
BUDDHISM, SOCIAL DYNAMICS AND SCIENTIFIC PERSPECTIVES IN CONTEMPORARY VIETNAM

**Thanh Viet Nguyen¹, Quyet Thi Nguyen², Huyen Thanh Thi Do³,
Khoa Vo Ngoc Nguyen³ and Anh The Phung^{2*}**

¹ Vinh Long University of Technology Education, 73 Nguyen Hue Street, Ward 2, Vinh Long City, Vinh Long, 700000, Vietnam

² Ho Chi Minh city University of Technology and Education, 1 Vo Van Ngan Street, Thu Duc, Ho Chi Minh City, 700000, Vietnam

³ University of Finance - Marketing, 778 Nguyen Kiem Street, Phu Nhuan, Ho Chi Minh City, 700000, Vietnam

(Received 1 February 2024, revised 8 February 2024)

Abstract

This study explores the interplay between Buddhism, social dynamics and scientific perspectives within the context of contemporary Vietnam. It delves into the historical roots and evolution of Vietnamese Buddhism, examining its profound influence on various societal dimensions including politics, economics, culture and ethics. Moreover, the paper scrutinizes the role of Buddhism in shaping the national identity and its integration into the fabric of daily life amidst Vietnam's rapid integration and digital transformation. This research also addresses the scientific viewpoints on Buddhism's contributions and limitations, particularly in terms of mental well-being and societal development. By employing a multidisciplinary approach, combining theological analysis with sociological and scientific methodologies, the authors aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of Buddhism in modern Vietnamese society. The paper also evaluates the policies of the Communist Party of Vietnam and the State of Vietnam regarding religion, emphasizing their significance in leveraging religious tenets for societal advancement.

Keywords: Vietnamese Buddhism, social integration, scientific analysis, cultural influence, policy implications

1. Introduction

Buddhism, founded over 2,600 years ago, has contributed a profound belief system to human civilization [1]. The Buddhist philosophy of human existence, dedicated to the emancipation of humanity, represents the convergence and crystallization of humanism, mirroring the humanity of the Buddha [2]. It is rooted in deep love for humanity, a spirit of great compassion, boundless wisdom and the essence of peace, freedom and equality [3]. Furthermore, Buddhism harbours the ambition to liberate people, alleviate their

*Corresponding author, e-mail: anhpt@hcmute.edu.vn

suffering, nurture love among individuals, with Nature and all living beings. It champions a life marked by simplicity, honesty, righteousness and active cultivation of personal morality for ‘enlightenment’ and ‘liberation’. These principles have substantially contributed to the creation and nurturing of societal cultural values, as the ideals of humanity and charity have found a home in the hearts of people [4]. Buddhism aspires to create an egalitarian and benevolent society here on Earth, guiding people to be humane, selfless, and self-sacrificing. These principles are not foreign to, nor do they oppose, the ideals of humanitarianism and Marxism-Leninism. The difference lies in the explanations of the causes, methods and means to achieve these goals [5, 6].

Since its introduction to Vietnam from India and China, Buddhism has seamlessly integrated with the beliefs, customs and traditions of the Vietnamese people, evolving into Vietnamese Buddhism with its distinct identity. This transformation has been a result of the reciprocal influence between Buddhism and Vietnamese beliefs [7]. It encompasses the synthesis and distillation of the core tenets of various Buddhist branches, harmoniously fused with indigenous civilizations. The outcome is a blend of Loving-kindness, Compassion, Empathetic-joy, and Equanimity, coupled with patriotism and a spirit of social cohesion during the process of building and defending the Vietnamese nation [8]. Buddhism has become an integral part of the Vietnamese tradition, infiltrating the lives of the Vietnamese, transcending generations, leaving an indelible mark in their hearts and contributing to the formation of Vietnamese cultural identity.

Vietnamese Buddhism has experienced numerous peaks and troughs throughout its national history. It once held a prominent ideological position during the Dinh and Le dynasties and later flourished during the Ly and Tran dynasties. During these periods, Buddhism played a dominant role in spiritual life and was even elevated to the status of state religion under the Ly dynasty (1009-1225 CE). It has deeply influenced the spiritual lives of the Vietnamese in various aspects, including politics, ethics, culture, lifestyle and societal development [9].

Notably, when Buddhism was introduced to Vietnam, its Mahayana version quickly captured the hearts of the Vietnamese. It was thoroughly embraced and integrated with the ideals of peace, patriotism, independence and self-reliance held by the people of Giao Chau, and later, Dai Viet [7]. This integration contributed to the synergy of national liberation and state-building. Buddhism also melded seamlessly with Confucianism and Taoism, known as Tam Dai Dong Nguyen, facilitating the exchange and integration of indigenous and foreign cultures.

The Buddhist view of life and the world represents a profound and unique philosophical system. It embodies the aspiration for a righteous life, love, humanity, tolerance and generosity, all deeply rooted in the hearts of the Vietnamese people [10]. Building upon this foundation, the promotion of Buddhism’s positive aspects and the resolution of its contemporary limitations

become essential. This task is in alignment with the nation's path towards the development of a new culture rooted in ethical socialism.

Besides the social, moral and cultural aspects, there is also the dimension of knowledge and Science. Incorporating the dimension of Science into the study of Buddhism's impact on Vietnamese society offers a nuanced perspective that bridges the gap between spiritual philosophy and empirical inquiry [11]. The scientific analysis of Buddhism's core beliefs and its influence extends beyond mere historical and cultural dimensions. It reaches into the realms of Psychology, Sociology, our understanding of the nature of our physical world, and even Neuroscience. Contemporary research in these fields provides insights into how Buddhist practices, such as meditation and mindfulness, contribute to mental well-being, social harmony and cognitive development. This approach aligns with the growing body of scientific literature that investigates the tangible effects of religious and spiritual practices on human behaviour, societal structures and individual psychological states [12, 13]. Furthermore, the application of scientific methods to the study of Buddhism in Vietnam can elucidate the ways in which religious beliefs and practices interact with and are shaped by socio-economic factors, technological advancements and global integration [10, 14]. This intersection of spirituality and Science creates a comprehensive framework for understanding the multifaceted role of Buddhism in contemporary Vietnamese society and we hope to contribute to this endeavour with our paper.

Scientific inquiry in this context is not limited to the validation or scrutiny of Buddhist principles; rather, it provides a platform for exploring how these principles are operationalized in the real world, impacting social policies, community welfare and the collective consciousness of the Vietnamese people. We use this lens in our efforts to discern the outcomes of Buddhist teachings on societal well-being, cultural resilience, environmental responsibility and individual mental health, thereby contributing to a holistic understanding of its contemporary relevance.

Our main goal, therefore, is to critically analyse and synthesize the multifaceted impacts of Buddhism on Vietnamese society through a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach. This includes examining historical and cultural influences, while integrating scientific methodologies to assess Buddhism's role in shaping social structures, cultural identities and individual psychological well-being in modern Vietnam. Through this endeavour, our paper strives to enhance the understanding of Buddhism's enduring legacy and evolving role in the complex tapestry of contemporary Vietnamese life.

2. Research methodology

The research methodology of our study is anchored in an exploration of both the theoretical foundations provided by Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh's perspectives, and their practical applications as evidenced in state policies and religious practices in Vietnam. This approach allows for a

multidimensional understanding of the complex relationship between Buddhism, state ideology and social dynamics in contemporary Vietnamese society. It is grounded in a critical examination of key documents from the 13th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam [15], as well as various resolutions and directives of the Communist Party and the Vietnamese government concerning religion and religious practices. These include Resolution No. 25-NQ/TW from March 12, 2003, of the 7th Conference of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (9th Tenure) on religious affairs, the 2017 documents of the 8th National Buddhist Congress (2017-2022 tenure), the 2021 documents of the 13th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Decree No. 162/2017/ND-CP dated December 30, 2017, by the Government for implementing specific articles and actions under the Law on Belief and Religion, and Decision No. 99/QĐ-BNV dated October 22, 2019, by the Ministry of Home Affairs concerning the recognition of religious organizations.

Marxism-Leninism, a foundational ideological tenet in Vietnamese governance and policy-making, provides a lens through which our society views religion not merely as a private spiritual experience, but also as a social phenomenon with significant implications for societal development and cultural dynamics. This perspective is deeply ingrained in Vietnam's political fabric. It posits that religious beliefs and practices, while acknowledged and respected, should align with socialist principles and contribute to the collective goals of society.

Ho Chi Minh's perspectives on religion, which are an integral part of this ideological backdrop, offer a more nuanced and culturally contextual interpretation. Ho Chi Minh, revered as the founding father of modern Vietnam, advocated for a harmonious balance between religious freedom and national unity [16]. In the interwar period, Ho Chi Minh criticized what he then perceived as a collusion "of colonialism and the Churches during the invasion in Vietnam" [17]. However, after the Second World War, he drafted "guidelines on religions and religious policies, focusing mainly on the following aspects: freedom of belief for all Vietnamese citizens; uniting non-religious and religious people; recognizing the cultural role, the human values of religions and religious ethics" [17]. He emphasized the importance of respecting religious diversity while ensuring that religious practices do not counteract the overarching goals of national development and social harmony [17]. His views reflect a pragmatic approach to religion, recognizing its potential to foster moral values and social cohesion, while cautioning against any form of religious extremism or divisiveness.

In this study, these ideological frameworks guide our methodological approach. We analyse religious content through the dual lenses of Marxist-Leninist philosophy and Ho Chi Minh's teachings. We do this implicitly by applying learned principles and approaches on the subject matter at hand. We examine how Buddhism in Vietnam navigates the interplay between religious autonomy and its integration within a socialist-oriented society. This involves an analysis of how these political ideologies influence the practice and perception

of Buddhism in Vietnam, particularly in terms of social engagement, environmental consciousness, moral education and cultural preservation.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. The positive influence of Buddhism on Vietnam's social life

Buddhism has played a pivotal role in shaping the social and cultural fabric of Vietnam. With a presence that spans over 2,600 years, it has integrated deeply into the nation's ethos, influencing ethical, humanitarian and environmental aspects of Vietnamese society. As of 2021, this religion boasted nearly 15 million Buddhist followers, close to 30,000 Buddhist dignitaries and over 18,000 places of worship [5, p. 82]. The Vietnam Buddhist Sangha is structured into three tiers: the administrative level, the provincial level (including cities directly under the central government) and the district level (encompassing districts, towns and provincial cities). At the administrative level, it includes the Verification, the Administration Council, and 13 Buddhist Departments and institutes. The provincial level houses the Provincial Buddhist Executive Committee (and its equivalent), while the district level comprises the District Buddhist Board (and its equivalent) [9, p. 92].

Throughout the nation's history of construction and defence, Buddhism has been regarded as both a guiding doctrine for leading a virtuous life and a doctrine emphasizing The Fourfold Grace, with a priority on the grace for the homeland. This dual role has significantly shaped Vietnamese ideology, politics and national culture. The dynamic evolution of Buddhism in Vietnam, reflecting the nation's socio-economic transformations and the adaptive innovations within the Buddhist community, underscores its enduring influence on Vietnamese ideology and culture [18].

3.1.1. The ethical and humanitarian impact of Buddhism in Vietnamese society

Buddhist teachings, with their emphasis on altruism, compassion and equality, have left an indelible mark on Vietnamese societal norms and behaviours, fostering a culture deeply rooted in kindness towards both humans and Nature, and advocating for non-violence and democratic values. It emphasizes the value of labour, combatting idleness and championing human virtues, goodwill and the creation of a peaceful society [1, p. 38]. The Vietnamese proverb "Better to save one life than build a seven-storied pagoda" [10, p. 41] aptly encapsulates Buddhism's commitment to life preservation and ethical conduct. Rescuing people is viewed as a natural expression of doing good, and the Buddha's spirit of compassion and alleviating suffering permeates society. This spirit melds seamlessly with the traditional moral value of "loving others as if loving ourselves" [10, p. 45].

T.B.C. Nguyen elucidates how Buddhist ethical principles have been integrated into the moral education of families in Ho Chi Minh City, influencing a wide range of societal aspects from personal ethics to environmental conservation, thereby reinforcing a compassionate and equitable societal ethos [19]. Furthermore, Swenson highlights the significant role of Buddhist volunteerism in Vietnam's social welfare landscape, where Buddhist charities facilitate the mobilization of resources for humanitarian and development endeavours, demonstrating Buddhism's profound societal impact, especially in times of crisis such as the covid-19 pandemic [20]. Notably, hundreds of Buddhist monks and nuns, along with medical and healthcare experts, have been on the frontline against the covid-19 pandemic, contributing to charity and welfare work with over 7,000 billion dongs [9, p. 88]. Swenson demonstrates that "Government officials in Vietnam propose that policy shifts toward privatization are part of a broader move toward 'socialization' (xã hội hóa)" [21]. This is revealing because "under socialization, the nation's citizens have a responsibility to accumulate and use private wealth to support one another. Buddhist charities have subsequently become a popular means for citizens to channel private capital into non-state humanitarian aid and development programs". Swenson further shows how "lay Buddhist charity organizers assert that socialization ultimately creates opportunities to advance Buddhist spiritual development" [21]. She draws upon Michel Foucault's notion of 'political spirituality' to examine the manner in which volunteers integrate state-promoted ethical citizenship practices to develop a Buddhist ethical consciousness, referred to as 'tâm'. Consequently, this research demonstrates the manner in which local participants assert their influence within the realms of national economics and politics, imbuing their involvement with a dimension of religious importance. These instances, among many, collectively underscore the ethical and humanitarian influence of Buddhism in shaping a compassionate, just and responsive Vietnamese society. While the authors recognize that more could be done, examples such as these bear witness of Buddhism positive potential for alleviating pain and social injustice.

3.1.2. Interweaving of Buddhist ethics and Vietnamese moral values

Buddhist ethics, with its core principles of compassion and truthfulness, have not only seamlessly integrated into the Vietnamese moral landscape but have also significantly bolstered traditional Vietnamese values. This synthesis has engendered a societal ethos marked by virtuous interpersonal behaviour and a profound communal orientation towards the well-being of all members. T.B.C. Nguyen [19] elucidates this integration within the familial context in Ho Chi Minh City, highlighting how Buddhist teachings of love, compassion and selflessness permeate various facets of Vietnamese life, from personal conduct to broader social and environmental stewardship. Furthermore, Le, Mai and Nizhnikov [21] examine the broader cultural implications of Buddhist morality, illustrating its pivotal role alongside other indigenous philosophies in shaping

the moral and spiritual dimensions of Vietnamese society. They underscore the existential and non-metaphysical nature of Buddhist humanism, which aligns with contemporary Vietnamese societal goals and enhances the nation's ethical landscape. Together, these studies affirm the integral role of Buddhist ethics in cultivating a moral ethos that is deeply interwoven with the fabric of Vietnamese cultural and moral values, fostering a society characterized by empathy, ethical integrity and collective solidarity.

3.1.3. Buddhism's role in promoting national unity and cultural harmony in Vietnam

Buddhism educates and promotes the patriotic tradition, upholds the principle of “following a virtuous religion to lead a virtuous life” [2, p. 22] and fosters national unity and community harmony. It has been a cornerstone in promoting national unity and cultural harmony within Vietnam, advocating for patriotism and community solidarity through its rich historical and contemporary influences. During the Ly - Tran dynasties, Buddhism was elevated to the status of a national religion, intertwining spiritual practice with state governance and educational advancements. T.D. Dang highlights Buddhism's instrumental role in shaping policies and fostering a unified national identity during this formative period, contributing to a harmonious cultural milieu that balanced spiritual and secular needs [22].

In times of foreign aggression or other forms of struggle to eradicate evil and bring peace and happiness to the virtuous, Buddhist monks and nuns have readily “shed their robes” to fight for the nation [23, p. 8]. In addition, Buddhism also contributes to preserving and transmitting the principle of gratitude among the Vietnamese people. Notably, the Vu Lan festival often coincides with the celebration of Vietnam's War Invalids and Martyrs Day. On this day, Buddhists across the country seize the opportunity to fully express their gratitude to the Fatherland and the people. They engage in activities such as visiting and assisting the families of martyrs, war invalids, families with meritorious services to the revolution, the elderly, the lonely and the underprivileged [8].

On another note, a strong case can be made on account of Buddhism's advocacy for peace and non-violence was pivotal during the US-Vietnam War. Tuladhar provides insight into how Buddhist principles and peaceful protests significantly influenced the war's resolution, underscoring Buddhism's enduring impact on national solidarity and the pursuit of peace [24]. We are convinced that these examples aptly illustrate Buddhism's profound contribution to fostering a sense of unity and cultural coherence among the Vietnamese people, from historical epochs to contemporary challenges. Through its teachings and social engagement, Buddhism has contributed to the shaping of a distinctive Vietnamese identity marked by altruism, community orientation and spiritual depth. It has fostered cultural evolution, emphasizing traditional values and national unity, and has played a critical role in the nation's cultural and spiritual domains.

3.1.4. *Buddhism's engagement with environmental challenges and cultural contradictions in Vietnam*

Environmental pollution and climate change are among the most significant challenges facing humanity in the 21st century, and their severity continues to increase. Today, the environment is recognized as the sole condition, foundation and basis for ensuring sustainable socio-economic development. In Buddhist scriptures, the Universe is depicted as a unified whole, akin to a net. If a single mesh in this net is separated, the entire structure would be destroyed. Buddhist cosmology delineates three realms: the Desire Realm, the Form Realm, and the Formless Realm. In the Rupa Realm, sentient beings, due to reincarnation, maintain a human-like form composed of four fundamental elements: Earth, Water, Wind and Fire. According to Buddhist teachings, living beings encompass all species, including those born from eggs, fetuses, or in aquatic environments, residing in these three realms while trapped in the cycle of birth and death [25].

Overall, Buddhism's engagement with environmental and scientific challenges is evident in its ecological ethics, which are in harmony with contemporary Environmental science. The principles of Buddhism, such as the interdependence of all life forms, advocate for sustainability and ecological balance, aligning closely with scientific perspectives on environmental conservation. A recent study by Javanaud discusses how Buddhist environmentalism, through the concept of Engaged Buddhism, effectively addresses ecological crises by fostering a deeper understanding of ecological interconnectedness and challenging the underlying causes of environmental degradation, such as greed and entitlement [26]. His study illustrates the usefulness of practices like meditation in fostering an awareness of ecological interconnectedness, and advocates for a reconnection with Nature. Another good example is the research conducted by Lin [27]. Lin delves into the Buddhist concept of dependent origination and its contemporary interpretation as interdependence, illustrating how this principle can contribute to a more sustainable approach to addressing environmental challenges by promoting a shift in collective attitudes and behaviours towards ecological well-being.

In Vietnam, Buddhism has demonstrated a positive role in environmental protection and climate change response in recent years. It achieves this by disseminating information and mobilizing dignitaries, monks, practitioners and believers to abandon practices and lifestyles that contribute to environmental pollution and climate change. Additionally, it promotes the construction of green, clean and aesthetically pleasing religious facilities, conducts training programs to enhance environmental protection and climate change response capabilities, and supports the development and replication of models involving Buddhist communities and individuals engaged in environmental protection and climate change response [7]. Vietnamese Buddhism actively participates in tree planting, forestry and the greening of living spaces, thereby enhancing air quality and mitigating factors contributing to climate change. Simultaneously,

these activities make substantial contributions to environmental preservation, the prevention of soil erosion, storms and floods, and the protection of species and biodiversity within the natural world. Over the past several years, Vietnamese Buddhism has acquired and signed contracts to independently cultivate forests and reforest barren hills, covering an area of over 1,000 hectares across the provinces of Lam Dong, Binh Phuoc, Binh Thuan, Dong Nai and more [7].

3.1.5. Bridging Buddhism and Science

In addressing the complex relationship between Buddhism and scientific perspectives, it is essential to examine the interplay of Buddhist philosophy with contemporary scientific understanding. Our paper does not allow us to go into much detail, nor to reflect on all aspects of this interplay but we will offer short concise examples of it below. Our analysis will show that Buddhism and Science, far from being disparate realms of thought, offer complementary insights into the nature of human existence, the environment and the Universe. This synthesis provides a more complex framework for understanding the dynamics of human behaviour, the ethics of environmental stewardship, and the profound interconnectedness of all phenomena, blending ancient wisdom with modern scientific inquiry to enrich our understanding of the world and our place within it.

First, we will speak about the convergence of Mind and Behaviour (Buddhism and modern Psychology). Buddhism's profound impact on human psychology is evident in its alignment with several modern psychological theories. Concepts like karma, traditionally seen as the moral consequences of one's actions, find resonance in psychological understandings of behaviour and its outcomes. Karma, in this context, is not merely a spiritual principle but aligns with the psychological concept that actions have consequences, shaping one's character and life experiences. Furthermore, Buddhist practices like meditation and mindfulness have been scientifically validated for their benefits in mental health, stress reduction and cognitive enhancement [28]. Neuroscience reveals how mindfulness practices alter brain structures associated with attention, emotion regulation, and self-awareness, offering a scientific basis for the transformative power of Buddhist practices on mental well-being [29].

Moreover, drawing inspiration from C. Baker's exploration into the psychological dimensions of spiritual capital, we can further illuminate how Buddhist practices contribute to a 'balanced spirituality', fostering transformative changes at personal, societal, and environmental levels [13]. Baker's psycho-theological motifs, resonating with Buddhist principles, underscore the potential of spiritual practices to enhance social capital and promote well-being across various societal strata. By integrating Baker's insights with Buddhist teachings, we can expand our understanding of the interplay between spirituality and social dynamics, enriching our analysis of Buddhism's role in shaping a compassionate, resilient and interconnected society. This approach aligns with classic views on the positive effects of social

capital and invites a re-evaluation of the frameworks used to assess the impact of faith-based engagement in civil society, ensuring a more nuanced appreciation of Buddhism's multifaceted contributions to Vietnamese culture and beyond.

Second, as part of holistic environmental ethics, we can point out the symbiosis of Buddhist philosophy and Ecological science. The Buddhist view of the Universe as an interconnected web mirrors contemporary ecological understanding of the interconnectedness of all life forms. This perspective is both philosophically profound and scientifically significant. It aligns with the ecological concept of the biosphere as a dynamic system where every element is interdependent. Modern Environmental science reinforces Buddhist teachings on the importance of preserving natural harmony and balance, highlighting the role of human actions in shaping environmental outcomes [25, p. 158-160]. The Buddhist approach to environmental ethics, emphasizing respect for all forms of life and advocating sustainable living, goes hand in hand with scientific calls for conservation and sustainable development practices. We find this convergence both inspiring and compelling.

Third, we can examine Buddhist understanding of suffering and well-being (insights from Neuroscience). Buddhism's focus on understanding and alleviating suffering intersects significantly with neuroscientific research. The Buddhist enumeration of physical and mental suffering finds a parallel in scientific explorations of the neurobiological basis of pain and emotional distress. Neuroscience elucidates how brain chemistry and neural pathways are involved in the experience of pain and pleasure, correlating with the Buddhist analysis of suffering [30]. The cycle of desire and dissatisfaction, as explained in Buddhist teachings, is reflected in neuroscientific studies on neurotransmitters like dopamine, which play a crucial role in motivation, reward, and the cyclical nature of human desires and contentment.

Finally, we notice an intriguing philosophical echo in scientific paradigms in Buddhist doctrine of Interdependent Origination [10, p. 59]. The Buddhist principle of dependent (or 'Inter-dependent') origination, which posits that all phenomena arise in interdependence and lack inherent existence, resonates intriguingly with scientific understandings in Physics and Biology. "Whoever understands the Dependent Origination understands the Dharma", says Buddha's greatest student, Sāriputta, and "Whoever understands the Dharma understands the Dependent Origination" [*Majjhima Nikaya*, Sutra 28, <https://suttacentral.net/mn28/en/sujato>]. This principle parallels scientific concepts such as the ecological interdependence of species and the relational nature of particles in Quantum physics. The Buddhist view that nothing exists in isolation but is the result of a web of interdependent causes and conditions aligns with scientific insights into the complex interrelations that define the natural world. But there are other examples of interaction. In the enriching discourse of 'The Quantum and the Lotus: A Journey to the Frontiers Where Science and Buddhism Meet', the dialogue between Matthieu Ricard, a Buddhist monk with expertise in Biochemistry, and Trinh Xuan Thuan, an astrophysicist, brings to light the profound intersection of scientific inquiry and Buddhist philosophy [11]. Central

to their exploration is the Buddhist notion of emptiness and interdependence, particularly in relation to contemporary scientific fields such as chaos theory, artificial intelligence, and the study of consciousness. This thematic intersection posits emptiness not as a void, but as a fundamental quality of interconnectedness and interdependence that echoes throughout the Cosmos. We agree with the book's central argument for the relevance and benefits of meditative contemplation on emptiness in the modern context, offering a nuanced Buddhist perspective on the material world.

3.2. The perceived negative impacts of Buddhism on Vietnamese society

Despite the aforementioned positive impacts, Buddhism has also introduced negative aspects into the spiritual life of Vietnamese people. Alongside its preservation of customs rich in traditional cultural values, Buddhism has significantly contributed to the perpetuation of archaic customs that hinder the progression towards a modern lifestyle in Vietnam.

On the negative side, some individuals have adopted a pessimistic outlook on life characterized by nihilism, strong beliefs in supernatural powers and miracles, underestimation of human agency, asceticism and excessive reliance on mystical rituals. A concerning trend of superstition within the cultural milieu has emerged, contradicting the fine customs and traditions of the nation's culture [15, p. 72]. This trend includes the commercialization of religious and belief-related activities in certain regions [15, p. 73]. Notably, there has been an upsurge in rituals conducted by monks and nuns for Buddhist followers and the general populace as spiritual services. These rituals include offerings to ward off misfortune, mourning for unexpected occurrences, and ceremonies for repaying debts. Many of these rituals are explained in the context of superstition and are performed for a fee. These services have generated significant economic income for numerous pagodas [5, p. 82]. Moreover, there has been an unseemly depiction of a small number of monks who have abandoned their moral principles, engaging in inappropriate conduct that adversely affects the reputation of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha [2, p. 60].

3.3. Some solutions to promote positive aspects and overcome negative aspects of Vietnamese Buddhism in the renovation process

Buddhism is undoubtedly a significant religion with a profound influence on the spiritual life of the Vietnamese people. It impacts various aspects of their lives, including morality, customs, practices, culture and art. This connection between religion, life and scientific understanding enriches the national spiritual culture. To promote its positive values and overcome its negative aspects, such as religious idealism and superstition, is crucial for the country's construction and development towards the goal of a "prosperous, strong, democratic, equitable, and civilized nation" [D.D. Pham, Political Theory Journal, 24 November 2021, <http://lyluanchinhtri.vn/home/en/index.php/theory-research/ite>

m/829-building-vietnam%E2%80%99s-national-and-cultural-value-systems-in-international-integration.html]. Achieving this goal requires a focus on the following solutions, which we wish to propose for an interdisciplinary discourse.

Firstly, in terms of awareness, it is essential to remain steadfast in the pursuit of the ideal of ‘Dharma-nationalism-socialism’. We must clarify the philosophical and humanistic values of Buddhism and not view religions, especially Buddhism, as remnants of an outdated society. While Buddhism has sometimes been seen as a means to lull people into complacency, isolating them from social engagement and encouraging passivity, it’s vital to counter this view. In the era of a market economy, materialistic lifestyles have led to the erosion of Buddhist ethics, with values and standards being compromised. Commercialization has seeped into religious practices. Therefore, we must emphasize the disinterested pursuit of noble ideals in the renewal process, preserving the core values of Buddhist philosophy and preventing distortions that hinder the country’s development.

Secondly, we should promote the spirit of experiencing the real world of Buddhism. This entails imparting the idea that individuals, like Buddhas and ancestors, have the potential for enlightenment and the capacity to achieve noble goals. It’s a spirit that has already shown positive effects in the renewal period. Additionally, we should focus on educating business ethics, fostering moral development in the younger generation, and encouraging acts of charity and gratitude. Buddhism’s emphasis on compassion and respect for all living beings, as well as environmental preservation, should guide these efforts.

Thirdly, we must emphasize the culturalization of Buddhist activities. Temples should serve as places for reflection, meditation and the nurturing of pure minds. This approach helps preserve the sanctity of Buddhism. It also promotes the diversification of Buddhist activities suitable for people of all ages and backgrounds, in line with the wholesome cultural environment of Vietnamese Buddhism. We aim to elevate Vietnamese Buddhism’s position in the spiritual life of the people and humanity’s progress.

Fourthly, there should be a concerted effort to raise awareness among believers and the public about religious freedom within the bounds of legal and constitutional frameworks. This awareness ensures that Vietnamese Buddhism aligns with the goals and ideals of the Party and state laws. It also safeguards against hostile forces that may collaborate with religious extremists and political opportunists to exploit issues such as land, the environment, and the covid-19 pandemic to sow discord and challenge state policies. Building a moral and ethical lifestyle under the principles of ‘Dharma-nationalism-socialism’ is our shared objective.

Fifthly, we must continue mobilizing monks, nuns and Buddhists to eliminate practices and habits that harm the environment and exacerbate climate change. Efforts should focus on creating green, clean and beautiful Buddhist facilities and organizing training programs to enhance the environmental protection capacity of Buddhist organizations at all levels. Collaboration with state environmental management agencies is essential. Additionally, we should

support Buddhist organizations across all provinces and cities in the development and replication of environmental protection and climate change response models tailored to the specific Buddhist practices of each locality. Propaganda and education should raise awareness of environmental protection and resource sustainability, emphasizing the responsible use of natural resources and waste management. This commitment aligns with the compassionate and relief-from-suffering spirit of Buddhism.

And finally (sixthly), to further enhance the positive aspects of Vietnamese Buddhism and address its challenges, an intentional and structured dialogue between the Buddhist religious community and the scientific world is indispensable. This engagement should aim to foster a mutual exchange of ideas and insights, where the rich philosophical and ethical teachings of Buddhism can be examined and expanded upon through scientific methodologies and perspectives. Such a collaboration would not only validate and amplify the beneficial aspects of Buddhist practices but also provide a critical lens to address and rectify negative tendencies like superstition and commercialization. Engaging scientists, researchers and Buddhist practitioners in forums, conferences and collaborative studies would create an environment where empirical evidence and spiritual wisdom are harmonized. This synergy can lead to innovative solutions for societal issues, be it in mental health, environmental sustainability, or ethical living. Scientific research can offer objective insights into the efficacy of Buddhist practices, such as meditation, in enhancing mental well-being and community harmony. Conversely, the Buddhist perspective can enrich scientific understanding with deeper ethical and philosophical dimensions.

4. Conclusions

With a history spanning more than 2,600 years in Vietnam, Buddhist philosophy regarding human life represents the culmination and epitome of humane factors, reflecting the boundless compassion of the Buddha for all sentient beings. Significantly, Buddhism's worldview encompasses a profound and unique system of philosophies deeply ingrained within the Vietnamese population. It has the potential to intertwine deeply with the scientific understanding of human existence and environmental ethics. The philosophical doctrines of Buddhism, emphasizing compassion, interdependence and mindfulness, have shaped the cultural and ethical landscape of Vietnam and continue to resonate with contemporary scientific insights into Psychology, Social studies, and Environmental science. This confluence of ancient wisdom and modern science enriches our understanding of the human condition, offering holistic approaches to personal well-being, community cohesion and ecological stewardship. Moreover, Buddhism has contributed to the creation and nurturing of the nation's cultural values, becoming an integral part of its folklore traditions. Possessing noble humanitarian and humanistic characteristics, coupled with a profound understanding of the world, Vietnamese Buddhism has

left its mark on every facet of social life, particularly in politics, culture, ethics, lifestyle and the development of the new Vietnamese identity. Despite some limitations, there is no denying that Buddhism has played a vital role in preserving, consolidating, and transmitting customs embedded in Vietnam's traditional cultural values.

The challenge now is to distinguish and maximize the positive contributions of Buddhism and emphasize the values of Buddhist philosophy to counter those who distort the true teachings of Buddhism and those who seek to exploit it to disrupt community harmony, undermine the peace of the people, and impede the ongoing process of national construction and development. Furthermore, Buddhist dignitaries and practitioners must continue to actively promote the spirit of 'Loving-kindness, Compassion, Empathetic-joy, and Equanimity' as a means of contributing to the creation of a more harmonious society.

References

- [1] P. Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History and Practices*, 2nd edn., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013.
- [2] H.T. Binh, *Buddhism and Life*, Phuong Dong, Hanoi, 2007, 27.
- [3] Q.T. Nguyen, L.T. Pham and P.T. Nguyen, Eur. J. Sci. Theol., **18(6)** (2022) 47-63.
- [4] N. Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, Religious Publishing House, Hanoi, 1999, 44.
- [5] ***, *Textbook of Religion and Belief (Used for Advanced Training in Political Theory)*, Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics, Political Theory Publishing House, Hanoi, 2021.
- [6] ***, *Theory of Religion and Religious Policy in Vietnam*, Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics and Administration, Religious Publishing House, Hanoi, 2021.
- [7] V.H. Vu, Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews, **8(3)** (2020) 811-823.
- [8] D.M. Tran, Technium Social Sciences Journal, **34(2)** (2022) 690.
- [9] N.T. Xuan, *Religions in Vietnam*, Religious Publishing House, Hanoi, 2005, 164.
- [10] N.D. Hinh, *Vietnamese Buddhist Philosophy*, Cultural and Information Publishing House, Hanoi, 2006, 34-36.
- [11] M. Ricard and T.X. Trinh, *The quantum and the lotus: A journey to the frontiers where science and Buddhism meet*, Crown, New York, 2009, 212.
- [12] T.G. Ewest, Journal of Religion and Business Ethics, **3(2)** (2015) 1-14.
- [13] C. Baker, *Social, religious and spiritual capitals: A psychological perspective*, in *International handbook of education for spirituality, care and wellbeing*, Springer Netherlands, Dordrecht, 2009, 169-187.
- [14] V.H. Vu, International Journal of Recent Scientific Research, **10(6)** (2019) 1-7.
- [15] ***, *Documents of the 13th National Congress of Deputies (Volumes 1-2)*, Communist Party of Vietnam, Truth National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, 2021.
- [16] V.C. Vu, T.N.H. Dinh and T.H. Nguyen, Review of International Geographical Education Online, **11(8)** (2021) 1650-1655.
- [17] T.H.H. Nguyen, T.M.T. Vu and H.D. Quang, *Ho Chi Minh's thought on religion and religious affairs*, in *Ho Chi Minh's heritage in Vietnam and abroad*, Moskovskiy gosudarstvennyy universitet imeni M.V. Lomonosova Izdatel'skiy Dom (tipografiya), Moscow, 2020, 188-202.

- [18] T.V. Chu, *XLinguae*, **13(3)** (2020) 40-50.
- [19] T.B.C. Nguyen, *International Journal of Business and Applied Social Science*, **8(6)** (2022) 25-32.
- [20] S.A. Swenson, *Political Theology*, **22(1)** (2020) 68-74.
- [21] T.H.P. Le, K.D. Mai and S. Nizhnikov, *Specificity of Buddhist Morality within the Framework of Vietnamese Culture*, Proc. of 5th International Conference on Contemporary Education, Social Sciences and Humanities - Philosophy of Being Human as the Core of Interdisciplinary Research (ICCESSH 2020), Atlantis Press, Dordrecht, 2020, 34-38.
- [22] T.D. Dang, *Vietnam Journal of Science and Technology - MOST*, **63(10)** (2021) 61-64.
- [23] S. Chinnak and P. Sarakijkosol, *Journal of International Studies*, **6(2)** (2016) 1-26.
- [24] M. Tuladhar, *Research Nepal Journal of Development Studies*, **5(1)** (2022) 112-121.
- [25] D.E. Cooper and S.P. James, *Buddhism, virtue and environment*, Routledge, London, 2017, 69.
- [26] K. Javanaud, *Religions*, **11(2)** (2020) 381-397.
- [27] N.K. Lin, *Religions*, **13(12)** (2022) 1191-1205.
- [28] Y. Tang, B. Hölzel and M. Posner, *Nat. Rev. Neurosci.*, **16(1)** (2015) 213-225.
- [29] A. Chiesa and A. Serretti, *Psychol. Med.*, **40(8)** (2009) 1239-1252.
- [30] R.A. Bressan and J.A. Crippa, *Acta Psychiat. Scand.*, **111(s427)** (2005) 14-21.