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A Contemporary Synthesis of Theravāda Buddhist Ethics

Author & Corresponding Author*

1. Thich Nguyen The*

Affiliation:

1. Vietnam Buddhist University, Ho Chi Min, Vietnam.

Email: thichnguyenthe@gmail.com

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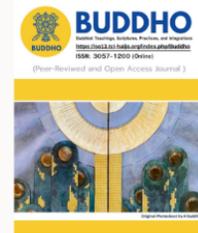


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Original Research Articles

A Contemporary Synthesis of Theravāda Buddhist Ethics

Thich Nguyen The*

Abstract

This study aims to synthesize core principles of Theravāda Buddhist ethics with contemporary ethical challenges in modern society. The research addresses the problem of ethical fragmentation in contemporary life, where rapid technological, economic, and social changes often outpace traditional moral frameworks. The objectives of the study are: (1) to analyze foundational ethical principles in Theravāda Buddhism, particularly *sīla* (moral conduct), *paññā* (wisdom), and *karuṇā* (compassion); (2) to examine how these principles can be reinterpreted and applied to contemporary social contexts; and (3) to propose an integrative ethical framework that bridges classical Buddhist teachings and modern ethical discourse. This research adopts a qualitative research design, employing documentary research and textual analysis of primary sources from the Pāli Canon and secondary academic literature. The study population consists of canonical texts and selected contemporary scholarly works, with purposive sampling used to select key texts relevant to Buddhist ethics. Research tools include content analysis matrices and thematic coding techniques. Data were analyzed using interpretive and comparative analysis. The findings reveal that Theravāda Buddhist ethics offer a coherent and flexible moral system grounded in intentionality (*cetanā*), non-harm (*ahiṃsā*), and interdependence (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). When contextualized for contemporary society, these principles can effectively inform ethical decision-making in areas such as social responsibility, environmental ethics, and personal development. The study concludes that a contemporary synthesis of Theravāda Buddhist ethics provides both theoretical depth and practical relevance, contributing to sustainable ethical development in modern societies.

Keywords: Contemporary, Synthesis, Theravāda, Buddhist Ethics

Introduction

In the contemporary world, ethical challenges have become increasingly complex as a result of globalization, rapid technological advancement, and profound socio-economic transformation. These changes have intensified moral dilemmas related to environmental degradation, social inequality, consumerism, and the erosion of shared moral values, often leading to ethical uncertainty and relativism in both personal and collective life (Bauman, 2013; Giddens, 1991). Many traditional moral systems struggle to respond adequately to such challenges, particularly when ethical issues extend beyond local or cultural boundaries and involve global interdependence (Singer, 2011).

Within this context, Buddhism especially the Theravāda tradition offers an ethical system grounded in the integrated cultivation of moral discipline (*sīla*), mental cultivation (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*), collectively known as the Threefold Training (Rahula, 1974; Harvey, 2000). Theravāda Buddhist ethics emphasize intentionality (*cetanā*) as the foundation of moral action, highlighting personal responsibility, non-harming (*ahiṃsā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and mindfulness as guiding principles for ethical conduct (Keown, 2005). These principles form a coherent moral framework aimed not only at individual liberation but also at harmonious social coexistence.

However, despite its rich ethical and philosophical heritage, Theravāda Buddhist ethics are often perceived as predominantly monastic, ascetic, or inwardly focused, leading to their limited application in contemporary social, political, and environmental contexts (Queen & King, 1996; Payutto, 1995). Such perceptions contribute to a gap between classical doctrinal teachings and modern ethical discourse, where Buddhism is sometimes viewed as insufficiently engaged with systemic social problems.

This gap highlights the need for a systematic and contemporary synthesis that reinterprets classical Theravāda ethical principles in ways that respond meaningfully to present-day concerns. By situating traditional Buddhist ethics within modern socio-cultural realities, it becomes possible to demonstrate their relevance to issues such as sustainable development, social responsibility, and ethical decision-making in complex societies. Therefore, this study seeks to bridge this gap by constructing a contemporary synthesis of Theravāda Buddhist ethics that is both doctrinally grounded and socially relevant, contributing to ongoing discussions in applied ethics, Buddhist studies, and moral philosophy.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**Literature Review**

This study investigates the ethical system of Theravāda Buddhism with the aim of articulating its foundational principles, evaluating their relevance to contemporary ethical challenges, and developing a synthesized ethical framework applicable to modern social contexts. The research is guided by the hypothesis that Theravāda Buddhist ethical principles, when contextually interpreted, can provide a coherent and practically applicable ethical

framework for contemporary society. To achieve this aim, the literature review examines classical and contemporary scholarly interpretations of Buddhist ethics, situates them within comparative ethical discourse, and identifies existing gaps that justify the present study.

Foundational Principles of Theravāda Buddhist Ethics

Scholarly discussions on Buddhist ethics consistently identify moral conduct (*sīla*) as the foundational dimension of ethical life within the Noble Eightfold Path, forming the practical basis upon which mental cultivation (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*) are developed (Harvey, 2000; Keown, 2005). In Theravāda Buddhism, *sīla* is not an isolated moral code but an integrated discipline shaping both individual character and social interaction. Ethical precepts function as training rules (*sikkhāpada*), intended to cultivate restraint, mindfulness, and moral sensitivity rather than mere legalistic obedience. A defining feature of Theravāda ethical theory is its emphasis on intentionality (*cetanā*). Moral evaluation is grounded primarily in the volitional quality of an action, reflecting the canonical assertion that “it is intention that I call kamma.” This intentional framework distinguishes Buddhist ethics from strict deontological systems, which prioritize rule adherence regardless of motivation, and aligns it more closely with intention-based and virtue-oriented ethical traditions. Ethical responsibility in Theravāda thought thus involves continuous self-reflection on mental states such as greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*), as well as their wholesome counterparts.

Comparative Perspectives in Buddhist Ethical Scholarship

Comparative ethical studies have situated Buddhist ethics in dialogue with major Western moral traditions, including virtue ethics, consequentialism, and care ethics. Keown (2005) argues that Buddhist ethics share strong affinities with virtue ethics due to their focus on character formation, habitual moral cultivation, and the development of wholesome dispositions such as compassion, generosity, and equanimity. Ethical practice in Buddhism is therefore understood as a gradual process of moral becoming rather than the application of abstract moral principles.

At the same time, the doctrinal centrality of kamma and its results (*vipāka*) has led some scholars to interpret Buddhist ethics through a qualified consequentialist lens. Harvey (2000) notes that while consequences matter, they are ethically significant insofar as they arise from intentional mental states. This distinguishes Buddhist ethics from utilitarian models that prioritize aggregate outcomes, as Buddhist moral reasoning remains grounded in the transformation of consciousness rather than outcome maximization alone. Additionally, scholars have drawn parallels between Buddhist compassion (*karuṇā*) and contemporary care ethics, particularly in contexts emphasizing relational responsibility, empathy, and interdependence (Queen & King, 1996). This relational dimension challenges atomistic conceptions of moral agency and highlights the ethical significance of social and environmental interconnectedness, a theme increasingly relevant in global ethical discourse.

Theoretical Framework

To address this gap, the present study adopts a theoretical framework grounded in core Theravāda doctrinal principles: the Threefold Training (*sīla, samādhi, paññā*), the law of kamma, and dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). These principles serve as interconnected analytical lenses for understanding ethical behavior as a dynamic and holistic process.

The Threefold Training provides the primary structural framework of the study. *Sīla* represents ethical restraint and social harmony, *samādhi* refers to mental discipline and mindful awareness, and *paññā* denotes insight into the nature of reality. Together, these dimensions illustrate that ethical conduct in Theravāda Buddhism is inseparable from mental development and wisdom, suggesting that sustainable ethical behavior arises from inner transformation rather than external regulation alone (Rahula, 1974).

The law of kamma further informs the framework by emphasizing moral causality, where intentional actions lead to corresponding results. This principle supports an ethical understanding grounded in responsibility, accountability, and long-term consequences, extending ethical consideration beyond immediate outcomes to include personal, social, and intergenerational effects (Harvey, 2000). Dependent origination complements this view by highlighting the interconnected nature of existence, reinforcing the idea that ethical actions are embedded within complex social and environmental systems rather than isolated individual choices.

By integrating these doctrinal principles, the theoretical framework conceptualizes Theravāda Buddhist ethics as an adaptable and context-sensitive ethical system. This framework directly supports the study's objectives by enabling: (1) systematic analysis of foundational ethical principles; (2) critical examination of their relevance to contemporary ethical issues; and (3) development of a synthesized ethical model that bridges classical Theravāda teachings with modern social realities. The study is guided by the hypothesis that, when contextually interpreted, Theravāda Buddhist ethical principles can offer a coherent, practical, and socially engaged ethical framework suitable for addressing contemporary moral challenges.

Objectives

1. To analyze the foundational principles of Theravāda Buddhist ethics.
2. To examine the relevance of these principles to contemporary ethical issues.
3. To develop a synthesized ethical framework integrating Theravāda Buddhist ethics with modern social contexts.

The study is guided by the hypothesis that Theravāda Buddhist ethical principles, when contextually interpreted, can provide a coherent and applicable ethical framework for contemporary society.

Research Methodology

Data Sources

This study employed documentary research as its primary methodological approach. The data sources consisted of both primary and secondary textual materials relevant to Theravāda Buddhist ethics.

Primary data sources included canonical texts from the Pāli Canon, particularly selections from the Sutta Piṭaka and Vinaya Piṭaka that explicitly address ethical principles such as *sīla* (moral conduct), *cetanā* (intentionality), *ahiṃsā* (non-harming), *karuṇā* (compassion), and *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent origination). Authoritative English translations by established scholars were used to ensure accuracy and consistency in interpretation.

Secondary data sources comprised peer-reviewed academic books, journal articles, and scholarly commentaries focusing on Buddhist ethics, applied ethics, and contemporary moral philosophy. These sources were selected to support interpretive analysis and to situate Theravāda ethical principles within modern ethical discourse. Purposive sampling was employed to select texts that were theoretically relevant, frequently cited, and directly aligned with the objectives of the study.

Research Instruments and Tools

The primary research instruments consisted of content analysis matrices and thematic coding frameworks developed by the researcher. These instruments were designed to systematically extract, categorize, and interpret ethical concepts from the selected texts.

The content analysis matrix was used to map core Theravāda ethical principles against contemporary ethical issues, such as social responsibility, environmental ethics, and personal moral development. The thematic coding framework enabled the identification of recurring ethical themes, doctrinal patterns, and conceptual relationships across canonical and contemporary texts. These tools enhanced analytical rigor by ensuring consistency, transparency, and traceability in the interpretive process.

Data Collection Method

Data collection was conducted through a structured and iterative process of textual selection, close reading, and documentation. Canonical passages and scholarly interpretations relevant to the research objectives were systematically reviewed and recorded. Key ethical concepts, doctrinal explanations, and interpretive arguments were extracted and organized according to predefined analytical categories derived from the theoretical framework.

The process involved repeated engagement with the texts to ensure depth of understanding and to minimize misinterpretation. Reflexive note-taking was employed throughout the data collection phase to document emerging insights, conceptual linkages, and interpretive reflections.

Method of Data Analysis

The study utilized qualitative interpretive analysis combined with comparative textual analysis. Interpretive analysis was applied to examine the meanings and ethical implications of core Theravāda concepts within their doctrinal context. Comparative analysis was then used to explore how these principles can be reinterpreted and aligned with contemporary ethical concerns. The analytical process followed four stages:

1. Textual familiarization through repeated reading of selected sources;
2. Thematic coding of key ethical concepts and principles;
3. Conceptual comparison between classical Theravāda ethics and modern ethical challenges; and
4. Synthesis, resulting in the construction of an integrative ethical framework.

This approach allowed for both doctrinal fidelity and contextual flexibility, ensuring that the synthesis remained grounded in classical teachings while addressing modern ethical realities.

Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study is confined to Theravāda Buddhist ethics, with primary emphasis on canonical Pāli texts and selected contemporary scholarly interpretations. The study focuses on ethical principles rather than ritual, metaphysical, or purely soteriological aspects of Buddhism.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, as a qualitative documentary study, the findings are interpretive in nature and do not involve empirical validation through fieldwork or participant-based research. Second, the reliance on translated texts may introduce interpretive bias, despite the use of authoritative sources. Finally, while the study proposes a contemporary ethical synthesis, it does not claim universal applicability across all cultural or religious contexts.

Research Significance

This study contributes to the fields of Buddhist studies, applied ethics, and moral philosophy by offering a systematic and contemporary synthesis of Theravāda Buddhist ethics. Theoretically, it advances scholarly understanding by demonstrating how classical ethical principles can be coherently integrated with modern ethical discourse. Practically, the study provides an ethical framework that can inform moral decision-making in areas such as social responsibility, environmental sustainability, and personal development.

By bridging the gap between doctrinal tradition and contemporary application, the research highlights the ongoing relevance of Theravāda Buddhist ethics as a flexible and context-sensitive moral system capable of addressing complex ethical challenges in modern society.

Results

The findings of this qualitative documentary study are presented in accordance with the three research objectives. Through interpretive and comparative textual analysis of canonical Theravāda sources and contemporary scholarly literature, the study reveals coherent patterns of ethical thought and their applicability to modern contexts.

Foundational Principles of Theravāda Buddhist Ethics

The analysis of primary canonical texts and authoritative commentaries reveals that Theravāda Buddhist ethics are structured around an integrated moral system grounded in intentionality (*cetanā*), moral discipline (*sīla*), wisdom (*paññā*), and compassion (*karuṇā*).

First, intentionality (*cetanā*) emerged as the central ethical determinant in Theravāda ethics. Canonical sources consistently emphasize that moral value is rooted not merely in external action but in the quality of volition motivating that action. Ethical conduct is therefore evaluated based on mental intention rather than outcome alone, establishing responsibility as an internal and reflective process.

Second, moral conduct (*sīla*) was identified as the foundational practical dimension of ethical life. The Five Precepts and related disciplinary principles function not only as prohibitive rules but as training guidelines aimed at cultivating non-harm (*ahiṃsā*), self-restraint, and social harmony. The findings indicate that *sīla* operates both at the individual level—shaping character and habits—and at the communal level—supporting ethical coexistence.

Third, wisdom (*paññā*) was found to play a crucial role in ethical discernment. Textual analysis shows that ethical behavior in Theravāda Buddhism is inseparable from insight into impermanence (*anicca*), non-self (*anattā*), and suffering (*dukkha*). Wisdom enables individuals to move beyond rigid moralism toward context-sensitive ethical judgment.

Finally, compassion (*karuṇā*) emerged as a key relational ethic embedded within the broader framework of loving-kindness (*mettā*) and non-harming. Rather than functioning as mere sentiment, compassion is grounded in insight into interdependence and shared vulnerability, reinforcing ethical responsibility toward others.

Overall, the findings confirm that Theravāda Buddhist ethics constitute a holistic moral system integrating conduct, intention, mental cultivation, and insight, rather than a rule-based or purely ascetic ethical model.

Relevance of Theravāda Ethical Principles to Contemporary Ethical Issues

The comparative analysis demonstrates that foundational Theravāda ethical principles can be meaningfully reinterpreted to address contemporary ethical challenges arising from social, environmental, and personal domains.

In relation to social responsibility, the principle of intentionality (*cetanā*) supports ethical accountability in institutional and professional contexts. Ethical action is understood not merely as legal compliance but as responsibility grounded in motivation, awareness, and long-term

consequences. This interpretation aligns Theravāda ethics with contemporary concerns regarding integrity, transparency, and ethical leadership.

Regarding environmental ethics, the findings show that dependent origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) provides a strong conceptual basis for ecological responsibility. The recognition of interdependence challenges anthropocentric moral frameworks and supports ethical awareness of human–nature relationships. Non-harming (*ahiṃsā*) extends beyond interpersonal ethics to include responsibility toward ecosystems and future generations.

In the context of personal development, Theravāda ethics offer a framework for ethical self-cultivation amid modern pressures such as consumerism, digital dependency, and psychological stress. The integration of mindfulness, ethical restraint, and wisdom supports sustainable moral agency, emphasizing inner transformation rather than external moral enforcement.

Importantly, the findings indicate that Theravāda ethics do not conflict with modern ethical discourse but rather complement and enrich contemporary approaches, particularly in areas emphasizing virtue, care, responsibility, and systemic awareness.

A Synthesized Ethical Framework Integrating Theravāda Buddhism and Modern Contexts

Based on the analytical findings, the study develops a contemporary synthesized ethical framework that bridges classical Theravāda teachings with modern ethical concerns.

This framework is structured around three interrelated dimensions:

1. Intentional Ethics – Ethical decision-making grounded in conscious intention (*cetanā*), emphasizing responsibility, awareness, and moral reflection.
2. Relational Ethics – Ethical responsibility informed by compassion (*karuṇā*), non-harming (*ahiṃsā*), and interdependence (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), extending moral concern beyond the individual to social and environmental systems.
3. Transformative Ethics – Ethical sustainability achieved through wisdom (*paññā*) and inner cultivation, enabling adaptive and context-sensitive moral responses rather than rigid moral absolutism.

The synthesis demonstrates that Theravāda Buddhist ethics function as a flexible and dynamic moral system capable of responding to contemporary ethical fragmentation. Rather than being limited to monastic or individual concerns, the ethical framework supports socially engaged, environmentally conscious, and psychologically grounded moral action.

The results thus confirm the study’s guiding hypothesis that, when contextually interpreted, Theravāda Buddhist ethical principles provide a coherent, applicable, and socially relevant ethical framework for contemporary society.

Discussion

The discussion of findings is structured in accordance with the stated research objectives and situates the results within existing scholarly discourse on Buddhist ethics and contemporary moral theory.

First, with regard to the analysis of foundational ethical principles in Theravāda Buddhism, the findings reaffirm that *sīla*, *paññā*, and *karuṇā* function as an integrated ethical triad rather than isolated virtues. Consistent with classical interpretations in the Pāli Canon, *sīla* operates as the practical foundation of ethical life, regulating bodily and verbal conduct through precepts grounded in non-harm (*ahiṃsā*) (Keown, 2005; Gethin, 1998). Scholars such as Harvey (2000) and Gethin (2004) have emphasized that *sīla* is not merely a rule-based morality but is inseparable from mental cultivation and wisdom. This study's findings support that position by demonstrating how moral conduct in Theravāda ethics is fundamentally intention-centered (*cetanā*), aligning with canonical assertions that ethical value is determined primarily by volition rather than external action alone (Harvey, 2000; Keown, 2018).

Paññā, as revealed in the analysis, provides the cognitive and reflective dimension of ethics, enabling moral agents to discern the impermanent (*anicca*), unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anattā*) nature of phenomena. This insight-based wisdom prevents ethical rigidity and dogmatism, a point also highlighted in contemporary Buddhist ethical scholarship, which characterizes Buddhist morality as context-sensitive and pragmatically oriented rather than absolutist (Gowans, 2015; Goodman, 2009). Meanwhile, *karuṇā* emerges as the affective and relational dimension of ethics, motivating moral action toward the alleviation of suffering and reinforcing the social applicability of Theravāda ethical thought (Harvey, 2013).

Second, in examining how these principles can be reinterpreted and applied to contemporary social contexts, the findings indicate that Theravāda Buddhist ethics possess a notable degree of adaptability. The principle of *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent origination) provides a conceptual framework for understanding complex modern systems characterized by interdependence, such as globalized economies, ecological networks, and digital societies. This interpretation aligns with modern ethical theories that emphasize relationality and systemic responsibility, including care ethics and environmental ethics (Queen & King, 1996; Loy, 2003).

The study's findings resonate with arguments made by engaged Buddhist scholars such as Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu (1994) and Thich Nhat Hanh (1987), who contend that Buddhist ethical principles can and should be extended beyond monastic or personal contexts to address collective and structural forms of suffering. In areas such as environmental ethics, the emphasis on non-harm and interdependence supports sustainable practices and challenges anthropocentric moral assumptions (Kaza, 2000; Harris, 2015). Similarly, in social responsibility and personal development, the cultivation of mindful intentionality offers an ethical counterbalance to the alienation and moral fragmentation often associated with rapid technological and economic change (Loy, 2013).

Third, in proposing an integrative ethical framework that bridges classical Buddhist teachings and modern ethical discourse, the findings suggest that Theravāda Buddhist ethics can contribute both normative guidance and methodological insight. Rather than positioning

Buddhist ethics as an alternative or oppositional system to contemporary moral philosophy, the study demonstrates its potential as a complementary framework that enriches existing ethical debates (Keown, 2005; Goodman, 2009). The emphasis on inner transformation, intentionality, and compassion addresses gaps in many modern ethical models that focus predominantly on external rules, consequences, or rights.

At the same time, the interpretive and flexible nature of Buddhist ethical reasoning allows for dialogue with pluralistic moral systems without sacrificing doctrinal integrity. This supports scholarly views that Buddhist ethics function less as a codified moral law and more as a praxis-oriented path aimed at reducing suffering at both individual and societal levels (Gethin, 1998; Harvey, 2013).

Overall, the discussion highlights that the coherence and adaptability of Theravāda Buddhist ethics directly respond to the problem of ethical fragmentation identified in contemporary society. By grounding ethical action in wisdom, compassion, and an understanding of interdependence, the synthesized framework offers a morally robust yet context-sensitive approach to modern ethical challenges. The findings thus contribute to academic discussions on applied ethics, religious ethics, and cross-cultural moral philosophy, demonstrating that classical Theravāda teachings remain a viable and valuable resource for sustainable ethical development in the modern world.

Conclusion

This study set out to construct a contemporary synthesis of Theravāda Buddhist ethics by analyzing its foundational principles, examining their relevance to modern ethical challenges, and developing an integrative ethical framework that bridges classical teachings with contemporary social contexts. Through qualitative documentary research and interpretive textual analysis of canonical sources and contemporary scholarship, the study demonstrates that Theravāda Buddhist ethics constitute a coherent, dynamic, and context-sensitive moral system.

The findings confirm that core ethical principles—particularly *sīla* (moral conduct), *cetanā* (intentionality), *paññā* (wisdom), *karuṇā* (compassion), and *paṭiccasamuppāda* (dependent origination)—are not confined to monastic or individual practice but possess significant applicability to contemporary ethical concerns. When interpreted within present-day socio-cultural realities, these principles offer meaningful guidance for ethical decision-making in areas such as social responsibility, environmental sustainability, and personal moral development. Rather than functioning as rigid moral prescriptions, Theravāda ethics emphasize intentional awareness, relational responsibility, and inner transformation as the foundations of ethical life.

By synthesizing doctrinal insights with modern ethical discourse, this study contributes a structured ethical framework that integrates intentional, relational, and transformative dimensions of moral action. This framework demonstrates how classical Theravāda teachings can engage constructively with contemporary ethical fragmentation, offering an alternative to purely rule-based or outcome-driven ethical models. In doing so, the study advances scholarly understanding of Buddhist ethics as an applied and socially engaged moral tradition.

Theoretically, this research enriches the fields of Buddhist studies and moral philosophy by clarifying the ethical coherence and adaptability of Theravāda Buddhism. Practically, it provides a conceptual foundation for applying Buddhist ethical principles in modern contexts, including education, leadership, environmental policy, and personal ethical cultivation. While the study is limited by its documentary and interpretive scope, it opens avenues for future research, particularly empirical studies examining how this synthesized ethical framework may be implemented and evaluated in real-world settings.

In conclusion, a contemporary synthesis of Theravāda Buddhist ethics offers both philosophical depth and practical relevance. By reaffirming the ethical vitality of classical Buddhist principles in addressing modern moral challenges, this study underscores the enduring significance of Theravāda Buddhism as a sustainable and integrative ethical system for contemporary society.

Recommendations

Body of Knowledge and Future Directions

This study makes several significant contributions to the existing body of knowledge in Buddhist studies, applied ethics, and moral philosophy.

First, the study contributes theoretical clarification by demonstrating that Theravāda Buddhist ethics constitute a coherent and integrated moral system grounded in intentionality, moral discipline, wisdom, and interdependence. By systematically synthesizing canonical doctrines with contemporary ethical discourse, the research challenges reductive interpretations of Theravāda ethics as purely monastic, ascetic, or individualistic.

Second, the study advances conceptual innovation through the development of a contemporary synthesized ethical framework that integrates intentional, relational, and transformative dimensions of moral action. This framework provides a structured model for understanding how classical Theravāda principles can function as applied ethics within modern social contexts.

Third, the research enriches applied ethical discourse by positioning Theravāda Buddhist ethics as a viable alternative to rule-based, relativistic, or purely consequentialist moral models. The emphasis on inner transformation, contextual awareness, and relational responsibility contributes a distinctive ethical perspective relevant to contemporary moral challenges.

Fourth, the study fills an identified research gap by moving beyond purely comparative or doctrinal analysis toward an integrative and application-oriented interpretation of Theravāda ethics. This approach strengthens the relevance of Buddhist ethical studies within interdisciplinary conversations on sustainability, social responsibility, and ethical leadership.

Finally, this research establishes a conceptual foundation for future interdisciplinary inquiry, offering scholars, educators, and practitioners a theoretically grounded and adaptable ethical framework. By bridging classical Theravāda teachings with contemporary ethical needs, the study affirms the enduring relevance of Buddhist ethics as a living moral tradition capable of contributing meaningfully to modern ethical development.

For future research

1. Future research should extend this conceptual framework through empirical investigation. Qualitative field studies, surveys, or mixed-method research could examine how the synthesized Theravāda ethical framework is understood, practiced, and evaluated in real-world contexts such as education, organizational leadership, environmental activism, and community development. Empirical validation would strengthen the applicability and operational clarity of the proposed framework.

2. Further comparative studies are recommended to explore the dialogue between Theravāda Buddhist ethics and other ethical traditions, including Mahāyāna Buddhism, Western virtue ethics, care ethics, and environmental ethics. Such comparative work could enhance intercultural ethical understanding and contribute to the development of global ethical frameworks grounded in pluralistic moral reasoning.

3. The integration of Theravāda ethical principles into educational curricula is recommended, particularly in ethics education, moral development programs, and mindfulness-based learning. Emphasizing intentionality (*cetanā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), and interdependence (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) may support ethical awareness, emotional intelligence, and responsible citizenship among learners in both secular and religious settings.

4. Policymakers and practitioners concerned with social and environmental sustainability may consider adopting this ethical synthesis as a reflective tool for ethical decision-making. The emphasis on non-harming, relational responsibility, and long-term consequences provides a moral lens for addressing systemic challenges such as environmental degradation, social inequality, and technological impact.

Finally, scholars of Buddhist studies are encouraged to further develop applied Theravāda ethics, moving beyond textual analysis toward context-sensitive ethical engagement. Such efforts would contribute to correcting the perception of Theravāda Buddhism as ethically inward or socially disengaged.

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