claims were cross-checked across multiple textual sources, and modern psychological terminology was used cautiously to avoid treating Buddhist and contemporary constructs as equivalent. The resulting framework should therefore be understood as a theoretically derived model grounded in textual analysis, not as an empirically validated clinical intervention.

Research result

Objective 1: The Nature and Causes of Conceit (Māna) in Theravāda Buddhist Scriptures

The analysis indicates that *māna* is an unwholesome mental factor characterized by self-elevation, comparison, and attachment to a constructed identity. The Abhidhamma tradition describes conceit through such qualities as loftiness, haughtiness, self-exaltation, and the figurative "raising of the mind's banner." Psychologically, its principal function is measurement: the individual evaluates the self in relation to other people, social positions, personal characteristics, or spiritual attainments (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012b).

Three principal comparative expressions were identified. *Superiority conceit* (*seyyamāna*) occurs when individuals regard themselves as better than others and use status, knowledge, wealth, morality, or achievement as grounds for self-elevation. *Equality conceit* (*sadisamāna*) arises when individuals insist upon equivalence with others and remain invested in competitive self-positioning. *Inferiority conceit* (*hīnamāna*) appears when individuals consider themselves deficient or less worthy. Although inferiority may resemble low self-esteem rather than pride, it remains a form of conceit when attention continues to revolve around "I," "mine," and comparative personal value. The *Saṃyutta Nikāya* similarly treats the judgments "I am superior," "I am equal," and "I am inferior" as consequences of failing to understand the conditioned aggregates as they actually are (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000).

The findings further indicate that conceit is sustained by unwise attention (*ayonisomanasikāra*), ignorance, craving, and identification with the five aggregates. When form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness are appropriated as "I" or "mine," their changing attributes become foundations for pride, shame, rivalry, and defensive self-evaluation (Boisvert, 2006; Ñāṇananda Bhikkhu, 1971). However, *māna* should not be equated directly with identity view (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*). Explicit identity view may be abandoned, while the subtler residual conceit "I am" (*asmimāna*) remains. The *Khemaka Sutta* shows that this underlying tendency persists until insight into the arising and cessation of the five aggregates fully uproots it (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000).

Objective 2: Practical Methods for Managing Conceit at Worldly and Supramundane Levels

The documentary analysis identified a two-level approach to dealing with conceit. At the *worldly level* (*lokiya*), the objective is regulation rather than complete eradication. Ethical restraint (*sīla*) prevents conceit from being expressed through humiliation, domination, divisive speech, or harmful conduct. Humility (*nivāta*) weakens self-display, while mindfulness (*sati*) enables practitioners to recognize comparison, defensiveness, and pride as they arise. Loving-kindness (*mettā*) counters rivalry and hostility by cultivating concern for the welfare of oneself and others.

Wise attention (*yonisomanasikāra*) serves as the central cognitive practice at this level. It directs reflection toward causes, conditions, consequences, and impermanence. Through wise attention, practitioners examine whether wealth, praise, knowledge, appearance, authority, or religious achievement is permanent, fully controllable, or sufficient grounds for a fixed identity. Such reflection reduces attachment to socially constructed attributes and weakens ego-driven reactions (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2010). These practices can diminish interpersonal conflict and encourage balanced conduct, but they do not necessarily remove the latent tendency toward conceit.

At the *supramundane level* (*lokuttara*), the aim is complete uprooting. Theravāda doctrine classifies conceit among the five higher fetters, together with attachment to form existence, attachment to formless existence, restlessness, and ignorance. Its eradication therefore requires the development of the Noble Eightfold Path and liberating insight, not behavioral restraint alone.

Through insight meditation (*vipassanā*), practitioners observe the five aggregates in terms of impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*). As attachment to the aggregates declines, the basis for asserting "I am superior," "I am equal," or "I am inferior" is progressively weakened. Complete cessation occurs only when the residual conceit "I am" is abandoned at Arahantship (Buddhaghosa, 2010; Mahāsi Sayādaw, 1994).

Objective 3: A Psychological Model Based on Wise Attention and Non-Self

Based on the textual synthesis, the study proposes the *Wise Attention–Non-Self Model for Reducing Conceit,* comprising three interconnected stages.

The first stage is *recognition of self-comparison*. Mindfulness identifies the triggers, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors associated with superiority, equality,

and inferiority. This stage makes the comparative process observable rather than allowing it to operate as an unconscious habit.

The second stage is *regulation through wise attention*. Practitioners investigate the conditions supporting conceit and reflect on the impermanent and dependent nature of the attributes being compared. Ethical restraint, humility, and loving-kindness support this process by preventing self-referential judgments from developing into harmful conduct.

The third stage is *deconstruction through insight into non-self.* The practitioner examines the five aggregates as conditioned processes rather than as a stable owner, agent, or identity. This shifts the intervention from managing the content of comparison to weakening the cognitive-affective structure that makes comparison personally compelling.

The model distinguishes two expected outcomes. At the practical level, it may reduce emotional reactivity, defensive behavior, rivalry, and interpersonal conflict. At the liberative level, sustained insight progressively removes identification with the aggregates and culminates in the eradication of *asmimāna*. The model therefore presents conceit reduction as a developmental continuum extending from everyday self-regulation to supramundane liberation.

Discussions

The findings indicate that conceit (māna) is best understood as a recurring process of self-referential measurement rather than merely overt arrogance. The three modes identified in the study—superiority, equality, and inferiority—share the same underlying structure because each evaluates experience through a constructed "I." This interpretation is consistent with Theravāda analyses that distinguish the explicit identity view (sakkāya-diṭṭhi) from the subtler conceit "I am" (asmimāna), which may persist after the identity view has been abandoned and is eradicated only at Arahantship (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000, 2012b).

The contemporary relevance of this finding is evident in digital environments that intensify comparison. Midgley et al. (2021), in four studies involving 798 participants, found that frequent and extreme upward comparisons on social media reduced state self-esteem, mood, and life satisfaction. Aubry et al. (2024) similarly reported a reciprocal cycle in which depressive symptoms increased upward comparison on Instagram, while such comparison further

worsened self-evaluation and depressive mood. These findings support the study's argument that comparison is not psychologically neutral: whether it produces pride, rivalry, shame, or withdrawal, it can reinforce unstable self-appraisal.

The proposed two-level intervention framework is therefore conceptually coherent. At the worldly level, ethical restraint (sīla), mindfulness (sati), loving-kindness (mettā), humility (nivāta), and wise attention (yonisomanasikāra) can interrupt comparison before it develops into harmful speech or conduct. Contemporary evidence that self-compassion buffers associations between problematic social media use, anxiety, and depression provides a partial psychological parallel, although self-compassion should not be treated as equivalent to Buddhist non-self practice (Phillips & Wisniewski, 2021).

At the supramundane level, however, regulation is insufficient. Insight practice examines the five aggregates as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and non-self, thereby weakening the appropriation that makes comparison possible (Buddhaghosa, 2010; Mahāsi Sayādaw, 1994). The principal contribution of the study is thus its distinction between managing the manifestations of conceit and uprooting its cognitive-affective basis. Because the research is documentary, the proposed model remains theoretical and requires empirical testing in contemplative, educational, and organizational contexts.

Knowledge from Research

The principal knowledge generated by this study is the *Wise Attention–Non-Self Transformation Model,* which explains how conceit (*māna*) may be progressively managed and ultimately uprooted within Theravāda Buddhist psychology. The model synthesizes canonical, Abhidhamma, and commentarial teachings into a developmental sequence that distinguishes clearly between the regulation of conceit in daily life and its complete eradication through liberating insight. ion is the identification of conceit as a *self-comparison mechanism* rather than merely overt arrogance. *Māna* operates whenever the mind evaluates itself as superior, equal, or inferior to others. These three modes differ in emotional expression but share the same underlying structure: attachment to a constructed "I." This interpretation clarifies why shame, inferiority, competitiveness, and pride may all arise from the same self-referential process.

The second contribution is the identification of *wise attention (yonisomanasikāra) as the central regulatory mechanism* at the worldly level. Through wise attention, the practitioner examines the conditioned, impermanent, and unstable nature of status, knowledge, appearance, wealth, praise, and achievement. Supported by ethical restraint, mindfulness, humility, and loving-kindness, this practice reduces defensive reactions, rivalry, and harmful interpersonal behavior. However, it regulates conceit rather than fully uprooting it.

The third contribution is the recognition that complete transformation requires insight into *non-self (anattā).* By observing the five aggregates as conditioned processes rather than as a permanent owner or identity, the practitioner weakens the basis of "I-making" and comparison. This marks the transition from psychological management to supramundane liberation.

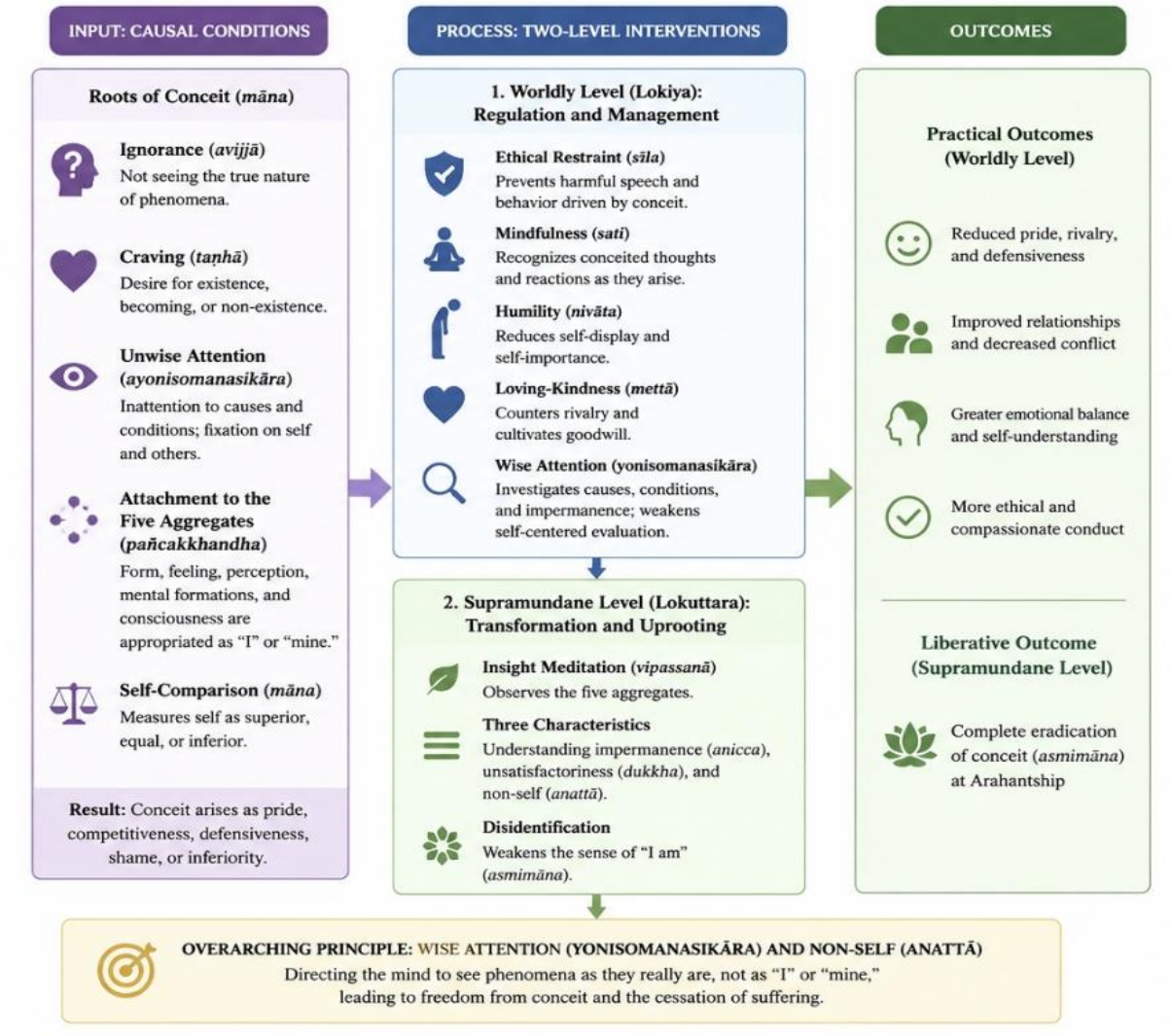

Figure 2. Wise Attention–Non-Self Transformation Model for Managing and Uprooting Conceit

Accordingly, the model proposes three sequential processes: *recognition of self-comparison, regulation through wise attention*, and *deconstruction through insight into non-self*. The anticipated practical outcomes are reduced ego-driven behavior, greater emotional balance, and improved relational harmony, while the liberative outcome is the eventual eradication of *asmimāna*. Because the study is documentary, the model should be treated as a theoretically derived framework requiring future empirical validation.

Conclusion

This study concludes that conceit (māna) is a multidimensional mental process rooted in attachment, ignorance, and self-referential comparison. It is expressed not only through superiority and arrogance but also through assertions of equality and experiences of inferiority when these are organized around the persistent measurement of "I." Conceit therefore affects both psychological well-being and social relationships by generating defensiveness, competition, envy, shame, and conflict.

The analysis demonstrates that māna must be distinguished from identity view. Although explicit belief in a permanent self may be abandoned, the subtle conceit "I am" can remain as a latent tendency until the attainment of Arahantship. This distinction explains why conceptual knowledge of non-self is insufficient for complete psychological transformation.

Theravāda Buddhism offers a progressive framework for dealing with conceit. At the worldly level, ethical restraint, humility, mindfulness, loving-kindness, and wise attention regulate its emotional and behavioral manifestations. These practices reduce harmful comparison and encourage more respectful interpersonal relationships. At the supramundane level, insight into impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self undermines the appropriation of the five aggregates and ultimately removes the basis of conceit.

The principal contribution of the study is therefore a two-level psychological model that differentiates management from eradication. Conceit may be moderated through ethical and attentional training, but its complete cessation requires liberating insight. This framework provides a doctrinally grounded basis for future research on Buddhist approaches to social comparison, narcissistic tendencies, emotional regulation, leadership, and conflict transformation.

Suggestion

Based on the conclusions and discussions of this study, the following suggestions are offered for both academic research and practical application:

1. Suggestions for Practical Application:

Educational Integration: Principles of humility (nivāta) and yonisomanasikāra should be integrated into leadership and organizational development programs to reduce institutional conceit and foster cooperative environments.

Mindfulness Programs: Mindfulness-based interventions should be specifically designed to target the cognitive distortions of "self-measurement" (superiority/inferiority complexes) in modern therapeutic settings.

2. Suggestions for Future Research:

Comparative Studies: Future researchers should conduct empirical studies comparing the effectiveness of Vipassanā meditation with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) in reducing narcissistic traits and social comparison anxiety.

Psychological Interconnectivity: Further research is needed to explore the relationship between māna and other defilements, such as envy (issā) and stinginess (macchariya), to develop a holistic Buddhist model of emotional regulation.

3. Recommendations for Further Research:

1. Empirical Studies: Conduct quantitative research on the effectiveness of Vipassanā in treating narcissistic personality disorder and Social Comparison Anxiety.

2. Comparative Analysis: Explore the relationship between Māna and Alfred Adler's inferiority complex theories.

3. Organizational Application: Study how the practice of humility (nivāta) can reduce institutional conflict and factionalism

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An Analysis of Animal Killing from Theravāda Buddhist Ethic Perspectives

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Abstract

This qualitative documentary study analyzes animal killing (pānātipāta) from the perspective of Theravāda Buddhist ethics. It has three objectives: to examine the meaning, types, and consequences of animal killing; to analyze selected scriptural case studies concerning animal killing; and to identify ethical teachings and practices in Theravāda Buddhism that prevent harm to animals. Primary sources include the Pāli Canon, commentarial literature, and authoritative English translations, while secondary sources include academic studies in Buddhist ethics, animal ethics, and environmental thought. The findings show that animal killing is morally evaluated through the First Precept and the central role of intention (cetanā), which determines the ethical and karmic weight of an act. Theravāda sources distinguish intentional, unintentional, direct, indirect, ritualistic, and economically motivated killing, with moral gravity shaped by intention, motivation, method, and the mental roots involved. The study examines three scriptural examples: the Kūṭadanta Sutta, which rejects ritual sacrifice; the Sundasūkarika narrative, which illustrates the danger of habitual cruelty; and the story of Thera Cakkhupāla, which clarifies the distinction between intentional and unintentional harm. The analysis concludes that Theravāda Buddhism offers a comprehensive ethical framework for reducing animal killing through moral discipline (sīla), loving-kindness (mettā), compassion (karuṇā), mindfulness of intention, and wisdom concerning kamma. The study contributes to Buddhist ethical studies by presenting a structured account of animal killing that is doctrinally grounded, ethically nuanced, and relevant to contemporary debates on animal welfare, ecological responsibility, and compassionate living.

Keywords: Animal killing; Theravāda Buddhist ethics; Non-violence; Compassion; Kamma; First Precept.

Introduction

Animal killing, understood as the intentional destruction of the life of a sentient being, remains a major ethical issue across religious, philosophical, legal, and environmental discourses. It occurs in diverse contexts, including hunting, food production, ritual practice, entertainment, animal experimentation, and wildlife management. In the contemporary world, the expansion of industrial farming and global animal exploitation has intensified moral debates concerning animal sentience, welfare, rights, ecological sustainability, and the scope of human responsibility toward non-human beings (Phelps, 2004; Singer, 1995; Waldau, 2013).

Theravāda Buddhism approaches this issue through the First Precept, expressed in the formula pānātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi, the training rule to abstain from taking life. This precept is not merely a prohibition but a foundation for moral cultivation. It is grounded in the recognition that living beings fear death, experience suffering, and seek happiness. The Buddhist ethical response to animal killing, therefore, begins with restraint but extends to compassion, loving-kindness, mindfulness, and wisdom.

A distinctive feature of Theravāda ethics is the centrality of intention (cetanā). The moral gravity of killing depends not only on the external act but also on the volitional state that motivates it. The Aṅguttara Nikāya presents intention as the core of kamma, while the Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta identifies killing as unwholesome bodily action connected with unwholesome mental roots (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012; Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu & Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1995). Thus, killing is ethically serious because it harms the victim and because it arises from, reinforces, and normalizes greed, hatred, or delusion.

This topic is increasingly relevant in modern ethical life. Industrial agriculture, animal experimentation, environmental destruction, commercial hunting, and habitat loss raise complex questions that cannot be addressed only through legal regulation. Theravāda Buddhist ethics contributes an internal dimension by asking how the mind relates to vulnerability, suffering, and life. It also offers practical disciplines that cultivate restraint and compassion rather than merely condemning harmful action.

This article therefore analyzes animal killing within Theravāda Buddhist ethics by integrating doctrinal explanation, scriptural case studies, and practical ethical reflection. It aims to clarify the meaning and moral weight of animal

killing, interpret selected Buddhist narratives, and identify practices that may help prevent harm toward animals in contemporary contexts.

Research Objectives

1. To study the meanings, types, and consequences of animal killing from the perspective of Theravāda Buddhist ethics.

2. To examine selected case studies of animal killing as presented in Theravāda Buddhist scriptures.

3. To analyze ethical teachings and practices in Theravāda Buddhism aimed at preventing animal killing.

Literature Review

Scholarship on animal killing in Buddhism has generally focused on four interrelated themes: non-violence (ahiṃsā), intention (cetanā), compassion (karuṇā), and the karmic consequences of taking life. In Theravāda Buddhism, the First Precept establishes abstention from killing as a basic moral discipline for both monastics and lay practitioners. This precept is not limited to human life but extends to sentient beings more broadly, since Buddhist ethics recognizes that living beings fear death and seek freedom from suffering. Harvey (2000) explains that killing is morally serious because it arises from unwholesome mental roots and damages the moral development of the agent. Keown (1992) similarly argues that Buddhist ethics should not be reduced to external rule-following; rather, it concerns the cultivation of virtue, character, and wholesome intention.

The role of intention is especially important in Buddhist ethical analysis. In Theravāda thought, cetanā determines the karmic quality of action, meaning that the moral weight of killing depends not only on the physical destruction of life but also on the agent's knowledge, motivation, effort, and mental state. Bodhi Bhikkhu (2005, 2012) shows that canonical teachings repeatedly connect bodily action with intention and mental roots. Goodman (2009) further emphasizes that Buddhist moral reasoning is sensitive to volition and compassion, thereby distinguishing it from purely outcome-based ethical systems. This perspective is crucial for distinguishing deliberate killing, indirect killing, ritual killing, economic killing, and unintentional harm.

Modern studies of Buddhist animal ethics extend this doctrinal foundation into contemporary debates on animal welfare and animal rights. Phelps (2004) argues that Buddhist narratives and ethical teachings provide a strong basis for compassion toward animals. Singer (1995), although writing from a secular utilitarian perspective, challenges moral systems that ignore animal suffering and therefore provides an important comparative framework for Buddhist ethics. Waldau (2000) connects Buddhist non-harming with modern animal-rights discourse, showing that Buddhist concern for sentient life can contribute to global discussions about the moral status of animals. These studies are especially relevant in relation to industrial farming, animal experimentation, commercial slaughter, and the commodification of animal bodies.

Buddhist environmental ethics also provides an important context for studying animal killing. Schmithausen (2000) highlights the relationship between Buddhism and nature, showing that Buddhist reflection on life, suffering, and interdependence can support ecological awareness. Sponberg (1997) develops this further by arguing that Buddhist compassion should be extended beyond human-centered concerns to encompass ecological relationships. Gombrich (2006) also notes that Theravāda Buddhism has historically shaped moral attitudes through practical discipline, social customs, and narrative teaching. Such scholarship demonstrates that Buddhist ethics is not only individual but also social and ecological.

Narrative literature plays a particularly significant role in communicating Buddhist ethical values. The Kūṭadanta Sutta critiques ritual sacrifice and replaces violence with generosity, ethical governance, and social welfare. Jātaka and commentarial stories, such as the Sundasūkarika narrative and the account of Thera Cakkhupāla, illustrate the moral consequences of killing and clarify the importance of intention. Collins (2000) shows that Buddhist narrative traditions often function as ethical instruction by embedding doctrinal ideas in memorable stories. Cousins (1996) also emphasizes the importance of kusala, or skillful action, in understanding how Buddhist texts evaluate moral conduct.

Previous studies have therefore made important contributions to Buddhist ethics, environmental thought, and animal welfare. However, much of the literature discusses Buddhist non-violence in broad terms rather than offering a structured Theravāda analysis of animal killing itself. Fewer studies integrate

doctrinal definitions, classifications of killing, scriptural case studies, intention-based moral evaluation, and practical methods for preventing harm. This article addresses that gap by analyzing animal killing through three connected dimensions: the doctrinal meaning of pānātipāta, selected scriptural examples of killing, and practical Buddhist training in sīla, mettā, karuṇā, mindfulness of intention, and wisdom concerning kamma.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is organized around three interrelated dimensions: doctrinal meaning, narrative illustration, and practical prevention. The first dimension examines animal killing through the First Precept, intention, kamma, and the unwholesome roots. The second dimension analyzes selected scriptural narratives that show how killing is evaluated in ritual, habitual, and unintentional contexts. The third dimension identifies Buddhist practices that cultivate non-harming and compassion. Together, these dimensions show how Theravāda ethics moves from understanding the moral problem of killing toward practical transformation of conduct and intention.

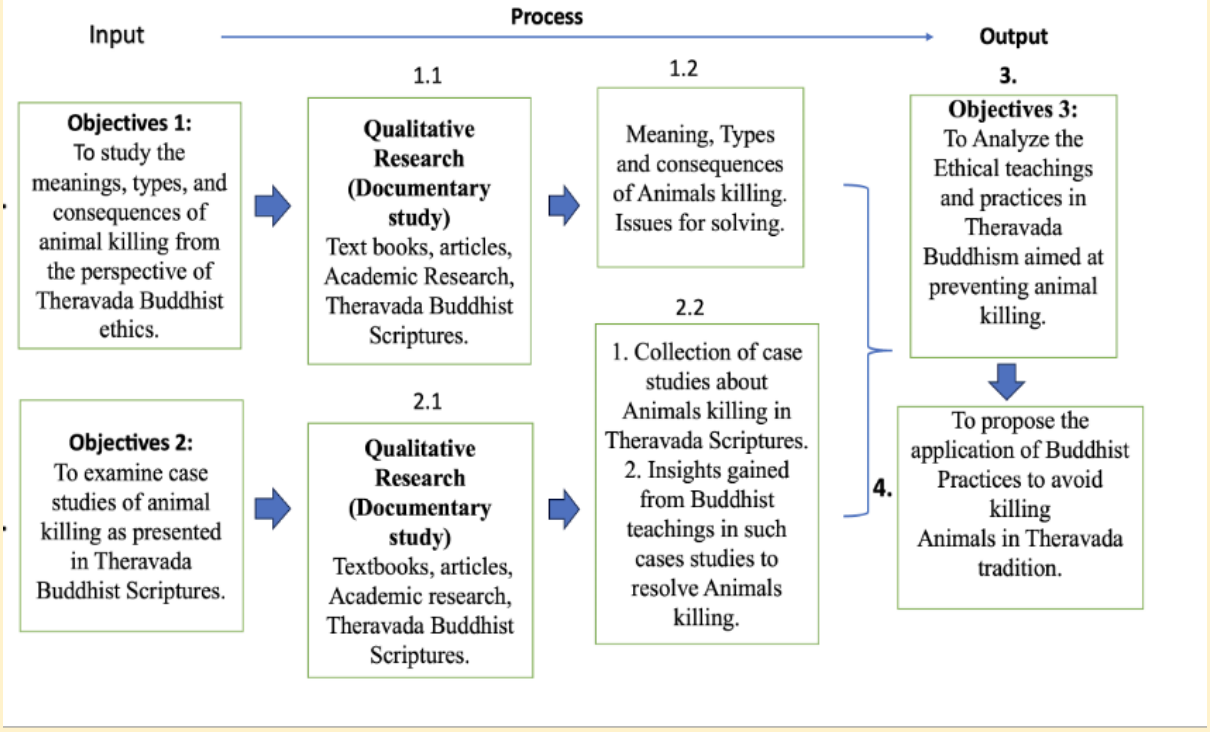

Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative documentary research design. This approach was appropriate because the research aimed to interpret ethical and doctrinal meanings found in Theravāda Buddhist texts rather than to collect statistical data from human participants.

Primary sources consisted of selected passages from the Pāli Canon and commentarial literature, including materials related to the First Precept, intention, kamma, compassion, non-harming, ritual sacrifice, and stories involving animal killing. Authoritative English translations published by Wisdom Publications, the Buddhist Publication Society, and the Pali Text Society were consulted where relevant. Secondary sources included academic books, journal articles, and studies in Buddhist ethics, animal ethics, environmental ethics, and religious philosophy.

Data were collected by identifying textual materials that directly addressed the meaning, causes, forms, consequences, and prevention of animal killing. The analysis focused on three categories: doctrinal teachings, narrative case studies, and practical ethical training. The data were then interpreted through qualitative content analysis, with attention to recurring concepts such as intention, unwholesome roots, karmic consequence, non-violence, compassion, and mindfulness.

To strengthen interpretive rigor, doctrinal claims were cross-checked across canonical sources, commentarial explanations, and modern scholarship. The study does not claim to provide empirical measurement of Buddhist practice; rather, it offers a textually grounded ethical analysis and a conceptual framework for understanding and preventing animal killing.

Research Results

The findings of this qualitative documentary study are organized according to the three research objectives. The analysis draws on Theravāda canonical teachings, commentarial explanations, and contemporary Buddhist ethical scholarship to clarify how animal killing is understood, evaluated, and prevented within Theravāda Buddhist ethics.

Objective 1: Meanings, Types, and Consequences of Animal Killing in Theravāda Buddhist Ethics

- *Animal killing is understood as pānātipāta, the intentional destruction of life.*

In Theravāda Buddhism, *pānātipāta* refers to the act of taking the life of a living being. The First Precept, *pānātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ*, establishes abstention from killing as a foundational moral discipline for both monastics and lay practitioners. This ethical principle applies not only to human beings but also to animals and other sentient beings capable of experiencing fear, pain, and the desire to live (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2005; Harvey, 2000).

- *Intention (cetanā) is the central criterion of moral evaluation.*

The study found that Theravāda ethics does not judge killing merely by its external result but by the mental volition behind the act. A killing act becomes morally complete when the agent recognizes a living being, forms the intention to kill, makes an effort to kill, and the being dies as a result. This confirms the Buddhist ethical principle that kamma is primarily rooted in intention rather than mechanical action alone (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012; Goodman, 2009; Keown, 1992).

- *Animal killing can be classified according to intention, method, motivation, and context***.**
  The analysis identifies several types of killing:
    - intentional killing, motivated by desire, hatred, fear, cruelty, or economic benefit;
    - unintentional killing, in which harm occurs without deliberate volition;
    - direct killing, where the agent personally performs the act;
    - indirect or delegated killing, where one commands, encourages, or facilitates killing;
    - ritualistic killing, where animals are sacrificed for religious or ceremonial purposes;
    - economic killing, especially in hunting, fishing, slaughter, animal trade, and industrial agriculture.

- *The karmic severity of killing depends on multiple moral factors.*

The study found that the gravity of killing is shaped by the strength of intention, the dominant unwholesome root (*akusala-mūla*), the degree of cruelty involved, the moral or sentient status of the being killed, and the psychological condition of the agent. Killing motivated by hatred and cruelty carries especially serious karmic consequences because it strengthens violent tendencies and obstructs compassion (Harvey, 2000; Keown, 2005).

- *Animal killing damages both the victim and the moral character of the perpetrator.*

Theravāda Buddhist ethics treats killing as harmful not only because it destroys life but also because it cultivates fearlessness toward violence, weakens moral restraint, and reinforces greed, hatred, and delusion. In this sense, killing is both an external act of harm and an internal process of ethical deterioration (Cousins, 1996; Harvey, 2000).

Objective 2: Case Studies of Animal Killing in Theravāda Buddhist Scriptures

- *The Kūṭadanta Sutta rejects ritualistic killing and replaces sacrifice with ethical generosity***.**

The study found that the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* presents a strong critique of animal sacrifice. Rather than endorsing ritual violence, the Buddha redirects the Brahmin Kūṭadanta toward non-violent offerings, social welfare, generosity, and moral conduct. This case demonstrates that Theravāda Buddhism does not accept religious justification as a valid reason for killing animals (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2005; Keown, 1992).

- *The Kūṭadanta Sutta also shows the social dimension of non-violence.*

The Buddha's alternative to sacrifice includes economic support, ethical governance, and generosity. This indicates that reducing violence requires not only individual restraint but also social conditions that reduce fear, poverty, and exploitation. This supports the broader Buddhist view that ethical society depends on reducing both direct violence and structural causes of harm (Collins, 2000; Gombrich, 2006).

- *The Sundasūkarika narrative illustrates the psychology and karmic danger of direct killing.*

The story of Sundasūkarika, associated with habitual animal slaughter, demonstrates how repeated killing hardens the mind and normalizes cruelty. The narrative functions pedagogically by showing that violent livelihood and repeated harm produce suffering for both animals and the killer. This supports Phelps's (2004) argument that Buddhist narratives often cultivate moral sensitivity toward animals through stories of karmic consequence.

- *The story of Thera Cakkhupāla clarifies the ethical importance of intention.*

The account of Thera Cakkhupāla, who unintentionally killed insects while walking in meditation, demonstrates that moral culpability depends on intention. Because there was no deliberate wish to kill, the act was not treated as morally equivalent to intentional killing. This case confirms that Theravāda ethics is not rigidly outcome-based; it is intention-sensitive and context-sensitive (Goodman, 2009; Harvey, 2000).

- *Together, the three case studies present a balanced moral framework.*

The *Kūṭadanta Sutta* addresses ritual killing, Sundasūkarika illustrates direct and habitual killing, and Thera Cakkhupāla clarifies unintentional harm. Taken together, these narratives show that Theravāda ethics evaluates killing through intention, context, mental state, and consequence rather than through a single external criterion.

Objective 3: Ethical Teachings and Practices for Preventing Animal Killing

- *Moral discipline (sīla) is the primary foundation for preventing killing.*

The First Precept trains practitioners to restrain bodily and verbal actions that harm living beings. Regular observance of *sīla* strengthens moral awareness, reduces cruelty, and creates the ethical basis for compassion toward animals (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1984; Harvey, 2000).

- *Loving-kindness (mettā) and compassion (karuṇā) transform the emotional roots of violence.*

The cultivation of *mettā* encourages goodwill toward all beings, while *karuṇā* responds to suffering with care and non-harming. These practices counter hatred, aggression, indifference, and instrumental attitudes toward animals. They also support the recognition that all sentient beings fear pain and seek safety (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2005; Phelps, 2004; Waldau, 2013).

- *Mindfulness of intention prevents harmful impulses before they become action.*

Mindfulness (*sati*) enables practitioners to observe anger, greed, carelessness, or indifference before these states produce harmful conduct. In relation to animals, mindfulness applies to daily choices involving food, livelihood, consumption, movement, speech, and environmental behavior. It therefore functions as a practical ethical safeguard (Anālayo Bhikkhu, 2010; Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1984).

- *Wisdom (paññā) deepens understanding of kamma and interdependence.*

Wisdom allows practitioners to recognize that killing produces suffering and reinforces unwholesome mental habits. It also reveals the interdependence of human and non-human life. This supports Schmithausen's (2000) argument that Buddhist ethics can contribute to ecological awareness and respect for living systems.

- *Theravāda ethics remains relevant to modern animal welfare and environmental issues.*

The findings show that classical Buddhist principles can be applied to contemporary concerns such as industrial farming, animal experimentation, wildlife exploitation, habitat destruction, and ethical consumption. While the ancient texts do not address modern factory farming directly, the principles of non-harming, compassion, intention, and karmic responsibility provide a strong ethical lens for evaluating these practices (Singer, 1995; Sponberg, 1997; Waldau, 2013).

- *The study proposes an ethical prevention model for animal killing.*
  The model moves from inner motivation to outward practice:
  ethical understanding → mindfulness of intention → compassion-based motivation → restraint from killing → compassionate coexistence.

This model shows that preventing animal killing requires both internal transformation and practical behavioral discipline.

- *The central finding is that Theravāda Buddhist ethics treats non-killing as a complete path of moral cultivation.*

Abstaining from killing is not merely obedience to a rule. It is a training that develops compassion, reduces violence, purifies intention, and supports harmonious coexistence between humans, animals, and the natural world.

The study concludes that Theravāda Buddhism provides a comprehensive ethical framework for understanding and preventing the killing of animals.

- Animal killing is morally serious because it violates the First Precept and arises from unwholesome intention.
- The moral weight of killing depends on intention, knowledge, effort, method, motivation, and consequence.
- Scriptural case studies demonstrate that the Buddha rejected violence, whether ritualistic, direct, or careless.
- Ethical practices such as *sīla*, *mettā*, *karuṇā*, mindfulness, and *paññā* function as practical tools for preventing animal killing.
- The Theravāda approach is relevant not only for personal morality but also for contemporary animal welfare, environmental ethics, and compassionate social policy.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Theravāda Buddhism approaches animal killing not merely as an external act of violence but as an ethically significant action rooted in intention (cetanā), mental defilement, and karmic consequence. The First Precept establishes abstention from taking life as a foundational discipline for both monastic and lay practitioners. In this framework, animal killing is morally problematic because it arises from unwholesome roots such as greed, hatred, and delusion, while also weakening the practitioner's capacity for compassion and moral restraint. This supports Harvey's (2000) interpretation that Buddhist ethics evaluates killing through the inner quality of volition as well as its harmful consequences. The canonical

emphasis on intention further confirms that Buddhist moral analysis cannot be reduced to legalistic rule-following; rather, it requires careful examination of the mental state behind action (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2005; Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012).

The three scriptural case studies reveal different ethical dimensions of killing. The Kūṭadanta Sutta rejects ritual sacrifice and replaces violent religious practice with generosity, ethical conduct, and social welfare. This supports Keown's (1992) argument that Buddhist ethics does not permit violence to be justified by ritual authority or religious convention. The Sundasūkarika narrative illustrates the dangers of direct killing and the psychological deterioration caused by repeated violence. This confirms Phelps's (2004) observation that Buddhist narratives often function pedagogically, cultivating compassion toward animals by showing the moral consequences of cruelty. The story of Thera Cakkhupāla adds an important doctrinal nuance: unintentional killing does not carry the same moral weight as deliberate killing because karmic responsibility depends primarily on volition. This aligns with Goodman's (2009) analysis of Buddhist moral responsibility as intention-sensitive rather than merely outcome-based.

The findings also show that Theravāda ethics has strong contemporary relevance. Modern animal killing often occurs not through isolated personal acts but through large-scale systems such as industrial farming, animal experimentation, wildlife destruction, and environmentally destructive consumption. Although classical Buddhist texts did not address factory farming directly, their principles of non-harming (ahiṃsā), compassion (karuṇā), loving-kindness (mettā), and awareness of karmic consequence provide a critical ethical lens for evaluating such practices. Waldau (2013) argues that Buddhist concern for sentient life can contribute meaningfully to modern animal ethics, while Singer (1995) similarly challenges ethical systems that ignore animal suffering. From a Buddhist perspective, the moral issue is not only the animal's suffering but also the human cultivation of callousness, greed, and indifference.

The study further confirms that preventing animal killing requires more than external regulation. Laws may reduce cruelty, but Buddhist ethics emphasizes internal transformation through sīla, mettā, mindfulness of intention, and wisdom (paññā). Schmithausen (2000) shows that Buddhist environmental ethics rests on a wider recognition of interdependence between human and non-human life. Sponberg (1997) likewise notes that Buddhist compassion can support ecological responsibility when it is extended beyond human-centered

concerns. Therefore, the prevention of animal killing requires both personal moral cultivation and social awareness of the systems that normalize harm.

The Knowledge from the Research

This study contributes a structured ethical model for understanding and preventing animal killing within Theravāda Buddhism. First, it clarifies that animal killing should be analyzed not only by the physical act but also by intention, motivation, method, and context. This enables a more nuanced distinction among intentional, unintentional, direct, indirect, ritualistic, and economically motivated killing.

Second, the study refines the understanding of karmic severity by linking the act of killing with three factors: the dominant unwholesome root, the strength of intention, and the moral awareness of the agent. This framework helps explain why different acts of killing may carry different ethical weight while still remaining contrary to the First Precept.

Third, the study integrates doctrinal analysis with scriptural narratives. The selected case studies show how Buddhist texts teach ethical principles through concrete examples rather than abstract theory alone. Fourth, the study identifies Buddhist practices such as sīla, mettā, karuṇā, mindfulness, and wisdom as active tools for preventing harm to animals. These findings demonstrate that Theravāda ethics is both doctrinally systematic and practically applicable to modern animal welfare concerns.

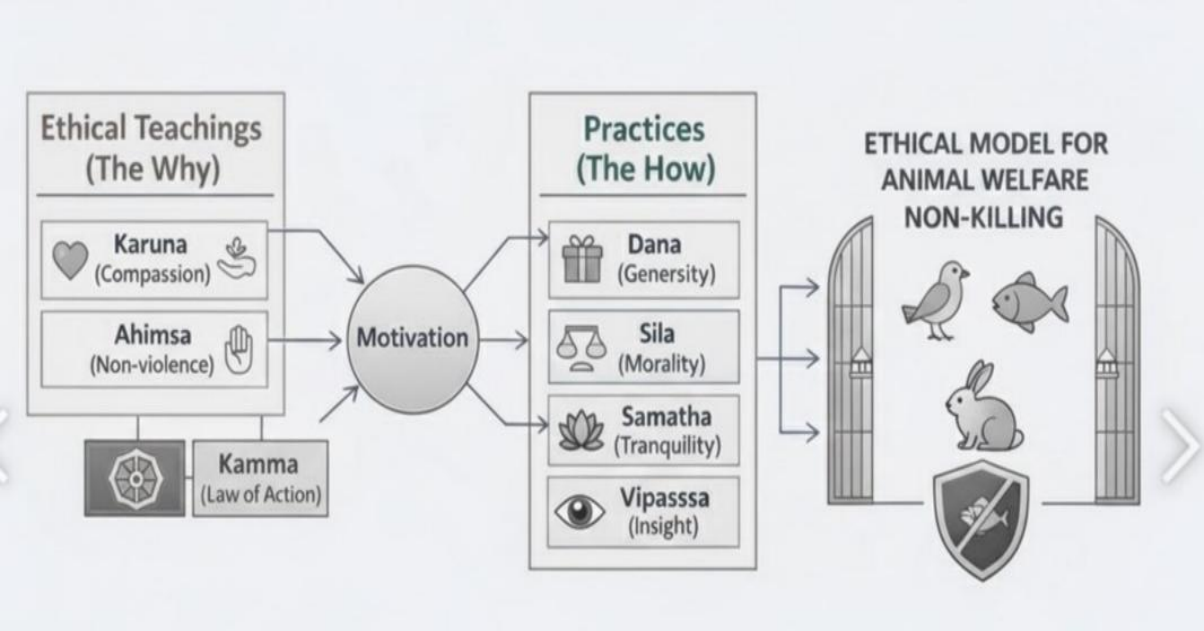

Figure 1. Synthesis of Buddhist principles for a compassionate approach to animal welfare and non-killing

Transferring and Utilization of the Research Findings

1. The findings can be applied in Buddhist education by strengthening instruction on the First Precept, intention, compassion, and non-harming in monastic and lay curricula.

2. Animal welfare organizations may use Buddhist principles such as mettā, karuṇā, and ethical awareness to design compassion-based public education and community programs.

3. Environmental conservation initiatives can draw on Buddhist teachings concerning interdependence and non-harming to promote habitat protection and sustainable living.

4. Mindfulness-based programs may incorporate loving-kindness and mindfulness of intention to reduce aggression, cultivate empathy, and encourage peaceful behavior.

5. Policymakers and educators may draw on these ethical insights to support humane decision-making in agriculture, research, wildlife management, and public health.

Conclusion

This study examined animal killing through the lens of Theravāda Buddhist ethics. It demonstrates that the prohibition against taking life is not merely a rule

but a comprehensive moral principle grounded in intention, compassion, non-violence, and awareness of kamma. The analysis shows that killing harms both the victim and the moral development of the agent, because it arises from and reinforces unwholesome mental states.

The selected case studies reveal the Buddha's consistent rejection of violence, whether justified by ritual, habit, or social convention. They also demonstrate the importance of intention in ethical judgment, especially in distinguishing deliberate killing from accidental harm. These narratives show that Buddhist ethics is doctrinally rigorous while remaining sensitive to context and mental motivation.

In contemporary society, animal exploitation and environmental degradation continue to present urgent ethical challenges. Theravāda Buddhist teachings on sīla, mettā, karuṇā, mindfulness, and paññā provide meaningful guidance for cultivating non-harming conduct and compassionate coexistence. By integrating doctrinal wisdom, narrative instruction, and practical ethical training, this study contributes to Buddhist ethical scholarship and offers a relevant framework for animal welfare and sustainable living.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies should compare Theravāda perspectives on animal killing with other Buddhist traditions and with secular animal-rights theories. Empirical research may also examine how Buddhist compassion practices influence attitudes toward animal welfare, vegetarianism, ethical consumption, and environmental responsibility.

Monastic and lay communities should strengthen teaching on the First Precept and incorporate loving-kindness and compassion meditation into programs designed to cultivate care for all sentient beings.

The ethical principles identified in this study may support humane education, environmental policy, public awareness campaigns, and institutional decision-making concerning agriculture, research, wildlife management, and animal welfare.

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Impact of Dhamma Music on the Emotional Well-being of Chinese Young Adults: A Uses and Gratifications Study of the Bilibili Platform

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Abstract

This study examines how Dhamma Music on the Bilibili platform contributes to the emotional well-being of Chinese young adults through the lens of Uses and Gratifications Theory. It has three objectives: (1) to identify the content characteristics of Bilibili Dhamma Music and the emotional and thematic distribution of user-generated texts; (2) to analyze the core need dimensions and gratification modes of Chinese young adults who use Bilibili Dhamma Music; and (3) to explain the influence paths through which Dhamma Music supports emotional well-being. The study used a mixed-methods design combining qualitative narrative analysis and computer-assisted quantitative text analysis. Eighteen Chinese young adults aged 18-35 were interviewed through semi-structured online interviews. In addition, 126,000 valid bullet-screen comments (danmu) and user comments were collected from ten high-engagement Bilibili Dhamma Music videos and analyzed through sentiment analysis and Latent Dirichlet Allocation topic modeling.

The findings indicate that Bilibili Dhamma Music appears mainly in three forms: long-duration scene-accompanying music, secularized adaptations, and traditional Buddhist chants. User interaction was dominated by themes of anxiety relief, sleep support, emotional decompression, life reflection, and spiritual comfort. Three gratification dimensions emerged: emotional relief, cognitive companionship, and spiritual comfort. These dimensions operated through a five-stage healing narrative: emotional dilemma, algorithmic or accidental discovery, acoustic comfort, community resonance, and cognitive-emotional transformation. The study concludes that Dhamma Music functions as a low-threshold digital resource for emotional regulation, companionship, and meaning-making among Chinese young adults. Its effect should be understood as a media-based support mechanism for emotional well-being rather than a clinical intervention.

Keywords: Dhamma Music; Emotional well-being; Uses and Gratifications Theory; Chinese young adults; Bilibili; Buddhist peaceful means

Introduction

Rapid social transformation, educational pressure, workplace competition, and digital saturation have intensified emotional strain among Chinese young adults. In recent public mental health reports, young adults aged 18-35 have been identified as a group with significant needs for anxiety relief, sleep support, and accessible emotional decompression (Fu et al., 2024). These pressures are especially visible in digital youth cultures, where social comparison, academic competition, and workplace fatigue are frequently expressed through online communities. In this context, media practices are no longer limited to entertainment; they increasingly function as everyday resources for mood regulation, companionship, and psychological recovery (Reinecke & Eden, 2017; Saarikallio, 2011).

Bilibili has become one of the most important youth-oriented video platforms in China. Its distinctive danmu system allows users to post real-time bullet comments across the video screen, creating a sense of simultaneous co-presence and emotional companionship (Chen et al., 2017). Within this environment, Dhamma Music has attracted considerable attention among young users. Unlike temple-based chanting alone, Bilibili Dhamma Music appears in hybrid forms that include traditional Buddhist chants, long-duration ambient soundtracks, Lo-Fi adaptations, electronic remixes, and meditative instrumental arrangements. These formats allow Buddhist-inspired sound to move from formal religious ritual into daily scenes of study, sleep, work, and emotional self-care.

The therapeutic value of music has been well documented. Music can reduce physiological arousal, support emotional regulation, and provide a structure for coping with stress (MacDonald et al., 2012; Pelletier, 2004). Research on soothing audiovisual media and ASMR similarly shows that sensory media may support relaxation and affective stabilization (Barratt & Davis, 2015; Poerio et al., 2018). In Buddhist and contemplative contexts, chanting and musical meditation have been associated with reduced anxiety, greater meditation engagement, and psychological well-being (Lee et al., 2020; Pascoe et al., 2021; Tsai et al., 2021). However, the use of Dhamma Music among non-monastic, digitally connected Chinese youth remains insufficiently examined.

Existing studies have discussed digital religion and Buddhist media transformation (Grieve & Veidlinger, 2014), the secular adaptation of Buddhist music on Chinese social platforms (Chen & Zhang, 2021; Wang, 2022), and the role of media in emotional recovery (Reinecke & Eden, 2017). Yet there remains a gap in explaining why young Chinese adults use Bilibili Dhamma Music, what gratifications they seek, and how these gratifications shape their emotional well-being. This study addresses that gap by applying Uses and Gratifications Theory, which views audiences as active users who select media to satisfy specific psychological and social needs (Katz et al., 1973; Rubin, 2009). The study therefore investigates Dhamma Music not only as religious sound but also as a digital emotional well-being practice situated within the interactive culture of Bilibili.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the content characteristics of Dhamma Music on Bilibili and the emotional and thematic distribution of user-generated interactive texts.
2. To analyze the core need dimensions and gratification modes of Chinese young adults using Bilibili Dhamma Music based on Uses and Gratifications Theory.
3. To explain the influence paths and mechanisms through which Dhamma Music supports the emotional well-being of Chinese young adults from a needs-gratification perspective.

Literature Review

Dhamma Music, Digital Religion, and Youth Audiences

Studies of digital religion show that religious practices are increasingly mediated through online platforms, where ritual, identity, emotion, and community are reconstructed through digital participation. Grieve and Veidlinger (2014) argue that Buddhist practice in digital media should be understood as an active field of adaptation rather than a simple transfer of offline religion. In this context, Dhamma Music on Bilibili represents a form of Buddhist-inspired sound practice that is detached from exclusively temple-based settings and reconfigured for everyday listening.

Music studies also provide an important foundation for understanding this phenomenon. MacDonald et al. (2012) demonstrate that music can support health and well-being through emotional, social, and embodied processes. Pelletier

(2004) shows that music can reduce stress-related arousal, while Saarikallio (2011) explains how individuals use music to regulate mood across adulthood. These findings are relevant to Bilibili Dhamma Music because many users treat it as a background soundscape for study, sleep, work, and emotional recovery rather than as a formal religious obligation.

In the context of Chinese youth, de Kloet and Fung (2017) show that young people use digital culture to negotiate pressure, identity, and belonging. Chen and Zhang (2021) and Wang (2022) further suggest that Buddhist music on Chinese platforms has undergone secular adaptation through short-video aesthetics, remix culture, and algorithmic circulation. These studies suggest that Dhamma Music may function simultaneously as cultural heritage, spiritual symbol, and emotional media resource.

Media Use and Emotional Well-Being

Research on media use and well-being has increasingly emphasized recovery, companionship, and mood regulation. Reinecke and Eden (2017) explain that deliberate media use can provide psychological detachment, relaxation, and stress recovery. Poerio et al. (2018) found that ASMR experiences are associated with reliable changes in affect and physiology, suggesting that soothing audiovisual environments may support emotional regulation. Barratt and Davis (2015) similarly describe ASMR as a flow-like state that may generate a sense of calm and affective stability.

Bilibili's danmu culture adds a distinctive social layer. Chen et al. (2017) found that danmaku videos satisfy gratifications related to social presence, information sharing, entertainment, and companionship. This is especially important for long-form Dhamma Music videos because users do not only listen individually; they also read others' confessions, encouragements, and emotional reflections. Thus, the healing experience is partly acoustic and partly communal.

Uses and Gratifications Theory and Healing Media

Uses and Gratifications Theory provides the theoretical foundation for analyzing why audiences use media and what psychological or social gratifications they obtain. Katz et al. (1973) argue that media users are active agents who select media according to specific needs. Rubin (2009) extended this perspective to media effects by emphasizing that motivations shape the meanings and outcomes of media use. In the present study, this approach helps explain why

young adults choose Dhamma Music not simply for religious reasons but for emotional relief, cognitive companionship, and spiritual comfort.

Healing media research further supports this perspective. Oliver (2008) shows that meaningful media content can generate tender, reflective, and eudaimonic emotions, while Gan and Wang (2015) demonstrate the applicability of U&G theory to Chinese social media. Narrative analysis is also suitable for this study because emotional healing often unfolds as a personal story of distress, discovery, comfort, and transformation (Riessman, 2008). At the same time, large-scale text analysis can identify broader psychological patterns across user-generated texts (Pennebaker et al., 2015).

Although previous studies have examined digital religion, music and well-being, ASMR, Buddhist chanting, and Uses and Gratifications Theory, few studies have integrated these areas to examine Bilibili Dhamma Music as a digital emotional well-being practice among Chinese young adults. Existing studies rarely analyze the relationship among user needs, gratification modes, danmu interaction, and emotional outcomes. This study addresses the gap by combining narrative interviews with large-scale sentiment and topic analysis of Bilibili user texts.

Conceptual Framework

This research is a mixed methods study dominated by qualitative narrative analysis, supplemented by quantitative text analysis. The researcher defines the research conceptual framework based on Katz's Uses and Gratifications Theory, combined with narrative healing theory and the core connotation of Buddhist peaceful means. The details are as follows.

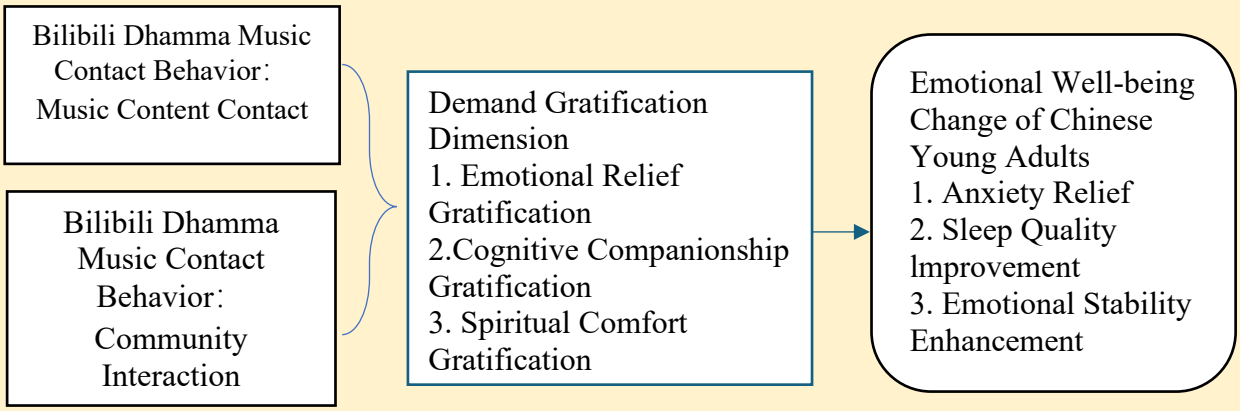

Figure1. Conceptual Framework

Based on the core logic of Uses and Gratifications Theory, this study takes the contact behavior of Chinese young adults with Dhamma Music on Bilibili as the starting point, divides the user's gratification modes into three core dimensions: emotional relief gratification, cognitive companionship gratification and spiritual comfort gratification. The core dependent variable is the change in the emotional well-being of Chinese young adults, including three specific dimensions: anxiety relief, sleep quality improvement, and emotional stability enhancement. The core research logic is to reveal the dynamic healing process through user narrative, and verify the universality of the healing phenomenon through massive interactive text analysis.

Research Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods design dominated by qualitative narrative analysis and supported by quantitative text analysis. This design was appropriate because the study aimed to understand both the lived experiences of Chinese young adults and the broader emotional patterns embedded in large-scale Bilibili user-generated texts.

The qualitative phase used purposive sampling. The researchers selected the top 50 Bilibili Dhamma Music videos with more than 10 million views from 2023 to 2026 and then identified ten core videos with high concentrations of healing-related comments. Eighteen valid respondents were recruited from comment areas and relevant Bilibili communities. Inclusion criteria were: Chinese citizenship, age between 18 and 35, residence in mainland China, more than 3 months of continuous use of Bilibili Dhamma Music, experience of emotional distress or healing reflected in comments or danmu, and voluntary informed consent. Interviews were conducted through WeChat voice or Tencent Meeting, lasted 30-60 minutes, and were transcribed verbatim. Data were analyzed using holistic content narrative analysis in NVivo 12, following the interpretive logic of narrative methods (Riessman, 2008).

The quantitative phase used computer-assisted text analysis to verify the wider distribution of user needs and emotional themes. A Python crawler collected danmu and user comments from the ten core videos between January 2023 and February 2026. After removing duplicates, meaningless, and invalid texts, 126,000 valid Chinese texts were retained. Sentiment analysis was conducted using the BosonNLP Chinese sentiment dictionary, and LDA topic modeling was conducted with the Gensim library after Chinese word segmentation and stop-word removal. The purpose of this phase was not to

establish clinical effectiveness but to triangulate interview narratives with large-scale platform data.

Ethical safeguards were applied. Interviewees participated voluntarily, consented to recording, and were anonymized in all transcripts and reports. Platform data were analyzed at aggregate level, and no personally identifiable information was reported.

Research Results

Objective 1: Content Characteristics and Sentiment Topography of Bilibili Dhamma Music

The analysis found that Bilibili Dhamma Music is organized around scene-based healing use. Long-duration scene-accompanying content accounted for approximately 60% of the core corpus, usually consisting of one- to eight-hour soundtracks for study, work, meditation, or sleep. Secular adaptations accounted for approximately 30% and integrated Lo-Fi, electronic music, traditional Chinese instruments, and soft ambient textures. Traditional Buddhist chants accounted for approximately 10%, usually preserving stronger ritual and liturgical features.

Table 1. Core Topic Distribution of Bilibili Dhamma Music User Interactive Texts

Topic Category	Core Subtopic	Proportion (%)
Emotional well-being healing	Emotional decompression and anxiety relief	28.5
	Sleep aid and insomnia improvement	21.3
	Life perception and spiritual comfort	10.7
	Mutual encouragement and community support	6.7
Music-related content	Music style and adaptation effect	15.2
	Instrument performance and singing level	10.6
Religious/cultural content	Religious culture-related content	4.3
Other	Irrelevant or unclear content	2.7

Sentiment analysis of 126,000 valid user texts showed a predominantly positive emotional orientation. Positive texts accounted for 68.3%, neutral texts for 22.7%, and negative texts for 9.0%. Negative texts frequently described academic pressure, workplace burnout, insomnia, loneliness, and uncertainty.

Positive texts often appeared during slow or meditative musical passages, indicating that users experienced these videos as soothing auditory environments. LDA topic modeling identified eight core topics. Emotional well-being and healing-related themes accounted for 67.2% of the total topic distribution. The most prominent subtopics were emotional decompression and anxiety relief (28.5%), sleep aid and insomnia improvement (21.3%), life perception and spiritual comfort (10.7%), and mutual encouragement and community support (6.7%). These results indicate that the primary use of Bilibili Dhamma Music is emotional restoration rather than formal religious learning alone.

2. The Five-Stage Healing Journey and Uses and Gratifications Typology

Grounded in the analytical framework of Uses and Gratifications (U&G) Theory, narrative analysis of the 18 deep-level interviews decoded three primary dimensions of demand gratification. First, Emotional Relief Gratification represents the core visceral demand to discharge real-time anxiety and psychological tension through calming acoustic stimuli. Second, Cognitive Companionship Gratification reflects the pragmatic need for non-interfering background environments to alleviate situational loneliness during isolated tasks. Third, Spiritual Comfort Gratification satisfies the advanced need for existential belonging and unconditional emotional acceptance via collective digital interactions.

Crucially, the narrative trajectories of the respondents collectively map onto a universal five-stage “healing journey” model that mirrors the structural living conditions of contemporary Chinese youth. (1) Falling into dilemma (Need Generation) serves as the narrative catalyst, wherein users experience acute stress from academic or corporate pressures. (2) Accidental discovery (Media Contact) marks the passive or algorithmic introduction to Dhamma Music channels on Bilibili during peak moments of distress. (3) Music comfort (Emotional Relief Gratification) introduces the physiological turning point, characterized by immediate muscular relaxation and a lowering of sympathetic nervous arousal. (4) Community resonance (Spiritual Gratification) occurs as users actively browse danmu (bullet comments) to discover shared generational peer vulnerabilities. Finally, (5) Cognitive transformation (Well-being Improvement) signifies the resolution, where Dhamma Music is internalized as an automated emotional safety valve, promoting long-term psychological resilience.

3. Integrated Influence Mechanisms on Emotional Well-being

Synthesizing both macro-textual and micro-narrative data, this study

constructs a holistic framework that demonstrates how Dhamma Music drives the emotional well-being of Chinese young adults through three interactive paths.

The Core Path operates through immediate emotional regulation elicited by the music itself, satisfying users' demands for emotional relief. Beyond its psychoacoustic properties, such as a slow, repetitive melodic structure and a 60–80 BPM tempo that naturally syncs with the human resting heart rate to lower sympathetic nervous arousal, this pathway is profoundly driven by the specific Buddhist teachings (Dhamma) embedded within the digitized musical corpus. On Bilibili, these audiovisual adaptations predominantly draw on textual and philosophical themes from foundational Mahayana texts, most notably the Heart Sutra (Prajñāpāramitā Hṛdaya) and the Great Compassion Mantra (Mahā Kāruṇika Citta Dhāraṇī). The core Dhamma conveyed through these remixes centers on the concepts of Śūnyatā (Emptiness/non-attachment) and Karuṇā (Compassion). By hearing the rhythmic chanting of these sacred verses, young audiences under acute temporal anxiety, such as postgraduate examination stress or corporate burnout, are cognitively guided to reframe their secular pressures through the lens of impermanence (Anicca), thereby neutralizing obsessive anxiety over life outcomes. This is the most direct healing path mentioned by all respondents and empirically validated by the real-time sentiment fluctuations across the video timelines.

The Secondary Path materializes through the sustained companionship value of long-term playback, fulfilling users' cognitive companionship gratification. By functioning as an ambient background anchor, the long-form audio format scaffolds a private, non-interfering acoustic sanctuary within high-pressure, competitive, and "involuted" (neijuan) environments. This matches the practical routines of Chinese youth during late-night exam preparation or overtime work, effectively mitigating situational isolation, reducing loneliness, and improving sleep quality by blocking environmental noise.

Finally, the Supplementary Path is achieved through the collective community resonance generated by interactive text layers, yielding spiritual comfort and gratification. Bilibili's unique danmu (bullet comment) interface allows users to project their vulnerabilities onto a digital public square, transforming individualized anxiety into a shared cultural ritual of healing. This reciprocal validation provides spiritual comfort and deepens the music's baseline healing effect.

As illustrated in Figure 2, these three paths do not operate in isolation; rather,

they form a synergistic, interconnected loop where acoustic properties, doctrinal philosophies, temporal habits, and digital communal support collectively drive the deep-level emotional well-being of contemporary youth. While the initial Conceptual Framework (Figure 1) hypothesized broad relationships based on theory, the Empirical Mechanism Model (Figure 2) maps out the precise, data-driven pathways and systemic operational logic discovered through our empirical text and narrative analyses.

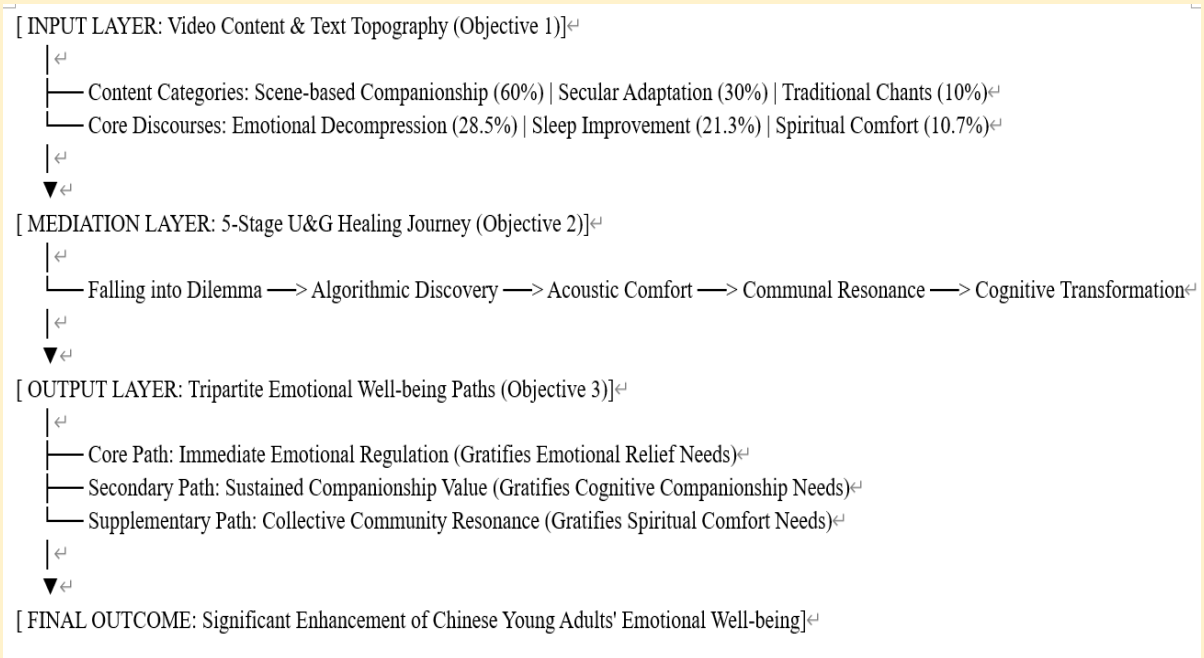

Figure 2. Empirical Mechanism Model of Bilibili Dhamma Music and Emotional Well-Being

Discussion

From the perspective of Uses and Gratifications Theory, this research found that the core content of Bilibili Dhamma Music presents obvious scene-based healing characteristics adapted to the needs of Chinese young adults, and user-interactive texts are dominated by positive emotions, with emotional well-being and healing-related topics accounting for 67.2% of the total core topics. This research, grounded in the Uses and Gratifications Theory, found that the core content of Bilibili Dhamma Music exhibits distinct scene-based healing characteristics tailored to the needs of Chinese young adults, aligning with the findings of Chen, Gao, & Rau (2017) on how Bilibili's danmaku videos foster companionship through user interaction. This may be because, against the backdrop of China's social transformation, Chinese young adults are facing

increasingly fierce academic and workplace competition, and their demand for emotional decompression is increasingly strong. The platform's algorithmic recommendations accurately match this demand, and content creators have completed the contemporary transformation of Dhamma Music, expanding its application from religious rituals to daily emotional healing practices grounded in the peaceful means of Buddhism, thereby helping it spread widely among non-religious Chinese young adults. This is also consistent with findings from studies in this journal indicating that Dhamma Music can serve as an accessible, peaceful Buddhist practice to promote individual emotional well-being (Riewpakorn, 2026; Panchanon, 2026). This finding aligns with and extends Fungladda's (2025) Happiness Workplace Model, which demonstrated the effectiveness of Dhamma music in promoting emotional well-being through sensory engagement in organizational settings. While Fungladda's study focused on workplace environments, the present research confirms that similar mechanisms operate in digital media contexts among Chinese young adults facing academic and workplace pressure.

From the perspective of Uses and Gratifications Theory, this research found that the use demands of Chinese young users for Bilibili Dhamma Music can be divided into three core dimensions: emotional relief gratification, cognitive companionship gratification, and spiritual comfort gratification, with a universal 5-stage healing narrative model from need generation to demand gratification. This is consistent with the classic dimension division of Uses and Gratifications Theory proposed by Katz (1959), and expands the application of this theory in the field of Dhamma Music and youth emotional well-being research. This may be because contemporary Chinese young adults are facing high pressure from involution in study and work, and their core demand for Dhamma Music is not religious belief but rather emotional decompression and an accompanying experience. As Fu et al. (2024) show that emotional decompression has become the primary demand among contemporary Chinese young adults for emotional well-being services, the emotional value of Dhamma Music has become the core driver of user engagement.

From the perspective of Uses and Gratifications Theory, this research found that Bilibili Dhamma Music promotes the emotional well-being of Chinese young adults through three core paths corresponding to different modes of demand gratification. This corresponds to the research results of Tsai et al. (2021) on the anxiety-reducing effects of Buddhist music, and further reveals the role of Bilibili's youth community interaction in strengthening the healing effect,

aligning with Chen, Gao, & Rau's (2017) findings on how danmaku interaction fosters companionship and emotional connection. Contrary to the previous view that religious music can only play a healing role for religious believers, this study found that even non-religious young Chinese adults can derive significant emotional well-being benefits from Dhamma Music. This may be because, as Grieve & Veidlinger (2014) discuss in the context of digital Buddhism, the healing effect for Chinese young people mainly comes from the satisfaction of their emotional, accompanying, and spiritual needs through media use, a process that does not depend on the user's religious belief, and is highly adapted to the emotional well-being needs of Chinese young adults in the current social context.

Knowledge from Research

The primary knowledge generated by this study is the Digital Dhamma Music Gratification Model for Chinese Young Adults. This model explains how Dhamma Music on Bilibili supports emotional well-being through the interaction of media content, user needs, platform participation, and Buddhist-inspired meaning.

First, the study clarifies the contemporary position of Dhamma Music in China's digital environment. It is no longer limited to formal religious ritual or temple-based chanting. On Bilibili, it is reconfigured as daily emotional healing media used by Chinese young adults for sleep, study, work, anxiety relief, and emotional stabilization. This finding broadens the understanding of Buddhist music as a flexible cultural and emotional resource.

Second, the study identifies three gratification dimensions: emotional relief, cognitive companionship, and spiritual comfort. Emotional relief refers to the immediate calming effect of sound. Cognitive companionship refers to the use of long-duration music as a non-intrusive background presence. Spiritual comfort refers to the sense of acceptance, meaning, and shared vulnerability generated through Buddhist-inspired content and danmu interaction.

Third, the study formulates a five-stage healing narrative: emotional dilemma, accidental or algorithmic discovery, acoustic comfort, community resonance, and cognitive-emotional transformation. This sequence explains how users move from distress to a more stable emotional state through repeated media use and social resonance.

Fourth, the study proposes three influence paths: the core path of emotional regulation through music, the secondary path of companionship through long-term playback, and the supplementary path of spiritual comfort through community interaction. Together, these paths show that Bilibili Dhamma Music

functions as a hybrid digital healing practice that combines acoustic, symbolic, temporal, and communal elements. This model may guide future research on Buddhist peaceful means, digital religious media, and interventions for youth emotional well-being.

Transferring and Utilizing the Research Findings

Academic application: This study expands the scope of Uses and Gratifications Theory in research on Buddhist peaceful means and youth emotional well-being, and innovatively combines narrative analysis with quantitative text analysis to explore the healing mechanism of digital Dhamma Music content for emotional well-being. The research paradigm and analysis framework can be used for subsequent research on other Buddhist peaceful practice content for youth emotional well-being, and the research results can be published in academic journals and presented at academic conferences to promote the in-depth development of related fields.

Platform operation application: The research results can serve as a reference for Bilibili's content operations and algorithm optimization. The platform can increase support for compliant Dhamma Music content with clear healing value, tailored to the needs of Chinese young adults, optimize the recommendation algorithm, and accurately deliver content to users with corresponding emotional healing needs. At the same time, the platform should strictly abide by China's Internet Religious Information Service Management Measures, standardize the content review of Dhamma Music, avoid the risk of illegal religious information dissemination, and guide the creation of positive and healthy healing content for young people based on Buddhist peaceful means.

Social-emotional well-being service application: The research results provide a new non-pharmaceutical, low-threshold intervention pathway for the emotional well-being service for Chinese young adults. Schools, community psychological service institutions, and mental health practitioners in China can integrate compliant Dhamma Music content into youth emotional well-being education, emotional decompression group counseling, and other services. At the same time, they can use the narrative healing model extracted from this study to guide Chinese young adults in constructing positive personal narratives through Dhamma Music practice, and to help them better cope with academic and workplace pressures and emotional dilemmas.

Cultural inheritance application: This study clarifies the innovative direction of the inheritance of traditional Dhamma Music in China's digital age. Traditional Buddhist music institutions, literary and art troupes and intangible cultural

heritage inheritors in China can create more Dhamma Music works that meet the emotional well-being needs of Chinese young adults based on the research results, promote the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional Dhamma Music, and let traditional Buddhist music play a new contemporary value in the field of youth emotional well-being through the practice of Buddhist peaceful means.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of Bilibili Dhamma Music on the emotional well-being of Chinese young adults from the perspective of Uses and Gratifications Theory. By combining narrative interviews with computer-assisted analysis of 126,000 danmu and comments, the study identified the content characteristics, need dimensions, gratification modes, and influence mechanisms associated with the use of Dhamma Music.

The findings show that Bilibili Dhamma Music is primarily used as scene-based emotional healing media. Long-duration accompaniment, secular adaptation, and traditional chanting serve different needs but collectively support anxiety relief, sleep improvement, companionship, and spiritual comfort. User-generated texts show a predominantly positive emotional orientation, and healing-related themes account for the majority of core topics.

The study concludes that Dhamma Music promotes emotional well-being through three interrelated pathways: immediate emotional regulation through acoustic features, sustained cognitive companionship through long-term playback, and spiritual comfort through community resonance. These findings suggest that traditional Buddhist music can gain new contemporary value when adapted to digital platforms and the emotional needs of youth.

Nevertheless, the study should be understood as an analysis of perceived emotional well-being and digital user experience, not as clinical evidence of therapeutic effectiveness. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, validated well-being scales, experimental comparisons, and cross-cultural analysis to examine the durability and generalizability of these effects.

Suggestions

This Uses and Gratifications study has found that Dhamma Music on Bilibili has a significant positive effect on the emotional well-being of Chinese young adults and has clarified its core demand dimensions, healing narrative model, and multi-dimensional influence mechanism, adapted to the Chinese social context. The important thing is that the emotional healing value of traditional Dhamma

Music can be fully played in China's digital age through reasonable adaptation and standardized dissemination as a Buddhist peaceful practice, and can be effectively integrated into the emotional well-being service system for Chinese young adults.

In terms of practical application, content creators should focus on the multi-level needs of Chinese young adults, create more compliant, high-quality Dhamma Music works with healing value, avoid excessive entertainment and rigid religious expression; video platforms should strengthen the standardized management and positive guidance of related content, and build a healthy healing content community for young people; schools and psychological service institutions in China should actively explore the application of Dhamma Music in youth emotional decompression and emotional well-being intervention, to help Chinese young adults better cope with academic and workplace pressure.

For future research, long-term tracking studies on the sustained healing effect of Dhamma Music on the emotional well-being of Chinese young adults, cross-cultural comparative studies on the healing mechanism of Dhamma Music in different countries and regions, and studies on the differential effects of Dhamma Music on the emotional well-being of different youth subgroups should be carried out.

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Effects of TMV-Based Mindfulness Practices on Student Happiness at the International Buddhist Studies College

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Abstract

This pilot study examined the effects of a five-day mindfulness intervention grounded in Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna (TMV) Buddhist practices on subjective happiness among undergraduate students at the International Buddhist Studies College (IBSC), Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University. The study had two objectives: (1) to examine whether a five-day TMV-based mindfulness intervention was associated with improvement in students' subjective happiness; and (2) to test the feasibility and preliminary effectiveness of a mindfulness innovation course in a Buddhist academic context. A mixed-delivery, single-group pre-test/post-test design was employed with 20 undergraduate students. Subjective happiness was measured before and after the intervention using a 15-item adapted Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ). The adapted instrument demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .81) and strong content validity based on expert Item–Objective Congruence review. Paired-samples t-test results indicated a statistically significant increase in happiness scores from pre-test (M = 4.08, SD = 0.35) to post-test (M = 4.26, SD = 0.41), t(19) = -3.51, p = .002. Qualitative feedback also suggested high engagement, acceptability, and practical feasibility.

The findings indicate that a short TMV-based mindfulness intervention is feasible and associated with preliminary short-term improvement in self-reported happiness among IBSC students. However, because the study used a small convenience sample, lacked random assignment and a control group, and measured outcomes only immediately after the intervention, the results should be interpreted as preliminary rather than causal evidence. The study contributes to culturally grounded mindfulness research by demonstrating the practical potential of integrating Buddhist contemplative traditions into student well-being programs.

Keywords: TMV-based mindfulness; Subjective happiness; Buddhist practices; Student well-being; Pilot study; Oxford Happiness Questionnaire

Introduction

Mindfulness has become an increasingly important approach for supporting psychological well-being in higher education. Students in contemporary universities face academic pressure, personal adjustment, social demands, and uncertainty about the future, all of which may affect emotional regulation, motivation, and life satisfaction. Mindfulness, commonly described as nonjudgmental awareness of present-moment experience, has roots in Buddhist contemplative traditions but has also been adapted widely into secular psychological and educational programs (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, 2003). Previous research indicates that mindfulness-based interventions can reduce stress and anxiety among college students and support broader well-being outcomes (Bamber & Schneider, 2016).

Subjective happiness, a multidimensional construct encompassing emotional well-being, life satisfaction, and positive affect, is critical for students navigating the demands of higher education (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). Research indicates that happiness is associated with improved academic performance, better interpersonal relationships, and reduced stress, making it a valuable outcome for educational interventions (Diener & Chan, 2011). However, most mindfulness interventions in educational settings draw from secular frameworks, such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), which may lack cultural specificity for students in Buddhist academic environments (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). The TMV-based mindfulness intervention addresses this gap by integrating practices from Theravāda (focused attention and insight meditation), Mahāyāna (compassion-based reflective exercises), and Vajrayāna (visualization and mantra recitation) traditions, designed to align with the spiritual and academic context of IBSC students.

This study pursues two central objectives, detailed further in the Research Objectives section below: first, to examine whether a five-day TMV-based mindfulness intervention can improve students' subjective happiness, assessed through a 15-item adapted version of the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) (Hills & Argyle, 2002); and second, to test the feasibility and preliminary effectiveness of this mindfulness innovation course within a Buddhist academic context (Bowen et al., 2009). Previous studies have demonstrated that short-term mindfulness interventions can yield significant improvements in well-being even with limited duration (Zeidan et al., 2010), and the TMV model's integration of practices from multiple Buddhist traditions offers a comprehensive approach that

may enhance emotional regulation, optimism, and contentment. The intervention's brevity makes it practical for integration into academic schedules, addressing the need for accessible, culturally grounded mental health interventions in higher education.

This study developed a five-day mindfulness innovation course based on three major Buddhist traditions: Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna. The Theravāda component emphasized breath awareness, bell-guided attention, and insight-oriented observation. The Mahāyāna component emphasized compassion-based reflection and mindful writing. The Vajrayāna component introduced simplified visualization and mantra recitation in a student-appropriate form. This selective synthesis was not intended to represent each tradition comprehensively; rather, it offered an accessible short-term intervention integrating attention, compassion, visualization, and reflective awareness (Gethin, 1998; Garfield, 1995; Powers, 1995; Shonin et al., 2014).

The present pilot study therefore examined whether a short TMV-based mindfulness intervention was associated with improvement in students' subjective happiness and whether such an intervention was feasible within a Buddhist academic setting. By combining pre-post quantitative assessment with qualitative feedback, the study provides preliminary evidence for a culturally grounded mindfulness model that may be useful for student well-being programs in Buddhist higher education.

Research Objectives

1. To examine whether a five-day TMV-based mindfulness intervention can improve students' subjective happiness.
2. To test the feasibility and preliminary effectiveness of a mindfulness innovation course grounded in Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna Buddhist practices in a Buddhist academic context.

Research Questions

1. How does a TMV-based mindfulness intervention affect undergraduate students' levels of subjective happiness?
2. To what extent is a mindfulness innovation course incorporating practices from Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna feasible and preliminarily effective in a Buddhist academic setting?

Literature review

Mindfulness has become an important approach for enhancing psychological well-being in higher education, where students often experience academic pressure, emotional strain, and difficulty balancing study with personal life. Mindfulness is commonly understood as present-moment awareness cultivated with openness and non-judgment, yet its deeper roots lie in Buddhist traditions of mental development, ethical awareness, and liberation from unwholesome states (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, 2003). Studies in educational contexts suggest that mindfulness-based interventions can reduce stress and anxiety, improve emotional regulation, and support students' subjective well-being (Bamber & Schneider, 2016; Zeidan et al., 2010).

Subjective happiness is a central construct in student well-being research. It includes positive affect, life satisfaction, emotional balance, optimism, and the capacity to experience meaning in daily life. Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999) conceptualize subjective happiness as a global self-assessment of whether individuals consider themselves happy, while Hills and Argyle (2002) developed the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) to measure psychological well-being through affective and evaluative dimensions. Happiness has also been associated with better health, reduced stress, and improved functioning (Diener & Chan, 2011). Within Buddhist higher education, happiness may be understood not only as emotional pleasure but also as inner balance, moral awareness, and meaningful engagement with study and practice.

The Buddhist foundation of mindfulness is especially relevant to the International Buddhist Studies College (IBSC), where students study within an academic environment shaped by Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna traditions. Theravāda emphasizes disciplined attention, breath awareness, calm meditation (samatha), and insight meditation (vipassanā) as methods for cultivating clarity and understanding experience (Gethin, 1998). Mahāyāna expands contemplative practice through compassion, wisdom, and the Bodhisattva ideal (Garfield, 1995). Vajrayāna employs visualization, mantra recitation, symbolic contemplation, and deity-oriented meditation as skillful means for transforming perception and cultivating awakened qualities (Powers, 1995).

The TMV-based intervention in this study selectively integrates representative practices from these three traditions. From Theravāda, it uses bell-guided attention, breath awareness, and body scanning. From Mahāyāna, it applies compassion-based reflection and mindful writing. From Vajrayāna, it introduces simplified Avalokiteśvara visualization, mantra recitation, and symbolic reflection. Such integration requires careful design, since multi-traditional programs must remain coherent, accessible, and ethically grounded (Shonin et al., 2014). In the Thai Buddhist context, previous studies have examined mindful bowing meditation with Dhamma music for mental well-being (Vasuratna et al., 2024) and mindfulness activities for peaceful well-being (Jiwattanasuk, 2024).

IBSC already provides a supportive context through Buddhist curricula, morning meditation, and annual meditation retreats (IBSC, 2021a; IBSC, 2021b). Mindfulness innovation also aligns with Thai higher education reforms emphasizing learning quality, innovation, and student development (International Affairs Division, 2022). Although previous research supports mindfulness in student well-being, few studies have tested a short intervention integrating Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna practices for undergraduate students in a Buddhist academic institution. This gap justifies the present pilot study.

Conceptual Framework

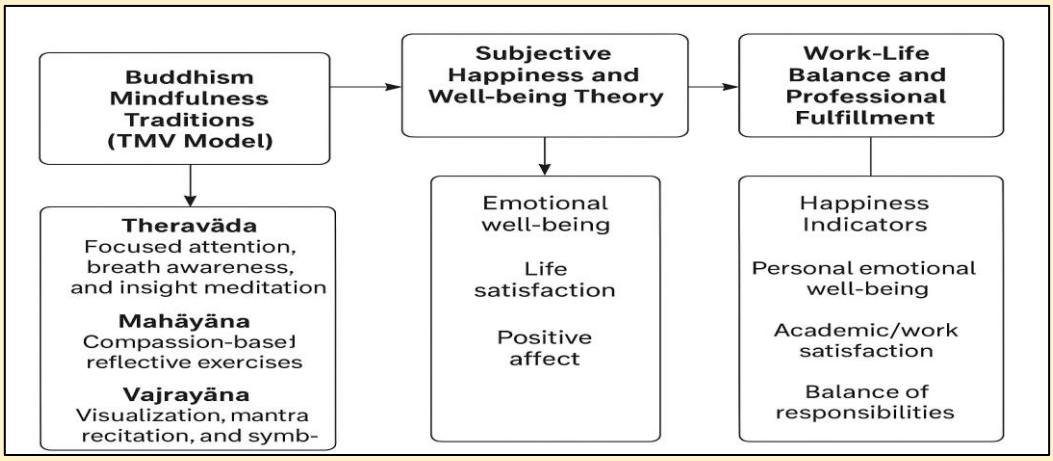

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 summarizes this input-mechanism-outcome logic. This conceptual framework serves as the foundation for the study, outlining the logic connecting the intervention to its expected outcome. The framework treats the

TMV-based mindfulness innovation course as the input, comprising three practice components drawn from Theravāda (attention- and breath-based meditation), Mahāyāna (compassion-focused reflective exercises), and Vajrayāna (visualization and mantra recitation). These components are hypothesized to jointly support three interrelated mechanisms—emotional regulation, present-moment awareness, and compassionate self-reflection—which in turn are expected to contribute to the outcome of interest: improved subjective happiness, operationalized through the adapted OHQ across personal emotional well-being, academic life satisfaction, and balance between personal and academic responsibilities.

Research Methodology

This study used a mixed-delivery pilot design with a single-group pre-test/post-test structure. The design was appropriate for examining feasibility and preliminary change in subjective happiness, but it was not designed to establish causal effectiveness. All 20 participants completed identical pre- and post-test assessments. Ten participants attended structured in-person training, and ten completed the same practice content through self-guided remote practice. Because assignment was based on availability rather than randomization, delivery format was not treated as a formal comparison factor. The participants were pooled and analyzed as one group (N = 20) using within-subject pre-post comparisons (Campbell & Stanley, 1963).

The participants were 20 undergraduate students enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts in Buddhist Studies program at IBSC, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University. Participants were recruited through purposive and convenience-based sampling because the study was exploratory and focused on feasibility. The sample size was considered acceptable for an initial pilot and feasibility study, where small samples may provide useful preliminary information before a larger trial (Bowen et al., 2009).

Inclusion criteria were current enrollment at IBSC, age between 20 and 40 years, at least one semester of prior meditation experience, willingness to follow the intervention schedule, and signed informed consent. Exclusion criteria included current psychiatric diagnosis, psychiatric medication use, or any medical or psychological condition considered a contraindication to meditation practice. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants. The study protocol

was reviewed and approved according to IBSC academic ethics procedures; the approval documentation should be retained by the corresponding author.

Research Instrument

The primary instrument was a 15-item adapted version of the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire, originally developed by Hills and Argyle (2002). The adaptation retained items relevant to the IBSC context and organized them into three dimensions: personal emotional well-being, academic life satisfaction, and balance between personal and academic responsibilities. Each dimension contained five items, and responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Content validity was examined through an Item–Objective Congruence (IOC) review by three experts. Items were rated using the standard IOC scale of +1, 0, and -1. All 15 items achieved an average IOC score of 1.00, indicating strong expert agreement that the items corresponded to the intended objectives and measurement dimensions (Turner & Carlson, 2003). Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha; the pre-test alpha coefficient was .81, indicating good reliability (Cronbach, 1951).

Intervention Procedure

The intervention was conducted over five days from February 21 to 25, 2025. On Day 1, the in-person group received an eight-hour guided session introducing the TMV mindfulness innovation course. Theravāda practices included bell-guided attention, breath awareness, and body scanning. Mahāyāna practices included compassion-oriented reflection and mindful writing. Vajrayāna practices included simplified visualization of Avalokiteśvara, mantra recitation, and reflection on emptiness in a student-appropriate form.

During Days 2–4, all participants continued the same TMV-based practice sequence in self-selected quiet environments. Participants were asked to practice for up to two hours per day; actual practice time varied. Short daily reflection logs were used to monitor practice adherence. On Day 5, participants completed the post-test through Google Forms.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics were computed for pre- and post-test OHQ scores, including means and standard deviations. Normality was assessed by inspecting a Q–Q plot, which showed an approximately linear pattern. Given the within-subject design and approximate

normality, a paired-samples t-test was used to test whether mean happiness scores differed significantly between pre- and post-test measurements (Field, 2013). Because of the small sample and non-random delivery assignment, no formal statistical comparison was conducted between the in-person and self-guided subgroups.

Research Finding Results

Descriptive results showed a clear improvement in participants' happiness following the five-day TMV-based mindfulness intervention. Across all 20 participants, the average happiness score rose from 4.08 (SD = 0.35) before the program to 4.26 (SD = 0.41) afterward. Individual scores ranged from 3.5 to 4.9 at pre-test and from 3.4 to 4.9 at post-test, with many participants showing noticeable gains. These findings point to a steady upward trend in perceived well-being among participants overall. As a descriptive observation only, and without a formal statistical test of the difference, average scores among participants who completed the course through self-guided remote practice appeared to change less between pre- and post-test than scores among those who received in-person training; this pattern was not statistically tested and should not be interpreted as evidence of a between-group difference.

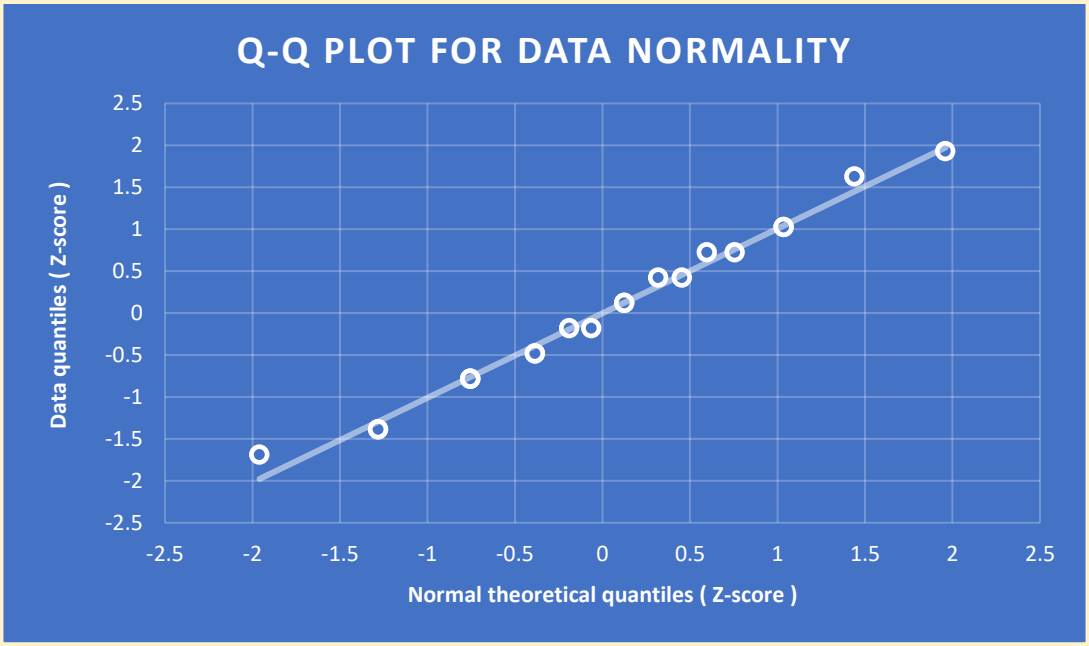

Figure 2. Q–Q plot of pre-test OHQ scores confirming approximate normal distribution (N = 20)

The adapted OHQ showed good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha = .81 at pre-test. Inspection of the Q–Q plot suggested no serious deviation from normality, supporting the use of a paired-samples t-test. The t-test showed a statistically significant increase in happiness scores, t(19) = -3.51, p = .002. These findings suggest that the TMV-based mindfulness pilot course was associated with short-term improvement in students' self-reported happiness. However, because there was no randomized control group or long-term follow-up, the findings should be interpreted as preliminary evidence of association rather than proof of causal effectiveness.

Table 1. Paired-Samples t-Test Results for Pre- and Post-Test Happiness Scores (N = 20)

Measure	Pre-Test	Post-Test	t (19)	p
Mean Score	4.08	4.26	-3.51	.002
Standard Deviation	0.35	0.41		

To better illustrate individual changes over time, a stacked column chart was created to display each participant's scores on the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) before and after the intervention. The chart included data from all 20 participants. Nearly all participants showed a consistent upward shift across the 15 questionnaire items, indicating broad improvements in self-reported happiness; a smaller number of participants, mostly among those who completed the course through self-guided remote practice, showed comparatively little change. This visual pattern is descriptive and complements, rather than substitutes for, the paired-samples t-test reported above as the primary statistical evidence for the intervention's effect.

Taken together, the statistical analysis, the consistency of the data, and the visual patterns in the scores point toward a consistent, if preliminary, conclusion: the TMV-based mindfulness pilot course was associated with an improvement in students' reported well-being over the five-day period. Most participants reported feeling more emotionally balanced and more at ease after the intervention, and this improvement was statistically significant within the study sample. Because this is a small, short-term pilot study without a randomized control group or long-term follow-up, these results should be interpreted as preliminary evidence that mindfulness practices drawn from Buddhist traditions can support students' short-term sense of well-being, rather than as evidence of lasting or causal impact.

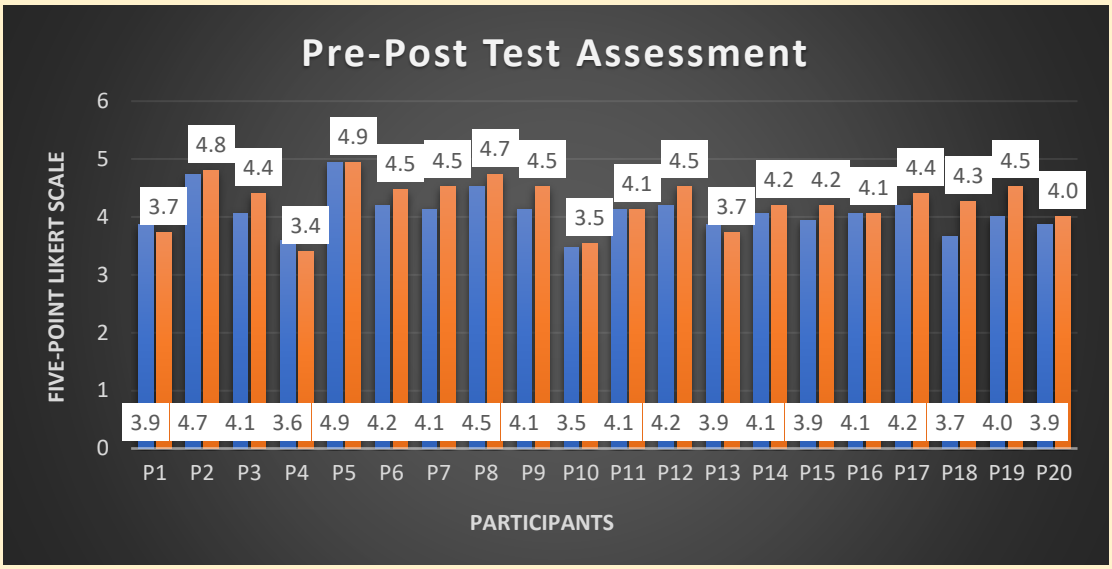

Figure 3. Stacked column chart of OHQ scores before and after mindfulness intervention (N = 20)

Discussion

The findings provide preliminary evidence that a five-day TMV-based mindfulness intervention was associated with an increase in subjective happiness among IBSC undergraduate students. The statistically significant improvement from pre-test to post-test suggests that even a brief mindfulness course may support short-term gains in students' perceived well-being. This result is consistent with earlier research showing that brief mindfulness interventions can produce measurable improvements in mood, attention, and psychological functioning (Zeidan et al., 2010), and with broader reviews indicating that mindfulness programs in college settings can reduce stress and improve well-being (Bamber & Schneider, 2016).

The first objective was addressed through the pre-post OHQ comparison. The increase in scores suggests that the TMV-based intervention may have supported personal emotional well-being, academic life satisfaction, and balance between personal and academic responsibilities. The adapted OHQ demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, supporting its use in this pilot context (Cronbach, 1951; Hills & Argyle, 2002). Nevertheless, the instrument was adapted for a specific Buddhist academic setting and should be further validated before wider use.

The second objective concerned feasibility and preliminary effectiveness. The intervention appeared feasible because participants completed the five-day

program, engaged with the practice structure, and provided positive feedback. The mixed-delivery format also suggests practical flexibility for Buddhist higher education, where students may have different schedules and access conditions. This supports the usefulness of feasibility studies as a necessary stage before larger intervention trials (Bowen et al., 2009).

The TMV model may be meaningful because it integrates complementary contemplative dimensions: Theravāda attention and insight, Mahāyāna compassion-based reflection, and Vajrayāna visualization and mantra practice. These components plausibly support present-moment awareness, emotional regulation, and compassionate self-reflection. However, the study did not test the independent effect of each component; therefore, claims about specific mechanisms must remain interpretive rather than conclusive (Shonin et al., 2014).

Several limitations are important. The sample was small, participants were recruited through purposive convenience sampling, and there was no randomized control group. Delivery format was not randomly assigned, so differences between in-person and self-guided participants cannot be interpreted causally. The intervention lasted only five days, and no follow-up data were collected. The findings therefore support feasibility and preliminary association, not durable effectiveness. Future research should use larger randomized controlled.

Knowledge from Research

The primary knowledge generated by this study is the TMV-Based Mindfulness Happiness Model for Buddhist higher education. The model explains how selected practices from Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna Buddhism may be organized into a short intervention to support student happiness in a Buddhist academic context.

First, the study identifies TMV-based mindfulness as a culturally grounded intervention model. Instead of relying only on secular mindfulness formats, the model draws on Buddhist contemplative traditions already meaningful to IBSC students. Theravāda practice contributes attention, breath awareness, and insight-oriented observation; Mahāyāna practice contributes compassion-based reflection; and Vajrayāna practice contributes visualization and mantra recitation.

Second, the study clarifies three proposed psychological mechanisms: present-moment awareness, emotional regulation, and compassionate self-

reflection. These mechanisms connect the intervention practices with the measured outcome of subjective happiness. Third, the study demonstrates that a brief five-day format can be feasible within an academic schedule, suggesting that short contemplative courses may be suitable for Buddhist higher education settings.

Fourth, the study provides preliminary evidence that an adapted OHQ can be used to assess happiness in a Buddhist academic context when supported by expert review and reliability testing. Overall, the model contributes a practical framework for integrating Buddhist contemplative traditions, student well-being, and educational innovation. Future studies should test the model with larger samples, control groups, and longitudinal follow-up.

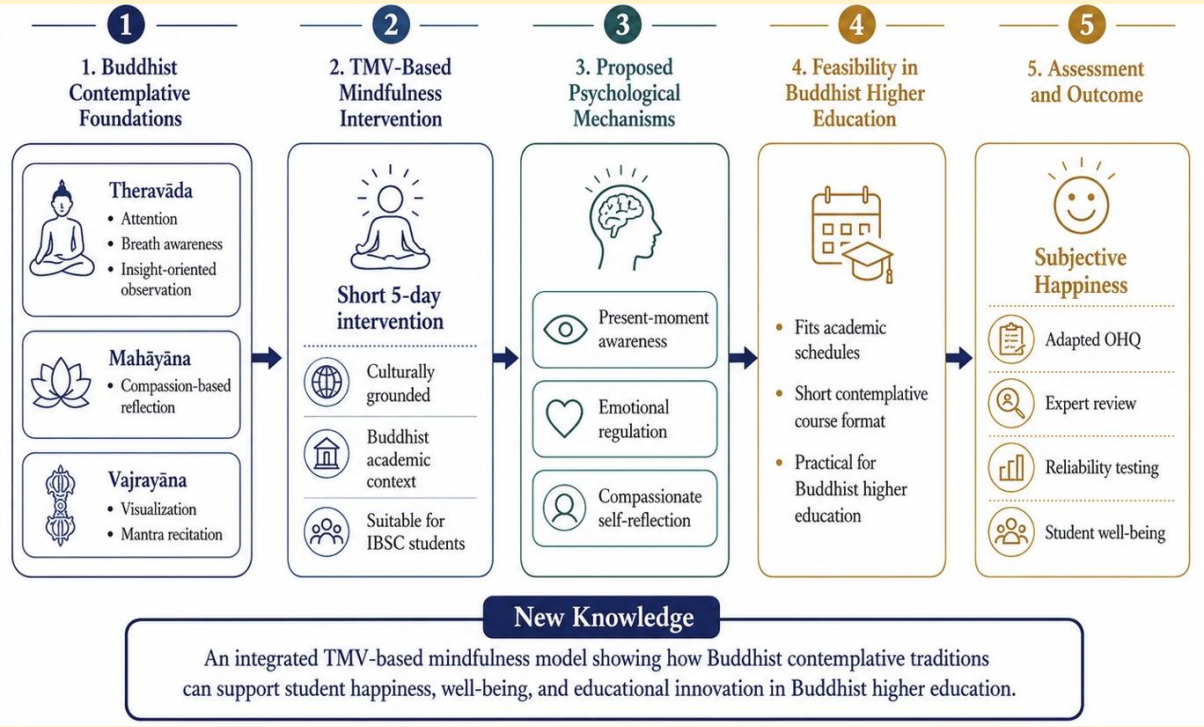

Figure 4. The TMV-Based Mindfulness Happiness Model for Buddhist higher education.

Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that a mindfulness innovation approach, rooted in Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna (TMV) traditions, holds substantial promise for enhancing subjective happiness and overall well-being within Buddhist academic contexts. The five-day intervention significantly

improved participants' self-reported happiness scores, affirming the effectiveness of culturally grounded mindfulness practices in supporting emotional regulation, academic satisfaction, and life balance. These findings underscore the adaptability and value of Buddhist-derived mindfulness when structured in a format accessible to modern students and personnel.

The significance of this research lies not only in its empirical results but also in its methodological and cultural contributions. Unlike many secularized mindfulness interventions, the TMV model integrates compassion, insight, visualization, and meditative concentration practices drawn from distinct Buddhist traditions. This synthesis provides a holistic approach that resonates deeply with individuals in Buddhist higher education while offering a replicable framework for other cultural and institutional settings. The intervention's brevity, high feasibility, and strong participant engagement highlight its practicality for integration into academic schedules where time constraints often pose challenges for sustained well-being programs.

At the institutional level, mindfulness innovation emerges as a crucial strategy for addressing the increasing academic, administrative, and personal pressures facing students and staff. By promoting self-awareness, reducing stress, and fostering work-life balance, mindfulness contributes to a healthier and more resilient academic community. The study also aligns with broader educational reforms in Thailand that emphasize innovation, well-being, and productivity as drivers of national development. Thus, the findings carry implications not only for IBSC but for higher education systems seeking sustainable approaches to mental health and performance enhancement.

Nonetheless, the limitations of this pilot study must be acknowledged. The small sample size (N = 20), quasi-experimental design, and lack of a randomized control group restrict the generalizability of the findings. The short intervention period also leaves questions about the long-term sustainability of the observed improvements. These limitations highlight the need for further research employing larger, randomized controlled trials, longitudinal designs, and more diverse samples. Moreover, examining the relative contributions of Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna practices within the TMV framework could provide greater insight into the mechanisms driving happiness enhancement.

In conclusion, this research advances the discourse on mindfulness-based interventions by demonstrating the feasibility and impact of a culturally resonant, multi-traditional Buddhist model. The results advocate for the inclusion of TMV-based mindfulness practices as part of holistic well-being strategies in higher

education. By bridging ancient Buddhist wisdom with contemporary psychological science, this study contributes to the cultivation of resilient, balanced, and flourishing academic communities, while setting a foundation for future research into mindfulness innovation and happiness development.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should test the TMV-based mindfulness model with larger and more diverse student samples. Randomized controlled trials should compare TMV-based mindfulness with secular mindfulness programs, ordinary classroom activities, or wait-list control groups. Longitudinal studies should examine whether improvements in happiness remain stable after several weeks or months.

Further research should also validate the adapted 15-item OHQ in Buddhist academic settings by examining construct validity, criterion validity, and test-retest reliability. Component-based studies may clarify whether Theravāda, Mahāyāna, or Vajrayāna practices contribute differently to emotional regulation, compassion, academic satisfaction, and life balance. Qualitative research should also explore students' lived experience of the intervention in greater depth.

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An Analysis of Necrophilia and Its Ethical Implications in the Light of Buddhism

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Abstract

Necrophilia is a rare and controversial paraphilic phenomenon that raises significant psychological, legal, and ethical concerns. This qualitative documentary study aimed to (1) examine the characteristics, classifications, and impacts of necrophilia; (2) analyze its psychological factors and relevant psychotherapeutic approaches; and (3) interpret its ethical implications through Buddhist teachings. Data were drawn from Buddhist canonical texts, scholarly literature in psychology and forensic psychiatry, and documented case materials, and were analyzed through qualitative content analysis. The findings indicate that necrophilia encompasses diverse patterns of fantasy and behavior, with motivations associated in the literature with psychopathology, trauma, disrupted attachment, personality disturbance, and other mental-health factors. From a Buddhist ethical perspective, necrophilic conduct conflicts particularly with principles of non-harming, refraining from taking what is not given, and sexual responsibility. Buddhist concepts such as craving (taṇhā), clinging (upādāna), delusion (moha), mindfulness (sati), and contemplation of bodily impurity (asubha-bhāvanā) provide an additional interpretive framework. The study concludes that necrophilia requires an interdisciplinary response combining clinical assessment, ethical analysis, legal safeguards, and compassionate rehabilitation.

Keywords: Necrophilia; Paraphilic disorder; Buddhist ethics; Buddhist psychology; Attachment; Trauma

Introduction

Necrophilia is one of the paraphilias, which are characterized by atypical sexual interests or activities that deviate from societal norms and expectations. Individuals with paraphilias may experience intense sexual arousal and satisfaction through unconventional or socially unacceptable stimuli, fantasies, or

behaviors. The term encompasses a wide range of specific paraphilic disorders, each associated with distinct preferences and expressions.

Paraphilias pose ethical challenges within society, particularly in relation to the precepts against harming (pānāṭipātā) and sexual misconduct (kāmesumicchācāra). These behaviors can sometimes involve actions that cause harm or disregard consent and personal boundaries (Mahatthanadull & Mahatthanadull, 2018). As such, they raise important questions about how individual sexual preferences may affect others. Addressing these complexities requires both ethical reflection and a compassionate, understanding approach.

Necrophilia, a rare and disturbing paraphilia involving sexual attraction to corpses (Mackinnon & Ellis, 2016), raises deep ethical, psychological, and philosophical questions. Exploring it can shed light on human desire, consent, and societal norms. This thesis examines the potential synergy between the DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) and Buddhist teachings, highlighting how combining clinical insight with compassion and mindfulness can offer a more holistic approach to understanding and addressing such complex behaviors. Buddhist teachings offer ancient wisdom for mental well-being, emphasizing mindfulness, compassion, and self-awareness to alleviate suffering and foster inner peace (Mahatthanadull et al., 2026). While seemingly different from the DSM-5's approach to mental health, there is a potential synergy between the two. This research explores these connections, highlighting how incorporating Buddhist practices like mindfulness and self-compassion can complement modern psychiatric diagnosis and treatment. The study aims to provide a deeper understanding of human sexual desire and behavior, specifically necrophilia, through the lens of Buddhism, which emphasizes these principles. It also examines the psychological and ethical dimensions of paraphilia, contributing to a broader discussion on the interplay of religion, ethics, and human sexuality (Woods, Lentz, & Merriam, 2007).

Buddhism provides a uniquely relevant analytical framework for understanding necrophilia because its core doctrinal concepts directly address the psychological mechanisms underlying paraphilic disorders. Craving (taṇhā) and attachment (upādāna) are central to the Buddhist explanation of suffering and compulsive behavior, paralleling the obsessive desires observed in necrophilic conditions. Greed (lobha) and delusion (moha) offer an ethical-psychological lens through which to examine the distorted cognition and moral disengagement that characterize such behaviors. Moreover, corpse contemplation (asubha-bhāvanā), a canonical meditation practice, engages directly with the object of necrophilic

desire, the corpse, reframing it as a subject for spiritual insight rather than sensual gratification. Mindfulness (sati) and ethical rehabilitation through the Five Precepts provide both preventive and therapeutic pathways that complement modern psychiatric interventions (Mahatthanadull et al., 2026). These concepts therefore serve not merely as descriptive categories but as the theoretical foundations for the present study's interdisciplinary analysis.

This ancient practice encourages individuals to confront the stark reality of the physical body's impermanence and decay, including the stages of decomposition detailed in the ten impurities. By engaging in this meditation, practitioners are guided to perceive the human body as transient, fragile, and inherently unattractive, thereby challenging any desires or obsessions related to it. Buddhism also emphasizes the importance of cultivating mental purity and equanimity in the face of disturbing and unpleasant realities. As individuals meditate on the bloated, discolored, and decaying corpses, they are encouraged to develop a sense of detachment and aversion to physical form. This practice promotes introspection and self-awareness, potentially serving as a deterrent against any inclination towards necrophilic behaviors. By exploring the implications of Buddhist teachings in the context of necrophilia, this study can shed light on how Buddhist teachings contribute to the ethical and moral considerations surrounding this paraphilic interest. Furthermore, studying Buddhist teachings in relation to necrophilia can offer insights into the role of compassion and respect for the deceased within Buddhist ethics (Harvey, 2000).

Research Objectives

1. To examine the characteristics, classifications, and impacts of necrophilia.
2. To analyze the psychological factors associated with necrophilia and relevant psychotherapeutic approaches.
3. To analyze the ethical implications of necrophilia from a Buddhist perspective.

Literature Review

1. The Characteristics and Classification of Necrophilia

Necrophilia is generally understood as a strong or recurrent sexual interest in dead bodies. The literature describes substantial variation in fantasy, motivation, behavioral expression, and severity. Proposed classifications include role players, romantic necrophiles, fantasizers, tactile necrophiles, fetishistic

necrophiles, necromutilomaniacs, opportunistic necrophiles, regular necrophiles, homicidal necrophiles, and exclusive necrophiles (Aggrawal, 2009; Knafo, 2015). These categories are descriptive and should not be treated as uniformly validated diagnostic subtypes.

The literature describes a continuum ranging from fantasy and fixation to contact offenses and, in rare cases, homicide (Kumar et al., 2019). Some individuals may report fantasies without acting on them, whereas others may seek access to corpses or engage in criminal conduct. Proposed motivations include a desire for control, fear of rejection, fascination with death, unresolved grief, trauma, and severe psychopathology. Because the empirical evidence base is limited, causal claims should be made cautiously.

The classification of necrophilia provides a framework for understanding the diverse ways this paraphilia manifests. By categorizing necrophilic behaviors, we can better assess the varying degrees of severity and complexity within this spectrum. These classifications help distinguish between individuals who engage in necrophilic fantasies or role-play and those who act on their desires, sometimes with harmful consequences (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The following details the different classifications of necrophilia (Aggrawal, 2009).

Table 1. Characteristics and Classification of Necrophilia

	Necrophilia	
No.	**Classification**	**Characteristics**
1	**Role Players**	Individuals who do not desire sexual activity with actual deceased persons but derive sexual enjoyment from engaging in role-play scenarios with living partners pretending to be dead.
2	**Romantic**	People who, in their grief, mummify a body part of a deceased loved one and keep it for psychosexual stimulation. Their interest is exclusive to their romantically involved partners in life.
3	**Fantasizers**	Individuals who engage in sexual fantasies involving deceased individuals, may visit cemeteries or funeral parlors, and sometimes masturbate in the presence of the deceased.
4	**Tactile**	Those who go beyond fantasies and actually touch the bodies of deceased individuals, including stroking erotic

	Necrophilia	
No.	**Classification**	**Characteristics**
		parts such as breasts, and may manipulate the sexual organs of the deceased for sexual gratification.
5	**Fetishistic**	People who mummify and keep parts of deceased bodies, typically from strangers with no prior romantic relationship. Their motivation differs from Class II necrophiles, as they do it without any connection to the deceased.
6	**Necromutilomaniacs**	Individuals whose necrophilic pleasure derives from mutilating deceased bodies.
7	**Opportunistic**	This category includes those who engage in sexual activity with the dead, often after coming into contact with deceased bodies in their work. They may also have sex with the living but do not refrain from engaging with the deceased.
8	**Regular necrophiles**	These individuals do not enjoy sexual intercourse with the living and prefer deceased bodies. However, they are capable of engaging in sexual activity with both the living and the dead.
9	**Homicidal necrophiles**	The most dangerous category, as they are willing to kill in order to engage in intercourse with the deceased. While they can have sex with the living, their compulsion to engage with the dead drives them to commit homicide.
10	**Exclusive necrophiles**	Individuals who can only engage in sexual intercourse with deceased persons, completely excluding the living as sexual partners.

One group of classifications centers around those who engage in necrophilia (Aggrawal, 2009) without a desire to harm the deceased. This includes "Role Players," who derive sexual enjoyment from simulating death-related scenarios with consenting partners, and "Romantic Necrophiles," who focus their interest on deceased partners with whom they had a prior romantic connection. "Fantasizers" derive sexual pleasure from fantasies involving deceased individuals, sometimes visiting places like cemeteries, while "Tactile Necrophiles" go beyond fantasies to touch and manipulate deceased bodies for sexual gratification. "Fetishistic Necrophiles" are aroused by possessing deceased body parts, and "Opportunistic Necrophiles" engage in sexual acts with the deceased when the opportunity arises, such as in their line of work.

The other classifications involve more dangerous or extreme behaviors. "Necromutilomaniacs" derive pleasure from mutilating deceased bodies.

"Regular Necrophiles" prefer deceased bodies but are capable of engaging in sexual activity with both the living and the dead. "Homicidal Necrophiles" are the most dangerous, as they are willing to kill to engage in sexual activity with a corpse (Loy, 2004). Finally, "Exclusive Necrophiles" are only sexually aroused by deceased persons, completely excluding living partners.

2. Psychotherapeutic Approaches to Necrophilia

Psychotherapeutic intervention for necrophilia should be individualized and based on comprehensive clinical and forensic assessment. Cognitive behavioral approaches may be used to address cognitive distortions, problematic behavioral patterns, risk factors, and relapse prevention, while psychodynamic therapy may explore unresolved trauma, loss, attachment disturbance, and unconscious conflict associated with necrophilic interests. Group-based interventions may also reduce isolation, promote accountability, and support the development of healthier coping strategies when clinically appropriate. Relapse prevention remains an important component of treatment, particularly through identifying triggers, strengthening self-regulation, and developing alternative responses to harmful urges. However, because empirical research specifically evaluating psychotherapy for necrophilia is extremely limited, claims regarding treatment effectiveness should be made cautiously and should not be inferred directly from interventions developed for other paraphilic disorders (Chatterjee, 2023; Knafo, 2015; Knoll, 2015; Kumar et al., 2019).

3. Factors Associated with and Impacts of Necrophilia

Necrophilia stems from multifaceted factors, including psychological and developmental influences. Psychopathological motivations, such as a desire for power and control, or a fascination with death, play a significant role. Childhood trauma (Knoll, 2015), disrupted attachment patterns, and the presence of personality disorders, particularly those with antisocial or narcissistic traits, are also contributing factors.

Mental health disorders, such as psychotic disorders, mood disorders, and anxiety disorders, can interact with these personality factors and traumatic experiences (Belik, 2012) to shape necrophilic tendencies. Additionally, biological factors, including hormonal imbalances and neurological dysfunctions, as well as substance abuse and dependency, are considered contributing factors. These elements highlight the complexity of necrophilic behavior, underscoring

the necessity for comprehensive interventions (Knoll, 2015) that address psychological, developmental, and environmental influences.

Necrophilia has significant psychological and emotional consequences, particularly for the families of the deceased, who often experience feelings of violation and distress. The act also raises ethical concerns regarding the dignity and rights of the deceased, leading to debates on legal protections and enforcement gaps (Knoll, 2015). Many legal systems lack clear statutes addressing necrophilia, complicating prosecution efforts. Additionally, public health risks arise due to the potential for disease transmission, especially when bodies are in advanced stages of decomposition. The lack of medical research on these risks further hampers effective prevention measures.

Beyond the legal and health implications, individuals exhibiting necrophilic tendencies face extreme social ostracization, making it difficult for them to seek psychological help. The stigma surrounding necrophilia perpetuates cycles of secrecy and shame, preventing open discussions and interventions. Historically, societal attitudes toward necrophilia have evolved, influenced by religious beliefs, mythology, and shifting moral values (Belik, 2012). Some historical accounts even depict necrophilia as a ritualistic practice, adding complexity to modern legal and ethical interpretations. Addressing necrophilia requires a multidisciplinary approach, including legal reforms, psychological support, and public awareness campaigns to mitigate its societal impact.

4. Buddhist Perspectives on the Dead Body and Sexual Conduct

Buddhist perspectives on the dead body emphasize impermanence, non-attachment, and contemplation of bodily decomposition. The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta describes cemetery contemplations in which a practitioner observes or imagines a corpse at successive stages of decay, while the Girimānanda Sutta includes perception of unattractiveness among contemplations intended to weaken attachment. The Kāyagatāsati Sutta likewise develops mindfulness of the body and its constituent elements. In the Vinaya Piṭaka, sexual intercourse with a corpse is treated within the rules concerning the gravest monastic sexual offense (Vin III 28–39). These sources establish a doctrinal basis for examining necrophilia through Buddhist ethics. The third precept concerning sexual misconduct, together with the broader principles of non-harming and refraining from taking what is not given, supports an analysis centered on consent, dignity,

restraint, and the consequences of unwholesome desire (Dhammajoti, 2021; Harvey, 2000; Mahatthanadull & Mahatthanadull, 2018).

Conceptual Framework

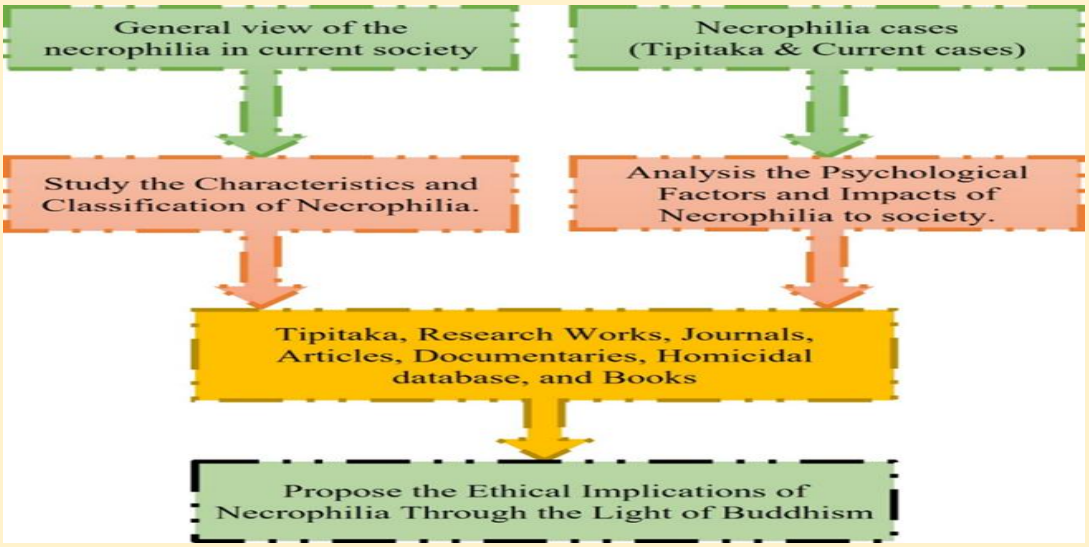

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents the research process beginning with a general review of necrophilia in contemporary society and an examination of relevant cases from the Tipiṭaka and current contexts. These sources inform the analysis of the characteristics, classifications, psychological factors, and social impacts of necrophilia. Evidence from Buddhist texts, research articles, documentaries, homicide databases, and books is then synthesized to propose the ethical implications of necrophilia from a Buddhist perspective**.**

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative documentary research methodology, utilizing content analysis of primary Buddhist canonical texts (Tipiṭaka), secondary scholarly literature, forensic psychology journals, and contemporary case studies to examine the ethical implications of necrophilia from the perspective of Buddhism. The research follows a systematic process[A3.1]:

1. General View of Necrophilia in Current Society: The first step is to gather a general understanding of necrophilia's prevalence and treatment in contemporary society.

2. Necrophilia Cases (Tipitaka & Current Cases): The next step involves examining historical perspectives on necrophilia through religious texts (Tipitaka) and analyzing current cases that might shed light on the issue.

3. Study of the Characteristics and Classification of Necrophilia: One branch of the analysis focuses on understanding the nature and types of necrophilia, including its psychological dimensions.

4. Analysis of Psychological Factors and Impacts on Society: Another component is to explore the psychological underpinnings of necrophilia, how individuals with this condition may be affected, and its societal consequences.

5. Tipitaka, Research Works, Journals, and Other Sources: Research will be based on a combination of traditional Buddhist texts (Tipitaka) and modern academic sources like journals, documentaries, and homicide databases.

6. Propose Ethical Implications: The final goal is to propose ethical insights on necrophilia, viewed through the lens of Buddhist teachings, offering perspectives on morality and societal well-being.

Research Results

Analysis of Necrophilia and Its Ethical Implications from a Buddhist Perspective

Pāṇātipāta (Abstaining from Taking Life): Necrophilia does not itself constitute taking life; however, homicidal necrophilia directly violates the principle of pāṇātipāta (Aṅguttara Nikāya, A II 253) by desecrating the corpse and disregarding the sanctity of the human form. This act, especially homicidal necrophilia, incurs severe ethical and spiritual repercussions, leading to negative karmic consequences and suffering.

Adinnādāna (Abstaining from Taking What is Not Given): Necrophilic conduct may also be interpreted as conflicting with the principle of adinnādāna (Vinaya Piṭaka, Vin III 45), as it involves using a deceased person's body without consent, since the deceased cannot consent to its use. This act disregards the dignity and autonomy of the deceased, akin to robbing a corpse or taking possessions without permission, which is a serious ethical violation in Buddhism.

Kāmesumicchācāra (Abstaining from Sexual Misconduct): Necrophilia is a severe deviation from normative sexual behavior and violates the precept of Kāmesumicchācāra (Majjhima Nikāya, M I 287). It involves a complete disregard

for the agency and autonomy of the deceased, reducing them to an object and perpetuating unwholesome mental states.

Kāmarāga (Sensual Desire or Sensual Lust): In Buddhist teachings, kāmarāga, or sensual lust, is a primary root of unwholesome actions, leading to attachment, suffering, and rebirth (Saṃyutta Nikāya, S I 188). Necrophilia is seen as an extreme manifestation of this craving, reflecting a distorted perception and attachment to the physical form, even in death, causing continued suffering and perpetuating the cycle of birth and death.

Kusala-Kammapada (The Ten Wholesome Causes of Action): The Ten Wholesome Causes of Action provide a framework for ethical conduct in Buddhism, encompassing bodily, verbal, and mental actions. Necrophilia violates several of these actions, including abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, divisive speech, harsh speech, idle chatter, covetousness, ill will, and wrong views. It disregards the sanctity of life, violates the autonomy of the deceased, and is rooted in unwholesome mental states, hindering spiritual growth. The Buddhist solution lies in cultivating wholesome mental states through mindfulness, ethical conduct, compassion, and wisdom.

Asubha-kammaṭṭhāna (The Ten Impurities): The Ten Impurities are contemplative practices in Theravāda Buddhism designed to overcome attachment and desire by focusing on the body's impermanence and unattractiveness (Buddhaghosa, 2010). These practices reduce sensual cravings by reflecting on the body's natural processes of decay, fostering detachment and insight into the nature of suffering and impermanence.

Anussati (Ten Recollections): The ten recollections are meditation subjects intended to cultivate confidence, mindfulness, clarity, and sustained attention. They include recollection of the Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, morality, generosity, deities, death, the body, breathing, and peace (Buddhaghosa, 2010). In the present analysis, recollection of death and mindfulness of the body are especially relevant to weakening denial, fixation, and distorted attachment.

Brahmavihāra (Four Sublime States): Loving-kindness (mettā), compassion (karuṇā), appreciative joy (muditā), and equanimity (upekkhā) cultivate prosocial and non-harming dispositions (Buddhaghosa, 2010). Within an ethical rehabilitation framework, these qualities may support empathy,

responsibility, emotional regulation, and respect for the dignity of others. Their clinical use, however, requires empirical evaluation.

Table 2. Classification of Necrophilia Cases and Ethical Implications

No.	Necrophilia	Necrophilia Cases	Tipiṭaka Cases	Ethical Implications
1	Role Players	The Corpse of Anna Fritz (2015)	Not available	Objectification of women and the primal nature of sexual exploration in young men.
2	Romantic	Carl Tanzler	Bone	Obsessive and delusional love, blurring the boundaries between life and death.
3	Fantasizers	Edmund Kemper	Not available	Pathological response to unmet needs for love, belonging, and self-esteem.
4	Tactile	Joachim Kroll	Not available	Non-sexual motives and the challenges of detecting and apprehending such criminals.
5	Fetishistic	Edward Gein	Sculpture and Wood Doll	Maternal fixation, sexual deviance, and severe mental illness.
6	Necromutilomaniacs	Karen Greenlee	Not available	Mental illness, sexual deviancy, and criminal behavior.
7	Opportunistic	Carroll Edward Cole	Cemetery	Sexual deviance with deep psychological issues stemming from his early life experiences.
8	Regular	Dennis Nilsen & Carl Tanzler	Corpse's wound	Loneliness, sexual deviance, and homicidal tendencies.
9	Homicidal	Jeffrey Dahmer	Not available	Mental health issues and the vulnerabilities of marginalized communities.
10	Exclusive	Victor Ardisson	Not available	Psychopathic behavior characterized by manipulation and violence.

Discussion

This study contributes to the growing interdisciplinary discourse on paraphilic disorders by integrating Buddhist ethical and doctrinal analysis with clinical psychiatric frameworks. The findings reveal that necrophilia, while

clinically rare, represents a convergence of psychological dysfunction, ethical transgression, and spiritual affliction that neither Western psychiatry nor Buddhist ethics alone can fully address. By applying both the DSM-5 diagnostic criteria (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) and Buddhist doctrinal concepts, including craving (taṇhā), attachment (upādāna), and mindfulness (sati), this study offers a more comprehensive understanding of the condition and its possible remediation.

The study's results, corresponding to the first research objective, indicate that necrophilia is a multifaceted paraphilic condition. The classification into ten types, from role-play to exclusive necrophilia, demonstrates diverse motivations and psychological traits, ranging from relatively benign fantasizers to dangerous homicidal necrophiles. Prior psychodynamic literature identifies possible motivations including a need for power or control, fear of rejection, unresolved abandonment or loss, and traumatic childhood experiences (Knafo, 2015; Knoll, 2015). These explanations remain interpretive because the empirical literature is dominated by case reports and conceptual analyses.

From a psychodynamic perspective, necrophilic behavior can be understood through the lens of attachment theory and early developmental disruption. Object relations theory suggests that individuals with necrophilic tendencies may have experienced severe disturbances in their primary attachment relationships, leading to an inability to form emotional bonds with living persons (Knafo, 2015). The deceased body, incapable of rejection or abandonment, becomes a surrogate object of attachment that the individual can control entirely. This parallels the Buddhist understanding of upādāna (clinging) as a fundamental cause of suffering; the necrophilic individual clings to the physical form precisely because it cannot leave, reflecting a deeply distorted manifestation of taṇhā (craving) rooted in unresolved grief and emotional deprivation (Harvey, 2000).

Table 3 summarizes the study's original analytical synthesis of necrophilia through selected Buddhist ethical and doctrinal principles. It maps the Five Precepts, the Four Sublime States (brahmavihāra), and contemplation of bodily impurity (asubha-kammaṭṭhāna) onto the ethical violations and psychological dynamics identified in the documentary data. The table should therefore be understood as a conceptual product of this study rather than as a previously validated clinical model.

Table 3. Summary of Necrophilia in the Light of Buddhism

No.	Object Meditation	Object Meditation (Pali)	Meaning	Necrophilia	Tipitaka	Kamaraga	Panca Sila
1	Earth device	Bhūmi-kāya	The earth element, symbolizing stability and materiality.		✓		✓
2	Water device	Āpo-kāya	Represents the water element, associated with fluidity and change.		✓		✓
3	Fire device	Tejo-kāya	The fire element, symbolizing heat, energy, and transformation.		✓		✓
4	Air or wind device	Vāyo-kāya	The wind element, associated with movement and breath.		✓		✓
5	Blue device	Nīla-kāya	Blue, a color of the body in decay, symbolizing calmness, distance, and transience.		✓		✓
6	Yellow device	Pīta-kāya	Yellow, symbolizing the process of decay and death.		✓		✓
7	Red device	Loṭṭha-kāya	Red, symbolizing the vitality of the body before death, and blood.		✓		✓
8	White device	Sudhā-kāya	White, a symbol of purity and clarity, but also the body's decaying state.		✓		✓
9	Space device	Ākāśa-kāya	The space element, representing emptiness and the void.		✓		✓
10	Consciousness device	Viññāṇa-kāya	Represents awareness, mental clarity, and the distinction between mind and body.		✓		✓
11	A corpse that is bloated	Uddhumāta	A decaying body, swollen with gases after death, representing impermanence.	✓	✓	✓	✓
12	A corpse that is livid	Vinīla	A corpse with patchy discoloration, symbolizing the fading life and physical decay.	✓	✓	✓	✓
13	A corpse that is festering	Vipubba	A corpse with oozing pus, signifying decay and decomposition.	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	A corpse that is cut up	Vicchidda	A body that has been severed, symbolizing violence and the breakdown of physical form.	✓	✓	✓	✓
15	A corpse that is gnawed	Vikkhāyita	A corpse that has been chewed or eaten by scavengers, symbolizing nature's inevitable destruction.	✓	✓	✓	✓
16	A corpse that is scattered	Vikkhitta	A body scattered in pieces, representing disintegration and separation of body parts.	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	A corpse that is hacked and scattered	Hata-vikkhittaka	A body hacked into pieces, representing violence, fragmentation, and destruction.	✓	✓	✓	✓
18	A corpse that is bleeding	Lohitaka	A corpse that is bleeding, signifying vitality and the loss of life force.	✓	✓	✓	✓
19	A corpse that is worm-infested	Puṭuvaka	A corpse infested with worms, symbolizing decomposition and the cycles of nature.	✓	✓	✓	✓
20	A corpse that is a skeleton	Aṭṭhika	A skeleton, the ultimate stage of decomposition, symbolizing the final breakdown of life and form.	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	Contemplation of the Buddha	Buddha-kalāpa	Reflecting on the Buddha, contemplating his qualities and wisdom.		✓		✓
22	Contemplation of the Dhamma	Dhamma-kalāpa	Contemplating the Dhamma (teaching), leading to understanding and realization of truth.		✓		✓
23	Contemplation of the Sangha	Sangha-kalāpa	Reflecting on the community of monks, recognizing their collective wisdom.		✓		✓
24	Contemplation of Virtue	Sīla-kalāpa	Contemplating the virtues of morality, helping to purify the mind and lead to inner peace.		✓		✓
25	Contemplation of Charity	Dāna-kalāpa	Reflecting on the practice of giving, cultivating generosity and selflessness.		✓		✓
26	Contemplation of the Devas	Deva-kalāpa	Reflecting on the divine beings, fostering goodwill and inspiration.		✓		✓
27	Mindfulness of Death	Maraṇa-sati	Mindfully contemplating the inevitability of death, which brings awareness to life's fleeting nature.		✓	✓	✓
28	Mindfulness of the Physical Body	Kāya-sati	Reflecting on the body's impermanence, fostering detachment from physical form.		✓	✓	✓
29	Mindfulness of Breathing	Ānāpāna-sati	Focusing on the breath, cultivating concentration and presence of mind.		✓		✓
30	Contemplation of Calmness	Ārammaṇa-sati	Reflecting on calmness and stillness, cultivating tranquility in the mind.		✓		✓
31	Loving-kindness	Mettā	Developing an attitude of unconditional love and kindness towards all beings.		✓		✓
32	Compassion	Karuṇā	Cultivating compassion, focusing on the suffering of others and developing empathy.		✓		✓
33	Sympathy	Muditā	Cultivating sympathetic joy, rejoicing in the happiness and success of others.		✓		✓
34	Equanimity	Upekkhā	Developing equanimity, cultivating a balanced mind that is free from attachment and aversion.		✓		✓
35	Sphere of Infinity of Space	Ākāśa-ñāṇa	Contemplating the infinite space, fostering an experience of boundless, limitless awareness.		✓		✓
36	Sphere of Infinite Consciousness	Viññāṇa-ñāṇa	Contemplating infinite consciousness, leading to awareness of all that exists.		✓		✓
37	Sphere of No-thingness	Ākāsa-ñāṇa	Contemplating no-thingness, experiencing a state of non-attachment and emptiness.		✓		✓
38	Sphere of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception	Neva-saññā-nā-saññā-ñāṇa	Contemplating the state beyond perception and non-perception, transcending mental distinctions.		✓		✓
39	Contemplation of the loathsomeness of food	Āhāra-sati	Contemplating food as a source of sustenance and recognizing its temporary and unsatisfactory nature.		✓	✓	✓
40	Analysis of the four physical elements	Catu-dhātu-vibhāga	Analyzing the four elements (earth, water, fire, air) as the components of the body and the world.		✓	✓	✓

Based on the findings aligned with the second research objective, necrophilia can be understood through a biopsychosocial framework that recognizes the interaction of psychological, developmental, and social factors. Potentially relevant factors include unresolved trauma, attachment disruption, personality pathology, comorbid mental disorders, social isolation, and

maladaptive responses to loss or rejection. Chatterjee (2023) likewise situates necrophilia at the intersection of criminal behavior and psychological disorder, emphasizing that it requires both forensic-legal analysis and psychological understanding. However, because the available evidence is dominated by case reports and conceptual reviews, biological or neurological explanations should be treated as tentative rather than established causal findings.

The integration of Buddhist psychology with Western clinical models represents the novel contribution of this study. While the DSM-5 provides diagnostic criteria and clinical pathways for paraphilic disorders, Buddhist teachings offer a complementary framework that addresses the root causes of suffering at the level of consciousness itself. The concept of the Three Poisons, greed (lobha), hatred (dosa), and delusion (moha), provides an analytical lens paralleling the Western clinical identification of cognitive distortions, emotional dysregulation, and impaired reality testing in necrophilic individuals. Buddhist mindfulness practices (sati) share therapeutic mechanisms with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) in that both seek to interrupt automatic behavioral patterns through enhanced self-awareness and cognitive restructuring (Mahatthanadull et al., 2026). The Buddhist emphasis on karuṇā (compassion) further provides a rehabilitative framework that Western punitive approaches to sexual offending often lack, suggesting that treatment protocols could benefit from incorporating contemplative practices alongside conventional psychotherapy.

The results about the last research objective reveal a profound Buddhist framework for addressing necrophilia, grounded in ethical principles of respect for life, mindfulness, and detachment from desires. Necrophilia conflicts with the Five Precepts, particularly those against sexual misconduct and harm, while Buddhist teachings on impermanence and non-self (anatta) stress the futility of attachment to physical forms. The Ten Wholesome Courses of Action further emphasize moral cultivation and compassion. This aligns with Saensuk and Chirasantimano's findings that desecration of a deceased body constitutes harm, disrespects the deceased and their relatives, and may spread disease. As the Buddha taught, life is impermanent and characterized by non-self; contemplation of a corpse helps relinquish bodily attachment, for when the body disintegrates, nothing is truly ours.

The findings of this study carry practical implications for multiple domains. In clinical practice, integrating mindfulness-based interventions grounded in Buddhist asubha-bhāvanā (contemplation of impurity) into existing treatment protocols for paraphilic disorders could offer a supplementary therapeutic pathway that addresses the cognitive and affective distortions underlying necrophilic behavior. In forensic and legal contexts, a nuanced understanding of the psychological and spiritual dimensions of necrophilia can inform more humane sentencing and rehabilitation programs. In religious counseling, Buddhist communities may draw on these findings to develop ethical education programs that address extreme forms of attachment and desire through doctrinal teachings (Mahatthanadull & Mahatthanadull, 2018).

This study contributes to the field by demonstrating that a single-disciplinary approach, whether psychiatric, legal, or religious, is insufficient for comprehensively understanding and addressing necrophilia. Future research should explore empirical studies on the effectiveness of mindfulness-based therapeutic interventions for individuals with paraphilic tendencies, longitudinal analyses of treatment outcomes combining Buddhist contemplative practices with psychotherapy, and cross-cultural comparative studies examining how other religious and philosophical traditions address similar paraphilic disorders. Additionally, incorporating more recent literature from forensic psychology and Buddhist studies would further strengthen the evidence base for this interdisciplinary approach (Kumar et al., 2019).

Knowledge from the Research

This study generates an interdisciplinary conceptual account of necrophilia by bringing forensic and psychological literature into dialogue with Buddhist ethics and psychology. The analysis distinguishes among descriptive classifications, proposed psychological factors, ethical consequences, and possible responses. It also shows that Buddhist concepts should not merely be appended to a psychiatric description; they can function as analytical categories for examining craving, clinging, delusion, loss of restraint, objectification, and the cultivation of ethical awareness.

The principal conceptual contribution is a Buddhist ethical-psychological framework organized around three dimensions: diagnosis of unwholesome mental processes, evaluation of conduct, and rehabilitation. Craving (taṇhā),

clinging (upādāna), greed (lobha), and delusion (moha) explain how fixation may be sustained; the precepts concerning non-harming, taking what is not given, and sexual misconduct provide criteria for evaluating conduct; and mindfulness, compassion, ethical restraint, and contemplation of bodily impermanence provide resources for prevention and rehabilitation. This framework is interpretive rather than clinically validated.

The study therefore proposes that responses to necrophilic behavior should combine clinical risk assessment, evidence-based psychotherapy, legal safeguards, respect for victims and bereaved families, and ethically informed rehabilitation. Buddhist practices may be explored as adjunctive resources, but they should not replace psychiatric care, forensic assessment, or empirically supported treatment.

Conclusion

The study concludes that necrophilia is a heterogeneous and poorly researched phenomenon involving psychological, ethical, legal, and social dimensions. Existing classifications describe a spectrum from fantasy and consensual role-play to contact offenses and homicidal behavior, but the evidence base remains limited. Reported associated factors include trauma, attachment disturbance, personality pathology, severe mental illness, and social isolation; these associations do not establish a single causal pathway.

From a Buddhist perspective, necrophilic conduct is incompatible with ethical restraint, respect for bodily dignity, and non-harming. Teachings particularly inform the analysis on craving, clinging, delusion, sexual misconduct, taking what is not given, mindfulness of the body, and corpse contemplation. These teachings offer a distinctive account of how distorted desire may arise and how ethical awareness, compassion, and wisdom may be cultivated.

An adequate response should not rely exclusively on punishment, religious instruction, or psychotherapy. It requires coordinated clinical, forensic, legal, and ethical measures. Further empirical research is needed before Buddhist contemplative practices can be recommended as treatment components for individuals with paraphilic disorders.

Recommendations

The study of necrophilia and its ethical implications through the lens of Buddhism reveals a complex issue that fundamentally opposes Buddhist principles. Necrophilia violates the Five Precepts by disregarding respect for life, engaging in sexual misconduct, and taking what is not given, highlighting unhealthy attachment and desire rooted in ignorance. Buddhist teachings emphasize the impermanence of the body and advocate for compassion, mindfulness, and right action to address and understand necrophilia's underlying causes, promoting a path of wisdom and interdependence.

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Editorial Introduction to the Special Issue: Embodied Wisdom and Human Flourishing

The Editorial Board
Journal of International Buddhist Studies College (JIBSC)

This special issue, **"Embodied Wisdom: Buddhist Perspectives on Body, Mind, and Human Flourishing,"** reflects an important direction in contemporary Buddhist studies. Buddhist wisdom is not concerned with abstract knowledge alone. It develops through lived experience: the body, mind cultivation, ethical conduct, insight into suffering, and compassionate engagement with others. Wisdom becomes embodied when understanding becomes practice and practice shapes how individuals perceive, respond to, and participate in the world.

This perspective is especially relevant in a period marked by rapid technological change, social uncertainty, psychological pressure, and increasingly fragmented attention. Contemporary life provides unprecedented access to information and communication while also creating new forms of distraction, anxiety, isolation, and ethical complexity. These conditions invite renewed consideration of Buddhist traditions not merely as historical or philosophical subjects, but as living resources for cultivating clarity, resilience, ethical awareness, and responsible action.

The contributions in this special issue approach these concerns from diverse disciplinary and cultural perspectives. They explore relationships among contemplative practice, psychological well-being, ethical development, social responsibility, interpersonal relationships, and the contemporary application of Buddhist thought. Despite differences in method and emphasis, they share a common recognition that human flourishing cannot be reduced to psychological comfort or material success. From a Buddhist perspective, flourishing involves understanding experience more clearly, responding wisely to suffering, cultivating wholesome qualities, and relating to others with compassion and responsibility.

Through this special issue, JIBSC seeks to encourage scholarship that remains grounded in Buddhist intellectual traditions while engaging constructively with contemporary human concerns. We hope these contributions will inspire readers to view Buddhist wisdom not only as knowledge to be studied, but as a living orientation toward a more aware, ethical, and compassionate form of human flourishing.

An Effective Method of Vegetarian Dietary Practice in Vietnam Based on Mahāyāna Buddhism and Food Science

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Abstract

This study aimed to propose an effective method of vegetarian dietary practice in Vietnam by integrating Mahāyāna Buddhist principles with contemporary food science. It had three objectives: (1) to examine the issues associated with vegetarian dietary practices in Vietnam; (2) to investigate methods of vegetarian practice in Mahāyāna Buddhism and their foundations in food science; and (3) to propose an effective method of vegetarian dietary practice in Vietnam based on Mahāyāna Buddhism and food science. The study employed a qualitative methodology comprising documentary research and fieldwork. Documentary data were drawn from primary and secondary sources concerning Mahāyāna Buddhist teachings, vegetarian dietary practices, and food science. Fieldwork data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with 17 key informants, including Buddhist monastics and scholars, nutrition experts, medical professionals, and long-term vegetarian practitioners in Vietnam. The data were analyzed using descriptive, thematic, analytical, and interpretive approaches.

The findings revealed that vegetarian dietary practices in Vietnam are strongly influenced by Mahāyāna Buddhist principles, particularly compassion (karuṇā) and non-violence (ahiṃsā), but are also affected by nutritional, economic, sociocultural, and knowledge-related challenges. Four principal methods of practice were identified: periodic vegetarianism, full-time vegetarianism, gradual and flexible vegetarianism, and mindful and compassion-based eating. Buddhist teachings provide the ethical and behavioral foundations for these practices, while food science supports nutritional adequacy through dietary balance, diversity, nutrient bioavailability, and the prevention of potential deficiencies, particularly in vitamin B12, iron, and protein. Based on these findings, the study proposes an integrated vegetarian dietary method emphasizing gradual transition, nutritional balance, mindful eating, cultural adaptability, and practical sustainability. This approach offers a framework for promoting healthy, sustainable, and ethically grounded vegetarian dietary practices in Vietnam.

Keywords: Vegetarian dietary practice; Mahāyāna Buddhism; Food science; Buddhist ethics; Nutritional balance; Mindful eating; Sustainable food systems

Introduction

Vegetarian diets have attracted increasing global attention because of their potential contributions to human health, environmental sustainability, and ethical food consumption. A growing body of evidence indicates that well-planned vegetarian and plant-based diets are associated with lower risks of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, hypertension, and certain cancers, while also producing lower environmental impacts than meat-based diets (Craig, 2009; Key et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2023; Baroni et al., 2024). Nevertheless, poorly planned vegetarian diets may result in deficiencies of vitamin B12, iron, calcium, zinc, omega-3 fatty acids, and high-quality protein, thereby increasing the risk of nutritional imbalance (Melina et al., 2016; Niklewicz et al., 2024).

In Vietnam, vegetarian dietary practices have developed under the long-standing influence of Mahāyāna Buddhism and traditional culture. Since Buddhism was introduced into Vietnam approximately two millennia ago, vegetarianism has become closely associated with the Buddhist values of compassion (karuṇā) and non-violence (ahiṃsā), especially among monastic communities and lay Buddhists during religious observances (Thư, 2008; Hiep & Mahatthanadull, 2019; Yen & Ha, 2023). In recent years, vegetarianism has also become increasingly popular among non-Buddhists because of growing awareness of health, environmental sustainability, and animal welfare (Nho, 2024; Thanh et al., 2025).

Despite its growing popularity, vegetarian practice in Vietnam continues to face several challenges. Previous studies have reported limited dietary diversity, inadequate nutritional knowledge, misconceptions regarding vegetarian diets, and socioeconomic barriers that hinder long-term adherence (Van et al., 2016; Thuy et al., 2023; Hang et al., 2024). Traditional Vietnamese vegetarian meals are often centered on rice, vegetables, tofu, and soy products, which may not adequately supply essential nutrients if meal planning is insufficient. Consequently, deficiencies in vitamin B12, iron, calcium, and protein remain concerns among long-term vegetarians (Craig, 2009; Melina et al., 2016; Niklewicz et al., 2024).

From a Mahāyāna Buddhist perspective, vegetarianism extends beyond dietary restriction to encompass ethical cultivation and spiritual practice.

Buddhist scriptures and contemporary scholarship emphasize that abstaining from meat expresses compassion toward sentient beings, reduces suffering, and supports the bodhisattva ideal (Keown, 2005; Hiep & Mahatthanadull, 2019; Mahatthanadull & Thanaboripat, 2021). Food science, meanwhile, demonstrates that the health benefits of vegetarian diets depend not only on food selection but also on balanced nutrient intake, dietary diversity, nutrient bioavailability, and appropriate supplementation where necessary (Appleby & Key, 2016; Nolden & Forde, 2023; Wang et al., 2023). These perspectives suggest that ethical values and nutritional science should be treated as complementary rather than separate approaches to vegetarian practice.

However, existing studies have generally examined Buddhist vegetarianism from religious or cultural perspectives or investigated vegetarian diets primarily from nutritional and medical viewpoints. Few studies have integrated Mahāyāna Buddhist ethical principles with modern food science to develop a comprehensive and practical framework for vegetarian dietary practice in the Vietnamese context. This gap limits the applicability of existing knowledge for promoting nutritionally balanced, culturally appropriate, and sustainable vegetarian lifestyles in Vietnam.

Accordingly, this study addresses the research gap by integrating Mahāyāna Buddhist teachings with contemporary food science to develop an effective method of vegetarian dietary practice in Vietnam. Through its interdisciplinary and practical focus, the study seeks to contribute to scholarship on Buddhist vegetarianism and food science and to support healthier, more sustainable dietary practices.

Research Objectives

1. To study the issues associated with vegetarian dietary practices in Vietnam.
2. To examine the methods of vegetarian practice in Mahāyāna Buddhism and their basis in food science.
3. To propose an effective method of vegetarian dietary practice in Vietnam based on Mahāyāna Buddhism and food science.

Literature Review

Previous scholarship demonstrates that vegetarian dietary practice involves both substantial health potential and identifiable nutritional risks. Craig (2009), Key et al. (2016), and Melina et al. (2016) found that appropriately

planned vegetarian diets may support healthy body weight and reduce cardiometabolic risk, but inadequate planning can compromise vitamin B12, iron, calcium, zinc, vitamin D, omega-3 fatty acids, and protein intake. More recent evidence reinforces the need to distinguish between simply avoiding animal products and following a nutritionally adequate plant-based pattern. Dawczynski et al. (2022) reported that vegetarians and vegans often consume more fiber, folate, and antioxidant nutrients but may have lower status of vitamin B12, iodine, calcium, iron, and zinc, while Peruvemba et al. (2024) showed that diet quality is strongly related to nutrition literacy and dietary motivation. In Vietnam, Chinh (2023), Van et al. (2016), and Hang et al. (2024) identified food insecurity, inadequate dietary diversity, limited understanding of portion sizes, and intermittent practice as barriers to nutritional adequacy. These findings indicate that the central problem is not vegetarianism itself, but the knowledge, food access, and meal-planning conditions under which it is practiced.

Research on Mahāyāna Buddhist vegetarianism emphasizes its ethical and cultural foundations. Yen and Ha (2023) and Hiep and Mahatthanadull (2019) explain that compassion, non-harming, mindfulness, and the bodhisattva ideal shape Vietnamese vegetarian practice, particularly periodic observance among lay Buddhists and more sustained practice among monastics. Food-science research complements this ethical framework. Appleby and Key (2016) associate well-planned vegetarian diets with favorable long-term health outcomes, while Raj et al. (2025) affirm that vegetarian and vegan dietary patterns can be nutritionally adequate when supported by evidence-based planning and professional guidance. Recent studies also clarify that adequate protein can be obtained from varied combinations of legumes, soy foods, nuts, seeds, and grains, although vitamin B12 and other nutrients may require fortified foods or supplementation. Taken together, these studies suggest that Buddhist motivation can sustain ethical commitment, but food science is necessary to translate that commitment into safe and nutritionally balanced practice.

Behavioral research further shows that sustainable dietary change depends on more than knowledge alone. McEachan et al. (2011) demonstrate that intention, social norms, and perceived behavioral control influence health behavior, while Yang et al. (2025) identify education, affordability, recipes, accessibility, and family support as facilitators of plant-based eating. In Vietnam, Nho (2024), Thao and Thanh (2023), and Markoni et al. (2023) show that environmental concern, food quality, availability, consumer identity, and social context influence vegetarian choices. Newer evidence also links mindful eating

with healthier plant-based dietary patterns (Paolassini-Guesnier et al., 2025), while Rickerby and Green (2024) identify convenience, taste, cost, knowledge, and social expectations as persistent barriers. The literature therefore supports an integrated model combining Mahāyāna ethics, nutrition literacy, gradual behavioral change, mindful eating, and culturally accessible food systems; however, few studies have tested such a model empirically in Vietnam.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework links the issues associated with vegetarian dietary practice in Vietnam, Mahāyāna Buddhist principles, food-science foundations, and fieldwork evidence to the development of an integrated and practical vegetarian dietary method.

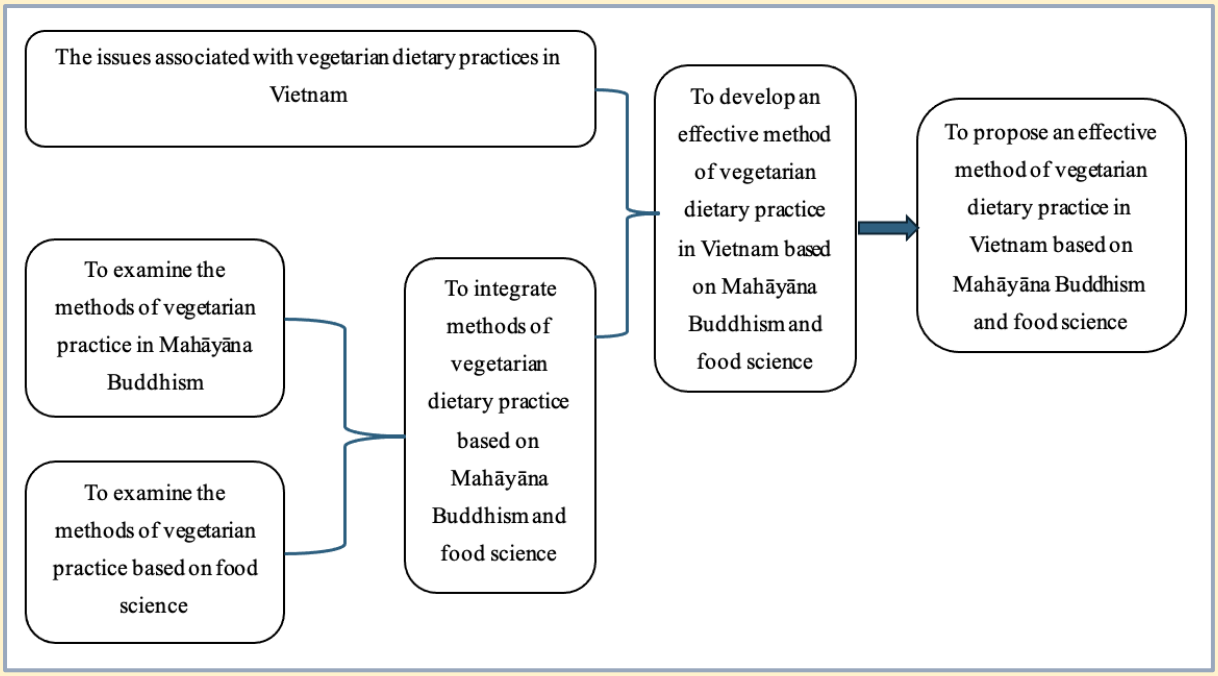

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative methodology comprising documentary research and fieldwork. The research process consisted of three main stages: (1) collecting documentary and fieldwork data, (2) conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews with selected key informants, and (3) analyzing and synthesizing the collected data to produce a descriptive and interpretive account.

1. Data Collection

Data were collected through documentary research and fieldwork. Documentary research involved the systematic collection and review of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included relevant Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures, Vinaya texts, and commentaries concerning vegetarian dietary practices, together with academic publications in food science, nutrition, and public health. Secondary sources included books, peer-reviewed journal articles, doctoral dissertations, master's theses, conference proceedings, government publications, and relevant institutional materials concerning Buddhism, vegetarianism, nutrition, and dietary practices in Vietnam.

Fieldwork data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with 17 key informants selected through purposive sampling. The interviews elicited empirical information concerning the issues associated with vegetarian dietary practices in Vietnam, methods of vegetarian practice in Mahāyāna Buddhism and their foundations in food science, and the development of an effective vegetarian dietary method suited to the Vietnamese context.

2. Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews and Key Informants

The fieldwork involved semi-structured in-depth interviews with 17 key informants selected through purposive sampling based on their knowledge, professional expertise, and long-term experience. The participants comprised nine members of the monastic community, three health and nutrition experts, and five lay practitioners. Their details are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Key Informants

Group	Number	Relevant Background
Buddhist monastics and scholars	9	Knowledge of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Buddhist ethics, and vegetarian practice
Health and nutrition professionals	3	Expertise in nutrition, medicine, dietary planning, and public health
Long-term vegetarian practitioners	5	Practical experience of vegetarian dietary practice in Vietnamese daily life
Total	**17**	

The fieldwork involved semi-structured in-depth interviews with 17 key informants selected through purposive sampling. The participants comprised nine Buddhist monastics and scholars, three health and nutrition professionals, and five long-term vegetarian practitioners. They were selected on the basis of their

knowledge, professional expertise, and practical experience relevant to vegetarian dietary practice in Vietnam.

3. Data Analysis and Synthesis

Documentary and fieldwork data were systematically organized, analyzed, and synthesized in accordance with the three research objectives. Documentary data from Buddhist scriptures, academic publications, and food-science literature were examined through document and content analysis to identify relevant concepts, principles, and theoretical foundations. Empirical data from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed thematically and supported by descriptive, analytical, and interpretive approaches. The interview data were coded and organized into major themes corresponding to the research objectives. Documentary evidence and empirical findings were then integrated and triangulated to produce a descriptive and interpretive account and to formulate an effective method of vegetarian dietary practice in Vietnam based on Mahāyāna Buddhism and food science.

Research Process

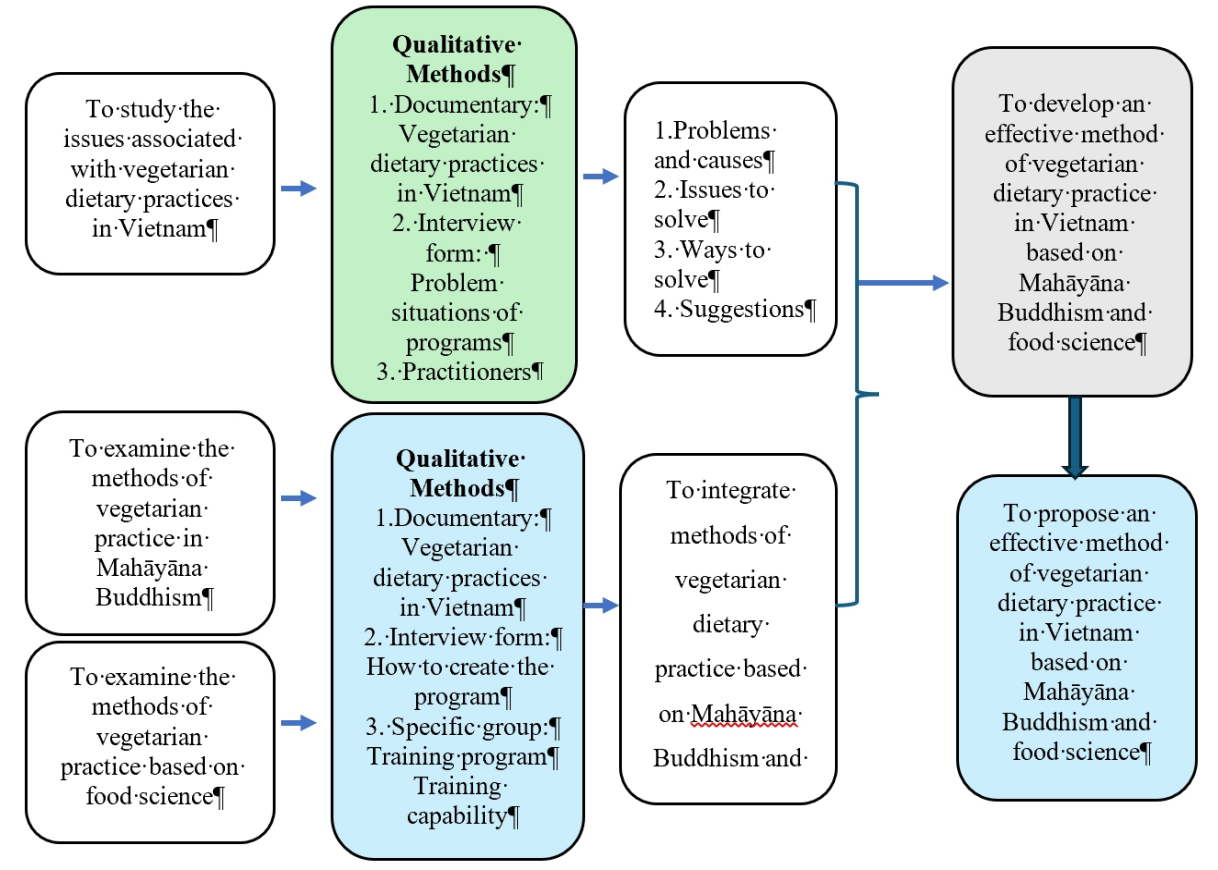

Figure 2. Research Process

Research Results

Objective 1: The Issues Associated with Vegetarian Dietary Practices in Vietnam

The findings from documentary analysis and in-depth interviews revealed that the issues associated with vegetarian dietary practices in Vietnam are multidimensional and interconnected. Four major issues were identified: (1) nutritional and health issues, (2) economic and access issues, (3) cultural and social barriers, and (4) lack of nutritional knowledge and information. Although participants generally recognized the religious, ethical, and health-related values of vegetarianism, the interview findings showed that maintaining a nutritionally balanced and sustainable vegetarian diet can be difficult when practitioners have limited dietary knowledge, insufficient food diversity, restricted access to suitable foods, or difficulties adapting the practice to everyday social life.

Table 2. Summary of Findings for Research Objective 1

Main Issue	Key Finding	Interview Evidence
Nutritional and health issues	Poorly planned diets may result in nutritional imbalance and insufficient dietary diversity.	Health professionals emphasized dietary balance, potential nutrient deficiencies, and scientific understanding.
Economic and access issues	Food availability and individual living conditions affect the ability to maintain a diverse vegetarian diet.	Lay practitioners reported adapting food choices to local availability and daily circumstances.
Cultural and social barriers	Family, work, and social environments influence the consistency of vegetarian practice.	Lay practitioners described balancing vegetarian practice with family responsibilities, work, and social situations.
Lack of knowledge and information	Religious motivation may not be accompanied by sufficient knowledge of balanced vegetarian nutrition.	Health professionals stressed the need for nutritional knowledge and appropriate dietary planning.

Objective 2: Methods of Vegetarian Practice in Mahāyāna Buddhism and Their Foundations in Food Science. The findings identified four principal methods of vegetarian practice in the Vietnamese Mahāyāna context: (1) periodic vegetarianism, (2) full-time vegetarianism, (3) gradual and flexible vegetarianism, and (4) mindful and compassion-based eating. Documentary and interview findings showed that these methods represent different levels of commitment and adaptation rather than a single rigid form of practice. From a

Buddhist perspective, they are grounded in compassion, non-harming, mindfulness, and ethical cultivation; from a food-science perspective, their effectiveness depends on nutritional adequacy, dietary diversity, appropriate food selection, and sustainable eating habits.

Table 3. Summary of Findings for Research Objective 2

Vegetarian Method	Mahāyāna Buddhist Basis	Food Science Basis	Interview Evidence
Periodic Vegetarian Method	Buddhist observance, compassion, and non-harming	Provides a practical starting point for increasing plant-based meals	Participants regarded periodic practice as familiar and adaptable to Vietnamese religious and daily life
Full-time Vegetarian Method	Stronger ethical commitment, compassion, and consistent non-harming	Requires dietary diversity and careful nutritional planning for long-term practice	Participants reported greater stability after adaptation, but also initial difficulties in social situations and meal preparation
Gradual and Flexible Vegetarian Method	Allows practitioners to progress according to personal conditions and readiness	Supports progressive dietary adjustment and sustainable behavioral change	Many participants described their transition to vegetarianism as gradual rather than immediate
Mindful and Compassion-based Eating Method	Mindfulness, compassion, gratitude, and awareness of non-harming	Encourages conscious food selection, moderation, and healthier eating behavior	Monastic participants emphasized awareness of food, its value, and the consequences of dietary choices

Objective 3: An Effective Method of Vegetarian Dietary Practice in Vietnam Based on Mahāyāna Buddhism and Food Science. By integrating documentary evidence and interview findings, the study proposes an effective vegetarian dietary method that combines Mahāyāna Buddhist ethical principles, nutritional adequacy, gradual behavioral change, and practical adaptation to the Vietnamese context. Rather than requiring an immediate or rigid transition, the method emphasizes gradual progression from periodic practice toward more consistent dietary habits, supported by balanced nutrition and mindful eating. It was developed to address the nutritional, practical, social, and knowledge-related issues identified under Objective 1 while incorporating the Buddhist and food-science foundations identified under Objective 2.

Table 4. Summary of Findings for Research Objective 3

Component	Main Findings	Interview Contribution
Structure	Integrates periodic vegetarian practice into daily eating habits while ensuring nutritional balance and dietary diversity	Participants supported gradual, flexible practice and emphasized balanced food choices
Core Mechanisms	Behavioral change and habit formation are reinforced by nutritional knowledge, awareness, and mindful eating	Key informants emphasized knowledge, motivation, mindfulness, and consistency
Practical Application	Accessibility, affordability, community participation, and cultural familiarity support long-term practice	Practitioners highlighted food availability and daily-life conditions; monastics and lay participants emphasized community support
Health and Scientific Validation	A well-planned, diverse vegetarian diet can support nutritional adequacy and long-term health	Health professionals emphasized proper planning and dietary diversity; practitioners reported perceived health benefits

Discussion

This study examined an effective method of vegetarian dietary practice in Vietnam based on Mahāyāna Buddhism and food science. The findings are discussed according to the three research objectives in order to compare them with previous studies and clarify the contribution of the research.

Regarding the first objective, the study found that vegetarian dietary practices in Vietnam involve multiple challenges, including nutritional imbalance, limited dietary diversity, economic constraints, insufficient knowledge, and inconsistency in practice. These findings are consistent with Craig (2009), Key et al. (2006), and Melina et al. (2016), who emphasized that vegetarian diets may lead to nutritional deficiencies when they are not properly planned. In the Vietnamese context, the findings are also supported by Chinh (2023), Van et al. (2016), and Hang et al. (2024), who identified food insecurity, limited dietary understanding, and unstable vegetarian practice. Whereas previous studies focused primarily on isolated nutritional or behavioral factors, the present study provides a more integrated analysis encompassing nutritional, economic, social, cultural, and religious dimensions. This broader approach helps explain the principal barriers to sustainable vegetarian practice in Vietnam.

Regarding the second objective, the study found that vegetarian practice in Vietnamese Mahāyāna Buddhism can be understood as a flexible and structured system comprising periodic vegetarianism, full-time vegetarianism, gradual

transition, and mindful eating. These findings are consistent with Hiep and Mahatthanadull (2019), who interpreted vegetarianism as both a moral and spiritual practice, and with Yen and Ha (2023), who emphasized the influence of Buddhism on Vietnamese culture and daily life. From a food-science perspective, the findings also align with Appleby and Key (2016), who showed that well-planned vegetarian diets may provide long-term health benefits. Previous studies often separated religious and scientific dimensions; this research integrates Buddhist ethics with food-science knowledge to develop a clearer and more practical system suited to contemporary Vietnamese life.

Regarding the third objective, the study found that an effective vegetarian dietary method in Vietnam should integrate ethical motivation, nutritional knowledge, and behavioral support. This finding is consistent with Nho (2024), Yang et al. (2025), and McEachan et al. (2011), who emphasized the importance of motivation, social norms, perceived behavioral control, and practical barriers in shaping dietary behavior. It is also supported by research on consumer behavior and access to vegetarian food in Vietnam. Previous studies, however, generally examined psychological, environmental, or consumer factors separately and did not integrate them into a comprehensive dietary method grounded in Mahāyāna Buddhist ethics. The present study addresses that gap by proposing a gradual, balanced, and sustainable method that combines Buddhist ethics, food science, and behavioral principles.

New Knowledge from the Research

This study generates new knowledge by integrating Mahāyāna Buddhist ethics, food science, and the lived experiences of vegetarian practitioners in Vietnam. The findings show that effective vegetarian practice should not be understood simply as abstaining from meat. Rather, it is a structured dietary system requiring nutritional balance, dietary diversity, appropriate food selection, and sustained behavioral adaptation.

The study also identifies nutritional knowledge as a decisive factor in successful vegetarian practice. Many health concerns associated with vegetarian diets arise not from vegetarianism itself but from insufficient knowledge of meal planning, nutrient sources, and possible deficiencies. Therefore, nutrition education should be incorporated into Buddhist vegetarian practice, particularly for long-term practitioners.

A further contribution is integrating Mahāyāna Buddhist principles with food science. Compassion, non-harming, mindfulness, and moderation provide ethical motivation and guide food choices, while food science ensures nutritional

adequacy and health protection. These two perspectives are complementary rather than contradictory.

Based on this integration, the study proposes three core elements of an effective vegetarian dietary method: gradual transition, nutritional balance, and mindful eating. Gradual transition improves adaptability, nutritional balance supports physical health, and mindful eating strengthens ethical awareness and self-regulation.

The findings also show that successful implementation depends on practical conditions, including affordability, food accessibility, cultural familiarity, and social support. The proposed method therefore extends beyond individual dietary choice and recognizes the broader social and economic environment. Overall, the study contributes a holistic framework that connects physical health, mental well-being, ethical cultivation, and sustainable dietary practice in the Vietnamese context.

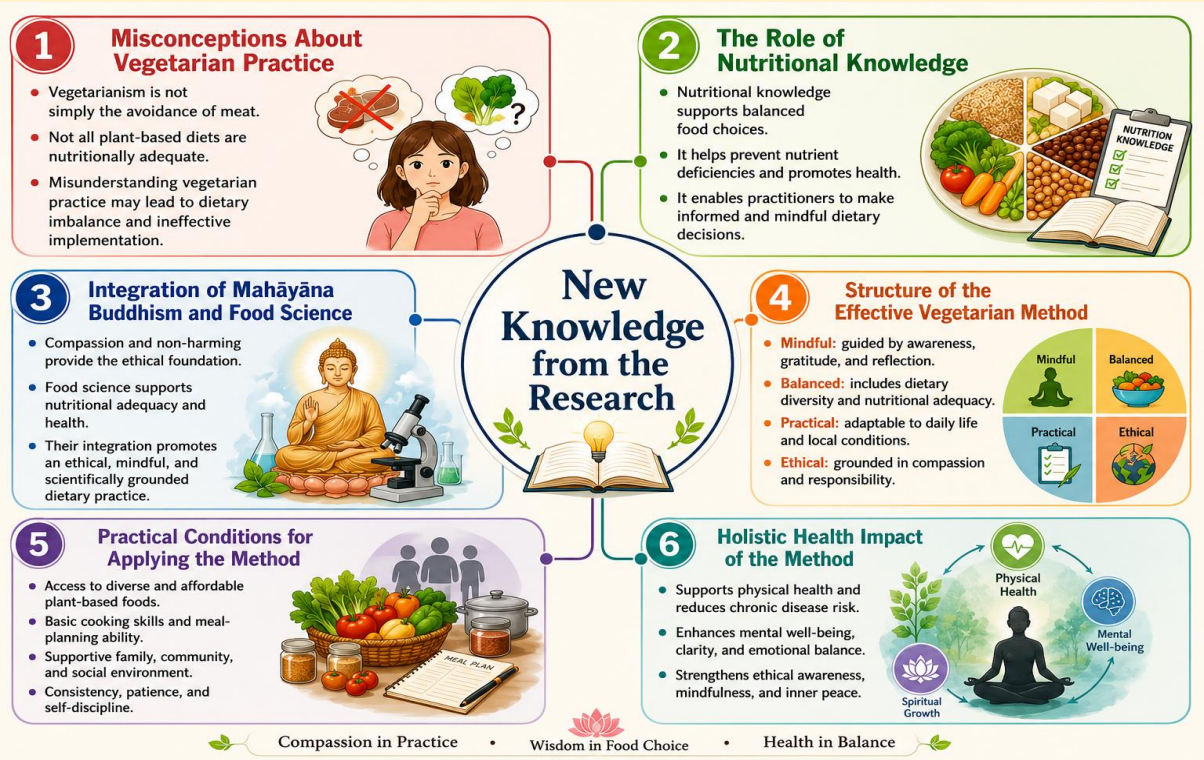

Figure 3. New Knowledge Generated from the Integration of Mahāyāna Buddhism and Food Science

Conclusion

This study examined vegetarian dietary practices in Vietnam by integrating Mahāyāna Buddhist principles, food science, and empirical findings from in-depth interviews. The findings revealed that vegetarian dietary practice is influenced by several interconnected issues, particularly nutritional and health concerns, economic and access limitations, cultural and social barriers, and

insufficient nutritional knowledge and information. These findings indicate that the main concern is not vegetarianism itself but how the diet is understood, planned, and maintained in everyday life. Sustainable practice therefore requires adequate nutritional knowledge, dietary diversity, practical guidance, and adaptation to social and cultural conditions. In response to these issues, the study identified four principal methods of vegetarian practice: Periodic Vegetarian Method, Full-time Vegetarian Method, Gradual and Flexible Vegetarian Method, and Mindful and Compassion-based Eating Method. These methods demonstrate that Mahāyāna Buddhist principles, particularly compassion, non-harming, mindfulness, and ethical cultivation, provide an important spiritual and behavioral foundation, while food science contributes the nutritional basis required for dietary balance, diversity, and appropriate food selection. Integrating these findings led to the development of an effective vegetarian dietary method characterized by gradual transition, nutritional balance, and mindful eating, supported by behavioral change and habit formation, nutritional knowledge and awareness, accessibility and affordability, and community and cultural support. Rather than promoting a rigid or sudden dietary transition, the proposed method provides a flexible approach that can be adapted to individual circumstances and everyday life in Vietnam while maintaining both Buddhist ethical values and nutritional adequacy. Overall, the study demonstrates that effective vegetarian practice requires the integration of ethical motivation, scientific nutritional knowledge, sustainable dietary behavior, and socio-cultural applicability. By bringing these dimensions together within a unified framework, the study contributes a practical and culturally appropriate approach to supporting healthy, sustainable, and long-term vegetarian dietary practice in Vietnam.

Recommendations

The study was organized around three research objectives, and its literature review, scope, methodology, and findings were aligned accordingly. Several directions for future research emerged from the analysis.

1. Develop and empirically evaluate an integrated model of vegetarian dietary practice for sustainable health and well-being in Vietnam based on Mahāyāna Buddhism and food science, with particular attention to the systematic interaction of ethical, nutritional, and behavioral components.

2. Conduct comparative research on vegetarian dietary practices across Mahāyāna, Theravāda, and Vajrayāna Buddhist traditions to identify similarities, differences, and potential applications in contemporary society.

3. Examine the effectiveness of vegetarian dietary practices among different population groups in Vietnam, including monastic communities, lay Buddhists, students, and working adults, with attention to practical challenges, behavioral sustainability, and socioeconomic conditions.

4. Investigate behavioral factors and practical solutions affecting the implementation of vegetarian dietary practices, including the intention-behavior gap, motivation, social influence, education, community support, and digital tools for sustaining long-term dietary change.

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Applying Santuṭṭhi Blessing and Minimalism: A Study of Harmonizing Modern Living Through the Four Requisites for Sustainable Peacebuilding

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Abstract

This study examines the application of Santuṭṭhi (contentment) and minimalism through the Buddhist framework of the Four Requisites: clothing, food, shelter, and medicine, as an approach to sustainable peacebuilding. Although previous studies have examined Buddhist contentment and modern minimalism independently, limited research has integrated these perspectives into a practical framework for addressing contemporary challenges associated with consumerism, excessive consumption, and declining well-being. Accordingly, this study aimed to (1) examine the foundational principles of Santuṭṭhi and minimalism through the Four Requisites, (2) investigate their impacts on personal, community, and collective well-being, and (3) propose practical methods for applying these principles in everyday life to promote sustainable peace. The study employed a qualitative documentary research methodology based on Buddhist scriptures, academic books, journal articles, and contemporary literature in Pāli, English, Burmese, and Pa-O. The collected data were analyzed through textual analysis and thematic synthesis.

The findings indicate that both Santuṭṭhi and minimalism encourage mindful consumption, gratitude, moderation, and ethical responsibility, thereby improving psychological well-being, strengthening social harmony, and supporting environmental sustainability. Integrating these perspectives through the Four Requisites provides a practical framework for balancing material needs with ethical and spiritual development. The study further proposes five practical strategies for cultivating contentment and intentional living in contemporary society. The research contributes new knowledge by demonstrating that Buddhist ethics and modern minimalist philosophy are complementary approaches that together provide an interdisciplinary framework for sustainable peacebuilding, ethical consumption, and holistic well-being.

Keywords: Santuṭṭhi; Minimalism; Four Requisites; Buddhist Ethics; Sustainable Peacebuilding; Mindful Consumption

Introduction

Contemporary society is increasingly shaped by consumerism, material abundance, and the continuous pursuit of acquisition, creating psychological stress, social inequality, and environmental degradation. Although economic development and technological progress have improved living standards, they have not necessarily increased happiness or inner peace. Instead, excessive consumption and attachment to material possessions have contributed to anxiety, dissatisfaction, and unsustainable patterns of living (Green Funders, 2023; Nandasara, 2023). These challenges have renewed scholarly interest in ethical and sustainable approaches that promote both personal well-being and social harmony.

Within the Buddhist tradition, Santuṭṭhi (contentment) is regarded as a fundamental virtue that encourages gratitude, moderation, and satisfaction with what is sufficient. The Buddha's teaching that "contentment is the greatest wealth" (Dhp. 204) emphasizes that genuine well-being arises not from accumulation but from freedom from excessive craving (Sandardhika, 2000). Similarly, the Four Requisites—clothing, food, shelter, and medicine—are understood in Buddhism as essential supports for life that should be used wisely and responsibly rather than as objects of attachment (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000; Mahāsi Sayādaw, 1972). These principles provide an ethical framework for balancing material needs with spiritual development.

In recent decades, minimalism has emerged as a contemporary lifestyle that promotes intentional consumption, simplicity, and reducing unnecessary possessions. Rather than advocating deprivation, minimalism encourages individuals to focus on meaningful relationships, personal growth, and responsible resource use (Millburn & Nicodemus, 2011; Telford, 2019; Dee, 2017). Recent studies further suggest that minimalist lifestyles can improve psychological well-being, reduce materialistic values, and encourage environmentally responsible behavior (Jain et al., 2023; Kasser, 2017).

Although previous studies have examined Santuṭṭhi and minimalism independently, little research has explored their integration through the Buddhist

framework of the Four Requisites as a practical model for sustainable peacebuilding. Existing literature has paid limited attention to how these complementary approaches can jointly address contemporary challenges such as overconsumption, emotional distress, and ecological degradation. This study addresses that gap by integrating Buddhist ethical principles with modern minimalist philosophy to propose a practical framework for applying Santuṭṭhi and minimalism in everyday life. In doing so, it contributes an interdisciplinary perspective that connects Buddhist ethics, intentional living, and sustainable peacebuilding within the context of contemporary society.

Research Objectives

1. To study the foundational principles of Santuṭṭhi Blessing and minimalism, especially through the Four Requisites.
2. To examine the benefits and impacts of practicing Santuṭṭhi and minimalism on personal, community, and collective well-being.
3. To apply Santuṭṭhi Blessing and Minimalism in daily life to cultivate sustainable peace in modern society.

Literature Review

Buddhist literature presents Santuṭṭhi as an ethical and psychological quality grounded in contentment with what is sufficient. The Dhammapada describes contentment as the greatest wealth, emphasizing that genuine well-being depends less on material accumulation than on freedom from excessive craving. Sandardhika (2000) interprets santuṭṭhi as satisfaction with what has been rightfully obtained and argues that external wealth cannot produce genuine happiness without inner peace. This interpretation also distinguishes contentment from laziness or complacency: Santuṭṭhi does not reject effort, but guides individuals to pursue their responsibilities without becoming dominated by dissatisfaction, competition, or greed.

The Buddhist framework of the Four Requisites, clothing, food, shelter, and medicine, provides a practical context for applying contentment. These requisites are intended to sustain life, protect health, and support ethical and spiritual development rather than serve as objects of status or attachment. Buddhist textual traditions encourage reflective use of clothing, moderation in food, functional shelter, and responsible use of medicine (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000; Mahāsi Sayādaw, 1972). When these basic needs are approached through

mindfulness and gratitude, they become instruments of restraint and well-being. When driven by craving, however, they may be transformed into sources of overconsumption and social comparison.

Contemporary minimalism offers a parallel response to consumer culture. Millburn and Nicodemus (2011) define minimalism as the intentional removal of what is unnecessary so that individuals can focus on meaningful relationships, personal growth, and contribution. Telford (2019) similarly associates decluttering and simplified living with mental clarity, emotional stability, and purposeful action. Dee (2017) extends this approach by showing that possessions may carry unresolved emotional attachments and that letting go can support psychological freedom. Empirical research also suggests that minimalism may reduce materialistic orientation and improve subjective well-being by encouraging individuals to prioritize meaningful experiences over acquisition (Jain et al., 2023).

Despite these convergences, the two bodies of literature remain largely separate. Buddhist studies generally discuss Santuṭṭhi as a moral or spiritual virtue, while minimalist literature treats simplicity primarily as a lifestyle strategy. Few studies have integrated them through the Four Requisites or examined their combined relevance to sustainable peacebuilding. This study addresses that gap by analyzing Santuṭṭhi and minimalism as complementary but distinct frameworks. It proposes that Buddhist contentment supplies the ethical orientation, while minimalism provides practical methods for reducing excess, clarifying needs, and supporting responsible consumption.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework follows an input–process–output structure. The inputs consist of Buddhist teachings on Santuṭṭhi, the Four Requisites, and contemporary literature on minimalism, well-being, ethical consumption, and sustainable peace. These sources are examined through documentary research, textual analysis, manual coding, and thematic synthesis. The analytical process identifies the foundational principles of Santuṭṭhi and minimalism, their application to clothing, food, shelter, and medicine, and their potential effects on personal, community, and collective well-being. The output is an integrated practical framework for applying Santuṭṭhi and minimalism in daily life. The framework proposes that contentment, mindful consumption, needs–wants

discernment, non-comparison, supportive social relationships, and digital moderation can reduce excessive craving and material dependence while promoting ethical living, environmental responsibility, social harmony, and sustainable peace.

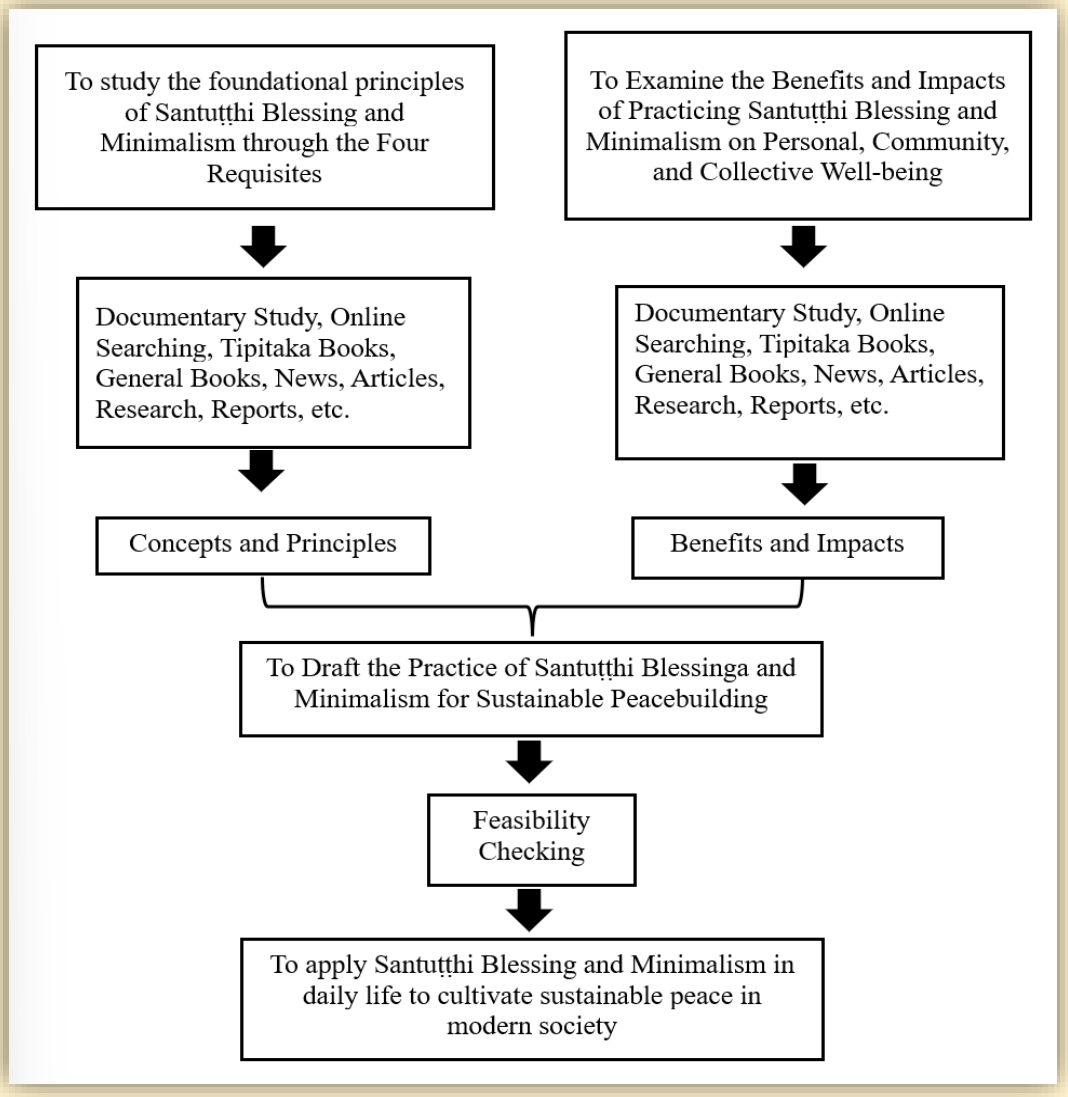

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Integrating Santuṭṭhi and Minimalism through the Four Requisites

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative documentary research design to examine how Santuṭṭhi and minimalism may contribute to sustainable peace when applied through the Four Requisites: clothing, food, shelter, and medicine. The research process comprised three stages: documentary selection, textual analysis, and thematic synthesis.

Documentary Selection

The initial documentary population consisted of approximately 100 sources located through academic databases, library collections, Buddhist textual repositories, and relevant institutional and online resources. The materials included Buddhist canonical and commentarial texts, academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, theses, and contemporary works on Santuṭṭhi, minimalism, consumption, well-being, and peacebuilding. Sources were written in Pāli, English, Burmese, and Pa-O.

Documents were included when they met at least one of the following criteria: direct relevance to Santuṭṭhi or the Four Requisites; discussion of minimalism, voluntary simplicity, or mindful consumption; analysis of well-being, sustainable living, or peacebuilding; and sufficient academic or textual credibility. Duplicate, unrelated, purely promotional, and insufficiently documented sources were excluded. Following screening, 35 documents were selected for detailed analysis.

Textual Analysis

The selected documents were read systematically and coded manually. The analysis focused on recurring concepts, ethical principles, practical strategies, and claimed outcomes related to contentment, simplicity, consumption, and sustainable peace. Initial codes included Santuṭṭhi, craving, gratitude, moderation, minimalism, clothing, food, shelter, medicine, well-being, ethical consumption, environmental responsibility, and social harmony.

Thematic Synthesis

The coded data were synthesized through four steps: generating initial codes, identifying recurring patterns, reviewing and refining themes, and interpreting relationships among the themes. The final themes were organized according to the three research objectives. Because this was a documentary study, the findings represent conceptual and interpretive conclusions derived from the selected literature. They should not be treated as direct evidence of behavioral or clinical effectiveness.

Research Results

Objective 1: Foundational Principles of Santuṭṭhi and Minimalism

The findings show that the Four Requisites, clothing, food, shelter, and medicine, are not merely material necessities but also ethical domains through which moderation, mindfulness, and non-attachment can be practiced.

The principal findings were as follows:

- *Clothing* serves to protect the body and cultivate modesty rather than display wealth or social status, as reflected in the *Visuddhimagga* (Mahāsi Sayādaw, 1972).
- *Food* sustains life, expressed in the teaching "Sabbesattā āhāraṭṭhitikā," meaning that all beings subsist on food (S II 11). Its proper use requires moderation, mindfulness, and attention to health.
- *Shelter* provides safety, rest, and suitable conditions for spiritual development rather than luxury or prestige.
- *Medicine* restores health and enables continued practice, but should be used responsibly rather than for unnecessary or excessive purposes.
- Modern consumer culture may distort the Four Requisites by turning basic needs into objects of status, competition, and excess.

The study identified three forms of Santuṭṭhi:

- contentment with what is received;
- contentment appropriate to one's needs and capacities; and
- contentment expressed through generosity toward others (Ven. Varasiri, 2024).

When applied to the Four Requisites, these forms encourage:

- simplicity;
- gratitude;
- mindful consumption;
- responsible resource use; and
- freedom from attachment.

The findings also clarify that Santuṭṭhi is not laziness or complacency. Rather, it promotes responsible effort, emotional resilience, and balanced living (Dhammasami, 2020).

The analysis further identified five principles of minimalism:

- living with less;
- intentionality;
- letting go of excess;

- prioritizing quality over quantity; and
- mindful consumption.

Minimalism is therefore not merely the reduction of possessions but a deliberate focus on what genuinely matters in life (Millburn & Nicodemus, 2011). Applied to the Four Requisites, it encourages essential clothing, mindful eating, functional housing, and responsible use of medicine.

Objective 2: Implications for Well-Being and Sustainable Peace

The documentary analysis indicates that Santuṭṭhi and minimalism may support well-being at personal, community, and collective levels.

Personal level

The practices may contribute to:

- greater mental clarity;
- lower material pressure;
- reduced stress and anxiety;
- improved emotional balance;
- more efficient use of time and resources; and
- stronger financial responsibility.

These findings are consistent with Jain et al. (2023), who found that minimalism may improve well-being by reducing materialistic orientation and enabling individuals to focus on meaningful experiences and relationships.

Community level

The integrated approach may encourage:

- ethical behavior;
- cooperation;
- social cohesion;
- reduced status competition;
- responsible resource use; and
- environmental awareness.

Collective level

At the broader social level, Santuṭṭhi and minimalism may support:

- greater fairness and equality;

- reduced resource waste;
- environmental sustainability;
- collective resilience; and
- peaceful coexistence.

The findings also suggest that excessive desire can contribute to interpersonal and social conflict. In the *Vivādamūla Sutta*, *pāpicchā*, or unwholesome desire, is identified as one of the roots of conflict (A III 334).

Because the study is documentary in nature, these findings should be interpreted as conceptual implications rather than direct empirical evidence that practitioners experience better health or stronger communities than non-practitioners.

Objective 3: Practical Application in Daily Life

The thematic synthesis identified five practical strategies for applying Santuṭṭhi and minimalism in contemporary life.

1. *Training the mind*

Mindfulness, reflection, and contemplation of impermanence may reduce craving and strengthen inner contentment. The teaching "Cittaṃ dantaṃ sukhāvahaṃ," meaning "a well-trained mind brings happiness," emphasizes the value of mental discipline (Dhp. 35).

2. *Distinguishing needs from wants*

Clarifying the difference between necessity and desire can reduce overconsumption and promote wiser decisions concerning clothing, food, shelter, and medicine.

3. *Practicing non-comparison*

Reducing social comparison may weaken dependence on external approval, status, and competitive consumption.

4. *Cultivating supportive relationships*

Wise friendship and positive social environments can reinforce simplicity, ethical conduct, and responsible consumption.

5. *Practicing digital moderation*

Limiting excessive social-media use may reduce comparison, anxiety, distraction, and consumerist influence. Excessive use has been associated with anxiety, depression, feelings of inadequacy, and reduced face-to-face interaction (Binh, 2025; HelpGuide.org, n.d.).

These strategies translate Santuṭṭhi and minimalism into practical guidance for daily life. The framework does not reject material necessities; instead, it promotes wise, moderate, and responsible engagement with the Four Requisites while reducing attachment, excess, and waste.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Santuṭṭhi and minimalism can be integrated through the Four Requisites as complementary approaches to ethical consumption and sustainable peacebuilding. Buddhist teachings provide a normative foundation by defining contentment, moderation, and non-attachment as conditions for inner peace. Minimalism contributes practical techniques for reducing possessions, clarifying priorities, and limiting unnecessary consumption. Their integration therefore connects ethical intention with everyday behavioral practice.

The first objective showed that the Four Requisites are not merely material necessities but ethical domains in which craving, moderation, and responsibility become visible. This extends Sandardhika's (2000) interpretation of Santuṭṭhi by translating contentment into concrete decisions concerning clothing, food, shelter, and medicine. It also develops Mahāsi Sayādaw's (1972) account of reflective consumption by applying it to contemporary consumer conditions. The analysis suggests that contentment should not be understood as resignation, but as disciplined sufficiency that permits responsible effort without attachment to excess.

The findings also broaden contemporary minimalist literature. Telford (2019) and Dee (2017) primarily focus on personal decluttering, emotional relief, and intentional living. The present study extends these concerns by locating minimalism within a Buddhist ethical framework and by applying it to the Four Requisites. This moves minimalism beyond an aesthetic preference or individual lifestyle choice toward questions of moral responsibility, environmental impact, and social harmony.

Regarding well-being, the study supports Jain et al. (2023), who found that minimalism may enhance well-being by reducing materialism and strengthening fulfillment. Nevertheless, the present findings are conceptual rather than empirical. Claims concerning lower stress, improved health, reduced crime, or

stronger communities should therefore be treated as propositions requiring further investigation rather than established outcomes.

The study's principal contribution is its integrated framework. Santuṭṭhi explains why restraint and sufficiency matter ethically; minimalism offers practical ways to enact them; and the Four Requisites provide a concrete structure for application. Sustainable peace is therefore understood as beginning with the regulation of desire and consumption at the personal level, while extending toward responsible resource use, equitable relationships, environmental care, and social cooperation.

The framework has practical relevance but also clear limitations. It is based on documentary analysis and does not test whether the proposed strategies produce measurable behavioral or social outcomes. Future research should therefore examine the framework through interviews, case studies, intervention programs, or comparative studies across cultural contexts. Such research would determine whether the proposed integration can effectively support well-being, ethical consumption, and sustainable peace in lived practice.

New Knowledge from the Research

This study contributes new knowledge by integrating Santuṭṭhi, contemporary minimalism, and the Buddhist framework of the Four Requisites into a unified conceptual model for sustainable peacebuilding. Its first contribution is to reinterpret clothing, food, shelter, and medicine not merely as material necessities, but as ethical domains in which craving, moderation, gratitude, and responsibility are expressed. This reframing shows that sustainable peace begins with the way individuals understand and use the basic supports of life.

The second contribution is clarifying the relationship between Santuṭṭhi and minimalism. Although both emphasize simplicity and restraint, they are not identical. Santuṭṭhi provides a Buddhist ethical and psychological foundation grounded in contentment, non-attachment, and sufficiency, while minimalism offers practical strategies for reducing excess, clarifying priorities, and consuming intentionally. Their integration therefore connects moral purpose with everyday behavioral practice.

The third contribution is the identification of five practical mechanisms through which this integrated framework may be applied: mental training, distinguishing needs from wants, non-comparison, supportive social relationships, and digital moderation. These mechanisms translate abstract principles into concrete practices that can guide decisions concerning the Four Requisites.

Finally, the study proposes a multi-level pathway from personal transformation to sustainable peace. At the personal level, the framework may reduce material pressure and encourage intentional living. At the community level, it may strengthen cooperation, ethical relationships, and responsible resource use. At the collective level, it offers a conceptual basis for environmental responsibility, social equity, and peaceful coexistence. As a documentary study, these contributions remain conceptual and require empirical testing, but they provide a coherent foundation for future research and practical application.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Santuṭṭhi and minimalism are complementary approaches that promote sustainable peace through the wise and ethical use of the Four Requisites: clothing, food, shelter, and medicine. While Santuṭṭhi provides the ethical foundation by cultivating contentment, gratitude, moderation, and freedom from excessive craving, minimalism offers practical strategies for reducing unnecessary consumption and encouraging intentional living. Their integration provides a coherent framework for responding to contemporary challenges associated with consumerism, psychological stress, environmental degradation, and social imbalance.

The findings indicate that applying these principles contributes to holistic well-being at multiple levels. At the individual level, they promote mental clarity, emotional stability, financial responsibility, and healthier consumption patterns. At the community level, they encourage cooperation, ethical relationships, environmental responsibility, and social cohesion. More broadly, they support sustainable peace by fostering responsible resource use, reducing unnecessary competition, and strengthening collective well-being through mindful and compassionate living.

A significant contribution of this study is the integration of Buddhist ethical principles with contemporary minimalist philosophy through the Four

Requisites. Previous research has generally examined these concepts independently, whereas this study demonstrates how they can function together as a practical framework for everyday life. The proposed approach moves beyond theoretical discussion by presenting applicable strategies that translate Buddhist teachings into contemporary practice while maintaining their ethical foundations.

Overall, the study suggests that sustainable peace begins not with the accumulation of material wealth but with the cultivation of contentment, ethical awareness, and intentional living. By reconnecting the Four Requisites with their original purpose as supports for human flourishing rather than objects of attachment, the integrated framework of Santuṭṭhi and minimalism offers a meaningful pathway toward personal well-being, social harmony, and sustainable peace in an increasingly consumer-oriented world.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and limitations of this documentary study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. *Empirically test the integrated framework.* Future studies should examine the practical effects of applying Santuṭṭhi and minimalism through the Four Requisites by using interviews, surveys, case studies, or intervention-based research. Such studies could evaluate changes in well-being, consumption behavior, financial responsibility, and social relationships.
2. *Conduct comparative cultural research***.** The framework should be examined across different cultural, religious, and socioeconomic contexts to determine how understandings of contentment, simplicity, and material sufficiency vary and how the model may be adapted appropriately.
3. *Investigate institutional applications.* Further research should explore how Santuṭṭhi may inform leadership, governance, education, organizational ethics, and public decision-making. This would extend the framework beyond individual lifestyle practice toward institutional and social transformation.
4. *Develop educational and community programs.* Buddhist institutions, schools, universities, and community organizations may adapt the proposed principles into practical programs on mindful consumption,

needs–wants discernment, digital moderation, responsible use of resources, and sustainable living.

5. *Examine policy implications.* Future studies should investigate how minimalist principles and Buddhist contentment may contribute to public policies addressing overconsumption, environmental degradation, economic inequality, climate change, and resource distribution.
6. *Assess the role of digital environments***.** Further research is needed on how social media, advertising, and digital comparison influence material desire and dissatisfaction, and on whether digital moderation can strengthen contentment, intentional living, and psychological well-being.

These recommendations would help determine whether the proposed framework can generate measurable benefits and how it may be translated into culturally appropriate practices for individuals, communities, and institutions.

Sutta Piṭaka

A = Aṅguttara Nikāya
Dhp. = Dhammapada
S = Saṃyutta Nikāya

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A Buddhist Approach to Reduce Domestic Violence Between Husband and Wife Within Vietnamese Society

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Abstract

Domestic violence between husbands and wives remains a serious social problem in Vietnamese society, while existing interventions have not fully addressed its root causes. Therefore, this study aimed to (1) examine the forms and causes of domestic violence between husbands and wives in Vietnamese society, (2) examine Buddhist teachings related to peaceful and respectful family relationships, and (3) propose a Buddhist approach to reducing domestic violence between husbands and wives in Vietnamese society. This study employed a qualitative research methodology combining documentary research and in-depth interviews. Primary sources included the Tipiṭaka, Commentaries, Sub-commentaries, and Buddhist scriptures related to morality, mindfulness, compassion, and household life, while secondary sources included academic books, journal articles, and previous research on domestic violence and Buddhist psychology.

The findings indicate that domestic violence in Vietnamese society occurs in physical, psychological, sexual, and economic forms. Major causes include economic pressure, alcohol addiction, patriarchal ideology, emotional instability, jealousy, and poor communication. Domestic violence can cause long-term emotional suffering, psychological trauma, and insecurity for women and children. Buddhist teachings related to peaceful and respectful family relationships, such as mindfulness, Brahmavihāra, Sigālovāda Sutta, Bhariyā Sutta, Saṅgahavatthu, Saṃvāsa Sutta, Samajīvī-dhamma, and Gharavāsa-dhamma, provide ethical and psychological foundations for harmonious family relationships. The research further proposes a Buddhist approach consisting of (1) Virtuous Conduct, (2) Inner Cultivation, (3) Responsible Conduct, and (4) Supportive Conduct to reduce domestic violence and promote peaceful family life within Vietnamese society.

Keywords: Domestic violence; Buddhist teachings; Mindfulness; Family harmony; Vietnamese society

Introduction

The family is the smallest social institution and a fundamental foundation of social stability and moral development. Within family life, the relationship between husbands and wives plays a central role in shaping emotional security, mutual understanding, and ethical responsibility. A harmonious marital relationship contributes not only to individuals' happiness but also to the stability of children, communities, and society as a whole (Mahatthanadull & Mahatthanadull, 2020). However, despite social progress and increasing awareness of gender equality, domestic violence between husbands and wives remains a serious social problem in many countries, including Vietnam (MOLISA, GSO, & UNFPA, 2020).

Domestic violence refers not only to physical assault but also includes psychological abuse, emotional intimidation, sexual coercion, economic control, and harmful verbal communication (United Nations, 1993; Vietnamese National Assembly, 2022). In many cases, victims suffer silently because of fear, social stigma, economic dependence, concern for children, and traditional cultural expectations. Consequently, violence frequently remains hidden within family structures and gradually develops into long-term suffering.

According to the 2019 National Study on Violence Against Women in Vietnam, a significant number of Vietnamese women have experienced at least one form of violence by intimate partners during their lifetime. Emotional violence was identified as one of the most common forms of abuse, followed by physical, sexual, and economic violence. The report also indicated that many victims do not seek help due to shame, fear, and lack of trust in intervention systems. These realities demonstrate that domestic violence is not merely an individual issue but a multidimensional social and psychological crisis (MOLISA, GSO, & UNFPA, 2020).

Modern approaches to reducing domestic violence frequently emphasize legal intervention, counseling, and social protection. Although these approaches are necessary, many of them primarily focus on external behavior while giving insufficient attention to the internal causes of violence, such as anger, greed, attachment, emotional instability, and ignorance. Therefore, sustainable peace

within family life requires not only legal solutions but also emotional transformation and ethical cultivation (Mahatthanadull & Kraichak, 2022).

These internal causes require deeper understanding from a psychological perspective, because emotional conditions strongly influence marital behaviors and relationships. Psychological factors such as emotional instability, uncontrolled anger, jealousy, and attachment can lead to harmful actions within family life. From a Buddhist perspective, these psychological difficulties are rooted in unwholesome mental states, particularly greed (lobha), hatred (dosa), and delusion (moha), which are the causes of suffering and harmful behaviors (Rahula, 1974). Therefore, Buddhist teachings on mindfulness (sati), loving-kindness (mettā), compassion (karuṇā), right speech (sammā-vācā), and non-harming (ahiṃsā) provide practical methods for transforming the mind, reducing conflict, and establishing peaceful family relationships (Keown, 1995; Hanh, 1998).

This article studies domestic violence between husbands and wives in Vietnamese society from a Buddhist perspective. It examines the causes and impacts of domestic violence, analyzes Buddhist teachings related to harmonious family life, and proposes an integrated Buddhist approach grounded in core doctrinal principles to reduce violence and strengthen peaceful coexistence.

Although previous studies have examined domestic violence from legal, social, and psychological perspectives, most approaches have focused mainly on external interventions rather than the internal transformation of individuals. Limited attention has been given to how Buddhist teachings can address the psychological and ethical roots of violence, including anger, attachment, and ignorance. Furthermore, few studies have explored a Buddhist-based approach to reducing domestic violence between husbands and wives in Vietnamese society. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap by applying Buddhist principles related to harmonious family life, such as mindfulness, compassion, and ethical cultivation, to promote inner transformation and harmonious marital relationships.

Research Objectives

1. To study the forms and causes of domestic violence between husbands and wives in Vietnamese society.

2. To study Buddhist teachings related to peaceful and respectful family relationships.

3. To propose a Buddhist approach to reducing domestic violence between husbands and wives in Vietnamese society.

Literature Review

Domestic violence is a serious social issue that affects family happiness and social stability. Many Buddhist scholars and authors have examined how Buddhist teachings can reduce conflict, cultivate compassion, and promote harmonious family relationships. However, there are still limited studies that directly focus on applying Buddhist teachings to solve domestic violence in contemporary Vietnamese society. Therefore, this study reviews relevant literature to establish the theoretical foundation for the research.

Keown (1995) explains that Buddhist ethics are based on avoiding harm and cultivating morality through the Five Precepts and the Four Sublime States of Mind (*brahmavihārā*): loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). These qualities help individuals control anger, develop empathy, and maintain peaceful relationships.

Similarly, Rahula (1974) presents the Noble Eightfold Path as a practical method for overcoming suffering. In particular, Right Speech and Right Action encourage peaceful communication and non-violent behavior within the family, while mindfulness helps individuals become aware of emotions and control anger effectively.

Hanh (1998) emphasizes mindfulness, deep listening, and loving speech as methods for transforming suffering and resolving family conflict. In his account, recognizing and embracing anger mindfully can reduce violent reactions and build mutual understanding among family members.

Likewise, Tu (2019) highlights teachings such as the *Sigālovāda Sutta*, Right Speech, and Buddhist family ethics for developing harmonious families based on compassion, trust, and responsibility.

In addition, Napthali (2015) and Bien (2011) argue that mindfulness and the Four Sublime States help couples regulate emotions, strengthen empathy, and reduce conflict. Furthermore, the study by Mahatthanadull and Mahatthanadull

(2020) demonstrates that combining Buddhist teachings with modern psychology can help reduce domestic violence and strengthen family well-being.

Overall, these studies demonstrate that Buddhist teachings provide important ethical and practical foundations for reducing domestic violence through compassion, mindfulness, moral discipline, and peaceful communication. Keown emphasizes Buddhist ethics based on non-harming and compassion, while Rāhula highlights the Noble Eightfold Path, especially Right Speech, Right Action, and mindfulness, as methods for overcoming suffering and harmful behaviors. Hanh further contributes practical approaches through mindfulness, deep listening, and loving speech for transforming anger and resolving conflicts.

However, previous studies mainly discuss Buddhist principles as general methods for cultivating peaceful relationships and emotional transformation. They have not sufficiently developed a systematic approach specifically addressing domestic violence between husbands and wives, particularly within the contemporary Vietnamese context. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by examining Buddhist teachings related to peaceful and respectful family relationships and proposing a Buddhist approach to reducing domestic violence in Vietnamese society.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is organized into three components: input, process, and output. The input consists of two main bodies of knowledge: the problematic situation of domestic violence between husband and wife in Vietnamese society and Buddhist teachings related to peaceful and respectful family relationships. These are supported by data from Buddhist scriptures, academic literature, and in-depth interviews with women experiencing domestic violence and Buddhist scholars. The process involves documentary research, semi-structured interviews, thematic analysis, and interpretive synthesis. The output includes an understanding of the forms, causes, and impacts of domestic violence, the identification of relevant Buddhist principles, and the development of the VIRS Model: Virtuous Conduct, Inner Cultivation, Responsible Conduct, and Supportive Conduct, as a Buddhist approach to reducing domestic violence and promoting harmonious family life in Vietnamese society.

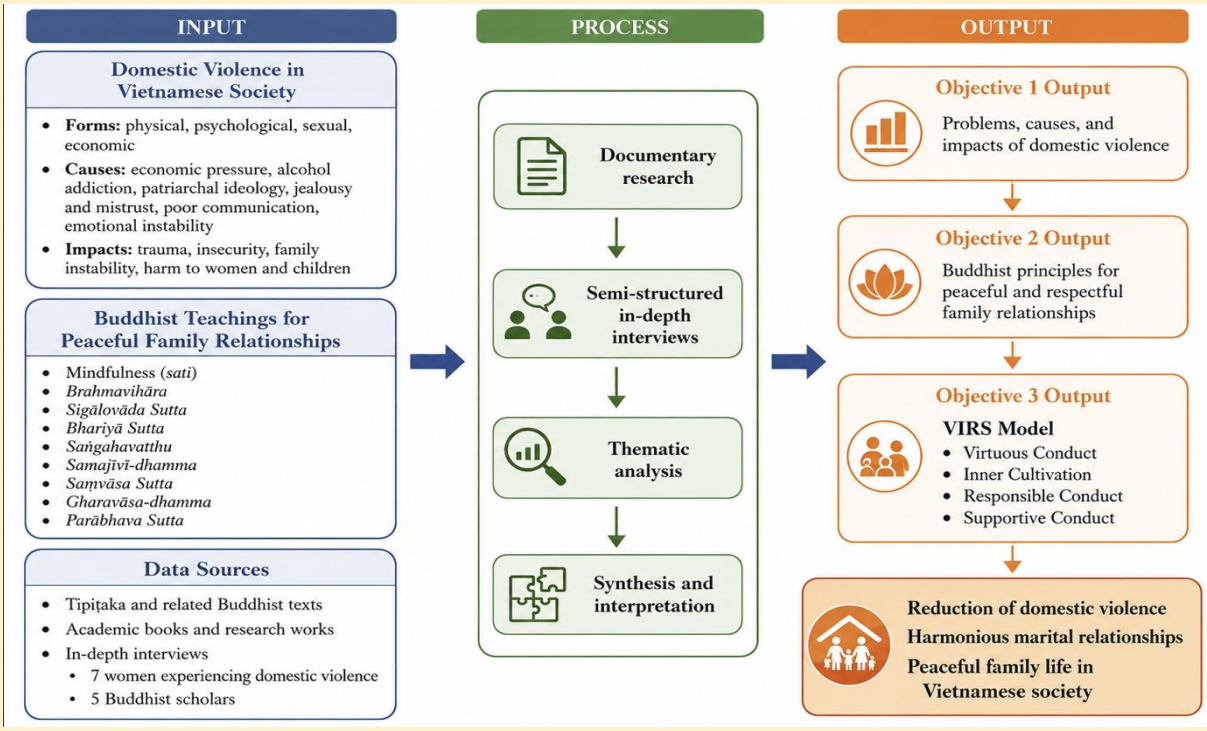

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design using documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews to examine domestic violence between husbands and wives in Vietnamese society and to propose a Buddhist approach for promoting peaceful family relationships.

Data Sources

Data were collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included the *Tipiṭaka* and related Buddhist texts, while secondary sources consisted of academic books, journal articles, and previous studies on Buddhism, family ethics, and domestic violence.

In-depth Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two groups selected through purposive sampling, including 12 people: a) 5 Buddhist scholars with expertise in Buddhist ethics and mindfulness, and b) 7 women who had experienced domestic violence. The interviews provided theoretical and experiential perspectives related to the causes of domestic violence and the role

of Buddhist principles in developing harmonious family relationships. Participants were informed of research objectives and provided informed consent.

The identities of the victims were kept confidential in order to protect their privacy, personal safety, and prevent psychological harm or social stigma that might arise during the research process. Semi-structured interviews were conducted through face-to-face meetings and online interviews using a guideline of pre-prepared interview questions, which were reviewed and validated by three Buddhist experts from Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU). This process ensured the relevance and appropriateness of the interview questions while maintaining flexibility for participants to share and discuss their personal experiences and perspectives in greater depth.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed through thematic analysis. Documentary and interview data were coded and categorized into major themes related to the causes of domestic violence, Buddhist principles, ethical transformation, and family harmony. The integration of textual and empirical findings supported the development of a Buddhist approach to reducing domestic violence between husbands and wives in Vietnamese society.

Research Results

Objective 1: Problems and Causes Leading to Domestic Violence Between Husbands and Wives in Vietnamese Society

The findings indicate that domestic violence between husbands and wives remains a serious and multidimensional problem in Vietnamese society. It affects physical safety, psychological well-being, marital stability, children's development, and wider social harmony. The National Study on Violence Against Women in Vietnam 2019 reported that 62.9% of Vietnamese women had experienced at least one form of violence by a husband or intimate partner during their lifetime. The violence identified in the study included physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse, as well as controlling behavior. Emotional violence was particularly common, affecting 47% of women who had experienced violence and taking forms such as humiliation, intimidation, insulting language, emotional neglect, prolonged silence, and psychological pressure (MOLISA, GSO, & UNFPA, 2020).

The interview findings confirmed that abuse does not always involve visible physical injury. One participant stated, "He never hit me, but his insults and prolonged silence made me feel worthless in my own home" (Anonymous Domestic Violence Survivor 1, interview). This testimony illustrates how psychological abuse may undermine dignity, self-worth, and emotional security even when physical violence is absent.

Several interrelated causes of domestic violence were identified. Patriarchal values and gender inequality remain influential in some Vietnamese families, where men may be viewed as dominant household figures and women may be expected to tolerate suffering in order to preserve family unity. Cultural expectations concerning obedience, family honor, and social reputation may discourage victims from reporting violence or seeking assistance (MOLISA, GSO, & UNFPA, 2020).

Economic pressure was also found to intensify marital conflict. Unemployment, debt, poverty, financial dependency, and unequal control over household income may contribute to stress and aggression (Agnew, 2014; MOLISA, 2021). One participant explained, "Every month I had to hand over my entire salary to my husband. I felt that I worked only to sustain his family, while losing all control over my own life" (Anonymous Domestic Violence Survivor 2, interview). Alcohol misuse, gambling, substance abuse, jealousy, infidelity, poor communication, mistrust, and emotional instability further weakened self-control and increased conflict.

The findings also showed that insecure attachment, unresolved anger, inadequate emotional regulation, and weak communication contribute to harmful marital interactions (Bancroft, 2003; Bowlby, 1988). The consequences extend to children, who may experience fear, anxiety, emotional insecurity, aggression, and distorted perceptions of intimate relationships (Davies & Cummings, 2018). Children exposed to family violence may also reproduce similar behavioral patterns in adulthood (Bancroft & Silverman, 2012).

Objective 2: Buddhist Teachings Related to Peaceful and Respectful Family Relationships

The findings for Objective 2 were synthesized from the Tipiṭaka and related Buddhist texts, academic literature, and interviews with five Buddhist scholars and practitioners. The study identified mindfulness, the Four Sublime States, Samajīvī-dhamma, Saṅgahavatthu, the Sigālovāda Sutta, the Bhariyā Sutta, the Saṃvāsa Sutta, Gharavāsa-dhamma, and the Parābhava Sutta as the principal Buddhist teachings relevant to peaceful marital life.

Mindfulness, particularly through Satipaṭṭhāna practice, supports awareness of anger, jealousy, fear, and reactive impulses before they develop into harmful behavior (Anālayo Bhikkhu, 2006). The Four Sublime States, loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, strengthen empathy, forgiveness, emotional balance, and non-harming within family relationships (Gunaratana, 2020).

Samajīvī-dhamma promotes marital harmony through shared faith, morality, generosity, and wisdom (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012). Saṅgahavatthu supports family relationships through generosity, kind speech, beneficial conduct, and equality (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2016). The Sigālovāda Sutta emphasizes reciprocal duties, mutual respect, fidelity, care, honesty, and responsibility between husband and wife (Walshe, 1995). The Bhariyā Sutta highlights moral conduct and faithfulness, while the Saṃvāsa Sutta emphasizes compassionate coexistence and shared morality (Buswell & Lopez, 2014; Mahatthanadull & Mahatthanadull, 2020).

Gharavāsa-dhamma identifies truthfulness, self-restraint, patience, and generosity as essential household virtues that strengthen trust and emotional stability (Dalai Lama, 2022). The Parābhava Sutta warns against arrogance, irresponsibility, deception, indulgence, and neglect of family duties, all of which may contribute to relational decline (Khuddakapāṭha & Sutta Nipāta, 2017).

The interview data further clarified how psychological and economic violence are experienced in everyday marital life. One participant from Ho Chi Minh City described a pattern of emotional abuse involving insults, withdrawal, and prolonged silence. She explained that although her husband did not physically assault her, repeated verbal humiliation and emotional exclusion gradually undermined her self-worth and sense of safety within the home. This account demonstrates that domestic violence may occur through coercive and psychologically damaging behaviors even when no visible physical injury is present (Anonymous Domestic Violence Survivor 1, personal communication, March 24, 2026).

A second participant from Hue City described economic control within the marital relationship. She reported being required to surrender her entire salary to her husband and losing the ability to make independent financial decisions. Her experience illustrates how economic abuse may restrict autonomy, reinforce dependence, and intensify unequal power relations between spouses. It also supports the finding that financial control should be understood not merely as a

household disagreement but as a form of domestic violence when it is used to dominate, isolate, or deprive a spouse of personal agency (Anonymous Domestic Violence Survivor 2, personal communication, March 24, 2026).

Taken together, these accounts show that domestic violence in Vietnamese families may remain hidden behind ordinary household routines. Psychological withdrawal, humiliation, control of income, and restrictions on personal decision-making may produce sustained emotional suffering even when physical violence is absent. The interview evidence therefore strengthens the documentary findings by demonstrating how emotional and economic abuse are experienced at the individual level and how unequal marital power can become normalized within daily family life.

Table 1. Summary of Buddhist Teachings Related to Peaceful and Respectful Family Relationships

Buddhist Principle	Meaning for Family Relationships	Tipiṭaka / Buddhist Source	Academic Sources
Mindfulness (Satipaṭṭhāna)	Develops awareness, emotional regulation, patience, and prevents reactive behaviors that may lead to conflict or violence.	Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10); Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta (DN 22)	Anālayo Bhikkhu (2006); Hanh (1998)
Four Sublime States (Brahmavihāra)	Cultivates loving-kindness, compassion, forgiveness, emotional balance, and care among family members.	Teachings on mettā, karuṇā, muditā, and upekkhā	Gunaratana (2020)
Samajīvī Dhamma	Establishes marital harmony through faith, morality, generosity, and wisdom.	Samajīvī Sutta (AN 4.55)	Bodhi Bhikkhu (2012); Mahatthanadull &Mahatthanadull (2020)
Saṅgahavatthu	Supports relationships through generosity, kind speech, beneficial conduct, and equality.	Teachings on the four bases of social harmony	Bodhi Bhikkhu (2016)
Sigālovāda Sutta	Explains reciprocal duties, respect, loyalty, care, and responsibility between husbands and wives.	Sigālovāda Sutta (DN 31)	Walshe (1995)
Bhariyā Sutta	Encourages moral conduct, faithfulness, and harmonious marital behavior.	Bhariyā Sutta	Mahatthanadull & Mahatthanadull (2020)
Saṃvāsa Sutta	Shows that marital happiness depends on morality, understanding, and compassionate coexistence.	Saṃvāsa Sutta	Buswell & Lopez (2014)

Buddhist Principle	Meaning for Family Relationships	Tipiṭaka / Buddhist Source	Academic Sources
Gharavāsa-dhamma	Develops trust, emotional stability, forgiveness, and mutual respect through household virtues.	Āḷavaka Sutta	Dalai Lama (2022)
Parābhava Sutta	Warns against arrogance, irresponsibility, deception, and neglect of duties that cause family decline.	Parābhava Sutta (Khuddakapāṭha & Sutta Nipāta)	Khuddakapāṭha & Sutta Nipāta (2017)

Objective 3: A Buddhist Approach to Reducing Domestic Violence

Based on the problems identified in Objective 1 and the Buddhist principles analyzed in Objective 2, the study developed the VIRS Model. The model consists of four interconnected dimensions: Virtuous Conduct, Inner Cultivation, Responsible Conduct, and Supportive Conduct.

Virtuous Conduct provides the ethical foundation for marital life through Gharavāsa-dhamma, Samajīvī-dhamma, and the Parābhava Sutta. It addresses dishonesty, irresponsibility, uncontrolled desire, and moral decline by emphasizing truthfulness, patience, generosity, shared morality, and avoiding conditions that lead to family breakdown (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2017; Sukittimaythee, 2021).

Inner Cultivation addresses anger, jealousy, emotional instability, and impulsive reactions through mindfulness and Brahmavihāra practice. It includes emotional awareness, mindful breathing, loving-kindness meditation, mindful consumption, forgiveness, and letting go (Mahatthanadull & Kraichak, 2022).

Responsible Conduct emphasizes reciprocal marital duties, equality, care, and accountability in accordance with the Sigālovāda Sutta and the Bhariyā Sutta. It encourages spouses to fulfill responsibilities in speech, behavior, emotional care, and family obligations with empathy and mutual respect (Tu & Thien, 2019). Supportive Conduct includes emotional, esteem, informational, social-network, and tangible support. These forms of support strengthen dignity, trust, communication, practical cooperation, and resilience during family difficulties (Cutrona, 1990; Cutrona & Suhr, 1992).

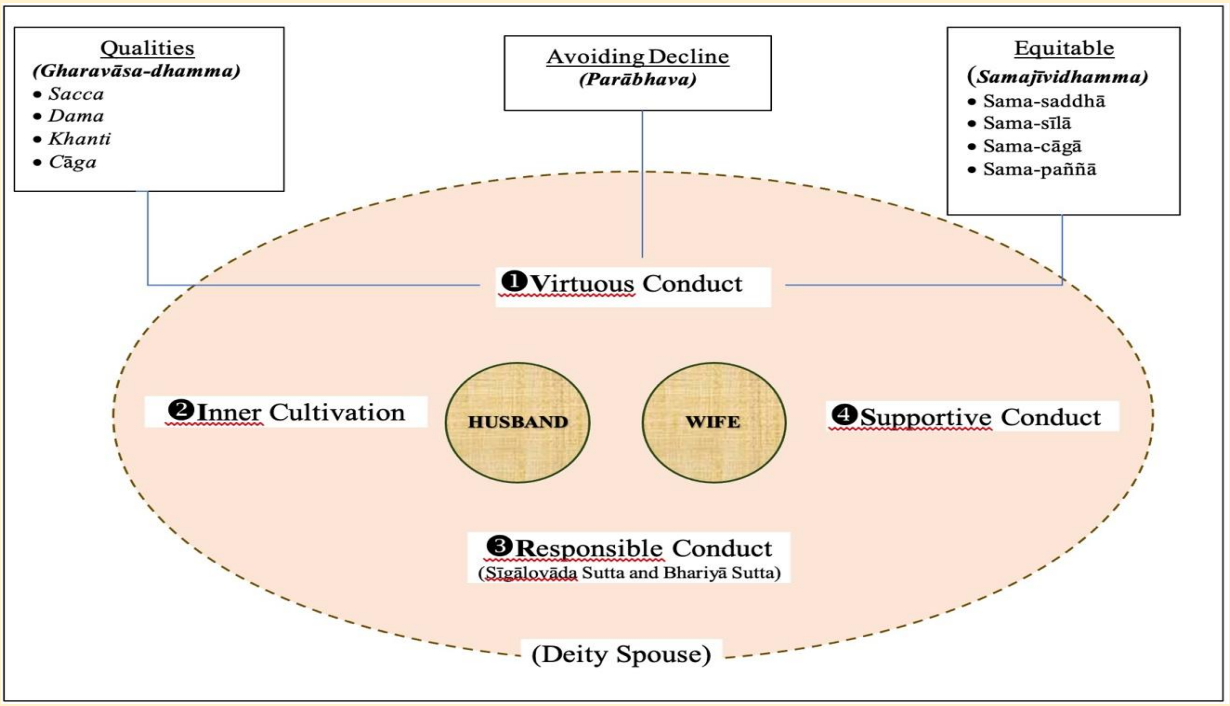

Figure 2: A Buddhist Approach to Reduce Domestic Violence between Husband and Wife

The four dimensions provide an integrated Buddhist framework for reducing harmful behavior, restoring trust, strengthening mutual responsibility, and promoting peaceful marital relationships in Vietnamese society.

Discussion

The findings show that domestic violence between husbands and wives in Vietnamese society is a multidimensional problem shaped by individual, relational, economic, cultural, and structural factors. Economic pressure, alcohol misuse, emotional instability, jealousy, poor communication, patriarchal attitudes, and gender inequality correspond with national evidence and ecological explanations of intimate partner violence (Heise, 1998; MOLISA, GSO, & UNFPA, 2020; World Health Organization [WHO], 2025). The findings also confirm that violence extends beyond physical assault to psychological, sexual, economic, and controlling behaviors (United Nations, 1993; Vietnamese National Assembly, 2022). Such conditions may involve coercive control, insecure attachment, and relational instability and can produce long-term consequences for both victims and children (Bancroft, 2003; Bancroft & Silverman, 2012; Bowlby, 1988; Davies & Cummings, 2018; Meyer et al., 2021).

From a Buddhist perspective, violence is associated with unwholesome mental states, particularly greed, hatred, and delusion (Rahula, 1974). Mindfulness may help individuals recognize anger, jealousy, and reactive

impulses before they become harmful speech or action (Anālayo Bhikkhu, 2006; Hanh, 1998, 2001). The Brahmavihāra further supports loving-kindness, compassion, emotional balance, and non-harming (Gunaratana, 2020). Nevertheless, Buddhist practices should complement rather than replace legal protection, trauma-informed care, and professional intervention (Emezue et al., 2022; WHO, 2025).

The findings also demonstrate that sustainable family harmony requires reciprocal ethical responsibility. Samajīvī-dhamma, Saṅgahavatthu, the Sigālovāda Sutta, the Bhariyā Sutta, the Saṃvāsa Sutta, and Gharavāsa-dhamma emphasize equality, fidelity, truthful communication, generosity, patience, and shared duties (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012, 2016; Dalai Lama, 2022; Mahatthanadull et al., 2019; Walshe, 1995).

The proposed VIRS Model integrates these principles through four dimensions. Virtuous Conduct addresses moral decline and irresponsible behavior (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2017; Sukittimaythee, 2021). Inner Cultivation develops mindfulness and compassion (Mahatthanadull & Kraichak, 2022). Responsible Conduct promotes reciprocal marital duties and accountability (Tu & Thien, 2019). Supportive Conduct strengthens emotional, informational, social, esteem, and practical support (Cutrona, 1990; Cutrona & Suhr, 1992).

The model's strength lies in combining ethical discipline, mental transformation, relational responsibility, and social support. This integration is consistent with evidence supporting multidimensional and survivor-centered interventions, although empirical outcomes remain uneven (Ogbe et al., 2020; Rivas et al., 2023; WHO, 2025). The VIRS Model should therefore be regarded as a culturally grounded complementary framework requiring further empirical evaluation.

New Knowledge from the Research

This study generates new knowledge by integrating empirical accounts of domestic violence, Buddhist ethical teachings, Buddhist psychology, and contemporary social-support theory into the VIRS Model. The first conceptual contribution is the recognition that domestic violence cannot be reduced to uncontrolled anger or individual moral failure. It develops through the interaction of internal mental states, unequal marital power, economic and cultural pressures, deficient communication, irresponsible conduct, and inadequate support. Consequently, an effective Buddhist response must address both personal transformation and relational conditions.

The second contribution is the reinterpretation of Buddhist family teachings as an interconnected violence-prevention framework. Mindfulness and the Brahmavihāra support emotional awareness and non-reactivity; Gharavāsa-dhamma and Samajīvī-dhamma establish ethical compatibility and household virtues; the Sigālovāda Sutta and Bhariyā Sutta clarify reciprocal responsibilities; Saṅgahavatthu strengthens compassionate communication and mutual assistance; and the Parābhava Sutta identifies conduct that contributes to relational decline.

The third contribution is the VIRS Model itself:

- Virtuous Conduct establishes honesty, restraint, patience, generosity, and avoidance of conditions leading to family decline.
- Inner Cultivation transforms anger, jealousy, attachment, and impulsive reactions through mindfulness and compassion.
- Responsible Conduct promotes equality, reciprocal marital duties, accountability, and respectful behavior.
- Supportive Conduct strengthens emotional, informational, social, esteem, and practical support between spouses and through wider networks.

The model proposes that sustainable family peace emerges when these four dimensions operate together. It also clarifies an important ethical boundary: Buddhist practices should complement—not replace—survivor protection, legal intervention, professional counseling, healthcare, and perpetrator accountability. Thus, the study contributes a culturally grounded but safety-conscious framework for future Buddhist family education, counseling, and violence-prevention research.

Conclusion

This study examined the forms, causes, and consequences of domestic violence between husbands and wives in Vietnamese society, identified Buddhist teachings relevant to peaceful family relationships, and developed the VIRS Model as an integrated Buddhist approach to violence reduction. The findings show that domestic violence includes physical, psychological, sexual, and economic abuse and controlling behavior. Its causes are multidimensional, involving economic pressure, alcohol misuse, patriarchal norms, gender inequality, emotional instability, jealousy, poor communication, irresponsibility, and inadequate emotional support.

Buddhist teachings contribute important ethical and psychological resources for addressing these conditions. Mindfulness and the Brahmavihāra support emotional awareness, compassion, and nonviolent responses. Gharavāsa-

dhamma, Samajīvī-dhamma, Saṅgahavatthu, and the discourses concerning marital duties and relational decline provide guidance on honesty, equality, patience, generosity, responsibility, and respectful communication. Their significance lies not simply in controlling anger but in transforming the mental and relational conditions that permit violence.

The principal contribution of the research is the VIRS Model, comprising Virtuous Conduct, Inner Cultivation, Responsible Conduct, and Supportive Conduct. Together, these dimensions connect moral discipline, emotional transformation, reciprocal marital responsibility, and social support within a unified framework for family peace.

The model should, however, be applied within a survivor-centered and multidisciplinary system. Buddhist education and practice cannot replace legal protection, emergency services, healthcare, shelters, trauma-informed counseling, or accountability for perpetrators. Nor should compassion or family harmony be interpreted as requiring victims to remain in unsafe relationships. Used with these safeguards, the VIRS Model offers a culturally relevant foundation for Buddhist family education, counseling, prevention programs, and future empirical research aimed at promoting safe, respectful, and nonviolent family relationships in Vietnam.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, government agencies, Buddhist organizations, and educational institutions should promote Buddhist ethics, mindfulness, and domestic violence prevention through educational, counseling, and community-based programs. The VIRS Model can be applied not only for individuals and couples experiencing family conflicts but also for developing premarital and postmarital training programs for men and women. Such programs may provide education on ethical conduct, emotional awareness, marital responsibility, communication skills, and supportive relationships before and after marriage.

Similar marriage preparation and family education programs have been developed in Christian and Islamic contexts; however, systematic Buddhist-based premarital and postmarital training programs remain limited. Therefore, future research may explore how the VIRS Model can contribute to Buddhist family education and counseling, particularly in preparing couples for harmonious marital relationships and preventing domestic violence through mindfulness, moral cultivation, and mutual responsibility.

Furthermore, future studies may investigate the application of the VIRS Model in Buddhist family counseling, examine the role of mindfulness in emotional healing among married couples, and compare Buddhist and non-Buddhist approaches to family harmony and domestic violence prevention.

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Dao An's Faith in Maitreya Pure Land in Chinese Buddhism

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Abstract

This article examines Dao An's faith in the Maitreya Pure Land in Chinese Buddhism. It has three objectives: (1) to analyze the reasons for Dao An's faith in the Maitreya Pure Land, (2) to examine his thoughts and writings related to the Maitreya Pure Land, and (3) to assess his influence on the development of Maitreya Pure Land devotion in Chinese Buddhism. The study draws primarily on the Chinese Buddhist canon and supplements these materials with relevant Chinese- and English-language scholarship.

The findings indicate that Dao An's faith developed from several interrelated factors. These include his desire to resolve doctrinal questions arising from his study of Prajñā literature, his compassionate aspiration to benefit sentient beings in a manner consistent with Maitreya's future mission, and his wish to pursue Buddhahood together with Maitreya. The social disorder and warfare of his time, together with the growing circulation of Maitreya-related scriptures, also formed an important historical background.

The study further identifies eleven extant prefaces associated with Dao An's engagement with Maitreya Pure Land thought. These may be grouped into three categories: works related to the Āgamas, works related to Prajñā literature, and works related to meditation. Through these prefaces, Dao An expressed doctrinal concerns, devotional aspirations, and practical orientations toward rebirth in Tuṣita Heaven.

Finally, the study finds that Dao An exercised a foundational influence on the development of Maitreya Pure Land devotion in China. He organized one of the earliest documented communities to make collective vows for rebirth in Tuṣita Heaven and established a model of Maitreya-oriented study and practice that influenced his disciples and later generations. He may therefore be regarded as a pioneer of organized Maitreya Pure Land devotion in Chinese Buddhism.

Keywords: Dao An; Maitreya; Maitreya Pure Land; Tuṣita Heaven; Chinese Buddhism

Introduction

Dao An 道安 (312–385), who lived in the East Jin dynasty, was a great monk in the history of Chinese Buddhism. He was born in Fuliu in the Changshan area (now Ji county in Hebei province), and became a monk at 18. He began to learn dharma from Fotu Cheng 佛图澄 at the age of 24. After Fotu Cheng passed away, Dao An began to preach dharma in Shanxi, Hebei, and Henan, and later went to Xiangyang to preach dharma. In general, Dao An can be regarded as the pioneer of Chinese Buddhist academic thought and has made great contributions to the development of Chinese Buddhism in various aspects, such as sūtra translation, Buddhist theories, monastic regulation, dharma preaching, and Buddhist education. One of his great contributions is to promote the development of the Maitreya Pure Land in Chinese Buddhism, so that Dao An has been well-known as a great monk in the Pure Land School even in modern Chinese Buddhism, who was regarded as the representative monk who had been born in the Maitreya Pure Land in Chinese Buddhism.

According to Foguo Ji (佛国记) and Datang Xiyu Qiufa Gaoseng Zhuan (大唐西域求法高僧传), early Indian Buddhism recorded that faith in Maitreya bodhisattva had appeared. Other records, such as in the 27th volume of Abhidharma Eight Categories (八犍度论, Ba Jiandu Lun), in Commentary on Biography of Famous Monks (Mingseng Zhuanchao, 名僧传钞), and in The Journey Record from Great Tang Dynasty to Western Regions (Datang Xiyu Ji, 大唐西域记), also introduced the Maitreya faith. In India, the earliest Maitreya faith can be found in the Cakkavatti Sīhanāda Suttanta of the Dīrghāgama Sūtra (Dīrghāgama Sūtra, T 1, no. 1, 41c–42a; Majumder, 1959), and in the Saṃyuktāgama Sūtra, which also records early material related to Maitreya faith (Saṃyuktāgama Sūtra, T 2, no. 99, discourse 593). These event records indicated that people's wish for a future Buddha (not satisfied with Sectarian doctrine) and for a future pure land (not satisfied with the contemporary living situation) directly resulted in the Maitreya faith arising and spreading extensively. According to E. Lamotte, Maitreya faith in India could be traced back to the period before 183-200 B.C., which is consistent with the record in Mahavastu; in China, the earliest record about Maitreya faith in India was made by Faxian who travelled to search dharma and recorded a craftsman ascending to Tusita Heaven seeing Maitreya bodhisattva and coming back to make a great wooden Maitreya image (Foguo Ji, T 51, no. 2085, 857b–858a; cf. Datang Xiyu Ji, T 51, no. 2087, 884b). Maitreya faith spread from northeast India to Central Asia, the West Regions, South Asia, etc. Therefore, the Maitreya faith in China appeared in the East Jin period through gradual translation related to Maitreya. In Chinese translated scriptures, there are mainly six scriptures about Maitreya Buddha,

including Guan Maitreya Ascending Tusita Heaven Sūtra, Maitreya Descending Sūtra, Maitreya Future Coming Sūtra, Contemplating on Maitreya Bodhisattva Descending Sūtra, Maitreya Descending to Become Buddha Sūtra, and Maitreya Great Buddhahood Sūtra. Biographies of Maitreya can be found in several scriptures and records in the Chinese Buddhist Canon, such as Contemplating on Maitreya Ascending Tusita Heaven Sūtra, Dari Jing, and Maitreya Bodhisattva Wish Sūtra.

The concept of the Maitreya Pure Land (Sukhāvatī or Jingtu) appeared after the rise of Mahayana Buddhism, although Maitreya as a prince, bodhisattva, or future Buddha had been well known in Sakyamuni Buddha's time. Maitreya is a Sanskrit expression, called Mettaya in Pali, Mile 弥勒 in Chinese, or Motaliye 末怛利耶, etc. Maitreya faith, or Maitreyanism, or Mile Jiao 弥勒教 in China, appeared early in the East Jin dynasty when Buddhist scriptures related to Maitreya were gradually translated; the Maitreya faith or belief began to develop in the South and North dynasties. Maitreya Pure Land refers to either Tusita Heaven where Maitreya bodhisattva preached dharma, or the future realm where Maitreya will become Buddha, which respectively evolved into two types of Maitreya Pure Land modes: Maitreya Ascent faith and Maitreya Descent faith, with different believers in historical periods of Chinese Buddhism.

Dao An's faith in Maitreya Pure Land refers to both modes of Maitreya Pure Land mentioned above: those who wished to be born in Tusita Heaven to ask dharma from Maitreya, and those who also wished to achieve Buddhahood to convert sentient beings together with Maitreya by descending to the world. In this sense, Dao An's faith has double meaning, who was listed in the ascent type of Maitreya Pure Land faith by previous Chinese Buddhist scholars, who concluded those who wished to be born in Tusita Heaven included Dao An, Fa Xiang in Southern dynasty, Dao Jiao, Seng Ye, Hui Yan, Dao Wang, Dao Fa, Tan Fu, Tan Bin in South and North dynasties; in Tang dynasty, they included Xuan Zhuang and Kui Ji, etc. Those who wished to descend to achieve Buddhahood with Maitreya included Emperor Ming in Song country, who composed the vow to Longhua Dharma Ceremony, a ceremony where Maitreya Buddha is to be held in the future; included King Wenxuan in Qi country who composed a note to Longhua Dharma Ceremony; included Empress Wu who claimed herself as reincarnation of Maitreya. Dao An's faith could obviously be shown in the first type, while he also intended to descend to achieve Buddhahood with Maitreya, because he had the compassion to convert sentient beings, which is also consistent with Maitreya Buddha's mission in the future.

A study of Dao An's Maitreya faith therefore illuminates an early stage in the formation of Maitreya Pure Land devotion in China. His engagement was not confined to personal belief; it appeared in his scriptural prefaces, doctrinal concerns, devotional vows, community practices, and influence on disciples.

Examining these dimensions clarifies how Maitreya devotion became integrated into Chinese Buddhist thought and practice.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze Master Dao An's reasons to keep faith in the Maitreya Pure Land.
2. To study Master Dao An's thoughts and works related to the Maitreya Pure Land.
3. To analyze Master Dao An's influence on the development of the Maitreya Pure Land in Chinese Buddhism.

Literature Review

Scholars generally agree that Dao An's Maitreya devotion was grounded in both Āgama scriptures and Prajñāpāramitā texts. Existing scholarship suggests that Maitreya devotion within the Chinese Saṅgha began with Dao An and his disciples, who relied upon the Āgamas, the Fangguang Bore Jing (Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā), and Hīnayāna meditative practices (chan guan 禅观) as the main axis of their cultivation (Daoyu, 2015). Zhang Ping's study on Dao An's Buddhist thought analyzes his progression from early Chan contemplation toward Prajñā philosophy and elucidates the profound motivations behind his Maitreya Pure Land faith (Zhang, 2009). This intellectual trajectory suggests that Dao An's Pure Land devotion was not a simplistic pietism but was integrated with his broader soteriological and philosophical concerns.

A central theme in the scholarship is the collective nature of Dao An's Maitreya faith. According to the Gaoseng Zhuan (2000), Dao An assembled his disciples before an image of Maitreya and made a collective vow to be reborn in Tuṣita Heaven. Historical records indicate that at least eight of his disciples, including Fayuan, Sengfu, Tanjie, and Daoyuan, pledged to seek rebirth in Tuṣita. This communal vow, made during Dao An's stay in Xiangyang (ca. 365–379 CE), represents one of the earliest documented instances of organized Pure Land practice in China (Dai, 2013).

The studies on the influence of Dao An's Maitreya faith have shown that it extended far beyond his immediate circle. Through his disciples, such as Fatai in Jiankang, Tan Yi in Jiangling, and Fahe in Sichuan, the devotion spread across southern and central China. Yifeng Xiang argues that Dao An and his followers initiated the first peak of Maitreya Pure Land faith during the Eastern Jin and Sixteen Kingdoms period, directly or indirectly influencing the sculpting of Maitreya images in cave temples throughout the subsequent Northern and Southern Dynasties (Yifeng Xiang, 2013).

Previous studies have examined Dao An's contribution and historical position in Chinese Buddhism, his translation theory, doctrinal development, meditation, and role in the sinicization of Buddhism, as well as the history of Maitreya devotion in China (Fang, 2006; Gao, 2013; Zhang, 2008, 2009, 2020). However, the relationship among Dao An's doctrinal concerns, his extant writings, his communal vows, and his wider influence on Maitreya Pure Land development remains insufficiently synthesized. This study addresses that gap by integrating textual, historical, and doctrinal evidence concerning the origins, expressions, and legacy of his faith.

Research Methodology

This study employed qualitative textual and documentary research. Primary data were drawn from the Chinese Buddhist canon, commentaries, sub-commentaries, biographical collections, and scriptures related to Maitreya. English translations were consulted where relevant. Secondary materials included scholarly books, journal articles, dissertations, conference papers, and reliable digital resources in Chinese and English.

Primary sources included canonical and historical works such as the Gaoseng Zhuan [高僧傳], the Chu Sanzang Jiji [出三藏記集], and Maitreya-related scriptures, especially The Buddha Speaks the Sūtra on Maitreya Bodhisattva's Ascent to Tuṣita Heaven (T 14, no. 452). These texts were examined for references to Dao An's doctrinal interests, vows, communal practices, and influence.

Primary sources included canonical and historical works such as the Gaoseng Zhuan (Biographies of Eminent Monks), the Chusan Zangji Ji (Collected Records Concerning the Tripiṭaka), and Maitreya-related scriptures, especially the Sūtra on the Ascension of Maitreya Bodhisattva to Tuṣita Heaven. These texts were examined for references to Dao An's doctrinal interests, vows, communal practices, and influence.

Secondary sources consisted of modern studies on Dao An, Maitreya Pure Land, early Chinese Buddhism, scriptural translation, and Buddhist intellectual history. Materials were selected according to their relevance to the three research objectives and their contribution to historical or textual interpretation.

Data were collected through academic databases and digital Buddhist repositories, including CNKI, JSTOR, CBETA, and the Taiwan Buddhist digital collections, as well as printed editions of the Chinese Buddhist canon. The materials were organized thematically according to Dao An's motivations, writings, practices, disciples, and historical influence.

The analysis combined close textual reading, historical contextualization, comparison of sources, and thematic synthesis. Claims were evaluated by comparing canonical records, biographical accounts, surviving prefaces, and modern scholarship. Because several texts attributed to Dao An are lost and some historical accounts are hagiographical, the study distinguishes documented evidence from interpretive inference.

Research Results

Objective 1: Reasons for Master Dao An's Faith in Maitreya Pure Land

Maitreya faith in Chinese Buddhism has a long history, which had appeared before Dao An. For example, Zhu Fahu translated the Maitreya Ascending Tusita Heaven Sūtra in 285 and the Right Lotus Sūtra in 284, both of which were related to Maitreya practice. In 303, Zhu Fahu translated the Maitreya Bodhisattva Wish Sūtra. In this period, Maitreya Pure Land thought was basically formed when Dao An was in his teenage years (Dao An was born in 314).

Regarding Master Dao An's reasons for keeping faith in Maitreya Pure Land, relevant materials can be found in the Chu Sanzang Jiji (1995), such as the Maitreya Becoming Buddha Sūtra translated by Zhufa Hu in 303 and the Maitreya's Descent Sūtra translated by Sanghadeva. These two sūtras introduced the Maitreya Pure Land, with which Dao An once kept close contact and studied. In addition, Dao An recorded some information about Maitreya Buddha in Weiyue Zanan Jing translated by Zhiqian in the preface of the Vasumitra Collection. Moreover, in the Gaoseng Zhuan (2000), several factual events in daily life about seeing Maitreya in Tusita Heaven are recorded, such as Buddhabhadra meditating to see Maitreya in Tusita Heaven.

Other materials related to Dao An's faith in the Maitreya Pure Land can also be found in records collected in the Chu Sanzang Jiji (1995), as well as in his works and his lifetime biographies and literature, which will be introduced in the following part.

The Chu Sanzang Jiji [出三藏記集] (1995) records that Zhu Fahu translated the Maitreya Becoming Buddha Sūtra in 303, as well as another sūtra called the Maitreya's Descent Sūtra, which was derived from the 44th volume of the Ankutaragama Sūtra translated by Sanghadeva. Dao An once joined an edition of the Angutaragama Sūtra. These two sūtras introduced the greatness of Maitreya Buddha and the splendid outlook of the Maitreya Pure Land, which deeply influenced Dao An. Maitreya's descending to convert sentient beings in the future is consistent with Dao An's positive personality to serve people and country, where Dao An lived in disorder and warfare (Tang, 2000), with the contemporary

social situation contrary to the happy and peaceful Maitreya Pure Land, which is an ideal paradise for people in suffering in contemporary society.

In Weiyue Zanan Jing (惟曰杂难经) translated by Zhiqian in the East Han dynasty, it is recorded that Vasumitra from the Sarvastivadian School would become the Buddha after Maitreya, which was also recorded by Dao An in the preface of Vasumitra Collection, with Vasumitra to be in Tusita Heaven to discuss dharma with the other three great Sarvastivadin masters. The Gaoseng Zhuan (2000) records that Buddhabhadra was in meditation to see Maitreya in Tusita Heaven. Influenced by these legendary tales, Dao An had a strong will to go to Tusita Heaven to ask Maitreya for dharma to solve his doubts about Buddhist doctrines, which he expressed in the preface of YinChi Ru Jing (Chu Sanzang Jiji, 1995).

The Chu Sanzang Jiji [出三藏記集] (1995) records that over 14 items related to Dao An's works about prājña sūtras are recorded. In addition, he studied prājña sūtras before he went to Xiangyang, and preached prājña sūtra (T 8, 221) twice each year during his stay in Xiangyang and Chang'an. The prājña sūtras he preached illustrated Maitreya's prajna theory and mentioned Maitreya's great status in prājña sūtras (T 8, 224, 451b). Therefore, when he had doubts about prājña learning, he was eager to get an answer from Maitreya, a famous enlightened figure mentioned in prājña sūtras. Dao An also devoted himself to sūtra translation, including prājña sūtras, during which he came across mistakes or profound meanings he was unable to resolve, which motivated him to wish to be born in Tusita Heaven to solve his doubts. However, the study of Dao An's aim to be born in Tusita Heaven has not been definitely clarified until now, with various presumptions, such as the aim of solving doubts, the aim of becoming Buddha, the aim of living a peaceful and pure life, the aim of benefiting sentient beings, etc.

It could be sure that Dao An's Maitreya faith was originated from his first contact of Bianyi Jing, and gradually improved along with frequent study translated scriptures related with Maitreya Pure Land, especially in Xinye, in Xiangyang, and in Chang'an where he expressed wish to be born in Tusita Heaven, especially King Fujian offered Maitreya image to Dao An in front of which he preached dharma and made vows. In conclusion, there might be three possible reasons for Dao An to keep faith in Maitreya Pure Land: his personality and intention to positively serve the secular world consistent with Maitreya descending to convert sentient beings; encouragement by legendary tales about going to Tusita Heaven to ask dharma from Maitreya; his aim to ask prajna theory from Maitreya; his intention to achieve Buddhahood. However, in Dao An's period, the Maitreya Descending Sūtra (T14, 452, 419c) had not been translated into Chinese, so Dao An's faith type of Maitreya Pure Land mainly belongs to the type of Maitreya ascending Tusita Heaven, and the theory or saying about

Maitreya preaching dharma in Tusita Heaven and Maitreya's great status of being future Buddha had been well-known in China. Therefore, it is also possible to presume that Dao An's reasons for keeping faith in the Maitreya Pure Land were also related to the wish to descend to become Buddha with Maitreya together, reflecting a Mahayana bodhisattva path practice.

Objective 2: Dao An's Thoughts and Works Related to Maitreya Pure Land

Although Dao An kept contact Maitreya theory early in his monastic life, he formally collected disciples practiced Maitreya Pure Land dharma started in Xiangyang, where he lived for 15 years and usually made vows to be born in Tusita Heaven and practiced Maitreya Pure Land dharma with Wangjia, Fayu and other disciples in front of Maitreya Buddha image, whose practice about Maitreya Pure Land dharma is recorded in the Gaoseng Zhuan (2000).

Dao An's Maitreya Pure Land faith could be found in his thoughts and works. According to Guangchang Fang's Review of Dao An's Works (Guangchang Fang, 2024), he referred to 13 types of Buddhist records and documents, in which 102 works of Dao An were mentioned; after deleting some repeated ones, there are 66 works in total. However, most of these 66 works had been lost, with only 25 works extant. They are classified into three types: commentaries, prefaces of sūtras, and letters, with one preface about āgama sūtras, 3 prefaces about prājña sūtras, and 7 prefaces related to meditation and Dao An's faith in Maitreya Pure Land.

Among the extant 25 works of Dao An, some relate to his faith in Maitreya Pure Land and his thoughts about it. His faith in Maitreya Pure Land could be mainly expressed in writing prefaces for translated Buddhist scriptures, with 19 prefaces extant, ranging from meditation, vinaya, prājña, abhidharma, āgama, etc. By exploring these prefaces, there are mainly 4 prefaces introducing or indicating Dao An's thoughts and faith in Maitreya Pure Land, including Preface of Zengyi Ahan Jing (Ekottarikāgama Sūtra), Preface of Daoxing Bore Jing (Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra), Preface of Fangguang and Guangzan Bore Jing (Pañcaviṃśati-sāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā Sūtra), Preface of Mohe Bore Boluo Mi Jing (Māha-prajñāpāramitā Sūtra). In addition, other 7 prefaces about meditation also reflected Dao An's thoughts and faith in Maitreya Pure Land, including Preface of An Bo Zhu (安般住), Preface of Yinchi Ru Jing (阴持入经), Preface of Liaoben Shengsi Jing (了本生死经), Preface of Shier Men Jing (十二门经), Preface of Dashi Ermen Jing (大十二门经), Preface of Daodi Jing (道地经). Among these seven scriptures with prefaces written by Dao An, six of them were translated by Anshi Gao, who was proficient in Hinayana meditation or traditional meditation, such as breath-in and breath-out meditation, contemplation on five aggregates, twelve

bases, contemplation on twelve causes and conditions, contemplation on impermanence, etc. These cultivation methods are consistent with Maitreya's cultivation, who got enlightened by contemplating impermanence. Dao An favored these meditation methods, although in his period Mahayana meditation scriptures had been translated, such as Ruxuan Sanmei Jing, Bozhou Sanmei Jing (Pratyutpanna Samadhi Sūtra, 般舟三昧经), etc.

Table1. Prefaces composed by Dao An related to the Maitreya Pure Land

No.	Type	Name
1	*āgama*	Preface of Zengyi Ahan Jing
2	*prājña*	Preface of Daoxing Bore Jing
3		Preface of Fangguang and Guangzan Bore Jing
4		Preface of Mohe Bore Boluo Mi Jing
5	meditation	Preface of Anbo Zhu
6		Preface of Yinchi Ru Jing
7		Preface of Renben Yusheng Jing
8		Preface of Liaoben Shengsi Jing
9		Preface of Shier Men Jing
10		Preface of Dashi Ermen Jing
11		Preface of Daodi Jing

Four prefaces introducing or indicating Dao An's thoughts and faith in the Maitreya Pure Land include Preface of Zengyi Ahan Jing, Preface of Daoxing Bore Jing, Preface of Fangguang and Guangzan Bore Jing, Preface of Mohe Bore Boluomi Jing. In addition, the other 7 prefaces about meditation also reflected Dao An's thoughts and faith in the Maitreya Pure Land, including Preface of Anbo Zhu, Preface of Yinchi Ru Jing, Preface of Renben Yusheng Jing, Preface of Liaoben Shengsi Jing, Preface of Shier Men Jing, Preface of Dashi Ermen Jing, Preface of Daodi Jing. Among these seven scriptures with prefaces written by Dao An, six of them were translated by Anshi Gao.

From Dao An's lifetime, it can be seen that Dao An's thoughts and faith in the Maitreya Pure Land were deeply influenced by āgama sūtras and prājña sūtras, which extensively mention the Maitreya Pure Land and Maitreya Buddha. It can be concluded that Dao An's understanding of the Maitreya Pure Land is mainly about ascending to Tusita heaven, rather than descending to achieve Buddhahood with Maitreya, although his thoughts and bodhisattva aspiration actually reflect the descending type. The reason for this is that the sūtra for Maitreya descending to achieve Buddhahood to convert sentient beings was transmitted to China 70 years after Dao An passed away.

Objective 3: Master Dao An's Influences on Development of Maitreya Pure Land in Chinese Buddhism

Maitreya Pure Land faith originated in the East Jin period and was formally established by Dao An. Through Dao An's and his disciples' efforts to promote the development of Maitreya Pure Land dharma, it gradually developed in the South and North Dynasties, and reached peak development in the Tang Dynasty. After the Tang Dynasty, it was not as popular as before, and later revived in the Song Dynasty. In the 19th and 20th centuries, in local periods, Maitreya Pure Land faith achieved wide development.

In the history of Chinese Buddhism, many great monks and lay Buddhists had been devoted to the Maitreya Pure Land faith, study, and practice, such as Dai Kui, Dao An, Fa Xian, Xuan Zhuang, Kui Ji, etc. Dao An should be regarded as the first monk clearly putting forward the Maitreya Pure Land concept and practice with community members, especially the type of Maitreya ascending to Tusita Heaven, with Faxian having more influence on the type of Maitreya descending faith. Compared with Dao An and Faxian, the greatest monk in Maitreya thought and theory development should be Xuan Zhuang, as well as his disciple Kui Ji, who also composed many works related to Maitreya.

Master Dao An's influence on the development of the Maitreya Pure Land in Chinese Buddhism could be reflected in sūtra translation and works, vows and community practice to be born in the Maitreya Pure Land, theories and thoughts related to the Maitreya Pure Land, as well as his final achievement of being born in the Maitreya Pure Land by telepathy verification.

In this history of Chinese Buddhism, Master Dao An should be regarded as the pioneer of sinicized Buddhism; Liang Qi Chao once honored Dao An as the first builder of Chinese Buddhism. Dao An made great contributions to the development of Chinese Buddhism in multiple aspects, such as sūtra translation, especially his translation principle "five deviations from original meaning and three difficulties in translation". The most well-known influence is that Dao An first gave the family name Shi to all monastic members, which has been used in modern Chinese Buddhism. Based on multiple records and documents, Dao An's influences on Maitreya Pure Land could be as follows.

Dao An's practice of Maitreya Pure Land had brought about extensive and deep influence on later practice of Maitreya Pure Land dharma, especially the influence on his disciples, such as Tanjie, Tanhui, Sengfu, Fayu, etc. Such records are preserved in the Mingseng Zhuan Chao (R 124, 001a) and related monastic biographies. In later periods, such as the Liu Song, North Qi, Tang dynasty, Song dynasty, etc., Maitreya Pure Land faith continued, and even in modern times, some great monks such as Taixu and Cihang also tried their best to develop and practice Maitreya Pure Land dharma.

Table2. Dao An's followers related to the Maitreya Pure Land faith

No.	Name	Hometown	Relations with Dao An	About Maitreya faith
1	Fahe	Rongyang	classmate	
2	Fatai	Dongguan	classmate	
3	Sengxian	Jizhou	live for a while	
4	Daohu	Jizhou		
5	Sengfu	Ye	in Huze together	Wish born in Tusita Heaven
6	Tanyi	Jizhou	disciple	
7	Fayu		disciple	
8	Tanhui	Henei	disciple	
9	Daoli		disciple	
10	Tanjie	Nanyang	disciple	Wish born in Tusita Heaven

Master Dao An's influence on the development of the Maitreya Pure Land could also be reflected in his activities related to Maitreya.

The first event is his acceptance of Buddha image offered by Fujian, the ruler of Qianqin country, so that every time, Dao An preached dharma, Dao An would put Maitreya image in the front and paid respect, which promoted the public's worship and veneration to Maitreya image and spread the development of Maitreya Pure Land, so that in peak period of Maitreya faith in Tang dynasty, due to extensive Maitreya faith, the large quantity of Maitreya images appeared, especially the famous Leshan Mile image built in Tang dynasty.

The second event is his vow and practice to be born in the Maitreya Pure Land, which had been conducted continuously during his periods of living in Xiangyang and Chang'an. According to the Gaoseng Zhuan (2000), he, together with his disciples, made vows in front of the Maitreya image to be born in Tusita Heaven (Tang, 2000). The event is also recorded in the Mingseng Zhuan Chao (R 124, 001a). His vows and practice to be born in Tusita Heaven influenced nearly all his disciples except Huiyuan and Daochi who wished to be born in Amitabha Pure Land, the reason for which might be due to the time when Dao An made vows to be born in Tusita Pure Land earlier than the time when Huiyuan came to learn dharma from Dao An, might be due to the time when Dao An practiced Maitreya Pure Land dharma was the time when Dao An asked Huiyuan to spread dharma in other areas with Huiyuan absent, but it could be inferred that Huiyuan's pure land wish and practice followed the style and mode of his mater Dao An, such as contemplating Buddha image, community practice, making vows in front of Buddha image, practice day and night, making confession, etc. Therefore, it could be said that Dao An was the pioneer of pure land development in Chinese Buddhism, which is still popular in modern Chinese Buddhism, with Amitabha Pure Land as the prevailing trend.

The third event is Dao An's telepathic verification of being born in Tusita Pure Land, which is recorded in the Gaoseng Zhuan (2000) and discussed by Tang (2000). The reason for Dao An's ability to be born in Tusita Heaven differs from

that recorded in Sarvastivadin doctrine: the former is due to merits, the latter due to meditation. According to the Gaoseng Zhuan (2000), this event happened in 385, the tenth year of the Taiyun period in the Jin dynasty, ten days before Dao An passed away. Compared with meditation method to be born in Tusita Heaven, Dao An's method of doing merit to be born in Tusita Heaven seems much easier to achieve for ordinary people, so that Dao An's telepathy verification to be born in Tusita Heaven brought about great influence on extensive development of Maitreya Pure Land in early Chinese Buddhism, which promoted later fast and peak development of Maitreya faith and Pure Land in South and North dynasties, in Sui and Tang dynasties, etc.

Discussion

The findings indicate that Dao An's faith in Maitreya Pure Land developed through the interaction of doctrinal inquiry, personal aspiration, historical circumstances, and communal religious practice. Regarding the first objective, Tang (2000) relates Dao An's devotion to the warfare and political instability of the Eastern Jin period, while Chu Sanzang Jiji (1995) records his wish to encounter Maitreya in Tuṣita Heaven in order to resolve doctrinal doubts. The present study extends these explanations by showing that his faith was also shaped by early contact with Buddhist scriptures, sustained engagement with Āgama and Prajñā literature, compassion for sentient beings, and the aspiration to participate in Maitreya's future salvific mission. This interpretation is consistent with Zhang (2009), who argues that Dao An's devotion formed part of his broader philosophical and soteriological concerns rather than representing a simple devotional belief.

Regarding the second objective, Fang (2024) identifies seven meditation-related prefaces associated with Dao An's Maitreya faith. The present analysis broadens this textual basis by identifying eleven relevant prefaces across Āgama-, Prajñā-, and meditation-related writings. These materials demonstrate that Dao An's faith was expressed through doctrinal interpretation, scriptural study, meditative cultivation, and religious practice. This finding also supports Shi (2002), who explains that Dao An's Maitreya devotion developed at the intersection of Āgama teachings, Prajñāpāramitā thought, and contemplative practice.

Regarding the third objective, Dao An's communal vow for rebirth in Tuṣita Heaven represents a major historical contribution. Dai (2013) identifies this event as an early organized form of Pure Land practice, while Xiang (2013) argues that Dao An and his disciples initiated an important phase in the spread of Maitreya devotion. The findings therefore suggest that Dao An transformed Maitreya faith from individual scriptural learning into collective, vow-based practice. His influence operated through writings, teaching, image veneration,

disciple networks, and communal aspiration, establishing him as a formative figure in the early development of Maitreya Pure Land Buddhism in China (McBride, 2014; Nattier, 1988).

New Knowledge from the Research

This study contributes new knowledge by reconstructing Dao An's Maitreya faith as a developmental process rather than a single act of devotion. His faith began through early encounters with Maitreya-related scriptures, deepened through Āgama, Prajñā, and meditative study, and matured into collective vows and community practice in Xiangyang and Chang'an. The findings show that doctrinal inquiry and devotional aspiration were mutually reinforcing in his religious life.

A second contribution is the identification of eleven extant prefaces that illuminate his Maitreya Pure Land thought. Grouping them into Āgama, Prajñā, and meditation categories reveals a coherent intellectual structure: the Āgama materials supplied historical and ethical foundations, the Prajñā texts generated doctrinal questions and bodhisattva aspirations, and meditation literature provided practical methods of cultivation.

The third contribution is a model of Dao An's historical influence based on four interconnected mechanisms: textual interpretation, image-centered teaching, communal vows, and transmission through disciples. This model explains how Maitreya devotion moved from translated scripture to organized Chinese Buddhist practice. It also distinguishes documented historical influence from later hagiographical claims concerning visionary confirmation of rebirth in Tuṣita Heaven.

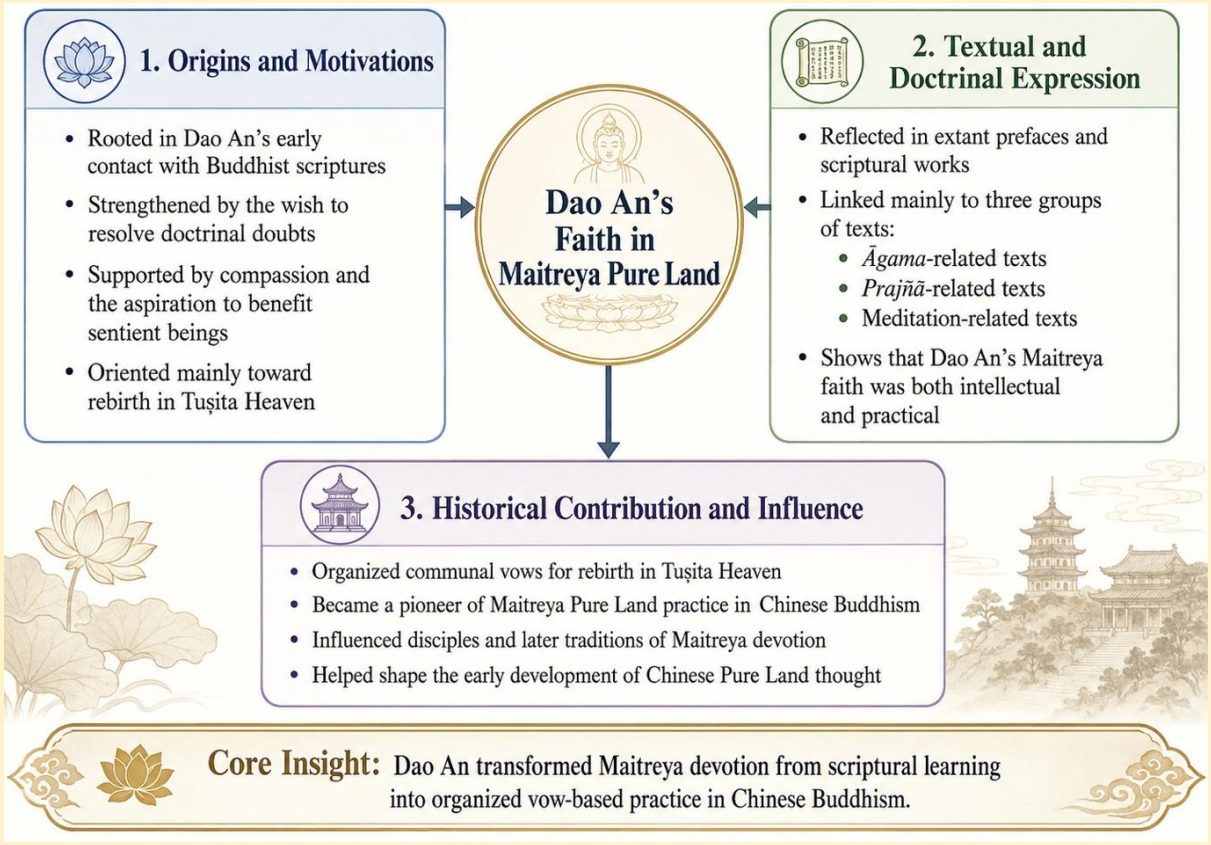

Figure 1. Origins, Textual Expression, and Historical Influence of Dao An's Maitreya Pure Land Faith

Conclusion

This study examined the reasons for Dao An's faith in Maitreya Pure Land, the writings and ideas through which that faith was expressed, and his influence on the development of Maitreya devotion in Chinese Buddhism. The findings indicate that his faith arose from several interconnected factors: his search for answers to doctrinal problems, especially in Prajñā literature; his compassionate aspiration to benefit sentient beings; his admiration for Maitreya's future mission; and the social instability of the fourth century.

Dao An's devotion was predominantly oriented toward rebirth in Tuṣita Heaven, although his bodhisattva aspiration also contained an implicit descent-oriented dimension. His surviving prefaces show that this devotion was integrated with Āgama study, Prajñā interpretation, and meditative cultivation. Through public teaching, image veneration, collective vows, and transmission by disciples, he helped establish one of the earliest organized models of Maitreya Pure Land practice in China. His role should therefore be understood not as the sole origin of Maitreya devotion, but as a foundational stage in its institutional and intellectual development.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study is limited by the fragmentary nature of the surviving sources. Many writings attributed to Dao An are lost, while later biographical accounts combine historical memory with devotional interpretation. Future research should therefore distinguish more carefully among contemporaneous evidence, later transmission, and hagiographical development.

Comparative research could examine Dao An's Maitreya devotion alongside Huiyuan's Amitābha Pure Land practice, with particular attention to communal vows, image contemplation, repentance, and monastic networks. Further study of Dao An's disciples may also clarify how his practices were transmitted across different regions.

Methodologically, future studies could combine textual criticism, manuscript comparison, digital humanities, and art-historical evidence. Chinese materials should be compared with Korean and Japanese sources that may preserve variant records concerning Dao An and early Maitreya devotion.

Additional research should also investigate the relationship between Dao An's translation theory, Prajñā interpretation, meditation, and Pure Land aspiration. Such work would clarify whether Maitreya devotion functioned as a separate devotional commitment or as an integrated component of his wider Buddhist thought.

Finally, the development of Maitreya practice after Dao An should be traced through the Northern and Southern Dynasties, Sui, Tang, and modern periods. This would provide a more complete account of how his model of textual study, communal vows, and image-centered practice was received and transformed.

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An Innovative Mindfulness Program (IMP) for Enhancing Holistic Well-Being among People with Blindness or Visual Impairment

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Abstract

This study pursued three objectives: (1) to explore the challenges faced by people with blindness or visual impairment (BVI); (2) to develop an Innovative Mindfulness Program (IMP) grounded in the Theravāda Satipaṭṭhāna framework; and (3) to assess preliminary short-term changes in holistic well-being following participation in the program. A mixed-methods sequential exploratory design was used across three phases. Phase I comprised in-depth interviews with sixteen BVI adults at the Lighthouse for the Blind, Pathum Thani, Thailand, analyzed thematically within a descriptive phenomenological orientation, together with consultative interviews with nine scholar-specialists. In Phase II, the IMP was developed and validated by experts. Phase III used the 25-item Peaceful Well-Being Questionnaire in a single-group design, with the pretest administered immediately before the one-day program (08:00), the posttest immediately after it (16:00), and satisfaction ratings and interviews collected that same afternoon; all outcomes therefore represent immediate responses rather than evidence of sustained change. Overall well-being improved significantly ($t(15) = -2.986$, $p = .009$, $dz = 0.75$; Wilcoxon $Z = 2.90$, $p = .004$), with psychological well-being the only dimension to reach conventional significance ($dz = 0.74$, $p = .010$) and 13 of the 16 participants showing improvement. Participants described a broader understanding of mindfulness as awareness that could be practiced through eating, touching, listening, walking, and forgiving. The findings support the feasibility and acceptability of a non-visually designed, Theravāda-grounded program for BVI adults and suggest that its cultural and institutional context may have contributed to participants' experiences. Given the single-site, single-group design, absence of a control group and follow-up, and small sample ($n = 16$), the results are exploratory and do not support statistical generalization; a randomized controlled trial with follow-up is needed.

Keywords: Mindfulness; Blindness and Visual Impairment; Satipaṭṭhāna; Holistic Well-Being; Buddhist Psychology; Khaṇikā-samādhi; Exploratory intervention study

Introduction

Blindness and visual impairment affect sensory functioning, psychological well-being, social participation, daily independence, and access to supportive services. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) estimates that at least 2.2 billion people worldwide live with near or distance vision impairment. Adults with blindness or visual impairment (BVI) may experience reduced mobility, social isolation, anxiety, depression, diminished self-confidence, and barriers to meaningful participation. In Thailand, organizations such as the Lighthouse for the Blind provide practical and residential support, but emotional, contemplative, and spiritually meaningful services may remain less systematically developed (Crews & Campbell, 2004; Tuttle & Tuttle, 2004; Rees et al., 2015).

Mindfulness-based and psychosocial interventions have increasingly been applied to BVI populations. Van der Aa et al. (2015) found that a stepped-care program reduced the cumulative incidence of depressive and anxiety disorders among older adults with visual impairment. Chan et al. (2023) reported that mindfulness-based music therapy improved emotion regulation among blind older women, while Lyngroth and Gammelsæter (2023) described positive experiences from an eight-week mindfulness-based stress reduction course. Li et al. (2024) registered a three-arm trial of mindfulness-based yoga, and Khodabakhshi-Koolaee et al. (2026) reported improvements in hope and happiness following mindfulness-based stress reduction.

These studies demonstrate growing interest in mindfulness for BVI adults. However, the limited literature located for this study mainly concerns programs originally developed for sighted populations and later adapted through audio instruction or modification of visually oriented exercises. Such adaptations are valuable, but they do not necessarily reconsider contemplative practice from the perspective of people whose engagement with the world does not primarily depend on sight.

Phase I interviews suggested that some participants relied extensively on sound, touch, taste, movement, and interpersonal guidance in daily life. These experiences may provide familiar sensory pathways for mindfulness practice,

although they should not be interpreted as evidence that all people with blindness possess heightened non-visual senses.

The Innovative Mindfulness Program (IMP) was grounded in the Theravāda Satipaṭṭhāna framework, especially the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta (DN 22) and the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10; Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu & Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1995). These discourses organize practice around contemplation of body, feelings, mind, and phenomena, many of which rely on breath, posture, movement, feeling tone, and mental awareness rather than vision. The Visuddhimagga and Paṭisambhidāmagga further support non-visual contemplative methods. (Buddhaghosa, 1991; Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu, 1997). The Thai Buddhist setting, monastic guidance, peer participation, and the narrative of Phra Cakkhupāla Thera may also have contributed to participants' experiences, although these contextual factors were not separately measured.

Accordingly, this study aimed to explore BVI adults' well-being challenges, develop a Theravāda-grounded non-visual mindfulness program, and examine immediate changes in holistic well-being and participants' experiences following the IMP. The study provides an exploratory foundation for future controlled and longitudinal research.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the well-being challenges experienced by adults with blindness or visual impairment.

2. To develop a Theravāda-based mindfulness program designed for non-visual participation.

3. To examine participants' immediate well-being changes and experiences after completing the program.

Literature Review

1. The Doctrinal Case for Non-Visual Contemplation

The primary foundation of the IMP is the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (DN 22); its shorter parallel, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10; Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu & Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1995), is identical on the four foundations but omits the extended treatment of the Four Noble Truths. Where one text is described as the foundation, DN 22 is intended. The discourse organizes practice around contemplation of

body (*kāyānupassanā*), feelings (*vedanānupassanā*), mind (*cittānupassanā*), and phenomena (*dhammānupassanā*). That this framework does not depend on vision is argued here from four sources rather than asserted (Anālayo Bhikkhu, 2003).

First, the body contemplations. Every exercise under *kāyānupassanā* (DN 22 2–10; MN 10 4–10) addresses a nonvisual modality. *Ānāpānasati* is defined by the felt length of breath. The four postures are known proprioceptively. Clear comprehension (*sampajañña*) is applied to going and returning, bending and stretching, eating, drinking, chewing, tasting, speaking, and keeping silent, a list naming gustatory, tactile, and kinaesthetic events, and not one visual one. The thirty-two parts and the four elements proceed by analytic reflection from within. Only the ninefold charnel-ground contemplation presupposes a visually encountered corpse, and the commentarial tradition treats that object as a *paññatti* fixed in mind rather than continuously looked at.

Second, the remaining three foundations contain no visual object. Vedanānupassanā discriminates hedonic tone; *cittānupassanā* enumerates sixteen states of mind; *dhammānupassanā* takes the hindrances, aggregates, sense bases, awakening factors, and Noble Truths. The *saḷāyatana* section is decisive: eye-and-forms is one of six sense-base pairs, given neither priority nor privilege, and the practice is to understand the fetter arising in dependence on any base. A framework treating vision as one-sixth of its field, with no special role, is not vision-dependent.

Third, the Visuddhimagga. Of the forty meditation subjects (Vism. III.104), only the ten *kasiṇa* and ten *asubha* require an initially visual object; the ten recollections, four *brahmavihāra*, four immaterial states, perception of the repulsiveness of nutriment, and defining the elements do not. Buddhaghosa's treatment of *ānāpānasati* (Vism. VIII.145–244) proceeds by the felt touch of breath and by counting, connecting, and fixing attention. As Carpenter (2018) observes, even visually initiated exercises instruct the meditator not to attend to color but to set the mind on the concept, so the visible device is a discardable scaffold.

Fourth, the Paṭisambhidāmagga. The *Ānāpānakathā*, the earliest systematic exegesis of breath meditation (Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu, 1997), analyses the sixteen steps and the sign/in-breath/out-breath triad in terms of touch and duration, a complete vocabulary for the practice with no visual object.

Two qualifications follow. Sound, taste, and touch are not each set out as separate named exercises in DN 22 or MN 10. What the texts supply is the *sampajañña* activity list, which includes eating, chewing, and tasting, and the *saḷāyatana* section, which makes ear-and-sounds, tongue-and-flavors, and body-and-tangibles proper objects of *dhammānupassanā*. The IMP's sound bath, tactile bags, mindful eating, and walking are therefore a legitimate extension of these canonical categories, not exercises listed under those names. Second, this is a claim about doctrinal structure, that the framework does not require vision, and not one the Phase III data establish or refute.

2. *Khaṇikā-Samādhi* as a Proposed Interpretive Resource

The *Visuddhimagga* distinguishes absorption cultivated in *jhāna* from *khaṇika-samādhi*, momentary concentration accompanying directed attention, which the commentarial tradition treats as sufficient to support insight (Vism. IV.99). Mahāsi Sayādaw (1991) built his account of insight practice on this point.

The practical implication is offered as a hypothesis. Participants' existing use of non-visual sensory attention may provide a useful foundation for cultivating mindfulness. Daily sensory attention is not automatically equivalent to Buddhist mindfulness or to momentary concentration; *khaṇikā-samādhi* was not measured here, and its possible role is a theoretical interpretation requiring further study.

3. Cultural and Institutional Context as a Potential Contributor

Delivering the IMP at Wat Chonprathanrangsarit, framed by the narrative of Phra Cakkhupāla Thera, reflected a theoretical position: that the institutional and symbolic context of practice may be constitutive of its effects rather than incidental (cf. Sharf, 2014, p. 933). The *Visuddhimagga*'s account of conditions preparatory to *samādhi*, the ten impediments, the good friend (*kalyāṇamitta*), the eighteen faults of an unsuitable dwelling (Vism III.29–56; IV.19–21), grounds the same insight canonically. The expression *khettabhūmi* ("prepared field") used to summarise these conditions is the authors' conceptual label, not a technical term of the *Visuddhimagga*. (Buddhaghosa, 1991).

A BVI practitioner receiving instruction in a temple, among peers, framed by the story of a monk who lost his sight and reached liberation, may occupy a different contemplative situation than the same person in a clinical group session. Because setting, ritual, peer group, monastic teaching, and narrative were

delivered together and not separately measured, this is a proposed contextual contributor, not a demonstrated mechanism.

The Cakkhupāla narrative belongs to the *Dhammapada Commentary* (*Dhammapada-aṭṭhakathā* I.3ff., *Cakkhupāla Vatthu*), attached to the first verse of the *Yamakavagga*, rather than to the canonical verse. In it the elder practised in the posture of not lying down; an eye disease worsened as he persisted; his sight and his defilements were destroyed at the same moment, so that he became an arahant as he became blind. The walking-meditation episode in which insects were crushed occurred after that attainment.

4. Holistic Well-Being across Four Dimensions

Holistic well-being was operationalized through the Peaceful Well-Being Questionnaire (Jiwattanasuk, 2021): 25 items on a seven-point Likert scale (maximum 175) across physical (items 1–6; max 42), psychological (7–14; max 56), behavioral (15–19; max 35), and intellectual (20–25; max 42) dimensions. Its four-dimensional structure is broadly consistent with the ICF-informed biopsychosocial account of disability (WHO, 2001; Leonardi et al., 2006, p. 1219).

The alignment between these dimensions and the four foundations of *Satipaṭṭhāna* is a conceptual mapping proposed by the authors for program design, not a foundational Theravāda teaching; no canonical source asserts a one-to-one correspondence. *Kāyānupassanā* is aligned with the physical dimension because its objects are the body as directly experienced; *vedanānupassanā* with the psychological, because feeling tone conditions the affective states assessed; *cittānupassanā* with the behavioral, on the reasoning that recognising states of mind as they arise makes non-reactive conduct possible, the loosest of the four; and *dhammānupassanā* with the intellectual, because its objects are the analytic categories through which understanding develops. The mapping is a design heuristic, not a tested model.

5. Prior Interventions and the Basis of Novelty Claims

A structured search was conducted in PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, Google Scholar, and Thai Journals Online (ThaiJO), January 2000 – May 2026, combining population terms (*blind*, *blindness*, *"visual impairment"*, *"visually impaired"*, *"low vision"*) with intervention terms (*mindfulness*, *meditation*, *MBSR*, *MBCT*, *satipatthana*, *vipassana*, *Buddhis) and, in a second pass, setting terms* (Thailand, Thai, temple, monastic). Reference lists were hand-

searched. This was not a PRISMA systematic review, and priority claims in this article are accordingly phrased as “to the authors' knowledge”.

The search located the studies summarized in 1. Three observations define the gap addressed here. Every located intervention delivers a program developed for sighted populations and subsequently adapted; none derives its architecture from a contemplative tradition's own account of what mindfulness is. Every located intervention is multi-week (seven to eight weeks); no single-session contemplative program for this population has been evaluated. And none was conducted in a Thai Buddhist institutional context or used a Buddhist multidimensional well-being outcome.

Conceptual Framework

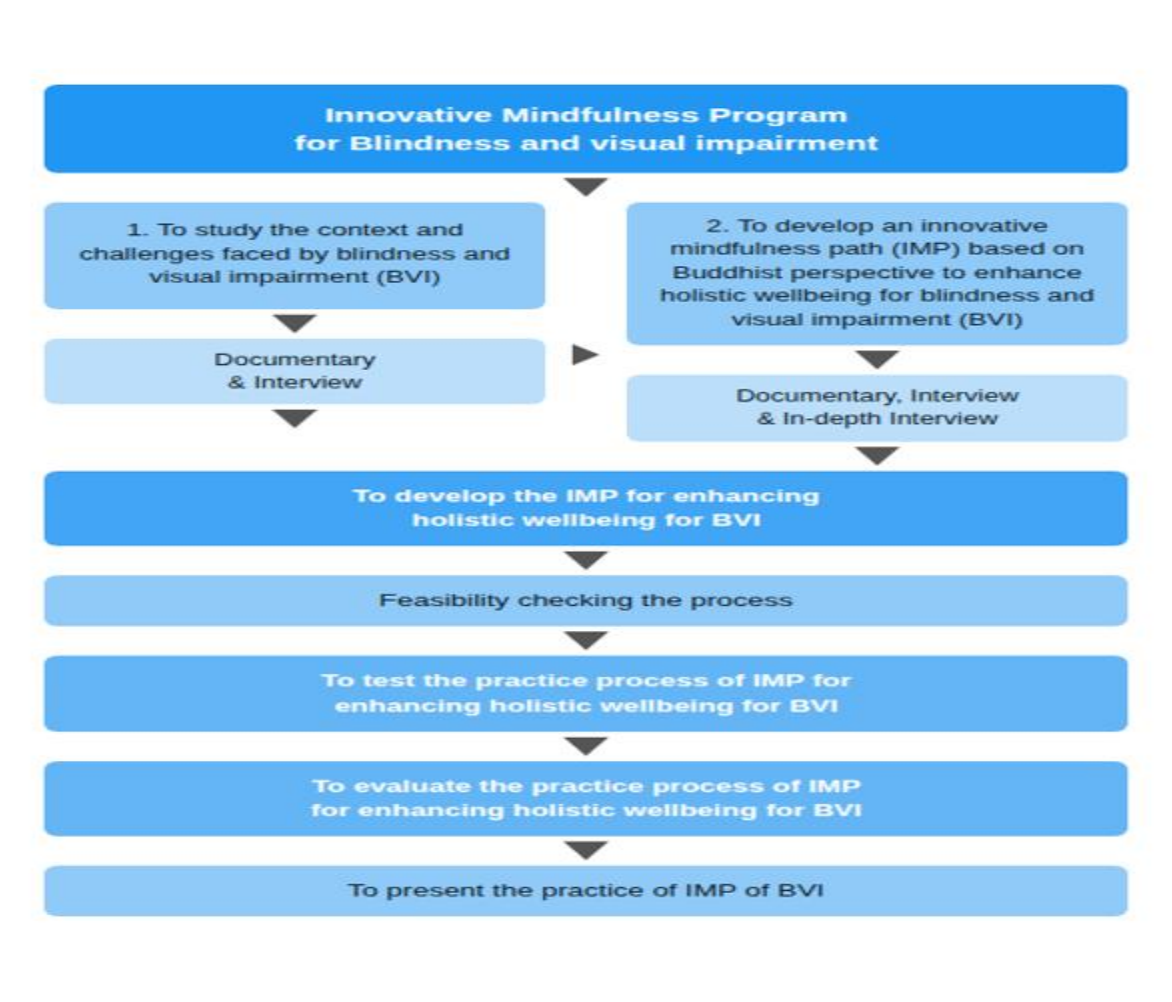

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Innovative Mindfulness Program (IMP)Conceptual framework

Figure 1 presents the study's input–process–output conceptual framework. *Inputs* are the Phase I themes, the doctrinal resources of DN 22, MN 10 and the *Visuddhimagga*, and the advice of nine scholar-specialists. These directly determined the content: the physical theme of unattended bodily routine generated the kinaesthetic-awareness and mindful-eating activities; the psychological theme of reactive anger and maintained grievance generated the Loving-Kindness session; the social theme of misrecognition generated the paired listening and group walking; and the intellectual aspiration for Dhamma-based programming generated the Dhamma Talk. The *process* is the one-day IMP (Table 1). The *outputs* are the immediate post-program assessment across the four measured dimensions and the qualitative themes of integration.

Research Methodology

Design and Integration

The study used a mixed-methods sequential exploratory design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), notated QUAL → program development → QUAN + qual. It combines a sequential backbone with a convergent final phase. *Sequentially*, Phase I was completed and analyzed before any quantitative instrument was administered, so the qualitative component had priority in determining the intervention's content. *Convergently*, within Phase III, the pre-/post-test and interview data were collected from the same sixteen participants on the same day, analyzed independently, and then compared. *Integration* occurred at the Phase I–II transition, where themes were mapped onto activities, and after independent analysis of both Phase III datasets, in the joint display at Table 3.

Timing. Phase I interviews were conducted at the Lighthouse for the Blind in the first quarter of the study period, followed by scholar-specialist consultations. Instrument validation was certified 14–17 February 2026. The IMP was delivered on a single day: pre-test at 08:00 before any activity, program 08:00–16:00, post-test immediately after the closing ceremony, and interviews and satisfaction ratings the same afternoon. There was no follow-up.

Participants and Recruitment

Sixteen Thai adults with blindness or visual impairment were recruited by purposive sampling at the Lighthouse for the Blind, Pathum Thani. The same sixteen completed every stage: Phase I interviews, Phase II consultation, the IMP, pre- and post-test, and Phase III interviews, with no attrition and no missing data.

Inclusion criteria: confirmed diagnosis; residence at or regular attendance at the center; voluntary enrolment; capacity to complete questionnaires with verbal assistance; consent to be interviewed. *Exclusion criteria*: acute medical or psychiatric conditions making a full day unsafe; inability to travel to the venue. The institution circulated the invitation, and interested residents contacted the researcher; reasons for non-participation were prior commitments and, in two cases, health limitations. The sample was predominantly male (87.5%, $n = 14$), aged 18–74 ($M = 51.38$, $SD = 15.89$), and included 14 totally blind participants, one with light perception only, and one with unilateral low vision.

Prior meditation experience. No participant reported regular, sustained formal practice at enrolment. This does not mean none had prior exposure: a weekly group prayer and meditation session was available at the center, and a small number, including KI 5, had earlier acquaintance with meditation without practicing regularly. The description of KI 5 in 6.4 refers to that earlier acquaintance, not to ongoing practice. This near-absence of current practice reflects a documented pattern: structured mindfulness or self-management programming is rarely available in institutional BVI rehabilitation settings even where need is expressed (Rees et al., 2015, p. 1479).

Expert panels. Two distinct groups contributed, described by role rather than name. The *consultative panel* ($n = 9$) took part in Phase I interviews and Phase II review: two senior Theravāda meditation teachers, one senior monastic administrator, one professor emeritus of Pāli and Buddhist philosophy, one ophthalmologist, one BVI-education specialist, one foundation executive, one academic philosopher, and one monastic scholar. Selection was by purposive criterion sampling, each requiring at least ten years' professional engagement in a relevant domain. Each reviewed the draft program and interview guides. Their feedback produced three substantive changes: adding the tactile “Magic Bags” activity; replacing the individually paced walking meditation with the connected group format on safety and orientation grounds; and opening the day with a bathing ceremony rather than a lecture. The **content-validation panel** ($n = 3$), none of whom served on the consultative panel, conducted Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) rating of the instruments, certified 14–17 February 2026.

Research Instruments

Four instruments were used; validation evidence is reported for each. (i) A *Phase I interview guide* covering perceived physical and psychological

difficulties, current coping strategies, and participants' own accounts of mindfulness, all items IOC 1.00. (ii) A *Phase II program-review guide* for scholar-specialists covering doctrinal suitability, non-visual sensory pathways, and cultural appropriateness, all items IOC 1.00. (iii) A *post-program interview guide* covering prior condition, engagement with each activity, perceived change in each dimension, an overall 1–10 rating, and suggestions, all items IOC 1.00. (iv) The *25-item Peaceful Well-Being Questionnaire*.

The questionnaire was adapted from Jiwattanasuk (2021), developed and validated with Thai meditation practitioners in a Buddhist institutional context. Items are scored 1–7; total scores range from 25–175. No published cut-points exist, so scores are interpreted as percentages of the maximum and as within-person change, not against thresholds. The IOC covered 30 items across all four instruments, not 30 items of the outcome questionnaire; 29 scored 1.00 and one (Q.10 of the questionnaire) scored 0.67, following a recommendation that it be supplemented by open-ended exploration. All exceeded the 0.50 threshold (Rovinelli & Hambleton, 1977).

Reliability and validity, and their limits. Cronbach's $\alpha = .941$ was computed on this sample's 25 pre-test responses ($n = 16$), not taken from the original validation; an estimate from sixteen cases is unstable and indicative only. Dimension-level α values are not reported because subscales of five to eight items estimated on sixteen cases would be even less stable. Beyond internal consistency, the evidence base is thin: no confirmatory factor analysis of the four-dimensional structure has been published; no criterion-related validity coefficients against an established well-being or affect measure are available; no test–retest data or standard error of measurement exists; and the instrument has not been validated with people who are blind or visually impaired. Its use rests on theoretical congruence; it is the only available multidimensional measure built on the Theravāda categories that organize the IMP, and on observed internal consistency. Dimension-level findings should be weighted accordingly.

The Program

The IMP was delivered as a one-day program (08:00–16:00) at Wat Chonprathanrangsarit, Nonthaburi. It opened with a traditional Thai bathing ceremony for the presiding abbot and proceeded through six core activities (Table 1).

Table 1. IMP Schedule as Delivered (N = 16). Dimension labels use only the four measured dimensions; social elements are identified as qualitative.

Time	Activity	Primary Sensory Channel	Measured Well-Being Dimension
08:00–09:30	Registration, Bathing Ceremony, Orientation	Ceremonial/interpersonal	Behavioral (social experience addressed qualitatively)
09:30–10:00	Activity 1: Ānāpānasati / Sound Bath / Deep Listening	Auditory/respiratory	Physical; Psychological
10:00–10:30	Activity 2: Kinesthetic Awareness	Proprioceptive/kinesthetic	Physical
10:30–11:00	Activity 3: Magic Bags — Mindful Tactile Exploration	Tactile/olfactory	Physical; Intellectual
11:00–11:30	Activity 4: Guided Mindful Eating	Gustatory/tactile	Physical; Psychological
11:30–13:00	Mindful Lunch / Sound-to-Soul Stretch	Multi-sensory	Physical; Behavioral
13:00–14:00	Dhamma Talk: Life of the Buddha / Phra Cakkhupāla	Auditory/conceptual	Intellectual; Psychological
14:00–14:30	Activity 5: Mindful Snake Walking (connected group walking)	Kinesthetic/interpersonal	Physical; Behavioral
14:45–15:30	Activity 6a: Echo of Mindfulness (dyadic listening)	Auditory/interpersonal	Behavioral; Intellectual
15:30–16:00	Activity 6b: Mindful Forgiving / Loving-Kindness Meditation	Internal/affective	Psychological; Behavioral
16:00	Closing Ceremony; post-test; post-program interviews	Community	Behavioral (social experience addressed qualitatively)

Accessible Data Collection

Consent. The information sheet and consent form were read aloud in full in Thai, in a private room, in advance of any data collection, covering purpose, procedures, duration, burden, and the right to decline or withdraw without effect on access to center services. Participants who could sign did so with guided hand placement; others gave audio-recorded verbal consent witnessed by center staff outside the research team. Screen-reader-compatible electronic text was available on request.

Questionnaire administration. The questionnaire was not distributed in print or Braille. It was read aloud item by item in Thai, in identical order and wording at both time points. The seven-point scale was explained at the outset and repeated in abbreviated form before each item; participants responded by stating a number, which was recorded and double-entered. Administration was individual, so participants did not hear one another's answers.

Bias reduction and its limits. Participants were told before both administrations that there were no right answers and that lower post-test scores were acceptable; the identical script was used at both time points, so bias from verbal delivery was constant rather than differential; administration was individual and out of earshot of facilitators; and interviews invited criticism, with two participants rating the program 6 out of 10 and offering critical suggestions. Nevertheless, the researcher both delivered the program and administered the measures, a source of expectancy and social-desirability bias that the design cannot exclude (8).

Analysis

Phase I. Reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006), within a descriptive phenomenological orientation, with the aim of describing the structure of participants' lived experience rather than building explanatory theory. All six stages were applied: verbatim transcription and repeated listening; inductive initial coding across the dataset; collation into candidate themes; review against extracts and the full dataset; definition and naming; and reporting. Trustworthiness was addressed by member checking and an audit trail of coding decisions. "Phenomenological" is used in this descriptive sense and does not denote Giorgi's or Colaizzi's formal procedures.

Phase III quantitative. Scores were double-entered into SPSS 26.0; there were no missing data and no exclusions. The distribution of total difference scores was examined by Shapiro–Wilk and by histogram and Q–Q inspection. Shapiro–Wilk was significant, $W = .824$, $p = .006$, indicating departure from normality attributable to positive skew (1.29) from three participants with large gains (+56, +51, +35). These were retained rather than trimmed: their responses were consistent with their interviews, and there was no data error. Because normality was not met, a Wilcoxon signed-rank test was added as confirmatory analysis of the primary outcome alongside the paired *t*-test.

Effect sizes and intervals. Effect sizes are Cohen's dz, mean difference divided by the standard deviation of difference scores, labeled *dz* throughout to distinguish them from between-groups *d*. Confidence intervals in Table 2 are for the mean difference in raw scale points, not for the effect size.

Multiplicity. Twenty-five items were each tested, producing 25 tests. No correction was applied to the primary analysis; item-level results are reported as exploratory and re-examined under Bonferroni ($\alpha = .002$) and Benjamini–Hochberg false-discovery-rate control at $q = .05$. Conclusions rest on overall and dimensional scores.

Phase III qualitative. Post-program interviews with all sixteen participants were analyzed using the same six-stage procedure, organized in relation to the four measured dimensions, with social experience treated as a separate cross-cutting theme.

Ethics

Approval was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University prior to data collection (approval number R.167/2026; date February 18, 2026 to be inserted at proof stage). Accessible consent is described in 4.5. Because participants were recruited through the institution in which they live and receive services, voluntariness was protected by three measures: the invitation was framed and repeated as an opportunity rather than an expectation; participants were told more than once that declining or withdrawing would not affect their access to services; and no member of center management was present when consent was taken. Transport and meals were provided to remove practical barriers rather than as an inducement. Participants were assigned codes KI 1–KI 16, with identifying information stored separately.

Research Results

1. Phase I: Well-Being Challenges

Physical. Participants showed considerable adaptive independence, many maintaining routines beginning at 5:00 AM, yet described eating, walking, and self-care as habitual and automatic rather than mindfully engaged.

Psychological. The dominant experience was not despair but chronic low-grade reactivity: lingering anger, grievances maintained over years, and

background tension rarely finding structured resolution. Participants who lost sight in adolescence described an initial disruption of identity followed by adaptation through a peer community; congenitally blind participants described habitual irritability and being perceived as objects of charity. None had access to structured psychosocial or contemplative programs.

Behavioral. Participants described interpersonal patterns shaped by accumulated frustration: withdrawal in some cases, quickness to irritation in others, and limited repertoires for repairing relationships after conflict.

Intellectual. The most consistent aspiration was for Dhamma-based programming to take non-visual sensory experience seriously as a contemplative resource rather than a deficiency to accommodate.

Social experience, a qualitative theme, not a measured dimension. Participants experienced genuine belonging within the Lighthouse community alongside persistent misrecognition from the sighted world, met with a kindness carrying an assumption of incapacity. This informed the program design but was not assessed by the questionnaire, and no quantitative claim about social well-being is made.

2. Phase III: Quantitative Results

Overall holistic well-being improved significantly. Mean totals rose from 120.38 (*SD* = 19.38; 68.8% of maximum) to 134.06 (*SD* = 17.05; 76.6%), a gain of 13.69 points (95% CI for the mean difference [3.92, 23.46]; $t(15) = -2.986$, $p = .009$, $dz = 0.75$). The confirmatory Wilcoxon signed-rank test gave the same conclusion: $Z = 2.90$, $p = .004$, rank-biserial $r = .82$. Thirteen of sixteen participants (81.25%) improved.

Table 2. Paired-sample t-test results by dimension (N = 16). CI columns are 95% confidence intervals for the mean difference in raw points, not for dz. p < .05. p < .01.

Dimension (items; max)	**Pre *M* (*SD*)**	**Post *M* (*SD*)**	***t*(15)**	***p***	***dz***	**95% CI of mean difference (points)**
Physical (1–6; max 42)	27.00 (4.87)	29.75 (4.92)	−2.071	.056	0.52	[−0.08, 5.58]

Psychological (7–14; max 56)	37.44 (7.77)	42.69 (5.79)	−2.948	.010*	0.74	[1.45, 9.05]
Behavioral (15–19; max 35)	25.00 (5.96)	28.31 (3.79)	−2.059	.057	0.52	[−0.12, 6.74]
Intellectual (20–25; max 42)	30.94 (3.79)	33.31 (5.39)	−1.996	.064	0.50	[−0.16, 4.91]
“““Overall (1–25; max 175)	120.38 (19.38)	134.06 (17.05)	−2.986	.009**	0.75	[3.92, 23.46]
Overall — Wilcoxon signed-rank (confirmatory)	—	—	Z = 2.90	.004	r = .82	Non-parametric; run because Shapiro–Wilk W = .824, p = .006

Only the psychological dimension reached α = .05. Physical (p = .056, dz = 0.52), behavioral (p = .057, dz = 0.52), and intellectual (p = .064, dz = 0.50) all showed positive change of medium magnitude without reaching significance; 6.2 examines why. Change was positive in all four dimensions, and post-test standard deviations were lower than pre-test in three of four.

Exploratory item-level analyses. Six of twenty-five items changed at the unadjusted $p < .05$ level: Q4 (vitality, .004), Q16 (non-harming intention, .005), Q12 (frustration tolerance, .006), Q13 (equanimity toward unmet desire, .014), Q11 (positive memory orientation, .018) and Q6 (sleep quality, .046). Because all 25 were tested without correction, some may reflect chance: under Bonferroni (α = .002) none remains significant, and under Benjamini–Hochberg control at q = .05 three remain, Q4, Q16 and Q12. These items lie within the territory of non-reactivity and goodwill addressed by the Loving-Kindness session, but individual activities were not isolated, so no attribution to that session is made.

The mean satisfaction rating was 8.67 out of 10 (SD = 1.35) among the fifteen participants who gave an explicit rating; KI 8 gave none. Nine of those fifteen (60.0%) rated the program 9 or 10, five gave 10, four gave 9, four gave 8, and two gave 6.

3. Phase III: Qualitative Results

Physical. Participants described attending to the texture and temperature of food during mindful eating, the weight and rhythm of each step during Mindful Snake Walking, and the quality of breath during the Sound Bath.

Psychological. Several independently described a feeling of spaciousness: reduced background irritability and a capacity to notice anger before acting on it. KI 8, who arrived with scattered thinking and anger toward others, described leaving “less mentally scattered” and “calmer, with resentment reduced.”

Behavioral. Participants described intentions toward more deliberate and compassionate engagement, particularly in accounts of the Echo of Mindfulness dyadic listening exercise. As interviews occurred immediately after the program, these are stated intentions rather than observed behavioral change.

Intellectual. The theme of greatest theoretical interest concerned a changed relationship to practice rather than new information. Participants who arrived associating mindfulness with formal seated meditation described leaving with a broader understanding of it as a quality of awareness available in ordinary sensory moments, in eating, touching, listening, walking, and forgiving. Because interviews took place immediately afterward, this is the understanding articulated at that moment; whether it persisted was not assessed.

One account requires clarification. KI 4, who arrived unaware that eating and touching could be objects of mindful attention, described his mind as "less scattered" and referred to "better concentration at work and improved listening." As the interview took place on the program day, this cannot report observed change at work; it is best read as an in-program observation, improved listening during the Echo of Mindfulness exercise he had just completed, combined with an anticipated benefit, and not as evidence of sustained occupational change.

4. Integration

Table 3 links each Phase I theme to the activities it generated, the quantitative outcome, the post-program qualitative theme, and an integration judgment. Three patterns emerge. The psychological strand *converges*: Phase I identified reactive anger as the most salient difficulty, the Loving-Kindness session targeted it, the psychological dimension produced the only significant change, and the qualitative theme independently described reduced irritability. The physical and behavioral strands show *expansion*: qualitative accounts are rich and specific, while quantitative change, though positive and medium-sized, did not reach significance. The intellectual strand shows *divergence in emphasis*: the study's strongest qualitative finding corresponds to the dimension with the smallest quantitative change, suggesting that the instrument does not capture what participants described.

Table 3. Joint Display: Phase I Themes, IMP Activities, Quantitative Outcomes, and Qualitative Themes.

Phase I theme (qualitative)	IMP activity generated	Phase III quantitative outcome	Phase III qualitative theme	Integration
Body present but unattended; eating, walking, self-care automatic	Ānāpānasati / Sound Bath; Kinesthetic Awareness; Magic Bags; Mindful Eating; Snake Walking	Physical: 27.00 → 29.75; p = .056; dz = 0.52 (n.s.)	Detailed accounts of texture, temperature, step, and breath becoming objects of attention	**Expansion** — qualitative detail exceeds what the non-significant quantitative change conveys
Chronic reactive anger; grievance maintained over years; internalized stigma	Mindful Forgiving / Loving-Kindness Meditation; Dhamma Talk	Psychological: 37.44 → 42.69; p = .010; dz = 0.74 (significant)	"Spaciousness"; reduced background irritability; noticing anger before acting	**Convergence** — the one strand where both datasets point the same way with equal strength
Limited repertoire for repair and connection; withdrawal or quick irritation	Echo of Mindfulness (dyadic listening); Snake Walking; shared meals	Behavioral: 25.00 → 28.31; p = .057; dz = 0.52 (n.s.)	Stated intentions toward more deliberate and compassionate engagement	**Expansion** — qualitative material is about intention; the measure is about conduct
Aspiration for Dhamma-based programming that treats non-visual experience as a resource	Dhamma Talk on Phra Cakkhupāla; framing of every activity in *Satipaṭṭhāna* terms	Intellectual: 30.94 → 33.31; p = .064; dz = 0.50 (n.s.)	Broadened understanding of mindfulness as awareness available in ordinary sensory moments	**Divergence in emphasis** — the strongest qualitative finding sits on the weakest quantitative dimension; the instrument does not assess understanding of practice.
Belonging within the centre, alongside misrecognition by the sighted world.	Bathing ceremony; peer group format; monastic reception; closing ceremony.	Not measured — social well-being is not a dimension of the instrument.	Being received as practitioners rather than as recipients of charity.	**Qualitative only** — reported as a theme; no quantitative claim is made.

Discussion

1. Relation to Previous Work

Chan et al. (2023) provide the closest comparator in design quality: their randomized trial with ninety-two blind older women found eight weeks of mindfulness-based music therapy improved emotion regulation more than a mindfulness-only or control condition. Two points of contact are notable: their strongest effects, like those here, were in the affective domain rather than in general functioning, and their intervention delivered mindfulness through a modality carrying cultural meaning for participants, as temple ritual and canonical narrative did here. Their design, however, permits causal inference where the present one does not.

Khodabakhshi-Koolaee et al. (2026) likewise reported psychological-domain gains after eight weeks of MBSR in a male sample. Lyngroth and Gammelsæter (2023) offer the closest qualitative parallel: their participants described the breath as an anchor and a changed relationship to hurry, resonating with the present intellectual theme, though this is a resonance between two small qualitative datasets and suggestive only. Li et al. (2024), when complete, will supply the controlled comparison that both lack.

Set against this literature, the distinctive features here are the single-session format, the derivation of architecture from canonical Theravāda categories rather than an adapted secular protocol, the Thai Buddhist setting, and a multidimensional Buddhist outcome. The weaknesses are equally clear: Chan et al. (2023) and van der Aa et al. (2015) randomized, controlled, and followed up; this study did none of these. Effect sizes should therefore not be compared across them. Outcome measures, populations, instruments, and designs all differ, and a within-group pre–post change in an uncontrolled design is not the same quantity as a between-group difference in a randomized trial.

2. Why Only the Psychological Dimension Reached Significance

Four candidate explanations were considered; they are not equally supported.

(a) Statistical power — the primary explanation. With $N = 16$ at $\alpha = .05$, two-tailed, a paired t-test has 80% power to detect only effects of $dz \geq 0.75$. The psychological effect ($dz = 0.74$) sits almost exactly on that boundary; the other three ($dz = 0.50$–0.52) fall well below it, where achieved power is approximately

.46–.49. The study therefore had roughly a coin-flip chance of detecting those effects even if entirely real. Detecting $dz = 0.52$ at 80% power would require about 32 participants, and $dz = 0.50$ about 34. The results are fully consistent with four genuine medium-sized effects of which only the largest crossed threshold; the non-significant findings are inconclusive rather than null.

(b) Intervention duration. The three non-significant dimensions ask about sleep, energy, conduct toward others, and settled understanding— matters plausibly requiring time. A single day can alter how a person feels; it cannot supply a week of sleep or a month of altered conduct. Plausible, but untestable here.

(c) Measurement sensitivity. The psychological subscale is longest (eight items) and therefore most reliable and most sensitive to change; the behavioral subscale is shortest (five). Baselines also differed as a proportion of maximum: psychological 66.9%, leaving most room to move, against behavioral 71.4% and intellectual 73.7%. Several items ask about reference periods longer than the pre–post interval, imposing a floor on detectable change that is a property of the instrument.

(d) Construct coverage. The study's strongest qualitative finding, a broadened understanding of what mindfulness is, has no corresponding item in the intellectual subscale, which assesses understanding of well-being and life circumstances rather than of contemplative practice. That dimension may have moved least, partly because the instrument was not measuring what changed.

Explanation (a) is primary; (c) and (d) contributory. A study with 35 or more participants, an instrument with demonstrated sensitivity to short-term change, and a follow-up would distinguish among them.

*3. Reorientation of **Mindfulness** and the Role of Context*

A person who leaves understanding mindfulness as something done in a particular posture at a particular time has a finite number of opportunities to practice; one who leaves understanding it as a quality of attention available in ordinary moments has, in principle, an unlimited one. For participants describing lives already rich in deliberate attention to sound, touch, and movement, this may be less an acquisition than a recognition, though durability was not assessed, and the possibility that it reflected the elevated mood of the closing hours cannot be excluded. The tradition marks a related distinction between *bhāvanā* and *sati-*

sampajañña, mindfulness with clear comprehension sustained through activity. The IMP did not teach this didactically: experience of mindful eating, deliberate walking, and uninterrupted listening preceded the Dhamma Talk that supplied the frame. The Cakkhupāla narrative, meanwhile, offered participants a figure from their own tradition who lost sight and reached its highest goal, and interviews indicated that it was received with particular resonance.

This suggests a hypothesis, not a mechanism. Neither *khaṇikā-samādhi* nor cultural and institutional embedding was measured, manipulated, or tested as a mediator here; both are theoretical explanations generated from the framework and the qualitative data. Future studies could measure concentration directly, assess cultural and religious identification, index outcome expectancy, quantify perceived group support, and vary setting experimentally to test them. Until then, statements about the contribution of setting, ritual, peer group, teaching, and narrative should be read as proposed contextual contributors delivered together and not disentangled.

4. Participants Whose Scores Decreased

Three participants showed small decreases: KI 13 (−7 points), KI 5 (−3), and KI 10 (−1). The reasons are unclear, and this study cannot determine them; they may include measurement variation, temporary changes in response, fatigue at the end of a full day, differences in how the program was experienced, or an absence of benefit. No claim is made that these represent normal test–retest variability, since the instrument's standard error of measurement in this population is unknown. All three participated fully and gave satisfaction ratings of 6 or above.

Contributions

Theoretical. The study advances, as a textual and interpretive argument rather than an empirical finding, the claim that the Theravāda *Satipaṭṭhāna* framework does not depend constitutively on vision, and proposes *khaṇikā-samādhi* as a candidate resource for understanding acute effects, a hypothesis it did not test. Together, these reframe BVI sensory experience as a possible contemplative resource rather than a deficit requiring accommodation.

Empirical. To the authors' knowledge, and based on the search in prior interventions and the basis of novelty claims, this is the first reported evaluation of a one-day *Satipaṭṭhāna*-based intervention designed for BVI adults in a Thai

institutional setting, providing preliminary evidence that such a program is feasible, acceptable, and associated with immediate improvement in self-reported well-being. Because the design was uncontrolled, single-site, and without follow-up, with $n = 16$, this establishes feasibility and acceptability rather than efficacy, and does not support statistical generalization.

Methodological. Rigorous mixed-methods evaluation is shown to be practicable for a single-session Buddhist intervention, content-validated instruments, parametric and non-parametric analysis, transparent multiplicity handling, and an integrated joint display, with a worked example of an accessible measurement procedure for BVI participants.

Practical. A preliminary program model whose six activities, design rationale, doctrinal grounding, and evaluation framework provide a template for further testing and replication, requiring no clinical specialists, proprietary materials, or purpose-built facilities. Tested once, with sixteen participants, at one site: a promising and feasible model, not a validated or widely deployable one.

Limitations

Design. A single-group pre-test/post-test design with no control condition. Observed change may reflect the passage of the day, the attention and hospitality participants received, expectancy, regression to the mean, or repeated exposure to the questionnaire, as well as or instead of contemplative content. Causal attribution is not warranted.

Timing. Post-test and interviews were both administered within hours of the closing ceremony. All outcomes are immediate responses; nothing here speaks to persistence.

Sample. Sixteen participants were purposively recruited from a single institution; 87.5% were male, aged 18–74. Statistical generalization is not possible, and findings should not be assumed to hold for women, younger cohorts, non-institutional settings, or those outside a Thai Buddhist context.

Power and multiplicity. The study could reliably detect only effects of $d_z \geq 0.75$; three of four dimensional findings fall below that and are inconclusive rather than null. Of twenty-five item-level tests, none survives Bonferroni correction, and three of six survive false-discovery-rate control.

Measurement. All outcomes are self-reported. The instrument was validated with sighted Thai meditation practitioners, not BVI populations; no published factor analysis, criterion-validity evidence, or standard error of measurement exists; and α was estimated from sixteen cases. Some items refer to periods longer than the pre–post interval.

Role conflict. The researcher designed the program, was present throughout, administered both questionnaires verbally, and conducted the interviews. The mitigations in 4.5 reduce but cannot eliminate expectancy and social-desirability effects; no independent blinded assessor was available.

Non-separability and reflexivity. Venue, ritual, teacher, peer group, narrative, activities, and shared meals were delivered as one package; no component can be credited with any part of the outcome. Coding was by the researcher, who also designed the program; member checking and an audit trail were used, but not independent double-coding or inter-coder agreement.

New Knowledge from the Research

This study generates new knowledge by developing an Innovative Mindfulness Program (IMP) specifically for adults with blindness or visual impairment rather than merely modifying a mindfulness program originally designed for sighted participants. Its principal contribution is the demonstration that a Theravāda mindfulness framework can be translated into a non-visually designed contemplative program grounded in bodily sensation, sound, touch, taste, movement, interpersonal awareness, and reflective understanding. The program therefore reframes visual impairment not as an obstacle to mindfulness practice but as a context requiring a different sensory and pedagogical architecture.

A second contribution is the conceptual integration of Satipaṭṭhāna with four dimensions of holistic well-being: physical, psychological, behavioral, and intellectual. This mapping is not presented as a canonical equivalence but as a program-design heuristic linking kāyānupassanā with bodily awareness, vedanānupassanā with affective experience, cittānupassanā with awareness supporting non-reactive conduct, and dhammānupassanā with reflective and

analytical understanding. This framework offers a structured basis for designing accessible Buddhist contemplative interventions.

A third contribution lies in identifying cultural and institutional context as a potential contributor to participants' experiences. Temple setting, monastic guidance, peer participation, ritual activities, and the narrative of Phra Cakkhupāla created a culturally meaningful environment for practice. These elements were not separately measured and should not be interpreted as proven mechanisms, but they suggest that contemplative outcomes may depend partly on the symbolic and relational setting in which practice occurs.

Finally, the findings provide preliminary evidence that a one-day, non-visually designed mindfulness program is feasible and acceptable for BVI adults. Immediate improvements were found in overall well-being, with psychological well-being showing the clearest change. Because the study used a small, single-group sample without follow-up, this contribution should be understood as an exploratory foundation for future controlled and longitudinal research rather than evidence of sustained effectiveness.

Conclusion

BVI adults in this Thai institutional context described challenges across four measured dimensions: physical disconnection from deliberate attention, chronic psychological reactivity, constrained repertoires for repair and connection, and an unmet aspiration for Dhamma-based programming, alongside social misrecognition. These findings informed the IMP directly.

A single, well-structured, Theravāda-grounded program designed from the outset for non-visual sensory engagement and delivered in a culturally familiar institutional setting could be delivered to and completed by BVI adults, and participation was associated with immediate, statistically significant improvement in self-reported holistic well-being (dz = 0.75 overall; dz = 0.74 psychological; 13 of 16 improved), alongside qualitative accounts of a broadened understanding of what practice can include. Because the design was uncontrolled and assessment was immediate, these results demonstrate feasibility, acceptability, and promise, not efficacy or durability.

Much secular mindfulness programming has proceeded as though visual impairment is an accessibility problem to be solved through modified delivery.

This study proposes a different framing: that the contemplative tradition, read closely, was not organized around sight in the first place, and that non-visual sensory experience can serve as a meaningful resource for practice and should be recognized as such in inclusive program design. This is a claim about the structure of a tradition and about program design, not a claim that visual impairment confers contemplative advantage.

Suggestions

For practice. A single structured day of non-visually designed Buddhist practice was feasible, well received, and associated with immediate improvement in one small group. On that basis, the following are suggestions for practitioners considering similar work, not validated recommendations. Facilitators should have training in *Satipaṭṭhāna* theory, in pedagogy for BVI participants, and in the use of non-visual sensory objects as contemplative anchors. Attention should be given to the Loving-Kindness component, identified by ten of sixteen participants as the day's most impactful activity, though its specific contribution was not isolated. Culturally embedded narratives and delivery within existing temple settings may be valuable, though whether setting contributes causally remains untested.

For policy. Recommendations from a single-site study of sixteen participants without control or follow-up must remain preliminary. The findings support investigating whether structured contemplative programming should be integrated into Thai BVI rehabilitation frameworks, which currently emphasize mobility, Braille literacy, and vocational skills. A staged approach is suggested: multi-site pilots with comparison conditions and follow-up, with the relevant ministries and the National Office for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities; facilitator training and certification developed with IBSC before wider delivery; formal safety and adverse-event evaluation, since contemplative practice is not risk-free and this study was not designed to detect harm; full cost analysis, including facilitator time, transport, catering, and coordination, which are real costs even where facilities exist; and consultation with BVI-led organisations, participants, and monastic institutions. Nationwide implementation is not recommended on present evidence.

For future research, six directions follow: replication with a larger, more diverse sample including women, younger cohorts, and community settings, for which the 6.2 power analysis indicates roughly 35 participants; a randomized

controlled trial with an active comparison, a secular mindfulness day, or an equivalent-duration social activity day, as the necessary next step for any causal claim; longitudinal follow-up at one, three, and six months; dose–response comparison of one-, three-, and seven-day formats; a dismantling design to test whether setting, narrative, the Loving-Kindness session, or the sensory activities carry the effect; and, prerequisite to much of this, psychometric development of a well-being instrument normed on BVI populations, reporting factor structure, criterion validity, test–retest reliability, and the standard error of measurement.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval: Granted by the Research Ethics Committee of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (number and date to be inserted at proof stage). Consent was obtained using the accessible procedure described in accessible data collection.

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Piṭaka Abbreviations

DN. = Dīgha Nikāya
MN. = Majjhima Nikāya
Vism. = Visuddhimagga

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A Mindfulness-Infused Yoga Module for Enhancing Emotional Well-Being among Chinese Yoga Practitioners

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Abstract

This study had three objectives: (1) to examine the current state of emotional well-being among Chinese yoga practitioners; (2) to explore how mindfulness-infused yoga may cultivate observer awareness; and (3) to develop and preliminarily evaluate a three-day Mindfulness-Infused Yoga Module. A qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design was implemented in three phases. Phase 1 involved eight purposively selected key informants: five experienced yoga practitioners or teachers, two Buddhist scholars, and one experienced Vipassanā practitioner. Phase 2 focused on module development and expert review. Phase 3 implemented the module with seven Chinese yoga practitioners. Participants completed the Emotional Well-Being Questionnaire before and immediately after the workshop, and six also answered three open-ended reflection questions. Quantitative data were summarized using means and standard deviations, while qualitative data were examined through content and thematic analysis and integrated during interpretation.

The findings showed that Chinese yoga practitioners experienced emotional pressures related to social expectations, work–family responsibilities, outcome-oriented practice, body-image anxiety, self-judgment, and disconnection from inner awareness. These pressures were reflected in bodily tension, unstable breathing patterns, and difficulty relaxing. The findings suggest that mindfulness-infused yoga may support emotional well-being by helping practitioners observe the body, breath, thoughts, emotions, and inner reactions without immediate identification. The mean total emotional well-being score increased descriptively from 54.00 (SD = 9.47) before the module to 59.86 (SD = 12.14) immediately afterward. Six of the seven participants showed higher total scores, while one showed a one-point decrease. In the written reflections, all six respondents described greater calmness or reduced emotional distress and an increased ability to notice thoughts or emotions without being carried away by them; four described applying this awareness in daily life or interpersonal

situations. These findings represent preliminary within-group changes and participant perceptions rather than evidence of causal effectiveness. Observer awareness is therefore presented as a proposed conceptual and pedagogical explanation, not as a directly measured mechanism.

Keywords: Mindfulness-Infused Yoga; Emotional Well-Being; Observer Awareness; Chinese Yoga Practitioners; Mindfulness.

Introduction

Emotional well-being is increasingly recognized as an important dimension of human health, encompassing emotional regulation, psychological stability, meaning, and the capacity to respond adaptively to everyday challenges (World Health Organization, 1948; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Among Chinese yoga practitioners, emotional well-being may be influenced not only by personal psychological conditions but also by social expectations, work–family responsibilities, cultural values, body-related concerns, and the way yoga is understood and practiced. Although yoga is widely used for health, relaxation, and self-development, contemporary practice may emphasize posture, flexibility, body shape, and visible achievement, potentially weakening yoga's traditional orientation toward self-regulation and inner observation (Bryant, 2009; Gard et al., 2014). In China, practitioners commonly engage in yoga for physical health, stress relief, body improvement, and personal growth (iResearch, 2021).

This study therefore develops a Mindfulness-Infused Yoga Module centered on observer awareness, defined here as the cultivated capacity to observe bodily sensations, breath, thoughts, emotions, and reactions without immediate identification or automatic response. This construct is conceptually related to mindfulness, metacognitive awareness, and decentering. Mindfulness involves intentional attention to present-moment experience with an open and nonjudgmental orientation (Bishop et al., 2004; Kabat-Zinn, 1990), while metacognitive awareness and decentering involve recognizing thoughts and feelings as transient mental events rather than direct representations of the self or reality (Bernstein et al., 2015; Teasdale et al., 2002). Observer awareness is used here as a pedagogical construct rather than as an independently validated psychological mechanism.

The theoretical framework integrates yoga philosophy and Buddhist mindfulness. The Yoga Sūtras describe yoga as the stilling of mental fluctuations and emphasize the distinction between the seer (draṣṭṛ) and changing mental processes (Bryant, 2009). Buddhist teachings, particularly the Four Foundations of Mindfulness and the Three Characteristics of Existence, provide practical methods for observing body and mind as changing processes without clinging (Bodhi, n.d.; Nyanasatta Thera, n.d.; Rahula, 1974). These traditions are not treated as metaphysically equivalent: classical yoga affirms puruṣa, whereas Buddhist non-self rejects a permanent observing self. Their relevance here lies in their practical convergence around reduced identification with changing experience.

Previous research supports the potential contribution of mindfulness and yoga to stress reduction, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Telles & Singh, 2013), and contemporary models suggest that yoga may operate through interacting processes of attention, body awareness, emotion regulation, and self-regulation (Gard et al., 2014). However, limited research has examined how mindfulness can be systematically infused into yoga to cultivate observer awareness among Chinese practitioners. Accordingly, this study develops, implements, and preliminarily evaluates a three-day Mindfulness-Infused Yoga Module as a structured approach to supporting emotional well-being.

Research Objectives

1. To study the current status of emotional well-being among Chinese yoga practitioners.
2. To examine how mindfulness-infused yoga may cultivate observer awareness and contribute to emotional well-being.
3. To develop, implement, and preliminarily evaluate a three-day Mindfulness-Infused Yoga Module for supporting emotional well-being among Chinese yoga practitioners.

Literature Review

The literature related to this study can be organized into three main groups: emotional well-being, mindfulness and Buddhist principles, and yoga practice and observer awareness. These groups of literature provide the

theoretical foundation for developing a Mindfulness-Infused Yoga Module for Chinese yoga practitioners.

1) Literature on Emotional Well-Being

Previous studies have shown that emotional well-being is an important dimension of overall health and human functioning. The World Health Organization (1948) defines health as a state of physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease. In psychological studies, Ryan and Deci (2001) distinguish between hedonic well-being, which emphasizes happiness and pleasure, and eudaimonic well-being, which emphasizes meaning, self-realization, and human potential. Ryff (1989) explains psychological well-being through dimensions such as self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, purpose in life, personal growth, and environmental mastery. Keyes (2002) further proposes that well-being includes emotional, psychological, and social dimensions.

These studies show that emotional well-being is not limited to positive emotion, but includes emotional regulation, meaning, resilience, interpersonal connection, and stable functioning in daily life. However, in the context of Chinese yoga practitioners, emotional well-being also needs to be understood in relation to cultural and social conditions. Cross-cultural studies suggest that well-being in many Asian societies is closely related to harmony, interdependence, moderation, and relational balance (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Joshanloo et al., 2021). Therefore, this research uses emotional well-being as the main outcome and understands it as a dynamic state of inner balance in which practitioners can observe, understand, and respond to thoughts, emotions, and bodily experiences with greater awareness and stability.

2) Literature on Mindfulness and Buddhist Principles

Mindfulness has been widely studied as an effective approach for stress reduction, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 1990). In Buddhist teachings, mindfulness is cultivated through the Four Foundations of Mindfulness: contemplation of the body, feelings, mind, and mental phenomena. The Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta emphasizes direct knowing of present experience, including breath, bodily postures, feeling tone, and mental states as they arise (Nyanasatta Thera, n.d.; Sujato, n.d.). In modern psychological literature, Kabat-Zinn (1990) defines mindfulness as paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.

These studies and teachings show that mindfulness supports emotional well-being by helping practitioners observe inner experience without immediate reaction. In this research, mindfulness is also connected with Buddhist insight into the Three Characteristics of Existence: impermanence, suffering or unsatisfactoriness, and non-self. These principles help practitioners recognize that bodily sensations, thoughts, and emotions are changing phenomena rather than fixed personal identity (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1994; Rahula, 1974). This theoretical perspective is used in the present study to guide practitioners from emotional identification toward observation, non-reactivity, and inner balance.

3) Literature on Yoga Practice and Observer Awareness

Yoga has also been widely discussed as a practice that supports physical health, relaxation, stress reduction, and psychological well-being (Telles & Singh, 2013). However, classical yoga philosophy presents yoga as more than physical exercise. In the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali, yoga is defined as the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind, through which the seer or observer abides in its own nature (Bryant, 2009). This shows that the deeper purpose of yoga is related to mental steadiness, awareness, and freedom from identification with mental fluctuations. The concepts of abhyāsa, or sustained practice, and vairāgya, or non-attachment, further guide practitioners away from outcome-oriented striving and toward steady, process-centered practice. Similarly, the Bhagavad Gītā teaches action without attachment to the fruits of action, which supports emotional balance in relation to success and failure (Sargeant, 2009).

From a psychological perspective, the functions described in this study as observer awareness overlap with metacognitive awareness and decentering, particularly in viewing thoughts and feelings as transient mental events rather than as complete representations of the self (Teasdale et al., 2002; Bernstein et al., 2015). In the present study, these functions are situated within an embodied yoga context in which bodily sensations, breath, effort, comparison, self-judgment, and emotional reactions become objects of mindful observation.

The reviewed literature shows that mindfulness and yoga are both related to emotional well-being. However, many studies discuss mindfulness and yoga as separate or general wellness practices. Relatively limited attention has been given to how mindfulness can be systematically infused into yoga practice to cultivate observer awareness. There is also limited research on observer awareness as the practical mechanism linking yoga practice and emotional well-

being, especially among Chinese yoga practitioners. This is the knowledge gap that the present study aims to fill.

In summary, the reviewed literature is used in this research in four areas. First, emotional well-being theory is used to define the study's outcome. Second, Buddhist mindfulness is used as a method for observing body, feelings, mind, and mental phenomena. Third, yoga philosophy is used to understand yoga as an inner discipline rather than merely physical exercise. Fourth, observer awareness is used as a proposed conceptual and pedagogical link connecting mindfulness-infused yoga with emotional well-being. Based on this literature gap, the present research develops, implements, and preliminarily evaluates a three-day Mindfulness-Infused Yoga Module for Chinese yoga practitioners.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was developed from the literature review and the identified knowledge gap. It explains how mindfulness-infused yoga may enhance emotional well-being among Chinese yoga practitioners through the cultivation of observer awareness.

The framework begins with the emotional and psychological pressures experienced by Chinese yoga practitioners, including social expectations, work–family responsibilities, body anxiety, self-judgment, outcome-oriented practice, and disconnection from inner awareness. Based on emotional well-being theory, Buddhist mindfulness, yoga philosophy, and the Three Characteristics of Existence, the three-day Mindfulness-Infused Yoga Module was developed as a practical intervention (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1994; Bryant, 2009; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

The module integrates breath awareness, body observation, mindful movement, meditation, relaxation, emotional observation, and reflective learning. Through these practices, the module is intended to cultivate observer awareness. In the proposed framework, observer awareness enables practitioners to observe body, breath, thoughts, emotions, and inner reactions without immediate identification or reactivity. This process is proposed to reduce emotional reactivity and strengthen reduced identification, thereby supporting emotional well-being.

As shown in Figure 1, emotional and psychological pressures among Chinese yoga practitioners, along with the study's theoretical foundations, jointly

support the development of the three-day Mindfulness-Infused Yoga Module. Through the proposed cultivation of observer awareness, the module is expected to reduce emotional reactivity and increase reduced identification, thereby supporting emotional well-being. This framework provides the basis for the research methodology described in the next section.

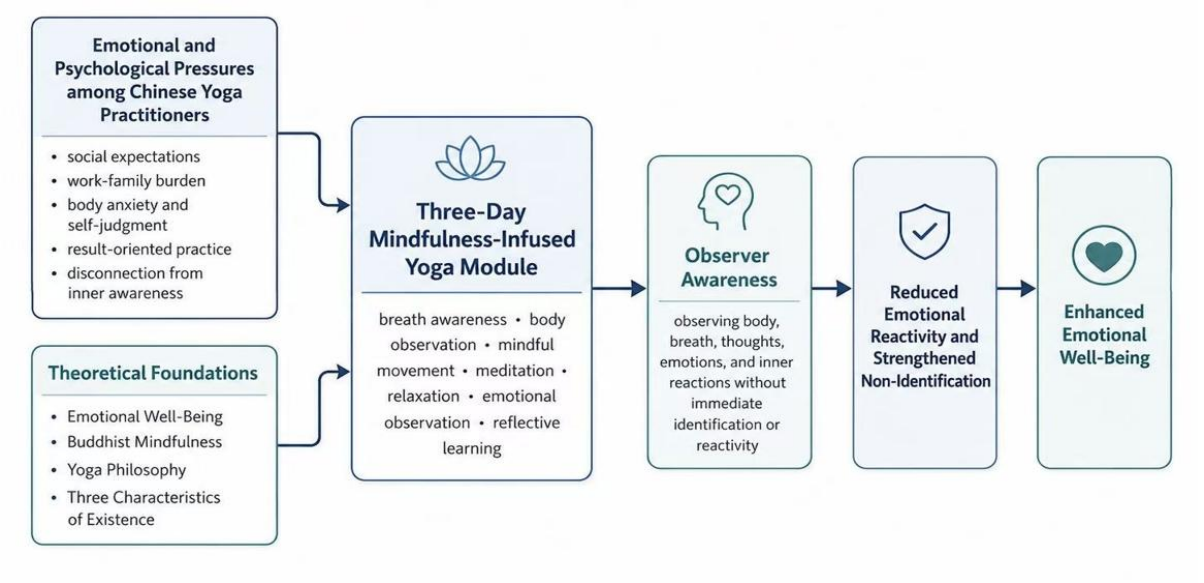

Figure 1. The conception framework

Research Methodology

This study employed a *qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design* to explore emotional well-being among Chinese yoga practitioners, develop a three-day Mindfulness-Infused Yoga Module, and conduct a preliminary evaluation of its practical application. The design combined qualitative exploration with descriptive quantitative assessment, allowing experiential findings to inform module development and subsequent evaluation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The research was conducted in three phases. *Phase 1* explored the emotional and practice-related experiences of Chinese yoga practitioners through semi-structured interviews with eight purposively selected key informants: five experienced yoga practitioners or teachers, two Buddhist scholars, and one experienced Vipassanā practitioner. The yoga teachers had approximately eight to ten years of teaching experience. Interviews were conducted mainly through WeChat voice calls, with one written response and one face-to-face interview. Voice interviews generally lasted 60–90 minutes, were recorded with consent,

and were transcribed for analysis. Data were examined through content and thematic analysis, involving repeated reading, coding, comparison, categorization, and development of recurring themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase 2 focused on developing and reviewing the Mindfulness-Infused Yoga Module. Its content was derived from the literature review, Buddhist mindfulness principles, yoga philosophy, Phase 1 findings, and expert recommendations. The module integrated breath awareness, body observation, mindful movement, meditation, relaxation, emotional observation, and reflective learning, with observer awareness positioned as the central pedagogical construct. Experts in Buddhist studies, Vipassanā practice, and yoga reviewed the module and research instruments for content relevance and alignment with the research objectives.

Phase 3 implemented the module with seven Chinese female yoga practitioners over three consecutive days, approximately seven hours per day. Participants completed the 15-item Emotional Well-Being Questionnaire immediately before and after the module. The instrument used a five-point Likert scale and assessed Emotional Awareness and Positivity, Social Connection and Support, Meaningful Engagement, and Accomplishment and Growth. Its published validation reported high internal consistency (Jiwattanasuk et al., 2025). Six participants also completed three open-ended reflection questions.

Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively using means and standard deviations because of the small exploratory sample. Qualitative reflections were analyzed thematically and integrated with questionnaire findings at the interpretation stage. Observer awareness was not directly measured; it was therefore treated as a *proposed conceptual and pedagogical explanation*, rather than a confirmed causal mechanism. All participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality, voluntary participation, secure data storage, and the right to withdraw were maintained throughout the study.

Research Results

The research results are presented according to the three objectives of the study. The first objective examined the current status of emotional well-being among Chinese yoga practitioners. The second objective examined how mindfulness-infused yoga may cultivate observer awareness and contribute to emotional well-being. The third objective focused on the development,

implementation, and preliminary evaluation of the three-day Mindfulness-Infused Yoga Module.

1. Results According to Objective 1: Current Status of Emotional Well-Being among Chinese Yoga Practitioners

The findings showed that Chinese yoga practitioners experienced several forms of emotional pressure in both daily life and yoga practice. Although many practitioners came to yoga with the hope of relaxation, stress relief, or inner peace, the field findings indicated that their actual mental and emotional condition was often restless, tense, and unstable. These emotional pressures were reflected not only in what practitioners expressed verbally, but also in how they breathed, moved, responded, and related to the practice itself.

The first major emotional pressure was restlessness and difficulty settling down. The interview findings indicated that many practitioners were physically present in yoga classes, but their minds remained active, unsettled, and easily distracted. Some practitioners also showed signs of tension, over-alertness, and difficulty relaxing into stillness. This finding suggests that the desire for calmness does not necessarily mean that practitioners already possess the inner capacity to settle down.

The second emotional pressure was body-image anxiety and self-judgment. Some practitioners approached yoga practice with concern about body shape, flexibility, posture achievement, or comparison with others. When yoga was practiced mainly through external standards, it could increase self-pressure and strengthen judgment toward the body. This finding indicates that yoga practice may reproduce emotional pressure if it is guided mainly by performance and comparison.

The third emotional pressure was attachment to the past and anxiety about the future. Some practitioners were affected by memory, regret, expectation, fear, and concern about future outcomes. These mental patterns made it difficult for them to remain inwardly settled. Their emotional pressure was therefore not only related to immediate situations, but also connected with habitual mental movement toward the past and future.

The fourth emotional pressure was tension held in the body and breath. The findings indicated that emotional pressure was often expressed through bodily tension, scattered attention, and difficulty using the breath in a deep and

connected way. The body and breath therefore became important places where emotional pressure could be observed and understood more clearly.

In addition to these emotional pressure phenomena, the study identified four major sources of emotional stress among Chinese yoga practitioners. These sources were social and cultural pressure; family, work, and daily-life burden; outcome-oriented practice and performance pressure; and disconnection from inner awareness and lack of proper guidance. These findings show that emotional well-being among Chinese yoga practitioners is influenced by both external life conditions and internal practice patterns.

Overall, the results for Objective 1 suggest that Chinese yoga practitioners need more than physical practice or temporary relaxation. They need an awareness-based approach that helps them recognize emotional pressure, observe inner experience, and gradually develop greater inner balance.

2. Results According to Objective 2: Mindfulness-Infused Yoga, Observer Awareness, and Emotional Well-Being

The findings for the second objective showed that integrating mindfulness with yoga practice should place observer awareness at the center of practice. The field study indicated that many practitioners needed not only physical techniques but also the ability to observe thoughts, feelings, emotions, and bodily reactions clearly. Therefore, observer awareness became the central conceptual and pedagogical principle in the design and understanding of the Mindfulness-Infused Yoga Module.

The findings indicated that the module should guide practitioners to observe thoughts, feelings, and emotions rather than identify with them immediately. This direction was important because many practitioners were easily carried away by emotional reactions, self-judgment, anxiety, or comparison. By cultivating observer awareness, practitioners could begin to see inner experience more clearly and create more space between emotional pressure and automatic reaction.

The findings also suggested that the module should introduce the insights of impermanence, suffering or unsatisfactoriness, and non-self in an accessible way. These principles were not presented as abstract doctrine for beginners, but as practical supports for observing bodily and mental phenomena.

Within the three-day module, these deeper insights were introduced gradually and realistically, according to participants' actual capacity in a short workshop format.

Another important finding was that yoga should be used as a practical ground for inner training. The field study showed that yoga practice could become a place for observing bodily sensation, breath, emotional reaction, self-judgment, comparison, resistance, and habitual mental patterns. In this sense, yoga was not treated merely as physical exercise, but as an embodied field for cultivating observer awareness.

The study also emphasized that the depth of change within three days should be understood realistically. A short-term module could provide participants with an initial experiential entry point into observer awareness, but it should not be expected to produce deep contemplative realization within a limited time. Therefore, the three-day module was designed to help participants begin cultivating observer awareness, see thoughts and emotional patterns more clearly, and gradually approach deeper understanding through continued practice.

Overall, the results for Objective 2 indicate that mindfulness-infused yoga may contribute to emotional well-being by reorienting yoga practice toward observation, reduced identification, and inner training. Observer awareness was proposed as a conceptual explanation connecting mindfulness-infused yoga with emotional well-being.

3. Results According to Objective 3: Development, Implementation, and Evaluation of the Three-Day Mindfulness-Infused Yoga Module

The third objective focused on developing, implementing, and evaluating the three-day Mindfulness-Infused Yoga Module. The module was developed based on the literature review, Buddhist principles, Yoga Sūtra, interview findings, and expert suggestions. It was designed to support observer awareness and emotional well-being among Chinese yoga practitioners through a structured three-day workshop.

The module included practices related to body and breath awareness, mindful movement, meditation, relaxation, emotional observation, and reflective learning. Its purpose was to guide participants from physical practice toward inner observation. The design was based on the understanding that short-term training should first provide accessible and effective entry points before guiding participants toward deeper emotional observation and self-understanding.

Seven Chinese yoga practitioners completed the full three-day module and provided pretest and posttest data using the Emotional Well-Being Questionnaire. The total pretest score of the seven participants was 378, with a mean score of 54.00. After the intervention, the total posttest score increased to 419, with a mean score of 59.86. The overall mean increase was 5.86 points.

Table 1. Pre-Test and Post-Test Total Scores of the Seven Participants

Participant	Pre-test	Post-test	Change
1	60	73	+13
2	57	62	+5
3	51	61	+10
4	64	73	+9
5	38	39	+1
6	46	50	+4
7	62	61	-1
Total	378	419	+41
Mean total score	**54.00**	**59.86**	**+5.86**
Standard deviation	**9.47**	**12.14**	**5.05**

As shown in Table 1, the mean total score increased descriptively from 54.00 (SD = 9.47) in the pretest to 59.86 (SD = 12.14) in the posttest. This represents a modest within-group change after the three-day module and should not be interpreted as evidence of causal effectiveness.

The results showed that six of the seven participants had higher posttest scores after the module. One participant showed a slight decrease from 62 to 61, but the difference was minimal. Overall, the data showed a positive direction of change. Because the intervention lasted only three days and the sample size was small, these findings should be interpreted as preliminary rather than conclusive evidence. The results therefore provide only initial descriptive information about the possible practical value of the module in supporting emotional well-being.

The pretest and posttest scores were also examined across four dimensions of the Emotional Well-Being Questionnaire: Emotional Awareness and Positivity, Social Connection and Support, Meaningful Engagement, and Accomplishment and Growth.

Table 2. Changes Across the Four Dimensions of the Emotional Well-Being Questionnaire

Dimension	Pre-test Mean	Pre-test SD	Post-test Mean	Post-test SD	Mean Change
Emotional Awareness and Positivity	3.33	0.55	3.69	0.89	+0.37
Social Connection and Support	3.65	1.41	4.14	1.46	+0.50
Meaningful Engagement	3.86	0.85	4.21	0.68	+0.36
Accomplishment and Growth	4.00	0.82	4.43	0.79	+0.43

The results showed positive changes across all four dimensions. The largest increase was found in Social Connection and Support, which increased from 3.65 to 4.14, with a mean change of +0.50. Accomplishment and Growth increased from 4.00 to 4.43, with a mean change of +0.43. Emotional Awareness and Positivity increased from 3.33 to 3.69, and Meaningful Engagement increased from 3.86 to 4.21. These descriptive results show modest positive within-group changes across emotional, social, meaningful engagement, and personal growth dimensions.

Six of the seven workshop participants completed the three open-ended written reflection questions. Their responses provided qualitative context for the descriptive questionnaire findings. Thematic analysis identified four recurring patterns: (1) greater calmness or reduced emotional distress; (2) increased awareness of thoughts and emotions without immediate identification; (3) reduced automatic reactivity and a quicker return to the present moment; and (4) application of awareness in daily life and interpersonal situations.

All six respondents described greater calmness, stability, or reduced distress, and all six described an increased capacity to notice thoughts or emotions without being carried away by them. For example, P2 wrote, “I could see the emotion without being carried away by it. I could notice that I was becoming angry without following the thought.” P5 similarly stated, “The same emotion still arose, but it no longer felt as painful.” These responses suggest a perceived change in participants’ relationship to emotional experience rather than the complete disappearance of emotion.

Four participants (P1, P4, P5, and P6) described applying awareness in daily life or interpersonal situations. P4 reported a change during a recurring conflict with a family member: “After returning from the course, I noticed a subtle change: I no longer followed the other person’s emotion, and I could clearly recognize that I was not being drawn into the conflict.” P6 described noticing both bodily and mental tension in public and becoming aware of the way she was

walking in the moment. P5 reported using breath awareness during communication and experiencing fewer emotional fluctuations.

The reflections were predominantly positive, but they did not imply that automatic reactions had disappeared. P6 reported that an impulsive reaction still occurred in one daily life situation; however, the participant noticed the emotion and behavior more quickly and reported remaining angry for a shorter period than before. No serious adverse experience was described in the written reflections. This mixed example supports a cautious interpretation: participants perceived earlier awareness and reduced duration of reactivity, rather than complete emotional control after three days.

In summary, the results for Objective 3 suggest that the three-day Mindfulness-Infused Yoga Module may have practical value in supporting emotional well-being among Chinese yoga practitioners. The quantitative findings showed a modest increase in emotional well-being scores, and the qualitative reflections indicated greater bodily awareness, clearer observation of thoughts and emotions, and stronger calmness. Because of the small sample size and short intervention period, the findings should be understood as preliminary descriptive information about the module rather than as final evidence of long-term effectiveness.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that emotional well-being among Chinese yoga practitioners is closely related to both external life pressures and internal patterns of practice. The emotional pressures identified in the study, including restlessness, self-judgment, body-related anxiety, and tension expressed through the body and breath, suggest that yoga practitioners may bring unresolved emotional and psychological patterns into yoga practice. This finding supports the view that emotional well-being is not only a matter of positive emotion, but also involves emotional regulation, self-understanding, interpersonal balance, and the capacity to respond to experience with greater awareness (Keyes, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989).

The results also indicate that yoga practice does not automatically lead to emotional well-being when it is practiced mainly as physical training or posture achievement. This finding is consistent with the classical understanding of yoga

as an inner discipline rather than merely physical exercise. In the Yoga Sūtras, yoga is related to the stilling of mental fluctuations and the abiding of the seer in its own nature (Bryant, 2009). Therefore, when yoga is guided by mindfulness and inner observation, it can become a field for cultivating steadiness, non-attachment, and emotional balance.

The integration of mindfulness with yoga practice in this study further supports the importance of observer awareness. Buddhist mindfulness emphasizes observing the body, feelings, mind, and mental phenomena, while Buddhist insight into impermanence, suffering or unsatisfactoriness, and non-self helps practitioners understand inner experience as changing rather than fixed (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1994; Nyanasatta Thera, n.d.; Rahula, 1974). These principles are directly relevant to the emotional difficulties identified among Chinese yoga practitioners, especially self-judgment, attachment to outcomes, body anxiety, and emotional reactivity.

The findings suggest that observer awareness may function as a practical bridge between mindfulness-infused yoga and emotional well-being. When practitioners learn to observe body, breath, thoughts, emotions, and habitual reactions, they may begin to relate to inner experience with less immediate identification. This does not mean that emotional pressure disappears quickly, especially within a three-day workshop. Rather, the study suggests that observer awareness may provide an initial inner capacity through which practitioners begin to recognize emotional patterns more clearly and respond with greater calmness and stability.

The quantitative results showed a modest descriptive increase in emotional well-being immediately after the three-day module, while the written reflections described perceived calmness, earlier awareness of thoughts and emotions, and reduced automatic reactivity. The convergence of these two forms of data provides preliminary support for the module's feasibility and perceived practical value. However, the findings should be interpreted carefully: the sample was small, there was no control group, no inferential test, and no follow-up assessment. The study therefore cannot establish that the module caused the score changes or that observer awareness was the mechanism responsible for them. Rather, observer awareness remains a proposed conceptual explanation consistent with participants' accounts and the module's pedagogical design.

The conceptual relationship between the yogic seer and Buddhist non-self also requires careful interpretation. The yogic seer is commonly presented as distinct from mental fluctuations, whereas Buddhist non-self denies a permanent and independent self. The two positions are therefore not treated as philosophically identical in this study. Their practical convergence lies in learning to observe changing experience with less attachment and immediate identification.

New Knowledge from the Research

This research proposes that yoga may support emotional well-being when it is reframed as an embodied, awareness-based, and gradually deepening process of inner training. This proposal was derived from the integration of the Phase 1 field study, the implementation of the three-day Mindfulness-Infused Yoga Module, the descriptive pretest and posttest results, and six participants' written reflections.

First, the study proposes observer awareness as a key conceptual link between mindfulness-infused yoga and emotional well-being. Emotional pressure among Chinese yoga practitioners was found not only in external life stress, but also in internal patterns such as self-judgment, body-related anxiety, emotional reactivity, and disconnection from inner awareness. Therefore, emotional well-being cannot be sufficiently supported by physical practice alone. It requires cultivating an inner capacity to observe the body, breath, thoughts, feelings, emotions, and habitual reactions without immediate identification.

Second, the study suggests that yoga becomes more meaningful when it is used as a practical field for observation. Many practitioners may already be familiar with yoga postures, breathing exercises, and relaxation methods. However, the findings suggest that these practices become more meaningful when they are used to observe bodily sensations, emotional responses, mental habits, grasping, resistance, and self-judgment. In this way, yoga practice is transformed from body-centered training into a practical ground for mindfulness and observer awareness.

Third, the study proposes that deeper contemplative principles should be introduced gradually and in an accessible way. The Three Characteristics of Existence—impermanence, suffering or unsatisfactoriness, and non-self—are important for reducing attachment and identification (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1994;

Rahula, 1974). However, the study indicates that these principles should not be forced too quickly as abstract doctrine. Instead, they should be introduced through simple language, direct bodily and emotional experience, and gradual reflection. This allows the module to remain faithful to Buddhist contemplative principles while still being appropriate to the readiness of Chinese yoga practitioners.

Fourth, the study emphasizes realistic progression in short-term practice. The three-day module should not be understood as producing complete inner transformation. Rather, its value lies in initiating a meaningful shift. This shift begins with bodily awareness and grounding, moves toward clearer observation of thoughts and emotions, and gradually supports the loosening of automatic identification. In this sense, the module functions as an introductory process that helps practitioners begin a new way of practicing yoga.

Based on these insights, the new knowledge from this research may be summarized as the Observer-Awareness-Based Mindfulness-Infused Yoga Module. The module is grounded in four foundations: (1) the cultivation of observer awareness; (2) the use of familiar yoga forms as practical support for mindfulness training; (3) the gradual introduction of deeper contemplative insight; and (4) realistic progression within a short-term training process. These four foundations form a practical framework for enhancing emotional well-being among Chinese yoga practitioners.

Therefore, the contribution of this research lies in proposing observer awareness as a central conceptual and pedagogical principle of mindfulness-infused yoga. It also presents yoga as an embodied field for inner observation rather than merely as physical exercise, relaxation, or posture training. This new understanding offers a practical and culturally accessible approach for supporting emotional well-being among Chinese yoga practitioners.

Limitations

The present study has several limitations that should guide interpretation.

1. The Phase 3 sample consisted of only seven participants selected without randomization. The results therefore cannot be generalized to the broader population of Chinese yoga practitioners.

2. The study used a single-group pretest/posttest design with no control group and no inferential statistical analysis. The observed score changes may

reflect the module, participant expectations, group support, facilitator influence, short-term mood variation, or other uncontrolled factors; causal effectiveness cannot be established.

3. The intervention lasted only three days, and the posttest and reflections were collected immediately after the module. The study cannot determine whether perceived or measured changes were maintained over time or whether deeper contemplative learning developed.

4. The findings relied on self-report data, and the researcher also served as module developer and facilitator, creating possible social desirability, expectancy, and interpretation bias. The reflection questions also included brief positive examples to clarify the requested focus, which may have influenced participants' wording.

5. Observer awareness was not directly measured with a validated instrument and should therefore be treated as a proposed conceptual and pedagogical explanation rather than an established mechanism.

6. Although all English EWBQ items were retained and translated directly into Chinese without substantive alteration, the Chinese version did not undergo a formal back-translation or separate psychometric validation in this small sample. In addition, the four applied dimensions followed a final mapping supplied by the lead questionnaire developer, whereas the published validation study reported six source domains. The four-dimension organization should therefore be interpreted as an applied scoring framework for this preliminary study, not as a newly validated factor structure.

7. Phase 1 key informants were recruited purposively, and some were known to the researcher through an existing professional network. This supported access to experienced participants but may have introduced selection and relationship bias. Future studies should use larger and more diverse samples, independent facilitators or assessors, formal validation of the Chinese questionnaire version, a control or comparison condition, direct measurement of observer awareness, and longer-term follow-up.

Conclusion

This article presented the development, implementation, and preliminary evaluation of a three-day Mindfulness-Infused Yoga Module designed to enhance

emotional well-being among Chinese yoga practitioners. The study found that Chinese yoga practitioners experienced emotional pressures related to social expectations, work–family responsibilities, outcome-oriented practice, body anxiety, self-judgment, and disconnection from inner awareness. These findings indicate that emotional well-being cannot be fully supported by physical yoga practice alone, but requires a deeper process of inner observation.

The study suggests that mindfulness-infused yoga may support emotional well-being through practices intended to cultivate observer awareness. By learning to observe body, breath, thoughts, emotions, and inner reactions without immediate identification, practitioners may begin to develop greater emotional clarity, stability, and non-reactivity. The mean total score increased descriptively from 54.00 (SD = 9.47) before the module to 59.86 (SD = 12.14) immediately afterward. Six written-reflection respondents described greater calmness or reduced distress and increased awareness of emotions without being carried away by them, while one account also showed that impulsive reactions could still occur. These findings indicate perceived and descriptive short-term changes, not confirmed causal effectiveness.

In conclusion, the study suggests that yoga may contribute to emotional well-being more effectively when it is practiced not merely as physical exercise, but as an embodied field for cultivating mindfulness, observer awareness, and inner training. Although the findings are preliminary due to the small sample size and short intervention period, the module shows potential practical value and a meaningful foundation for further research and application.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions are proposed.

1. Yoga teachers may integrate mindfulness and observer awareness into regular yoga classes. Instead of focusing only on posture, flexibility, or physical achievement, teachers can guide practitioners to observe body, breath, thoughts, emotions, and inner reactions during practice. This may help practitioners develop a more balanced and non-reactive relationship with their inner experience.

2. Chinese yoga practitioners may use yoga practice as a field for inner observation rather than only as physical training. By observing bodily sensations, emotional patterns, self-judgment, comparison, and attachment to results,

practitioners may gradually cultivate greater emotional clarity and stability in both yoga practice and daily life.

3. Future research should include a larger sample size and a longer intervention period in order to more rigorously examine the potential effects of the Mindfulness-Infused Yoga Module. A control group and follow-up assessment may also be included to evaluate whether improvements in emotional well-being are maintained over time.

4. Future studies may further develop tools for measuring observer awareness more directly. Since observer awareness was proposed as a central conceptual explanation in this study, future research may examine how it can be assessed, cultivated, and applied in different yoga, mindfulness, and well-being contexts.

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Applying Buddhist Right Livelihood (Sammā Ājīva) for Businessmen in Vietnam

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Abstract

This qualitative study had three objectives: (1) to examine unethical business conditions and their impacts in Vietnam; (2) to investigate Right Livelihood (Sammā Ājīva) in Buddhist scriptures; and (3) to propose an application of Buddhist Right Livelihood to business practice in Vietnam. Data were collected through documentary research and in-depth interviews with six key informants representing different perspectives on ethical business and the practical application of Right Livelihood.

The findings indicate that unethical business practices remain a significant concern in Vietnam despite rapid economic development. Major contributing factors include weak ethical awareness, incomplete or inconsistently enforced legal frameworks, and the pursuit of short-term profit, with consequences for society and the environment. Buddhist Right Livelihood emphasizes earning a living without harming oneself or others and therefore provides an ethical basis for business conduct. Based on the documentary and interview findings, the study proposes the "Three Rightness" model, comprising Rightness Regarding Persons, Rightness Regarding Actions, and Rightness Regarding Products. The model highlights ethical leadership, responsible conduct, stakeholder respect, social responsibility, and the provision of quality and sustainable products and services. It offers a context-sensitive framework for integrating Buddhist ethics into contemporary business practice in Vietnam.

Keywords: Right Livelihood; Business Ethics; Business Culture; Buddhist Ethics; Sustainable Development

Introduction

Over recent decades, Vietnam has transformed from a centrally planned economy into a socialist-oriented market economy. The Đổi Mới reforms

initiated in 1986 marked a major turning point in the country's economic development (Chinh & Hoang, 2009). Businesspeople have subsequently become important contributors to industrialization, modernization, employment, and socioeconomic growth. Rapid development, however, has also intensified concerns about corruption, regulatory violations, environmental harm, commercial fraud, and the erosion of public trust. Recent Vietnamese cases involving bribery, fraudulent appropriation of property, counterfeit goods, and environmental violations illustrate the continuing relevance of business ethics to national development (Dinh, 2024; Manh, 2024; Nhat, n.d.; Thien, 2024).

Buddhist Right Livelihood (Sammā Ājīva) offers an ethical framework for addressing these concerns. As a factor of the Noble Eightfold Path, Right Livelihood requires that one earn a living honestly and without causing suffering to oneself or other living beings (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1984; Harvey, 2000). Buddhist teachings further emphasize that wealth should be acquired through energetic effort, lawful and peaceful means, truthfulness, and conduct that does not exploit or harm others (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012). The Buddha also identified five forms of trade to be avoided: trade in weapons, human beings, meat, intoxicants, and poisons (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012).

Right Livelihood is closely connected with other dimensions of Buddhist ethics, particularly compassion, non-harming, and the Five Precepts (pañca-sīla). A livelihood based on deception, exploitation, or greed conflicts with the ethical discipline expected of Buddhist laypeople (Harvey, 2000). Consequently, business conduct cannot be evaluated solely by profitability; it must also be considered in relation to its effects on employees, customers, communities, other living beings, and the natural environment.

Right Livelihood is intended to support genuine well-being for both individuals and society by promoting responsible relationships and reducing harm (Piyadassi, 2003). Observance of the Five Precepts similarly contributes to individual and social peace because ethical restraint protects both the practitioner and others from avoidable suffering (Mahatthanadull & Mahatthanadull, 2018). For laypeople, moral livelihood therefore forms part of a wider ethical discipline that includes Right Action (Sammā Kammanta), honesty, restraint, and responsibility.

Buddhist morality is best understood as a way of life rather than as a set of rules followed mechanically. Its value lies in practice and in cultivating conduct that supports peace and well-being in this life. This practical orientation is consistent with the Buddhist emphasis that ethical and spiritual teachings must be

embodied in conduct rather than remaining matters of belief alone (Narada, 2006). From this perspective, the central question for contemporary business is how economic activity can generate prosperity without producing avoidable harm to individuals, society, or the environment.

Against this background, the present study examines the application of Buddhist Right Livelihood to business practice in Vietnam. It seeks to clarify the ethical problems evident in the contemporary business environment, analyze the Buddhist foundations of Right Livelihood, and develop a practical model through which Vietnamese businesspeople may align business decisions with compassion, honesty, responsibility, and sustainable development.

Research Objectives

1. To examine unethical business conditions and their impacts in Vietnam.
2. To analyze Right Livelihood (Sammā Ājīva) in Buddhist scriptures.
3. To propose an application of Buddhist Right Livelihood (Sammā Ājīva) to business practice in Vietnam.

Literature Review

Bodhi Bhikkhu (1984), in The Noble Eightfold Path: Way to the End of Suffering, explains Right Livelihood (Sammā Ājīva) as the requirement to earn one's living in a righteous manner. His account situates livelihood within the Noble Eightfold Path and emphasizes the ethical relationship between one's occupation, intention, and consequences for other beings.

Piyadassi (2003), in The Buddha's Ancient Path, explains that Right Livelihood is intended to contribute to the well-being of both individuals and society. Wrong or exploitative livelihoods disturb social harmony because they are driven by greed and disregard the suffering imposed on others. This perspective highlights the social consequences of livelihood choices rather than treating them as merely private economic decisions.

Boatright (2009), in Ethics and the Conduct of Business, examines ethical problems arising in relationships with shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers, and the wider public. Business decisions often involve tensions between commercial objectives and moral responsibilities. This perspective is useful for understanding the practical challenges involved in applying ethical principles within competitive markets.

Hanh (1999), in The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching, presents Right Livelihood as earning a living without violating the ideals of love and compassion. Livelihood can express one's deepest ethical commitments or become a source of suffering for oneself and others. This interpretation provides a practical bridge between Buddhist ethics and everyday occupational choices.

Harvey (2000), in An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values, and Issues, explains that livelihood should neither be dishonest nor cause suffering to other living beings. His analysis connects Right Livelihood with broader Buddhist principles such as non-harming (ahiṃsā), loving-kindness (mettā), compassion (karuṇā), and ethical responsibility toward social and environmental concerns.

Payutto (1994), in Buddhist Economics: A Middle Way for the Marketplace, argues that economic activity should be evaluated in relation to human well-being rather than profit alone. From this perspective, the absence of ethical principles in business can damage consumers, investors, communities, and the environment, while Buddhist economic principles provide an alternative framework for responsible production and consumption.

Mahatthanadull and Mahatthanadull (2020) discuss holistic well-being from the perspective of Buddhist psychology and emphasize the importance of ethical conduct in establishing a balanced way of life. Their analysis supports the view that the Five Precepts provide a basic moral foundation for harmonious human relationships and responsible conduct.

Studies of Vietnamese business culture similarly emphasize credibility, social responsibility, community cooperation, and transparent competition as important conditions for sustainable development (Ho, 2020; Quang, 2004). As Vietnam continues economic integration and modernization, businesspeople play an increasingly important role in generating wealth, employment, and national development; this role also increases the importance of ethical responsibility.

Contemporary Buddhist approaches to business likewise emphasize that wealth creation need not be separated from compassion and morality. Buddhist business ethics seeks harmony among people, products, society, and the natural environment, encouraging business activity that avoids harm while contributing to collective well-being (Harvey, 2000; Hanh, 1999).

Mahatthanadull and Mahatthanadull (2018) examine the Five Precepts as criteria for promoting individual and social peace. Their study demonstrates that Buddhist moral principles can guide individuals toward conduct that protects others from harm and strengthens social harmony. This ethical foundation is directly relevant to business relationships and decision-making.

The reviewed literature provides strong foundations in Buddhist ethics, business ethics, and Vietnamese business culture. However, limited research has integrated these strands into a practical framework specifically applying Right Livelihood to contemporary business practice in Vietnam. The present study addresses this gap by synthesizing Buddhist ethical principles with the conditions of the Vietnamese business environment and developing the "Three Rightness" model.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework follows an input–process–output structure. The inputs comprise documented ethical problems in the Vietnamese business environment and Buddhist teachings on Right Livelihood. The process combines documentary analysis, in-depth interviews, analysis, and synthesis. The output is a practical model for applying Right Livelihood to business practice in Vietnam.

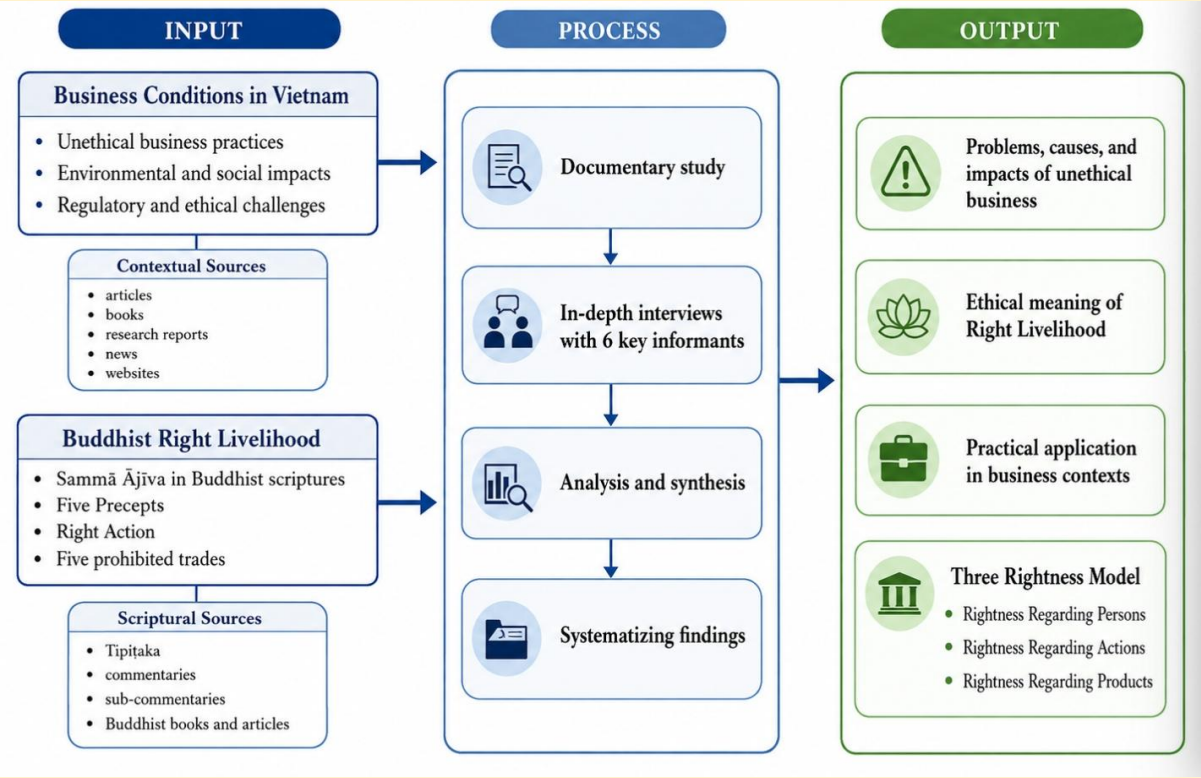

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This study employed qualitative documentary and interview-based research. The methodology comprised the following stages:

Data Collection

Primary documentary sources included the Pāli Tipiṭaka (Nikāyas), commentaries (Aṭṭhakathā), and relevant sub-commentarial materials, using established English translations published by the Buddhist Publication Society, Wisdom Publications, and the Pali Text Society. Secondary sources included academic books, theses, journal articles, research reports, and documents related to Buddhist ethics, Right Livelihood, business ethics, and the Vietnamese business context. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with six key informants to obtain practical perspectives on the application of Right Livelihood to business practice in Vietnam.

Analysis and Synthesis

The documentary and interview data were analyzed and synthesized thematically in relation to the three research objectives. Buddhist sources were examined to clarify the meaning, ethical foundations, and practical implications of Right Livelihood, while contemporary sources and interview data were used to identify business problems, contextual challenges, and possibilities for application in Vietnam.

Outline Construction

The findings were organized according to the three research objectives: unethical business conditions and their impacts, Buddhist teachings on Right Livelihood, and the practical application of Right Livelihood in the Vietnamese business context.

Problem Discussion

Key problems and tensions identified in the documentary and interview data were compared and interpreted, particularly the conflict between short-term profitability and ethical responsibility.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The final stage synthesized the principal findings, formulated the “Three Rightness” model, identified limitations, and developed recommendations for future research.

Research Results

Objective 1: The findings indicate that Vietnam's business environment continues to face significant ethical challenges. Unethical conduct is associated with pressures for rapid economic growth, gaps in regulation and enforcement, weak ethical awareness, and the pursuit of short-term profit. Such practices have consequences beyond individual firms, including environmental degradation, weakened public trust, corruption, and broader social harm. The findings therefore suggest that economic development requires an ethical framework capable of evaluating not only profitability but also the effects of business decisions on society and the environment.

Objective 2: Buddhist Right Livelihood (Sammā Ājīva), the fifth factor of the Noble Eightfold Path, requires earning a living through lawful, peaceful, honest, and non-harming means. The findings identify the Five Precepts, Right Action, and the five prohibited trades as particularly relevant ethical foundations. These teachings establish clear limits on occupations and commercial activities that involve deception, exploitation, violence, intoxicants, or other forms of harm. Right Livelihood therefore provides both a personal moral discipline and a broader framework for responsible economic conduct.

Objective 3: The study developed the "Three Rightness" model as a practical framework for applying Buddhist Right Livelihood to business practice in Vietnam. The model comprises Rightness Regarding Persons, Rightness Regarding Actions, and Rightness Regarding Products. Together, these dimensions address ethical relationships with stakeholders, integrity and accountability in business decisions, and the social and environmental quality of goods and services.

The findings also indicate that implementation may be constrained by competitive pressure and tensions between short-term profitability and ethical standards. Nevertheless, the model suggests that ethical conduct can support long-term organizational value through trust, reputation, employee commitment, responsible resource use, and stronger relationships with customers and communities. These potential benefits should be understood as qualitative findings and propositions for further empirical testing rather than as established causal effects.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that applying Buddhist Right Livelihood to business practice must be understood within Vietnam's specific economic and institutional context. Ethical problems identified in the study—including corruption, short-term profit orientation, regulatory weakness, environmental harm, and declining public trust—show that business ethics is not merely an individual matter but a systemic concern. This interpretation is consistent with contemporary Vietnamese evidence documenting bribery, commercial fraud, and environmental violations (Dinh, 2024; Manh, 2024; Thien, 2024). The present study extends this discussion by examining these problems through the Buddhist principle that economic activity should avoid causing suffering to oneself and others.

The findings for Objective 2 reinforce the ethical significance of Right Livelihood as part of the Noble Eightfold Path. Right Livelihood is not simply the avoidance of a few prohibited occupations; it is connected with the Five Precepts, Right Action, honesty, non-harming, compassion, and responsibility for the consequences of one's livelihood (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1984, 2012; Harvey, 2000; Piyadassi, 2003). This broader understanding is important for contemporary business because many harmful practices do not fall neatly within the five prohibited trades but may nevertheless involve deception, exploitation, environmental damage, or avoidable suffering.

For Objective 3, the "Three Rightness" model translates these ethical principles into three interrelated domains: persons, actions, and products. Rightness Regarding Persons emphasizes fair and respectful relationships with employees, customers, partners, communities, and other stakeholders. Rightness Regarding Actions concerns honesty, transparency, accountability, social responsibility, and ethically responsible decision-making. Rightness Regarding Products focuses on quality, safety, sustainability, and avoidance of harm. In this respect, the model provides a contextualized Buddhist ethical framework for Vietnamese business practice. Its contribution lies in connecting Buddhist moral principles with stakeholder relationships, organizational conduct, and product responsibility; however, its effectiveness requires further empirical evaluation across different industries and organizational settings.

New Knowledge from the Research

This study contributes new knowledge by integrating analysis of ethical problems in Vietnam's business environment with Buddhist Right Livelihood and translating that synthesis into a practical business framework. The findings show that Right Livelihood can be interpreted not only as an individual occupational principle but also as a multidimensional guide for organizational relationships, business decisions, and the social consequences of products and services.

The study further clarifies that livelihood encompasses both the means by which people sustain themselves and the ethical effects of economic activity on other stakeholders and the wider environment. Right Livelihood therefore provides an ethical foundation centered on non-harming, compassion, honesty, responsibility, and the long-term consequences of economic conduct.

The principal contribution is the "Three Rightness" model, which organizes the application of Right Livelihood into three dimensions: Rightness Regarding Persons, Rightness Regarding Actions, and Rightness Regarding Products (Figure 2). This model offers a practical structure through which Vietnamese businesspeople can align stakeholder relationships, organizational conduct, and products or services with Buddhist ethical principles.

Rightness Regarding Persons emphasizes fairness, dignity, trust, and respectful relationships with stakeholders. Rightness Regarding Actions emphasizes integrity, transparency, accountability, responsible decision-making, and social responsibility. Rightness Regarding Products emphasizes quality, safety, sustainability, and the avoidance of harm in the production and delivery of goods and services.

Taken together, the three dimensions provide a context-sensitive framework for connecting Buddhist Right Livelihood with contemporary business ethics. The model proposes that sustainable business development requires ethical alignment among the people involved, the actions undertaken, and the products or services created.

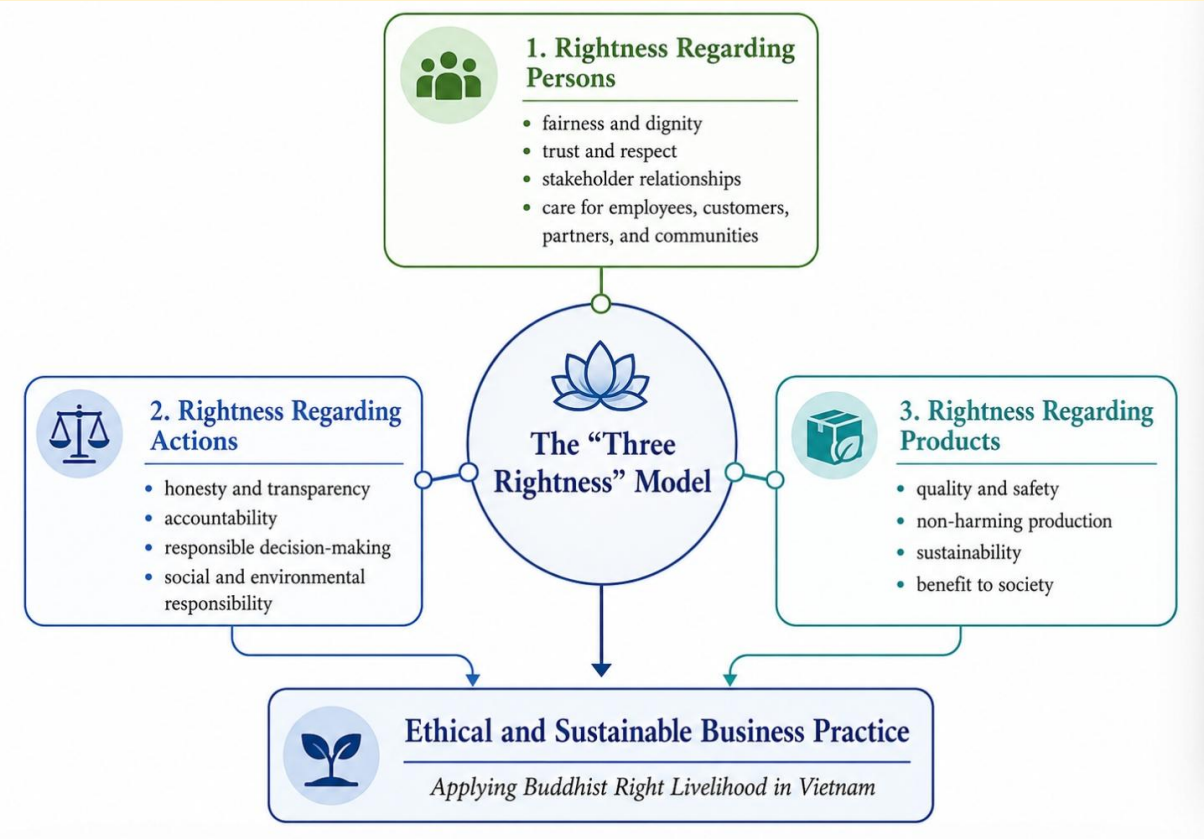

Figure 2. The "Three Rightness" Model

Conclusion

This study examined unethical business conditions in Vietnam, analyzed Buddhist Right Livelihood (Sammā Ājīva), and developed a practical framework for its application to contemporary business practice. The findings show that ethical challenges in the Vietnamese business environment include short-term profit orientation, weak ethical awareness, regulatory and enforcement limitations, corruption, social harm, and environmental damage. Buddhist Right Livelihood offers an alternative ethical orientation grounded in honest, lawful, peaceful, and non-harming economic activity. The study identifies the Five Precepts, Right Action, and the five prohibited trades as particularly relevant foundations for business ethics.

The study's principal contribution is the "Three Rightness" model: Rightness Regarding Persons, Rightness Regarding Actions, and Rightness Regarding Products. The model extends Right Livelihood from individual occupational choice to organizational relationships, decision-making, and product responsibility. It therefore provides a practical framework through which Vietnamese businesspeople may integrate compassion, honesty, accountability,

stakeholder responsibility, and sustainability into economic activity. Because the research is qualitative, the model should be regarded as a conceptual and practical framework requiring further empirical testing rather than as a demonstrated causal model of business performance. Nevertheless, it offers a Buddhist ethical approach to business development that seeks to reconcile economic success with social well-being and environmental responsibility.

Recommendations

This study is limited by its qualitative design and by the absence of systematic testing across different industries, firm sizes, and organizational contexts. It also does not quantitatively assess whether adoption of the "Three Rightness" model improves business performance, stakeholder trust, or sustainability outcomes.

Future research should therefore:

1. Quantitatively examine relationships between Right Livelihood practices and business performance, stakeholder trust, and sustainability outcomes in Vietnamese firms.

2. Compare the application of the "Three Rightness" model across industries, organizational sizes, and regions in Vietnam.

3. Investigate how organizational and national business culture influences the adoption and implementation of Buddhist Right Livelihood.

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Dependent Origination and Emptiness in Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (MMK): An Analytical Study

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Abstract

The Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (MMK), attributed to Nāgārjuna, is a foundational text of Madhyamaka philosophy and one of the most influential works of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Through its analysis of dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda), emptiness (śūnyatā), causal conditions (pratyaya), and the Eight Negations, the MMK articulates a distinctive account of the Middle Way that profoundly shaped later Buddhist thought.

This qualitative study employs historical, textual, and comparative analysis to examine dependent origination in the MMK and its relationship with emptiness and non-arising (anutpāda). It aims to clarify Nāgārjuna's understanding of dependent origination, analyze its relationship with causal conditions and emptiness, and examine the significance of non-arising for Madhyamaka practice and liberation.

The findings reveal three major points. First, Nāgārjuna does not treat dependent origination merely as a theory of causal production; rather, it functions as a philosophical method for revealing the absence of inherent existence (niḥsvabhāva) in all phenomena. Comparative analysis of early Buddhist, Mahāyāna, and Tibetan Madhyamaka interpretations further highlights the distinctive Madhyamaka use of dependent origination.

Second, the relationship among dependent origination, causal conditions, and emptiness shows that emptiness is not the negation of phenomena but the recognition that phenomena arise only in dependence on conditions. Dependent origination and emptiness therefore express the Middle Way beyond the extremes of inherent existence and nihilistic nonexistence.

Third, the analysis indicates that non-arising (anutpāda) and non-ceasing (anirodha) do not deny conventional appearance; rather, they deny arising and ceasing through an independent essence. This insight provides a philosophical basis for overcoming reified views and cultivating liberative wisdom in Madhyamaka.

Keywords: Dependent origination; Emptiness; Causal conditions; Non-arising; Madhyamaka; Mūlamadhyamakakārikā

Introduction

Dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) is one of the fundamental teachings in Buddhist philosophy and plays a central role in explaining the arising and cessation of phenomena. In early Buddhism, dependent origination was primarily presented as an explanation of the conditioned process through which suffering arises and ceases. The twelve links of dependent origination describe the relationship between ignorance, karmic formations, consciousness, and the continuation of the cycle of birth and death. However, dependent origination is not limited to a description of rebirth; it also provides a philosophical framework for understanding the conditional nature of human experience and the possibility of liberation through wisdom and insight (Ellis, 2021).

With the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism, dependent origination came to be interpreted in increasingly philosophical terms, especially in relation to emptiness (śūnyatā). Because phenomena arise dependently, they cannot possess an independent and permanent essence. Later Buddhist traditions further elaborated the implications of conditionality and interdependence for understanding reality, causality, and liberation (Anālayo, 2021).

Among the various philosophical interpretations of dependent origination, Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (MMK) occupies a particularly significant position. Nāgārjuna develops the Madhyamaka philosophy of the Middle Way through systematic analysis of dependent origination, emptiness, and causal conditions. The MMK rejects both independently existing entities and nihilistic nonexistence, instead presenting phenomena as conventionally existent through dependent conditions (Garfield, 1995; Westerhoff, 2009).

Previous studies of the MMK have extensively examined Nāgārjuna's theory of emptiness, Madhyamaka reasoning, and the relationship between conventional and ultimate truth. Ames (1994), Eckel (1987), Garfield (1995), and Westerhoff (2009) have made important contributions to interpreting Nāgārjuna's arguments. However, the integrated relationship among dependent origination, causal conditions, emptiness, and non-arising (anutpāda), particularly in relation to liberation, warrants further systematic analysis.

This study therefore seeks to address this gap by examining dependent origination in the MMK from the perspectives of textual analysis, historical

development, and comparative philosophical interpretation. In particular, this study investigates how Nāgārjuna connects dependent origination with emptiness and how this relationship contributes to understanding the Madhyamaka path toward liberation.

Research Objectives

1. To examine dependent origination in the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (MMK).

2. To analyze the relationship among dependent origination, causal conditions (pratyaya), and emptiness (śūnyatā) in the MMK.

3. To examine the relationship between dependent origination and emptiness and its significance for non-arising (anutpāda), the Middle Way, and liberation.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to Madhyamaka studies by clarifying the philosophical relationship between dependent origination and emptiness. Furthermore, this study provides a deeper understanding of how *Nāgārjuna*'s analysis of causal conditions functions not only as a philosophical argument but also as a framework for Buddhist practice and the cultivation of wisdom.

Literature Review

Scholarship on Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (MMK) has concentrated principally on emptiness (śūnyatā), dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda), causality, and the Madhyamaka rejection of intrinsic existence (svabhāva). These studies provide the philosophical foundation for the present research, but they also reveal a need for a more integrated account of how dependent origination, causal conditions (pratyaya), emptiness, and non-arising (anutpāda) function together within Nāgārjuna's thought.

Garfield (1995) provides one of the most influential modern philosophical interpretations of the MMK. His reading emphasizes that emptiness should not be interpreted as nihilism or the denial of conventional phenomena. Rather, phenomena are empty precisely because they arise dependently and therefore lack independent, self-established existence. This interpretation is particularly important for understanding MMK 24.18, where dependent origination, emptiness, dependent designation, and the Middle Way are presented as conceptually inseparable.

Westerhoff (2009) further develops this interpretation by examining Nāgārjuna's critique of svabhāva. He argues that phenomena cannot possess intrinsic existence because their identity, causal efficacy, and conceptual determination depend upon conditions and relations. Dependent origination therefore functions not merely as a description of causal succession but as a philosophical argument against metaphysical independence. This perspective provides an important basis for examining how causal dependence supports the Madhyamaka doctrine of emptiness.

The analysis of causal conditions is further illuminated by Ames (1994), whose study of Bhāvaviveka's Prajñāpradīpa examines the interpretation of the MMK's opening chapter on conditions (pratyaya). The study demonstrates how Madhyamaka reasoning scrutinizes causal relations in order to challenge assumptions that causes, conditions, and effects possess fixed inherent natures. Such analysis is relevant to the present study because the critique of causal production forms an important step toward understanding non-arising.

Historical studies also clarify the development of dependent origination prior to and beyond Madhyamaka. Shulman (2008) challenges overly simplified interpretations of early dependent origination as merely a universal doctrine of causality and emphasizes its close relationship with the arising and cessation of suffering. Anālayo (2021) similarly distinguishes dependent arising from broader modern notions of interdependence, showing the importance of maintaining doctrinal precision when comparing early Buddhist and later Mahāyāna interpretations. These studies indicate that Nāgārjuna's interpretation develops from earlier Buddhist conditionality while giving it a distinctive ontological and epistemological function.

Eckel (1987), through his study of Bhāvaviveka, demonstrates how later Madhyamaka thinkers employed systematic reasoning and philosophical argument to interpret reality without reifying either conventional or ultimate truth. Ellis (2021), although approaching dependent origination from a contemporary cognitive perspective, also illustrates the continuing interpretive significance of conditionality for understanding the formation of human experience.

The literature establishes three important points. First, dependent origination is central to Buddhist accounts of conditionality and suffering (Anālayo, 2021; Shulman, 2008). Second, in Madhyamaka it becomes inseparable from the critique of intrinsic existence and the doctrine of emptiness

(Garfield, 1995; Westerhoff, 2009). Third, causal analysis serves as an important philosophical method for exposing reified assumptions concerning arising, existence, and identity (Ames, 1994; Eckel, 1987). However, the relationship among dependent origination, causal conditions, emptiness, and non-arising has often been treated in separate discussions. The present study therefore synthesizes these concepts as an interconnected framework for explaining Nāgārjuna's Middle Way and its relevance to wisdom and liberation.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this research is developed based on the three research objectives and follows an input–process–output model. The framework aims to examine how *Nāgārjuna*'s analysis of dependent origination in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MMK) provides a philosophical foundation for understanding emptiness and the realization of non-arising.

The input of this research consists of primary Buddhist texts, particularly the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* and related *Madhyamaka* literature, together with secondary scholarly studies on dependent origination, emptiness, and causal conditions. These sources provide the theoretical foundation for examining *Nāgārjuna*'s philosophical analysis.

The research process is divided into three analytical stages corresponding to the research objectives:

First, the study examines the concept of dependent origination in the MMK through textual and philosophical analysis. This stage investigates how *Nāgārjuna* interprets dependent origination beyond a simple theory of causation and connects it with the absence of inherent existence (*niḥsvabhāva*).

Second, the research analyzes the relationship between dependent origination, causal conditions (*pratyaya*), and emptiness. This stage explores how the arising of phenomena through conditions demonstrates their empty nature and reflects the *Madhyamaka* understanding of the Middle Way.

Third, the study compares the concepts of dependent origination and emptiness in the MMK in order to clarify the significance of non-arising (*anutpāda*) and non-ceasing. This stage examines how the realization of dependent origination and emptiness contributes to the understanding of reality and liberation.

The expected output of this research is a systematic interpretation of the relationship between dependent origination, emptiness, and non-arising in *Madhyamaka* philosophy. This framework contributes to a deeper understanding of *Nāgārjuna*'s philosophical method and demonstrates how causal analysis functions as a foundation for the cultivation of wisdom and the Buddhist path toward liberation.

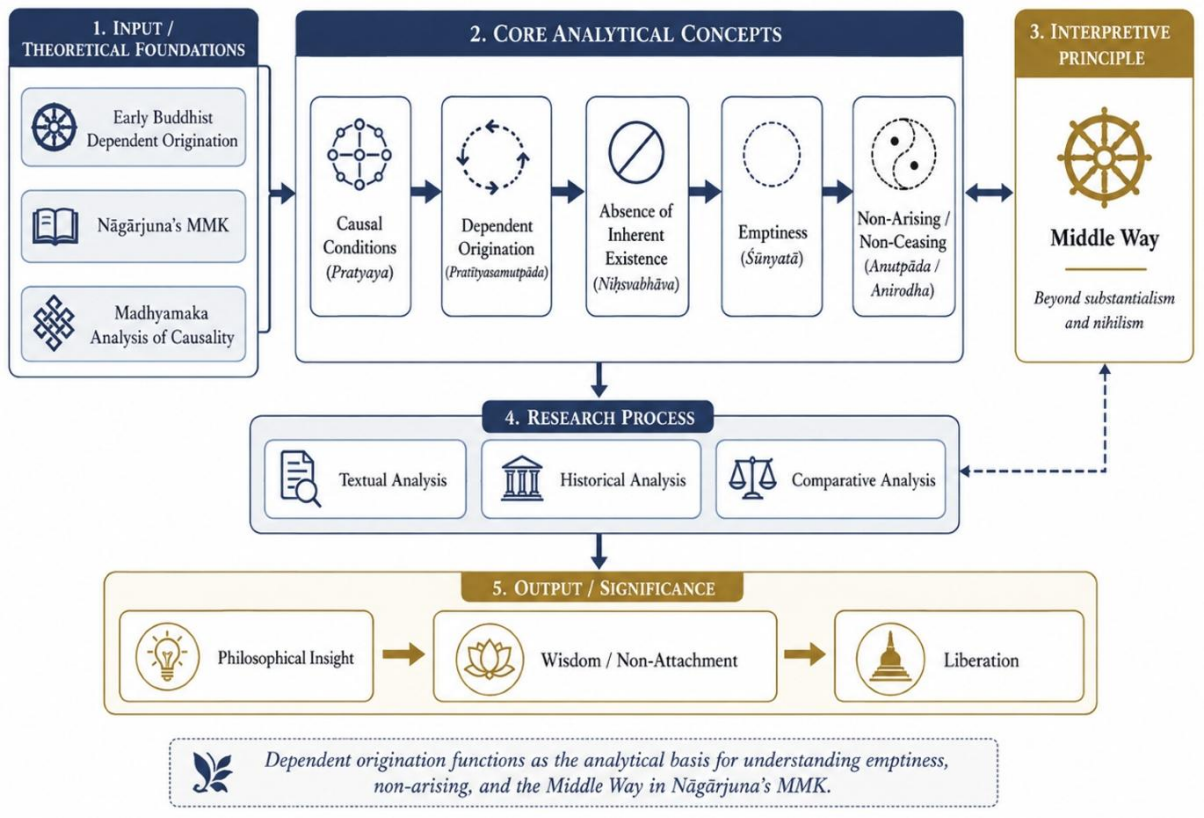

Figure 1. The conceptual framework

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on textual, historical, and comparative analysis. Because the research concerns philosophical interpretation of the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (MMK), these methods are appropriate for examining textual arguments, doctrinal concepts, and their development across Buddhist traditions. The analysis proceeds in three stages corresponding to the research objectives**.**

Step 1: Textual Analysis of Dependent Origination in the MMK

The first stage applies close textual analysis to dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda) in the MMK and related Madhyamaka literature. Particular attention is given to passages concerning causal conditions (pratyaya), emptiness (śūnyatā), and the rejection of inherent existence (svabhāva/niḥsvabhāva),

including the MMK's analysis of causation and its identification of dependent origination with emptiness (Garfield, 1995).

Step 2: Philosophical Analysis of the Relationship between Dependent Origination and Emptiness

The second stage analyzes the philosophical relationship between dependent origination and emptiness. Nāgārjuna's arguments are examined to clarify how dependence on causes, conditions, concepts, and relations undermines claims to intrinsic existence and how this relationship supports the Madhyamaka understanding of the Middle Way (Garfield, 1995; Westerhoff, 2009).

Step 3: Comparative Analysis of Dependent Origination and Emptiness

The third stage employs comparative analysis to situate Nāgārjuna's account alongside early Buddhist, Mahāyāna, and Tibetan Madhyamaka interpretations. The comparison identifies distinctive emphases in Madhyamaka reasoning and clarifies the significance of non-arising (anutpāda), non-ceasing (anirodha), and liberation.

Through these three methodological steps, this research provides a systematic analysis of the relationship between dependent origination, causal conditions, emptiness, and liberation. The methodology enables a deeper understanding of *Nāgārjuna*'s philosophical framework and its significance within Buddhist studies.

Research Results

1. Findings on the Concept of Dependent Origination in the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (MMK)

The first objective of this research was to examine the concept of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MMK). Through textual analysis of the MMK and comparative examination of *Theravāda*, *Mahāyāna*, and Tibetan Buddhist interpretations, this study found that dependent origination has developed from an explanation of conditional arising and cessation into a profound philosophical principle for understanding the nature of reality.

The findings indicate that Nāgārjuna's interpretation of dependent origination in the MMK differs from a merely causal explanation of how phenomena arise. Instead, dependent origination functions as a method of philosophical analysis that reveals the absence of inherent existence (niḥsvabhāva). According to Nāgārjuna, because all phenomena arise dependently, they cannot possess an independent and permanent essence.

Therefore, dependent origination becomes the foundation for understanding emptiness (śūnyatā) and the Middle Way (Garfield, 1995; Westerhoff, 2009).

The comparative analysis further reveals that different Buddhist traditions emphasize different aspects of dependent origination. Early Buddhist traditions mainly understand dependent origination as the explanation of the conditioned process of suffering and liberation. Mahāyāna Buddhism develops this understanding by emphasizing the relationship between dependent origination and emptiness. Tibetan Madhyamaka further elaborates this relationship through philosophical reasoning, emphasizing that dependent origination demonstrates the lack of intrinsic existence and supports the realization of the Middle Way (Anālayo, 2021; Shulman, 2008; Westerhoff, 2009).

The different interpretations of dependent origination among the three Buddhist traditions are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Different Interpretations of Dependent Origination among Buddhist Traditions

Buddhist Tradition	Understanding of Dependent Origination	Main Philosophical Emphasis
***Theravāda* Buddhism**	Dependent origination explains the conditional process through which suffering arises and ceases, particularly through the twelve links (*paṭiccasamuppāda*).	Conditionality, causation, cessation of suffering
***Mahāyāna* Buddhism**	Dependent origination is understood together with emptiness; because phenomena arise dependently, they lack independent essence.	Relationship between dependent origination and emptiness (*śūnyatā)*
Tibetan Madhyamaka Buddhism	Dependent origination is used as a philosophical argument demonstrating the absence of inherent existence and establishing the Middle Way.	Logical analysis, emptiness, rejection of extremes

2. Findings on the Relationship between Dependent Origination, Causal Conditions, and Emptiness in the MMK

The second objective of this research was to examine the relationship between dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), causal conditions (*pratyaya*), and emptiness (*śūnyatā*) in the Mūlama*dhyamakakārikā* (MMK). Through textual analysis of *Nāgārjuna*'s examination of causal conditions and philosophical analysis of the relationship between dependent arising and emptiness, this study found that dependent origination and emptiness are not separate doctrines but mutually connected principles within Madhyamaka philosophy.

The findings demonstrate that Nāgārjuna's analysis of causal conditions aims to reveal that phenomena do not arise independently or possess their own inherent nature (svabhāva). Since all phenomena arise through dependence upon causes and conditions, they lack permanent and independent existence. Therefore, dependent origination provides the logical foundation for understanding emptiness (Ames, 1994; Garfield, 1995).

Furthermore, this study finds that emptiness should not be interpreted as the denial of phenomena or a form of nihilism. Rather, emptiness represents the recognition that phenomena exist through dependent conditions. In this sense, dependent origination explains the conventional existence of phenomena, while emptiness reveals their ultimate nature. Together, the two concepts represent the Middle Way that avoids both the extremes of eternalism and nihilism (Garfield, 1995; Westerhoff, 2009).

The relationship between dependent origination, causal conditions, and emptiness is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. The Philosophical Relationship between Dependent Origination, Causal Conditions, and Emptiness in the MMK

Concept	Explanation	Philosophical Significance
Causal Conditions (*pratyaya*)	Phenomena exist because multiple conditions come together; no single permanent cause exists independently.	Reveals the relational and conditional nature of existence.
Dependent Origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*)	All phenomena arise through the interaction of causes and conditions.	Demonstrates that phenomena are dependent rather than independent.
Absence of Intrinsic Existence (*niḥsvabhāva*)	Dependent arising means that phenomena lack an inherent essence because they rely on external and changing conditions.	Provides the logical basis for understanding emptiness.
Emptiness (*śūnyatā*)	Because phenomena arise dependently, they lack inherent existence (*niḥsvabhāva*).	Reveals the ultimate nature of phenomena and establishes the Middle Way.
Relationship	Dependent origination explains how phenomena appear; emptiness explains why they lack independent essence. Both concepts function within the framework of the Two Truths and are mutually inseparable.	Together they form *Nāgārjuna*'s philosophical method for overcoming mistaken views regarding the nature of reality.

3. Findings on the Comparison between Dependent Origination and Emptiness in the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā

The third objective of this research was to compare the concepts of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and emptiness (*śūnyatā*) in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MMK). Through comparative philosophical analysis of *Nāgārjuna*'s arguments, this study found that dependent origination and emptiness are not two separate teachings, but two interconnected aspects of the same Madhyamaka understanding of reality.

The findings demonstrate that dependent origination explains the conventional functioning of phenomena through causes and conditions, while emptiness reveals that these dependently arisen phenomena lack inherent existence (niḥsvabhāva). Therefore, dependent origination provides the logical basis for understanding emptiness, and emptiness reveals the ultimate meaning of dependent origination (Garfield, 1995).

Furthermore, this research found that Nāgārjuna's integration of dependent origination and emptiness establishes the Middle Way (madhyamā pratipad) by avoiding the two extremes of eternalism (śāśvatavāda) and nihilism (ucchedavāda). The realization that phenomena arise dependently but lack independent essence leads to an understanding of non-arising (anutpāda) and non-ceasing, which is essential for the cultivation of wisdom and the Buddhist path toward liberation (Garfield, 1995; Westerhoff, 2009).

The comparison between dependent origination and emptiness in the MMK is summarized in Table 3. In Madhyamaka, conventional and ultimate truth are not independent domains; rather, dependent origination and emptiness reveal two inseparable aspects of the same reality.

Table 3. Comparison of Dependent Origination and Emptiness in the MMK

Aspect	Dependent Origination (*Pratītyasamutpāda*)	Emptiness (*Śūnyatā*)	Relationship in *Madhyamaka*
Main Question	How do phenomena arise?	What is the nature of phenomena?	Together they explain the nature of reality.
Analytical Focus	Examines causes and conditions (*pratyaya*) through which phenomena appear.	Examines the absence of inherent existence (*svabhāva*).	Causal dependence reveals emptiness.
Level of Explanation	Mainly explains conventional reality (*saṃvṛti-satya*).	Reveals ultimate understanding (*paramārtha-satya*)	Two truths are mutually related, not contradictory.

Aspect	Dependent Origination (*Pratītyasamutpāda*)	Emptiness (*Śūnyatā*)	Relationship in *Madhyamaka*
Philosophical Meaning	All phenomena exist dependently and relationally	All phenomena are empty of independent essence.	Dependent origination and emptiness express the Middle Way.
Function in Practice	Helps practitioners understand the conditioned nature of experience.	Helps practitioners overcome attachment to fixed existence.	Together they support wisdom and liberation.

Discussion

The findings of this research demonstrate that dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) occupies a central position in *Nāgārjuna*'s *Madhyamaka* philosophy. Although dependent origination originated as a fundamental Buddhist teaching explaining the conditional arising and cessation of suffering, the MMK develops a deeper philosophical interpretation by connecting dependent origination with emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and the absence of inherent existence (*niḥsvabhāva*).

The first finding indicates that Nāgārjuna's understanding of dependent origination cannot be reduced to a simple theory of causation. Instead, dependent origination functions as a method of philosophical investigation that reveals the relational and conditioned nature of all phenomena. This interpretation distinguishes Madhyamaka from approaches that understand causality as involving independently existing entities or fixed essences (Garfield, 1995; Westerhoff, 2009).

The second finding highlights the inseparable relationship between dependent origination and emptiness. Nāgārjuna does not regard emptiness as a denial of conventional reality; rather, emptiness is understood precisely because phenomena arise dependently. Since phenomena depend upon causes and conditions, they cannot possess independent existence. Therefore, dependent origination and emptiness represent two aspects of the same Middle Way: dependent origination explains the conventional appearance of phenomena, while emptiness reveals their ultimate nature (Garfield, 1995; MMK 24.18).

The third finding demonstrates that integrating dependent origination and emptiness provides the philosophical foundation for understanding non-arising (anutpāda) and non-ceasing. In the MMK, non-arising does not imply that phenomena completely disappear or do not appear at all. Instead, it indicates that phenomena do not arise from an independent essence. This understanding enables

practitioners to overcome attachment to fixed views of reality and cultivate wisdom consistent with the Madhyamaka path (Garfield, 1995).

Finally, the findings suggest that Nāgārjuna's causal analysis has a practical as well as philosophical function. By exposing the tendency to treat persons, objects, and experiences as inherently fixed, Madhyamaka reasoning undermines attachment to reified views. In this sense, understanding dependent origination and emptiness contributes to the cultivation of wisdom and non-attachment. The study therefore supports the conclusion that, in the MMK, philosophical analysis and liberative practice are not separate enterprises: insight into dependent and empty phenomena constitutes part of the transformation of view required for liberation.

New Knowledge from the Research

This study contributes new knowledge by synthesizing dependent origination, causal conditions, emptiness, and non-arising as an integrated interpretive sequence within the MMK. Rather than treating dependent origination as only a causal doctrine and emptiness as a separate metaphysical claim, the study shows how analysis of conditionality functions as the argumentative basis for the denial of inherent existence and, consequently, for the Madhyamaka understanding of emptiness (Garfield, 1995; Westerhoff, 2009).

A second contribution is the clarification that dependent origination and emptiness operate at different but inseparable explanatory levels: dependent origination accounts for the conventional functioning of phenomena, while emptiness identifies their lack of intrinsic nature. This relationship avoids both substantialism and nihilism and provides a coherent interpretation of the Middle Way (MMK 24.18; Garfield, 1995).

A third contribution concerns non-arising (anutpāda). The study interprets non-arising not as the denial of conventional appearance but as the denial that phenomena arise through an independent essence. This interpretation connects causal analysis with the transformation of view: insight into dependent and empty phenomena weakens reification and supports wisdom, non-attachment, and liberative practice.

Taken together, these findings provide a four-part analytical framework: *causal conditions → dependent origination → absence of inherent existence → emptiness/non-arising.* This framework clarifies how Nāgārjuna's analysis of causality functions simultaneously as philosophical critique and as a basis for Buddhist wisdom.

Conclusion

This research aimed to examine the concept of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MMK) and to clarify its philosophical relationship with causal conditions (*pratyaya*), emptiness (*śūnyatā*), and non-arising (*anutpāda*). Through textual, historical, and comparative analysis, this study investigated how *Nāgārjuna*'s interpretation of dependent origination contributes to the understanding of Madhyamaka philosophy and the Middle Way.

Regarding the first objective, this research examined the concept of dependent origination in the MMK. The findings demonstrate that *Nāgārjuna* does not interpret dependent origination merely as a process of causal production, but as a philosophical method for revealing the lack of inherent existence (*niḥsvabhāva*) of all phenomena. Dependent origination therefore provides a fundamental framework for understanding the conditioned and relational nature of reality.

Regarding the second objective, this research analyzed the relationship between dependent origination, causal conditions, and emptiness. The findings show that dependent origination and emptiness are inseparable aspects of *Madhyamaka* philosophy. Since all phenomena arise through causes and conditions, they cannot possess independent and permanent existence. Therefore, emptiness is not a rejection of phenomena but the deeper understanding of their dependent nature.

Regarding the third objective, this research compared the concepts of dependent origination and emptiness in the MMK. The findings reveal that these two concepts together establish *Nāgārjuna*'s Middle Way by avoiding the extremes of eternalism and nihilism. Understanding the dependent and empty nature of phenomena provides the foundation for realizing non-arising (*anutpāda*), cultivating wisdom, and progressing toward liberation.

In conclusion, the study clarifies the interconnected relationship among dependent origination, causal conditions, emptiness, and non-arising in Nāgārjuna's MMK. It argues that dependent origination is not merely a doctrine of causal succession but a Madhyamaka method for exposing the absence of inherent existence. Emptiness, accordingly, does not negate conventional phenomena but expresses their dependent mode of existence. This integrated interpretation illuminates the Middle Way and demonstrates how philosophical analysis can support the cultivation of wisdom and liberation.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although this research provides an analysis of dependent origination, causal conditions, and emptiness in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MMK), further studies may expand and deepen this investigation from broader historical, comparative, and interdisciplinary perspectives.

First, the scope of the study may be extended beyond *Mahāyāna Madhyamaka* interpretations. Since this research mainly focuses on Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan *Mahāyāna* sources, future research may further compare the understanding of dependent origination among *Theravāda*, *Mahāyāna*, and *Vajrayāna* traditions. Such comparative studies may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the development and transformation of Buddhist theories of causality and conditionality.

Second, future research may expand the range of primary and secondary sources. In addition to Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan Buddhist texts, further studies may include Pāli canonical materials, commentarial literature, and contemporary academic research. A broader range of sources may contribute to a more complete understanding of the historical development of dependent origination and emptiness across Buddhist traditions.

Third, future research may apply additional research methods beyond textual analysis. While philosophical and textual approaches are essential for Buddhist studies, interdisciplinary methods such as interviews with Buddhist practitioners and scholars, surveys, or comparative studies with contemporary philosophical and scientific perspectives may provide additional insights into the interpretation and practical significance of dependent origination.

Possible future research topics include:

A comparative study of dependent origination and causal conditions (*pratyaya*) among *Theravāda*, *Mahāyāna*, and *Vajrayāna* Buddhist traditions.

A comparative investigation of Buddhist philosophical explanations of causality and contemporary scientific interpretations of causal relationships.

Further studies on related *Madhyamaka* concepts, including *nirvāṇa*, the Four Noble Truths, the Middle Way, selflessness (*anātman*), emptiness (*śūnyatā*), and dependent origination.

Through these future investigations, further research may continue to deepen the academic understanding of Buddhist philosophy while exploring the relationship between theoretical analysis and Buddhist practice.

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Kumārajīva's Buddhist Translation and Its Impact on Chinese Buddhism

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Abstract

This study examines (1) the linguistic and terminological contributions of Kumārajīva's Buddhist translations, (2) their influence on major Chinese Buddhist schools, and (3) their role in the cultural adaptation of Mahāyāna Buddhism within the Chinese intellectual context. Using qualitative historical, textual, and comparative analysis, the study focuses on selected translations associated with Kumārajīva, including the Diamond Sūtra, the Lotus Sūtra, the Amitābha Sūtra, and Madhyamaka-related texts, together with relevant historical and modern scholarship.

The findings indicate that Kumārajīva's translation activities significantly shaped the linguistic, doctrinal, and cultural development of Chinese Buddhism. His meaning-oriented approach emphasized readability, conceptual intelligibility, and doctrinal coherence, contributing to the stabilization of Chinese Buddhist terminology and to the reception of Mahāyāna thought. His translations became important textual resources for the later development of Tiantai, Sanlun, Chan, and Pure Land traditions. The study further proposes a Four-Layered Translation Model comprising textual fidelity, linguistic naturalization, doctrinal clarification, and cultural adaptation. The model conceptualizes Buddhist translation as a process that mediates not only between languages but also between philosophical systems and religious cultures.

This study further proposes a "Four-Layered Translation Model" integrating textual fidelity, cultural adaptation, linguistic naturalization, and doctrinal clarification, providing a transferable analytical framework for cross-cultural religious translation studies. This research contributes to Buddhist translation studies and the intellectual history of Chinese Buddhism.

Keywords: Kumārajīva; Buddhist translation; Chinese Buddhism;Cultural adaptation; Mahāyāna Buddhism

Introduction

The transmission of Buddhism to China from the first centuries of the Common Era was accompanied by a sustained translation movement in which Indian and Central Asian Buddhist texts were rendered into Chinese. Translation was therefore not a secondary activity but a central mechanism through which Buddhist doctrines, practices, and textual traditions entered the Chinese intellectual world (Zürcher, 2007). Among the major translators, Kumārajīva (ca. 344–413 CE) occupies a particularly important position because his translations combined doctrinal learning, literary fluency, and collaborative translation practice, and many of his versions became enduring classics of East Asian Buddhism.

Before Kumārajīva, translators such as Lokakṣema (支婁迦讖) and An Shigao (安世高) worked under difficult linguistic and conceptual conditions, and early Chinese Buddhist translations often retained foreign syntax, transliteration, or terminology that was not yet standardized (Boucher, 1996; Nattier, 2008; Zürcher, 2007). Kumārajīva's translation activity marked an important development toward more idiomatic Chinese and greater conceptual clarity. His work contributed to the stabilization of Buddhist vocabulary and helped make Mahāyāna scriptures more intelligible within Chinese literary and philosophical culture (Jin, 2003; Yu Wanju, 1999).

Although Kumārajīva's historical importance is widely recognized, scholarship has often examined his translation practice, individual texts, or later doctrinal developments separately. Less attention has been given to the relationship among linguistic naturalization, doctrinal transmission, the formation of Chinese Buddhist schools, and broader cultural adaptation as interconnected outcomes of his translation enterprise. The present study addresses this gap by examining Kumārajīva's translation activity across linguistic, doctrinal, institutional, and cultural dimensions (McRae, 2003; Nattier, 2008; Zürcher, 2007).

1. How did Kumārajīva's translation approach contribute to linguistic naturalization and the stabilization of Buddhist terminology in Chinese?
2. How did his translations contribute to the doctrinal development of major Chinese Buddhist schools, particularly Tiantai, Sanlun, and Pure Land Buddhism?
3. How did his translation practices facilitate the cultural adaptation of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism in China?

By addressing these questions, the study seeks to clarify the relationship between translation practice, doctrinal formation, and cross-cultural religious transmission.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze Kumārajīva's translation approach and its contribution to the readability, linguistic naturalization, and conceptual clarity of Buddhist texts.
2. To examine the doctrinal influence of his translations on major Chinese Buddhist schools, particularly Tiantai, Sanlun, and Pure Land Buddhism.
3. To analyze how Kumārajīva's translations contributed to the cultural adaptation of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism in China.

Literature Review

Buddhist Translation in China: Historical Context

The translation of Buddhist scriptures played a decisive role in the development of Buddhism in China, shaping religious vocabulary, philosophical discourse, and textual culture (Zürcher, 2007). Early translators such as Lokakṣema and An Shigao worked before a stable Chinese Buddhist lexicon had emerged, and their translations frequently relied on transliteration and syntactic patterns that reflected the source languages (Boucher, 1996; Nattier, 2008). Kumārajīva's translation bureau represented a major development in this process. His translations generally favored idiomatic expression and intelligibility while preserving doctrinal meaning, and they became influential models of Chinese Buddhist literary style (Jin, 2003; Zürcher, 2007).

Kumārajīva's Translation Methodology and Linguistic Impact

Scholarship commonly emphasizes three interrelated features of Kumārajīva's translation practice: attention to semantic intelligibility, fluent literary expression, and the stabilization of Buddhist terminology. These characteristics should not be understood as a simple rejection of transliteration in favor of free translation. Rather, his translations employed different strategies according to doctrinal, linguistic, and rhetorical needs (Boucher, 1996; Nattier, 2008).

1. *Semantic and Conceptual Clarity*

Kumārajīva's translations often sought Chinese expressions capable of conveying Buddhist concepts intelligibly without reducing them to pre-existing Chinese philosophical categories. At the same time, important Indic technical

terms could be retained through established transliterations when this better protected doctrinal specificity. His contribution therefore lies less in replacing transliteration wholesale than in developing a more stable and context-sensitive Buddhist vocabulary (Boucher, 1996; Nattier, 2008).

2. *Literary Fluency and Recitability*

Kumārajīva's Chinese versions are also noted for their literary economy and rhythmic fluency. Texts such as the *Diamond Sūtra* became highly influential not only because of their doctrinal content but also because their phrasing was memorable and suitable for recitation, commentary, and liturgical use (Boucher, 1996; McRae, 2003).

3. *Stabilization of Buddhist Terminology*

Kumārajīva's corpus helped stabilize Chinese expressions for Mahāyāna concepts such as emptiness, skillful means, the bodhisattva path, and the One Vehicle. These terminological patterns became important resources for later exegetical traditions and contributed to the formation of distinctively Chinese systems of Buddhist thought (Jin, 2003; Wu, 2015; Zürcher, 2007).

Influence on Chinese Buddhist Schools

Kumārajīva's translations supplied key scriptural and scholastic resources for several later Chinese Buddhist schools. His Lotus Sūtra became central to Tiantai exegesis, his translations of Madhyamaka treatises were foundational for Sanlun, and his version of the Amitābha Sūtra became an important Pure Land scripture. The relationship is best understood as one of textual and doctrinal influence rather than as direct institutional founding by Kumārajīva himself (Lai, 2019; Sharf, 2002; Wu, 2015).

Table 1. Kumārajīva's Translations and Their Influence on Chinese Buddhist Schools

Translated Text	Associated School	Doctrinal Reception
Lotus Sūtra <法華經>	Tiantai Buddhism (天台宗)	One Vehicle and later Threefold Truth exegesis
Madhyamakaśāstra / Zhonglun <中論>	Sanlun Buddhism (三論宗)	Madhyamaka analysis of emptiness
Amitābha Sūtra <阿彌陀經>	Pure Land Buddhism (淨土宗)	Amitābha devotion and rebirth aspiration

His conceptual clarity and doctrinal precision enabled Buddhist schools to develop sophisticated philosophical frameworks, such as Zhiyi's Tiantai Threefold Truth (三谛圆融) doctrine (Wu, 2015).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework links Kumārajīva's translation practice with three principal outcomes: linguistic naturalization and terminological stabilization, doctrinal transmission and school formation, and cultural adaptation. It draws heuristically on translation studies concerned with meaning, readability, and cultural mediation, while remaining grounded in the historical study of Chinese Buddhism (Nida, 1964; Venuti, 1995; Zürcher, 2007). The framework treats translation as an interpretive process through which Buddhist texts were linguistically reformulated, doctrinally clarified, and embedded within a new intellectual environment.

Table 2. Conceptual Framework: Analytical Dimensions and Relationships

Analytical Input	Research Process	Interpretive Outcome
Kumārajīva's historical and intellectual context	Historical and biographical analysis	Context for translation activity
Translation strategies and terminology	Comparative textual analysis	Linguistic naturalization and conceptual clarity
Reception in Chinese Buddhist traditions	Historical and doctrinal analysis	Doctrinal and institutional influence
Cross-cultural transmission	Linguistic and cultural interpretation	Adaptation of Mahāyāna thought in China

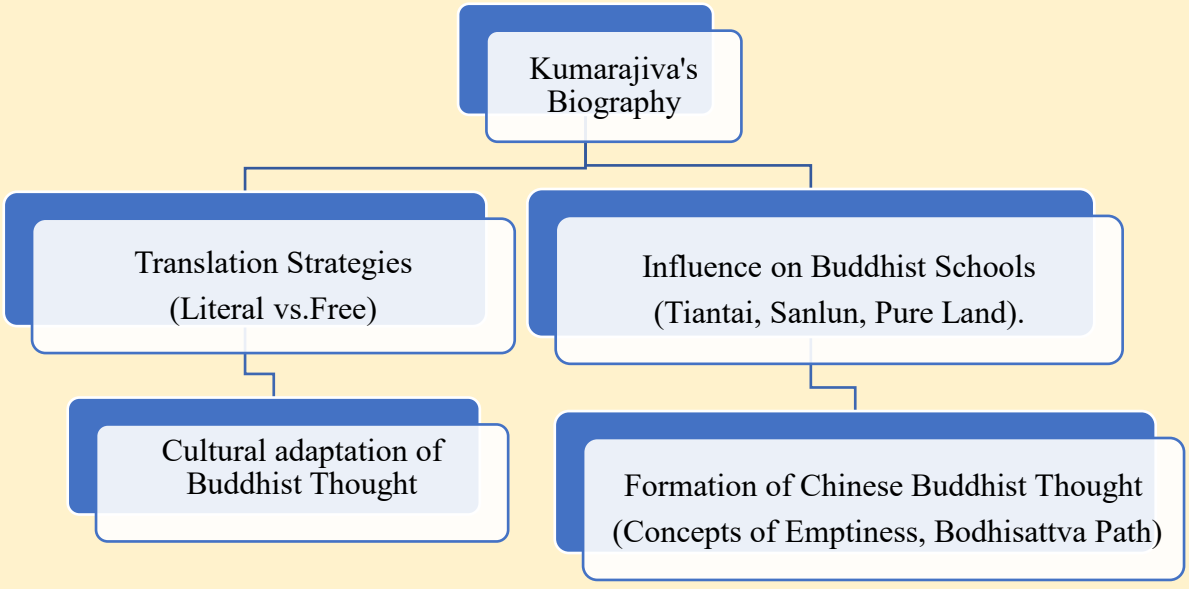

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for the Study of Kumārajīva

Research Methodology

This study employed qualitative historical, textual, and comparative analysis. Primary materials consisted of selected Chinese Buddhist translations associated with Kumārajīva, especially the Diamond Sūtra, Lotus Sūtra, Amitābha Sūtra, and Madhyamaka-related texts. Secondary materials included scholarly studies of Chinese Buddhist history, translation practice, doctrinal development, and cross-cultural transmission. The analysis proceeded in three stages corresponding to the research objectives: (1) examination of translation strategies and terminology; (2) analysis of the reception and doctrinal use of Kumārajīva's translations in Tiantai, Sanlun, and Pure Land traditions; and (3) interpretation of their role in the cultural adaptation of Mahāyāna Buddhism in China. Evidence was synthesized thematically rather than statistically; the study does not claim quantitative measurement of historical influence.

Research Results

Objective 1: Linguistic and Terminological Contributions

(1) Stabilization of Buddhist Terminology

The analysis indicates that Kumārajīva's translations contributed substantially to the stabilization of Mahāyāna Buddhist terminology and to the development of a more readable Chinese Buddhist literary style. His importance lies not in consistently choosing semantic translation over transliteration, but in using flexible strategies that balanced doctrinal precision withintelligibility (Boucher, 1996; Nattier, 2008).

Table 3. Selected Translation Terms and Later Reception

Indic Buddhist Term	Representative Chinese Expression	Later Reception
Prajñā (प्रज्ञा)	般若 (bōrě; transliteration)	Established Mahāyāna technical vocabulary
Śūnyatā (शून्यता)	空 (kōng; emptiness)	Central to Chinese Madhyamaka and related traditions

Compared with many earlier translations, Kumārajīva's versions often display greater literary fluency and conceptual coherence. The enduring reception of passages from texts such as the Diamond Sūtra illustrates how concise Chinese phrasing could support doctrinal interpretation, memorization, and later Chan reflection (McRae, 2003).

A well-known passage is rendered in Chinese as "應無所住而生其心," a formulation that later became influential in discussions of non-attachment.

Objective 2: Doctrinal Influence on Chinese Buddhist Schools

Kumārajīva's translations became doctrinal cornerstones for multiple Buddhist schools:

Table 4. Selected Translations and Their Doctrinal Reception

Translated Text	Associated School	Doctrinal Reception
Lotus Sūtra <法華經>	Tiantai Buddhism (天台宗)	One Vehicle; later Tiantai doctrinal synthesis
Madhyamakaśāstra / Zhonglun <中論>	Sanlun Buddhism (三論宗)	Madhyamaka analysis of emptiness
Amitābha Sūtra <阿彌陀經>	Pure Land Buddhism (淨土宗)	Amitābha devotion and rebirth aspiration

Kumārajīva's translations provided authoritative textual resources for later Chinese exegetes. His Lotus Sūtra was central to Tiantai interpretation, while his Madhyamaka translations informed Sanlun thought and the work of Jizang (Lai, 2019; Wu, 2015). His Amitābha Sūtra also became an important scriptural source for Pure Land devotion (Sharf, 2002).

Objective 3: Cultural Adaptation of Mahāyāna Buddhism

The findings further suggest that Kumārajīva's translation enterprise facilitated the cultural adaptation of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism by expressing Buddhist concepts in forms that could be read, debated, and incorporated within Chinese intellectual culture. This process should not be described as a simple merger of Buddhism with Daoism or Confucianism. Rather, translation created a new Chinese Buddhist vocabulary through which Indian doctrines could be interpreted in dialogue with existing Chinese categories while retaining distinctive Buddhist meanings (Yu Wanju, 1999; Zürcher, 2007).

Table 5. Selected Conceptual Encounters in Chinese Buddhist Adaptation

Buddhist Concept	Chinese Intellectual Context	Interpretive Significance
空 (śūnyatā; emptiness)	Discourse on 無 (wú; non-being)	Similar vocabulary facilitated discussion, but the concepts should not be treated as doctrinal equivalents.
無住 (non-abiding / non-attachment)	Chinese discussions of non-grasping and naturalness	Provided an interpretive bridge while retaining a distinct Buddhist soteriological context.

The linguistic and doctrinal findings indicate that cultural adaptation occurred through selective translation, interpretation, commentary, and

institutional reception rather than through straightforward conceptual equivalence.

Discussion

Translation Strategy and Linguistic Mediation

The first finding concerns Kumārajīva's translation strategy. His work is often characterized as meaning-oriented or "free" translation because it prioritizes intelligibility and idiomatic Chinese more strongly than many earlier translations. Modern concepts such as Nida's (1964) dynamic equivalence can illuminate this emphasis heuristically, but they should not be projected onto Kumārajīva as if he consciously followed a modern translation theory. His historical contribution is better understood as a flexible practice of semantic mediation shaped by collaborative translation, doctrinal expertise, and the literary possibilities of Chinese (Boucher, 1996; Nattier, 2008; Zürcher, 2007).

Table 6. Comparison of Translation Approaches

Translator	General Translation Tendency	Historical Significance
Lokakṣema (支婁迦讖)	Strong source-language influence and extensive transliteration	Early formation of Chinese Mahāyāna vocabulary
Kumārajīva (鳩摩羅什)	Meaning-oriented, idiomatic, and collaborative translation	Literary readability and doctrinal intelligibility
Xuanzang (玄奘)	Systematic technical terminology and closer philological control	Highly standardized scholastic vocabulary

This interpretation supports the conclusion that Kumārajīva's translations helped establish influential patterns of Chinese Buddhist vocabulary and literary style, while later translators such as Xuanzang developed different priorities concerning technical precision and terminological consistency.

Doctrinal and Institutional Influence

The second finding concerns the long-term doctrinal reception of Kumārajīva's translations. His Lotus Sūtra became a principal textual foundation for Tiantai Buddhism, and his translations of Madhyamaka treatises provided central sources for the Sanlun tradition (Lai, 2019; Wu, 2015). His Amitābha Sūtra also became deeply embedded in Pure Land textual and ritual culture

(Sharf, 2002). These relationships demonstrate substantial influence, but they should not be overstated as direct institutional causation: the schools emerged through later processes of commentary, classification, ritual practice, and community formation.

Table 7. Doctrinal Reception of Selected Kumārajīva Translations

Translated Text	Associated School	Key Doctrinal Reception
Lotus Sūtra <法華經>	Tiantai Buddhism (天台宗)	One Vehicle and Tiantai doctrinal synthesis
Madhyamakaśāstra / Zhonglun <中論>	Sanlun Buddhism (三論宗)	Madhyamaka analysis of emptiness
Amitābha Sūtra <阿彌陀經>	Pure Land Buddhism (淨土宗)	Amitābha devotion and rebirth aspiration

Cross-Cultural Adaptation and Contemporary Relevance

The third finding concerns cultural adaptation. Kumārajīva's translations demonstrate that successful religious translation involves more than lexical substitution: it requires negotiation among source-text meaning, target-language readability, doctrinal interpretation, and cultural intelligibility. Venuti's (1995) account of translation as culturally situated mediation helps illuminate this dimension, although Kumārajīva's historical setting differs fundamentally from modern translation contexts. The study therefore treats his translation practice as a historical case of cross-cultural intellectual formation rather than as a direct precursor of contemporary machine translation.

Its contemporary relevance lies primarily in the methodological lesson that religious translation must preserve doctrinal distinctions while producing language that is intelligible within a different cultural and conceptual environment.

New Knowledge from the Research

This study contributes new knowledge by conceptualizing Kumārajīva's translation enterprise not merely as the transmission of Buddhist texts from Sanskrit into Chinese, but as a *multilayered process of intellectual formation and cultural transformation.* The findings indicate that the enduring influence of his translations emerged from the interaction of two major contributions: the establishment of a more coherent Buddhist terminology and translation

methodology, and the formative influence of his translated texts on major Chinese Buddhist traditions.

The first contribution concerns the *standardization and naturalization of Buddhist language in Chinese.* Kumārajīva's meaning-oriented approach moved beyond rigid word-for-word correspondence and sought to preserve doctrinal meaning while producing Chinese expressions that were intelligible, readable, and suitable for religious interpretation. This approach helped stabilize important Mahāyāna concepts and provided later Chinese Buddhist thinkers with a more consistent conceptual vocabulary for doctrinal analysis and interpretation (Boucher, 1996; Zürcher, 2007). His significance therefore lies not simply in linguistic elegance, but in creating a conceptual environment within which Buddhist philosophy could be systematically understood and developed in China.

The second contribution concerns the *doctrinal and institutional influence of translated texts.* Kumārajīva's translations became important textual foundations for later Chinese Buddhist traditions. His translation of the *Lotus Sūtra* contributed to the doctrinal development of Tiantai Buddhism, while his Madhyamaka translations were fundamental to the formation of Sanlun thought. His translation activities also influenced the broader development of Pure Land and later Chinese Buddhist discourse (McRae, 2003; Wu, 2015; Lai, 2019). These influences demonstrate that translation functioned not merely as textual reproduction but as an enabling condition for doctrinal systematization and sectarian development.

Based on these findings, the study proposes the *Four-Layered Translation Model* as its principal theoretical contribution. The model consists of four interconnected dimensions: *Textual Fidelity, Linguistic Naturalization, Doctrinal Clarification, and Cultural Adaptation*. Textual Fidelity concerns preserving the doctrinal integrity of the source tradition. Linguistic Naturalization refers to expressing Buddhist ideas in forms understandable within Chinese linguistic conventions. Doctrinal Clarification involves rendering concepts with sufficient precision to support interpretation and systematic Buddhist thought. Cultural Adaptation refers to the broader process through which translated Buddhism became intelligible and meaningful within Chinese intellectual and religious contexts.

As illustrated in *Figure 2,* these four dimensions should not be understood as isolated stages but as mutually reinforcing functions of translation. Their

interaction explains how Kumārajīva's translations could simultaneously remain connected to Indian Mahāyāna sources while becoming influential components of Chinese Buddhist thought.

The principal new insight of this research is therefore that *translation can function as intellectual infrastructure*. Kumārajīva's work demonstrates how textual translation may shape terminology, doctrinal interpretation, institutional development, and cross-cultural religious transmission. The integrated framework thus provides a useful analytical model not only for understanding Kumārajīva's historical contribution but also for comparative research on Buddhist translation and cross-cultural religious adaptation.

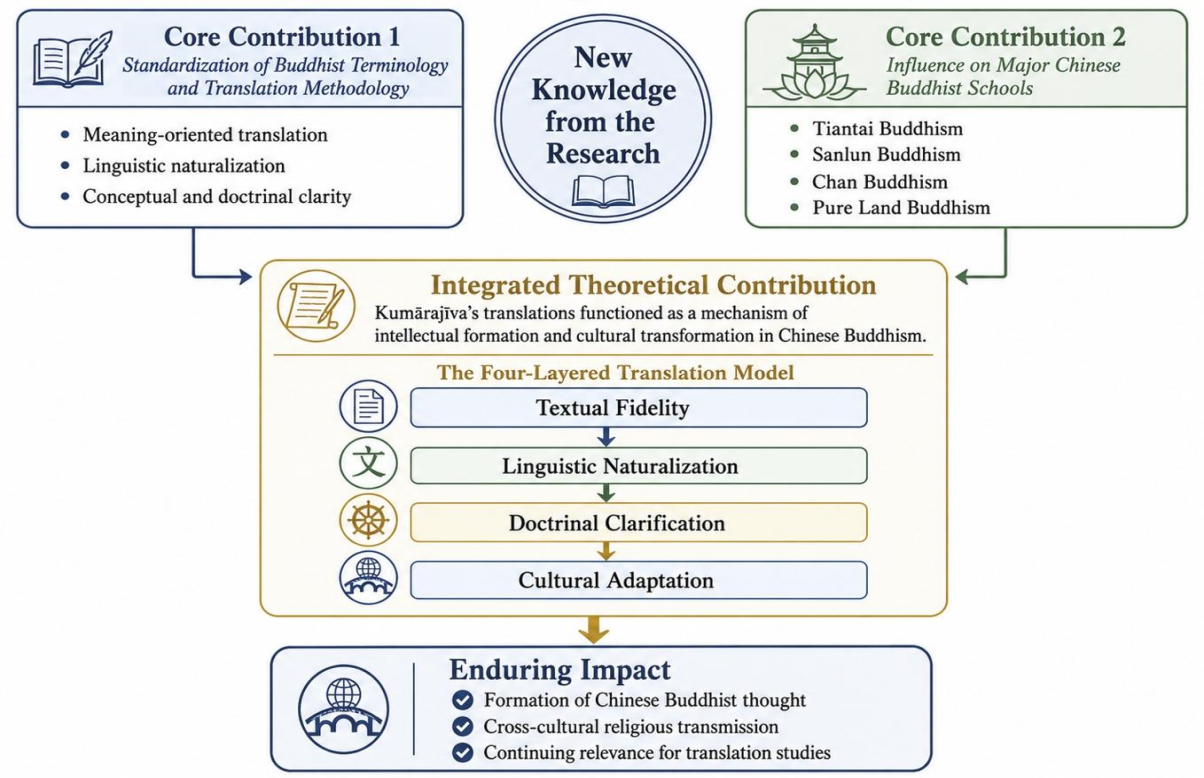

Figure 2. Integrated New Knowledge Framework of Kumārajīva's Translations

Conclusion

This study examined Kumārajīva's translation approach, the doctrinal reception of his translations, and their role in the cultural adaptation of Mahāyāna Buddhism in China. The findings indicate that his historical importance derives from the interaction of linguistic naturalization, doctrinal intelligibility, and sustained reception. His translations helped stabilize influential forms of Chinese

Buddhist vocabulary and provided major textual resources for later Tiantai, Sanlun, Chan, and Pure Land traditions.

Kumārajīva's approach should not be reduced to a simple opposition between "free" and "literal" translation. His corpus reflects flexible choices shaped by textual genre, doctrinal requirements, and Chinese literary usage. This flexibility contributed to the readability and long-term authority of many of his translations (Boucher, 1996; Nattier, 2008; Zürcher, 2007).

The study also finds that Kumārajīva's influence on Chinese Buddhist schools was mediated through later interpretation. His translations did not themselves create Tiantai, Sanlun, Chan, or Pure Land institutions, but they furnished texts and concepts that subsequent teachers used to construct doctrinal systems and practices (Lai, 2019; McRae, 2003; Sharf, 2002; Wu, 2015).

Finally, Kumārajīva's translations illustrate the central role of cultural mediation in religious transmission. Their significance lies in making Indian Buddhist thought intelligible in Chinese while preserving enough doctrinal distinctiveness to support new forms of Buddhist philosophy and practice. The proposed Four-Layered Translation Model summarizes this process through textual fidelity, linguistic naturalization, doctrinal clarification, and cultural adaptation.

The model may also provide a useful comparative framework for future studies of religious translation, provided that historical translation practices are not uncritically equated with contemporary computational or AI-assisted translation systems.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should deepen the historical and comparative study of Kumārajīva's translation practice while testing the explanatory value of the Four-Layered Translation Model across other Buddhist translation contexts.

1. Compare Kumārajīva with later translators

Comparative studies of Kumārajīva, Xuanzang, and Yijing could clarify how Chinese Buddhist translation strategies changed across historical periods, particularly in the balance among readability, transliteration, technical precision, and doctrinal interpretation.

2. Examine implications for digital and AI-assisted translation

Research on AI-assisted religious translation could investigate whether historically informed principles such as contextual interpretation, terminological consistency, and doctrinal sensitivity can improve machine-assisted workflows. Such studies should distinguish carefully between human historical translation practice and computational language modeling.

3. Study the reception of Kumārajīva's translations across East Asia

Future studies could compare the reception of Kumārajīva's translations in China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, examining how the same Chinese texts were interpreted within different doctrinal, institutional, and ritual settings.

These directions would provide a more historically grounded account of Kumārajīva's long-term influence while also clarifying the broader relationship between translation, doctrinal development, and cultural transformation.

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Online Dhamma for Enhancing Psychological Well-Being among Multicultural Practitioners in London, UK.

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Abstract

This mixed-methods study examined the use of online Dhamma practice to enhance psychological well-being among multicultural practitioners in London, United Kingdom. The study had three objectives: (1) to explore participants' current psychological well-being and major life challenges; (2) to develop and implement a four-week online Mindfulness, Wisdom, and Loving-kindness (MWL) program; and (3) to evaluate changes in psychological well-being after participation. Thirty multicultural Dhamma practitioners participated in the three-phase study. Qualitative data were obtained through in-depth interviews, focus-group discussions, action-research observations, and follow-up interviews, while quantitative data were collected using a 10-item Mental Health Well-being Questionnaire adapted from the Thai Mental Well-being Scale (Pimthong et al., 2022). Phase 1 identified fluctuating well-being, work–life imbalance, relationship and family difficulties, health concerns, cultural-inclusivity needs, and differing levels of community support and engagement. Following the intervention, the paired total score increased from M = 37.90 (SD = 3.33) to M = 62.47 (SD = 3.07), a mean increase of 24.57 points, $t(29) = 45.89$, $p < .001$, with a calculated 95% CI for the mean difference of [23.47, 25.66]. Item-level effects were consistently large (Cohen's d = 1.56–1.61; Cliff's delta = 0.84–0.93). Follow-up interviews indicated six principal experiential themes: enhanced mental clarity, increased calm and emotional stability, deeper understanding of impermanence, strengthened compassion, reconnection with purpose and values, and greater gratitude. The convergence of quantitative and qualitative findings suggests that the culturally responsive online Dhamma program was associated with substantial short-term improvements in psychological well-being.

Keywords: Online Dhamma; Psychological well-being; Mindfulness; Loving-kindness meditation; Multicultural practitioners; Digital religion; Buddhist practice

Introduction

The growing cultural and religious diversity in Western nations presents both opportunities and challenges for promoting mental health and well-being. In London, one of the world's most ethnically and religiously diverse cities (Office for National Statistics, 2018), many people from various cultural backgrounds are turning to online resources to engage with teachings and practices from their spiritual traditions. Buddhism, particularly the Theravada tradition with its emphasis on Dhamma (the teachings of the Buddha), has increasingly been disseminated online, reaching a global audience (Tarocco, 2017).

Dhamma teachings aimed at laypeople often focus on the development of mindfulness - purposeful, present-focused attention with an accepting, nonjudgmental attitude (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) have been shown to have significant positive impacts on psychological health and quality of life in clinical and non-clinical adult populations (Khoury et al., 2013; Grossman et al., 2004). Despite the growing popularity of online Dhamma teachings, there is limited research on their impact on practitioners' quality of life, particularly in multicultural contexts.

Most existing studies have focused on the general effects of religiosity and spirituality on well-being (Koenig, 2012), without considering the specific role of online engagement or the experiences of diverse cultural groups. Moreover, the few studies that have examined online Buddhist teachings have primarily focused on their doctrinal content or technological implementation (Grieve & Veidlinger, 2015; Prebish, 2004), rather than their impact on practitioners' lived experiences. This represents a significant research gap, as understanding how multicultural practitioners engage with and benefit from online Dhamma could provide valuable insights for developing more targeted and effective resources.

This research aims to address this gap by exploring how online Dhamma teachings influence quality of life and psychological well-being among multicultural practitioners in London. As a global city, London provides a relevant context for examining this question. Its substantial Buddhist population, estimated around 82,000 individuals (Bluck, 2006), likely includes many who rely on online resources to practice, especially given pandemic-related limits on in-person gatherings.

The study is guided by three primary research questions:

1. What is the current status in terms of Quality of Life in Psychological Well-being of Multicultural Practitioners in London, UK?
2. How can Dhamma Online develop the Quality of Life in Psychological Well-being of Multicultural Practitioners in London, UK?
3. How can the Quality of Life in Psychological Well-being of Multicultural Practitioners in London, UK be evaluated?

The findings of this research can contribute to a growing understanding of how online religious engagement impacts well-being, especially for underserved and under-researched populations. Insights from practitioners' lived experiences can inform the development of more inclusive and impactful online Dhamma resources. More broadly, investigating culturally relevant pathways to improving quality of life is vital for promoting mental health in increasingly diverse societies.

Literature Review

Research relevant to online Dhamma practice and psychological well-being can be organized around five interconnected areas: mindfulness and psychological well-being, Self-Determination Theory, cultural influences on practice, technology acceptance, and the Mindfulness, Wisdom, and Loving-kindness (MWL) approach. Together, these perspectives provide a multidisciplinary foundation for understanding how Buddhist contemplative practice may be adapted to an online and multicultural setting.

Mindfulness and Psychological Well-Being

Mindfulness is commonly understood as present-moment awareness characterized by openness, receptivity, and nonjudgmental attention (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). A substantial body of evidence associates mindfulness-based interventions with reductions in stress, anxiety, and depression and with improvements in emotional regulation, positive affect, and psychological well-being (Hofmann et al., 2010; Goyal et al., 2014; Schutte & Malouff, 2019). Meta-analytic research also suggests that mindfulness-based interventions can improve psychological health across both clinical and non-clinical populations (Khoury et al., 2013).

Several mechanisms may explain these effects. Mindfulness can strengthen awareness of automatic cognitive and emotional reactions, improve

attentional regulation, reduce reactivity, and enhance acceptance and coping capacity (Chambers et al., 2009; Gu et al., 2015). These mechanisms are relevant to online Dhamma practice because practices such as meditation, mindful movement, mindful listening, and reflective engagement with Buddhist teachings may provide opportunities for participants to observe and regulate difficult experiences more skillfully.

Self-Determination Theory and Online Engagement

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) offers a complementary perspective by explaining how environments can support or undermine three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Satisfaction of these needs is associated with intrinsic motivation, psychological development, and well-being, whereas persistent need frustration may contribute to poorer functioning (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013).

Applied to online Dhamma practice, autonomy may be supported through flexible participation and the ability to select when and how to engage with practices. Competence may develop through clear instructions, structured activities, and opportunities to apply teachings in daily life. Relatedness may be fostered through teacher–participant interaction, peer support, group practice, and an online spiritual community. SDT therefore helps explain why the quality of online delivery may influence not only participation but also psychological outcomes.

Cultural Responsiveness in Multicultural Practice

Culture influences how individuals interpret well-being, learning, religious practice, authority, and social relationships. Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions, particularly individualism–collectivism and power distance, provide one framework for understanding such differences. For example, practitioners from more individualistic backgrounds may value autonomy and self-directed practice, whereas those from more collectivistic traditions may place greater importance on shared practice, community belonging, and teacher guidance.

These considerations are especially important in a multicultural city such as London. Cultural identity may shape participants' familiarity with Buddhist ritual, expectations of teachers, interpretation of mindfulness, and willingness to participate in group activities. Research on culturally relevant

mindfulness interventions therefore recommends adapting language, examples, delivery methods, and contextual explanations rather than assuming that one form of practice is equally meaningful for all populations (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Modood, 2013; Proulx et al., 2018). Cultural responsiveness is consequently treated in this study as an enabling condition rather than an optional feature of online Dhamma practice.

Technology Acceptance and Digital Dhamma

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) explains technology use primarily through perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (Davis et al., 1989). These perceptions influence attitudes, behavioral intention, and continued engagement with digital systems (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). In online Dhamma practice, usefulness may relate to whether participants perceive the program as relevant to stress management, emotional well-being, spiritual development, or daily-life challenges, while ease of use concerns accessibility, navigation clarity, instructional simplicity, and convenience.

This perspective is particularly relevant because digital spiritual practice offers increased flexibility and accessibility but may also reduce direct interpersonal contact or create technical barriers. Research on online mindfulness interventions suggests that digital delivery can improve psychological well-being when programs are structured, accessible, and sufficiently engaging (Spijkerman et al., 2016). Thus, technological design should be understood as part of the intervention context rather than merely as a delivery channel.

Mindfulness, Wisdom, and Loving-Kindness (MWL)

The Mindfulness, Wisdom, and Loving-Kindness (MWL) approach integrates Buddhist contemplative practices with culturally responsive program design. Previous work by Jiwattanasuk et al. (2024a, 2024b) identified mindfulness activities that can support peaceful and psychological well-being among multicultural practitioners. These include mindful walking and sitting, mindful bowing, mindful eating, discussion of karma and family appreciation, loving-kindness meditation, asking for forgiveness, and mindful listening to Dhamma teachings.

The MWL approach is supported by evidence that mindfulness-based interventions can improve psychological well-being (Khoury et al., 2013), while

loving-kindness meditation may enhance positive emotions, compassion, and interpersonal connection (Galante et al., 2016; Zeng et al., 2015). Its emphasis on wisdom additionally introduces Buddhist concepts such as impermanence, non-attachment, and reflection on suffering as resources for cognitive reframing and meaning-making.

For the present study, the MWL approach was adapted to online delivery for multicultural practitioners. The literature suggests that such adaptation should integrate contemplative practice, psychological need satisfaction, cultural responsiveness, and technological accessibility. Accordingly, the study does not rely on a single theoretical model. Instead, it draws on these complementary perspectives to examine how online Dhamma practice may support psychological well-being through mindfulness, wisdom, loving-kindness, culturally sensitive participation, supportive social connection, and accessible digital delivery.

Synthesis and Research Gap

Existing research demonstrates the psychological benefits of mindfulness, the importance of loving-kindness and compassion, the role of autonomy and relatedness in sustained engagement, the influence of culture on learning and spiritual practice, and the significance of perceived usefulness and accessibility in digital environments. However, these strands of literature are usually examined separately. There remains limited empirical research integrating Buddhist Dhamma practice, multicultural responsiveness, and online delivery within a single well-being intervention.

The present study addresses this gap by developing and evaluating a four-week online MWL program among multicultural practitioners in London. It examines not only whether psychological well-being changes after participation but also how cultural responsiveness, online accessibility, community support, mindfulness, wisdom, and loving-kindness may contribute to participants' experiences and perceived benefits.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a sequential mixed-methods design conducted in three phases. Qualitative inquiry informed program development, and

quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods were then used to assess the intervention. This sequencing is appropriate when exploratory qualitative findings are used to shape a subsequent intervention and its evaluation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Phase 1: Exploring Current Status (Qualitative Research Design)

Phase 1 addressed the first research question by exploring psychological well-being and experiences of Dhamma practice among 30 multicultural practitioners in London selected through purposive sampling. Eligibility criteria were: (1) residence in London and engagement with Dhamma practice; (2) age 18 years or older; and (3) willingness to provide informed consent.

Semi-structured interviews explored participants' psychological well-being, experiences of Dhamma practice, and use of online Dhamma resources. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically following the recursive stages of familiarization, coding, theme development, theme review, definition, and reporting (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase 2: Developing the Intervention (Qualitative and Action Research Design)

Phase 2 addressed the second research question by developing and implementing an online Dhamma program designed to enhance the quality of life in psychological well-being of multicultural practitioners. This phase combined qualitative methods (focus group discussions) with action research.

A focus group comprising 30 multicultural practitioners was conducted to gather insights on essential components of Dhamma practice for improving quality of life, challenges in adapting Dhamma teachings for online delivery, and strategies for engaging and supporting multicultural practitioners in an online setting. The discussion guide was validated by a panel of experts in Dhamma practice, online learning, and mental health.

Based on Phase 1 findings, focus-group input, prior MWL research, and evidence on mindfulness and loving-kindness practices, a four-week online MWL program was developed (Jiwattanasuk et al., 2024a, 2024b; Khoury et al., 2013; Zeng et al., 2015). The program retained nine core activities while adapting instructions, pacing, participation options, and online interaction for a multicultural group. Thirty practitioners participated in weekly online sessions with guided home practice.

Phase 3: Evaluating the Intervention (Quantitative and Qualitative Research Design)

Phase 3 addressed the third research question by evaluating changes in psychological well-being following the four-week program. The evaluation combined quantitative pretest-posttest measurement with qualitative follow-up interviews, allowing changes in scores to be interpreted alongside participants' lived experiences.

Participants completed a 10-item Mental Health Well-being Questionnaire before and after the four-week program. The 10 items were selected from the Thai Mental Well-being Scale developed and validated by Pimthong et al. (2022). Each item was rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree), with higher scores indicating better psychological well-being and a possible total score of 10–70. In the present study, internal consistency was acceptable to excellent, with Cronbach's alpha of .84 at pretest and .92 at posttest. Semi-structured follow-up interviews were conducted with 15 participants to examine perceived changes, coping processes, and experiences of the online program.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic-analysis process: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) searching for candidate themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the analytic report.

Quantitative pretest and posttest data were summarized using means and standard deviations. Because normality tests indicated non-normality for several item distributions, both Wilcoxon signed-rank tests and paired-samples t tests were reported as robustness checks. Effect sizes were estimated using Cliff's delta and Cohen's d. For the article-level total-score analysis, the paired-sample summary reported in the dissertation appendix was used: pretest $M = 37.90$ ($SD = 3.33$), posttest $M = 62.47$ ($SD = 3.07$), mean difference = 24.57, $t(29) = 45.89$, $p < .001$. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference, calculated from the reported mean difference and paired t statistic, was 23.47 to 25.66.

Qualitative and quantitative findings were integrated at the interpretation stage by examining convergence, complementarity, and divergence across data sources (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The study received approval from the

Research Ethics Committee of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (Certification No. R. 921/2024; certified January 27, 2025; certificate expiration January 27, 2026). Participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained before data collection.

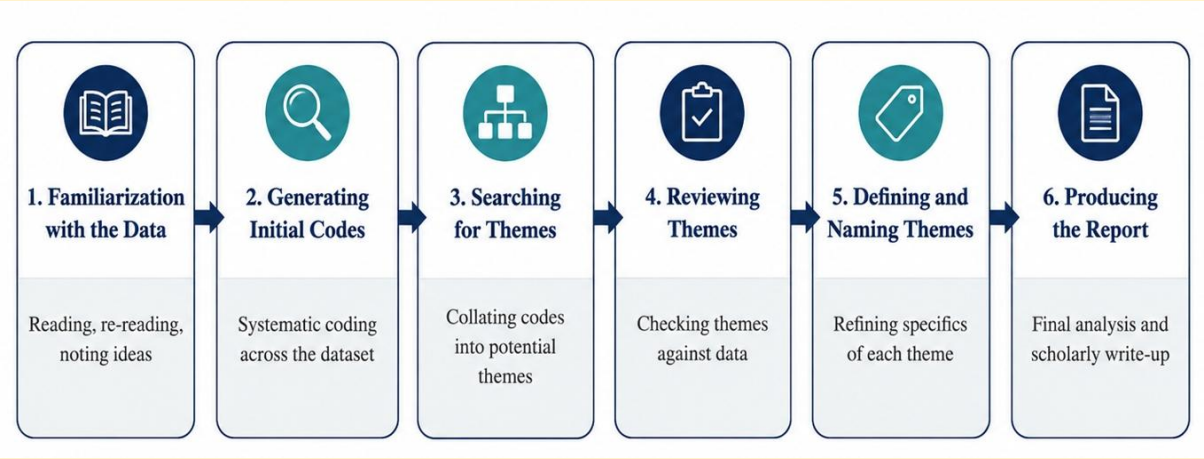

Figure 1. Six-Phase Thematic Analysis Process [Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006)].

Research Results

The results are presented according to the three research objectives. Phase 1 identified the principal psychological well-being challenges and supportive resources reported by 30 multicultural practitioners. Phase 2 translated these findings into a culturally responsive four-week online MWL program. Phase 3 evaluated the program through pretest–posttest measurement and follow-up qualitative interviews.

1. Current Status of Psychological Well-Being

The Phase 1 interviews showed that psychological well-being was dynamic rather than uniformly positive or negative. Eight interrelated themes were identified: fluctuating mental well-being; work–life balance challenges; relationship and family issues; health concerns; the perceived universal relevance of Dhamma teachings; a desire for greater cultural inclusivity; the positive influence of social support; and varied levels of community engagement. Financial and occupational pressures were especially salient among participants managing businesses or irregular schedules, while relationship disruption, caregiving responsibilities, and physical health problems contributed additional emotional strain. At the same time, participants described Dhamma teachings and

supportive spiritual relationships as resources for mindfulness, compassion, resilience, belonging, and coping.

Table 1. Phase 1 Themes and Illustrative Participant Evidence

Theme	Analytic Description	Illustrative Participant Evidence	Cultural/Online Context
Fluctuating mental well-being	Alternating periods of contentment and stress, worry, or sadness.	P1: "In general, I feel good… However… I do have moments of worry, especially when it comes to work, business, and finances."	Shows psychological well-being as dynamic and context-sensitive.
Work–life balance challenges	Demanding workloads, business uncertainty, irregular schedules, and difficulty balancing roles.	P8 described frequent international travel, changing time zones, disrupted sleep, and physical exhaustion.	Urban work patterns and transnational mobility shaped stress.
Relationship and family issues	Marital conflict, separation, breakup, and family responsibilities affected emotional security.	P22 described feeling "deeply upset and lost" after the breakup of an eight-year relationship.	Relational stress intersected with migration, work, and family roles.
Health concerns	Physical pain, health limitations, and caregiving responsibilities affected psychological well-being.	P6 reported persistent back pain affecting both work and personal life.	Highlights mind–body interaction and caregiving burden.
Universal relevance of Dhamma teachings	Participants viewed mindfulness, compassion, and resilience practices as applicable across cultural backgrounds.	Participants described Dhamma as providing practical tools for understanding suffering and managing difficult emotions.	Supports cross-cultural adaptability of core practices.
Desire for greater cultural inclusivity	Some participants requested more diverse representation and contextual explanation of practices.	Interview analysis identified a need to address specific cultural needs and perspectives more explicitly.	Supports culturally responsive program design rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

Theme	Analytic Description	Illustrative Participant Evidence	Cultural/Online Context
Positive influence of social support	Spiritual friendship and community belonging provided comfort, guidance, and motivation.	P17 described understanding, encouragement, and practical help from fellow practitioners as strengthening well-being.	Relatedness remained important even in digitally mediated practice.
Varied community engagement	Participants differed in how actively they joined community activities while still valuing available support.	Some reported active participation; others had limited direct involvement but valued knowing that teachings and practitioners were available.	Online programs need multiple pathways for participation and connection.

2. Development of the Online MWL Program

Phase 2 produced a four-week online Mindfulness, Wisdom, and Loving-kindness (MWL) program informed by Phase 1 inquiry, focus-group input, prior multicultural mindfulness work, and evidence supporting mindfulness and loving-kindness practices (Jiwattanasuk et al., 2024a, 2024b; Khoury et al., 2013; Zeng et al., 2015). The program incorporated nine activities: mindful walking and sitting, discussion of karma, mindful bowing, mindful eating, mindful walking with Dhamma songs, discussion of parent/family appreciation, loving-kindness meditation, asking for forgiveness, and mindful listening to Dhamma talks. For multicultural online delivery, the program emphasized clear instructions, flexible participation, respect for different levels of Buddhist familiarity, opportunities for group interaction, and accessible digital delivery. These design principles are consistent with research on cultural variation, psychological needs, and technology acceptance (Davis et al., 1989; Hofstede, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000).

3. Evaluation of Psychological Well-Being

The Phase 3 evaluation demonstrated substantial short-term improvement in psychological well-being after the four-week program. In the paired total-score analysis ($n = 30$), the mean increased from 37.90 ($SD = 3.33$) at pretest to 62.47 ($SD = 3.07$) at posttest. The mean difference was 24.57 points, $t(29) = 45.89$, $p < .001$, with a calculated 95% confidence interval of [23.47, 25.66]. Non-parametric analyses were consistent with the parametric findings: all ten questionnaire items increased significantly (Wilcoxon $p < .001$), and item-level Cliff's delta values ranged from 0.84 to 0.93. Reported Cohen's d values ranged

from 1.56 to 1.61, indicating large effects. The dissertation further summarized improvements in mental clarity and relaxation (77.1%), positive outlook (80.2%), social connection (74.8%), emotional resilience (80.1%), and self-expression (66.8%).

Table 2. Phase 3 Pretest–Posttest Summary

n	Pretest M	Pretest SD	Posttest M	Posttest SD	Mean Difference	t (df)	p	95% CI
30	37.90	3.33	62.47	3.07	24.57	45.89 (29)	< .001	23.47–25.66

***Note**. The 95% CI was calculated from the paired mean difference and t statistic reported in the dissertation appendix. Item-level effect sizes were Cohen's d = 1.56–1.61 and Cliff's delta = 0.84–0.93, all interpreted as large.*

Follow-up interviews with 15 participants provided an experiential account of the changes represented by the quantitative results. Six principal themes were identified: enhanced mental clarity and lightness; increased calm and emotional stability; deeper understanding of impermanence and the Three Characteristics; strengthened compassion; reconnection with purpose and values; and cultivation of gratitude and appreciation. Participants also described greater stress-management capacity, present-moment awareness, transformed perspectives on life challenges, stronger community belonging, and practical integration of Dhamma into daily life.

Table 3. Main Themes from Follow-up Interviews

Theme	Interpretation	Illustrative Evidence
Enhanced mental clarity and lightness	Participants described reduced mental burden, clearer thought processes, and greater ability to navigate daily challenges.	P8 described "a sense of clarity and calmness" and feeling as if "a weight has been lifted."
Increased calm and emotional stability	Participants reported reduced reactivity, greater emotional balance, and more resilient responses to stress.	P22 described the practices as an "anchor" during emotional turmoil after a breakup.
Deeper understanding of impermanence and the Three Characteristics	Participants connected anicca, dukkha, and anattā with reduced attachment and more flexible responses to difficulty.	P21 observed that "nothing lasts forever, and every situation has its conclusion."
Strengthened compassion	Participants reported greater kindness toward themselves and	P26 linked forgiveness practice with reflection on past actions

Theme	Interpretation	Illustrative Evidence
	others and improved relational responses.	and increased compassion for others.
Reconnection with purpose and values	Participants described renewed meaning, direction, and alignment of daily responsibilities with deeper values.	P28 described gaining "a new perspective on life" and a deeper understanding of existence.
Cultivation of gratitude and appreciation	Participants reported greater thankfulness, reverence, appreciation of relationships, and resilience amid difficulty.	P12 described mindful bowing and Dhamma songs as deepening reverence and gratitude.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the four-week Dhamma Online program was associated with substantial improvement in psychological well-being among multicultural practitioners in London. Quantitative results showed significant gains across all ten measured indicators ($p < .001$), with large effect sizes, while qualitative findings independently described greater mental clarity, emotional stability, coping ability, compassion, social connection, and sense of purpose. This convergence strengthens the interpretation that the intervention influenced multiple dimensions of well-being rather than a single psychological outcome.

These results are consistent with previous research showing that mindfulness-based interventions can reduce psychological distress and strengthen well-being (Khoury et al., 2013; Schutte & Malouff, 2019). Participants' reports of reduced reactivity and improved coping also align with mindfulness mechanisms involving attentional regulation, emotional awareness, and non-reactivity. Loving-kindness practices may further support positive affect, compassion, and interpersonal connection (Galante et al., 2016; Zeng et al., 2015).

The findings also support Self-Determination Theory, in which autonomy, competence, and relatedness contribute to well-being and sustained engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Flexibility in online participation may support autonomy; repeated practice and clear instruction may strengthen competence; while interaction with teachers and peers may foster relatedness. The importance participants placed on cultural responsiveness also reinforces recommendations that contemplative interventions be adapted to diverse cultural contexts (Proulx et al., 2018). Technology Acceptance Model principles are relevant because accessibility, perceived usefulness, and ease of participation appear to facilitate

continued engagement with online spiritual practice (Davis et al., 1989; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000).

Importantly, qualitative evidence helps explain processes that quantitative scores alone cannot reveal. Participants linked improvements to mindfulness, understanding impermanence, compassion, daily-life application, and community support. Nevertheless, because this study used a small non-randomized sample without a control group, the findings should be interpreted as promising evidence of short-term change rather than definitive causal proof.

New Knowledge from the Research

This study generates new knowledge by proposing the *Integrated Dhamma Online Well-being Framework*, which explains how online Buddhist practice may support psychological well-being among multicultural practitioners. The framework synthesizes the mixed-methods findings into five interconnected components: *Life Challenges, Dhamma Online Practices, Enabling Conditions, Transformative Mechanisms, and Well-being Outcomes.*

First, participants entered the program with diverse life challenges, including work–life pressure, financial stress, relationship and family difficulties, health concerns, and fluctuating mental well-being. These findings demonstrate that psychological well-being among multicultural practitioners is shaped by multiple personal, relational, occupational, and social conditions rather than by a single source of distress.

Second, the Dhamma Online program responded through structured practices including mindfulness, wisdom related to impermanence, loving-kindness, forgiveness, Dhamma talks, chanting, and mindful bowing. These practices were supported by important enabling conditions, accessibility and flexibility, cultural responsiveness, quality instruction, and a supportive online community, which helped make the program relevant across diverse cultural and religious backgrounds.

Third, the study identifies several *transformative mechanisms* through which these practices may operate: cognitive reframing, emotional regulation, compassionate behavior, social support, and spiritual meaning-making. The qualitative findings show that participants used concepts such as impermanence and non-attachment to reinterpret problems, mindfulness to regulate emotions,

compassion to improve relationships, and community participation to strengthen belonging.

These processes were associated with improved mental clarity, calmness, resilience, social connection, compassion, purpose, gratitude, and psychological well-being. Quantitative findings demonstrated significant improvements across all measured dimensions, while qualitative evidence explained how those changes were experienced in everyday life.

Thus, the principal contribution of the study is the proposition that *online Dhamma practice functions as an integrated pathway in which life challenges are addressed through Buddhist practices, strengthened by culturally responsive digital conditions, and translated through psychological, relational, and spiritual mechanisms into improved well-being.* Figure 1 summarizes this framework and highlights the importance of continuous practice and feedback in sustaining these processes.

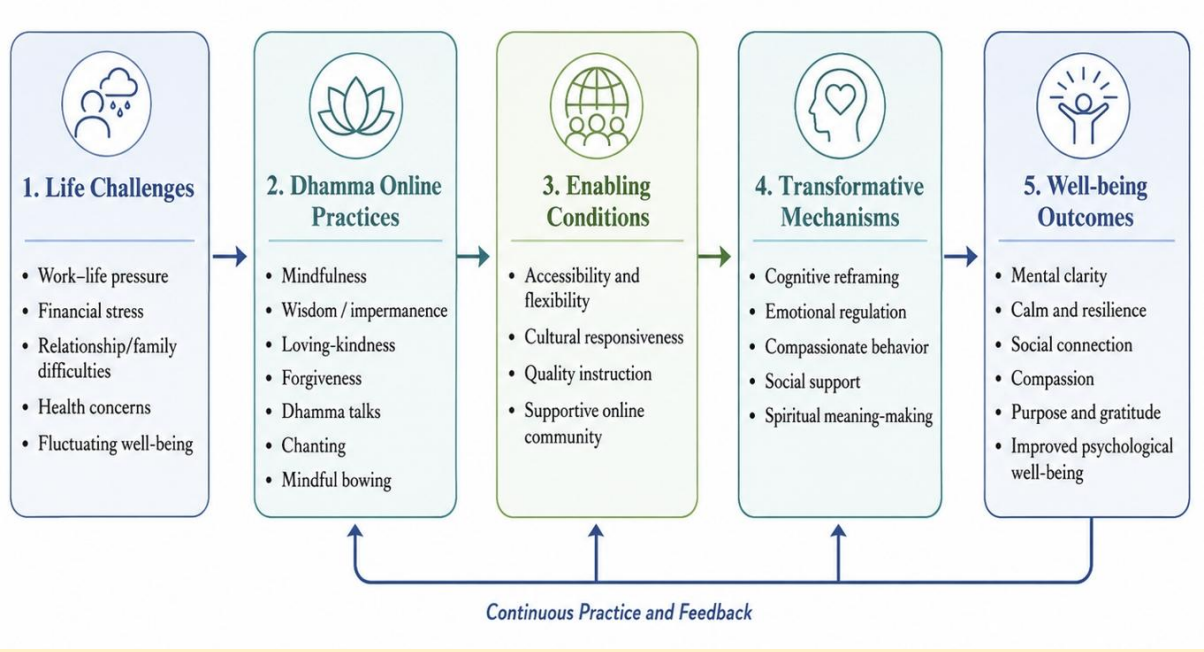

Figure 2. Integrated Dhamma Online Well-being Framework for Multicultural Practitioners

Conclusion

The study answered all three research questions. First, Phase 1 showed that multicultural practitioners in London experienced fluctuating psychological well-being shaped by work–life pressures, financial stress, relationship and family difficulties, health concerns, and differing levels of social support. Dhamma

teachings and spiritual community were simultaneously perceived as important coping resources, although participants also identified a need for greater cultural inclusivity. Second, these findings informed the development and implementation of a four-week online MWL program combining mindfulness, wisdom-oriented reflection, loving-kindness, Dhamma teaching, ritual practice, media, and community-oriented activities. Third, evaluation indicated substantial short-term improvement: the total well-being score increased from M = 37.90 (SD = 3.33) to M = 62.47 (SD = 3.07), mean difference = 24.57, $t(29) = 45.89$, $p < .001$, with large item-level effect sizes. Follow-up interviews converged with the quantitative results, identifying enhanced mental clarity, emotional stability, understanding of impermanence, compassion, purpose, and gratitude. The findings therefore support the feasibility and promise of culturally responsive online Dhamma practice for multicultural psychological well-being, while the uncontrolled design requires cautious interpretation of causal effectiveness.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should use larger and more diverse samples, report validated outcome measures clearly, include longer follow-up, and consider comparison conditions where feasible. Research should also examine how cultural background, prior Buddhist familiarity, digital literacy, and perceived usefulness or ease of use shape engagement with online Dhamma. Comparative studies of online, hybrid, and in-person delivery would further clarify which elements of digital practice support psychological well-being and which require embodied community or teacher contact.

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Navigating Higher Education and Monastic Life: Challenges Faced by Buddhist Nuns in Hue, Vietnam

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Abstract

This qualitative case study explored the experiences of Buddhist nuns pursuing higher education at secular universities in Hue, Vietnam. It addressed three objectives: (1) to identify the challenges they encounter, (2) to examine the coping strategies they use, and (3) to analyze how they balance academic responsibilities with religious practices and monastic obligations. Five Buddhist nuns enrolled in undergraduate programs were purposively selected. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and analyzed thematically.

The findings revealed four interrelated challenges: time constraints, financial difficulties, psychological and cultural pressures, and academic workload. Participants responded through strategic time management, Buddhist practices such as mindfulness, meditation, chanting, and reflection, and social and institutional support from temples, mentors, fellow nuns, classmates, lecturers, and universities. Balancing academic and monastic life involved both practical adjustment and psychological and spiritual integration. Participants used flexible scheduling and task prioritization while interpreting higher education as compatible with Buddhist values, personal development, and service to society. Rather than viewing secular education and monastic life as opposing domains, they understood university study as a complementary dimension of their religious vocation. The study contributes context-specific evidence to the limited literature on Buddhist nuns in secular higher education and highlights the importance of institutional flexibility, financial and social support, and recognition of the dual academic and monastic responsibilities of religious students.

Keywords: Buddhist nuns; Higher education; Secular universities; Coping strategies; Monastic life

Introduction

Higher education has become increasingly accessible to religious practitioners in Vietnam. The 2019 Law on Education affirms equal learning opportunities regardless of religion, belief, gender, social status, or economic circumstances and provides a legal basis for participation in the national education system (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2019). Since Đổi Mới, religious communities have also become more engaged in educational and social development, including Buddhist participation in preschool, vocational, and higher-education activities (Van Bien et al., 2024). Within this changing environment, Buddhist nuns increasingly encounter opportunities to pursue secular academic study alongside monastic education and religious service.

Nevertheless, Buddhist nuns' educational experiences are shaped by distinctive institutional and personal demands. International studies have documented unequal access to advanced education, limited institutional resources, and gendered expectations among Buddhist nuns in several Asian contexts (Gutschow, 2004; Heirman, 2011; Kawanami, 1997; Sonam & Juli, 2016; Theri, 2019). Research on Buddhist students in higher education more broadly also indicates that religious identity may create specific needs for institutional understanding, accommodation, and supportive campus environments (Edwards, 2024). For Buddhist nuns, these concerns are intensified by monastic schedules, ritual obligations, temple responsibilities, and behavioral expectations that continue while they participate in secular university life.

In Vietnam, Buddhism has long contributed to moral, educational, and social development through values such as compassion, wisdom, and ethical conduct (Ngo & Tran, 2019). Higher education may therefore offer Buddhist nuns additional knowledge and professional competencies that strengthen their ability to contribute to teaching, counseling, communication, and community service. However, participation in secular universities also requires them to negotiate academic workload, financial limitations, mixed-gender interaction, travel, and the practical tension between university and monastery schedules.

Despite growing scholarship on Buddhist women, existing research has focused mainly on monastic education, gender inequality, historical development, and religious participation. Little empirical attention has been given to Buddhist nuns studying in secular universities in Vietnam, particularly in Hue,

an important center of Vietnamese Buddhism. This study addresses this gap by examining the challenges Buddhist nuns face in higher education, the strategies they use to cope, and how they integrate academic responsibilities with monastic practice. By focusing on their lived experiences, the study contributes to research on religion, gender, higher education, and contemporary Buddhist adaptation.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the challenges experienced by Buddhist nuns pursuing higher education in secular universities in Hue, Vietnam.
2. To examine the coping strategies they use to manage academic and monastic demands.
3. To analyze how they integrate academic responsibilities with religious practices and monastic obligations.

Literature review

Research on Buddhist nuns and education has concentrated primarily on monastic training, gender inequality, institutional access, and religious participation. Across several Buddhist contexts, women have historically received fewer educational opportunities, resources, and leadership pathways than monks. Gutschow (2004) documented structural disadvantages affecting nuns in the Himalayan region, while Kawanami (1997) and Theri (2019) described the constrained educational and institutional position of Buddhist nuns in Myanmar. Heirman (2011) similarly showed that the status of Buddhist nuns must be understood within broader historical and disciplinary structures. In Bhutan, Sonam and Juli (2016) found that monastic education could empower nuns while remaining shaped by unequal institutional support.

These studies are important, but they focus mainly on education within Buddhist institutions. The experience of nuns entering secular higher education introduces a different set of demands because participants must move between two institutional environments with distinct schedules, social norms, pedagogical expectations, and forms of authority. Research on religiously minoritized students indicates that higher-education institutions may overlook religious identity when designing academic and student-support systems. Edwards (2024), for example, argues that Buddhist students can encounter both barriers and opportunities depending on the inclusiveness of the campus environment. Such concerns are particularly relevant for monastics whose religious commitments are embodied in daily schedules, dress, ritual practice, and interpersonal boundaries.

In Vietnam, the relationship between religion and national education has become more open since Đổi Mới. Religious communities, including the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, have contributed to literacy programs, preschool education, vocational training, and other educational initiatives, while religious individuals participate in the national education system under state law (Van Bien et al., 2024). Buddhist educational engagement is also consistent with an ethical tradition that links wisdom, compassion, and service to social development (Ngo & Tran, 2019).

The literature also suggests that individuals occupying multiple roles may experience tension when demands from one domain interfere with responsibilities in another. Classic role-conflict theory identifies time-based, strain-based, and behavior-based forms of conflict between competing roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), while work–life balance scholarship emphasizes that balance should be understood as a dynamic process involving the management of competing demands, resources, and subjective well-being rather than equal time allocation across domains (Guest, 2002). More recent research has extended this perspective to higher education. In a scoping review of boundary management among university students, Eastgate et al. (2021) found that how students manage boundaries between different life roles is associated with role conflict, role overload, role balance, academic performance, and well-being. These perspectives are particularly relevant to Buddhist nuns, who must continually negotiate the boundaries between university study and monastic responsibilities. At the same time, religious commitment may provide coping resources rather than functioning solely as a competing demand. Religious coping can involve meaning-making, spiritual support, and reinterpreting stressful experiences (Pargament et al., 2000), while Buddhist practices such as mindfulness, meditation, chanting, and reflection may help participants regulate emotion and sustain resilience.

A clear research gap therefore remains. Existing scholarship provides substantial knowledge about Buddhist nuns in monastic education and about religious communities in social development, but little empirical research examines how Buddhist nuns navigate secular university education in Vietnam. The present study addresses this gap by investigating their challenges, coping strategies, and processes of academic-monastic integration in Hue.

The study is guided by an integrated framework combining role-conflict theory, religious coping, and lived experience. Role-conflict theory provides a useful lens for understanding how demands from different institutional roles may compete for time, generate strain, or require incompatible behaviors (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Applied to this study, Buddhist nuns occupy at least two

structured roles, university student and monastic practitioner, whose schedules and expectations may occasionally overlap or conflict.

Religious coping complements this perspective by explaining how religious beliefs and practices can become resources for interpreting and managing stressful experiences (Pargament et al., 2000). Mindfulness, meditation, chanting, reflection on impermanence, and support from spiritual mentors may therefore operate not only as religious obligations but also as resources for emotional regulation, meaning-making, and resilience.

Finally, a lived-experience perspective directs attention to how participants themselves interpret the relationship between academic and monastic life. Rather than assuming that the two roles are inherently incompatible, the framework allows the analysis to examine whether participants experience tension, accommodation, or integration. The study therefore conceptualizes the process as: dual academic and monastic demands → role tension → coping resources → adaptive academic-monastic integration.

Although previous research has documented gendered educational inequality, monastic training, and the social roles of Buddhist nuns, little attention has been given to nuns enrolled in secular universities in Vietnam. The present study contributes context-specific evidence from Hue by examining not only barriers to participation but also the strategies and interpretive processes through which Buddhist nuns sustain higher education. Its distinctive contribution is identifying academic-monastic integration as a dynamic process involving role tension, Buddhist coping resources, social support, and meaning-making.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the lived experiences of Buddhist nuns pursuing higher education while maintaining monastic commitments in Hue, Vietnam. A case study approach was appropriate because it permits in-depth examination of a bounded contemporary phenomenon within its real-life setting (Stake, 1995). The qualitative design emphasized participants' perceptions, meanings, and interpretations rather than statistical generalization.

Participants and Sampling

Five Buddhist nuns enrolled in secular university programs in Hue were selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling identified information-rich participants with direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). Eligibility required participants to have completed at least one year of university study, to be actively fulfilling both academic and monastic responsibilities, and to participate voluntarily. Participants ranged from 22 to 34 years of age and had 11–20 years of monastic experience. Their fields included Educational Psychology, Literature Education, and English Language Studies.

Table 1. Participants and Sampling

Participants (Pseudonyms)	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Years in Monastery	Current University	Field of Study (Major)	Year of Study
Hai	Female	Kinh	22	11	University of Education, Hue City	Educational Psychology	4
Giac	Female	Kinh	28	15	Phu Xuan University, Hue City	English Language	2
Chan	Female	Kinh	30	15	University of Education, Hue City	Literature Pedagogy	3
Tran	Female	Kinh	34	18	University of Education, Hue City	Educational Psychology	4
Hien	Female	Kinh	30	20	University of Education, Hue City	Educational Psychology	3

Data Collection

Data were collected between November and December 2024 through five semi-structured individual interviews: three face-to-face and two telephone interviews. Semi-structured interviewing was selected because it enables systematic coverage of key topics while allowing participants to elaborate on experiences that are significant to them (Kvale, 1996; Dörnyei, 2007). Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and addressed three areas corresponding to the research objectives: challenges encountered in higher education, coping strategies, and experiences of balancing academic and

monastic responsibilities. With informed consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis and Ethics

The transcripts were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2012) approach. Analysis involved repeated reading, initial coding, identifying recurring patterns, developing and reviewing themes, and interpreting them in relation to the research objectives and theoretical framework. Both inductive and deductive reasoning were used: themes were allowed to emerge from participants' accounts while the concepts of role tension, coping, and integration informed interpretation. Participants were invited to review their interview transcripts for accuracy, consistent with member-checking procedures used to strengthen credibility in qualitative research (Erdmann & Potthoff, 2023).

Ethical procedures included voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, the right to withdraw, and pseudonyms. Audio files and transcripts were stored securely and used only for research purposes. Because the manuscript does not provide an institutional ethics approval number, no approval number is reported here; insert this information before publication if formal approval was obtained.

Research results

The thematic analysis produced three groups of findings corresponding to the research objectives: challenges encountered in secular higher education, coping strategies, and processes used to integrate academic and monastic responsibilities.

Challenges in Secular Higher Education

The first objective was to identify the challenges Buddhist nuns encountered while pursuing higher education in secular universities. Analysis of the interview data revealed four major and interconnected challenges: time management, financial constraints, psychological and cultural pressures, and academic workload. These challenges arose from the participants' simultaneous responsibilities as university students and Buddhist monastic practitioners.

Time Management

Time management emerged as the most prominent challenge reported by the participants. The nuns had to coordinate university classes, assignments, examinations, and travel with regular monastic responsibilities, including chanting, meditation, scriptural study, temple duties, and community activities. The overlap between these responsibilities frequently resulted in limited time for study and rest.

Participants described particularly demanding daily schedules. One participant explained:

"I have to wake up at 4 a.m. every day to prepare for morning prayers and temple duties. Then I rush to the university for my classes. By the time I return to the temple in the evening, there are evening prayer sessions to attend. I often stay up until midnight or later to complete my assignments." (Hai, personal communication, November 22, 2024)

Commuting between temples and universities further intensified the problem. Participants reported that travel time could be substantial, particularly when the temple was located far from the university. Restrictions concerning leaving the temple also made participation in university activities more complicated.

Participants therefore experienced time management not simply as organizing academic activities but as a continuing need to negotiate competing academic and monastic schedules. When classes, examinations, group assignments, and Buddhist studies overlapped, participants sometimes had to prioritize one responsibility over another.

Financial Constraints

Financial constraints constituted another significant challenge. Participants reported expenses associated with tuition fees, transportation, learning materials, and other educational requirements. Because they generally lacked independent income, they relied on support from temples, spiritual mentors, lay Buddhists, scholarships, and tuition reductions to sustain their studies.

Although such assistance enabled participants to continue their university education, financial concerns remained. Some participants also expressed feelings of indebtedness and responsibility toward those who supported their education. Thus, financial difficulties involved both material concerns and an emotional dimension associated with dependence on external support.

Psychological and Cultural Pressures

The transition between the monastic environment and the secular university environment generated psychological and cultural pressures. Participants described the monastery as a disciplined, structured, and contemplative environment, whereas the university provided a more diverse and socially open setting.

Particular challenges arose in social interaction, including mixed-gender group work and extracurricular activities. Participants had to navigate forms of interaction that differed from the behavioral expectations and interpersonal boundaries associated with their monastic lives. Some reported feelings of discomfort, isolation, or uncertainty when participating in secular university activities.

These experiences indicate that the participants' adjustment involved more than adapting to academic requirements. They also had to negotiate their religious identity and monastic commitments within a secular educational environment.

Academic Workload and Role Conflict

Academic workload was the fourth major challenge. Participants reported pressure arising from assignments, examinations, presentations, research activities, and group projects. These demands became more difficult because they occurred alongside Buddhist studies and temple responsibilities.

The simultaneous demands of university and religious education sometimes created role conflict. Participants had to choose between academic activities and religious responsibilities. During examination periods, the pressure could increase substantially and affect sleep, physical health, and emotional well-being.

Overall, Objective 1 shows that the challenges participants experienced were interconnected. Limited time could intensify academic workload; financial difficulties could contribute to psychological pressure; and conflicts between university and monastic schedules could affect both academic participation and religious responsibilities.

Coping Strategies

The second objective was to examine the coping strategies Buddhist nuns used to overcome challenges associated with higher education. Three major strategies emerged from the interview data: strategic time management, Buddhist practices, and seeking social and institutional support.

Table 2. Coping Strategies Used by Buddhist Nuns

Main coping strategy	Specific practices identified in the interviews
Strategic time management	Creating daily, weekly, and monthly schedules; setting goals; prioritizing urgent and important tasks; completing tasks efficiently; maximizing available study time
Buddhist practices	Mindfulness; meditation; chanting; reading Buddhist teachings; maintaining emotional calm; reflecting on Buddhist teachings
Seeking social and institutional support	Seeking guidance from spiritual mentors, fellow nuns, friends, classmates, teachers, temples, and educational institutions; receiving academic, emotional, and financial support

Source: Compiled from the five semi-structured interviews.

Strategic Time Management

Strategic time management was the most frequently reported coping strategy. Participants described creating specific schedules, setting daily goals, planning their academic work, and prioritizing important or urgent tasks.

For example, one participant stated:

“I work based on goals and arrange my schedule. On that day, I decide what to do. At night, I set goals for the next day: Where I will study, what I will do to ensure nothing is missed. During a class session, I focus entirely and make the most of my time in class.” (Hai, personal communication, November 22, 2024)

Other participants similarly described preparing detailed schedules for their studies and temple responsibilities. One participant emphasized creating specific plans to balance study and temple duties, while another reported planning in detail on a weekly and monthly basis and prioritizing important and urgent tasks.

These accounts indicate that participants responded to time pressure through deliberate planning rather than attempting to manage competing responsibilities spontaneously.

Buddhist Practices

Buddhist practices represented a second major coping strategy. Participants referred to mindfulness, meditation, chanting, reading Buddhist teachings, and maintaining emotional calm as ways of responding to academic pressure. These practices were described as helping them stabilize their emotions, maintain concentration, and preserve psychological energy during demanding periods.

One participant explained:

"I've learned to keep my mind at ease by practicing meditation and taking time to rest, which helps me sustain my energy." (Hien, personal communication, November 30, 2024)

Participants also described mindfulness as a way of becoming more attentive to their actions and words. In this sense, Buddhist practices were not experienced solely as religious obligations but also as resources for managing stress and maintaining emotional stability.

Seeking Social and Institutional Support

The third coping strategy involved seeking support from both monastic and educational communities. Participants described receiving assistance from spiritual mentors, fellow practitioners, friends, classmates, teachers, and universities.

One participant stated:

"At the temple, my spiritual mentor and fellow practitioners are always there to support me when I need help, especially during times of stress." (Hien, personal communication, November 30, 2024)

Support from spiritual mentors could include emotional encouragement and financial assistance. One participant reported that her mentor occasionally provided additional financial support to encourage her studies, while another described the temple as providing a peaceful environment conducive to learning.

Participants also expressed a desire for greater understanding from their mentors, friends, and educational institutions, particularly during examination periods. The combination of personal effort and support from others enabled them to continue their academic activities while maintaining their monastic responsibilities.

Academic-Monastic Integration

The third objective was to analyze how Buddhist nuns balance academic responsibilities with religious practices and monastic obligations. The findings indicate that participants approached this balance through two interconnected dimensions: physical and practical adjustment and psychological and spiritual integration.

Table 3. Ways of Balancing Academic and Religious Responsibilities

Dimension	Main strategies	Examples identified in the interviews
Physical and practical balance	Flexible scheduling	Adjusting study and temple schedules according to academic and religious demands
	Prioritizing important tasks and goals	Giving priority to urgent academic or monastic responsibilities, particularly during examinations or important religious activities
Psychological and spiritual balance	Practicing Buddhist teachings	Using mindfulness and reflection on Buddhist teachings to maintain emotional stability
	Integrating academic and religious life	Viewing higher education as connected to wisdom, personal development, service, and monastic life

Source: Compiled from the five semi-structured interviews.

Physical and Practical Balance

Participants achieved practical balance primarily through flexible scheduling and prioritization. When academic and religious responsibilities conflicted, they adjusted their schedules according to the urgency and importance of particular tasks.

During examination periods, some participants reduced participation in non-essential temple activities. At other times, they adjusted academic commitments to accommodate important religious activities. Thus, balance did not necessarily mean allocating equal time to university and monastic activities. Instead, it involved continuously adjusting priorities as circumstances changed.

One participant explained that even with detailed planning, periods of overlapping academic and temple responsibilities could still result in exhaustion:

"These plans help me develop time management, organizational skills, and self-discipline. However, I sometimes feel tired due to the overlap between studying and temple duties." (Hien, personal communication, November 30, 2024)

This suggests that practical balance was an ongoing process rather than a fixed state.

Psychological and Spiritual Balance

Beyond practical scheduling, participants also sought psychological and spiritual balance through Buddhist teachings and practices. Mindfulness, meditation, and reflection helped them maintain emotional stability when facing academic pressure.

A particularly important finding was that participants did not necessarily perceive academic education and monastic life as opposing commitments. Instead, they increasingly understood university education as part of their broader pursuit of knowledge, personal development, and service to society.

Academic knowledge could therefore be connected to their religious and community activities. This integration allowed participants to perceive their

university studies as meaningful within their broader spiritual journey rather than simply as an external obligation.

Overall, the findings indicate that balancing academic and religious responsibilities involved both external adjustment and internal integration. The participants managed their schedules and priorities while also developing a perspective in which academic learning and religious practice could support one another.

Discussion

The findings show that Buddhist nuns pursuing secular higher education in Hue experience a distinctive form of role tension created by the simultaneous demands of university study and monastic life. Time constraints, financial difficulties, psychological and cultural pressures, and academic workload were interconnected rather than isolated challenges. This aligns with research showing that students managing multiple responsibilities often struggle to allocate time and sustain well-being (Reay et al., 2002; Stone & O'Shea, 2013). Role-conflict theory similarly suggests that competing domains can generate time-, strain-, and behavior-based tensions when expectations from one role interfere with another (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). For Buddhist nuns, these tensions are intensified because both university and monastery life involve structured schedules, behavioral expectations, and institutional responsibilities.

Financial and cultural pressures also parallel earlier research documenting unequal educational resources and institutional constraints among Buddhist nuns in Asian contexts (Gutschow, 2004; Sonam & Juli, 2016; Theri, 2019). However, this study extends the literature by focusing on nuns who have already entered secular universities. Their challenge is therefore not simply gaining access to education but negotiating monastic identity within mixed-gender and socially diverse academic environments. This finding is consistent with recent scholarship emphasizing the need for higher-education institutions to recognize the distinctive experiences of Buddhist students and create more supportive campus environments (Edwards, 2024).

The second major finding concerns coping. Participants relied on strategic time management, Buddhist practices, and social and institutional support. Planning and prioritization correspond with established research on time-management behaviors and academic performance (Britton & Tesser, 1991; Claessens et al., 2007). More distinctively, mindfulness, meditation, chanting,

and reflection on impermanence functioned simultaneously as religious commitments and coping resources. This interpretation aligns with religious coping theory, which emphasizes meaning-making, spiritual support, and reinterpretation of stressful experiences (Pargament et al., 2000), and with research linking Buddhist meditation and mindfulness to improved psychological functioning among students (Shonin & Van Gordon, 2014). Recent research also demonstrates that religious women in higher education may actively reconcile rather than simply choose between academic and religious identities.

Finally, participants achieved balance through flexible adjustment and psychological-spiritual integration. Rather than perceiving university education as incompatible with monastic life, they interpreted learning as contributing to wisdom, personal development, and service. This extends previous studies emphasizing institutional disadvantage by showing that Buddhist nuns can actively construct continuity between academic and religious identities (Gutschow, 2004; Sonam & Juli, 2016; Theri, 2019). Overall, the findings suggest that successful academic-monastic integration depends on both individual coping resources and institutional environments that provide flexibility, recognition, and support.

New knowledge from the research

This study generates new knowledge by proposing the Academic–Monastic Integration Framework, illustrated in *Figure 1*. The framework explains how Buddhist nuns pursuing secular higher education in Hue manage the interaction between academic responsibilities and monastic commitments through a dynamic process of tension, coping, and integration.

The first component is *Dual Demands*. Participants simultaneously faced university expectations, academic deadlines, examinations, temple duties, chanting, meditation, and other monastic obligations. These overlapping responsibilities created the second component, *Role Tension*, expressed through time constraints, financial strain, psychological and cultural pressure, and academic workload. The findings therefore show that the challenges experienced by Buddhist nuns are not isolated problems but interconnected consequences of operating within two structured institutional environments.

The third component, *Coping Resources*, represents the principal mechanism through which participants responded to these tensions. These resources included strategic time management, mindfulness, meditation, chanting, social support, and institutional support. Importantly, Buddhist practice

did not function only as an additional religious obligation. It also provided emotional regulation, meaning-making, resilience, and a disciplined foundation for managing academic demands.

The fourth component is *Adaptive Academic–Monastic Integration*. Participants used flexible scheduling, emotional resilience, identity integration, and reinterpretation of higher education as part of spiritual and social development. Rather than experiencing the identities of "student" and "nun" as fundamentally incompatible, they constructed continuity between academic learning, Buddhist values, and service to society.

The study's core new knowledge is that monastic life can function simultaneously as an obligation and *a resource for academic persistence and resilience*. As Figure 1 demonstrates, successful integration develops through an ongoing pathway:

Dual Demands → Role Tension → Coping Resources → Adaptive Academic–Monastic Integration

This framework offers a context-sensitive model for understanding Buddhist nuns in higher education and provides a basis for future research and institutional support.

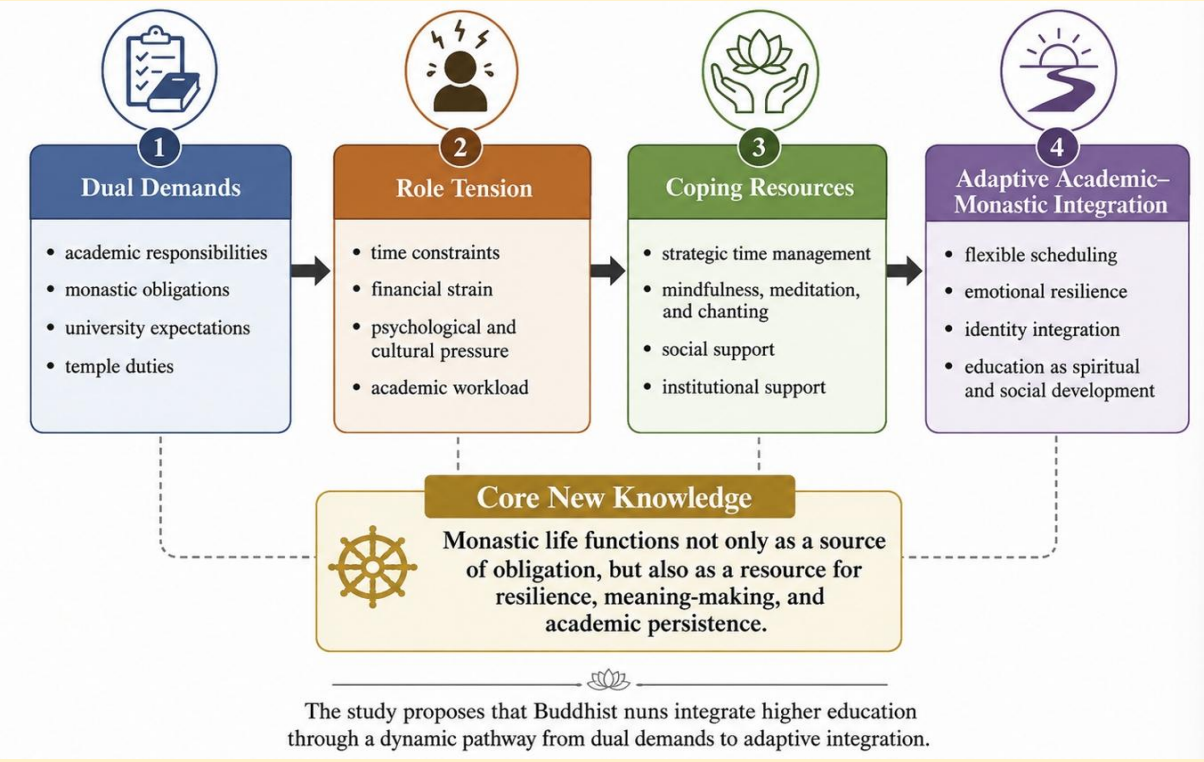

Figure 1. Academic-Monastic Integration Framework

Conclusion

This study examined the experiences of five Buddhist nuns pursuing higher education at secular universities in Hue, Vietnam, focusing on the challenges they encountered, the strategies they used to cope, and the ways they balanced academic responsibilities with monastic life. The findings show that four interconnected challenges shaped their educational experiences: time constraints, financial difficulties, psychological and cultural pressures, and academic workload. These challenges arose largely from the need to meet university requirements while maintaining regular religious practices, temple duties, and monastic responsibilities.

Participants responded through strategic time management, Buddhist practices, and social and institutional support. Planning and prioritization enabled them to manage competing demands, while mindfulness, meditation, chanting, and reflection on Buddhist teachings supported emotional stability and resilience. Support from temples, spiritual mentors, fellow nuns, classmates, lecturers, and universities was also essential. Importantly, participants did not generally regard secular higher education and monastic life as incompatible. They increasingly understood academic learning as complementary to Buddhist values, personal development, and service to society. Balancing the two domains therefore involved both practical flexibility and constructing meaningful continuity between academic and religious identities.

The study contributes context-specific evidence to the limited literature on Buddhist nuns in secular higher education. It suggests that supporting nuns in university settings requires more than individual perseverance: universities and Buddhist institutions should recognize their dual responsibilities and provide appropriate academic flexibility, financial assistance, mentoring, and institutional cooperation. Given the small qualitative sample, the findings are not intended for statistical generalization, but they provide a useful foundation for larger comparative studies of religious identity, gender, monastic life, and higher education in Vietnam and other Buddhist contexts.

Recommendations

The study is limited by its small, context-specific sample of five Buddhist nuns in Hue and by its reliance on self-reported interview data. The findings are therefore intended for analytical rather than statistical generalization. Future studies should include participants from different regions, Buddhist traditions, academic disciplines, and institutional contexts and should consider additional

data sources such as observation and interviews with monastic mentors, lecturers, and university administrators.

Universities should recognize Buddhist nuns as students with distinctive religious responsibilities and provide reasonable flexibility during major religious observances, accessible academic advising, and information about financial support. Buddhist temples and monastic communities can support nuns through mentorship, encouragement, and appropriate adjustment of duties during periods of intense academic demand. Stronger communication between universities and Buddhist institutions may reduce unnecessary role conflict and improve continuity between academic and monastic responsibilities.

Future research should test the Academic-Monastic Integration Framework with larger and more diverse samples and compare the experiences of Buddhist nuns with monks, lay Buddhist students, and religious students from other traditions. Longitudinal research could also examine whether the integration strategies identified here change across different stages of university study and monastic life.

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A Guideline for Promoting the Mon's Traditional Culture by Buddhist Peaceful Means

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines challenges affecting the preservation of Mon traditional culture and proposes culturally grounded guidelines based on Buddhist peaceful means. The study pursued three objectives: (1) to examine the context, problems, causes, and preservation needs of Mon traditional culture; (2) to analyze relevant cultural-preservation theories and Buddhist principles; and (3) to formulate practical guidelines for promoting Mon traditional culture through peaceful and participatory approaches. Data were drawn from documentary sources on Mon culture, cultural heritage, peacebuilding, and Buddhism, along with field observations and interviews with Mon Buddhist monks and cultural stakeholders. The findings indicate that Mon cultural continuity is challenged by modernization, cultural assimilation, declining intergenerational transmission, and weakening participation in selected traditional practices. At the same time, monasteries, religious ceremonies, Mon-language education, community festivals, and local cultural leaders remain important resources for cultural resilience. The study identifies four mutually reinforcing areas for cultural promotion: non-violent cultural preservation, community engagement and education, adaptive cultural transmission, and intercultural dialogue. Buddhist principles of non-harming, loving-kindness, compassion, mindfulness, and communal harmony provide an ethical orientation for these strategies, while contemporary heritage and peacebuilding perspectives emphasize participation, education, cultural rights, and locally grounded institutions. The resulting framework positions cultural preservation not as the static protection of inherited customs, but as a peaceful process of transmission, participation, adaptation, and dialogue. The study contributes a context-sensitive model for strengthening Mon cultural identity while supporting social cohesion and peaceful coexistence.

Keywords: Mon traditional culture; Buddhist peaceful means; Cultural preservation; Community participation; Peacebuilding

Introduction

The Mon are one of the long-established ethnic communities of mainland Southeast Asia, with a cultural heritage closely associated with Theravāda Buddhism, Mon-language traditions, religious ceremonies, community rituals, and distinctive forms of social organization. Historical and contemporary studies of Mon communities in Myanmar and Thailand show that Buddhist institutions have played a central role in sustaining religious practice, education, language, and collective identity (Jinadhaja & Dhammahaso, 2020; Phra Raphin Buddhisaro et al., 2019; Tiptas, 1998). In Mon State, monasteries and religious networks continue to function not only as spiritual institutions but also as sites of cultural transmission.

Cultural continuity, however, cannot be taken for granted. Modernization, migration, changing educational patterns, globalization, and the growing influence of national and transnational media may weaken intergenerational transmission and alter the meanings attached to traditional practices. Research on cultural heritage has increasingly emphasized that preservation requires more than safeguarding objects or ceremonies; it also depends on education, community participation, institutional support, documentation, and the capacity to adapt traditions to changing social conditions (Achille & Fiorillo, 2022; Mekonnen et al., 2022; Tuncer, 2023). For Mon communities, this challenge is particularly important because language, ritual, Buddhist practice, and ethnic identity remain deeply interconnected.

A peace-oriented approach offers an important perspective on cultural preservation. Peacebuilding scholarship emphasizes social relationships, participation, local institutions, dialogue, and the transformation of conflict rather than the mere absence of overt violence (Fernandez-Dols et al., 2004; Lederach, 1999). Buddhist approaches add an ethical orientation grounded in non-harming, compassion, mindfulness, and reducing hostility. Within this perspective, preserving Mon culture should not be framed as opposition to other communities or as resistance to all forms of change. Rather, it can be understood as a process of strengthening cultural dignity while cultivating cooperation, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence.

Despite existing studies of Mon history, beliefs, Buddhist development, architecture, and cultural practices, less attention has been given to an integrated framework that combines cultural-preservation strategies with Buddhist peaceful

means. This study therefore examines the principal challenges and needs affecting Mon traditional culture, analyzes cultural and Buddhist resources relevant to preservation, and proposes practical guidelines that can support cultural continuity without intensifying social division. The study focuses on the role of monasteries, education, community participation, cultural adaptation, festivals, dialogue, and peaceful advocacy as mutually supportive components of cultural resilience.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the context, problems, causes, and preservation needs of Mon traditional culture.
2. To analyze contemporary cultural-preservation approaches and Buddhist principles relevant to promoting Mon traditional culture.
3. To develop guidelines for promoting Mon traditional culture through Buddhist peaceful means.

Literature Review

The literature relevant to this study can be organized into three themes: cultural preservation and identity, peacebuilding and participation, and the role of Buddhism in Mon cultural continuity. Cultural-heritage research increasingly treats preservation as a living social process rather than the protection of isolated artifacts. Education, professional training, community involvement, and experiential learning can strengthen public engagement with cultural heritage (Achille & Fiorillo, 2022). Studies of heritage conservation also emphasize the importance of local participation, institutional capacity, documentation, and managing pressures arising from modernization and development (Mekonnen et al., 2022). Globalization may generate cultural hybridization rather than simple cultural disappearance, making selective adaptation an important component of continuity (Sirikanchana, 2018; Tuncer, 2023).

A second body of literature concerns peacebuilding and social cohesion. Lederach (1999) argues that sustainable peace depends on relationships and locally rooted networks that connect community leaders, institutions, and ordinary citizens. This perspective matters for cultural preservation because cultural institutions can either deepen social boundaries or become platforms for cooperation and reconciliation. Fernandez-Dols et al. (2004) similarly emphasize that a culture of peace involves social norms and practices that support non-

violent conflict management. Cultural rights scholarship further suggests that communities require meaningful opportunities to maintain and express cultural identity within broader social and legal frameworks (Renteln, 2015). Together, these approaches support a model of cultural promotion based on participation, dialogue, and non-coercive preservation.

The third theme concerns Mon culture and Buddhism. Research on Mon communities shows the continuing importance of Buddhist institutions, ethnic identity, and traditional beliefs in social life. Mar Latt (2012) documents the close relationship between traditional Mon beliefs and Buddhist practices in Hinthagon, while Jinadhaja and Dhammahaso (2020) identify Buddhism as a significant element in the continuing development of Mon State. Studies of Mon communities in Thailand likewise demonstrate how religion, language, architecture, and collective identity remain intertwined across geographic settings (Phra Raphin Buddhisaro et al., 2019; Tiptas, 1998). The preservation of Mon culture therefore cannot be separated from the role of monasteries, monks, religious ceremonies, and Buddhist education.

Buddhist peaceful means provide an ethical complement to these cultural and peacebuilding approaches. Applied Buddhist peace scholarship emphasizes non-harming, compassion, mindfulness, dialogue, and cultivating peaceful relationships (Phra Pramote Vatagovito et al., 2019). At the same time, Buddhist traditions should not be romanticized as inherently free from conflict; the relationship between Buddhism and violence requires critical attention to social and political context (Deegalle, 2003). The research gap therefore lies in developing a balanced framework that uses Buddhist ethical principles to strengthen Mon cultural transmission while also drawing on contemporary approaches to participation, education, cultural rights, adaptation, and peacebuilding.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework integrates three analytical domains: (1) challenges and needs affecting Mon traditional culture, (2) contemporary cultural-preservation and peacebuilding approaches, and (3) Buddhist peaceful means. These domains are synthesized into practical guidelines for cultural transmission, community participation, adaptation, and dialogue, as illustrated in Figure 1.

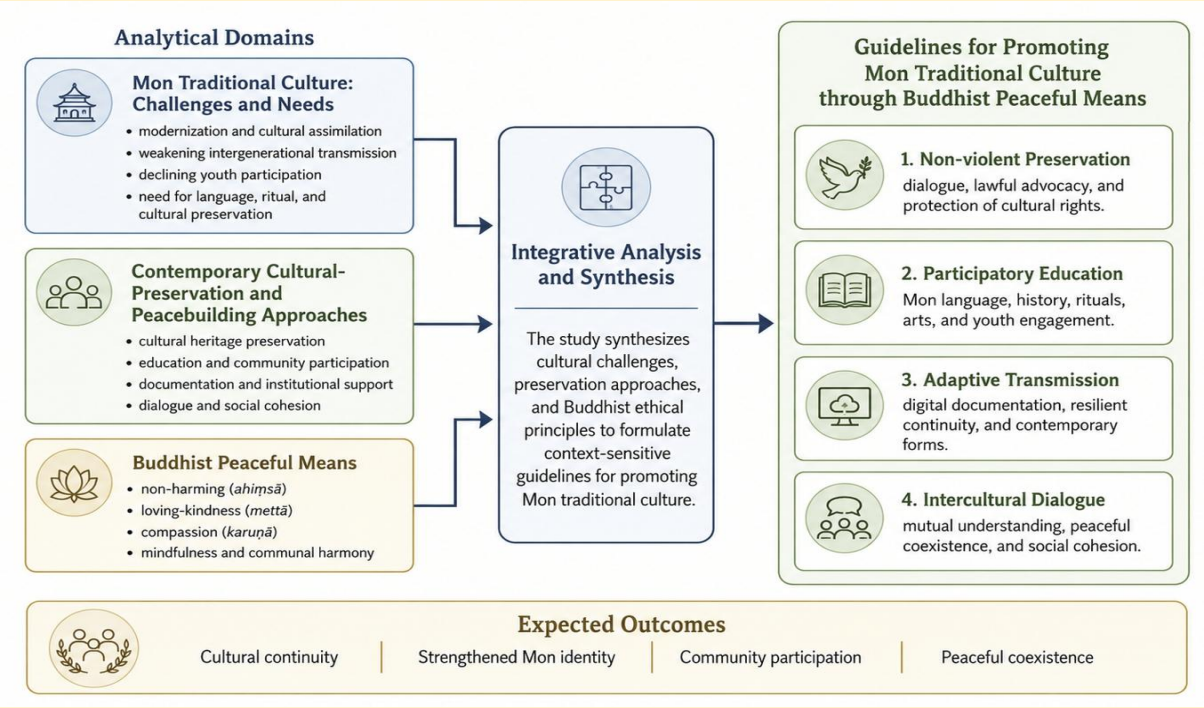

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design combining documentary analysis, field observation, and interviews. The design was appropriate because the research sought to understand the cultural meanings, preservation challenges, and community-based strategies associated with Mon traditional culture rather than to estimate population-level prevalence.

Research Design

The documentary component examined academic books, journal articles, research reports, and Buddhist materials related to Mon culture, cultural heritage, peacebuilding, and Buddhist peaceful means. Field observation focused on cultural and religious practices relevant to transmitting Mon identity. Interviews were used to obtain perspectives from Mon Buddhist monks and cultural stakeholders on perceived challenges, preservation needs, and feasible strategies.

Data collection

Data were collected from documentary sources and field-based materials relevant to the three research objectives. Documentary evidence was organized thematically around cultural identity, preservation challenges, education, community participation, religious institutions, adaptation, and peaceful coexistence. Observational and interview data contextualized these themes within Mon communities.

Analysis and synthesis

The data were analyzed thematically through repeated reading, coding, categorization, and synthesis. Findings from documentary sources, observations, and interviews were compared across the three objectives. The final guidelines were developed by identifying recurrent themes and examining how contemporary cultural-preservation approaches could be integrated with Buddhist ethical principles. Because the manuscript does not specify the number or selection procedure of interview participants, these details should be added before publication to improve methodological transparency.

Research Result

Objective 1: Context, Problems, Causes, and Preservation Needs of Mon Traditional Culture

The findings indicate that Mon traditional culture remains strongly connected to Buddhist institutions, community ceremonies, language, and intergenerational practices. Monasteries continue to function as important cultural spaces in which religious knowledge, Mon-language literacy, chanting, ritual practice, and community memory are transmitted. This finding is consistent with studies showing that Buddhism remains a central institution in Mon social and cultural development (Jinadhaja & Dhammahaso, 2020; Mar Latt, 2012).

At the same time, participants and documentary sources identified pressures associated with modernization, migration, changing educational preferences, and the declining participation of younger generations in some traditional activities. These pressures do not imply that Mon culture is disappearing; rather, they indicate uneven transmission and the need to strengthen the institutions through which cultural knowledge is learned and practiced. Similar heritage studies emphasize that cultural continuity depends on community involvement, education, and institutional support rather than preservation through documentation alone (Achille & Fiorillo, 2022; Mekonnen et al., 2022).

The principal needs identified were stronger Mon-language and cultural education, greater youth participation, support for monasteries and community organizations, documentation of vulnerable traditions, and opportunities for intergenerational exchange. Festivals and religious ceremonies remain especially important because they combine ritual practice, language, dress, music, food, and collective participation within a shared social setting. These activities function not merely as performances but as mechanisms for reproducing cultural identity.

Objective 2: Contemporary Approaches and Buddhist Principles for Cultural Promotion

The second objective identified a strong complementarity between contemporary cultural-preservation approaches and Buddhist ethical principles. Heritage scholarship emphasizes education, participation, documentation, institutional collaboration, and adaptive transmission (Achille & Fiorillo, 2022; Mekonnen et al., 2022). Peacebuilding approaches emphasize locally grounded relationships, dialogue, inclusion, and non-violent social processes (Fernandez-Dols et al., 2004; Lederach, 1999). These perspectives provide practical mechanisms for organizing cultural preservation.

Buddhist peaceful means contribute an ethical orientation to these mechanisms. Non-harming discourages coercive cultural defense; loving-kindness and compassion support respectful relationships; mindfulness encourages reflective rather than reactive responses to cultural change; and communal harmony supports dialogue across generations and ethnic or religious boundaries (Phra Pramote Vatagovito et al., 2019). These principles are most useful when applied to concrete cultural practices rather than treated only as abstract ideals.

The findings therefore suggest that cultural promotion should neither reject modernization nor passively accept cultural assimilation. A more sustainable approach is selective adaptation: preserving core meanings, language, ritual knowledge, and communal memory while allowing forms of presentation and transmission to evolve. Cultural-hybridization research similarly indicates that traditions can change while maintaining meaningful continuity (Tuncer, 2023).

Objective 3: Guidelines for Promoting Mon Traditional Culture through Buddhist Peaceful Means

The synthesis produced four interrelated guidelines. First, cultural preservation should be explicitly non-violent and rights-respecting. Community leaders, monasteries, and cultural organizations should use dialogue, education, documentation, and lawful advocacy rather than confrontation. This approach is consistent with peacebuilding principles that prioritize relationship-building and locally grounded conflict transformation (Lederach, 1999).

Second, community engagement and education should be strengthened. Monasteries, Sunday Dhamma schools, summer programs, cultural associations, families, and local educators can work together to teach Mon language, history,

arts, ceremonies, and Buddhist values. Heritage education is particularly important for younger generations because active participation creates stronger cultural attachment than passive exposure alone (Achille & Fiorillo, 2022).

Third, cultural transmission should be adaptive and resilient. Digital media can document oral histories, manuscripts, music, ritual knowledge, and community events, while festivals can be redesigned to involve younger participants without removing their historical and religious meaning. Adaptation should therefore be evaluated by whether it strengthens continuity, participation, and cultural understanding, rather than by whether a practice remains completely unchanged.

Fourth, cultural dialogue should connect preservation with peaceful coexistence. Mon cultural activities can provide opportunities for exchange with neighboring ethnic and religious communities, enabling cultural difference to become a basis for mutual learning rather than exclusion. In this sense, Buddhist peaceful means transform cultural preservation from an inward-looking project into a contribution to social cohesion.

Discussion

The findings suggest that the central challenge facing Mon traditional culture is not simply cultural loss but the weakening of transmission mechanisms. Language, ceremonies, festivals, monastic education, and community participation remain present, yet their continuity depends on whether younger generations can encounter them as meaningful parts of contemporary life. This interpretation is consistent with heritage research that emphasizes participation, education, and institutional capacity as central to sustainable conservation (Achille & Fiorillo, 2022; Mekonnen et al., 2022).

The study also supports a relational understanding of cultural preservation. Lederach (1999) argues that sustainable peace depends on networks of relationships rather than isolated interventions. Applied to Mon culture, this means that monasteries, families, elders, youth, educators, cultural organizations, and public institutions should not work independently. Cultural continuity is strengthened when these actors share responsibility for education, documentation, ceremonies, and community decision-making.

A further contribution concerns the role of Buddhist peaceful means. Non-harming, loving-kindness, compassion, mindfulness, and harmony do not by themselves constitute a preservation strategy; their value lies in shaping how cultural action is undertaken. They encourage non-coercive advocacy, respectful intergenerational exchange, dialogue with other communities, and cultural adaptation without hostility. This is especially important because Buddhist identity should not be used to romanticize conflict or assume that religious affiliation automatically produces peace (Deegalle, 2003).

Finally, the findings indicate that preservation and adaptation should not be treated as opposites. Mon culture has historically changed across locations while retaining recognizable linguistic, religious, and communal features. The objective should therefore be cultural continuity with integrity rather than cultural immobility. Digital documentation, youth-led activities, and contemporary educational formats can strengthen rather than weaken tradition when communities retain meaningful control over what is transmitted and why (Tuncer, 2023).

New Knowledge from the Research

The principal new knowledge generated by this study is a four-dimensional framework for promoting Mon traditional culture through Buddhist peaceful means. The framework integrates *Non-violent Preservation, Participatory Education, Adaptive Transmission, and Intercultural Dialogue*. These dimensions are mutually reinforcing rather than sequential. Non-violent preservation provides the ethical boundary for cultural advocacy; participatory education transmits knowledge across generations; adaptive transmission keeps cultural practices relevant amid changing social conditions; and intercultural dialogue connects cultural identity with peaceful coexistence.

The framework adds a Buddhist ethical layer to contemporary cultural-preservation practice. Rather than treating Buddhist principles as separate religious teachings, the model operationalizes them within cultural action: non-harming guides advocacy, loving-kindness and compassion guide community relationships, mindfulness supports reflective adaptation, and harmony guides dialogue. The resulting proposition is that cultural resilience is strongest when identity, participation, adaptation, and peace are developed together.

This model also reframes preservation as a living process. Mon traditional culture is not sustained merely by protecting old practices from change; it is sustained when communities continue to learn, practice, reinterpret, and transmit those traditions with a clear sense of cultural meaning. The framework therefore offers a practical basis for future community projects and comparative research on Buddhist approaches to cultural resilience.

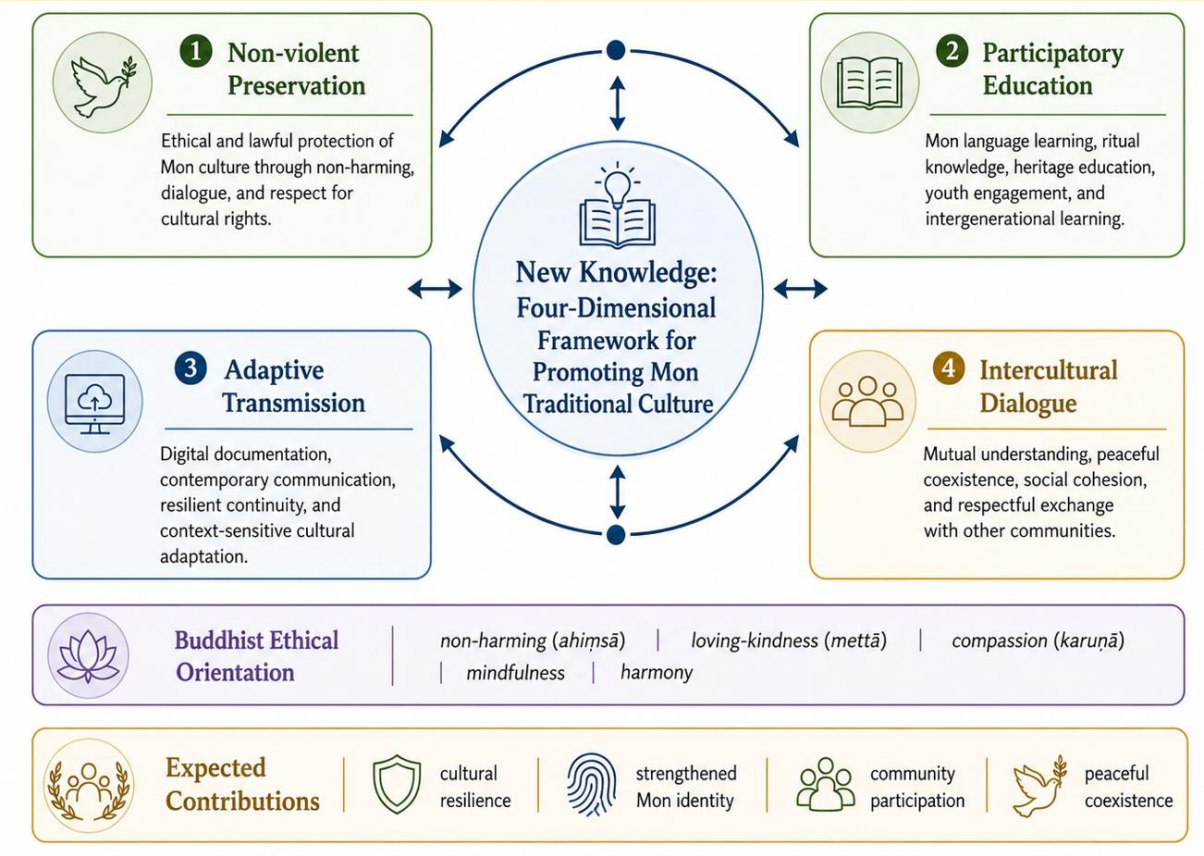

Figure 2 New knowledge from research

Conclusion

This study examined the context, challenges, and preservation needs of Mon traditional culture and developed guidelines grounded in contemporary heritage approaches and Buddhist peaceful means. The findings indicate that Mon cultural identity continues to be sustained through monasteries, language, religious ceremonies, festivals, community relationships, and intergenerational learning, while modernization and changing participation patterns create significant pressures on cultural transmission.

The study identifies four priorities for sustainable cultural promotion: non-violent preservation, participatory education, adaptive transmission, and

intercultural dialogue. These priorities connect cultural heritage with Buddhist ethical principles of non-harming, loving-kindness, compassion, mindfulness, and harmony. The framework does not seek to preserve culture as an unchanging artifact; instead, it emphasizes Mon communities' capacity to maintain cultural integrity while responding constructively to social change.

The practical implication is that cultural preservation should be community-centered and institutionally supported. Monasteries, families, educators, youth groups, cultural organizations, and relevant public institutions should collaborate in language education, documentation, cultural events, digital preservation, and intergenerational exchange. By linking cultural continuity with peaceful participation and dialogue, Mon cultural promotion can contribute simultaneously to ethnic identity, social cohesion, and peaceful coexistence.

Recommendations

Future research should examine the proposed four-dimensional framework in specific Mon communities using clearly defined participant groups and transparent qualitative procedures. Comparative studies may explore differences between Mon communities in Myanmar and Thailand, generational differences in cultural participation, and the role of digital media in language and heritage transmission. Action research involving monasteries, youth, educators, and cultural organizations would be particularly useful for evaluating which preservation strategies are sustainable in practice. Future studies should also report participant numbers, sampling procedures, interview protocols, and ethical-review information in sufficient detail to meet contemporary journal standards.

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Integrating Buddhist Approaches and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy to Address Simulacra-Induced Psychological Issues in Modern Chinese Society

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Abstract

This study examines Simulacra-Induced Psychological Issues (SIPI), a proposed conceptual framework for psychological difficulties associated with prolonged exposure to idealized and algorithmically curated digital representations in contemporary Chinese society. The objectives were to: (1) examine patterns of simulacra exposure and perceived psychological effects; (2) explore functional relationships between selected Buddhist psychological concepts and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT); and (3) develop a preliminary Buddhist-integrated CBT framework. An exploratory multi-method design combined documentary and scriptural analysis, a descriptive online questionnaire completed by 100 Chinese internet users selected by convenience sampling, and semi-structured interviews with seven experts. Participants commonly reported compulsive checking, anxiety, depressive feelings, emptiness, and cognitive dissonance in relation to digital-media use. Documentary and interview analyses identified three candidate mechanisms: addictive design, idealized settings, and reality replacement.

These findings are descriptive and do not establish prevalence, diagnosis, or causality. Comparative analysis identified possible functional parallels between the Five Aggregates and elements of CBT cognitive processing, and between Yogācāra concepts such as ālayavijñāna and manas and hierarchical belief models; these parallels are heuristic rather than doctrinal or clinical equivalences. The study proposes a Buddhist-integrated CBT model and a 12-session intervention prototype incorporating cognitive restructuring, behavioral experiments, mindfulness, Five Aggregates observation, and optional Buddhist practices. Expert feedback supported further development while identifying concerns regarding complexity, cultural fit, and religious applicability. The model requires instrument validation, pilot safety testing, and controlled outcome research before clinical use.

Keywords: Simulacra; Cognitive behavioral therapy; Buddhist psychology; Five Aggregates; Digital mental health; Chinese society

Introduction

Digital media increasingly shape how individuals encounter images, identities, lifestyles, and social comparison. Baudrillard's concept of simulacra describes representations that may cease to reflect reality and instead help construct a form of "hyperreality," in which distinctions between representation and reality become unstable (Baudrillard, 1995). In contemporary China, the scale of mobile internet and short-video use makes this question especially relevant. According to the China Internet Network Information Center, China had more than 1.1 billion internet users by the end of 2024, and short-video platforms reached a substantial majority of netizens (CNNIC, 2025). These conditions provide an important context for examining how digitally curated representations may influence cognition, emotion, and behavior.

The present study uses the term Simulacra-Induced Psychological Issues (SIPI) as a provisional conceptual framework rather than as a recognized diagnosis. SIPI refers to self-reported patterns such as compulsive checking, appearance-related anxiety, depressive rumination, cognitive dissonance, and difficulty disengaging from idealized digital content. These experiences overlap with established research on problematic short-video use, reward-based learning, social comparison, body-image concerns, and digital well-being (Brewer, 2017; Fardouly et al., 2023; Montag et al., 2022; Potenza, 2014; Zhang & DeAndrea, 2024). The purpose of introducing SIPI is therefore heuristic: to organize potentially related experiences around the perceived replacement or distortion of reality by highly curated digital representations, not to establish a new psychiatric disorder.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) offers an established framework for examining relationships among situations, appraisals, beliefs, emotions, and behavior (Beck, 2011). Buddhist traditions, meanwhile, contain detailed analyses of perception, attachment, suffering, mental conditioning, and the cultivation of mindfulness and wisdom. Concepts such as māyā, pañcakkhandhā, paṭiccasamuppāda, anattā, and Yogācāra theories of consciousness provide distinctive philosophical and contemplative perspectives on how experience is constructed. The present study does not assume that Buddhist and CBT concepts are theoretically or clinically equivalent. Instead, it examines whether carefully

delimited functional analogies can support a culturally sensitive conceptual model for future research.

Accordingly, this study combines documentary analysis, descriptive questionnaire data, and expert interviews to examine SIPI in contemporary Chinese society, clarify selected Buddhist-CBT correspondences, and develop a preliminary integrative framework. Because the questionnaire was based on a convenience sample and a self-designed instrument, the study does not estimate population prevalence or establish causal mechanisms. Likewise, the proposed 12-session model should be understood as a treatment prototype requiring further validation rather than as an established clinical intervention.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the prevalence and influence of Simulacra-Induced Psychological Issues (SIPI) in modern Chinese society and explore Buddhist perspectives on this phenomenon.

2. To explore the interrelationship between Buddhadhamma and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.

3. To propose a Buddhist-integrated CBT approach to address SIPI in modern Chinese society.

Literature Review

Baudrillard's concept of simulacra concerns representations that progressively detach from an original referent and participate in the production of hyperreality (Baudrillard, 1995, 1996). In digital environments, algorithmic personalization, visual enhancement, and repeated exposure can intensify the salience of highly curated representations. Contemporary research does not generally use Baudrillard's terminology as a clinical construct, but related studies have examined problematic short-video use, behavioral reinforcement, social-media well-being, social comparison, and body-image effects (Fardouly et al., 2023; Montag et al., 2022; Potenza, 2014; Vogel et al., 2019; Zhang & DeAndrea, 2024). These findings support examining how digital content and platform design may interact with psychological vulnerability, while also cautioning against treating media exposure as a single causal explanation for anxiety or depression.

Buddhist literature provides a different conceptual vocabulary for analyzing perception and attachment. Mahāyāna texts frequently employ imagery

of dreams, bubbles, shadows, or illusory appearances to emphasize the conditioned and unstable character of phenomena (Conze, 1958; Muller, 1999). Theravāda analyses of the Five Aggregates, rūpa, vedanā, saññā, saṅkhāra, and viññāṇa, describe dimensions of psycho-physical experience without positing a permanent self (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000; van Gorkom, 2010). Yogācāra traditions further develop the concepts of ālayaviññāṇa and manas to explain continuity, conditioning, and self-grasping ((T 16, no. 672, p. 627a; T 31, no. 1585, p. 9a; Lin, 2016; Waldron, 2003). These frameworks arise from soteriological traditions and should not be reduced to modern clinical categories; however, they may offer useful interpretive resources for examining how perception, habit, and attachment operate in digitally mediated experience.

CBT conceptualizes psychological distress through reciprocal relationships among situations, automatic thoughts, intermediate beliefs, core beliefs, emotions, physiological responses, and behavior (Beck, 1979, 2011). Meta-analytic evidence supports CBT for major depression and anxiety disorders, although effectiveness varies by condition, comparison group, and treatment context (Cuijpers et al., 2016). Buddhist-derived practices have also influenced contemporary therapeutic approaches, especially through mindfulness-based methods and research on reward-based learning and attention (Anālayo Bhikkhu, 2006; Brewer et al., 2021). Nevertheless, borrowing Buddhist concepts for psychotherapy requires conceptual caution, cultural sensitivity, and clear differentiation between religious practice and evidence-based clinical procedures.

The research gap lies not in the absence of work on digital-media-related distress or Buddhist-informed psychological practice, but in the lack of an explicit conceptual model connecting Baudrillardian simulacra, selected Buddhist theories of cognition, and CBT in the Chinese digital context. Existing studies have separately examined problematic short-video use, digital well-being, body-image effects, Buddhist psychology, and cognitive-behavioral approaches (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000; Fardouly et al., 2023; Montag et al., 2022; van Gorkom, 2010; Zhang & DeAndrea, 2024). The present study therefore develops a heuristic integration while explicitly distinguishing conceptual analogy from doctrinal or clinical equivalence.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework links three research objectives with documentary analysis, descriptive questionnaire data, and expert interviews,

culminating in a preliminary Buddhist-CBT model for understanding and responding to SIPI (Figure 1).

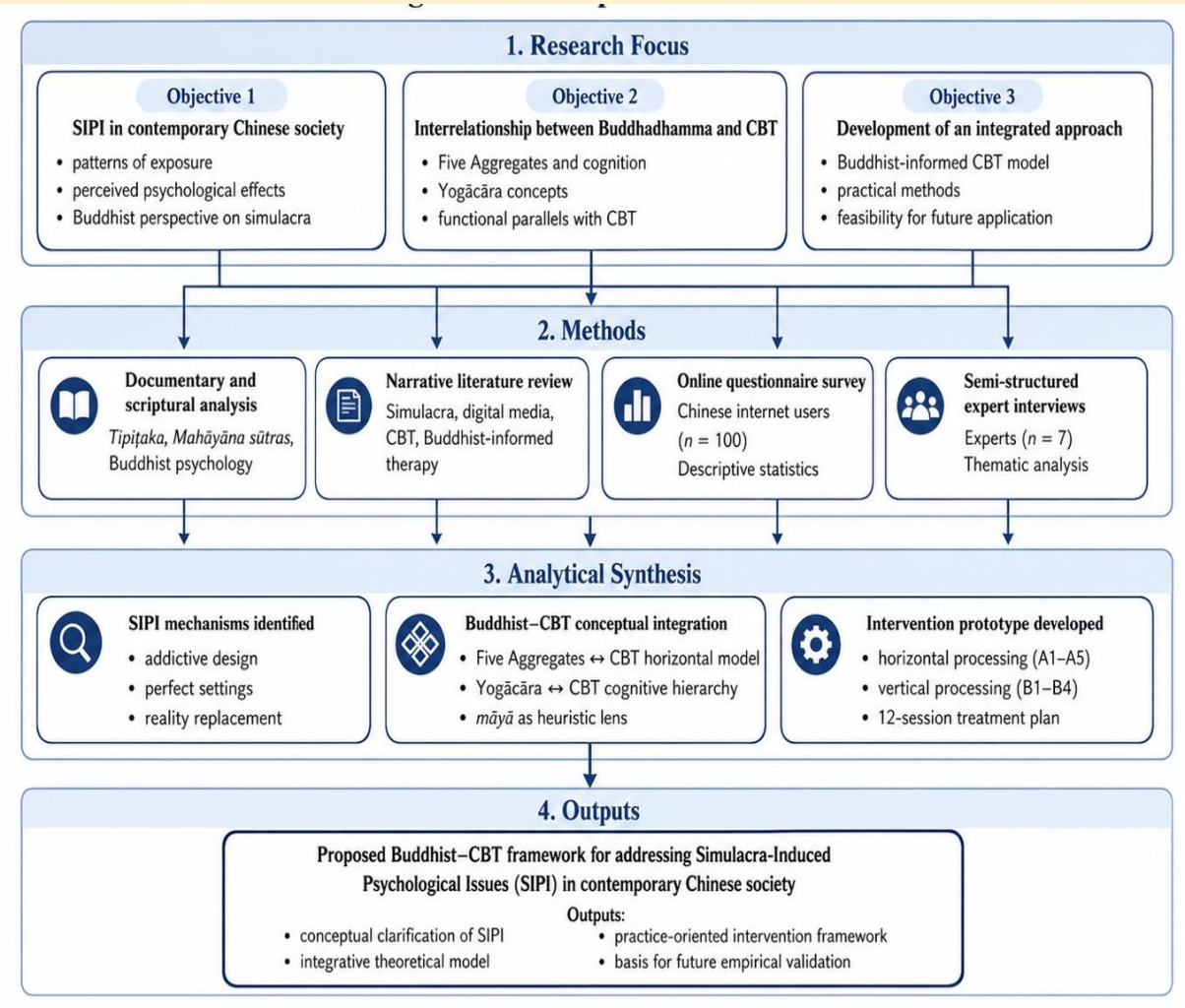

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This study used an exploratory mixed-methods design combining documentary analysis, a descriptive questionnaire survey, and qualitative expert interviews. Documentary analysis examined Buddhist texts, Baudrillard's theory of simulacra, CBT literature, and relevant scholarship on digital-media-related psychological outcomes. The questionnaire provided descriptive information about a convenience sample of Chinese internet users, while expert interviews evaluated conceptual coherence, cultural relevance, feasibility, and safety considerations. Because SIPI is a proposed construct and the questionnaire was not a validated diagnostic instrument, the study focused on conceptual development rather than prevalence estimation or treatment-efficacy testing.

Data Collection

Documentary sources included selected texts from the Tipiṭaka and Mahāyāna traditions addressing māyā, suññatā, pañcakkhandhā, paṭiccasamuppāda, anattā, and Yogācāra theories of consciousness. Secondary literature covered Baudrillard's theory of simulacra, CBT, Buddhist psychology, problematic digital-media use, and related psychological outcomes. We selected these materials for conceptual relevance to the three research objectives rather than through a systematic-review protocol. References to texts in the Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō are cited in the conventional form T [volume], no. [text number], p. [page/column].

We administered an online questionnaire in April 2026 using convenience sampling. Eligible participants were Chinese citizens who used mobile internet daily, could use mobile devices independently, voluntarily agreed to participate, and provided informed consent. The self-designed 22-item questionnaire covered four domains: usage patterns, perceived addictive features, self-reported psychological states, and cognitive perceptions. Of 110 responses received, 100 were retained for descriptive analysis. No standardized diagnostic scale was embedded in the instrument; therefore, the results represent self-reported patterns within this sample and should not be interpreted as clinical prevalence estimates.

Seven experts were interviewed online using a semi-structured guide aligned with the three research objectives. Participants represented Buddhist studies, psychology, sociology, and media-related professional experience. Interviews were conducted in Chinese, lasted approximately 30–60 minutes, were audio-recorded with consent, and were transcribed for analysis. Questions addressed the conceptualization of SIPI, the plausibility and limits of Buddhist-CBT integration, and the feasibility and safety of the proposed intervention components.

Data Analysis

Documentary materials were analyzed comparatively to identify conceptual relationships and differences among Baudrillardian simulacra, Buddhist models of cognition, and CBT. Particular attention was paid to avoiding direct equivalence between constructs derived from different philosophical, soteriological, and clinical traditions. The questionnaire data were summarized

using descriptive statistics only. No inferential statistical analysis was undertaken.

Interview transcripts were analyzed thematically through familiarization, initial coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting. Expert feedback was used to refine the proposed framework and identify implementation concerns, including religious appropriateness, therapist competence, client screening, informed consent, and the need for pilot testing. The expert review was treated as a feasibility assessment rather than evidence of treatment effectiveness.

Research Ethics

Participants received information about the study purpose, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw. The questionnaire did not intentionally collect direct personal identifiers, and interview participants provided informed consent before recording. The researcher stored research data on a password-protected device. Because the manuscript does not report an institutional ethics-review reference number, add this information before publication if formal ethics approval or exemption was obtained.

Research Results

Objective 1: Self-Reported Patterns Associated with SIPI and Buddhist Interpretation

National internet-use statistics establish the broader digital context rather than the prevalence of SIPI. By December 2024, China had approximately 1.108 billion internet users, an internet penetration rate of 78.6%, and more than 1.04 billion short-video users (CNNIC, 2025). These figures indicate extensive exposure to digitally mediated and algorithmically curated content, but they do not in themselves demonstrate psychological harm or SIPI.

Within the convenience sample of 100 respondents, substantial proportions reported heavy smartphone use, frequent checking, perceived addictive platform features, anxiety, depressive feelings, and dissatisfaction with offline reality. For example, 62% reported compulsive checking and 60% reported unlocking their phones more than 50 times per day. Self-rated anxiety and depressive symptoms were also common. These percentages are descriptive sample findings only: the questionnaire used non-validated response categories and cannot establish diagnosis, severity, national prevalence, or causal attribution to simulacra.

Accordingly, terms such as "addiction symptoms," "compulsive checking," and "moderate-to-severe anxiety/depression" should be understood as participants' self-descriptions rather than clinician-assessed conditions. The findings are best interpreted as signals of potentially problematic digital engagement that warrant further study with validated measures and representative sampling.

Three interrelated mechanisms were identified conceptually: addictive design, idealized representation, and perceived reality replacement. Addictive design refers to platform features such as rapid rewards, metrics, and personalized recommendation systems that may reinforce repeated engagement (Brewer, 2017; Eyal, 2014; Montag et al., 2022). Idealized representation refers to filtered, beautified, or selectively presented content that may intensify social comparison and dissatisfaction. Perceived reality replacement refers to increasing psychological investment in mediated environments at the expense of engagement with offline activities. These mechanisms are theoretical propositions derived from the documentary analysis and participant reports; this study did not test them experimentally.

The proposed mechanisms may help organize experiences such as compulsive checking, appearance-related anxiety, depressive rumination, and cognitive dissonance, but they should not be interpreted as established neurobiological pathways. Existing literature suggests associations between problematic digital-media use, reward learning, body-image concerns, social comparison, and psychological distress (Fardouly et al., 2023; Montag et al., 2022; Potenza, 2014; Vogel et al., 2019). The present study did not measure dopamine, neural activity, or clinical outcomes and therefore cannot demonstrate biological causation.

The documentary analysis also identified a heuristic relationship between simulacra and Buddhist descriptions of illusion. Mahāyāna texts use metaphors such as dreams, bubbles, shadows, "flowers in the sky," and the "second moon" to emphasize the conditioned and unstable character of appearances (Conze, 1958; Muller, 1999). Digital simulacra can be interpreted through this lens insofar as they are constructed, contingent, and potentially mistaken for a more complete representation of reality. The Mahāprajñāpāramitā Śāstra similarly analyzes material form as lacking fixed independent reality (T 25, no. 1509, p. 349c). This comparison is philosophical and interpretive rather than empirical.

Baudrillardian simulacra and Buddhist māyā should therefore remain conceptually distinct. Baudrillard analyzes the relation between representation, signs, and hyperreality, whereas Buddhist traditions use māyā and related concepts within broader analyses of impermanence, dependent origination, emptiness, and liberation (Baudrillard, 1995; Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000; van Gorkom, 2010). The comparison functions as a heuristic for examining attachment to digitally mediated appearances, not as a claim of ontological equivalence.

The study initially considered broader cultural and social explanations for the expansion of simulacra in China. Such explanations should be interpreted cautiously because the present design did not test national cultural traits, educational attainment as a causal factor, or macroeconomic determinants of digital-media use. The most defensible conclusion is that technological availability, algorithmic distribution, social comparison, entertainment demand, and psychosocial stress may interact in shaping digital engagement; establishing their relative contribution requires separate population-level research (CNNIC, 2025).

Therefore, understanding both the external mechanisms and internal psychological processes of simulacra is essential for developing sustainable approaches to mental health and well-being in contemporary Chinese society.

Objective 2: Heuristic Relationships Between Buddhadhamma and CBT

The analysis identified several possible functional parallels between Buddhist descriptions of mental processes and CBT, while also identifying substantial doctrinal differences. Both traditions examine how perception, interpretation, habit, and repeated mental activity shape distress and behavior; however, CBT is a clinical framework oriented toward psychological functioning, whereas Buddhist systems are embedded in ethical and soteriological projects concerned with suffering, non-attachment, and liberation (Beck, 2011; Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000; van Gorkom, 2010).

The comparison between the CBT horizontal model and the Five Aggregates is therefore presented as heuristic rather than structural equivalence. External situations may be compared with sense objects and material form; feeling (vedanā) with affective tone; perception (saññā) with recognition and meaning-ascription; and volitional formations (saṅkhāra) with tendencies, intentions, and habitual responses. Consciousness (viññāṇa), however, is not equivalent to emotion or behavior, and the Five Aggregates are not a linear information-processing sequence. Table 1 therefore presents functional

similarities together with explicit differences (Beck, 2011; Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000; van Gorkom, 2010).

Canonical descriptions of the Five Aggregates emphasize impermanence and non-self rather than a fixed psychological sequence (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000). Accordingly, any mapping to CBT should be interpreted as a pedagogical device for generating questions about experience, not as a doctrinal translation of the aggregates into contemporary cognitive science.

To clarify this comparison, the following table presents both similarities and important differences between the CBT model and the Five Aggregates framework.

Table 1. Heuristic Similarities and Differences Between the CBT Model and the Five Aggregates

CBT Component	Proposed Buddhist Parallel	Possible Functional Similarity	Important Conceptual Difference
Situation	External rūpa / six sense objects	Both refer to conditions or stimuli encountered by the individual.	A CBT "situation" may include external events, memories, bodily states, or internal experiences, whereas *rūpa* specifically concerns material form and is only one of the five aggregates.
Initial processing / Process 1	Vedanā (feeling)	Both may involve an early affective response to contact with an experience.	*Vedanā* refers specifically to the hedonic tone of experience, pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, and is not equivalent to a general cognitive-processing stage.
Automatic thoughts	Saññā (perception)	Both involve rapid recognition, labeling, and interpretation of experience.	*Saññā* is a broad perceptual function involved in recognition and designation, whereas automatic thoughts are situation-specific verbal or imaginal cognitions within CBT.
Intermediate processing / Process 2	Saṅkhāra (volitional formations)	Both may involve tendencies, intentions, impulses, and patterns that shape subsequent responses.	*Saṅkhāra* is a much broader Buddhist category encompassing volitional and conditioned mental formations and cannot be reduced to a single CBT processing stage.
Emotion, behavior, and physiological response	Viññāṇa and kamma-related response	Both concern aspects of conscious experience and subsequent behavioral responding.	*Viññāṇa* refers to consciousness dependent on sense contact and is not an "outcome" of the preceding aggregates. *Kamma* concerns intentional action and has a doctrinal scope substantially broader than behavioral response in CBT.

This comparison is heuristic rather than doctrinal. The Five Aggregates are not simply a linear cognitive model but a comprehensive classification of all psycho-physical phenomena, emphasizing their impermanent and non-self nature (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000; van Gorkom, 2010). *Rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra*, and *viññāṇa* each have broader doctrinal meanings than their assigned CBT counterparts. This comparison aims to identify functional parallels for therapeutic application, not to equate the two systems ontologically.

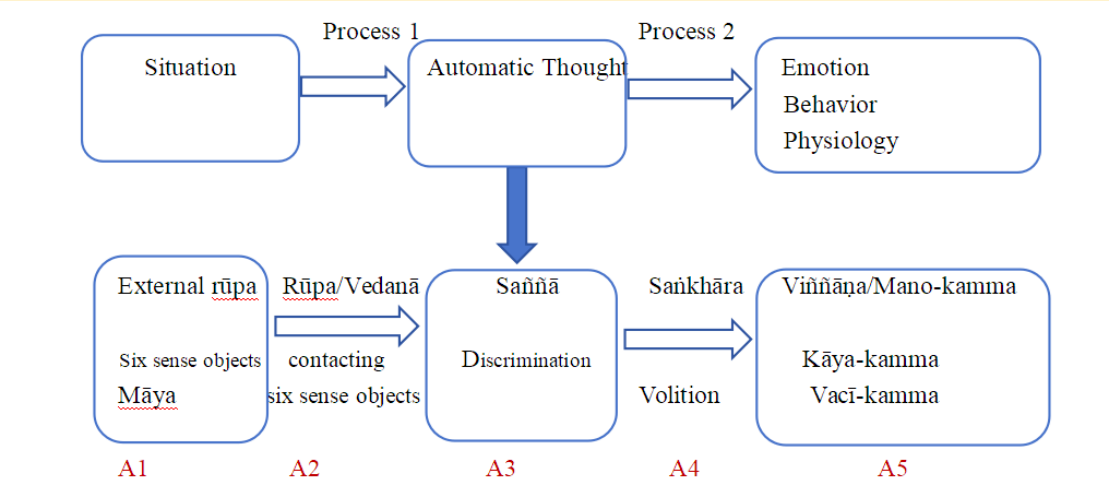

Figure 2. Heuristic Transformation from the CBT Horizontal Model to a Buddhist-Informed Model

A second heuristic comparison concerns the CBT hierarchy of automatic thoughts, intermediate beliefs, and core beliefs and Yogācāra accounts of the first six consciousnesses, manas, and ālayaviññāṇa. Both frameworks address different levels of psychological patterning and continuity, but they arise from different theoretical purposes. CBT core beliefs are clinically formulated propositions about the self, others, and the world; ālayaviññāṇa is a Buddhist philosophical construct concerning karmic continuity and latent tendencies. Likewise, manas refers to a form of self-referential appropriation rather than a direct equivalent of intermediate beliefs (Beck, 2011; Lin, 2016; Waldron, 2003).

Yogācāra texts describe ālayaviññāṇa as a basis for the continuity of latent seeds (bīja) and manas as persistently appropriating this stream in relation to selfhood (T 16, no. 672, p. 627a; T 31, no. 1585, p. 9a; Lin, 2016; Waldron, 2003). These concepts may provide a comparative vocabulary for discussing deeply conditioned cognitive patterns, but the analogy should not imply that

Buddhist consciousness theory anticipated or validates CBT. The clinically relevant question is whether the comparison helps clients or practitioners understand patterns in a culturally meaningful and ethically appropriate way.

Accordingly, the proposed correspondence is explicitly heuristic. Yogācāra concepts belong to a soteriological framework concerned with saṃsāra and liberation, whereas CBT constructs are designed for case formulation and psychological intervention. Functional parallels may support conceptual dialogue, but ontological, mechanistic, and clinical equivalence cannot be inferred (Beck, 2011; Lin, 2016; Waldron, 2003).

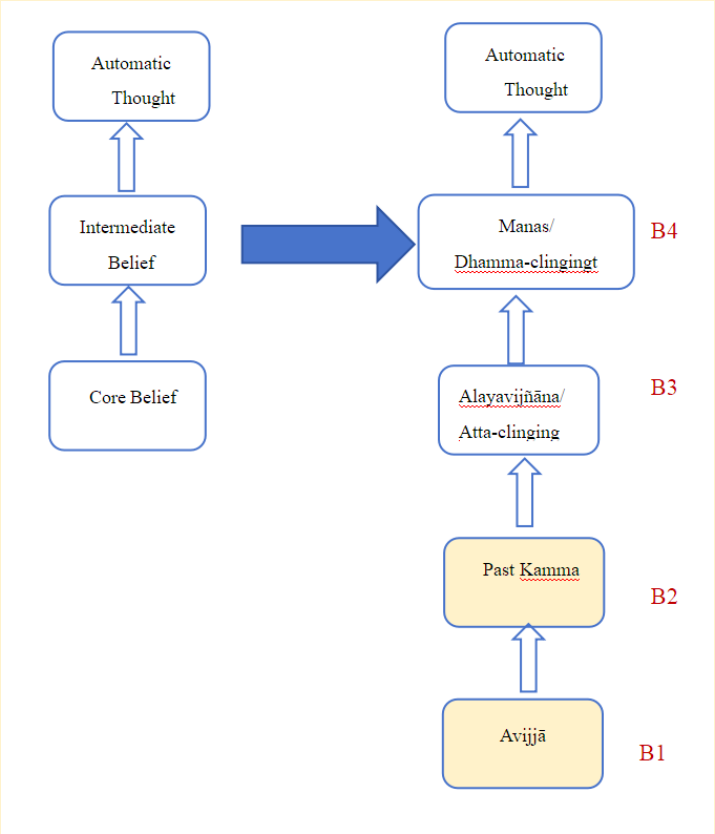

Figure 3. Heuristic Comparison of the CBT Vertical Model and a Buddhist-Informed Model

Dependent Origination (paṭiccasamuppāda), ignorance (avijjā), and kamma were also introduced as Buddhist interpretive dimensions that extend beyond standard CBT formulation. These concepts should not be described as missing causal mechanisms that make CBT "incomplete." Rather, they represent additional ethical and soteriological perspectives on conditioning, habit, and suffering that may be relevant in explicitly Buddhist contexts. Their inclusion in a therapeutic framework requires careful translation and cannot be assumed to

improve clinical outcomes without empirical testing (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000, 2012; van Gorkom, 2010).

On this basis, the study proposes two complementary heuristic pathways: a horizontal pathway using the Five Aggregates to support moment-to-moment observation of experience, and a vertical pathway using selected Buddhist concepts to reflect on deeper patterns of attachment and conditioning. These pathways are intended as conceptual scaffolds for future pilot work, not replacements for established CBT case formulation.

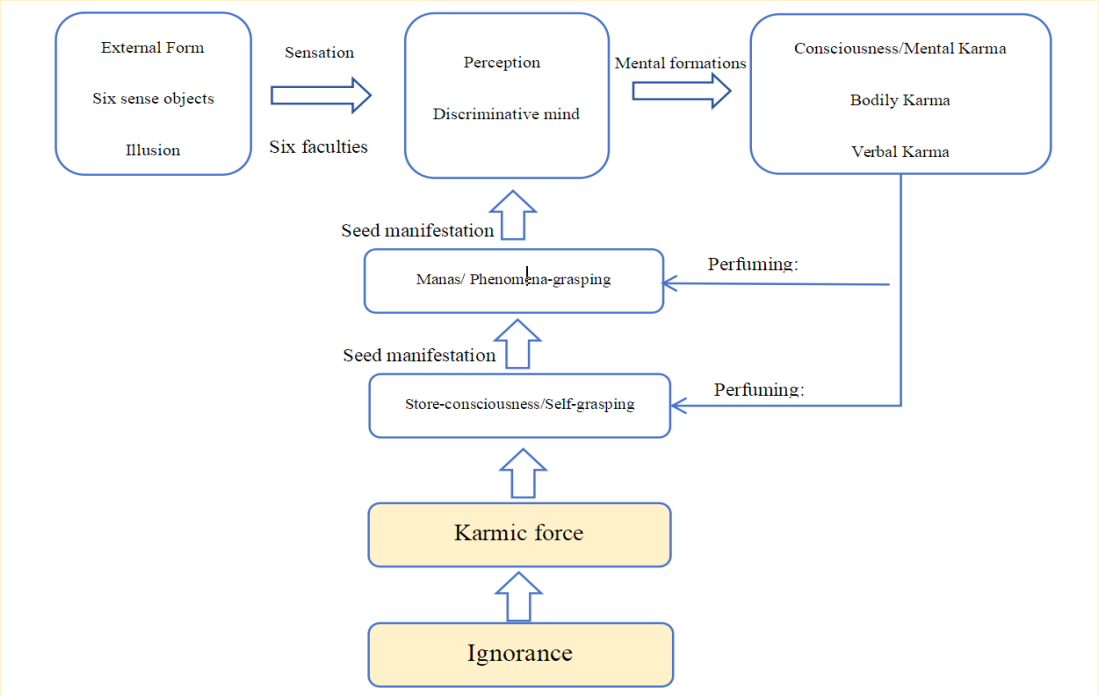

Figure 4. Proposed Buddhist-Informed Reinterpretation of Aaron T. Beck's Cognitive Hierarchy Model (based on Buddhadhamma)

Objective 3: Proposed Buddhist-Integrated CBT Framework

The third objective generated a preliminary intervention framework that combines standard CBT procedures with selected Buddhist-informed practices. The model includes a horizontal component focused on moment-to-moment observation and a vertical component focused on beliefs, attachment, and conditioning. Because no clients received the full protocol in this study, all intervention components should be regarded as hypotheses for feasibility and safety testing rather than established treatments.

Proposed Practice Components: Safety and Implementation Considerations

Any future clinical testing of the proposed procedures should require appropriately trained mental-health professionals, participant screening, informed consent, standardized outcome monitoring, predefined stopping criteria, and independent ethical oversight. Buddhist-origin practices should be optional and should not be presented as clinically superior to secular alternatives. The proposed 12-session sequence is therefore a research prototype, not a treatment recommendation for routine clinical use.

Practitioners involved in future pilot research should have formal CBT competence and sufficient familiarity with the Buddhist concepts used in the protocol to avoid doctrinal misrepresentation. Components involving explicitly religious practices would additionally require cultural competence and clear procedures for obtaining participant preference and consent.

Future pilot studies should establish eligibility and exclusion criteria prospectively and use validated measures for depression, anxiety, problematic digital-media use, and adverse events. Participants with acute suicidality, psychosis, severe substance-use problems, or other conditions requiring higher-level care should be referred for established clinical services. Because SIPI has not been validated as a clinical construct, eligibility should be based on operationalized research criteria rather than on the assumption of a new diagnosis.

Distress should be monitored throughout any future intervention study, with predefined stopping and referral procedures. The current manuscript proposes possible thresholds and monitoring practices, but these require review by qualified clinicians and an ethics committee before implementation. No efficacy or safety conclusions can be drawn from the present expert-feasibility assessment alone.

Horizontal Processing Methods (A1-A5):

For A1 (External Rūpa / Situation), the framework proposes awareness-oriented exercises that examine discrepancies between perceived and actual screen time, temporarily reduce selected digital inputs, and critically analyze how simulacra are produced. These procedures are intended to increase metacognitive awareness of media-use patterns and the constructed nature of digital representations. References to guarding the sense doors (indriyasaṃvara), emptiness (suññatā), and impermanence (anicca) may be included for participants who knowingly choose a Buddhist interpretive framework (Baudrillard, 1995; Conze, 1958; Eyal, 2014; Muller, 1999). Claims involving physics or “string

theory" have been removed because they are not necessary to the psychological rationale and could create conceptual confusion.

For A2 (Vedanā / Process 1), the proposed exercise involves repeatedly observing emotional responses to a brief digital stimulus. The intended purpose is not to induce habituation as a guaranteed therapeutic mechanism but to help participants notice changes in affective response over time. The exercise draws conceptually on contemplation of feeling and on behavioral observation, but it requires pilot testing, standardized monitoring, and clear stopping criteria before clinical use (Anālayo Bhikkhu, 2006).

For A3 (Saññā / Automatic Thoughts), contrasting digital stimuli can help participants identify rapid judgments, labels, and interpretations. The proposed procedure may be paired with standard CBT thought monitoring and cognitive reappraisal. Buddhist language concerning perception and conceptual proliferation should be presented as an optional interpretive aid rather than as a substitute for evidence-based cognitive formulation.

For A4 (Saṅkhāra / Process 2), the framework proposes observing urges and action tendencies that arise in response to salient stimuli. The aim is to improve discrimination between an external cue, affective response, interpretation, urge, and subsequent action. This functional analysis is compatible with CBT and behaviorally oriented approaches, while the Buddhist terminology provides an additional contemplative vocabulary for participants who find it meaningful.

For A5, the proposed Five Aggregates observation form integrates external stimulus, feeling, perception, volitional response, consciousness, and reflective attention. The form is best understood as a self-monitoring tool for future feasibility research. Claims that repeated use will necessarily "remove discrimination" or improve emotional outcomes have been avoided because these effects have not yet been tested (Anālayo Bhikkhu, 2006; Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012; van Gorkom, 2010).

Vertical Processing Methods (B1-B4):

For B4 (Intermediate Beliefs / Manas), the model combines standard CBT techniques such as the downward-arrow method and behavioral experiments with an optional Buddhist analysis of attachment to concepts. The functional aim is to identify rigid assumptions and rules that maintain distress. The Buddhist

comparison should remain exploratory and should not imply that manas is clinically equivalent to intermediate beliefs (Beck, 2011; Lin, 2016).

For B3 (Core Beliefs / Ālayaviññāṇa), standard CBT procedures for identifying and evaluating core beliefs may be supplemented, for consenting Buddhist participants, by reflection on anattā and the Five Aggregates. Such reflection should be used carefully because Buddhist teachings on not-self are doctrinal and contemplative concepts, not established methods for restructuring negative core beliefs. The proposed integration therefore requires therapist competence, cultural sensitivity, and empirical evaluation (Beck, 1979, 2011; Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000).

For B2 (Kamma), the Four Powers of Confession are retained only as an optional religious practice for participants who explicitly request or accept a Buddhist framework. The practice should not be framed as a treatment for psychopathology or as a method for "purifying" clinically defined symptoms. Its possible role is limited to structured reflection, regret, reparative intention, and commitment to changed behavior within an appropriate Buddhist context (Pabongka Rinpoche, 1991).

For B1 (Avijjā), the model recognizes ignorance as a Buddhist soteriological concept rather than a clinical target. Future interventions should not claim to eliminate avijjā through psychotherapy. For participants seeking Buddhist study outside therapy, optional educational resources may be suggested, such as Zhao (2018), Jiang (2009), and Nan (2022), provided that such recommendations are clearly separated from clinical treatment and respect participant preference.

Adaptation for Non-Buddhist Clients:

For non-Buddhist participants, religious language should be replaced with established secular therapeutic processes rather than translated mechanically. Reflection on past patterns can be framed as nonjudgmental functional analysis; "remedy" as constructive behavioral change; "abstention" as relapse-prevention planning; and "support" as therapeutic alliance and social support. These adaptations should be evaluated empirically rather than assumed to reproduce the meaning or effects of the original Buddhist practice.

Secular Alternative to the Four Powers of Confession:

A fully secular version can rely on standard CBT processes: identifying recurring behavioral and cognitive patterns, evaluating automatic thoughts and

assumptions, testing beliefs through behavioral experiments, and using behavioral activation where indicated (Beck, 2011; Martell et al., 2010). This option matters because an integrative model should not require religious assent to provide psychological care.

Precautions Against Guilt or Imposition:

When explicitly Buddhist practices are used, therapists should emphasize compassionate self-understanding rather than moral condemnation, distinguish constructive accountability from excessive guilt or shame, monitor emotional responses, and remind participants that religious components are optional. If religious anxiety, shame, or distress increases, the practice should be discontinued and a secular evidence-based alternative used (Beck, 2011; Martell et al., 2010; Pabongka Rinpoche, 1991).

Treatment Plan and Feasibility

The study developed a 12-session prototype organized around assessment, digital-use awareness, Five Aggregates observation, cognitive formulation, belief-focused work, and long-term planning. Seven experts judged the framework conceptually coherent and potentially relevant, while also raising concerns about religious applicability and practitioner knowledge. This feedback supports further model refinement but should not be interpreted as evidence of effectiveness, client acceptability, or clinical safety. All components require manual development and staged pilot testing before any controlled efficacy study.

Table 2. Proposed 12-Session Prototype for Future Feasibility Testing

Session	Theme	Model Node	Core Methods
1	Initial Assessment & Relationship Building	Assessment Baseline	Simulacra Time Experiment (Time1-4), Scale Assessment
2	Abstinence Experiment & Guarding Sense Doors	A1 Element Processing	App Organization·24-hr Abstinence·Teaching Guarding Sense Doors
3	Simulacra Production Experiment	A1 Deepening	Production Experiment·Initial Emptiness Probe·Introduction to Dependent Origination & Emptiness
4	Five *Khandhas* Education & *Vedanā* Training	A2 Element Processing	Teach Five *Khandhas* Model·Single simulacra Contact·Contemplate *Vedanā* as *Dukkha*

Session	Theme	Model Node	Core Methods
5	*Saññā* Observation & Identifying Discrimination (*Vikalpa*)	A3 Element Processing	*Saññā* Observation·Identify Discrimination·Ordinary/Noble Attention
6	*Saṅkhāra* Identification & Urge Awareness	A4 Element Processing	Physiological Reaction *Saṅkhāra* Experiment·Urge Intensity Recording
7	Initiate Five *Khandhas* Comprehensive Training	A5 Integration	Six-Column Five *Khandhas* Training Form·7-Day Progressive Training Plan
8	Downward Arrow Technique & Vertical Model Introduction	B4-B3 Exploration	Downward Arrow·Excavating Intermediate/Core Beliefs
9	Intermediate Belief Restructuring & *Dhamma*-clinging Analysis	B4 Deepening	Behavioral Experiments·Innate/Discriminative *Dhamma*-clinging Deconstruction
10	Core Belief Restructuring & *Anattā*	B3 Deepening	Emptiness of Five *Khandhas*·*Anattā* Concept·Loosening *Atta*-clinging
11	Four Powers of Confession & *Kamma* Purification	B2 Processing	Complete Four Powers Confession Practice
12	Integration Summary & Long-term Planning	Full Model + B1	Summary Assessment·Introduce *Avijjā*·Long-term Practice Plan

Discussion

The findings should be interpreted as an exploratory integration of digital-media research, Buddhist psychology, and CBT rather than as validation of a new diagnosis or treatment. Three points are particularly important: SIPI's status as a provisional construct, the limits of Buddhist-CBT comparison, and the distinction between conceptual feasibility and clinical efficacy.

First, the descriptive survey suggests that heavy digital engagement, compulsive checking, anxiety, depressive feelings, and dissatisfaction with offline reality can co-occur within the study sample. This is broadly consistent with literature linking problematic digital-media engagement with reward processes, social comparison, body-image concerns, and well-being outcomes (Fardouly et al., 2023; Montag et al., 2022; Potenza, 2014; Vogel et al., 2019; Zhang & DeAndrea, 2024). However, the present study used convenience sampling and a self-designed questionnaire, so it cannot establish the prevalence,

diagnostic validity, or causal structure of SIPI. A more defensible contribution is identifying three candidate mechanisms, addictive design, idealized representation, and perceived reality replacement, that can be operationalized and tested in future research.

Second, Buddhist concepts provide a rich interpretive vocabulary for examining attachment, perception, conditioning, and the instability of experience, but their relationship with CBT should remain heuristic. The Five Aggregates are not a linear cognitive-processing model, and ālayaviññāṇa or manas are not historical precursors of core and intermediate beliefs. The value of comparison lies instead in generating culturally meaningful questions about how stimuli are perceived, interpreted, appropriated as self-relevant, and transformed into habitual responses (Beck, 2011; Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000; Lin, 2016; van Gorkom, 2010; Waldron, 2003). This distinction protects both Buddhist doctrinal integrity and psychological scientific validity.

Third, the proposed Buddhist-integrated CBT model should be regarded as a research prototype. Expert endorsement indicates perceived conceptual feasibility but does not demonstrate efficacy. Several components, including media abstinence, repeated exposure to digital stimuli, not-self reflection, and the Four Powers of Confession, could have different effects across participants and therefore require explicit clinical rationale, cultural consent, adverse-event monitoring, and comparison with standard CBT procedures. A staged research program should begin with construct validation and manual development, proceed to small feasibility and safety studies, and only then examine comparative effectiveness.

New Knowledge from the Research

The principal new contribution of this study is proposing SIPI as a hypothesis-generating framework linking digitally curated simulacra with three candidate mechanisms: addictive design, idealized representation, and perceived reality replacement. Rather than defining a new disorder, the framework organizes a cluster of self-reported cognitive, emotional, and behavioral difficulties that future studies can examine using validated measures.

A second contribution is a two-level Buddhist-CBT comparative model. At the horizontal level, the Five Aggregates serve as a contemplative scaffold for

observing moment-to-moment experience; at the vertical level, selected Buddhist concepts concerning attachment, conditioning, and self-grasping generate reflective questions about deeper belief patterns. The innovation lies in using these comparisons as explicit heuristic bridges while acknowledging that Buddhist and CBT concepts differ in purpose, ontology, and clinical status.

The resulting framework can be summarized as:

digital simulacra exposure → candidate psychological mechanisms → moment-to-moment observation → cognitive-behavioral formulation → optional Buddhist-informed reflection → adaptive behavioral response.
Its contribution is conceptual rather than therapeutic: it identifies testable constructs, clarifies where Buddhist concepts may enrich culturally sensitive formulation, and provides a prototype for future intervention research without claiming that the proposed model has established clinical efficacy.

Several limitations constrain the findings. SIPI has not been psychometrically validated; the questionnaire used a convenience sample of 100 internet users and a self-designed instrument; expert interviews involved only seven participants; the proposed causal mechanisms were not experimentally tested; and the 12-session prototype was not delivered to clients. The Buddhist-CBT correspondences are functional analogies rather than doctrinal or mechanistic equivalences. Future research should therefore prioritize construct definition, scale development, representative sampling, qualitative validation with intended users, therapist-manual development, adverse-event procedures, and controlled feasibility studies before making treatment claims.

Conclusion

This study explored how digitally curated simulacra may be associated with psychological difficulties in contemporary Chinese society and developed a preliminary Buddhist-CBT framework for future research. Descriptive findings from the convenience sample suggest that heavy digital engagement can coexist with compulsive checking, anxiety, depressive feelings, cognitive dissonance, and dissatisfaction with offline reality. These findings should not be interpreted as population prevalence estimates or evidence that simulacra directly cause psychiatric disorders.

The comparative analysis indicates that Buddhist teachings can contribute interpretive perspectives on perception, attachment, conditioning, and self-related cognition, while CBT provides established methods for case formulation, cognitive restructuring, behavioral experiments, and behavioral change. The Five Aggregates, dependent origination, and Yogācāra concepts may therefore support culturally meaningful reflection, but they should not be treated as equivalents of CBT constructs or as independently validated clinical mechanisms.

The major contribution of the research is a testable conceptual framework and 12-session prototype rather than a validated treatment. Its future value depends on rigorous operationalization of SIPI, use of validated psychological measures, clearer intervention manuals, ethical and cultural safeguards, pilot safety studies, and controlled outcome research. Until such evidence is available, the model should be presented as a preliminary interdisciplinary contribution at the intersection of Buddhist psychology, digital-media studies, and cognitive behavioral therapy.

Recommendations

At the policy and educational levels, the findings support continued attention to digital-literacy education, transparent platform design, age-appropriate safeguards, and public awareness of algorithmic curation and idealized online representations. Buddhist organizations and educational institutions may contribute mindfulness, ethical reflection, and media-awareness programs, but mental-health interventions should remain within professional scope and should distinguish spiritual education from clinical treatment.

Future research should first validate the SIPI construct using qualitative work and standardized psychometric development, then test its associations with established measures of problematic internet use, anxiety, depression, body image, loneliness, and functional impairment. Subsequent pilot studies may evaluate the acceptability and safety of selected Buddhist-CBT components using pre/post measures such as the PHQ-9 and GAD-7, along with digital-use and adverse-event measures. Comparative studies should examine whether the integrative model adds value beyond standard CBT or mindfulness-based interventions and whether adaptations differ for Buddhist and non-Buddhist participants.

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Developing Wholesome Intention Through the Four Right Efforts (Sammappadhāna)

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Abstract

This mixed-methods action research study examined the development of wholesome intention among student volunteers at the International Buddhist Studies College (IBSC), with particular attention to volunteer fatigue, expectation-related distress, and intention–behavior consistency. The study had three objectives: (1) to identify current challenges affecting wholesome intention among IBSC student volunteers; (2) to develop a structured cultivation process based on the Four Right Efforts (Sammappadhāna); and (3) to evaluate preliminary changes following the intervention. The research proceeded in three phases. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 expert informants from Buddhist studies, psychology/mindfulness, volunteer management, and field practice. Second, the qualitative findings informed development of a 12-session iDANA training program integrating the Four Right Efforts with selected cognitive-behavioral tools, including the STOP technique and a 4C Response process. Third, 15 IBSC student volunteers completed a single-group pre-test/post-test evaluation using the 12-item Questionnaire-XJ. Qualitative findings highlighted tension between wholesome aspiration (chanda) and rigid, outcome-dependent expectation (taṇhā) as a recurring challenge in volunteer service. Quantitative results showed significant pre–post improvement on several questionnaire items, including maintenance of original wholesome intention (Q01: M = 3.73 to 4.27, p = .006, Cohen's d = 0.83) and use of the 4C tool (Q12: d = 2.16). Overall training satisfaction was 4.70/5.00. Because the study used a small single-group sample and a researcher-developed instrument, the findings should be interpreted as preliminary evidence of feasibility and potential benefit rather than proof of intervention efficacy. The study proposes the Dynamic Consistency Model as a Buddhist-informed framework linking mindful awareness, cognitive reframing, committed action, and the Four Right Efforts in volunteer development.

Keywords: Wholesome intention; Four Right Efforts; Sammappadhāna; Student volunteers; Buddhist psychology; Dynamic Consistency

Introduction

Volunteer service is widely associated with prosocial values, community engagement, and psychological well-being, yet sustained volunteering can also involve emotional exhaustion, declining motivation, role strain, and withdrawal when personal resources or expectations are repeatedly challenged. Research on volunteer motivation suggests that motivation quality is particularly important for satisfaction, persistence, and well-being. Values-oriented and relatively self-determined motives tend to be associated with more favorable outcomes than motives dominated by external pressure, self-enhancement, or controlled regulation (Stukas et al., 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2000). More recent evidence also indicates that volunteering can benefit social, mental, and physical well-being, although these effects vary according to individual characteristics, volunteering context, motivation, and the quality of available evidence (Nichol et al., 2024).

Mindfulness, compassion, and related contemplative practices have increasingly been investigated as resources for sustaining prosocial functioning. Loving-kindness and compassion meditation may support emotional regulation and compassionate responding (Hofmann et al., 2011), while meta-analytic evidence suggests that meditation-based practices can produce small-to-moderate improvements in empathy, compassion, and prosocial behavior (Luberto et al., 2018). Mindfulness has likewise been positively associated with prosocial behavior across both correlational and intervention studies (Donald et al., 2019). Nevertheless, these findings do not imply that mindfulness alone can prevent volunteer burnout. Research from demanding helping professions suggests that burnout and compassion fatigue are multidimensional phenomena influenced by both personal and contextual factors, and that mindfulness-based programs show variable effects across outcomes (Conversano et al., 2020).

Within Buddhist ethical psychology, the problem of sustaining wholesome service can be examined through the distinction between chanda and taṇhā. Chanda may denote a wholesome aspiration or willingness to undertake skillful action, whereas taṇhā refers to craving and attachment. In volunteer settings, an initial wish to help may become entangled with rigid expectations concerning recognition, recipient response, or visible outcomes. When those expectations are frustrated, emotional reactivity, disappointment, or disengagement may follow. The Four Right Efforts (Sammappadhāna) provide a

systematic Buddhist framework for regulating this process through preventing unarisen unwholesome states, abandoning those already arisen, cultivating unarisen wholesome states, and maintaining wholesome states that have already developed (Bodhi, 2012). Rather than functioning merely as a moral checklist, the Four Right Efforts describe an active process of mental cultivation that links intention with repeated behavioral practice.

Contemporary psychological approaches provide complementary, although conceptually distinct, resources. Cognitive therapy emphasizes the role of appraisals, assumptions, and beliefs in shaping emotional and behavioral responses (Beck et al., 1979). Acceptance and Commitment Therapy emphasizes psychological flexibility, values clarification, acceptance of difficult internal experiences, and committed action (Hayes et al., 2011). Self-Determination Theory further distinguishes autonomous from controlled forms of motivation and proposes that internalized, self-endorsed motivation is more conducive to sustained functioning and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In volunteer research, self-determined motivation has similarly been associated with greater satisfaction and more sustainable participation.

At the International Buddhist Studies College (IBSC), student volunteers operate within a distinctive environment in which academic demands, multicultural interaction, Buddhist values, and community-service responsibilities converge. The original study identified recurring difficulties when wholesome aspiration became fused with rigid expectations about service outcomes. However, little research has examined how the Four Right Efforts can be operationalized as a structured developmental process for volunteer self-regulation and then evaluated through both qualitative and quantitative evidence.

Accordingly, this study develops and preliminarily evaluates a 12-session iDANA training program integrating the Four Right Efforts with selected cognitive-behavioral and acceptance-based tools. The study does not assume that Buddhist concepts, CBT, ACT, and motivational theories are theoretically equivalent. Instead, it uses them in functional dialogue to examine whether mindful awareness, cognitive reframing, committed action, and Buddhist mental cultivation can strengthen wholesome intention and intention–behavior consistency among IBSC student volunteers. The resulting framework is conceptualized as Dynamic Consistency: the capacity to maintain a stable wholesome orientation while adapting behavior appropriately to changing interpersonal and service conditions.

Research Objectives

1. To examine current challenges affecting the development and maintenance of wholesome intention among IBSC student volunteers.

2. To develop a structured cultivation process for wholesome intention based on the Four Right Efforts (Sammappadhāna).

3. To evaluate preliminary changes in intention stability, intention–behavior alignment, and participant experience following the training program.

Literature Review

Within Buddhist ethical psychology, cetanā refers to intention or volition and is central to the moral quality of action, while the Four Right Efforts provide a practical structure for regulating wholesome and unwholesome mental states (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012). For the present study, the distinction between chanda and taṇhā is particularly important. Wholesome aspiration can orient service toward skillful action, whereas attachment to a predetermined outcome may generate frustration when reality does not conform to expectation. The Four Right Efforts therefore offer a process model: prevent conditions likely to undermine wholesome service, abandon unwholesome reactions that have arisen, cultivate wholesome qualities not yet established, and sustain wholesome qualities already present.

Contemporary psychological research provides complementary but conceptually distinct perspectives. The empathy–altruism hypothesis proposes that empathic concern can generate other-oriented helping motivation (Batson, 2011). Loving-kindness and compassion practices have also been examined as potential psychological interventions for affect regulation and prosocial functioning (Hofmann et al., 2011). Cognitive therapy focuses on identifying and evaluating maladaptive appraisals (Beck et al., 1979), while ACT emphasizes acceptance, values clarification, and committed action (Hayes et al., 2011). Self-Determination Theory further suggests that more autonomous and internalized forms of motivation are associated with stronger self-regulation and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Despite these convergences, Buddhist concepts should not be reduced to modern clinical constructs. Sammappadhāna is embedded in a path of ethical and contemplative development, whereas CBT, ACT, and motivation theories were developed for different explanatory and applied purposes. The research gap addressed here is therefore not the absence of stress-management techniques, but

the limited study of how a Buddhist framework of active mental cultivation can be operationalized for volunteer development while retaining conceptual clarity. The study responds to this gap through the iDANA program and the proposed Dynamic Consistency Model.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework integrates the Four Right Efforts with selected cognitive-behavioral processes to explain how wholesome intention may be maintained across changing service conditions. The central proposition is that volunteer strain can emerge when intrinsic aspiration becomes fused with rigid outcome expectations. Training therefore targets awareness of this distinction, regulation of unwholesome reactions, cultivation of skillful responses, and maintenance of value-consistent action. The term Dynamic Consistency refers to the capacity to preserve a stable wholesome orientation while adapting behavior appropriately to changing interpersonal and situational demands.

1. Intervention: The 12-session iDANA training program based on the Four Right Efforts, incorporating the STOP technique, 4C Response, reflective practice, and field-based exercises.

2. Practice Context: Application of training skills in volunteer service settings, including the Camp Son field site.

3. Outcomes: Intention stability, intention–behavior alignment, self-reported coping, and participant satisfaction, assessed through Questionnaire-XJ and qualitative field evidence.

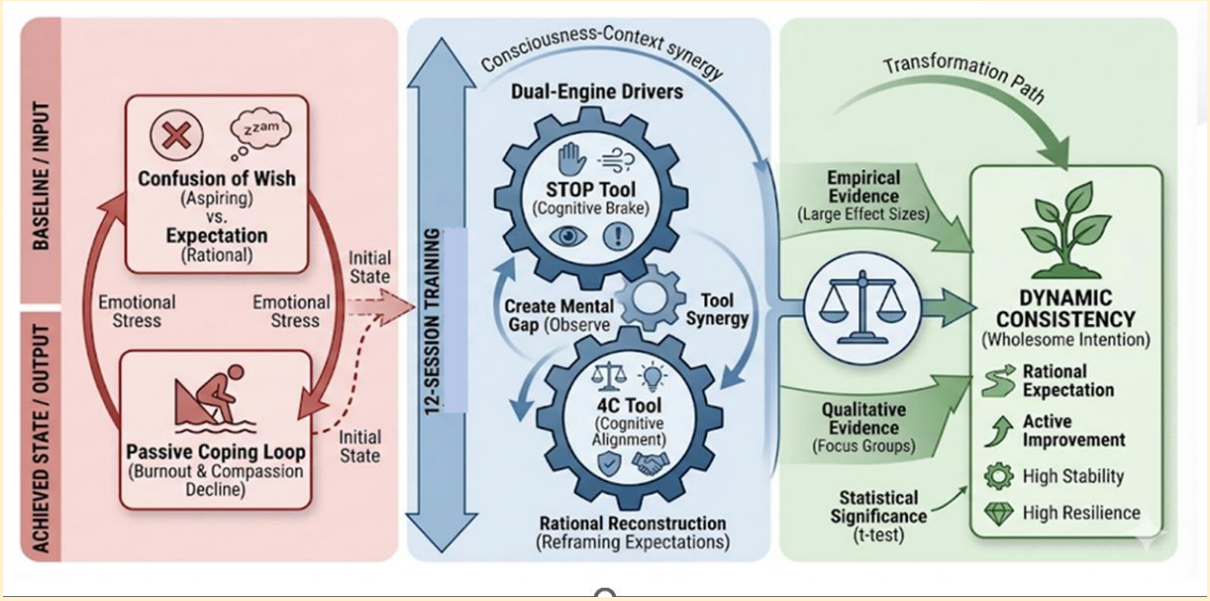

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Wholesome Intention Development

Research Methodology

This study employed a sequential mixed-methods action research design involving qualitative exploration, intervention development, and a quantitative single-group pre-test/post-test evaluation. The three phases were linked sequentially so qualitative findings informed the training design, and the quantitative phase provided preliminary evidence of changes following implementation.

Phase 1: Qualitative Exploration and Needs Assessment

- Participants and Selection Criteria: Purposive sampling was used to select 15 expert informants representing four groups: Buddhist scholars (n = 2), mindfulness and psychology experts (n = 3), volunteer managers (n = 6), and field practitioners (n = 4). Selection emphasized relevant academic, clinical, administrative, or field experience. The expert sample identified recurring challenges in volunteer service and assessed the conceptual and practical relevance of the proposed training components.
- Data Collection and Analysis: Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide reviewed through the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) procedure, with reported item scores ranging from 0.67 to 1.00. Interview data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring cognitive, emotional, motivational, and organizational factors affecting wholesome intention and volunteer fatigue.

Phase 2: Qualitative-Informed Intervention Development

- How Qualitative Findings Informed the Intervention: Qualitative findings indicated recurring tension between aspiration (chanda) and rigid expectation (taṇhā), together with a need for strategies that could be applied during emotionally demanding service encounters. These findings informed the development of the 12-session iDANA training program. The Four Right Efforts provided the organizing Buddhist framework, while the STOP technique and 4C Response were used as practical tools for interrupting reactivity, examining craving or complaint, generating a skillful alternative, and committing to appropriate action.

Phase 3: Quantitative Implementation and Evaluation

- Participants and Selection Criteria: The intervention was implemented with 15 IBSC student volunteers selected on the basis of current enrollment, active involvement in volunteer service, reported strain or motivation depletion related to academic-service demands, and willingness to complete the full training program. Because no control group was included, interpret the quantitative phase as a preliminary within-group evaluation rather than a controlled efficacy trial.
- Data Collection and Analysis: Participants completed Questionnaire-XJ before and after the intervention. The instrument contained 12 competency items rated on a five-point Likert scale and had an internal consistency coefficient of Cronbach's $\alpha = .745$ in the study sample. Pre–post item scores were analyzed using paired-samples t tests and Cohen's d effect sizes in JAMOVI. Given the small sample, multiple item-level tests, and absence of a control condition, statistical findings were interpreted cautiously.
- Integration of Findings: Quantitative results were interpreted together with post-training interviews and field observation notes from Camp Son. This integration examined whether changes in questionnaire scores were accompanied by participants' reports and observed examples of calmer, more reflective, and more value-consistent responses in volunteer settings.

Research Results

Objective 1. Qualitative findings indicated that a recurring challenge among IBSC volunteers was shifting from an initial aspiration to help to rigid expectations about how recipients, colleagues, or situations should respond. When expected outcomes were not achieved, participants and experts described frustration, helplessness, emotional reactivity, and disengagement. These findings support the study's working distinction between chanda-oriented service and taṇhā-like attachment to outcomes; however, they should not be interpreted as establishing a single causal explanation for volunteer burnout.

Objective 2. The qualitative findings were translated into the 12-session iDANA training process structured around the Four Right Efforts. The 4C Response helped participants recognize craving or complaint, interrupt reactive patterns, generate a more skillful response, and commit to action. The process has

functional similarities with acceptance- and values-based approaches, particularly the emphasis on responding flexibly to difficult internal experiences while acting in accordance with chosen values (Hayes et al., 2011). The iDANA reflective log supported self-monitoring and review of the relationship among intention, context, and behavior.

Objective 3. The single-group pre-test/post-test evaluation showed improvement on several Questionnaire-XJ items after the intervention. These results provide preliminary evidence of change within the participating group but do not, by themselves, establish that the intervention caused the observed improvements.

Table 1. Paired-Samples t-Test Results for the Intervention Group

Table 4.1
Paired Sample t-Test Results with Effect Sizes for Pre- and Post-Training Scores

Item	Pre-test M	Post-test M	t	p	Cohen's d	Effect Size
Q01	3.73	4.27	3.23	.006**	0.83	Large
Q02	4.00	4.33	2.09	.055	0.54	Medium
Q03	2.00	2.27	1.47	.164	0.38	Small
Q04	3.73	4.20	2.17	.048*	0.56	Medium
Q05	3.20	3.80	2.36	.033*	0.61	Medium
Q06	2.27	2.60	2.09	.055	0.54	Medium
Q07	2.93	3.27	1.58	.136	0.41	Small
Q08	2.27	2.87	2.36	.033*	0.61	Medium
Q09	3.20	3.87	2.32	.036*	0.60	Medium
Q10	3.40	3.53	0.56	.582	0.15	Small
Q11	3.40	3.60	1.38	.189	0.36	Small
Q12	2.07	3.40	8.37	<.001***	2.16	Very Large

Note. N = 15. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.
Effect size interpretation: Small (d ≈ 0.2), Medium (d ≈ 0.5), Large (d ≥ 0.8).

Quantitative results showed a statistically significant increase in maintaining original wholesome intention (Q01), from a pre-test mean of 3.73 to a post-test mean of 4.27 (p = .006), with a large standardized mean difference (Cohen's d = 0.83). Q12, representing use of the 4C tool to transform external demands into internal action commitments, showed the largest observed change (d = 2.16). Several other items also improved, although the pattern was not uniform across all 12 items. Mean participant satisfaction was 4.70/5.00. Post-training interviews and field notes provided convergent examples of participants

reporting greater calm, reflection, and conflict management during service activities. Because the sample included only 15 participants and no comparison group, these findings should be regarded as preliminary rather than as evidence of established effectiveness.

Discussion

The findings provide preliminary support for understanding volunteer strain as partly related to the way aspirations, expectations, and service outcomes are cognitively organized. Participants described difficulty when an initial wholesome wish to serve became fused with demands for particular recipient responses, recognition, or visible results. From a Buddhist perspective, the distinction between *chanda* and *taṇhā* offers an ethical-psychological vocabulary for differentiating skillful aspiration from attachment to outcomes. Contemporary psychological evidence supports a related, though not equivalent, interpretation. Research on psychological flexibility indicates that distress is often intensified when individuals become rigidly fused with thoughts, expectations, or internal demands and are less able to respond adaptively to changing circumstances. A 2024 systematic and meta-analytic review of ACT mechanisms found that reductions in psychological inflexibility and increases in values-based committed action were consistently associated with reductions in psychological distress (Macri & Rogge, 2024). The present findings therefore suggest that volunteer strain may involve not only negative cognitions but also reduced flexibility in relating to expectations. At the same time, the data do not support treating the *chanda–taṇhā* distinction as the sole cause of burnout. Volunteer well-being is also shaped by workload, organizational support, role demands, social climate, and motivational quality. Recent volunteer research shows that supportive work climates and more autonomous forms of motivation are associated with lower emotional exhaustion and stronger continuation intentions, whereas controlled motivation is associated with greater exhaustion.

The second contribution is operationalizing the Four Right Efforts within a structured volunteer-training process. Rather than treating mindfulness as a stand-alone relaxation technique, the iDANA program organizes practice around preventing unwholesome states, abandoning those that have arisen, cultivating wholesome states, and maintaining them over time. This active regulatory sequence has functional similarities with contemporary process-based approaches that combine awareness, acceptance, cognitive flexibility, and committed action. Recent evidence from workplace ACT-informed training indicates that increases in psychological flexibility are associated with lower

burnout and greater resilience (Archer et al., 2024). Nevertheless, conceptual boundaries should remain clear. ACT is a psychological intervention model centered on flexibility and values-guided behavior, whereas *Sammappadhāna* belongs to a Buddhist ethical and soteriological framework. Their relevance to one another is therefore best described as *functional dialogue rather than theoretical equivalence.*

The quantitative findings further suggest improvement in several targeted competencies, particularly maintaining original wholesome intention and using the 4C Response. The large effect for Q01 ($d = 0.83$) and the very large effect for Q12 ($d = 2.16$) are notable, but they should be interpreted cautiously because the study involved only 15 participants, no control group, repeated measurement, and a researcher-developed instrument. These findings are more appropriately treated as evidence of feasibility and possible benefit than as confirmation of efficacy. The motivational interpretation is nevertheless consistent with Self-Determination Theory and more recent volunteer research. A 2023 study of sport volunteers found that controlled motivation predicted later emotional exhaustion, whereas emotional exhaustion negatively predicted intention to continue volunteering (Li et al.,2023). Research with food-bank volunteers similarly found that intrinsic motivation strongly predicted both commitment and subjective well-being, while prosocial activity was not necessarily beneficial when the underlying motivation was less self-determined (Sheldon et al., 2023). These findings strengthen the present study's argument that shifting from outcome-dependent pressure toward internalized prosocial values may support more sustainable volunteer engagement.

Importantly, the results also indicate that individual mental cultivation should not be separated from organizational conditions. Studies of volunteers show that organizational support, work climate, time demands, and the quality of motivation are all related to burnout and well-being (Dekel, Geldenhuys & Harris, 2022). The practical implication is that the iDANA model should complement, rather than replace, organizational measures such as workload management, supervision, role clarity, and supportive volunteer climates.

New Knowledge from the Research

The principal new knowledge generated by this study is the Dynamic Consistency (DC) Model, which explains wholesome volunteer intention as a regulated relationship among aspiration, expectation, awareness, context, and action. Dynamic consistency does not mean maintaining identical emotions or behaviors across situations. Rather, it refers to maintaining a stable wholesome

orientation while adapting one's response to changing interpersonal and service conditions.

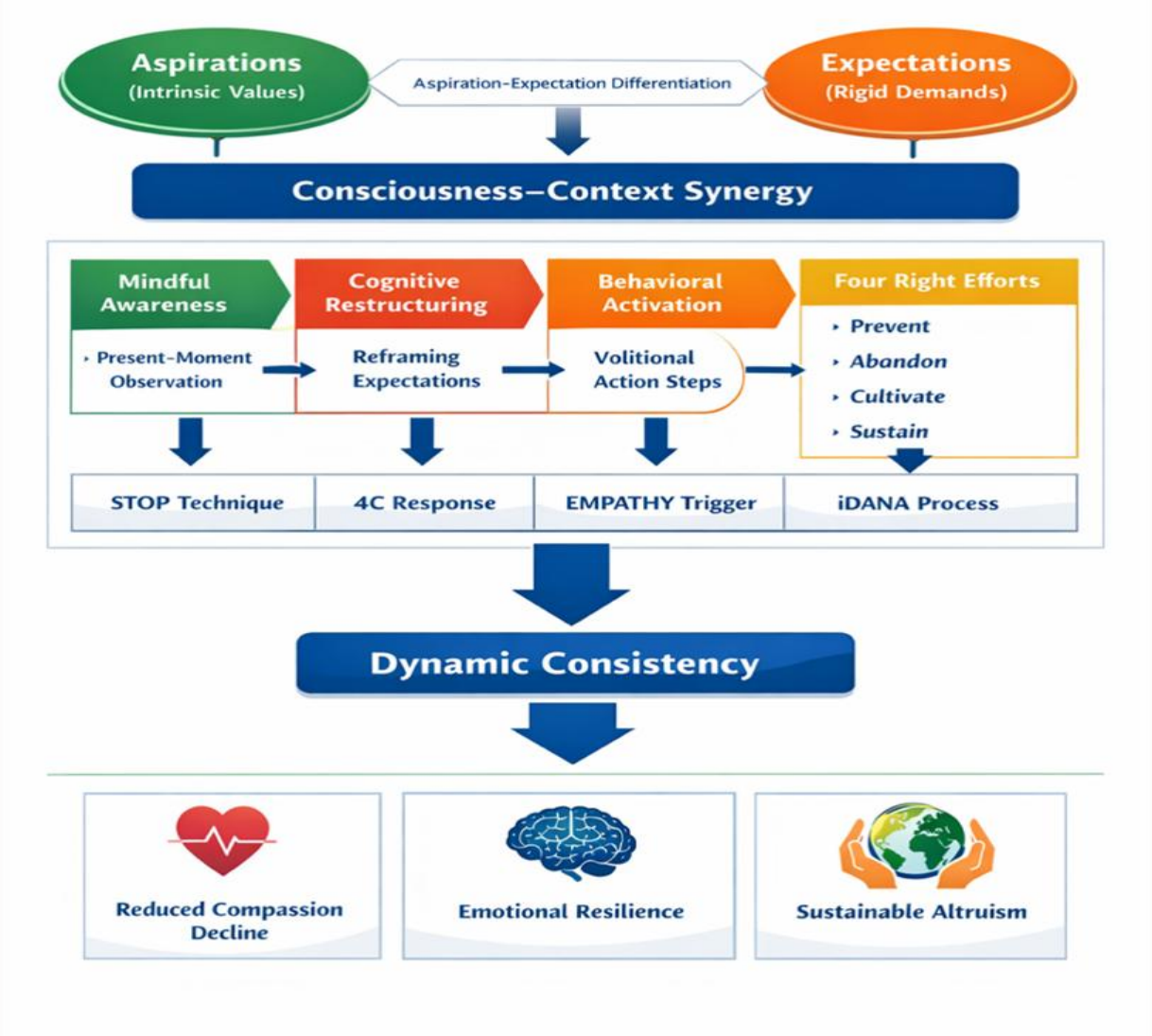

Figure 2. Dynamic Consistency Model Developed from the 12-Session iDANA Training Program

The model contains three linked propositions. First, the Aspiration–Expectation Differentiation distinguishes chanda, understood here as a wholesome orientation toward skillful service, from rigid outcome-dependent expectation associated with taṇhā. This distinction helps participants identify when altruistic motivation has become entangled with demand, recognition, or control. Second, Consciousness–Context Synergy describes the interaction between mindful awareness and real-world service conditions. The STOP technique, 4C Response, empathy-based field exercises, and reflective logs function as practice tools through which participants can notice reactivity, reconsider interpretation, and select a value-consistent action. Third, the Four

Right Efforts provide the regulatory architecture: prevent unwholesome patterns before they intensify, abandon those already present, cultivate wholesome responses, and sustain them through repeated practice. The expected outcome is dynamic consistency expressed through greater emotional resilience, reduced reactive withdrawal, and more sustainable altruistic behavior. This model remains a conceptual product of the present small-scale action research study and requires replication and independent validation.

Potential Application: The DC Model may be adapted for volunteer-development programs in universities, Buddhist organizations, and nonprofit settings. Such transfer should not be assumed to produce equivalent outcomes in different cultural or institutional contexts. Future applications should preserve the voluntary nature of Buddhist content, clarify facilitator competencies, and evaluate outcomes with validated measures and comparison groups.

Conclusion

This study developed and preliminarily evaluated a 12-session Buddhist-informed training program designed to strengthen wholesome intention among IBSC student volunteers. Qualitative findings identified recurrent tension between aspiration and rigid outcome expectation, while the intervention translated the Four Right Efforts into a structured sequence of awareness, interruption of unwholesome reactions, cultivation of skillful alternatives, and maintenance of value-consistent action. The quantitative phase showed meaningful pre–post improvements on several targeted items, including maintenance of original wholesome intention (Q01, $d = 0.83$) and use of the 4C Response (Q12, $d = 2.16$), together with high participant satisfaction.

Limitations and Recommendations

These findings should be interpreted in light of important limitations. The intervention group was small ($n = 15$), no control group was used, Questionnaire-XJ was researcher-developed, and multiple item-level statistical tests were conducted. The study therefore cannot establish causal efficacy, long-term retention, or generalizability beyond the participating IBSC volunteers. Future research should replicate the model with larger samples, validated measures of burnout, compassion fatigue, psychological flexibility, and volunteer retention, and preferably controlled or quasi-experimental designs with follow-up assessment. Qualitative research should also examine whether the chanda–taṇhā distinction is experienced similarly across Buddhist and non-Buddhist volunteers. For institutional application, psychological monitoring and volunteer support

should emphasize both individual self-regulation and organizational factors such as workload, supervision, role clarity, and social support.

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Development and Preliminary Evaluation of Mindfulness-Based Anxiety Reduction (MBAR) for Chinese Professionals

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Abstract

This study developed and preliminarily evaluated Mindfulness-Based Anxiety Reduction (MBAR), a brief online intervention for Chinese professionals experiencing overlapping work, family, and intrapersonal stress. The study aimed to identify participants' psychological needs, iteratively refine MBAR by integrating Buddhist-informed principles with selected psychological techniques, and examine the program's feasibility, acceptability, and immediate participant-reported outcomes.

Using a mixed-methods action research design, the research first involved 13 multidisciplinary key informants (4 Buddhist scholars, 3 meditation masters, 3 psychotherapists, and 3 professionals) in a needs assessment. A total of 22 workplace participants then took part across four iterative Plan-Act-Observe-Reflect (PAOR) cycles. The 22 participants were divided into four independent groups of 6, 5, 6, and 5 participants, respectively, with each participant attending only one cycle. The core structure of MBAR remained consistent, while safety prompts, alternative visualization instructions, and grounding procedures were progressively refined in response to participant feedback. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus-group discussions, open-ended feedback, and standardized self-report measures. The four cycles progressively refined a brief, single-session online MBAR workshop centered on Heart-Amber Awareness and Heart-Amber Mellowing, which translated Buddhist-informed reflections on impermanence (Anicca), non-self (Anattā), and loving-kindness (Mettā) into accessible experiential practices.

Immediate post-session assessments showed within-group score changes across several outcomes, accompanied by qualitative reports of reduced bodily tension, greater distance from distress, and a less self-critical stance. These findings should be interpreted cautiously because the study used a small, uncontrolled sample; intervention refinements varied across PAOR rounds;

reassessments were immediate; and measures had standard recall periods that exceeded the workshop duration. Accordingly, the results provide preliminary evidence of feasibility and acceptability rather than clinical effectiveness. Further evaluation should use a standardized intervention protocol, control or comparison conditions, validated timing of outcome assessment, adverse-event monitoring, and longer follow-up.

Keywords: Mindfulness-Based Anxiety Reduction (MBAR); Mindfulness; Chinese professionals; Anxiety; Multi-scenario stress.

Introduction

Anxiety and overlapping work-family pressures are important concerns among contemporary Chinese professionals. National evidence has linked long working hours with elevated detection rates for anxiety and depression (Sun & Jiang, 2024). Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) have established evidence bases, but their conventional multi-week formats may present adherence challenges for time-constrained professionals (Khoury et al., 2015; Segal et al., 2013). Critical scholarship has also described a form of "thin mindfulness" in which mindfulness is reduced to an attentional or productivity technique and detached from ethical and philosophical contexts (Purser, 2019; Van Dam et al., 2018). This critique represents one scholarly perspective; secular adaptation has also increased mindfulness accessibility in clinical and educational settings. The specific gap addressed here is the limited evidence on brief, online, culturally responsive, Buddhist-informed interventions designed for overlapping work, family, and intrapersonal stress.

The target population for this research was Chinese working professionals across diverse sectors who experienced overlapping pressures from workplace demands, family responsibilities, financial uncertainty, and self-imposed expectations. Participants described distress through emotional, cognitive, relational, and bodily experiences, including insomnia, chest tightness, and fatigue. MBAR was therefore designed as an accessible, short-duration program that could address distress across life domains rather than treating workplace or family stress in isolation. The research does not assume that one brief workshop can change participants' objective circumstances; instead, it examines whether an integrated experiential program is feasible, acceptable, and associated with immediate changes in how distress is perceived and approached.

To address these practical and theoretical gaps, this research used Lewin's Plan-Act-Observe-Reflect (PAOR) cycle (Adelman, 1993) to develop and iteratively refine Mindfulness-Based Anxiety Reduction (MBAR), a single-session 2- to 2.5-hour online small-group program. The Heart-Amber framework operationalized selected Buddhist-informed principles and psychological resources through two core practices: Heart-Amber Awareness and Heart-Amber Mellowing. This article reports the development process and conducts a preliminary evaluation of feasibility, acceptability, and exploratory short-term participant-reported outcomes; it does not present MBAR as a validated clinical treatment.

Research objectives

1. To examine the psychological challenges and intervention needs of Chinese professionals to inform the development of MBAR.
2. To develop and iteratively refine Mindfulness-Based Anxiety Reduction (MBAR) by integrating Buddhist-informed principles with selected psychological techniques through four PAOR cycles.
3. To conduct a preliminary evaluation of the feasibility, acceptability, and exploratory short-term participant-reported outcomes of MBAR.

Literature review

The theoretical foundation of this study is built upon a critical synthesis of Western psychological stress theories and Eastern Buddhist mental cultivation. To address the multi-scenario stress faced by Chinese professionals, the literature review is structured into three main themes:

1. Western Psychological Concepts and Interventions

Chinese professionals may encounter overlapping pressures arising from work, family obligations, and personal expectations. Self-Efficacy Theory suggests that perceived coping capability shapes how people appraise demanding situations (Bandura, 1997), while Work/Family Border Theory explains how permeable boundaries allow strain to transfer between occupational and family domains (Clark, 2000). Mindfulness-based programs have shown benefits for stress and related outcomes (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Khoury et al., 2015), and brief mindfulness research suggests that shorter formats may influence negative affect (Schumer et al., 2018). However, evidence from established multi-session

programs cannot be assumed to apply directly to a single 2- to 2.5-hour online workshop. The practical question for MBAR is therefore how a brief program can remain accessible while preserving sufficient theoretical coherence, participant choice, and psychological safeguarding.

2. Buddhist Foundations of Mental Cultivation

MBAR draws on Buddhist teachings as philosophical and ethical resources rather than treating them as interchangeable with modern psychological constructs. Satipaṭṭhāna, as presented in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (MN 10), provides a canonical foundation for attending to the body, feelings, mind, and mental phenomena (Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu & Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1995). However, "non-judgmental observation" is primarily modern psychological terminology and does not exhaust the fuller Buddhist context of mindfulness, clear comprehension, ethical cultivation, and insight (Anālayo Bhikkhu, 2006; Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2011). The Anattālakkhaṇa Sutta (SN 22.59) relates impermanence and change to the non-self character of the five aggregates; accordingly, anicca and anattā inform MBAR's emphasis on the changing and non-fixed character of experience (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000). The Karaṇīyamettā Sutta (Sn 1.8) presents mettā as an unbounded orientation of goodwill toward living beings, thereby informing MBAR's stance of goodwill and non-harming toward distress (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2017; Gunaratana, 2017). In this intervention, self-directed loving-kindness is used as a specific pedagogical and therapeutic application; it should not be presented as a universal sequence or complete definition of Buddhist practice.

3. Knowledge Gaps and Conceptual Framework

Existing research supports mindfulness-based and brief mindfulness approaches, but important uncertainties remain regarding single-session delivery, online small-group formats, cultural adaptation for Chinese professionals, and the explicit integration of Buddhist-informed principles with psychological techniques. Concerns about "thin mindfulness" further suggest the value of examining whether ethical and philosophical context can be retained without making a brief program inaccessible (Purser, 2019; Van Dam et al., 2018). Action research offers an appropriate development strategy because intervention content can be revised in response to participant observations and feedback (Stringer, 2014).

The conceptual framework therefore treats Buddhist foundations (Satipatthana, Anicca, Anattā, and Mettā) and selected psychological resources (somatic awareness, self-efficacy, work-family theory, and parts-oriented dialogue) as inputs that inform MBAR design. These foundations are not manipulated independent variables. Through the PAOR process, needs-assessment findings and participant feedback informed successive versions of MBAR. The preliminary evaluation then examined feasibility, acceptability, and exploratory participant-reported outcomes, including anxiety, depression, perceived stress, self-efficacy, and work-family conflict.

Conceptual framework

Figure 1 presents MBAR as a development pathway. Buddhist foundations and selected psychological resources informed a needs-responsive preliminary design. The design was then implemented, observed, and refined through four PAOR cycles, producing a revised MBAR program for preliminary evaluation. The framework distinguishes theoretical inputs, the action-research development process, intervention components, and evaluation domains rather than treating the theoretical foundation itself as an independent variable.

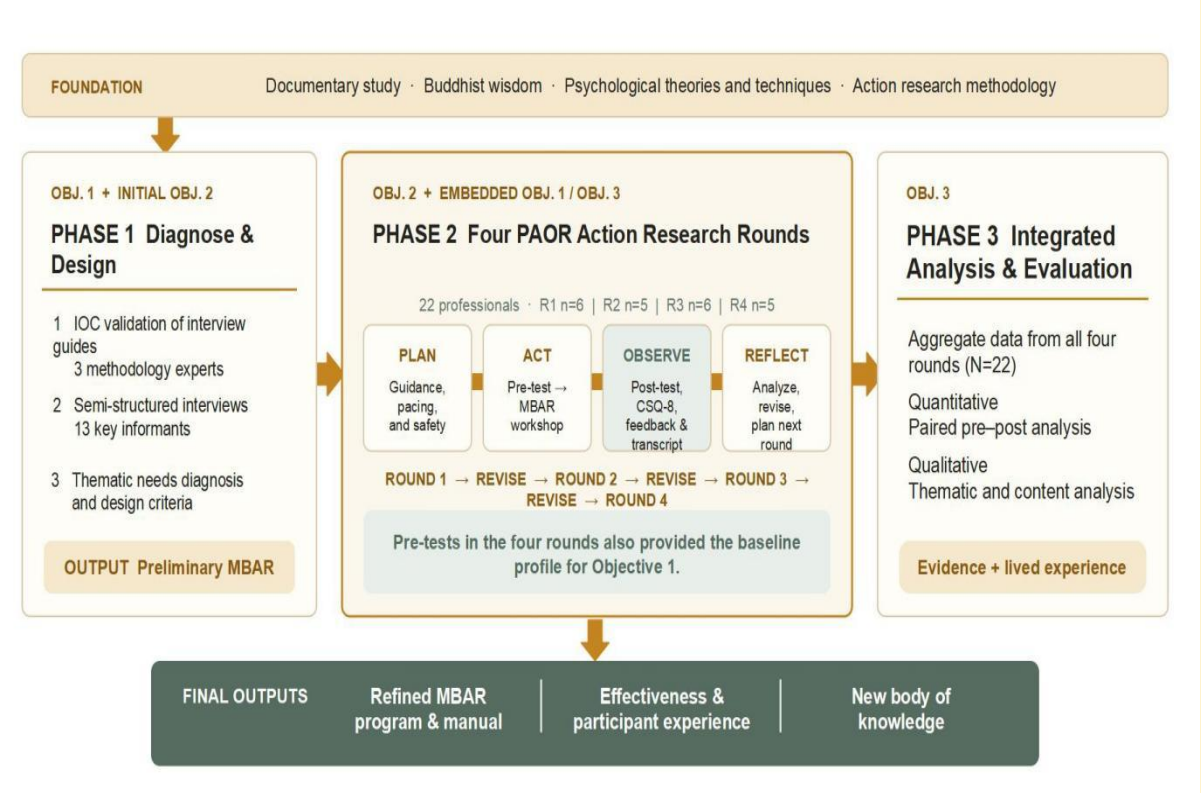

Figure 1. MBAR Development and Preliminary Evaluation Pathway

Foundational Inputs: Buddhist-informed principles and selected psychological resources used to guide intervention design.

Development Process and Intervention:

1. Mixed-Methods Action Research based on the Plan-Act-Observe-Reflect (PAOR) cycle.
2. The Mindfulness-Based Anxiety Reduction (MBAR) Program (A single-session online workshop utilizing "Heart-Amber Awareness" and "Heart-Amber Mellowing" practices).
3. Target Audience: Chinese working professionals experiencing multi-scenario stress.

Preliminary Evaluation Domains:

Feasibility, acceptability, and exploratory participant-reported outcomes measured through GAD-7 (He et al., 2010), PHQ-9 (Wang et al., 2014), PSS-10 (Lu et al., 2017), GSES (Zhang & Schwarzer, 1995), WFCS (Breyer & Bluemke, 2016), CSQ-8 (Mak et al., 2017), and qualitative feedback.

Research Methodology

This research used a multiphase mixed-methods action research design conducted online with Chinese working professionals experiencing multi-scenario stress. Phase 1: Qualitative data from 13 key informants were first used to identify participant needs and inform the initial development of MBAR. Phase 2 used four PAOR cycles to implement, observe, and refine successive versions of MBAR. Phase 3 combined standardized self-report measures with focus-group and open-ended feedback for a preliminary evaluation.

During the four PAOR cycles, we collected quantitative pre- and post-session measures alongside qualitative observations and participant feedback. The qualitative component was given priority because the primary purpose was to develop and iteratively refine the intervention, while the quantitative data provided supplementary exploratory evidence. The two data types were integrated during reflection after each cycle to guide subsequent modifications and again during the final interpretation of the findings.

Step 1: Qualitative Study and Needs Diagnosis

The needs assessment involved 13 multidisciplinary key informants: 4 Buddhist scholars, 3 Vipassanā meditation masters, 3 psychotherapists, and 3

professionals. Semi-structured interview protocols were tailored to each category and reviewed by three methodology experts using Item-Objective Congruence (IOC). We examined interview transcripts through familiarization, initial coding, category development, and theme refinement to identify stress-related needs and inform the preliminary MBAR design. IOC results and qualitative procedures are reported descriptively rather than being characterized as "robust" without further evidence. The informant sample was purposively structured to represent four relevant perspectives rather than determined through a formal saturation procedure.

Key Informants and Instrument Validation

The key informants included four Buddhist scholars with master's degrees or above who taught or conducted research in Buddhist or religious institutions, three experienced psychologists or psychological counselors with master's degrees or above, three senior Vipassanā meditation teachers, and three working professionals who met the participant eligibility criteria. Each Mandarin-language interview lasted approximately one hour and was recorded and transcribed. Three senior MCU faculty members reviewed the interview guide, and all items received an IOC score of 1.00 (M = 1.00, range = 1.00–1.00).

Participants and Data Collection

Participants were Mandarin-speaking employed adults aged 18–50, regardless of gender or occupation. Pre-test screening excluded individuals with severe psychological or physical health conditions that could affect safe participation. The online workshops were conducted in Mandarin, lasted approximately 2–2.5 hours, and were recorded with consent and subsequently transcribed. The researcher served as the facilitator and was solely responsible for recording management, transcription, and qualitative coding.

Step 2: Action Research and Intervention Implementation

A total of 22 Chinese workplace participants took part across four PAOR cycles. Workshops were delivered through Tencent Meeting in small groups of approximately 5 to 6 participants and lasted 2 to 2.5 hours. The small-group format was intended to support interaction and individualized guidance; psychological safety must be evaluated through documented procedures rather than inferred from group size alone.

Following the eligibility screening described above, 22 participants took part in four sequential PAOR rounds, with 6, 5, 6, and 5 participants, respectively. Each participant attended only one round, and no participant was included more than once across cycles. The facilitator was the MBAR developer and a doctoral candidate in Innovative Mindfulness and Peace Studies, with a master's degree in applied psychology, professional psychological-counseling qualifications, mindfulness-teaching training, and extensive meditation-practice experience. All four workshops were delivered using the MBAR manual. No independent facilitator supervision or formal fidelity checklist was used because the program developer delivered all sessions using the MBAR manual.

Table 1. Participant Distribution and Key Modifications Across the Four PAOR Cycles

PAOR cycle	N	Principal observation or feedback	Modification for the subsequent cycle
Round 1	6	Some participants required greater choice and preparation before visualization.	Added an eyes-open option and pre-workshop reflection questions.
Round 2	5	Some participants had difficulty forming or engaging with visual imagery.	Added the prompt, "If this feeling could speak, what would it say?"
Round 3	6	Additional grounding and clearer interpersonal boundaries were needed.	Added gentle shoulder tapping and the instruction "approach but do not touch."
Round 4	5	The refined version was implemented and reviewed.	Consolidated the revised instructions into the MBAR manual.

As summarized in Table 1, participant feedback and facilitator reflection informed the progressive refinement of MBAR. Because the four groups received progressively modified versions, the pooled pre-post analysis was treated as exploratory rather than as an evaluation of one fixed intervention.

Step 3: Data Collection and Effect Evaluation

The preliminary evaluation involved the same 22 workplace participants. Measures included GAD-7, PHQ-9, PSS-10, GSES, WFCS, and CSQ-8, together with focus-group discussion and open-ended feedback. Self-report measures were administered before the workshop and immediately afterward. Because GAD-7 and PHQ-9 use a two-week recall period and PSS-10 uses a longer retrospective frame, immediate post-session scores cannot be interpreted

as standard symptom change over those periods; they are retained only as exploratory response patterns. Quantitative analysis used descriptive statistics and paired comparisons, while qualitative material was examined thematically. The two forms of evidence were integrated during interpretation rather than treated as independent proof of effectiveness.

Ethical Considerations

Formal institutional ethical approval was not required for this non-clinical educational action research under the applicable program requirements. Before entering the online MBAR program, all participants reviewed an electronic informed-consent form and were enrolled only after selecting "Agree." They were informed of the study procedures, online audio/video recording, confidentiality arrangements, potential psychological discomfort, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Questionnaire, interview, recording, and transcript data were encrypted and kept confidential, and pseudonyms were used in all publications. Consent also covered the academic use of anonymized excerpts from participant feedback and transcripts. During the online workshop, participants could turn off their cameras or pause any practice, and free professional psychological support was available if intense emotional distress occurred.

Anxiety, depressive symptoms, perceived stress, and general self-efficacy were assessed using the validated Chinese versions of the GAD-7, PHQ-9, PSS-10, and GSES, respectively. Higher scores indicated higher levels of anxiety, depressive symptoms, and perceived stress, whereas higher GSES scores indicated stronger perceived self-efficacy. The CSQ-8 was administered after the workshop to assess participant satisfaction.

Quantitative data were analyzed using paired-samples t tests to examine immediate within-group pre–post score changes. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's d for paired observations. Given the small, uncontrolled sample and the immediate timing of the post-test, the findings were treated as exploratory rather than as evidence of clinical effectiveness.

Research results

Objective 1. Baseline findings described the psychological characteristics and intervention needs of the 22 participating Chinese professionals; they should not be generalized to Chinese professionals as a whole.

At baseline, the 22 participants had mean scores of 13.6 on the GAD-7, 12.9 on the PHQ-9, 24.0 on the PSS-10, 26.7 on the GSES, and 11.8 on the WFCS.

Pre-intervention open-ended responses and interviews indicated four recurring sources of pressure: workload and career development, family and intimate relationships, financial and life uncertainty, and internal expectations or perfectionism. Participants also described bodily experiences such as insomnia, chest tightness, sweating, and numbness, together with self-critical thought patterns. These findings informed the decision to combine bodily awareness, compassionate dialogue, and cross-domain coping within MBAR; they do not establish that these patterns characterize all Chinese professionals.

Objective 2. The action-research process developed and iteratively refined MBAR by combining Buddhist-informed principles with selected psychological techniques in response to participant needs and feedback.

Across four PAOR cycles, MBAR was refined into a brief 2- to 2.5-hour online small-group workshop. The sequence of modifications is central to the development result and should be interpreted alongside the fact that the four groups may have received different versions.

The integration principles of MBAR are actualized through two core practices:

1. Heart-Amber Awareness (approximately 30 minutes): This practice combines attention to bodily and affective experience with somatic description. Participants locate an anxiety-related sensation and observe its size, shape, texture, temperature, and boundaries. Observing changes in these qualities is presented as an experiential illustration of change consistent with the Buddhist teaching of impermanence (Anicca), not as evidence that participants attained Buddhist insight. The practice is intended to support a shift from identification with distress toward observation of experience, while maintaining choice through options such as keeping the eyes open or pausing.

2. Heart-Amber Mellowing (approximately 30 minutes): Building on bodily awareness, this practice uses compassionate internal dialogue with a past or vulnerable self. Loving-kindness (Mettā) contributes an orientation of goodwill and non-harming, self-compassion supports a less self-critical response to suffering, and parts-oriented dialogue provides an operational structure for

engaging with differentiated inner experience. These traditions are treated as complementary rather than conceptually identical. The changing image of the Heart-Amber is offered as an accessible reflection inspired by Anattā and the non-fixed character of experience; it is not presented as a comprehensive definition or attainment of the Buddhist doctrine of non-self.

Within MBAR, Mettā, self-compassion, and parts-oriented dialogue serve different but complementary functions: ethical-affective orientation, reduction of self-criticism, and structured engagement with vulnerable experience. The present research describes this integration as a preliminary intervention design and does not establish the equivalence of these traditions or the mechanisms through which they may operate.

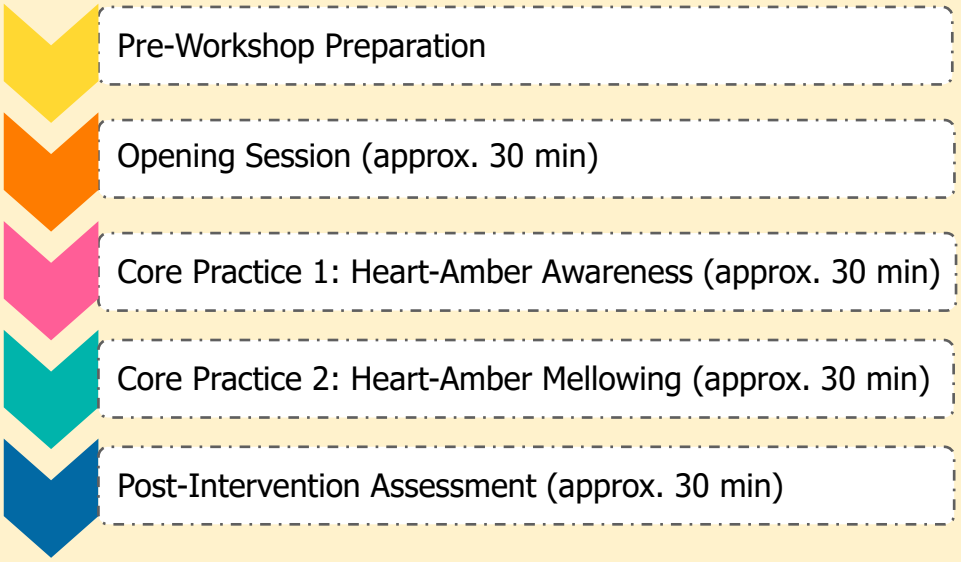

Figure 2. The MBAR Workshop Procedure

Objective 3. The research explored immediate participant-reported outcomes together with feasibility and acceptability; the uncontrolled immediate pre-post design does not establish effectiveness or causation.

Quantitative score patterns and qualitative feedback were considered together to identify areas of convergence, divergence, and uncertainty.

Integration of the quantitative and qualitative findings showed general convergence. The exploratory immediate changes in anxiety, stress, and self-efficacy scores were broadly consistent with participants' reports of feeling calmer, gaining distance from distress, and experiencing greater confidence in coping. However, these findings were not uniform across all participants and should not be interpreted as evidence of sustained clinical effectiveness.

As shown in Table 2, immediate within-group score changes were observed across the five measures. These results indicate short-term response patterns within this sample, not clinical improvement or causal effects of MBAR. The mean GAD-7 and PHQ-9 changes were small. Interpretation must also account for multiple testing, the lack of a control group, and the mismatch between immediate reassessment and the standard recall periods of GAD-7, PHQ-9, and PSS-10.

The quantitative findings showed exploratory immediate score changes across several outcomes. Given the small sample size, the absence of a control group, and the primarily qualitative action-research design, these results should be interpreted as supportive rather than confirmatory evidence.

Table 2. Pre- and Post-Test Results for All Participants (N = 22)

Measure	Pre-test mean	Post-test mean	Mean change	p value	Cohen's d
GAD-7	13.6	12.6	-1.0	0.043	0.48
PHQ-9	12.9	11.5	-1.4	0.014	0.57
PSS-10	24.0	22.2	-1.8	0.008	0.62
GSES	26.7	28.3	+1.6	0.024	|0.51|
WFCS	11.8	10.8	-1.0	0.020	0.53

Qualitative analysis generated four themes concerning participants' experiences, perceived changes, and program acceptability. The themes complement but do not independently validate the quantitative findings.

Nature-based pseudonyms were assigned to protect participant identities. All quotations were originally expressed in Chinese and translated into English by the researcher. The English versions were checked against the original transcripts to preserve the intended meaning, with only minor linguistic adjustments made for readability.

Participant responses were not uniformly positive. Some participants reported they were aware of nasal discomfort and distraction when breathing,

while others experienced little immediate change. These accounts indicate variation in acceptability and response and were considered during the subsequent refinement of MBAR. No serious adverse events were spontaneously reported or documented during the four cycles; however, no independent adverse-event monitoring procedure was used.

Theme 1. Changes in Bodily Experience and Metaphor

Before the workshop, several participants described anxiety through heavy or solid bodily metaphors. Thyme described her chest as heavy "as if pressed by a large stone"; Fern described an iron-sheet-like Heart-Amber that changed in texture; and Clover described "black smoke" becoming lighter. Some participants also cried, trembled, or sighed during practice and described these reactions as relieving. These observations are reported as participant experiences and interpretations; they should not be assumed to represent therapeutic release without information on persistence of distress, safety assessment, or adverse-event monitoring.

Theme 2. A Less Self-Critical Stance: Permission

A notable qualitative observation concerned a less self-critical stance toward distress. Some participants described rigid internal "shoulds" before the workshop and greater willingness afterward to let difficult experience remain without immediately changing it. Within MBAR, "permission" was introduced as a less demanding initial stance for participants who interpreted acceptance as another obligation. This finding supports a preliminary practice-based distinction, not a confirmed paradigm shift or evidence that established acceptance approaches require approval or liking of experience.

Theme 3: Novel Awareness Experiences and Safe Group Atmosphere

Participants described novel awareness experiences and greater recognition of the perceived boundaries of anxiety. Furthermore, participants emphasized experiencing a safe, warm, and non-judgmental group atmosphere throughout the sessions.

Theme 4: Safety Mechanisms and Program Acceptability

Participants described the eyes-open option and other safety choices as helpful when practice felt difficult, and many expressed willingness to continue practicing.

Participant satisfaction was assessed using the Chinese-language version of the eight-item Client Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ-8). A Chinese-language version has previously been used with Chinese college students and working adults (Mak et al., 2017). All 22 participants completed the CSQ-8 immediately after their respective MBAR workshop. The mean CSQ-8 score was 27.9 out of 32, which provides information about satisfaction and acceptability rather than effectiveness.

Overall, qualitative feedback suggested perceived changes in participants' relationship with bodily distress and self-criticism, together with generally favorable views of the workshop. These reports are subject to facilitator influence, group conformity, expectancy, and social-desirability bias.

Discussion

This study yielded three main findings. First, the participating Chinese professionals reported anxiety, perceived stress, reduced self-efficacy, and work-family conflict, frequently accompanied by somatic symptoms and self-critical patterns. Second, four iterative Plan-Act-Observe-Reflect cycles produced a brief online MBAR program that participants regarded as acceptable and accessible. Third, immediate post-intervention assessments showed immediate within-group score changes across the measured outcomes, accompanied by qualitative reports of somatic relief and reduced internal resistance. These findings provide preliminary evidence for the feasibility of MBAR and its association with exploratory immediate participant-reported changes, but they do not establish causal efficacy.

The baseline findings suggest that participants' distress extended across work, family, financial, and intrapersonal domains rather than originating from a single source. This pattern is compatible with Work/Family Border Theory, which explains how weakened boundaries allow strain to transfer between life domains (Clark, 2000), and with Chinese evidence linking excessive workload to anxiety and depression (Sun & Jiang, 2024) and parenting stress to poorer mental health and well-being among working mothers (He et al., 2025). Participants' reports of insomnia, chest tightness, sweating, and muscular tension further indicate that multi-scenario stress was experienced as an interconnected cognitive, emotional, relational, and somatic condition. Given the small purposive sample, however, these findings characterize the participants rather than Chinese professionals generally.

The action research process clarified how a brief intervention could remain both accessible and psychologically responsive. MBAR was progressively modified by adding pre-workshop reflection, an eyes-open option, alternative prompts for participants who had difficulty visualizing, and grounding instructions. These changes gave participants greater choice over their level of engagement. The high satisfaction score and willingness to continue practicing support the program's acceptability, although satisfaction does not demonstrate effectiveness. MBAR also translated Buddhist principles into experiential processes: Heart-Amber Awareness applied observation of changing bodily sensations, while Heart-Amber Mellowing used loving-kindness and parts-oriented dialogue to loosen identification with painful experiences. In this respect, MBAR offers one possible response to concerns that mindfulness may lose its ethical and philosophical foundations when reduced to an attentional technique (Purser, 2019; Van Dam et al., 2018).

The direction of the quantitative changes is broadly comparable with evidence that mindfulness-based and brief mindfulness interventions may reduce stress and negative affect (Khoury et al., 2015; Schumer et al., 2018). Nevertheless, MBAR involved only one 2- to 2.5-hour session, whereas much of the existing evidence concerns multi-session programs. The immediate decrease in work-family conflict is therefore unlikely to reflect changes in participants' objective circumstances; it may instead indicate a short-term shift in emotional reactivity or perceived manageability. Likewise, increased self-efficacy may reflect an immediate sense of coping capacity rather than durable behavioral change.

Several mechanisms may plausibly account for the observed changes. Localizing diffuse distress in the body may have helped participants shift from identification with anxiety toward observation of it. Compassionate dialogue with vulnerable parts may also have reduced self-criticism and the urge to suppress or immediately eliminate distress. Participants' descriptions of the Heart-Amber becoming lighter, softer, or less rigid support this interpretation phenomenologically. The non-judgmental group atmosphere, facilitator attention, and safety options may also have contributed. Because mediators were not tested, these explanations remain provisional. Expectancy effects, group support, repeated measurement, regression to the mean, and participants' desire to report improvement are alternative explanations for the pre-post changes.

A particularly important qualitative observation concerned the distinction between permission and acceptance. Some highly self-critical participants appeared to turn the instruction to accept anxiety into another demand, regarding difficulty in doing so as a personal failure. MBAR introduced permission as a less demanding initial stance: an experience could be allowed to remain without being approved, welcomed, or immediately transformed. This distinction may help explain participants' reduced internal opposition. At this stage, "Permission ≠ Acceptance" should be regarded as a practice-based conceptual proposition rather than an established paradigm. Future studies should operationalize both constructs and test whether permission offers particular benefits for individuals with high perfectionism or self-criticism.

Taken together, the research demonstrates a feasible development process for integrating Buddhist-informed principles, somatic awareness, compassionate dialogue, and explicit safety choices into a brief online program. MBAR should currently be regarded as a promising preliminary or adjunctive intervention rather than a replacement for treatment or established multi-session mindfulness programs. Future research should evaluate a standardized version through adequately powered controlled studies, longer follow-up, and direct tests of mechanisms, including the proposed distinction between permission and acceptance.

Knowledge from the research

This research generated two preliminary practice-based concepts for further examination: the pedagogical metaphor of Heart-Amber Clusters and Life Amber, and the distinction between permission and acceptance. Both concepts emerged from the MBAR development process and participant feedback; neither should be regarded as a validated model or established clinical paradigm.

1. A Preliminary Therapeutic and Pedagogical Metaphor: Heart-Amber Clusters and Life Amber

Heart-Amber Clusters and Life Amber are proposed as a preliminary therapeutic and pedagogical metaphor, not as a validated model of personality or emotional trauma. The metaphor represents difficult experiences as temporarily rigid or disconnected "Heart-Ambers" and uses changes in texture, boundaries, and relationship as accessible ways to discuss non-fixed experience. The image of Life Amber represents greater fluidity, inclusiveness, and connection. This metaphor is inspired by Anattā but does not define the Buddhist doctrine of non-

self. Future research should examine whether the metaphor is understandable, acceptable, and useful across different participants and settings.

2. A Preliminary Practice-Based Distinction: "Permission ≠ Acceptance"

Some highly self-critical participants appeared to interpret acceptance as another demand: "I should accept my anxiety; if I cannot, I am failing." MBAR used permission as a less demanding initial stance, allowing an experience to remain without requiring approval, welcome, or immediate transformation. Established psychological and contemplative approaches generally do not define acceptance as liking or approving an experience; the contribution proposed here is therefore a practice-based response to how acceptance may be misunderstood or enacted by particular participants. The distinction requires operational definition and direct testing before claims can be made about reducing secondary distress.

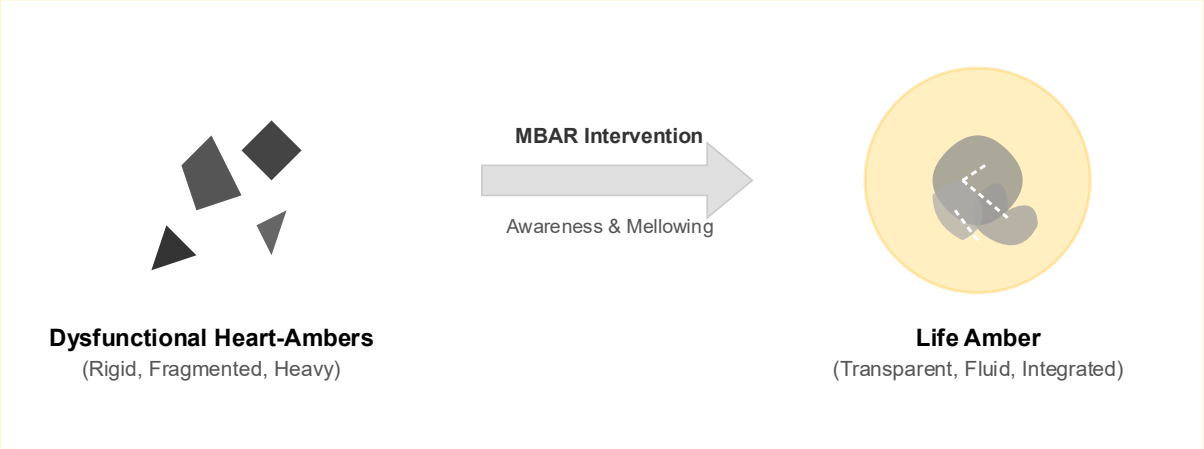

Figure 3. Preliminary Metaphorical Model of Heart-Amber Clusters and Life Amber

Potential applications for future piloting

Corporate, online, and stepped-care contexts may be considered settings for further supervised piloting of MBAR, but this small, uncontrolled study does not establish readiness for routine deployment. Any future pilot should use trained facilitators, participant screening, explicit safeguarding, adverse-event monitoring, data protection, and referral pathways. Automated self-help delivery should not be recommended until separately evaluated for safety, acceptability, and effectiveness.

Limitations

The findings are constrained by a small purposive sample, absence of a control group and randomization, immediate post-session assessment, and lack of follow-up. The standard recall periods of GAD-7, PHQ-9, and PSS-10 are not compatible with interpreting immediate scores as symptom change over those periods. Five outcome tests increase the risk of chance findings, and the four PAOR groups may have received non-equivalent versions of the intervention. Reliance on self-report and facilitator-embedded qualitative feedback introduces expectancy, social-desirability, group-conformity, and researcher-influence risks. These limitations restrict causal inference, durability claims, and generalization beyond the participating sample.

Conclusion

This study developed and preliminarily evaluated Mindfulness-Based Anxiety Reduction (MBAR), a brief Buddhist-informed online program for Chinese professionals experiencing overlapping work, family, and intrapersonal pressures. Needs-assessment findings and feedback across four PAOR cycles informed the progressive refinement of a single-session intervention centered on Heart-Amber Awareness and Heart-Amber Mellowing. Participants generally regarded the program as acceptable and reported immediate changes in several self-report outcomes and qualitative experiences, including reduced bodily tension, greater distance from distress, and a less self-critical stance. These findings are encouraging but remain preliminary. The small, uncontrolled sample; non-equivalent refinements across PAOR rounds; immediate reassessment; mismatch between post-test timing and standard symptom-scale recall periods; lack of follow-up; and absence of independent fidelity and adverse-event monitoring substantially limit causal interpretation and generalizability. The Heart-Amber metaphor and the distinction between “permission” and “acceptance” should therefore be treated as practice-based propositions requiring further conceptual clarification and empirical testing. MBAR warrants continued development through a standardized protocol, controlled evaluation, longer follow-up, and explicit safety monitoring before claims of clinical effectiveness or broader implementation can be justified.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Practice

At this stage, MBAR may be used only in carefully supervised pilot contexts. Delivery should involve trained facilitators, screening, informed consent, participant choice, confidentiality, distress monitoring, debriefing, data protection, and referral pathways. Satisfaction and immediate self-reported response should not be interpreted as evidence of established effectiveness.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should evaluate one standardized MBAR version with a larger sample, an appropriate control or comparison condition, preregistered primary and secondary outcomes, assessment times consistent with scale recall periods, and longer follow-up. Research should also examine adverse events, facilitator fidelity, mechanisms of change, the Heart-Amber metaphor, and the distinction between permission and acceptance.

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The Seven Factors of Awakening (*Satta Bojjhaṅga*) and Health Promotion: A Theravāda Buddhist Framework with Contemporary Mindfulness Evidence

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Abstract

This qualitative documentary study examines the Seven Factors of Awakening (*satta bojjhaṅga*) in Theravāda Buddhism and develops a cautious framework for supportive health promotion without conflating Buddhist soteriology with biomedical treatment. The study has three objectives: (1) to study the doctrinal concept, functions, and interrelationships of the Seven Factors of Awakening in Theravāda Buddhism; (2) to analyze canonical illness narratives together with post-canonical/traditional and modern meditation accounts associated with the Seven Factors of Awakening and health; and (3) to develop an evidence-informed *Bojjhaṅga* Health-Promotion Framework for supportive health promotion. Primary sources include the *Bojjhaṅgasaṃyutta* (SN 46), *Satipaṭṭhāna* materials, the Vibhaṅga, and the Visuddhimagga. Secondary sources include Theravāda meditation manuals and contemporary systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and clinical studies of mindfulness-based interventions. The analysis shows that the Seven Factors of Awakening—mindfulness, investigation of phenomena, energy, rapture, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity—constitute a coordinated system of mental cultivation directed primarily toward awakening. Canonical illness narratives and later meditation accounts are religious, historical, and experiential sources rather than clinical evidence of cure. Contemporary research indicates that mindfulness-based programs can reduce psychological distress and support selected health-related behaviors in some populations, while effects vary across participants, comparators, outcomes, and intervention formats. The proposed framework therefore organizes the Seven Factors of Awakening into mindful recognition, state-sensitive activation, calming and stabilization, and integrated health action. It is intended for supportive health promotion among psychologically stable adults and for carefully supervised complementary use among people receiving

professional care; it is not a validated treatment protocol or a substitute for medical or psychiatric treatment.

Keywords: *Satta Bojjhaṅga*; Seven Factors of Awakening; mindfulness; Health promotion; Theravāda Buddhism; Contemplative practice

Introduction

Health occupies an important but carefully delimited place in Buddhist thought. The Buddha's teaching is principally directed toward understanding suffering, cultivating the path, and realizing liberation rather than constructing a biomedical system. Nevertheless, early Buddhist texts address illness, care for the sick, mental cultivation, and the conditions that influence bodily and psychological experience. Within this context, the Seven Factors of Awakening (*satta bojjhaṅga*), mindfulness (*sati*), investigation of phenomena (*dhammavicaya*), energy (*vīriya*), rapture (*pīti*), tranquility (*passaddhi*), concentration (*samādhi*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*), are especially significant because they are presented as qualities to be developed for awakening and are also recalled in several canonical illness narratives (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000; Gethin, 1992).

The health significance of these texts requires careful interpretation. Canonical accounts in the *Bojjhaṅgasaṃyutta* (SN 46) associate recollection or exposition of the Seven Factors of Awakening with recovery from illness, but such narratives do not provide the diagnostic procedures, comparison groups, physiological measures, or controls required to establish biomedical cau*sati*on (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000). Contemporary mindfulness research likewise supports cautious rather than universal claims. Meta-analytic evidence indicates average benefits for some dimensions of anxiety, depression, distress, pain, and well-being, but effects vary substantially by population, comparator, baseline characteristics, and intervention design (Galante et al., 2023; Goldberg et al., 2022; Goyal et al., 2014; Sieder et al., 2024). Meditation-related adverse experiences have also been documented, reinforcing the need for proportionate practice, informed consent, and appropriate professional referral when vulnerable populations are involved (Farias et al., 2020).

A rigorous Buddhist Studies analysis should therefore distinguish the doctrinal and health-promotion levels of inquiry. Doctrinally, the Seven Factors of Awakening belong to the *bodhipakkhiyā dhammā* and function in relation to wisdom, awakening, and liberation rather than as a set of independent therapeutic

techniques (Gethin, 1992). Within practice, mindfulness is one of the Seven Factors of Awakening and serves as a continuous monitoring condition through which the presence, absence, arising, and development of the other factors can be recognized. The activating factors, investigation, energy, and rapture—and the calming factors, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity—can then be cultivated according to the condition of mind, while their ultimate orientation remains liberation (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000; Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu, 2010).

On this basis, the present study interprets the Seven Factors of Awakening as a contemplative and ethical system that may inform supportive health promotion without claiming equivalence with modern clinical interventions. It distinguishes three levels of health-related evidence: canonical illness narratives, post-canonical/traditional and modern meditation accounts, and contemporary empirical research on mindfulness-based interventions. This distinction allows Buddhist textual meaning and contemporary health evidence to inform one another without treating religious testimony as clinical proof.

Research Objectives

1. To study the doctrinal concept, functions, and interrelationships of the Seven Factors of Awakening (*satta bojjhaṅga*) in Theravāda Buddhism.

2. To analyze canonical illness narratives together with post-canonical/traditional and modern meditation accounts associated with the Seven Factors of Awakening and health.

3. To develop an evidence-informed *Bojjhaṅga* Health-Promotion Framework for supportive health promotion.

Literature Review and Theoretical Foundations

The term *bojjhaṅga* denotes a factor or constituent of awakening. In Theravāda sources, the Seven Factors of Awakening are *sati*, *dhammavicaya*, *vīriya*, *pīti*, *passaddhi*, *samādhi*, and *upekkhā*. Their doctrinal importance lies in their inclusion among the *bodhipakkhiyā dhammā*, the qualities conducive to awakening, rather than in any original medical classification (Gethin, 1992). The *Bojjhaṅgasaṃyutta* (SN 46) presents the Seven Factors of Awakening as qualities to be developed and balanced, while the Visuddhimagga explains their cultivation in relation to insight and the path (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000; Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu, 2010). More recent analytical work has likewise emphasized the functional

relationship between the Seven Factors of Awakening and mindfulness practice, including their role in the development of insight rather than as isolated techniques (Thanateerasate & Koomkrong, 2022).

The *Satipaṭṭhāna* framework provides an important context for practice. In contemplation of *dhamma*s, practitioners recognize whether an awakening factor is present or absent, understand how an unarisen factor arises, and cultivate an arisen factor toward fulfillment. Mindfulness therefore functions within the sevenfold system as a continuous condition for recognition and regulation, while the remaining factors contribute investigation, effort, affective uplift, calming, attentional unification, and balance (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000; Ko Lay, 2007). Commentarial and modern Burmese meditation traditions further describe the Seven Factors of Awakening as developing dynamically during insight practice (Mahāsī Sayādaw, 1991; Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu, 2010; Paṇḍita, 1992).

Health-related Buddhist sources can be organized chronologically into three categories. First, canonical illness narratives in the *Bojjhaṅgasaṃyutta* concern figures such as Mahākassapa and Mahāmoggallāna and associate recollection or exposition of the Seven Factors of Awakening with recovery (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000). Second, post-canonical and traditional meditation literature interprets meditation, recitation, and cultivation as resources for spiritual composure and coping during illness. Third, modern meditation manuals and practitioner accounts sometimes report recovery from specific physical conditions (Mahāsī Sayādaw, 1991; Paṇḍita, 1992). These later reports are historically and phenomenologically relevant but do not provide sufficient clinical information to establish diagnosis, treatment efficacy, or causal mechanisms.

Contemporary mindfulness research provides a distinct empirical evidence base. Goyal et al. (2014) reported moderate evidence for improvements in anxiety, depression, and pain in some populations, while Goldberg et al. (2022) found that mindfulness-based interventions generally outperform passive controls but show smaller and less consistent advantages over active controls. More recent individual-participant meta-analysis confirms average reductions in psychological distress in non-clinical adults while also demonstrating substantial heterogeneity in response (Galante et al., 2023). Sieder et al. (2024), synthesizing 177 randomized trials, further showed that intervention effects may vary according to baseline mindfulness and comparison condition. Beyond symptom outcomes, mindfulness-based interventions have also been studied as supports for

modifiable health behaviors such as sleep, diet, physical activity, and substance-related behaviors, although the evidence remains heterogeneous (Mace et al., 2025).

A balanced health-promotion framework must therefore integrate potential benefit with safety and scope. Farias et al. (2020) documented meditation-related adverse events in both clinical and non-clinical settings, including anxiety, depression, and unusual cognitive experiences. Loucks et al. (2023) showed that adapted mindfulness training can be combined with behavioral cardiovascular-health targets under structured and monitored conditions. Taken together, the literature supports investigating contemplative practice as a complementary resource for psychological well-being, coping, self-regulation, and health-supportive behavior, but it does not justify presenting the Seven Factors of Awakening as a disease-specific treatment.

Research Methodology

Research Design. This study employed qualitative documentary research with a critical-integrative analytical strategy. The design was selected because the three objectives require (1) doctrinal interpretation of the Seven Factors of Awakening, (2) comparative analysis of health-related narratives across textual periods, and (3) synthesis of Buddhist and contemporary health evidence into a conceptual framework. The study did not test clinical efficacy or treat canonical or traditional recovery narratives as biomedical case reports.

Sources and Selection Criteria. Primary Buddhist sources were selected when they directly addressed the Seven Factors of Awakening, *Satipaṭṭhāna*, illness, or their doctrinal development. Particular attention was given to the *Bojjhaṅgasaṃyutta* (SN 46), *Satipaṭṭhāna* materials, the Vibhaṅga, and the Visuddhimagga (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000; Ko Lay, 2007; Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu, 2010; Setthila, 1988). Secondary Buddhist sources included Theravāda meditation manuals and scholarship that explicitly discussed the Seven Factors of Awakening or their relationship to insight practice (Gethin, 1992; Mahāsī Sayādaw, 1991; Paṇḍita, 1992; Thanateerasate & Koomkrong, 2022). Contemporary health literature was selected when it consisted of systematic reviews, meta-analyses, randomized trials, or major empirical studies of mindfulness-based interventions relevant to psychological distress, health behavior, or safety (Farias et al., 2020; Galante et al., 2023; Goldberg et al., 2022; Loucks et al., 2023; Mace et al., 2025; Sieder et al., 2024).

Data Collection, Analysis, and Framework Development. We extracted and organized textual passages according to the three objectives. For Objective 1, the analysis identified canonical definitions, functions, balancing principles, and relationships among the Seven Factors of Awakening. For Objective 2, health-related materials were classified into three chronological-evidentiary groups: canonical illness narratives, post-canonical/traditional accounts, and modern meditation accounts. Each group was interpreted according to its textual genre and evidentiary limits. For Objective 3, we compared doctrinal functions with contemporary findings on attention, psychological distress, health behavior, and safety. The synthesis proceeded through four steps: identifying recurrent functions, distinguishing activating and calming patterns, defining an appropriate target population and safeguards, and specifying an operational pathway. This process produced the *Bojjhaṅga* Health-Promotion Framework. The framework is conceptual and hypothesis-generating; it has not been clinically validated.

Research Results

Objective 1: Doctrinal Concept, Functions, and Interrelationships of the Seven Factors of Awakening

The documentary analysis shows that the Seven Factors of Awakening (*satta bojjhaṅga*) are a coordinated group of qualities conducive to awakening within the broader *bodhipakkhiyā dhammā*. In SN 46, their defining context is cultivation toward knowledge, liberation, and the realization of *Nibbāna* rather than symptom reduction (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000). The Visuddhimagga likewise situates them within the development of insight and supramundane path factors (Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu, 2010). Accordingly, the Seven Factors of Awakening should be understood first as a soteriological system of mental cultivation and only secondarily, in the present article, as a possible source of health-promotion principles.

Functionally, mindfulness (*sati*) provides continuity and recognition; investigation of phenomena (*dhammavicaya*) discriminates relevant mental and experiential conditions; energy (*vīriya*) sustains skillful effort; rapture (*pīti*) energizes practice; tranquility (*passaddhi*) calms bodily and mental disturbance; concentration (*samādhi*) stabilizes attention; and equanimity (*upekkhā*) supports balanced observation. Canonical and commentarial sources also describe a balancing principle: when the mind is sluggish, investigation, energy, and rapture are cultivated; when the mind is agitated, tranquility, concentration, and

equanimity are emphasized, while mindfulness remains useful in both conditions (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000; Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu, 2010). This dynamic relationship is consistent with more recent analysis of the Seven Factors of Awakening in relation to mindfulness practice (Thanateerasate & Koomkrong, 2022).

Their relation to *Satipaṭṭhāna* further clarifies the system. In *dhamma* contemplation, the practitioner recognizes the presence or absence of each awakening factor, understands the conditions for its arising, and develops it toward fulfillment (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000; Ko Lay, 2007). Mindfulness is therefore one factor within the Seven Factors of Awakening and also performs an important monitoring role in their cultivation. The doctrinal trajectory is from careful observation and balanced cultivation toward wisdom and liberation; the present health-promotion interpretation must remain subordinate to that primary Buddhist purpose.

Table 1. Seven Factors of Awakening and Their Proposed Health-Promotion Functions

Factor	Traditional function	Possible health-promotion relevance	Caution
Sati	Mindful recognition and continuity	Awareness of thoughts, feelings, bodily states, and behavioral patterns	Not identical to clinical monitoring or diagnosis
Dhammavicaya	Investigation of phenomena	Curiosity, appraisal, discrimination of conditions and consequences	Should not be reduced to intellectual analysis alone
Vīriya	Sustained skillful effort	Behavioral engagement and persistence	Excessive effort may increase strain; balance is required
Pīti	Rapture/joyful interest	Positive engagement and motivation	Not equivalent to mood elevation or treatment of depression
Passaddhi	Tranquility	Down-regulation of agitation and tension	Does not establish a physiological cure
Samādhi	Concentration/ unification	Attentional stability and reduced distractibility	Intensive concentration practices require appropriate guidance
Upekkhā	Equanimity/ balance	Non-reactivity and balanced response to changing conditions	Not indifference or emotional suppression

Objective 2: Analysis of Canonical, Traditional, and Modern Health-Related Meditation Accounts

The health-related materials fall into three chronological and evidentiary categories. The first consists of canonical illness narratives in the *Bojjhaṅgasaṃyutta* (SN 46), including accounts associated with Mahākassapa and Mahāmoggallāna. These passages connect the Seven Factors of Awakening with illness, confidence in the Dhamma, and recovery within a canonical religious setting (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000). They are therefore doctrinal and narrative evidence concerning Buddhist understandings of practice during illness, not clinical case reports.

The second category comprises post-canonical and traditional interpretations in which recitation, recollection, meditation, and cultivation are treated as supports for composure, confidence, and spiritual coping. Such materials contribute to Buddhist healing traditions and to the devotional use of *paritta*, but their purpose and genre differ from modern biomedical documentation. The third category consists of modern meditation manuals and practitioner accounts, including reports attributed to Mahāsī and other meditation teachers (Mahāsī Sayādaw, 1991; Paṇḍita, 1992). These accounts may describe perceived recovery or changes in bodily symptoms but generally lack standardized diagnosis, comparison groups, objective outcome measures, and documentation of concurrent treatment.

This three-level classification resolves an important evidentiary problem. Canonical narratives establish religious and doctrinal meaning; post-canonical and traditional accounts show the historical development of healing interpretations; and modern meditation accounts provide experiential testimony. None of these categories, by itself, establishes biomedical efficacy. Contemporary clinical evidence must therefore be evaluated separately through systematic reviews and trials of clearly specified mindfulness-based interventions (Galante et al., 2023; Goldberg et al., 2022; Goyal et al., 2014).

The strongest defensible conclusion is that Buddhist traditions have long understood contemplative practice as a resource for meeting illness with confidence, composure, meaning, and disciplined attention. Whether such practices also influence specific medical outcomes remains an empirical question requiring appropriate diagnosis, controlled study, and clinically valid outcome measurement. This distinction protects both the religious significance of the Buddhist sources and the evidentiary standards of contemporary health science.

Table 2. Evidentiary Status of Health-Related Sources in the Study

Source type	Example	What it can support	What it cannot establish
Canonical narrative	*Bojjhaṅga* illness discourses	Doctrinal/religious meaning of practice during illness	Biomedical cau*sati*on or treatment efficacy
Meditation testimony	Recovery stories in meditation manuals	Practitioner experience and traditional interpretation	Validated diagnosis, causal attribution, population effectiveness
Systematic review / RCT	Modern mindfulness research	Estimated effects for specified outcomes and populations	Direct validation of *Satta Bojjhaṅga* as a medical protocol

Objective 3: Development of the *Bojjhaṅga* Health-Promotion Framework

The synthesis produced the *Bojjhaṅga* Health-Promotion Framework as a conceptual model for supportive health promotion. Its target population is psychologically stable adults interested in contemplative self-regulation and, with appropriate professional coordination, people receiving medical or psychological care who wish to use contemplative practice as a complementary resource. The framework is not intended for emergency conditions, unstable psychiatric states, or unsupervised treatment of diagnosed disease. Its structure contains four linked components derived from the functional organization of the Seven Factors of Awakening (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000; Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu, 2010).

Component 1, Mindful Recognition, uses *sati* to identify the current bodily, affective, and cognitive condition without reacting immediately. Component 2, Adaptive Activation, emphasizes *dhammavicaya*, *vīriya*, and *pīti* when the mind is depleted, disengaged, or sluggish. Component 3, Calming and Stabilization, emphasizes *passaddhi*, *samādhi*, and *upekkhā* when agitation, distractibility, or emotional overactivation predominates. Component 4, Integrated Health Action, links contemplative regulation with ethical conduct, realistic self-care, social support, treatment adherence, and appropriate professional services. This operational sequence translates the canonical balancing principle into a health-promotion hypothesis while preserving the distinction between Buddhist cultivation and clinical treatment.

The proposed mechanism is therefore regulatory rather than curative: mindful recognition informs whether activation or calming is appropriate, equanimity supports non-reactive stabilization, and the resulting mental balance

is directed toward health-supportive action. Contemporary mindfulness evidence makes this translation plausible but does not directly validate the framework. Meta-analytic and trial evidence indicates that mindfulness-based programs can reduce psychological distress and support selected health behaviors, while outcomes differ across individuals and interventions (Galante et al., 2023; Loucks et al., 2023; Mace et al., 2025; Sieder et al., 2024). Safety remains essential because adverse experiences can occur, particularly with intensive practice or vulnerable participants (Farias et al., 2020). The framework should therefore be implemented gradually, with informed choice, appropriate instruction, and referral to qualified health professionals when symptoms exceed the scope of contemplative support.

1. Mindful Recognition Sati Observe present condition	2. Adaptive Activation Dhammavicaya + Vīriya + Pīti Engage when depleted	3. Calming & Stabilization Passaddhi + Samādhi + Upekkhā Regulate when agitated	4. Integrated Health Action Ethics + self-care + professional care Support—not substitute—treatment

Figure 1. *Bojjhaṅga* Health-Promotion Framework

Note. The framework is a conceptual synthesis derived from Theravāda descriptions of balancing the awakening factors and contemporary evidence on mindfulness-based health interventions. *It is not a validated clinical treatment protocol.*

Discussion

Objective 1: Doctrinal meaning and functional organization. The first finding confirms previous Theravāda scholarship that the Seven Factors of Awakening belong primarily to the path of awakening rather than to a medical theory (Gethin, 1992). The canonical and commentarial analysis also supports the traditional distinction between activating factors and calming factors, with mindfulness operating across both conditions (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000; Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu, 2010). Thanateerasate and Koomkrong (2022) similarly describe the Seven Factors of Awakening as dynamically related to mindfulness practice. The present study extends these works by making the balancing principle explicit as the doctrinal basis for a cautious health-promotion interpretation. Its novelty is therefore not the discovery of new awakening factors, but the systematic

translation of their internal regulatory logic into a clearly delimited, non-curative health-promotion model.

Objective 2: Health-related narratives and evidentiary boundaries. Previous Buddhist literature has often preserved illness narratives and meditation recovery accounts as meaningful expressions of confidence, practice, and healing. The present study agrees that these sources are religiously and historically significant, but differs from interpretations that treat them as direct evidence of biomedical efficacy. By separating canonical illness narratives, post-canonical/traditional interpretations, and modern meditation accounts, the analysis introduces an explicit evidence hierarchy. This distinction is consistent with contemporary evidence-based reasoning, in which anecdotal reports cannot substitute for controlled outcome studies. The resulting contribution is methodological: Buddhist healing narratives can remain central to Buddhist Studies while being interpreted according to their genre rather than being asked to function as clinical trials.

Objective 3: Contemporary mindfulness evidence and framework development. The *Bojjhaṅga* Health-Promotion Framework is broadly consistent with modern mindfulness research in emphasizing attention regulation, emotional balance, and adaptive health behavior, but it is not equivalent to MBSR, MBCT, or other manualized interventions. Reviews by Goldberg et al. (2022) and Galante et al. (2023) indicate that mindfulness-based programs can reduce distress on average, while substantial heterogeneity remains. Sieder et al. (2024) further show that individual baseline characteristics can moderate outcomes, and Mace et al. (2025) extend the evidence base to lifestyle behaviors relevant to health. The present framework differs by deriving its internal organization from the Seven Factors of Awakening: rather than treating mindfulness as a stand-alone skill, it specifies state-sensitive activation and calming clusters embedded within a Buddhist soteriological system.

The framework also extends contemporary discussions by making target population, operational sequence, and safety boundaries explicit. Loucks et al. (2023) demonstrate that mindfulness can be incorporated into structured health-behavior interventions without being treated as a stand-alone cure. Similarly, the present model directs contemplative regulation toward integrated health action rather than disease treatment. This is important because the Seven Factors of Awakening have not been clinically validated as a medical protocol. The

proposed model should therefore be regarded as hypothesis-generating and suitable for future feasibility testing, not as evidence of treatment efficacy.

Safety findings further qualify the proposed integration. Farias et al. (2020) documented adverse events associated with meditation practices in both clinical and non-clinical contexts. This evidence differs from traditional accounts that tend to emphasize benefit and reinforces the need for screening, informed consent, qualified instruction, gradual practice, and referral when symptoms exceed the scope of contemplative support. The present study therefore adds a safeguard dimension that is often absent from traditional health interpretations of *Bojjhaṅga* practice.

Taken together, the study contributes three forms of new knowledge: a doctrinally grounded account of the Seven Factors of Awakening as a state-sensitive regulatory system; a three-level evidentiary classification for interpreting Buddhist illness and recovery narratives; and an operational *Bojjhaṅga* Health-Promotion Framework that specifies target population, components, sequence, mechanisms, and safety limits. These contributions remain conceptual and require empirical testing before clinical or population-level claims can be made.

New Knowledge from the Research

This study generates the *Bojjhaṅga* Health-Promotion Framework, which translates the internal balancing logic of the Seven Factors of Awakening into a cautious, testable model for supportive health promotion. The framework does not equate Buddhist awakening factors with biomedical mechanisms. Instead, it integrates four functional components, Mindful Recognition, Adaptive Activation, Calming and Stabilization, and Integrated Health Action, within explicit target-population and safety boundaries.

First, *sati* functions as mindful recognition of bodily sen*sati*on, affect, cognition, and behavioral tendency. Second, *dhammavicaya*, *vīriya*, and *pīti* form an activating cluster that may support inquiry, motivation, and constructive engagement when the mind is depleted or withdrawn. Third, *passaddhi*, *samādhi*, and *upekkhā* form a calming and stabilizing cluster that may support regulation when agitation or distractibility predominates. Fourth, the regulated mental state is directed toward integrated health action, including ethical conduct, realistic

self-care, social support, treatment adherence, and appropriate use of professional health services.

A second conceptual contribution is the distinction among three levels of evidence: canonical illness narratives, post-canonical/traditional and modern meditation accounts, and contemporary clinical research. These levels can inform one another but should not be treated as interchangeable. The framework therefore preserves the soteriological meaning of the Seven Factors of Awakening while defining a separate, empirically testable health-promotion application.

The framework therefore proposes the pathway:
Mindful Recognition → State-Sensitive Activation or Calming → Equanimous Regulation → Integrated Health Action.

Future research can operationalize these functions and test whether a *Bojjhaṅga*-informed intervention adds value to standard mindfulness or health-promotion programs.

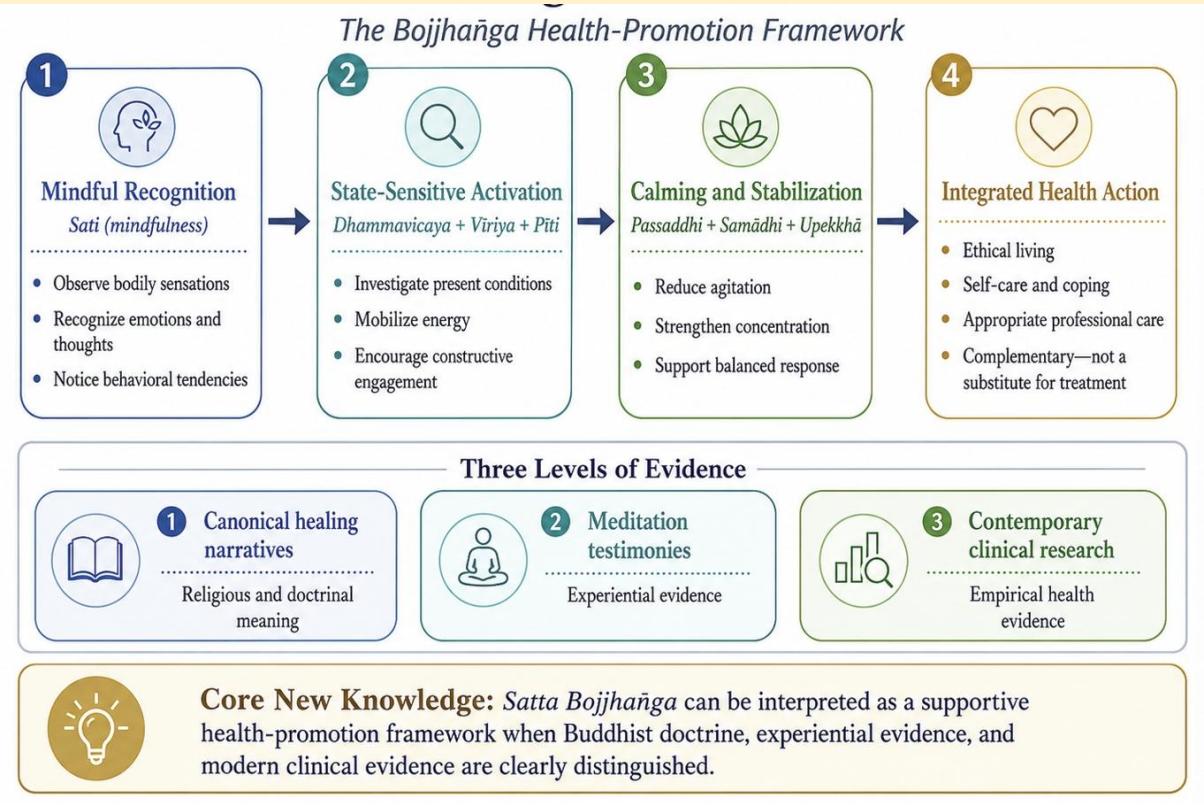

Figure 2. New Knowledge from the Research

Conclusion

The Seven Factors of Awakening constitute a sophisticated Theravāda framework for cultivating mindfulness, investigation of phenomena, energy, rapture, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity. Canonical and commentarial sources place these qualities within the path to wisdom, awakening, and liberation, while their balancing logic also provides a plausible conceptual basis for state-sensitive self-regulation.

Canonical illness narratives, post-canonical/traditional interpretations, and modern meditation accounts show that Buddhist communities have long associated contemplative practice with healing, confidence, and coping. Their evidentiary roles, however, differ from those of contemporary clinical research. They should not be presented as proof that meditation prevents or cures physical disease. Current mindfulness evidence supports more limited conclusions concerning psychological distress, well-being, selected health behaviors, and individual variability, together with the need to monitor adverse experiences.

The proposed *Bojjhaṅga* Health-Promotion Framework therefore positions the Seven Factors of Awakening as a complementary contemplative resource for mindful recognition, adaptive activation, calming and stabilization, equanimous regulation, and health-supportive action. Its novelty lies in combining Theravāda balancing principles with explicit evidentiary and safety boundaries. Its scientific value will depend on future operationalization, feasibility testing, comparison with established mindfulness-based programs, and longer-term outcome research. Until such evidence is available, the framework should remain a supportive health-promotion model rather than a clinical treatment protocol.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study is a documentary and conceptual analysis rather than an intervention trial. It does not provide evidence that practice of the Seven Factors of Awakening prevents, treats, or cures any specific disease. The post-canonical/traditional and modern meditation accounts lack standardized diagnostic verification and cannot support causal inference. The contemporary evidence reviewed concerns heterogeneous mindfulness-based interventions and therefore cannot be treated as direct validation of the Seven Factors of Awakening or the proposed *Bojjhaṅga* Health-Promotion Framework.

Future studies should first develop a clear manual and measurable constructs for the proposed framework. Qualitative work with Buddhist practitioners and health professionals could assess cultural acceptability and conceptual clarity. Subsequent feasibility studies should use validated psychological and health measures, record adverse events, document concurrent treatment, and compare *Bojjhaṅga*-informed practice with established mindfulness-based or health-education controls.

For practice, Buddhist teachers and health professionals should present meditation as complementary support rather than an alternative to necessary medical care. Practitioners with significant physical or psychiatric illness should receive appropriate professional assessment, and intensive meditation should be adapted to individual capacity.

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A Conceptual Framework of Wrong View on Self (sakkāya-Diṭṭhi) and Its Transformative Approaches for a Peaceful Society

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines sakkāya-diṭṭhi, commonly translated as identity view or wrong view of self, and develops a Theravāda Buddhist framework for transforming its individual and social consequences. The study had three objectives: (1) to analyze the concept of sakkāya-diṭṭhi in Theravāda Buddhist scriptures; (2) to examine its causes, manifestations, and impacts from Theravāda and scholarly perspectives; and (3) to propose transformative approaches that may contribute to a peaceful society. Documentary research was combined with semi-structured interviews with nine purposively selected experts, including Buddhist scholar-monks and specialists from modern academic disciplines. The data were examined through content and thematic analysis.

The findings show that sakkāya-diṭṭhi is classically expressed through twenty modes of identification with the five aggregates and can be interpreted at three levels of manifestation: transgressive behavior, active mental domination, and latent tendency. The study further identifies ignorance, attachment to the five aggregates, unwise attention, misleading external influence, and unwholesome association as conditions that can reinforce self-centered interpretation. Rather than treating sakkāya-diṭṭhi as a psychiatric diagnosis, the article interprets its consequences within a Buddhist ethical-psychological framework, including attachment, hostility, rigid self-protection, and conduct that may contribute to interpersonal and social conflict. The proposed transformative framework links three levels of practice to three domains of peace: ethical transformation through bodily and verbal restraint; mental transformation through cultivation of non-greed, non-hatred, mindfulness, and concentration; and insight transformation through right view, wise attention, and insight into the five aggregates. The study argues that reducing reified attachment to self may support ethical conduct, psychological balance, and peaceful coexistence, while recognizing that the

proposed framework remains conceptual and requires further empirical evaluation.

Keywords: Sakkāya-diṭṭhi; Identity view; Five aggregates; Right view; Buddhist transformation; Peaceful society.

Introduction

The Buddhist teaching of not-self (anattā) challenges the assumption that an enduring, independent, and controllable self exists within conditioned experience. In the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, the five aggregates—form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness—are examined as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and inappropriate to regard as "mine," "I," or "my self." Modern Theravāda interpretation emphasizes that this teaching does not deny conventional personhood but critiques the reification of changing psycho-physical processes into an intrinsically existing self (Sīlānanda, 1999). Recent scholarship similarly cautions against reducing not-self to a therapeutic slogan; its meaning belongs to a broader soteriological transformation of how identity and experience are understood (Ennen, 2024). Contemporary Buddhist psychology also increasingly interprets selfhood as a dynamic pattern of interrelated processes rather than a fixed substance, creating a useful point of dialogue with process-based theories of selfhood (Gallagher & Ransom, 2023).

Within this doctrinal framework, sakkāya-diṭṭhi, commonly translated as "identity view" or "personality view," refers to erroneous identification with the five aggregates. It belongs to the broader Buddhist critique of diṭṭhi, or grasped views, which distort experience and ethical judgment (Fuller, 2005). Commentarial sources further distinguish wrong views according to their ethical and karmic consequences (Buddhaghosa, 1921). Sakkāya-diṭṭhi is distinctive because it concerns the basic structure of self-identification: regarding an aggregate as self, possessed by self, contained in self, or containing self.

Theravāda teachers consequently associate the identity view with craving, defensiveness, rivalry, and harmful conduct. Mogok Sayadaw (1966) presents sakkāya-diṭṭhi as a powerful condition underlying destructive behavior, while Mahatthanadull (2016) places it among the fetters binding beings to suffering. The Saṃyutta Nikāya likewise presents abandonment of identity view as fundamental to the path (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000). These doctrinal claims, however, should not be converted directly into clinical or sociological causation.

Contemporary research provides a cautious comparative context. Selfhood is increasingly understood as processual and conditioned by bodily, cognitive, and social factors (Zhang et al., 2024), while rigid forms of collective identification can, under certain conditions, predict extreme pro-group orientations and outgroup hostility (Varmann et al., 2024). Yet conflict is multidetermined by threat, narratives, emotion, norms, institutions, and social context (Čehajić-Clancy & Halperin, 2024). Accordingly, this study examines sakkāya-diṭṭhi as a Theravāda ethical-philosophical framework for understanding self-centered attachment and develops ethical, mental, and insight-oriented approaches that may contribute to individual and societal peace.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the concept of Wrong View on Self (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) as depicted in the Theravada Buddhist Scriptures
2. To examine the problems, causes, and impacts of Wrong View on Self *(sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) from the perspective of *Theravāda* Buddhism and Buddhist scholars
3. To propose transformative approaches to Wrong View on Self *(sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) for a peaceful society

Literature Review

Theravāda sources define sakkāya-diṭṭhi through the relation between self-view and the five aggregates. Nārada Mahā Thera (1987) explains the classical twenty modes by applying four forms of identification to each aggregate: regarding the aggregate as self, regarding self as possessing the aggregate, regarding the aggregate as existing within self, or regarding self as existing within the aggregate. This framework clarifies that sakkāya-diṭṭhi is not merely a vague sense of egoism but a structured cognitive view concerning the relation between identity and conditioned experience. Fuller (2005) similarly emphasizes that diṭṭhi in early Buddhism concerns a mode of grasping or holding to views rather than opinion in a neutral sense.

Commentarial and practice-oriented literature further describes different levels at which wrong view may operate. Ledi Sayadaw (2004) associates self-centered wrong view with bodily, verbal, and mental misconduct, while Buddhaghosa's (1921) commentarial framework distinguishes transgressive, actively dominating, and latent levels of defilement. These distinctions matter because they allow transformation to be discussed in graduated terms rather than as a single event. At the behavioral level, ethical restraint limits harmful

expression; at the mental level, wholesome cultivation weakens active greed, hatred, and wrong view; and at the latent level, insight is required to challenge the underlying identification with the aggregates.

Modern Theravāda writers have extended the discussion from doctrinal analysis to its ethical and social implications. Rahula (1959) argues that belief in a substantial self underlies craving, possessiveness, hatred, and conflict, while Kundala (2022) identifies ignorance, attachment to the five aggregates, unwise attention, misleading external influence, and unwholesome association as conditions that reinforce self-view. Dhammapiya (2004) emphasizes progressive purification through morality, concentration, purification of view, and insight as a means of overcoming belief in an enduring self. These works collectively support the article's three-level transformative structure, although most are doctrinal or interpretive rather than empirical studies of social outcomes.

Recent scholarship has reopened the problem of selfhood in ways that are relevant to Buddhist studies. Ennen (2024) argues that Buddhist not-self should be understood as a transformation of self-understanding within the path rather than as a simple experiential technique. Zhang et al. (2024) compare Buddhist aggregate analysis with contemporary constructivist approaches to the self, emphasizing the processual and conditioned character of self-experience. These interdisciplinary parallels are useful, but they should not be treated as proof that Buddhist and cognitive-scientific theories are equivalent. The present study therefore uses contemporary self-research only as a comparative context for clarifying why a non-substantialist account of identity may remain philosophically significant.

The link between self-identification and social conflict also requires careful qualification. Buddhist texts and modern Buddhist writers frequently connect attachment to self and view with hostility and harmful action. Contemporary social psychology provides partial analogs: a meta-analysis of identity fusion found a strong but highly heterogeneous association with extreme pro-group orientations, including collective extremity and outgroup hostility (Varmann et al., 2024). Yet identity processes are context-dependent and can also support trust and cooperation. Likewise, current intergroup-intervention research emphasizes that peaceful relations are shaped by emotion regulation, social norms, threat, motivation, and institutional context, not by one psychological variable alone (Čehajić-Clancy & Halperin, 2024). These findings reinforce the need to treat sakkāya-diṭṭhi as a Buddhist interpretive framework for self-centered rigidity rather than as a sufficient empirical explanation of war or social violence.

The research gap lies in integrating these strands into a coherent Theravāda model that connects doctrinal analysis with differentiated transformative practice and a cautiously framed account of peace. Existing literature explains the twenty forms of identity view, levels of defilement, and insight-based eradication, but it has paid less attention to aligning different levels of sakkāya-diṭṭhi with ethical, mental, and wisdom-centered responses and then examining their possible relevance to peaceful coexistence. The present study addresses this gap through a three-level transformative framework.

Conceptual Framework

This qualitative research study aims to explore in depth the conceptual framework of Wrong View on Self (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) and how it can be transformed to build a peaceful society. This study draws on analyses of Wrong View on Self (sakkāya-diṭṭhi) from the perspective of Theravāda Buddhism and Buddhist scholars. Meanwhile, this study presents transformative approaches to Wrong View on Self (sakkāya-diṭṭhi) for a peaceful society, as described below.

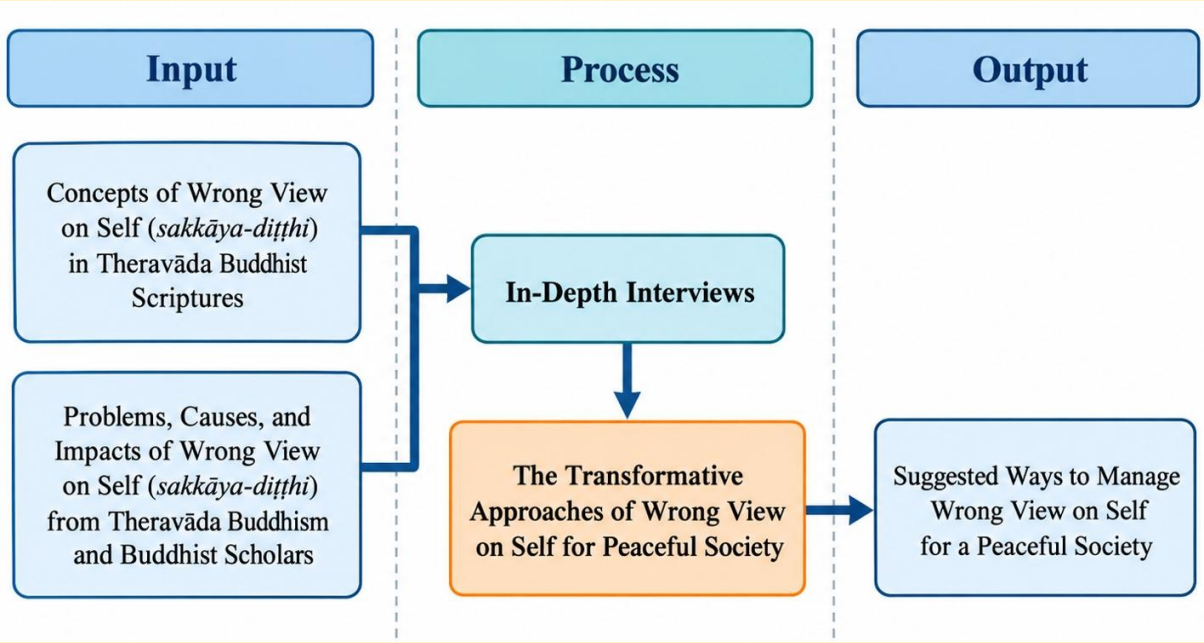

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Methodology

The methodology of this dissertation applies a qualitative research method, an approach comprising documentary research that collects data to explore the concepts of Wrong view on Self (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) what the Buddha really means, the problems, causes and impacts of Wrong View on Self (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) and the transformative approaches of Wrong View on Self for peaceful

society using Buddhist scripture research methods and in-depth interviews by means of interpretation.

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative exploratory approach, which allows for a deep look into complex and subtle ideas. It combines two methods: document analysis (to understand theories from written sources) and in-depth interviews (to get expert opinions that help explain and confirm how these ideas work in practice).

Data Sources

Primary Sources

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposively selected panel of experts, comprising seven Buddhist scholar-monks with extensive expertise in Theravāda Buddhist canonical and commentarial literature, and two lay specialists in modern disciplines. Experts were selected based on their academic publications, professional reputation, and practical experience. The study drew on classical Buddhist texts, including commentaries and works by modern Buddhist scholars, relevant to the concept of wrong view on self (sakkāya-diṭṭhi) and its management.

Secondary Sources

Academic books, theses, dissertations, and scholarly articles published in peer-reviewed journals, with a particular focus on those addressing the concept of wrong view on self (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), its associated problematic issues, and its management.

Data Collection

Data will be collected and critically analyzed from the primary source of the Pali Canon (tipiṭaka) using the pāli Text Society's pāli version and English translation series. In addition, Buddhist literature based on the original sources of Pali texts and commentaries in Theravada Buddhism will be used as primary sources. In this study, the views of earlier and later scholars will be included, and, if necessary, doctoral dissertations, articles, magazines, journals, newspapers, online websites, and other sources related to this title will be used as secondary sources.

1. Data Analysis

An analysis of knowledge from Buddhist scholars to show the series of knowledge and the process gained from the study in organizations and

universities. Data analysis will also use qualitative methods. In addition to data analysis, data synthesis will bring results from various areas together.

2. Validation

The interview process will follow a flexible, semi-structured format with open-ended questions customized for each expert's specific area of knowledge. Each session will last between 30 and 50 minutes. I will use note-taking templates to record key ideas, recurring themes, and observations. Additionally, the researcher will use a voice recorder to capture every detail for accurate transcription later.

Research results

Objective 1. To analyze the concept of Wrong View on Self (sakkāya-diṭṭhi) as depicted in Theravada Buddhist Scriptures

The term *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* in *Pali* is a combination of two words: *sakkāya* and *diṭṭhi*. According to the *Culavedalla Sutta*, *sakkāya* refers to the grasping of the five aggregates: materiality, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. (Maurice Walshe, 1987) This definition implies that these five aggregates are not created by an eternal Lord or a Brahma living forever in heaven. The word *diṭṭhi* is usually translated as "view," "belief," or "opinion." Regarding the combination of the two words in *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, Venerable Narada Maha Thera explained in detail how a wrong view of the "self" or "soul" develops. He identified twenty different theories of the soul related to the five aggregates. For the first aggregate (the body), there are four specific views: 1) The soul is the same as the body. 2) The soul owns or possesses the body; 3) The soul exists inside the body; 4) The body exists within the soul. The same four theories apply to each of the remaining four aggregates (feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness), resulting in twenty variations in total. (Nàrada Mahà Thera, 1987) Therefore, *sakkāyadiṭṭhi* can be defined as the mistaken belief that the five aggregates, form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness, constitute a permanent "self" or a fixed identity. It is the misconception that these elements represent an individual's essence, leading to the false idea of a "person," "man," or "woman." Regarding the different stages of wrong view on self (sakkāya-diṭṭhi), it can be studied in the commentary to the Dhammasaṅgaṇī (Dhs.a.) that the three stages of fetters are diversified according to their level, namely: the level of transgression (vītikkama-kilesa), the level of tyranny (pariyuṭṭhāna-kilesa), and the latent level (anusaya-kilesa) (Buddhaghosa, 1921).

Table 1. Twenty types of Wrong View on Self (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*)

Five aggregates	Wrong view on Self	Three stages
The matter aggregate	1. The aggregate is the self 2. The "self" possesses the aggregate 3. The aggregate is in the self 4. The self is in the aggregate	1. The level of transgression (vītikkama) 2. The level of tyranny (pariyuṭṭhāna) 3. The level of latent (anusaya)
The feeling aggregate The perception aggregate The mental formation aggregate The consciousness aggregate		

In summary, sakkāyadiṭṭhi is formally defined as the emergence of the concept of "self through twenty distinct perspectives. Each of these perspectives is derived from the "five" aggregates, based on the mistaken belief that the aggregates are identical to the self, that the "self" possesses the aggregates, or that the self and the aggregates exist within one another.

Objective 2. To examine the problems, causes, and impacts of Wrong View on Self (sakkāya-diṭṭhi) from the perspective of Theravāda Buddhism and Buddhist scholars

This research find that it is not deniable that Wrong View on Self (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) has surely ability to generate the mental unhealthy conditions such as stress and depression under the name of taints (*āsava)*, floods (*ogha*), bonds (*gantha*), clinging *(upādāna*), dispositions *(anusaya*), and defilements *(kilesa)* due to this statement "ten kinds of fetters (*saṃyojana)*, four kinds of cankers or intoxicants (*āsava),* four kinds of floods *(ogha*), four kinds of bonds (*yoga)*, four kinds of knots (*gantha*), four kinds of clinging (*upādāna*), six kinds of hindrances (*nivarana)*, seven kinds of latent dispositions *(anusaya*) can also be considered as the mental illnesses in accordance with the Buddhist psychology. (Ashin Sumanãcara, (2010). The problematic issues mentioned above can be recognized as mental disorders at the level of the tyranny of Wrong View on Self (sakkāya-diṭṭhi), based on the following statement taught by the Buddha himself: "Here, householder, the uninstructed worldling... With the change and alteration of form, there arise in him sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair." (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000).

Based on such wrong thoughts, a person who clings to the notions of "permanence, happiness, self, and purity" in relation to the five aggregates may

engage in various forms of misconduct, including violent acts such as killing. This behavior often stems from the belief that "this is my self," leading individuals to act without remorse to safeguard their perceived self from harm. Conversely, some individuals refute the idea that anything or anyone could hold greater significance than their own self. Consequently, they may pursue the welfare of loved ones through ethically questionable means, such as killing, stealing, lying, or even committing matricide, patricide, or shedding the blood of the Buddha — this corresponds to the stage of transgression level of Wrong View on Self (sakkāya-diṭṭhi) (Ledi Sayadaw, 2004). Regarding the causes of Wrong View on Self (*sakkãya-ditthi*), internal conditions—such as ignorance (*avijjā*), (Bodhi Bhikkhu,2000) attachment rooted in clinging to the Five Aggregates, (Bodhi Bhikkhu,2000) and a lack of wise attention (*ayonisomanasikāra*)—together with external conditions, namely indoctrination by others *(paratoghosa*) and association with bad friends (*pāpamitta*) (Buddhaghosa, 1921), play an essential role as causes of Wrong View on Self (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*). In Buddhist psychology, the psychological conflicts or internal disturbances arising from the influence of the Wrong View on Self (sakkāya-diṭṭhi) refer to mental states characterized by distress, agitation, confusion, and suffering. These states frequently emerge from attachment, craving, aversion, ignorance, and unwholesome mental formations. They manifest in various forms of negative affect, such as anger, greed, jealousy, anxiety, and despair, all of which are rooted in the misconception of a permanent, independent self (sakkāya-diṭṭhi). (Gombrich, Richard,1996) Moreover, social conflicts, such as fights, wars, unfair treatment, and misunderstandings, often come from deep beliefs that the self and others are fixed and separate. The idea of an eternal self persists even though our physical and mental experiences, such as feelings, ideas, thoughts, habits, and attitudes, are always changing, interconnected, and temporary. Because of this, if we hold on to the idea of a self, we will feel the need to defend ourselves, our belongings, status, opinions, and even our words. In addition, when we see ourselves as a separate being, we create a division between ourselves and others, as well as between ourselves and the world around us. (Santina & Della, 1984). To understand the harmful effects of having a Wrong View on the Self (sakkāya-diṭṭhi), it is helpful to first recognize how important the idea of self is in some religions. Many religions are built on the concept of a self, a view that the Buddha did not share. We can see that two ideas are deeply rooted in people's minds: self-protection and self-preservation. All religions, in one way or another, can be included under these two ideas. (W.Rahula, 1959)

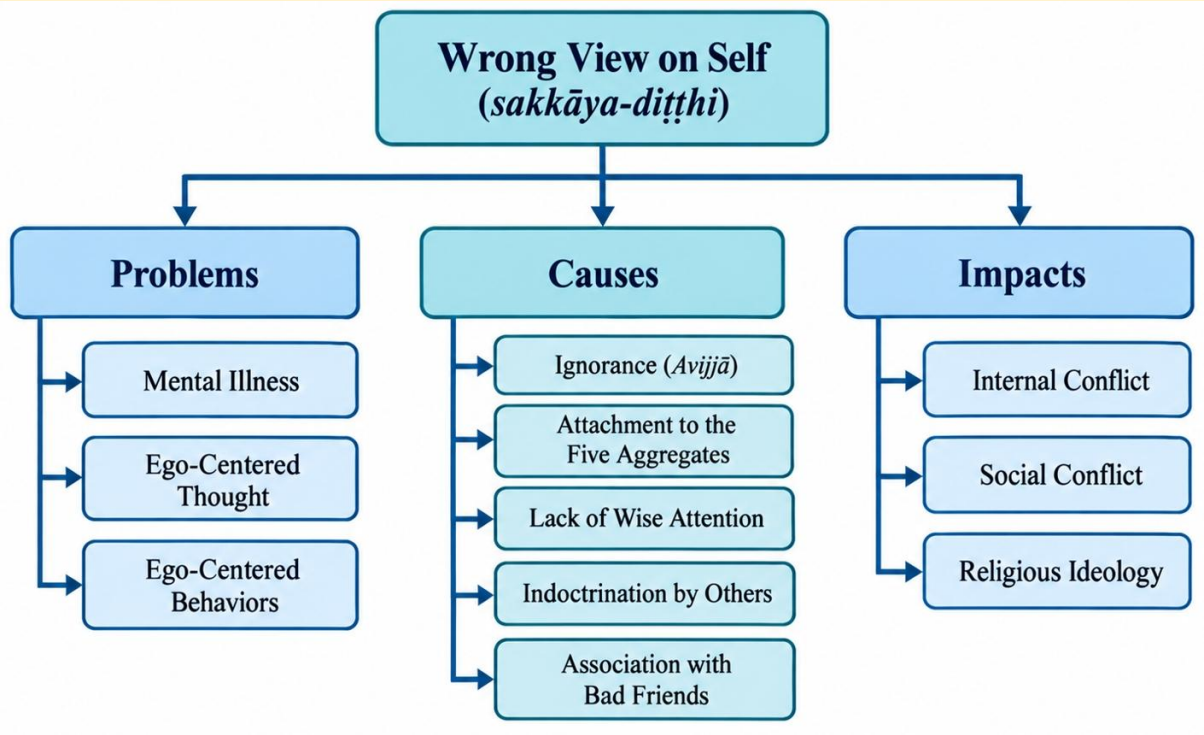

Figure 2. Problems, Causes, and Impacts of Wrong View on Self (sakkaya-diṭṭhi)

Objective 3. After examining the concept of Wrong View on Self (sakkāya-diṭṭhi) from the perspectives of Theravāda Buddhism and Buddhist scholars, it is understood that the transformative approaches to this wrong view and their social implications must be presented to fulfill the objectives of this study. It is necessary to apply the principle of "character transformation" to address the ethical decline resulting from sakkāya-diṭṭhi, that is, the transgression-level manifestation of Wrong View on Self. The Buddha himself emphasized the importance of character transformation in the Dhammapada, stating: "Restraint of the body is good. Restraint of speech is good. Restraint of the mind is good. Restraint everywhere is good. A bhikkhu who is restrained everywhere is released from all suffering." (Norman,1997) This encompasses three bodily deeds: refraining from killing, refraining from stealing, and refraining from sexual misconduct. It also includes four verbal expressions: refraining from false speech, refraining from divisive speech, refraining from harsh speech, and refraining from idle chatter. These seven moral practices serve to manage the transgression level of Wrong View on Self in the Buddhist framework.

To manage the covetousness, ill-will, and wrong views that can be described as the tyranny level of Wrong View on Self (sakkāya-diṭṭhi), mental transformative approaches must be developed. The Buddha taught that mental

discipline and transformative practices can regulate psychological afflictions, such that "passion does not penetrate a well-developed mind." (Norman,1997)

In particular, the three components of the Noble Eightfold Path's concentration group, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration, should be cultivated. The core of training in higher mind is to develop and strengthen the mind's qualities and potential, thereby enabling the practitioner to live virtuously and to employ wisdom in the most effective way. (Payutto,2021)

To effectively address the latent level of wrong view regarding self (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), it is essential to recognize that the establishment of right view *(sammā-diṭṭhi)* through study (*pariyatti)*, wise attention *(yoniso manasikāra*), and insight practice *(vipassanā bhāvanā)* plays a crucial role in restraining the emergence of self-centered defilements within *Theravāda* Buddhism. The evidence that learning, wise attention, and insight practice can prevent the arising of wrong view—namely, the mistaken belief in a self that is controllable and everlasting, is demonstrated in the *Cūḷavedalla Sutta*, as described below:

"Friend Visākha, a well-instructed noble disciple who respects the noble ones and is trained and steady in his understanding of the Dhamma, who honors true humans and is skilled and disciplined in their Dhamma, does not identify material form with the self, nor the self with something possessed by material form, nor attribute material form to being part of the self, nor treat the self as something contained in material form." (Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu & Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2001) Consequently, establishing right view through study, wise attention, and insight practice should be recognized as an approach to insight transformation in managing the wrong view of self (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) within *Theravāda* Buddhism.

In examining the concept of peace to articulate what constitutes a peaceful society within Buddhism, researchers consistently identify three dimensions of peace.

(1) Ethical Peaceful society: A society that coexists in peace and order. It is free from violence in physical actions, speech, and online interactions. Cities and homes are clean, organized, and safe. The environment is preserved, and natural resources are utilized in a balanced and sustainable manner. (Harvey, 2000)

(2) Psychological Peaceful society: A supportive society characterized by public consciousness (public spirit). People in the society are happy, and the foundations of family and community are strong. (Hare,1973)

(3) Social Peaceful society: A society where people live together with mutual respect and honor. People lead honest lives guided by wisdom and sufficiency. There is harmony and unity without division. The society accepts cultural and religious diversity. (Walshe,1987)

Of the three types of peaceful society in Buddhism, avoiding the three physical wrong actions (killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct) and the four verbal wrong actions (lying, harsh speech, idle chatter, and gossip) is essential for an ethical peaceful society, as these directly lead to social instability (Walshe, 1987). Mental transformative approaches support a psychologically peaceful society because concentration overcomes hatred, produces tranquility, and frees the mind from defilements (Upatissa, 1961). Insight transformative approaches establish peaceful coexistence by eradicating the illusion of a permanent self, which otherwise fosters self-centeredness and immoral acts, such as murder, theft, and fraud, that constitute crime (Mehm Tin Mon, 2007).

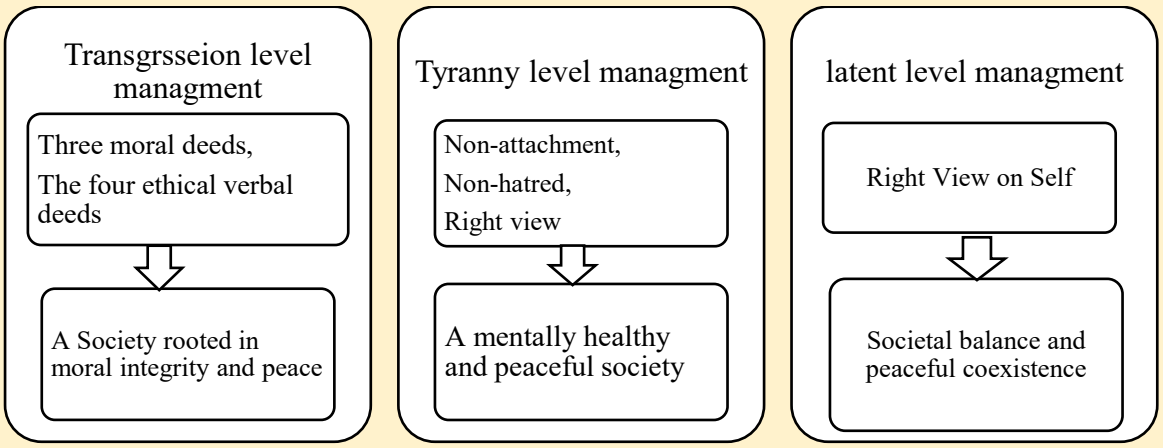

Figure 3. Right View on Self as a Structural Factor in a Peaceful Society

In conclusion, three transformative approaches correspond to three levels of Wrong View on Self: ethical transformation, psychological transformation, and insight practice. Correspondingly, Buddhism identifies three types of peaceful society: a society rooted in moral integrity and peace, a mentally healthy and peaceful society, and a society characterized by balance and peaceful coexistence. These three transformative approaches can each contribute to establishing the three types of peaceful society.

Discussion

The first finding clarifies sakkāya-diṭṭhi as a specific doctrinal structure rather than a general label for selfishness. Consistent with the Cūḷavedalla Sutta and later Theravāda explanation, the view arises when one or more of the five aggregates are interpreted through four self-relations, producing twenty modes of identity view (Walshe, 1987; Nārada Mahā Thera, 1987). The further classification into transgressive, actively dominating, and latent levels (Buddhaghosa, 1921) is analytically useful because it distinguishes observable misconduct from active mental defilement and deep-seated dispositional tendencies. This three-level distinction provides the structural basis for the study's proposed transformation model.

This finding also resonates with contemporary philosophical debate concerning the self. Recent Buddhist scholarship argues that not-self is not adequately understood as the mere disappearance of subjective experience, but as a transformation in the way selfhood is known and appropriated (Ennen, 2024). Similarly, contemporary constructivist accounts describe the self as an ongoing process emerging from interacting bodily, cognitive, and relational conditions rather than as an isolated substance (Zhang et al., 2024). The convergence is conceptual rather than evidentiary: modern self-construction theories do not verify the Buddhist doctrine of anattā, and Buddhist aggregate analysis should not be reduced to a cognitive-scientific model. Nevertheless, both bodies of work challenge simplistic assumptions that a stable, independent essence is required to explain personal continuity.

The second finding concerns the causes and consequences attributed to sakkāya-diṭṭhi. The Buddhist sources analyzed in this study associate self-view with ignorance, attachment to the aggregates, unwise attention, external influence, and unwholesome association, while Buddhist scholars connect it with craving, hostility, defensive conduct, and interpersonal conflict (Kundala, 2022; Shraman, 2003). These findings should be interpreted as doctrinal and ethical claims, not as evidence that sakkāya-diṭṭhi is a psychiatric disorder or a singular cause of depression, criminality, or war. The article therefore reframes earlier language of "mental illness" as Buddhist descriptions of mental affliction, agitation, attachment, and unwholesome states unless independently supported by clinical evidence.

The social implications require similar caution. The study's claim is strongest when it proposes that reified self- and group-identification can provide

one condition for defensiveness, exclusion, or hostility, not when it treats self-view as the sole cause of social conflict. Contemporary identity research supports this more limited interpretation. Varmann et al. (2024), in a meta-analysis of 90 studies, found a strong but highly heterogeneous relationship between identity fusion and extreme pro-group orientations, including outgroup hostility. At the same time, other research shows that strong identity bonds can promote trust and cooperation under supportive conditions. Thus, the relevant comparison is not "identity equals violence," but that rigid, threat-saturated forms of identification can interact with situational conditions to intensify conflict.

The third finding is the proposed correspondence between levels of sakkāya-diṭṭhi and levels of transformation. Ethical transformation addresses transgressive manifestations through restraint of bodily and verbal misconduct. Mental transformation targets actively dominating states through non-greed, non-hatred, right effort, mindfulness, and concentration. Insight transformation addresses the latent structure of identity view through study, wise attention, right view, and insight into the five aggregates. This sequence is consistent with the broader Theravāda logic of sīla, samādhi, and paññā and avoids treating insight as disconnected from behavioral and mental preparation.

The article's principal contribution is to connect this three-level Buddhist transformation with three domains of peace: ethical order, psychological balance, and peaceful coexistence. This contribution should, however, be described as a normative-conceptual framework rather than an empirically validated peace intervention. Modern intergroup research shows that effective peacebuilding requires attention to the target population, conflict context, social norms, motivation, historical narratives, institutions, and intervention mechanisms (Čehajić-Clancy & Halperin, 2024). The Buddhist framework can therefore add an intrapersonal and ethical dimension, especially by examining attachment to self, status, possessions, and views, but it should complement rather than replace social, political, and institutional approaches to conflict.

Taken together, the findings support a more defensible formulation of the study's thesis. Sakkāya-diṭṭhi is a foundational Buddhist account of misidentification with conditioned experience; its transformation is pursued through ethical restraint, mental cultivation, and insight; and these practices may plausibly support less reactive, less self-centered, and more peaceful forms of conduct. What remains to be tested empirically is whether and how a structured intervention based on this model affects measurable outcomes such as hostility, psychological flexibility, interpersonal conflict, prejudice, or prosocial behavior.

Future work should therefore operationalize the three transformative levels and evaluate them using mixed-methods or intervention designs rather than relying on textual inference alone.

New Knowledge from the Research

This study introduces new knowledge demonstrating that managing the Wrong View on Self (sakkāya-diṭṭhi) at different levels yields progressive contributions to peace. Managing it at the transgression level (vītikkama) promotes individual and social peace, particularly in ethical conduct. Managing it further leads from individual peace to psychological peace at the societal level. Managing it at the latent level (anusaya) fosters social balance and peaceful coexistence. Based on these findings, this study presents transformative approaches to sakkāya-diṭṭhi for achieving a peaceful society, derived from examining its problems, causes, impacts, and conceptual understanding from the perspective of Thereavãda Buddhism and the views of Buddhist scholars.

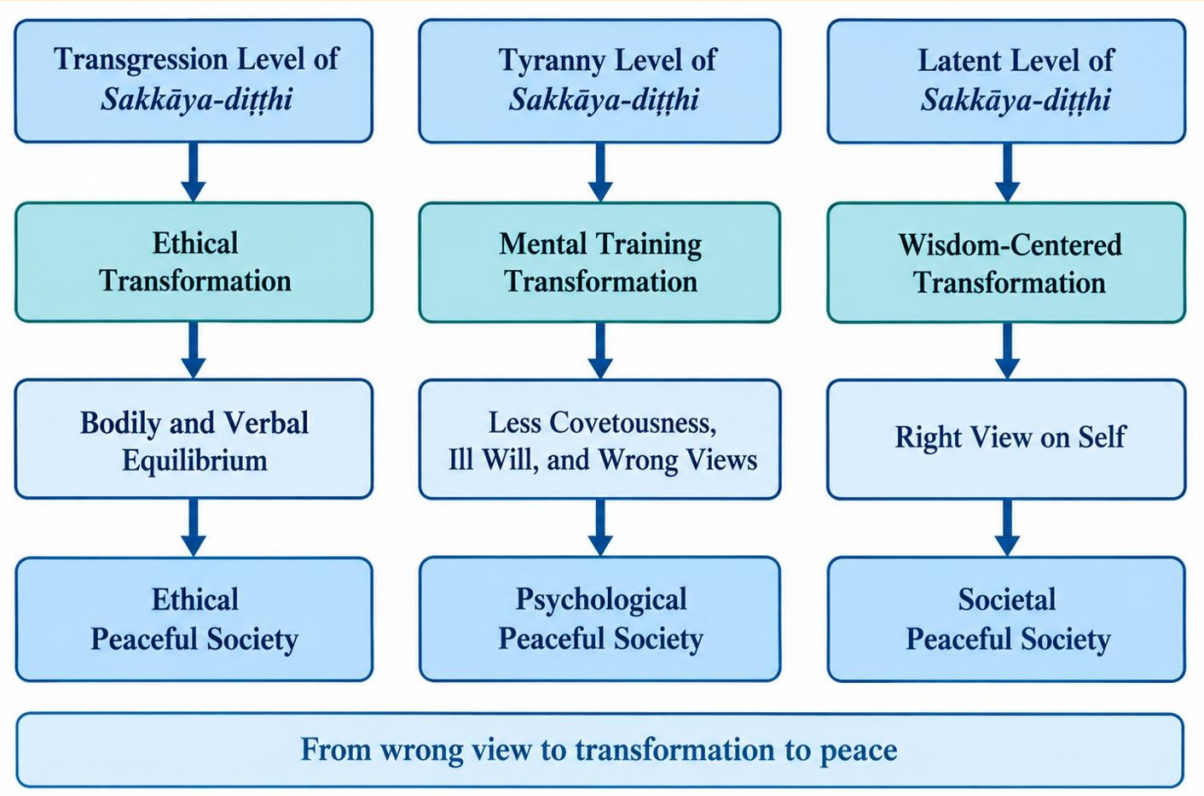

Figure 3. New Knowledge from the Study

Conclusion

This study examined sakkāya-diṭṭhi as a Theravāda Buddhist account of mistaken identification with the five aggregates and developed a three-level framework for its transformation. The analysis shows that identity view is classically expressed through twenty modes of identification and can be understood at transgressive, actively dominating, and latent levels. In Buddhist sources, it arises from ignorance, attachment, unwise attention, misleading influence, and unwholesome association, and manifests as self-centered attachment, hostility, defensive conduct, and other mental and behavioral disturbances.

The proposed framework responds to these levels through three corresponding forms of cultivation. Ethical transformation restrains harmful bodily and verbal conduct; mental transformation develops non-greed, non-hatred, mindfulness, effort, and concentration; and insight transformation cultivates right view, wise attention, and direct understanding of the five aggregates as impermanent and not-self. In this model, peace develops progressively from ethical restraint to psychological balance and, ultimately, to forms of coexistence less dominated by rigid self-centered identification.

The study's main contribution is conceptual rather than causal. It offers a Theravāda framework for linking self-view, graded transformation, and peaceful society without claiming that sakkāya-diṭṭhi alone explains mental disorder or social violence. Social conflict is multidetermined, and the Buddhist model should be understood as one ethical and contemplative contribution within a broader field of psychological, social, political, and institutional approaches to peace. Future research should operationalize the three transformative levels, examine their cultural applicability, and test their relationships with measurable psychological and social outcomes.

Suggestion for Further Research

The findings of this study reveal insights that extend beyond the original objectives. Based on these results, four areas are proposed for future investigation:

1. Deconstructing the 'Default Mode Network': A Comparative Analysis of *Sakkaya-ditthi* and Modern Neuropsychological Models of the Self.

2. From Self-View to Social Conflict: The Role of *Sakkaya-ditthi* in the Proliferation of 'Papañca' (Conceptual Diversification).
3. The Evolution of *Sakkaya-ditthi*: From Early Buddhist Suttas to the Commentarial Tradition of *Buddhaghosa*

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A Buddhist Approach to Stress Management Through the Sevenfold Methods of the Sabbāsavasutta

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Abstract

This study had three objectives: (1) to examine problematic situations and causes of stress; (2) to explore the principles underlying the sevenfold methods of the Sabbāsavasutta in relation to the management of stress and mental defilements; and (3) to analyze these sevenfold methods as a Buddhist approach to stress management. The study employed qualitative documentary analysis, drawing on Buddhist scriptures and relevant scholarly perspectives for analysis and synthesis.

The findings indicate that stress is an unavoidable part of life until liberation of the mind is attained. Not all stress is inherently harmful; many scholars maintain that people need a certain degree of stress to sustain health, motivation, and adaptability. When stress functions as a positive force that encourages individuals to achieve goals or adapt to challenges, it may be beneficial. However, when stress becomes harmful rather than helpful, it affects physical health as well as emotional, behavioral, and cognitive functioning, with consequences for both individuals and society. Such stress should therefore be recognized and addressed promptly and seriously.

This study argues that unwise attention (ayonisomanasikāra) is a foundational condition for the mental defilements that generate stress. Ordinary beings (puthujjana) are particularly vulnerable because much of life is shaped by unwise attention. Drawing on the Sabbāsavasutta, the study proposes a sevenfold framework for stress reduction. The first method, seeing, enables a detailed understanding of stress, including its symptoms, causes, benefits, harms, and possible coping strategies. Only by understanding stress clearly can individuals prepare to confront and overcome it. The next five methods help prevent conditions that give rise to stress, while the final method cultivates wholesome qualities that support the abandonment of taints and the development of a resilient mind oriented toward liberation. Together, the seven methods constitute a comprehensive Buddhist approach to managing stress.

Keywords: Buddhist approach; Stress management; Sevenfold methods; Wise attention; Unwise attention; Sabbāsavasutta.

Introduction

Stress is a common mental health issue in the modern world, with severe problems increasingly prevalent in today's society. Dhammananda (2004) described it as "the disease of civilization." The term disease can be understood as a form of suffering that includes both physical discomfort (dukkha) and mental pain (domanassa). Extensive research has documented the damaging and potentially lethal consequences of stress, often describing it as "the silent killer" due to its association with conditions like heart disease, high blood pressure, chest pain, and irregular heartbeat (Chilnik, 2008). Furthermore, stress impacts not only physical health but also mental and emotional health, contributing to anxiety, worry, depression, hostility, fears, and related experiences (Davis et al., 2008).

In general, when people are confronted with stress, many of them often turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as overeating, excessive alcohol consumption, increased smoking, oversleeping, excessive shopping, dancing, gambling, or other behaviors aimed at relaxation and alleviating the burden of stress. While these behaviors may provide temporary relief or distraction from stress, they are not healthy or sustainable long-term solutions. In fact, they can often exacerbate the underlying issues and lead to additional problems, both physical and mental.

Buddhism is the most psychologically interesting of the great world religions (Padmasiri de Silva, 2000). Its education-oriented framework yields both theoretical insight and practical methods for addressing a wide range of human psychological issues, including problems related to stress. In fact, many discourses in Buddhist teachings offer effective and efficient ways to overcome and reduce stress. However, in the research, I chose the Sabbāsavasutta as a particular discourse because it provides a comprehensive sequence of practice. From the term sabbāsava, which is the name of this discourse, it can be understood that sabbāsava (generally translated as all defilements or taints) is the primary cause of stress. But, āsava also depends on causes, which are expressed in the principle: "When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases." (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000)

In the Sabbāsavasutta, it is explicitly stated: "When one attends unwisely, unarisen taints arise and arisen taints increase. When one attends wisely, unarisen taints do not arise and arisen taints are abandoned." (Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu & Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1995) Here, the practice of wise attention (yonisomanasikāra) becomes particularly important. The question then arises: how can we practice and develop wise attention (yonisomanasikāra) to combat defilement (āsava) and cope with stress? This makes it interesting to study and analyze Buddhist approaches to stress management, with a specific focus on the sevenfold methods outlined in the Sabbāsavasutta: (1) the method of seeing (dassana), (2) the method of restraint (saṃvara), (3) the method of using (paṭisevana), (4) the method of endurance (adhivāsana), (5) the method of avoidance (parivajjana), (6) the method of removal (vinodana) and (7) the method of development (bhāvanā).

The aims of this study are to provide actionable approaches for restraining and eliminating mental defilements or taints that contribute to stress and suffering, and to show how applying these methods can guide individuals toward enhanced mental growth and personal development in alignment with the profound teachings of Buddhism.

Research Objective

1. To examine the problematic situations and causes leading to stress.
2. To explore the principles underlying the sevenfold methods of the *Sabbāsavasutta* in relation to managing stress.
3. To analyze the sevenfold methods presented in the *Sabbāsavasutta* as a Buddhist approach in relation to stress management.

Literature Review

This literature review examines key scholarly works relevant to the study's objectives, focusing on the nature and causes of stress, the principles of the sevenfold methods in the Sabbāsavasutta, and their practical application as a Buddhist approach to stress management.

1. The general concept and problematic situation of stress

Brian Luke Seaward (2018) gathers multiple concepts of stress from diverse scholars and perspectives, offering principles and strategies aimed at health and well-being. The book provides scientific documentation of stress-related cases and presents various coping methods to manage stress effectively.

Hans Selye (1976) offers a foundational history and overview of stress theories from a biological standpoint, distinguishing between distress and eustress and detailing the impacts of long-term stress on the body, emotions, and cognition. Selye also introduces the General Adaptation Syndrome, with its three stages: alarm, resistance, and exhaustion. Selye's General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) provides an influential framework for understanding stress, but it has been critiqued for its linear progression model and limited attention to individual variability, chronicity, and context.

2. The principles of the sevenfold methods outlined in the Sabbāsavasutta

Zhuang Po-Hui (2014) provides a complete translation from the *Pāli* commentary tradition, accompanied by an illuminating introduction and numerous valuable notes related to the *Sabbāsavasutta*. This work can be immensely helpful as a foundational resource for understanding the meaning and terminology of the *Sabbāsavasutta* from the commentary perspective.

Tan's (2006) translation and exposition of the Sabbāsavasutta provide a fresh and insightful interpretation of the sutta. The author goes beyond mere translation, offering detailed exposition and practical commentary that brings the sutta's teaching to life. His approach bridges textual study and practical application, presenting a unique perspective that can inspire deeper reflection and personal insight.

3. The sevenfold practical application to managing stress

Buddharakkhitha (2011) articulates an explanation to these sevenfold methods grounded in the *Sabbāsavasutta* to address mental problems, balancing a religious framing with considerations relevant to modern psychology. The literature also offers a valuable perspective that could further benefit from integration with contemporary psychological insight.

A dissertation by Beliatte (2018) analyzes how the *Sabbāsavasutta*'s sevenfold methods can support mental wellbeing and address commonly encountered mental health concerns such as stress, depression, and anger. The author maps each of the seven methods onto an integrated, gradual program to reduce mental agitation and enhance happiness. A notable limitation of this dissertation is its lack of empirical data and primary qualitative interviews, which constrains the ability to test the efficacy of the *Sabbāsavasutta*'s sevenfold methods or to explore participants'lived experiences in applying these practices.

Collectively, the reviewed literature demonstrates multifaceted approaches to understanding and managing stress through Buddhist teachings and contemporary psychology. This synthesis provides a foundation for examining the interpretation and practical application of the Sabbāsavasutta's sevenfold methods in stress management.

Conceptual Framework

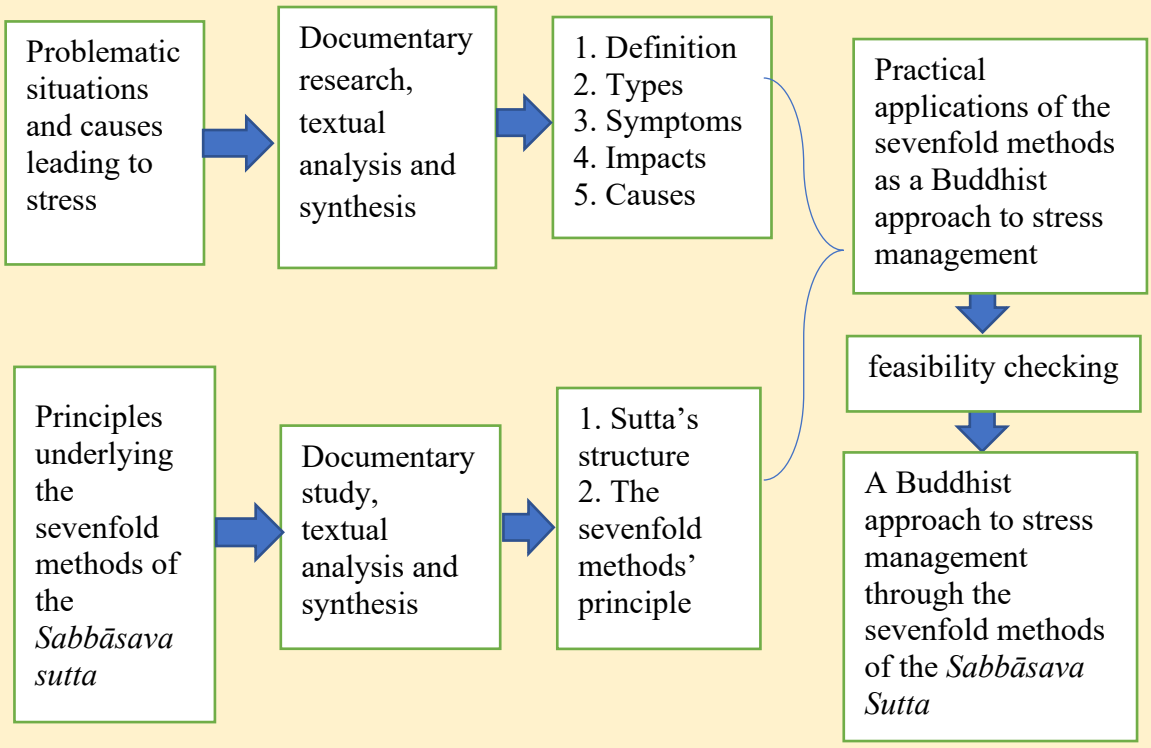

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Research Methodology

The methodology of this research is based on qualitative documentary analysis. This research methodology can be divided into three stages as follows:

1. Data Collection

This study primarily relies on documentary research as the main source of information. It seeks to explore and extract the essential teachings of the Buddha related to stress management and coping with stress. The main focus of this research is the *Sabbāsavasutta* from *Majjhima-nikāya*. In addition to this primary source, other discourses, relevant academic works, journal articles, websites, and electronic resources will also be collected and consulted to gather comprehensive information and insights on stress management in Buddhist teachings.

2. Analysis and Synthesis

Conducting research and synthesis of the raw data, and organizing the collected information systematically to provide a comprehensive understanding of stress management in accordance with the *Sabbāsavasutta*.

3. Conclusion and Suggestion

Formulating conclusions, identifying significant research findings, and giving useful suggestions for further research.

Research Results

Objective 1: The problematic situations and causes leading to stress.

The results showed that stress affects not only physical health but also emotional, behavioral, and cognitive aspects, with implications for both individuals and society as a whole.

Chilnick (2008) underscores the intricate connection between stress and physical disease. He elaborates on the adverse impact of stress, linking it to conditions such as high blood pressure, chest pain, irregular heartbeat, and heart disease. Davis et al. (2008) describe that emotional manifestations of stress encompass a wide range of symptoms, including anxiety, worry, depression, hostility, irritability, resentment, phobias, fears, and mood swings such as rapid changes from happiness to sadness or anger. Behavioral manifestations may include sudden or unexpected changes in conduct. Bhagtani (2022) identifies sleep disturbances, lack of punctuality, exhaustion, risk-taking behavior, and unhealthy eating habits as behavioral indicators. Cognitively, stress may diminish self-esteem and self-confidence and produce feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. In extreme cases, an individual may contemplate suicide (Dhammananda, 2004).

The findings suggest that stress arises through an interaction between external conditions and internal cognitive processes. External factors, including adverse environments, biological and physiological conditions, and social contexts, may be interpreted within a Buddhist framework as outcomes of kamma that predispose individuals to particular forms of stress. Such conditions may shape family dynamics and psychological or physical tendencies, thereby influencing responses to stress.

Kamma, however, does not deterministically fix the future. Although its consequences may be difficult to alter, individuals can cultivate resilience through

wise attention (*yonisomanasikāra*) and an informed understanding of kamma, thereby changing their responses to stressful conditions. Unwise attention allows taints to arise and intensify; wise attention, by contrast, provides a means of reducing and overcoming stress.

Objective 2: The principles underlying the sevenfold methods of the *Sabbāsavasutta* in relation to managing stress.

The *Sabbāsavasutta*, a discourse delivered by the Buddha to monks at Jetavana Monastery in Sāvatthi, presents seven methods for cultivating wise attention (*yonisomanasikāra*):

1. The method of seeing (*dassanā*): Attending wisely in accordance with the Four Noble Truths. Seeing can be synonymous with right view, as understanding principles of the Four Noble Truths forms (Tan, 2006). When applied to stress, this means recognizing the impermanent and conditioned nature of stressful thoughts and situations. By seeing their transient nature, practitioners can lessen attachment to sources of stress, thereby reducing the power of mental defilements over peace of mind.

2. The method of restraint (*saṃvarā*): Abiding with the six sense faculties restrained. The Sutta advises vigilance with sensory experiences to avoid unnecessary craving, aversion, and attachment. In terms of stress management, this principle suggests avoiding overstimulation and staying mindful of what one consumes mentally (thoughts, media, conversations) as this can help prevent and reduce stress.

3. The method of using (*paṭisevanā*): Reflecting wisely while using four requisities (*catu-paccaya*), namely robe, food, residence, and medicine. The Sutta suggests a mindful approach to life's necessities, reflecting on the purpose and use of objects to prevent attachment and overindulgence. This practice can alleviate stress related to material desires or social comparisons by grounding one in purposeful simplicity, encouraging contentment with what one has.

4. The method of endurance (*adhivāsanā*): Endure patiently through a range of challenges, such as adverse weather, bodily discomfort, and harsh treatment. By using this method, one learns not to resist or react impulsively to difficult situations or unpleasant conditions, reducing stress and inner conflict. Acceptance and tolerance can lessen the mental burden that arises from everyday frustrations.

5. The method of avoidance (*parivajjanā*): Avoidance of hazardous situations, unsuitable surroundings, and detrimental associations that may provoke negative emotions or unwholesome thoughts. This principle suggests that managing stress includes consciously avoiding conditions that are known triggers for anxiety or negative mental states.

6. The method of removal (*vinodanā*): Removing thoughts of sensual desire, ill-will, harmfulness, and evil unwholesome states. Upon recognizing the arising of these negative thoughts and understanding their potential to cause affliction, obstructing wisdom, causing difficulties, and leading away from *Nibbāna*, one should frequently reflect and ponder upon thoughts of renunciation (*nekkhammavitakko*), thoughts of goodwill (*abyāpādavitakko*), and thoughts of harmlessness (*avihiṃsāvitakko*),

7. The method of development (*bhāvanā*): Develop the seven factors of Enlightenment, which are supported by seclusion (*vivekanissitaṃ*), dispassion (*virāganissitaṃ*), and cessation (*nirodhanissitaṃ*), and ripen in relinquishment (*vossaggapariṇāmiṃ*).

Objective 3: Practical application of the sevenfold methods as a Buddhist approach to stress management.

Unwise attention (*ayonisomanasikāra*) is presented as a foundational cause of mental defilements that generate stress. In contrast, cultivating wise attention (yonisomanasikāra) through the sevenfold methods offers a comprehensive approach to addressing the pervasive problem of stress, especially when practiced gradually and systematically.

1. The method of seeing (*dassanā*): Understanding the reality of stress is not something to be avoided; as long as ignorance and craving persist, stress can be well managed and overcome by cultivating wise attention.

2. The method of restraint (*saṃvarā*): Mindfully avoiding overstimulation and maintaining awareness of what is perceived and engaged with through the six senses, including thoughts, media, and conversations. Tan (2006) offers a simple analogy for the practical application of sense-restraint, comparing it to careful driving. Whether you are driving in a busy city street or on the highway, you have to keep your hands on the steering wheel, your feet on the pedals, and your eyes on the road and its surroundings, including the rearview mirrors. Mindfully watch for other cars and vehicles, pedestrians, road conditions, and of course traffic signs. However, you do not stare at any one thing

for too long, just enough to know whether they need to slow down, stop, or can safely proceed. By maintaining this mindful awareness, a driver reaches their destination safely. Similarly, applying restraint and mindfulness to our mental inputs allows us to navigate the complexities of modern life with greater calm and stability, helping us manage and reduce stress more effectively.

3. The method of using (*paṭisevanā*): Wisely and satisfactorily utilizing every daily necessity. As Dhammmananda (2004) notes, when a person thinks, "this much is enough for my family and for me and I do not want anything beyond," that is contentment. Learning how to balance our mental and physical health while pursuing material wealth is a crucial aspect of stress management. By balancing material pursuits with contentment and reflection on their true purpose, we can better manage stress. Furthermore, food consumption also plays a crucial role in stress management; one should select food based on hygiene, health, organic quality, safety, easy digestion, and adequate production capacity, and one should avoid overeating (Mahatthanadull, 2016).

4. The method of endurance (*adhivāsanā*): Reflect on the advantages of patience and the disadvantages of impatience, and cultivate acceptance of any situation through contemplative patience. Whether an experience is pleasant or unpleasant, one must learn to accept it with patience through reflection and contemplation.

5. The method of avoidance (*parivajjanā*): Reducing stress by selecting suitable environments, prudent companions, and constructive social contexts that foster mental peace and spiritual development. Modern research confirms that the environment plays a significant role in increasing or decreasing stress levels (Plaford, 2013). Social support also helps individuals manage the uncertainties associated with stress and enhances their sense of personal control and effectiveness over their environment. (Charles, 1996).

6. The method of removal (*vinodanā*): Replacing adverse thoughts with their opposites: renunciation, loving-kindness, and harmlessness. Bhikkhu Bodhi Bhikkhu (2005) suggests that the primary method for freeing the mind from desire is through understanding. Instead of forcefully suppressing cherished attachments, we need to realize that desire is inherently linked to dukkha as its nature, and by transforming our perspective on it, we can gradually diminish its power. The effective way to counteract ill will is through loving-kindness (*mettā*), and the way to cultivate harmlessness is guided by compassion (*karuṇā*).

7. The method of development (*bhāvanā*): Develop the seven factors of Enlightenment, which are:

1) Mindfulness (*sati*): maintaining present moment mindfulness.
2) Investigation-of-states (*dhammavicaya*): increasing awareness of beneficial and harmful stimuli that cause stress and suffering.
3) Energy (*viriya*): enhancing the other positive qualities, and preventing negative mental states.
4) Rapture (*pīti*): fostering a sense of inner joy and calmness.
5) Tranquility (*passaddhi*): relief and inner calm experienced from any burden.
6) Concentration (*samādhi*): helps minimize mental dispersal and enhances clarity.
7) Equanimity (*upekkhā*): to support resilient coping and cultivate a sense of acceptance and detachment.

Among these, the method of seeing (*dassanā*) plays a crucial role in understanding stress through the lens of the Four Noble Truths. The other five methods serve to prevent the causes that lead to stress. It is essential to understand how to prevent and mindfully manage the six sense bases, select appropriate associations, use material possessions wisely, maintain endurance through difficult challenges, and eliminate negative mental aspects that can lead to stress. The last method, development (*bhāvanā*), involves cultivating positive mental qualities.

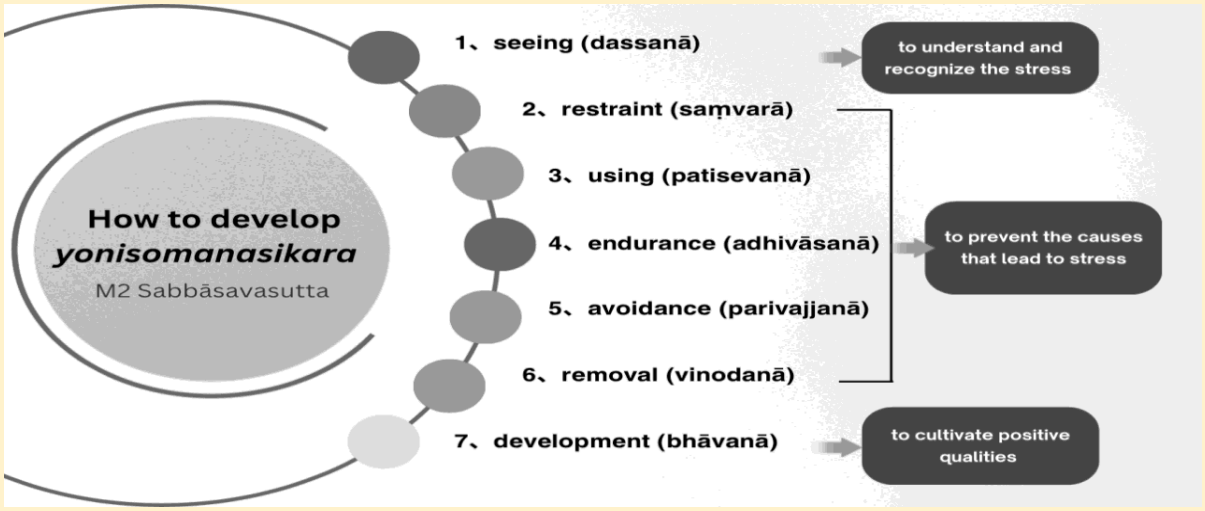

Figure 2: The chart of the sevenfold methods in relation to stress management

Discussion

The findings of this study illuminate a Buddhist framework for stress management grounded in the *Sabbāsavasutta*'s sevenfold methods. Rather than treating stress as inherently pathological, the analysis suggests that stress is a pervasive facet of life whose harmful effects emerge when attention becomes unwise. Central to this perspective is the idea that the sevenfold methods provide an integrated program for cultivating wise attention and translating insight into practiced regulation of experience.

The Buddhist canon does not explicitly employ the modern psychological term stress, which became established only in the twentieth century. Dhammananda (2004) describes stress as the "disease of civilization," with "disease" understood as suffering that includes physical discomfort (dukkha) and mental pain (domanassa). Beliatte (2018) similarly notes that although dukkha is often translated as suffering, unsatisfactoriness, or stress, its broader meaning encompasses birth, aging, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, despair, association with the unloved, separation from the loved, and not obtaining what is desired. In summary, the five aggregates subject to clinging are stressful.

The emphasis is that not all stress is inherently bad. Selye (1976) argued that humans need a certain degree of stress to maintain health, motivation, and adaptability. When stress acts as a positive force, driving individuals to achieve goals or adapt to challenges, it can be considered beneficial. However, when stress becomes harmful rather than helpful, it affects physical health as well as emotional, behavioral, and cognitive aspects, impacting both individuals and society. Some scholars also note that stress occurs when appraisal yields a negative outcome and the situation is perceived as potentially damaging (Van Praag et al., 2004). In such cases, it is crucial to face and address stress promptly and seriously.

Unwise attention (*ayonisomanasikāra*) functions as a foundational condition for the mental defilements that generate stress. Tyson and Pongruengphant (2007) describe stress as a discrepancy between circumstances and one's expectations, needs, desires, or interpretations. Ordinary beings (*puthujjana*) are particularly vulnerable because much of their experience is shaped by unwise attention. Developing wise attention (*yonisomanasikāra*) through the seven methods of the Sabbāsavasutta is therefore central to reducing and managing stress.

In summary, the sevenfold methods of the *Sabbāsavasutta* offer a comprehensive approach to addressing the pervasive problem of stress, especially

when practiced gradually and systematically. However, the present discussion is interpretive and doctrinal, drawing on Buddhist sources and secondary literature without empirical data. Future research directions include designing and evaluating curriculum or workplace-based interventions inspired by *Sabbāsavasutta* principles and measuring effects on stress, mental growth and personal development. Such work would test the practical recommendations proposed here and extend the dialogue between classical Buddhist ethics and contemporary wellbeing science.

Knowledge from Research

This study demonstrates the continuing relevance of Buddhist teachings to contemporary discussions of stress in psychology and health science. Although the Sabbāsavasutta is primarily concerned with abandoning the taints and attaining Nibbāna, its seven methods can also be interpreted as practical resources for modern life, in which individuals face persistent pressures and conditions that readily generate stress.

A practical approach to applying the sevenfold methods to stress begins with seeing (dassanā), that is, knowing the problem in detail, which enables a better understanding of the situation. As Diane McIntosh (2017) states, “it is always easier to deal with difficult emotions if we understand them better”. Next, practice restraint (saṃvarā) by mindfully limiting overstimulation and choosing what we expose ourselves to through the six senses: thoughts, media, and conversations. For using (paṭisevanā), foster contentment and mindful use of necessities, preventing attachment and social comparison that fuel stress. Endurance (adhivāsana) involves cultivating patience by facing and withstanding life’s challenges with equanimity. Avoidance (parivajjanā) means strategically curating environments, relationships, and activities to minimize known stress triggers, while removal (vinodanā) focuses on identifying and substituting negative mental states that can lead to stress. Finally, development (bhāvanā) emphasizes cultivating positive mental qualities to overcome stress.

The effectiveness of these methods depends on careful understanding, sustained effort, and appropriate application. The Sabbāsavasutta presents wise attention as the foundation of a systematic path toward the abandonment of taints. For ordinary beings (puthujjana), who remain vulnerable to stress through unwise attention, cultivating wise attention through the seven methods provides a disciplined approach to mental development. The framework should, however, be

understood as a doctrinal and practical model whose effectiveness for contemporary stress management requires empirical investigation.

Conclusion

Stress is not inherently harmful, and a certain degree may support motivation and adaptation. Nevertheless, excessive or chronic stress can adversely affect physical and mental health and therefore requires timely recognition and management. From a Buddhist perspective, stress remains possible until liberation of the mind is attained because ignorance, craving, and clinging continue to condition experience.

Effective stress management begins with understanding stress, including its causes, pathways, and consequences for individuals and society. Within the Sabbāsavasutta, the taints are sustained by ignorance and craving and are intensified through unwise attention (ayonisomanasikāra). The discourse states that unwisely attended taints arise and increase, whereas wise attention prevents unarisen taints and abandons those already present. Wise attention therefore serves as the central operational principle of the seven methods.

Among these sevenfold methods, the first method of seeing (dassanā) plays a crucial role in understanding stress through the lens of the Four Noble Truths. While the other five methods serve to prevent the causes that lead to stress. Among these, it is essential to understand how to prevent and mindfully manage the six sense bases, select appropriate associations, use material possessions wisely, maintain endurance through difficult challenges, and eliminate negative mental aspects that can lead to stress. And the last method of development (bhāvanā) involves cultivating positive mental qualities. Together, these methods represent a dual approach to maintaining mental liberation: removing harmful factors and promoting beneficial qualities to effectively manage human stress.

Suggestion

A broad range of approaches has been explored to cope with stress and promote mental health, spanning scientific, spiritual, and traditional modalities. These include practices such as praying or chanting, mindfulness meditation, aromatherapy, observing nature (e.g., green grass), music therapy, massage therapy, animal-assisted therapy, diaphragmatic breathing, yoga, humor therapy, art therapy, nutrition therapy, progressive muscular relaxation, physical exercise, jogging, counseling, and more. While these approaches can be beneficial for many individuals and contribute positively to mental health, Buddhism emphasizes not

only stress reduction but also the minimization of defilements, offering a comprehensive framework that integrates ethical, contemplative, and practical dimensions for addressing mental health challenges.

Aligned with this holistic orientation, "wise attention (yonisomanasikara)" is central to coping with stress while reducing defilements. The sevenfold methods outlined in the Sabbāsavasutta provide a practical, accessible framework for cultivating this wise attention. After analyzing and thoroughly understanding the scope of this teaching, individuals can undertake practice independently; however, guidance from a qualified teacher or a trusted, wise companion can be beneficial during the learning process.

In applying these methods to stress management, the initial method supports detailed analysis of the stress situation, its symptoms, causes, potential advantages and disadvantages, and coping strategies. Through such understanding, one becomes better prepared to face stress and engage in proactive remedial effort. The remaining five methods prevent the emergence of stress precursors, while the final method cultivates positive qualities that help eradicate taints and develop a resilient mind capable of attaining liberation rather than remaining trapped in stress. Collectively, these seven methods constitute a comprehensive, integrated approach to addressing stress as a pervasive issue.

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An Integrated Philosophical Analysis of The Proper Cultivation of Compassion in Theravāda Buddhism

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Abstract

This philosophical study examines the proper cultivation of compassion (karuṇā) in Theravāda Buddhism and clarifies the conditions under which compassion can support the path to liberation rather than become entangled with attachment or emotional distress. The study has three objectives: (1) to examine the concept of karuṇā in the Pāli Nikāyas; (2) to analyze its relationship with wisdom (paññā), non-attachment (virāga), and equanimity (upekkhā); and (3) to propose an integrated framework for cultivating compassion on the path to liberation. Using qualitative philosophical research, the study applies textual analysis and philosophical interpretation to selected passages from the Dīgha Nikāya, Majjhima Nikāya, Saṃyutta Nikāya, and Aṅguttara Nikāya, supported by authoritative translations and relevant Buddhist and interdisciplinary scholarship. The analysis indicates that karuṇā is not merely an affective reaction to suffering but a cultivated wholesome quality directed toward the alleviation of suffering. Its liberative function is strengthened when compassion is guided by wisdom, purified through non-attachment, and stabilized by equanimity. Wisdom clarifies suffering and its causes; non-attachment prevents compassionate concern from becoming possessive or outcome-dependent; and equanimity supports impartiality and emotional balance. The study therefore proposes an Integrated Compassion Framework in which karuṇā operates in dynamic relation with paññā, virāga, and upekkhā. This framework is a philosophical synthesis rather than an empirically validated psychological model. It contributes to Theravāda Buddhist philosophy by clarifying compassion as an integrated element of the path to liberation and provides a conceptual basis for dialogue with contemporary research on compassion, empathic distress, emotional regulation, and well-being.

Keywords: Compassion; Karuṇā; Wisdom; Non-attachment; Equanimity; Theravāda Buddhism

Introduction

Compassion has become a major focus of interdisciplinary research in psychology, neuroscience, healthcare, and contemplative science. Contemporary studies generally distinguish compassion from empathy by emphasizing not only sensitivity to suffering but also concern and motivation to alleviate it. Neuroscientific and psychological research suggests that empathic sharing of distress and compassion are related but distinguishable processes, with compassion more consistently associated with positive affect, prosocial motivation, and emotional resilience (Singer & Klimecki, 2014). More recent scholarship continues to underline the conceptual complexity of compassion and empathy and the importance of distinguishing them carefully in both theory and measurement (Vieten et al., 2024).

Compassion-based interventions have also received growing empirical attention. Compassion-Focused Therapy and Mindful Self-Compassion have been associated with reductions in self-criticism and psychological distress and with improvements in emotional well-being (Gilbert, 2014; Neff & Germer, 2013). A recent systematic review and meta-analysis of compassion training for healthcare professionals found improvements in compassion, self-compassion, and compassion satisfaction, together with reductions in compassion fatigue, although the evidence base remains limited by the number and quality of available studies (Alcaraz-Córdoba et al., 2024). A 2025 meta-analysis further reported a moderate positive association between compassion for others and well-being, while noting that causal evidence from intervention studies remains preliminary (Zhuniq et al., 2025). These findings support the value of compassion cultivation while also cautioning against overly broad claims about its effects.

At the same time, contemporary discourse often uses the language of "compassion fatigue" to describe exhaustion among caregivers and helping professionals (Figley, 1995; Sinclair et al., 2017). This terminology can obscure an important distinction: emotional over-identification with another person's suffering is not necessarily the same as compassion itself. Singer and Klimecki (2014) argue that empathic distress may involve aversive self-oriented responses, whereas compassion is characterized by warmth, concern, and a motivation to help. This distinction is highly relevant to Buddhist philosophy, because Theravāda sources do not define karuṇā as absorbing or reproducing another person's suffering. Rather, compassion is cultivated as a wholesome orientation toward the alleviation of suffering

Within Theravāda Buddhism, compassion must also be interpreted in relation to the broader structure of the path. Buddhist scholarship has long emphasized that compassion is inseparable from ethical discipline, meditation, and wisdom (Anālayo, 2015; Gethin, 1998; Harvey, 2000; Keown, 2005). Yet a conceptual problem remains insufficiently developed: under what conditions does compassion remain wholesome and liberative rather than become entangled with craving, attachment, grief, or emotional imbalance? The Pāli Nikāyas provide important resources for answering this question because compassion appears within broader systems of cultivation that also include right view, dispassion, equanimity, and the factors of awakening (Bodhi, 2000, 2012; Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995; Walshe, 1995).

This article therefore examines karuṇā not as an isolated virtue or therapeutic technique but as an integrated mental quality whose liberative function depends upon its relationship with wisdom (paññā), non-attachment (virāga), and equanimity (upekkhā). The study asks three questions: What is the doctrinal character of karuṇā in the Pāli Nikāyas? How do paññā, virāga, and upekkhā regulate and deepen compassionate cultivation? And how can these relationships be synthesized into a coherent philosophical framework for the proper cultivation of compassion? By addressing these questions, the study seeks to contribute to Theravāda Buddhist philosophy while also offering a carefully delimited conceptual bridge to contemporary discussions of compassion, emotional regulation, and sustainable care.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the concept of *karuṇā* in *Theravada* Buddhism.

2. To analyze the relationship between compassion, wisdom, non-attachment, and equanimity.

3. To propose a framework for cultivating compassion on the path to liberation.

Literature Review

Compassion (karuṇā) has been examined extensively in Buddhist studies, where it is generally understood as a central ethical and contemplative quality rather than a stand-alone emotion. Gethin (1998), Harvey (2000), Keown (2005), and Anālayo (2015) situate compassion within wider structures of moral

discipline, meditation, wisdom, and liberation. In the Nikāyas, compassion is one of the four brahmavihāras and is cultivated as an immeasurable attitude toward beings who suffer (Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995; Walshe, 1995). These studies establish the doctrinal and soteriological importance of karuṇā, but they do not always make explicit how compassion is regulated by related qualities such as paññā, virāga, and upekkhā.

The relationship between compassion and wisdom is particularly important. Early Buddhist ethics does not treat wholesome motivation as independent of right view. The Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta (MN 9) links right understanding with knowledge of wholesome and unwholesome states, suffering, its origin, cessation, and the path (Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995). The Karuṇāsutta (SN 46.63) places compassion in relation to the factors of awakening and to seclusion, dispassion, and cessation (Bodhi, 2000). These texts suggest that compassion becomes soteriologically significant when it is integrated with discernment and dispassion rather than driven simply by emotional resonance. Equanimity provides a complementary dimension: within the brahmavihāras and related teachings, upekkhā supports impartiality and balance without negating concern for suffering (Bodhi, 2012; Walshe, 1995).

Contemporary compassion research approaches the subject from a different conceptual and methodological direction. Gilbert (2009, 2014) and Neff and Germer (2013) examine compassion and self-compassion as psychological capacities relevant to emotion regulation and mental health, while Singer and Klimecki (2014) distinguish compassion from empathic distress. Recent reviews have strengthened this distinction by showing that compassion and empathy are multidimensional constructs requiring careful conceptualization and measurement (Vieten et al., 2024). Intervention research among healthcare professionals suggests that compassion training may reduce compassion fatigue and strengthen compassion satisfaction and self-compassion, although the available evidence is heterogeneous and should not be interpreted as proof that all forms of compassion training produce the same effects (Alcaraz-Córdoba et al., 2024).

Recent evidence also complicates the assumption that compassion is inherently exhausting. Zhuniq et al. (2025) found a moderate positive relationship between compassion for others and well-being across multiple domains, while noting that intervention-based causal evidence remains limited. This is broadly compatible with the Buddhist distinction between karuṇā and emotionally

conditioned suffering, but the two literatures should not be treated as theoretically equivalent. Psychological studies usually examine measurable affective, motivational, behavioral, or clinical outcomes; Theravāda sources evaluate compassion within an ethical and soteriological path. The research gap addressed by the present study lies precisely at this intersection: existing scholarship explains many benefits and functions of compassion, but less attention has been given to a philosophical account of the conditions under which compassion remains non-attached, balanced, and oriented toward liberation. The present study responds by examining karuṇā together with paññā, virāga, and upekkhā as an integrated system of cultivation.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is drawn from the *Pāli Nikāya* scriptures and the *Theravāda* Buddhist commentary tradition. It provides a theoretical basis for considering the proper cultivation of compassion (*karuṇā*) by conceptualizing compassion as an integrated mental practice rather than a single emotional response. As illustrated in Figure 1, this framework comprises four closely related components: compassion (*karuṇā*), wisdom (*paññā*), non-attachment (*virāga*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*). Compassion serves as the central concept of the study, while wisdom provides correct understanding of suffering, non-attachment prevents compassion from becoming entangled with craving and emotional attachment, and equanimity maintains emotional balance and objectivity. Together, these qualities ensure that compassion functions as a healthy and liberating mental state consistent with the Noble Eightfold Path. When compassion is not guided by wisdom, non-attachment, and equanimity, it can become entangled with emotional identification, attachment, and psychological suffering, ultimately increasing suffering. Conversely, when these qualities are cultivated together, compassion develops into a liberating mental quality that supports the process toward Nirvana. Accordingly, this framework serves as the primary analytical lens of the present study, guiding the examination of the philosophical relationship between compassion, wisdom, non-attachment, and equanimity in the *Pāli Nikāya* scriptures and providing a basis for proposing a framework for cultivating compassion properly.

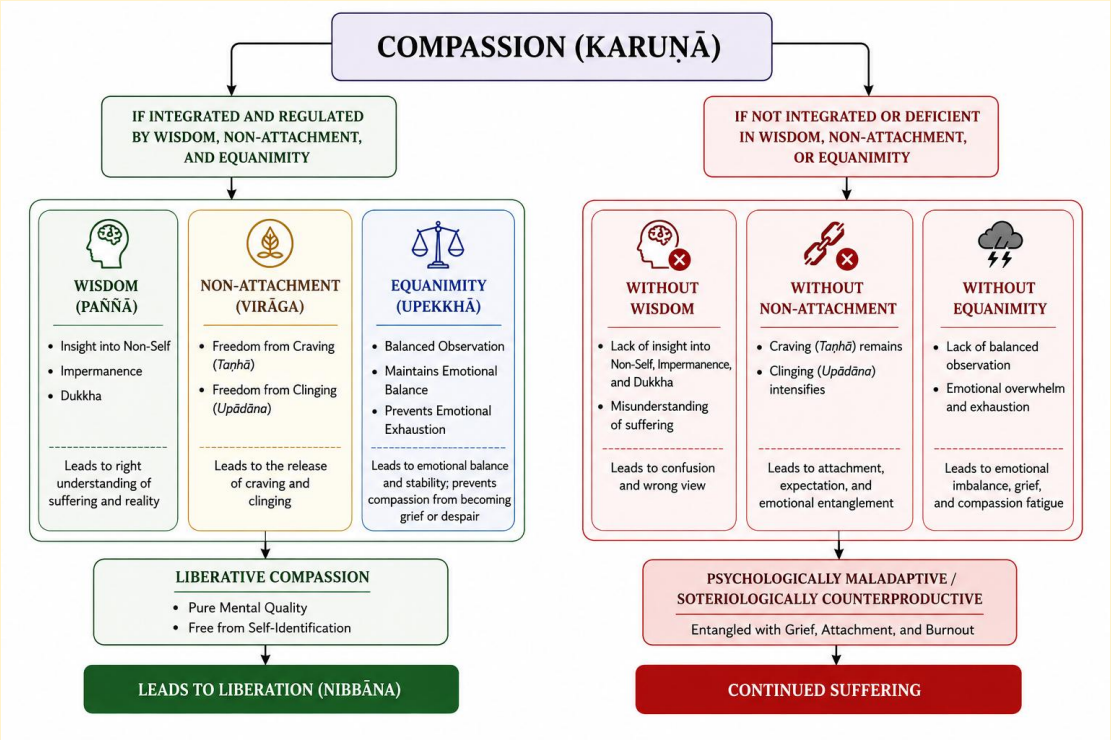

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for the Proper Cultivation of Compassion

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative philosophical research approach based on textual analysis and philosophical interpretation of the Pāli Nikāyas. The approach is appropriate because the study aims to examine the doctrinal and philosophical conditions under which compassion (karuṇā) can support liberation rather than to test empirical hypotheses (Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 2015). The research design therefore focuses on identifying, interpreting, and critically examining relevant canonical teachings concerning compassion and its relationship with wisdom (paññā), non-attachment (virāga), equanimity (upekkhā), and liberation (nibbāna).

Research Sources and Selection Criteria

The study uses both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources consist of the four major Pāli Nikāyas: the Dīgha Nikāya, Majjhima Nikāya, Saṃyutta Nikāya, and Aṅguttara Nikāya. The original Pāli texts are examined alongside authoritative English translations, particularly those of Bhikkhu Bodhi and Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, to support textual and doctrinal accuracy. Secondary

sources include peer-reviewed books and journal articles in Buddhist studies, Buddhist ethics, philosophy, psychology, and contemporary compassion research.

The selection of primary textual data follows three inclusion criteria. First, passages must directly discuss karuṇā or the cultivation of compassion. Second, passages are included when they explicitly or contextually relate compassion to one or more of the study's analytical concepts: wisdom (paññā), non-attachment (virāga), equanimity (upekkhā), suffering (dukkha), or liberation (nibbāna). Third, passages are selected when their textual context provides sufficient information for philosophical interpretation. Passages that merely mention compassion without relevance to these research objectives are excluded from the primary analysis. Secondary sources are selected according to their relevance to the study's research questions, scholarly credibility, and contribution to Buddhist or contemporary theories of compassion.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was conducted through a systematic identification and selection of relevant passages from the four Pāli Nikāyas. The search focused on key Pāli concepts, including karuṇā, paññā, virāga, upekkhā, dukkha, and nibbāna, together with passages concerning the cultivation and consequences of compassion. After potentially relevant passages were identified, their surrounding textual and doctrinal contexts were examined to determine whether they satisfied the inclusion criteria. Relevant passages were then organized according to their relationship to the three research objectives and the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1.

The collected textual data were analyzed through two complementary procedures: textual analysis and philosophical interpretation. First, textual analysis examined the meaning and function of compassion within its original canonical context. Second, philosophical interpretation examined the relationships among karuṇā, wisdom, non-attachment, and equanimity, with particular attention to how these qualities either support or undermine the liberative function of compassion. The analysis subsequently compared the canonical findings with relevant contemporary scholarship in order to clarify similarities, differences, and the philosophical significance of the findings for current discussions of compassion.

The conceptual framework served as the principal analytical lens throughout this process. In particular, the analysis examined whether compassion is integrated with wisdom, non-attachment, and equanimity, and how the presence or absence of these qualities affects the development of compassion. This approach enables the study to distinguish between compassion understood as a liberative mental quality and compassion associated with attachment, emotional distress, or continued suffering. To enhance the credibility and consistency of the interpretation, relevant passages were examined within their broader textual and doctrinal contexts rather than interpreted in isolation. Interpretations were also cross-checked against authoritative English translations and established academic scholarship. Where differences in translation or interpretation occurred, the original Pāli terminology and surrounding canonical context were considered before drawing philosophical conclusions.

Scope and Methodological Limitations

This study is philosophical and interpretive in nature and aims to clarify the doctrinal and philosophical foundations of compassion in the Pāli Nikāyas. The findings should therefore be understood as textually grounded philosophical interpretations rather than empirical generalizations concerning the psychological effects of compassion. This study is primarily limited to the Dīgha Nikāya, Majjhima Nikāya, Saṃyutta Nikāya, and Aṅguttara Nikāya, as well as a selection of scholarly books and journals.

Research Results

Objective 1: the concept of karuṇā in Theravada Buddhism

The analysis of the Pāli Nikāyas indicates that karuṇā is presented as a wholesome mental quality directed toward the alleviation of suffering rather than as passive emotional sorrow. Within the framework of the brahmavihāras, compassion is cultivated universally toward beings without hostility or ill will. The Tevijja Sutta (DN 13) presents compassion as a boundless mental cultivation extended in all directions, while the Subha Sutta (MN 99) places compassion alongside loving-kindness, sympathetic joy, and equanimity as forms of expansive mental cultivation (Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995; Walshe, 1995). The Nikāyas further indicate that compassion is a cultivated mental quality capable of transforming harmful mental states. In the Nissāraṇīya Sutta (AN 6.13), the development of the liberation of mind through compassion is presented as a

means of overcoming thoughts associated with harming others (Bodhi, 2012). This finding indicates that karuṇā has both an ethical and contemplative dimension. Ethically, it motivates the alleviation of suffering; contemplatively, it contributes to the purification and transformation of the mind. The results therefore indicate that karuṇā should not be understood merely as an emotional reaction to another person's suffering. Rather, it is a cultivated wholesome quality whose deeper significance becomes evident when it is developed together with wisdom, non-attachment, and equanimity.

Objective 2. The Relationship Among Compassion, Wisdom, Non-Attachment, and Equanimity

The textual analysis reveals that the relationship among karuṇā, paññā, virāga, and upekkhā is integrative rather than merely additive. Each quality performs a distinct function in the proper cultivation of compassion, while their interaction determines whether compassion remains emotionally balanced and oriented toward liberation.

2.1 Compassion and Wisdom (Paññā)

Wisdom provides the cognitive foundation for understanding suffering. In the Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta (MN 9), right view is explained through understanding wholesome and unwholesome states, the origin and cessation of suffering, and the path leading to its cessation (Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995). This teaching clarifies the role of wisdom in compassionate practice: compassion responds to suffering, while wisdom enables the practitioner to understand the nature and causes of that suffering. Accordingly, the findings suggest that wisdom prevents compassion from remaining merely emotionally reactive. Through right understanding, compassion is directed not only toward the immediate experience of suffering but also toward its causes and cessation. This relationship is particularly significant in the Karuṇāsutta (SN 46.63), where compassion is cultivated together with the factors of enlightenment, including mindfulness, investigation of the Dhamma, concentration, and equanimity. The discourse further connects this cultivation with seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, demonstrating that compassion can operate within a clearly liberative framework (Bodhi, 2000).

2.2 Compassion and Non-Attachment (Virāga)

The findings further indicate that non-attachment functions as a regulating condition for compassionate engagement. The Sammādiṭṭhi Sutta (MN 9) explains the relationship between craving, attachment, and suffering and identifies the Noble Eightfold Path as the way leading to their cessation (Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995). This relationship is important for distinguishing compassionate concern from attachment to persons, situations, or particular outcomes. Compassion motivates the practitioner to alleviate suffering, whereas non-attachment prevents this motivation from becoming possessive or dependent upon a desired result. The Karuṇāsutta (SN 46.63) is particularly significant because compassion is cultivated in association with dispassion and cessation, indicating that mature compassion is compatible with the weakening of attachment rather than its reinforcement (Bodhi, 2000). Thus, the analysis suggests that virāga does not weaken compassion. Rather, it purifies the motivational basis of compassion by reducing craving and clinging.

2.3 Compassion and Equanimity (Upekkhā)

Equanimity provides the stabilizing and balancing function within the cultivation of compassion. The Tevijja Sutta (DN 13) presents equanimity together with loving-kindness, compassion, and sympathetic joy as a boundless mode of mental cultivation (Walshe, 1995). This indicates that equanimity should not be understood as indifference to suffering but as a quality that allows compassionate concern to remain impartial and mentally balanced. The relationship is particularly evident in the Karuṇāsutta (SN 46.63), where the enlightenment factor of equanimity is cultivated in association with compassion (Bodhi, 2000). Similarly, the Āghātavinaya Sutta (AN 5.161) presents compassion and equanimity as approaches for overcoming hostility toward another person (Bodhi, 2012). These findings suggest that equanimity regulates reactive emotional responses while preserving the compassionate orientation toward others. Therefore, within the framework of this study, upekkhā functions as a stabilizing condition that enables compassion to remain consistent and impartial when confronted with suffering.

3. An Integrated Framework for the Proper Cultivation of Compassion

Based on the preceding findings, the study proposes that the proper cultivation of karuṇā should be understood as an integrated process of mental cultivation rather than as an isolated virtue or meditation technique. The analysis

of the Pāli Nikāyas indicates that compassion becomes more closely aligned with the path to liberation when cultivated together with wisdom, non-attachment, and equanimity. The integrated pathway can therefore be understood as follows: compassion is guided by wisdom, purified through non-attachment, and stabilized by equanimity. Wisdom provides the correct understanding of suffering and reality; non-attachment prevents compassionate engagement from becoming entangled with craving and clinging; and equanimity maintains emotional balance and impartiality. When these qualities operate together, compassion can develop into a liberative mental quality rather than becoming a source of attachment or distress. The Karuṇāsutta (SN 46.63) presents compassion in relation to the factors of enlightenment and describes its cultivation in connection with seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, with liberative attainments as possible results (Bodhi, 2000). This evidence provides a significant textual basis for understanding compassion within a broader soteriological framework rather than merely as an ethical or psychological virtue.

Conversely, the framework identifies the potential consequences when compassion is not adequately integrated with wisdom, non-attachment, and equanimity. Without wisdom, suffering may be misunderstood and compassion may remain emotionally reactive. Without non-attachment, compassionate concern may become entangled with craving, clinging, and expectations. Without equanimity, engagement with suffering may become emotionally unstable or overwhelming. These consequences are analytical implications of the present framework, rather than direct canonical definitions of karuṇā. Contemporary research on empathic distress and compassion fatigue provides a complementary perspective for understanding these potential psychological consequences.

Discussion

The first major finding is that karuṇā in the Pāli Nikāyas is a cultivated wholesome quality directed toward the alleviation of suffering rather than a mere experience of shared distress. This interpretation is consistent with established Buddhist scholarship that places compassion within ethics, meditation, and the path to liberation (Anālayo, 2015; Gethin, 1998; Harvey, 2000; Keown, 2005). It also resonates with contemporary distinctions between compassion and empathy. Singer and Klimecki (2014) argue that empathic distress can involve aversive emotional sharing, whereas compassion includes warmth and prosocial motivation. More recent work likewise emphasizes that compassion is a

multidimensional construct and should not be collapsed into empathy, sympathy, or distress resonance (Vieten et al., 2024). The present study extends this discussion by grounding the distinction in a specifically Theravāda philosophical framework: wholesome compassion is evaluated not only by affective tone or behavioral intention but by its relationship to wisdom, non-attachment, equanimity, and liberation.

The second finding concerns wisdom (paññā). The analysis of MN 9 and SN 46.63 indicates that compassion is strengthened when suffering is understood in relation to causes, conditions, cessation, and the path (Bodhi, 2000; Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995). Wisdom therefore does more than provide factual knowledge; it situates compassionate concern within a broader understanding of conditioned experience. This finding differs from approaches that frame compassion primarily as emotional sensitivity or prosocial motivation. Contemporary psychology has demonstrated important benefits of compassion training (Gilbert, 2014; Neff & Germer, 2013), but the Theravāda perspective adds a soteriological criterion: compassion should not merely feel caring or produce immediate relief; it should be compatible with right understanding and with the weakening of ignorance and craving.

The third finding is that non-attachment (virāga) does not diminish compassion but regulates its motivational structure. SN 46.63 associates compassion with dispassion and cessation, while MN 9 identifies craving and clinging as conditions of suffering (Bodhi, 2000; Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995). The implication is that compassionate action can remain deeply engaged without becoming possessive, outcome-dependent, or self-referential. This provides a Buddhist philosophical response to contemporary concerns about compassion fatigue. Research among healthcare professionals suggests that compassion-focused training may reduce compassion fatigue and increase compassion satisfaction (Alcaraz-Córdoba et al., 2024), yet such findings should not be read as direct confirmation of Buddhist doctrine. Rather, they offer a useful point of dialogue: both bodies of literature indicate that sustainable care requires more than unregulated emotional identification with suffering.

The fourth finding concerns equanimity (upekkhā). DN 13, SN 46.63, and AN 5.161 show that compassion and equanimity can operate within the same system of cultivation (Bodhi, 2000, 2012; Walshe, 1995). Equanimity in this context should not be interpreted as emotional indifference. Its role is to preserve impartiality, steadiness, and freedom from reactive bias while compassion

remains oriented toward the welfare of beings. This is especially significant for the study's proposed framework because it clarifies that balanced compassion is not emotionally cold. Instead, upekkhā protects compassionate intention from being destabilized by attachment to persons, outcomes, praise, blame, success, or failure.

Taken together, these findings support the Integrated Compassion Framework proposed in this study: karuṇā is guided by wisdom, purified through non-attachment, and stabilized by equanimity. The novelty of the framework lies not in claiming that these qualities have never been discussed together, but in specifying their distinct regulatory functions within one philosophical model. Wisdom addresses cognitive orientation, virāga addresses attachment and motivational entanglement, and upekkhā addresses stability and impartiality. The model thereby clarifies why compassion can be both deeply responsive to suffering and free from the forms of clinging that reproduce suffering. It also provides a clearer basis for distinguishing liberative compassion from emotional over-identification.

The framework has contemporary relevance but should be interpreted cautiously. Current evidence suggests that compassion for others is positively associated with well-being and that compassion-oriented interventions can benefit some populations (Alcaraz-Córdoba et al., 2024; Zhuniq et al., 2025). However, the present article is a philosophical and textual study, not an intervention trial. It therefore does not establish that integrating paññā, virāga, and upekkhā will reduce burnout, depression, or compassion fatigue in clinical populations. Its contribution is conceptual: it provides a Theravāda account of the conditions under which compassion is ethically wholesome, psychologically sustainable in principle, and soteriologically oriented. Future empirical research can test whether the proposed dimensions can be operationalized without reducing their Buddhist meanings to modern psychological variables.

Knowledge from Research

This study contributes to knowledge by providing an integrated philosophical account of the proper cultivation of compassion (*karuṇā*) in *Theravāda* Buddhism. Previous Buddhist scholarship has examined compassion primarily in relation to ethics, meditation, and liberation, while contemporary research has focused largely on its psychological and therapeutic functions. This study extends these approaches by examining karuṇā through its functional

relationship with wisdom (*paññā*), non-attachment (*virāga*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*).

The main contribution is the integrated theoretical framework proposed by this study. Its originality lies not simply in identifying these four qualities, but in explaining their complementary functions within a single philosophical model: wisdom guides compassion, non-attachment frees it from craving and clinging, and equanimity stabilizes its mental and emotional expression. This framework therefore moves beyond treating compassion as an isolated ethical virtue or psychological capacity and explains the conditions through which karuṇā develops into a liberative mental quality.

The framework also provides a conceptual basis for Buddhist meditation and education by emphasizing that the cultivation of compassion requires the simultaneous development of wisdom, non-attachment, and equanimity. It may also contribute to contemporary compassion research by offering a Theravāda philosophical perspective for understanding the distinction between sustainable compassion and compassion associated with emotional distress. In this way, the study advances existing scholarship by connecting the ethical, psychological, and soteriological dimensions of compassion within a unified philosophical framework

Conclusion

This study examined the proper cultivation of compassion (karuṇā) in Theravāda Buddhism through philosophical analysis of selected passages from the Pāli Nikāyas. The findings show that karuṇā is not adequately understood as an isolated emotional response or moral sentiment. It is a cultivated wholesome quality whose deeper significance emerges within the Buddhist path of mental purification and liberation. The analysis further indicates that compassion becomes philosophically and soteriologically coherent when it is integrated with wisdom (paññā), non-attachment (virāga), and equanimity (upekkhā).

The study therefore proposes an Integrated Compassion Framework in which wisdom guides compassion by clarifying suffering and its causes, non-attachment prevents compassionate concern from becoming entangled with craving or rigid expectations, and equanimity stabilizes compassionate engagement through impartiality and mental balance. The framework helps explain how Theravāda compassion can remain responsive to suffering without

collapsing into emotional over-identification. In this respect, it complements contemporary research distinguishing compassion from empathic distress while retaining a specifically Buddhist criterion of liberation rather than reducing karuṇā to psychological well-being alone (Singer & Klimecki, 2014; Zhuniq et al., 2025).

The study is limited by its philosophical and interpretive design, its focus on selected passages from the four major Nikāyas, and the unavoidable influence of translation and interpretive choices. Its proposed framework is conceptual and has not been empirically validated. Future research should therefore extend the textual analysis to commentarial and Abhidhamma materials, examine variations in the interpretation of karuṇā across Theravāda traditions, and operationalize the framework cautiously in qualitative or mixed-methods studies. Such work may clarify whether the integration of compassion, wisdom, non-attachment, and equanimity can contribute to sustainable caring practices while preserving the ethical and soteriological integrity of Theravāda Buddhism.

Suggestion

Based on the findings of this study, three practical directions are suggested for future research. Each direction extends the proposed framework of integrated compassion, in which compassion (karuṇā) is guided by wisdom (paññā), purified through non-attachment (virāga), and stabilized by equanimity (upekkhā).

1. A Comparative Study of Integrated and Non-Integrated Compassion among Caregivers and Social Welfare Workers in Vietnam.

This research could compare caregivers who practice compassion with and without the integration of wisdom, non-attachment, and equanimity. The study could examine differences in emotional stability, attachment, and compassion fatigue. This would empirically test the present study's finding that these three qualities help regulate and stabilize compassion.

2. An Analysis of the Application of Integrated Compassion among Buddhists at Pho Minh Temple in Vietnam.

This research could apply the proposed framework in a specific Buddhist community by examining how practitioners at Pho Minh Temple understand and cultivate compassion together with wisdom, non-attachment, and equanimity.

Interviews, observation, or questionnaires could be used to assess how the framework is reflected in actual Buddhist practice. This would extend the present philosophical framework into a concrete practice context.

3. An Analysis of the Role of Integrated Compassion in Supporting Depression Treatment among Buddhist Practitioners in Japan.

This research could examine whether integrated compassion can serve as a complementary approach for Buddhist practitioners receiving treatment for depression. The study could investigate whether the integration of compassion with wisdom, non-attachment, and equanimity is associated with emotional regulation and psychological well-being. This would extend the present study from philosophical analysis toward a practical psychological application. However, integrated compassion should be examined as a supportive or complementary approach, rather than as an independent treatment for depression.

Tipiṭaka Abbreviations

AN : Aṅguttara Nikāya (Numerical Discourses)

DN : Dīgha Nikāya (Long Discourses)

MN : Majjhima Nikāya (Middle-Length Discourses)

SN : Saṃyutta Nikāya (Connected Discourses)

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An Integrated Buddhist-Psychological Framework for Overcoming Dream-Related Suffering: Modern Psychology and the Śūraṅgama Sūtra

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Abstract

This qualitative interdisciplinary study examines dream-related suffering (DRS) through contemporary psychological research and the Śūraṅgama Sūtra and develops the SAGE conceptual framework as a basis for future empirical investigation. The study has three objectives: (1) to examine the causes, psychological impacts, and contemporary psychological approaches to DRS; (2) to analyze teachings of the Śūraṅgama Sūtra relevant to the interpretation and transformation of distressing dream experiences; and (3) to synthesize both domains into an integrated conceptual framework. Data were drawn from psychological and sleep-medicine literature, textual analysis of the Śūraṅgama Sūtra and related commentarial sources, and semi-structured interviews with six senior Mahāyāna monastic educators in Vietnam. The findings indicate that recurrent nightmares and related distress can be maintained by interactions among hyperarousal, waking stress, maladaptive appraisal, and avoidance. Contemporary approaches such as Imagery Rehearsal Therapy and cognitive-behavioral methods primarily target nightmare frequency, distress, sleep disruption, and daytime functioning. By contrast, the Śūraṅgama Sūtra is interpreted as addressing a broader soteriological problem: attachment to mind-generated appearances and misidentification of transient mental phenomena as ultimately real. The proposed SAGE framework organizes these perspectives into four stages—Stabilization, Analysis, Growth, and Enlightenment—moving from immediate regulation and appraisal toward behavioral cultivation and contemplative insight. The framework is conceptual rather than clinically validated and should not be considered a substitute for evidence-based assessment or treatment of nightmare disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, or other psychiatric conditions. Its principal contribution is to clarify how psychological symptom-focused approaches and Mahāyāna contemplative

perspectives can be placed in structured dialogue without treating them as theoretically equivalent.

Keywords: Śūraṅgama Sūtra; Dream-related suffering; Nightmares; Imagery Rehearsal Therapy; Modern psychology; SAGE conceptual framework

Introduction

Dreaming can influence waking emotion, cognition, behavior, and interpersonal functioning, particularly when dreams are recurrent, threatening, or interpreted as highly significant. Previous research has linked nightmare frequency and distress with anxiety, impaired sleep, and reduced well-being, while trauma-related nightmares are especially prominent in post-traumatic stress presentations (Skancke, 2019; Stone et al., 2021). More recent systematic evidence indicates that nightmares are associated bidirectionally with a range of psychiatric symptoms and may themselves represent a clinically relevant treatment target rather than merely a secondary symptom (Sheaves et al., 2023). Contemporary reviews likewise emphasize the importance of distinguishing occasional nightmares from nightmare disorder and of evaluating distress, impairment, comorbidity, and treatment needs systematically (Garriques et al., 2024).

For the purposes of this study, dream-related suffering (DRS) refers to persistent psychological, emotional, physiological, perceptual, or behavioral distress linked to disturbing dream narratives and their waking appraisal. This working construct includes recurrent nightmares and trauma-related dreams that produce meaningful daytime consequences, while excluding parasomnias whose primary mechanism is not narrative dream content, such as sleepwalking, isolated sleep paralysis without distressing dream imagery, and sleep-disordered breathing. The distinction is important because the clinical significance of a dream depends not only on its content but also on recurrence, appraisal, emotional carryover, and functional impairment.

Modern psychology provides several approaches for working with distressing dreams. Dream journaling has been used to identify recurring themes and support reflective self-awareness (Barrett, 1993), while therapeutic dream work has explored meaning, imagery, and unresolved conflict (Kumar, 2024). Evidence-based nightmare treatment, however, relies more directly on structured interventions such as Imagery Rehearsal Therapy (IRT), cognitive-behavioral

approaches, and related rescripting methods. Earlier clinical work demonstrated that IRT can reduce chronic nightmares and associated distress (Foa et al., 2000; Krakow & Kellner, 2001), and recent systematic reviews continue to identify imagery rehearsal and exposure-based approaches among the best-supported psychosocial treatments for nightmares (Gill et al., 2023; So et al., 2025).

The article also addresses a different level of inquiry through the Śūraṅgama Sūtra. In the interpretive tradition used in this study, dreams are treated as vivid but conditioned mind-generated appearances associated with the activity of consciousness during sleep (Giới Hương, 2018; Luk, 1966). The Sūtra's language of illusion, discriminative consciousness, and the distinction between transient mental appearances and the "True Mind" provides a soteriological analysis of why mind-generated phenomena can be grasped as ultimately real. Buddhist Text Translation Society (2002) similarly presents the contemplative method of "turning the hearing back to the self-nature" as a way of redirecting attention from grasped objects toward the nature of awareness. These teachings should not be treated as clinical claims about nightmare mechanisms; rather, they offer a philosophical and contemplative interpretation of attachment to mental appearances.

This distinction is central to the present study. Psychological therapies such as CBT and IRT seek primarily to reduce nightmare frequency, maladaptive appraisal, emotional distress, and sleep-related impairment, whereas the Śūraṅgama Sūtra addresses broader questions concerning delusion, attachment, consciousness, and liberation. The two domains therefore differ in aims, methods, and standards of evidence. Yet they may still be brought into disciplined dialogue. Neurocognitive accounts of dreaming emphasize the continuing activity of the sleeping brain and the construction of internally generated experience (Hobson & Pace-Schott, 2002), while the Buddhist material examined here emphasizes the constructed and non-substantial character of perceived phenomena. Their apparent similarity is heuristic rather than evidentiary.

Accordingly, this study develops the SAGE (Stabilization, Analysis, Growth, Enlightenment) conceptual framework as a staged synthesis rather than a new clinical treatment. Stabilization and Analysis draw primarily on evidence-informed psychological principles of regulation, appraisal, and dream-focused intervention; Growth and Enlightenment introduce ethical and contemplative dimensions derived from the Śūraṅgama Sūtra. The framework is intended to clarify possible points of dialogue between contemporary psychology and

Mahāyāna Buddhist thought, while preserving the distinction between symptom-focused clinical care and soteriological practice.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the causes, psychological impacts, and contemporary psychological approaches to dream-related suffering.

2. To analyze the teachings of the Śūraṅgama Sūtra relevant to dream-related suffering.

3. To propose an integrated SAGE conceptual framework based on modern psychology and the Śūraṅgama Sūtra.

Literature Review

Dream-related distress sits at the intersection of sleep medicine, clinical psychology, trauma research, and dream studies. Nightmare disorder is distinguished from occasional bad dreams by recurrent dysphoric dreams that produce clinically meaningful distress or impairment. Contemporary reviews emphasize that nightmares occur across diagnostic categories and can contribute to sleep disruption, anxiety, depressive symptoms, post-traumatic stress, and suicidal ideation, although causal pathways remain complex and bidirectional (Garriques et al., 2024; Sheaves et al., 2023). This literature supports treating persistent nightmares as a clinically relevant problem in their own right rather than assuming that they will necessarily resolve when a comorbid condition is treated.

Current psychological models explain nightmare persistence through interacting cognitive, affective, and physiological processes. Neurocognitive accounts emphasize hyperarousal, impaired fear extinction, affective network dysfunction, and the continuity between waking concerns and dream content (Levin & Nielsen, 2007; Nielsen & Levin, 2007). Research on nightmare distress further shows that waking interpretation matters: recurrent threatening imagery may become more impairing when it is catastrophically appraised, treated as predictive, or associated with fear of sleep (Blagrove et al., 2004; Morewedge & Norton, 2009). Thus, dream-related suffering is better conceptualized as a cycle linking nocturnal imagery, arousal, appraisal, avoidance, and daytime impairment than as the dream image alone.

The strongest contemporary treatment literature concerns structured psychosocial interventions. Imagery Rehearsal Therapy asks patients to alter a recurrent nightmare while awake and repeatedly rehearse the revised imagery. Earlier randomized and clinical studies established its promise for chronic and trauma-related nightmares (Krakow et al., 2001; Krakow & Kellner, 2001), and a 2023 systematic review of 69 studies found strong evidence for exposure and imagery-rehearsal approaches in reducing nightmare frequency, severity, and distress across several populations (Gill et al., 2023). A recent review of PTSD-related nightmare treatment likewise concludes that IRT remains among the most supported interventions, while newer approaches increasingly combine rescripting, exposure, and sleep-focused strategies (So et al., 2025). CBT-I, cognitive restructuring, mindfulness-based decentering, and acceptance-oriented techniques may be useful adjuncts, especially when insomnia, hyperarousal, or maladaptive interpretations maintain distress (Beck, 2020; Hayes et al., 2006; Segal, 2012; Teasdale et al., 2002).

Dream-focused psychotherapy also includes approaches that explore meaning rather than directly target symptoms. Dream journaling and cognitive-experiential dream work may increase insight and reflective awareness (Barrett, 1993; Spangler & Sim, 2023). Psychoanalytic and Jungian traditions likewise view dreams as meaningful expressions of conflict, compensation, or psychological development (Roesler, 2018, 2020; Zhu, 2013). These approaches differ substantially from evidence-based nightmare interventions and should not be presented as equivalent in clinical efficacy. Their relevance here lies in highlighting that waking interpretation and personal meaning can influence how a dream is experienced after awakening.

The second body of literature concerns the Śūraṅgama Sūtra and related Mahāyāna interpretations of mind, illusion, and consciousness. Within the textual tradition examined in this study, transient perceptual and conceptual phenomena are contrasted with an unconditioned or "true" dimension of mind, and suffering is associated with mistaking conditioned appearances for stable reality (Buddhist Text Translation Society, 2009; Hsuan Hua, 2003; Luk, 1966). The imagery of "sky-flowers," "guest and host," and the persistence of mental discrimination when external sense contact is reduced is used to illustrate the instability and constructed character of experience. Contemporary Vietnamese Buddhist scholarship has interpreted dreams within this framework of mind-consciousness, karmic conditioning, and attachment (Giới Hương, 2008, 2018).

These Buddhist teachings operate within a soteriological framework and therefore cannot be mapped directly onto psychiatric or neurocognitive models. Concepts such as the "True Mind," delusive consciousness, karmic seeds, the Five Aggregates, and reversal of the hearing faculty are doctrinal and contemplative categories rather than measurable clinical mechanisms. Their value in this article is interpretive: they provide a framework for examining why mental appearances are grasped as real and how contemplative practice seeks to transform that grasping. The research gap is therefore not the absence of nightmare therapies or Buddhist discussions of illusion, but the limited methodological work showing how these distinct bodies of knowledge can be brought into dialogue without collapsing their epistemological differences. The SAGE framework is proposed to address that gap.

Conceptual Framework

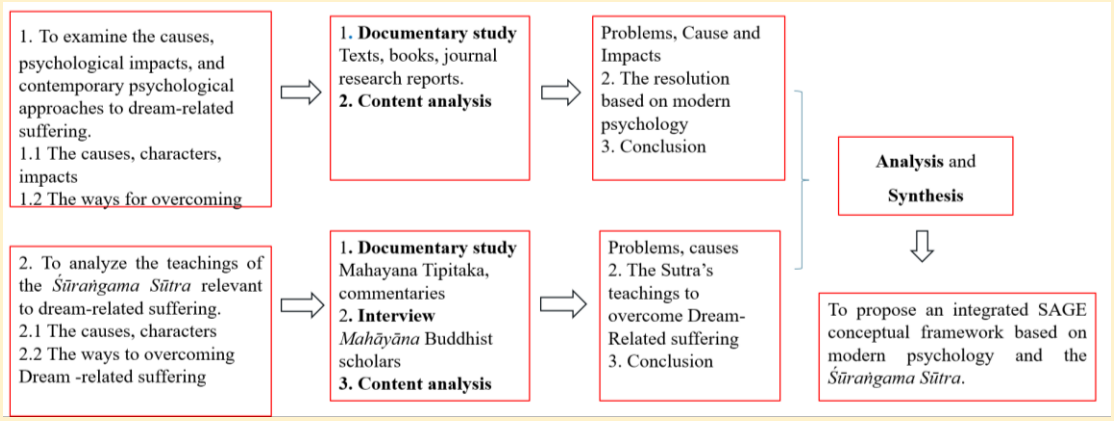

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

This study draws on two principal sets of findings from the first two objectives of the research. The first objective is to examine the causes, psychological impacts, and contemporary psychological approaches to dream-related suffering by using documentary study and content analysis to produce findings about the problem, its causes and impacts, and approaches grounded in modern psychology.

The second objective is to analyze the teachings of the Śūraṅgama Sūtra relevant to dream-related suffering by drawing on documentary study of the Mahayana Tipiṭaka and related commentaries, together with interviews with Mahayana Buddhist scholars and content analysis. The findings from this objective address the problem and its causes as understood in the Sūtra along with its teachings on overcoming dream-related suffering.

The findings from the two objectives are then compared and integrated through a stage of analysis and synthesis with the expectation of producing an integrated SAGE conceptual framework based on modern psychology and the Śūraṅgama Sūtra.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative interdisciplinary design combining documentary analysis, textual interpretation, and semi-structured expert interviews. The design was used to address three linked questions: the contemporary psychological understanding of dream-related suffering (DRS), the interpretation of DRS through the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, and the development of an integrated SAGE conceptual framework. The study did not test clinical efficacy; rather, it generated a theoretically informed model from the synthesis of psychological literature, Buddhist textual sources, and expert interpretation.

The documentary component drew on two bodies of literature. Psychological sources included peer-reviewed research on nightmares, post-traumatic stress, hyperarousal, dream appraisal, Imagery Rehearsal Therapy (IRT), cognitive-behavioral approaches, mindfulness, and related sleep interventions. Buddhist primary sources centered on the Śūraṅgama Sūtra and selected classical and modern commentaries relevant to illusion, consciousness, the Five Aggregates, ethical discipline, and contemplative practice. Sources were analyzed for concepts directly related to the three research objectives rather than for exhaustive historical coverage.

The empirical component involved six senior Mahāyāna monastic educators recruited purposively from recognized Buddhist institutions in Vietnam. Participants included four monks and two nuns, aged 42–68 years (M = 54.5), with an average of 18.3 years of teaching experience. Eligibility required at least 10 years of formal monastic experience, documented expertise in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra or Mahāyāna philosophy, substantial meditation-teaching experience, and current or recent institutional teaching responsibilities.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, either face-to-face or through secure video conferencing, and lasted approximately 45–70 minutes. With written consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Questions addressed three domains: interpretations of dream imagery and mind in the Śūraṅgama Sūtra; contemplative practices used to respond to

nightmare-related distress; and perceived points of compatibility and difference between Buddhist mind training and contemporary psychological self-regulation. Participant identifiers were replaced with alphanumeric codes, and digital materials were anonymized and stored securely.

Analysis proceeded in two stages. First, Buddhist textual materials and interview transcripts were analyzed separately. The textual analysis identified recurring doctrinal concepts such as illusion (māyā), discriminative consciousness, the "host and guest" analogy, the Threefold Training, and reversal of the hearing faculty. Interview data were coded thematically for recurring interpretations of dream distress, mental attachment, emotional regulation, and contemplative response. Second, the two datasets were compared with the psychological literature through thematic mapping to identify convergences, divergences, and appropriate boundaries for integration.

Trustworthiness was strengthened through source triangulation, explicit linkage of interpretive claims to primary texts or participant accounts, transparent documentation of selection and analytical procedures, and contextual description of the monastic sample. The final SAGE framework was generated from this cross-domain synthesis. Because the framework has not undergone feasibility or outcome testing, it is presented as a conceptual model for future research rather than as a validated clinical intervention.

Research Results

Objective 1: Causes, Psychological Impacts, and Contemporary Psychological Approaches

T The psychological literature indicates that recurrent nightmares and related DRS are maintained by interacting neurobiological, cognitive, and emotional processes. Trauma-related memory activation, waking anxiety, pre-sleep hyperarousal, fear of sleep, and maladaptive appraisal can reinforce one another across the sleep–wake cycle (Blagrove et al., 2004; Levin & Nielsen, 2007; Nielsen & Levin, 2007). Recent reviews further show that nightmares occur across several psychiatric conditions and can intensify symptom burden, supporting direct assessment rather than treating nightmares only as secondary manifestations of another disorder (Faccini & Del-Monte, 2024; Sheaves et al., 2023).

The main consequences identified were fragmented sleep, daytime anxiety, emotional reactivity, impaired concentration, and avoidance of sleep or trauma-related cues. These effects were especially salient when dream content was interpreted catastrophically or as evidence of imminent danger. The findings therefore support a cyclical model in which nocturnal imagery produces arousal, waking appraisal amplifies distress, and anticipatory anxiety increases vulnerability to further disturbed sleep.

Among contemporary interventions, IRT and related imagery-rescripting approaches have the strongest direct relevance to recurrent nightmares. IRT uses waking rescripting and rehearsal to modify recurrent nightmare imagery, while CBT-I and cognitive-behavioral strategies address insomnia, hyperarousal, catastrophic interpretation, and maladaptive sleep behavior. Systematic reviews continue to support imagery rehearsal and exposure-based treatments, although treatment effects vary across populations and nightmares may persist even after broader PTSD symptoms improve (Gill et al., 2023; Hicks et al., 2024; So et al., 2025). Mindfulness- and acceptance-based techniques may function as adjunctive strategies for decentering from distressing thoughts and reducing reactive appraisal (Hayes et al., 2006; Teasdale et al., 2002).

Objective 2: Śūraṅgama Sūtra Teachings Relevant to Dream-Related Suffering

The textual analysis identified a different explanatory level. In the Śūraṅgama Sūtra and the commentarial tradition used in this study, dream appearances are vivid and experientially consequential but lack independent self-nature. Images such as “sky-flowers” and the contrast between “host” and “guest” illustrate how transient mental phenomena can be mistaken for stable reality (Buddhist Text Translation Society, 2009; Hsuan Hua, 2003; Luk, 1966). The analysis therefore interprets DRS, within this Buddhist framework, not simply as disturbing content but as distress intensified by identification with conditioned mental appearances.

A second theme concerns the activity of discriminative consciousness during sleep. The interview and textual materials converged on the view that the withdrawal of ordinary sensory engagement does not imply an absence of mental activity; rather, conditioned impressions, memory, and conceptualization continue to generate experience (Giới Hương, 2008, 2018; Luk, 1966). The Buddhist sources frame this process through doctrinal concepts such as karmic

conditioning, the Five Aggregates, and delusive discrimination. These categories are soteriological and should not be interpreted as direct equivalents of neurocognitive mechanisms.

The practical response identified in the Buddhist material involves ethical discipline, contemplative stabilization, and a shift in identification. The Threefold Training provides a general ethical and meditative foundation; the "host and guest" analogy encourages non-identification with passing mental events; and the practice of reversing the hearing faculty directs attention away from grasped appearances toward the nature of awareness (Hsuan Hua, 2003, 2009; Luk, 1966). These practices aim ultimately at liberation from delusion rather than at nightmare symptom reduction alone.

Objective 3: Development of the SAGE Conceptual Framework

The synthesis produced the SAGE framework as a four-stage model: Stabilization, Analysis, Growth, and Enlightenment. Stabilization prioritizes immediate reduction of arousal and reactive interpretation through clinically compatible strategies such as grounding, delayed response, and cognitive reframing. Analysis examines recurrent dream patterns, waking stressors, and the meanings attached to distressing imagery. These first two stages are most closely aligned with contemporary psychological approaches to nightmare distress.

Growth extends the model beyond symptom management to daytime behavior, sleep-supportive conditions, ethical conduct, and the modification of habits that may contribute to ongoing distress. Enlightenment represents the specifically Mahāyāna dimension of the framework, emphasizing non-attachment to mind-generated appearances, "host and guest" discernment, and contemplative realization. This final stage is not a clinical outcome and should not be equated with psychological symptom remission.

The central result is therefore not evidence that Buddhist practice and clinical psychology share the same mechanisms, but a staged model that assigns them different functions. Psychological methods primarily address safety, symptom burden, appraisal, sleep behavior, and functional recovery; the Śūraṅgama-based practices address ethical cultivation and the soteriological interpretation of consciousness and attachment. The six monastic interviews supported the cultural and doctrinal coherence of this integration, but the study provides no direct evidence of clinical effectiveness. SAGE should therefore be

treated as a hypothesis-generating framework requiring independent feasibility, safety, and outcome testing.

Knowledge from Research

The principal new knowledge from this study is the SAGE framework, which organizes dream-related suffering across four analytically distinct levels: immediate stabilization, appraisal and pattern analysis, daytime behavioral and ethical cultivation, and Mahāyāna contemplative insight. Its contribution lies in sequencing psychological and Buddhist resources without claiming theoretical equivalence between them.

The framework also establishes an explicit evidentiary boundary. Psychological interventions can be evaluated through clinical outcomes such as nightmare frequency, distress, sleep quality, and daytime functioning, whereas the Śūraṅgama Sūtra contributes doctrinal and soteriological interpretations of mind, illusion, and attachment. Future research can test whether the early SAGE stages are feasible and clinically useful while separately examining the cultural and contemplative value of its later stages.

Discussion

The present findings support a layered interpretation of dream-related suffering in which recurrent nightmares are clinically meaningful phenomena rather than merely symbolic or incidental by-products of broader psychopathology. This interpretation is consistent with longitudinal and clinical evidence showing bidirectional associations between nightmares and psychiatric symptoms, particularly PTSD, depression, and anxiety (Sheaves et al., 2023). A recent systematic review focused on clinical populations likewise found that nightmares and bad dreams occur across a broad psychopathological spectrum and tend to exacerbate symptom severity (Faccini & Del-Monte, 2024). The implication for the present study is that DRS should be conceptualized through measurable dimensions—nightmare frequency, distress, arousal, avoidance, sleep disruption, and daytime impairment—before any philosophical interpretation is introduced.

The first research objective also confirms the importance of targeted nightmare treatment. Contemporary evidence does not support a single universal intervention, but imagery rehearsal and related rescripting or exposure-based

approaches remain among the most consistently supported psychosocial treatments (Gill et al., 2023). Recent work in military veterans similarly found beneficial effects of imagery-rescripting interventions on nightmare and sleep outcomes, while highlighting heterogeneity across studies (Hicks et al., 2024). The 2025 review by So et al. further notes that IRT remains well supported but that newer CBT-based models increasingly combine rescripting, exposure, sleep strategies, and sequencing with PTSD or insomnia treatment. These findings strengthen the rationale for the Stabilization and Analysis stages of SAGE, but they also require a more modest interpretation than the original manuscript: the framework cannot claim to improve nightmares until its components are operationalized and directly tested.

The second objective contributes a qualitatively different level of interpretation. The Śūraṅgama Sūtra does not offer a clinical theory of nightmare disorder; rather, it addresses the misapprehension of consciousness and the grasping of transient appearances. The themes of "sky-flowers," "host and guest," discriminative consciousness, and reversal of the hearing faculty are meaningful within Mahāyāna soteriology, where the central problem is delusion and attachment rather than sleep pathology (Buddhist Text Translation Society, 2009; Hsuan Hua, 2003; Luk, 1966). This distinction is critical for conceptual rigor. Similarities between Buddhist non-attachment and psychological decentering may be heuristically useful, but they do not establish common mechanisms. A Scopus-level interdisciplinary argument is stronger when it preserves these epistemological differences rather than treating Buddhist doctrine as an early version of cognitive therapy.

The SAGE framework represents the study's primary theoretical contribution because it organizes the two knowledge systems sequentially. Stabilization and Analysis are proximal to established psychological practice: they prioritize safety, regulation, rescripting, appraisal, and links between waking stress and dream content. Growth introduces broader behavioral and ethical cultivation, while Enlightenment locates the final stage explicitly within a Mahāyāna soteriological horizon. This sequencing reduces a major risk in integrative contemplative research—the conflation of symptom reduction with liberation. It also makes the framework more testable: early stages can be evaluated through standard clinical and sleep outcomes, whereas later stages require distinct qualitative or contemplative measures rather than conventional symptom scales.

The interview findings provide contextual support but should be interpreted within their methodological limits. The six participants were experienced monastic educators rather than clinicians or patients, and their accounts primarily inform doctrinal coherence, pedagogical interpretation, and cultural acceptability. They cannot establish whether SAGE is feasible for people with nightmare disorder, PTSD, dissociation, psychosis, or suicidal ideation. This limitation is especially important because nightmare treatment in trauma-exposed populations requires attention to comorbidity, risk, and treatment sequencing. Recent reviews emphasize that nightmare-focused interventions may need to be integrated with PTSD and insomnia care rather than delivered as isolated techniques (So et al., 2025). Therefore, any empirical translation of SAGE should retain evidence-based assessment and referral pathways as non-negotiable safeguards.

Future research should proceed in a staged manner. First, the SAGE components should be operationally defined and reviewed by independent experts in sleep medicine, clinical psychology, and Mahāyāna Buddhist studies. Second, feasibility studies with non-acute participants should assess acceptability, comprehension, adverse events, and intervention fidelity. Third, controlled studies could test whether a psychologically bounded SAGE protocol adds benefit to established nightmare treatment on outcomes such as nightmare frequency, nightmare distress, insomnia severity, PTSD symptoms, and daytime functioning. Qualitative work should separately examine whether the Buddhist stages influence participants' relationship to dream imagery, attachment, and existential meaning. Such a design would preserve the interdisciplinary ambition of the model while meeting contemporary standards for mechanism, safety, and evidentiary transparency.

Overall, the revised interpretation positions SAGE as a conceptual bridge rather than a treatment claim. Its value lies in distinguishing two layers of suffering: clinically measurable nightmare-related distress and a Buddhist account of attachment to conditioned mental appearances. By clarifying where the two traditions converge functionally, where they remain irreducibly different, and how each stage could be examined empirically, the framework becomes more coherent, falsifiable, and suitable for future interdisciplinary research.

Conclusion

This study examined dream-related suffering through contemporary psychological research, textual analysis of the Śūraṅgama Sūtra, and interviews with six Mahāyāna monastic educators. The findings indicate that dream-related distress can be understood at more than one level. Contemporary psychology explains how recurrent nightmares may be maintained through hyperarousal, waking stress, maladaptive appraisal, avoidance, and disrupted sleep, while the Buddhist materials examined in this study interpret suffering more broadly through attachment to transient mind-generated appearances.

The SAGE framework synthesizes these perspectives into four stages: Stabilization, Analysis, Growth, and Enlightenment. Its purpose is not to merge Buddhism and psychology into a single theory, but to clarify how symptom-focused psychological strategies and soteriological contemplative practices may be situated in a structured sequence. The first stages emphasize immediate safety, emotional regulation, appraisal, and behavioral conditions; the later stages introduce ethical cultivation and a Buddhist transformation in the relationship to consciousness and perceived phenomena.

The principal contribution of the study is therefore conceptual. It proposes a disciplined interdisciplinary model that respects the distinct aims and evidentiary standards of modern clinical psychology and Mahāyāna Buddhist thought. The SAGE framework has not been clinically validated and should not be used as a replacement for established assessment or treatment of nightmare disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidality, or other psychiatric conditions. Future research should examine the framework's conceptual validity, cultural acceptability, feasibility, safety, and measurable outcomes before any clinical application is considered.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several study limitations must be acknowledged:

1. Sample and Geographic Scope: The empirical qualitative data were gathered from a small purposive sample of six monastic educators affiliated with two Buddhist institutions in Vietnam, without the direct participation of clinical patients or psychiatric practitioners.

2. Interpretive Nature: The textual analysis of canonical sources is interpreted by nature, carrying potential researcher subjectivity.

3. Lack of Clinical Validation: The proposed SAGE conceptual framework remains a theoretical model that has not undergone empirical pre-test/post-test intervention trials or sleep architecture measurement.

Clinical and Medical Disclaimer: The SAGE conceptual framework is presented strictly as a theoretically informed contemplative model for scholarly exploration. It has not been clinically validated and must not replace formal psychological assessment, psychiatric care, or evidence-based treatments provided by qualified mental health professionals, particularly for individuals suffering from severe PTSD, suicidal ideation, or clinical nightmare disorders. Future research should focus on empirical feasibility, safety testing, and clinical outcome measurements across diverse clinical populations.

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An Integrated Framework Linking Thai Law on Theft and the Second Pārājika Rule (Dutiyapārājika) in Theravāda Buddhism for Peaceful Coexistence

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Abstract

This qualitative comparative study examines Thai law on theft and the Second Pārājika rule (Dutiyapārājika) in Theravāda Buddhist monastic discipline and develops an integrated framework for peaceful coexistence. The study had three objectives: (1) to analyze the development and principles of Thai law on theft in relation to ethical responsibility and property protection; (2) to analyze the development and principles of the Second Pārājika rule, with particular attention to its ethical and disciplinary foundations; and (3) to develop an integrated framework linking the two normative systems. The research combined qualitative documentary analysis with semi-structured expert interviews involving ten purposively selected informants with expertise in Buddhism and law. The research analyzed documentary and interview data through directed content analysis, thematic coding, and comparative synthesis.

The findings show that Thai theft law and the Second Pārājika rule share a concern with protecting property and restraining wrongful taking, but they differ in legal status, jurisdiction, evidentiary structure, and consequences. Thai criminal law requires dishonest taking and applies no minimum property-value threshold for the basic offense, whereas a Pārājika determination under the Vinaya depends on specific conditions including ownership, knowledge, intention, action, and the prescribed value threshold for a defeat offense. The analysis also identifies procedural tension when state detention measures affect monastic status before a final criminal judgment. The study contributes a coordination framework that distinguishes secular criminal adjudication from Vinaya disciplinary determination while promoting communication between legal and ecclesiastical authorities. Recommendations concerning statutory amendment, preliminary Vinaya review, and specialized training are presented as normative proposals derived from the comparative analysis and expert interviews rather than as conclusively established legal requirements.

Keywords: Dutiyapārājika; Thai law on theft; Buddhist Vinaya; Saṅgha Act; Legal pluralism; Procedural justice; Peaceful coexistence.

Introduction

Human societies use multiple normative systems to regulate conduct, protect rights, and resolve conflict. State law establishes publicly enforceable rules, while religious communities may also maintain internal disciplinary systems with distinct sources of authority, procedures, and consequences. In Thailand, Buddhist monks are subject to both state law and monastic discipline under the Vinaya and the institutional framework of the Buddhist Saṅgha. This creates a form of legal pluralism in which secular, ecclesiastical, and monastic norms operate simultaneously rather than as a single legal order (Borchert, 2022; Schonthal, 2022).

The relationship becomes particularly sensitive when a monk is accused of a criminal property offense. Thai criminal law determines criminal liability as a matter of state jurisdiction, while the Vinaya determines whether a monk has committed a monastic offense and whether that offense affects continuing eligibility for bhikkhu status. The Second Pārājika rule concerns taking what has not been given and, when all conditions for a defeat offense are fulfilled, entails irreversible loss of monastic status (Horner, 2014; Payutto, 2018). These two systems therefore address related conduct but apply different legal concepts, procedures, and sanctions.

A central structural issue concerns the timing and legal basis of compulsory renunciation of monkhood. Under the Sangha Act, B.E. 2505 (1962), as amended, Section 29 authorizes an investigation officer, in specified custody-related circumstances, to proceed with compelling a monk to renounce monkhood; Section 30 applies where a monk is to be imprisoned, confined, or detained pursuant to a court judgment or court order (National Office of Buddhism, 2021). These provisions do not determine Vinaya guilt. They instead create a procedural intersection between state custody and monastic status. The 2018 arrests of senior monks brought this intersection into public debate (Bangkok Post, 2018), while later Thai legal scholarship has questioned how Sections 29 and 30 should operate in relation to due process, ecclesiastical participation, and the presumption of innocence (Charoonchart, 2021; Wongwangphoem & Khwayotha, 2025).

The significance of this problem extends beyond individual cases. Premature conflation of criminal accusation, state custody, and Vinaya defeat

may affect the procedural interests of accused monks, the disciplinary autonomy of the Saṅgha, and public confidence in both legal and religious institutions. At the same time, monks cannot be placed outside the jurisdiction of Thai criminal law. The analytical problem is therefore not whether state law or Vinaya should prevail absolutely, but how each system can perform its proper function without one being mistaken for the other.

Existing scholarship has examined Thai criminal law, Buddhist monastic discipline, compulsory disrobing, and the governance of the Saṅgha, while legal-pluralism research has shown that Buddhist monastic communities frequently operate within overlapping normative regimes (Borchert, 2022; Charoonchart, 2021; Schonthal, 2022; Voyce, 2007). However, comparatively less attention has been given to a structured framework that compares the substantive elements of theft under Thai law with the Second Pārājika rule and then separates criminal adjudication, Vinaya determination, and institutional coordination. This gap matters because apparent agreement at the level of ethical purpose can conceal important differences in property-value thresholds, intention, jurisdiction, and consequences. The present study addresses this gap through documentary analysis and expert interviews and develops an integrated framework intended to support procedural fairness, institutional clarity, and peaceful coexistence.

Research Objective

1. To analyze the development and principles of Thai law on theft in relation to ethical responsibility and property protection.
2. To analyze the development and principles of the Second Pārājika rule (Dutiyapārājika) in Theravāda Buddhism, with particular attention to its ethical and disciplinary foundations.
3. To develop an integrated framework linking Thai law on theft and the Second Pārājika rule for promoting peaceful coexistence.

Literature Review

The literature relevant to this study falls into four interrelated areas: the social and legal function of theft law; the Second Pārājika rule and Buddhist monastic jurisprudence; legal pluralism and Saṅgha governance; and procedural concerns arising when state custody affects monastic status. Legal philosophy treats law as an institutional framework for defining prohibited conduct, protecting legitimate interests, and resolving competing claims (Chekeevong,

2004; Hobbes, 1996; Kasemsap, 1996). Under the Thai Penal Code, the basic offense of theft is defined in Section 334 as the dishonest taking of property belonging to another person or jointly owned by another. General criminal intent is addressed by Section 59 (Thailand, 1956). Thus, Thai theft law focuses on state-defined criminal liability, dishonest intent, and legally protected property interests.

Within Theravāda Buddhism, the Vinaya regulates monastic conduct through a distinct disciplinary system. The Second Pārājika rule concerns adinnādāna, taking what has not been given. The Vinaya analysis identifies conditions relevant to disciplinary liability, including that the property belongs to another, the monk knows that it belongs to another, there is an intention to steal, the property meets the relevant value threshold for a defeat offense, and the monk performs an act sufficient to complete the taking (Horner, 2014; Oldenberg, 2005). A completed Pārājika offense is not a temporary punishment but a status consequence: the offender is no longer eligible to remain a bhikkhu. Lesser conduct may fall under lesser Vinaya offenses. This graded structure is essential to any comparison with secular criminal law.

The two systems therefore overlap in subject matter but not in institutional identity. Scholarship on Buddhist law emphasizes that Vinaya can function as a sophisticated normative and adjudicative system within the monastic community (Voyce, 2007). More recent legal-pluralism research likewise shows that Buddhist monastic governance may involve the interaction of religious law, state law, and ecclesiastical regulation rather than a simple opposition between ‘law’ and ‘religion’ (Borchert, 2022; Schonthal, 2022). This perspective is particularly relevant in Thailand, where monks are citizens subject to criminal law while also being members of a religious institution governed by the Dhamma-Vinaya and the Sangha Act.

The contemporary procedural issue is most visible in Sections 29 and 30 of the Sangha Act. The official English translation published by the National Office of Buddhism states that Section 29 permits an investigation officer to proceed with compulsory renunciation of monkhood in specified circumstances concerning arrest, provisional release, and custody, while Section 30 addresses imprisonment, confinement, or detention pursuant to a court judgment or order (National Office of Buddhism, 2021). Thai scholarship has criticized aspects of these provisions and proposed greater ecclesiastical involvement or alternative custody arrangements, but such proposals remain normative legal arguments

rather than settled interpretations of what justice requires (Charoonchart, 2021; Wongwangphoem & Khwayotha, 2025).

The literature therefore establishes the need for conceptual separation. Thai criminal law determines state criminal liability; Vinaya determines monastic disciplinary status; and the Sangha Act regulates institutional consequences at the interface between state and ecclesiastical administration. The research gap lies in connecting these domains through a comparative framework that identifies substantive similarities and differences before proposing procedural coordination. This study responds by comparing the elements, purposes, and consequences of Thai theft law and the Second Pārājika rule and by using expert interviews to examine the practical implications of their intersection.

Scope of Research

1. Scope of data sources: Primary legal sources included the Thai Penal Code, especially Sections 59 and 334 and related property-offense provisions, and the Sangha Act, B.E. 2505 (1962), as amended, especially Sections 29 and 30. Primary Buddhist sources included the Vinaya Piṭaka materials concerning the Second Pārājika rule, consulted through the Pali Text Society editions and translations by Horner (2014) and Oldenberg (2005). Secondary sources were selected for direct relevance to Thai theft law, Vinaya discipline, Saṅgha governance, legal pluralism, procedural justice, and peaceful coexistence.

2. Scope of content: The study examined (1) the historical development and legal principles of Thai theft law, (2) the origin, elements, ethical basis, and disciplinary consequences of the Second Pārājika rule, and (3) points of convergence, divergence, and procedural tension relevant to an integrated framework.

3. Key informants: Ten experts were purposively selected for their relevant experience in Buddhism, Buddhist monastic discipline, and law. The sample comprised five monastic scholars and five lay academics.

4. Interview instrument: A semi-structured interview guide was reviewed by three experts for content relevance and consistency using a four-point rating scale. The review refined question wording and ensured coverage of the three research objectives before data collection.

Research Methodology

Research Design. The study used a qualitative comparative design consisting of documentary research and semi-structured expert interviews. Documentary analysis was the primary method for identifying the legal and Vinaya rules relevant to theft, while interviews explored expert interpretations of procedural tension, institutional competence, and possible coordination between secular and ecclesiastical systems.

Document Selection and Data Collection. The legal corpus included the Thai Penal Code provisions governing intention and theft, especially Sections 59 and 334, together with related property-offense provisions where needed for context; the Sangha Act, B.E. 2505 (1962), as amended through the current official English translation, especially Sections 29 and 30; and relevant Thai legal scholarship. The Buddhist corpus centered on the Second Pārājika rule in the Vinaya Piṭaka and authoritative Pali Text Society editions and translations (Horner, 2014; Oldenberg, 2005), supplemented by modern Theravāda explanatory works. Secondary literature was included when it directly addressed monastic law, Thai criminal procedure, Saṅgha governance, legal pluralism, or procedural justice.

Expert Interviews. Ten key informants were selected purposively for their relevant expertise in Buddhism, Buddhist monastic discipline, and law. The sample comprised five monastic scholars and five lay academics. Semi-structured interviews focused on: (1) the substantive principles of theft in Thai law; (2) the ethical and disciplinary foundations of the Second Pārājika rule; (3) the distinction between criminal guilt and Vinaya guilt; (4) concerns arising when state custody affects monastic status; and (5) feasible mechanisms for coordination. The interview component was interpretive rather than statistically representative, and no numerical generalization to the wider population was attempted.

Data Analysis. Documentary materials were analyzed through directed content analysis. Relevant passages were coded under the categories of purpose, protected interest, act requirement, mental element, property/value condition, decision-making authority, procedure, sanction or status consequence, and institutional scope. Interview records were then coded thematically for recurring issues concerning procedural timing, fairness, Vinaya competence, institutional autonomy, and coordination. Comparative matrices were used to identify

convergence, divergence, and potential points of institutional interaction between the two normative systems.

Synthesis and Framework Development. Results were synthesized objective by objective. Objective 1 was answered from Thai legal sources; Objective 2 from Vinaya and Theravāda disciplinary sources; and Objective 3 through comparative analysis informed by expert themes. Normative recommendations, such as possible statutory amendment, preliminary Vinaya review, or specialized training, were separated from descriptive findings so that the article does not present policy preferences as empirically proven legal requirements.

Research Findings

Objective 1: Development and Principles of Thai Law on Theft

Thai law developed from customary, royal, moral, and later codified legal traditions into a modern civil-law system. For this study, the key point is not a complete chronology of Thai law but the progressive formalization of property protection and criminal responsibility. Modern Thai criminal law defines offenses through statutory elements and applies state sanctions through the criminal justice system (Boonchalermvipas, 1988; Meangsaeng, 2017).

The core provision for theft is Section 334 of the Penal Code, which criminalizes dishonestly taking away property belonging to another person or property in which another person has a share. Section 59 supplies the general principle of intentional criminal responsibility (Thailand, 1956). The analysis therefore identifies four central features relevant to comparison with Vinaya: a protected property interest, an act of taking, a dishonest mental element, and state adjudication of criminal liability. Unlike the Second Pārājika rule, the basic theft offense in Section 334 does not depend on a minimum property-value threshold for the existence of the offense. Separate statutory provisions govern aggravating circumstances and related property offenses (Thiumchan & Viriyayutthangkul, 2022).

From an ethical perspective, Thai theft law protects security of possession and ownership and seeks to deter wrongful appropriation. Its consequences are public-law sanctions imposed by the state, such as imprisonment or fines, rather than a religious status determination. The findings for Objective 1 therefore establish the legal side of the comparison without importing Vinaya criteria into the definition of the state offense.

Objective 2: Development and Principles of the Second Pārājika Rule

The Second Pārājika rule developed within the Vinaya as part of the Buddha's regulation of monastic conduct. The Vinaya presents disciplinary rules as serving multiple purposes, including restraining misconduct, maintaining harmony in the Saṅgha, building confidence among the laity, and preserving the teaching (Horner, 2014). The origin narrative associated with the rule on taking what has not been given (adinnādāna) illustrates how specific conduct generated a disciplinary response and subsequent clarification of the rule (Oldenberg, 2005).

The documentary analysis identifies several conditions relevant to a Pārājika determination for theft: the property belongs to another; the monk recognizes another's ownership; there is an intention to steal; the property reaches the value threshold prescribed for a defeat offense; and the monk performs the act of taking to the degree required by the Vinaya analysis (Horner, 2014). The value threshold is especially important. Conduct involving property below the threshold may still be blameworthy or constitute a lesser Vinaya offense, but it does not automatically constitute Pārājika. This differs from the basic Thai theft offense, which does not make a minimum value threshold an element of liability.

Intention also requires careful distinction. Thai criminal law uses statutory concepts of intention and dishonesty, whereas the Vinaya inquiry asks whether the monk had the relevant intention to steal within the disciplinary framework. These concepts overlap in their concern with culpable mental states but are not legally interchangeable. The consequence also differs fundamentally: Pārājika entails irreversible loss of eligibility to remain a bhikkhu, whereas state punishment is imposed within the criminal justice system. Objective 2 therefore establishes the ethical and monastic foundations of the rule without prematurely comparing procedures or proposing integration.

Objective 3: Integrated Framework Linking Thai Theft Law and the Second Pārājika Rule

The comparative analysis found both convergence and divergence. The two systems converge in condemning wrongful appropriation, protecting legitimate property interests, and requiring a culpable mental element. They diverge in jurisdiction, legal source, property-value requirements, institutional decision-maker, procedure, and consequence. Thai law determines criminal liability applicable to citizens generally; Vinaya determines monastic disciplinary liability within the Saṅgha. The study therefore does not support the claim that

the two systems are identical or that there is no conflict at all. Rather, it identifies a need to distinguish substantive compatibility from procedural tension.

The most important substantive differences concern property value and intention. Under the Second Pārājika rule, the prescribed value threshold helps determine whether theft reaches the level of a defeat offense; under Section 334 of the Penal Code, no comparable minimum value threshold determines whether basic theft exists. Both systems consider culpable intention, but Thai criminal law defines criminal intention and dishonest taking through state law, while Vinaya evaluates intention within a religious disciplinary inquiry. A finding of criminal theft therefore does not by itself establish Pārājika, and a Vinaya determination does not substitute for a criminal judgment.

The principal procedural tension arises when state custody affects monastic status. Section 29 of the Sangha Act authorizes an investigation officer, under specified circumstances involving arrest, provisional release, and custody, to proceed with compulsory renunciation of monkhood. Section 30 applies when imprisonment, confinement, or detention is to occur pursuant to a court judgment or court order (National Office of Buddhism, 2021). These provisions regulate institutional status in connection with state custody; they do not constitute a Vinaya finding that the monk has committed Pārājika. This distinction supports a neutral procedural concern about how pre-adjudication or custody measures relate to the presumption of innocence and to the Saṅgha's disciplinary competence (Charoonchart, 2021; Wongwangphoem & Khwayotha, 2025).

The thematic synthesis of the expert interviews centered on three practical issues: the timing of measures affecting monastic status, the need for officials handling monk-related cases to understand basic Vinaya distinctions, and the need for clearer coordination between legal and ecclesiastical authorities. These themes informed, but did not conclusively determine, the study's policy proposals. The integrated framework therefore separates three functions: (1) state criminal adjudication under Thai law; (2) monastic disciplinary determination under Vinaya; and (3) institutional coordination under the Sangha Act and related procedures. Peaceful coexistence is promoted not by merging the two legal systems, but by clarifying their boundaries while encouraging non-greed (alobha), contentment (santuṭṭhi), fairness, due process, and mutual institutional respect.

Discussion

The first objective demonstrates that Thai theft law operates through a state-centered system of criminal liability in which Section 334 defines dishonest taking and Section 59 provides the general framework for intention. This finding is consistent with legal scholarship emphasizing the regulatory and protective functions of criminal law (Chekeevong, 2004; Kasemsap, 1996). Establishing this legal baseline is essential because it prevents the subsequent comparison with Buddhist discipline from obscuring the distinct purposes and procedures of state law.

The second objective shows that the Second Pārājika rule constitutes a separate monastic disciplinary regime embedded within the Vinaya. Its determination depends on factors such as ownership, knowledge, intention to steal, completion of the act, and the prescribed property-value threshold (Horner, 2014). This supports Buddhist-law scholarship that treats the Vinaya as a genuine normative system rather than merely a body of moral advice (Voyce, 2007). Accordingly, criminal liability for theft cannot automatically establish Pārājika, because the two systems apply different legal categories, decision-making processes, and consequences.

The findings under Objective 3 are best interpreted through legal pluralism. Thai monks are simultaneously subject to state law, ecclesiastical regulation, and monastic discipline, a condition identified in recent scholarship on contemporary Thai Buddhist governance (Borchert, 2022). Schonthal (2022) similarly demonstrates that Buddhist legal systems negotiate between normative unity and plurality, reinforcing the need to distinguish rather than collapse overlapping jurisdictions. The present study extends this perspective by separating three institutional determinations: criminal guilt, Vinaya liability, and administrative consequences affecting monastic status.

This distinction is particularly important in relation to Sections 29 and 30 of the Sangha Act. The issue is not that these provisions confer inherently "unjust" authority, but that, in certain circumstances, their operation can affect monastic status before final criminal adjudication (National Office of Buddhism, 2021; Charoonchart, 2021; Wongwangphoem & Khwayotha, 2025). Recent Thai scholarship has likewise called for closer examination of the relationship between state authority, monks' legal status, constitutional rights, and Vinaya principles (Patipanavat et al., 2023; Phramaha Anuwong Mermana, 2026).

The study therefore supports a model of coordinated jurisdiction, not institutional substitution. Criminal authorities retain responsibility for state offenses, while competent monastic authorities determine Vinaya consequences. Its principal contribution is to clarify that peaceful coexistence depends on procedural clarity, institutional competence, communication, and Vinaya literacy rather than on merging the two normative systems. Future research should test whether such coordination improves perceived fairness, institutional trust, and case management in actual monk-related legal proceedings.

New Knowledge from the Research

This study proposes an integrated framework for addressing cases in which alleged property offenses by Buddhist monks fall simultaneously within Thai criminal law, the Second Pārājika rule (Dutiyapārājika), and relevant provisions of the Sangha Act. The framework was developed from documentary analysis and expert interviews and is organized into four interrelated stages: input, process, output, and outcome. Its purpose is not to merge secular criminal law and Buddhist monastic discipline, but to clarify their respective functions and identify appropriate points of coordination.

The input stage comprises the principal normative sources relevant to such cases: the Second Pārājika rule in the Vinaya and its commentarial tradition, Thai criminal law concerning theft, and Sections 29 and 30 of the Sangha Act. These sources operate differently. Thai criminal law applies generally to persons within state jurisdiction, whereas the Vinaya governs monastic disciplinary status. The Sangha Act forms an institutional bridge where state custody and monastic status intersect. Careful analysis of these sources is therefore necessary before determining how an accused monk should be treated.

The process stage concerns procedural coordination. Two broad policy options emerge. The first is a formal review of Sections 29 and 30 to determine whether their operation adequately balances state custody requirements, procedural fairness, and monastic status. The second is to retain the existing statutory framework while strengthening consultation with competent ecclesiastical authorities, distinguishing criminal liability from Vinaya liability, and providing relevant officials with basic training in Buddhist disciplinary procedures. Any preliminary Vinaya inquiry should complement, rather than replace, the state criminal process.

The output stage consists of improved procedural clarity, more appropriate treatment of accused monks, and clearer institutional standards. These improvements may reduce confusion between criminal accusation, compulsory renunciation, and a formal Pārājika determination. They may also

strengthen confidence that monks and laypersons are treated fairly under state law while preserving the Saṅgha's disciplinary competence.

The final outcome stage is peaceful coexistence based on fairness, institutional clarity, mutual respect, and protection of property rights. The framework's principal contribution is a coordinated model in which Thai law and Vinaya remain distinct normative systems but operate in a complementary manner. Rather than assuming that legal harmony requires unifying the two systems, the framework shows that peaceful coexistence is better promoted by clearly separating their jurisdictions, procedures, and consequences while establishing appropriate mechanisms for communication and coordination.



Figure 1. Integrated Coordination Framework for Thai Law on Theft and the Second Pārājika Rule

Conclusion

This study analyzed Thai law on theft, the Second Pārājika rule, and their institutional intersection in cases involving Buddhist monks. Thai criminal law and Vinaya share a concern with wrongful taking and property protection, but they differ in source, jurisdiction, elements, procedure, and consequence. Thai theft law is a public criminal regime centered on dishonest taking and state adjudication; the Second Pārājika rule is a monastic disciplinary regime in which ownership, knowledge, intention, action, and the prescribed value threshold determine whether misconduct reaches the level of defeat. The study therefore rejects any simple equation between criminal theft and Pārājika. It proposes instead a three-function framework that separates criminal adjudication, Vinaya determination, and institutional coordination. The main procedural concern arises when state custody measures affect monastic status before final criminal

adjudication. In response, the article recommends clearer coordination, Vinaya literacy among relevant officials, and careful consideration of whether statutory or procedural reform is warranted. These proposals remain normative and require further legal and empirical evaluation. The study's principal contribution is to show that peaceful coexistence is better supported by institutional clarity, due process, and respect for both legal and monastic competence than by allowing either normative system to stand in for the other.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Legal and Procedural Management

Throughout the comprehensive and intensive study of the secular law on theft and discipline on the second Pārājika rule, as well as an observation of scandalous situations in Thailand, the solutions proposed to rectify the problematic issues and improve the situations which are associated with the Buddhist discipline dimension are generated according to these procedural methods indicated below: -

1. The Amendment of the Buddhist Saṅgha Act:

The Buddhist Saṅgha Act has placed excessive power on judicial officials, especially in sections 29 and 30. In this regard, it is likely to trigger strong criticism over compelled disrobing before a definite determination of guilt, even though it operates in conformity with the prescribed law of the Buddhist Saṅgha Act. Therefore, it would be an effective solution to reform certain parts of the Buddhist Saṅgha Act to avoid public outrage.

2. The Maintenance of the Aforementioned Buddhist Saṅgha Act:

If amending or rectifying the Buddhist Saṅgha Act seems impossible, its preservation can be pursued instead. Additionally, these approaches are introduced as follows:

(1) Allegations involving monks should first be investigated by the monastic authorities to circumvent unfair treatment imposed by judicial officials who lack Buddhist disciplinary education.

(2) If the alleged conduct does not rise to the level of Pārājika but instead constitutes a lesser transgression, particularly one subjected to social reproach yet not amounting to a criminal offense under the Thai Penal Code, then proceedings should be conducted in accordance with the disciplinary procedures established by the Buddha within the Vinaya framework.

(3) The legal personnel should be taught and trained in ecclesiastical procedural management in tune with the Buddhist disciplinary practice and to avoid the consequences of the unwanted outcome arising from outrageous and unreliable criticism.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study provides a foundation for further research on the relationship between Thai criminal law, Buddhist monastic discipline, and procedural justice. Future studies may extend the present findings through the following topics:

(1) A Comparative Study of Thai Legal Proceedings and Monastic Rule Process in Treating the Pastoral Offender.

(2) A Study of Justice in Thai Legal Process for Treating the Population with Various Status: Focused on Ecclesiastical One.

(3) A Comparative Study of Treating the Religious Members Found in Thai Legal Process.

(4) A Study of Restorative Justice from Thai Law and Buddhist Ethical Integration in Theravāda Buddhism.

(5) Developing a Harmonized Procedural Framework between Saṅgha Discipline and Thai Criminal Justice in Cases of Property Offenses

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Buddhist Peace Thought for Global Peace: Implications for Diplomacy, Conflict Resolution, and Sustainable Economic Governance

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Abstract

This qualitative review examines the contemporary relevance of Buddhist peace thought to global conflict, international diplomacy, and sustainable economic governance. The study had three objectives: (1) to analyze the relevance of Buddhist principles to contemporary global challenges; (2) to examine their application in diplomacy and conflict resolution; and (3) to explore how Buddhist ethical principles can inform economic systems oriented toward fairness, sustainability, and peace. The study used qualitative secondary analysis of peer-reviewed scholarship, academic books, and selected policy-oriented sources, applying thematic content analysis to identify recurring concepts, applications, and limitations.

The findings indicate that nonviolence (ahiṃsā), compassion (karuṇā), mindfulness, equality, interdependence, and right livelihood provide a coherent ethical vocabulary for peacebuilding. In conflict settings, these principles emphasize restraint, dialogue, empathy, and attention to the mental roots of hostility. In diplomacy, Buddhist heritage and values can function as forms of cultural and soft-power engagement, although their effectiveness depends on political context and should not be assumed to replace conventional diplomatic institutions. In economic governance, Buddhist economics challenges growth-centered and consumption-intensive models by emphasizing sufficiency, responsible consumption, shared well-being, and environmental responsibility. The study proposes a three-domain synthesis linking conflict transformation, ethical diplomacy, and sustainable economic governance. Its contribution is conceptual rather than causal: Buddhist peace thought can enrich contemporary peace and governance discourse, but its practical effects require context-sensitive empirical evaluation.

Keywords: Buddhist peace thought; Nonviolence; Compassion; Diplomacy; Conflict resolution; Buddhist economics; Sustainable development

Introduction

Contemporary global peace faces armed conflict, political polarization, widening inequality, and accelerating environmental degradation. These problems are not only institutional or strategic; they also involve moral choices concerning violence, dignity, consumption, responsibility, and the treatment of others. Buddhist thought offers an ethical vocabulary for examining these dimensions through nonviolence, compassion, mindfulness, interdependence, and reducing greed, hatred, and delusion. Recent Buddhist peace research has therefore moved beyond purely historical interpretation toward questions of peacebuilding, reconciliation, and ethical governance (Barua, 2023; Makhumtup et al., 2024; Tanabe & Hartsell, 2024).

In conflict resolution, Buddhist peace thought emphasizes both inner and relational transformation. Nonviolence (ahiṃsā) is not limited to the absence of physical force but includes restraint in intention, speech, and action, while compassion (karuṇā) directs attention toward suffering and the conditions that sustain it. Mindfulness can support emotional regulation and reduce reactive responses during conflict, although such contemplative practices should not be treated as substitutes for political negotiation, law, or institutional peacebuilding (Sunandabodhi, 2024). This distinction is important because Buddhism has also been entangled with nationalism and political conflict in Buddhist-majority societies; Buddhist ethics therefore possess peacebuilding potential without guaranteeing peaceful political outcomes (Makhumtup et al., 2024).

The diplomatic dimension is similarly complex. Buddhism can function as cultural diplomacy and soft power where states draw on shared Buddhist heritage to build relationships, particularly in Asia. India's use of Buddhist heritage in relations with Southeast Asian countries illustrates how non-coercive cultural resources can complement conventional diplomacy (Khobragade & Kriti, 2022; Mahaseth et al., 2023). Such initiatives may create symbolic trust and common cultural reference points, but their diplomatic value depends on broader political interests, institutional credibility, and reciprocal engagement. Buddhist diplomacy should therefore be understood as a supplementary ethical and cultural resource rather than a complete theory of international relations.

A third area concerns economic governance. Growth-centered economic systems have generated material benefits while also contributing to persistent inequality, ecological stress, and consumption patterns that are difficult to

reconcile with planetary limits (Helleiner, 2023). Buddhist economics offers a contrasting normative orientation centered on right livelihood, sufficiency, responsible consumption, well-being, and concern for the common good. Contemporary scholarship presents Buddhist economics not as a rejection of markets per se but as an ethical critique of economic arrangements that privilege accumulation while externalizing social and environmental costs (Gotsis, 2023; Williams-Oerberg, 2019). Brown (2024) similarly argues for economic policies that integrate shared prosperity, environmental sustainability, and human well-being.

Despite this growing literature, the three domains, conflict transformation, diplomacy, and economic governance, are often discussed separately. The research gap is therefore integrative rather than doctrinal: we need to clarify how Buddhist peace principles function across different institutional settings without assuming that philosophical compatibility equals empirical effectiveness. This study addresses that gap through qualitative secondary analysis. It examines Buddhist peace thought as a normative framework for global challenges, assesses its application in diplomacy and conflict resolution, and explores its implications for fair and sustainable economic governance.

Research Objectives

This study addresses the following objectives:

1. To analyze the relevance of Buddhist peace thought to contemporary global challenges, particularly conflict, inequality, and environmental degradation.

2. To examine the practical application of Buddhist peace thought in international diplomacy and conflict resolution.

3. To investigate how Buddhist ethical principles can inform global economic systems oriented toward fairness, sustainability, and peace.

Literature Review

The literature on Buddhist peace thought identifies nonviolence, compassion, loving-kindness, mindfulness, ethical restraint, and wisdom as recurring foundations for peacebuilding. King (2013) situates questions of war and peace within broader Buddhist philosophical commitments, while Tanabe

(2016, 2021) argues that Buddhist peace theory adds an inner and ethical dimension often underdeveloped in liberal or institution-centered approaches. More recent work has developed applied Buddhist models for nonviolence and social conflict resolution, emphasizing that sustainable peace requires attention to both structural conditions and the mental roots of aggression (Barua, 2023; Makhumtup et al., 2024). These studies support the relevance of Buddhist ethics but also show that peacebuilding outcomes depend on context, institutions, and political conditions.

A second strand concerns diplomacy and conflict management. Kafle (2022) interprets the Noble Eightfold Path as relevant to international relations through right understanding, right intention, ethical conduct, and responsible communication. Sunandabodhi (2024) focuses more specifically on mindfulness in conflict resolution, arguing that attention and emotional regulation can support non-reactive communication. At the interstate level, Buddhism also appears as a cultural and diplomatic resource. Khobragade and Kriti (2022) examine Buddhism in India's soft-power diplomacy, while Mahaseth et al. (2023) analyze temple diplomacy in Southeast Asia. These studies indicate that Buddhist heritage can facilitate cultural connection and non-coercive engagement, although none demonstrates that religious soft power independently resolves geopolitical disputes.

The third strand concerns Buddhist economics. Williams-Oerberg (2019) shows that Buddhist-economic ideas are diverse and embedded in different social and institutional contexts. Kumari (2021) emphasizes sustainability and ethical consumption, while Gotsis (2023) develops the environmental-policy implications of Buddhist economics around compassion, responsibility, and the common good. Brown (2024) advances a contemporary policy-oriented model linking shared prosperity, reduced inequality, well-being, and ecological sustainability. Together, these works support a shift from maximizing consumption toward evaluating economic activity through human and ecological consequences.

These bodies of scholarship also reveal important limitations. First, Buddhist concepts are sometimes presented as universal solutions without sufficient attention to political economy, institutional power, or competing interpretations of Buddhism. Second, much of the literature is conceptual, normative, or case-based rather than comparative and empirically causal. Third, the connection between peacebuilding and economic governance remains

underdeveloped even though inequality, resource competition, and environmental stress can intensify conflict. The present study therefore treats Buddhist peace thought as an ethical and analytical resource rather than as a self-sufficient policy mechanism.

The research gap lies in synthesizing these domains within one framework while preserving their differences. This study proposes that Buddhist peace thought can be analyzed through three linked fields of application: conflict transformation, ethical diplomacy, and sustainable economic governance. The framework does not assume direct causal effectiveness; instead, it identifies how common Buddhist principles—especially nonviolence, compassion, mindfulness, equality, interdependence, and right livelihood—can inform distinct forms of practice and future empirical research.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework links core Buddhist peace principles—nonviolence, compassion, mindfulness, equality, interdependence, and right livelihood—to three domains of application: conflict transformation, international diplomacy, and sustainable economic governance. Dialogue, non-coercive engagement, cultural diplomacy, responsible consumption, and equitable economic practice are treated as possible mechanisms of application rather than predetermined outcomes. The framework therefore distinguishes ethical principles from the institutional processes through which they may contribute to peace.

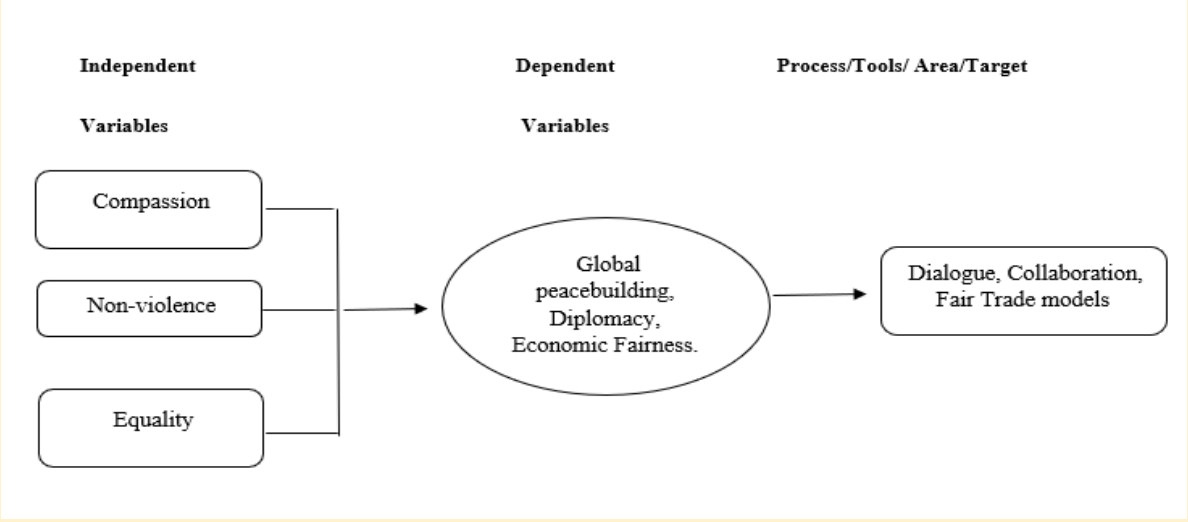

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative secondary-analysis design. Secondary analysis is appropriate when the purpose is to synthesize conceptual, historical, and applied scholarship rather than generate primary field data (Irwin, 2013). The design enabled comparison across Buddhist studies, peace and conflict studies, international relations, and Buddhist economics.

2 Data Collection

Sources were identified through Google Scholar, Scopus, journal databases, academic books, and selected policy-oriented publications. Priority was given to peer-reviewed studies directly related to Buddhist peacebuilding, conflict resolution, diplomacy, soft power, Buddhist economics, sustainability, and global governance. The manuscript's core analytical corpus emphasized recent scholarship, particularly from 2020–2025, while earlier foundational works were retained when necessary to establish key concepts or intellectual development. Sources were excluded when their subject matter did not substantively address the research objectives.

3 Data Analysis

The materials were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. First, sources were coded according to the three research objectives. Second, recurring concepts were grouped into thematic categories, including nonviolence, compassion, mindfulness, equality, interdependence, right livelihood, cultural diplomacy, sustainable consumption, and shared well-being. Third, the study compared how these concepts were translated into proposed practices or institutional applications. Claims were treated according to their evidentiary status: philosophical and normative arguments were distinguished from documented case applications, and neither was interpreted as proof of causal policy effectiveness. This procedure produced the three-domain synthesis presented in the Results and Knowledge from Research sections.

Research Results

The analysis produced three groups of findings corresponding to the research objectives. Across the reviewed literature, Buddhist peace thought

functions primarily as an ethical and interpretive framework. Its relevance is strongest when Buddhist principles are linked to specific practices—such as dialogue, non-coercive engagement, mindfulness, cultural diplomacy, responsible consumption, and right livelihood—rather than presented as abstract solutions to complex global problems.

Objective 1: Results on Buddhist Peace Thought in Global Contexts

The literature identifies nonviolence, compassion, mindfulness, and equality as mutually reinforcing dimensions of Buddhist peace thought. Nonviolence addresses harmful intention, speech, and action; compassion directs attention toward suffering and the welfare of affected parties; and mindfulness supports awareness of reactive emotions before they escalate into harmful conduct. Contemporary Buddhist peace models consequently emphasize transformation at both intrapersonal and interpersonal levels (Barua, 2023; Sunandabodhi, 2024).

These principles are particularly relevant to conflict transformation because Buddhist analysis directs attention to greed, hatred, and delusion as recurring drivers of harmful behavior. This does not reduce political violence to individual psychology. Structural inequality, nationalism, institutional power, historical grievance, and competition over resources remain important. Recent scholarship on Buddhism and political conflict confirms this ambivalence: Buddhist actors and symbols may contribute to reconciliation, but they can also become entangled with exclusionary politics (Makhumtup et al., 2024).

The principal finding for Objective 1 is therefore qualified. Buddhist peace thought offers a coherent ethical foundation for restraint, dialogue, dignity, and concern for shared well-being, but it should complement rather than replace political negotiation, legal institutions, social reform, and structural peacebuilding. Its contribution lies in shaping the moral orientation and quality of engagement through which conflict-management institutions operate (King, 2013; Tanabe & Hartsell, 2024).

Objective 2: Application in International Diplomacy:

The second objective concerns diplomacy and conflict resolution. The reviewed literature indicates two main pathways of application. The first is ethical practice within negotiation: right understanding, right intention, non-harming, mindfulness, and compassionate communication can support more reflective and

less adversarial interaction (Kafle, 2022; Sunandabodhi, 2024). These principles are most plausible as capacities that influence how diplomats and mediators communicate, rather than as substitutes for bargaining, international law, or security institutions.

The second pathway is cultural diplomacy and soft power. India's use of Buddhist heritage illustrates how shared religious and historical connections can support non-coercive diplomatic engagement. Khobragade and Kriti (2022) identify Buddhism as a soft-power resource, while Mahaseth et al. (2023) show how temple restoration and shared cultural heritage have been incorporated into India's relations with Southeast Asian states. These cases demonstrate diplomatic use of Buddhist cultural resources, although the political effectiveness of such initiatives depends on wider strategic and bilateral conditions.

Mindfulness also appears in conflict-resolution literature as a method for cultivating attention, emotional regulation, and non-reactivity. Sunandabodhi (2024) argues that these qualities can support mediation and communication under conditions of tension. The evidence is conceptually relevant but remains limited for professional diplomacy specifically; stronger claims would require studies involving diplomats, mediators, or negotiation outcomes.

Interdependence and not-self add a deeper philosophical dimension by challenging rigid self–other distinctions and encouraging attention to reciprocal consequences. Tophoff (2016) connects Buddhist perspectives with conflict-resolution processes that reduce ego-centered positioning. In institutional diplomacy, however, such ideas should be translated cautiously into practical norms such as mutual responsibility, perspective-taking, and recognition of shared interests.

Taken together, Objective 2 shows that Buddhist peace thought is most defensible as a complementary framework for ethical communication, cultural diplomacy, and reflective conflict management. The literature supports documented use of Buddhist heritage in diplomacy and Buddhist concepts in conflict resolution, but it does not justify the stronger claim that Buddhist principles are already widely institutionalized across international diplomatic systems.

The practical implication is therefore selective integration: Buddhist principles may enrich training, dialogue, mediation, cultural exchange, and confidence-building initiatives where they are culturally and institutionally

appropriate. Their legitimacy is strengthened when participation is voluntary and when Buddhist language is translated into inclusive ethical terms suitable for pluralistic international settings.

Table 1: Practical Application of Buddhist Peace Principles in Modern International Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution.

Buddhist Principle	Application in International Diplomacy	Example
Nonviolence (Ahimsa)	Promotes peaceful conflict resolution by focusing on ethical and non-coercive approaches.	India's use of Buddhism as a tool for diplomacy in Southeast Asia, focusing on mutual respect and peace.
Compassion (Karuṇā)	Enhances empathy and understanding in conflict situations, fostering reconciliation.	Buddhist-led peacebuilding efforts in conflict zones like Southern Thailand, where compassion bridges divides.
Mindfulness	Helps diplomats maintain emotional control and clarity during negotiations.	Mindfulness techniques employed by diplomats to reduce tension and promote peaceful dialogue in negotiations.
Equality (Samanatā)	Encourages inclusive and respectful diplomatic practices that prioritize mutual dignity.	Diplomatic efforts in Southeast Asia that focus on shared humanity and respect for all nations involved.
Anatman (No-Self)	Encourages transcending personal or national interests to focus on collective well-being.	Buddhist principles used in negotiations to reduce ego-driven conflicts and promote collective cooperation.

Objective3. Integration with Global Economic Systems

The third objective concerns global economic systems. Buddhist economics shifts attention from maximizing production and consumption toward the quality, purpose, and consequences of economic activity. Right livelihood, sufficiency, compassion, and interdependence provide criteria for evaluating whether economic practices reduce suffering, protect human dignity, and avoid unnecessary environmental harm. This orientation challenges both excessive consumption and the treatment of economic growth as an end in itself (Gotsis, 2023; Williams-Oerberg, 2019).

Recent scholarship strengthens this argument's environmental dimension. Gotsis (2023) connects Buddhist economics with sustainability and environmental responsibility, while Brown (2024) proposes policy approaches that combine shared prosperity, reduced inequality, ecological sustainability, and well-being. Kumari (2021) likewise emphasizes ethical consumption and

sustainable economic development. These approaches are compatible with contemporary sustainability agendas, although Buddhist economics should not be represented as a single standardized economic system.

The findings therefore support a policy-oriented interpretation of Buddhist economics centered on responsible consumption, environmentally sustainable production, fair opportunity, social protection, and work that does not depend on exploitation or serious harm. The study does not find sufficient evidence for a distinct 'merit-based distribution' mechanism applicable to global economic governance; that language is better understood as a moral orientation toward generosity and social contribution than as a technical allocation system. Objective 3 thus contributes a normative framework for evaluating economic policy rather than a ready-made substitute for existing economic institutions.

Table 2: Integration of Buddhist Peace Principles into Global Economic Systems

Buddhist Principle	Application in Economic Systems	Impact on Fairness, Sustainability, and Peace
Compassion (Karuṇā)	Encourages economic practices that prioritize community welfare and reduce harm.	Fosters a cooperative, community-oriented economic system that focuses on collective well-being over individual profit.
Equality (Samanatā)	Promotes the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities.	Reduces economic inequality and ensures fair access to resources, contributing to a more just global economy.
Nonviolence (Ahimsa)	Advocates for sustainable consumption and environmental protection in economic practices.	Protects the environment and reduces resource depletion, creating long-term sustainability.
Right Livelihood	Encourages ethical employment that benefits both individuals and society.	Promotes socially responsible work and discourages harmful or exploitative practices, leading to fairer economies.

Discussion

The findings indicate that Buddhist peace thought is most useful when treated as an ethical framework that can inform, but not replace, contemporary institutions. Under Objective 1, nonviolence, compassion, mindfulness, and equality provide a vocabulary for restraining harm and engaging conflict without reducing peacebuilding to coercive control. This interpretation is consistent with Barua (2023), King (2013), and Tanabe and Hartsell (2024), while Makhumtup

et al. (2024) adds an important qualification: Buddhism can contribute to reconciliation but can also be entangled with nationalism and political conflict. The contribution of Buddhist peace thought therefore depends on how principles are interpreted, institutionalized, and connected to structural conditions.

Under Objective 2, the study distinguishes ethical diplomacy from Buddhist cultural diplomacy. Kafle (2022) and Sunandabodhi (2024) support the relevance of ethical intention, mindfulness, and non-reactive communication to conflict management. At the state level, Khobragade and Kriti (2022) and Mahaseth et al. (2023) provide concrete evidence that Buddhist heritage can function as soft power in India's engagement with Asia. These cases support the claim that Buddhism can facilitate cultural connection and symbolic trust; they do not establish that Buddhist diplomacy independently changes strategic behavior or resolves interstate conflict. This distinction makes the argument more consistent with contemporary international-relations standards.

Objective 3 extends peace analysis into economic governance. Williams-Oerberg (2019) and Kumari (2021) identify Buddhist-economic approaches to consumption and sustainability, while Gotsis (2023) and Brown (2024) develop stronger links to environmental policy, inequality, and shared prosperity. The present study therefore interprets right livelihood and sufficiency as evaluative principles for economic governance rather than as a rejection of markets. This framing also avoids a false dichotomy between 'capitalism' and 'Buddhist economics': the relevant question is whether particular economic institutions reduce suffering, distribute opportunities fairly, and remain within ecological limits.

The study's principal theoretical contribution is its three-domain synthesis: conflict transformation, ethical diplomacy, and sustainable economic governance. The same core principles operate differently across these domains. Compassion may guide reconciliation, humanitarian concern, and distributive priorities; nonviolence may shape conflict behavior and avoidance of exploitative harm; mindfulness may support reflective decision-making; and interdependence may widen the perceived scope of responsibility. This is an integrative conceptual contribution rather than evidence of a single causal mechanism.

Several limitations follow. The study is based on secondary literature, the evidence base is heterogeneous, and many sources are conceptual or case-specific. No primary interviews, diplomatic outcome data, or economic-policy

evaluation were conducted. Accordingly, future research should test particular applications—such as mindfulness-informed mediation, Buddhist cultural diplomacy, or sufficiency-oriented economic policy—using clearly defined populations, comparison conditions, and measurable outcomes. Such work would allow Buddhist peace thought to move from broad normative relevance toward stronger evidence about when, where, and how it contributes to sustainable peace.

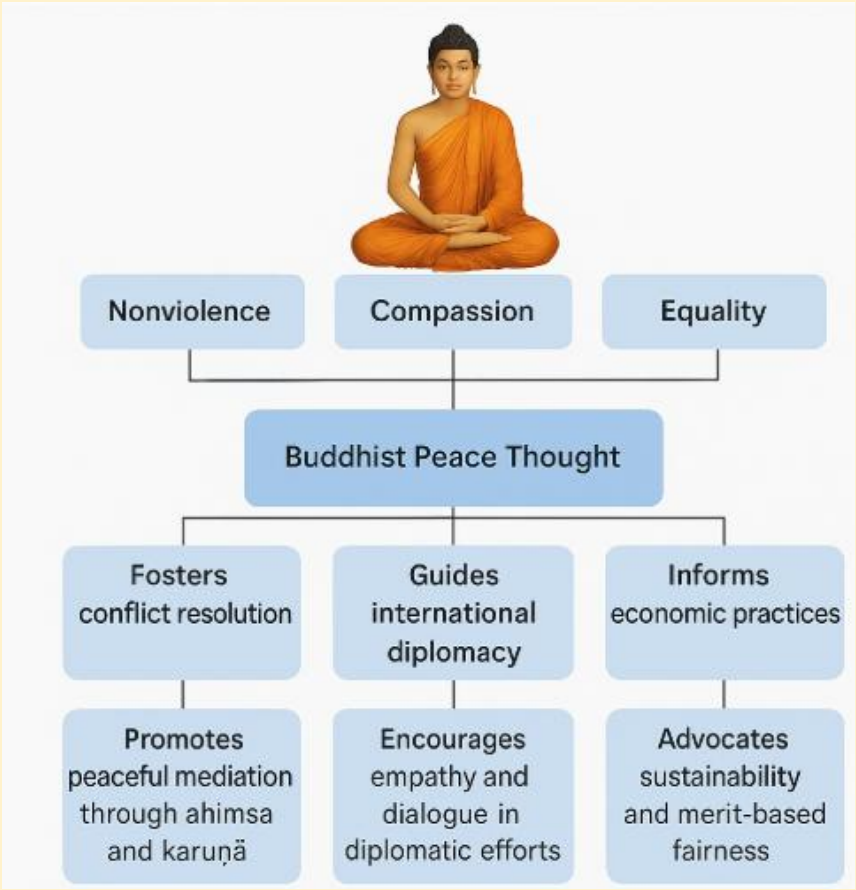

Figure 2. Synthesis of Buddhist Peace Thought

Figure 2 synthesizes the study's new knowledge into a three-domain model. Buddhist peace thought is represented by a common ethical core, nonviolence, compassion, mindfulness, equality, interdependence, and right livelihood, whose application varies by institutional context. In conflict transformation, these principles support dialogue, restraint, empathy, and reduction of reactive hostility. In international diplomacy, they inform ethical communication and can also operate through cultural and soft-power initiatives. In economic governance, they provide criteria for responsible consumption, shared well-being, fair opportunity, and environmental sustainability.

Conflict Transformation: Buddhist nonviolence and compassion support approaches that seek to reduce harm while addressing the psychological and relational conditions that intensify conflict (Barua, 2023; Makhumtup et al., 2024). Their contribution is strongest when combined with institutional mechanisms for justice, dialogue, and structural reform.

International Diplomacy: Buddhist ethics can inform diplomatic conduct through mindful communication, perspective-taking, and non-coercive engagement, while shared Buddhist heritage can function as a cultural-diplomacy resource (Khobragade & Kriti, 2022; Mahaseth et al., 2023; Sunandabodhi, 2024).

Sustainable Economic Governance: Buddhist economics evaluates economic activity through well-being, sufficiency, responsible consumption, and ecological responsibility rather than through growth alone (Brown, 2024; Gotsis, 2023; Williams-Oerberg, 2019).

The model's distinctive contribution is therefore not a claim that one Buddhist principle produces peace directly. It shows how a shared ethical core can be translated into different practices across political, diplomatic, and economic domains while preserving the need for context-specific institutions and empirical evaluation.

The framework has implications for universities, public institutions, peacebuilding organizations, and policy research. It can structure interdisciplinary education and future empirical studies without requiring governments or international institutions to adopt specific religious commitments.

1. Academic implications: Future scholarship should connect Buddhist studies more systematically with peace and conflict studies, international relations, ecological economics, and public policy. Comparative research should distinguish normative Buddhist arguments from tested interventions.

2. Policy implications: Buddhist-inspired principles may be translated into inclusive policy language, such as non-harm, responsible consumption, shared prosperity, reflective decision-making, and interdependence, where these concepts complement established legal and institutional frameworks.

3. Community peacebuilding: Buddhist practices may support dialogue, emotional regulation, and compassionate engagement in culturally appropriate settings. Their use should remain voluntary, trauma-sensitive, and compatible with the religious diversity of contemporary societies.

Conclusion

This study examined the significance of Buddhist peace thought for contemporary conflict, diplomacy, and sustainable economic governance. The findings show that nonviolence, compassion, mindfulness, equality, interdependence, and right livelihood constitute a coherent ethical framework for reducing harm and widening responsibility. In conflict transformation, these principles emphasize dialogue, restraint, empathy, and attention to the mental as well as structural conditions of violence. In diplomacy, Buddhist ethics can inform communication and mediation, while Buddhist heritage can function as a form of cultural and soft-power engagement.

In economic governance, Buddhist economics provides a normative critique of excessive consumption, inequality, and environmentally damaging growth by emphasizing sufficiency, responsible livelihood, shared well-being, and ecological responsibility. The study therefore proposes a three-domain synthesis linking conflict transformation, ethical diplomacy, and sustainable economic governance. Its conclusions should remain appropriately bounded: the evidence reviewed is largely conceptual, qualitative, and case-specific, so Buddhist principles should not be presented as empirically proven solutions to global conflict or economic instability. Their strongest contribution is to supply ethical criteria and practices that can complement existing institutions while encouraging more humane, reflective, and sustainable forms of governance.

Suggestions

Future research should move from broad claims about Buddhist peace thought toward clearly specified applications and measurable outcomes. Studies of diplomacy could examine whether mindfulness-informed negotiation training, compassionate communication, or Buddhist cultural-diplomacy initiatives affect trust, communication quality, or conflict de-escalation. Peacebuilding research should compare Buddhist-inspired approaches with established mediation and reconciliation practices in different cultural settings.

Research on global institutions should also investigate how Buddhist ethical principles can be translated into pluralistic language compatible with international law, human rights, and religious diversity. The United Nations and regional organizations may be relevant sites for studying non-harm, interdependence, dialogue, and responsible leadership, but empirical inquiry is needed before making claims about institutional effectiveness.

Further work is also required on Buddhist economics. Comparative policy studies could evaluate how sufficiency, right livelihood, responsible consumption, and shared well-being relate to existing sustainability frameworks, social-protection systems, and climate policy. Rather than assuming that Buddhist economics is a single alternative economic system, research should identify which policy mechanisms are feasible, ethically coherent, and measurable in particular national contexts.

Finally, interdisciplinary research should examine the tensions as well as the contributions of Buddhism in public life. Buddhist traditions can support peace and sustainability, but they can also be shaped by nationalism, institutional interests, and political power. A stronger research agenda will therefore combine Buddhist ethical analysis with political science, economics, peace studies, and empirical policy evaluation.

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Strengthening the Buddhist Community to Propagate Buddhism in Arakan

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines how the Rakhine Buddhist community can sustain the propagation of Theravāda Buddhism in four areas of Arakan (Rakhine State), Kyauktaw, Mrauk U, Ponnagyun, and Kyaukphyu, amid social and political instability. It addresses three objectives: to identify locally significant modes of Buddhist propagation, to analyze patterns of community participation, and to propose guidelines for strengthening Buddhist community capacity. Data were drawn from Buddhist and historical documents, census and conflict-related reports, and in-depth interviews with 20 purposively selected informants representing monastic, educational, lay, student, and community-organizational perspectives. Interviews were conducted in English, Rakhine, and Burmese, audio-recorded with consent, translated where necessary, and analyzed thematically.

The findings identify recurring propagation practices: pariyatti (study of Buddhist teachings), paṭipatti (practice and mental cultivation), ordination, Dhamma teaching, and community festivals and merit-making activities. The Saṅgha, lay supporters, community organizations, and public authorities sustain participation through complementary roles. Interview and documentary evidence further suggests that education, economic capacity, and access to health care shape the community's ability to maintain religious institutions and activities. These findings are synthesized into a provisional PSCK framework: Principles, Social well-being, Caring, and Kindness, grounded in Buddhist principles of social solidarity and communal welfare. The framework is conceptual, not an evaluated intervention, and its transferability is limited by conflict-related access constraints and the purposive sample composition.

Keywords: Theravāda Buddhism; Rakhine Buddhist community; Community participation; Saṅgha; Arakan; PSCK model

Introduction

Arakan, presently administered as Rakhine State in Myanmar, has a long and complex Buddhist history. In this article, "Arakan" refers to the historical-cultural region and local usage, while "Rakhine State" refers to the contemporary administrative unit. Traditional Arakanese chronicles trace the kingdom to King Marayu and place Buddhist origins in the Dhañña̱vatī period; these accounts are important expressions of regional religious memory but should not be treated as securely established archaeological chronology (Seekins, 2020; Charney, 1999). Better-documented evidence from the early modern Mrauk U kingdom strengthens this case, as its political and religious culture connected the Bay of Bengal and mainland Southeast Asia (Gutman, 2001; Charney, 1999).

The Konbaung invasion of Arakan began in December 1784, and Mrauk U fell in early January 1785. Bodawpaya ordered the campaign, while Crown Prince Thado Minsaw led the invasion in the field (Thant Myint-U, 2006, pp. 109–110). In Arakanese memory, this defeat is associated with the loss of political sovereignty and the removal of the Mahāmuni image to central Burma. These historical memories continue to shape the symbolic importance of Buddhist monuments, monasteries, and pilgrimage sites in the region.

The present study focuses specifically on the Rakhine Buddhist community. Rakhine State is religiously plural rather than religiously homogeneous; official census reporting records Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, Hindu, animist, and other religious affiliations, while also acknowledging substantial non-enumeration in parts of the state (Department of Population, 2016). The article therefore does not claim to represent all residents of Rakhine State. It focuses on the Buddhist community and the institutions, practices, and forms of participation through which *Theravāda* Buddhism is maintained.

Kyauktaw, Mrauk U, Ponnagyun, and Kyaukphyu were selected because they represent different configurations of Buddhist heritage and contemporary practice: pilgrimage and relic sites, monumental temple landscapes, monastic education, community festivals, and lay support networks. Mrauk U contains major monuments such as Shite-thaung, Koethaung, Htukkanthein, and Andaw-thein, while Kyauktaw, Ponnagyun, and Kyaukphyu maintain locally important pagodas, monasteries, and religious events (Seekins, 2020; Gutman, 2001). These institutions provide religious education, social organization, and ritual functions.

The contemporary context makes community capacity especially significant. Armed conflict has disrupted mobility, public services, educational

institutions, and religious life in parts of Rakhine State. ACLED reports that the ULA/Arakan Army captured Kyauktaw and Mrauk U during intensified fighting between 6 and 12 February 2024, illustrating the volatility of the study environment (ACLED, 2024). Such conditions affect access to monasteries, schools, health services, livelihoods, and heritage sites and complicate the continuity of organized religious activity.

Existing scholarship has addressed Burmese and Southeast Asian Buddhism, monastic institutions, ritual change, and Arakanese history (Gombrich, 2006; Schober, 2011; Swearer, 2010; Gutman, 2001; de Mersan, 2009). Rakhine-specific historical scholarship also shows that religion in Arakan developed through changing political, social, and interreligious contexts rather than as an unchanging or isolated tradition (Charney, 1999). Yet less attention has been given to how contemporary Rakhine Buddhist actors themselves understand propagation, participation, and community capacity across these four areas. This study addresses that gap by combining documentary research with interview evidence and developing a context-specific framework for community strengthening.

The study is delimited to the Rakhine Buddhist community in Kyauktaw, Mrauk U, Ponnagyun, and Kyaukphyu. Documentary sources include the *Tipiṭaka* and commentarial materials, historical studies, government census reports, conflict-monitoring reports, and scholarship on Buddhism, community development, education, livelihoods, health, and participation. The study does not attempt to represent all religious communities in Rakhine State or to provide a comprehensive political analysis of the ongoing conflict.

The four areas were purposively selected because of their importance to Buddhist heritage, monastic learning, pilgrimage, community ritual, and contemporary religious activity.

The empirical scope includes 20 purposively selected key informants, whose roles and interview dates are reported anonymously in the Methodology section.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the principal ways in which *Theravāda* Buddhism is propagated in Kyauktaw, Mrauk U, Ponnagyun, and Kyaukphyu.

2. To analyze how members and institutions of the Rakhine Buddhist community participate in the propagation and maintenance of Buddhism.

3. To propose context-sensitive guidelines for strengthening the Rakhine Buddhist community to support the sustainable propagation of Buddhism.

Literature Review

Buddhism and Religious Heritage in Arakan

Scholarship on Arakanese Buddhism requires careful distinction between traditional chronicles and historically verifiable evidence. Regional chronicles preserve accounts of the Buddha's visit to Dhañña*v*atī and later missions associated with Emperor Ashoka (Seekins, 2020; Danyawati Aung Zay Ya, 2016). These narratives matter for local Buddhist identity, but modern historical studies place Arakan within broader patterns of maritime exchange, political change, and religious plurality (Charney, 1999; Gutman, 2001). The monumental landscape of Mrauk U reflects extensive royal patronage of Buddhist architecture, while work on contemporary Rakhine religion shows that religious practice is also intertwined with locality, political authority, and cultural identity (de Mersan, 2009).

Schober (2011) and Swearer (2010) demonstrate more broadly that *Theravāda* Buddhist institutions in Myanmar and Southeast Asia are shaped by modern state formation, education, civil society, ritual change, and lay-monastic relations. These perspectives help move the analysis beyond a simple preservation narrative: the continuity of Buddhism depends not only on monuments or doctrinal transmission but also on institutional adaptation, social networks, and the material conditions that sustain religious practice.

Buddhist Principles for Community Cohesion

The study draws on three sets of Buddhist principles relevant to communal welfare. First, the seven conditions of non-decline (*aparihāniya-dhamma*) in the Mahāpari*nibbāna* Sutta emphasize regular assembly, concord, respect for established norms and elders, protection of women, respect for shrines, and support for worthy religious practitioners (DN 16; Walshe 1995, 231–232). Second, the four bases of social solidarity (*saṅgahavatthu*), giving (*dāna*), kindly speech (*peyyavajja*), beneficial action (*atthacariyā*), and impartiality (*samānattatā*), provide a model for reciprocal support and participation (AN 4.32; AN 8.24; Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012). Third, the six principles of cordiality (*sāraṇīya-dhamma*) emphasize loving-kindness in bodily, verbal, and mental conduct; sharing; ethical concord; and harmony of view (AN 6.11–12; Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012).

These teachings do not constitute a modern development policy, but they provide an ethical vocabulary for cooperative action. The Five Precepts support restraint from harm, while the Noble Eightfold Path integrates ethical conduct, mental cultivation, and wisdom (Gethin, 1998, pp. 81–84). For this study, Buddhist principles serve as normative resources that shape how participants understand community responsibility, rather than as substitutes for education policy, economic planning, or health systems.

Community Participation and Capacity

Participation is not simply attendance at activities; it concerns the extent to which community members influence decisions, contribute resources, share responsibilities, and benefit from collective action. Arnstein's (1969) classic ladder distinguishes token participation from forms that give citizens meaningful decision-making power. Cohen and Uphoff (1980) similarly distinguish participation in decision-making, implementation, benefits, and evaluation. These frameworks help interpret the roles of the *Saṅgha*, lay supporters, local organizations, and public authorities in Buddhist community activities.

The literature on social capital and development also highlights the importance of trust, networks, education, material resources, and institutional capacity (Putnam, 2000; Sen, 1999; World Bank, 2002). Education can build knowledge and organizational capacity; economic security can sustain institutions and voluntary activity; and access to health care affects individuals' ability to participate in community life. These relationships support the study's focus on education, economic capacity, and health, but the study should examine them with context-specific evidence rather than generic definitions.

Previous studies provide important historical, doctrinal, and sociological perspectives on Buddhism in Myanmar and Arakan, yet they offer limited empirical analysis of how contemporary Rakhine Buddhist participants across Kyauktaw, Mrauk U, Ponnagyun, and Kyaukphyu understand religious propagation and community strengthening under present conditions. The gap is therefore both geographic and analytical. This study contributes interview-based evidence on propagation practices, participation, and community capacity, and uses that evidence to formulate a provisional PSCK framework for further research and community discussion.

Research Methodology

1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative design combining documentary research and semi-structured in-depth interviews. A qualitative approach was appropriate for examining religious practices, participant interpretations, community roles, and locally specific understandings of Buddhist propagation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). The study analyzed documentary and interview materials in relation to the three research objectives.

2. Documentary Sources and Study Areas

Documentary sources included the Pāli *Tipiṭaka* and established translations; historical chronicles and modern historical studies; scholarship on Arakanese and Myanmar Buddhism; government census reports; conflict-monitoring reports; and literature on community participation, education, economic capacity, and health. Kyauktaw, Mrauk U, Ponnagyun, and Kyaukphyu were purposively selected because each contains significant Buddhist institutions, heritage sites, monastic or lay networks, and ongoing religious activities.

3. Key Informants and Sampling

Interview evidence is reported primarily as coded paraphrases rather than verbatim quotations. This approach preserves the substantive meaning of participants' accounts while maintaining anonymity and avoiding unwarranted precision where translated transcript-level wording was unavailable.

Table 1. Key Informants

Code	Participant role	Location/affiliation context	Interview date
KI01	Monastic educator / Buddhist organization leader	Kolkata, India	20 Jan. 2026
KI02	Monastic scholar/visiting scholar	United States	27 Jan. 2026
KI03	Senior monk / Saṅgha council member	Sittwe, Rakhine State	13 Dec. 2025
KI04	Monk/township Saṅgha council member	Yangon, Myanmar	17 Aug. 2025
KI05	Monastic informant	Varanasi, India	23 Aug. 2025
KI06	Abbot	Yangon, Myanmar	4 Dec. 2025
KI07	Retired headmaster	Mrauk U, Rakhine State	10 Nov. 2025
KI08	Retired headmistress	Tripura, India	23 Aug. 2025
KI09	Buddhist education/community leader	Kyauktaw, Rakhine State	7 Dec. 2025

Code	Participant role	Location/affiliation context	Interview date
KI10	Lay Buddhist	Rathedaung, Rakhine State	1 Dec. 2025
KI11	University student	Bangkok, Thailand	27 Feb. 2026
KI12	Lay Buddhist	Mrauk U, Rakhine State	6 Mar. 2026
KI13	Lay Buddhist	Kyauktaw Township, Rakhine State	3 Jan. 2026
KI14	Lay Buddhist	Mon State, Myanmar	8 Mar. 2026
KI15	Lay Buddhist	Kyaukphyu Township, Rakhine State	1 Mar. 2026
KI16	University student	Bangkok, Thailand	27 Feb. 2026
KI17	University student	Sittwe, Rakhine State	8 Mar. 2026
KI18	Community-organization founder	Sittwe, Rakhine State	11 Jan. 2026
KI19	Community-association executive	Bangkok, Thailand	7 Dec. 2025
KI20	Community-association member	Bangkok, Thailand	7 Dec. 2025

4. Data Collection, Translation, and Ethics

Researchers conducted interviews face-to-face or online in English, Rakhine, and Burmese. With participants' consent, researchers audio-recorded interviews; they translated non-English material into English for analysis. Participation was voluntary. The Human Research Ethics Committee of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University approved the study (approval no. R. 632/2025). Given the security risks associated with the ongoing conflict in Rakhine State, the study omits identifying details from the findings and reports interview evidence using coded identifiers.

5. Data Analysis

The study analyzed interview transcripts and notes using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach. Initial coding focused on Buddhist propagation practices, forms of participation, institutional roles, perceived barriers, and conditions needed for community sustainability. Codes were then grouped into themes aligned with the research objectives. Documentary evidence contextualized and compared interview themes. The revised article does not claim formal member checking or independent double-coding because the source materials did not document these procedures; this is treated as a methodological limitation.

6. Reporting of Interview Evidence

Interview evidence is reported primarily as coded paraphrases rather than verbatim quotations. This approach preserves the substantive meaning of

participants' accounts while maintaining anonymity and avoiding unwarranted precision where translated transcript-level wording was unavailable.

7. Participant Composition and Analytical Boundaries

The participant profile was deliberately heterogeneous within the study's Rakhine Buddhist focus. Six informants were members of the Saṅgha, including senior monks, an abbot, monastic educators, and monks with institutional responsibilities. Fourteen were lay participants, including retired school administrators, university students, lay devotees, a Buddhist education/community leader, and representatives of community organizations. Some participants were interviewed while residing temporarily outside Rakhine State, including in Yangon, Bangkok, India, and the United States. This geographic dispersion reflects both the translocal character of Rakhine Buddhist networks and the practical constraints created by conflict and mobility. It also means that the study should not be read as a township-representative survey.

The analysis distinguished between evidence derived from interview accounts and contextual claims derived from documentary sources. Themes were retained when they were relevant to the research objectives and supported by more than one interview or consistent with the documentary corpus. Documentary material was not used to convert participant perceptions into verified factual claims. Where the available sources did not provide reliable counts, for example, the current number of functioning monasteries, schools, health facilities, or community funds, the article does not supply estimates. This boundary is important because the security environment makes independent verification difficult.

8. Trustworthiness and Researcher Positioning

Trustworthiness was addressed primarily through methodological transparency and source comparison. The documentary corpus and interview material were analyzed separately before being compared across the three research objectives, allowing historical or doctrinal claims to be distinguished from participant perceptions. Themes reported as findings were required to be relevant to the interview material and consistent with the broader documentary context; contested political claims were supported with independent sources where available. Translation was treated as an interpretive step rather than a neutral mechanical process, and the analysis therefore avoids assigning fine-grained meanings to individual words when the original interview language is not reproduced. Because the researcher is closely connected to the Rakhine Buddhist

cultural context, insider knowledge provided access to local terminology, institutions, and historical memory but also created a risk of over-identification with community narratives. The revised article addresses this risk by distinguishing chronicle traditions from established historical claims, identifying Rakhine State as religiously plural, and avoiding claims that the Buddhist community represents the whole population.

Results (Findings)

Objective 1: Modes of Buddhist Propagation

The interview data identify five recurring modes of propagation across the four study areas: study of Buddhist teachings (*pariyatti*), practice and mental cultivation (*paṭipatti*), ordination, Dhamma teaching, and communal festivals or merit-making activities. KI02, a monastic scholar, emphasized the combined importance of textual study and practice, while KI19, a community-association representative, linked festivals and merit-making with social relationships and continuity of religious participation. These accounts support the interpretation that propagation is both educational and participatory rather than limited to formal preaching.

Monastic institutions remain central because they provide instruction, ritual leadership, ordination opportunities, and spaces for meditation and merit-making. However, the findings do not support the stronger claim that propagation depends on monks alone. Lay donors, students, community associations, educators, and local authorities contribute resources, organization, attendance, and institutional support. The four study areas therefore display different combinations of monastic leadership and lay participation within a shared *Theravāda* framework.

The conflict context conditions these practices. Mobility restrictions, insecurity, and service disruptions can limit access to monasteries, festivals, schools, and heritage sites. ACLED (2024) documents substantial territorial change in Kyauktaw and Mrauk U during February 2024. In this setting, religious propagation also involves maintaining institutions and networks amid instability, not merely expanding religious activities.

1. Kyauktaw

Kyauktaw illustrates the relationship between pilgrimage, monastic education, and contemporary insecurity. Local Buddhist identity is associated with Selāgīri (Kyauktaw Hill) and relic traditions described in Arakanese sources (Seekins, 2020). The 2014 census recorded a substantial township population and

provides a demographic baseline for understanding the scale of community life (Department of Population, 2017). At the same time, ACLED (2024) reports that Kyauktaw changed territorial control during fighting in February 2024. For this study, this means that maintaining Buddhist institutions cannot be separated from questions of mobility, safety, and access to public services.

2. Mrauk U

Mrauk U represents the strongest heritage dimension of the four-site design. Its temple landscape, including Shite-thaung, Koethaung, Htukkanthein, Laymyet-hna, and Andaw-thein, embodies the historical relationship between Buddhist patronage, political authority, and regional identity (Gutman, 2001; Charney, 1999). Participants and documentary sources treat these sites not as archaeological remains alone but as continuing places of worship, pilgrimage, teaching, and collective memory. The propagation of Buddhism in Mrauk U therefore includes heritage preservation as well as doctrinal transmission.

3. Ponnagyun

Ponnagyun is associated particularly with Urittaung and local relic traditions. Arakanese historical narratives connect the site with Buddhist missions and the enshrinement of relics (Seekins, 2020). In contemporary community practice, monasteries and lay networks sustain almsgiving, precept observance, Dhamma listening, and meditation. These activities illustrate how propagation operates through repeated communal practices that reproduce both religious knowledge and social attachment to Buddhist institutions.

4. Kyaukphyu

Kyaukphyu adds a coastal-town setting in which pagodas, annual festivals, and lay participation are prominent. Local historical documentation records longstanding religious sites and community celebrations (Executive Committee of Township People's Council, Kyaukphyu 1982). In the interview framework, these events matter because they connect religious practice with intergenerational transmission: younger participants encounter Buddhist teaching through ceremonies, collective merit-making, and voluntary service rather than through formal monastic education alone. Across the four sites, therefore, propagation is not a uniform program but a combination of textual learning, practice, ritual, heritage, and social participation adapted to local institutional conditions.

Objective 2: Community Participation

The second theme concerns complementary participation by the *Saṅgha*, laypeople, community organizations, educators, students, and public authorities. KI06, an abbot, associated community strengthening with Dhamma teaching, Buddhist education, moral guidance, meditation, volunteer service, donations, and institutional maintenance. This pattern reflects a participatory model in which different actors contribute different resources, rather than a single institution controlling all activities.

Interview evidence can be interpreted through Cohen and Uphoff's (1980) distinction among participation in decision-making, implementation, benefits, and evaluation. In the present data, implementation and resource contribution are the most visible forms: organizing festivals, supporting monasteries, teaching, donating, volunteering, and maintaining religious sites. Evidence for community control over formal decision-making is less clear. The study therefore avoids equating attendance or donation with full participatory power in Arnstein's (1969) sense.

Buddhist principles provide a normative language for this participation. The seven conditions of non-decline (*aparihāniya-dhamma*) emphasize assembly and concord; the four *saṅgahavatthu* emphasize giving, kindly speech, beneficial action, and impartiality; and the *sāraṇīya-dhamma* emphasize cordiality and ethical harmony (Walshe, 1995, pp. 231–232; Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012). The findings suggest that participants understand community strength not only in organizational terms but also through moral expectations of generosity, cooperation, and mutual care.

Objective 3: Guidelines for Strengthening Community Capacity

The third theme is that religious continuity depends partly on social conditions beyond ritual life. Interview and documentary evidence converged on three practical domains: education, economic capacity, and health. Education includes both monastic learning and broader knowledge that enables community members to organize, teach, and manage institutions. Economic capacity concerns the material resources needed to maintain monasteries, schools, community organizations, and religious events. Health concerns people's ability to participate and the availability of basic care in communities affected by insecurity and disrupted services.

These domains should not be interpreted as a causal formula in which education automatically produces economic prosperity or health. Rather,

participants identify them as enabling conditions, supported by development literature on human capability, social capital, and institutional resilience (Sen, 1999; Putnam, 2000; World Bank, 2002). Education, economic capacity, and health are therefore treated as context-specific enabling conditions that support participation rather than as abstract or universally applicable categories.

Interview evidence also indicates that the three enabling domains are interdependent rather than hierarchical. Educational capacity supports Buddhist literacy and organizational competence; economic resources help sustain institutions and communal activities; and health affects whether individuals can participate consistently. Yet the available data do not establish that one domain causes improvement in another. The three domains are therefore reported as perceived enabling conditions. This distinction replaces the earlier generic claims that education, funding, or health automatically strengthen a community and keeps the findings within the limits of the qualitative evidence.

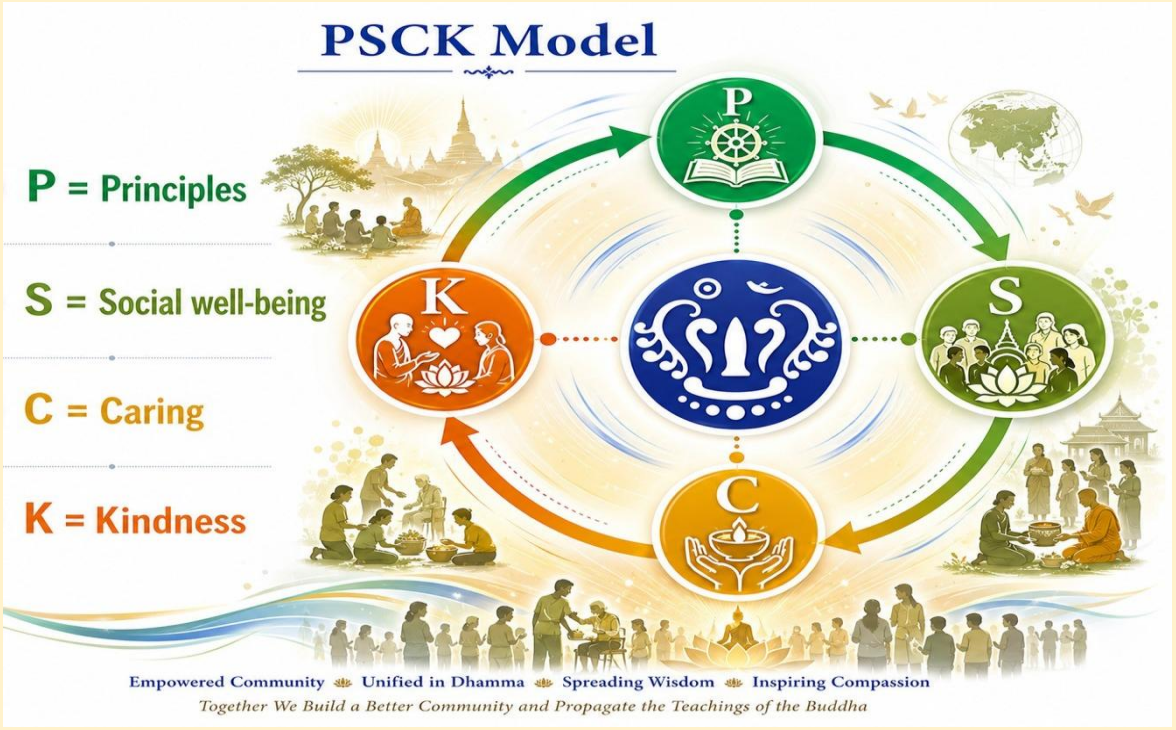

Figure 1. PSCK Model: Principles, Social well-being, Caring, and Kindness

The synthesis is represented provisionally in the PSCK model: Principles, Social well-being, Caring, and Kindness. "Principles" refers to Buddhist ethical resources, especially *aparihāniya-dhamma*, *saṅgahavatthu*, *sāraṇīya-dhamma*, the Five Precepts, and the broader cultivation of ethical conduct and wisdom. "Social well-being" captures the enabling roles of education, economic capacity,

health, and community organization. "Caring" refers to concrete mutual support, while "Kindness" is grounded particularly in *mettā* and compassionate concern. The model is a conceptual synthesis of the documentary and interview themes; it has not been tested as an intervention or validated as a measurement model.

Discussion

The findings for Objective 1 confirm the continued importance of monastic education, practice, ordination, Dhamma teaching, and ritual activity in maintaining *Theravāda* Buddhist communities. This aligns with broader scholarship on Myanmar and Southeast Asian Buddhism, where monasteries have functioned as religious, educational, and social institutions (Schober, 2011; Swearer, 2010). The Arakan case extends this literature by showing how these functions are negotiated in a conflict-affected environment where mobility, institutional continuity, and access to heritage sites cannot be assumed. Religious propagation in the study areas therefore includes preservation and institutional resilience as well as teaching and ritual transmission.

The findings for Objective 2 also qualify a common assumption that "community participation" is synonymous with attendance or donation. Participants described multiple roles for monks, lay devotees, educators, students, organizations, and authorities, but the evidence is strongest for implementation and resource contribution. This is broadly compatible with Cohen and Uphoff's (1980) participation framework and with Putnam's (2000) emphasis on networks and cooperative capacity. At the same time, the data provide less evidence of community power over formal institutional decisions. The study therefore contributes a more differentiated account of Buddhist participation than a purely devotional description.

Comparison with other *Theravāda* contexts reveals both similarities and distinctiveness. Rural Thai monasteries have historically combined ritual, education, and local leadership (Tambiah, 1970), while Sri Lankan Buddhist institutions have linked lay participation, religious education, and merit-making (Gombrich & Obeyesekere, 1988). Myanmar monasteries likewise serve educational and civic functions (Schober, 2011). Arakan differs in the density of its regional historical memory, the symbolic importance of Mrauk U and other heritage sites, and the severe constraints created by contemporary armed conflict. These features make institutional continuity and community networks unusually central to religious preservation.

The third objective extends the analysis from religious activity to community capacity. Education, economic security, and health emerged as enabling conditions for sustained participation. This finding agrees with capability-oriented development approaches that emphasize education, livelihood security, and institutional access as foundations of collective agency (Sen, 1999; World Bank, 2002). However, the study does not claim that economic growth or health services constitute Buddhist propagation in themselves. Their relevance is indirect: they shape the capacity of people and institutions to support learning, ritual, heritage maintenance, voluntary service, and religious organizations.

The PSCK model is the study's principal conceptual contribution, but its novelty should be stated cautiously. Its value lies in organizing the findings into an ethical-social sequence: Buddhist Principles provide a normative orientation; Social well-being identifies enabling conditions; Caring translates values into mutual support; and Kindness emphasizes *mettā* and compassionate social relations. The model aligns with saṅgahavatthu and sāraṇīya-dhamma, but it is not a canonical Buddhist model and should not be presented as one. It is a contextual synthesis generated for this study and requires further testing with broader and more diverse samples.

Finally, the study must be read within the religious plurality of Rakhine State. Strengthening a Rakhine Buddhist community is a legitimate research objective, but Buddhist community development should not be equated with the identity or welfare of the entire state. The ethical emphasis on kindness, non-harm, and social solidarity is most defensible when practiced in ways that respect the security, dignity, and religious freedom of neighboring communities. This boundary strengthens rather than weakens the article's claim that Buddhist principles can support responsible community life.

Rakhine-specific scholarship further helps interpret the findings. Charney (1999) emphasizes that religious identities in Arakan developed historically through political, economic, and interreligious interaction rather than as fixed and timeless categories. De Mersan (2009) similarly demonstrates the continuing relationship among locality, religious practice, authority, and identity in Rakhine State. The present findings complement these studies by shifting attention from historical identity formation to contemporary Buddhist community practice. Participants emphasized concrete forms of continuity, teaching, ordination, festivals, donations, organization, and heritage maintenance, rather than an abstract notion of religious identity alone.

The study also extends the literature by connecting Buddhist ethical resources with participation theory. The four saṅgahavatthu and the sāraṇīya-dhamma provide normative reasons for generosity, helpful action, respectful communication, and concord, whereas Arnstein (1969) and Cohen and Uphoff (1980) provide analytical tools for asking who participates, in what activities, and with what degree of influence. Keeping these functions distinct is important: canonical Buddhist principles explain an ethical orientation toward community, while participation theory helps evaluate organizational practice. Their combination is one basis for the PSCK framework, but the model remains provisional rather than a demonstrated causal mechanism.

New Knowledge from the Research

The study offers a context-specific synthesis linking Buddhist propagation with community participation and social capacity in conflict-affected Arakan. The first new element is the distinction between propagation as religious transmission and propagation as community resilience. In the four study areas, maintaining Buddhism involves not only teaching doctrine but also sustaining monasteries, heritage sites, festivals, lay networks, and opportunities for practice when mobility and institutional continuity are uncertain.

The second contribution is an analytical distinction between ethical principles and the social conditions that enable them. Buddhist teachings such as aparihāniya-dhamma, saṅgahavatthu, and sāraṇīya-dhamma provide the normative orientation for assembly, generosity, beneficial action, mutual respect, and harmony. Education, economic capacity, health, and community organization operate at a different level: they shape whether people possess the knowledge, resources, time, and physical capacity to participate. Treating these levels separately prevents social-development factors from being presented as Buddhist doctrine.

The third contribution is the provisional PSCK model. Principles (P) identify the ethical foundation; Social well-being (S) represents enabling educational, economic, health, and organizational conditions; Caring (C) represents concrete mutual support; and Kindness (K) emphasizes mettā and compassionate social relations. The model is intended as a heuristic for community reflection and future research. It does not claim canonical status, psychometric validation, or demonstrated effectiveness. Its value lies in making explicit the pathway by which the study connects doctrinal resources, social conditions, and participatory practices.

Conclusion

This study examined the propagation of *Theravāda* Buddhism and the strengthening of the Rakhine Buddhist community in Kyauktaw, Mrauk U, Ponnagyun, and Kyaukphyu. The findings identify several recurring forms of religious continuity: the study of Buddhist teachings (*pariyatti*), practice and mental cultivation (*paṭipatti*), ordination, Dhamma teaching, festivals, merit-making, and the maintenance of religious institutions and heritage sites. These activities depend on complementary participation by the *Saṅgha*, lay supporters, educators, students, community organizations, and, where relevant, public authorities.

The study further shows that community participation is shaped by the capacity to sustain education, livelihoods, organizations, and health in a conflict-affected setting. These factors are not substitutes for Buddhist practice; they are enabling conditions that influence whether people and institutions can maintain religious activities over time. Buddhist principles such as *aparihāniya-dhamma*, *saṅgahavatthu*, and *sāraṇīya-dhamma* provide a normative framework for assembly, generosity, beneficial action, mutual respect, and harmony.

The PSCK model: Principles, Social well-being, Caring, and Kindness, summarizes this synthesis. It should be understood as a provisional conceptual framework derived from the present documentary and interview analysis rather than as an empirically validated intervention. The article's principal contribution is a context-specific account of how Buddhist propagation in Arakan is connected with community participation and social capacity under conditions of instability. Future research can refine this model through more extensive fieldwork, broader participant representation, and participatory validation in the study areas.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

The study has several limitations.

1. Armed conflict and security risks constrained access to the four study areas. The researcher was based in Bangkok and conducted many interviews with participants who were temporarily outside Rakhine State or through online communication; this limits direct observation of local institutions and activities.
2. Purposive sampling produced a sample with substantial monastic, educational, and community-organization representation but does not constitute a representative cross-section of the wider Buddhist population.

3. Some participant accounts could not be independently verified under current field conditions.
4. The analytical record supplied for copyediting documents thematic analysis but does not document formal member checking, independent double-coding, or an audit by a second researcher.
5. The article focuses specifically on the Rakhine Buddhist community and does not examine the experiences of other religious communities in the state.

Future research should include more site-based observation when security permits, recruit a broader range of Buddhist participants from each township, and examine differences by age, gender, occupation, and degree of institutional involvement. Comparative work could also investigate how Buddhist community development interacts with religious plurality and local peacebuilding. Treat the PSCK model as provisional and test it through participatory validation, additional qualitative studies, or carefully designed mixed-methods research before claiming wider applicability.

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Cultivating Gratitude in Buddhist Practice: Pathways to Inner Peace, Compassion, and Holistic Well-Being

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Abstract

This qualitative documentary study examines gratitude in Buddhist thought and evaluates its relevance to contemporary psychological and holistic well-being. The study addresses three objectives: (1) to examine the ethical and philosophical foundations of gratitude in early Buddhist teachings; (2) to analyze the relationship between gratitude, compassion, mindfulness, and psychological well-being; and (3) to synthesize a conceptual framework explaining how gratitude may connect Buddhist contemplative awareness with ethical and compassionate action. Data were drawn from selected Pāli discourses in the Aṅguttara Nikāya, Dīgha Nikāya, Sutta Nipāta, and related English translations, together with scholarly literature on Buddhist ethics, positive psychology, mindfulness, compassion, and contemplative neuroscience. The materials were analyzed through qualitative thematic analysis and comparative conceptual synthesis.

The findings identify four interrelated dimensions of Buddhist gratitude: recognition of received benefit (kataññutā), ethical reciprocation (kataveditā), awareness of relational and conditioned existence, and compassionate engagement. Contemporary psychological research similarly associates gratitude with psychological well-being, prosocial behavior, and stronger interpersonal relationships, although recent evidence indicates that the effects of gratitude interventions are generally modest and context-dependent. Based on the documentary synthesis, the study proposes the Gratitude-to-Compassion Pathway (GCP), comprising Recognition, Relational Awareness, Ethical Reciprocation, and Compassionate Engagement. The GCP conceptualizes gratitude as a movement from awareness of received benefit toward ethical responsibility and broader concern for others. As the framework is derived from documentary analysis rather than empirical testing, it should be regarded as a provisional conceptual model requiring further qualitative, quantitative, and cross-cultural validation.

Keywords: Gratitude; Buddhism; Kataññutā; Kataveditā; Compassion; Mindfulness; Well-being

Introduction

Gratitude has attracted increasing attention in contemporary psychology as a factor associated with well-being, resilience, life satisfaction, and positive interpersonal relationships (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Wood et al., 2010). Research suggests that gratitude functions not only as an emotion but also as a cognitive and relational orientation that helps individuals recognize benefits received from others and develop stronger social connections (Algoe, 2012). Fredrickson's (2004, 2009) broaden-and-build theory further proposes that positive emotions, including gratitude, may expand cognitive and behavioral repertoires and build enduring psychological resources. Recent systematic reviews and meta-analyses generally support positive associations between gratitude and psychological well-being, although effect sizes vary across studies and cultural contexts (Diniz et al., 2023; Kirca et al., 2023).

In Buddhist thought, gratitude is understood in a broader ethical context. Early Buddhist teachings emphasize kataññutā (recognizing benefits received) and kataveditā (appropriately reciprocating those benefits), presenting gratitude as both awareness and moral responsibility (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012). The Aṅguttara Nikāya identifies benefactors and those who repay kindness as rare and admirable individuals, highlighting gratitude as a foundational social virtue (AN 2.118). Buddhist teachings concerning parents, teachers, and benefactors further demonstrate that gratitude is closely linked to ethical conduct and social harmony.

Beyond interpersonal relationships, Buddhist philosophy also provides a wider framework through the principle of dependent origination (paṭiccasamuppāda), which explains existence in terms of conditions and interdependence (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000). Although dependent origination does not explicitly include gratitude, awareness of interconnectedness may encourage recognition of the many conditions that support human life. Such awareness can foster appreciation, responsibility, and compassionate action toward others.

Despite growing interest in gratitude within psychology and increasing scholarship on mindfulness and compassion, relatively limited attention has been given to gratitude as an integrated Buddhist ethical-contemplative process. Existing studies often focus either on psychological outcomes or on doctrinal interpretations without examining how gratitude may connect recognition,

reciprocity, interdependence, and compassion. Therefore, this study explores the ethical foundations of gratitude in Buddhist teachings, examines its relationship with contemporary understandings of well-being, and proposes a conceptual framework linking gratitude with compassionate engagement.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the ethical and philosophical foundations of gratitude in early Buddhist teachings.
2. To analyze the relationship between Buddhist gratitude, compassion, mindfulness, and contemporary psychological well-being.
3. To synthesize a conceptual framework explaining how gratitude may connect contemplative awareness with ethical and compassionate action.

Literature Review

Gratitude in Contemporary Psychology

Modern psychological research treats gratitude as both a state and a relatively enduring disposition. Emmons and McCullough (2003) helped establish the empirical study of gratitude through experimental work on gratitude-focused reflection. Wood et al. (2010) later reviewed evidence linking gratitude to psychological well-being and social functioning. Algoe (2012) emphasized its relational functions, particularly the ways gratitude can identify and strengthen valuable social bonds.

Fredrickson's (2004, 2009) broaden-and-build perspective offers a theoretical explanation of how positive emotions may expand cognition and gradually build durable personal resources. This literature provides a useful contemporary comparison, although association or intervention findings should not be interpreted as proof that gratitude produces identical outcomes in every cultural or religious setting.

Gratitude in Buddhist Ethics

Buddhist ethics locates gratitude within a wider moral field of received benefit, reciprocity, responsibility, and wholesome conduct. The paired concepts kataññutā and kataveditā are especially important: the first concerns recognizing benefits or kindness received, while the second concerns responding appropriately to that benefit. This pairing makes gratitude ethically active rather than merely affective.

The Aṅguttara Nikāya describes the benefactor and the person who is grateful and repays kindness as rare persons (AN 2.118). Teachings on parents likewise emphasize the extraordinary difficulty of repaying parental care, while the Maṅgala Sutta and Sigālovāda Sutta situate care, respect, and reciprocal duties within lay ethical life. These teachings suggest that gratitude is embedded in concrete relationships and responsibilities rather than presented as an isolated doctrine.

Interdependence, Compassion, and Contemplative Practice

Dependent origination (paṭiccasamuppāda) explains phenomena through conditions and relations rather than independent self-subsistence. Gratitude is not a formal component of the dependent-origination formula, but awareness of conditioned existence can provide a philosophical context for recognizing dependence on others and on sustaining conditions. This connection should therefore be understood as an interpretive ethical relationship, not as a claim that the canonical doctrine of dependent origination is a doctrine of gratitude.

Gratitude also intersects with compassion (karuṇā), loving-kindness (mettā), generosity (dāna), and mindfulness (sati). These qualities are conceptually distinct, yet contemplative reflection may connect them: recognition of benefit can weaken self-sufficient narratives, encourage appreciation, and motivate reciprocal care. Contemporary mindfulness and self-compassion research provides related evidence concerning emotional regulation and well-being (Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Neff, 2011), although these modern constructs should not be conflated with canonical Buddhist categories.

Existing literature is rich in psychological studies of gratitude and broader scholarship on Buddhist ethics, mindfulness, and compassion, but it has given less attention to a structured analysis of gratitude as an ethical-contemplative pathway linking recognition, reciprocity, interdependence, and compassionate action. The present study addresses this conceptual gap through documentary analysis and comparative synthesis.

Conceptual Framework

The study begins with a four-part analytical sequence derived from the literature: (1) recognition of benefit (kataññutā), (2) awareness of relational and conditioned existence, (3) ethical reciprocation (kataveditā), and (4) compassionate and prosocial action. This study uses contemporary psychological

literature on gratitude, positive emotion, resilience, and relationships to assess areas of convergence and difference. This framework guides the coding and synthesis of the documentary materials.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative documentary research design. Its primary materials consisted of selected early Buddhist discourses concerning gratitude, reciprocal duties, parents, benefactors, compassion, and conditioned existence, consulted through established English translations of the Pāli Nikāyas and related texts. Secondary materials included scholarly works on Buddhist ethics and contemplative practice and peer-reviewed or established academic literature on gratitude, positive psychology, mindfulness, self-compassion, and contemplative neuroscience.

Documents were purposively selected based on their direct relevance to the three research objectives. The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, passages and scholarly discussions were coded for recurring concepts, including recognition of kindness, repayment or reciprocity, interdependence, compassion, mindfulness, emotional well-being, and prosocial conduct. Second, the authors grouped related codes into broader themes. Third, the study compared Buddhist and psychological materials conceptually to identify convergence, divergence, and limits of interpretation.

The study uses thematic and conceptual analysis rather than statistical meta-analysis or experimental evaluation. Claims concerning psychological or neuroscientific effects are therefore reported as findings of the cited literature, not as outcomes generated by this study. Likewise, Reiki and other complementary healing practices mentioned in the source manuscript are not treated as empirical evidence because the available material does not provide a documented sample, data-collection protocol, ethics procedure, or analyzable dataset sufficient for research claims.

Trustworthiness was strengthened through source differentiation: canonical or translated Buddhist texts supported doctrinal and ethical claims, while contemporary empirical literature supported psychological claims. The authors explicitly present interpretive connections between the two domains as conceptual synthesis. A limitation of this approach is that translation choices and

selective documentary sampling can shape interpretation; the resulting framework therefore requires further empirical and cross-cultural testing.

Results

The documentary and thematic analysis identified three major sets of findings corresponding to the research objectives: (1) the ethical and philosophical foundations of gratitude in early Buddhist teachings; (2) the relationship between gratitude, compassion, mindfulness, and psychological well-being; and (3) an integrative pathway through which gratitude may develop from recognition of received benefit into ethical and compassionate engagement. Across the Buddhist and contemporary psychological materials, gratitude emerged not as a single emotional state but as a multidimensional process involving recognition, relational awareness, ethical response, and social orientation.

1. Ethical and Philosophical Foundations of Gratitude in Buddhist Teachings

The first finding demonstrates that gratitude in early Buddhist thought has a distinctive twofold ethical structure expressed through kataññutā and kataveditā. Kataññutā refers to recognizing and remembering benefits or kindness received, whereas kataveditā concerns responding appropriately to those benefits. The analysis therefore indicates that Buddhist gratitude cannot be adequately understood as appreciation alone. Recognition becomes ethically significant when it generates an appropriate response.

This relationship is particularly evident in the Aṅguttara Nikāya. In the Dve Puggalā Sutta, the Buddha describes two persons as rare in the world: one who first performs an act of kindness (pubbakārī) and one who recognizes and repays kindness (kataññū katavedī) (AN 2.118; Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012). The pairing is significant because it places gratitude within a reciprocal moral relationship. The benefactor initiates wholesome action, while the recipient recognizes the benefit and responds rather than treating assistance as something to which one is automatically entitled.

The analysis further showed that this principle applies concretely to relationships with parents. Buddhist teachings emphasize the magnitude of parental care and the difficulty of repaying it adequately. Such teachings do not imply that gratitude can be discharged through a single equivalent transaction. Instead, they emphasize continuing respect, care, moral responsibility, and

recognition of beneficence. The ethical meaning of gratitude consequently extends beyond repayment in a narrow economic sense and becomes a continuing orientation toward those who have contributed to one's life.

The Maṅgala Sutta (Sutta Nipāta 2.4) similarly identifies support for one's mother and father, responsibility toward family, and blameless livelihood among the highest blessings (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2017).

The Sigālovāda Sutta (DN 31) broadens this relational structure by describing reciprocal responsibilities between parents and children, teachers and students, spouses, friends, religious practitioners and householders, and employers and workers (Walshe, 1995). Together, these teachings indicate that gratitude is embedded in a broader Buddhist understanding of ethical social relationships. It contributes to trust and social harmony because people neither ignore the benefits they receive nor treat them as purely private advantages; they generate responsibilities toward others.

A second philosophical dimension emerged through the analysis of dependent origination (paṭiccasamuppāda). The Saṃyutta Nikāya presents existence and experience as conditioned processes arising through causes and supporting conditions (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000). Gratitude is not itself a factor in the formal formula of dependent origination. Nevertheless, the principle of conditionality provides an interpretive framework for understanding why gratitude can acquire ethical significance. Human existence is never entirely self-produced. Biological life, education, livelihood, social opportunity, and psychological development depend upon multiple conditions and relationships.

From this perspective, the analysis suggests that awareness of conditionality can challenge an exaggerated conception of self-sufficiency. Personal achievement remains meaningful, but it can no longer be interpreted as the product of isolated individual agency alone. Parents, teachers, communities, social structures, and environmental conditions all help sustain human life. Gratitude thus emerges as an ethical recognition of relational existence. Importantly, this is an interpretive connection rather than a claim that paṭiccasamuppāda constitutes a canonical doctrine of gratitude.

Taken together, these findings show that the Buddhist foundation of gratitude contains three interconnected elements: recognition of benefit, awareness of relational dependence, and ethical reciprocation. Gratitude therefore operates simultaneously at cognitive, relational, and behavioral levels.

2. Gratitude in Relation to Compassion, Mindfulness, and Psychological Well-Being

The second set of findings concerns the relationship between gratitude and other dimensions of human flourishing. The Buddhist materials show that gratitude and compassion (karuṇā) are conceptually distinct but ethically complementary. Gratitude arises primarily from recognizing kindness or benefit received, whereas compassion arises through awareness of suffering and the wish that suffering be alleviated. This distinction matters because compassion should not be treated as another term for gratitude.

Nevertheless, the analysis identified a plausible developmental relationship between them. Recognition of the care received from parents, teachers, friends, communities, and others can make a person increasingly aware of human dependence and vulnerability. This awareness may reduce excessive self-centeredness and encourage greater sensitivity to others' circumstances. Kataveditā then moves gratitude beyond internal appreciation by requiring an ethically meaningful response.

The original materials also connect this process with mettā (loving-kindness), karuṇā (compassion), dāna (generosity), khanti (patience), and other wholesome qualities. These virtues should not be collapsed into a single construct; rather, the analysis suggests that gratitude may create conditions favorable to their cultivation. A person who becomes more conscious of receiving support may become more inclined to provide support in return or to extend kindness beyond the original benefactor.

Mindfulness (sati) adds a contemplative dimension to this process. Mindfulness can increase awareness of experiences that ordinarily remain unnoticed, including everyday acts of assistance, care, sacrifice, and cooperation. Gratitude reflection, loving-kindness meditation, and compassion meditation can similarly direct attention toward relational dimensions of experience. The analysis therefore suggests that contemplative practice may help transform gratitude from an occasional emotional reaction into a more stable mode of awareness.

These Buddhist findings show important areas of convergence with contemporary psychological research. Emmons and McCullough (2003) found that structured gratitude practices were associated with increased positive affect and subjective well-being. Wood et al. (2010) further identified relationships among gratitude, psychological well-being, prosocial tendencies, and interpersonal functioning. Algoe (2012) particularly emphasized gratitude's

relational role, suggesting that it helps identify and strengthen socially valuable relationships.

Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory provides an additional explanatory perspective. Positive emotions may temporarily broaden attention and behavioral possibilities and, through repeated experiences, contribute to durable psychological and social resources (Fredrickson, 2004, 2009). Within this framework, gratitude may help redirect attention from an exclusive preoccupation with deficits or difficulties toward recognizing supportive relationships and beneficial conditions.

Recent meta-analytic evidence further supports a cautious interpretation of these benefits. Gratitude interventions have generally demonstrated positive but modest effects on psychological well-being (Diniz et al., 2023; Kirca et al., 2023). A large cross-cultural meta-analysis involving 145 papers, 163 samples, and 24,804 participants across 28 countries similarly found a small overall positive effect, while identifying substantial variation across national contexts (Choi et al., 2025). These findings suggest that gratitude may be a beneficial psychological resource, but its effects should not be assumed to be uniform across populations or cultural settings.

The neuroscience-related materials require similar caution. Literature concerning neuroplasticity and contemplative training suggests that repeated mental practices can influence patterns of attention, emotional regulation, and behavior (Goleman & Davidson, 2017; Hanson, 2009). However, the documentary evidence reviewed in this study does not justify claiming that Buddhist gratitude itself produces specific neurological changes. Neuroscience therefore provides a complementary account of the trainability of mental processes rather than direct biological validation of Buddhist teachings on gratitude.

The original manuscript also considered Reiki and holistic healing contexts. These materials suggest that gratitude may be used experientially to establish attentiveness, appreciation, and a supportive orientation during complementary wellness practices. However, because the available material does not provide a defined participant sample, systematic data collection, validated measures, or an empirical analytical protocol, such observations cannot be reported as research outcomes. They are better understood as practice-based contextual observations that may generate questions for future empirical investigation.

Overall, the second objective therefore produced a differentiated finding: Buddhist and psychological perspectives converge in recognizing gratitude as potentially transformative, but they explain that transformation differently. Buddhist sources emphasize ethical cultivation and responsible relationships, while contemporary psychology primarily examines measurable emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal outcomes.

3 . Integrating Gratitude, Ethical Responsibility, and Compassionate Engagement

The third objective sought to synthesize these findings into a framework that explains how gratitude may bridge Buddhist contemplative wisdom and contemporary approaches to well-being. Four recurring themes emerged across the documentary analysis: Recognition, Relational Awareness, Ethical Reciprocation, and Compassionate Engagement.

The first stage, Recognition, corresponds most directly with kataññutā. Gratitude begins when individuals recognize that another person or conditions beyond themselves have supported some dimension of their well-being. Recognition involves more than noticing a pleasant event; it includes remembering beneficence and acknowledging its significance.

The second stage, Relational Awareness, broadens this recognition. Reflecting on the conditions that support one's life reveals networks of dependence involving family, teachers, communities, institutions, and the natural world. Buddhist conditionality provides a philosophical context for this stage, while psychological research on relational gratitude provides a contemporary parallel. Recognition thus expands from “I have received something beneficial” toward “my well-being is relationally supported.”

The third stage, Ethical Reciprocation, corresponds principally to kataveditā. At this stage, gratitude becomes behavioral. Recognition motivates responses through respect, care, service, generosity, ethical conduct, or other appropriate forms of reciprocity. This distinguishes the proposed Buddhist-oriented model from approaches in which gratitude ends with subjective appreciation or increased personal well-being.

The fourth stage, Compassionate Engagement, extends ethical response beyond direct repayment. Received kindness can generate a wider disposition to support others, including persons who were not the original benefactors. Gratitude consequently moves from reciprocity toward prosocial and compassionate orientation. This stage connects the framework with mettā, karuṇā, and dāna, while maintaining their conceptual distinctiveness.

The four themes constitute the study's Gratitude-to-Compassion Pathway (GCP):

Recognition → Relational Awareness → Ethical Reciprocation → Compassionate Engagement

The GCP represents the principal synthesis arising from the documentary analysis. It frames gratitude as a movement from awareness to action rather than a static psychological state. At the individual level, the pathway may support emotional awareness and humility; at the relational level, it may strengthen reciprocity and trust; and at the wider social level, it may encourage compassionate and responsible engagement.

However, the GCP should be understood as a conceptual model generated from documentary analysis, not as an established canonical Buddhist framework or an empirically validated psychological intervention. Its value lies in organizing the findings into a sequence that can subsequently be examined through qualitative interviews, surveys, cross-cultural studies, and contemplative intervention research.

Overall, the results suggest that Buddhist gratitude's distinctive contribution lies in the transition from recognition to responsibility. Contemporary psychology demonstrates why gratitude may matter for well-being; Buddhist ethics adds the question of what individuals ought to do once they recognize the benefits they have received. Integrating these perspectives helps us understand gratitude not only as a resource for personal flourishing but also as a pathway to ethical relationships and compassionate participation in society.

Discussion

The findings indicate that gratitude occupies a distinctive position within Buddhist ethics. Unlike many contemporary psychological approaches that primarily conceptualize gratitude as an emotion, disposition, or positive psychological state, Buddhist teachings emphasize both recognition of benefit (kataññutā) and appropriate ethical reciprocation (kataveditā). Gratitude therefore extends beyond appreciation and becomes a relational moral practice expressed through respect, responsibility, generosity, and care for others. This interpretation is consistent with the Aṅguttara Nikāya, which presents the recognition and repayment of kindness as an important ethical quality (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012).

The study also demonstrates the importance of distinguishing gratitude from related Buddhist concepts. Gratitude is not identical to compassion (karuṇā), loving-kindness (mettā), or dependent origination (paṭiccasamuppāda). Nevertheless, these concepts can interact. Awareness of benefits received from parents, teachers, communities, and other supporting conditions may deepen recognition of human relationality. Such awareness can encourage ethical reciprocation and, potentially, wider concern for the well-being of others. In this sense, gratitude may offer one pathway from recognizing received benefit to compassionate engagement.

The comparison with contemporary psychological research reveals both convergence and important differences. Empirical studies associate gratitude with greater subjective well-being, stronger relationships, and prosocial functioning (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Wood et al., 2010). More recent systematic reviews and meta-analyses also report beneficial effects of gratitude interventions, although these effects are generally modest and vary according to intervention design, comparison conditions, and population characteristics (Diniz et al., 2023; Kirca et al., 2023). Kerry et al. (2023) further found consistent associations between gratitude and life satisfaction while cautioning that evidence for causal effects is less conclusive when gratitude interventions are compared with other positively oriented activities. Cross-cultural evidence similarly indicates that the effects of gratitude interventions are not uniform across national contexts (Choi et al., 2025). These findings suggest that gratitude is a potentially valuable psychological resource, but its benefits should not be generalized without attention to methodological and cultural variation.

Based on the documentary analysis, the study proposes the Gratitude-to-Compassion Pathway (GCP): Recognition, Relational Awareness, Ethical Reciprocation, and Compassionate Engagement. The framework integrates the Buddhist emphasis on recognition and reciprocity with contemporary understandings of relational well-being and prosocial behavior. However, the GCP should not be interpreted as a canonical Buddhist doctrine or an empirically validated psychological model. Rather, it is a heuristic synthesis intended to clarify how gratitude may develop from awareness into ethical action.

The study's principal contribution is reframing gratitude as more than a beneficial psychological experience. Within Buddhist ethics, gratitude connects recognition with responsibility, thereby offering a conceptual bridge between

personal well-being, reciprocal relationships, and compassionate social engagement.

New Knowledge from the Research

The study's principal conceptual contribution is the provisional Gratitude-to-Compassion Pathway (GCP). The pathway contains four connected stages: Recognition, Relational Awareness, Ethical Reciprocation, and Compassionate Engagement. Recognition corresponds primarily to kataññutā: becoming aware of benefit and kindness received. Relational Awareness interprets this recognition within the broader conditioned, interdependent nature of human life. Ethical Reciprocation corresponds to kataveditā: translating appreciation into responsible action. Compassionate Engagement extends reciprocal responsibility beyond the original benefactor to a wider concern for others' well-being.

Stage	Buddhist emphasis	Practical implication
1. Recognition	Kataññutā	Recognize and remember the benefit received.
2. Relational Awareness	Conditioned/interdependent existence	See personal well-being as supported by multiple relationships and conditions.
3. Ethical Reciprocation	Kataveditā	Respond through respect, service, generosity, and responsible conduct.
4. Compassionate Engagement	Karuṇā, mettā, dāna	Extend care beyond repayment toward wider prosocial and compassionate action.

The GCP is a heuristic synthesis derived from documentary analysis; it is not a canonical Buddhist model, a psychometric scale, or a clinically validated intervention. Its research value lies in separating stages that are often collapsed into the single term “gratitude” and in providing testable questions for future qualitative, cross-cultural, and intervention studies.

Conclusion

This study examined gratitude through Buddhist ethics and contemporary psychological research. The findings demonstrate that gratitude in Buddhism extends beyond emotional appreciation and is fundamentally grounded in the ethical principles of kataññutā (recognition of benefits received) and kataveditā (appropriate reciprocation). Gratitude is therefore understood as a relational virtue that connects awareness of received kindness with responsible action toward others.

The analysis further suggests that gratitude may be interpreted within a broader context of interdependence. Although gratitude is not explicitly part of the doctrine of dependent origination, awareness of conditioned and relational existence can encourage recognition of the many individuals and conditions that support human life. Such recognition may foster a deeper sense of responsibility, generosity, and concern for others.

The study also identified meaningful areas of convergence between Buddhist teachings and contemporary psychological research. While empirical studies associate gratitude with enhanced well-being, resilience, and positive social relationships, Buddhist thought contributes an additional ethical dimension by emphasizing reciprocity and moral responsibility. This perspective broadens the understanding of gratitude from an individual psychological resource to a social and ethical practice.

As a conceptual contribution, the study proposed the Gratitude-to-Compassion Pathway (GCP), which consists of four stages: Recognition, Relational Awareness, Ethical Reciprocation, and Compassionate Engagement. The framework offers a way to understand how gratitude may develop from personal appreciation into broader compassionate action.

Because this study employed documentary analysis, the proposed framework remains conceptual and requires empirical validation. Future research should investigate the GCP through qualitative, quantitative, and cross-cultural studies in order to examine how gratitude influences ethical behavior, social relationships, and compassionate engagement in diverse contexts.

Limitations and Recommendations

1. The study is documentary and conceptual; it does not provide original interview, survey, clinical, or neuroscientific data.

2. The selection of Buddhist texts and English translations is purposive rather than exhaustive, and translation choices may affect interpretation.

3. The proposed relationship between dependent origination and gratitude is interpretive and should not be treated as an explicit canonical formulation.

4. Claims regarding Reiki or complementary healing cannot be evaluated empirically from the source material because no documented research protocol or dataset was supplied.

5. Future studies should test the GCP framework through qualitative interviews, validated psychological measures, cross-cultural comparison, and appropriately designed contemplative interventions.

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Buddhist Faith (saddhā) and Phenomena in the Digital World: A Theravāda Abhidhamma Framework for Defending Human Space through Cetasika Analysis

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Abstract

Contemporary digital environments increasingly shape human attention, interpretation, and volitional autonomy through recommender systems, algorithmic personalization, and persistent information flows. This study examines how Theravāda Abhidhamma may provide a conceptual framework for interpreting such conditions and defending human cognitive space. The objectives were: (1) to analyze *saddhā* (faith/confidence) as a foundational *cetasika* and controlling faculty relevant to digital engagement; (2) to develop an Abhidhammic framework for distinguishing technical digital processes from conventional lived experience; and (3) to apply conditional and *cetasika* analysis to selected digital cases in order to formulate context-specific strategies for preserving human agency. The study employed a qualitative documentary design combined with exploratory framework development and Buddhist-Informed Phenomenological Analysis (BIPA). The study drew primary doctrinal materials from the Abhidhamma Piṭaka, selected Sutta Piṭaka texts, and commentarial sources, while contemporary literature on digital ethics, autonomy, persuasive technologies, and technostress provided comparative context. The study analyzed three qualitative cases through conditional relations (*paccaya*) and mental-factor configurations at the mind-door (*manodvāra*). The study produced three main contributions: a three-stage model of *saddhā* progressing from initial confidence to investigative discipline and resilient stability; an ontological distinction between computational processes and conventional human experience; and Cetasika Remediation Analysis (CRA), which interprets problematic digital encounters through wholesome and unwholesome mental factors and proposes corresponding remedial strategies. These elements are synthesized in the Theravāda Framework for Defending Human Space (TFDHS). The framework should be understood as a doctrinally informed, exploratory analytical model rather than an empirically validated intervention, and further research is needed to test its applicability across diverse digital contexts.

Keywords: Buddhist faith (*saddhā*); Digital world phenomena; Theravāda Abhidhamma; Defending human space; *Cetasika* analysis.

Introduction

The digital world is increasingly shaped by information infrastructures, recommender systems, and algorithmic methods that organize what users see, attend to, and act upon. These systems can reduce information overload, yet they can also reshape choice environments and raise concerns about manipulation, knowledge formation, identity, and personal autonomy (Bonicalzi et al., 2023). Research on persuasive technologies likewise shows that contemporary digital platforms compete for and structure human attention, making attentional autonomy an ethical as well as a cognitive concern (Bombaerts et al., 2023). From this perspective, the impact of digital technology is not confined to physical interfaces; it also concerns how attention, interpretation, and volition are conditioned during ongoing human–computer interaction. Recommender systems and algorithmic methods are conventional designations (*paññatti*) of the digital world. From an Abhidhammic perspective, a real challenge lies in the structural causal conditions that intercept the mind-door (*manodvāra*). This study therefore uses conditional analysis before turning to mental remediation, ensuring that the foundation of human space is defended at its most basic level.

Theravāda Buddhism, particularly the *Abhidhamma*, provides a detailed analytical vocabulary for examining consciousness (citta), mental factors (*cetasika*), objects, and conditional relations. Central to the present study is *saddhā*, conventionally translated as faith, confidence, or trust, which functions within wholesome consciousness and must be balanced with wisdom rather than treated as uncritical belief (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2016; Karunadasa, 1996; Sīlānanda, 2012). Applied cautiously to digital experience, *saddhā* can therefore be interpreted as an ethically directed form of confidence that supports inquiry, stability, and deliberate engagement rather than passive acceptance of technological outputs.

The primary significance of this research lies in its attempt to defend human space, defined here as the human capacity for cognitive and volitional autonomy within highly technologized environments. This concern is consistent with contemporary research showing that recommender systems and personalization can both assist decision-making and constrain autonomy through manipulation, narrowed information exposure, or reduced reflective control

(Bonicalzi et al., 2023). Buddhist ethical scholarship similarly argues that attention should be understood not merely as a scarce cognitive resource but as a practice shaped by right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration (Bombaerts et al., 2023). The Theravada Framework for Defending Human Space (TFDHS) addresses these concerns with an Abhidhammic methodology centered on the mind-door (*manodvāra*), mental factors, and conditional analysis. Indeed, recommender systems are a conventional designation (*paññatti*) for numeric processes. The Abhidhamma analysis shows that what matters is not only the designation but the raw causality (*paccaya*) that links these numeric stimuli to the mind-door (*mano-dvāra*).

The present study distinguishes between canonical and commentarial concepts from Theravāda Buddhist literature and analytical constructs developed by the researchers to interpret contemporary digital experience. Concepts such as *saddhā*, *cetasika*, *manodvāra*, *paññā*, and *Paṭṭhāna* are treated as established doctrinal categories. By contrast, the Three-staged method of *saddhā*, Buddhist-Informed Phenomenological Analysis (BIPA), *Cetasika* Remediation Analysis (CRA), *Khetta-Vibhāga* for the Digital World (KVDW), *Khetta-Pakaraṇa* Experience Converter (KPEC), and the Theravada Framework for Defending Human Space (TFDHS) are treated as researcher-developed analytical constructs informed by, but not identical to, canonical or commentarial categories.

Research Problem

Despite growing scholarship on Buddhism, technology, and digital ethics, much of the literature remains focused on broad philosophical, ethical, or social questions rather than on operational analysis of moment-to-moment cognitive processes. Recent Buddhist ethics research has examined persuasive technologies as a problem of attention and autonomy (Bombaerts et al., 2023), while Buddhist approaches to AI ethics emphasize the continuing centrality of human moral agency rather than attributing moral subjecthood to machines (Lin, 2023). A methodological gap nevertheless remains in applying *Abhidhamma* categories directly to specific lived encounters with algorithmically mediated environments.

Furthermore, algorithmic personalization can create what this study terms epistemic gaps: structural distances between human intention, lived meaning, and the data-driven representations through which digital systems sort and present experience. Contemporary work on recommender systems identifies related concerns involving manipulation, identity formation, knowledge, and critical

thinking (Bonicalzi et al., 2023), while broader technostress research documents psychological and behavioral pressures associated with persistent digital demands and technologically mediated work and communication (Kumar, 2024). To address these gaps, the study develops an Abhidhammic framework using *tikas* (triads), *paññā* (wisdom), *cetasika* analysis, and *Paṭṭhāna* conditional relations to interpret and remediate digital experience at the mind-door.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the nature of *saddhā* (faith/confidence) as a foundational *cetasika* and controlling faculty (*indriya*) within the *Abhidhamma*, establishing it as the foundation for a three-staged engineering method for wholesome engagement with the digital world.
2. To identify an ontology and develop a Buddhist-Informed Phenomenological Analysis (BIPA) method and epistemic supports, based on triads (*tikas*) and wisdom (*paññā*) as analytical tools for digital engagement.
3. To analyze and describe lived experience within the digital world through conditional analysis (*Paṭṭhāna*) and mental factor (*cetasika)* analysis, defining individual mental solution strategies to defend human space and cognitive autonomy.

Literature Review

This literature review examines the theoretical, doctrinal, and empirical foundations for understanding human cognitive autonomy in digital environments through the lens of *Theravāda Abhidhamma*. It is organized into three major thematic areas: doctrinal and contemporary scholarship on *saddhā* (faith/confidence), Buddhist philosophical perspectives on technology and digital existence, and conventional designation (*sammā-vohāra*) in relation to ontology and epistemic gaps. The review synthesizes these domains to establish the research gap and presents the theoretical framework guiding the study.

Doctrinal and Contemporary Perspectives on *Saddhā*

In classical Theravāda doctrine, *saddhā* (faith, trust, or confidence) is central to Buddhist psychology and epistemology. Within the Dhammasaṅgaṇī, *saddhā* is classified as the first of the nineteen universal beautiful mental factors (*sobhana-sādhāraṇa-cetasika*), establishing its foundational status in every moment of wholesome consciousness (*kusala-citta*) (Rhys Davids, 1923). In the

Atthasālinī tradition, *saddhā* is described in terms of serene purification (*pasādana-lakkhaṇa*), which clears the mind of defilements, and leaping forward or aspiring (*sampakkhandhana-lakkhaṇa*), which provides an active impulse for wholesome engagement (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2016). The *Vibhaṅga* and later *Abhidhamma* manuals further explain *saddhā* as a governing faculty (*saddhindriya*) that counters skeptical doubt (*vicikicchā)* and, upon maturation, as an unshakable power (*saddhābala*) resilient against cognitive disturbance (Thittila, 1969; Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2016; Sīlānanda, 2012).

Contemporary Buddhist scholars emphasize that Buddhist faith is neither blind belief nor uncritical dogmatism. Karunadasa (1996) frames *saddhā* within an *Abhidhammic* epistemological structure in which confidence is related to recognition of dhammas and their causal relations. Sīlānanda (2012) underscores its functional role in balancing the five controlling faculties (*pañcindriya*), where *saddhā* must be harmonized with wisdom (*paññā*) and supported by mindfulness (*sati*), energy (*vīriya*), and concentration (*samādhi*). Van Gorkom (2010a, 2010b) highlights how saddhā and other cetasikas operate in daily cognitive moments (*vīthi-citta*), linking wholesome mental factors with wise attention and decisive mental engagement. Tilakaratne (2020) likewise emphasizes the relationship between confidence, knowledge, and purposeful Buddhist practice. Across the *Sutta Piṭaka* - specifically in discourses such as the *Kālāma Sutta* (AN 3.65; Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012)*, Vīmaṃsaka Sutta* (MN 47; Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu & Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1995)*, and Caṅkī Sutta* (MN 95; Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu & Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1995)- *saddhā* is presented not as unquestioning belief but as confidence that can initiate inquiry and mature through verification.

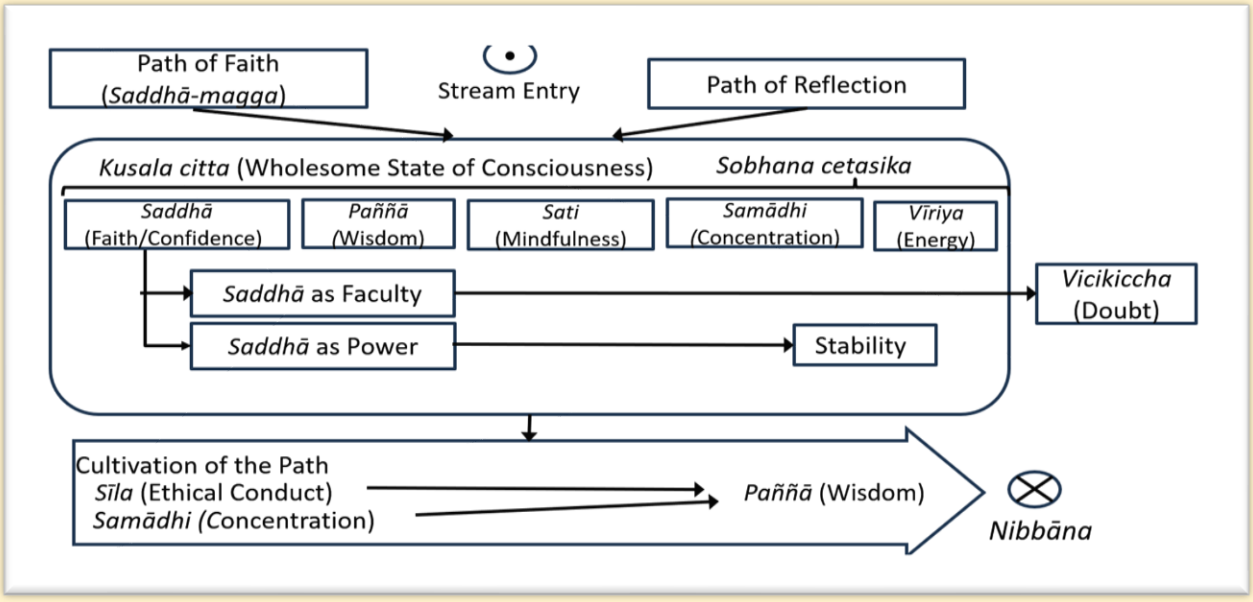

Figure 1. *Saddhā* in the Cultivation of the Path

Buddhist Analyses of Digital Existence

The rapid expansion of information systems and digital platforms has generated significant scholarly interest regarding the psychological and ethical impacts of technology. Payutto (2019) provides a Buddhist critique of modern scientific and technological development by distinguishing instrumental technological capacity from the cultivation of wisdom and values. From this perspective, technology may expand human capabilities while also intensifying craving (taṇhā) and unwholesome grasping unless ethical conduct (sīla) and mental cultivation (bhāvanā) regulate its use.

Contemporary scholarship on Buddhism and technology has explored digital environments through philosophical, ethical, and cultural lenses, examining how artificial interfaces, automated feeds, and data-driven systems condition social interaction and attention. Research on digital well-being likewise documents problems such as cognitive fatigue, fragmented attention, and technostress associated with persistent digital engagement. However, these approaches predominantly analyze digital phenomena at a macro-sociological or broad ethical level, leaving an unaddressed gap in applying micro-level mental-factor (*cetasika*) analysis directly to human–computer interactions.

Conventional Reality, Designation (*Sammā-vohāra*), and Epistemic Gaps

A crucial dimension in analyzing digital interactions is the Abhidhammic distinction between ultimate realities (*paramattha-dhamma*) and conceptual designations (*paññatti*). Promta (2016) emphasizes that, within conventional discourse (*sammuti-vohāra*), language can function either as valid conventional communication (sammā-vohāra) or as erroneous and distorted talk (*micchā-vohāra*). From this perspective, *micchā-vohāra* reifies conceptual constructs by attributing ultimate existence or conscious volition (*cetanā*) to entities that lack such qualities. Applied to digital systems, attributing consciousness (*citta*) or intrinsic agency to software, algorithms, or artificial intelligence may therefore create ontological confusion. Conversely, *sammā-vohāra* allows practitioners to engage with digital tools as structured information processes without conflating them with conscious human agency.

Technological intermediation introduces epistemic gaps, structural ruptures where algorithmic processing strips away the qualitative richness of

lived experience (*attha-paññatti*), leaving only quantified data. These include the digital object gap (where algorithmic sorting replaces user intent with an engineered *ārammaṇa*), the datafication gap (the omission of non-quantifiable human experience), and the deterministic gap (mistaking fixed interface displays for absolute reality). Navigating these gaps requires structured epistemic tools to stabilize awareness at the mind-door (*manodvāra*) and prevent automated conditioning.

The literature review identifies four fundamental academic gaps:

- Absence of a foundational doctrinal layer for digital existence: While *saddhā* has been analyzed doctrinally, existing research has not established *saddhā* as an operational mechanism for cognitive stability within the volatile digital realm.
- Lack of an *Abhidhammic* digital ontology: A formal ontological framework separating technical machine operations from conventional human experience - defining taxonomies and relational rules corresponding to *sabhāva-dhamma* - is absent from current Buddhist literature.
- Methodological gap in *cetasika* mapping: There is no direct, validated qualitative method to translate informal narratives of digital lived experience into specific *cetasika* configurations and conditional relations (*paccaya*).
- Lack of pragmatic remediation models: Existing Buddhist critiques offer general ethical advice but lack an engineering-like, input-output remediation framework capable of deconstructing digital triggers at the mind-door into actionable mental factor adjustments.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative documentary research design integrated with exploratory reconciliation and constructive framework development. The methodology systematically extracts doctrinal principles from the Theravāda Abhidhamma and applies them to the contemporary digital environment. The analytical scope is strictly confined to the mind-door (*manodvāra*), prioritizing internal mental states over deconstructing physical hardware interfaces.

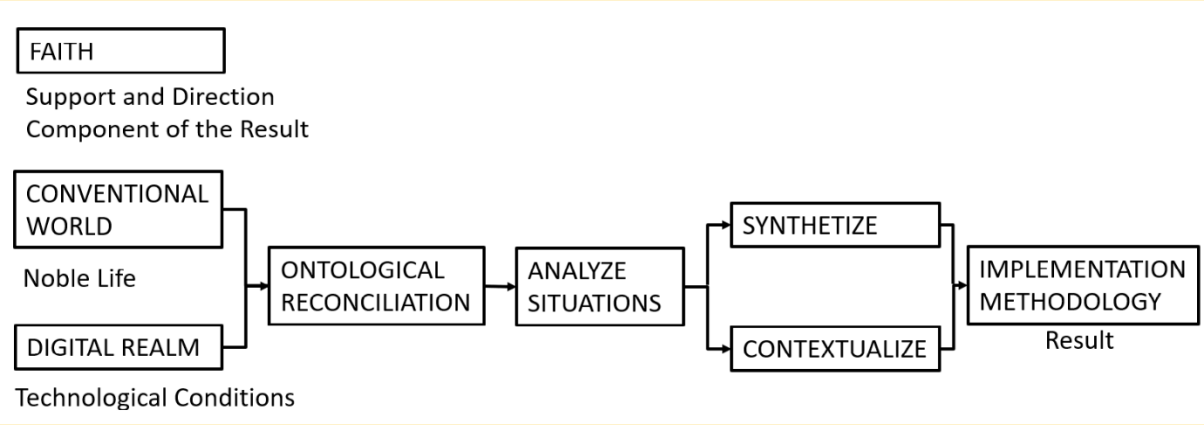

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

Data Collection and Key Informants

This study collected data from both documentary sources and empirical case studies. The theoretical foundation was drawn from a strict separation of documentary sources:

- Primary canonical sources included the Dhammasaṅgaṇī (Rhys Davids, 1923), Vibhaṅga (Thittila, 1969), and Paṭṭhāna (Nārada, 1969, 1981), together with relevant Nikāya texts and commentaries.
- Secondary sources: Contemporary Buddhist scholarship, digital ethics, human-computer interaction (HCI), and technology studies.

Empirical material used to examine the theoretical framework was gathered through phenomenological self-reflection and in-depth interviews. Three qualitative cases represented distinct modes of digital interaction: Bruce (Digital Existence and Manipulation), Prof. Charlie (Formalistic Invasiveness and Determinism), and Leo (The Fortress of Active Resistance).

The Theravada Framework for Defending Human Space (TFDHS)

To address the gaps identified in the Literature Review, this study constructs a theoretical model grounded in *Theravāda Abhidhamma* and phenomenological inquiry, formalized as the *Theravāda* Framework for Defending Human Space (TFDHS). The framework operates through four interconnected pillars:

1. The ontology architecture: The model establishes a strict ontological boundary between the technical digital realm (governed by computational code, data, and algorithmic conditions) and the digital world (*sammuti-*

loka, the conventional space of human lived experience). Ultimate reality consists of four *paramattha-dhammas*: consciousness (*citta*), mental factors (*cetasika*), matter (*rūpa*), and *Nibbāna*. (Dhammasaṅgaṇī; Rhys Davids, 1923; Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2016). Digital hardware and code are recognized as matter (*rūpa*) and conceptual designations (*paññatti*), lacking consciousness and volition. This separation prevents the reification of algorithms and positions the human agent's mind-door (*manodvāra*) as the primary site of agency.

2. The Three-stage method of *saddhā*: To track and cultivate cognitive autonomy, the framework formulates a two-axis developmental model:
    - The Y-Axis (maturity of *saddhā*): Traces the internal maturation of faith from initial serene clarity (*pasāda-saddhā* / *pubbaṅgama*), to investigative governing discipline (*saddhindriya*), to unshakable, verified stability (*aveccapasāda* / *saddhābala*).
    - The X-Axes (Epistemic Evolution & Support): Organizes epistemic support using *tikas* (triads), defined as sets of three *dhammas* from the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* matrix. (Dhammasaṅgaṇī; Rhys Davids, 1923). The primary X-axis support is the threefold wisdom triad (*paññā-ṭīkā*): learning (*suta-mayā paññā*), reflection (*cintā-mayā paññā*), and cultivation (*bhāvanā-mayā paññā*). Diagnostic progress checks integrate the threefold knowledge triad (*sacca-ñāṇa-ṭīkā*), in which functional action (*kicca-ñāṇa*) is evaluated as a member of the triad.
3. Buddhist-Informed Phenomenological Analysis (BIPA): BIPA functions as the operational bridge to deconstruct lived digital experience into doctrinal categories. It uses the *Khetta-Vibhāga* for the Digital World (KVDW) and the *Khetta-Pakarana* Experience Converter (KPEC) to extract meaning units from user narratives, isolate situational contexts (*pakaraṇa*), and map them to underlying *cetasika* configurations and *Paṭṭhāna* conditional relations (*paccaya*) (Paṭṭhāna; Nārada, 1969, 1981).
4. *Cetasika* Remediation Analysis (CRA): Problematic interactions are diagnosed through the wholesome states triad (*kusala-ṭīkā*) (Dhammasaṅgaṇī; Rhys Davids, 1923) and remediated through two distinct cognitive cycles:
    - Tactical defense cycle: Mobilizes the tactical triplet (*sati – saddhā – vīriya*) to provide immediate agility, detecting weak signals and creating an intentional pause at the mind-door.

- Structural defense cycle: Deploys the resistance triplet (*saddhā* – *paññā* – *appamāda*) to deconstruct algorithmic logic, establishing a robust fortress of heedfulness (*appamāda*) that preserves the cognitive interval of Human Space (*manussa-okāsa*).

Results

The research produced three primary structural findings synthesized into the Theravada Framework for Defending Human Space (TFDHS).

The Three-Staged Method of *Saddhā*

Saddhā (confidence) emerged as a dynamic, functional mechanism that requires systematic maturation to overcome digital volatility. The progression is supported by a *tika* (triad), which organizes the epistemic support for the three-stage model of *saddhā* (X-axis). This study proposes a constructive three-stage model of saddhā by synthesizing distinct canonical and commentarial descriptions of confidence, the faculty of faith, and the power of faith (Vibhaṅga; Thittila, 1969; Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2016). The developed conceptual synthesis includes:

1. Path Initiation (*pasāda-saddhā*): Establishing wholesome intention and mental clarity.
2. Investigative Discipline (*saddhindriya*): Maintaining cognitive stability during active inquiry into digital phenomena.
3. Unshakable Foundation (*saddhābala*): Reaching verified confidence (*okappanā-saddhā*) where the mental factor becomes a resilient power.

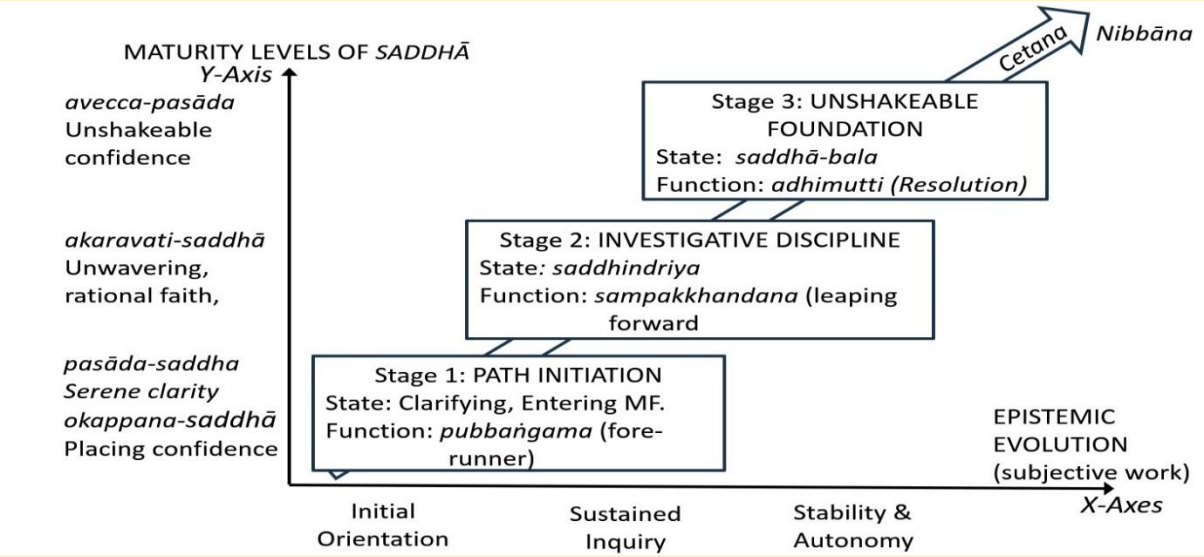

Figure 3. Three-Staged Model of *Saddhā*

Elaborated Ontologies

An ontology is a set of object names, also called taxonomies, and it may also include rules describing relations between these objects. In Buddhism, this corresponds to *sabhāva-dhamma*, to distinguish between different conceptual labels (*paññatti*). The research populated specific ontological domains and generated corresponding data objects:

- The *Khetta-Vibhāga* for the Digital World (KVDW): To classify the different descriptions of fields and situations involving both the digital realm (governed by code, data, and algorithms) and the conventional Digital World (*sammuti-loka*).
- The *Khetta-Pakaraṇa* Experience Converter (KPEC): To identify the correspondences (data points) between conventional narratives and the digital environment. The KPEC was elaborated as an extraction artifact. From a specific situational context (*pakaraṇa*) it extracts distinct meaning units from subjective user encounters.
- Buddhist-Informed Phenomenological Analysis (BIPA): The overarching methodology. BIPA was conceived to bridge the subjective digital encounters within the conventional world with the objective doctrinal categories of the Ultimate World. It uses the outputs of both the KVDW and KPEC to map human responses to underlying *cetasika* configurations and *Paṭṭhāna* conditional relations (*paccaya*).

Case Analysis

The analysis of the cases used the newly developed Buddhist-Informed Phenomenological Analysis (BIPA). Within BIPA, the case studies are elaborated primarily through two complementary approaches: conditional analysis (*Paṭṭhāna*), which evaluates external conditions, and *cetasika* analysis, which focuses directly on mental states and the evolution of *cetasika* clusters. While these two methods form the core of the practical analysis, the more specific *naya* methods from the *Abhidhamma* - namely *Cetasika* Remediation Analysis (CRA) and *Cetasika* Opportunity Analysis (COA) function primarily as *a posteriori* consistency checks to verify the theoretical coherence of the identified *cetasika* configurations. Throughout this process, the framework strictly restricts its analysis of digital environments to the mind-door (*manodvāra*), prioritizing internal mental states over physical interface deconstruction.

Applying CRA to the case studies revealed specific remediation strategies. When measuring cognitive depth and operational function, *kicca* is evaluated strictly as a member of the sacca-ñāṇa-ṭīkā to ensure analytical precision in the epistemic evaluation. The exploratory case analysis identified a two-tiered active defense model:

Tactical cycle (agility): Deploys the triad of *sati* (mindfulness), *saddhā* (confidence), and *vīriya* (energy) to create an immediate cognitive gap against high-frequency algorithmic nudges.

- Structural cycle (depth): Uses *saddhā*, *paññā* (wisdom), and *appamāda* (heedfulness) to construct a fortress of resilience, deconstructing the deterministic logic of the machine.

Table 1. Synthesized Case Study Findings and *Cetasika* Remediations

Case Study	Central Problem	Governing Mental Factor	Primary Outcome
Bruce	Addiction & Algorithmic Steering	*saddhā* (conviction)	Reclaiming intentional volition from automated reactivity.
Charlie	Formalistic Invasiveness & Determinism	*paññā* (discernment)	Identifying algorithmic outputs as conditioned phenomena rather than absolute truth.
Leo	Loss of Integrity & Cognitive Overload	*appamāda* (heedfulness)	Establishing an active defense and digital sovereignty.

Bruce (Digital Existence and Manipulation). The narrative of the Bruce case follows a retired financial adviser who previously organized community discussion groups and engaged in intensive, compulsive nightly sessions consuming political, geopolitical, and consciousness debates on YouTube. Over time, persistent exposure to algorithmic feeds, conflicting information, and perceived manipulation led to profound disillusionment and a feeling of being reduced to an obedient slave. This chronic mental distress and health drainage culminated in his abandoning the internet altogether, which led to severe personal inactivity and manifest signs of depression. Bruce's crisis illustrates affective entrapment defined by an algorithmic object gap and a datafication gap at the

mind-door (*manodvāra*). Manipulative incoming stimuli degrade the object condition (*ārammaṇa-paccaya*), interrupt the resting state (bhavaṅga), and generate mental pain (*domanassa-vedanā*). This unwholesome contact conditions conceptual proliferation (*papañca*) dominated by an unwholesome cluster of aversion (*dosa*), skeptical doubt (*vicikicchā*), and delusion (*moha*). Because datafied content lacks qualitative depth, decisive support (*upanissaya-paccaya*) is weakened, paralyzing his ability to form sound judgments. To address this, the research proposes, as a theoretical solution strategy, the deployment of the epistemic energy triplet (*kusala-ṭīkā – vīmaṃsā – appamāda*). Under this proposed model, Bruce would utilize *pasāda-saddhā* oriented toward verified secondary anchors to shield the mind-door, mobilize investigative scrutiny (*vīmaṃsā*) to deconstruct platform mechanics, and cultivate heedfulness (*appamāda*). This theoretical pathway is designed to mature faith into an unshakeable power (*saddhābala*), allowing the user to reach the moment of choice (*adhimokkha*) and reclaim volitional intention (*cetanā*).

Prof. Charlie (Formalistic Invasiveness and Determinism). Charlie's narrative follows an anatomy and neuroscience professor whose intellectual life is rooted in a deterministic, materialistic paradigm. An intensive user of academic databases, digital search engines, and scientific media, he encountered an explanatory limit within physical models when analyzing equilibria between competitive and collaborative forces. Although drawn to Buddhism for its parallels with neuroscience, Charlie treats algorithmic models and data-driven outputs as absolute physical laws, struggling to separate information accumulation from genuine wisdom. We interpret Charlie's condition as a cognitive entrapment driven by the deterministic gap. The digital interface exhibits a prenascence condition (*purejāta-paccaya*), wherein pre-existing, finished computational displays lead his cognition into passive receipt (*avitakka-avicāra*), reinforcing the erroneous view (*diṭṭhi*) that human agency is a mechanistic illusion. His intellectual capacity remains confined to surface designations (*nāma-paññatti*) under *suta-mayā paññā*. Remediation applies a dual X-axis intervention using the three wisdoms triad (*paññā-ṭīkā*) and the initial thought triad (*vitakka-ṭīkā*). By introducing an epistemic design log (a physical cane acting as a secondary anchor) before launching calculations, Charlie intentionally mobilizes initial thought (*savitakka*) to strike the digital object. This active deconstruction breaks the deterministic illusion, shifting his cognition into reflective contemplation (*cintā-mayā paññā*) of the system's conditioned nature, thereby uncovering the interval of human space.

Leo (The Fortress of Active Resistance). Leo's narrative illustrates an intensive user who relies extensively on digital environments for professional production and domestic policy analysis. As a researcher, he understands the foundational importance of heedfulness (*appamāda*), the deliberate capacity to take into account and act upon critical opportunities before it is too late. In his lived experience, however, he encounters the digital environment as an intrusive, colonizing force characterized by high volume but low quality. Leo experiences a direct conflict between the overwhelming speed and efficiency of the machine and the natural reflective tempo required for human cognition, leading to acute cognitive overload and a drop in mental stability whenever control is ceded to an algorithmic flow. Recognizing these hazards, Leo's objective is not passive retreat, but the intentional construction of an active fortress of resistance grounded in *Abhidhamma* principles to safeguard his autonomy. Leo is interpreted as facing systemic entrapment where the machine's intrusive velocity creates an algorithmic object gap. The algorithmic object (*ārammaṇa-paccaya*) arrives so abruptly that it bypasses the natural investigative pause of the cognitive series (*citta-vīthi*), causing a sudden drop in *saddhā* and the rapid arising of restlessness (*uddhacca*). To realize Leo's goal of structured heedfulness, the analysis formulates a two-tiered active defense:

- Tactical defense cycle: Mobilizes the tactical triplet (*sati – saddhā – vīriya*) for immediate operational agility. Mindfulness (*sati*) acts as the signal detector, *saddhā* re-centers the mind on original purpose, and mental effort (*vīriya*) interrupts the automatic technical sequence, creating an intentional pause at the moment of contact (*phassa*).
- Structural defense cycle: Deploys the resistance triplet (*saddhā – paññā – appamāda*) to establish continuous cognitive sovereignty. By applying wisdom (*paññā*) to deconstruct algorithmic triggers as mere conditioned phenomena (*paccaya*) rather than authoritative imperatives, the researcher establishes unremitting heedfulness (*appamāda*). This operationalizes the desired fortress, securing mental steadiness (*ṭhiti*) and preserving human space (*manussa-okāsa*) against systemic colonization.

Discussion

The findings suggest that perceived losses of agency in digital environments can be interpreted through the study's concept of epistemic gaps and through the conditioning of attention and response at the mind-door. This interpretation is broadly consistent with contemporary concerns about persuasive

and recommender technologies, which may influence autonomy through manipulation, identity shaping, and effects on knowledge and critical reflection (Bonicalzi et al., 2023). Buddhist ethics adds a distinctive perspective by treating attention not simply as a resource to be protected but as a practice requiring ethical discrimination, right effort, mindfulness, and concentration (Bombaerts et al., 2023). The present study extends this line of inquiry by proposing *cetasika*-level analysis as a way to examine how specific wholesome and unwholesome mental factors may arise in digitally mediated encounters. However, because the study is qualitative and exploratory, the framework should be understood as a doctrinally informed interpretive model rather than as empirical proof that algorithms directly determine mental states.

The framework also contributes a treatment of *saddhā*. Rather than presenting *saddhā* as passive religious belief, the study interprets it as a stabilizing, wholesome mental factor that works with wisdom, mindfulness, energy, and concentration (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2016; Sīlānanda, 2012). This interpretation also resonates with Buddhist approaches to contemporary technology that preserve human moral responsibility rather than transferring agency to artificial systems (Lin, 2023). Accordingly, saddhā should not be interpreted as an autonomous technical stabilizer in a literal engineering sense. Rather, the three-stage method conceptualizes saddhā as confidence that becomes progressively more reflective, disciplined, and resilient in uncertain or persuasive digital environments.

The proposed ontological distinction between conscious human experience and algorithmic processing also requires careful qualification. Current recommender systems can shape choice architectures and user behavior, but this alone does not establish machine consciousness or moral agency. Contemporary Buddhist AI ethics similarly argues that artificial systems should not be treated as autonomous moral subjects simply because they simulate intelligent behavior (Lin, 2023). Within the *Abhidhamma* framework adopted here, software, data, and algorithms are therefore analyzed as conditioned objects and processes rather than as bearers of citta or cetanā. This distinction supports the article's concept of Human Space by locating responsibility for interpretation, evaluation, and ethical action primarily in the human agent.

The TFDHS should nevertheless be positioned as complementary to, rather than a replacement for, existing digital-well-being and technology-ethics approaches. Systematic research on technostress shows that digital demands can

affect psychological, emotional, and work-related well-being through multiple pathways and contextual factors (Kumar, 2024). Likewise, studies of algorithmic systems emphasize that the same technologies may both support and constrain autonomy depending on design, transparency, user control, and context (Bonicalzi et al., 2023). The value of the present framework is therefore its micro-level Buddhist contribution: it offers a structured vocabulary for examining attention, confidence, discernment, heedfulness, and volition at the point of digital encounter. Future research should test whether these proposed constructs can be operationalized reliably and whether they add explanatory or practical value beyond existing models of digital self-regulation and human–computer interaction.

New Knowledge from the Research

The principal body of knowledge generated by this study is the Theravada Framework for Defending Human Space (TFDHS), a systematic methodology for preserving human agency and cognitive autonomy against algorithmic conditioning and epistemic gaps. While conditional analysis primarily identifies epistemological gaps at the mind-door (*manodvāra*), pure *cetasika* analysis of mental states connects these lived digital encounters with classical *Abhidhamma* categories across the broader cognitive spectrum. The TFDHS consists of three integrated components.

First, the framework introduces a three-stage method of saddhā, framing *saddhā* as a dynamic functional mechanism for cognitive stability rather than a static belief. A *tika* (triad) - a set of three dhammas from the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* (Rhys Davids, 1923), for example, the three wisdoms - is used to organize the epistemic support for this three-stage model of *saddhā* (X-axis). The maturation pathway progresses through three distinct phases:

- Stage 1: Path initiation (*saddhā-pubbaṅgama*): Using *saddhā* as a forerunner to establish wholesome intention and mental clarity (*pasāda*) upon initial digital contact.
- Stage 2: Investigative discipline (*saddhindriya*): Applying saddhā as a controlling faculty to maintain cognitive stability during active inquiry into digital phenomena.

- Stage 3: Unshakeable foundation (*saddhābala*): Reaching a state of verified confidence (*okappanā-saddhā*) where the mental factor matures into a resilient power, providing steadfastness in digital complexity.

Second, the methodology relies on a framework that strictly separates the technical digital realm from the conventional digital world. An ontology is a set of object names, also called taxonomies, and may also include rules describing relations between these objects. In Buddhism, this corresponds to *sabhāva-dhamma*, to separate conceptual labels (*paññatti*).

Third, the framework operationalizes *Cetasika* Remediation Analysis (CRA), an engineering-like model for deconstructing unwholesome digital interactions into actionable mental remedies. Within this analysis, specific cognitive functions must be rigorously mapped; for instance, *kicca* is treated as a member of the *sacca-ñāṇa-ṭīkā* rather than a standalone function triad, ensuring that the diagnostic assessment of a digital encounter accurately reflects the progression of knowledge and truth.

These components establish an integrated active defense model for reclaiming volitional sovereignty. The synthesis provides a unique answer to how Buddhist faith (*saddhā*) and phenomena in the digital world interact: by applying *cetasika* analysis to these encounters, the framework actively defends Human Space. It transforms *saddhā* from a theoretical concept into an operationalized shield, ensuring that human cognitive autonomy is preserved.

Conclusion

This research establishes the Theravada Framework for Defending Human Space (TFDHS) as a systematic methodology to navigate the digital age. By isolating the analytical focus to the mind-door (*manodvāra*) and formalizing an Abhidhammic ontology for digital interactions, the findings suggest that the proposed TFDHS framework may provide a structured interpretive approach for examining and potentially mitigating the effects of algorithmically mediated environments on human attention, discernment, and volitional regulation. In doing so, the framework clarifies that digital encounters cannot be evaluated only by behavioral habits, but are structured by identifiable causal conditions (*paccaya*) that act as an operative architecture of lived digital experience. Recognizing these structural conditions allows practitioners and researchers to shift from reactive coping to systematic, *cetasika*-level defense of human space.

Ultimately, this research bridges classical Theravāda doctrine with 21st-century technological realities, demonstrating that ancient psychological ethics driven by the maturation of *saddhā* remain profoundly applicable for sustaining human dignity and agency today.

Recommendations

Future research should scale the BIPA methodology to analyze emerging technologies, such as generative artificial intelligence, and foster interdisciplinary dialogues between *Abhidhamma* scholars and human-computer interaction (HCI) engineers to embed *cetasika*-level ethical awareness into digital design.

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From Inner Awareness to Human Flourishing: Buddhist Wisdom in a Changing World

The Editorial Board

Journal of International Buddhist Studies College (JIBSC)

Introduction

Contemporary societies are characterized by rapid technological change, expanding access to information, and unprecedented forms of communication. Yet greater connectivity has not necessarily produced greater clarity, deeper relationships, or stronger well-being. Psychological distress, social fragmentation, loneliness, conflict, and competition for human attention remain significant concerns. Recent international reports have therefore emphasized social connection as an important dimension of health and well-being, while also recognizing that digital technologies can both strengthen and weaken human relationships (OECD, 2025; World Health Organization [WHO], 2025).

These conditions raise an enduring Buddhist question: What does it mean to live well in a changing world?

Buddhist traditions approach human flourishing differently from models centered primarily on pleasure, productivity, material success, or the absence of distress. Quality of life is closely connected to how individuals understand experience, respond to suffering, regulate desire and aversion, cultivate ethical conduct, and relate to others. Mindfulness, wisdom, moral discipline, and compassion therefore function not as isolated techniques but as interdependent capacities for reducing suffering and living responsibly (Anālayo Bhikkhu, 2003; Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1994; Harvey, 2000).

This editorial argues that Buddhist wisdom contributes to human flourishing not simply by helping individuals become calmer, but by cultivating the awareness, ethical discernment, and compassionate responsibility required to live wisely amid changing conditions.

Embodied Wisdom: From Awareness to Understanding

Buddhist wisdom is fundamentally experiential. It develops through sustained attention to lived experience rather than through abstract knowledge alone. The classical framework of *satipaṭṭhāna*, for example, directs awareness toward body, feeling, mind, and phenomena, providing a disciplined means of observing experience without immediately becoming absorbed in habitual reactions (Anālayo Bhikkhu, 2003).

This embodied dimension matters in a world where attention is increasingly mediated by screens, notifications, and constantly changing information. Individuals may be constantly connected while becoming less aware of bodily experience, emotional states, or the quality of their immediate

relationships. Contemplative practice provides a counterbalance by returning attention to experience as it unfolds.

However, embodied wisdom involves more than awareness of the body. Wisdom becomes embodied when insight influences speech, action, relationships, and choices. Knowing intellectually that anger causes suffering is different from recognizing anger as it arises and choosing not to intensify it through harmful speech. Similarly, understanding compassion as an ideal is different from responding compassionately when another person is difficult, distressed, or vulnerable.

This distinction matters for contemporary research on mindfulness. Mindfulness-based approaches have shown benefits in attention, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being (Good et al., 2016; Shapiro et al., 2006). Yet when mindfulness is separated from ethical conduct and wisdom, a multidimensional Buddhist practice can be reduced to an attentional technique. From a Buddhist perspective, awareness is valuable because it opens the possibility of discernment, and discernment matters because it can transform how one acts.

Beyond Mindfulness: Ethics, Wisdom, and Compassion

One major challenge in contemporary engagement with Buddhism is the tendency to treat mindfulness as representative of Buddhist practice as a whole. Yet the Noble Eightfold Path places right mindfulness within a wider framework that includes right view, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, and concentration (Bodhi, 1994). Mindfulness therefore acquires its full meaning when connected with wisdom and ethical responsibility.

This broader context matters because attention alone is not inherently ethical. A person may be attentive while pursuing harmful goals. Buddhist practice asks not only whether one is aware, but also what one understands, what motivates one's actions, and whether those actions reduce or increase suffering.

Wisdom (*paññā*) allows experience to be interpreted in relation to impermanence, attachment, conditionality, and suffering. Ethical discipline (*sīla*) translates understanding into conduct, while compassion and loving-kindness extend concern beyond the individual toward others (Harvey, 2000). In this sense, mindfulness allows one to notice what is happening; wisdom helps one understand its significance; ethics guides what should follow.

The secular adoption of mindfulness has produced useful applications, but it has also generated criticism that Buddhist-derived practices can become detached from their ethical foundations and used primarily for productivity or stress management (Purser, 2019). This concern does not invalidate secular applications. Rather, it reinforces the need to distinguish between mindfulness as a therapeutic technique and mindfulness as one component of a wider Buddhist path.

Compassion further shifts the purpose of practice from self-management to relational responsibility. Research on loving-kindness meditation suggests that cultivating positive emotions may strengthen personal and relational resources (Fredrickson et al., 2008). From a Buddhist perspective, however, compassion is more than a means to feel better. It responds to the recognition of suffering and shared vulnerability.

Human flourishing therefore involves not only inner stability but also the capacity to act without unnecessarily increasing suffering in oneself, in relationships, and in society.

Human Flourishing in a Digital and Uncertain Age

The question of flourishing becomes increasingly important in an environment where digital systems can capture, direct, and reproduce human attention. Technology offers substantial benefits, including access to education, communication, health information, and knowledge. Buddhist teachings themselves can now reach global audiences through digital media.

Nevertheless, technological capacity does not determine the wisdom with which technology is used.

Digital environments may amplify tendencies already familiar within Buddhist analysis: craving, comparison, distraction, aversion, and habitual reaction. The key issue, therefore, is not whether technology is inherently beneficial or harmful, but how it interacts with human tendencies and how individuals learn to use it without becoming governed by it.

Recent concerns regarding loneliness and social disconnection illustrate this complexity. Digital communication can sustain relationships across distance, yet constant contact does not necessarily create meaningful connection. Individuals may have large networks while lacking depth, support, or belonging (OECD, 2025; WHO, 2025).

Buddhist thought offers a useful distinction between the quantity of contact and the quality of engagement. Mindfulness can reveal fragmented or compulsive patterns of attention. Wisdom can question whether consumption strengthens or undermines well-being. Ethics can direct reflection toward how digital behavior affects others, while compassion reminds us that people encountered through screens remain vulnerable human beings.

The development of artificial intelligence intensifies these questions. Greater computational intelligence can expand the range of available choices, but it cannot by itself determine which choices are wise or ethically justified. Buddhist traditions do not provide ready-made technical policies for AI, but they do cultivate capacities increasingly necessary in technological societies: awareness, restraint, discernment, compassion, and responsibility.

The challenge of the digital age is therefore not only to make technology more intelligent, but also to ensure that human beings remain capable of asking what technology is for, whom it serves, and what forms of life it helps create.

From Personal Awareness to Shared Responsibility

Buddhist practice begins with cultivating one's own mind and conduct, but its ethical implications extend beyond the individual. Non-harming, truthful speech, generosity, compassion, and restraint all influence relationships and wider social conditions. Inner transformation therefore affects the worlds individuals create around themselves.

At the same time, Buddhist approaches should not imply that meditation or changes in personal attitude can solve all suffering. Poverty, violence, discrimination, institutional injustice, environmental degradation, and social isolation also require collective and structural responses. Contemplative practice does not replace social responsibility.

Its contribution lies in helping individuals examine how inner dispositions and external conditions interact. Greed can function as both a personal tendency and an institutional incentive. Anger can be experienced individually and amplified socially. Compassion can operate as a personal virtue and as a principle shaping education, care, leadership, and public action.

This movement from personal awareness to shared responsibility is essential to a fuller understanding of human flourishing. A flourishing life is not simply one that feels secure or successful, but one capable of participating wisely in a shared world.

For Buddhist studies, this opens important directions for future scholarship. Textual research and empirical inquiry need greater dialogue, while longitudinal, cross-cultural, and mixed-method studies can help determine whether contemplative practices produce sustained changes in behavior, relationships, and community well-being. Research on Buddhism and digital life, including attention, online communities, AI, and digital ethics, will also become increasingly important.

Conclusion

Buddhist traditions offer a demanding understanding of human flourishing. To flourish is not simply to feel better or function more efficiently, but to see experience more clearly, understand the causes of suffering, cultivate wholesome qualities, and participate responsibly in relationships and society.

This editorial has argued that moving from inner awareness to human flourishing depends on integrating mindfulness, wisdom, ethics, and compassion. Mindfulness creates the space to recognize experience before habitual reactions take control. Wisdom brings discernment, ethical discipline gives practical form to understanding, and compassion extends concern beyond the self.

These capacities matter especially in an age marked by both technological power and human vulnerability. Digital connection does not guarantee meaningful relationships, information does not ensure wisdom, and increasing intelligence does not automatically generate ethical judgment.

Buddhist wisdom therefore continues to contribute not by providing fixed solutions to every contemporary problem, but by cultivating the human capacities needed to meet changing conditions with clarity, restraint, responsibility, and compassion. In this way, Buddhist studies can remain grounded in its intellectual traditions while contributing meaningfully to contemporary discussions of well-being, technology, ethics, and shared human flourishing.

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Beyond Positive Thinking: A Critical Integrative Review of Skillful Thought in Theravāda Buddhism and Contemporary Psychological Approaches

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Abstract

The language of "positive thinking" is widely used in psychology, education, health promotion, and self-help, but it does not refer to a single psychological construct. This critical integrative review examines what makes a thought desirable in Theravāda Buddhist analysis and in contemporary psychological approaches, identifies areas of convergence, and clarifies conceptual differences. The review uses a purposive source base centered on the Dvedhāvitakka Sutta (MN 19), the Vitakkasaṇṭhāna Sutta (MN 20), selected Buddhist scholarship, and construct-specific psychological literature on cognitive therapy, cognitive reappraisal, optimism, positive psychological interventions, positive self-statements and fantasy, acceptance-based approaches, and goal pursuit. The comparison identifies partial convergence in metacognitive awareness, cognitive redirection, consequence evaluation, attentional regulation, and repeated practice. The principal difference is normative: contemporary psychological approaches use varying criteria such as evidential fit, functioning, symptom change, well-being, psychological flexibility, or goal attainment, whereas Buddhist training explicitly evaluates cognition in relation to wholesome and unwholesome roots, non-harming, wisdom, and liberation. Evidence on positive self-statements and idealized positive fantasies further indicates that unqualified positivity may be ineffective or counterproductive under some conditions. The review therefore proposes an ethically grounded adaptive cognition framework comprising awareness, epistemic fit, functional fit, ethical fit, and developmental fit. The framework is offered as a conceptual synthesis and research agenda, not as an empirically validated clinical intervention.

Keywords: Skillful thought; Positive thinking; Kusala vitakka; Cognitive reappraisal; Buddhist psychology; Cognitive behavioral therapy

Introduction

Thinking influences emotion, motivation, behavior, and interpersonal response, yet "positive thinking" is too broad to function as a precise scientific category. Cognitive therapy evaluates appraisals and beliefs; emotion-regulation research examines strategies such as cognitive reappraisal; optimism concerns generalized outcome expectancies; positive psychological interventions target well-being; and goal-pursuit research distinguishes expectations, fantasies, obstacles, and plans (Beck, 1976; Gross, 1998; Scheier et al., 1994; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Outside research settings, these distinct constructs are often compressed into a single slogan. That compression is consequential because a cognition may feel positive while remaining inaccurate, avoidant, ethically harmful, or motivationally weak.

Empirical findings illustrate this problem. Positive self-statements can worsen mood for some individuals with low self-esteem when the statement conflicts with existing self-beliefs (Wood et al., 2009). Positive expectations and positive fantasies are likewise not equivalent: expectations grounded in perceived feasibility may support effort, whereas idealized fantasies can reduce energization and achievement when they provide symbolic satisfaction without sufficient engagement with obstacles (Oettingen & Mayer, 2002; Kappes & Oettingen, 2011). Mental contrasting addresses this problem by juxtaposing a desired future with present obstacles, and meta-analytic evidence suggests that combining mental contrasting with implementation intentions can improve goal attainment (Wang et al., 2021). These findings do not invalidate hope or optimism; rather, they show that the effects of cognition depend on the construct, context, credibility, and subsequent behavior.

Theravāda Buddhism evaluates thought through a different conceptual and normative vocabulary. In MN 19, thoughts of sensual desire, ill will, and cruelty are contrasted with thoughts of renunciation, non-ill will, and non-cruelty. The former are rejected because they lead to affliction, obstruct wisdom, and lead away from Nibbāna, while repeated thinking is described as inclining the mind in a corresponding direction (Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995). MN 20 presents five methods for responding to recurrent unwholesome thoughts, progressing from attending to another wholesome theme through reflection, non-attention, and calming of thought-formation to intensified restraint when earlier methods fail (Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 1995). The evaluative question is therefore not whether a

thought is pleasant, but what conditions it expresses, what consequences it supports, and what kind of mind repeated cultivation develops.

This article has four objectives: (1) to clarify the constructs of "positive thinking" and skillful thought; (2) to compare Buddhist and psychological evaluative criteria and intervention functions; (3) to assess the empirical and ethical limits of unqualified positivity; and (4) to derive a psychologically testable and ethically explicit framework for thought training. The guiding argument is that skillful thought should not be translated simply as positive thought. A more defensible bridge is ethically grounded adaptive cognition: cognition evaluated in relation to awareness, evidential fit, contextual function, foreseeable harm, and developmental trajectory.

This article is a critical integrative review rather than a systematic review or meta-analysis. Integrative reviews are appropriate when the objective is conceptual synthesis across heterogeneous bodies of literature, but their credibility depends on transparency regarding source selection and on avoiding claims of exhaustiveness that the method cannot support (Grant & Booth, 2009; Snyder, 2019). The source base was therefore purposive and organized around the four objectives stated above.

MN 19 and MN 20 are the principal Buddhist primary texts because they directly address the classification and management of thought relevant to the comparison. Related passages are used selectively where they clarify wholesome and unwholesome roots, wise attention, and right intention. Passages central to the argument in MN 19 and MN 20 were checked against the English translation of Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi (1995). No claim is made that the Pāli text was independently collated for this review, that the English translation resolves every philological question, or that these discourses exhaust the canonical material relevant to cognition. Doctrinal interpretation is supplemented by selected scholarship on Buddhist ethics, *kusala*, and Buddhist psychology. English-language scholarship was used for the comparative analysis.

Psychological sources were selected for construct relevance rather than under the umbrella term "positive thinking." The review includes literature on cognitive therapy, emotion regulation and reappraisal, dispositional optimism, positive psychological interventions, positive self-statements and positive fantasy, mental contrasting and goal pursuit, thought suppression, mindfulness and compassion, and acceptance- and process-based approaches. Older landmark

studies were retained where they remain conceptually foundational, while recent systematic reviews and meta-analyses were used to update major empirical claims. Supplementary targeted searches conducted during revision were used to verify scholarly and publisher records and to identify recent syntheses; these searches did not constitute a reproducible systematic database protocol. No PRISMA screening process, predetermined publication-date restriction, or formal quality-appraisal instrument was applied.

For empirical claims, preference was given to directly verifiable peer-reviewed sources, particularly recent systematic reviews and meta-analyses where appropriate. Landmark primary studies were retained when they define a construct or provide the direct evidence underlying a specific claim. Popular or non-scholarly sources were not used as evidence for psychological efficacy. When reported limitations were relevant to interpretation—including comparator effects, heterogeneity, small-study effects, risk of bias, or possible publication bias—they were incorporated into the discussion rather than treating all reported effects as equivalent.

The comparison is dimensional. It asks six questions across the two literatures: What makes a thought desirable? What causal model links thought to emotion and behavior? What strategies modify cognition? What outcomes count as success? What risks or contraindications are recognized? How are individual well-being and moral responsibility related? This permits functional analogy without assuming historical, theoretical, mechanistic, or clinical equivalence. Tables 1 and 2 are the author's comparative syntheses, and Table 3 maps the derivation of the proposed framework. None of the tables is a validated measurement instrument or treatment algorithm.

Conceptual Framework

1. Construct Clarification

A comparison is only as strong as its constructs. In ordinary language, positive thinking often means interpreting events favorably or maintaining hope. In psychological science, however, no single accepted variable corresponds to that expression. Dispositional optimism concerns generalized expectations that good rather than bad outcomes will occur (Scheier et al., 1994). Cognitive reappraisal changes the meaning assigned to a situation in order to alter emotional response (Gross, 1998). Cognitive therapy examines evidence, appraisals, and

behavioral predictions rather than simply replacing negative thoughts with pleasant ones (Beck, 1976). Positive psychological interventions may cultivate gratitude, strengths, meaning, savoring, or prosocial behavior rather than directly changing belief content.

Positive self-statements constitute another distinct practice. Their effects should not be conflated with formal self-affirmation paradigms, which typically involve reflecting on valued aspects of the self rather than repeating globally positive claims. Future-oriented cognition also requires differentiation: expectations concern judged likelihood, positive fantasies depict desired futures, and mental contrasting deliberately relates a desired future to present obstacles (Oettingen & Mayer, 2002; Wood et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2021). These constructs have different theories, procedures, and outcomes. Accordingly, "positive thinking" is used here only as an umbrella discourse; empirical claims name the specific construct to which they apply.

2. Theravāda Buddhist Model of Skillful and Unskillful Thought

This article uses the expression kusala vitakka as an analytical umbrella, not as a claim that the Nikāyas employ a single standardized technical category. In MN 19, vitakka refers to thoughts divided into two classes: sensual desire, ill will, and cruelty on one side, and renunciation, non-ill will, and non-cruelty on the other. Their evaluation is explicitly consequential and ethical: the unwholesome class leads to one's own affliction, the affliction of others, or both; obstructs wisdom; and leads away from Nibbāna. Repeated thinking is also described as becoming an inclination of mind (Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu & Bodhi Bhikkhu , 1995; MN 19). Vitakka also appears in a more technical meditative sense as a factor associated with the first jhāna; these usages should not be collapsed.

The wholesome triad in MN 19 closely corresponds to the content of *sammā-saṅkappa*, right intention, defined in MN 117 as intention of renunciation, non-ill will, and non-harming. The concepts are therefore related in ethical direction without being treated as identical in every context. Likewise, the broader distinction between wholesome and unwholesome mental activity is associated with non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion versus greed, hatred, and delusion (Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu & Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1995; MN 9; Gethin, 1998; Harvey, 2000; Keown, 1992). Kusala cannot be reduced to immediate pleasantness or technical efficiency. The term carries ethical and developmental

force, although scholarship differs in how best to translate its semantic range (Cousins, 1996).

This distinction matters for uncomfortable moral recognition. A pleasant thought may be unskillful, while an uncomfortable recognition of wrongdoing may support skillful change when it leads to moral concern, correction, restraint, and resolve not to repeat harm. Such acknowledgment should be distinguished from *kukkucca*, classified in *Theravāda* Abhidhamma as an unwholesome mental factor of remorse or worry. The skillful element lies not in repetitive self-reproach but in clear recognition and corrective action (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000). This prevents the comparative argument from treating distress itself as wholesome.

MN 20 adds a strategic model. When unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, hate, or delusion arise, the practitioner is instructed successively to attend to another wholesome theme, examine the danger or drawbacks in the thought, not attend to it, attend to the stilling of thought-formation, and finally employ forceful mental restraint if the preceding methods fail (Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu & Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1995; MN 20). The discourse addresses a bhikkhu "pursuing the higher mind"; it is therefore a contemplative training text, not a psychiatric emergency manual. Wise attention in MN 2 provides a wider principle: how attention is directed can contribute either to the arising and growth of unwholesome states or to their abandonment (Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu & Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1995; MN 2). Skillful thought consequently involves recognition, selective attention, ethical appraisal, consequence sensitivity, and repeated cultivation.

3. Contemporary Psychological Models of Positive Cognition

Contemporary psychology includes several models relevant to this comparison, but they should not be treated as a single position. CBT emphasizes evidence, appraisal, behavior, and functioning. Reappraisal research examines how changing meaning alters emotional responses and how a strategy's usefulness depends on context. Optimism research concerns generalized expectations and coping rather than a prescribed technique. Positive psychological interventions comprise heterogeneous activities intended to increase well-being rather than a single procedure for replacing negative thoughts. Goal-pursuit research distinguishes expectations from fantasies and examines how obstacles and plans influence action.

Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) further shifts emphasis from changing the literal content of thoughts to changing the person's relationship with them while supporting values-guided action (Hayes et al., 2012). Recent meta-analytic work supports psychological flexibility and inflexibility as relevant ACT treatment mechanisms while also showing that the evidence varies across processes and study designs (Macri & Rogge, 2024). Process-based therapy similarly argues that intervention science should target empirically relevant processes and their contextual functions rather than assume that one named treatment package fits every problem (Hofmann & Hayes, 2019).

These models differ in what counts as successful cognition. CBT may favor an appraisal that is more accurate and useful even if it is unpleasant. Reappraisal can change emotional response without requiring positive content. Optimism is primarily an expectancy construct. Positive psychological interventions target well-being through multiple pathways. ACT emphasizes flexible, value-consistent responding, and goal-pursuit research makes obstacle engagement central. The comparison with Buddhism is therefore strongest when it proceeds construct by construct rather than by opposing two monolithic traditions.

Table 1. Comparative Dimensions of Skillful Thought and Selected Psychological Constructs

Dimension	Theravāda skillful thought	Selected psychological construct(s)	Critical observation
Primary criterion	Roots, ethical quality, consequences, reduction of suffering, movement toward wisdom (MN 9; MN 19).	CBT: evidential accuracy and functioning (Beck, 1976). Reappraisal: regulatory and contextual fit (Gross, 1998; Cui et al., 2024). Optimism: expectancy (Scheier et al., 1994). Positive psychological interventions: well-being (Wilkie et al., 2026).	No single psychological criterion corresponds to the Buddhist one.
Valence	Pleasantness is secondary; a pleasant thought may be unskillful, while painful recognition can support correction.	Optimism and some positive interventions study favorable outcomes; CBT and reappraisal do not require pleasant content.	Valence alone is an inadequate bridge.

Dimension	Theravāda skillful thought	Selected psychological construct(s)	Critical observation
Unit of change	Thought, intention, attention, habit, conduct, and character.	CBT: beliefs, appraisals, and behavior. Reappraisal: meaning. Optimism: expectations. Self-statements: verbal self-evaluations. Goal pursuit: expectations, fantasies, plans, and action.	Buddhist analysis is more explicitly ethical and developmental.
Mechanism	Recognition, redirection, consequence reflection, disengagement, calming, restraint, and repeated cultivation (MN 19; MN 20).	CBT restructuring and testing; reappraisal; mental contrasting and planning; ACT flexibility and defusion.	Functional similarity does not establish equivalence.
Desired outcome	Non-greed, non-hatred, non-harming, wisdom, and liberation.	CBT: functioning and symptoms. Reappraisal: regulation. Optimism: coping. Positive interventions: well-being. Goal pursuit: attainment.	Integration requires explicit outcome selection.
Risk model	Delusion, craving or aversion, ethical harm, and spiritual bypassing.	Self-statement discrepancy (Wood et al., 2009); fantasy reducing energization (Kappes & Oettingen, 2011); suppression rebound (Wang et al., 2020); adverse contemplative events (Farias et al., 2020).	Risks depend on the construct and context.

Note. This table is the author's comparative synthesis. "Psychological constructs" does not denote a single unified position; the cited approaches differ in theory, method, and outcome.

Discussion

1. Positive Valence, Awareness, and Classification

The central difference lies in the evaluation criterion. Popular positive-thinking discourse privileges favorable content: confidence appears preferable to doubt, hope to fear, and an optimistic interpretation to an unfavorable one. Buddhist skillfulness, by contrast, prioritizes causal roots, consequences, non-harming, and development. This does not make Buddhism hostile to joy or hope; rather, pleasantness is neither necessary nor sufficient for wholesomeness. A sensual fantasy may be pleasant while strengthening craving, whereas a painful recognition of harm may support restraint, repair, and wiser action.

Psychological science also supplies reasons to reject valence as a sufficient criterion, although through different theories. A fear-related appraisal can be useful when danger is real; an acknowledgment of loss can be accurate even when distressing; an optimistic self-statement can be counterproductive when implausible; and reappraisal can be unhelpful if it displaces action that a controllable situation requires. Thus, pleasantness and adaptiveness are related only contingently. The practical convergence is limited but important: both traditions can ask what a cognition does rather than merely how it feels.

Both traditions also require some capacity to notice thought as thought. Cognitive therapy asks clients to identify automatic thoughts, while research on decentering describes a shift in relation to mental content that includes meta-awareness, reduced identification, and reduced reactivity (Beck, 1976; Bernstein et al., 2015). Buddhist training similarly requires recognition and discrimination among mental states. The systems diverge, however, in classification. Cognitive therapy often focuses on evidential or inferential error, whereas Buddhist analysis also evaluates motivational and ethical orientation. A cognition can therefore be accurate yet ethically harmful in the way it is rehearsed or used. Accuracy, contextual function, and ethical direction should be treated as distinct dimensions rather than substitutes for one another.

2. Five Methods of MN 20 and Psychological Analogs

The five methods of MN 20 can be compared with psychological procedures only at the level of possible function. The first method, attending to another wholesome theme, shares a redirection function with cognitive restructuring. In CBT, an alternative appraisal is ordinarily generated in relation to evidence and behavioral testing, whereas the Buddhist alternative is normatively constrained: it must itself be connected with the wholesome rather than merely be more pleasant (Beck, 1976). The comparison is therefore functional, not theoretical.

The second method, examining danger or drawbacks, resembles consequence-focused work in which a person considers what a pattern does to behavior, relationships, and goals. Motivational interviewing also makes discrepancies and consequences salient while avoiding coercive confrontation (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). MN 19 broadens the evaluative field beyond symptom relief by explicitly including affliction to oneself and others, obstruction of wisdom, and the direction in which repetition inclines the mind. Consequence

review can therefore include both immediate function and longer-term disposition.

The third method, non-attention, is especially easy to misread. It should not be equated with effortful thought suppression or anxious monitoring of whether a thought has disappeared. Meta-analysis indicates that deliberate suppression can produce ironic or rebound effects under some conditions (Wang et al., 2020). A narrower functional analogy is disengagement from elaboration, including aspects of cognitive defusion, in which a thought is experienced as a mental event rather than an instruction that must be obeyed (Hayes et al., 2012). This does not justify ignoring relevant evidence, danger, or moral responsibility.

The fourth method, attending to the stilling of thought-formation, shifts attention from content toward the process that sustains cognition. Its closest psychological analogies are therefore process-focused rather than one-to-one techniques: reduced elaboration, decentering, and regulation of the processes that maintain repetitive thought (Bernstein et al., 2015). The canonical instruction remains embedded in a contemplative sequence whose conceptual setting differs from modern psychotherapy.

The fifth method represents intensified mental restraint within the contemplative sequence of MN 20 after the preceding methods have failed. The discourse addresses a bhikkhu pursuing the higher mind; it has not been established as an emergency intervention for violence, relapse, psychosis, trauma-related intrusions, severe obsession, or suicidal cognition. No clinical equivalence is claimed here. Any clinical adaptation, particularly where acute risk or severe symptoms are present, requires professional assessment and established safety protocols rather than reliance on the canonical instruction alone.

Taken together, these comparisons identify partial similarities in function, redirection, consequence evaluation, disengagement, process regulation, and restraint, without asserting a common theory, mechanism, indication, or evidence base. This distinction is essential if comparative scholarship is to avoid converting functional analogy into retrospective validation.

Table 2. Functional Comparison of the Five Methods of MN 20 and Psychological Procedures

Method (MN 20)	Proposed functional analog	Shared function	Caution
1. Attend to another wholesome theme	Cognitive restructuring and redirection (Beck, 1976).	Redirects attention and appraisal.	The Buddhist alternative is normatively constrained; it is not simply a more pleasant thought.
2. Examine danger or drawbacks	Consequence-focused review; motivational interviewing (Miller & Rollnick, 2013).	Makes costs and consequences salient.	Consequence review should not become shame-based self-attack.
3. Non-attention	Aspects of cognitive defusion (Hayes et al., 2012).	Disengages from elaboration.	Not equivalent to forceful suppression; rebound effects are documented (Wang et al., 2020).
4. Still thought-formation	Decentering and process-focused regulation (Bernstein et al., 2015).	Targets processes that sustain repetitive cognition.	The analogy is functional only; there is no one-to-one clinical equivalent.
5. Intensified restraint	No established clinical equivalent.	Forceful interruption within the contemplative sequence.	Not emergency guidance; acute risk or severe symptoms require professional assessment and established safety protocols.

Note. Functional comparisons only; they do not imply historical, theoretical, mechanistic, or clinical equivalence. No randomized trial has evaluated the five MN 20 methods as a modern clinical protocol.

3. Empirical Support and the Limits of Evidence

The empirical literature supports construct-specific conclusions rather than a general "positive-thinking" effect. A 2025 unified series of meta-analyses found that CBT benefits several adult mental disorders, although effect sizes and certainty vary by disorder, comparator, and study quality (Cuijpers et al., 2025). This supports structured cognitive and behavioral methods rather than the proposition that positive thoughts alone remediate psychological disorders. Reappraisal research likewise requires qualification. A 2024 meta-analytic review found that individuals with anxiety or depressive disorders can reduce negative emotion through reappraisal, while behavioral and neural patterns of reappraisal capacity differ across diagnostic groups (Cui et al., 2024). The

relevant conclusion is not that reappraisal is universally adaptive or ineffective, but that capacity, context, and indication matter.

Recent evidence on well-being interventions likewise supports calibrated claims. A 2026 preregistered network meta-analysis of 183 randomized trials found that most well-being-focused interventions improved outcomes relative to inactive controls. Mindfulness, compassion-based approaches, and single positive psychological interventions showed moderate effects, but no consistent significant differences emerged among these psychological approaches; risk of bias was often moderate to high, and funnel-plot asymmetry suggested possible publication bias (Wilkie et al., 2026). A systematic review of 44 meta-analyses similarly found that mindfulness-based interventions generally outperform passive controls but show smaller and less consistent advantages against active controls (Goldberg et al., 2022). Compassion-focused therapy is promising, yet a systematic review and meta-analysis emphasizes the limited size and methodological quality of the clinical evidence base and the need for stronger long-term research (Millard et al., 2023).

The most direct caution about unqualified positivity remains construct-specific. Wood et al. (2009) found that repeating a highly positive self-statement could make some participants with low self-esteem feel worse. Kappes and Oettingen (2011) found that idealized positive fantasies can reduce energization. These findings do not show that hope, optimism, or all positive interventions are harmful. They show that some forms of positivity can fail when they conflict with existing beliefs or provide symbolic reward without engaging with obstacles. Mental contrasting with implementation intentions offers a contrasting example: meta-analytic evidence indicates a small-to-moderate benefit for goal attainment, although publication-bias concerns remain (Wang et al., 2021).

Contemplative research also requires explicit attention to potential harms. A systematic review of meditation-related adverse events found adverse experiences across both clinical and non-clinical studies, with prevalence estimates varying substantially by study design and reporting method (Farias et al., 2020). This does not justify treating meditation as generally harmful; it supports attention to population, dose, context, monitoring, and adverse-event reporting. The empirical conclusion is therefore disciplined rather than celebratory: cognition and contemplative practice should be evaluated by specific mechanisms, outcomes, comparators, and risks.

4. Cultural Translation and Ethical/Clinical Limits

Cross-cultural translation is not a neutral transfer of techniques. Scholarship on Buddhist modernism shows that modern presentations of meditation can be detraditionalized and psychologized, with practices reinterpreted through categories of modern psychology, science, and individual self-development (McMahan, 2009, 2023). Such translation can make practices accessible, but it also changes the conceptual setting in which they are understood and the outcomes for which they are used. Cultural psychiatry similarly cautions that Buddhist-derived practices take on different meanings across moral, religious, and clinical settings (Kirmayer, 2015). Recent work on culturally adapted mindfulness interventions shows that adaptation may involve language, values, delivery, representation, and community context rather than simple transplantation (Morales & Burnett-Zeigler, 2025).

The opposite risk is traditionalist insulation: treating canonical descriptions as if textual authority alone settled modern empirical questions. A critical comparison should resist both moves. For the present analysis, three levels should remain distinct: historical Buddhist meaning, proposed functional analogy, and modern empirical claim. A similarity at one level does not establish identity at another.

The same caution applies clinically. A person with obsessive-compulsive symptoms, trauma-related intrusions, severe depression, or acute risk may require a formulation in which direct suppression or moral classification of thoughts is counterproductive. Buddhist-derived interventions therefore require competence, informed consent, and clear limits. The ethical contribution of Buddhist thought is not a license for a practitioner to impose Buddhist doctrine; its relevance must be translated transparently and, in secular settings, collaboratively.

Proposed Integrative Framework and Research Agenda

1. Derivation and Relation to Existing Approaches

The proposed framework, ethically grounded adaptive cognition, is a synthetic model derived from recurring evaluative questions in the reviewed literature rather than from a single pre-existing theory. Awareness reflects the shared importance of recognizing cognition as an event before acting on it. Epistemic fit reflects evidence checking and calibration to uncertainty. Functional fit reflects consequence analysis and context-sensitive regulation. Ethical fit

reflects foreseeable harm, non-harming, and value-consistent action. Developmental fit reflects MN 19's emphasis on repeated thinking as an inclination of mind together with psychological accounts of learning, accessibility, and process change.

The five domains were derived by asking what was missing when the two literatures were compared dimensionally. Psychological models provide strong tools for evidential testing, functional analysis, regulation, and process change but do not share one substantive moral criterion. Buddhist analysis adds explicit attention to roots, non-harming, and the disposition strengthened by repetition, but these criteria require operationalization to be studied empirically. The framework therefore does not translate Buddhist categories directly into psychological variables; it treats them as sources for questions that can be made explicit and tested.

The novelty claim is intentionally narrow. The framework does not introduce new therapeutic techniques or claim superiority over established therapies. It overlaps with CBT in evidence checking and functional analysis, with ACT in values and psychological flexibility, with compassion-focused approaches in attention to hostile self-criticism and affiliative responding, and with process-based therapy in its focus on modifiable processes (Beck, 1976; Hofmann & Hayes, 2019; Macri & Rogge, 2024; Millard et al., 2023). Its distinctive contribution is to place epistemic, functional, ethical, and developmental criteria within one explicit evaluative structure rather than treating emotional positivity as the endpoint. Whether this integration adds explanatory, predictive, or practical value remains an empirical question.

Table 3. Derivation and Proposed Operationalization of the Five-Domain Framework

Domain	Buddhist basis	Psychological basis	Proposed indicator / expected outcome
Awareness	MN 19 recognition of arising thought; wise attention in MN 2.	Metacognitive awareness and decentering (Bernstein et al., 2015).	Indicator: identifies thought, emotion, and trigger without immediate fusion. Expected outcome: increased response choice.

Domain	Buddhist basis	Psychological basis	Proposed indicator / expected outcome
Epistemic fit	Attention to conditions and consequences; not equated with modern truth-testing.	CBT evidence checking and behavioral testing (Beck, 1976).	Indicator: can state evidence for and against an appraisal and identify uncertainty. Expected outcome: more calibrated appraisal.
Functional fit	MN 19 evaluates consequences for self, others, wisdom, and direction of cultivation.	Functional and context-sensitive regulation; goal-pursuit obstacle engagement.	Indicator: response is proportionate to the situation and supports effective action. Expected outcome: improved context fit.
Ethical fit	Non-greed, non-hatred, non-harming, and right intention (MN 9; MN 117).	Client values, professional ethics, and compassion-focused or values-based approaches.	Indicator: collaborative assessment of foreseeable harm, fairness, values, and consent. Expected outcome: less harmful, value-consistent action.
Developmental fit	MN 19: repeated thinking becomes an inclination of mind.	Learning, repetition, and process change.	Indicator: identifies the disposition strengthened by repetition. Expected outcome: durable beneficial habit and reduced maladaptive rehearsal.

Note. This table is the author's conceptual synthesis. It is not a validated scale or treatment algorithm. Ethical fit is collaboratively interpreted in pluralistic counseling and does not authorize therapist-imposed Buddhist doctrine.

2. Ethical Fit, Applications, and Research Agenda

In pluralistic counseling, ethical fit must be collaborative. It does not authorize the practitioner to impose Buddhist doctrine. Client and practitioner identify the client's values and goals, consider foreseeable harm to self and others, and remain within professional ethics, legal duties, autonomy, and informed consent. Explicitly Buddhist commitments such as renunciation or non-greed should function as normative commitments only when the client or institutional setting has knowingly chosen a Buddhist framework. In secular care, ethical discussion can focus on harm, compassion, fairness, and value-consistent action without requiring assent to Buddhist soteriology.

Educational application can follow the same logic. Instead of telling students simply to "think positively," a curriculum can ask them to notice the

thought, distinguish feeling from evidence, consider consequences for self and others, choose a context-appropriate strategy, and review what repeated use is cultivating. For examination anxiety, for example, "I will certainly get the highest score" may be less useful than a credible, action-oriented appraisal that acknowledges anxiety while identifying the next controllable step. The aim is not maximum positivity but calibrated, non-harming, behaviorally connected cognition.

Research should first operationalize the five domains, test whether they can be measured reliably, and determine whether they predict outcomes beyond established constructs. Comparative studies could examine whether adding ethical and developmental evaluation to standard cognitive or values-based interventions changes interpersonal harm, functioning, or maintenance over time. The five methods of MN 20 should be studied separately rather than presumed to form a validated clinical package. In particular, the fifth method should not be tested or taught as an acute-risk coping instruction; research bearing on it should distinguish contemplative training from emergency mental-health protocols.

Limitations

Several limitations constrain the conclusions. First, the review is purposive rather than systematic: no preregistered protocol, exhaustive database search, PRISMA flow diagram, or formal risk-of-bias instrument was used. Relevant sources may therefore have been missed, and source weighting partly reflects author judgment. Second, the psychological evidence is drawn mainly from English-language publications, while the Buddhist analysis relies primarily on English translations of selected early Buddhist texts, especially MN 19 and MN 20. The Pāli text was not independently collated, and wider canonical, commentarial, linguistic, and living-tradition materials could support different interpretations. Third, the review necessarily simplifies internal diversity within both Theravāda traditions and contemporary psychology. The cross-traditional analogies are conceptual and functional, not demonstrations of historical, mechanistic, or clinical equivalence. Finally, the five-domain framework has not been operationalized or empirically tested. Its proposed indicators and applications should therefore be treated as hypotheses for future research rather than established intervention guidance.

Conclusion

Theravāda Buddhist analyses of skillful thought and contemporary psychological approaches share a practical conviction that cognition can be observed, evaluated, and trained, but they do not employ a single common criterion for what counts as a desirable thought. Construct clarification shows that "positive thinking" is an unstable umbrella rather than a unitary psychological intervention. The comparison identifies partial functional similarities in awareness, redirection, consequence reflection, disengagement, process regulation, and repeated cultivation, while the empirical literature demonstrates that benefits and risks depend on the specific construct, population, context, and comparator.

The traditions nevertheless retain important conceptual differences. Psychological approaches variously emphasize evidential accuracy, functioning, symptom change, well-being, psychological flexibility, or goal attainment. Buddhist training explicitly situates thought within an ethical and liberative path concerned with non-greed, non-hatred, non-harming, wisdom, and the direction of cultivation. These aims may overlap in practice without becoming theoretically identical.

The central conclusion is therefore that positive valence alone is insufficient as a criterion of adaptive cognition. A more defensible evaluation requires attention to awareness, epistemic fit, functional fit, ethical fit, and developmental fit. This formulation preserves the empirical discipline of contemporary psychology while making explicit the Buddhist concern with non-harming and long-term cultivation. The proposed framework is not a new therapy and does not establish clinical equivalence between Buddhist and psychological techniques. Its scientific value will depend on whether the five domains can be operationalized, measured, and tested without erasing the conceptual differences that motivated the comparison.

Ethics Statement

This conceptual and critical review did not involve human participants, animals, interventions, or identifiable personal data.

Abbreviation of Pāli Tipiṭaka

MN: Majjhima Nikāya

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Wise Dietary Consideration of Eating Preferences for Anti-Aging Through the Buddha's Principles Synchronized to Medical Science

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Abstract

Population aging has intensified interest in approaches that support health span, physiological resilience, and healthy aging across the life course. Among modifiable factors, dietary behavior plays an important role in health and longevity. However, eating behavior is shaped not only by nutritional composition, but also by psychological, social, environmental, and attentional processes that influence what individuals consume, why they consume it, and how they consume it.

This article introduces an alternative pathway to anti-aging by applying the Buddha's principles, aligned with medical science, through wise consideration of eating preferences and the consumption of food and edible substances. Aging is an unavoidable and natural biological process; however, its acceleration may be influenced by lifestyle patterns, environmental conditions, and inappropriate dietary behaviors. From a medical perspective, anti-aging is not merely about outward appearance, but also about slowing progressive physiological and cellular deterioration while preserving physiological balance, resilience, health, and longevity.

Aging may also progress silently through repeated inappropriate eating behaviors, even before visible signs of physical decline become apparent. In this sense, dietary behavior may contribute to internal biological deterioration long before aging becomes externally recognizable.

In contemporary food culture, eating behaviors may be increasingly influenced by convenience, emotional responses, social pressures, trends, and artificial satisfaction rather than genuine physiological needs. Repeated inappropriate consumption may contribute to physical and psychological stress, chronic inflammation, disruption of homeostasis, cellular senescence, and progressive biological deterioration. These interconnected processes are conceptualized in this article through the Aging Loop, a self-reinforcing cycle in

which physiological deterioration may further intensify physical and psychological stress and contribute to continued biological decline.
Keywords: Healthy aging; Dietary behavior; Biological aging; Mindful eating; Food and Edible Substances; The Buddha's Principles; Moderation (Sappāye-Mattaññū); Suitability (Sappāya-Kārī); Wise Attention (Yonisomanasikāra); Cellular senescence; Inflammaging; Preventive medicine; Health span

Introduction

In today's fast-paced world, the way humans eat and live plays an increasingly influential role in the acceleration of aging. Although people may live longer than in previous generations, the rise in chronic conditions, physical degeneration, and emotional distress has become more evident than ever. Longer life expectancy has also shifted attention toward health span, functional well-being, and the quality of aging rather than survival alone. These issues raise an important question: why does premature aging persist despite advancements in medicine and longevity? One major factor is dietary behavior. The act of eating today extends beyond mere consumption of food; it includes one's relationship with food and edible substances, and also with external stimuli such as media and societal influence, all of which can act as accelerators of aging.

Recent studies have shown that poor dietary habits, stress from environmental stimuli, and internal imbalances play a significant role in triggering cellular damage and accelerating biological decline (López-Otín et al., 2013). In modern food culture, convenience and synthetic appeal often outweigh mindfulness and nutritional value. As a result, individuals consume without awareness, driven by artificial satisfaction rather than necessity, contributing to metabolic imbalance and chronic stress. Dietary behavior is shaped not only by nutritional composition, but also by psychological, social, environmental, and attentional processes that influence food choice and consumption.

Medical science has long emphasized evidence-based practices to preserve health and slow biological aging. However, the Buddha's principles offer a unique behavioral framework that aligns with these scientific findings. The principles of suitability (Sappāya-Kārī), moderation (Sappāye-Mattaññū), and wise attention (Yonisomanasikāra) are deeply rooted in mindful awareness of what we eat, why we eat it, and how we eat it. These principles encourage a conscious relationship with food and edible substances, helping individuals to not

only nourish the body and mind appropriately, but also to differentiate true value from artificial value. Such consideration also recognizes that appropriate dietary choices may vary according to individual physical and mental conditions, lifestyle, environment, and context rather than following a single pattern for everyone.

Building upon previous work on anti-aging through the synchronization of the Buddha's principles with medical science [(Brikshavana) Songpaiboon, 2024], this article focuses specifically on eating preferences and wise dietary consideration. It introduces an alternative approach to anti-aging by aligning the Buddha's principles with modern medical insights, focusing particularly on the impact of mindful dietary behavior. It proposes that integrating ethical, conscious consumption with scientific understanding can lead to a more sustainable, health-enhancing lifestyle, in terms of both health span and life span.

Fast-Paced Lifestyles and Changing Food Choices

In today's rapidly changing world, food and edible substances, ranging from traditional meals to functional beverages, nutritional supplements, herbal products, and beauty-enhancing consumables, have become more than sources of nourishment. They now intersect with identity, lifestyle, and social influence. The pressures of modern urban life, with its tight schedules and increasing reliance on technology, have significantly altered the way people eat. Meals once carefully prepared at home are now often replaced by processed foods, ready-to-eat meals, or fast deliveries due to time constraints.

This shift in consumption behavior has had profound implications. Overconsumption of ultra-processed foods high in added sugars, refined carbohydrates, and synthetic additives has been associated with adverse metabolic and inflammatory effects that may contribute to processes related to biological aging (Monteiro et al., 2018; López-Otín et al., 2013). Beyond physiological effects, eating habits now reflect social signals. Influencer-endorsed trends and visually appealing meals promoted through social media often lead individuals to choose foods based on image rather than true value, compromising both physical and mental health.

Moreover, it is not only luxurious wellness products that pose risks; even simple, everyday foods can become stressors to the body when consumed without suitability, moderation, or mindful attention. Ingestible substances marketed for

anti-aging, such as functional drinks, beauty supplements, or exotic herbal extracts, are widely advertised on digital platforms, often with dramatic claims. While these products may have certain benefits, if consumed without discernment or critical thinking, they may lead to overuse, metabolic imbalance, and internal disharmony.

Critically, even everyday foods—regardless of how simple or natural—can disrupt internal homeostasis if consumed without suitability, moderation, or the ability to distinguish true from artificial value. The Buddha's principle of wise attention (Yonisomanasikāra) emphasizes the importance of conscious discernment in consumption: asking not only what we eat, but why and how we eat. Without such reflection, individuals may fall into patterns of mindless eating that overburden the body and accelerate aging.

In this context, both extravagant wellness products and ordinary meals can either serve as nourishment or as stressors, depending on the presence or absence of mindfulness and discernment. Encouraging the integration of medical science with behavioral principles from the Buddha's teachings provides a balanced, comprehensive framework for rethinking food choices in today's society. This approach underscores the central theme of this article: food and edible substances, when consumed unmindfully, may become silent accelerators of aging—yet when aligned with wisdom, they can become powerful tools for promoting health and longevity.

Trend-Based Eating and Celebrity Imitation

In today's media-saturated world, food consumption is increasingly shaped by social trends, public figures, and digital platforms. Eating choices are no longer based solely on personal needs or health considerations but are often influenced by popular aesthetics, celebrity endorsements, and the desire to align with aspirational lifestyles portrayed online (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015).

A wide range of modern dietary patterns, such as low-carbohydrate regimens, plant-based eating, or time-restricted feeding, have gained popularity through online communities. While these approaches may offer benefits when practiced with awareness and medical guidance, their promotion through social media can sometimes lead to uncritical adoption. Individuals may follow such trends without mindful reflection or without considering their unique health conditions, which may result in physical or emotional strain (Deliens et al., 2014).

What is often overlooked is that these behaviors can be driven more by external pressure than by inner discernment. Social validation, influencer culture, and the "image" of healthy living can lead to an emphasis on artificial value, what appears beneficial, rather than true value, which supports genuine well-being. This is especially concerning among younger populations who are more vulnerable to idealized body standards and trend-based eating (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015).

The Buddha's principle of wise attention (Yonisomanasikāra) encourages mindful awareness of one's motivations and the underlying value of what is consumed. Applying this principle helps individuals recognize the difference between choices that nourish the body and those that are shaped by impulse or imitation. Without this discernment, even health-labeled behaviors can turn into patterns that strain both body and mind (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

In this light, integrating medical understanding with Buddhist ethical perspectives provides a grounded framework for evaluating modern eating behaviors. Rather than rejecting all trends, the aim is to cultivate conscious decision-making, where food choices are guided by personal needs, balance, and sustainability—rather than trends alone.

Mindless Eating and the Social Function of Food

In the context of modern life, food and edible substances no longer serve solely as nourishment but have taken on complex social, emotional, and symbolic roles. Many people consume food not because of physical hunger but in response to social influence, emotional states, or environmental triggers. Digital media, particularly social platforms, have intensified these behaviors by promoting food as part of a lifestyle identity. Sharing meals online, seeking validation through aesthetic food presentations, or consuming what is perceived as trendy has shifted the act of eating from a biological necessity to a form of social performance.

Numerous individuals now eat under the influence of peer behavior, societal expectations, or emotional stress—sometimes without any conscious connection to actual bodily needs. Emotional or stress-induced eating often arises from conditioned habits and internalized coping mechanisms, leading individuals to eat in response to anxiety, sadness, or even boredom rather than hunger (Kristeller & Wolever, 2011). Such patterns contribute to both physical

imbalance and psychological strain, reinforcing cycles of overconsumption or nutritional neglect.

Moreover, the food environment itself fosters impulsivity. Heavily marketed products—ranging from indulgent desserts to wellness items—often emphasize artificial appeal rather than genuine suitability. Without wise attention (Yonisomanasikāra), individuals may unconsciously engage in habitual eating or social mimicry, weakening their ability to discern the true value of what they consume. This lack of discernment, combined with overstimulation, can erode internal equilibrium and intensify the aging process through stress and metabolic dysregulation.

Importantly, these behaviors, though normalized, may go unnoticed as contributors to biological decline. When food becomes more about image, validation, or emotional compensation than nourishment, the body may silently bear the consequences through systemic inflammation, hormonal disruption, and emotional exhaustion. This article highlights that even seemingly harmless daily eating behaviors **may contribute to premature aging** if not grounded in mindfulness, suitability, and conscious awareness.

Distorted Eating Patterns and the Importance of Conscious Food Choices

In contemporary society, food and edible substances are no longer merely sources of nourishment; they have evolved into complex symbols of lifestyle, emotion, social status, and even personal identity. Unlike previous sections that explored shifting food trends and media influence, this section focuses on distorted eating patterns that disrupt internal balance and silently contribute to premature aging.

1. Overeating and the "Buffet Mentality"

One of the most pervasive forms of distorted eating is overeating, often seen in environments that encourage consumption without reflection, such as all-you-can-eat buffets. The "buffet mentality," driven by a desire to maximize artificial value for money, compels individuals to eat beyond their actual hunger. Research has shown that people tend to consume more when exposed to a greater variety of foods, a phenomenon known as sensory-specific satiety delay (Rolls et al., 1981; Cunningham et al., 2023). This behavior can lead to obesity, metabolic

disorders, and chronic inflammation, which ultimately disrupt cellular function and hasten aging.

Moreover, social and environmental cues heavily influence overconsumption. People often mimic their peers' eating behavior during group dining experiences, normalizing excessive intake. Food abundance in social contexts reinforces a departure from mindful moderation, contradicting the Buddha's principles of Sappāya-Kārī and Sappāye-Mattaññū, which emphasize suitability and moderation.

2. Under-eating and Extreme Dieting

While overeating is widely recognized, under-eating and extreme dietary restrictions are equally problematic. Many individuals adopt unsupervised regimens such as prolonged fasting, extreme caloric restriction, or low-carbohydrate diets in pursuit of rapid results, often inspired by trends rather than medical guidance. These practices can result in nutrient deficiencies, hormonal imbalances, and long-term metabolic damage (Trepanowski & Bloomer, 2010).

In the digital age, social media reinforces unrealistic body standards, fueling conditions like orthorexia nervosa, an obsessive focus on "clean eating" that paradoxically undermines holistic health. When dietary behaviors are dictated by perfectionism or peer comparison rather than mindful inquiry, both physical and mental health are compromised.

3. Eating as a Status Symbol: When Food Becomes Fashion

Today, food and edible substances often reflect social aspiration rather than nourishment. High-end ingredients, aesthetic superfoods, and luxury dining experiences are frequently consumed not for health value but for symbolic capital. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok normalize this behavior, promoting visually appealing but nutritionally questionable options.

This shift distracts individuals from evaluating the true value of what they consume. Products marketed as "healthy" or "clean" often contain hidden sugars or synthetic additives, giving rise to a false sense of well-being. Such consumption habits demonstrate how artificial value can replace genuine nourishment, clouding discernment and perpetuating imbalance.

4. Emotional and Stress-Driven Eating

Emotional eating is another critical dimension of distorted eating. Stress, sadness, or anxiety often drive individuals to consume comfort foods rich in sugars and fats, temporarily soothing but physiologically damaging. Elevated cortisol levels during stress have been linked to increased cravings for energy-dense food (Epel et al., 2001).

However, not all stress leads to overeating. Some individuals respond to emotional turmoil by skipping meals, consuming nutritionally void items, or intentionally avoiding self-care. This "passive resistance" can manifest as subtle self-sabotage—ignoring hunger, avoiding hydration, or rejecting nourishing foods. These behaviors, often unconscious, initiate a loop of emotional depletion and physical deterioration. Together, they mark the starting point of an aging cycle propelled by both mental and metabolic imbalance.

5. The Importance of Conscious Food Choices

To reverse this degenerative trajectory, individuals must return to mindful inquiry (or Yonisomanasikāra) by observing not just what they eat, but why and how they eat it. Conscious food choices require clarity, balance, and self-respect.

- **Balancing Quantity with Quality** – Eating is neither indulgence nor deprivation; it is the thoughtful intake of nutrients that align with the body's changing needs.
- **Evaluating Trends vs. True Value** – Not all wellness trends are health-promoting. Critical awareness helps consumers distinguish evidence-based practices from manipulative branding.
- **Understanding Social and Emotional Drivers** – Awareness of psychological and cultural triggers allows individuals to restore agency over their choices.

Distorted eating patterns, whether through excess, restriction, or social mimicry, have far-reaching consequences. However, when food and edible substances are approached with conscious attention, even daily consumption becomes a transformative act. It can restore vitality, preserve inner balance, and ultimately support the process of aging wisely.

Ultimately, distorted eating behaviors, whether driven by stress, societal pressures, or status-seeking, represent more than poor dietary choices; they signify a disconnection between the body's true needs and the mind's conscious

awareness. Recognizing this disconnection is essential for reclaiming health and preventing the subtle onset of premature aging.

In essence, distorted eating reflects imbalance, both physiological and psychological. Through the lens of the Buddha's principles, such imbalance underscores the absence of wise attention, including discernment between true and artificial value, suitability, and moderation, key elements that, if overlooked, may silently initiate the aging process.

Therefore, to truly break free from this cycle, the practice of wise attention in choosing food and edible substances is the only starting point—one with no shortcut.

Theoretical Explanation of the Aging Loop in Medical Perspectives

1. The Impact of Neglecting Suitability, Moderation, and Wise Discernment Between True and Artificial Value in Food and Edible Substance Consumption

The Aging Loop is presented in this study as a theoretical explanation of how inappropriate consumption behavior may gradually accelerate biological and psychosomatic aging (Brikshavana) Songpaiboon, P., 2024). In medical perspectives, aging is not merely a chronological process, but a self-reinforcing cycle involving stress, inflammation, disruption of homeostasis, cellular senescence, and progressive physiological deterioration.

This cycle may begin when individuals consume food and edible substances without suitability, moderation, and wise discernment between true and artificial value. Repeated inappropriate consumption behaviors may gradually disturb the body's internal equilibrium and contribute to the acceleration of aging through interconnected biological and psychosomatic mechanisms.

2. Physical and Psychological Stress — The Beginning of the Aging Loop

The Aging Loop may begin when the body and mind are repeatedly exposed to physical and psychological stress caused by inappropriate consumption behavior. Such stress may arise from overeating, under-eating, excessive consumption, restrictive consumption, or the repeated consumption of

food and edible substances chosen without careful consideration of their true value and suitability to the body's condition.

In contemporary society, many individuals consume food and edible substances not solely for nourishment, but in response to emotional distress, social pressure, symbolic value, trend-based influence, or temporary artificial satisfaction. Some individuals consume excessively to seek emotional comfort, while others may intentionally neglect nourishment or hydration due to emotional exhaustion or psychological imbalance. These behaviors reflect a growing disconnection between the body's true needs and the impulses of the mind.

Persistent psychosomatic stress disrupts neuroendocrine regulation and elevates stress hormones such as cortisol, contributing to metabolic imbalance, sleep disturbance, immune suppression, emotional instability, and reduced physiological resilience (Epel et al., 2001; Cannon, 1932). Over time, the body becomes increasingly vulnerable to biological deterioration.

3. Chronic Inflammation — Silent Biological Deterioration

As stress and inappropriate consumption behaviors persist, the body gradually enters a state of chronic low-grade inflammation, commonly referred to as inflammaging (Franceschi et al., 2000). Prolonged inflammatory activity weakens the body's restorative capacity and promotes oxidative stress throughout tissues and organ systems.

This inflammatory environment silently damages cells and accelerates biological deterioration. As the process continues, individuals may begin to experience fatigue, reduced vitality, slower physiological recovery, diminished cognitive clarity, and progressive physical decline—early manifestations of accelerated aging (Harman, 2006).

4. Loss of Homeostasis — Disruption of Internal Equilibrium

Persistent inflammation progressively disrupts homeostasis, the body's intrinsic ability to maintain internal physiological balance. Regulatory systems responsible for metabolic stability, hormonal coordination, immune function, and tissue repair gradually become inefficient.

Mitochondrial activity decreases, physiological recovery slows, and resilience weakens. Both body and mind become increasingly unstable, reducing

the organism's capacity to adapt effectively to continuous stressors. This stage reflects the progressive collapse of systemic equilibrium described in Cannon's concept of "the wisdom of the body" (Cannon, 1932).

5. Cellular Senescence — Progressive Cellular Degeneration

As imbalance continues over prolonged periods, damaged cells gradually enter a state of cellular senescence in which they lose the capacity to divide, regenerate, and function normally (Hayflick, 1965; Campisi, 2013). Senescent cells accumulate within tissues and contribute to further inflammatory signaling, weakening surrounding healthy cells and impairing tissue regeneration.

At this stage, biological aging becomes increasingly visible. Organ function declines, physical resilience weakens, recovery capacity decreases, and physiological degeneration progresses more rapidly. The body progressively loses its ability to restore internal equilibrium effectively.

6. Accelerated Aging and Reinforcement of the Aging Loop

Eventually, the cumulative effects of chronic stress, inflammation, disruption of homeostasis, and cellular senescence manifest as accelerated aging and chronic disease. Conditions such as cardiovascular disease, metabolic disorders, neurodegenerative conditions, and immune dysfunction emerge with increasing severity and earlier onset (López-Otín et al., 2013; Barzilai et al., 2012).

Importantly, this physiological deterioration becomes an additional source of physical and psychological stress. Fatigue, emotional exhaustion, chronic discomfort, declining vitality, and reduced quality of life further intensify psychosomatic imbalance. As a consequence, the body repeatedly re-enters the cycle of stress, inflammation, and degeneration, reinforcing the Aging Loop and continuously accelerating the aging process.

In medical perspectives, the repeated neglect of suitability, moderation, and wise discernment between true and artificial value in food and edible substance consumption may gradually initiate a self-reinforcing Aging Loop. Chronic psychosomatic stress, persistent inflammation, disruption of homeostasis, and cellular senescence collectively contribute to progressive physiological deterioration and accelerated aging.

Therefore, aging should not be understood solely as the passage of time, but also as the consequence of repeated imbalance in behavioral and physiological processes. The careful consideration of food and edible substances through suitability, moderation, and wise discernment may serve as an important foundation for preserving internal balance, supporting resilience, and reducing the acceleration of biological aging.

Synchronizing the Buddha's Principles with Medical Science Through Wise Dietary Consideration

1. Introduction: Integrating the Buddha's Principles and Modern Medical Science for Anti-Aging

In the pursuit of anti-aging, modern medical science recognizes that the aging process begins not merely with external degeneration but with internal imbalances—particularly those triggered by chronic physical and psychological stress. Such stress is often initiated by inappropriate eating behaviors, including the consumption of food and edible substances that are not aligned with the body's actual physiological and psychological needs. These inappropriate dietary behaviors gradually disturb internal equilibrium and contribute to inflammation, metabolic disruption, cellular deterioration, and accelerated aging.

As discussed in Section 1.5, the Aging Loop describes aging as a self-reinforcing psychosomatic cycle involving stress, chronic inflammation, disruption of homeostasis, cellular senescence, and progressive physiological decline. In this framework, inappropriate consumption behavior acts as an important trigger that continuously reinforces biological deterioration.

While modern medical science explains the biological mechanisms underlying aging, the Buddha's principles provide a behavioral and contemplative framework that may help interrupt this degenerative cycle. Through wise attention (Yonisomanasikāra), including the discernment between true and artificial value, suitability (Sappāya-Kārī), moderation (Sappāye-Mattaññū), individuals are encouraged to carefully consider food and edible substances before consumption. These principles emphasize not only physical nourishment, but also the maintenance of psychological balance and long-term well-being (Payutto, 2021).

Therefore, synchronizing the Buddha's principles with medical science offers an alternative pathway to anti-aging through wise dietary consideration. This integration may help reduce psychosomatic stress, support physiological balance, delay cellular deterioration, and promote sustainable health and longevity.

2. The Role of Wise Attention (Yonisomanasikāra) in Dietary Consideration

At the core of the Buddha's principles is wise attention (Yonisomanasikāra), which refers to careful, reflective, and discerning consideration before action (Payutto, 2021). When applied to food and edible substance consumption, wise attention encourages individuals to examine not only what they consume, but also why and how they consume it. This principle promotes awareness of long-term consequences rather than temporary satisfaction or impulsive desire.

Wise attention also supports discernment between true value and artificial value in food and edible substances. True value refers to consumption that genuinely supports the body's physiological needs, preserves internal balance, and contributes to long-term well-being. Artificial value, by contrast, refers to consumption driven primarily by external appearance, social influence, emotional gratification, excessive advertising, or temporary sensory pleasure rather than genuine biological benefit.

In modern society, many food and edible substances are heavily marketed through wellness trends, social media influence, and image-based advertising. Functional beverages, dietary supplements, beauty-enhancing products, and highly processed consumables are often promoted as symbols of health or social identity. However, without wise attention, individuals may consume these products uncritically despite their questionable nutritional value or potential physiological burden.

From medical perspectives, repeated inappropriate consumption behaviors may contribute to psychosomatic stress, metabolic imbalance, inflammatory responses, and progressive cellular deterioration. Through the application of wise attention, individuals become more capable of selecting food and edible substances that support physiological resilience, reduce unnecessary biological stress, and contribute to healthier aging processes.

3. Suitability (Sappāya-Kārī) and Moderation (Sappāye-Mattaññū) in Food and Edible Substance Consumption

Suitability (Sappāya-Kārī) and moderation (Sappāye-Mattaññū) are important principles in both the Buddha's teachings and modern medical perspectives on health preservation (Payutto, 2021). These principles emphasize that food and edible substance consumption should be balanced, appropriate, and aligned with the body's actual needs rather than driven by excess, deprivation, or external influence.

Suitability, on the other hand, refers to selecting food and edible substances that are appropriate to an individual's age, health condition, mental state, environment, and lifestyle. Appropriate consumption may vary among individuals depending on physiological conditions and psychosomatic vulnerability. Food and edible substances that are suitable for one individual may not necessarily benefit another.

Moderation refers to the consumption of food and edible substances in appropriate quantities—neither excessive nor insufficient. Excessive consumption inevitably places a burden on the body, causing both physical and psychological stress, leading to inflammation, and gradually entering the Aging Loop. Likewise, insufficient consumption also places a burden on the body and contributes to both physical and psychological stress, which may similarly lead to inflammation, loss of internal equilibrium, and cellular senescence. Both conditions therefore disrupt internal balance and contribute to the Aging Loop and the acceleration of biological deterioration.

In contemporary consumption culture, individuals are frequently exposed to social pressures, excessive marketing, and trend-driven dietary behaviors that distort perceptions of quantity and appropriateness. Concepts such as "all-you-can-eat" promotions, excessive supplementation, restrictive dieting, and image-driven consumption may encourage behaviors that contradict suitability and moderation.

From medical perspectives, maintaining suitability and moderation in dietary behavior may help reduce psychosomatic stress, preserve homeostasis, support metabolic balance, and reduce the progression of chronic inflammation associated with accelerated aging. These principles therefore function as

important behavioral mechanisms that may help interrupt the Aging Loop described in Section 1.5.

4. True Value and Artificial Value in Food and Edible Substance Consumption Through Wise Attention (Yonisomanasikāra)

The discernment between true value and artificial value in food and edible substance consumption is closely associated with the practice of wise attention (Yonisomanasikāra) (Payutto, 2021). This perspective emphasizes that consumption should not be guided merely by temporary desire, social image, convenience, or marketing influence, but by careful consideration of whether the consumed substance genuinely supports physiological and psychological well-being.

True value refers to food and edible substances that genuinely nourish the body, maintain internal balance, support cellular function, and contribute to long-term health. Such substances may include nutritious meals, appropriately formulated supplements, functional foods, or health-supportive consumables that are beneficial to the body when consumed appropriately and suitably.

Artificial value, by contrast, refers to food and edible substances consumed primarily because of social trends, emotional gratification, external appearance, symbolic status, exaggerated advertising, or temporary sensory pleasure despite limited physiological benefit. These may include excessively processed products, highly marketed wellness consumables, sugar-dense beverages, or image-driven dietary products that create the illusion of health without genuinely supporting physiological resilience.

Modern medical science increasingly recognizes that repeated consumption behaviors lacking careful discernment may contribute to metabolic imbalance, oxidative stress, chronic inflammation, and progressive biological deterioration (Franceschi et al., 2000; López-Otín et al., 2013). Over time, these physiological disturbances may accelerate cellular senescence and reinforce the Aging Loop.

Through wise attention, individuals become more capable of critically evaluating food and edible substances beyond surface-level attraction. This mindful discernment may reduce unnecessary physiological burden, preserve internal equilibrium, and support healthier, more sustainable aging.

5. Alternative Pathways to Anti-Aging Through Wise Dietary Consideration:

The Synchronization of the Buddha's Principles and Medical Science

The synchronization of the Buddha's principles with medical science offers an alternative framework for understanding anti-aging beyond external appearance or temporary intervention. Rather than focusing solely on cosmetic outcomes, this perspective emphasizes the relationship between dietary behavior, psychosomatic balance, physiological resilience, and long-term health.

Medical science explains aging through mechanisms such as chronic stress, inflammation, disruption of homeostasis, and cellular senescence. The Buddha's principles complement these mechanisms by addressing the behavioral and psychological conditions that contribute to physiological deterioration. Through wise attention (Yonisomanasikāra), suitability (Sappāya-Kārī), moderation (Sappāye-Mattaññū), and discernment between true and artificial value, individuals may reduce inappropriate consumption behaviors that accelerate biological decline.

This integrative framework highlights that food and edible substances are not merely sources of temporary pleasure or symbolic identity, but important factors capable of influencing psychosomatic balance, metabolic regulation, inflammatory responses, and cellular health. The repeated practice of wise dietary consideration may therefore help interrupt the Aging Loop by reducing unnecessary stress, preserving homeostasis, supporting physiological recovery, and reducing progressive degeneration.

Consequently, anti-aging should not be understood solely as resistance to chronological aging, but as the continuous cultivation of balance between body, mind, behavior, and consumption. Through the synchronization of the Buddha's principles and medical science, wise dietary consideration may serve as an alternative pathway toward sustainable health, resilience, and longevity.

The Wise Dietary Consideration Model for Anti-Aging Through the Buddha's Principles Synchronized to Medical Science

The proposed conceptual model illustrates Wise Dietary Consideration as a pre-decision process that connects the Buddha's principles with medical science in the context of anti-aging. The model is guided by wise attention

(Yonisomanasikāra), suitability (Sappāya-Kārī), and moderation (Sappāye-Mattaññū), with wise attention including discernment between true and artificial value.

From this pre-decision process, dietary choices may lead toward appropriate or inappropriate consumption. Appropriate consumption is associated with Healthy Aging, whereas inappropriate consumption may be associated with the Aging Loop and Aging. The model therefore presents a conceptual pathway linking wise dietary consideration with different aging-related outcomes without detailing the underlying physiological mechanisms.

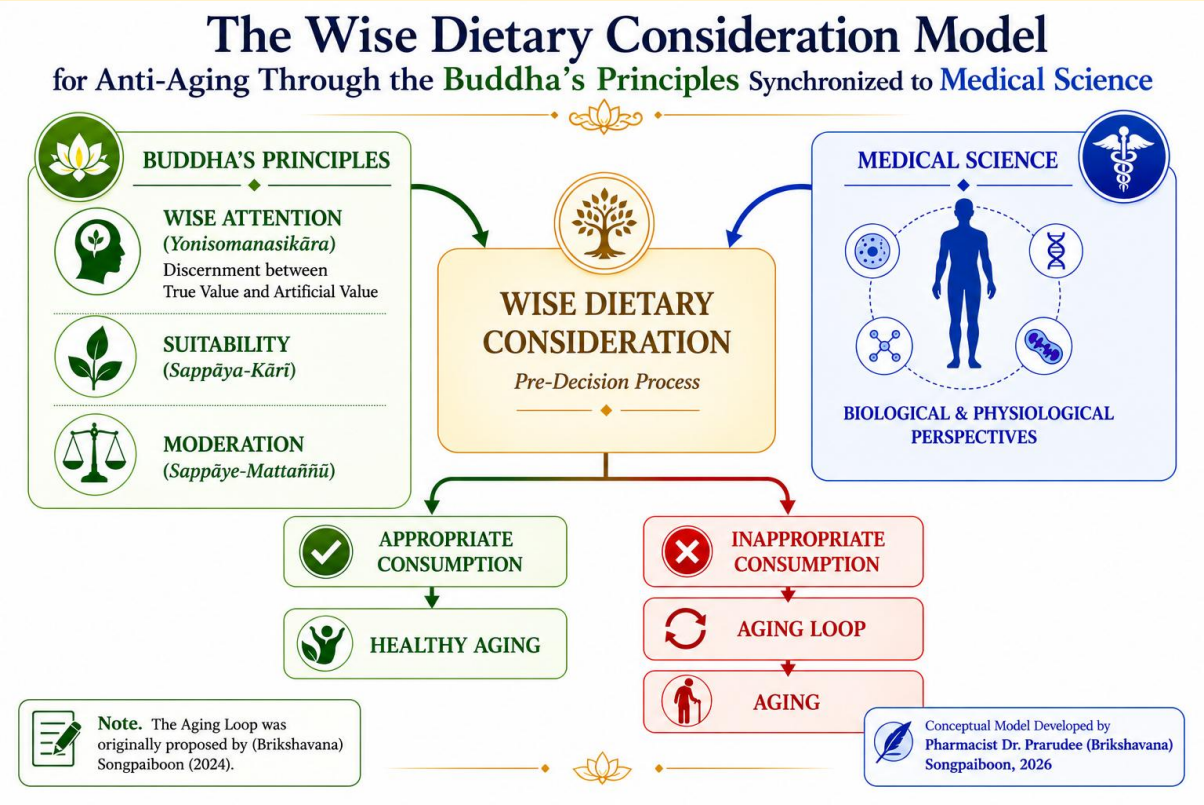

Figure 1. The Wise Dietary Consideration Model for Anti-Aging Through the Buddha's Principles Synchronized to Medical Science.

Note. *The Aging Loop was originally proposed by (Brikshavana) Songpaiboon (2024).*

Implications for Preventive Medicine and Behavioral Health

The Wise Dietary Consideration Model may provide a practical framework for preventive medicine, dietary counseling, and health education by encouraging individuals to consider their consumption before making dietary

choices. Rather than focusing only on what is consumed, the model emphasizes consideration of what, why, how, when, and how much individuals consume. Through Wise Attention (Yonisomanasikāra), individuals may discern between true and artificial value, while Suitability (Sappāya-Kārī) and Moderation (Sappāye-Mattaññū) help align consumption with individual physical and mental conditions and appropriate amounts.

In practical settings, these principles may complement conventional nutritional assessment by helping health professionals and individuals consider the behavioral and psychosomatic dimensions of dietary choices, including physiological needs and the influence of emotional, social, environmental, and marketing factors.

Limitations

This article focuses specifically on dietary behavior and wise dietary consideration in relation to anti-aging, building upon previous research on anti-aging through the synchronization of the Buddha's principles with medical science [(Brikshavana) Songpaiboon, 2024].

Aging is a complex and multidimensional process influenced by numerous biological, behavioral, psychological, social, and environmental factors beyond dietary consumption. Accordingly, the proposed model should be interpreted within the specific scope of this article rather than as a comprehensive explanation of all determinants of aging.

Conclusion

The aging process should not be understood solely as a chronological phenomenon, but also as a self-reinforcing psychosomatic cycle influenced by behavioral, physiological, and psychological imbalances. This article proposes that inappropriate consumption behaviors, particularly the consumption of food and edible substances without wise attention, suitability, and moderation, may contribute to chronic stress, inflammation, disruption of homeostasis, cellular senescence, and the acceleration of biological aging through the Aging Loop.

Modern medical science explains the mechanisms underlying aging through physiological deterioration, chronic inflammation, oxidative stress, and progressive cellular degeneration. At the same time, the Buddha's principles provide a contemplative and behavioral framework that encourages careful

consideration of food and edible substance consumption through wise attention (Yonisomanasikāra), suitability (Sappāya-Kārī), and moderation (Sappāye-Mattaññū). Through the synchronization of these principles with medical science, individuals may become more capable of reducing psychosomatic stress, preserving internal equilibrium, and supporting healthier aging processes.

This integrative perspective highlights that food and edible substances are not merely matters of temporary pleasure, consumption trends, or symbolic value, but important factors capable of influencing long-term physiological and psychological well-being. The careful consideration of consumption behaviors may therefore serve as an important foundation for slowing the acceleration of biological deterioration and promoting sustainable health, resilience, Health Span, and Life Span.

The contribution of this article lies in positioning wise dietary consideration as a pre-decision process that guides consumption choices before they are made. Rather than addressing dietary behavior only after choices have been made, the proposed model emphasizes the importance of considering physiological and psychological needs, suitability, moderation, and the true value of food and edible substances before consumption occurs. By bringing this reflective process into the decision stage, the model offers a practical conceptual bridge between behavioral regulation and the physiological processes associated with healthy aging.

Ultimately, food and edible substances may either preserve internal balance or silently intensify degeneration. The acceleration of aging may therefore be influenced not only by what is consumed, but also by how wisely consumption is considered.

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A Study on Nāgārjuna's Mahayana Precept Thoughts in Chinese-Translated Mādhyamika-śāstra

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Abstract

This academic article examines Nāgārjuna's Mahāyāna precept thought as reflected in the Chinese translation of the Madhyamaka-śāstra. It focuses on passages concerning dependent arising, karmic causality, non-self, and the emptiness of dharmas in order to clarify how ethical cultivation can remain meaningful within a philosophy of emptiness. Although modern scholarship has extensively examined Nāgārjuna's ontology and epistemology, the ethical and disciplinary implications of Madhyamaka thought have received comparatively less attention

The article employs qualitative documentary and textual analysis. The primary source is Kumārajīva's Chinese translation of the Madhyamaka-śāstra in the Taishō canon, supplemented by Garfield's English translation of the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā and relevant modern scholarship in Buddhist philosophy and ethics. The analysis is organized around the Two Truths and three interrelated contemplative themes: dependent arising, karmic causes and effects, and non-self/non-dharma.

The analysis shows that Nāgārjuna's account of emptiness does not require the rejection of moral discipline. At the level of conventional truth (saṃvṛti-satya), precepts, karmic responsibility, and wholesome conduct retain practical and ethical force. At the level of ultimate truth (paramārtha-satya), neither precepts, agents, actions, nor consequences possess independent intrinsic nature (svabhāva). Their emptiness is precisely what makes them dependently arisen and relational rather than fixed or self-subsistent.

The article therefore argues that Mahāyāna precept cultivation and emptiness are not contradictory. Ethical discipline can be understood as a conventional and skillful expression of insight into dependent arising, while the realization of emptiness prevents moral practice from hardening into reification or dogmatism. This interpretation contributes to Buddhist ethics by highlighting

the practical dimension of Madhyamaka thought and to Chinese Buddhist studies by showing how the Chinese Madhyamaka-śāstra can be read as a source for reconstructing Nāgārjuna's ethical vision.

Keywords: Nāgārjuna; Mahāyāna precepts; Emptiness; Two Truths; Madhyamaka-śāstra; Buddhist ethics.

Introduction

Nāgārjuna is widely recognized as one of the most influential philosophers of Mahāyāna Buddhism, particularly for his analysis of emptiness (śūnyatā), dependent arising (pratītyasamutpāda), and the Middle Way. Modern scholarship has often emphasized the ontological and epistemological implications of his critique of intrinsic nature (svabhāva). Yet Madhyamaka philosophy also raises an unavoidable ethical question: if persons, actions, rules, and consequences are empty of inherent existence, on what basis can moral discipline and precept cultivation retain significance? This question is especially important for Mahāyāna Buddhism, in which philosophical insight and bodhisattva conduct are expected to develop together rather than as independent domains.

Recent scholarship has increasingly addressed this ethical dimension. Finnigan (2018) notes that contemporary debates on Madhyamaka ethics center partly on whether a philosophy of emptiness can sustain meaningful ethical distinctions. Tillemans (2010) similarly argues that Madhyamaka does not eliminate ordinary ethical practices; rather, ethical distinctions continue to function at the level of conventional truth. These discussions help challenge the assumption that emptiness necessarily leads to moral nihilism. They also provide a basis for reconsidering Nāgārjuna's use of practical examples, giving, restraint, karmic consequences, and precept observance, within arguments that are usually read primarily as metaphysical or logical.

Against this background, the present article examines precept-related passages in the Chinese Madhyamaka-śāstra, especially those associated with dependent arising, karmic causes and effects, non-self, and the emptiness of dharmas. Its central question is how ethical cultivation can operate coherently within Nāgārjuna's theory of emptiness and the Two Truths. Rather than treating the precepts as a separate ethical system superimposed on Madhyamaka

philosophy, the analysis asks how examples of precept practice function within Nāgārjuna's reasoning itself.

The study is based primarily on Kumārajīva's Chinese translation of the Madhyamaka-śāstra (T 30, no. 1564), with reference to Garfield's English translation of the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā and relevant Chinese- and English-language scholarship. The method is qualitative documentary and textual analysis. Because the article is concerned with the relation between doctrine and cultivation, it also treats contemplation as an interpretive category: dependent arising, causality, and non-self are examined not only as propositions but as ways of seeing that shape ethical conduct.

The article advances three related claims. First, Nāgārjuna's analysis of dependent arising undermines reified views of both moral agents and moral rules without abolishing ethical responsibility. Second, karmic causality remains intelligible at the level of conventional truth precisely because causes and effects are dependently arisen rather than intrinsically existent. Third, reflection on non-self and the emptiness of dharmas weakens attachment to the agent, action, and object of moral conduct while preserving the practical necessity of wholesome behavior. In this sense, the Two Truths provide the conceptual framework through which emptiness and precept cultivation can be understood as mutually compatible.

This approach contributes to Buddhist ethics by foregrounding the practical and disciplinary implications of Madhyamaka philosophy. It also contributes to Chinese Buddhist studies by treating Kumārajīva's translation not merely as a vehicle for metaphysical argument but as a textual site in which ethical examples help articulate the relation between conventional practice and ultimate insight.

Buddhist Principles Related to Mahāyāna Precepts in the Madhyamaka-śāstra

Emptiness. Discussions of "nothingness" and "non-being" in Indian and comparative philosophy involve several distinct concepts; Yao (2010) cautions against treating them as a single undifferentiated category. Within Madhyamaka, emptiness is more precisely understood as the absence of intrinsic nature (niḥsvabhāva), not as absolute non-existence. This distinction is essential for ethical interpretation. To say that persons, actions, or precepts are empty is not to say that they are meaningless or nonexistent; it is to say that they arise

dependently and lack self-subsistent essence. Buddhadāsa (1994), from a modern Theravāda perspective, similarly emphasizes the practical dimension of emptiness as non-clinging. Although his framework differs historically from Nāgārjuna's, it helps illustrate why emptiness need not be interpreted as nihilism. In the Madhyamaka-śāstra, practical examples involving giving, restraint, and karmic consequences show that emptiness is discussed together with, rather than against, ethical cultivation.

Dependent Arising. Pratītyasamutpāda refers to the arising of phenomena in dependence upon conditions. Within Madhyamaka, dependent arising and emptiness are mutually implicative: what arises dependently cannot possess an independent intrinsic nature. Earlier Buddhist schools developed different accounts of dependent arising and the ontological status of dharmas, and recent scholarship continues to reconstruct those debates (Zhao & Liu, 2025). Nāgārjuna's distinctive move is to use dependent arising to challenge the assumption that causes, effects, agents, or events must possess fixed self-nature in order to function.

From this perspective, dependent arising is not a denial of the phenomenal world but an account of its relational and conditioned character. Balsys (2016) emphasizes that dependent phenomena cannot be treated as self-grounding entities, while recent studies likewise connect Buddhist dependent arising with relational accounts of experience and self-understanding (Han & Chang, 2026; Kaewwilai, 2025; Levman, 2024). The ethical implication is that conduct occurs within networks of conditions: actions have consequences, but neither agents nor outcomes exist independently of those conditions.

For the present study, this relational view is crucial because precept cultivation depends upon changeability. If persons and habits possessed fixed intrinsic nature, moral transformation would be difficult to explain. Dependent arising instead provides a conceptual basis for understanding ethical cultivation as conditioned, gradual, and revisable.

Causes and Effects. Buddhist discussions of karma developed within a wider Indian intellectual context, but Buddhism reinterpreted karma in relation to intention, dependent arising, and liberation (Chapple, 1986). Karma should therefore not be reduced to a mechanical doctrine of reward and punishment. In the context of Madhyamaka, karmic causality functions conventionally while remaining empty of intrinsic nature. Wholesome and unwholesome actions can

condition different consequences precisely because causal relations are dependent and dynamic rather than eternally fixed.

Nāgārjuna's analysis rejects the reification of causes and effects. A cause is not an independently existing substance that contains its effect, nor is an effect an intrinsically existent entity produced from nothing. Causal phenomena are intelligible through relational dependence and conceptual designation. Thus, conventional truth allows one to speak meaningfully of moral agency, wholesome action, harmful action, and consequences, whereas ultimate analysis finds no self-existing cause, effect, or agent apart from dependent relations.

This approach is consistent with the broader Madhyamaka strategy of avoiding the extremes of identity and absolute difference, permanence and annihilation. Cause and effect are neither wholly identical nor wholly unrelated. The continuity of causal processes can therefore be maintained without positing an unchanging substance beneath them. Ethical responsibility is preserved at the conventional level without requiring metaphysical essentialism.

The Two Truths clarify this point. At the level of conventional truth, karmic distinctions function: intentional actions can be wholesome or unwholesome, and conduct has consequences. At the level of ultimate truth, those relations are empty of independent self-nature. Emptiness therefore does not invalidate causality; rather, it prevents causal relations from being understood as intrinsically fixed. This is central to the article's interpretation of precepts as effective practices that remain non-reified.

The Two Truths and Precept Cultivation. From a Mahāyāna ethical perspective, conventional truth (saṃvṛti-satya) and ultimate truth (paramārtha-satya) should not be treated as mutually exclusive. Conventional truth is the domain in which persons, vows, precepts, actions, and social relations are meaningfully distinguished. Ultimate truth concerns the emptiness of those distinctions when analyzed for intrinsic nature. Nāgārjuna's well-known account of the Two Truths therefore provides a framework in which ethical practice can function without being absolutized (Garfield, 1995).

Precepts belong to conventional practice, but this does not make them philosophically insignificant. Without conventional distinctions, there would be no intelligible language of harming and non-harming, wholesome and unwholesome action, or cultivation and transgression. At the same time, ultimate

analysis prevents practitioners from treating precepts, moral identities, or the status of "being virtuous" as independently existing realities.

Emptiness can therefore support rather than undermine ethics. Because persons and situations arise interdependently, actions affect others within networks of conditions. Mahāyāna precepts may accordingly be understood as skillful means (upāya) that orient conduct toward non-harming, generosity, patience, and compassion. The ethical force of these practices does not depend upon intrinsic existence; it depends upon their conditional efficacy within lived relationships.

This reading also guards against two extremes. Reifying moral rules can lead to legalism and self-righteous attachment, whereas invoking emptiness to dismiss ethical distinctions can lead to nihilism. Madhyamaka's Middle Way allows moral discipline to operate conventionally while remaining informed by insight into emptiness. The ultimate is therefore not realized by abandoning the conventional but by seeing the conventional without reification.

Non-self and the Emptiness of Dharmas. The Buddhist doctrine of non-self (anattā; Sanskrit: anātman) denies an independent, permanent, controlling self. Narraway (2008) emphasizes the ethical importance of this challenge to substantial selfhood in Mahāyāna thought. Buddhadāsa (1994) likewise describes non-clinging to "I" and "mine" as a practical dimension of emptiness. Although these sources arise from different doctrinal settings, both illustrate the ethical significance of weakening attachment to a fixed self.

The emptiness of dharmas extends this analysis beyond the person. It denies that phenomena themselves possess independent intrinsic nature. In Madhyamaka terms, the distinction between personal non-self and the emptiness of dharmas should not be treated as two unrelated doctrines; both concern the absence of self-subsistent essence and the conditioned status of experience.

For ethical cultivation, this distinction has practical implications. Reflection on personal non-self weakens attachment to the moral agent as a fixed identity, while reflection on the emptiness of dharmas weakens attachment to actions, rules, and objects as inherently existent. Yet neither form of analysis entails the disappearance of conventional responsibility. Rather, they shift the basis of moral practice from substantial identity to relational and conditioned activity.

The five aggregates provide an important example. What is conventionally called a person can be analyzed into form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness without discovering an independent self apart from these conditioned processes. This does not mean that the conventional person is useless or nonexistent; it means that the person is dependently designated.

Likewise, phenomena conventionally designated as "precept," "transgression," "merit," or "harm" have practical functions without possessing fixed self-nature. Their ethical significance is contextual and causal rather than substantial. Such an interpretation is consistent with the Two Truths: conventional distinctions remain indispensable for practice, while ultimate analysis prevents their reification.

For this reason, the article avoids presenting non-self as a simple progression in which one doctrinal level mechanically replaces another. Instead, personal non-self and the emptiness of dharmas are treated as related analytical perspectives that deepen the critique of attachment and support non-reified ethical cultivation.

The essential point is that insight into emptiness does not remove ethical practice; it changes how ethical practice is understood. Precepts can be observed seriously without construing the observer, the rule, or the act as independently existing entities.

Nāgārjuna's Mahāyāna Precept Thought in the Madhyamaka-śāstra

The practical dimension of the Madhyamaka-śāstra becomes especially visible when philosophical analysis is read together with examples of moral conduct. Nāgārjuna's arguments repeatedly invite a contemplative shift away from reified assumptions about causes, agents, actions, and objects. In this article, three themes, dependent arising, karmic causes and effects, and non-self/the emptiness of dharmas, are used to reconstruct the ethical implications of that shift.

The purpose of this reconstruction is not to claim that the Madhyamaka-śāstra is primarily a Vinaya text or a systematic treatise on bodhisattva precepts. Rather, precept-related examples are examined as evidence that Madhyamaka reasoning presupposes a functioning conventional domain of ethical practice.

Such examples are philosophically important because they show that the critique of intrinsic nature does not erase moral distinctions.

The following sections therefore examine how precept-related examples operate within Nāgārjuna's treatment of dependent arising, karmic causality, and non-self/non-dharma.

1. Precept Thought Through Contemplation on Dependent Arising

Nāgārjuna's analysis of dependent arising challenges the assumption that phenomena must possess intrinsic nature in order to function. Balsys (2016) similarly emphasizes the incompatibility between dependent existence and self-subsistent essence. In the Madhyamaka framework, the absence of intrinsic nature does not destroy causal relations; it explains why phenomena can arise, change, and cease in dependence upon conditions.

Garfield's translation of the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā summarizes this relation in the well-known formulation that whatever is dependently arisen is explained to be emptiness and is dependently designated; this itself is the Middle Way (Garfield, 1995). Read ethically, the point is significant: if conduct is dependently arisen, moral transformation remains possible, while no action or identity needs to be reified as permanent.

The Chinese Madhyamaka-śāstra uses precept-related examples within arguments concerning causality and non-arising (T 30, no. 1564). The text reasons that if phenomena arose without causes, the distinction between wholesome and unwholesome action would lose coherence: giving, precept observance, and other meritorious actions could no longer be connected meaningfully with their consequences. The example therefore indicates that emptiness cannot be interpreted as causelessness. Rather, the absence of intrinsic nature is compatible with, indeed inseparable from, dependent causal functioning.

From the perspective of precept cultivation, this means that ethical practice remains meaningful at the conventional level because actions arise within causal networks. At the same time, practitioners are cautioned against reifying precepts or karmic relations as absolute substances. Nāgārjuna's precept thought can therefore be reconstructed as a disciplined middle position: moral conduct is neither denied nor absolutized.

Dependent arising thus provides the first bridge between emptiness and ethical discipline. Because conduct is conditioned, it can be cultivated; because it

is empty, it should not become an object of attachment. This interpretation aligns Madhyamaka ethics with the broader concern identified by Finnigan (2018) and Tillemans (2010): preserving ethical distinctions without treating conventional categories as ultimately self-existent.

2. Precept Thought Through Contemplation on Causes and Effects

A second set of passages concerns karmic causality. The Madhyamaka-śāstra argues that denying causal relations would make ordinary ethical distinctions unintelligible: giving and precept observance could not be connected with merit, while killing and stealing could not be connected with harmful consequences (T 30, no. 1564). The argument does not posit karma as an eternal substance. Rather, it protects the intelligibility of causal responsibility within conventional truth while denying intrinsic nature at the ultimate level.

Karmic causality is therefore neither fixed fate nor metaphysical permanence. Its conditioned character makes ethical transformation possible. By changing intentions, habits, and actions, practitioners alter the conditions that shape future experience. This is consistent with Chapple's (1986) emphasis on karma as action and transformative possibility rather than simple determinism.

Keown's study of Buddhist ethical cultivation likewise emphasizes that moral discipline is integral to Buddhist soteriology rather than an optional supplement (Keown, 1986). In the Madhyamaka-śāstra, giving, precept cultivation, patience, and conduct that benefits sentient beings are presented as meaningful conventional practices (T 30, no. 1564). Their value lies not in possessing intrinsic moral substance but in their capacity to condition less harmful and more compassionate patterns of action.

The Two Truths again provide the interpretive key. Conventionally, agents act, karmic patterns develop, and consequences matter. Ultimately, no agent, action, or result can be established as independently self-existent. Nāgārjuna's ethical position therefore avoids both moral absolutism and nihilism: causal responsibility functions without requiring intrinsic essence.

3. Precept Thought Through Contemplation on Non-self and Non-dharma

Narraway (2008) argues that Mahāyāna ethics need not collapse when the substantial self is denied; rather, the critique of self can transform the basis on which ethical relations are understood. This point is relevant to the Madhyamaka-

śāstra, where examples involving the continuity of the aggregates show how conventional identity can function without an eternal self (T 30, no. 1564).

A conventional person may be designated on the basis of the continuity and coordination of the five aggregates, just as a house is designated in dependence upon its constituent parts. Yang and Shi (1996) similarly describe emptiness as requiring insight into the conditioned character of both material and mental phenomena. The practical consequence is not that persons disappear, but that attachment to a permanent "I" or "mine" is weakened.

The Madhyamaka-śāstra illustrates this point through practical examples associated with precept observance (T 30, no. 1564). The continuity of a person is sufficient for conventional responsibility, even though no independent self can be found apart from the aggregates. The example allows precept practice to remain meaningful without presupposing a metaphysically permanent moral agent.

This distinction is important for Mahāyāna ethics. If the self is conventionally designated rather than intrinsically existent, moral cultivation can still address habits, intentions, and relationships while avoiding attachment to a fixed moral identity. The practitioner may undertake wholesome conduct without reifying "the one who keeps the precepts."

The same logic extends to the emptiness of dharmas. The Madhyamaka-śāstra presents teachings on self and non-self according to the capacities and conditions of sentient beings, while maintaining that all dharmas arise dependently and are empty of intrinsic nature (T 30, no. 1564). Such flexibility is compatible with the Mahāyāna notion of skillful means: conventional teachings remain useful when they conduce to ethical restraint and insight.

From this perspective, the emptiness of dharmas does not abolish precepts. Rather, it shows that precepts themselves are dependently established practices whose meaning is inseparable from context, intention, and consequence. Their conventional efficacy can therefore coexist with their ultimate emptiness.

Contemplation of non-self and non-dharma thus deepens the article's central argument. Ethical cultivation remains possible because conventional persons and practices function; non-attachment becomes possible because neither persons nor practices possess intrinsic nature.

Nāgārjuna's Mahāyāna precept thought, as reconstructed from these passages, is therefore best understood through the Two Truths: ethical discipline is indispensable conventionally, while ultimate analysis prevents that discipline from becoming reified. Emptiness and precept cultivation are not competing doctrines but complementary dimensions of the Middle Way.

Conclusion

The Chinese Madhyamaka-śāstra provides important evidence that Nāgārjuna's philosophy of emptiness is compatible with, and can illuminate, Mahāyāna ethical cultivation. Passages concerning dependent arising, karmic causes and effects, non-self, and the emptiness of dharmas repeatedly presuppose a conventional world in which actions have consequences and wholesome conduct matters.

The Two Truths make this compatibility intelligible. At the level of conventional truth, precepts, moral agents, karmic distinctions, and compassionate action function as indispensable categories of practice. At the level of ultimate truth, these categories are empty of intrinsic nature. Their emptiness does not render them ineffective; rather, it explains their dependence upon causes, conditions, relations, and designation. Ethical cultivation is therefore possible precisely because persons and habits are not fixed.

The article consequently rejects two opposing interpretations: that precepts must be treated as absolute realities in order to be meaningful, and that emptiness eliminates the basis of moral responsibility. Nāgārjuna's Middle Way allows practitioners to cultivate precepts seriously while relinquishing attachment to the precept, the transgression, and the moral self as inherently existent. This reading contributes to contemporary discussions of Madhyamaka ethics by showing how philosophical analysis and ethical practice can mutually reinforce one another. It also suggests that further study of Chinese Madhyamaka sources can deepen understanding of the transmission of Nāgārjuna's ethical thought in East Asian Buddhism.

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AI-Generated Short Videos and Their Potential Effects on Users: A Buddhist Self-Awareness Approach to Mindful Media Consumption

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Abstract

This academic article adopts a conceptual approach informed by a narrative review of literature on AI-generated short videos, digital-media consumption, user cognition and emotion, and Buddhist mindfulness. The article thematically examines academic studies and selected primary Buddhist sources to develop a framework for mindful and responsible media consumption. The article addresses three interconnected themes: (1) the emergence of AI-generated short videos on social-media platforms, (2) their potential effects on users, and (3) Buddhist self-awareness as an approach to learning and responsible digital-media consumption.

The reviewed literature indicates a transition from predominantly human-produced short-form videos toward increasing use of AI-assisted and AI-generated content. Generative AI can support scriptwriting, image and voice generation, editing, and other stages of content production, while platform recommendation systems separately rank and personalize the content presented to users. Research on short-form video use raises concerns regarding attention, cognitive fatigue, credibility judgments, and habitual scrolling; however, the available evidence does not establish that AI-generated short videos alone directly cause these outcomes. From a Buddhist perspective, *sīla* (ethical discipline), *sammā-vācā* (right speech), *sati* (mindfulness), and *sampajañña* (clear comprehension) provide complementary principles for more reflective digital engagement. These principles encourage users to notice what they are doing, examine the purpose and possible consequences of continued viewing or sharing, and make a deliberate ethical choice. The proposed framework therefore treats Buddhist self-awareness not as a rejection of digital media but as a way of engaging with emerging forms of content without surrendering reflective judgment.

Keywords: AI-generated short videos; Artificial intelligence (AI); Buddhist self-awareness; Mindfulness; Media consumption

Introduction

Thinking The contemporary digital landscape has been reshaped by the rapid growth of short-form video across platforms such as TikTok, Facebook Reels, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts. Recent developments in generative artificial intelligence (AI) have further expanded the capacity to produce written, audio, visual, and video content at scale. In short-form video settings, disclosure that content is AI-generated can influence users' perceptions of content quality and engagement intentions (Chen et al., 2025). At the same time, the growing production and circulation of synthetic or highly automated content raise broader concerns about content accuracy, misinformation, and credibility within online environments (Candogan & Drakopoulos, 2020).

Digital-media effects also depend on how users interpret interface and source cues. Source disclosure and visible interface features can activate cognitive heuristics, or 'rules of thumb,' that influence judgments of credibility and quality (Sundar, 2008). Interactive-media features may likewise shape user psychology by directing attention toward salient cues and encouraging particular forms of engagement (Sundar et al., 2015). In short-form video environments, algorithmically curated feeds may use emotionally salient and highly engaging content to sustain attention, potentially encouraging habitual or less reflective patterns of consumption. These processes should still be distinguished from content generation itself: generative AI creates or helps create content, whereas recommender systems select, rank, and personalize what users encounter.

To navigate rapidly changing digital environments without becoming overly dependent on algorithmically selected content, Buddhist principles can provide a framework for self-awareness, ethical conduct, and wise reflection. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* presents the four establishments of mindfulness as a systematic path of observing body, feelings, mind, and mental phenomena (Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu & Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1995). Within this broader Buddhist framework, ethical discipline supports mental cultivation, while concentration and insight weaken unwholesome tendencies and develop wisdom (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2005). Applied conceptually to contemporary digital media, these principles may support more conscious and responsible consumption patterns.

A conceptual and interdisciplinary gap remains because technological developments and contemplative approaches are often discussed separately. In particular, scholars have paid limited attention to connecting AI-generated short-form videos with Buddhist doctrinal and ethical principles such as *sīla* (ethical discipline), *sati* (mindfulness), and *sampajañña* (clear comprehension). This article therefore examines three main issues: (1) the emergence of AI-generated short videos on social-media platforms, (2) their potential effects on users, and (3) the possible application of Buddhist self-awareness to learning and responsible digital-media consumption. By bringing these perspectives together, the article proposes a Buddhist approach that may help users move from automatic, habitual scrolling to more conscious, reflective, and responsible engagement with digital content.

The Emergence of AI-Generated Short Videos on Social Media Platforms

AI-generated short-form video is changing both content production and audience engagement patterns on social media. Two developments are especially relevant: the growing use of generative AI to create short-form content and the role of recommendation algorithms in shaping what users see and how long they stay engaged.

From Human-Produced Videos to AI-Generated Content

Artificial intelligence-generated content (AIGC) refers to material created wholly or partly through generative AI systems. AIGC is increasingly visible in advertising and social-media production, including AI-generated short-video advertising (Yan, 2026). Research on AI-generated advertising suggests that audience responses depend on message design and the perceived role of AI: consumers may respond more positively to some AI-generated advertisements, particularly when the appeals fit perceived AI capabilities (Chen et al., 2024). At the same time, disclosure that a message is AI-generated can reduce evaluations or preferences among users who already hold negative attitudes toward AI (Lim & Schmälzle, 2024). These developments indicate a transition from predominantly human-produced short-form videos toward increasingly AI-assisted and AI-generated content. Generative AI can support scriptwriting, image and voice generation, editing, and other stages of content production, thereby lowering some barriers to producing short-form media.

Short-Video Consumption and User Attention

Generative AI and recommendation systems perform related but distinct functions within short-video environments. AIGC systems can generate multimodal material, including text, images, audio, and video, and may support interactive or personalized forms of communication (Liu et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023). Platform recommendation systems, by contrast, analyze behavioral signals such as viewing time, likes, comments, shares, searches, and followed accounts to rank and present content that may correspond to users' inferred interests. Distinguishing these functions matters because the psychological effects of consuming short-form video cannot automatically be attributed to AI-generated content.

By continuously analyzing interaction data, recommendation algorithms can create highly personalized and rapidly updated social-media feeds. AI-generated short videos may appear in those feeds and attract attention through novelty, personalization, and emotionally salient presentation. However, AI-generated content may also contain inaccurate or misleading information when produced or distributed without adequate human oversight. Its growing prevalence can make it difficult for users to determine whether a video is human-created, AI-generated, or a combination of both. These developments raise questions about authenticity, credibility, transparency, and the quality of short-form digital content.

Potential Effects of AI-Generated Short Videos on Users

AI-generated short videos offer creative and communicative opportunities, but they grow within a broader short-form video environment already associated with concerns about attention, cognition, credibility, and habitual media use. The evidence reviewed below should therefore be interpreted as contextual rather than as proof that AI-generated videos alone produce these outcomes.

Effects on Users' Attention and Cognitive Experience

Previous research suggests that intensive short-form video use may be associated with changes in attentional functioning. An EEG study found that greater short-video addiction tendency was associated with lower self-control and reduced executive control during attention-related tasks (Yan et al., 2024). Alruwaili (2025), in the study "Scroll Immersion and Short-Form Video Use: Predictor of Attention, Memory, and Fatigue among Saudi Social Media Users,"

examined 745 social media users and found that the frequency and duration of short-form video use, together with scroll immersion, were associated with difficulty in attention, working-memory disruption, and cognitive fatigue.

Together, these studies suggest that problematic patterns of short-form video use and immersive scrolling may affect users' attentional and cognitive experiences. Importantly, the cited studies examine short-form video consumption generally, not AI-generated videos specifically. Their findings therefore provide contextual evidence for considering how increasing volumes of AI-generated short-form content may interact with existing patterns of intensive or habitual media consumption.

Effects on Credibility, Message Evaluation, and Perceived Authenticity

Continuous exposure to algorithmically selected content may influence users' attention, information processing, emotional responses, and evaluations of digital messages. In research on AI-generated short-video advertising, credibility and trustworthiness emerge as important dimensions of perceived quality (Yan, 2026). The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) offers a framework for understanding these judgments: when information is personally relevant, users are more likely to engage in effortful, central-route processing, whereas other situations may rely more on peripheral cues (Kitchen et al., 2014). Industry evidence also indicates continued skepticism toward generative-AI advertising among younger consumers, particularly Gen Z and Millennials (Williamson & Koch, 2024). These findings suggest that users do not receive AI-generated content passively; source disclosure, prior attitudes, perceived relevance, and credibility cues can all shape evaluation.

Overall, the literature suggests that AI-generated content may influence how users evaluate the credibility, trustworthiness, and quality of digital messages. The ELM helps explain why personally relevant information may receive deeper scrutiny, while research on AI-source disclosure shows that prior attitudes toward AI can affect message evaluation (Lim & Schmälzle, 2024). The evidence therefore supports a cautious interpretation: AI-generated content raises new questions about credibility and authenticity, but users' responses depend on context, disclosure, prior attitudes, and message characteristics.

Buddhist Self-Awareness for Learning and Responsible Digital Media Consumption

The rise of AI-generated short videos reflects changing patterns of media production and consumption. From a Buddhist perspective, users can respond not by rejecting technology, but by cultivating ethical conduct, mindful awareness, and clear comprehension when engaging with digital content.

Buddhist Ethical Responsibility on AI-Generated Short Videos

The *Sigālovāda Sutta* presents ethical conduct as a foundation for responsible social relationships and identifies harmful actions, including false speech, that should be abandoned (Walshe, 1995, p. 462). The Dhammapada likewise emphasizes non-harming and the ethical consequences of actions that cause harm to others (Buddharakkhita, 1985). Applied to digital-media environments, these teachings support an ethical responsibility to avoid deceptive, harmful, or misleading communication. This responsibility applies not only to individual users but also to content creators, advertisers, and platform operators whose choices shape the quality and trustworthiness of the digital environment.

Table 1. Buddhist Ethical Responsibilities in AI Short-Video Consumption

Actor	Buddhist Principle	Practical responsibility	Expected ethical benefit
Users	sīla sammā-vācā	Check information before sharing; avoid false, harmful, or disrespectful communication; reflect before reacting or reposting	More mindful, responsible, and respectful media use
Content creators	sīla sammā-vācā	Produce accurate content, avoid deception and harmful speech, and disclose significant AI involvement when appropriate	Greater honesty, transparency, and trust
Advertisers	sīla sammā-vācā	Avoid deceptive AI-generated claims, manipulated representations, and misleading emotional appeals	More ethical and transparent communication with consumers
Platform operators	sīla; non-harming ethical conduct	Improve transparency, provide reporting and labeling mechanisms, and consider the effects of recommendation practices	A safer, more transparent, and responsible digital environment

Note. *Developed by the author as a conceptual application of sīla and sammā-vācā to different actors in AI-mediated short-video environments*.

Buddhist ethical principles can be applied differently according to the roles of users, content creators, advertisers, and platform operators. For users, *sīla* and *sammā-vācā* encourage careful communication, verifying information before sharing, and avoiding harmful or misleading content. For content creators, these principles support truthful and responsible production, including appropriate transparency about significant AI involvement. Advertisers should avoid deceptive claims and manipulated representations that may mislead audiences. Platform operators, although not individual speakers, also influence the conditions under which content is recommended and circulated and can support harm reduction through transparency, reporting, labeling, and responsible recommendation practices. Table 1 summarizes these role-based responsibilities as an author-developed application of Buddhist ethical principles to AI-mediated short-video environments.

Buddhist Mindfulness on AI-Generated Short Videos

In the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, mindfulness is presented as part of a systematic practice involving awareness of the body, feelings, mind, and mental phenomena, along with observing their arising and passing away (Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu & Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1995). In this context, *sati* involves maintaining awareness of present experience rather than remaining absorbed in automatic reactions. Applied conceptually to digital-media use, such awareness can help users notice the act of watching, scrolling, reacting, or sharing rather than becoming fully carried away by the flow of content.

Sampajañña, or clear comprehension, complements *sati* by emphasizing clear understanding of purpose, appropriateness, and consequences while performing an activity. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* connects mindfulness and clear comprehension with ordinary activities such as walking, sitting, eating, speaking, and responding to one's surroundings (Ñāṇamoli Bhikkhu & Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1995). Applied to AI-generated short videos, *sati* can help users recognize what they are doing in the present moment, while *sampajañña* encourages them to ask why they are engaging with the content, whether continued consumption or sharing is beneficial, and what consequences may follow.

Table 2. Buddhist Mindfulness Application to AI-Generated Short Videos

Buddhist Concept	Meaning	Main Function	Application to AI Short Videos	Key Questions
sati (Mindfulness)	Maintaining awareness of present experience	Recognize what is happening in the body, feelings, mind, and mental phenomena	Notice the experience of watching, scrolling, reacting, and sharing AI-generated videos	**What am I experiencing now?**
sampajañña (Clear Comprehension)	Clear understanding of purpose, appropriateness, and consequences	Understand why an action is being performed and its possible consequences	Examine why the user is watching the video, whether the activity is appropriate and beneficial, and what may result from continued consumption or sharing	**Why am I doing this? Is it beneficial? What may happen?**
sīla (Ethical Discipline)	Ethical guidance for actions and communication	Guide behavior toward non-harming and responsible conduct	Guide decisions about whether to continue watching, comment, respond, or share AI-generated content responsibly	**Is my action ethical and non-harmful?**
Integrated Practice	Awareness + clear comprehension + ethical guidance	Support conscious and responsible action	Move from automatic scrolling toward mindful, reflective, and responsible digital-media consumption	**Notice → Understand → Choose responsibly**

Note. *Developed by the author as a conceptual synthesis of sati, sampajañña, and sīla for digital-media engagement; the sequence is not a canonical Buddhist formula.*

Overall, *sati*, *sampajañña*, and *sīla* can be understood as complementary principles for mindful and responsible engagement with AI-generated short-form videos. Sati supports awareness of immediate experience; *sampajañña* extends that awareness through reflection on purpose, appropriateness, and consequences; and *sīla* provides ethical guidance for deciding how to act, particularly in relation to communication, sharing, and non-harming. Together, these principles support a movement from automatic media consumption toward greater awareness, reflection, and ethical decision-making. Table 2 expresses this integration through the author-developed sequence 'Notice -> Understand -> Choose responsibly.' The sequence is a conceptual synthesis for digital-media practice rather than a canonical Buddhist formula.

Conclusion

The development of AI-generated short videos has introduced new possibilities for digital-media production and consumption while intensifying existing questions about attention, habitual scrolling, credibility, and authenticity. The literature reviewed in this article suggests potential risks associated with intensive short-form video use, algorithmic recommendation, and AI-generated content, but these mechanisms should not be conflated. Evidence on short-form video use generally does not show that AI-generated videos alone cause attentional or cognitive difficulties, and research on AI-generated content indicates that users' responses vary by source disclosure, perceived credibility, prior attitudes, and message context.

From a Buddhist perspective, *sati* (mindfulness), *sampajañña* (clear comprehension), *sīla* (ethical discipline), and *sammā-vācā* (right speech) provide complementary principles for responding to these challenges. Sati supports awareness of media-use behavior, *sampajañña* encourages reflection on purpose and consequences, and *sīla* and *sammā-vācā* guide responsible communication and action. Together, these principles may support more deliberate, reflective, and ethically responsible engagement with AI-generated short-form videos. The principal contribution of this approach is therefore not to reject AI-mediated media, but to integrate awareness, clear comprehension, and ethical discernment so that users can engage with emerging forms of digital content without surrendering reflective judgment.

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Buddhist Mindfulness and Anti-Inflammatory Medication in Stress-Related Inflammation

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Abstract

This qualitative documentary study compares Buddhist mindfulness practice and anti-inflammatory medication regarding stress-related inflammation. It addresses three objectives: (1) to analyze the reported outcomes and proposed mechanisms of Buddhist mindfulness practice; (2) to examine the outcomes, mechanisms, and limitations of major anti-inflammatory drug classes; and (3) to compare the two modalities within a psychoneuroimmunological framework. Primary Buddhist sources were examined alongside peer-reviewed biomedical and mindfulness literature, with recent empirical studies prioritized and foundational sources retained where necessary.

The review suggests that mindfulness-based interventions may influence stress-related inflammatory processes by changing attention, emotional regulation, autonomic activity, and hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis function. Evidence suggests possible reductions in selected markers such as cortisol, C-reactive protein, interleukin-6, and tumor necrosis factor-alpha, although findings are heterogeneous and depend on population, intervention, and study design. Anti-inflammatory medications act more directly on inflammatory pathways and remain essential for clinically indicated inflammatory conditions, but their benefits and risks vary substantially by drug class, dose, duration, and patient characteristics. Therefore, the comparison does not support simple equivalence between mindfulness and pharmacotherapy. Instead, mindfulness is best understood as a potentially useful complementary strategy for stress regulation, whereas medication should be prescribed according to established clinical indications. The proposed integrative framework is conceptual and requires direct empirical testing before it can guide clinical treatment.

Keywords: Buddhist mindfulness; stress-related inflammation; psychoneuroimmunology; anti-inflammatory medication; HPA axis; cytokines; integrative health.

Introduction

Psychological stress can influence immune and endocrine activity, and persistent stress exposure has been associated with dysregulation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, sympathetic activation, and changes in inflammatory signaling. Researchers frequently examine biomarkers such as C-reactive protein (CRP), interleukin-6 (IL-6), and tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF-α) in stress and inflammation research. However, these associations are complex and bidirectional, and stress should not be treated as the sole cause of inflammatory disease (Black & Slavich, 2016; Pascoe et al., 2017).

Biomedical management of inflammatory conditions includes several drug classes, among them nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), corticosteroids, conventional disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs, targeted small-molecule agents, and biologics. These treatments differ substantially in indication, mechanism, speed of action, and adverse-effect profile. NSAIDs primarily inhibit cyclooxygenase pathways, corticosteroids regulate broad inflammatory gene expression, and targeted agents act on selected cytokine or signaling pathways (Barnes, 2006; Brunton et al., 2018; Díaz-González & Sánchez-Madrid, 2015; Roskoski, 2016). Their clinical role cannot therefore be reduced to a single category of 'symptomatic treatment.'

Buddhist mindfulness originates in a different conceptual and practical context. In the Satipaṭṭhāna tradition, mindfulness (sati) is cultivated through systematic contemplation of body, feelings, mind, and dhammas as part of the path toward insight and liberation (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 1994). Modern clinical programs such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) adapt selected contemplative practices for health-related settings (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). These programs should not be equated with the full soteriological aims of Theravāda practice, but they provide a bridge through which attentional and affective processes associated with mindfulness can be investigated empirically.

Research has increasingly examined whether mindfulness-based interventions influence inflammatory and neuroendocrine markers. Systematic reviews and clinical studies suggest potential effects on stress physiology and immune regulation, but effect sizes and biomarkers vary across studies, and many trials have small samples or heterogeneous interventions (Black & Slavich, 2016; González-Moret et al., 2020; Gardi et al., 2022; Alhawatmeh et al., 2024). These findings support cautious interest rather than a conclusion that mindfulness is an anti-inflammatory treatment equivalent to medication.

The Buddhist conceptual contribution requires similar caution. Abhidhamma discussions of mind-conditioned material phenomena (*cittaja-rūpa*) articulate a doctrinal account of mind-body dependence (Ācariya Anuruddha, 1993). This concept may offer a useful comparative lens for contemporary mind-body research, but it should not be presented as a premodern description of cytokines, cortisol, or neural circuitry. Doctrinal categories and biomedical mechanisms operate within different explanatory systems and should be compared analogically rather than identified as scientifically equivalent.

A clear research gap therefore remains. Mindfulness and anti-inflammatory medication are often discussed in separate literatures, and few reviews compare them using common dimensions such as level of action, time course, evidence base, safety, and appropriate role in care. The present study addresses this gap through a structured documentary comparison. Rather than asking which modality is 'better,' it examines what each is designed to do, what evidence supports its effects, where the mechanisms differ, and where a complementary relationship may be conceptually plausible.

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the reported outcomes and proposed mechanisms of Buddhist mindfulness practice in relation to stress-related inflammation.
2. To analyze the outcomes, mechanisms, and limitations of anti-inflammatory medications relevant to inflammatory regulation.
3. To compare the two modalities in terms of mechanisms, evidence, safety, time course, and potential complementary roles.

Literature Review

The literature relevant to this study falls into three overlapping areas: Buddhist and clinical mindfulness, psychoneuroimmunology, and anti-inflammatory pharmacology. Buddhist sources frame mindfulness as part of a wider ethical and contemplative path, whereas contemporary clinical programs operationalize mindfulness primarily as attentional and emotional training. Gunaratana (2011) offers a modern Theravāda-oriented presentation of mindfulness practice, while Kabat-Zinn (1990) provides the foundational clinical formulation of MBSR. These traditions overlap in technique but differ in purpose, terminology, and scope.

Psychoneuroimmunological research provides a scientific framework for examining pathways through which psychological processes may influence inflammatory activity. Black and Slavich (2016) reviewed randomized controlled trials and found that mindfulness meditation may affect selected immune parameters, although the evidence was heterogeneous. Pascoe et al. (2017) likewise reported changes in stress-related physiological measures across mindfulness-based and related interventions. More recent clinical studies have reported changes in CRP, cytokines, cortisol, and other inflammatory markers in specific populations, including those with inflammatory bowel disease, renal disease, and COVID-19 (González-Moret et al., 2020; Subramanian et al., 2022; Gardi et al., 2022; Alhawatmeh et al., 2024).

The pharmacological literature is more mechanistically specific because it defines drug targets more directly. NSAIDs inhibit cyclooxygenase-mediated prostaglandin synthesis; corticosteroids alter transcription of multiple inflammatory genes; and targeted agents such as JAK inhibitors and cytokine-directed biologics act on selected immune pathways (Barnes, 2006; Brunton et al., 2018; Díaz-González & Sánchez-Madrid, 2015; Roskoski, 2016). Efficacy and toxicity vary by drug class and clinical indication, which makes broad comparisons between ‘medication’ and ‘mindfulness’ potentially misleading unless the level of comparison is clearly specified.

Additional literature concerns inflammation as a treatment target in chronic disease. For example, Ridker et al. (2017) showed that targeted anti-inflammatory therapy with canakinumab reduced recurrent cardiovascular events in selected patients with prior myocardial infarction and elevated inflammatory risk. This finding confirms the clinical importance of inflammatory pathways but does not show that such therapy treats psychological stress. Conversely, mindfulness trials may target stress and quality of life while measuring inflammatory biomarkers only secondarily.

The literature therefore supports a functional, rather than equivalence-based, framework. Mindfulness may influence upstream psychological and neuroendocrine processes associated with stress reactivity, whereas anti-inflammatory drugs act more directly on inflammatory mediators or immune pathways. The evidence does not justify describing all mindfulness effects as ‘etiological’ or all medication effects as merely ‘symptomatic.’ A stronger scientific comparison must distinguish conceptual level, clinical indication, biomarker outcomes, and evidentiary strength.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework compares Buddhist mindfulness practice and anti-inflammatory medication across five dimensions: intended target, proposed mechanism, measurable outcomes, time course, and safety/limitations. The comparison is interpretive rather than a claim of therapeutic equivalence. Mindfulness is examined primarily as a stress-regulation approach that may influence neuroendocrine and immune processes, whereas medications are examined according to their established pharmacological targets and clinical uses.

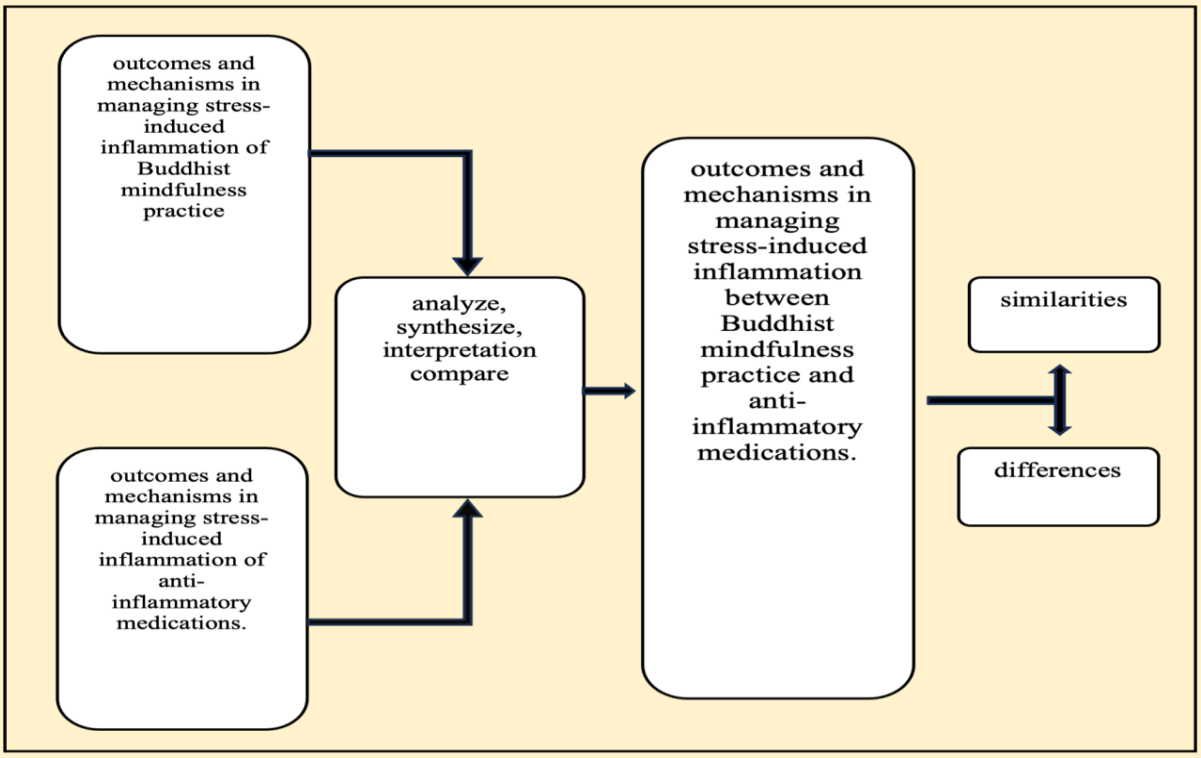

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This study used a qualitative documentary-review design. It did not involve patients, clinical treatment, or experimental comparison. The purpose was to synthesize Buddhist doctrinal sources and biomedical literature in order to compare conceptual mechanisms, reported outcomes, and limitations.

Source selection followed two principles. First, we prioritized recent peer-reviewed empirical studies published mainly between 2020 and 2025 that made claims about mindfulness, inflammatory biomarkers, and clinical outcomes.

Second, we retained earlier foundational sources where they remain central to Buddhist doctrine, pharmacology, or the development of mindfulness-based clinical programs. These included the *Satipaṭṭhāna* and *Ānāpānasati* traditions, Abhidhamma summaries, Kabat-Zinn's MBSR formulation, and established pharmacological references.

Sources were included when they addressed at least one of the following: (1) mindfulness or meditation and stress-related physiological or inflammatory outcomes; (2) mechanisms or clinical effects of anti-inflammatory medications; (3) psychoneuroimmunological links among stress, endocrine regulation, and inflammation; or (4) Buddhist accounts of mindfulness and mind-body relations relevant to the conceptual comparison. We excluded non-scholarly sources and materials without a clear connection to the research objectives.

Analysis proceeded in three stages. First, we analyzed the mindfulness and pharmacological literature separately to identify proposed mechanisms, outcome measures, benefits, risks, and evidentiary limitations. Second, we organized findings in a comparison matrix using shared dimensions: level of action, onset and duration, biomarker effects, clinical indication, safety, and role in long-term care. Third, Buddhist concepts were interpreted alongside, but not equated with, biomedical mechanisms. This distinction avoided treating doctrinal categories such as taṇhā, papañca, or cittaja-rūpa as direct biological variables.

Because the reviewed literature identified no head-to-head trials directly comparing mindfulness with anti-inflammatory drug therapy, the study does not estimate comparative effect sizes or claim superiority of one modality. Any integrative framework proposed below is therefore conceptual and hypothesis-generating rather than a validated clinical protocol.

Research Results

Objective 1: Outcomes and Mechanisms of Buddhist Mindfulness Practice

The findings indicate that Buddhist mindfulness approaches stress and suffering primarily through the regulation of mental processes rather than through direct intervention in inflammatory pathways. Within the framework of the Four Noble Truths, *dukkha* encompasses multiple dimensions of suffering associated with embodied existence, illness, unwanted experience, and psychological distress, while *taṇhā* is identified as a central condition contributing to the arising and continuation of suffering (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2000). Mindfulness (*sati*),

together with clear comprehension (*sampajañña*) and other wholesome mental qualities, is cultivated as part of a broader path concerned with understanding and transforming patterns of reactivity.

The Abhidhamma provides an additional conceptual account of mind–body interdependence through the notion of *cittaja-rūpa*, or material phenomena conditioned by mind (Ācariya Anuruddha, 1993). This doctrinal category suggests that Buddhist analysis does not treat mental and physical processes as entirely independent. However, *cittaja-rūpa* should not be interpreted as a premodern biomedical account of cortisol, cytokines, neural circuits, or inflammatory disease. Its relevance to the present study is therefore comparative and conceptual rather than a claim of direct scientific equivalence.

Contemporary empirical research provides a different but potentially complementary explanatory framework. Mindfulness-based and related meditation interventions have been associated with changes in physiological stress measures, including cortisol, autonomic activity, and selected inflammatory biomarkers. Meta-analytic and systematic-review evidence suggests possible reductions in CRP, TNF-α, cortisol, blood pressure, and other stress-related measures, although findings vary according to population, intervention type, duration, and study design (Black & Slavich, 2016; Pascoe et al., 2017). Accordingly, the evidence supports a potential regulatory effect rather than a uniform anti-inflammatory response.

From a psychoneuroimmunological perspective, mindfulness may operate predominantly through a top-down pathway. Training attention and reducing habitual emotional reactivity may influence neural and neuroendocrine systems involved in stress regulation, which in turn may affect autonomic and immune processes. Proposed mechanisms include reduced stress reactivity, altered HPA-axis activity, improved autonomic regulation, and downstream modulation of inflammatory signaling. Some studies also suggest that contemplative interventions may influence transcriptional pathways associated with inflammation, although this evidence remains developing and should not be interpreted as demonstrating a consistent shift of immune cells from pro-inflammatory to regulatory states across populations (Black & Slavich, 2016; Gardi et al., 2022).

From a Buddhist interpretive perspective, cultivation of *sati*, *sampajañña*, and *upekkhā* may reduce patterns of cognitive and emotional reactivity that contribute to sustained psychological stress. The interruption of repetitive mental

proliferation (*papañca*) provides a useful conceptual parallel to contemporary models in which persistent cognitive-emotional activation contributes to prolonged stress-system activation. The Buddhist and biomedical accounts remain epistemologically distinct, but both support the proposition that changes in mental regulation may have consequences for embodied stress responses.

Objective 2: Outcomes and Mechanisms of Anti-Inflammatory Medications

The findings indicate that anti-inflammatory medications act more directly on biochemical and immune pathways than mindfulness-based interventions. This study considers major pharmacological categories, including nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), corticosteroids, disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARDs), targeted small-molecule agents, and biological therapies. These drug classes differ substantially in mechanism, clinical indication, speed of action, efficacy, and adverse-effect profile (Brunton et al., 2018).

NSAIDs, including aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen, and selective COX-2 inhibitors such as celecoxib, primarily inhibit cyclooxygenase enzymes and thereby reduce the synthesis of prostaglandins involved in pain, fever, and inflammation (Díaz-González & Sánchez-Madrid, 2015). Their effects are relatively direct but vary with drug selectivity, dose, duration of treatment, and patient characteristics.

Corticosteroids such as prednisolone and dexamethasone exert broad anti-inflammatory and immunomodulatory effects through glucocorticoid receptors. After receptor binding, glucocorticoid signaling influences the transcription of numerous inflammatory genes and interferes with transcription factors such as NF-κB and AP-1. These mechanisms can suppress inflammatory mediator production, including several cytokines and chemokines (Barnes, 2006). Their clinical effects may be substantial, but responsiveness varies by disease and patient, and prolonged exposure is associated with important adverse effects.

DMARDs and targeted immunomodulatory agents operate through additional mechanisms. JAK inhibitors such as tofacitinib and baricitinib interfere with intracellular JAK–STAT signaling, whereas biological agents may target specific cytokines or their receptors, including TNF-α and IL-6 pathways (Roskoski, 2016). Unlike purely symptomatic treatments, several of these therapies modify inflammatory processes central to disease activity and, under appropriate conditions, can alter disease progression.

The benefits of pharmacological treatment must nevertheless be balanced against class-specific risks. NSAIDs may increase gastrointestinal, renal, and cardiovascular risks, particularly with prolonged use or in vulnerable patients (Aronson, 2009). Long-term systemic corticosteroid exposure may contribute to adrenal suppression, metabolic complications, osteoporosis, infection risk, and other adverse effects (Barnes, 2006). Targeted immunomodulatory drugs also require condition-specific screening and monitoring, particularly because interfering with immune pathways can increase infection susceptibility and cause other adverse effects.

The findings therefore do not support characterizing all anti-inflammatory medication as merely symptomatic. Instead, pharmacological therapies act primarily at molecular or cellular levels and may suppress, regulate, or modify inflammatory pathways depending on the drug class and the disease being treated. At the same time, these medications are not generally designed to address psychological stress, cognitive reactivity, or behavioral patterns that may contribute to stress-related physiological activation.

Objective 3: Comparative Results

Similarities

The comparison identifies several areas of overlap, while also demonstrating important differences in evidentiary strength and mechanism. Both mindfulness-based interventions and anti-inflammatory pharmacotherapy may influence inflammatory outcomes, but through different pathways and with varying degrees of directness.

Mindfulness and meditation studies have reported changes in selected inflammatory and stress-related biomarkers, including CRP, TNF-α, cortisol, and other physiological indicators, although the findings remain heterogeneous (Black & Slavich, 2016; Pascoe et al., 2017). Pharmacological agents can produce substantially more direct and predictable effects on inflammatory mediators when used for appropriate clinical indications.

Both modalities may also influence interconnected regulatory systems. Mindfulness may affect inflammatory activity indirectly through changes in psychological stress, neuroendocrine signaling, autonomic regulation, and possibly inflammatory gene-expression pathways. Pharmacological therapies act more directly on enzymes, receptors, transcriptional pathways, cytokines, or intracellular signaling systems. Thus, convergence may occur at the level of

inflammatory outcomes even though the initiating mechanisms differ considerably.

Some evidence further suggests that mindfulness-based interventions may influence transcriptional pathways associated with inflammatory regulation, including NF-κB-related processes, while corticosteroids and several other anti-inflammatory therapies directly interfere with inflammatory transcription and signaling mechanisms (Black & Slavich, 2016; Barnes, 2006). This similarity concerns the eventual biological pathways affected rather than equivalence in mechanism, magnitude, or clinical efficacy.

Differences

The principal difference identified in this study concerns the level at which the two modalities primarily intervene. Mindfulness can be described heuristically as predominantly top-down: intervention begins with attention, awareness, emotional regulation, and patterns of psychological reactivity, with possible downstream effects on neural, endocrine, autonomic, and immune processes. Anti-inflammatory medications operate more directly at biochemical, cellular, or immune levels by modifying inflammatory mediators and signaling pathways.

This distinction should not, however, be interpreted as an opposition between an "etiological" mindfulness treatment and a merely "symptomatic" pharmacological treatment. Stress-related inflammation is multifactorial, and psychological processes are only one contributing factor. Likewise, several pharmacological therapies modify mechanisms central to inflammatory disease rather than simply suppressing symptoms. The distinction is therefore better described as one of the primary level and mode of intervention.

A further difference concerns time course. Mindfulness generally requires repeated training and sustained practice, and its physiological effects, where present, are likely to develop through changes in stress regulation over time. It may therefore contribute to resilience, coping, and reduced stress reactivity. Pharmacological agents often produce faster effects on inflammatory activity, although onset varies substantially by drug class. Medications are not necessarily restricted to reactive use: some are prescribed chronically to prevent disease activity, relapse, or inflammatory progression.

The modalities also differ in scope. Mindfulness-based interventions may influence multiple interconnected aspects of functioning, including perceived stress, emotional regulation, sleep, pain experience, autonomic activity, and

quality of life. These broader effects are consistent with the fact that mindfulness primarily targets patterns of experience and self-regulation rather than a single molecular pathway. Buddhist accounts of mind–body interdependence provide a conceptual context for interpreting this multidimensional orientation, although they should not be equated directly with contemporary physiological models.

Pharmacological treatments are generally more pathway-specific. This specificity can be clinically advantageous because it allows treatment to target known disease mechanisms. However, specificity also means that different inflammatory diseases may require different therapeutic targets, combinations, or treatment strategies, with benefits and risks evaluated individually.

The comparison also indicates different relationships with endogenous regulation. Mindfulness may support the individual's capacity for psychological and physiological self-regulation by reducing stress reactivity and improving coping. Some studies report changes in cortisol, autonomic measures, and inflammatory biomarkers consistent with improved regulation, but the evidence does not support claims of complete restoration of homeostasis or immune function (Gardi et al., 2022; Alhawatmeh et al., 2024). Pharmacological treatment, by contrast, modifies physiological processes through externally administered agents; depending on the medication, prolonged use may also influence endogenous feedback systems, as occurs with HPA-axis suppression during chronic systemic corticosteroid therapy (Barnes, 2006).

Taken together, the results do not establish the superiority of one modality over the other. Pharmacotherapy has a substantially stronger evidence base for treating diagnosed inflammatory diseases, whereas mindfulness appears more appropriately understood as a behavioral and contemplative intervention that may support stress regulation, coping, quality of life, and selected physiological outcomes. Their most defensible relationship is therefore complementary rather than competitive. For patients with clinically significant inflammatory disease, mindfulness should not replace indicated pharmacological treatment but may serve as an adjunctive strategy where appropriate.

Discussions

The findings clarify that Buddhist mindfulness practice and anti-inflammatory medication operate at different but potentially complementary levels. Rather than supporting a binary distinction between “root-cause mindfulness” and “symptomatic medication,” the results indicate that

mindfulness primarily engages psychological and behavioral processes related to stress regulation, whereas pharmacological treatments act more directly on biochemical, cellular, and immune pathways.

For Objective 1, the findings align with prior research suggesting that mindfulness-based interventions may influence stress physiology and select inflammatory markers. Systematic and meta-analytic evidence reports changes in cortisol, CRP, TNF-α, and other stress-related measures, though effects remain heterogeneous across populations and intervention designs (Black & Slavich, 2016; Pascoe et al., 2017). More recent studies likewise suggest possible biomarker changes in specific clinical populations (González-Moret et al., 2020; Gardi et al., 2022; Alhawatmeh et al., 2024). These findings support plausible psychoneuroimmunological pathways, but they do not establish mindfulness as a direct anti-inflammatory treatment equivalent to pharmacotherapy.

The Buddhist contribution is primarily conceptual. Practices involving *sati*, *sampajañña*, and *upekkhā* may reduce habitual cognitive and emotional reactivity, while concepts such as *taṇhā*, *dosa*, and *papañca* help explain how mental patterns can sustain suffering and stress. The Abhidhamma concept of *cittaja-rūpa* further expresses mind-body interdependence (Ācariya Anuruddha, 1993). However, these doctrinal concepts should not be equated directly with the HPA axis, cytokines, or neural mechanisms. Their value lies in offering a distinct interpretive framework that can enter into dialogue with contemporary mind-body research.

For Objective 2, the findings confirm that anti-inflammatory medications have greater mechanistic specificity. NSAIDs inhibit cyclooxygenase pathways, corticosteroids influence inflammatory gene transcription, and JAK inhibitors and biologic agents target specific immune signaling pathways (Barnes, 2006; Brunton et al., 2018; Roskoski, 2016). This evidence also shows why pharmacotherapy should not be described as merely symptomatic; some treatments modify pathways central to disease activity. However, their use must be balanced against class-specific risks.

Objective 3 shows that the most defensible comparison concerns level and direction of action. Mindfulness may be described heuristically as predominantly top-down, beginning with attention and emotional regulation and potentially influencing downstream physiological systems. Medications act more directly at molecular or cellular levels. Neither pathway is exclusively one-directional, and neither should be treated as inherently superior.

The study therefore supports a complementary rather than competitive model. Pharmacotherapy remains essential when clinically indicated, while mindfulness may serve as an adjunctive strategy for stress regulation, coping, quality of life, and selected physiological outcomes. Because no direct head-to-head trials were identified, this framework remains conceptual and should be tested in future empirical research.

Knowledge from Research

The study's principal contribution is a comparative framework that distinguishes Buddhist mindfulness practice and anti-inflammatory medication by their primary levels of intervention, rather than treating them as competing or equivalent therapies. Mindfulness primarily engages attention, emotional regulation, cognitive reactivity, and stress-related self-regulation, with possible downstream effects on neuroendocrine, autonomic, and immune processes. Anti-inflammatory medications, by contrast, act more directly on molecular, cellular, and immune pathways through pharmacologically defined mechanisms.

A second contribution clarifies the relationship between Buddhist doctrine and biomedical science. Concepts such as *taṇhā*, *dosa*, *papañca*, and *cittaja-rūpa* provide a Buddhist framework for understanding suffering, mental reactivity, and mind-body interdependence. However, these concepts should not be interpreted as direct equivalents of cortisol regulation, cytokine signaling, neural circuitry, or inflammatory gene expression. Their value lies in offering a distinct interpretive framework that can contribute to interdisciplinary dialogue without collapsing Buddhist and biomedical explanatory systems into one another.

A third contribution is the rejection of the simplified distinction between “root-cause mindfulness” and “symptomatic medication.” The findings show that several pharmacological therapies modify mechanisms central to inflammatory disease, while mindfulness may influence important psychological and physiological processes without directly treating inflammatory pathology. The more defensible distinction therefore concerns level, direction, and mode of action rather than causal superiority.

Based on these findings, the study proposes a complementary model in which clinically indicated pharmacotherapy addresses inflammatory disease through established biomedical mechanisms, while mindfulness may support stress regulation, coping, quality of life, and selected physiological outcomes.

This model is conceptual rather than prescriptive and requires empirical testing through comparative and adjunctive clinical research.

Conclusion

This study compared Buddhist mindfulness practice and anti-inflammatory medication in relation to stress-related inflammation. The findings indicate that the two modalities operate primarily at different levels. Mindfulness begins with attention, emotional regulation, and patterns of psychological reactivity and may influence downstream neuroendocrine, autonomic, and immune processes. Anti-inflammatory medications act more directly on biochemical and immune pathways and remain essential for clinically indicated inflammatory conditions.

The study also demonstrates the importance of maintaining conceptual boundaries between Buddhist doctrine and biomedical science. Buddhist concepts such as *taṇhā*, *papañca*, and *cittaja-rūpa* offer a valuable account of suffering, mental reactivity, and mind-body interdependence, but they should not be equated directly with contemporary physiological mechanisms.

The evidence therefore does not support a binary opposition between an etiological mindfulness approach and merely symptomatic pharmacological treatment. Instead, the two approaches address different dimensions of stress-related and inflammatory processes. Pharmacotherapy has a stronger evidence base for treating diagnosed inflammatory disease, while mindfulness may support stress regulation, coping, quality of life, and select physiological outcomes.

The most defensible conclusion, therefore, is a complementary model rather than therapeutic substitution. Mindfulness should not replace indicated medical treatment, but it may serve as an adjunctive strategy in appropriate contexts. Because direct head-to-head evidence remains limited, the proposed framework should be regarded as hypothesis-generating and tested through future clinical and interdisciplinary research.

Suggestions

1. Suggestions for Clinical Practice

Mindfulness should be presented as an adjunctive stress-management option rather than as a replacement for prescribed anti-inflammatory treatment. Clinicians who incorporate mindfulness should consider patient preference, psychological readiness, disease severity, and the feasibility of sustained practice.

Any medication adjustment or tapering should remain under the supervision of the prescribing clinician and should not be inferred from mindfulness participation alone.

Where stress appears to exacerbate symptoms or impair coping, clinicians may consider evidence-based psychological or mindfulness-based programs as part of multidisciplinary care. Such integration should include appropriate screening, informed consent, realistic expectations, and monitoring for adverse psychological responses. The purpose is to support coping and self-regulation, not to reclassify meditation as a pharmacological substitute.

2. Suggestions for Further Research

Future research should prioritize direct comparative and adjunctive designs. A clinically meaningful trial could compare standard treatment alone with standard treatment plus a standardized mindfulness intervention while measuring identical inflammatory biomarkers, symptom outcomes, quality of life, medication use, adherence, and adverse events over sufficient follow-up. A three-arm design including mindfulness alone would be appropriate only where withholding standard treatment is ethically and medically acceptable.

Further studies should distinguish among mindfulness techniques, intervention intensity, teacher training, participant diagnosis, and baseline inflammatory status. Mechanistic research should avoid assuming that all contemplative practices act through the same pathways. Longitudinal studies are also needed to determine whether any biomarker changes are durable and whether they translate into clinically meaningful outcomes.

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MN Majjhima Nikāya
DN Dīgha Nikāya

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Integrating Buddhist Principles and Peace Education: A Model for Youth Development in Kengtung, Myanmar

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Abstract

This study examined Buddhist principles relevant to peace and self-development in summer school contexts, analyzed the current conditions and challenges of summer schools in Kengtung, Shan State, Myanmar, and developed an integrated Summer School Model based on Buddhist principles and peace education concepts. The study used a qualitative design, including documentary analysis and in-depth interviews with five senior monastic teachers selected through purposive sampling. The study analyzed documentary and interview data using content and thematic analysis. The findings identified mindfulness (sati), loving-kindness (metta), compassion (karuṇā), gratitude, moral discipline (sīla), and right speech as key principles supporting emotional regulation, empathy, ethical awareness, and harmonious relationships among youth. The study also identified declining student participation, limited curriculum innovation, insufficient integration of peace-oriented learning activities, and continued reliance on lecture-based instruction as major challenges. In response, the study developed an integrated Summer School Model with four interconnected components: ethical formation, mindfulness and compassion training, cooperative peace education, and community engagement. The model emphasizes experiential learning, dialogue, meditation, and service learning. The study contributes to Buddhist Peace Studies by proposing a culturally grounded educational framework that connects Buddhist ethical cultivation with contemporary peace education. The proposed model is conceptual and requires further implementation and evaluation before claims of effectiveness can be established.

Keywords: Buddhist principles; Peace education; Summer School Model; Youth development; Self-development

Introduction

Summer schools in Kengtung, Shan State, have long served as centers of Buddhist education, moral cultivation, and community cohesion. Monastic summer programs provide young people with opportunities to study Buddhist teachings, practice meditation, cultivate ethical conduct, and strengthen social relationships. In recent years, however, these programs have faced declining enrollment, reduced community participation, and limited pedagogical innovation. Modernization, digital technology, migration, economic pressure, and changing parental expectations have shaped perceptions of the relevance of traditional summer programs. At the same time, contemporary educational discourse increasingly emphasizes peace education, social-emotional learning, and character development. Harris and Morrison (2013) describe peace education as an educational process concerned with nonviolence, conflict transformation, and peaceful citizenship. Longitudinal research also suggests that adolescent gratitude growth is associated with increases in prosocial behavior and related developmental outcomes (Bono et al., 2019). Buddhist teachings likewise emphasize loving-kindness, compassion, mindfulness, and ethical conduct as foundations for harmonious living (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012). These converging perspectives provide a basis for examining how Buddhist principles and contemporary peace education might be integrated within summer school programs in Kengtung.

This study focuses on Buddhist educational development and peace education within Kengtung's sociocultural context, Shan State, Myanmar. The central problem is declining participation in monastic summer programs and the lack of a clear educational framework that integrates Buddhist principles with contemporary peace education. Young people in changing social environments may encounter emotional stress, cultural transition, digital distraction, and challenges to social cohesion. Educational programs that cultivate emotional resilience, ethical awareness, compassion, self-discipline, and peaceful coexistence may therefore be increasingly important. Previous scholarship supports the relevance of cooperative learning, multicultural education, teacher quality, compassion, and gratitude to educational and psychosocial development (Banks, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Singer & Klimecki, 2014).

Accordingly, this article analyzes Buddhist principles relevant to peace and self-development, examines the current conditions and challenges of summer

schools in Kengtung, and proposes an integrated Summer School Model grounded in Buddhist and peace education concepts. The study seeks to contribute to Buddhist educational development while offering practical implications for community-based peacebuilding and youth development.

Research Objectives

1. To study Buddhist principles relevant to peace and self-development in summer school contexts.
2. To analyze the current conditions and challenges of summer schools in Kengtung.
3. To propose an integrated Summer School Model based on Buddhist principles and peace education concepts.

Literature Review

1. Buddhist Principles for Peace and Self-Development

Buddhist teachings emphasize inner cultivation as an important foundation for ethical conduct and harmonious relationships. The Aṅguttara Nikāya presents teachings on mindfulness (sati), loving-kindness (mettā), compassion (karuṇā), wisdom (paññā), and moral discipline (sīla), all of which support wholesome conduct and emotional balance (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012). The Dalai Lama (1999) similarly emphasizes compassion and universal responsibility as foundations for peace at personal and social levels. Buddhist educational traditions also stress gratitude, patience, and right speech as qualities that support responsible and peaceful interaction.

2. Peace Education and Youth Development

Peace education promotes nonviolence, conflict transformation, human dignity, dialogue, and social responsibility. Harris and Morrison (2013) define it as an educational process that develops knowledge, values, attitudes, and skills needed for peaceful living. Social interdependence theory and cooperative learning provide a complementary pedagogical basis for collaborative learning environments that strengthen communication, participation, and constructive interaction (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Multicultural education further helps learners understand diversity and respect cultural differences (Banks, 2008). Community-based youth programs can support emotional development, social responsibility, and leadership when they provide appropriate developmental settings (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Psychological research also supports the

relevance of compassion and gratitude: compassion training has been associated with improved emotional responses and prosocial orientation, while gratitude practices have been linked to subjective well-being and prosocial behavior (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Singer & Klimecki, 2014).

3. Summer Schools and Contemporary Educational Challenges

Traditional summer schools in Kengtung have functioned as centers of Buddhist learning and moral training, but contemporary social change has created challenges for participation and pedagogy. Programs that rely heavily on sermon- or lecture-based instruction may provide limited opportunities for experiential learning and active student participation. Youth development literature suggests that effective programs benefit from supportive relationships, meaningful participation, skill-building opportunities, and responsiveness to young people's developmental contexts (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Integrating Buddhist principles with participatory peace education may therefore provide a constructive direction for strengthening summer school programs while preserving their religious and cultural foundations.

Overall, the literature indicates substantial conceptual overlap between Buddhist ethical cultivation and peace education in their concern with self-regulation, compassion, constructive relationships, and social harmony. This study draws on mindfulness, compassion, cooperative learning, dialogue, and conflict transformation to develop an integrated Summer School Model for youth development and peace education in Kengtung.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework integrates Buddhist principles, peace education, and participatory educational practices to examine peace and self-development through summer school activities in Kengtung. Buddhist principles provide the ethical and contemplative foundation for individual development, while peace education contributes social and pedagogical dimensions such as nonviolence, dialogue, cooperation, intercultural understanding, and conflict transformation. Cooperative learning is treated as a pedagogical strategy within the broader peace education framework (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). The study connects individual cultivation with relational and social development through documentary research and in-depth interviews. The principal areas of analysis include emotional regulation, peaceful behavior, empathy, self-discipline,

communication, social responsibility, self-development, community harmony, and peacebuilding.

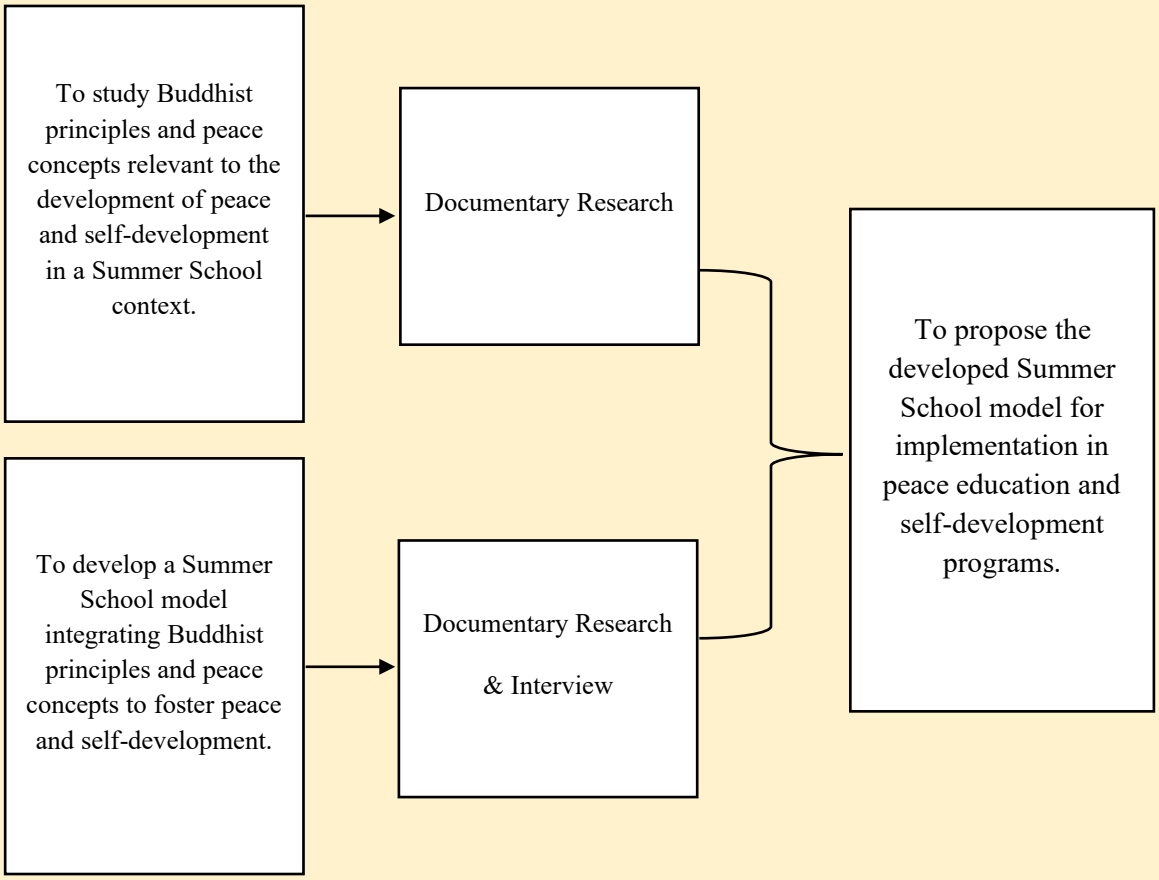

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

This study used a qualitative research design that combined documentary research with qualitative field research in Kengtung, Shan State, Myanmar. Data were collected between June 2025 and April 2026 through documentary analysis and in-depth interviews. Two research instruments were used: (1) a documentary analysis form for reviewing Buddhist texts, academic literature, educational theories, and previous research related to Buddhist principles, peace education, youth development, and summer school programs; and (2) a semi-structured interview guide for exploring participants' experiences, perspectives, challenges, and recommendations concerning summer school programs. Academic advisors and two relevant experts reviewed the interview guide to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives.

The study analyzed documentary data through content analysis and descriptive synthesis, while coding and analyzing interview data thematically.

The study then integrated findings from both sources to develop a proposed Summer School Model based on Buddhist principles and peace education concepts for youth development in Kengtung. The research process consisted of three stages.

Step 1: Documentary Research

The study reviewed relevant Buddhist texts, academic books, journal articles, educational theories, and prior studies on Buddhist principles, peace education, youth development, and summer school programs. A documentary analysis form was used to classify and synthesize key concepts and theoretical perspectives. The study identified sources through library research and academic databases and analyzed them using content analysis and descriptive synthesis to establish the study's conceptual and theoretical foundation.

Step 2: Qualitative Field Research

The study conducted in-depth interviews with five senior monastic teachers selected through purposive sampling. Participants were chosen based on their direct experience with summer school programs and Buddhist education, their knowledge of teaching or program management, their ability to provide relevant information, and their willingness to participate.

The semi-structured interview guide addressed the current conditions and challenges of summer schools, educational practices, student behavior, and recommendations for program improvement. Following expert review, the interview questions were revised before data collection. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, and researchers analyzed the data using thematic analysis and descriptive interpretation.

Step 3: Data Synthesis and Model Development

The study synthesized findings from the documentary and interview components to develop an integrated Summer School Model appropriate to the Kengtung context. The synthesis used thematic comparison and descriptive interpretation to connect Buddhist ethical formation, mindfulness and compassion practices, cooperative learning, dialogue-based peace education, and community engagement.

The resulting model is conceptual and is intended to provide a framework for future implementation and evaluation rather than to demonstrate established program effectiveness.

Research Results

Objective 1. Documentary and interview findings identified mindfulness (sati), loving-kindness (mettā), compassion (karuṇā), moral discipline (sīla), gratitude, and right speech as Buddhist principles closely related to peace and self-development in summer school contexts. The reviewed sources and interview participants associated these principles with self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, patience, ethical conduct, and responsibility toward others.

Interview findings further indicated that monastic teachers regarded mindfulness and moral discipline as especially important foundations for youth development. As Dr. Phramaha Duangthip Pariyattidhari, abbot of Wat Jomkham, stated, "Mindfulness helps young people control their thoughts and actions, while moral discipline guides them to distinguish between what is right and wrong." Participants also reported that meditation practice and ethical training can help students improve concentration, reduce reactive behavior, and strengthen harmonious relationships. Participants also identified loving-kindness and compassion as qualities that encourage mutual respect, cooperation, and nonviolent communication.

The study also identified gratitude and respect toward parents, teachers, and community members as important for moral awareness and social responsibility. Taken together, the findings suggest that Buddhist educational principles may provide both spiritual guidance and practical resources for self-regulation, ethical development, and peaceful relationships among youth.

Table 1: Buddhist Principles Relevant to Peace and Self-Development

Buddhist Principles	Contribution to Youth Development
Mindfulness (s*ati*)	Emotional regulation and self-awareness
Loving-kindness (*metta)*	Empathy and harmonious relationships
Compassion (k*aruna*)	Nonviolence and helping behavior
Moral Discipline (s*ila*)	Ethical behavior and self-control
Gratitude (*katannu*)	Respect and social responsibility
Right Speech (s*ammavaca*)	Peaceful communication and conflict reduction

Objective 2. The findings indicate that summer schools in Kengtung remain important settings for Buddhist education, cultural preservation, and moral training. Programs commonly emphasize chanting, Buddhist teachings, meditation, and discipline, and interview participants reported that parents and community members continue to value these functions.

Several challenges were also identified. Participants described declining student participation linked to modernization, technology use, migration, and changing parental expectations for formal education. They also reported continued reliance on lecture-based teaching, limited student participation, insufficient structured peace education activities, and limited curriculum innovation suited to contemporary youth learning preferences.

Interviewees also reported that students respond positively to interactive activities such as group discussion, meditation practice, role-playing, teamwork, and community service. Monastic teachers therefore emphasized curriculum development and teacher training as priorities to improve teaching practice and sustain the relevance of summer school programs.

Objective 3. Based on the documentary and interview findings, the study developed an integrated Summer School Model combining Buddhist principles with peace education. The proposed model consists of four interconnected components: (1) ethical formation, (2) mindfulness and compassion training, (3) cooperative peace education, and (4) community engagement. The model is intended to support peace and self-development among youth but has not yet been empirically evaluated as an intervention.

The first component, ethical formation, focuses on moral discipline, daily reflection, gratitude practice, and responsible behavior based on Buddhist teachings. Students are encouraged to observe precepts, develop self-discipline, and cultivate respect toward others. The second component, mindfulness and compassion training, includes meditation practice, emotional awareness exercises, loving-kindness meditation, and reflective activities designed to strengthen emotional regulation and empathy.

The third component, cooperative peace education, uses interactive learning methods such as group dialogue, teamwork, role-playing, and conflict-resolution exercises. These activities aim to improve communication skills, cooperation, mutual understanding, and peaceful problem-solving abilities among students.

The fourth component, community engagement, encourages students to participate in service-learning activities, environmental conservation projects, and community support programs in order to strengthen social responsibility and civic awareness.

The integrated model is designed to create a learning environment that connects emotional, ethical, social, and spiritual development. Interview

participants favored participatory and experiential approaches over exclusive reliance on lecture-centered instruction for contemporary youth.

Proposed practical elements for implementation include teacher training, structured daily activities, curriculum planning, meditation and reflective exercises, cooperative learning, community service, and appropriate behavioral and program evaluation. These elements connect Buddhist self-cultivation with peace education while remaining open to future testing and refinement.

Discussion

The findings for Objective 1 indicate that mindfulness, loving-kindness, compassion, moral discipline, gratitude, and right speech form a coherent Buddhist ethical foundation for peace and self-development in youth education. This interpretation aligns with teachings in the Aṅguttara Nikāya, which emphasize cultivating wholesome mental qualities and ethical conduct as foundations for individual and relational well-being (Bodhi Bhikkhu, 2012). It is also supported by contemporary research on contemplative education. A systematic review of 77 school-based mindfulness studies involving more than 12,000 students found relatively strong evidence for improvements in prosocial behavior, resilience, executive function, attention, and mindfulness, together with reductions in anxiety and conduct-related difficulties (Phan et al., 2022). An updated meta-analysis of 66 randomized controlled trials likewise found small but significant benefits of mindfulness-based programs for anxiety and stress, attention, executive functioning, and social behavior among children and adolescents, although the authors emphasized that effects were generally modest and less consistent against active controls (Dunning et al., 2022).

The role of loving-kindness and compassion is similarly supported, but should be interpreted cautiously. Perkins et al. (2022) found that kindness- and compassion-based meditation may contribute to well-being and prosocial outcomes among children and adolescents, while also noting variability in study quality and intervention design. These findings reinforce the educational relevance of Buddhist practices concerned with *mettā* and *karuṇā*, but they do not establish that such practices automatically produce prosocial development. The present findings therefore identify educationally meaningful principles that require structured pedagogy and sustained practice, rather than demonstrating direct causal effects.

Objective 2 highlights an important tension between the continuing cultural and moral significance of Kengtung's summer schools and the changing educational expectations of contemporary youth. Participants reported declining participation, continued reliance on lecture-based instruction, and limited

curriculum innovation, while also observing stronger engagement with interactive and experiential activities. This finding aligns with youth development literature that emphasizes participation, supportive relationships, and developmentally responsive learning environments (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). It is also supported by evidence from experiential learning. A systematic review and meta-analysis found that experiential learning programs were more effective than non-experiential approaches in improving empathy and subjective well-being among adolescents, suggesting that active participation and reflection can enhance important social-emotional outcomes (Chan et al., 2021). Cooperative learning research further supports the value of structured interaction and social interdependence for student engagement and interpersonal development (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

This does not mean traditional monastic education should be replaced. Rather, pedagogical adaptation may better sustain its enduring ethical and cultural strengths. Meditation, Dhamma teaching, moral discipline, and respect for Buddhist traditions can remain central while being delivered through dialogue, cooperative activities, reflection, service learning, and participatory learning. This approach preserves continuity while making Buddhist education more responsive to contemporary youth.

For Objective 3, the proposed Summer School Model integrates these findings through four components: ethical formation, mindfulness and compassion training, cooperative peace education, and community engagement. The model corresponds with peace education's emphasis on nonviolence, dialogue, cooperation, and conflict transformation (Harris & Morrison, 2013), while retaining Buddhist ethical cultivation as its cultural and spiritual foundation. Recent syntheses of peace education research also suggest that effective practice depends not only on curriculum content but also on situated pedagogy, student and teacher agency, relational practice, and sensitivity to local cultural contexts.

The model's principal contribution is therefore integrative rather than evaluative. It connects inner cultivation with interpersonal learning and community participation within a culturally grounded educational framework. However, because the model was derived from documentary analysis and interviews with a small, purposively selected sample and was not experimentally implemented, claims of effectiveness would be premature. Future research should pilot the model, include student and parent perspectives, examine implementation fidelity and acceptability, and assess outcomes such as emotional regulation, prosocial behavior, participation, conflict-management skills, and perceived community relevance.

Knowledge from Research

This study contributes an integrated educational framework linking Buddhist ethical cultivation with contemporary peace education in monastic summer schools in Kengtung. The framework identifies a progression from individual cultivation, through mindfulness, moral discipline, compassion, loving-kindness, gratitude, and right speech, to relational learning through dialogue, cooperation, and conflict transformation, and finally to community engagement. Its distinctive contribution lies in organizing these elements within a single Summer School Model grounded in the local Buddhist educational context.

The study also clarifies that revitalization requires both continuity and adaptation. The Buddhist foundations of summer schools remain central, while participatory pedagogy, curriculum development, teacher preparation, and community engagement are needed to respond to contemporary educational conditions. The resulting model comprises four components: ethical formation, mindfulness and compassion training, cooperative peace education, and community engagement. As a conceptual model derived from documentary and interview evidence, it provides a basis for implementation and future evaluation rather than proof of educational effectiveness.

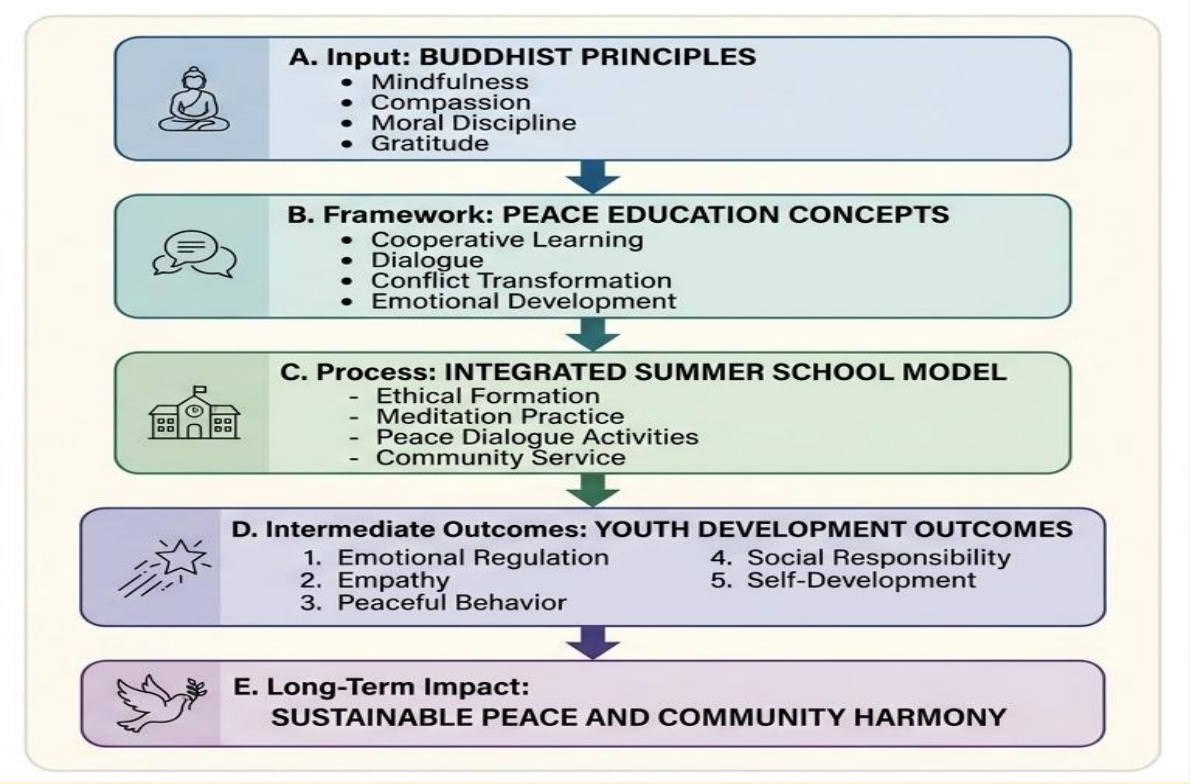

Figure 2: Integrated Summer School Model for Peace and Youth Development.

Conclusion

This study examined Buddhist principles relevant to peace and self-development, analyzed the current conditions and challenges of summer schools in Kengtung, and developed an integrated Summer School Model based on Buddhist and peace education concepts. The findings indicate that mindfulness, loving-kindness, compassion, moral discipline, gratitude, and right speech provide an ethical and contemplative foundation for youth development. Interview participants also identified ongoing strengths in Buddhist cultural and moral education, alongside challenges such as declining participation, lecture-centered instruction, limited curriculum innovation, and insufficient peace-oriented learning activities.

In response, the study proposes a four-component model: ethical formation, mindfulness and compassion training, cooperative peace education, and community engagement. The model seeks to preserve the Buddhist identity of summer schools while incorporating participatory teaching, dialogue, experiential learning, meditation, and service-oriented activities that may be more responsive to contemporary youth.

The study therefore contributes a culturally grounded framework that connects inner cultivation with interpersonal and community-oriented peace education. However, the model has not yet been implemented or tested through outcome evaluation. The findings should not be interpreted as proof of effectiveness, and the small, purposively selected interview sample and Kengtung's specific sociocultural setting limit their generalizability.

Suggestions

Educational and monastic institutions seeking to strengthen summer school programs may consider integrating structured mindfulness and compassion activities, cooperative learning, dialogue-based peace education, community engagement, and teacher development while preserving core Buddhist educational aims. Any implementation should adapt to local conditions and include systematic evaluation, rather than assuming the proposed model will produce the same outcomes across settings.

Future research should pilot the proposed model with broader participant groups, including students, parents, and teachers; examine implementation processes and acceptability; and evaluate short- and long-term outcomes related to emotional regulation, prosocial behavior, participation, self-development, and community engagement. Comparative studies across Buddhist summer school contexts would also help determine which elements are context-specific and which may be transferable.

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