



**THE PHILOSOPHICAL APPLICABILITY OF TIAITAI  
BUDDHISM'S DOCTRINE OF INSENTIENT BEINGS WITH  
BUDDHA-NATURE IN CHINA'S ECOLOGICAL PRESERVATION  
PRACTICES**



**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS IN GLOBAL BUDDHISM  
INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE INNOVATION AND CULTURE  
RAJAMANGALA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY KRUNGTHEP  
ACADEMIC YEAR 2024  
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TECHNOLOGY KRUNGTHEP, THAILAND**

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**FEIFEI DONG**



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<b>Major</b>	Master of Arts (Global Buddhism)
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Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Master's Degree

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## ABSTRACT

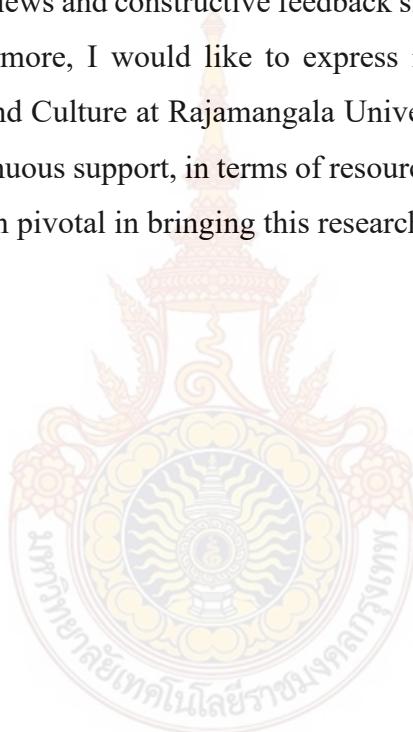
This study aims to investigate the important philosophical concept of insentient entities (wuqing you xing, 无情有性) in Tiantai Buddhism and its impact on individuals' psychological well-being and ecological awareness. This study employs qualitative methods to gain a deeper understanding of the topic. Semi-structured 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 a significant role in shaping people's views and actions regarding environmental preservation initiatives and environmental volunteering. Hence, this result provides insight to the government and organizations about maintaining environmental issues, which are rapidly growing globally. This study is one of the few that highlights the Buddhist views of the Chinese people. Hence, the government must improve the alignment between religion and people's awareness, as well as develop a long-term strategy to combat climate change.

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

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Metteyya Beliatte, for his unwavering guidance, patience, and mentorship throughout this research. Additionally, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Yaoping Liu, whose expertise and invaluable insights have been instrumental in shaping this thesis. I am deeply grateful to the members of the Examination Committee, whose meticulous reviews and constructive feedback significantly enhanced the quality of this work. Furthermore, I would like to express my gratitude to the Institute of Science Innovation and Culture at Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep, Thailand. Their continuous support, in terms of resources and fostering an encouraging environment, has been pivotal in bringing this research to fruition.

Feifei DONG



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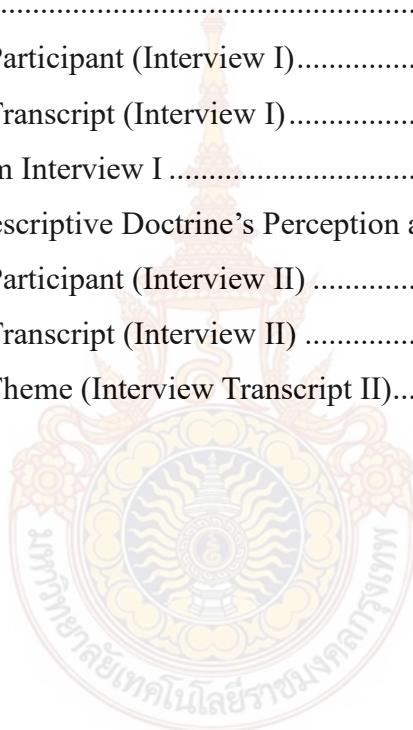
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Research Background

Buddhist researchers have become rather interested in the highly important philosophical idea of non-sentient entities (wuqing you xing) in Tiantai Buddhism. It offers a very different viewpoint on the presence of unconscious entities with Buddha-nature. This philosophy holds that both conscious individuals and unconscious entities—including plants, stones, and other natural elements—have the capacity for illumination. This perspective is grounded in a comprehensive understanding of the interrelationship between humans and nature, positioning all entities within the universe as essential components of the web of existence. This concept provides a pertinent perspective for promoting ecological awareness and encouraging environmentally conscious practices that align with spiritual principles within the context of the global environmental crisis.

Prior research has examined the connection between Buddhism and environmental sustainability. Miller's (2017) study examined the impact of Buddhist teachings on the development of environmental ethics in East Asia. Additionally, Loy and Stanley (2018) connected the Buddhist concept of interdependence to contemporary ecological movements. Tucker and Williams (2020) demonstrated how Buddhist ideas—especially the concept of Buddha-nature—can be employed to advance environmental projects. Research on the conceptual application of the doctrine of sentient beings from Tiantai Buddhism to ecological sustainability measures in China is rare, nonetheless. This void in the research presents an opportunity for thorough investigations that incorporate this philosophy into the framework of ecological policy and practice in China, particularly in light of the growing need to address national environmental issues.

China's ecological preservation philosophy has undergone significant evolution over the past few decades in response to both internal environmental degradation and global sustainability challenges. Historically rooted in traditional Chinese thought, particularly Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, contemporary

environmental policies reflect ancient philosophical principles and modern environmental imperatives. The overarching framework for these efforts is China's concept of "ecological civilization," which underscores the government's commitment to sustainable development and environmental stewardship as part of its broader socio-economic agenda. This overview examines the historical origins of China's environmental philosophy, the contemporary practices related to ecological preservation, and the challenges and implications that shape its current and future direction.

The philosophical foundations of ecological preservation in China are deeply intertwined with its traditional cultural heritage. Confucianism, one of China's most influential intellectual traditions, has long emphasized the harmonious relationship between humans and the natural world. The Confucian concept of *tian ren he yi* (天人合一), or the unity of heaven and humanity, underscores the moral responsibility of humans to maintain balance within the natural world. According to Confucian thought, individuals are morally obligated to act as stewards of nature, as the natural environment is integral to the functioning of society. In Confucian philosophy, human well-being is directly linked to the state of the environment, and disruption of this balance is seen as detrimental to both individual virtue and societal harmony (Zhang, 2019).

Daoism, another key pillar of Chinese thought, further enriches the country's ecological perspective. Daoist philosophy advocates for *wu wei* (无为), often translated as "non-action" or "effortless action," which suggests that humans should align themselves with the natural order rather than impose their will upon it. The Daoist text *Daodejing* emphasizes that nature operates according to its intrinsic principles, which should not be disrupted by human intervention. From a Daoist perspective, over-exploitation or manipulation of the natural world is both imprudent and unsustainable, as it violates the fundamental laws of nature (Zhang, 2019). These philosophical tenets continue to influence Chinese environmental ethics, encouraging a more restrained and reverent approach to ecological management.

Buddhism, while introduced to China from India, also plays a role in shaping China's ecological consciousness. The Buddhist emphasis on compassion and interdependence has parallels in environmental thinking, where all forms of life are

interconnected and worthy of respect. Although Buddhist influence is less overt in contemporary Chinese policy, its ethical implications resonate with broader cultural values that emphasize respect for life and the natural world (Liu, 2020).

### **1.1.1 Modern Ecological Policies and the Concept of Ecological Civilization**

The introduction of the concept of 'ecological civilization' represents a significant shift in China's approach to environmental governance. Initially introduced in the early 2000s and formally incorporated into the Chinese Communist Party's guiding philosophy by 2012, ecological civilization aims to integrate environmental sustainability into the country's socio-economic development framework. Unlike the traditional development models that prioritize economic growth at the expense of environmental health, ecological civilization advocates for a balanced approach that harmonizes development with ecological preservation (Schmitz, 2021).

This philosophy has been codified into law, with the 2018 constitutional amendment explicitly promoting ecological civilization as a guiding principle for national governance. This legal and ideological shift reflects the government's recognition of the severe environmental degradation that accompanied China's rapid industrialization. Decades of unchecked economic growth have led to significant environmental challenges, including air and water pollution, deforestation, desertification, and biodiversity loss. In response, the government has introduced a series of reforms aimed at addressing these issues while maintaining economic progress.

Key policies under the ecological civilization framework include promoting renewable energy, establishing national parks and nature reserves, and implementing stringent regulations on industrial pollution. China's commitment to renewable energy is particularly notable, as it has become a global leader in solar, wind, and hydropower production. By 2020, China had accounted for nearly one-third of the world's renewable energy capacity, driven by government policies that encouraged investment in clean energy technologies and reduced reliance on fossil fuels (Zhang & Ma, 2021).

On the ground, the Chinese government has initiated large-scale reforestation projects, including the "Great Green Wall" initiative, which aims to combat desertification by planting millions of trees in arid regions. This project,

alongside other afforestation efforts, reflects China's commitment to restoring its degraded landscapes and combating climate change. The creation of protected areas, such as national parks, is also a central component of China's strategy to preserve its biodiversity. These efforts aim to protect endangered species, such as the giant panda, snow leopard, and Tibetan antelope, while also preserving the integrity of vital ecosystems (Wang, 2020).

### **1.1.2 Challenges and Limitations**

Despite the impressive scope of China's ecological preservation efforts, significant challenges remain. One of the primary tensions in China's environmental policy is the need to balance continued economic development with environmental sustainability. China's rapid industrialization has led to unprecedented environmental degradation. 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). Air pollution remains a critical issue in many urban areas, particularly in northern China, where coal remains a primary energy source. Although China has made strides in reducing the levels of fine particulate matter (PM2.5) in the atmosphere, industrial emissions and vehicular exhaust continue to contribute to poor air quality. Similarly, water pollution poses a significant threat to both human health and biodiversity. Many of China's rivers and lakes have been severely polluted by industrial waste and agricultural runoff, resulting in long-term ecological damage and a decline in freshwater biodiversity (Schmitz, 2021).

Meanwhile, the enforcement of environmental regulations has been uneven across different regions. While some areas have seen significant improvements in environmental quality, others, particularly in economically disadvantaged regions, continue to struggle with weak enforcement and regulatory oversight. This disparity is often attributed to local governments prioritizing economic growth over environmental protection, reflecting the ongoing tension between development and sustainability (Li, 2022).

### **1.1.3 Global Implications and Future Outlook**

China's environmental policies have far-reaching implications for global sustainability efforts. As the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases, China's approach to ecological preservation is crucial to the success of international climate

agreements, such as the Paris Agreement. The country has pledged to reach peak carbon emissions by 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2060, ambitious goals that, if realized, could significantly mitigate global climate change. However, achieving these targets will require continued investment in renewable energy, as well as a transition away from coal and other fossil fuels (Zhang & Ma, 2021).

On the international stage, China has also positioned itself as a leader in green finance, promoting sustainable investment and development through initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI, which spans multiple countries across Asia, Europe, and Africa, has incorporated green principles into its framework to promote environmentally sustainable infrastructure development. However, the environmental impact of BRI projects has been criticized, particularly in relation to biodiversity loss and deforestation in host countries, raising concerns about the consistency of China's ecological preservation practices abroad (Wang, 2020).

Looking forward, China's ability to successfully navigate the balance between economic growth and environmental sustainability will be critical to its role in shaping global environmental governance. The philosophical foundation of ecological civilization, with its emphasis on harmonizing development with nature, offers a promising framework for addressing these challenges. However, the effective implementation of this philosophy will require stronger regulatory mechanisms, greater public engagement, and an unwavering commitment to environmental protection at all levels of government (Li, 2022).

The evolving philosophy and practice of ecological preservation in China, influenced by traditional Confucian, Daoist, and Sinicized Buddhist thought, provide an essential framework for exploring the application of Buddhist doctrinal insights, particularly the concept of Wuqing youxin 无情有性 [Insentient beings with Buddha-nature], in environmental efforts. The Tiantai School, established in the 6th century as the first Indigenous Buddhist school in China (Ng, 1993), offers key perspectives within this framework. China's concept of "ecological civilization" reflects a synthesis of these traditional philosophies with modern environmental goals, emphasizing harmony between human activity and nature. While current policies focus on renewable energy, biodiversity conservation, and reforestation, the challenge of balancing economic growth with environmental sustainability remains a significant concern. Insights from

Sinicized Buddhism, especially from the Tiantai School, provide an ethical framework that extends moral consideration to non-sentient elements of nature. This perspective can complement and deepen China's ecological policies, fostering a more integrated approach that recognizes the intrinsic value of the natural world. The current research examines how Tiantai Buddhist doctrine can inform and enhance China's ecological philosophy and practices, offering new ethical dimensions to its environmental preservation efforts.

## 1.2 Statement of Research Problems

While China's concept of "ecological civilization" and its environmental policies have garnered significant attention, a gap remains in integrating deeper ethical and philosophical frameworks into these efforts. 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 (Schmitz, 2021; Zhang & Ma, 2021). However, 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. Despite the philosophical richness these traditions offer, particularly in promoting harmony between humans and nature, their practical applications in contemporary ecological preservation remain underexplored (Zhang, 2019; Li, 2022).

The Tiantai School of Buddhism, with its doctrine of 'insentient beings with Buddha-nature,' presents an important yet underutilized ethical framework for extending moral consideration to non-sentient elements of the natural world. Although this doctrine offers a unique perspective that can enhance ecological efforts by recognizing the intrinsic value of all natural entities, its applicability to modern environmental practices in the context of China's ecological policies has not been sufficiently investigated. Previous studies that engage with Buddhist ethics in environmental contexts often overlook the specific contributions of the Tiantai School and the Sinicized Buddhist doctrinal insights in addressing contemporary ecological issues (Liu, 2020). As a result, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis on how these philosophical traditions can inform and strengthen China's approach to environmental

preservation.

The current research aims to fill this gap by examining how Buddhist insights, particularly those of the Tiantai School, can be applied to China's ecological policies. By doing so, it seeks to provide a more integrated approach to environmental preservation, one that moves beyond technical and policy-driven solutions to incorporate deeper moral and spiritual considerations.

### 1.3 Research Questions

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:

- 1) What is the interpretation of the philosophical significance of the doctrine of non-sentient beings in Tiantai Buddhism regarding environmental conservation in China?
- 2) In what ways can the doctrine be utilized in the formulation and implementation of environmental conservation policies and practices in China?
- 3) What are the philosophical and practical consequences of implementing this doctrine about individuals' ecological awareness?

### 1.4 Research Objectives

Based on the academic gaps highlighted above, this research aims to address the underexplored role of Sinicized Buddhist doctrines, particularly those of the Tiantai School, in shaping China's ecological preservation practices. By focusing on the ethical and philosophical dimensions of Tiantai Buddhism, this research seeks to provide new insights into enhancing ecological efforts through a deeper moral framework. Given this premise, this research aims:

- 1) To explore the interpretation of the philosophical significance of the doctrine of non-sentient beings in Tiantai Buddhism regarding environmental conservation in China.

- 2) To explore the doctrine to be utilized in the formulation and implementation of environmental conservation policies and practices in China
- 3) To investigate the philosophical and practical consequences of implementing this doctrine on individuals' ecological awareness

## 1.5 Scope and Limitations of Research

### 1.5.1 Scope of the Research

To explore the application of Tiantai Buddhist ethics, particularly the doctrine of "insentient beings with Buddha-nature," to contemporary ecological preservation practices in China, the current research focuses on two key dimensions: the ethical and philosophical underpinnings of Tiantai Buddhism and the practical implications of integrating these principles into current environmental initiatives. Doing so, the research encompasses the following scope:

#### 1) Theoretical framework development

The research undertakes a comprehensive literature review and textual analysis of foundational Tiantai Buddhist teachings, with a specific focus on the doctrine of 'insentient beings with Buddha-nature.' It aims to explore how this doctrine provides an ethical framework for extending moral consideration to non-sentient elements of nature and its relevance to modern ecological ethics.

#### 2) Application to China's ecological preservation practices

The research will analyze case studies of existing ecological initiatives in China, such as reforestation efforts, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable environmental management. The goal is to examine how Tiantai Buddhist principles can be integrated into these initiatives to enhance their ethical foundation and practical outcomes.

#### 3) Development of a theoretical model

Based on insights from the literature review, textual analysis, and case studies, the research develops a theoretical model to demonstrate how Tiantai Buddhist ethical principles can be systematically incorporated into China's ecological policies. This model provides both philosophical justification and practical recommendations for enhancing China's current ecological preservation efforts.

#### 4) Temporal scope

The research focuses on ecological preservation practices implemented in China over the past two decades (2012–2022), a period marked by significant policy shifts towards sustainable development and environmental conservation. The temporal scope enables the examination of recent developments in China's ecological civilization framework and their alignment with traditional ethical principles, particularly those of Tiantai Buddhism.

In summary, this research seeks to bridge the gap between Tiantai Buddhist ethics and contemporary ecological practices in China, providing both a theoretical exploration and practical application of Buddhist principles in environmental policy and management. Through this, the research seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on sustainable ecological preservation within the Chinese context.

#### 1.5.2 Limitations of the Research

The limitations of this research stem primarily from its scope and methodological focus. First, the study is predominantly theoretical, relying on textual analysis and philosophical interpretation, which may limit its direct applicability to real-world environmental policies. While case studies provide practical examples, the research lacks empirical data collection, such as fieldwork or interviews with practitioners, which could offer more detailed insights into the practical challenges of integrating Buddhist ethics into ecological preservation efforts.

Second, the research is geographically focused on China and draws specifically on Tiantai Buddhism, which may limit its broader applicability to other contexts or environmental traditions. While the study aims to highlight the relevance of Sinicized Buddhist ethics within China's unique environmental and cultural landscape, the findings may not directly translate to ecological practices in other regions or within different cultural frameworks.

Lastly, the research focuses on a relatively narrow timeframe (2012–2022), which may not fully capture longer-term historical trends in both ecological policy and the development of Tiantai Buddhist thought. Expanding the temporal scope could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how these principles evolved and interacted with ecological preservation over a broader period. Despite these limitations, the research contributes valuable insights into the intersection of religious ethics and

ecological preservation, offering a philosophical lens through which to view and potentially enhance current environmental practices in China.

## 1.6 Significance of the Research

The significance of this research lies in its exploration of how Tiantai Buddhist ethical principles, particularly the doctrine of "insentient beings with Buddha-nature," can inform and enhance ecological preservation practices in China. By addressing a gap in current scholarship, which often neglects the integration of Sinicized Buddhist ethics into environmental policies, this study introduces a fresh perspective on the moral dimensions of ecological preservation.

By focusing on Tiantai Buddhism, this research provides a distinct ethical framework that extends moral consideration to non-sentient elements of nature. This framework offers a deeper philosophical foundation for China's ecological efforts, complementing and enriching existing policies under the banner of "ecological civilization." Through both doctrinal analysis and the examination of case studies, this research not only advances theoretical understanding but also offers practical recommendations for embedding these ethical principles into policy and practice.

Moreover, the study has broader implications for environmental ethics and sustainability, demonstrating how Buddhist philosophical traditions, particularly those emphasizing interconnectedness and the intrinsic value of nature, can support contemporary environmental goals. The comparative analysis with other Chinese traditions further enhances understanding of how diverse ethical perspectives can contribute to addressing ecological challenges.

In sum, this research is significant for its potential to influence both academic discourse and policy development by offering a novel ethical perspective that can strengthen China's efforts in biodiversity conservation, reforestation, and sustainable environmental management.

## 1.7 Definition of Key Terms

### 1.7.1 Tiantai Buddhism

Tiantai Buddhism represents a significant school within Mahayana

Buddhism that emerged in China. This school is recognized for its focus on diverse doctrines and the organization of Buddhist teachings, with the Lotus Sutra serving as its primary text. This study employs Tiantai Buddhism as a philosophical framework to examine the relationship between humans, nature, and living beings within the context of ecological conservation practices.

### **1.7.2 Doctrine of Insentient Beings with Buddha-Nature**

This doctrine is a philosophical concept in Tiantai Buddhism that posits that inanimate entities (such as plants, rocks, and natural elements) possess the potential for Buddha-nature (Buddhata), or the nature of enlightenment. This doctrine reaffirms the cosmic unity of humans and nature, encouraging a reevaluation of human responsibility in preserving the environment.

### **1.7.3 Buddha-Nature**

In Mahayana Buddhism, the term "Buddha-nature" refers to the fundamental essence of all living beings that enables them to attain enlightenment. This research broadens the definition of Buddha-nature to encompass non-living entities, thereby bolstering the notion that the entire universe possesses intrinsic and spiritual value.

### **1.7.4 Ecological Preservation Practices in China**

Ecological conservation practices encompass a variety of initiatives implemented by governments, organizations, and individuals to preserve biodiversity, mitigate environmental degradation, and preserve ecosystem equilibrium. This investigation examines these practices from the perspective of Tiantai Buddhism to develop a comprehensive methodology that integrates ecological and spiritual principles.

### **1.7.5 Sentient Beings**

In Buddhism, sentient beings encompass all beings capable of experiencing emotions, including humans, animals, and certain supernatural entities. This study distinguishes between sentient beings and insentient beings, highlighting how both are treated in the Tiantai doctrine.

### **1.7.6 Insentient Beings**

Insentient beings refer to non-sentient entities, such as rocks, soil, water, and trees. In the Tiantai doctrine, these entities are considered to possess Buddha-nature,

thereby expanding the traditional definition of beings with spiritual value.

### 1.7.7 Philosophical Applicability

The term "philosophical applicability" refers to the practical application of philosophical doctrines and concepts from Tiantai Buddhism to address environmental conservation challenges in China. This encompasses a detailed explanation of how spiritual values are translated into ecological practices.

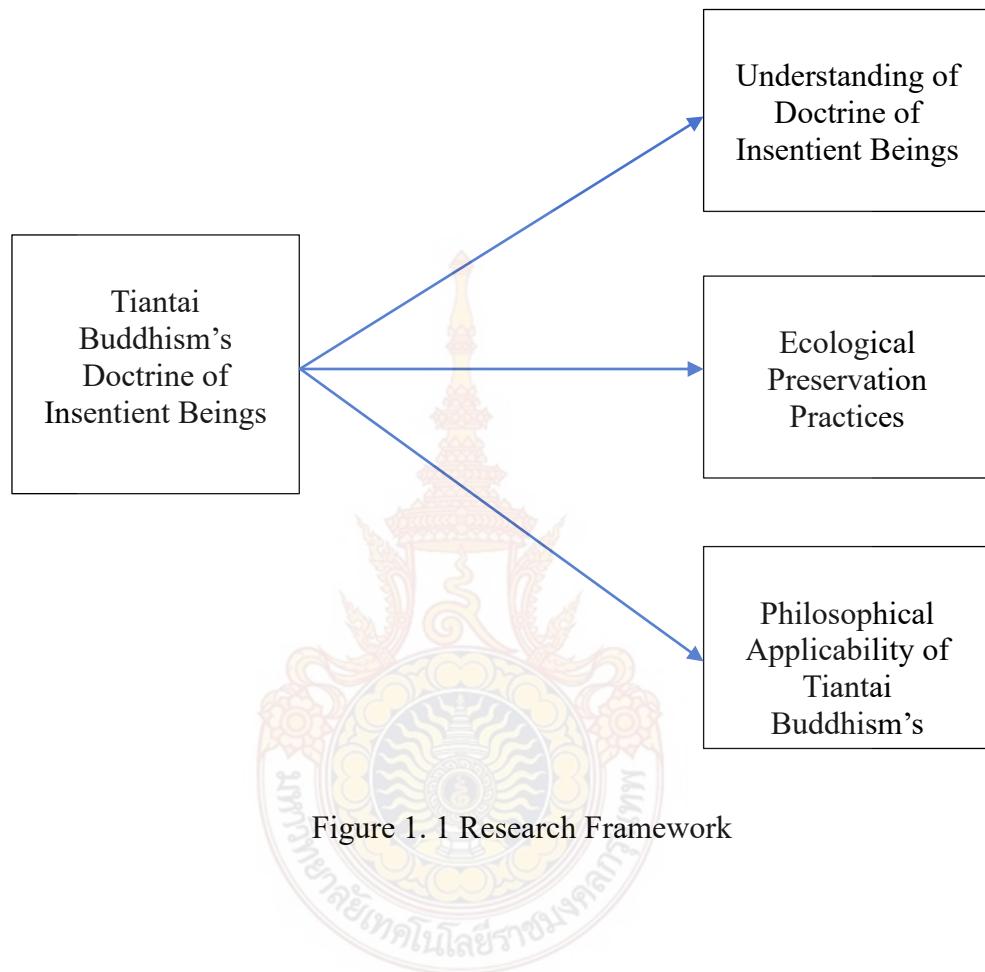
## 1.8 Research Framework

Grounded in conceptual frameworks that link Buddhist philosophy, environmental ethics, and the preservation of natural systems, this study posits that, according to Tiantai Buddhist philosophy, all events reflect Buddha-nature, independent of their ability for sentience. This ideology supports a thorough ecological viewpoint, as fundamental to the spiritual and ecological bases of life, emphasizing the connectivity of all living entities. Also consulted in the study is Arne Naess's theorized Deep Ecology Theory, which stresses the inherent worth of all living entities. In Tiantai Buddhism, this idea fits the premise of world interconnection. Environmental ethics from a Buddhist perspective are included in the research to explore the possibilities of ideas such as insentient beings as a means to inspire moral responsibility toward nature and to support sustainable ecological activities.

Although previous research has extensively investigated the philosophical foundations of Tiantai Buddhism, the incorporation of Buddhist ethics into ecological movements, and China's ecological policies from a secular perspective, a critical gap persists in the connection between the philosophical principles of the doctrine of insentient beings and practical ecological preservation strategies in China. The majority of studies do not address the potential of traditional Buddhist doctrines to influence modern environmental policy and practice in a Chinese context, nor do they integrate Tiantai Buddhist principles into actionable frameworks for ecological preservation.

The research framework is briefly outlined as follows: The doctrine of insentient entities in Tiantai Buddhism serves as a theoretical framework that facilitates the investigation of philosophical principles, including Environmental Ethics and the concept of Buddha Nature. The Practice of Ecological Conservation in China

contextualizes these principles. The practical framework for integrating Buddhist philosophy with ecological conservation practices in China is the result of a hermeneutic textual analysis, supplemented by surveys and interviews, which comprise the research methodology. Figure 1.1 illustrates the research framework.



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This study employs a theoretical framework that integrates Buddhist concepts, specifically the doctrine of Insentient Beings and Buddha-Nature, with contemporary ecological preservation theories. This approach aims to integrate philosophical and spiritual perspectives with the environmental issues facing China.

#### **2.1 Tiantai Buddhism and Buddha-Nature Doctrine**

In the 6th century, Tiantai Buddhism was one of the primary streams in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition that underwent accelerated development in China. This flow emphasizes a systematic approach to Buddhist teachings, with a primary emphasis on the Silk Sutra as a sacred text that serves as the cornerstone of its doctrines (Ziporin, 2004). A fundamental philosophical concept in Buddhist thought is the theory of Buddhist Nature. It holds that everyone, whether inert or alive, can attain enlightenment. This idea extends beyond the traditional understanding that limits the Buddha-Nature to living entities, thereby providing a conceptual framework for a comprehensive awareness of human relations and the 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 (Sheng, 2007). Tiantai Buddhism emphasizes that by broadening the definition of Sentient Beings to include Sentientless Beings, natural materials possess intrinsic value in addition to instrumental value. From this perspective, nature is viewed as a spiritual entity with inherent rights and values, rather than merely 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 (Loy, 2003). 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.

Furthermore, the Buddhist concept in Tiantai Buddhism is based on the teachings of causal efforts (skillful means), which promote flexibility in interpreting Buddhist teachings in accordance with the context of the era. In the context of environmental preservation, this doctrine can be implemented to foster a more profound ecological consciousness within society by establishing the principle that every human action against nature must be founded on reverence for its spiritual values (Wang, 2016). As such, this philosophy is not only relevant in the spiritual domain but also provides moral solutions to current environmental problems. The entire understanding of the ecosystem presented by Tiantai Buddhism, with its Buddhist-Nature ideology, connects the spiritual, ethical, and ecological components. This method is particularly relevant for addressing a range of contemporary environmental issues, especially in China, which is currently grappling with the impact of economic development on its ecosystem (Liu & Diamond, 2005). Consequently, this doctrine can serve as a robust philosophical foundation for advocating the preservation of a sustainable ecology centered around spiritual principles.

## 2.2 Theory of Environmental Ethics

The concept of a land ethic, proposed by Leopold (1949), is frequently referenced in academic discourse. Leopold emphasizes that humans are not the rulers of nature, but rather a crucial component of a broader biotic community. Consequently, environmental ethics necessitate acknowledging that each component of nature, whether it is a living organism or not, possesses inherent values that must be honoured. This theory emphasizes the importance of ecological solidarity, which entails not only safeguarding but also restoring ecosystems that human activities have harmed.

This method is consistent with the concept of deep ecology, as introduced by Naess (1973). 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 or practical use. 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 (Devall & Sessions, 1985).

The theory of environmental ethics reflects a method anchored in Environmental Justice. This approach emphasizes the link between social inequality and environmental damage, implying that underprivileged individuals are often the most severely affected by environmental deterioration (Schlosberg, 2007). This perspective holds that human responsibility for the environment encompasses both the preservation of natural resources and the creation of inclusive and socially equitable environmental policies. Environmental ethics addresses both ecological and societal aspects; thus, it is relevant to present world concerns, such as climate change and biodiversity loss.

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 (Loy, 2003). The integration of the spiritual dimension into environmental ethics fosters an understanding of the moral responsibilities individuals have towards nature and encourages the incorporation of these responsibilities into their daily lives.

### **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 China's environmental policies. This idea highlights the importance of striking a balance between social cohesiveness, environmental sustainability, and economic

development to foster a more lasting connection between people and nature (Pan, 2016). Ecological civilization also incorporates traditional Chinese viewpoints, including Taoism, which emphasizes the harmony between people and nature, and supports resource efficiency, biodiversity preservation, and low-carbon development (Zhang et al., 2019).

The practice of ecological preservation in China is influenced by the modern theory of sustainable development, as introduced in *Our Common Future* (also known as the Brundtland Report, 1987). This approach promotes policies that address the needs of the present generation while ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources for future generations. China utilizes this concept in national projects such as Grain-for-Green (GFG), which aims to convert marginal agricultural land into forests or grasslands to reduce soil erosion and enhance carbon absorption capacity (Liu et al., 2008). A shining example of the practical application of sustainable development theory in the context of environmental preservation is this initiative. From a philosophical perspective, traditional Confucian ideas emphasizing human moral responsibilities to both society and the environment influence 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 (Tucker & Berthrong, 1998). 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 to preserve ecology in China is significantly influenced by technology-driven scientific approaches, including the concepts of Green Technology and Smart Cities. As fundamental elements of the nation's ecological preservation efforts, the application of sustainable technology in industrial activities, the development of renewable energy sources, and the optimization of waste management systems are emerging as key priorities for the nation. For example, initiatives to create low-carbon urban settings, such as those in Shenzhen, have demonstrated how technical developments can effectively reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve resource efficiency (Huang et al., 2015). This approach not only provides sensible solutions to environmental problems but also strengthens China's

position as a leader in sustainable technological innovation.

## 2.4 Buddhism and Ecological Holistic Models

The comprehensive framework that integrates Buddhism with ecology highlights the close connection between Buddhist spiritual principles and the imperative for environmental protection. Within Buddhism, the concept of nature as a whole is firmly rooted in the *pratītyasamutpāda*, also 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 have a ripple effect on the entire ecosystem. This methodology provides a comprehensive perspective on ecology, recognizing humans not only as natural custodians but also as essential elements of a broader web of existence (Kabilsingh, 1998). As a result, this instruction promotes the development of conscientious and synergistic interactions with the natural world.

In interpersonal interactions, relationships with other living entities, and encounters with natural elements, the concept of non-violence—also known as *ahimsa*—plays a significant role. Every facet of Buddhism encompasses important principles that extend beyond simple utilitarian benefits. This principle aligns with the ethnocentric ethical perspective, which regards all forms of life as essential elements of a sacred cosmos (Thurman, 2006). As a result, Buddhism offers not only pragmatic guidelines for environmental conservation but also the moral underpinnings that facilitate a harmonious relationship between humanity and the ecological system. Additionally, the Buddhist doctrine of Buddha-Nature encompasses all entities, including inanimate beings such as mountains, rivers, and forests, 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 fosters a profound love for nature and helps us recognize that caring for the environment is an integral part of our spiritual journey (Cook, 1977). This view provides a clear framework that highlights the development of human understanding, which is crucial for living sustainably, alongside efforts aimed at protecting the environment.

Additionally, Buddhism incorporates mindfulness and meditation practices

to foster greater ecological awareness. The development of mindfulness allows individuals to understand the impact of their daily activities on the environment. The monastic tradition of Buddhism is a prime example of a philosophy that promotes the judicious minimization of waste and resource utilization, as well as mindful and deliberate consumption (Hanh, 2013). As a result, Buddhism offers a pragmatic approach to mitigating the adverse effects of human activity on ecosystems and provides a philosophical foundation for environmental conservation.

## 2.5 China's Ecological Preservation Policies and Initiatives: A Review of 2021-2022

China's ecological preservation policies have undergone a significant evolution, particularly under the framework of 'ecological civilization' (生态文明), a concept deeply rooted in the idea of harmonizing development with nature. This framework, formally enshrined in the 2018 constitution, represents China's unwavering commitment to environmental sustainability. The year 2021-2022 marked a significant milestone with the announcement of peak carbon emissions by 2030 and carbon neutrality by 2060 (Stern, 2021). Notable policies during this period include the National Action Plan on Climate Change (2021-2030) and the heightened enforcement of the Environmental Protection Law (Wang et al., 2022).

Among the most notable initiatives was China's strengthening of biodiversity protection. The "Green Shield 2021" initiative aimed to safeguard key ecosystems, and the expansion of the National Park System established key parks such as the Hainan Tropical Rainforest National Park and the Giant Panda National Park (Li & Li, 2022). These efforts reflect China's growing commitment to biodiversity, aligning with global frameworks such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (Zhou & Zhao, 2021).

China's emphasis on green development also included reforestation and combating desertification. The "Great Green Wall" initiative, a reforestation program aimed at restoring degraded lands, continues to expand. Reforestation was further bolstered by the 2022 action plan, which seeks to plant new forests to cover 23% of China's land by 2035 (Liu et al., 2022). Despite these advances, challenges persist in

striking a balance between economic growth and environmental sustainability. China's rapid industrialization has strained its ecosystems, and while policies have become increasingly effective, issues such as air and water pollution persist. Critics also note that policy implementation can be uneven, with more developed regions often being more successful in enforcement (Shapiro, 2021). Therefore, while the central government's goals are ambitious, the practical realization at local levels can vary widely (Miao et al., 2022). This section highlights China's current ecological strategies, such as ecological civilization, setting the stage for investigating how the ethical framework of Tiantai Buddhism can offer a complementary philosophical dimension to these policies, potentially strengthening their implementation and moral foundation.

## 2.6 Traditional Chinese Philosophies and Their Influence on Contemporary Ecological Preservation

China's rich philosophical traditions—Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism—have long been instrumental in shaping its environmental ethics, promoting harmony between humanity and nature (Callicott & Ames, 2021). These profound ideas are increasingly mirrored in China's ecological preservation policies, particularly under the banner of ecological civilization. Confucianism, with its concept of *tian ren he yi* (天人合一), emphasizes the interdependence of humans and nature. It teaches that human morality is closely linked to ecological balance, positioning humans as stewards of the natural world (Tucker & Berthrong, 2019). This is mirrored in modern Chinese policies that aim to balance economic development with environmental sustainability, such as the integration of green technologies in infrastructure and industrial projects (Yang & Duan, 2021).

Daoism, with its principle of *wu wei* (无为) or non-action, promotes living in accordance with nature, discouraging excessive human intervention in natural processes (Girardot et al., 2019). Daoist philosophy has a significant influence on China's conservation efforts, including national reforestation projects and wetland restoration programs. Modern policies reflect this Daoist ethos, particularly in their emphasis on nature conservation and restoration of degraded ecosystems (Wang et al., 2021). Buddhism has played a pivotal role in shaping China's ecological values. Its

teachings of compassion and the interconnectedness of all life forms have increasingly influenced environmental movements in China. Buddhist-inspired environmentalism promotes care for all living beings, including plants and animals, as part of a broader spiritual responsibility (Clarke, 2020). This perspective is evident in the country's focus on biodiversity conservation, especially through the protection of sacred natural sites (Shen & Bowers, 2021).

The integration of China's rich philosophical traditions—Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism—into contemporary ecological preservation practices is a testament to China's efforts to merge its cultural heritage with modern sustainability goals. While each tradition offers distinct ethical perspectives, they collectively inform a holistic approach to environmental stewardship. This is evidenced by initiatives that prioritize ecological restoration and biodiversity conservation, reflecting China's deep-rooted respect for nature. This section demonstrates how traditional Chinese philosophies have shaped modern ecological policies, laying the foundation for research to explore the specific contributions that Tiantai Buddhist teachings on "insentient beings" can make to further ethical environmental stewardship in China.

## 2.7 The Role of Buddhism in Ecological Ethics within the Chinese Context

Buddhism's role in ecology, especially in China, is grounded in its teachings of interconnectedness, impermanence, and non-harming (ahimsa) (Kaza & Kraft, 2020). The Buddhist notion that all life is interdependent aligns closely with modern ecological thought, which views ecosystems as interconnected wholes where the well-being of one part affects the overall well-being of the whole. In the Chinese context, Buddhism, particularly in its Sinicized forms, has historically contributed to environmental preservation through the protection of sacred natural sites and the promotion of ethical living in harmony with nature (Shen, 2020). One significant aspect of Buddhist ecology is its emphasis on compassion toward all sentient beings. In China, this is reflected in the protection of wildlife and biodiversity, often through the influence of Buddhist temples and monasteries, which have traditionally maintained forests and other natural areas as part of their spiritual practice (Clarke, 2020). For

example, the continued efforts to preserve forests around Buddhist temples contribute not only to ecological preservation but also to the cultural heritage of these sites (Jiang, 2020).

Moreover, contemporary Buddhist leaders in China have increasingly engaged in ecological issues. For example, the collaboration between Buddhist communities and governmental agencies in projects like reforestation and water conservation highlights how Buddhist values can support practical environmental efforts (Schroeder, 2020). Buddhist principles also underpin China's growing commitment to combating climate change, as seen in various eco-religious movements advocating for the use of renewable energy and reduced carbon footprints (Jones, 2020). By examining the role of Buddhism in Chinese environmental ethics, this section highlights the significance of Buddhist teachings in ecological preservation, laying the groundwork for a deeper exploration of how Tiantai Buddhism's doctrine of 'insentient beings with Buddha-nature' can make a unique contribution to China's environmental strategies.

## 2.8 Tiantai Buddhism's Doctrine of 'Insentient Beings with Buddha-Nature' and Its Relevance to Environmental Ethics

Tiantai Buddhism, developed by Zhiyi in the 6th century, is a school of thought that emphasizes the interconnection and oneness of all phenomena, including both sentient and non-sentient beings. One of its central teachings is that all beings, including non-sentient ones such as plants, rocks, and rivers, possess Buddha-nature (佛性, Buddha-dhātu) (Swanson, 1989). This doctrine, which asserts the spiritual and moral significance of the natural world, offers a unique perspective on ecological preservation. The Tiantai concept of "insentient beings with Buddha-nature" suggests that all elements of nature, not just sentient beings, have intrinsic value. This perspective challenges anthropocentric views and encourages an ethic of care and respect for the environment, aligning with modern ecological movements that advocate for the intrinsic value of biodiversity (Shen & Bowers, 2021). Tiantai Buddhism's non-dualistic approach, which posits that humans and nature are fundamentally interconnected, provides an ethical framework for treating ecological preservation as a

moral duty (Chappell, 1997).

Furthermore, Tiantai's emphasis on non-duality extends to its view of nature as a reflection of the ultimate reality (Dharmadhatu), wherein all beings participate equally in the unfolding of life. This principle aligns with modern ecological ethics that stress the importance of maintaining the balance and harmony of ecosystems (Yao, 2017). The recognition of Buddha-nature in all beings, including insentient ones, serves as a basis for environmental ethics that transcend utilitarian approaches, advocating for the protection of nature as a sacred obligation.

This section is central to the research, as it introduces the core doctrinal basis from Tiantai Buddhism that will be explored for its applicability to China's contemporary ecological preservation efforts, enriching both the theoretical and practical dimensions of environmental ethics.

## 2.9 Theoretical Approaches to Ecological Preservation in China: A Critical Review

Research on ecological preservation in China has largely been grounded in environmental science, policy studies, and socio-economic theories. However, the integration of ethical and philosophical perspectives, especially from Chinese intellectual traditions, is gaining prominence. A key theoretical framework employed in recent ecological studies is the concept of "ecological civilization," which synthesizes sustainability science with traditional Chinese values (Pan et al., 2020). This framework has been central to understanding China's approach to balancing development with environmental protection (Geall, 2019).

Ecological modernization theory is another prominent lens through which scholars have analyzed China's environmental policies. This theory focuses on how technological advancements and economic reforms can contribute to sustainable development (Mol & Sonnenfeld, 2020). While it has been useful in explaining the role of green technologies in China's environmental policies, critics argue that it often neglects the ethical dimensions of sustainability (Beeson, 2018). In contrast, Buddhist ecological ethics, particularly as derived from schools like Tiantai, offer a more holistic perspective by emphasizing the moral significance of nature. While Confucian and

Daoist influences on Chinese environmental policies have been widely studied, the contributions of Buddhism—especially Tiantai Buddhism—remain underexplored (Clarke, 2020). This research aims to bridge that gap by applying Tiantai Buddhist teachings to contemporary ecological preservation practices, thus offering a unique ethical dimension to existing theories. This section reviews the dominant theories used in ecological research in China, including ecological modernization theory. It highlights the gap in integrating Buddhist ethical perspectives. It underscores the need for a more comprehensive framework, which this research aims to address by incorporating Tiantai Buddhist principles into ecological preservation practices.

## 2.10 Philosophical and Theoretical Implications of Tiantai Buddhism for Ecological Preservation in China

Tiantai Buddhism's doctrine of "insentient beings with Buddha-nature" provides a compelling ethical framework for ecological preservation in China. By asserting the intrinsic value of all forms of existence, this doctrine aligns with modern ecological principles that recognize the interconnectedness and interdependence of all beings. The philosophical underpinnings of Tiantai Buddhism offer a non-anthropocentric perspective on nature, encouraging environmental stewardship as a moral obligation rather than merely a utilitarian or economic necessity.

The integration of Tiantai Buddhist principles into China's ecological preservation efforts could enhance the ethical and spiritual foundations of policies aimed at biodiversity conservation, reforestation, and sustainable resource management. In doing so, it offers a theoretical framework that complements existing policy frameworks, such as "ecological civilization," while also enriching them with deeper ethical insights drawn from China's religious traditions. This concluding section synthesizes the insights from the previous sections, highlighting the philosophical and theoretical significance of Tiantai Buddhist principles for advancing China's ecological preservation efforts. It frames the research's potential contribution to both academic discourse and environmental policy development in China.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed in this study, encompassing research design, population and sample selection, data collection methods, research instruments, validity and reliability assessments, and data analysis techniques.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This investigation employs a mixed-methods research design to examine the philosophical significance, practical applications, and implications of the *Insentient Beings* doctrine in Tiantai Buddhism, with a specific focus on its relevance to environmental conservation in China. The mixed methods approach is selected because it enables the integration of qualitative and quantitative data, offering a comprehensive understanding of the research issues. To address three research inquiries, this investigation was conducted in three complementary phases.

The initial phase is designed to address inquiries regarding the philosophical significance of the *Insentient Beings* doctrine in the context of environmental preservation in China. The analysis of Tiantai Buddhism's thought, specifically Jingxi Zhanran's thoughts, which interpret this doctrine, is a qualitative research method. Content analysis was employed to analyze the data and identify the primary concepts that link this theory to environmental issues. This literature review includes detailed interviews with Buddhist and environmental philosophers, performed between January and March 2024. The purpose of these interviews was to gain a more contextual understanding of the doctrine's relevance in the current ecological situation in China.

The second stage is dedicated to the application of the *Insentient Being* doctrine in China's environmental preservation policies and practices. This study employs a quantitative approach to evaluate the extent of Tiantai Buddhist influence on national and local environmental policies. Data were gathered through polls involving environmental activists, legislators, and religious groups engaged in environmental

protection. The study employed a Likert-scale structured questionnaire to assess the extent to which Buddhist ideas were understood, embraced, and applied in environmental policies. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the survey responses and identify trends in the application of theory in various environmental preservation situations.

The third stage is intended to address the philosophical and pragmatic implications of the Insertient theory on societal ecological awareness. This paper examines specific cases of environmental preservation strategies influenced by Tiantai Buddhist ideas, employing an interview approach. Qualitative data are collected through direct observations of conservation events, as well as semi-structured interviews with residents, monastery communities, and environmental volunteers. This interview took place in August and October 2024.

## 3.2 Research Participants

This investigation involves participants from various contexts at each research stage, which is tailored to meet the research objectives. Detailed explanations of each stage are provided below:

### 3.2.1 Phase 1 of Research Participants

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 and their philosophical understanding of human relations with nature.

### 3.2.2 Phase 2 of Research Participants

The survey was administered to 100 respondents, categorized into three groups: policymakers, environmental activists, and representatives of religious communities. Participants originated from diverse regions in China, where Buddhist teachings have shaped environmental preservation initiatives and policies. The survey was conducted online, taking into account geographical diversity.

### 3.2.3 Phase 3 of Research Participants

This phase involves semi-structured interviews with seven participants from local communities, including 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.

The distribution of research participants at each stage is detailed in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3. 1 Detail of Research Participants

Phase	Participant Category	N (people)	Participants Characteristics	Region
1	Buddhism and Philosophy Expert	7	Academics (2 people), senior monks (3 people), environmental practitioners (2 people)	Beijing, Hangzhou, Nanjing, Chengdu
2	Policy maker	15	Government officials in the field of environment and sustainable development planning	Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen
	Environmental activist	50	Ecological Preservation Communities	Chengdu, Guangzhou, Wuhan
	Religious Community	35	Leaders of active Buddhist communities are engaged in conservation programs.	Hangzhou, Suzhou, Xiamen
3	Local community	2	Villagers are involved in the environmental conservation program around the monastery.	Jiangxi province, Zhejiang province
	Monastery Community	3	Monks engaged in environmental preservation initiatives rooted in the Tiantai Buddhist tradition.	Fujian province
	Environmental volunteers	2	Volunteers from social institutions or religious communities that support ecological preservation programs	Sichuan province

### 3.3 Data Collection

#### 3.3.1 Semi-structured Interview I

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 employed a semi-structured guide that featured questions designed to explore the doctrine of "Insentient 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.

#### 3.3.2 Survey

Data were collected through a survey using a structured questionnaire to investigate the application of the doctrine of Tiantai Buddhism in ecological preservation policies and practices. The survey was administered online via Google Forms. The survey was administered between May and July 2024, with respondents spending an average of 20 to 30 minutes completing the questionnaire.

#### 3.3.3 Semi-Structured Interview II

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 conducted using a semi-structured interview guide that included questions regarding the implementation of religious-based environmental practices, associated challenges, and their impact 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 Instruments

#### 3.4.1 Interview Protocol I

Interview Protocol I is employed to investigate the philosophical interpretation of the doctrine of "Insentient 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 doctrine of insentient beings, its relevance to ecological preservation,

and the ethical implications and theoretical perspectives of the doctrine. (See in Appendix 1)

### **3.4.2 Questionnaire**

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information from policymakers, environmental activists, and religious communities regarding the integration of the Tiantai Buddhist doctrine into environmental preservation policies and practices. The questionnaire consists of 18 statement items, including the following: the impact of doctrine on community environmental awareness (5 items), the implementation of doctrine in ecological preservation policy (7 items), and aspects of understanding the doctrine of Buddhism (6 items). The development of this questionnaire is predicated on the adaptation of prior research on religious-based environmental ethics (Zhu et al., 2020; Wang & Xue, 2019). A combination of closed queries (Likert scale 1–5) is present in each aspect. (See in Appendix 2).

### **3.4.3 Interview Protocol II**

Interview Protocol II is employed to investigate the direct experiences of environmental volunteers, monastery communities, and local communities in applying Buddhist teachings to Tiantai Buddhism for ecological preservation. The Protocol II interview 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. (See in Appendix 3).

## **3.5 Validity and Reliability of the Instrument**

### **3.5.1 Validity and Reliability Interview Protocol I**

Three experts, including a philosophy professor with expertise in Tiantai Buddhism, an environmental ethics and ecology specialist, and a practitioner of qualitative research, reviewed the interview guide. Expert evaluation of the relevance, clarity, and depth of the questions was conducted using a Likert scale assessment form, ranging from 1 to 4, where 1 represented 'not relevant' and 4 denoted 'very significant'. The feedback provided consisted of rephrasing the queries and the inclusion of additional exploratory elements 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 ranged from 0.80 to 0.91, with an average of 0.86 (indicating a very excellent category), as indicated by the trial analysis results.

Table 3. 2 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 "insentient beings with Buddha-nature" in Tiantai Buddhism?	0.90
2	How do you understand the doctrine of "Insentient 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 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 into 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

### 3.5.2 Validity and Reliability Questionnaire

The questionnaire was content-validated by a philosophy professor specializing in Tiantai Buddhism and two experts in environmental ethics. Each item was evaluated by experts based on its intelligibility, representation, and relevance. A 1–4 Likert scale format was employed for validation. Next, the questionnaire, which had been deemed legitimate by experts, was empirically validated by 20 respondents representing policymakers, environmental activists, and religious communities. Exploratory factor analysis was implemented to evaluate construct validity. The KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) value of 0.85 (good category) indicated that the factors formed were consistent with the specified aspects, as indicated by the validation results. The construct validity was satisfactory, as all items had a loading factor greater than 0.5.

Subsequently, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was implemented to evaluate the questionnaire's reliability. The reliability test results indicated that the questionnaire's total reliability averaged 0.87, which is classified as high. Table 3.3 provides a comprehensive overview of the doctrine of Tiantai Buddhism, including its implementation in policy (0.90), impact on environmental awareness (0.84), and comprehension (0.87).

Table 3. 3 The Result of Validity and Reliability of Questionnaire

No	Item Statement	Factor Loading	KMO	Sig. Value Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Cronbach's Alpha	
Understanding the doctrine of Tiantai Buddhism						
1	I understand the concept of "insentient beings with Buddha-nature" as the basis that all beings, including inanimate ones, have the potential for enlightenment.	0.73	0.78	0.000	0.89	Valid and reliable
2	The doctrines of Tiantai Buddhism helped me see the importance of maintaining harmony between humans and nature.	0.78	0.81	0.000	0.90	Valid and reliable
3	I believe that the Tiantai teachings teach the value of equality between living beings and the environment.	0.67	0.80	0.000	0.91	Valid and reliable
4	I understand the relationship between Tiantai Buddhism and environmental conservation.	0.65	0.82	0.000	0.87	Valid and reliable
5	The doctrine of Tiantai Buddhism presents a distinctive perspective on how humans should interact with nature.	0.76	0.79	0.000	0.85	Valid and reliable
6	I feel this doctrine is relevant to apply in the	0.79	0.76	0.000	0.86	Valid and reliable

No	Item Statement	Factor Loading	KMO	Sig. Value Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Cronbach's Alpha	
	context of environmental conservation today.					
	Implementation of doctrine in ecological conservation policies					
7	The ecological conservation policy in my area already reflects the values taught by Tiantai Buddhism.	0.81	0.79	0.000	0.87	Valid and reliable
8	Local governments work with religious communities to implement ecological conservation principles.	0.79	0.76	0.000	0.86	Valid and reliable
9	I believe that the teachings of Tiantai Buddhism can serve as a guide for formulating more effective environmental policies.	0.76	0.72	0.000	0.89	Valid and reliable
10	The doctrines of Tiantai Buddhism have been translated into concrete programs for environmental conservation.	0.62	0.73	0.000	0.92	Valid and reliable
11	Religious communities, including monasteries, have an active role in supporting environmental conservation policies.	0.82	0.83	0.000	0.92	Valid and reliable
12	Current environmental policies have taken into account the importance of maintaining harmony between humans and nature, as per the teachings of the Tiantai school.	0.81	0.88	0.000	0.91	Valid and reliable
13	Collaboration between religious communities and environmental activists has had a positive impact on environmental	0.80	0.88	0.000	0.89	Valid and reliable

No	Item Statement	Factor Loading	KMO	Sig. Value Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Cronbach's Alpha
conservation.					
14	The impact of doctrine on public environmental awareness				
14	Tiantai Buddhism's teachings raised my awareness of the importance of environmental conservation.	0.86	0.81	0.000	0.89
15	After understanding this doctrine, I became more motivated to participate in environmental conservation activities.	0.88	0.86	0.000	0.85
16	Public awareness of environmental conservation has increased due to the influence of Tiantai Buddhism teachings.	0.84	0.80	0.000	0.87
17	Environmental conservation programs based on Tiantai teachings have a positive impact on people's lifestyles.	0.85	0.86	0.000	0.85
18	I believe that the implementation of Tiantai Buddhism's doctrine brings long-term benefits to environmental conservation.	0.81	0.79	0.000	0.87

### 3.5.3 Validity and Reliability Interview Protocol II

The interview guide was evaluated by three experts: a professor of religious ecology, an anthropologist focused on 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 with 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 ranged from 0.78 to 0.89, with an average of 0.83 (excellent category), as indicated by the trial analysis results.

Table 3. 4 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 "insentient 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

### 3.6 Data Analysis

#### 3.6.1. Quantitative Analysis

The research question regarding the application of Tiantai Buddhism doctrine in environmental conservation policies and practices in China was addressed by utilizing survey data obtained through questionnaires. SPSS 32.0 software was

employed to conduct quantitative data analysis. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to provide an overview of the respondents' perceptions regarding the comprehension of doctrine, the implementation of policies, and the collaboration of environmental actors.

### **3.6.2 Qualitative Analysis**

Data from in-depth interviews conducted in Stage 1 were examined to help answer the study question: how the philosophical importance of the doctrine of sentient beings in Tiantai Buddhism is understood within 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. The interview transcript data was entered into NVivo 12. Reading the entire transcript in the first step helped to provide a thorough understanding of the data. The data were then arranged according to themes, including the concept of sentient entities, the perspective on human-nature harmony, and the application of the Buddha-nature principle to environmental preservation.

Meanwhile, the data from semi-structured interviews conducted during Stage 2 were analyzed to address research inquiries regarding the practical and philosophical implications of applying the doctrine of sentient beings to the community's ecological awareness. To execute initial coding, the transcribed interview data were analyzed using NVivo 12 software. The primary themes identified were the impact of Tiantai Buddhism-based programs on community environmental behavior, the involvement of religious communities in conservation practices, and changes in community environmental awareness.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the results of the research, integrating findings from the textual analysis of Tiantai Buddhist doctrines, a survey of China's ecological preservation practices, and interviews I and II to address the research question.

#### **4.1. Qualitative Findings from Research Question 1**

RQ 1. What is the interpretation of the philosophical significance of the doctrine of insentient beings in Tiantai Buddhism regarding environmental conservation in China?

##### **4.1.1 Doctrinal Insights from Jingxi Zhanran's Thoughts and Teachings of Zhiyi: " Tiantai Buddhist Insentient Beings with Buddha-nature"**

The doctrine of sentient beings in the context of environmental conservation in China is examined through the teachings of Zhiyi and the concepts of Tiantai Buddhism, specifically Jingxi Zhanran. This idea establishes a profound philosophical framework for the relationship between living and non-living entities, specifically the intrinsic value of natural elements like soil, water, trees, and mountains. Tiantai Buddhism holds that this theory not only emphasizes universal connectivity but also provides a relevant perspective on contemporary problems, particularly environmental protection. One can gain a thorough understanding of the study's findings on Jingxi Zhanran's ideas and Zhiyi's teachings through the following detailed explanations.

###### **4.1.1.1 Jingxi Zhanran's Thoughts**

Jingxi Zhanran (711–782), a prominent figure in Tiantai Buddhism, further developed and refined Zhiyi's teachings by emphasizing the Buddha-nature (佛性, fóxìng) of sentient beings. According to Zhanran, the concept of insentient beings with Buddha-nature implies that all elements of nature, including purportedly sentient beings such as rocks, trees, and rivers, possess an inherent Buddha-nature. Zhanran derived his theory from the Perfect Teaching as a means of articulating the ultimate truth. In the remaining three provisional teachings, inanimate creatures are regarded as lacking

Buddha-nature. Nevertheless, the Buddha-nature is present in all entities, including the inanimate, in the Perfect Teaching. Zhanran believed that Tiantai's teachings would lose their philosophical foundation if this perspective were not adopted, as the duality of consciousness and matter would undermine the fundamental principles of Tiantai's philosophical system. As part of his defense and clarification of the Perfect Teaching, Zhanran enthusiastically broadened the concept of Buddha-nature to encompass inanimate entities.

Zhanran explains that the real world is an important part of the interconnected web of life, not just a setting for human activities. In his lessons, he highlights the idea of Ichinen Sanzen (一念三千), which means that one mind can encompass three thousand worlds. This principle underscores the fact that even non-human entities influence the spiritual and moral well-being of humanity. This perspective can be applied to environmental conservation by acknowledging and respecting non-human elements as integral components of the broader life cycle. Zhanran also issues a warning about the dangers of anthropocentrically using the environment. Instead, he advocates for a comprehensive viewpoint that regards nature as having moral and spiritual relevance. This point of view is relevant in the modern period, as it is possible to halt the exploitation of natural resources by recognizing nature as a Buddha-natured entity that is so deserving of preservation.

#### *4.1.1.2 Teachings of Zhiyi*

Among the earliest Buddhist philosophers to establish a comprehensive metaphysical framework that considered the relationship between living and non-living entities was Zhiyi (538–597 CE), the founder of the Tiantai tradition. In his doctrine, Zhiyi introduced the Three Truths (三谛, sāndi): emptiness (空, kū), provisional existence (假, jiǎ), and the middle way (中, zhōng). These three interconnected facts complement each other, capturing the fundamental nature of reality. By use of this idea, Zhiyi argued that every entity—sentient or non—sentient—is linked and inseparable. From this vantage point, mountains, rivers, flora, and rocks—among other natural components—became even more important in the web of life.

Zhiyi argues that all phenomena, regardless of their classification as inanimate, are imbued with an essence of emptiness and maintain a transitory existence

that can be utilized for the benefit of all beings. This viewpoint broadens the notion that inanimate elements, such as mountains and rivers, contribute to achieving spiritual harmony. This instruction provides a foundation for appreciating nature as sacred, rather than solely as a resource for exploitation, within the context of environmental conservation. Zhiyi argues that humans are morally obligated to maintain the equilibrium of nature as a fundamental component of bodhisattva practice. This practice focuses on protecting nature, which is necessary for life on Earth, and helping to reduce the suffering of living things. Zhiyi's teachings provide a moral framework for protecting the earth, grounded in Buddhist principles.

Additionally, Zhiyi introduced the concept of Ichinen Sanzen (一念三千), which posits that a single thought encompasses three thousand realms. This suggests that each human thought and action has a significant impact on the broader universe. As a result, the physical realm and the spiritual and moral well-being of individuals are both influenced by human interactions with the environment. Through learning from Zhiyi, one can develop a strong ecological consciousness, realizing that spiritual and ethical growth depend on the protection of the surroundings. This is especially important in light of China's current environmental challenges, where the pressures of urbanization and industrialization significantly strain natural ecosystems.

#### **4.1.2 Interview I to Explore the Doctrine Perception of "insentient Beings with Buddha-nature"**

This Phase I interview was conducted with seven respondents, comprising academics (2 individuals), senior monks (3 individuals), and environmental practitioners (2 individuals). This interview was conducted to complement the analysis of Doctrinal Insights from Jingxi Zhanran's thoughts and teachings on "Insentient Beings with Buddha-Nature," drawing on academic perspectives, the views of senior monks, and environmental practitioners (Table 4.1). The following is detailed data from the respondents for Phase I interviews.

Table 4. 1 Interview Participant (Interview I)

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

Additionally, researchers conduct 45-minute interviews with each respondent online using the Zoom application. The interview transcripts with respondents are presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4. 2 Interview Transcript (Interview I)

Interview Question	Interview Transcript
How do you explain the concept of "insentient beings with Buddha-nature" in Tiantai Buddhism?	<i>"The idea implies that Buddha-nature exists even in modest objects like rivers or rocks. This is consistent with Tiantai's nonduality teachings, which stress that in their potential for enlightenment, there is no difference between the sentient and insentient." (AY).</i>
	<i>"That is a really important concept. It suggests equality among all kinds of life and interconnection. This philosophy, in my opinion, motivates greater environmental consciousness by helping us perceive the spiritual core within nature (BR).</i>
	<i>"Insentient creatures with Buddha-nature suggest that the divine essence permeates everything. For Tiantai Buddhists, this underlines that even mountains or trees are manifestations of the ultimate truth, worthy of respect and care." (CW)</i>
	<i>"This theology shows how interrelated everything in the cosmos is. Actually, it helps us to cultivate compassion for the surroundings as well as for individuals." (XN).</i>
	<i>"This instruction encourages environmental harmony. If everything has Buddha-nature, harming or polluting the surroundings is akin to injuring a living entity, which drives environmentally friendly living. (ZC)</i>

Table 4. 3 Interview Transcript (Interview I) (continued)

Interview Question	Interview Transcript
How do you understand the doctrine of "Insentient Beings with Buddha-Nature" in Tiantai Buddhism?	<i>Reading the Tiantai commentaries by Zhiyi and Buddhist sutras, especially the Lotus Sutra, "this doctrine emphasizes that all beings, including inanimate ones like rocks or rivers, possess Buddha-nature and are connected in the process of enlightenment". AY)</i>
What source do you use?	<i>"It reflects the Tiantai belief that everything, sentient or non-sentient, has the potential to attain enlightenment". Tiantai school treatises and meditation techniques help me to understand this idea. (XN).</i>
What is the relevance of the doctrine to human relations and nature?	<i>"The doctrine shows the unity of life and non-life, encouraging compassion towards all beings, including the natural world. Commentary by Chinese Tiantai academics on the Mahaparinirvana Sutra (CY)</i>
	<i>"The theory guides us on interconnection. In human contact, it promotes compassion and equality. Regarding nature, it encourages us to regard it as an integral part of our spiritual life, rather than as a distinct entity. (AY).</i>
	<i>"Philosophy stresses harmony." It suggests that a damaging nature is akin to harming oneself. In human relations, too, it fosters understanding that everyone is part of the same universal truth and promotes mutual respect. (CW)</i>
	<i>"This theology links spiritual practice with moral activity. It inspires us to treat others with respect and to view environmental care as a development of our interaction with the divine." (CY)</i>
How does this doctrine affect the view of Tiantai Buddhism on ecology?	<i>"Tiantai Buddhism sees interdependence as a guiding perspective on ecology. Emphasizing ecological protection as a moral obligation, philosophy emphasizes how damaging the environment is tantamount to upsetting the equilibrium of life." (BR)</i>
	<i>"This concept teaches that nature and living entities have the same Buddha-nature, therefore deepening the ecological viewpoint. It asks for respect for every element of the surroundings. (XN)</i>
	<i>"Viewing the environment as a living creature with inherent value helps one to raise ecological awareness. According to Tiantai Buddhism, ethical life and spiritual development complement each other, and environmental protection fits both." (ZC)</i>

Table 4. 4 Interview Transcript (Interview I) (continued)

Interview Question	Interview Transcript
Is there a special interpretation of this doctrine applied in China?	<p><i>Indeed, the theory is sometimes understood in China as complementing the idea of "harmony between humans and nature" (天人合一). It underlines a harmonic cohabitation and links environmental protection to moral and cultural necessity connected with Buddhist principles." AY</i></p>
How is this concept integrated into the teachings of Buddhist environmental ethics?	<p><i>"Chinese Tiantai practitioners read this philosophy as a call to use Buddhist teachings and practices to guard the environment. Temples, for instance, host compassionate events including tree planting and campaigns to cut plastic waste." (CW)</i></p> <p><i>"The Chinese perspective emphasizes bringing the theory into daily living. Buddhist ideas inspire several environmental movements in China to promote waste reduction and sustainable farming." (CY)</i></p>
How does this doctrine affect daily religious practices related to environmental preservation?	<p><i>"In Buddhist environmental ethics, stressing interdependence helps to combine this idea. It emphasizes that, as everything is interconnected, damage to the environment also affects all living entities. Modern Buddhist campaigning for environmentally friendly living reflects this idea. (BR)</i></p> <p><i>"The idea is closely connected in Buddhist ethics to the non-harming (ahimsa) precept. As mountains, rivers, and forests are also representations of Buddha-nature, it urges practitioners to extend their compassion outside of living entities." (XN)</i></p> <p><i>"The idea is incorporated by useful lessons urging people to lessen their environmental impact. For instance, Buddhist groups sometimes promote sustainable living and vegetarianism as shows of regard for all kinds of life." (ZC)</i></p> <p><i>"This theory promotes including environmental care into mindfulness and meditation practices. Nowadays, many Buddhists meditate in natural surroundings to strengthen their bond with the surroundings and promote environmental responsibility." (CY)</i></p> <p><i>"Religious practices have evolved to incorporate environmental projects as eco-pilgrimages, in which participants plant trees and clean up sites. The conviction that preserving the surroundings is a spiritual obligation motivates these deeds." (ZC)</i></p>

Table 4. 5 Interview Transcript (Interview I) (continued)

Interview Question	Interview Transcript
In your opinion, is there a gap between theory and practice in the application of this doctrine?	<p><i>"Yes, there is a gap, especially since many practitioners may find it difficult among modern challenges and lifestyle demands, since the teachings demand consistent effort to merge into daily life."</i> BR (BR)</p> <p><i>"I sense a disconnect, particularly in how the teachings are interpreted against how they are practiced. Some supporters deviate from the central message by giving ritualistic activities top priority above environmental action."</i> (XN)</p> <p><i>"I sense a disconnect, particularly in how the teachings are interpreted against how they are practiced. Some supporters deviate from the central message by giving ritualistic activities top priority above environmental action."</i> (CY)</p>
What do you envision as the potential impact of adopting this doctrine in China's environmental policies?	<p><i>"The doctrine offers a special philosophical viewpoint that, especially in balancing development with preservation, can enrich environmental policies by embedding ethical considerations into ecological decision-making."</i> (BR)</p> <p><i>"This philosophy emphasizes the connectivity of all things; hence, it has immense potential. Policies guided by such principles would give harmony between humans and nature priority, which fits very nicely with traditional Chinese society."</i> (CW)</p> <p><i>"The doctrine's emphasis on mutual inclusion between humans and nature could shape policies that address environmental issues not just as technical challenges but also as moral and spiritual imperatives."</i> (ZH)</p>

Based on the interview results, several themes related to the Insentient Beings doctrine were identified. In detail, five themes emerge from Interview I, which are presented in Table 4.3 as follows:

Table 4. 6 Theme from Interview I

Code	Theme	Interpretation
○ The relationship between all beings	Insentient Beings concept	Emphasizes that Insentient creatures possess Buddhas that are interconnected with all living things and the universe
○ The Buddha-Nature in insentient creatures		
○ Nondualism (non-dualism)		demonstrates that insentient entities (e.g., water, trees, and stones) possess the potential of Buddha-Nature, which signifies a sense of equality and interconnectedness with all living things.

Code	Theme	Interpretation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ecological awareness</li> <li>• Moral and spirituality</li> <li>• Sustainability and harmony</li> </ul>	Human-natural harmony views	<p>In Buddha-nature, living and non-living creatures are not distinct; they possess the same nature and values, which influence our perception of the environment and the natural world.</p> <p>The Tiantai posits that the harmony between humanity and nature is a result of the realization that everything, including nature, possesses Buddha-Nature. This establishes a relationship that is characterized by mutual respect and the preservation of ecosystems. Encourages policies and actions that promote environmental sustainability, with a focus on fostering spiritual awareness that respects nature and all beings.</p> <p>The Tiantai's concept of harmony promotes sustainability in human interactions with nature, where humans are not only stakeholders but also the custodians of the universe.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Philosophical incorporation in environmental policies</li> <li>• Principle without separation</li> <li>• Human responsibility</li> </ul>	The application of Buddhist Principles to Environmental Preservation	<p>In the context of the environment, the application of Buddhist principles posits that the sustainability of existence is a shared responsibility between humans and the natural world.</p> <p>Buddhist teachings emphasize that all entities, including nature, possess the capacity for sanctity and wisdom, underscoring the significant role humans play in preserving the environment.</p> <p>The integration of Buddhist philosophy and environmental preservation policies in China has the potential to generate more comprehensive paradigm shifts in addressing environmental concerns.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inconsistency in concrete action</li> </ul>	The distinction between theory and	<p>The teachings of Buddhism regarding human harmony are</p>

Code	Theme	Interpretation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inadequate applicative practice comprehension</li> <li>• Social and economic constraints</li> </ul>		<p>distinct from the practical actions in society and environmental policies.</p> <p>Despite the theoretical acceptance of this teaching, its practical application in environmental policies and daily life is frequently restricted to the spiritual realm and fails to translate into tangible actions.</p> <p>The principles of environmental preservation, rooted in Buddhism, often conflict with the rapid economic expansion, particularly in developing countries like China.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic and political challenges</li> <li>• Limitations of institutional collaboration</li> <li>• Mismatch between religion and science</li> <li>• Limited comprehension</li> </ul>	<p>Challenges in the implementation of doctrine</p>	<p>One of the primary challenges is the limited understanding and acceptance of this teaching outside the Buddhist community, which complicates the application of this philosophy.</p> <p>The difficulty in combining Buddhist ideas with a more pragmatic, statistically based scientific approach in environmental policy</p> <p>Lack of support and a platform for cooperation among religious leaders, government officials, and environmental specialists to convert this idea into specific actions or policy.</p> <p>In a society that values rapid economic growth, the preservation of ecological ideas drawn from Buddhist teachings may be seen as a barrier to economic progress.</p>

## 4.2 Quantitative Findings from Research Question 2

RQ 2. In what ways can the doctrine be utilized in the formulation and implementation of environmental conservation policies and practices in China?

To investigate the potential application of the Tiantai Buddhist doctrine in

environmental preservation policies and practices in China, researchers distributed questionnaires to 100 respondents. Out of the 100 respondents who were provided with a questionnaire, 97 respondents completed the entire questionnaire. In the initial phase, researchers conducted a descriptive statistical analysis to identify potential trends in the comprehension of Buddhist doctrine and its practical application.

Table 4.7 Statistical Descriptive Doctrine's Perception and Its Implementation

No.	Aspect and Its Indicator	N	Mean Score	SD
1	Understanding the doctrine of Tiantai Buddhism I understand the concept of "insentient beings with Buddha-nature" as the basis that all beings, including inanimate ones, have the potential for enlightenment.	97	4.3	0.7
2	The doctrines of Tiantai Buddhism helped me see the importance of maintaining harmony between humans and nature.	97	4.5	0.5
3	I believe that the Tiantai teachings teach the value of equality between living beings and the environment.	97	4.4	0.6
4	I understand the relationship between Tiantai Buddhism and environmental conservation.	97	4.2	0.8
5	The doctrine of Tiantai Buddhism presents a distinctive perspective on how humans should interact with nature.	97	4.1	0.9
6	I feel this doctrine is relevant to apply in the context of environmental conservation today.	97	4.0	0.8
7	Implementation of doctrine in ecological conservation policies The ecological conservation policy in my area already reflects the values taught by Tiantai Buddhism.	97	3.8	0.9
8	Local governments work with religious communities to implement ecological conservation principles.	97	4.1	0.7
9	I believe that the teachings of Tiantai Buddhism can serve as a guide for formulating more effective environmental policies.	97	4.5	0.6
10	The doctrines of Tiantai Buddhism have been translated into concrete programs for environmental conservation.	97	3.7	1.0
11	Religious communities, including monasteries, have an active role in supporting environmental conservation policies.	97	4.2	0.7
12	Current environmental policies have taken into account the importance of maintaining harmony between humans and nature, as per the teachings of Tiantai.	97	3.9	0.8

No.	Aspect and Its Indicator	N	Mean Score	SD
13	Collaboration between religious communities and environmental activists has had a positive impact on environmental conservation. The impact of doctrine on public environmental awareness	97	4.3	0.6
14	Tiantai Buddhism's teachings raised my awareness of the importance of environmental conservation.	97	4.4	0.6
15	After understanding this doctrine, I became more motivated to participate in environmental conservation activities.	97	4.2	0.7
16	Public awareness of environmental conservation has increased due to the influence of Tiantai Buddhism teachings.	97	4.1	0.8
17	Environmental conservation programs based on Tiantai teachings have a positive impact on people's lifestyles.	97	4.0	0.9
18	I believe that the implementation of Tiantai Buddhism's doctrine brings long-term benefits to environmental conservation.	97	4.3	0.6

Analysis based on Table 4.4:

The first aspect, "Understanding the Doctrine of Buddhism," has an overall measurement item with an average value exceeding 4.0. This indicates that the Tiantai Doctrine of Buddhism is comprehended by both respondents, particularly in the context of human-natural harmony. The measurement item with the highest average score is "The Doctrines of Tiantai Buddhism helped me understand the significance of preserving harmony between humans and nature," with an average score of 4.5. This demonstrates that respondents comprehend the primary message of the Tiantai doctrine that is pertinent to environmental preservation: human-natural harmony. This item also demonstrates the consensus among respondents that human-natural harmony is a critical component and the essence of this doctrine, as evidenced by the value of SD 0.5. The measurement item with the lowest score is "I believe this doctrine is pertinent to apply in the current context of environmental conservation," with an average score of 4.0. Despite respondents endorsing the relevance of doctrine, there is a potential for uncertainty regarding its practical application in the contemporary environment, due to obstacles such as economic and cultural constraints.

Conversely, the items with the greatest variance are located in the "The

doctrine of Tiantai Buddhism provides a new view of how humans should interact with Nature" section, with an SD value of 0.9. This variation reveals a significant disparity in how respondents evaluate the relevance of this new perspective on human interactions with nature.

The most consistent and strongest item in the second aspect, "Implementation of doctrine in ecological conservation policies," is "I believe that the teachings of Tiantai Buddhism can serve as a guideline for formulating better environmental policies," with an average score of 4.5 and SD 0.6. This demonstrates that respondents are profoundly in agreement that this doctrine is pertinent as a framework for environmental policies. Subsequently, the item with the greatest degree of variation is "The doctrines of Tiantai Buddhism have been translated into concrete programs for environmental conservation," which has an average score of 3.7 and an SD of 1.0. The substantial variation suggests that respondents have varying opinions on the effectiveness of the doctrine's concrete implementation. These results also indicate that the primary obstacle is the translation of the doctrine into tangible programs, which suggests that there is room for enhancement and reinforcement of implementation.

The most consistent and strongest item in the third aspect, "The impact of doctrine on public environmental awareness," is "Tiantai Buddhism's teachings raised my awareness of the importance of environmental conservation," with an average score of 4.4 and a standard deviation of 0.6. This suggests that the respondents are in complete agreement that these teachings directly increase their environmental awareness. At the same time, the item with the most variance is "Environmental conservation programs based on Tiantai teachings have a positive impact on people's lifestyles," with an average score of 4.0 and a standard deviation of 0.9. This suggests that a portion of the respondents do not believe the impact is yet complete.

### 4.3 Qualitative Findings from Research Question 3

RQ3. What are the philosophical and practical consequences of implementing this doctrine concerning individuals' ecological awareness?

To address the third inquiry, the researcher conducted interviews with seven respondents, comprising 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 in that it focuses on respondents who are engaged in environmental conservation activities. This interview was conducted online using the Zoom application, with each respondent participating for 30 to 45 minutes. The respondent data for the second interview is presented below.

Table 4. 8 Interview Participant (Interview II)

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

Next, Table 4.6 below displays the interview transcript.

Table 4. 9 Interview Transcript (Interview II)

Interview Question	Transcript
What motivates you to participate in environmental conservation initiatives?	<p>Li W: My connection to the environment and my sense of obligation to next generations inspire me.</p> <p>Wang M: Along with the wish to motivate others to act, the apparent environmental damage in my neighborhood pushes me.</p> <p>Shi Y: I view conservation as a means of addressing climate change; my family instilled in me a love of the natural world.</p> <p>SH: The urgency to preserve ecosystems and the chance to work with like-minded people motivate me.</p> <p>SG: My training as an environmental scientist drives me to use my knowledge and observe real outcomes.</p> <p>Zhang X: Inspired by firsthand experience seeing illegal logging, I decided to work for conservation.</p> <p>Liu X: I channel the health effects of pollution I have personally seen in my family into a useful activity.</p>
In what ways do the teachings of Tiantai Buddhism influence your actions in the field of ecological conservation?	<p>Li W: Tiantai Buddhism reminds me that damaging the environment immediately affects humanity, as it stresses the interconnectedness of all things. This instruction guides my efforts toward achieving ecological balance and sustainable living.</p> <p>Wang M: The idea of Three Thousand Realms in a Single</p>

Interview Question	Transcript
	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: Utilizing mindfulness in Tiantai Buddhism, I can remain conscious of my everyday consumption patterns, thereby guaranteeing they complement ideas of ecological preservation.
How do you practice the doctrine of "insentient beings with Buddha-nature"?	SG: Tiantai's lessons on the oneness of mind and environment have helped me to see better how inner tranquility supports outside ecological equilibrium. This motivates me to support holistic, mindfully focused 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 the importance of respecting spiritual practice in natural surroundings. This viewpoint motivates me to view environmental protection as a sacred obligation rather than a mere necessity.
	Li W: As Buddha-nature is embodied by all kinds of nature—trees, rivers, mountains—I cultivate it by respecting all of them. This perspective allows me to approach ecological preservation with respect and care.
	Wang M: For me, it denotes realizing the environmental holiness. I view ecosystems as living creatures deserving of protection and strive to restore them, thereby avoiding damage to natural resources.
	Shi Y: Seeing non-sentient objects, such as rocks and water, as linked with living helps me to live by this philosophy. This motivates me to coexist peacefully with my surroundings and support their protection.
	SH: I work on it utilizing mindfulness, and I thank the earth. Whether it is trees or waste reduction, I see these acts as means of honoring the Buddha-nature inherent in all things.
	SG: This philosophy reminds me that everything in the cosmos has intrinsic value. I follow it by teaching others to treat the environment with the same regard we would show living entities.
	Zhang X: Seeing natural habitats as representations of Buddha-nature that need to be fostered, I teach this by participating in conservation initiatives that emphasize their

Interview Question	Transcript
<p>What actions have you taken to preserve the environment in your community?</p>	<p>restoration.</p> <p>Liu X: I embody this philosophy by reducing my environmental impact and performing rites honoring non-sentient entities, such as prayers to rivers prior to clean-up projects.</p> <p>Li W: I revere all sorts of nature as Buddha-nature is embodied by all kinds of it—trees, rivers, mountains. This perspective enables me to approach ecological preservation with greater regard and sensitivity.</p> <p>Wang M: It means, for me, realizing the environmental purity. I strive to repair ecosystems, considering them living entities worthy of protection, thereby preventing the degradation of natural resources.</p> <p>Shi Y: Seeing non-sentient objects, such as rocks and water, connected with living, encourages me to adopt this philosophy. This drives me to live in harmony with my surroundings and help preserve them.</p> <p>SH: I work on it using thanks for the land and awareness. Whether it is trees or garbage reduction, I consider these deeds as ways to respect the Buddha-nature that underlies all things.</p> <p>SG: This idea helps me to realize that everything in the universe has inherent value. I advise others to treat the surroundings with the same respect we would show live entities.</p>
<p>In what manner do local communities react to environmental conservation initiatives that are rooted in Buddhism?</p>	<p>Zhang X: I teach this by supporting conservation projects, emphasizing their restoration, as natural environments reflect the Buddha-nature that needs to be nurtured.</p> <p>Liu X: By lowering my environmental effect and carrying out ceremonies respecting non-sentient entities, such as prayers to rivers before clean-up projects, I live by this concept.</p> <p>Li W: Many in my neighborhood find great significance in these projects, as they complement the Buddhist teachings they already value, namely mindfulness and compassion for all living entities.</p> <p>Wang M: Particularly when the projects are presented as part of their spiritual practice, local populations usually respond favourably. People perceive a moral obligation to participate.</p> <p>Shi Y: Generally speaking, Buddhist principles and environmental behavior go really closely. Many see these projects as a means of applying the ahimsa—non-harm—toward nature precept.</p> <p>SH: Communities that view such initiatives as an extension of their faith usually respond positively. Some, meanwhile,</p>

Interview Question	Transcript
<p>Does the doctrine of Tiantai Buddhism offer a viable approach to ecological preservation?</p>	<p>require further study to see the connection between Buddhist principles and environmental responsibility.</p> <p>SG: Particularly in cases when monks or temples spearhead the projects, communities value the spiritual background of these activities. It inspires mutual responsibility and confidence.</p> <p>Zhang X: As it provides a cultural and spiritual dimension, I have observed that people become more involved when projects are connected to Buddhist rituals, such as tree ordinations or prayers for the environment.</p> <p>Liu X: Usually, reactions are beneficial. Many residents believe that participating in these projects will help them earn merit and simultaneously help preserve their surroundings.</p>
<p>How is the collaboration between the monastic community, local</p>	<p>Li W: Surely. The ideology is an excellent tool for ecological preservation, as its emphasis on connectivity and compassion offers a comprehensive framework for interpreting our interactions with the environment.</p> <p>Wang M: Indeed, it is feasible as Tiantai Buddhism emphasizes the oneness of all existence. From this perspective, environmental protection becomes necessary for spiritual development.</p> <p>Shi Y: That seems right. Tiantai Buddhism teaches us to value all kinds of life, including non-sentient entities, thereby guiding an ethical approach to preserving ecosystems.</p> <p>SH: Yes. Practical instruments for encouraging sustainable living and minimizing environmental damage include an emphasis on mindfulness and the dependent origination concept.</p> <p>SG: Indeed, the philosophy and moral foundation of conservation is given by the doctrine. It motivates people to consider environmental preservation as a responsibility rather than only a choice.</p> <p>Zhang X: I consider it to be successful. Recognizing that small actions contribute to greater environmental harmony, the concept of Three Thousand Realms in a Single Moment of Life encourages individuals to take responsibility for their actions.</p> <p>Liu X: Clearly. By combining spiritual development with environmental care, Tiantai Buddhism offers a sustainable and balanced approach to ecological protection.</p> <p>Li W: Usually, the cooperation is robust. While local communities and the government provide resources and policy assistance, monastic groups offer moral and spiritual direction.</p>

Interview Question	Transcript
communities, and the government in conservation activities?	<p>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.</p>
What are the primary challenges encountered in the implementation of Tiantai Buddhism's value-based environmental conservation program?	<p>Shi Y: I have observed successful cooperation whereby the government implements environmental rules, monks prepare awareness programs, and the community actively supports events such as tree planting and clean-ups.</p> <p>SH: The interaction is reciprocal. Mediators between the government and residents, monastic leaders ensure that conservation initiatives honor both modern environmental policies and cultural legacy.</p> <p>SG: Cooperation is most effective when all parties involved share a common vision. Many times, monks support environmental preservation, community service, and government funding, therefore fostering a synergy that propels achievement.</p> <p>Zhang X: While there are difficulties, when coordinated, the cooperation produces notable outcomes. Buddhist temples, for instance, have started garbage control projects supported by the government and involving local communities.</p> <p>Liu X: Shared regard is what makes the cooperation strong. Monastic communities emphasize spiritual principles; the government ensures scalability; and residents feel empowered to take responsibility for environmental efforts.</p> <p>Li W: A primary obstacle is ignorance. It is challenging to garner general support, as many individuals, particularly local populations, are unfamiliar with the connection between Tiantai Buddhist beliefs and environmental preservation.</p> <p>Wang M: One other primary concern is funding. Although the idea is interesting, implementing initiatives in line with these ideals often requires financial resources that are not always easily accessible.</p> <p>Shi Y: Another difficulty can come from cultural variances. Different communities have different understandings and acceptances of Tiantai Buddhism, which may impede group projects.</p> <p>SH: Another difficulty is juggling contemporary environmental remedies with ancient Buddhist methods. Some traditional ceremonies require cautious adaptation, as they conflict with ecological principles.</p> <p>SG: Government assistance is not always readily available. Although officials might show enthusiasm, long-term dedication to these initiatives and policy congruence are</p>

Interview Question	Transcript
What strategies did you employ to address these challenges, and do you require any further assistance to enhance the circumstances?	<p>sometimes lacking.</p> <p>Zhang X: Getting the younger generation involved presents difficulty. Many young people find modern lifestyles more appealing and do not perceive Tiantai Buddhist values as relevant in solving environmental problems.</p> <p>Liu X: Measurement of impact might be challenging lastly. Quantifying the success of value-based conservation programs can be challenging, which may lead to mistrust among stakeholders.</p> <p>Li W: We have concentrated on outreach events and education to help overcome the ignorance. To demonstrate the connection between Tiantai Buddhism's principles and environmental protection, we have organized seminars and workshops. Increased cooperation with nearby religious organizations and educational institutions will help disseminate this message even further.</p> <p>Wang M: We have worked with other NGOs and applied for grants in our search for outside funding. The activities are also more sustainable, as we have encouraged the community to participate through small gifts and volunteer work.</p> <p>Shi Y: We ensure that Tiantai Buddhism's values complement current traditions by incorporating local beliefs and practices into our activities, thereby addressing cultural variations. We also engage in open conversations to foster cooperation and understanding.</p> <p>SH: We have collaborated with environmental experts to modify Buddhist ceremonies to incorporate ecological practices, thereby striking a balance between traditional methods and new approaches. For instance, we modified some practices to be more environmentally friendly by reducing electricity consumption and waste generation.</p> <p>SG: Especially important has been interacting with the government. We have visited local authorities to demonstrate the benefits of these initiatives, thereby linking them to broader environmental policy. Formal agreements and collaborations help us promote long-term support as well.</p> <p>Zhang X: We have shared the message on digital channels and social media to involve younger generations. We also work with schools and young groups to make the conservation initiatives more appealing and pertinent to them.</p> <p>Lung X: Measuring impact remains challenging; therefore, we have begun gathering information through questionnaires and community feedback to evaluate the</p>

Interview Question	Transcript
	effectiveness of our projects. Making our programs more successful would depend on more help with data analysis and impact evaluation.

The researcher then identified codes and themes that emerged from the interview transcript to address the third research question: "What are the philosophical and practical consequences of implementing this doctrine in relation to individuals' ecological awareness?" The interview transcript yielded the following codes and themes.

Table 4. 10 Code and Theme (Interview Transcript II)

No.	Code	Theme	Interpretation
1	Interconnectedness	Spiritual Framework for Ecological Awareness	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.
2	Compassion	Ethical Approach to Environmental Conservation	The application of this doctrine offers a philosophical consequence of cultivating empathy and mindfulness toward the environment, motivating individuals to take environmentally conscious actions.

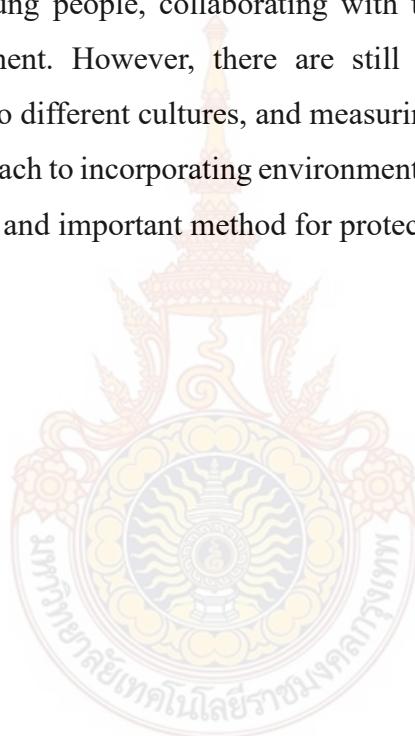
No.	Code	Theme	Interpretation
3	Environmental Leadership by Monastic Communities	Role of Religious Leaders in Ecological Education	<p>toward nature and non-human beings.</p> <p>The practical consequence of this is that individuals are more likely to engage in initiatives that promote the well-being of the environment, as their actions are rooted in the moral obligation to reduce harm to all living beings.</p>
4	Education Awareness Campaigns	and Knowledge Dissemination as a Means of Change	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>To overcome challenges related to the lack of awareness, participants 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.</p> <p>The philosophical consequence is a shift in how individuals perceive environmental conservation as not just a practical matter but also a spiritual responsibility.</p> <p>The practical consequence is the empowerment of individuals with the knowledge to engage in sustainable practices.</p>

No.	Code	Theme	Interpretation
	Local Culture	and Modern Environmental Practices	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>
	Government Support and Policy Alignment	Bridging Tradition and Modern Environmental Practices	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>
	Youth Engagement	Generational Awareness and Engagement	<p>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</p>

No.	Code	Theme	Interpretation
Adaptation Practices	of Flexibility in Tradition		<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>
Measuring Impact	Monitoring and Evaluating Ecological Practices		<p>Respondents noted that measuring the success of these value-based conservation efforts has been difficult. The lack of clear metrics for impact makes it hard to assess the full effect of Tiantai Buddhist principles in environmental preservation.</p> <p>The practical consequence of this is a need for better data collection and evaluation tools to measure the effectiveness of conservation programs. Philosophically, it also points to the challenge of quantifying spiritual and ethical</p>

No.	Code	Theme	Interpretation	
		impacts, which are often subjective in nature.		

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 engaging young people, collaborating with the government, and promoting community involvement. However, there are still challenges, such as a lack of awareness, adapting to different cultures, and measuring the effect. The theory offers a straightforward approach to incorporating environmental awareness into our daily lives, promoting a practical and important method for protecting the natural world.



## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

#### 5.1. Discussion

##### 5.1.1 Discussion for Finding Research Question 1

The initial discovery from research question 1 is that Zhiyi offers a philosophical framework for comprehending the doctrine of "insentient beings with Buddha-nature" through the teaching of the Three Truths. This concept emphasizes that all creatures, whether living or nonliving, possess Buddha-nature due to their interconnectedness through the principle of universal truth. Zhiyi also introduced the principle of "Ichinen Sanzen" (一念三千), which posits that there are three thousand potential realms in a single moment of consciousness. This principle highlights the profound interdependence of all elements of existence, whether living or nonliving, and their connection to the spiritual realm. This concept illustrates that human actions toward nature have a profound impact on the moral and spiritual dimensions, in addition to the physical world, within the environmental context. 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, cultivating reverence for nature is an essential component of spiritual practice. This teaching is particularly pertinent in the contemporary era, especially in the context of environmental exploitation based on materialistic or anthropocentric perspectives.

Interviews with academics, senior monks, and environmental practitioners have yielded findings that bolster the doctrine of "insentient beings with Buddha-nature." They primarily comprehend the doctrine through the Tiantai commentaries of Zhiyi, while environmental practitioners understand it through discussions with priests and participation in Buddhist environmental advocacy programs. The preliminary results of the research are consistent with these findings, suggesting that the teachings of the Three Truths and the principle of Ichinen Sanzen, as presented by Zhiyi, provide a philosophical foundation for understanding the interconnectedness of all beings, both living and nonliving, 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. 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 directly 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 where environmental practitioners prioritize applying lessons in real-world contexts. Discussions provide direct experiences that facilitate the internalization of doctrines through concrete actions with monks and participation in advocacy programs. From a philosophical perspective, these discoveries illustrate the distinction between text-based and practice-based comprehension in the Buddhist tradition. Although both groups understand 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 found that Buddhist teachings promote sustainable environmental management by emphasizing the importance of maintaining a harmonious relationship between humans and nature. 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. Additionally, Febriani (2021) emphasizes that the Buddhists at Vihara Mahavira Graha Semarang demonstrate their perspective on living in harmony with nature through tangible actions, including the adoption of a

vegetarian lifestyle and the cultivation of trees. This demonstrates that the teachings regarding the interconnectedness of all entities, including the unconscious, are implemented in ways that promote environmental preservation.

Another study, conducted by Sanjaya (2022), emphasizes the importance of literacy in preserving Buddhist teachings. He emphasizes the importance of documenting and disseminating Buddhist teachings on environmental preservation in his writing, ensuring that future generations can comprehend and apply these principles in a contemporary context. Additionally, a study conducted by Santoso and his associates (2022) demonstrated that Buddhists hold a high level of environmental awareness, as evidenced by their participation in activities such as tree planting and animal release. They underscore the fact that Buddhist teachings motivate their adherents to coexist harmoniously with nature, acknowledging that environmental degradation undermines cosmic equilibrium. Ultimately, Kamadhis (2019) research asserts that the environmental conservation paradigm in Buddhist teachings can be succinctly encapsulated by Dhammapada verse 49, which underscores the significance of living in harmony with all entities and refraining from causing harm to nature. This demonstrates that Buddhist teachings have consistently emphasized the significance of environmental preservation as a fundamental component of spiritual practice.

### **5.1.2 Discussion for Finding Research Question 2**

The research findings from the second research query provide three significant discoveries. Initially, the respondents demonstrated a high level of comprehension of the doctrine of Tiantai Buddhism, particularly in the context of human-nature harmony, as evidenced by the fact that all measurement items had an average score exceeding 4.0. The measurement item with the highest average score is "The doctrines of Tiantai Buddhism helped me understand the significance of preserving harmony between humans and nature," with an average score of 4.5. This suggests that the Tiantai doctrine's primary message, which pertains to environmental preservation, is the harmony between humanity and nature, as acknowledged by the respondents. This item also demonstrates consistency among respondents, as evidenced by an SD value of 0.5. This suggests that respondents generally concur that human-nature harmony is a fundamental and significant aspect of this doctrine.

In contrast, the measurement item with the lowest score is "I believe this

doctrine is pertinent to apply in the current context of environmental conservation," with an average score of 4.0. Despite respondents endorsing the doctrine's relevance, there may be skepticism regarding its practicality in the contemporary era due to obstacles such as economic and cultural limitations. Conversely, the item with the most significant degree of variation is "The doctrine of Tiantai Buddhism offers a novel perspective on how humans should interact with nature," with a standard deviation of 0.9. This variation suggests a substantial disparity in the way respondents assess the relevance of this novel perspective to the relationship between humans and nature.

Based on the results of this investigation, it appears that the respondents possess a comprehensive comprehension of the Tiantai Buddhism doctrine, particularly regarding the harmony between humans and nature. Numerous factors can contribute to this understanding. Initially, the Tiantai doctrine historically offered a robust philosophical framework for comprehending the profound interconnections between all entities, including living and non-living beings, within a cosmic unity. "Three Truths" and "Ichinen Sanzen" are concepts that facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between humanity and the environment, thereby enhancing comprehension of the fundamental principles of this doctrine in an ecological context. Nevertheless, the results also suggest that, despite respondents recognizing the importance of Tiantai teachings in the context of environmental conservation, there are still concerns regarding their practicality in the contemporary era. Given the current context of environmental conservation, the potential challenges that may arise are indicated by the lowest average score (4.0) on items related to the application of these teachings. These challenges may be the result of cultural, economic, or policy factors that do not always facilitate the incorporation of Buddhist values into environmental approaches. This factor is also corroborated by a significant degree of variation in responses to the assertion that the Tiantai doctrine offers a novel perspective on human interaction with nature (SD 0.9). This variation suggests that, although some individuals regard this teaching as a novel and revolutionary perspective, others believe that it is still abstract or difficult to implement in practical situations.

Tucker and Williams (2017) found that Buddhist teachings, particularly those in the Mahayana tradition, provide a robust philosophical framework for environmental ethics, which aligns with the results of this study. The concept of

interconnectedness in Buddhism is frequently translated into an attitude of respect for nature. However, its implementation in environmental policies continues to encounter a variety of structural and social obstacles, they disclosed. Moreover, Swearer (2019) found that the interpretation of Buddhist doctrine in an environmental context is frequently contingent upon both community and individual approaches to interpreting the teachings. This is the reason for the discrepancy in comprehension regarding how the Tiantai doctrine offers a novel perspective on the relationship between humans and nature in this study. Educational and social factors also influence this comprehension.

Bai et al. (2021) conducted an additional study that determined Buddhist ecological teachings can serve as a basis for more sustainable environmental policies when influential social actors, including academics and religious leaders, endorse them. This corroborates the research's conclusions that the Tiantai doctrine is pertinent for environmental policy; however, there are still deficiencies in its concrete application. In their investigation of Buddhism and ecology, Stolz and Usarski (2020) also found that the adoption of ecological teachings in Buddhism is frequently contingent upon the local cultural and economic context. This corroborates the discovery that, despite respondents possessing a comprehensive understanding of this doctrine, there remains uncertainty regarding its practical application in contemporary environmental conservation. This is attributable to external factors, including policies and socio-economic conditions. Lastly, Jenkins (2018)'s research highlights the potential of environmental teachings in Buddhism to influence individual ecological awareness, despite their not always being effectively translated into systematic collective action. This corroborates the discovery that respondents exhibit a high level of environmental awareness; however, the tangible influence of these teachings on societal behavior remains inconsistent. Consequently, the results of this study substantiate the findings of prior research, which have demonstrated that the teachings of Tiantai Buddhism can provide a comprehensive understanding of the interdependence between humans and nature, as well as their significance in environmental conservation.

The strongest and most consistent item in the second finding, which demonstrates the second aspect "Implementation of doctrine in ecological conservation policies," is "I believe that the teachings of Tiantai Buddhism can serve as a guideline for formulating better environmental policies," with an average score of 4.5 and SD 0.6.

This suggests that the respondents are in complete agreement that this doctrine is pertinent as a framework for environmental policies. Subsequently, the item with the greatest degree of variation is "The doctrines of Tiantai Buddhism have been translated into concrete programs for environmental conservation," which has an average score of 3.7 and an SD of 1.0. The substantial variation suggests that respondents have varying opinions on the effectiveness of the doctrine's concrete implementation. These results also indicate that the primary obstacle is the translation of the doctrine into tangible programs, which suggests that there is room for enhancement and reinforcement of implementation.

These results suggest that the Tiantai Buddhist doctrine has significant potential to serve as a guide in the development of environmental policies. The statement "I believe that the teachings of Tiantai Buddhism can serve as a guideline for formulating better environmental policies" has a high average score (4.5) and a low standard deviation (0.6), which suggests that the majority of respondents have a consistent understanding of the relevance of this doctrine in environmental policy implementation. 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, as evidenced by the average score of 3.7 and a relatively high standard deviation (1.0) on the statement "The doctrines of Tiantai Buddhism have been translated into concrete programs for environmental conservation," suggest that there are obstacles to translating these teachings into tangible actions. This variation may be the result of several factors, including the interpretation of Tiantai teachings, resource limitations in program implementation, and structural constraints in integrating Buddhist principles into broader environmental policies. Economic, political, or cultural factors may have hindered the operationalization of this doctrine in specific communities, while others have effectively translated it into tangible programs. In addition, this disparity in

perception may be primarily due to technical limitations in translating religious teachings into effective environmental policies.

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, although numerous environmental policies in Asian countries, particularly in Thailand and China, incorporate Buddhist principles, their implementation in concrete regulations remains limited by more influential political and economic factors. Furthermore, Gier and Kabil Singh (2019) investigated the role of Buddhist monasticism in environmental conservation, revealing that Buddhist teachings, such as Tiantai, are frequently employed as a moral justification for environmental policies. Nevertheless, the efficacy of implementing these teachings is contingent upon the government's and local communities' willingness to work together to translate these values into tangible actions. They emphasize that religious teachings are generally challenging to implement concretely and tend to remain at the normative level in the absence of strong institutional support (Gier & Kabil Singh, 2019).

Additionally, Shiu and Stokes (2021) 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 (Shiu & Stokes, 2021). Ji and Zhang (2018) 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 remain critical components for their successful implementation (Ji & Zhang, 2018). The results of this study confirm that the teachings of Tiantai Buddhism have significant potential as a guide for environmental policy, as 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 third discovery regarding the influence of Tiantai Buddhism teachings on public environmental awareness reveals a substantial impact, with a notable distinction between the two items analyzed. The initial item, "My awareness of the significance of environmental conservation was enhanced by the teachings of Tiantai Buddhism," demonstrates a low standard deviation (0.6) and a high average score (4.4). This suggests that the majority of respondents concur that Tiantai teachings directly increase their understanding of the significance of environmental conservation. This high average score is indicative of the substantial positive impact that respondents attribute to the Tiantai Buddhist teachings in terms of their understanding of the environment's significance. This may include Buddhist principles that emphasize the equilibrium of nature and the relationship between humans and the environment.

Nevertheless, the second item, "Environmental conservation programs based on Tiantai teachings have a positive impact on people's lifestyles," exhibits greater variation, with an average score of 4.0 and a standard deviation of 0.9, despite the apparent substantial impact on raising awareness. This suggests that, despite the potential of Tiantai teachings to increase environmental awareness, the daily lives of all respondents have not yet been significantly influenced by the implementation of conservation programs based on these teachings. This substantial variation may be the result of a variety of factors, including the absence of direct participation or access to programs founded on Tiantai teachings, as well as varying degrees of acceptance of these teachings among individuals from diverse cultural and social backgrounds.

These results suggest that while religious teachings can increase awareness of the significance of environmental preservation, their actual implementation in daily life necessitates more than mere knowledge and awareness. This may also indicate that, although Tiantai teachings emphasize the principles of harmony and interconnectedness between humans and nature, the direct impact on behavioral change is not always easily accessible, particularly when external factors (such as a lack of policy support or

infrastructure for environmental programs) impede it. These findings are consistent with those of Choi and Pak (2019), which demonstrate that Buddhist teachings can significantly contribute to the development of environmental awareness. However, the primary obstacle is converting this awareness into tangible actions. They discovered that, despite a significant number of individuals being exposed to Buddhist teachings on nature conservation, the impact of these teachings on lifestyle changes is more limited. This finding is consistent with those that demonstrate the diversity in the impact of environmental programs based on Tiantai teachings. This study also suggests that the extent to which Buddhist teachings can be integrated into the daily lives of individuals is influenced by various social and cultural factors (Choi, 2019).

Similar challenges in translating awareness into tangible actions are also demonstrated in another study conducted by Nattapol and Phansak (2020) on the role of Buddhist teachings in natural resource management in Thailand. It was discovered that Buddhist-based conservation programs are often limited to specific segments of society that are more educated or have a higher level of awareness, despite the fact that Buddhist teachings generally promote ecological awareness. Other groups have not yet fully embraced lifestyle changes based on these teachings. In this context, the diverse effects of the Tiantai program's results suggest that the successful implementation of the program is significantly influenced by individual involvement in religion-based programs and socio-economic factors.

### **5.1.3 Discussion for Finding Research Question 3**

The philosophical and practical repercussions of implementing this doctrine concerning individual ecological awareness are explored through interviews with local communities, monastic communities, and environmental volunteers. The results of these interviews reveal three significant findings: the existence of a gap between the doctrine's understanding and the ecological awareness of individuals. Secondly, the necessity of establishing a connection between traditional and contemporary environmental practices in order to enhance the program's relatability and acceptability. Third, the necessity of youth engagement is underscored by the fact that contemporary lifestyles often divert young people from ecological issues.

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 a philosophical understanding of Buddhist principles, such as the interconnectedness of living entities and the balance of nature, the discrepancy between comprehension of teachings and actual actions indicates that many individuals have not yet incorporated them into 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.

Additionally, the significance of integrating traditional practices with contemporary environmental practices presents a distinct challenge to developing ecological awareness following Buddhist teachings. To be more relevant in addressing contemporary environmental concerns, spiritual principles in Tiantai teachings must be contextualized within a scientific framework. 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. Several prior studies, including those conducted by Jenkins and Chapple (2020), have demonstrated that religion-based environmental programs are more effective when they integrate traditional elements with contemporary innovations. Consequently, it is imperative to develop a narrative that establishes a connection between Buddhist environmental ethics and sustainable policies and empirical methodologies.

Conversely, the younger generation's participation in the Buddhist-based environmental movement continues to pose a substantial obstacle. Ecological awareness is not a top priority, as modernization and digital lifestyles often divert attention away from sustainability issues. According to a study conducted by Loy and Stanley (2021), the younger generation is more interested in concrete actions than in philosophical approaches alone. Consequently, religion-based environmental programs must be presented in a manner that is more appealing and consistent with their social dynamics. This can be achieved through the use of digital campaigns, social media, and active participation in environmental communities. Furthermore, the sustainability movement's participation among adolescents is significantly influenced by the role of

religious leaders and environmental activists in establishing strong role models.

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dynamics. This can be achieved through the use of digital campaigns, social media, and active participation in environmental communities. Furthermore, the participation of adolescents in the sustainability movement is significantly influenced by the role of religious leaders and environmental activists in establishing strong role models.

## 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: 1) Zhiyi's Three Truths teaching provides a philosophical framework for comprehending the doctrine of "insentient 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 "insentient beings with Buddha-nature." They primarily comprehend the doctrine through the Tiantai commentaries of Zhiyi, while environmental practitioners understand it through discussions with priests and participation in 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 Tiantai Buddhist doctrine, its implementation in ecological conservation policies, and the influence of Tiantai Buddhist teachings on public environmental awareness. Public environmental awareness does not necessarily correspond with 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 establishing a connection between traditional and contemporary environmental practices to render the program more relatable and acceptable.

Additionally, the necessity of youth engagement is crucial, as contemporary lifestyles often divert young people from ecological concerns. Although the doctrine is widely understood, its capacity to motivate practical action remains limited by the absence of transformative mechanisms that can link philosophical

principles with tangible environmental practices. Consequently, this research suggests that religious institutions should be strengthened in their capacity to develop sustainability practice models 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.

Additional research could focus on the practical application of Tiantai teachings in ecological conservation, with a particular emphasis on translating the doctrine of insentient entities with Buddha-nature into more tangible sustainability policies and programs. Additionally, further investigation is required to examine the role of religious institutions in promoting public environmental awareness, considering the discrepancy between doctrinal understanding and actual actions in ecological preservation. 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 engaging youth in Buddhism-based conservation movements to make them more relevant to their lifestyles, given the contemporary challenges faced by the younger generation in ecological issues. Furthermore, an assessment of the efficacy of environmental education programs based on Tiantai teachings can be conducted to determine their impact 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.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. Interview Protocol 1

No.	Interview Question
1	How do you explain the concept of " insentient beings with Buddha-nature" in Tiantai Buddhism?
2	How do you understand the doctrine of "Insentient Beings with Buddha-Nature" in Tiantai Buddhism? What source do you use?
3	What is the relevance of the doctrine to human relations and nature?
4	How does this doctrine affect the view of Tiantai Buddhism on ecology?
5	Is there a special interpretation of this doctrine applied in China?
6	How is this concept integrated into the teachings of Buddhist environmental ethics?
7	How does this doctrine affect daily religious practices related to environmental preservation?
8	In your opinion, is there a gap between theory and practice in the application of this doctrine?



## Appendix 2. Questionnaire

No	Item Statement	Score				
		1	2	3	4	5
Understanding the doctrine of Tiantai Buddhism						
1	I understand the concept of "insentient beings with Buddha-nature" as the basis that all beings, including inanimate ones, have the potential for enlightenment.					
2	The doctrines of Tiantai Buddhism helped me see the importance of maintaining harmony between humans and nature.					
3	I believe that the Tiantai teachings teach the value of equality between living beings and the environment.					
4	I understand the relationship between Tiantai Buddhism and environmental conservation.					
5	The doctrine of Tiantai Buddhism offers a novel perspective on how humans should engage with nature.					
6	I feel this doctrine is relevant to apply in the context of environmental conservation today.					
Implementation of doctrine in ecological conservation policies						
7	The ecological conservation policy in my area already reflects the values taught by Tiantai Buddhism.					
8	Local governments work with religious communities to implement ecological conservation principles.					
9	I believe that the teachings of Tiantai Buddhism can serve as a guide for formulating more effective environmental policies.					
10	The doctrines of Tiantai Buddhism have been translated into concrete programs for environmental conservation.					
11	Religious communities, including monasteries, have an active role in supporting environmental conservation policies.					
12	Current environmental policies have taken into account the importance of maintaining harmony between humans and nature, as per the teachings of Tiantai.					
13	Collaboration between religious communities and environmental activists has had a positive impact on environmental conservation.					
The impact of doctrine on public environmental awareness						
14	Tiantai Buddhism's teachings raised my					

No	Item Statement	Score				
		1	2	3	4	5
	awareness of the importance of environmental conservation.					
15	After understanding this doctrine, I became more motivated to participate in environmental conservation activities.					
16	Public awareness of environmental conservation has increased due to the influence of Tiantai Buddhism teachings.					
17	Environmental conservation programs based on Tiantai teachings have a positive impact on people's lifestyles.					
18	I believe that the implementation of Tiantai Buddhism's Doctrine brings long-term benefits for environmental preservation.					



### Appendix 3. Interview Protocol II

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



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