

Historical and Cultural Dimensions of Buddhist Ethics in Moral and Lifestyle Education for Vietnamese Students

Nguyen Van Thang¹, Phan Thi Chau² and Lu Thuy Lien^{3*}

¹Thu Dau Mot University, Vietnam

²Nghe An University, Vietnam

³The University of Da Nang, University of Science and Education, Vietnam

*Corresponding Author: Lu Thuy Lien, ltlien_kv@ued.udn.vn

Abstract

The contemporary knowledge society provides significant opportunities for human advancement but also presents serious challenges, particularly the erosion of moral values and lifestyle among younger generations. In Vietnam, where students represent the future of national development, this issue has become increasingly urgent. Responding to UNESCO's four pillars of education, namely learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be, Vietnam must strengthen its moral foundation by integrating traditional cultural values with modern educational practices. Buddhism, introduced to Vietnam nearly two millennia ago, has profoundly influenced Vietnamese thought, morality, and lifestyle. Its philosophy of compassion, altruism, and equality resonates deeply with the nation's cultural identity and offers a sustainable framework for moral education. By emphasizing empathy, ethical conduct, and social responsibility, Buddhist ideas can complement contemporary educational goals, fostering holistic personality development and preparing students to navigate complex social realities.

Keywords: Buddhism, Moral Education, Lifestyle Education, Vietnamese Students, Sustainable Development

INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, rapid globalization, technological advancement, and economic modernization have profoundly transformed societies. While these changes have created unprecedented opportunities for human development, they have also generated serious challenges, particularly the erosion of moral values and lifestyle among younger generations. In Vietnam, students represent the future of the nation, yet they are increasingly exposed to social evils, individualism, and cultural alienation. Recent surveys conducted by the Institute for Research on Educational Development (IRED) revealed that misconduct among students tends to increase with higher levels of education, highlighting the urgency of addressing moral degradation in schools (Vietnam Institute of Research on Educational Development [IRED], n.d.).

The Communist Party of Vietnam has consistently emphasized the importance of building a new moral foundation for society. The *Document of the XI Congress* affirmed the mission of "respecting and promoting the good ethical and cultural values of religion" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2011). President Ho Chi Minh also stressed that the prosperity or decline of the nation depends largely on the youth, underscoring the need for comprehensive education that integrates politics, ideology, intellectual knowledge, morality, and cultural lifestyle (Ho Chi Minh, 2000; Pham & Nguyen, 2003). Against this backdrop, the application of Buddhist ideas to moral and lifestyle education emerges as a timely and necessary solution.

Buddhism has played a profound role in shaping Vietnamese culture and morality for nearly two millennia. Its philosophy of compassion, altruism, and equality resonates deeply with the nation's

cultural identity and provides a sustainable framework for ethical education (Ahir, 2001; Sarao, 1995). Historically, pagodas functioned not only as religious centers but also as schools, transmitting both literacy and moral lessons to generations of youth (Giau, 1973). Figures such as Vạn Hạnh and Trần Nhân Tông exemplify how Buddhist education produced leaders who combined intellectual achievement with ethical integrity. Even today, Buddhist teachings continue to influence literature, art, architecture, and community life, reinforcing their relevance for contemporary education (Tinh Hai, 1992).

The integration of Buddhist ethics into modern education can help students resist the negative influences of consumerism, individualism, and moral decline. By emphasizing compassion, mindfulness, and right livelihood, Buddhist thought provides tools for cultivating resilience, civic responsibility, and harmonious living. As Ikeda (1996) observed, Buddhism transcends caste, ethnicity, and social status, affirming equality and dignity for all. This universal vision aligns with global educational goals, such as UNESCO's four pillars of education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

The role of Buddhism in moral and lifestyle education has been extensively examined in both Vietnamese and international scholarship. Historically, Buddhism has been a major cultural force shaping Vietnamese identity, morality, and social cohesion (Ahir, 2001; Sarao, 1995). Pagodas functioned not only as religious centers but also as educational institutions, transmitting literacy and ethical values to generations of youth (Giau, 1973). Influential figures such as Vạn Hạnh and Trần Nhân Tông exemplify the integration of Buddhist education with leadership and ethical governance, demonstrating the enduring relevance of Buddhist thought in Vietnamese society (Tinh Hai, 1992).

Buddhist ethics, rooted in compassion, altruism, and equality, provide a sustainable framework for addressing contemporary challenges of moral decline and individualism (Ikeda, 1996; Sugata Priya, 2008). The Five Precepts and the paramitas (perfections) are frequently cited as guiding principles for ethical conduct, social responsibility, and resilience in modern life (Ross & Hills, 2007). Moreover, Buddhist teachings on equality and social justice resonate with global human rights discourses, affirming dignity and rejecting discrimination based on gender, class, or ethnicity (Dan, n.d.; Sugata Priya, 2008).

Recent Vietnamese studies highlight the urgency of applying Buddhist ethics to education in the context of globalization and modernization. Surveys by the Institute for Research on Educational Development (IRED) reveal increasing misconduct among students, underscoring the need for moral reinforcement in schools (IRED, n.d.). The Communist Party of Vietnam has also affirmed the importance of "respecting and promoting the good ethical and cultural values of religion" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2011), while Ho Chi Minh emphasized that the prosperity of the nation depends largely on the youth (Ho Chi Minh, 2000). Together, these perspectives suggest that integrating Buddhist ethical thought into education can provide a holistic foundation for sustainable development, aligning with UNESCO's four pillars of education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be.

To explore this issue, the study employs a **qualitative, historical-analytical approach**. First, it reconstructs the evolution of Buddhist influence on Vietnamese morality and education from its introduction nearly two millennia ago to the present, analyzing historical figures, institutions, and cultural practices that exemplify the integration of Buddhist ethics into social life. Second, it applies textual and philosophical analysis to examine primary Buddhist texts (e.g., Sigalovada Sutta, Vasala Sutta) and ethical frameworks such as the Five Precepts and paramitas, interpreting these teachings in relation to contemporary challenges facing Vietnamese students, including consumerism, individualism, and moral decline. Third, it integrates policy analysis, reviewing official documents of the Communist Party of Vietnam, UNESCO's educational frameworks, and recent surveys on student

morality (IRED), to assess how Buddhist ethical thought can be incorporated into national education policies and practices.

By synthesizing historical depth, philosophical insight, and policy relevance, this combined literature review and methodology provides a comprehensive foundation for understanding how Buddhist ethics can be applied to modern educational contexts. It ensures that the research captures both the enduring cultural significance of Buddhism and its practical applicability to current educational challenges in Vietnam.

BUDDHIST IDEAS OF MORALITY AND LIFESTYLE

Buddhist thought has long emphasized compassion, altruism, and charity as essential foundations for constructing a bright, healthy, and moral life. As one of the key elements shaping Vietnamese national culture for nearly two millennia, Buddhism continues to preserve positive values that contribute to the moral education and lifestyle of the Vietnamese people (Ahir, 2001; Sarao, 1995). The moral philosophy of Buddhism is deeply intertwined with Vietnamese humanism, offering guidance for individuals to cultivate ethical conduct, social responsibility, and respect for humanity (Tinh Hai, 1992).

Central to Buddhist morality is the principle of filial piety, which stresses gratitude and reverence toward parents. As Nguyen Van Manh (2019) explains, Buddhism teaches that “everything in this world is nothing more than the foster educated services of the parents.” This principle not only reinforces family bonds but also serves as a moral compass for the younger generation, helping them resist temptations, remain committed to community welfare, and live ethically.

Buddhism also prescribes the Five Precepts, which prohibit killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and intoxication. These precepts form the ethical foundation for everyday life and are elaborated in the *Sigalovada Sutta*, which outlines moral standards for lay Buddhists (Ross & Hills, 2007). Beyond these basic precepts, the Buddha identified fourteen forms of misconduct to be avoided, including four acts of distress (killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying), four mental afflictions (lust, anger, fear, ignorance), and six destructive habits (intoxication, indulgence in sensual pleasures, gambling, excessive sleep, idleness, and loitering). These guidelines emphasize the holistic nature of Buddhist morality, which integrates both external behavior and internal dispositions (Ikeda, 1996).

In addition to prohibitions, Buddhism encourages the cultivation of virtues through the practice of the *paramitas* (perfections). These include generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, effort, patience, truthfulness, determination, compassion, and loving-kindness (Sugata Priya, 2008). The Buddha’s teaching that “anger should be overcome by love, and evil should be overcome by good” (Ross & Hills, 2007, p. 134) reflects the transformative power of these virtues in fostering harmony and resilience. Practicing the *paramitas* leads to the development of qualities such as selflessness, right view, humility, and compassion, which are essential for both personal growth and social cohesion.

The impermanence of worldly possessions and achievements is another cornerstone of Buddhist ethics. As Ikeda (1996) notes, the Buddha reminded his disciples that “destruction is a property of things in this world” and urged them to cultivate diligence and mindfulness. This teaching underscores the importance of detachment from materialism and the pursuit of spiritual development, a message particularly relevant in contemporary societies facing moral decline and excessive individualism.

The relevance of Buddhist morality to modern Vietnam is evident in its capacity to counteract the negative effects of market-driven lifestyles, such as selfishness, materialism, and moral decadence. By encouraging compassion, altruism, and community-oriented living, Buddhist ethics provide a framework for building a society based on mutual care and responsibility (Giau, 1973; Pham & Nguyen, 2003). Ho Chi Minh (2000) affirmed this perspective, stating that “the principles and the goal of Buddhism aim to build an extremely beautiful, good, equal, happy, peaceful, and prosperous

lifetime" (p. 45). His words highlight the enduring relevance of Buddhist values in shaping a moral foundation for national development.

BUDDHIST IDEAS ON EQUALITY, GENDER, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

In the relationship between human beings, Buddhist thought consistently seeks to build a foundation of equality, peace, and mutual respect. This orientation is not only philosophical but also practical, as it addresses pressing social issues such as gender equality, human rights, and justice.

Gender Equality

Gender equality and women's rights are among the most important issues of modern times. Across cultures, women have historically been subject to injustice and discrimination, and the struggle for gender equality is inseparable from the struggle for human rights. In Vietnam today, gender equality remains a central component of building a fair and inclusive society. The ideological struggle is particularly significant, since changes in perception often precede changes in action. Buddhism offers valuable insights into this struggle.

In the Buddha's time, Indian society was dominated by rigid class hierarchies and patriarchal norms. Women were rarely considered equal to men, and social injustice was pervasive. Against this backdrop, Buddhism introduced a revolutionary spirit of equality. Ikeda (1996) observed that "beyond the narrow perspective of blood race, caste and ethnicity, Buddhism determined on the equality of the four traditional classes in Indian society" (p. 108). This egalitarian vision extended to women, as the Buddha recognized their capacity for enlightenment and liberation. His teachings to Mahapajapati Gotami, his stepmother, affirmed women's spiritual potential and paved the way for the establishment of the bhikkhuni (nun) order, even within Theravada traditions (Ikeda, 1996).

Buddhist scriptures also emphasize mutual respect within family life. The *Thien Sanh* scripture teaches that husbands should love and provide for their wives, avoid contempt, allow them freedom at home, and treat them as equals (Dan, n.d.). The Buddha's declaration, "I have become the Buddha, all beings can become Buddha," reflects his conviction that enlightenment is attainable for all, regardless of gender, class, or social status.

Human Equality and Social Justice

Beyond gender, Buddhist ideas consistently affirm equality and respect for basic human dignity. Justice, democracy, and freedom are eternal aspirations of humanity, but they must be grounded in morality to become reality. For more than 2,500 years, Buddhism has emphasized ethical foundations as the basis for social justice. According to the *Vasala Sutta*, "a misery is not due to birth, a sinful life is not due to birth" (Sugata Priya, 2008). This teaching rejects hereditary privilege and affirms that human worth is determined by conduct rather than origin. Similarly, the Buddha taught that nobility or inferiority arises from karma, not from social position (Dan, n.d.).

Buddhism also extends its concern for rights beyond humans to all sentient beings. The Five Precepts form the ethical foundation of Buddhist practice: refraining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and intoxication. These precepts safeguard life, property, dignity, and social harmony. The first precept affirms the right to life for all beings, the second protects ownership, the third safeguards family and sexual integrity, the fourth ensures honesty in communication, and the fifth promotes sobriety and mindfulness (Ross & Hills, 2007). Observing these precepts not only benefits individuals but also strengthens social cohesion and democratic living.

Buddhism is therefore not an isolated religion but a social philosophy deeply engaged with life. Its emphasis on compassion, cooperation, and justice explains why millions of people worldwide embrace Buddhist practice. Schumacher (as cited in Sugata Priya, 2008) argued that development in Buddhism begins not with wealth but with people, education, organization, and ethics. Buddhism discourages competition and instead promotes cooperation as the most appropriate measure to address economic crises, political instability, and social injustice.

The relevance of Buddhist social philosophy is further underscored by modern thinkers. Nietzsche, for example, admired Buddhism's rejection of hostility and hatred, noting that "Buddhism does not stimulate people to make war against other religions. The most touching thing is Buddhism against the ideology of hostility and hatred" (Giau, 1973, p. 214). This perspective highlights Buddhism's enduring contribution to peace and interreligious harmony.

Taken together, Buddhist ideas on equality, gender, and social justice provide a comprehensive ethical framework that remains highly relevant for contemporary Vietnam. By affirming the dignity of women, rejecting caste and class discrimination, and promoting universal compassion, Buddhism offers both philosophical depth and practical guidance for building a society based on justice, democracy, and peace. These teachings not only enrich Vietnam's cultural heritage but also provide essential resources for moral and lifestyle education in the modern era.

Buddhist Ideas on the Relationship Between Man and Nature

In the relationship between human beings and nature, Buddhist thought emphasizes respect, harmony, and the construction of a sustainable environment. This perspective is highly relevant in the modern era, where environmental degradation has become one of the most pressing global challenges. Buddhism provides not only a spiritual framework but also practical ethical guidelines that encourage humanity to adopt a more responsible and compassionate attitude toward the natural world (Ayya Khema, 2002; Thich Hue Thong, 2010).

The Buddhist commandments, particularly the principle of refraining from destroying life, extend beyond human beings to include animals, plants, and all sentient creatures. This holistic ethic recognizes that humans depend on nature for survival, while nature itself is profoundly affected by human actions. The interdependence between humans and the environment is a central tenet of Buddhist philosophy, which teaches that the exploitation of nature without restraint leads to suffering for both individuals and society (Tinh Hai, 1992).

A crucial aspect of Buddhist environmental ethics is the concept of *right livelihood*, one of the elements of the Noble Eightfold Path. The Buddha advised his disciples to earn a living honestly and without causing harm to themselves, other people, or living beings (Ikeda, 1996). This teaching directly addresses economic practices, which are often at the root of environmental destruction. Unsustainable exploitation of forests, overhunting of animals, and irresponsible industrial activities are inconsistent with the principle of right livelihood. By practicing this lifestyle, individuals contribute to long-term environmental protection and ensure that economic development does not compromise ecological balance (Thich Hue Thong, 2010).

The precept of "not killing" further reinforces compassion and respect for life. It encourages Buddhists to cultivate empathy toward all beings, thereby reducing practices that harm ecosystems. This ethic of nonviolence extends to everyday actions, reminding individuals that environmental protection is not only a collective responsibility but also a personal moral duty (Ross & Hills, 2007).

Buddhist scriptures provide comprehensive evidence of the importance of compassion and harmony with nature. Ayya Khema (2002) records a prayer that reflects this universal respect: "Pray for all people and all species to live in safety and well-welfare, in the gentle and disengaged mind; pray for all species on earth to live peacefully, the major species, the stronger species, the species composition, the lower species, the large species, the small species, the species that can be seen, the species that cannot be seen, the near species, the distant species... pray for species which do not kill any species, let no one despise other lives, let no one due to anger or malice wish suffering upon others." This passage illustrates the Buddhist vision of ecological harmony, where compassion is extended universally to all forms of life.

Moreover, Buddhist philosophy does not separate individual interests from social and ecological interests. It emphasizes that personal well-being and societal prosperity must coexist with

environmental sustainability. The Five Precepts, which form the foundation of Buddhist ethics, can be interpreted as ecological principles. The first precept affirms the right to life and the protection of all species. The second safeguards property, which includes natural resources. The third protects family and social integrity, indirectly discouraging exploitative practices. The fourth promotes honesty, which is essential for transparent environmental governance. The fifth prohibits intoxicants, which impair judgment and can lead to irresponsible exploitation of nature (Sugata Priya, 2008).

Buddhism is therefore not a religion detached from worldly concerns but a social philosophy deeply engaged with life. Its teachings encourage cooperation rather than competition, a principle that Schumacher (as cited in Sugata Priya, 2008) identified as crucial for addressing economic crises, political instability, and ecological imbalance. By promoting cooperation, compassion, and moderation, Buddhism offers a sustainable model for human development that begins with ethics rather than material wealth.

The relevance of Buddhist environmental thought is further underscored by modern Vietnamese scholars. Giau (1973) emphasized that Buddhism's rejection of hostility and exploitation aligns with the nation's cultural values of harmony and respect. In this sense, Buddhist teachings provide not only spiritual guidance but also practical solutions for contemporary environmental challenges.

Taken together, Buddhist ideas on the relationship between man and nature highlight the importance of compassion, right livelihood, and ecological responsibility. They call for a lifestyle that respects all forms of life, avoids unnecessary harm, and promotes sustainable coexistence. In the context of Vietnam's rapid modernization and environmental pressures, these teachings offer a valuable ethical foundation for building a society that balances economic growth with ecological sustainability.

THE NEED TO APPLY BUDDHIST IDEAS ON MORAL AND LIFESTYLE EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS IN VIETNAM TODAY

The *Document of the XI Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam* emphasized the importance of "respecting and promoting the good ethical and cultural values of religion" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2011). This directive highlights the necessity of integrating Buddhist ideas into moral and lifestyle education for students in Vietnam today, both from a factual and scientific basis.

The Current Situation of Students' Morality and Lifestyle

Humanity has achieved remarkable progress in science and technology, yet the complexities of global politics, industrialization, and market-driven economies have led to serious pollution of both the natural and social environment. These conditions have contributed to a crisis of faith, morality, and lifestyle in many societies. In Vietnam, since the late twentieth century, the rapid process of industrialization and modernization has exerted powerful influences on social life. While these changes have brought economic growth, they have also eroded traditional moral values. Alien lifestyles, contrary to Vietnamese customs and traditions, have become increasingly common.

Among the youth, especially students, this erosion manifests in attitudes of selfishness, individualism, and indifference to social obligations. Juvenile delinquency has risen, with offenses becoming more serious and widespread. Painful phenomena such as violence in schools, disrespect for teachers, and disregard for communal responsibilities cannot be ignored. Statistics indicate that between 55 and 65 percent of offenders in recent years were teenagers, many of whom were students (Vietnam Institute of Research on Educational Development (IRED, n.d.). A 2007 survey of 30 universities and colleges revealed that 51.4 percent of students considered premarital cohabitation a widespread phenomenon. The Committee for Population and Family Planning reported that each year there are over 1.5 million abortions in Vietnam, with adolescents accounting for more than 35 percent, and approximately 20 percent of these cases involving students (IRED, n.d.).

President Ho Chi Minh emphasized that youth are the future owners of the country, and the prosperity or decline of the nation depends largely on them (Ho Chi Minh, 2000). The XI Congress of

the Communist Party of Vietnam reaffirmed this mission, calling for the comprehensive development of Vietnamese people in politics, ideology, intellectual knowledge, morality, physical health, creativity, community spirit, kindness, tolerance, gratitude, cultural lifestyles, and harmonious relations within families and society (Pham & Nguyen, 2003). Therefore, constructing a new moral foundation and lifestyle for students, rooted in humanity, progress, and sustainability, is an urgent requirement.

The Enduring Influence of Buddhism in Vietnamese Life

Buddhism has profoundly shaped Vietnamese culture and morality from its introduction in the early centuries BCE to the present day. It has become inseparable from the spiritual life of the Vietnamese people. The chanting of Amitabha Buddha and the image of Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva of compassion, are deeply embedded in daily life and literature, symbolizing the enduring presence of Buddhist compassion and altruism (Tinh Hai, 1992).

In East Asia, Confucianism became the dominant ideology in countries such as China, Japan, and Korea. In mainland Southeast Asia, however, Buddhism played a comparable role, shaping the cultural and spiritual life of nations such as Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam (Ahir, 2001). In Vietnam, Buddhism became part of the collective consciousness, binding communities together and serving as a moral compass.

Pagodas historically functioned not only as religious centers but also as cultural and educational institutions. They were the origin and foundation of traditional morality in villages and hamlets. Monks, who were also teachers, delivered sermons that instilled Buddhist moral lessons in generations of youth, encouraging them to live with gentleness, altruism, and loyalty. In the Ly and Tran dynasties, prominent figures such as Vạn Hạnh, Khuông Việt, Trần Thái Tông, Trần Nhân Tông, and Tuệ Tĩnh were educated in temples and became symbols of morality and lifestyle (Giau, 1973). Pagodas thus served as schools, inspiring literacy and literature while nurturing ethical values.

The influence of Buddhism extended to literature, art, architecture, and sculpture. Buddhist teachings dominated the ideology of the Ly and Tran dynasties, shaping literary works and cultural achievements. Architectural landmarks such as the One Pillar Pagoda, Báo Thiên Tower, and Thiên Mụ Pagoda became symbols of national pride and the prosperity of Vietnamese Buddhism (Sarao, 1995). Although Buddhism's political influence declined after the fifteenth century, its moral and cultural impact deepened as it penetrated the masses more broadly. The compassion of Amitabha and Avalokiteśvara fostered kindness and solidarity among the Vietnamese people.

In modern life, characterized by stress and rapid change, people increasingly seek spiritual moments of relaxation and renewal. The Buddha's teachings of compassion and equanimity serve as a source of comfort and nourishment for the soul, offering guidance for ethical living in a complex world (Ayya Khema, 2002).

Buddhism as an Educational System

The educational philosophy of Buddhism is not limited to spiritual cultivation but extends to the holistic development of human beings. The ultimate goal of Buddhist education is wisdom, referred to in Sanskrit as *Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*, meaning the perfect and ultimate enlightenment. The Buddha's teachings guide individuals to realize this innate wisdom, which enables them to transform suffering into happiness and ignorance into understanding. Without wisdom, human beings perceive and act incorrectly, leading to harmful consequences. With wisdom, however, thoughts, viewpoints, and behaviors align with truth, resulting in harmony and happiness (Ayya Khema, 2002).

Master Chin Kung (n.d.) distinguishes four types of Buddhism practiced today: religious Buddhism, academic Buddhism, cultic degeneration, and traditional Buddhism. Among these, only traditional Buddhism, rooted in the authentic teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha, represents the true essence of

Buddhist education. This form of education emphasizes moral cultivation, intellectual development, and spiritual practice, aiming to produce individuals who embody both compassion and wisdom.

The Buddha himself serves as the archetype of the educator. Revered as the "Original Teacher," he exemplifies morality, lifestyle, and pedagogy. His relationship with disciples was fundamentally that of teacher and student, rather than priest and follower. This educational model was institutionalized through practices such as the summer retreat, where disciples returned annually during the rainy season to receive further instruction and engage in collective learning. This system parallels modern continuing education, demonstrating the Buddha's foresight in establishing lifelong learning as a cornerstone of personal and communal development (Chin Kung, n.d.).

Buddhist education is deeply humanistic. It nurtures individuals to become complete human beings who live tranquil lives and embody compassion and wisdom. The Dharma is not an abstract ideal but a practical path that guides people toward ethical living, social responsibility, and inner peace. The image of the Buddha serves as a mirror, inspiring learners to cultivate virtues such as patience, generosity, and truthfulness (Sugata Priya, 2008).

In Vietnam, the educational role of Buddhism has historically been expressed through pagodas, which functioned as centers of both religious practice and cultural learning. Monks acted as teachers, transmitting not only literacy but also moral lessons that shaped generations of youth. Figures such as Vạn Hạnh and Trần Nhân Tông illustrate how Buddhist education produced leaders who combined intellectual achievement with ethical integrity (Giau, 1973). This tradition underscores the relevance of Buddhist pedagogy for contemporary moral and lifestyle education.

Applied to modern contexts, Buddhist education offers a framework for addressing the moral challenges facing Vietnamese students today. By emphasizing compassion, mindfulness, and right livelihood, it provides tools for resisting the negative influences of consumerism, individualism, and moral decline. As Ho Chi Minh (2000) observed, the principles of Buddhism aim to build a society that is beautiful, equal, happy, peaceful, and prosperous. Integrating Buddhist educational values into schools and universities can therefore contribute to the cultivation of responsible citizens who embody both intellectual competence and moral integrity.

In essence, Buddhism as an educational system is not confined to religious instruction but represents a comprehensive philosophy of human development. It integrates moral education, lifestyle cultivation, and intellectual growth, offering a sustainable model for nurturing wisdom and compassion in individuals and communities. For Vietnam, where the younger generation faces increasing moral and social challenges, the application of Buddhist educational principles is both timely and necessary.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PROMOTING THE ROLE OF BUDDHISM IN THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS ABOUT MORALS AND LIFESTYLE

Technological advances and economic modernization are transforming human conduct and lifestyles, requiring adaptation to new circumstances. Yet, even as societies evolve, moral and lifestyle education must remain grounded in traditional values. As former Russian President Vladimir Putin once remarked, "morality cannot be separated from religious rules." Religions, beyond their doctrinal systems, embody moral standards deeply rooted in humanity, such as filial piety, honesty, and compassion. For Vietnam, where Buddhism has profoundly shaped cultural and spiritual life for centuries, applying Buddhist ideas to moral and lifestyle education is both necessary and urgent (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2011).

Raising Awareness of Buddhist Educational Thought

First, it is essential to recognize Buddhist ideas as one of the most progressive educational philosophies in human history. While Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought remain the mainstream ideological foundations in Vietnam, education must draw upon diverse traditions to achieve comprehensive human development. As Marx noted, "man is the sum of social relationships,"

implying that education must adapt to changing contexts. In the West, Socratic thought emphasized self-improvement and the relationship between individuals and community. In the East, the educational philosophies of Confucius and the Buddha contributed significantly to shaping ethical life. Buddhism, in particular, contains precious values of moral education that penetrate deeply into the human heart and endure sustainably (Giau, 1973; Ho Chi Minh, 2000).

Integrating Buddhist Ideas into Educational Practice

Second, educators should integrate Buddhist ideas into teaching across disciplines, whether in the social sciences or natural sciences. The Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the Threefold Training provide a universal framework for addressing human suffering and cultivating ethical living. These teachings are not confined to Buddhists but can be applied broadly to moral education. Teachers play a crucial role in guiding students to appreciate and practice these values. To do so effectively, they must possess knowledge of Buddhist ethics and lifestyle, and apply them naturally and reasonably in classroom instruction, extracurricular activities, and personal guidance (Thich Hue Thong, 2010).

Encouraging Student Engagement with Buddhist Values

Third, students should be encouraged to actively seek moral values contained in Buddhism, particularly the Eightfold Path and the Threefold Training. Modern education often prioritizes scientific knowledge and vocational skills, sometimes neglecting moral development. Yet ethical education is vital and often more challenging than imparting technical knowledge. Rather than imposing moral lessons mechanically, educators should inspire students to self-reflect, self-contemplate, and self-practice Buddhist ethical ideas or other traditional values they find meaningful. This approach fosters autonomy and internalization of moral principles, making ethical living a conscious choice rather than an external obligation (Ayya Khema, 2002).

Collaboration Between Schools and Religious Institutions

Finally, schools should collaborate with social and religious organizations, including Buddhist institutions, to enrich moral and lifestyle education. Pagodas, historically centers of both religious and cultural education, continue to play a vital role in transmitting moral lessons and fostering community spirit. Partnerships between schools and pagodas can diversify educational activities, leverage the strengths of religious institutions, and provide students with experiential opportunities to practice compassion, altruism, and social responsibility (Tinh Hai, 1992; Sarao, 1995).

Moral and lifestyle education has been a fundamental component of education throughout history. In each era, however, appropriate ideas and methods must be applied to achieve effectiveness. In Vietnam today, applying Buddhist thought can yield both immediate and long-term benefits for students' moral development. Buddhism, as a global religion, transcends dogma and theology, encompassing both natural and spiritual dimensions. Rooted in lived experience, it offers a comprehensive system of values that remain profoundly relevant for contemporary education (Buddha and Buddhism, n.d.). By integrating Buddhist ethics into educational practice, Vietnam can cultivate a generation of students who embody compassion, wisdom, and responsibility, thereby contributing to the sustainable development of society.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the application of Buddhist ideas to moral and lifestyle education for students in Vietnam is both necessary and feasible in the current era. Rapid modernization, globalization, and the pressures of market-driven economies have contributed to the erosion of traditional values, resulting in increasing moral challenges among the younger generation. Statistics and surveys reveal that misconduct among students is rising, underscoring the urgency of building a new moral foundation that integrates cultural heritage with contemporary educational

practices (Vietnam Institute of Research on Educational Development (IRED, n.d.; Communist Party of Vietnam, 2011).

Buddhism, with its long-standing influence on Vietnamese culture and society, offers a comprehensive ethical framework that emphasizes compassion, altruism, equality, and respect for life. Its teachings on filial piety, the Five Precepts, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the cultivation of wisdom and compassion provide practical guidance for students to navigate modern challenges while maintaining moral integrity (Nguyen Van Manh, 2019; Sugata Priya, 2008; Ross & Hills, 2007). Historically, pagodas served as centers of both religious and educational life, nurturing generations of leaders and intellectuals who embodied ethical values and civic responsibility (Giau, 1973; Tinh Hai, 1992). This tradition highlights the enduring relevance of Buddhist pedagogy for contemporary education.

Integrating Buddhist ethics into schools and universities can help students resist the negative influences of consumerism, individualism, and moral decline. By encouraging self-reflection, compassion, and right livelihood, Buddhist education fosters holistic personality development and strengthens social cohesion. As Ho Chi Minh (2000) observed, the principles of Buddhism aim to build a society that is beautiful, equal, happy, peaceful, and prosperous. This vision aligns with UNESCO's four pillars of education, learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be, providing a global framework for sustainable educational development.

Ultimately, the application of Buddhist thought to moral and lifestyle education contributes not only to the personal growth of students but also to the sustainable development of Vietnamese society. By cultivating a generation of students who embody both intellectual competence and moral integrity, Vietnam can ensure that its future leaders are equipped to build a just, compassionate, and resilient nation.

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