

Buddhism and Environmental Protection: An Approach to Sustainable Development in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT:

Environmental protection and sustainable development represent defining global trends, to which Vietnam actively subscribes. Achieving sustainability necessitates the collective mobilization of all societal sectors, including religious organizations. As an inherently engaged spiritual tradition, Buddhism has consistently prioritized ecological preservation and sustainable practices throughout both historical and contemporary eras. This commitment is manifested not only in practical actions but also deeply embedded within the philosophical doctrines of the Buddhist tenets. Historically evolving alongside the Vietnamese nation, Buddhism continues to make substantial contributions to the country's modern socio-economic progress through eco-friendly initiatives. This article analyzes the eco-philosophical dimensions of Buddhist doctrines, examines the historical and contemporary contributions of Vietnamese Buddhism to environmental governance, and proposes strategic solutions to further amplify the role of this religion in Vietnam's sustainable development agenda.

Keywords: Buddhism · Doctrinal system · Engaged Buddhism · Environmental protection · Sustainable development.

1 Introduction

In the contemporary era, alongside unprecedented economic and technological milestones, humanity is confronted with escalating global ecological crises, most notably environmental degradation and climate change. Consequently, establishing effective environmental protection mechanisms and pursuing sustainable development have become paramount imperatives for national strategies worldwide. These issues, however, are not entirely modern phenomena; they have long been contemplated within historical human thought, particularly through religious lenses. As a faith characterized by proactive worldly engagement, Buddhism stands out for its early and

sophisticated integration of ecological ethics and sustainability principles within its core doctrinal system. These conceptual frameworks transcend canonical texts, actively shaping daily rituals and monastic lifestyles. Investigating the eco-philosophical dimensions of Buddhism holds dual significance: it enriches contemporary philosophical discourse and offers pragmatically viable pathways to optimize religious resources for environmental sustainability in contemporary Vietnam.

2 Method

This study examines environmental protection and sustainability from a philosophical and sociological perspective. The conceptual framework is grounded in the methodological

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systems of dialectical materialism and historical materialism, which facilitate an investigation of the dynamic, interconnected relationships between human society, religious institutions, and the natural ecosystem within the specific socio-historical context of contemporary Vietnam.

To ensure analytical rigor, the research employs two complementary methodological clusters. The first encompasses theoretical analysis and synthesis, which are applied to interpret classical Buddhist texts and contemporary treatises. This qualitative approach allows for the systematic identification of the intrinsic characteristics, ethical nature, and doctrinal nuances of Buddhist ecological thought. The second cluster utilizes an interdisciplinary approach, integrating concepts from ecology, environmental science, and sociology. By incorporating empirical comparative data, historical analysis, and relevant sociological survey insights, this methodology provides a multidimensional validation of the findings, underscores the tangible social impacts of Buddhist institutions, and reinforces the unique value of analyzing ecological crises through a philosophical lens.

3 Results

3.1. Environmental protection and sustainable development: Contemporary perspectives

Environmental protection and sustainable development have become two of the most important issues confronting humanity in the twenty-first century. Unlike previous periods, when environmental concerns were often viewed as separate from economic growth, contemporary approaches increasingly recognize that environmental sustainability constitutes a prerequisite for long-term social prosperity, economic stability, and human well-being. The growing impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental pollution, resource depletion, and ecological degradation have demonstrated that the future of human civilization depends fundamentally on the health and resilience of natural systems.

From a contemporary perspective, the environment is not merely the physical space surrounding human beings but a complex

ecological system comprising interdependent relationships among humans, other living species, and natural resources. Modern ecological science has shown that disturbances occurring in one component of the ecosystem may generate far-reaching consequences for the entire ecological network. This recognition has gradually transformed the traditional anthropocentric worldview—which places humans at the center of nature—toward a more ecocentric and holistic understanding that emphasizes the interconnectedness and mutual dependence of all forms of life.

The environmental crises currently facing the world have accelerated this shift in perception. According to the United Nations Environment Programme, climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution should not be viewed as isolated problems but as interconnected dimensions of a broader planetary crisis requiring integrated solutions (UNEP, (2021); pp.720-733). Consequently, environmental protection today extends beyond pollution control or resource conservation to include ecological restoration, climate adaptation, sustainable consumption, and the promotion of environmentally responsible lifestyles.

Closely linked to environmental protection is the concept of sustainable development. The most widely accepted definition was proposed by the World Commission on Environment and Development in its landmark report *Our Common Future*, which defines sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, (1987); p.43). Although this definition was introduced nearly four decades ago, it continues to serve as the normative foundation for global development policies.

In recent years, however, the concept of sustainable development has evolved significantly. Beyond balancing economic growth, social equity, and environmental protection, contemporary discussions increasingly emphasize green growth, circular economy, low-carbon development, climate

resilience, and environmental justice. The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes that poverty reduction, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and peace are mutually reinforcing objectives that must be pursued simultaneously (UN, (2015); pp.720-733). Sustainable development is therefore understood not merely as an economic strategy but as a comprehensive model of human development that seeks harmony between society and nature.

At a deeper philosophical level, contemporary environmental thought has increasingly questioned the assumption that nature exists solely as an object for human exploitation. Many scholars argue that ecological crises originate not only from technological or economic factors but also from underlying value systems that encourage excessive consumption, unlimited growth, and the instrumental treatment of nature. As a result, the search for sustainable development has expanded beyond scientific and policy solutions to include ethical, cultural, and spiritual dimensions. Building a sustainable society requires not only institutional reforms and technological innovation but also transformations in human consciousness, values, and lifestyles.

In this context, religious and philosophical traditions have attracted growing scholarly attention because they provide ethical resources capable of shaping human attitudes toward nature and guiding environmentally responsible behavior. Among these traditions, Buddhism is particularly noteworthy due to its emphasis on interdependence, compassion, non-harming, moderation, and harmonious coexistence among all forms of life. Although classical Buddhist texts do not employ modern concepts such as "environmental protection" or "sustainable development," many Buddhist philosophical principles contain insights that resonate strongly with contemporary ecological thinking. Examining these philosophical foundations therefore contributes not only to a deeper understanding of Buddhist thought but also to identifying valuable ethical resources for

environmental protection and sustainable development in the contemporary world.

3.2 Thought of Buddhist philosophy on environmental protection and sustainable development

In its teaching system, although Buddhism does not use terms like "environmental protection" or "sustainable development," the philosophical viewpoints about the relationship between people and nature, along with the policy of exhorting disciples and all beings in the world to adopt a harmonious, nature-friendly lifestyle as a means of achieving "liberation," show that the Buddha was interested in issues such as environmental protection and sustainable development very early on. This is reflected in the major treatises of Buddhism, such as the theory of causation (Thuyết Duyên khởi), the theory of equality for all things (Thuyết Vạn vật bình đẳng), and the theory of cause and effect (Thuyết Nhân quả - Báo ứng).

The theory of causation (pratītyasamutpāda), also called the twelve links of "Cause and Effect" or "Karmic Causality" in the "Four Noble Truths" (the four truths of Buddhism), is the basic reasoning system of Buddhism that expresses insight into the universe and humanity. The concept of the "theory of causation" comes from the Buddha's view that the world, and the universe, is a unified whole composed of overlapping and tightly connected relationships. This is predestined affinity (Pratyaya, duyên), which allows everything to exist, meaning that everything in this world exists in a diverse and vivid way. If one thing is lost, it can lead to the loss, alteration, or disturbance of another. Thus, the relationship between people and nature is a symbiotic one, where survival and development are interdependent. If one party suffers, all are affected. The world of all things is diverse and abundant, but everything exists in mutual support and mutual effect. Everything in the world exists due to specific causes and conditions.

In the Buddhist theory of Dependent Origination (expressed in The Minor Collection), it is stated that: "The nature of phenomena all has its causes and conditions. The relationship between humans and nature depends on the conditions of causes and conditions to arise, exist, transform, and perish, independent of human consciousness. The natural

environment is the foundation of all existence" (Thich Minh Chau, n.d., Kinh 115). In the Bodhi section of the Minor Collection of Buddhism, it is also stated: "Because this is present, that exists. Because this is born, that is born. Because this is not present, that does not exist. Because this is destroyed, that is destroyed" (Thich Minh Chau, n.d., Kinh 115). In the Lotus Sutra, Buddha Shakyamuni spoke about the equality of all beings: "All living beings can become Buddhas." Even more special is when the Buddha said that: not only humans and animals, but even grass, trees, bricks, and stones also have Buddha nature (Thich Tri Tinh (Trans.). (2008). With this thought, Buddhism affirms that all living beings are equal, and this world was not created solely for the benefit of humans. No species is born to serve another species, but only because of the survival instinct that drives them to "eat" each other.

Equal theory for all things was born in the context of ancient Indian society, a society that was strictly divided into different levels. As a result, Buddhism, along with many religions in India, emphasizes the equal relationship between people and society. However, Buddhism goes further in its conception than other religions by not only affirming the equal relationship between people in society but also extending this equality to all things in the world. Buddhism asserts that the existence of all things in this world is in a unified form. Everything that exists has the same equality: not being, not non-being, not high, not low. However, due to different "karmic" conditions, each object is transformed and "reincarnates" into different "lifetimes" (a form that exists differently from the previous existence). The existence of everything and every phenomenon in life, including human life, is always temporary—sometimes as fleeting as the wind or passing clouds. In the cycle of creation, everything transforms, being both the cause and the result of each other according to the rules of reincarnation: "Sinh - trụ - diệt" or "Thành - trụ - hoại - không." Thus, everything, whether high or low, becomes necessary for each other's existence. The role and position of each thing, each life in this world, become equal—neither high nor low, neither good nor bad. The Buddha said: "Everyone in those hundred different races can bring

bath powder to water and wash it, except to remove the dirty structures so it can be cleaned. All of those hundred different races can use any kind of wood as a fire, then use a puncher to make fire and fire grow" (Thich Minh Chau, 1992), pp.447). And Namennais² wrote: "The Creator does not give birth to anyone. Who is a coward? Who is a teacher, a servant, a king? Who am I? The Creator creates all equal people" (Thich Minh Chau (1992, tr. 107). Since then, Buddhism has advised sentient beings to practice a compassionate, non-competitive way of life and to avoid harming the surrounding environment. A lifestyle of goodness and non-killing is derived from the philosophy of all things being equal, as described above.

Causal - Repaid Theory is one of the basic principles of Buddhist philosophy regarding human life. It derives from one of the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism, providing an in-depth analysis of the causal relationship in the cycle of reincarnation of all things. According to Buddhism, all things that form, exist, develop, and transform (Samsara) have their causes. A cause is what creates a result, but each cause can produce many results depending on certain conditions (as per "pratyaaya"). The Hetu-pratyaaya-Repaid rule is an objective law in the world of things, including humans. Additionally, Buddhism holds that the life of every human being, from birth to maturity and death, is "predestined." This predestination is not coincidental but an inevitable result of the effects of the law of cause and effect (also called karma). Each person's karma in life can be "bad karma" (leading to many uncertainties and less safety) or "good karma" (bringing many advantages and benefits). People create their own karma, but the effects of karma (or karmic retribution) on real life can be quite complex, sometimes direct and sometimes indirect. For example, one might create karma in this life, but its results might manifest in the next life. Simply put, the "Causal - Repaid" theory suggests that doing good things leads to good retribution, while doing evil leads to evil retribution. The law of cause and effect is the method, rule, and fixed law of causation, which applies to everyone, regardless of status or wealth. Therefore, Buddhism advises that we live responsibly, considering every thought, word, and

² French priest, philosopher, and political theorist (1782-1854)

action. If we do not believe in the law of cause and effect, we may live impulsively, irresponsibly, and selfishly, causing harm to others. However, according to Buddhist causality, good and bad karma will come sooner or later, depending on conditions. Each of our words or actions, whether accidental or intentional, can create karma. Having karma will, of course, produce karmic retribution. We should be wary of bad retribution in this life and avoid sinful actions, while doing good deeds that promote human love in life to accumulate good karma for the future. A good person harms no one, a family with moral character creates harmony, and a society will develop stably and sustainably in the long term.

From the above basic philosophical treatises, Buddhism outlines essential ethical principles that promote a friendly, sociable lifestyle with the environment, environmental protection, and sustainable development, such as:

First, the principle of adopting environmentally friendly lifestyles and upholding ethical standards, particularly non-killing. A hospitable and friendly lifestyle towards all species should replace a selfish, self-centered one. As Buddha often taught: "Buddhists should neither kill themselves, nor encourage others to kill, nor use means of killing, nor praise killing, nor witness killing and do nothing, nor intentionally harm any living being" (According to Lotus Library (n.d.). He also said: "The more the mind is inclined to murder, the more karma grows, leading to endless suffering in samsara" (Lankavatara Sutra), (According to the Great Mandala Stupa of the Western Heaven, n.d.).

Greed is one of the "three poisons" (tam độc), which include greed, anger, and ignorance (tham, sân, si) according to Buddhist teachings. These poisons harm the spiritual health of individuals. When greed overwhelms a person, it leads to severe consequences. Buddhism teaches people to live by the principle of "thiểu dục tri túc" (want less, know enough). This teaches individuals to appreciate and value what they have, instead of being driven by greed that harms all species in nature and disrupts the natural order. This principle aligns with modern life and encourages a lifestyle rooted in mindfulness and self-awareness, where one's actions do not harm the environment or other species. Furthermore, it emphasizes the

responsible use of natural resources—reducing environmental pressure and avoiding wasteful exploitation. By being aware of this, people can avoid over-exploiting natural resources, preventing environmental pollution, and living harmoniously with nature. This means utilizing resources appropriately, allowing nature time to regenerate. It also represents a lifestyle that takes responsibility for both oneself and future generations, ensuring they can continue to enjoy and benefit from nature's resources to sustain their lives (Nguyen, n.d.).

Second, it is essential to awaken the Buddha nature and stay away from "dosa" (anger). To achieve this, each person must cultivate tolerance and unconditional love for all beings, as this is the path to salvation. As Buddha once taught his disciples: "There is no reason to be friendly with one person and hostile to another. Everyone is equal, as everyone seeks peaceful happiness and no one desires sickness or suffering. Therefore, we must treat all people with love and respect" (Landaw, 2006, p. 167). In Buddhism, all things in the world (not just humans) have the right to exist equally, regardless of status or hierarchy. However, due to differences in characteristics, forms, and modes of operation, conflicts of interest are inevitable. These conflicts can sometimes escalate into disputes between parties. Thus, the best way to resolve conflicts is to awaken Buddha nature, stay away from dosa (anger), and embrace reconciliation, mutual respect, and cooperation rather than bigotry and competition. This approach should be considered one of the fundamental moral standards for sentient beings on the path to achieving "moska" (liberation) for themselves and their communities. Consequently, the cultivation of compassion and love for all beings—regardless of status, luxury, or humility—must become a core principle of ecological ethics. Every sentient being should strive to embody this, as taught in the Buddha's Karuna Sutra: "...Bring joy to all beings; May they all be at peace; Do not neglect any friend; Whether they are sick or healthy; Large or small; Medium or short, rough; Whether they have a visible form or no form at all; Whether near or far; Whether already born or about to be born; May all be at peace..." (Nguyen, n.d.). Therefore, awakening Buddha nature and distancing oneself from "dosa" (anger) has become one of the critical moral

principles in Buddhism for guiding how people should approach their relationships with one another and with the natural world.

Third, create good karma and stay away from bad karma. The idea of “creating good karma and staying away from bad” is one of the fundamental ecological ethical principles in Buddhism that encourages a friendly and compassionate lifestyle on the path to the cessation of suffering. There are many ways to “create good karma and stay away from bad,” but Buddhism teaches that the best way is through the practice of the “ten good deeds” (*sa. daśakuśalakarmāṇi*) and the “five precepts” (*pañca veramani*). The ten good deeds are divided into actions (body), words (speech), and thoughts (mind). There are three rules for action (body), including: no killing, no stealing, and no sexual misconduct. There are four rules for speech (mouth), including: do not lie, do not speak divisively (do not spread rumors), do not speak harshly, and do not speak frivolously. There are three rules for thinking (mind), including: no thoughts of desire, no anger or hatred, and no delusion. The five precepts are the five foundational commandments for lay Buddhists. These precepts act as guidelines that prevent harmful actions through body, speech, and mind. They include: no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no intoxication, and no lying or gossiping.

Fourth, realizing life is *anatta* (not-self) and impermanence (*anicca*).

“*Anatta*” (not-self) from the Buddhist perspective means that there is no permanent ego (*ātman*). Buddhism teaches that the existence of each individual is fleeting when compared to the vast eternity of the universe (*brahman*). In the end, the self or ego does not truly exist—it is an illusion. By recognizing “*anatta*,” Buddhism emphasizes the transient nature of individual life and encourages us not to cling to the physical world, as it is temporary. Ultimately, spiritual life, transcending to *nirvana*, is the true meaning of existence and the goal for all sentient beings. In line with “*anatta*,” Buddhism introduces the concept of “impermanence” (*anicca*). Impermanence refers to the constant change in all things and phenomena in life and in the universe. In the doctrine of “Dependent Origination,” Buddhism teaches that “nothing lasts forever; everything is in a

state of continuous change.” This idea of impermanence is not unique to Buddhism and is also found in other philosophies, such as the teachings of Heraclitus, the ancient Greek philosopher who said, “No one can bathe in the same river twice.” This statement highlights the ever-changing nature of all things—yesterday's river water is not the same as today's. Recognizing impermanence frees us from the attachment to ideas of permanence or stability.

When we apply this understanding to environmental protection, Buddhism suggests that realizing the impermanent nature of life and the world around us helps shift our priorities and lifestyle. Instead of pursuing selfish and self-centered goals, we are encouraged to live selflessly, dedicating ourselves to the well-being of the community and the Earth. By embracing this mindset, we replace traditional ethical principles with new ones that promote a sustainable lifestyle—ethics that prioritize environmental protection and sustainable development.

3.3. Vietnamese Buddhism in the cause of environmental protection and sustainable development today

3.3.1. Viewpoints of the Party, State, and Vietnam Buddhist Sangha on environmental protection and sustainable development

In contemporary Vietnam, environmental protection and sustainable development are not merely objective requirements for national progress but also collective responsibilities shared across all social strata, including religious organizations. Amidst the escalating challenges of climate change, resource depletion, and ecological degradation, these issues have assumed critical importance in national socio-economic planning. Consequently, the Party, the State, and the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha have established pivotal viewpoints, policies, and strategic directives to foster active Buddhist participation in environmental governance and sustainability initiatives.

The consistent stance of the Party and the State dictates that environmental protection constitutes both a prerequisite and a foundational pillar for ensuring sustainable national growth. The Political Report of the 13th National Congress explicitly demanded rapid and

sustainable development grounded in the rational utilization of natural resources, rigorous environmental conservation, and "proactive adaptation to climate change". Advancing these principles, the 14th National Congress Documents continue to emphasize that accelerated economic growth must be structurally coupled with sustainability, elevating environmental protection to a core element of the national development strategy. Furthermore, these documents mandate the institutionalization of a new growth model driven by the knowledge economy, digital transformation, a green economy, and a circular economy. The 14th Congress underscores the urgency of green transitions, improving resource efficiency, mitigating greenhouse gas emissions, and actively building institutions to facilitate long-term sustainability.

These overarching political orientations are codified in several milestone legislative documents. The Law on Environmental Protection 2020 legally defines environmental preservation as an intrinsic right, obligation, and responsibility of all government agencies, organizations, residential communities, and individuals. Correspondingly, the Government has enacted the National Green Growth Strategy for the 2021–2030 period, with a vision toward 2050; the National Strategy on Climate Change until 2050; and the Action Plan for Circular Economy Development, all aiming to materialize Vietnam's commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050. These frameworks reflect a paradigm shift in development thinking—transitioning from a traditional model reliant on resource exploitation to a holistic green growth model that harmonizes economic, social, and ecological dimensions. Additionally, the State consistently encourages and empowers religious organizations to leverage their unique resources in social, humanitarian, and environmental actions, thereby strengthening national solidarity and advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Aligned with these state policies, the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha has proactively engaged in environmental protection under the guiding

motto: "Dharma – Nationalism – Socialism". This orientation epitomizes the historically grounded spirit of "engaged Buddhism" (*nhập thế*) and its contemporary commitment to accompanying the nation. Inheriting the traditional mandate of "protecting the nation and securing peace for the people" (*hộ quốc an dân*), the Sangha considers its involvement in addressing ecological crises a vital component of its modern religious mission. From a doctrinal perspective, Buddhism propagates the interdependent co-arising (*dependent origination*) of humans and nature, rooted in compassion and non-harm. Humanity does not exist in isolation but is inextricably linked to the broader ecosystem; thus, ecological destruction directly undermines human survival. This concept provides a robust ethical foundation for advocating simple lifestyles, responsible consumption, and eco-friendly development.

In recent years, the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha has issued numerous messages and action plans to mobilize monks, nuns, and lay Buddhists. The Sangha has enthusiastically responded to the Joint Coordination Program enacted between the Central Committee of the Vietnam Fatherland Front, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, and various religious organizations. This has led to the successful deployment of the "Green Pagoda" (*Chùa Xanh*) models, campaigns to mitigate plastic waste, tree-planting initiatives, and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles within Buddhist communities. Furthermore, global platforms such as the United Nations Vesak Celebrations hosted by Vietnam have consistently integrated declarations emphasizing human moral accountability toward environmental preservation, peace, and global sustainability.

Ultimately, despite differing institutional origins, the strategic visions of the Party, the State, and the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha converge harmoniously on the overarching goal of sustainable development. This synergy provides a robust political, legal, and ideological framework to further amplify the contributions of Vietnamese Buddhism to modern ecological governance.

3.3.2. Current status of Vietnamese Buddhism's participation in environmental protection and sustainable development

Faced with the tangible impacts of climate change, pollution, and ecological decline, the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha has actively operationalized the state's environmental mandates. Utilizing its extensive national network comprising tens of thousands of monastics, numerous pagodas, and millions of devotees, the Buddhist community has emerged as a highly effective social actor capable of raising public awareness, executing grassroots ecological projects, and advancing sustainability paradigms.

a) Advocacy and education to elevate ecological awareness

A primary contribution of Vietnamese Buddhism lies in the systematic integration of environmental ethics into Dharma propagation, monastic education, and daily religious practices. Guided by the doctrines of dependent origination and a profound reverence for life, monastics frequently incorporate topics such as climate action, resource conservation, and mindful consumption into their sermons and spiritual retreats. Consequently, lay Buddhists develop an enhanced sense of ecological responsibility, translating these values into sustainable behavioral transformations within their daily routines.

Major religious forums—including summer youth retreats, single-day mindfulness retreats, and prominent festivals such as Vesak and Vu Lan—have been effectively transformed into platforms for disseminating messages on sustainability. Monastic institutions actively instruct devotees to minimize single-use plastics, curtail the traditional burning of joss paper, conserve water and electricity, and participate in local environmental sanitation drives. This advocacy is further amplified by the Sangha's extensive media apparatus, including the *Giac Ngo* (Enlightenment) Newspaper, the Buddhist Studies Magazine, the Vietnam Buddhist Information Portal, and various digital applications, all of which regularly feature content on green growth and circular economies.

b) Active participation in localized environmental programs

A definitive milestone occurred with the formal execution of the Coordination Program on Environmental Protection and Climate Change Response involving the Vietnam Fatherland Front, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, and religious bodies, which commenced in 2015. Under this framework, the Sangha designed concrete action plans to systematically mobilize its followers.

Operational models such as Green Pagodas (*Chùa Xanh*), "Eco-friendly Monastic Facilities", and "Say No to Plastic Waste" have been extensively replicated nationwide. In Hanoi, numerous pagodas have pioneered source-separated waste classification and banned plastic bags during major festivals. In Ho Chi Minh City, monastics regularly lead urban cleanup campaigns and maximize green spaces within temple compounds. Similarly, across Thua Thien Hue, Quang Ninh, Ninh Binh, and An Giang provinces, Buddhist volunteers spearhead tree-planting initiatives, landscape restoration at heritage sites, and riverine or coastal cleanups. Advanced institutions have begun adopting solar energy technologies, implementing water-recycling systems, and engineering architectural layouts that exist in harmony with local natural ecosystems.

c) Tangible contributions to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Beyond direct ecological initiatives, Vietnamese Buddhism significantly advances the SDGs through its robust social security and humanitarian operations. Annually, the Sangha and individual pagodas mobilize trillions of Vietnamese Dong (VND) to fund charity programs. Poverty alleviation schemes, the construction of charitable housing, educational scholarships for impoverished youth, free medical clinics, and care centers for vulnerable demographics (such as the elderly, orphans, and disabled individuals) directly support the

realization of SDG³ (No Poverty), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), and SDG 4 (Quality Education). During acute natural disasters or public health crises, notably the COVID-19 pandemic, Buddhist monasteries seamlessly transitioned into community relief hubs, distributing food, medical supplies, and critical care.

Concurrently, Buddhist campaigns dedicated to reforestation, water conservation, and plastic reduction actively fulfill SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 15 (Life on Land). While these expansive contributions defy simple quantification through conventional economic metrics, their overarching social resonance and educational value remain profoundly impactful.

d) The role of Buddhism in building ecological culture

One of the most important and sustainable contributions of Buddhism to environmental protection is building ecological culture in the community. Through the teachings of compassion, selflessness, dependent origination and the spirit of non-harm, Buddhism contributes to forming a sense of respect for nature, responsibility for the environment and a lifestyle in harmony with ecosystems.

Buddhist ethical values encourage people to limit greed, reduce wasteful consumption, and lead a moderate, simple lifestyle. These are contents that have special meaning in the context of a modern consumer society that is creating a lot of pressure on natural resources and the living environment. At the same time, a spirit of compassion for all living beings contributes to cultivating moral responsibility in protecting animals, plants and biodiversity.

It can be seen that the participation of Vietnamese Buddhism in environmental protection and sustainable development does not stop at propaganda or social charity activities but also contributes to forming the cultural foundation and ecological ethics for the community. This is an important social resource to support the

implementation of the Party and State's policies on sustainable development, green growth, circular economy and response to climate change in the current period.

3.3.3. Evaluate achieved results, limitations and causes

After nearly a decade of implementing the Coordination Program to protect the environment and respond to climate change between the Central Committee of the Vietnam Fatherland Front, state environmental management agencies and religious organizations, along with implementing the policies of the Party, State and Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (VBS), Buddhism's participation in environmental protection and sustainable development has achieved many remarkable results. However, besides positive achievements, there are still many limitations and challenges that need to continue to be overcome in the coming time.

a) Outstanding results

First of all, one of the most important achievements is that awareness of the environment and sustainable development of monks, nuns, and Buddhists has gradually been improved. Through Dharma propagation and Buddhist education activities, retreats, seminars and communication programs, content related to environmental protection, saving resources, reducing plastic waste and responding to climate change is increasingly popular. Many monks, nuns and Buddhists have transformed awareness into concrete actions in daily life, contributing to spreading green lifestyle and environmental responsibility in the community.

Second, many models of environmental protection with Buddhist imprints have been formed and replicated in many localities. The models "Green Pagoda", "Environmentally friendly Buddhist facilities", "Say no to plastic waste", "Planting trees", "Protecting water sources" have contributed to improving the environmental landscape at religious facilities and residential areas. Many temples have become

³ SDG1, SDG2, SDG3... are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations. This is a global framework to

solve humanity's major challenges, leading to a prosperous and sustainable future.

bright spots for practicing an environmentally friendly lifestyle, creating a positive influence in the community.

Third, the participation of religious communities in environmental activities is increasingly expanding. With an organization system spread across the country, the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha has mobilized significant resources from monks, nuns, Buddhists and volunteer organizations to participate in environmental protection programs, respond to natural disasters and support the community. This is consistent with the Party and State's viewpoint on promoting the role of religious organizations in national development, building great national unity and implementing sustainable development goals.

Fourth, Buddhist activities have made positive contributions to social security and sustainable development. Through charity programs, supporting the poor, public health care, natural disaster relief, educational support and care for the vulnerable in society, Buddhism has contributed to implementing many of the United Nations' sustainable development goals as well as Vietnam's social security policies. These activities not only have humanitarian significance but also contribute to strengthening community resilience against environmental risks and climate change.

Overall, the achieved results show that Buddhism's participation has contributed to concretizing the Party and State's policies on environmental protection, green economic development, circular economy and implementing the commitment to net zero emissions by 2050.

b) Some limitations

Besides positive results, Buddhism's participation in the field of environmental protection and sustainable development still has some limitations.

First of all, environmental activities have not been implemented evenly among localities. Some provinces and cities have many effective models and have received the attention of the local Church, while in many places activities are still spontaneous or have not been maintained regularly.

Second, some environmental protection models

are still movement-based, mainly focusing on specific initiatives or events without forming a stable and long-term operating mechanism. Therefore, the actual effectiveness in some places is not commensurate with the potential and resources of the Buddhist community.

Third, the number of large-scale and replicable ecological models is relatively limited. Most current activities focus on propaganda, advocacy or small-scale community activities, while models of applying green technology, renewable energy or professional environmental management are still not popular.

Fourth, the evaluation of the effectiveness of environmental activities mainly stops at qualitative reports. Specific assessment indicators on environmental impact, emission reduction level or resource use efficiency at Buddhist establishments are incomplete, making it difficult to summarize and replicate the model.

In addition, the financial resources, professional human resources and facilities serving environmental activities of many Buddhist establishments are still limited. This directly affects the ability to implement long-term and large-scale programs.

c) Causes of limitations

The above limitations come from both objective and subjective reasons.

Objectively, climate change is becoming increasingly complicated with extreme weather phenomena, unusual natural disasters and natural resource degradation. Rapid urbanization, population growth and economic development pressures also make environmental problems more diverse and difficult to solve. In that context, religious organizations, including Buddhism, face increasing demands on organizational capacity and implementation resources.

Subjectively, awareness of environmental protection among monks, nuns, Buddhists and Church levels is not really uniform. Some places still view environmental activities as a supporting task instead of an important content of Buddhist activities in the new era. In addition, the team of experts or officials with in-depth knowledge of the

environment in the Church system is limited, leading to difficulties in building and implementing professional programs.

In addition, the coordination between the Church and state management agencies, scientific organizations, businesses and local communities in some places is not really tight. This reduces the effectiveness of social resource mobilization and the ability to replicate successful models.

From the above results, limitations and causes, it can be seen that Vietnamese Buddhism has been playing an active role in environmental protection and sustainable development. However, facing the new requirements of the green transition, circular economy and response to climate change, it is necessary to continue to innovate operating methods, improve organizational capacity and strengthen coordination between relevant entities to further effectively promote the role of Buddhism in the cause of sustainable development of the country.

3.3.4. Some issues raised and orientations for promoting the role of Vietnamese Buddhism in the coming time

a) Issues raised

In the global context of promoting the implementation of sustainable development goals, green transition and responding to climate change, the participation of religious organizations, including the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (GHPGVN), is increasingly important. However, this process also raises many new issues that need to be recognized and resolved.

First of all, the requirement for green transformation is becoming an inevitable development trend of Vietnam in the current period. The documents of the 13th and 14th Party Congress both affirmed the task of promoting green growth, effectively using natural resources and building a low-emission economy. This requires religious organizations not only to participate in propaganda but also to proactively innovate their methods of operation, aiming to build environmentally friendly development models and spread green lifestyles in the community.

In addition, the development of a circular economy following the orientation of the Party and State is requiring changes in social awareness and behavior in using resources, minimizing waste and reusing resources. For Buddhism, this is a favorable condition to promote traditional values of moderating material needs, preventing waste and living in harmony with nature. However, transforming ethical values into specific practice models is still a big challenge.

Another important issue is implementing the commitment to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 that Vietnam announced at the COP26 Conference. This goal requires the participation of the entire society, in which religious organizations have an important role in raising public awareness and promoting environmentally friendly behaviors. At the same time, biodiversity loss, environmental pollution and the increasingly serious impact of climate change also pose a need to increase ecological responsibility in social life.

In addition, the process of modernization, urbanization and market economic development are giving rise to excessive consumption trends, pragmatic lifestyles and the decline of traditional moral values. This shows the urgent need to build an ecological culture, in which people not only correctly perceive the relationship with nature but also have the responsibility to protect the environment for the benefit of the community and future generations.

b) Main orientation

To continue promoting the role of Buddhism in environmental protection and sustainable development, first of all, it is necessary to continue to deeply grasp the Party and State's guidelines and policies on green growth, circular economy, response to climate change and sustainable development. Church levels need to concretize these orientations into action programs suitable to the practical conditions of each locality, thereby contributing to the effective implementation of national development goals.

Second, it is necessary to promote propaganda and education to raise environmental awareness for monks, nuns and Buddhists. The content of environmental protection, response to climate

change, resource saving and sustainable consumption needs to continue to be integrated into Dharma propaganda activities, monk and nun training, retreats and community activities. This is a meaningful long-term solution to form a sense of ecological responsibility in religious and social life.

Third, it is necessary to expand and improve the effectiveness of models of "green temples", "environmentally friendly Buddhist facilities", minimizing plastic waste, using energy economically and protecting ecological landscapes. These models not only contribute to improving the environment at Buddhist establishments but also create positive spillover effects in the residential community.

Fourth, the Church needs to strengthen cooperation with state management agencies, scientific organizations, educational institutions and businesses to mobilize resources, share experiences and improve the effectiveness of environmental protection programs. Interdisciplinary coordination will help Buddhist activities more closely align with the country's sustainable development strategies.

Fifth, it is necessary to focus on ecological ethics education and building a green lifestyle on the basis of Buddhist humanistic values such as compassion, harmlessness, dependent origination and abstinence. These are values that have the potential to contribute to regulating human behavior towards nature, encouraging responsible consumption and minimizing negative impacts on the environment.

Finally, Vietnamese Buddhism needs to continue to actively participate in national sustainable development programs, especially in the fields of environmental protection, poverty reduction, social security, education and response to climate change. By promoting the spirit of "Dharma - Nationalism - Socialism" and the tradition of "protecting the country and protecting the people", the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha can contribute more and more effectively to the process of building an ecological culture, promoting harmonious development between humans and nature and realizing the country's

sustainable development goal in the new period.

The above orientations are an important basis to further promote the role of Vietnamese Buddhism in environmental protection and sustainable development, while affirming the companionship of Buddhism with the nation in the process of implementing the country's development goals to 2045 and vision to 2050.

4 Discussion and conclusion

Research results show that environmental protection and sustainable development are not only a requirement of the socio-economic development process but also an issue with profound philosophical, ethical and cultural significance. In the context of climate change, decreasing natural resources and increasing environmental challenges, promoting ethical, cultural and religious values to form a sense of human responsibility towards nature becomes one of the important conditions for realizing the goal of sustainable development.

From a theoretical perspective, research shows that there are many similarities between ecological philosophy and Buddhist thought in the way of viewing the relationship between humans and nature. Principles such as dependent origination, compassion, non-harming and a moderate lifestyle of Buddhism contribute to forming an ecological ethical foundation, guiding people to rationally use resources, respect life and build a lifestyle in harmony with the environment. In Vietnam's current conditions, these values have practical significance for building ecological culture and raising community awareness of environmental protection.

The research results also confirm that the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha has been increasingly actively participating in environmental protection and sustainable development. Through propaganda, education, communication, social charity activities and coordination programs with state agencies, many models such as "green pagoda", reducing plastic waste, planting trees, protecting water sources and supporting the community have been implemented in many localities. These activities not only contribute to realizing sustainable development goals but also clearly demonstrate

the spirit of entering the world, the tradition of "protecting the country and protecting the people" and the motto "Dharma - Nation - Socialism" of Vietnamese Buddhism in the new era.

However, the study also shows that Buddhism's participation in the field of environmental protection still has some limitations such as uneven implementation levels among localities, lack of large-scale ecological models, limited financial resources and professional human resources, and performance evaluation is still mainly qualitative. These limitations show that it is necessary to continue to strengthen coordination between the Church, state management agencies, scientific organizations and social communities to improve the quality and effectiveness of environmental protection activities in the future.

In the context that Vietnam is promoting green transformation, developing a circular economy and implementing a commitment to net zero emissions by 2050, the role of religious organizations is becoming increasingly important. With a widespread organizational system, a large number of followers and unique humanistic ethical values, Vietnamese Buddhism has many favorable conditions to continue to contribute to the process of building a sustainable society. Promoting ecological ethics education, expanding

"green temple" models, strengthening interdisciplinary cooperation and promoting the positive values of Buddhism in social life will contribute to building an ecological culture, raising the community's awareness of environmental protection and promoting harmonious development between humans and nature.

From the above research results, it can be affirmed that Vietnamese Buddhism is not only an important cultural and spiritual resource of the nation but also an active social subject in the cause of environmental protection and sustainable development. Further effectively promoting the role of Buddhism in this field will contribute to the successful implementation of Vietnam's sustainable development goals, while affirming the value and significance of Buddhism in the process of building a prosperous, happy and sustainable country in the 21st century.

Note: This paper is based on the author's own sources and incorporates additions, updates, and revisions from the article "Some Issues in Ecological Philosophy," published in the Proceedings of the 14th International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities 2018 (IC-HUSO 2018), held at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Khon Kaen University, Thailand.

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