



The Sustainability of Buddhist Culture in the Era of Globalization: Approaches to Protecting Buddhism

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Abstract: In the era of globalization where the world is interconnected more closely than ever, Buddhist culture, which represents one of humanity's most significant spiritual and intellectual heritages, is facing numerous new challenges. This article aims to study and analyze the current situation of Buddhist culture within the context of globalization, focusing on exploring both positive and negative impacts arising from globalization trends on the existence and transmission of Buddhist traditions and practices. This study employs document analysis and synthesis of concepts from diverse secondary sources, including academic research, religious documents, and reports from international organizations. The study findings reveal that globalization affects Buddhist culture in multiple dimensions, both creating opportunities for Buddhism to spread to new areas and generating challenges in maintaining cultural purity and identity. This article proposes comprehensive approaches to protecting Buddhism covering five main dimensions: education and learning, dharma practice, community building, technology utilization, and international networking. These approaches will help create balance between adapting to the modern world and preserving the traditional values of Buddhism.

Keywords: Buddhist culture, globalization, sustainability, Buddhist protection, adaptation

1. Introduction

Buddhism has been recognized as one of the most ancient and influential religions in the development of human civilization for over 2,500 years. Since the Buddha achieved enlightenment and propagated the dharma in ancient India, Buddhism has spread to various lands throughout Asia and become a crucial foundation of culture in this region (Harvey, 2013). Buddhist culture encompasses not only religious rituals and traditions but also value systems, life philosophy, arts, architecture, literature, and ways of life that reflect Buddhist teachings. In the contemporary era, the world has entered the age of globalization, a process that interconnects the world closely through technology, trade, human mobility, and information exchange. This globalization trend has profoundly impacted cultures worldwide, including Buddhist culture (Obadia, 2011). These impacts are both positive and negative, creating the necessity to study and deeply understand in order to find appropriate solutions.

On one hand, globalization has opened opportunities for Buddhism to spread to new territories previously unfamiliar with it, creating new Buddhist communities in Europe, America, and Australia, along with the application of Buddhist principles to solve modern social problems. However, simultaneously, globalization has brought new challenges such as the invasion of consumerist culture, changes in traditional lifestyles, and the loss of cultural

identity in Buddhist communities (McMahan, 2008).

The importance of studying this topic lies not in opposing or completely accepting globalization, but in finding ways to create balance between adapting to the modern world and preserving the core values of Buddhism. This study therefore aims to analyze the current situation of Buddhist culture in the context of globalization, identify challenges and opportunities that arise, and propose sustainable approaches to protecting Buddhism that are compatible with the conditions of the 21st century world.

2. Buddhist Culture in Historical Context

Understanding the development of Buddhist culture from past to present is essential for gaining an overall perspective of the changes and adaptations of Buddhism in each era. Buddhist culture has undergone continuous transformation and development throughout the 2,500 years since its inception, with each period having distinct characteristics and different challenges. In its early period, Buddhism emerged in ancient India during the 6th-5th centuries BCE within the context of a society with caste divisions and complex religious belief systems. The Buddha presented a new approach emphasizing dharma practice and achieving enlightenment through personal effort, without attachment to rituals or caste systems (Gethin, 1998). During this initial phase, Buddhist culture was characterized by simplicity, emphasizing practice over creating elaborate architecture or artistic works.

The expansion of Buddhism began seriously during the reign of Emperor Ashoka (approximately 268-232 BCE), who supported the propagation of Buddhism to various territories both within and outside India. From that point onward, Buddhist culture began adapting and integrating with local cultures of each region, creating diverse distinctive characteristics such as Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia; Mahayana Buddhism in China, Japan, and Korea; and Tantric Buddhism in Tibet and Mongolia (Robinson & Johnson, 1997). In Southeast Asia, Buddhist culture came to play a crucial role in shaping society, politics, and arts and culture, particularly in Thailand where Buddhism became the national religion and profoundly influenced the development of national identity, education, and social value systems (Swearer, 2010). Temples and Buddhist architecture became community centers, not only for religious activities but also for education, healthcare, and social development.

However, upon entering the colonial era in the 19th and early 20th centuries, Buddhist culture faced major challenges from the arrival of Western civilization, modern education systems, technology, and new religious concepts. In many countries, Buddhist culture was pressured to adapt and find ways to coexist with external influences (Lopez, 2002). This transformation led to the emergence of Buddhist reform movements in various countries that attempted to reinterpret Buddhist teachings to align with the modern world.

In the 20th century, particularly after World War II, Buddhism began spreading to Western countries seriously. Scholars and interested individuals from Europe and America traveled to study Buddhism in Asia and brought the teachings back to propagate in their own countries. This movement led to the emergence of modern Buddhism adapted to Western cultural contexts (Prebish, 1999). Simultaneously, academic study of Buddhism was greatly developed, creating deeper and more comprehensive understanding of Buddhist teachings and history.

3. The Impact of Globalization on Buddhist Culture

The globalization trend has impacted Buddhist culture in multiple dimensions, both beneficially and challengingly. Analyzing these impacts comprehensively will help us

understand the current situation and plan appropriate responses.

3.1 Positive Impacts

Globalization has opened opportunities for Buddhism to spread to continents and countries that had never been exposed to Buddhism before. Over the past 50 years, the number of Buddhists in Western countries has increased dramatically, particularly in the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and Australia (Baumann, 2001). This growth stems from people in Western society beginning to show interest in meditation practice, teachings about impermanence, and approaches to living that emphasize peace and mindfulness.

Information technology has become an important tool in propagating Buddhism. Websites, applications, and various online media have made access to Buddhist teachings easier. People can study dharma, listen to sermons, and learn dharma practice through digital media anytime, anywhere (Campbell, 2013). The translation of the Tripitaka and Buddhist documents into various languages worldwide has been supported by modern translation and communication technology.

Furthermore, globalization has brought about exchange and learning between different Buddhist traditions that were previously separated. Monks and dharma practitioners from various countries can meet, exchange experiences, and learn from each other more frequently. International conferences, monk exchanges, and academic cooperation projects have helped strengthen understanding and unity among Buddhist communities worldwide (Queen, 2000).

The application of Buddhist principles in solving modern social problems has also received increased attention, particularly in mental healthcare, meditation therapy, and developing environmental consciousness. Buddhist teachings on loving-kindness, non-violence toward animals, and balance in living have been applied to create sustainable and environmentally friendly societies.

3.2 Negative Impacts

Although globalization brings new opportunities, it has also created several significant challenges for Buddhist culture. One major problem is the emergence of consumerist culture that conflicts with Buddhist teachings about contentment with what one has, non-greed, and non-attachment. In societies that emphasize material accumulation, competition, and material success, Buddhist teachings about letting go and sufficiency become difficult to practice (Loy, 2002).

Changes in traditional Buddhist community lifestyles represent another concerning issue. The fast pace of modern life, population migration from rural to urban areas, and changes in family structures have made the transmission of Buddhist knowledge and traditions from generation to generation more difficult (Keyes, 1999). Temples and monks, who were once community centers, are beginning to lose their roles and influence in some areas.

The problem of distortion or misinterpretation of Buddhist teachings is a significant concern. When Buddhism spreads to societies with different cultural foundations, sometimes teachings are interpreted or presented in ways inconsistent with the true essence of the teachings. The emergence of "commercial Buddhism" that emphasizes selling books, courses, and various products claiming to relate to Buddhism but not focusing on genuine dharma practice is an example of this problem (Wilson, 2014).

The loss of local languages and traditional knowledge is another significant impact. In many Buddhist communities, particularly in developing countries, English and other international languages have come to play important roles in education and communication, resulting in local languages previously used in dharma study being used less or disappearing entirely. Local knowledge and wisdom accumulated over long periods also risk being lost.

4. Challenges in Preserving Cultural Identity

Preserving Buddhist cultural identity in the era of globalization is a complex challenge requiring consideration from multiple dimensions. These challenges do not occur in isolation but are often interconnected and impact each other in the nature of complex systems.

4.1 Positive Impacts

Modern education systems that emphasize scientific and technological knowledge have made dharma study and Buddhist philosophical principles seem outdated or unnecessary. In many countries, Buddhist education in schools has decreased or been replaced by other subjects (Jackson, 2004). Many young people lack basic understanding of their own Buddhist history, teachings, and traditions.

The loss of monks' roles as intellectual leaders and community advisors is another significant issue. In the past, monks not only performed religious ceremonies but also provided education, life counseling, and community development leadership. However, in modern society, these roles have been replaced by specialists in various fields, weakening the connection between people and Buddhism (Swearer, 1995).

4.2 Practice and Lifestyle Challenges

Modern lifestyles filled with rush and pressure have made dharma practice requiring peace, contemplation, and time for mental development challenging. Many people feel they lack sufficient time for meditation, temple visits, or dharma study (Loy, 2008). Work stress and various responsibilities make maintaining peaceful and mindful mental states difficult.

Consumption and materialism widespread in globalized society have created conflicts with Buddhist teachings about contentment and non-attachment. Advertising and various media have instilled the idea that happiness comes from having and getting, which is opposite to teachings that suffering arises from attachment and greed (Sulak Sivaraksa, 1999). This conflict makes many people confused and uncertain about how to apply teachings in real life.

4.3 Tradition and Ritual Preservation Challenges

Buddhist rituals and traditions that were once important parts of community life are beginning to be viewed as outdated or incompatible with modern life. Many young people do not understand the meaning and importance of these rituals, leading to decreased participation (Gombrich & Obeyesekere, 1988). Politics and social changes in some countries have also impacted the organization and practice of Buddhist traditions.

The transmission of Pali and other ancient languages used in studying the Tripitaka and Buddhist documents is another challenge. The number of people knowledgeable in these languages continues to decrease, making study and interpretation of original texts more difficult (Hinüber, 2000). Reliance on translations into modern languages may cause subtle and profound meanings of teachings to be lost.

4.4 Technology Adaptation Challenges

Although technology is a useful tool for propagating Buddhism, it has also created new challenges. Using digital media and social media may make dharma learning superficial and lack depth (Campbell, 2013). People may easily find information about Buddhism, but actual practice and developing true understanding become more difficult.

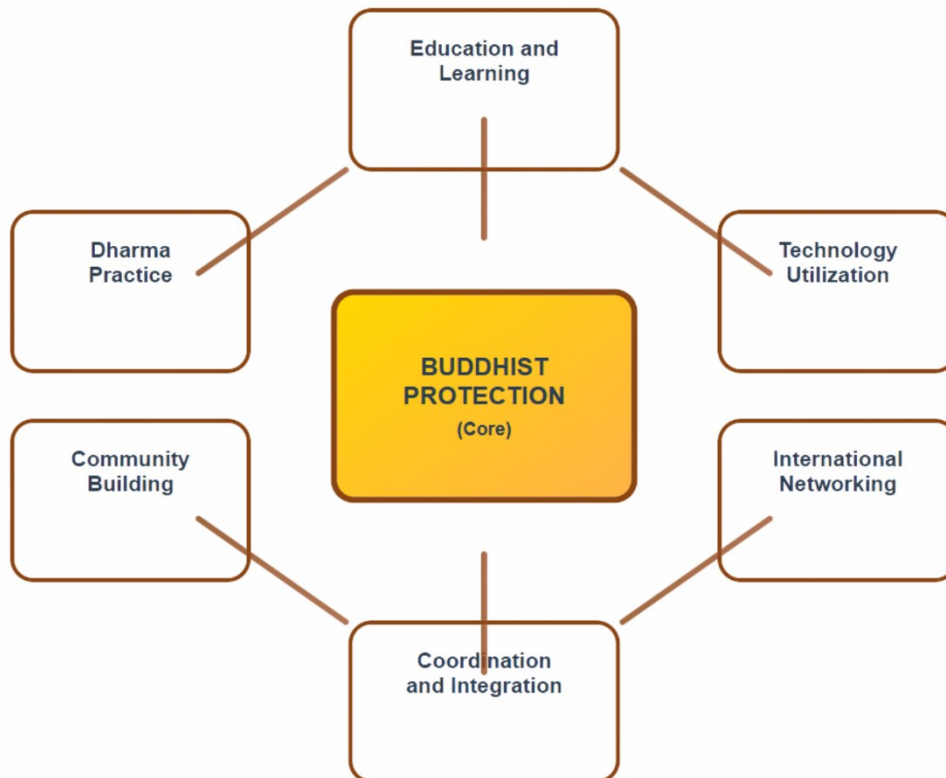
The spread of incorrect information or wrong interpretations about Buddhism through the internet is a problem requiring vigilance. Those without basic knowledge may accept incorrect information as their understanding, which may lead to practices deviating from true

teachings.

5. Approaches to Protecting Buddhism in the Era of Globalization

Protecting Buddhism in the era of globalization requires balanced approaches between preserving the core values of Buddhism and adapting to modern world conditions. From studying and analyzing works of various scholars and Buddhist leaders, approaches to protection can be synthesized into five main dimensions, as shown in Figure 1.

Five-Dimensional Model for Protecting Buddhism in the Era of Globalization



Dimension Descriptions:

- **Education and Learning:** Curriculum development, modern teaching methods, multilingual resources
- **Dharma Practice:** Meditation centers, retreat programs, practical application
- **Community Building:** Youth engagement, interfaith dialogue, local networks
- **Technology Utilization:** Digital platforms, mobile apps, virtual reality experiences
- **International Networking:** Global conferences, academic exchanges, policy coordination

Figure 1: Model for Protecting Buddhism in the Era of Globalization

Source: Synthesized from the authors (2023)

Dimension 1: Developing Education and Learning

Education is a crucial foundation for protecting Buddhism. There needs to be reform and development of Buddhist education systems to align with contemporary times while maintaining the purity of teachings. Creating modern and engaging Buddhist education curricula for youth is an urgent necessity (Prebish & Keown, 2006). These curricula should integrate traditional dharma study with practical applications in daily life.

Developing diverse and easily accessible learning materials is another important approach. Creating books, videos, applications, and educational games with Buddhist content will help make learning enjoyable and effective. Translating important Buddhist documents into various languages and creating easily understandable explanations for beginners are equally important.

Creating international exchange programs and scholarships for Buddhist studies will help strengthen understanding and cooperation among Buddhist communities worldwide. Establishing Buddhist learning centers in universities and educational institutions will help Buddhism receive academic study and reach more people.

Dimension 2: Promoting Dharma Practice

Dharma practice is the essential heart of Buddhism. Protecting Buddhism must therefore emphasize creating opportunities and supporting people to truly practice dharma. Adapting practice forms to suit modern lifestyles is necessary without destroying the essence of practice (Bodhi, 2011).

Organizing short-term dharma practice programs for working people and students will help people have opportunities to experience dharma practice even with limited time. Teaching meditation techniques and mindfulness practice in daily life will help people apply teachings in real situations. Creating dharma practice groups in communities and workplaces will help create mutual support in practice.

Developing modern and environmentally friendly dharma practice centers will help attract people to practice dharma. These places should be designed to facilitate meditation and mental development, equipped with technology that supports practice, such as meditation guidance applications and progress tracking systems.

Dimension 3: Creating and Strengthening Communities

Communities are crucial foundations for transmitting and preserving Buddhist culture. Creating strong Buddhist communities with participation from all age groups is key to protecting Buddhism (Numrich, 1996). These communities should not be limited to religious activities only but should expand to mutual assistance, collaborative learning, and working together for society.

Establishing groups for youth and children will help new generations learn and understand Buddhism from an early age. These activities should be fun and age-appropriate, such as Jataka storytelling, Buddhist-related art activities, and dharma camps for youth. Creating opportunities for youth to participate in organizing activities and decision-making in communities will help them feel ownership and connection to the community.

Creating networks between various Buddhist communities at local, national, and international levels will help strengthen mutual support. Exchanging experiences, resources, and knowledge between communities will help all communities learn and develop in better directions.

Dimension 4: Creative Technology Utilization

Modern technology can be a powerful tool for propagating and conserving Buddhism if used appropriately and creatively. Developing digital platforms for Buddhist education will help people worldwide access teachings conveniently and effectively (Campbell, 2013). Creating digital libraries that collect Buddhist documents from around the world will help preserve knowledge and make study and research easier. Using AR (Augmented Reality) and VR (Virtual Reality) technology to create new dimensional learning experiences, such as virtual visits to important Buddhist sites or creating simulations of significant events in

Buddhist history.

Developing applications for dharma practice will help people practice dharma anywhere, anytime. These apps may have various features such as meditation technique guidance, daily practice reminders, progress tracking, and connection with practitioner communities.

However, technology use must consider Buddhist principles as paramount. Technology should not become something that creates attachment or hinders mental development. Technology use should be a tool that supports dharma practice, not an end in itself.

Dimension 5: Creating International Cooperation Networks

In the era of globalization, creating cooperation networks between Buddhist organizations, educational institutions, and Buddhist communities worldwide is extremely important. These networks will help strengthen understanding, exchange experiences, and mutual support in facing shared challenges (Queen, 2000).

Establishing international organizations representing Buddhist communities worldwide will help Buddhist voices be heard on the world stage. These organizations can serve as intermediaries in coordinating various projects, exchanging resources, and supporting Buddhist communities in difficult situations.

Creating educational and research cooperation projects between universities and educational institutions will help develop knowledge and understanding about Buddhism in new aspects. Organizing international conferences and academic exchanges will help create collaborative learning and development.

Collaborating in solving world problems using Buddhist principles will help Buddhism play important roles in creating a better world. Various problems such as climate change, social inequality, and international conflicts all require solutions emphasizing loving-kindness, balance, and sustainability, which are fundamental principles of Buddhism.

6. Case Studies: Successes in Protecting Buddhism

To demonstrate the feasibility and effectiveness of approaches to protecting Buddhism in practice, studying successful examples from various countries will provide important information that can be applied.

Case Study 1: Buddhist Development in the United States

The United States represents an interesting example of Buddhism's adaptation and growth in Western society. Over the past 50 years, the number of Buddhists in America has increased from 200,000 people in 1970 to more than 1.2 million people in 2020 (Pew Research Center, 2021). This success results from appropriate adaptation and use of diverse strategies.

The first important factor is presenting Buddhism in forms that are easily understood and compatible with American lifestyles. Emphasizing practice over beliefs and rituals, particularly teaching meditation techniques for stress reduction and mental development, has received great interest. Meditation centers and dharma practice centers have been established in major cities throughout the country, designed simply and focusing on functionality.

Using technology and modern media for dharma propagation is another important factor. Books, podcasts, applications, and various websites have helped people access Buddhist teachings more easily (Wilson, 2014). Many American writers and dharma teachers have been able to interpret and present teachings in ways compatible with American culture without losing the essence of the teachings.

Case Study 2: Buddhist Culture Conservation in Japan

Although Japan is a country with a long Buddhist tradition, it faces challenges from modern society and decreased participation in religious activities among younger generations. However, temples and Buddhist organizations in Japan have developed interesting strategies to attract young people and maintain relevance to society.

One successful approach is organizing activities that blend tradition and innovation. Many temples have organized various projects such as judo and karate classes emphasizing mental development alongside physical development, music concerts and art exhibitions with Buddhist content, and markets and festivals that connect communities together (Reader, 2005).

Using technology to improve temple visitor experiences is another interesting innovation. Some temples have implemented QR codes to provide information about the history and significance of various places in temples, created applications for meditation guidance and dharma practice, and developed websites with interesting content for all age groups.

Case Study 3: Buddhist Education Reform in Thailand

In Thailand, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University has been a leader in reforming Buddhist education to be modern and aligned with societal needs. Developing new curricula that integrate Buddhist teachings with modern sciences such as psychology, management, and information technology has helped make Buddhist education more relevant to real life (Payutto, 2007).

The "IT Monk" project that trains monks in information technology knowledge is an example of successful adaptation. Monks who completed training can use technology for dharma propagation, temple administration, and community communication effectively. Creating temple websites, producing digital content, and using social media to reach new target groups have become important tools for modern monks' work.

Establishing youth development centers in temples throughout the country is another project receiving attention. These centers not only teach Buddhist principles but also organize life skills activities, non-formal education, and personality development, making youth see the relevance and benefits of coming to temples for self-development.

Lessons from Case Studies

From all three case studies, important lessons can be summarized as follows:
Importance of Adaptation: Adapting to local contexts and contemporary times is necessary, but this adaptation must be done carefully to avoid losing the essence of teachings.
Creative Technology Use: Technology can be a powerful tool for propagating and conserving Buddhism if used appropriately and with clear purposes.
Emphasis on Practice and Application: Presenting Buddhism in ways emphasizing practice and real-life application receives good responses from people in modern times.
Importance of Education and Personnel Development: Developing teachers and leaders with knowledge in both teachings and modern skills is key to success.

7. Policy and Practice Recommendations

From analysis and studying various examples, policy and practice recommendations for protecting Buddhism in the era of globalization can be presented, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Policy Recommendations for Protecting Buddhism

Level	Recommendations	Primary Responsibility	Success Indicators
Government Level	Support Buddhist education in national	Ministry of Education	Number of schools providing Buddhist

	education system		education
	Allocate budget for Buddhist cultural heritage conservation	Ministry of Culture	Number of conservation projects supported
Educational Institution Level	Develop modern Buddhist curricula	Universities and educational institutions	Number of new curricula developed
	Create interdisciplinary Buddhist research centers	Universities and research institutes	Number of published research works
Community Level	Establish Buddhist learning centers in communities	Temples and community organizations	Number of activity participants
	Create cooperation networks between temples	Monks and community leaders	Number of joint projects

7.1 Policy-Level Recommendations

Government Support: The government should have clear policies supporting the protection and propagation of Buddhism without conflicting with the principle of separating religion from politics. Allocating budgets for conserving Buddhist archaeological sites, supporting research and education, and promoting Buddhist cultural tourism are appropriate approaches (Ishii, 2003).

Education Reform: The national education system should integrate Buddhist education into curricula, emphasizing teaching values and ethics over rituals. Developing modern and interesting teaching materials and training teachers to have appropriate knowledge and skills.

Creating Coordination Mechanisms: There should be organizations or mechanisms coordinating between various agencies involved in protecting Buddhism, both nationally and internationally, to ensure consistent and efficient operations.

7.1 Practice-Level Recommendations

Personnel Development: Training monks and religious leaders to have modern knowledge and skills is urgently necessary. Training programs should cover communication skills, technology use, management, and understanding modern social problems (Payutto, 2007).

Content and Media Development: Creating diverse, modern, and easily accessible Buddhist educational content is important. There should be development of books, videos, applications, educational games, and other online media appropriate for different target groups.

Creating Networks and Cooperation: Creating cooperation networks between temples, communities, organizations, and educational institutions will help strengthen and increase work effectiveness. Exchanging resources, experiences, and knowledge will benefit all parties.

7.1 Monitoring and Evaluation Approaches

Monitoring and evaluating the success of protecting Buddhism is important to enable appropriate improvement and development of operational approaches. Indicators to consider include:

Quantitative Indicators: Number of Buddhist activity participants, number of courses

and projects organized, number of media and content produced, number of participating organizations and networks, and amount of budget used.

Qualitative Indicators: Level of understanding and knowledge about Buddhism among the public, level of applying teachings in real life, satisfaction of activity participants, quality of content and learning media, and impact on communities and society.

Opinion Surveys: Conducting regular surveys of public opinions and attitudes toward Buddhism will help understand changes and long-term trends.

8. Conclusion

Buddhist culture in the era of globalization is at an important turning point. The challenges that arise require careful and creative responses, but simultaneously, emerging opportunities open doors to exciting new possibilities. Protecting Buddhism in this era does not mean isolating oneself from change but means learning to dance to the rhythm of the modern world while maintaining the spirit and core values of Buddhism. Buddhist teachings about impermanence, change, and adaptation are highly relevant to current situations. The Buddha himself adapted teaching methods to suit different audiences and situations. Learning from this example will help Buddhist communities find ways to create balance between preserving traditions and adapting to the modern world wisely.

The sustainability of Buddhist culture does not depend on clinging to old forms but depends on the ability to make Buddhist teachings and values relevant and beneficial to people in all eras. True Buddhist protection means making Buddhism an effective "medicine" for the suffering and problems of the modern world while being a "light" that helps guide people toward true happiness and peace. Future operations must rely on cooperation from all parties, including monks, community leaders, scholars, policymakers, and general community members. Success in protecting Buddhism will occur when everyone works together sincerely and committedly, using Buddhist principles as guidance. Working with loving-kindness, patience, and wisdom will help us overcome various challenges and create a bright future for Buddhism and all humanity.

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