

# BUDDHIST ETHICS AND ETHICAL EDUCATION IN VIETNAMESE FAMILIES TODAY

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**Abstract:** Buddhism is one of the world's major philosophical-religious ideologies that was spread into Vietnam very early and quickly became a religion that has a profound influence on the cultural and spiritual life of Vietnamese families and society. Within the scope of this article, the authors draw on the research methods of philosophy, religion, and some specific sciences to clarify some of the following theoretical issues: Ethical education in the family and some ethical values of Vietnamese Buddhism; the influence of Buddhist ethics on ethical education in Vietnamese families. As these studies show, although there are certain similarities and differences between Buddhism and the family regarding educational content and methods, however, in terms of educational content, Buddhist teachings always contain a deep human spirit so that Vietnamese families can fully absorb these positive moral values to improve the effectiveness of moral education in their families today.

**Keywords:** Buddhism, Education, Family, Ethics.

# БУДДИЙСКАЯ ЭТИКА И ЭТИЧЕСКОЕ ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ ВО ВЬЕТНАМСКИХ СЕМЬЯХ СЕГОДНЯ

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**Аннотация:** Буддизм — одна из крупнейших мировых философско-религиозных идеологий, которая очень рано распространилась во Вьетнаме и быстро стала религией, оказывающей глубокое влияние на культурную и духовную жизнь вьетнамских семей и общества. В рамках данной статьи авторы привлекают методы исследования философии, религии и некоторых конкретных наук для прояснения некоторых из следующих теоретических вопросов: Этическое воспитание в семье и некоторые этические ценности вьетнамского буддизма; влияние буддийской этики на этическое воспитание во вьетнамских семьях. Как показывают эти исследования, хотя между буддизмом и семьей существуют определенные сходства и различия в отношении содержания и методов обучения, однако с точки зрения содержания образования буддийские учения всегда содержат глубокий человеческий дух, чтобы вьетнамские семьи могли полностью усвоить эти положительные моральные ценности. повысить эффективность нравственного воспитания в своих семьях сегодня.

**Ключевые слова:** буддизм, образование, семья, этика.

### Introduction

Globalization and the explosion of the information technology revolution have helped countries and peoples come closer together in recent years to solve common problems. Ethnic groups, in particular, now have conditions for cultural exchange, absorbing the cultural quintessence of other ethnic groups to enrich their own culture. Furthermore, globalization has consequences and major obstacles to the development of developing countries, particularly small nations, and ethnic groups with low levels of development, cultural differences cause "conflicts of ideas, lifestyles, deadlocks, and even crises and disturbances in the exclusion or acceptance of external cultures that have caused tension and conflicts"[1], failure to find a way to resolve these conflicts will lead to "millions of people who will find themselves gradually disoriented, gradually losing the ability to adapt to their surroundings"[2]. It is critical to have comprehensive and timely remedies, or the following countries, like many Western countries in the past, will pay a high price. In reality, "the values, dreams, and promises of modern times are seriously questioned in advanced countries"[3]. With the strong development of the market economy and international integration, many ethical values in general and the ethical values of the Vietnamese families, in particular, have been undermined in recent years in Vietnam as a result of manipulation of money, a hybrid lifestyle lacking

culture, defying morality and ethics, corrupting morality is hindering the development of the families and society in the direction of progress. In that situation, it is very necessary to inherit the ethical standards of religions, especially Buddhist ethics in family education.

Historical evidence shows that major religions, which contain many humanistic and humanitarian principles, contribute to the preservation of nations' ethical and cultural values while also balancing people's lifestyles and strengthening people's trust and goodwill. People who practice religion also have a "strong belief"[4] in spiritual force. "Religion brings people back to themselves, creates happiness, privacy, sacredness, depth"[1] that people have lost due to their greed and selfishness. As a result, religion serves a cultural and spiritual need for a segment of the people while also contributing to society's long-term viability. "The phenomenon of Westernization, standardization and even a lack of faith in the future of progress has led to the desire to return to religious identity's roots..."[3], according to Edgar Morin.

It is clear that religion, in general, and Buddhism in particular, contain a wide range of ethical ideals that are very human and compassionate. As a result, ethical principles should be acquired through religious teachings in general, and Buddhism in particular, to improve the effectiveness of ethical education in Vietnamese families. Buddhism, as a religion and meditation philosophy, contains a wealth of profound educational content. Furthermore, Buddhism serves as an ethical ideology, actively engaging in the development and shaping of society's ethical value system while also serving as a constant source of education, value orientation, and social ethics. The authors will explore the positive influences of Buddhist ethics on ethical education in Vietnamese families today from a theoretical perspective in the article.

## **1. Ethical education in the families and some ethical values of Vietnamese Buddhism**

### ***1.1. Ethical education in the families***

Family is a unique educational institution because it is an educational institution founded on blood links, sacred feelings, and paying attention to the distinctiveness of each educational object. Family education occurs within the family and is defined as "the systematic and purposeful impact of the adults in the family and the entire family's lifestyle on the kid"[5]. Family education is an educational process that takes place throughout a person's life, from birth to adulthood and even into old age. A.X. Macareno once asserted: "What parents do for their child before he is 5 years old - that is 90% of the result of all the upbringing"[6]. When talking about the issue of ethical education at home, the Buddha emphasized the educational role of parents for their children. Parents are called "first teachers" (*pubbācariya*) by the Buddha before sending their children to preschools, primary schools, secondary schools, high schools, and universities. As the teachers of their children, parents need training in ethics (*sīla*), life skills, and life values [7].

As a result, "ethical education in the family can be defined as the systematic and purposeful effect of family adults, particularly parents, to transform social ethical principles and standards into ethical traits and personalities in children, form in children the right attitude in communication, a sense of self-discipline, voluntary implementation of the ethical standards of the society, the habit of complying with the regulations of the law"[8].

Children have been cared for and raised in a family setting since birth. As a result, activities such as structuring family life, and interactions between grandparents, parents, siblings, and others have a direct impact on children's ethical feelings. "The primary reason and aim of family life - that is, the teaching of children. The family is a child's first school of intellectual, ethical, artistic, and physical education, along with their interactions with their parents"[6], V.A. Sukhomlinsky, a famous Soviet educator, famously stated. The earliest and most essential educational environment for the formation of children's basic ethical traits is the exchange activities that take place in family life. Ethical education in the family is seen to play a role in the formation and development of moral and human characteristics, as evidenced by several primary contents, such as "ethical education in the family contributes to the formation and development of ethical and human qualities; contributes to the establishment of children's beliefs and ethical ideals; contributes to the development of a young generation with both Virtue and Talent Development; contributes to the preservation of the nation's ethical values and traditional culture"[8].

During the development of the Vietnamese nation, Buddhism has made many contributions to preserving and supplementing enriching the nation's traditional cultural and ethical value system. When traditional moral and cultural values are established, they always have a strong impact on the formation of behavioral patterns, children's evaluations, and pure moral feelings.

Buddhism has played an important role in the development of the Vietnamese nation, contributing to the preservation and enrichment of the country's traditional cultural and ethical values. When traditional ethical and cultural norms are formed, they have a significant impact on the creation of behavioral patterns, as well as on children's evaluation and pure ethical feelings. In addition, in institutions that preserve traditional ethical and cultural values, the family is the first environment and plays an important role in preserving, transmitting, and transferring cultural and ethical values of the nation so that it has a great influence on the personality development of each person. The family has contributed most effectively to protecting and developing the nation's ethical and cultural values through ethical education in the face of significant challenges of the times, especially in today's worldwide integration process. A nation that wishes to develop sustainably must first be founded on sound ethical and cultural traditions, which must be preserved and promoted for future generations, including Buddhist ethical ideals.

### ***1.2. Some ethical values of Vietnamese Buddhism***

Buddhism originated in India, and during the centuries of its existence and development, it has evolved into one of the world's main religions, with a strong influence on the spiritual lives of people from all walks of life. Buddhism has pervaded Vietnamese morality, thought, and lifestyle, shaping the Vietnamese nation's distinct identity. Buddhism is easy to enter into people's hearts, has the effect of polishing ethical character for the future generation, and towards building a benevolent society, with its philosophy of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, inspiring people to do good. It can be seen that, in addition to specific values such as maintaining religious teachings and beliefs, Vietnamese Buddhism has a wide range of ethical values and standards, including filial piety, honesty, compassion, altruism, love for people and things, and a good spirit, among others. The identity of Vietnamese culture is formed through the crystallization of all values and moral standards. The following are some of Buddhism's core ideals and ethical standards:

Firstly, the notion of Good vs. Evil. If viewed from a general level, when it comes to Buddhist ethics, there are only two basic categories: "good" and "evil." Buddhism recommends based on the premise of retribution, life, death, and happiness. In general, there is a discussion of good in the Buddhist scriptures, but primarily on evil, or the division of good and evil into two opposites, balancing in the direction of retribution. Instead of talking about good, the Buddha talks about evil in Chapter 4 of the "Twelve Chapters" sutra, and it appears that the Buddha wishes people to be enlightened and give up evil and the good from that result will be displayed. In the "Ten Good" sutras, after the Buddha showed the Dragon King to compare the difference between the bodies of Bodhisattvas and Devas... with species in the great ocean, he pointed out the cause of this difference as: "Behold, the sentient beings in the great ocean whose gross and ugly appearance, whether great or small, are all caused by all thoughts of their mind, caused by their body, speech, and mind, and their unwholesome actions, so depending on where they cause their karma, they will bear the retribution"[9]. Therefore, the ethical standards set forth by Buddhism are the antidote to ignorance, greed, hatred, and delusion. For example, giving is the antidote to greed, patience is the antidote to anger, wisdom is the antidote to delusion, and so on.

Secondly, the concept of fairness, equality, and tolerance. To a certain extent, justice, equality, and tolerance are also good. Justice and equality obvious things in human-to-human relations. Buddhism comes from equality to build justice and equality in Buddhism has its characteristics. Unlike many other religious ideas, Buddhism builds a system of teachings based on equality between people and people, and also extends the equality between Buddhas, people, and sentient beings in general.

Third, four gifts are four graces that people must remember and pay for. Although Buddhist research and propaganda books explain the Four Gifts differently, in general, the grace here is human, animal grace, and social grace, not divine or God's grace. The "Mahayana Sutra of mind-ground contemplation" says that the four graces to be paid are: "One is the grace of parents, the second is the grace of sentient beings, the third is the grace of the king, the fourth is the grace of the three refuges".

Fourth, is the concept of happiness. Derived from human aspiration without stopping, according to Buddhism it is motivated by the mind of ignorance, so can compare happiness to a kind of water, the more you drink, the more thirsty you become. For Buddhism, the state of Nirvana is transcendental happiness, that is, absolute freedom, peace of mind, beyond the cycle of duality, cause, and effect. However, for the world, Buddhism offers each level of happiness. According to the principle, the religion from the Human beings to the Bodhisattva, each religion has as many things, as much happiness is obtained. For example, achieving religion of the Five Precepts then there are 5 blessings, achieving religion of the Ten Goods then there are 10 blessings, etc. Thus, throughout the development process, Buddhism has always been attached to the nation and affirmed its true value for the cause of preserving traditional cultural and ethical values of the Vietnamese nation such as filial piety, love, and care, tolerance and forgiveness, promotion of good, prevention of evil, etc. Buddhism contains many profound educational contents. Moreover, Buddhism also assumes the role of an ethical doctrine, actively participating in the establishment and shaping of values and ethical standards in society.

## **2. Influence of buddhist ethics on ethical education in Vietnamese families**

Buddhism has been spiritual support for many Vietnamese families due to its profound human principles. Buddhist ethical principles have the effect of regulating conduct, and habits, and developing the personality of the next generation in the family and community. When Buddhism was first introduced to Vietnam, it quickly adapted to the Vietnamese people's lifestyles, customs, and rituals, eventually assuming a central role in society's spiritual life. Today, Buddhist teachings' ethical ideals have a good impact on ethical education in Vietnamese families, as evidenced by the following primary contents:

Firstly, Buddha's teachings contain a profound human spirit, notably the philosophy of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity, and saving from misfortune and danger, which contributes to the education of human love for children. As a major religion, Buddhism has many profound teachings, showing a unique worldview and point of view on human life. However, the profound teachings of Buddhism greatly influenced the intelligentsia; and for the general public, the Buddha is the embodiment of the morality of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity (loving-kindness means to love and compassion towards others; compassion is being sad with the sadness of others, suffering for the suffering of others; sympathetic joy is to rejoice with the happiness of others; equanimity is to forgive the mistakes of others, accept to give up fame, fortune, and life if necessary and beneficial to others, etc.).

Buddhism, which is inherently a humane, good-oriented religion, originating from humanitarianism, is very suitable for the concept and way of life of the Vietnamese people. Talking about this special point, Tran Bach Dang commented: "The

eternal life in Buddhist ethics is loving-kindness, compassion and saving from misfortune and danger. It transcends time and space because it aims to protect, promote and maintain the humanity “do good”, “towards good” or at least “do not do evil”, “do not turn towards evil”[10]. In family education, arousing and encouraging loving-kindness and compassion, the charity will make an important contribution to building morality and personality for the young generation, creating a harmonious lifestyle among people; The spirit of sympathetic joy, equanimity, saving from misfortune and danger is to encourage the spirit of leaves to protect tattered ones in the family and social relationships. Vietnamese families receive Buddhism not in abstract and sublime treatises, but often in practical content, applied to solve life’s problems. That is why deeply educational moral values are often absorbed by many families in ethical education for children. In particular, in the context of improving socio-economic life, there are still many miserable lives and difficult situations, thus promoting the spirit of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity, and saving from misfortune and danger is extremely necessary, showing the deeply humane and humanitarian spirit in the ethical and cultural traditions of the Vietnamese people.

In Buddhist ethics, the responsibility of individuals for good and bad deeds is emphasized. Buddhism has used the theory of cause and effect, samsara, and karma to explain human suffering through different lives. Almost every Vietnamese believes in the law of cause and effect: living ethically will reap good things; living immorally, and unethically, will receive retribution. This moral philosophy has been having a positive influence on ethical education in the family, contributing to the formation of moral beliefs and directing children toward the values of truth, goodness, and beauty. Although there are certain limitations because of creating fatalism, from a moral perspective, this theory of Buddhism has emphasized the cultivation and training of personal morality, directing people to think and do good deeds, cultivating virtues and morals, eliminating evil and badness, promoting each person’s sense of responsibility to themselves and society; these concepts have a great impact on ethical education for children in the family, contributing to shaping the personality and lifestyle of the young Vietnamese generation.

Secondly, Buddhism emphasizes “filial piety”. In the spirit of humanity, Buddhism proposes ethical requirements and standards to regulate family relationships, especially those between parents and children, and between husband and wife. It is worth noting that the family moral standards proposed by Buddhism are based on equal relations between parents and children; and between husband and wife. These are two-way relationships, which means that if parents have obligations towards their children, children also have duties corresponding to their parents; Likewise, if a husband has a duty to his wife, then the wife also has a duty corresponding to her husband. This shows the profound humanity and equality of Buddhism compared with the conceptions of Chinese Confucianism and Song Confucianism, which only absolutize the obligations of children towards their parents, and the wife towards her husband.

Buddha’s teachings advise people to always remember “filial piety”, taking the word “filial piety” as the first: “Dutiful is Buddha’s conduct, filial piety is Buddha’s mind”; “All things in the world are nothing more than the nurturing of parents”. In the thought of grace respect, parental grace is put in the first place. “The Sutra of Contemplation,” says that people have four graces to pay, including: “One is the grace of parents, the second is the grace of sentient beings, the third is the grace of the king, the fourth is the grace of the three jewels”. Thich Thanh Nghiem also emphasized: “Nursing parents with filial piety, saving all sentient beings, protecting the country, respecting the three jewels, all have only one motive, which is to be grateful”[11]. However, it would be an omission and incorrect understanding of the spirit of Buddhism if we mentioned filial piety and forgot the roles and responsibilities of parents towards their children. In the Theravada and Mahayana sutras, the “filial piety” of the Buddhists is fully expressed in the reciprocal relationship between parents and children, and between children and parents, which is called parents duty and filial duty.

According to Buddha’s teachings, the relationship between parents and children is the most sacred. The sacredness does not simply lie in the blood relationship, but it also contains many values of affection, responsibility, obligation, morality, and culture of two generations. A child who breaks this sacred relationship with his parents is unfilial. On the contrary, parents who do not fulfill their obligations towards their children, such as if they do not educate their children to grow up physically, mentally, and independently in a righteous life, such parents are not worthy of being parents. The dialectical ideas about the responsibility of parents towards their children and the obligations of children towards their parents of Buddhist ethics still have profound meaning in moral education for the young generation in Vietnam today. The development of the market economy and international integration with its negative sides have negatively impacted the practice of filial piety in Vietnamese families today. Many families and parents are busy making a living but neglect to raise and educate their children, besides, some children for various reasons forget their filial duty, resulting in their respect and order in the family that is turned upside down, and the family environment is “polluted” which is the main cause leading to the deterioration and degradation of social morality.

Thirdly, Buddhist ethics turns people away from mistakes and sins, away from passions and desires disturbing the human mind. Buddha’s teachings contribute to the cultivation of a patient lifestyle for the young generation, which can help them overcome the temptations of life through the patient practice of Precepts - Concentration – Wisdom (Precepts mean ones that believers must follow in order not to make mistakes in thought, speech, and action; Concentration is the meditation to eliminate distractions; Wisdom is wisdom, which eliminates desire, including the wisdom of understanding (obtained by learning), the wisdom of thought (think to gain wisdom), the wisdom of meditation practice (wisdom obtained due to meditation practice), thereby helping the young generation to be firm and brave in the face of life’s temptations, encouraging them to care about their destiny of community, honest living, respecting humanity, etc. Besides, Buddhism

upholds the spirit of “living amid the dust and enjoying the way” and has contributed to building a responsible lifestyle with a sense of “not covetousness for power, not clinging to material benefits, living a noble and relaxing, self-mastery and untied life”[1].

The ethical values of Buddhism are also expressed through daily behavior and communication with others. In Buddhism’s Eightfold Path, there is right speech (keeping words right), which is one of the conditions for people to behave appropriately with those around them. In the Buddhism scriptures, it is mentioned that sentient beings must say gently, kindly, not say harshly, falsely, do not say flattery or slander. These thoughts are also expressed in detail by the precepts forbidden in the Five Precepts and the Ten Virtues, such as not lying, not saying falsehoods, not saying two-way, not saying bad words, etc. In communicating with others, the Buddha also taught that neither should be exaggerated nor belittled. What you want to say can be painful and not true, don’t say it. What is useful but not true should not be said. These concepts are of great significance, helping parents educate their children on how to behave and communicate with their children in today’s social relationships. Especially in the current context, when more and more children show dishonesty, impoliteness in communication, behavior, etc., the education on honesty for children in the family is very necessary.

Fourthly, Buddhist ethics have contributed to supplementing new ethical values, enriching and deepening the content of ethical education in Vietnamese families today. Buddhism's compassionate spirit is unconditional love for all sentient creatures (sentient and inanimate). In Buddhism, people's compassion, tolerance, and love are built on equality, without restrictions; it is a love that knows no bounds, transcending caste, family, and nationality. The ethical ideals of the Vietnamese people have been strengthened and deepened by Buddhist thought. Because the Vietnamese nation's formation and progress are intertwined with the wet rice civilization and the war against foreign invaders, so the Vietnamese attach great importance to solidarity, community cohesion, and mutual love and care. When there is harmony with the ethical concept of Buddhism, the human spirit has become a core ethical standard of the Vietnamese nation.

Furthermore, Buddhism has influenced Vietnamese people's ethical lives through its educational function, which guides people toward good and humane principles. Vietnamese people are drawn to Buddhism not just for its spiritual benefits, such as feeling relaxed and serene at the Buddha's feet, but also for the ethical and social contents contained within its teachings. Firstly, Buddhism's educational goal is to educate the human person as a subject who is accountable for his own life. Buddhist education views humans as both the object and the goal of learning. Simultaneously, highlight the importance of people's self-mastery, and attempt to perfect and conquer challenges and deadlocks in life on their own. People are readily lured, dragged, and drawn into social problems if they lose sight of the significance of self-mastery.

As a result, Buddhism affirms the humanistic principles found in Buddhist teachings by placing humans at the core of the system. To begin with, Buddhism seeks to liberate individuals from ignorance, afflictions, enlightenment, and Buddhahood. The Pure Land world, to which Buddhism aspires, is characterized by equality, peace, joy, and contentment. Buddhist education's goal is to show and teach individuals how to open their minds, acquire intuitive insight, and achieve enlightenment and liberation. Many aspects of Buddhism's educational objective are aligned with the substance of family moral education. As a result, it has a favorable impact on the young generation's self-awareness, encouraging them to strive for perfection and overcome challenges and deadlocks in life.

### **Conclusion**

As a religion and philosophy, Buddhism contains many profound ethical educational contents. Moreover, Buddhism also assumes the role of an ethical theoretical master, actively participating in the establishment and shaping of the moral value system in society, and at the same time constantly performing the role of education, value orientation, and social ethics. The content of social-ethical education in Buddhism has many similarities with the one of ethical education in Vietnamese families today, such as education on love and gratitude towards grandparents and parents; education of solidarity, the spirit of mutual affection, loving and caring for each other; education of the sense of organization discipline, sense of responsibility in the study and work as well as in daily life; education of lifestyle, respect, obedience and courtesy to teachers; honesty in friendship, etc. Professor Hoang Nhu Mai said that: What Buddhism teaches is human (if understood clearly and understood correctly), and completely by the requirements for educating and training the people of our country and the world today. I think if the precepts of Buddhism were partially instilled in humanity, society would reduce a lot of crimes and life would be much more benevolent [12]. Thanks to a certain degree of compatibility between Buddhist ethics and traditional Vietnamese ethics, Buddhism has been making positive contributions to the formation of moral qualities and personality of the Vietnamese young generation. Although in educating people, the thought of loving-kindness and compassion, doing nothing, and making peace as the end has reduced the ambition to strive to rise in each person’s life, the thought of living with suffering, feeling smug about the present circumstances of Buddhism still has some negative elements, but the system of Buddha’s teachings always contains many positive elements. Therefore, strengthening the education of Buddhism’s ethical philosophy and thought in the family and society will contribute to adjusting and shaping the moral qualities, lifestyle, and personality of the young generation in Vietnam today.

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