

Buddhist Philosophy: A Study of Human Nature and the Path to Liberation

Filosofia Budista: Um Estudo da Natureza Humana e o Caminho para a Libertação

Bui Xuan DUNG

University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City – UEH

Email: dungbx@ueh.edu.vn

ORCID: 0000-0002-8323-6443

Acknowledgements: This research is funded by University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (UEH)

ABSTRACT

Buddhist philosophy is a profound system of thought that provides a unique approach to the nature of existence, suffering, and the path to liberation. This article explores the core concepts of Buddhist philosophy, including the Four Noble Truths, Impermanence, Selflessness, and the Noble Eightfold Path. Through the analysis of these aspects, the article sheds light on how Buddhist philosophy addresses fundamental questions about the meaning of life, the nature of consciousness, and the relationship between humans and the universe. With an approach that does not rely on specific quotations, this study emphasizes the presentation of a comprehensive perspective, reflecting the fundamental principles of Buddhism and their significance in the modern context of the world and Vietnam. The article concludes that Buddhist philosophy is not only a system of religious thought but also a practical approach, providing value in facing the challenges of contemporary life.

KEYWORDS: Buddhist Philosophy, Four Noble Truths, Impermanence, Selflessness, Noble Eightfold Path, Liberation, Consciousness, Vietnam.

RESUMO

A filosofia budista é um profundo sistema de pensamento que oferece uma abordagem única à natureza da existência, ao sofrimento e ao caminho para a libertação. Este artigo explora os conceitos centrais da filosofia budista, incluindo as Quatro Nobres Verdades, a Impermanência, a Ausência de Eu e o Nobre Caminho Óctuplo. Por meio da análise desses aspectos, o artigo esclarece como a filosofia budista aborda questões fundamentais sobre o significado da vida, a natureza da consciência e a relação entre os humanos e o universo. Com uma abordagem que não se baseia em citações específicas, este estudo enfatiza a apresentação de uma perspectiva abrangente, refletindo os princípios fundamentais do budismo e sua importância no contexto moderno do mundo e do Vietnã. O artigo conclui que a filosofia budista não é apenas um sistema de pensamento religioso, mas também uma abordagem prática, que agrega valor ao enfrentamento dos desafios da vida contemporânea.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Filosofia Budista, Quatro Nobres Verdades, Impermanência, Ausência de Eu, Nobre Caminho Óctuplo, Libertação, Consciência, Vietnã.

1. Introduction

Buddhist philosophy, which originated from the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha more than 2500 years ago, is not only a religious system but also a profound philosophy, offering unique insights into the nature of man and the universe. In contrast to many Western schools of philosophy, which often focus on metaphysical questions about objective reality, such as the nature of reality or the relationship between matter and consciousness, Buddhist philosophy focuses on the subjective human experience. In particular, it emphasizes suffering, a universal reality of human life, the causes of suffering, and the practical path to attaining liberation. This approach not only provides a theoretical framework for understanding the nature of existence, but also provides concrete guidelines that help people orient their lives in the direction of awareness, harmony, and meaning (Dung, 2025).

The uniqueness of Buddhist philosophy lies in the fact that it is not only an abstract system of thought but also a method of life, which can be applied to all aspects of everyday life. While Western schools of philosophy often seek to explain reality through logical reasoning or metaphysical analysis, Buddhist philosophy focuses on transforming the mind, helping people to face real experiences such as suffering, loss, or insecurity (Takakusu, 1998). By emphasizing suffering and the path through it, Buddhist philosophy offers an insight into the human psyche, while also proposing a lifestyle based on self-awareness and compassion. Therefore, Buddhist philosophy is not only limited to the religious context

but also has universal value, which can be applied in many fields such as psychology, ethics, and even environmental management. (Garfield, 2014).

In the context of the modern world, when people face a myriad of challenges, from psychological stress and work pressures to social issues such as inequality and conflict, Buddhist philosophy offers a valuable perspective to navigate life (Bui, 2025). Environmental crises, such as climate change and resource degradation, also raise pressing questions about how humans interact with nature. Buddhist philosophy, with concepts such as Impermanence and Selflessness, encourages people to recognize the fragility of the world and the deep connection between themselves and their surroundings. Rather than pursuing material accumulation or personal desires, Buddhist philosophy directs people to a simple, sustainable, and meaningful way of life, based on mindfulness and compassion (Sangma and Bharani, 2024).

This paper is designed to provide a general presentation of the core concepts of Buddhist philosophy, including the Four Noble Truths, Impermanence, Selflessness, and the Noble Eightfold Path. The Four Noble Truths provide a theoretical framework for understanding suffering, its causes, and the path to liberation. Meanwhile, Impermanence and Selflessness shed light on the nature of reality, helping people to realize the transience of all phenomena and the non-existence of a fixed self. The Noble Eightfold Path, with its principles of wisdom, ethics, and meditation, offers a practical route to living a harmonious and mindful life. Through the analysis of these tenets, the paper not only sheds light on the essence of Buddhist philosophy but also explores its implications for solving contemporary problems. Challenges such as psychological stress, social conflict, and environmental crises can be approached through the lens of Buddhist philosophy, thereby providing practical and sustainable solutions (Hardnaulee et al., 2025). The structure of the paper is divided into four main sections to ensure a systematic and comprehensive approach. The first part will analyze the Four Noble Truths, laying the foundation for understanding Buddhist philosophy. The second part will explore the concepts of Impermanence and Selflessness, elucidating the nature of reality from a Buddhist perspective. The third part will focus on the Noble Eightfold Path, presenting the path of practice to achieve liberation and living in harmony. Finally, the fourth section will discuss the modern significance of Buddhist philosophy, particularly its role in addressing psychological, social, and environmental issues. The conclusion will synthesize the main theses and emphasize the practical value of Buddhist philosophy in today's world, not only as a philosophy but also as a way of life that can bring peace and meaning to modern people (Shonin et al., 2014).

2. The Four Noble Truths: The Foundation of Buddhist Philosophy

The Four Noble Truths are the ideological pillars of Buddhist philosophy, creating a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the nature of suffering and the way to overcome it. Presented by Shakyamuni Buddha more than 2500 years ago, the Four Noble Truths are not only a theoretical system

but also a practical guide, helping people identify and transform suffering in life. With the four truths, the Noble Truth of Suffering, the Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering, the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering, and the Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering, Buddhist philosophy offers a profound approach, both philosophical and practical, to guide people to live a life of awareness and harmony.

The Noble Truth of Suffering affirms that suffering is an integral part of human life. Suffering is not limited to physical pain such as illness or injury, but also includes deeper psychological states such as anxiety, dissatisfaction, sadness, and feelings of loss. From the Buddhist point of view, suffering is present in every aspect of life, from basic experiences such as birth, old age, illness, and death to unfulfilled desires or separation from familiar things (Bodhi, 2010). A person may experience suffering when losing a loved one, when facing failure at work, or when feeling empty despite having achieved material successes. The Noble Truth of Suffering does not aim to pessimise life, but instead, it encourages people to look directly at reality. By acknowledging the existence of suffering, people can begin their journey of finding meaning and solutions to overcome it. This perspective reflects a deep understanding of the nature of the human experience, emphasizing that suffering is a natural part of existence and cannot be ignored or avoided. Instead of running away from suffering, Buddhist philosophy proposes that facing it mindfully is the first step to achieving well-being (Pham, 2025).

The Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering indicates that the root cause of suffering lies in craving, clinging to ephemeral things such as pleasure, fame, power, or materialism. Craving is not merely the desire to possess tangible things, but also includes clinging to the idea of a fixed "self," an unchanging identity. According to Buddhist philosophy, it is this clinging that creates an internal conflict between personal desires and ever-changing reality. A person may suffer when they do not achieve what they want, or even if they do, they are afraid of losing what they have (Bain et al., 2020). The concept of craving reflects an insight into the human psyche. It turns out that suffering does not come from external circumstances but mainly from how people react to those circumstances. Clinging to temporary pleasure or to the idea of an independent "self" leads to an endless cycle of dissatisfaction and suffering. When a person puts their happiness on owning a particular asset, they may feel temporary joy in achieving it, but that joy is quickly replaced by anxiety about losing or longing for other things. The Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering emphasizes that in order to end suffering, one needs to identify and let go of craving, thereby freeing the mind from the constraints of desire and ignorance.

The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering brings a message of hope that suffering can be ended. The state of Nirvana, the supreme goal of Buddhist philosophy, is a state of pure consciousness where one is completely free from craving, ignorance, and suffering. Nirvana is not a place or a supernatural state out

of reach, but a psychological state that can be achieved through proper practice and awareness. In the state of Nirvana, people overcome the constraints of desire, no longer being dominated by clinging or inner conflict. The concept of Nirvana emphasizes that liberation is not about escaping from the world, but about changing the way people perceive and interact with the world. When the mind is cleansed of craving and ignorance, one can experience a state of deep peace, unaffected by the vicissitudes of life. The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering asserts that suffering is not a fixed or permanent state, but can be overcome through proper effort and understanding. This brings a positive vision, encouraging people to lead a free and mindful life (Sangma and Bharani, 2024).

The Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering points to the path to the cessation of suffering through the Noble Eightfold Path, a practical path that consists of eight branches related to wisdom, ethics, and meditation. The Noble Eightfold Path includes Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. These elements are designed to help people live in harmony with themselves, others, and the world around them (Mahatthanadull, 2018). Right View encourages a correct understanding of reality, while Right Speech and Right Action guide people to act and communicate in a kind, non-harmful manner. The Noble Eightfold Path is not a series of sequential steps, but a system of mutually complementary principles, creating a holistic way of life. Through the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path, people can gradually transform their minds, let go of cravings, and achieve peace of mind (Bui, 2025). The Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering emphasizes that Buddhist philosophy is not only an abstract theory but also a practical guide, encouraging people to face reality consciously and responsibly. By living by these principles, people not only overcome suffering but also build a meaningful and harmonious life.

The Four Noble Truths are the core foundation of Buddhist philosophy, providing a theoretical and practical framework for understanding and overcoming suffering. From identifying suffering (the Noble Truth of Suffering), understanding its causes (the Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering), believing in the possibility of ending suffering (the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering), to practicing the path to liberation (the Noble Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering), the Four Noble Truths offer a clear and profound path. These truths are not only philosophical but also have practical value, helping people to live a life of awareness, compassion, and harmony with the world around them (Anderson, 2016).

3. Impermanence and Selflessness: The Essence of Reality

Buddhist philosophy, with the profound teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha, offers two fundamental concepts for understanding the nature of reality: Impermanence and Selflessness. These concepts not only provide a philosophical lens to identify the nature of the world, but also provide practical lessons to

help people live a life of awareness, harmony, and alleviation of suffering. By being aware of the transience of all phenomena and the non-existence of a fixed self, Buddhist philosophy encourages people to let go of clinging and live in harmony with the flow of reality (Shakya, 2024).

Impermanence is the core concept that asserts that every phenomenon in the universe, whether tangible or invisible, is in a state of constant change. No thing or phenomenon is fixed or eternal. From physical entities such as the human body, trees, or mountains and rivers, to mental states such as emotions, thoughts, or perceptions, all are governed by the flow of time and constant change. The human body goes through the stages of birth, aging, illness, and death; emotions such as joy or sadness come and go; even the ideas we consider sustainable change over time and circumstances (Pham, 2025). The awareness of Impermanence provides an insight into the nature of life. It reminds us that clinging to temporary things, such as money, fame, or relationships, often leads to suffering when those things disappear or change. A person may suffer when they lose an asset or when a close relationship breaks down, but if they understand that everything is impermanent, they can learn to accept change and let go of clinging. Impermanence is not a pessimistic view, but on the contrary, it encourages people to live fully in the present, to cherish the moments they have without obsessing over the past or worrying about the future. By accepting change as a natural part of life, people can alleviate suffering and find peace in the flow of reality.

Selflessness is a revolutionary concept of Buddhist philosophy that challenges the conventional notion of the existence of a fixed "self" or an immutable soul. According to this view, a person is not an independent, eternal entity, but only a temporary combination of the five aggregates: form (matter), sensation (feeling), perception, mental formations, and consciousness. These elements are constantly interacting and changing, creating the illusion of a fixed self. However, upon closer analysis, there is no independent "self" that exists apart from the temporary combination of these aggregates. The concept of Selflessness has profound philosophical and practical significance. It rejects the notion that humans are a separate entity, separate from the world around them. Instead, Buddhist philosophy sees humans as part of a continuous flow of phenomena, inextricably linked to all things and events in the universe. A person may think that they are a separate "individual" with fixed characteristics, but from the Selflessness perspective, that "self" is only a set of temporary elements, influenced by their environment, experiences, and relationships. This understanding helps people overcome their arrogance, selfishness, and conflicts that arise from defending an illusory ego.

The understanding of Impermanence and Selflessness is not only abstract philosophical theories but also offers profound practical lessons, which can be applied to everyday life. When people realize that everything is impermanent, they can learn to accept change as a natural part of life. Instead of grieving the

loss of a job or a relationship, they may see the loss as an opportunity to grow and explore new possibilities. Impermanence encourages people to live in the present, appreciate what is there, and not be obsessed with what has passed or has not yet come. Similarly, the concept of Selflessness helps people overcome negative emotions such as pride, jealousy, or conflict. When people realize that there is no fixed "self," they can reduce their selfishness and build relationships based on compassion and understanding. In an argument, understanding that both sides are temporary collections of aggregates can make it easier for the parties to sympathize and find a peaceful solution. Selflessness also encourages people to see themselves as part of a larger whole, thereby promoting cooperation and responsibility towards the community and the environment.

Impermanence and Selflessness are two core concepts of Buddhist philosophy, which provide an insight into the nature of reality. Impermanence reminds people that all phenomena are temporary, encouraging them to let go of their attachment and live fully in the present. Selflessness, with the denial of the fixed "self," helps people overcome selfishness and conflict, towards a harmonious and compassionate life. Both of these concepts are not only philosophical theories but also practical guidelines that help people face suffering and build a meaningful, mindful, and harmonious life with the world around them.

4. The Noble Eightfold Path: The Path of Practice

The Noble Eightfold Path is the core practical roadmap of Buddhist philosophy, proposed by Shakyamuni Buddha to help people achieve liberation from suffering and live a mindful, harmonious life. This path consists of eight branches, which are organized into three main groups: Wisdom (Right View, Right Intention), Ethics (Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood), and Meditation (Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration). Rather than being a series of sequential steps, these eight branches act as a system of mutually complementary elements, creating a holistic way of life, directing people towards well-being and wisdom. The Noble Eightfold Path is not only for practitioners but also a guideline for anyone who wishes to build a meaningful life, especially in the modern context with psychological, social, and moral challenges (Hardnaulee, 2025).

The Wisdom group consists of Right View and Right Intention, two fundamental branches that help people develop a correct understanding of reality. Right View is the ability to clearly perceive the nature of life, based on the core tenets of Buddhist philosophy such as the Four Noble Truths, Impermanence, and Selflessness. Right View is not only an understanding of theory but also a deep understanding that suffering is a natural part of life, that all phenomena are temporary, and that there is no fixed "self." A person with Right View will realize that clinging to fame or possessions does not bring lasting happiness, because these things are impermanent. Right Intention, on the other hand, involves directing the mind in the direction of compassion, non-clinging, and towards liberation. It encourages people to develop an

altruistic attitude, avoiding negative thoughts such as greed, anger, or jealousy. For instance, instead of cultivating resentment at being treated unfairly, a practitioner of Right Intention will choose to respond with compassion and understanding. Both Right View and Right Intention act as illuminating torches, helping people direct their actions and thoughts in a positive direction, thereby laying the foundation for a mindful life.

The Ethics group, which includes Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood, focuses on building an ethical lifestyle that does not harm oneself or others. Right Speech encourages people to use words in an honest, kind, and constructive way. This means avoiding lying, divisive speech, insulting speech, or spreading unfounded rumors. In an argument, instead of using offensive language, a practitioner of Right Speech will choose to communicate gently, encouraging harmony and mutual understanding. Right Action emphasizes taking the right actions, avoiding harm to oneself and the community. This includes not killing, not stealing, not causing hurt, and acting with compassion. Right Action encourages people to consider the consequences of their actions before taking them, thereby building a life based on respect and responsibility. Right Livelihood involves choosing a career or way of earning a living in accordance with ethical principles. A profession is considered "right" when it does not harm others or the environment, such as avoiding jobs that involve exploitation, deception, or destruction of nature.

The Meditation group, which includes Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration, focuses on training the mind to achieve peace and wisdom. Right Effort is the persistent effort to eliminate negative thoughts and cultivate positive psychological states (Savel and Munro, 2017). When a person feels angry, Right Effort encourages them to identify and transform that emotion instead of letting it dominate their behavior. This requires patience and a strong will to maintain a clean mind. Right Mindfulness is a state of awareness, paying full attention to the present without being distracted by the past or the future. In the modern context, Right Mindfulness has become a popular concept, applied in psychotherapies and meditation practices to reduce stress and improve mental health. A person who practices Right Mindfulness can focus on the breath, feeling every moment of the body and mind, thereby achieving inner peace. Right Concentration, the last branch, is a state of deep concentration where the mind becomes calm and undistracted. This state is often achieved through meditation, which helps people develop deep wisdom and experience lasting well-being.

The Noble Eightfold Path is not only a path reserved for practitioners, but also a universal guide, suitable for anyone who wants to live a meaningful and harmonious life. In the modern context, the principles of the Noble Eightfold Path can be applied to improve mental health, build positive relationships, and contribute to a more equitable society. Right Mindfulness helps people cope with stress and anxiety, while Right Speech and Right Action promote communication and action based on respect and compassion.

Right Livelihood encourages sustainable lifestyle choices, in line with ethical values and environmental responsibility. The Noble Eightfold Path is a comprehensive, practical route of Buddhist philosophy that guides people through suffering and attains liberation through wisdom, ethics, and meditation. With eight mutually supportive branches, this path not only brings personal well-being but also contributes to building a harmonious and just society. In the modern world, the Noble Eightfold Path continues to be a valuable guideline, helping people live mindful and meaningful lives in a turbulent world.

5. Modern Significance of Buddhist Philosophy

In the 21st century, Buddhist philosophy, with its profound teachings originating from Shakyamuni Buddha more than 2500 years ago, is gaining more and more attention not only in religious communities but also in the fields of Western science, psychology, and philosophy. Core concepts such as Right Mindfulness, compassion, Impermanence, and Selflessness not only carry spiritual significance but also provide practical solutions to face the challenges of the modern age, from psychological stress to social conflict to environmental crises. Buddhist philosophy brings a unique vision, helping people orient their lives in the direction of awareness, harmony, and sustainability, thereby contributing to building a more balanced world.

One of the outstanding contributions of Buddhist philosophy in the current era is the integration of concepts such as Right Mindfulness and compassion into modern psychotherapy. Right Mindfulness, a core principle of the Noble Eightfold Path, has been widely applied in methods such as mindfulness-based cognitive behavioral therapy. This method helps people cope with stress, anxiety, and depression by training the ability to focus on the present, identify, and manage emotions consciously. For example, during a mindfulness session, participants can focus on their breathing or body sensations to alleviate negative thoughts, thereby achieving a peaceful psychological state. The popularity of Right Mindfulness in modern psychology shows the practical value of Buddhist philosophy in improving mental health. In a world where the pace of life and work pressure are increasing, principles such as Right Mindfulness and Right Effort help people find their inner balance. By training the mind to focus on the present and letting go of worries about the past or the future, people can reduce stress and develop self-awareness. This not only brings personal benefits but also helps improve relationships, as people become more understanding and compassionate in communication.

Buddhist philosophy also provides a unique perspective for addressing social issues such as inequality, conflict, and differentiation. The concept of Selflessness, with its denial of the existence of a fixed "self," encourages people to overcome selfishness and build a community based on sharing, cooperation, and mutual respect. In a society where competition and individualism often lead to conflict, Selflessness reminds people that all are part of a larger whole, which in turn promotes empathy and solidarity

(Chakravarti, 1986). A practitioner of Selflessness will be less inclined to blindly defend their own interests; instead, they will act for the common good of the community. Moreover, the compassionate perspective, part of Right Intention, encourages people to treat each other with compassion and understanding. In conflict situations, compassion can help defuse tensions and pave the way for peaceful solutions. Buddhist philosophy, with its focus on ethics and responsibility, offers an ideal model for building a just and harmonious society where values such as tolerance and sharing are upheld.

The concept of Impermanence, which asserts that every phenomenon is in a state of constant change, provides an important perspective on environmental issues. Impermanence reminds humans of the fragility of nature, from ecosystems to natural resources. In the context of environmental crises such as climate change, land degradation, and pollution, Buddhist philosophy encourages people to live sustainably, avoid overexploitation, and respect the balance of ecosystems. For example, a person who understands Impermanence will realize that consuming resources insatiably not only harms the environment, but also creates suffering for themselves and future generations. The Selflessness perspective also plays an important role in promoting environmental awareness. Realizing that humans are not separate from nature but are part of it, Buddhist philosophy encourages humans to act with responsibility towards the planet. This can be reflected in choosing a simple lifestyle, minimizing consumption, and advocating for environmental protection initiatives. Buddhist philosophy, with its emphasis on the interconnectedness between man and the universe, provides an ethical foundation for building a sustainable future.

In the age of technology, when distractions and excessive consumption dominate life, Buddhist philosophy offers a practical approach to finding focus and meaning again. Principles such as Right Mindfulness and Right Effort help people escape the whirlwind of social media, advertising, and consumer pressure. Practicing meditation, as part of Right Concentration, not only improves mental health, but also helps people develop self-awareness, which in turn makes more informed decisions in a volatile world. Moreover, Buddhist philosophy challenges the dominant material values of modern society. By emphasizing that true happiness does not come from material accumulation but from purity of mind, Buddhism offers an alternative path to consumerism and relentless competition. In the context of a growing spiritual crisis, Buddhist philosophy offers a vision of a simple, harmonious, and meaningful life where people find joy in mindfulness and compassion.

6. Conclusion

Buddhist philosophy, with core concepts such as the Four Noble Truths, Impermanence, Selflessness, and the Noble Eightfold Path, provides a profound and practical system of thought for understanding human nature and the path to liberation. More than just a religious philosophy, Buddhism offers valuable

lessons on how to live in harmony with oneself, others, and the world around you. In the modern context, the principles of Buddhist philosophy can be applied to address psychological, social, and environmental issues, from improving mental health to promoting a just and sustainable society. The study explored key aspects of Buddhist philosophy, from the theoretical underpinnings of the Four Noble Truths to the philosophical concepts of Impermanence and Selflessness, as well as the path of practice of the Noble Eightfold Path. Through the analysis of these aspects, it can be seen that Buddhist philosophy is not only valuable in the historical context but also offers practical solutions to the challenges of the modern world. In the future, the continued study and application of Buddhist philosophy can open up new directions in building a more meaningful and sustainable life.

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DUNG, Bui Xuan; CHERLSON, D. Buddhist Philosophy: A Study of Human Nature and the Path to Liberation. *Kalagatos*, Fortaleza, vol.22, n.2, 2025, eK25032, p. 01-12.

Received: 02/2025
Approved: 09/2025