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THE ROLES OF BUDDHISM IN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION IN VIETNAM THESE DAYS

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Abstract

Vietnam is considered one of the developing countries heavily affected by environmental pollution and climate change. The issue of "protecting and regenerating the natural environment" is top priority by authorities from the central to local levels, guided, implemented, mobilizing resources from religions, including Buddhism, to actively participate in the common movement, building the country increasingly rich and beautiful. However, practically Buddhism and environmental protection, besides the achievements, there are still many limitations. How to improve the effectiveness of activities, promote the role of the monks and nuns, Buddhists in environmental protection, overcome the remaining difficulties is an issue that needs to be concerned and resolved. Using the interdisciplinary method of religious studies, the research has presented a number of concepts related to the topic; Buddhist teachings related to environmental protection; Status of environmental protection work of Buddhism in Vietnam; some issues and solutions to promote the role of Buddhism in environmental protection in Vietnam.

Keywords: *environmental protection, Buddhism, doctrine, ideology, activities*

1. Some related concepts

The environment has always been an issue that the whole society, organizations, and many researchers are interested in and researched on a global scale. In 1972, the United Nations

Environment Programme (UNEP) was established under Resolution 2997 of the United Nations General Assembly. "Environment" is generally defined as the totality of natural and

social conditions in which a human or an organism exists and develops in relation to that human or organism; is the combination of all special circumstances or external conditions that affect the existence and development of an organic entity¹. "Environment" is the set of all external conditions and phenomena that affect an object or an event. Any object or event exists and develops in an environment. Such a general concept of environment is specified for each subject and each research purpose.²

According to Clause 1, 2, Article 3 of the Law on Environmental Protection of Vietnam issued on November 17, 2020: "The environment includes natural and artificial physical elements that are closely related to each other, surrounding humans, affecting the life, economy, society, existence and development of humans, organisms and nature." Environmental protection activities are activities to prevent and limit negative impacts on the environment; respond to environmental incidents; overcome pollution, environmental degradation, improve environmental quality; rationally use natural resources, biodiversity and respond to climate change.

Clause 1,2, Article 4 of the Law on Environmental Protection clearly states as follows: Environmental protection is the right, obligation and responsibility of all agencies, organizations, communities, households and individuals. Environmental protection is a condition, foundation, central and prerequisite for sustainable socio-economic development. Environmental protection activities must be linked to economic development, resource management and considered and evaluated during the implementation of development activities³. Thus, there are many different ways to define the environment, but in general, it can be concluded that the environment consists of two basic elements: the natural environment and the social environment, both of which play an important role and have a profound impact on the lives of the community and all species on this earth. Protecting the natural environment, building and promoting the development of the social environment is an extremely necessary task.

2. Buddhist teachings on environmental protection

Through Buddhist scriptures, worldviews and philosophy of life, it can be seen that Buddhism is one of the religions that emphasizes ethical factors related to the environment. In Buddhist scriptures, there are no specific terms or nouns that talk about the environment such as "environment", "environmental ethics", "green lifestyle", "sustainable development"... but the teachings and specific Buddhist activities all aim at protecting the environment and building a lifestyle in harmony with nature.

2.1. Origination - highlighting the connection between humans and nature

The theory of dependent origination is also known as dependent origination, the twelve links of dependent origination (in Sanskrit: Paṭicca-samuppāda). The theory of dependent origination is summarized as follows: "Because this exists, that exists. Because this does not exist, that does not exist. Because this arises, that

arises. Because this ceases, that ceases."⁴ This is one of the fundamental teachings of Buddhism, talking about the movement, correlation, and connection of the twelve areas in particular as well as the elements in the universe, life, and humans... contributing to the formation of the worldview of Buddhism.

"The Buddha observed the world in two different forms, namely the real world view and the ideal world view. Accordingly, the real world view is formed based on the five aggregates (form, feeling, perception, mental formation, and consciousness). However, the five aggregates depend on causes and conditions to combine or separate." According to the spirit of Buddhism⁵, the real or ideal world view is based on causes and conditions. In addition, depending on the good or endless karma created, sentient beings can be reborn into many different realms, belonging to the realms of desire, form, and formlessness.

If humans only care about their own interests without respecting the natural environment and other living beings, it will lead to many undesirable consequences. We are often covered by ignorance, always chasing after desires and cravings, unable to control ourselves, often clinging to the idea that "ego" is me, is mine, or thinking that humans have the right to own nature, exploit nature, promote consumerism to serve themselves... from there, we do not pay much attention to the problems that nature has to bear.

This doctrine is closely related to cause and effect, "the law of cause and effect according to the process of the twelve links of dependent origination has no starting point, no one knows when it started. Only know that it continuously has cause and then effect, cause gives birth to effect. It goes on like that forever and only when a link is cut off, that is, a component is destroyed or the cause or effect is destroyed, then the process stops happening."⁶

The theory of dependent origination holds that the world is formed and exists as a great network, composed of many factors. People or things, events, and phenomena cannot exist independently but on the contrary, are closely related to each other, always having a certain role and function in a whole. People must rely on nature to live, however, to survive long term, people must live in harmony, use natural resources reasonably, and regenerate resources that have been exploited to ensure sustainable life for themselves and for future generations.

Buddhists understand that protecting the natural environment is not only a responsibility but also comes from the belief in the law of cause and effect, in liberation from suffering, reincarnation, and towards the realm of liberation. If we apply the Buddhist doctrine of 12 causes and conditions to our lives, we will create good karma, bringing good results for ourselves and future generations.

2.2. Compassion - positive thinking, good actions towards environmental protection

Compassion is a fundamental value in Buddhist ethics. Compassion in Buddhism is not only to bring joy and eliminate suffering to humans but also to all living beings. Buddha taught: "Compassion can bring joy to all living beings; Compassion can

¹Many authors, Environmental Law Textbook, Hanoi Law University, People's Public Security Publishing House, Page 9

²Le Van Khoa (2001), Environmental strategy and policy, Hanoi National University Publishing House, p. 5

³<https://vanban.chinhphu.vn/?pageid=27160&docid=202613&classid=1&typegroupid=3>

⁴Thich Chon Thien (1993), Introduction to Buddhist Studies, published by the Buddhist Sangha Education Board, p. 138

⁵Venerable Thich Thanh Kiem (1989), "History of Indian Buddhism", Religion Publishing House.

⁶Pham Dinh Nhan (2012), Human with the Doctrine of Twelve Links of Dependent Origination, Religion Publishing House

eliminate suffering for all living beings." That is, Compassion is to bring joy to all living beings; Compassion is to eliminate suffering for all species. Eliminating suffering and bringing joy are all the aspirations and altruistic actions, saving lives of people with compassion. Therefore, compassion is not passive, escapist or weak. The suffering and joy mentioned here are not only physical suffering and joy but also spiritual suffering and joy."⁷

One of the precepts that represents the spirit of compassion of Buddhism is the precept of "no killing". This is one of the precepts that monks and lay Buddhists are not allowed to do, from not killing living beings, buying and selling rare living beings, to actively contributing to environmental protection.

There are three main methods of contemplating compassion: compassion for sentient beings, compassion for dharmas, and compassion without cause.

Compassion for sentient beings means breaking one's ego-attachment, knowing how to observe the suffering of sentient beings in the six realms: Heaven, Human, Asura, Hell, Hungry Ghost, Animal... Although this method has not completely broken ego-attachment, it has expanded the narrow scope of the ego to penetrate into a larger environment. If anyone can practice this contemplation, they will demonstrate a way of life for the community, for all species.

Dharma affinity The practitioner observes that he and all sentient beings are of the same dharmadhatu, so the pain of sentient beings is also his own pain, from there he generates compassion to "save suffering, give joy" to sentient beings, seeing the suffering of natural disasters and epidemics caused by environmental pollution as the suffering of humans and countless sentient beings that are having to endure. Therefore, he himself also feels deeply, feels extremely miserable.

No reason Compassion is the result of practicing precepts, concentration, and wisdom. Once attained, it comes naturally without any effort. It is like when a rain falls, it waters the entire land, without distinguishing between tall and short trees. It covers the entire human world and waters all living beings. Similarly, this compassion no longer treats oneself or others, or treats oneself or other living beings.

In the Sutra of the Last Teachings, there is a passage "do not cut down trees or clear land". Thus, compassion in Buddhism is not limited to sentient beings but also extends to insentient beings. In Buddhism, all beings have Buddha nature and are equal. In the Agama Sutra, the Buddha forbade his disciples from engaging in occupations that are contrary to good deeds, namely: hunting, fishing, trading raw meat, trading cooked meat, producing and trading alcohol, all of which are directly or indirectly related to the issue of environmental protection.

According to the Chinese master Zhan Ran (711-782) who practiced the Tiantai sect, "inanimate beings with enlightenment are only mountains, rivers, land, bricks and stones... without conscious feelings, all have Buddha nature".⁸ According to the

⁷Thich Thien Hoa (2016), Popular Buddhism, volume 1, Religion Publishing House

⁸Nguyen Duc Dong, "Buddhism's view on ecological environment", in Thich Nghan Dat translation, Buddhism and environment, Ho Chi Minh City General Publishing House, 2015, p. 134

viewpoint of the Japanese master Liang Yuan (912-985) of the Tiantai sect, "grass and trees have four characteristics: birth, existence, change and destruction. Although they have the mind to practice, they are only the shadow of Bodhi and Nirvana. If so, are they not sentient beings? Therefore, we know that when grass and trees have the mind to practice, sentient beings also practice. When sentient beings have the mind to practice, grass and trees also have the mind to practice."⁹

The benefits of compassion are: repelling anger and cruelty; eliminating egoism and selfishness; creating a spirit of community cohesion; thus, compassion is the opposite of cruelty and selfishness. Once compassion is nurtured, the human mind will naturally turn to goodness, hatred will give way to love, and unwholesome actions will give way to wholesome values.

Thus, compassion in Buddhism is mentioned not in general but in a specific way, with profound humanity. Buddhists start from a low level of practice and then work hard to improve, nurturing limited compassion to gradually develop unlimited and immeasurable compassion, thereby making great contributions to environmental protection, from the issue of not killing, hunting rare animals, to condemning bad elements, exploiting nature to feed themselves. Buddhists not only treat all living beings well, but also spread the teachings of compassion to the community through sharing Buddhist teachings, organizing many models of activities that are beneficial to the environment. The beauty of the spirit of compassion in Buddhism is that it solves the root, the crux of the problem, creating sustainable motivation to help Buddhists, who understand Buddhism, take action in the long term, not just in the moment. It is the thread that connects like-minded people, aiming for the common goal of protecting the environment and valuing nature.

2.3. The Noble Eightfold Path - the true path to awaken humanity, raise awareness and take action to protect the environment

The Noble Eightfold Path is the eightfold path, the eight miraculous means that lead sentient beings to the state of Sainthood and to a wonderful life. The Noble Eightfold Path includes: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

Right view: Is the correct and clear perception of the nature of dharmas, things, and phenomena. Thanks to right view, people can escape negative and erroneous thoughts, have reasonable perceptions and viewpoints, in accordance with objective truth, and not be influenced by their own desires and psychology. **Right thinking:** Is thinking correctly, knowing one's own mistakes and evil thoughts, thereby distancing oneself from them, knowing that the path of practice must be based on the three studies of discipline, concentration, and wisdom, aiming for liberation, which is to eliminate ignorance. **Right speech:** is truthful speech, bringing joy, peace, and happiness to others, and not causing others to suffer. People with right speech know how to speak at the right time and be silent at the right time. **Right action:** is honest action and work, bringing benefits to both oneself and others. **Right livelihood:** supporting oneself with an honest profession; **Right effort:** diligence, effort, perseverance, not discouraged to achieve the set goal, effort to transform the mind of affliction into the mind

⁹Thich Hang Thanh (2015), "The theory of plants having sentient nature and ground layer ecology", Ho Chi Minh City General Publishing House, p. 317

of liberation, always in a state of steadfastness and determination; including (1) diligence to generate wholesome dharmas that have not yet arisen, (2) developing wholesome dharmas that have arisen, (3) abandoning unwholesome dharmas that have arisen, (4) not allowing unwholesome dharmas that have not yet arisen to arise. Right **mindfulness**: awareness, observing what is happening, focusing on the present moment, right now, not letting the mind drift to the past or the future. Right **concentration** : is a state that arises through concentration and attention. In Buddhism, there are four levels: first meditation, second meditation, third meditation, and fourth meditation.

The Noble Eightfold Path has a positive impact on environmental protection, forming for Buddhists as well as those who understand Buddhism correct thinking and correct action. Changing perspectives, thoughts, actions, efforts, awakening, meditation to reach the best state, perfecting the human self. From there, people have a relationship with the natural environment, no matter what they do or say, they take Buddhism as a compass. Following the Noble Eightfold Path will help people be aware of using resources economically, limit wasteful consumption, not pollute the environment, think correctly about the relationship between humans and the environment, understand the importance of environmental protection to maintain a good life for the present and future generations. Changing consciousness helps people live in harmony with nature, appreciate the natural environment, thereby transforming actions, living in harmony, loving, knowing how to give and preserve, not seeing temporary benefits for personal gain. The Noble Eightfold Path is also considered the path of Discipline, Concentration and Wisdom, one of the practical paths of practice, leading to a mindful lifestyle, from which people learn and practice, promoting the inherent power of consciousness in each person, turning it into beneficial actions for society, especially environmental issues.

In addition to the above teachings, there are some Buddhist teachings such as: *Four Noble Truths, Cause and Effect, Six Paramitas...* which are related to the issue of environmental protection. Applying these teachings also guides Buddhists and those who study Buddhism to change their lifestyle, contributing to building a green, clean, and sustainable environment for humans and living beings.

3. Current status of environmental protection of Vietnamese Buddhism in the current period

3.1. Environmental situation in Vietnam

In recent years, the natural environment in Vietnam is facing many challenges, “environmental pollution” has become a concern of sectors, organizations and people living in polluted areas as well as our people in general. Pollution of soil, water, air... has become common, negatively affecting health and life. Through practical research by interviewing environmental specialists and studying the "National Environmental Status Report" over the years of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, we have come to the following conclusions:

The environment in Vietnam is facing many challenges: water and air pollution in some big cities is at an alarming level; illegal deforestation and exploitation are still happening, causing storms, floods, natural disasters and habitat degradation for many species; diseases caused by water and air pollution are high in the

population. Rising sea levels, saltwater intrusion, and drought are increasing. Activities that put pressure on the environment in Vietnam include: economic growth (reducing the proportion of agriculture, forestry and fishery; increasing the proportion of industry, construction and services); urbanization; transportation activities; increase in industrial production activities; agricultural activities, etc.

According to the report of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, "the energy consumption of our country's industry in 2021 is 58% of the total number of industries, the increase in energy demand in the industrial sector means an increase in polluting waste into the environment. In addition, other industries such as construction and services are still growing and developing. The total population of Vietnam is about 98.5 million people, of which the urban population accounts for about 37.1%." ¹⁰The increase in population means an increase in household waste, open landfills, soil and water pollution, increased demand for products leading to increased production demand;

The waste management system still has many limitations, and environmental protection awareness is still low. According to the investigation and analysis of domestic wastewater samples in canals, fields and outlets of the three river basins of the Red River, Duong River and Ca Lo River, it shows that: "the content of organic substances and suspended substances exceeds the permissible standards, directly affecting the environment, causing harm to the aquatic environment, causing clogged drains, sedimentation of canals, and affecting aquatic resources."¹¹. Polluted environment not only affects the quality of life but also affects the health of people. The population is large but the allocation of resources to manage quality and protect the environment has not met social and practical requirements.

3.2. Ideological orientation activities for Buddhists and the community on environmental protection issues

The viewpoint of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha is that religion and nation are not at all opposed to each other. A true Buddhist must be a good citizen, living a “good life, good religion”. The message of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha on Environmental Protection and Climate Change Response in 2015 stated: “Scientists all affirm that the great advances of science and technology cannot stop the rapid progress of climate change, because only human consciousness can decide on environmental protection and climate change response. More than ever, environmental protection solutions are sought in the teachings of Buddhism and religions as the most effective source of energy possible to protect, preserve, and restore the natural beauty of Mother Earth, to protect our beloved planet.”¹²

Protecting the natural environment is identified as an important content in the social activities of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha. The Resolution of the 8th National Congress of Buddhist Delegates, term 2017-2022, marked a qualitative change in thinking on the issue of Environmental Protection of Vietnamese

¹⁰Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (2022), National State of the Environment Report, https://pcd.monre.gov.vn/Data/files/2023/03/20230217_Bao%20ca%20HTMT%20quoc%20gia%20nam%202021.pdf

¹¹ Dong Anh District Department of Natural Resources and Environment (2017), summary report on environmental protection work, pp. 18, 19

¹²<https://ghpgvn.vn/thong-diep-cua-Giao-hoi-phat-Giao-viet-nam-ve-bao-ve-moi-truong/>

Buddhism. Article 13 of the resolution clearly states: "The Congress calls on Vietnamese monks, nuns and Buddhists to actively participate in the patriotic emulation movement, respond to the action program to protect the environment, respond to climate change and promote traffic culture ." ¹³

Article 8 of the 2019 Ha Nam Declaration on the occasion of the 16th United Nations Day of Vesak clearly states: The Buddhist approach to responsible consumption and sustainable development with the following contents: "Promote the story of the Buddha's life as a person who spent most of his life living in harmony with nature as an indispensable need, rather than connecting with nature to exploit it for greed, thereby promoting the protection of nature and limiting the unconscious exploitation of the resources . Applying the spirit of Buddhism, emphasizing the principle of dependent origination - all things depend on each other to survive to ensure the balance of the natural ecosystem and the harmony between humans and the natural world. Encourage energy conversion, replacing energy sources that emit large amounts of pollution or deplete natural resources with clean and safe energy. Cooperate with businesses to develop safe alternative food sources that do not depend on animal protein."¹⁴

In addition, the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha also issued many official dispatches calling on people to respond to the policies of the Party and State, the calls of departments, organizations, and leaders of all levels of government in responding to the environmental protection movement, such as: *Official dispatch No. 248/CV-HDTS* sent to the Executive Committee of the Buddhist Sangha of provinces and cities on responding to the call of the Prime Minister and the movement of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment on "fighting plastic waste"; *Official dispatch No. 031/CV-HDTS* dated February 12, 2018 on enhancing the beauty of traditional national culture at Buddhist places of worship sent to the Standing Committee of the Executive Committee of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha of provinces and centrally run cities, instructing Buddhists not to burn votive paper at Buddhist places of worship; *Official dispatch No. 087/CV-HDTS* dated March 5, 2020 on responding to the "Anti-plastic waste" movement and protecting the environment; *Official dispatch No. 223/CV-HDTS* dated June 15, 2021 on organizing environmental protection activities at Buddhist places of worship....

Thus, the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha not only implements this through encouraging monks and nuns to strictly observe the precepts established by the Buddha, but also practices the spirit of engaging in the world, concretizing thoughts and doctrines into practical documents to determine the direction and ideology for Buddhist monks and nuns, continuing the tradition of Buddhism accompanying the nation, especially in the field of environment.

3.3. Practical activities of Vietnamese Buddhism in environmental protection work

Buddhism is one of the first religions sign the "coordination program on environmental protection and climate change response between religions and the Central Committee of the Vietnam Fatherland Front" for the period 2015-2019. By the second phase:

¹³<https://ghpgvn.vn/ngghi-quyet-dai-hoi-dai-bieu-phan-quoc-ghpgvn-lan-thu-viii-nhiem-ky-2017-2022/>

¹⁴Ho Chi Minh City Police Newspaper, https://congan.com.vn/tin-chinh/tuyen-bo-chung-ha-nam-dai-le-phan-dan-lhq-vesak-2019_74032.html

2019-2022, 43 organizations from 16 religions have participated in this coordination program.

The signing between the Central Committee of the Vietnam Fatherland Front and religions, including Buddhism, has profound significance, aiming to strengthen the great national unity bloc, leading to unified action, effectively implementing the goal of "protecting the environment", concretizing the responsibility of religion in general and Buddhism in particular to the country in the work of protecting the environment. After many years of implementation, Buddhism has introduced many models aimed at protecting the environment and responding to climate change. In pagodas, teachings such as dependent origination, compassion, the Noble Eightfold Path, cause and effect, the six perfections, etc. are widely disseminated among the people. Most pagodas hang signs and banners related to keeping precepts, prohibiting killing, aiming at protecting the environment, mobilizing people to come to pagodas not to kill, harm animals, not to eat meat, not to hunt or buy products from rare animals, replacing animal foods with vegetarian mushroom floss and vegetarian foods to aim for a green lifestyle, limiting animal breeding and trading that pollutes the environment.

In the North, in the provinces and cities, pagodas actively participate in environmental protection work, such as Dau Pagoda (Hung Yen), Phu Tho Pagoda (Phu Tho); Tran Quoc Pagoda, Bao An Pagoda, Quan Su Pagoda, Phuc Khanh Pagoda... are known for participating in environmental protection activities such as planting trees and educating people about environmental protection.

Phap Van Pagoda in Hanoi has made significant contributions: establishing the Phap Van Xanh Executive Board with 20 core members and 4 advisory members who are professors and experts working for the community; establishing a green environment club with the participation of youth union members and students from universities in Hanoi; launching the program "million signatures, million actions for the environment"; organizing a discussion on "religion with a peaceful life and a beautiful environment"... organizing environmental protection campaigns in residential areas of Hoang Liet ward with the criteria of green - clean - beautiful from home to the street, contributing to improving the quality of life of the people. In particular, in November 2016, Phap Van Pagoda organized a launching ceremony "joining hands to protect the environment, responding to climate change", the theme "being kind to the environment through environmental sanitation activities in the Linh Dam lake area, Hoang Liet ward, Hoang Mai district, Hanoi. This is the second green, clean campaign activity in the plan of Phap Van Pagoda to build a model Buddhist site in the North on environmental protection and climate change response."¹⁵

Dien Phuc Pagoda, Thai Binh village, Dong Anh, Hanoi is one of the typical pagodas in environmental protection work. Venerable Thich Minh Thinh, the abbot of the pagoda, is one of the typical examples of monks and nuns in the North who carry out the role of propaganda about civilized and progressive funerals to protect the environment in 20 communes and 1 town (Dong Anh district). From the propaganda, people changed their awareness of environmental protection. In some communes such as Duc Tu commune, Lien Ha commune... Dong Anh district, Hanoi, initially the rate of people cremating was only about 50 percent, but after

¹⁵Huong Lan, "Phap Van Pagoda: a model of Buddhism in environmental protection and climate change response", Environment Magazine, No. 9, 2019.

listening to lectures about the role of cremation in environmental protection and answering some of the people's spiritual concerns, the cremation rate increased to more than 90 percent.

In the Central region, pagodas and monasteries such as Tu Dam Pagoda (Hue) built ecological lakes, Ba Na Pagoda (Da Nang), Linh Ung Pagoda (Da Nang)... propagated to tourists about environmental protection, tree planting, garbage collection, building ecological lakes, Khai Doan Pagoda (Quang Nam)... planted trees, cleaned the pagoda area, and propagated to people about river protection. Pagodas also recognized and aimed to limit the bad practice of burning votive paper, offering real items instead of votive paper on major holidays such as "Xa Toi Vong Nhan"; the procession of bringing souls to the pagoda...

In the Southern provinces, some pagodas in the provinces and cities have implemented many models such as: planting trees, composting organic waste, using solar lighting systems, building a model of a restaurant selling vegetarian food and paper bags, biodegradable bags, planting trees, cleaning grass and garbage a few times a month... Some pagodas can be mentioned such as: Vinh Trang Pagoda (Can Tho), Giac Lam Pagoda (Ho Chi Minh), Buu Long Pagoda (Bien Hoa), Linh Thu Pagoda (Ho Chi Minh)... are among many pagodas in the South that do a good job of protecting the environment.

Pagodas and monasteries also encourage Buddhists to use environmentally friendly products instead of plastic bags, classify plastic and nylon waste; some pagodas set up funds from collecting recyclable waste for charity .

"In the Khmer Theravada pagodas in Can Tho, there is also a culture of close behavior towards animals through decorative images and sculptures of animals, sometimes deified. The most common animal images decorated in the pagoda are snakes, dragons, birds, tigers, elephants, lions, phoenixes, unicorns, carps... The culture of friendly and harmonious behavior towards animals is also shown through the tolerance and protection of monks towards the animals that come to reside and live in the pagoda."¹⁶

During sermons, the Abbots often guide Buddhists in classifying waste, building a clean and beautiful environment and residence, participating in activities and movements to plant trees, protect the environment, and compost organic waste launched by villages, neighborhoods, hamlets, and groups.

In the Central Highlands , Buddhist teachings are still held regularly. However, in the face of the current environmental issues that the State and the Church are concerned about, pagodas also incorporate environmental issues into their teachings so that Buddhists can understand their own responsibilities towards the natural environment, encourage their relatives to fulfill their responsibilities, and spread the spirit of "living green, living well, and practicing religion" in the most effective and practical way. "In a survey of 396 Buddhist followers in 5 provinces of the Central Highlands conducted by the Institute of Religious Studies in 2014, 363 respondents answered that they had listened to teachings on the environment in the teachings, accounting for 91.7% of the respondents. The number of respondents who had not listened was

¹⁶ Le Thuy An (2023), Responding to the natural environment in Khmer Theravada Buddhist temples in Religion and the Issue of Protecting the Ecological Environment, Hong Duc Publishing House

33 people, accounting for 8.3% of the respondents, clearly showing this."¹⁷

Buddhism calls on every Buddhist to not only change their consciousness, but also to take practical actions to protect the environment. Each person, through practical actions, commits to protecting the environment sustainably, together making the surrounding environment increasingly greener, cleaner, and more beautiful... In addition, there are a number of activities that can be mentioned such as: establishing an environmental protection fund, organizing seminars and Buddhist competitions related to Buddhist teachings and environmental protection, having a mechanism to monitor and report on environmental protection activities of Buddhist monks and nuns, applying technology in spreading the Buddhist spirit towards environmental protection such as organizing online competitions: "Buddhism and the environment" painting contest, debate, multiple choice... to spread the Buddhist spirit of protecting nature.

With a large number of followers, Buddhism in Vietnam has made positive contributions to environmental protection, aiming at strategic and sustainable actions, changing the "consciousness" of the community, promoting the spirit of "engaging in the world" of Buddhism in the most effective way. Environmental protection is carried out in many provinces and cities across the country, promoting the spirit of "religion connected with life" of Buddhism.

4. Some issues raised

Not yet synchronous and not yet systematic: The dissemination of teachings on environmental protection in Buddhism is still not systematic, not yet implemented synchronously in the scope of provinces and cities, and there is no specific plan or program of activities, it is voluntary and spontaneous, so the implementation efficiency is not high. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a specific plan and solution for environmental protection, considering it the task of the Pagodas ... to join hands with the community. Discuss and agree on suitable solutions, with the highest feasibility and dissemination.

Difficulties in mobilizing resources : Buddhist activities are quite rich and diverse, divided into many fields, so the allocation of specialized human resources in the field of environmental protection propaganda and advocacy is still limited. There is a lack of human resources for monks, nuns, and Buddhists who are professionally trained in environmental issues. From this, it can be seen that the allocation of human resources needs to be considered, at the same time, the leadership departments and authorities at all levels need to coordinate with the Church to open classes and courses related to environmental protection, providing methods and ways for "religions" to join hands in the environmental field in the most effective way.

Unsustainable activities: Most of the environmental protection activities of Buddhism are still spontaneous, lacking strategies and long-term plans, lacking sustainability, and have not created habits and lifestyles for Buddhists as well as the community. The number of Dharma lectures related to the environment compared to some other issues is still small, and not repeated many times. The requirement is to increase the number of Dharma lectures related to

¹⁷See Institute of Religious Studies (2014), "Report on the final results of the investigation data processing" of the topic Religious Issues in Sustainable Development of the Central Highlands, document of the Institute of Religious Studies

the environment, and at the same time, there must be a strategy so that "environmental protection" becomes a conscious lifestyle for every Buddhist as well as for a long time, not just a "prominent" issue for a period of time;

Media crisis: The development of media information, Buddhism is facing negative phenomena, causing people to lose faith in Buddhism in general, thereby losing faith in the Sangha and the Buddha's teachings, causing some obstacles in the dissemination of social issues, including the "environment" issue. Therefore, the Sangha needs to come up with solutions to solve negative problems in the media, approve information before posting on social networks, have common regulations and standards for the preaching of the Dharma by Lecturers, and avoid the phenomenon of only starting to solve problems when problems arise.

On the part of the leadership of all levels of government: in some localities, the coordination between the leadership, local government cables and Buddhism in the issue of Environmental Protection is not close. The authorities at all levels need to further promote the strength of the community, especially religion, in general and Buddhism in particular, have a mechanism to deploy coordination, monitor and support implementation to orient and help the implementation of Environmental Protection work of Buddhism achieve the highest efficiency.

Conclude

Buddhism is currently one of the religions with the largest number of followers in Vietnam. The presence of thousands of pagodas, monasteries, temples, hermitages, and pagodas across the country demonstrates the development and profound influence of Buddhism. Buddhism, as a social entity with a large number of Buddhist followers, is an active force contributing to building a more civilized and better society. More than 2500 years since its introduction to our country, Buddhism has not only been close to the people through its spirit of compassion and altruistic teachings, but also through concrete actions, closely linked to many areas of social life, including the environment. The life of the Buddha from birth to enlightenment and Nirvana was close to and closely connected to nature. Buddhist teachings also mention many environmental issues, such as the twelve causes and effects, the Noble Eightfold Path, and other teachings such as cause and effect, the Four Noble Truths, the Six Perfections, etc.

Buddhism has been deeply involved in the world through joining hands to protect the green-clean-beautiful environment with practical and concrete actions. Faced with the increasingly polluted environment, negatively affecting the quality and spiritual life of the people. Applying Buddhist teachings, changing people's awareness and actions in joining hands to protect the environment is a very practical work that contributes to the overall development of the country. This work is not only the effort of the Church, Buddhist monks and nuns, but also requires the cooperation and support of all levels of government from the central to local levels.

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