**The Philosophical Applicability of Tiantai Buddhist Doctrine on Ecological Preservation Practices**

**Abstract**

This study aims to investigate the important philosophical idea of sentientless entities (wuqing you xing无情有性) in Tiantai Buddhism and its effect on people's psychological well-being and ecological preservation awareness. This study employs qualitative methods to form a more profound understanding of Buddhist doctrine and philosophical views on environmental awareness. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven experts, including academics, senior monks, and writers specializing in Tiantai Buddhism and environmental philosophy in Guangzhou, China. This study used phenomenological techniques for its data analysis. Understanding these variations provides insight into the complexities of Buddhist doctrine and philosophy in multicultural societies. This study has found that Buddhist doctrine and philosophy play an important role as a source of people's views and actions on environmental preservation initiatives and environmental volunteers. Hence, this result provides an insight to the government and organization about how to maintain environmental issues, which are rapidly growing globally. This study is one of the few that highlights the Chinese people's Buddhist views. Hence, the government needs to improve the alignment between religion and people's awareness and long-term strategy to combat climate change.

**Keywords**: Tiantai Buddhism, *Wuqing Youxing*, Doctrinal Application, Ecological Preservation, China,

**1. Introduction**

Globally, environmental awareness has grown significantly due to scientific research, media coverage, and international agreements (Baiardi & Marana, 2021; Boermans et al., 2024). Initiatives such as the Paris Agreement (2015) and the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) promote global cooperation in tackling climate change and protecting natural resources. Countries are adopting renewable energy, reducing carbon emissions, and implementing conservation programs to combat deforestation and protect biodiversity (Abbas et al., 2022; Ofori-Sasu et al., 2023). The rise of digital platforms and social media has further amplified environmental consciousness, enabled real-time dissemination of climate-related issues, and mobilized global movements (Mehra et al., 2025; Shang et al., 2022). Educational institutions worldwide have integrated environmental studies into their curricula, fostering an informed generation equipped to address sustainability challenges. In addition, businesses are increasingly held accountable for their environmental impact, with many adopting corporate sustainability initiatives and adhering to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards. Innovations in clean technology, such as carbon capture and storage, biodegradable materials, and smart grids, have also contributed to global conservation efforts (Altin, 2024; Silva, 2023).

China, as the world’s most populous country and a major industrial power, has faced significant environmental challenges, including air and water pollution, deforestation, and greenhouse gas emissions (Huo & Peng, 2023; Raihan & Mainul Bari, 2024). Nowadays, the Chinese government has intensified efforts to promote environmental conservation and sustainable development (Li et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2024). Public awareness campaigns, environmental education, and the rise of green technology have also played a significant role in fostering sustainable practices. Companies are increasingly adopting eco-friendly business models, and consumers are more conscious of their environmental footprint. The rapid pace of industrialization and urbanization also continues to strain natural resources, leading to issues such as soil degradation and water scarcity (Liu & Waqas, 2024). In addition, enforcing environmental policies at all levels of government need more effort, as local economic interests sometimes conflict with national sustainability goals.

One of the primary tensions in China's environmental policy is the need to balance continued economic development with environmental sustainability (Chen et al., 2023; Feng et al., 2024). China's rapid industrialization has contributed to environmental degradation on an unprecedented scale, and while the government has made considerable progress in reversing some of this damage, the pressure to sustain economic growth often leads to compromises in environmental policy enforcement (Li, 2022; Winter et al., 2021). In policy implementation, doctrine is instrumental in mobilizing government agencies, industries, and communities. The government enforces strict environmental laws and regulations by integrating them into its broader ideological framework, ensuring compliance at all levels (Hernández Guzmán et al., 2023; Situ et al., 2021; Walter, 2024). In addition, the doctrine promotes green technological innovation, encouraging industries to adopt sustainable practices through incentives and state support. Public awareness campaigns and education initiatives also reflect doctrinal influence, fostering a collective sense of responsibility for environmental protection.

Despite the philosophical richness these traditions offer, especially in terms of promoting harmony between humans and nature, their practical applications in contemporary ecological preservation remain underexplored (Geng & Lo, 2023; Ma & Wang, 2024; Zhao et al., 2022). China continues to advance its commitment to ecological sustainability while navigating the complexities of economic growth and environmental stewardship towards conservation value. The concept of “Ecological Civilization,” a guiding doctrine promoted by the Chinese government, integrates sustainability into economic and social development. This doctrine emphasizes harmony between humanity and nature, serving as the foundation for environmental regulations and policy enforcement, there remains a gap in integrating deeper ethical and philosophical frameworks into these efforts. However, existing research primarily focuses on the technical, economic, and policy dimensions of China’s ecological preservation strategies, such as renewable energy development, biodiversity conservation, and reforestation initiatives (Kuo et al., 2017; Song et al., 2022).

Less attention has been given to the ethical underpinnings of these policies, particularly the influence of indigenous philosophies such as Confucianism, Daoism, and Sinicized Buddhism. The philosophical and practical consequences of implementing this doctrine in relation to individuals' ecological awareness, particularly as Tiantai Buddhism doctrine need to confirm to promote people environmental awareness. To align with the research objectives, the following research questions are formulated to guide the investigation into the ethical contributions of Tiantai Buddhism and their potential application in China’s ecological preservation practices. These questions aim to explore both the theoretical foundations and practical outcomes of integrating Tiantai principles into contemporary environmental strategies What is the interpretation of the philosophical significance of the doctrine of sentientless beings in Tiantai Buddhism regarding environmental conservation in China? In what ways can the doctrine be utilized in the formulation and implementation of environmental conservation policies and practices in China? What are the philosophical and practical consequences of implementing this doctrine in relation to individuals' ecological awareness?

**2. Literature Review**

2.1. Tiantai Buddhisme and Buddha-Nature Doctrine

Tiantai Buddhism is one of the primary streams in the Mahayana Buddhism tradition that is undergoing accelerated development in China. This flow emphasizes a systematic approach to Buddhist teachings, with the primary emphasis on the silk lotus as a sacred text that serves as the cornerstone of its doctrines (Acharya et al., 2021; Altin, 2024). A basic philosophical idea in the Buddhism of the Ainch is the Buddhist-Nature theory. It holds that everyone, inert and alive, can reach enlightenment. This idea goes beyond the traditional understanding that limits the Buddha-Nature to the living entities, therefore providing a conceptual framework for a whole awareness of human relations and environment. The Buddhist-Nature doctrine in Tiantai Buddhism is founded on the principle of Threefold Truths (three truths), which comprise Emptiness, Provisional Existence (temporary existence), and the Middle Way. Tiana teaches that all entities, including inert creatures such as mountains, water, and trees, possess an inherent natural enlightenment through this doctrine (Agarwal & Bhattacharjee, 2024; Borchert, 2023). Tiantai Buddhism underline that by broadening the definition of Senticent Beings to include Senticentless Bears, natural materials have intrinsic values in addition to instrumental values (Cairns et al., 2023; Feng et al., 2024). From this point of view, nature is seen as a spiritual being with natural rights and values rather than only a target of human exploitation. The concept of interdependence (interrelatedness) that is frequently encountered in the Mahayana tradition is pertinent to the philosophy of Tiantai Buddhism. Tiantai underscores the profound interdependence of humans and nature, as the devastation of nature will directly impact human suffering (Geng & Lp, 2023; Jiang et al., 2019). Thus, the Buddhist-Nature doctrine within the Tiantai tradition may provide a philosophical basis for addressing the ecological crisis. This notion signifies a transformative change from the conventional perspective of human supremacy over the natural world to a more integrated approach that recognizes the spiritual essence inherent in all components of the universe.

2.2. Theory of environmental ethics

Bourban (2023) and Furness (2021) emphasizes that humans are not the rulers of nature, but rather a crucial component of a broader biotic community. Consequently, environmental ethics necessitates acknowledging that each component of nature, whether it is a living organism or not, possesses inherent values that must be honored (Epstein, 2022). This theory underscores the significance of ecological solidarity, which entails the responsibility of humans to not only safeguard but also to restore ecosystems that have been harmed by human activity. This concept emphasizes the inseparability of human existence from the existence of nature. Deep Ecology challenges traditional anthropocentric perspectives by advocating for an ecocentric perspective that assigns intrinsic value to all natural entities, regardless of their utility. In this context, it is expected that humans will develop a more profound ecological awareness and take actions that consider the equilibrium of all ecosystems, rather than exclusively concentrating on their immediate interests (Hernández Guzmán et al., 2023; Moore et al., 2022).

The theory of environmental ethics reflects a method anchored in Environmental Justice. This approach emphasizes the link between social inequality and environmental damage and implies that underprivileged people are usually the ones who suffer most from environmental deterioration (Jiang et al., 2019; Ma & Wang, 2024). This point of view holds that human responsibility for the environment consists in the preservation of natural resources as well as in the creation of inclusive and socially fair environmental policy (Mehra et al., 2025; Ofori-Sasu et al., 2023). Environmental ethics addresses both ecological and societal aspects, thus it is relevant for present world concerns such climate change and biodiversity loss (Raihan & Mainul Bari, 2024). Furthermore, environmental ethics theory is expanding to include spirituality-based perspectives. Buddhism makes a substantial contribution to the discussion of environmental ethics by emphasizing the interdependence between humans and nature. Buddhism emphasizes the principle of ahimsa, which promotes nonviolence toward all forms of life, including natural elements (Shang et al., 2022). The integration of the spiritual dimension into environmental ethics fosters an understanding of the moral responsibilities that individuals have to nature and the integration of these responsibilities into their daily routines.

2.3. The practice of ecological preservation in China

In China, ecological preservation is based on a comprehensive approach that encompasses philosophical values, cultural traditions, and government policies. Since its inclusion in the state constitution in 2012, the concept of ecological civilization has served as a fundamental theoretical framework that has been central to environmental policies in China (Shang et al., 2022; Situ et al., 2021). This idea underlines the need of striking a balance between social cohesiveness, environmental sustainability, and economic development to foster a more lasting link between people and nature (Song et al., 2022; Vu et al., 2021). Ecological civilization also incorporates traditional Chinese viewpoints including Taoism, which stresses the harmony between people and nature, and which supports resource efficiency, biodiversity preservation, and low-carbon development (Zhang & Shi, 2024). This approach promotes policies that address the needs of the present generation while safeguarding the availability of natural resources for future generations. China uses this idea under national projects like Grain-For- Green (GFG), which seeks to convert marginal agricultural land into forests or grasslands to lower soil erosion and boost carbon absorption capacity (Wang & Tan, 2024; Yang et al., 2024). A shining illustration of the useful use of sustainable development theory in the framework of environmental preservation is this initiative.

From a philosophical approach, traditional Confucian ideas stressing human moral responsibilities to both society and environment affect methods of ecological preservation in China. Ren (humanity) and li (order) from Confucian teachings inspire the ethical framework including environmental concerns into decision-making processes. Modern Confucianism has been developed to support environmental ethics by emphasizing the interdependence between humans and nature (Silva, 2023; Swearer, 2006). These values support ecological preservation initiatives by establishing a moral basis for safeguarding nature as a fundamental aspect of human existence. On the other hand, the effort of ecological preservation in China is much influenced by technology-driven scientific approaches including the ideas of Green Technology and Smart Cities. Emerging as basic elements of the nation's ecological preservation efforts are the application of sustainable technology inside industrial activities, the progress of renewable energy sources, and waste management system optimization. For example, initiatives to create low-carbon urban settings such as Shenzhen have shown how well technical developments may reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve resource economy (Moore et al., 2022; Sen, 2002). This approach not only provides sensible solutions for environmental problems but also strengthens China's position as leader in the field of sustainable technological innovation.

2.4. Buddhism and Ecological Holistic Models

The framework that combines Buddhism with ecology emphasizes the close relationship between the spiritual principles of Buddhism and the need of environmental protection (Cairns et al., 2024). Within Buddhism, the idea of nature as a whole is firmly anchored in the pratītyasamutpāda, sometimes known as "interdependent causes". This doctrine asserts that all phenomena in the universe are interconnected, and that the consequences of harming a single element can affect the entire ecosystem (Wang & Tan, 2024). This methodology offers a comprehensive perspective on ecology, recognizing humans as not only natural custodians but also as essential elements of a more extensive web of existence (Winter et al., 2021). As a result, this instruction promotes the development of conscientious and synergistic interactions with the natural world. In interpersonal contacts, relationships with other living entities, and interaction with natural elements, the idea of non-violence or ahimsa plays a major role. Every facet of Buddhism includes important principles that go beyond simple utilitarian benefit. This principle is consistent with the ethocentric ethical perspective, which esteems all forms of life as essential elements of a sacred cosmos (Simonds, 2023). Additionally, the Buddhist doctrine on Buddha-Nature encompasses all entities, including inanimate beings like mountains, rivers, and forests, in order to expand the importance of spirituality. In the Mahayana tradition, which encompasses Tiantai Buddhism, there is a conviction that all entities, whether sentient or otherwise, have the innate capacity to achieve enlightenment. This belief encourages a deep love for nature and helps us understand that taking care of the environment is an important part of our spiritual journey (Mehra et al., 2025; Sen, 2002). This view offers a clear framework that highlights the development of human understanding, which is important for living sustainably, along with efforts aimed at protecting the environment.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

The initial phase is designed to address inquiries regarding the philosophical significance of the Sentigentless Benings doctrine in the context of environmental preservation in China. The analysis of the thought of Tiantai Buddhism, specifically Jingxi Zhanran's Thoughts, which interpreted this doctrine, is a method of qualitative research. Content analysis was used to study the data and find the main ideas linking this theory to environmental problems. The second stage is dedicated to the use of the Sentientless Being doctrine in the policies and practices of environmental preservation in China. Data gathered via polls including environmental activists, legislators, and religious groups engaged in environmental protection.

3.2. Participants

This investigation involves participants from a variety of contexts for each research stage, which is customized to serve the research objectives. This stage entails conducting in-depth interviews with seven experts, including academics, senior monks, and writers specializing in Tiantai Buddhism and environmental philosophy. Respondents were selected through the Purposive Sampling method, informed by their expertise in the doctrine of Buddhism of Tied and the philosophical understanding of human relations with nature. This phase includes semi-structured interviews with seven participants from local communities, monks engaged in environmental preservation initiatives, and environmental volunteers. Participants were selected from the region that served as the focus of case studies, specifically areas significantly influenced by the teachings of Tiantai Buddhism in ecological preservation comprises of 2 academics, 3 senior monks, and 2 environmental practitioners.

3.3. Data collection

Data were collected via in-depth interviews employing semi-structured guidelines. Interviews are conducted online via the Zoom platform, contingent upon the availability of respondents. The interview utilized a semi-structured guide featuring questions aimed at exploring the doctrine of "Sentientless Beings with Buddha-Nature" in Tiantai Buddhism and its connection to environmental preservation. The interviews were conducted between March and April 2024, with each session lasting 60 to 90 minutes. In the stage 2, data were collected via semi-structured interviews, allowing for flexibility in exploring respondents' direct experiences in environmental preservation influenced by the teachings of Tiantai Buddhism. Interviews were carried out utilizing a semi-structured interview guide that included inquiries regarding the implementation of religious-based environmental practices, associated challenges, and their effects on ecological awareness. The interviews were conducted from August to October 2024, each lasting 45 to 60 minutes, and took place directly at the study site.

**3.4. Research Instrument**

3.4.1. Interview Protocol 1

Three experts including a philosophy professor with Tiantai Buddhist expertise—reviewed the interview guide. Environmental ethics and ecology specialist, a practitioner of qualitative research. Expert evaluation of the relevance, clarity, and depth of the questions Validation used a Likert scale assessment form ranging 1–5; 1 representing not relevant and 5 denoting very significant. The feedback offered consisted of the rephrasing of the queries and the inclusion of additional exploratory elements that were pertinent to the ecological conservation context. Experts provided feedback on the revision of questions to prevent ambiguity, including the use of excessively technical philosophical terms. Additionally, an additional question was incorporated regarding collaboration with non-religious communities. Subsequently, five respondents participated in a trial interview. The Cohen's Kappa reliability coefficient for each item was 0.80–0.91, with an average of 0.86 (very excellent category), as indicated by the trial analysis results.

**Table 1.** Cohen’s Kappa reliability coefficient for each item of Interview Protocol 1

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| No | Interview question | Cohen’s Kappa |
| 1 | How do you explain the concept of " sentientless beings with Buddha-nature” in Tiantai Buddhism? | 0.90 |
| 2 | How do you understand the doctrine of "Sentientless Beings with Buddha-Nature" in Tiantai Buddhism?  What source do you use? | 0.81 |
| 3 | What is the relevance of the doctrine to human relations and nature? | 0.86 |
| 4 | How does this doctrine affect the view of the Tiantai Buddhism on ecology? | 0.91 |
| 5 | Is there a special interpretation of this doctrine applied in China? | 0.83 |
| 6 | How is this concept integrated in the teachings of Buddhist environmental ethics? | 0.80 |
| 7 | How does this doctrine affect daily religious practices related to environmental preservation? | 0.85 |
| 8 | In your opinion, is there a gap between theory and practice in the application of this doctrine? | 0.86 |

Interview protocol 1 is employed to investigate the philosophical interpretation of the doctrine of "Sentientless beings with Buddha-Nature" in Tiantai Buddhism and its significance in the context of environmental preservation. This interview guide comprises eight question items that address the philosophical significance of the Sentientless beings’ doctrine, its relevance to the preservation of ecology, and the ethical implications and theoretical perspectives of the doctrine.

### 3.4.2. Interview Protocol 2

The interview guide was evaluated by three experts: a professor of religious ecology, an anthropologist focused in rural communities, and an expert in qualitative research techniques. Experts were asked to assess the relevance, clarity, and applicability of the questions on a scale of 1–4, therefore determining their content validity in respect to the research objectives. The validation results indicated an average CVI value of 0.88 for the entire interview protocol, which is classified as "good." The experts provided two suggestions for improvement: (1) the questions were revised to be more specific, such as modifying the language to be more appropriate for the local community, and (2) the addition of two questions related to obstacles to environmental conservation. Subsequently, five respondents participated in a trial interview. The Cohen's Kappa reliability coefficient for each item was 0.78–0.89, with an average of 0.83 (excellent category), as indicated by the trial analysis result.

Table 2 Cohen’s Kappa reliability coefficient for each item of Interview Protocol II

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| No | Interview question | Cohen’s Kappa |
| 1 | What motivates you to participate in environmental conservation initiatives? | 0.79 |
| 2 | In what ways do the teachings of Tiantai Buddhism influence your actions in the field of ecological conservation? | 0.83 |
| 3 | How do you practice the doctrine of "sentientless beings with Buddha-nature"? | 0.82 |
| 4 | What actions have you taken to preserve the environment in your community? | 0.87 |
| 5 | In what manner do local communities react to environmental conservation initiatives that are rooted in Buddhism? | 0.79 |
| 6 | Does the doctrine of Tiantai Buddhism offer a viable approach to ecological preservation? | 0.86 |
| 7 | How is the collaboration between the monastic community, local communities, and the government in conservation activities? | 0.83 |
| 8 | What are the primary challenges encountered in the implementation of Tiantai Buddhism's value-based environmental conservation program? | 0.83 |
| 9 | What strategies did you employ to address these challenges, and do you require any further assistance to enhance the circumstances? | 0.85 |

### Interview protocol 2 is employed to investigate the direct experiences of environmental volunteers, monastery communities, and local communities in the application of Buddhist teachings to Tiantai Buddhism for the purpose of ecological preservation. The stage comprises nine questions that pertain to practical experience in environmental preservation, the impact of the Tiantai Buddhist doctrine on ecological awareness, and the obstacles and challenges associated with implementation.

**3.4 Data Analysis**

Data from in-depth interviews in stage 1 were examined to help to answer the study question of how the philosophical importance of the doctrine of sentient beings in Tiantai Buddhism is understood in the framework of environmental preservation in China. During the study process, the narratives of specialists in environmental philosophy and Buddhism underwent thematic analysis techniques to uncover main themes and patterns (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2022). The interview transcript data was entered into NVivo 12. Reading the whole transcript in the first step helped one to have a thorough awareness of the data. The data then was arranged according to themes including the idea of sentient entities, the viewpoint on human-nature harmony, and the application of the Buddha-nature principle to environmental preservation. The data from semi-structured interviews conducted during stage 2 were analyzed to address research inquiries regarding the practical and philosophical implications of the application of the doctrine of sentient beings to the ecological awareness of the community. To execute initial coding, the transcribed interview data were analyzed using NVivo 12 software. The primary themes that were identified were the impact of Tiantai Buddhism-based programs on community environmental behavior, the involvement of religious communities in conservation practices, and the changes in community environmental awareness.

**4. Result**

### Interview 1 to explore the doctrine perception of "sentientless beings with Buddha-nature". This phase 1 interview was conducted to seven respondents consisting of academics (2 people), senior monks (3 people), and environmental practitioners (2 people). This interview was conducted to complement the results of the analysis of Doctrinal Insights from Jingxi Zhanran’s Thoughts and Teaches of Zhiyi about "Sentientless Beings with Buddha-Nature", based on academic perceptions, senior monks and environmental practitioners. Table 4.1. the following detailed respondents' data for phase 1 interviews.

**Table 3.** Interview participant (Interview 1)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| No | Initial Name | Age (year) | Background |
| 1 | AY | 45 | Academics |
| 2 | BR | 38 | Academics |
| 3 | CW | 60 | Senior monk |
| 4 | XN | 55 | Senior monk |
| 5 | ZH | 62 | Senior monk |
| 6 | CY | 40 | Environmental practitioners |
| 7 | ZC | 35 | Environmental practitioners |

## 4.3. Findings

In order to address the third inquiry, the researcher interviewed seven respondents, including two members of the local community, three members of the monastic community, and two environmental volunteers. The second stage of the interview is distinguished from the first stage by the fact that it concentrates on respondents who are engaged in environmental conservation activities. This interview was conducted online using the Zoom application, with each respondent participating for 30-45 minutes. The respondent data for the second interview is presented below.

**Table 4.** Interview participant (Interview 2)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| No | Initial Name | Age (year) | Background |
| 1 | Li W | 35 | Local community |
| 2 | Wang M | 42 | Local community |
| 3 | Shi Y | 50 | Monastic community |
| 4 | SH | 48 | Monastic community |
| 5 | SG | 55 | Monastic community |
| 6 | Zhang X | 30 | Environmental volunteers |
| 7 | Liu X | 28 | Environmental volunteers |

What motivates you to participate in environmental conservation initiatives?

People are motivated to participate in environmental conservation initiatives for various reasons, including personal values, social influences, economic incentives, and a sense of responsibility toward future generations. As participants stated:

Li W: My own connection to environment and my sense of obligation to next generations inspire me.

Wang M: Along with the wish to motivate others to act, the obvious environmental damage in my neighborhood pushes me.

Shi Y: I see conservation as a means of addressing climate change; my family taught me a love of the natural world.

SH: The urgency to preserve ecosystems and the chance to work with like-minded people motivate me.

SG: My training as an environmental scientist drives me to use my knowledge and observe real outcomes.

Zhang X: Inspired by firsthand experience seeing illegal logging, I decided to work for conservation.

Liu X: I channel the health effects of pollution I have personally seen in my family into useful activity.

Tiantai Buddhism, with its emphasis on interconnectedness, compassion, and the inherent Buddha-nature of all beings, offers profound ethical and philosophical guidance for ecological conservation. Here are some key ways Tiantai teachings can influence environmental action:

Li W: Tiantai Buddhism reminds me that damaging the environment immediately affects mankind since it stresses the connectivity of all things. This instruction directs my attempts toward ecological balance and sustainable living.

Wang M: The idea of Three Thousand Realms in a Single Moment of Life motivates me to recognize how even little deeds like recycling or waste reduction add to more general ecological harmony.

Shi Y: Tiantai's emphasis on compassion inspires me to take care of all living entities since they are essential components of the ecology including plants and animals.

SH: By means of mindfulness in Tiantai Buddhism, I am able to remain conscious of my everyday consumption patterns, thereby guaranteeing they complement ideas of ecological preservation.

SG: Tiantai's lessons on the oneness of mind and environment have helped me to better see how inner tranquility supports outside ecological equilibrium. This motivates me to support holistically minded conservation.

Zhang X: Tiantai Buddhist dependent origination's theory reminds me that the surroundings are closely entwined with human activities. It motivates me to participate in pollution control and tree-planting projects.

Tiantai Buddhism emphasizes in spiritual practice respect of the natural surroundings. This viewpoint motivates me to see environmental protection as a holy obligation rather than as a need.  Tiantai philosophy teaches that all beings and phenomena are interdependent. This view fosters a deep ecological awareness, recognizing that harming nature ultimately harms humanity. Conservation efforts align with this belief by promoting harmony between humans and nature, ensuring sustainable ecosystems. Meditation and mindfulness cultivate awareness of one’s actions and their consequences, leading to more eco-conscious decisions. Practitioners may incorporate mindfulness in daily habits, such as reducing carbon footprints, using renewable energy, and engaging in reforestation efforts. This result aligns with prior studies who found that meditation and mindfulness play an important role in influencing people conservation awareness. It also pursues people to make a real action such as:

Shi Y: I have observed successful cooperation whereby the government implements environmental rules, monks prepare awareness programs, and the community actively supports events such tree planting and clean-ups.

SH: Communities seeing such initiatives as an extension of their faith usually respond in a positive way. Some, meanwhile, require further study to see the connection between Buddhist principles and environmental responsibility.

Zhang X: As it provides a cultural and spiritual dimension, I have observed people get more involved when projects are connected to Buddhist rituals such as tree ordunctions or prayers for the environment.

How is the collaboration between the monastic community, local communities, and the government in conservation activities?

Li W: Usually, the cooperation is really robust. While local communities and the government help with resources and policy assistance, monastic groups lead by offering moral and spiritual direction.   
Wang M: It is a harmonic relationship. Through Buddhist teachings, local communities supply workers, and the government grants financing and logistical support, monks stimulate action.   
Shi Y: I have observed successful cooperation whereby the government implements environmental rules, monks prepare awareness programs, and the community actively supports events such tree planting and clean-ups.

What are the primary challenges encountered in the implementation of Tiantai Buddhism's value-based environmental conservation program?

Li W: A main obstacle is ignorance. It is difficult to get general support since many individuals, especially local populations, do not know how Tiantai Buddhist beliefs relate to environmental preservation.   
Wang M: One other major concern is funding. Although the idea is interesting, putting initiatives in line with these ideals usually calls for financial resources not always easily accessible.   
Shi Y: Another difficulty can come from cultural variances. Different communities mean different understandings or acceptance of Tiantai Buddhism, which might impede group projects.   
SH: Another difficulty is juggling contemporary environmental remedies with ancient Buddhist methods. Some traditional ceremonies call for cautious adaption since they contradict with ecological principles.

Implementing Tiantai Buddhism’s doctrine of interconnectedness fosters an understanding that all forms of life, including the environment, are deeply interrelated. Respondents mentioned how the belief that every action impacts the greater whole shapes individuals’ ecological awareness. When individuals realize the interconnectedness of nature, they become more inclined to protect it. The application of this doctrine offers a philosophical consequence of cultivating empathy and mindfulness toward the environment, motivating individuals to take environmentally-conscious actions. Compassion, as a central tenet of Tiantai Buddhism, directly influences individuals' approach to ecological preservation. The interviews revealed that respondents view environmental conservation as an extension of Buddhist compassion (*ahimsa*). This value encourages individuals to act with care and responsibility toward nature and non-human beings. The practical consequence of this is that individuals are more likely to engage in initiatives that promote the well-being of the environment, as their actions are rooted in the moral obligation to reduce harm to all living beings.

The influence of monastic communities in guiding environmental conservation initiatives through their leadership was highlighted as a critical factor in implementing Tiantai Buddhist values. Monks educate and inspire communities through teachings and actions, motivating others to embrace ecological awareness. The practical consequence of this is that monastic communities serve as role models, making the implementation of Tiantai Buddhism's environmental teachings more tangible and accessible to laypeople. The participants also emphasized the importance of educational efforts, such as workshops, seminars, and digital platforms. These campaigns not only raise awareness but also deepen understanding of how Tiantai Buddhism connects with ecological issues. The philosophical consequence is a shift in how individuals perceive environmental conservation as not just a practical matter but also a spiritual responsibility. The practical consequence is the empowerment of individuals with the knowledge to engage in sustainable practices.

The integration of Buddhist principles with local cultural practices makes the conservation programs more relatable and acceptable. Respondents mentioned how they tailored environmental programs to align with local customs, creating a blend of traditional and contemporary approaches to conservation. The philosophical consequence is the expansion of ecological awareness to include both spiritual values and local wisdom. Practically, this approach increases community participation and fosters a sense of ownership and pride in environmental initiatives. The challenge of engaging younger generations was acknowledged, with respondents noting that modern lifestyles often distract youth from ecological concerns. However, efforts to use social media and youth-focused programs have shown promise in fostering a new generation of environmentally-conscious individuals.

The philosophical consequence of this strategy is the cultivation of a value system that connects Buddhism, ecology, and the next generation’s responsibility to the environment. The practical consequence is the creation of long-term environmental stewards among younger people, helping to ensure the continuity of the conservation efforts. In adapting Buddhist rituals to suit modern environmental needs, such as making ceremonies more eco-friendly, respondents highlighted the importance of balancing traditional practices with current environmental concerns. This allows the doctrine to remain relevant in contemporary society.

The philosophical consequence is the adaptability of Buddhist teachings in addressing ecological concerns. Practically, this adaptation helps preserve traditional practices while also aligning them with sustainable practices, ensuring that the environment benefits from both spiritual and modern approaches.

Tiantai Buddhism advocates for a viewpoint that emphasizes the significance of compassion for the environment and the interdependence of all living organisms. This leads to a profound ethical commitment to the preservation of the environment, as individuals acknowledge the intrinsic value of nature and sense a moral obligation to safeguard it. Conservation efforts based on Tiantai Buddhist principles include getting young people involved, working with the government, and encouraging community engagement. However, there are still challenges, such as lack of awareness, adapting to different cultures, and measuring effect. The theory offers a clear way to include awareness of the environment in our daily lives, encouraging a practical and important method for protecting nature.

**5. Key Finding**

5.1. Discussion

The initial discovery from research question 1 is that Zhiyi offers a philosophical framework for comprehending the doctrine of "sentientless beings with Buddha-nature" through the teaching of the Three Truths. This concept underscores the fact that all creatures, whether living or non-living, are endowed with Buddha-nature due to their interconnectedness through the principle of universal truth. Zhiyi also introduced the principle of "Yinian Sanqian" (一念三千), which posits that there are three thousand potential realms in a single moment of consciousness. This principle underscores the profound interdependence of all elements of existence, whether living or non-living, and their connection to the spiritual dimension (Swearer, 2006; Zhang & Shi, 2024). This concept demonstrates that human actions toward nature have an impact on the moral and spiritual dimensions in addition to the physical world in the context of the environment (Simonds, 2023; Wang & Tan, 2024). Zhiyi espoused that the devastation or neglect of non-living elements, including rivers, mountains, and trees, is equivalent to disrupting the overall cosmic equilibrium. Consequently, the cultivation of reverence for nature is an essential component of spiritual practice. Particularly in the context of environmental exploitation that is based on materialistic or anthropocentric perspectives.

Interviews with academics, senior monks, and environmental practitioners have yielded findings that bolster the doctrine of "sentientless beings with Buddha-nature." They primarily comprehend the doctrine through the Tiantai commentaries of Zhiyi, while environmental practitioners comprehend it through discussions with priests and Buddhist environmental advocacy programs. The preliminary results of the research are internally consistent with these findings, which suggest that the teachings of the Three Truths and the principle of Ichinen Sanzen by Zhiyi provide a philosophical foundation for comprehending the interconnectedness of all beings, both living and non-living, within a broader cosmic system. The primary factor contributing to the increased reliance on Zhiyi's commentaries by academics and senior clergy is the textual analysis-based nature of academic and religious studies (Blown & Bryce, 2018; Sen, 2002). Zhiyi is a prominent figure in the Tiantai school, where he offered a systematic interpretation of Buddhist teachings, which included the doctrine of the Buddha nature in inanimate entities. Consequently, academicians and senior monks who have access to classical texts and engage in in-depth studies of Buddhist philosophy are inclined to comprehend this doctrine through primary sources, specifically Tiantai commentaries.

Conversely, environmental practitioners gain a more comprehensive understanding of this doctrine by participating in Buddhist environmental advocacy programs and engaging in direct interaction with monastic communities. This can be attributed to the experiential approach that is characteristic of Buddhist-based environmental practices. Conservation practices, ecosystem restoration, and community-based waste management are among the areas in which environmental practitioners prioritize the application of teachings in real-world contexts (Ardoin et al., 2020). Direct experiences that assist in the internalization of doctrines in the form of concrete actions are provided by discussions with monks and involvement in advocacy programs. From a philosophical perspective, these discoveries illustrate the distinction between text-based and practice-based comprehension in the Buddhist tradition. Despite the fact that both groups comprehend the same doctrine, they differ in their approaches to accessing and interpreting it. Academics and senior monks prioritize conceptual and historical analysis through Zhiyi's commentaries, whereas environmental practitioners concentrate on pragmatic aspects and their practical application in daily life. Nevertheless, both are rooted in the same, fundamental principle: the profound interconnection between humanity and nature within a broader cosmic system.

The results of this study are consistent with the research conducted by Situmorang and Silalahi (2019), which determined that Buddhist teachings foster sustainable environmental management by emphasizing the significance of preserving a harmonious relationship between humans and nature (Agarwal & Bhattacharjee, 2024; Choudhury, 2025). They emphasize that Buddhist principles can be implemented in the administration of conservation areas, such as Lumbini Nature Park, where the foundation of conservation practices is the respect for all forms of life, including the unconscious. Furthermore, the perspective on living in harmony with nature is demonstrated through tangible actions, including the adoption of a vegetarian lifestyle and the cultivation of trees (Zhang & Shi, 2024; Zhao et al., 2022; ). This demonstrates that the teachings regarding the interconnectedness of all entities, including the unconscious, are implemented in ways that promote environmental preservation.

Simods (2023) and Swearer (2006) discovered that Buddhist teachings, particularly those in the Mahayana tradition, establish a robust philosophical framework for environmental ethics, which is consistent with the results of this study. The concept of interconnectedness in Buddhism is frequently translated into an attitude of respect for nature, but its implementation in environmental policies continues to encounter a variety of structural and social obstacles, they disclosed. Moreover, Purser and Milillo (2014) and Vu and Tran (2021) discovered that the interpretation of Buddhist doctrine in the environmental context frequently is contingent upon the community and individual approaches to interpreting the teachings. This is the reason for the discrepancy in comprehension regarding the manner in which the Tiantai doctrine offers a novel perspective on the relationship between humans and nature in this study. This comprehension is also influenced by educational and social factors. Acharya et al. (2021) also discovered that the adoption of ecological teachings in Buddhism frequently is contingent upon the local cultural and economic context. This corroborates the discovery that, despite the fact that respondents possess a comprehensive understanding of this doctrine, there is still uncertainty regarding its practical application in contemporary environmental conservation. This is attributable to external factors, including policies and socio-economic conditions.

These results suggest that the Tiantai Buddhism doctrine has significant potential to be used as a guide in the development of environmental policies. This can be attributed to the fundamental concept of Tiantai Buddhism, which underscores the principle of harmony between humans and nature. This world is interconnected in the unity of reality, as elucidated in the doctrine of the Three Truths developed by Zhiyi, which includes the relationship between humans and nature. Consequently, this philosophical teaching establishes a moral and spiritual foundation for environmental policies that prioritize sustainability. Nevertheless, the disparities in respondents' perspectives regarding the practical application of these teachings in environmental conservation programs These results are consistent with the research conducted by Tucker and Williams (2020), which discovered that ecological teachings in Buddhism are frequently regarded as a powerful source of values for environmental policies. However, their implementation frequently fails due to a lack of systematic frameworks and institutional support. The research conducted by Tucker and Williams (2020) demonstrates that, despite the fact that numerous environmental policies in Asian countries, particularly in Thailand and China, incorporate Buddhist principles, their implementation in concrete regulations remains restricted by more influential political and economic factors.

Additionally, Cairns et al. (2024) conducted research on environmental sustainability based on religious values, which revealed that the integration of Buddhist teachings into environmental policies frequently succeeds at the local community level but encounters obstacles at the broader scale. They discovered that programs designed around spiritual values, such as those implemented at Wat Chak Daeng in Thailand, effectively fostered a high level of environmental consciousness. However, the integration of these principles into more comprehensive environmental policies continues to encounter structural obstacles (Borchert, 2024). Christopher and An (2024) conducted an additional investigation into the correlation between Buddhist philosophy and environmental policy in China. Their findings indicated that, despite the widespread recognition of Buddhist principles in environmental conservation, their concrete implementation is frequently impeded by secular and economically motivated state regulations. This research demonstrates that while Buddhist teachings can establish a robust ethical framework for environmental policies, political and economic support are still critical components of their successful implementation (Feng et al., 2024; Kuo et al., 2017). It is confirmed by the results of this study that the teachings of Tiantai Buddhism have significant potential as a guide for environmental policy, as has been observed in numerous other studies. Nevertheless, the primary obstacle to implementing this doctrine in concrete programs is the discrepancy between spiritual principles and practical application.

The results of this study indicate that the implementation of Buddhist doctrine toward individual ecological awareness is hampered by three primary challenges: the gap between environmental awareness and the comprehension of the teachings, the necessity of integrating modern environmental practices with traditional practices, and the low level of engagement of the younger generation in sustainability issues. Despite the philosophical comprehension of Buddhist principles, such as the interconnectedness of living entities and the balance of nature, the discrepancy between the comprehension of teachings and actual actions is indicative of the fact that many individuals have not yet implemented them in their daily lives. This can be attributed to the influence of contemporary consumer culture, the lack of translation of teachings into concrete practices, and the minimal external encouragement, such as regulations and incentives, that support environmentally responsible behavior. The significance of integrating traditional practices with contemporary environmental practices presents a distinctive obstacle to the development of ecological awareness in accordance with Buddhist teachings. In order to be more pertinent in addressing contemporary environmental concerns, spiritual principles in Tiantai teachings must be contextualized with a scientific approach. The impact of these teachings on individual behavior change will be restricted if they are not conveyed in a more universal language or combined with policy and technology-based strategies. Some prior studies, including those conducted by Li et al. (2020), Shang et al. (2022) and Song et al. (2022) demonstrate that religion-based environmental programs are more effective when they integrate traditional elements with contemporary innovations. Consequently, it is imperative to fortify the development of a narrative that establishes a connection between Buddhist environmental ethics and sustainable policies and empirical methodologies.

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## 5.2. Conclusion and Recommendations

This research is a significant contribution to the discourse on Tiantai Buddhism and Ecological Preservation. This study yields three primary conclusions, Zhiyi's Three Truths teaching provides a philosophical framework for comprehending the doctrine of "sentientless beings with Buddha-nature," which implies that all beings, whether living or non-living, possess Buddha-nature due to their interconnectedness through the principle of universal truth. Interviews with academics, senior priests, and environmental practitioners have yielded findings that bolster the doctrine of "sentientless beings with Buddha-nature." The doctrine is primarily comprehended by them through the Tiantai commentaries of Zhiyi, while environmental practitioners comprehend it through discussions with priests and Buddhist environmental advocacy programs. Secondly, quantitative results indicate that the doctrine of Tiantai Buddhism is well comprehended by respondents, particularly in the context of human-nature harmony. Three aspects were assessed: the comprehension of the doctrine of Tiantai Buddhism, the implementation of the doctrine in ecological conservation policies, and the influence of Tiantai Buddhist teachings on public environmental awareness.

Public environmental awareness does not necessarily correspond with a comprehensive comprehension. Respondents' comprehension of the public environment is most closely indicative of their awareness of it. There is a discrepancy between the doctrine's comprehension and the ecological awareness of the general population. This necessitates the establishment of a connection between traditional and contemporary environmental practices in order to render the program more relatable and acceptable. Additionally, the necessity of youth engagement is essential, as contemporary lifestyles frequently divert youth from ecological concerns. Despite the fact that the doctrine is widely comprehended, its capacity to motivate practical action remains restricted by the absence of transformative mechanisms that can link philosophical principles with tangible environmental practices. Consequently, this research suggests that religious institutions should be bolstered in their capacity to develop sustainability practice models that are based on Tiantai teachings. This can be achieved by implementing continuous education, fortifying partnerships with ecological communities, and adapting the teachings to a more inclusive and contemporary context. A comparative study of Tiantai Buddhism and other Buddhist traditions, such as Chan or Vajrayana, can also offer a more comprehensive understanding of the efficacy of teachings in fostering environmental awareness and action. Future research should also investigate strategies for youth engagement in Buddhism-based conservation movements to make them more relevant to their lifestyles, given the contemporary challenges encountered by the younger generation in ecological issues. Furthermore, an assessment of the efficacy of environmental education programs that are based on Tiantai teachings can be conducted to ascertain their influence on the public's awareness and involvement in ecological practices. Consequently, additional research can offer a more comprehensive contribution by connecting Tiantai teachings with more applicable and extensively impactful conservation practices.

5.3. Theoretical implications

Tiantai Buddhism provides a profound philosophical framework for environmental ethics, emphasizing interdependence, compassion, and sustainable living. At its core, the doctrine of Dependent Origination (縁起, Pratītyasamutpāda) teaches that all beings and phenomena are interconnected. This perspective aligns with ecological science, reinforcing the idea that human actions directly affect ecosystems, biodiversity, and climate stability. Another key Tiantai concept, Yinian Sanqian (一念三千, “Three Thousand Realms in a Single Thought”), posits that every thought and action influence reality on a vast scale. This suggests that even small conservation efforts, such as reducing waste or protecting local ecosystems, contribute to global environmental well-being. Recognizing the Buddha-nature in all beings, including animals, plants, and even inanimate elements, cultivates a moral responsibility toward nature, discouraging exploitation and promoting harmonious coexistence.

Ethically, Tiantai Buddhism fosters compassion (慈悲, Cí Bēi) as a guiding principle for ecological action. Conservation efforts, from afforestation to sustainable agriculture, become an expression of this compassion, ensuring both present and future generations benefit from a balanced environment. Additionally, the Middle Way (中道, Zhōng Dào) advocates for avoiding extremes in consumption and industrial practices, promoting sustainability.

From a practical standpoint, Tiantai Buddhism provides a spiritual motivation for ecological conservation, positioning environmental care as a sacred duty rather than a mere policy goal. It integrates meditative awareness with environmental consciousness, encouraging mindful decision-making in daily life. Thus, Tiantai Buddhism offers a holistic ecological ethic that merges spiritual wisdom with modern environmental science. By applying these principles, conservation efforts gain deeper ethical grounding, inspiring long-term sustainable practices and fostering a more profound respect for nature.

5.4. Practical implications

One significant implication is the promotion of sustainable living practices. The Middle Way (中道, Zhōng Dào) encourages balance, advocating for mindful consumption, reduced waste, and eco-friendly habits. Tiantai practitioners may adopt minimalism, sustainable diets (such as plant-based eating), and low-carbon lifestyles to reduce their environmental footprint. The doctrine of Dependent Origination (縁起, Pratītyasamutpāda) highlights the interconnectedness of all life forms, reinforcing the need for community-driven conservation projects. Buddhist temples and organizations can lead reforestation programs, water conservation efforts, and sustainable agriculture initiatives, demonstrating how spiritual practice translates into tangible environmental action.

Tiantai’s emphasis on compassion (慈悲, Cí Bēi) extends to environmental policies and ethical business practices. Companies influenced by these principles might integrate green technologies, reduce pollution, and support fair-trade, eco-conscious supply chains. Additionally, Buddhist-led initiatives can advocate for government policies on climate change, deforestation, and wildlife protection. Furthermore, Tiantai meditation and mindfulness practices can enhance environmental education. By integrating environmental awareness into spiritual training, practitioners develop deeper respect for nature. Schools and community programs influenced by Tiantai principles can incorporate ecological mindfulness exercises, promoting long-term sustainable habits among younger generations. Lastly, the belief in Buddha-nature in all beings strengthens conservation ethics. This perspective discourages harmful practices such as deforestation and habitat destruction, advocating instead for holistic land and wildlife preservation strategies.

5.5. Limitations and future study directions

While Tiantai Buddhism provides a strong ethical and philosophical foundation for ecological conservation, there are several limitations to its practical application. One challenge is the lack of direct environmental policies within traditional Tiantai teachings. Unlike contemporary environmental science, Buddhist scriptures do not explicitly address modern issues such as climate change, deforestation, or industrial pollution. This requires reinterpretation and adaptation of Buddhist principles to contemporary ecological concerns. Another limitation is cultural and regional variations in practice. Tiantai Buddhism is primarily practiced in East Asia, meaning its environmental influence may be less prominent in regions where other belief systems dominate. Future research could explore how Tiantai ecological ethics can be integrated into global conservation efforts beyond Buddhist communities.

The effectiveness of Buddhist-inspired conservation programs remains underexplored. Empirical studies are needed to assess whether Tiantai-based environmental initiatives lead to measurable ecological benefits. Comparative studies between religious and secular conservation approaches could offer valuable insights. Future research could also examine how Tiantai meditative practices influence pro-environmental behavior. Investigating the psychological impact of Buddhist mindfulness on sustainable decision-making may provide practical strategies for environmental education and policy-making. It can be addressing these gaps, scholars can further bridge Tiantai Buddhist philosophy with modern ecological action.

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