religions

MDPI

Article

Towards a Holistic Buddhist Eco-Ethics

Juan Wang and Joan Qionglin Tan *

Department of Philosophy, Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, Shanghai 200433, China; sufeedu@163.com
* Correspondence: tan.qionglin@mail.shufe.edu.cn

Abstract: The debate on Buddhist eco-ethics emerged in the late 20th century and continues to the present day, which fosters the intersection of Buddhist eco-ethics with environmental ethics. However, the current understanding of Buddhist eco-ethics still falls short of a holistic concept. To fill the gap, this paper argues that different macro perspectives should be considered in the process of developing a concept of holistic Buddhist eco-ethics. For this, we firstly attempt to clarify the dispute over the feasibility of Buddhist eco-ethics from the internal, external, and Buddhists' perspectives. Then, we address the dispute concerning the classification of Buddhist eco-ethics, proposing a typology that accommodates different perspectives. Finally, two methods are suggested to mediate the dispute over Buddhist eco-ethics and justify its holistic concept, that is, regarding Buddhist eco-ethics as a form of virtue ethics and as a product of "engaged Buddhism." Here, it is also emphasized to include Buddhists' perspectives when mediating the dispute. Accordingly, we put forward a holistic concept for Buddhist eco-ethics that incorporates three main macro perspectives: ecological ethics in Buddhism, Buddhism in ecological ethics, and Buddhists' environmental activities. It is hoped that the wisdom of Buddhist eco-ethics can help us forge a path towards a more harmonious and sustainable world in the near future.

Keywords: Buddhist eco-ethics; ecological ethics in Buddhism; Buddhism in ecological ethics; Buddhists' environmental activities; engaged Buddhism

Citation: Wang, Juan, and Joan Qionglin Tan. 2024. Towards a Holistic Buddhist Eco-Ethics. *Religions* 15: 844. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15070844

Academic Editor: Todd Lewis

Received: 15 May 2024
Revised: 10 July 2024
Accepted: 11 July 2024
Published: 14 July 2024

1. Introduction

Since the 19th century, Buddhism, in particular Zen Buddhism, has witnessed its flourishing in the Western world, which has been permeating the public consciousness and evolving towards a more integrated form known as "engaged Buddhism" in Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh's lexicon (Keown 2003, p. 86). This Buddhist social movement was initiated to address the then social, political, ecological, racial, and poverty problems via some teachings of the Buddha Dharma and meditation practice "in a more activist way", whose aim is to "reduce suffering and oppression through the reform of unjust and repressive social and political structures, while not losing sight of the traditional Buddhist emphasis on inward spiritual growth" (Keown 2003, p. 86). In the face of an ever-increasing ecological crisis, engaged Buddhism recruits an increasing number of Buddhist practitioners, whose engagement in local environmental preservation prompts some ethicists and philosophers to turn their attention to engaged Buddhism. Accordingly, these philosophers endeavor to establish Buddhism as a new kind of Gaia Earth religious foundation for ecological ethics or eco-ethics at a time of global environmental crisis, seeking to develop a Buddhist ecology to enrich environmental thought. Regarding the definition of "Buddhist ecology", it is claimed that "the main approaches draw upon traditional values such as compassion, (karuna), and less anthropocentric notions of the relationship between humans and nature than those found in the West. [. . .] Buddhists do not believe that the world was created for man's use and enjoyment, or that he stands in the position of divinely appointed steward over the rest of creation" (Keown 2003, p. 83).

Within the Western context, Buddhism is often seen as an exotic doctrine, but its potential to strengthen environmental ethics has inevitably sparked hot discussions and critiques in academia. These critiques echo arguments from the past when Eastern religions gained significant attention in the West as early as the 19th century when Buddhism was considered an external force for undermining the foundations of Western civilization. Some scholars, like well-known Scottish social anthropologist James Frazer (1854–1941), argue that the holistic principles of Ancient Greek and Roman traditions were disrupted by "the spread of Oriental religions" (Frazer 1983, p. 470). With the involvement of Buddhist practitioners, environmental ethicists, and historians, this concern has sparked a heated debate regarding the validity of Buddhist eco-ethics and its classification. At its core, such debate has enlivened one of the most fundamental questions, that is, whether Buddhist scriptures and traditions can truly support or mediate environmental ethics, given historical Buddhist attitudes towards nature.

Due to the ongoing debates, a more macroscopic examination is needed in order to organize those specific conflicting views and formulate a holistic concept of Buddhist eco-ethics. However, the current interaction between Buddhism and environmentalism focuses more on expressing views rather than embracing broader perspectives. In this sense, to effectively promote the formation of a holistic concept, the dispute over Buddhist eco-ethics, whether regarding its validity or classification, should prioritize the consideration of perspectives. Based on this premise, this article attempts to clarify the debates and mediation approaches concerning Buddhist eco-ethics and justify Buddhist eco-ethics as a holistic concept within the framework of environmental ethics. It is hoped that a clearer portrayal of Buddhist eco-ethics can be presented and a resilient, yet theoretical Buddhist eco-ethics can be formulated from different perspectives.

2. The Dispute over the Feasibility of Buddhist Eco-Ethics

The debate on Buddhist eco-ethics emerged in the late 20th century and continues to the present day. Experts specializing in early Buddhist scriptures, such as German scholar Lambert Schmithausen (1997, 2000) and English Orientalist Ian Harris (1995), tend to take a historical standpoint, raising questions about the essence of Buddhist eco-ethics, which was largely born out of the practical need of connecting environmental ethics with Buddhist principles. Their concerns, together with those of other environmental ethicists, can be delineated into three macro perspectives. Firstly, there is a quest to identify intrinsic environmental values within Buddhism (Harris 1995; Kaza 1997; Schmithausen 1997, 2000; Keown 2007; Ives 2013), exploring the feasibility of formulating an ecological moral framework based on diverse Buddhist teachings. Secondly, scholars (Gross 1997; James 2000; Wu 2006; Cavazza 2014; Strain 2016) attempt to examine whether Buddhist doctrines can support environmental ethical theories like deep ecology, though Arne Naess takes Buddhism, along with Christianity and Western philosophies (such as Spinozist and Whiteheadian thoughts) as its fundamental premises (Naess 1998, p. 205). Thirdly, some scholars (Scicot et al. 2017; Elverskog 2020; Capper 2022) re-evaluate Buddhists' attitude towards nature, which has recently sparked interest among environmental ethicists who seek to investigate how Buddhists should approach the surrounding environment in their spiritual pursuit. These three inquiries strongly suggest the imperative of discussing a holistic concept of Buddhist eco-ethics within the context of environmental philosophy.

2.1. The Internal Macro Perspective: Whether There Is Eco-Ethics in Buddhism

The possible embodiment of eco-ethics in Buddhism is a topic that scholars vary on, with two different emphases: the historical and the socialized. The former helps uncover a kind of authentic environmental ethics presented in early Buddhist scriptures, whereas the latter perceives Buddhist eco-ethics as a pioneering accomplishment stemming from Buddhists' active engagement in environmental activities. Scholars, with emphases ranging from the historical viewpoint to the socialized one, are academically and meticulously categorized by Donald Swearer (2006, p. 124) as eco-apologists, eco-critics, and

eco-constructivists. In fact, these groups sometimes overlap. To better delineate the macro perspective, this article takes a comprehensive look at these groups and analyzes them with two different emphases. In the debate, historical emphasis plays an important role in exploring Buddhist eco-ethics by prioritizing historical objectivity and questioning the uncritical assertion of Buddhist environmentalism. By examining ancient Buddhist scriptures and doctrines, it is argued that Buddhism lacks an inherent basis to support an eco-ethics within itself, thereby casting doubt on the future development of Buddhist environmentalism. Some scholars, like Lambert Schmithausen (1997, 2000), Ian Harris (1995), Damien Keown (2007), Stephen Kaza (1997), and Christopher Ives (2013), critically scrutinize early Buddhist classics, claiming that the coined concept "Buddhist eco-ethics" appears to be rather weak-founded. This is because early Indian Buddhism evolved and diversified over the course of millennia, and even though today's Buddhism innovatively supports ecological ethics, we must pay attention to the historical examination of earlier documents. Therefore, cherry-picking Buddhist scriptures may compromise the historical objectivity valued by these scholars when addressing Buddhist eco-ethics.

Here, we take some examples. Schmithausen contends that an in-depth analysis or evaluation of early Buddhist texts does not inspire any efforts in nature preservation. This finding makes him believe that early Buddhism manifests its detachment from nature, criticizing that "believers may feel the need for, and hence tend to create the myth of, an identity of their re-interpreted, re-organized or creatively extended or changed tradition with the original one" (Schmithausen 1997, p. 9). Harris, in his criticism, claims that the belief in the unity between nature and humanity lacks a doctrinal or historical foundation, ultimately rendering eco-Buddhism to "shift away from traditional Buddhist cosmology" (Harris 1995, p. 199). British bioethicist Damien Keown expounds his views upon Harris's work, highlighting that the contemporary pursuit of Buddhist eco-ethics "is driven by Westerner pursuing a green agenda" (Keown 2007, p. 98). American eco-writer Stephen Kaza openly voices her reservations about the existence of an intrinsic ecological ethic embedded in Buddhism. She acknowledges that "it is unclear whether ecological practices are primarily motivated by Buddhist tradition or by American environmentalism" (Kaza 1997, p. 244). American scholar Christopher Ives, based on his analysis of resources on Buddhist environmental ethics, mentions some weak points of current Buddhist environmental ethics. In this respect, Ives advocates for "the intrinsic value and rights of things without clarifying a legitimate Buddhist basis for doing so," stating that it fails to "take into account historical Buddhist terms for and views of 'nature'" (Ives 2013, p. 542). In principle, the aforementioned scholars with skeptical opinions question the congruity of early Buddhism with environmental ethics, arguing that the foundation on which Buddhist eco-ethics rests is weak when analyzed from an internal perspective (that is, by examining Buddhist literature historically). For them, Buddhist eco-ethics represents an innovative outcome of contemporary Buddhist engagement with the ecological agenda. Alternatively, in Ives' words, "eco-Buddhists are generally focused more on continuing their activism than responding to the skeptics" (Ives 2017, p. 43). However, the historical research on early Buddhist texts, to some extent, provides conclusive evidence to discredit the existence of Buddhist eco-ethics in pre-modern Buddhism.

The historical survey encourages those with a critical eye to doubt whether a well-established Buddhist eco-ethic can be internally constructed, and challenges those who rely on the "lines of 'how to imagine a Buddhist environmentalism' or 'we Buddhists also love nature'"(Sørensen 2013, p. 84). As a matter of fact, when examined through a lens of historical objectivity, Buddhism appears to hold an incongruous position regarding environmental ethics, because there is limited evidence within early Buddhist scriptures and historical literature to support the existence of ecological ethics. In the skeptics' opinion, early Buddhist texts on nature often reflect a pessimistic outlook and show an absence or a rejection of "certain key elements that define contemporary environmental ethics" (Holder 2007, p. 114). These missing elements, such as nature's intrinsic value and preference for the wilderness (Holder 2007, p. 114), enhance the skeptics' claim that early

Buddhist texts lack an inherent framework for ecological ethics when adapting Buddhist concepts and philosophy to align with contemporary environmentalism. Furthermore, these skeptics may argue that Buddhist engagement with environmental concerns primarily stems from the assimilation of Buddhism into societal constructs, known as "engaged Buddhism," rather than arising from the historical examination of Buddhist texts. Therefore, they strongly recommend that Buddhist eco-ethics be seen as a social phenomenon. In their mind, the evolving nature of Buddhism and its diverse interpretations indicate that the understanding of its stance on environmental ethics remains open-ended and subject to ongoing interpretations and discussions.

According to the platform of "engaged Buddhism," Buddhist eco-ethics seems to emerge as a practical consequence of the engagement of Buddhism with current environmental paradigms. That is to say, Buddhist eco-ethics is a kind of socialized concept. Thus, the disparity between the historical and the socialized views highlights a central paradox in the study of Buddhist ecological ethics, contributing to a more nuanced exploration of the relationship between Buddhism and environmental ethics. It is essential to recognize that historical objectivity and the socialized "engaged Buddhism" need not be seen as adversarial. Skeptical scholars who question Buddhist eco-ethics often stress historical inquiry and objectivity, primarily examining the Indian Buddhist texts and the origins of Buddhism. However, they sometimes also tend to align themselves with engaged Buddhism, which intentionally fosters their own unique Buddhist ecological thinking.

We cannot deny the fact that the presence of skeptical scholars raising valid questions highlights the importance of acknowledging historians' commitment to historical objectivity while promoting innovative ideas. In fact, many of them posit the combination of both perspectives. For example, though Schmithausen holds a skeptical opinion, he duly recognizes the necessity of valuing innovation. In this sense, it is paramount to realize that historical objectivity and socialized inclination do not necessarily have to stand in adversarial opposition. The queries posed by skeptical scholars revolve around the imperative nature of Buddhist eco-ethics. Regardless of personal proclivities or anticipations, supporters of novel thoughts must "acknowledge the historian's and philologist's commitment to historical and philosophical objectivity" (Schmithausen 2000, p. 58). It is worth noting that the scaffolding of historical documents plays a significant role in many humanities disciplines. Therefore, the future development of Buddhist eco-ethics, amidst the delicate balance of historical and socialized emphases, remains a significant challenge that requires deep contemplation. Alongside the approach to examining early Buddhist documents, there is another group of scholars who respond to the tension between Buddhist philosophy and modern environmental ethics. They tend to take an external macro perspective when addressing Buddhist environmentalism; namely, they concentrate more on the problem of adaptation between Buddhism and various branches of environmental ethics.

2.2. The External Macro Perspective: Whether Buddhism Can Support Deep Ecology

In order to delve into the external exploration of Buddhism's engagement with environmental philosophy, we take "deep ecology" as a case study, which echoes our later discussion of David Cooper and Simon James' resistance to certain proposals from deep ecology and their inclination to connect virtue ethics with Buddhist eco-ethics. Arne Naess (1912–2009), progenitor of deep ecology, openly acknowledges the influence of Buddhism. He recognizes that Buddhism, alongside Christianity and related Western philosophies, offers the most immediate affirmation of its fundamental tenets (Naess 1998, p. 205). Indeed, the congruence between Buddhism and deep ecology gives rise to numerous inquiries, reflecting an external macro perspective that discusses the adaptation of Buddhism to other environmental branches in the ongoing discourse on Buddhist eco-ethics. These inquiries can be broadly categorized into two main domains: theoretical mediation and practical application. Here, the former seeks to explore how Buddhism and deep ecology can be reconciled in theory, whereas the latter attempts to discuss the practical difficulties of combining Buddhism and deep ecology. This external perspective with two levels, to

some extent, helps enhance our understanding of the relationship between Buddhism and environmental ethics, particularly within the context of deep ecology. By addressing these inquiries, both scholars and practitioners can go deeper into the potential of Buddhist eco-ethics and understand its implications for promoting sustainable and compassionate approaches to environmental issues.

For the possibility of mediating Buddhism and deep ecology, the first inquiry centers on theoretical mediation, that is, whether it is possible to reconcile Buddhism's emphasis on human spiritual potential and its holistic orientation with deep ecology. Some scholars discern that deep ecology bestows equal value to all beings, animate and inanimate, within an ecosystem, while Buddhism, though not strictly homocentric, has been perceived as giving higher reverence to human life compared to other life forms. This discrepancy arises from the belief among many Buddhists that the spiritual potential resides exclusively within human existence, which contradicts the fundamental principles of deep ecology (Gross 1997, p. 337). Moreover, the doctrine of interdependence in Buddhism demonstrates a strong tendency towards holism, which poses a conundrum when individual intrinsic values are emphasized by deep ecology. This dilemma creates a profound quandary in the realm of Buddhist eco-ethics, where individuals often find themselves at a crossroads, seemingly compelled to choose between holism and intrinsic value. This requires careful theoretical expansion before it can be overcome. For instance, British environmental philosopher Simon P. James (2000) adeptly draws inspiration from Buddhism's Middle Way and Martin Heidegger's philosophical ideas to develop a distinctly holistic conception of nature. James describes the deep ecologist's experience in two moments: one is holistic, associated with the "dependency of individual beings," and the other retains a sense of integrity or independence without dissolving everything into an undiversified, nihilistic blur (James 2000, p. 371). With this distinct idea, James strives to construct a framework that aims to transcend the apparent dichotomy and enable a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between human beings, other life forms, and the environment. In some sense, his efforts contribute to the evolution of Buddhist eco-ethics and pave the way for a more balanced and integrated approach to environmental ethics. However, within the context of contemporary environmental ethics that encompasses concerns for future generations and even extraterrestrial beings, further deliberation is warranted to fully comprehend the nuanced connotations of "intrinsic value." Consequently, there is an imperative need for a continuous exploration of its relationship with holism.

Regarding the practical implications of combining Buddhism and deep ecology, it appears that aligning deep ecology with strict Buddhist principles may be seen as excessively demanding in light of rapid economic and technological progress, as well as prevalent opulent lifestyles in contemporary society. The notion of "tread[ing] lightly on the Earth" (Wu 2006, p. 24), central to deep ecology, necessitates one's dedication to minimal consumption and material requisites as a path toward one's self-realization in its purest form, which might be criticized for hindering the advancement of human civilization. Scholars, who support both deep ecology and Buddhism, advocate for restrained consumption and procreation as a means to incorporate Buddhist eco-ethics. For example, as a fervent adherent of the Buddhist faith, the well-known American Buddhist scholar Rita M. Gross thinks that Buddhism must act as a restraint against unrestrained opulence and procreation, even in the face of the prevailing cultural norms that endorse lavish consumption and prolific reproduction (Gross 1997, p. 333). In her mind, veneration for the natural world, if in isolation, falls short of a necessary element to compose a comprehensive environmental ethics. Additionally, Daniel H. Henning, an American scholar of political science, observes the phenomenon of over-production and analyzes its underlying premise as "a short term orientation that is principally concerned with quantity, economic benefits, newness, and expediency, rather than with long-range quality or environmental considerations" (Henning 2002, pp. 23–24). With this phenomenon in mind, Henning refers to the Buddhist economic counterculture proposed by the International Network of Engaged Buddhists and advocates for a Buddhist economic culture based on "interconnectedness,

sustainability, and non-accumulation," as well as "other fundamental Buddhist values such as compassion, loving-kindness, and altruism combined with respect for all life" (Henning 2002, p. 24). However, this countercultural approach embraced by Buddhism and deep ecology may confront severe criticism as it may not always align with productive policies prioritized by a society. Hence, balancing the principles of deep ecology, Buddhist teachings, and the realities of modern society requires a continuous examination and thoughtful engagement.

In fact, the analyses of Buddhism and deep ecology by Gross and Henning touch upon two significant inquiries within political economy: consumption and reproduction. Currently, a number of scholars like David Loy also write about "the conjunction of Buddhism and the environment primarily through critiquing existing structures of political economy" (Lin 2022, p. 1192). However, from the perspective of political economy, intentionally pursuing simplicity and advocating reduced consumption and procreation may be perceived as practices unsuitable for certain societies. On the other hand, the practical efficacy of the ecological holism advanced by both Buddhism and deep ecology has been cast into doubt. Some scholars perceive it as "ethically vacuous" (Strain 2016, p. 190), given that the Buddha Dharma offers limited guidance in the face of the formidable choices that we must tackle urgent challenges of a warming planet. In general, various explorations are essentially needed to address environmental crises by integrating Buddhist teachings with deep ecology. These explorations not only pertain to the intersection of Buddhism and deep ecology but also represent a crucial inquiry into the evolution of Buddhist environmental ethics.

Although there exists potential compatibility between Buddhism and deep ecology, some scholars like Cavazza still contend that "the arguments and terminology of ecosophy and Buddhist philosophies do not completely overlap" (Cavazza 2014, p. 43). Accordingly, alternative approaches are needed to address the challenge of reconciling these arguments and eventually achieve the harmonious evolution of Buddhist eco-ethics. By analyzing the interaction between Buddhism and deep ecology, both theoretically and practically, we navigate the intricacies of Buddhist environmentalism from an external macro perspective. Consequently, it is imperative to delve into the third perspective of Buddhists and their activities.

2.3. The Perspective of Disciples: Whether Buddhists Are Friendly to Nature

The concept of Buddhist eco-ethics in contemporary environmental ethics undergoes scrutiny within academic circles. In addition to the internal macro perspective that focuses on Buddhist literature and teachings, as well as the external macro perspective that examines the interactions between Buddhism and other environmental ethics, it is also significant to consider the perspective of Buddhists themselves. Within a specific space–time context, Buddhists and their environmental practices are shaped not only by Buddhism itself but also by the particularity of their contexts. This aspect is highlighted by Swearer, who refers to them as eco-contextualists (Swearer 2006, pp. 135–36). Given this perspective, this section will discuss the ongoing debate on Buddhists' affinity towards nature. It is insisted that Buddhists and their activities did not prioritize nature or ecology to the same degree as modern environmentalists do. To support this position, American professors Daniel Capper and Johan Elverskog give their specific reasons. Capper emphasizes that the compassion of Buddhists solely targets humans and animals, which is biocentric in essence but lacks an ecocentric orientation demanded by "a viable environmental ethic" (Capper 2022, p. 7). Elverskog (2020), in his book *The Buddha's Footprint: An Environmental History of Asia*, argues that early Buddhist communities and their followers were deeply concerned about prosperity, which inevitably leads to the exploitation and deletion of natural resources in their pursuit of economic power. This perspective suggests that Buddhism, as a tradition, was not inherently beneficial to the physical world. Though this is the case, we have to notice that Buddhism, like any living tradition, has evolved and adapted over time. While Buddhists may have demonstrated a historical neglect of nature, this does not preclude Buddhism from aligning with eco-ethical principles. Practically, Buddhism has showcased

its capacity to transform and adapt to different contexts and challenges throughout history. For instance, when Buddhism was transmitted from India to China, it incorporated Daoist concepts and terminology to translate and elucidate Buddhist teachings via methods such as "analogy" or "matching the meaning", namely, *geyi* in Chinese. This adaptation eventually led to the emergence of various sects within Chinese Buddhism, including Tiantai, Chan, Huayan, and Pure Land Buddhism. Within the realm of eco-Buddhism, there are also numerous examples that highlight Buddhism's adaptability. For instance, Mongolian Buddhism absorbed "the pre-Buddhist tradition in Mongolia of respecting environment through recognizing specific mountains, rivers, and other landscape features as being sacred, and decreeing that they were therefore forbidden for activities such as hunting or logging" (Chimedsengee et al. 2009, p. 14). Subsequently, Mongolian Buddhism has developed the concept of "nagas," which refers to nature spirits and prompts Mongolian Buddhists to protect nature. Similarly, alarmed by the Thai government's granting of numerous concessions to timber companies in the name of economic progress, Phrakhru Pitak and other Thai monks responded by organizing tree ordination ceremonies and introducing sustainable agricultural techniques (Darlington 2012, pp. 44–51). These examples prove that Buddhism has the potential to address environmental concerns and develop an eco-friendly perspective both in history and in contemporary society.

On the other hand, Buddhism is contended to align deeply with the natural world, emphasizing a harmonious relationship between Buddhists and nature. Some Thai scholars, such as Phramaha Sangvech Scicot, Apaporn Bulsathaporn, and Thaweesak Chooma, staunchly support this viewpoint, claiming that Buddhism has an impeccable record free of conquest, intrusion, or the subjugation of sentient life (Scicot et al. 2017, p. 54). They expound that there exists a close relationship between Buddhists and nature. It is legendarily recorded that Prince Siddhartha Gautama, who later became the Buddha, attained enlightenment through his intensive meditation under the Bodhi tree in Bodh Gaya, India, and subsequently sought solace in natural environments like forests, mountains, and caves in the wilderness (Scicot et al. 2017, p. 57). The Buddha himself highly praised the virtues of solitude and the tranquility of nature as conducive to one's spiritual quest and liberation. Further, these Thai scholars claim that the practice of Buddhism in the presence of nature forms the foundation for seeking a harmonious relationship between humans and the natural world. Thus, the Buddha imparts to his followers the precept of partaking in the Earth's bounty based on their bodily needs during their spiritual journey, rather than indulging in sensory pleasures. This perspective resonates with the principles of deep ecology, which advocate for a balanced and respectful relationship with nature.

These two viewpoints, one emphasizing Buddhists' neglect of nature and the other highlighting a reverence for nature, diverge to a large extent. The former examines the historical actions of Buddhists, while the latter focuses on the connection between Buddhists and nature during their spiritual journey. These differing viewpoints naturally lead to disparate conclusions and interpretations regarding the relationship between Buddhists and nature. This diversity of viewpoints also reflects the dynamic nature of Buddhism as it evolves and adapts to different contexts and interpretations in history. In fact, the ongoing discourse regarding whether Buddhists embrace a friendly attitude towards nature is intricately linked to the ecological environment of a particular region (and also time), as well as the prevailing social atmosphere and policies. Therefore, the approach taken by scholars like Phramaha Sangvech Scicot, who solely focus on Buddhists' practice in nature, appears insufficient to address the question of whether Buddhists are environmentally friendly. To better answer the question, we need to consider various specific social elements. For example, when discussing the activities of Chinese Buddhists in Dunhuang (located in the northwest of China, with a dry and often windy climate), a different result will emerge compared to that of Elverskog. In Dunhuang, desertification has become a prominent issue since the Han Dynasty, leading the monks to cultivate a deep sense of environmental stewardship. They actively involved local communities in conservation practices, such

as tree planting and water preservation (Xu and Wei 2015, pp. 26–27), showcasing the imperative for continuous and diverse investigations into the Buddhist perspective.

3. The Dispute over the Classification of Buddhist Eco-Ethics

The debate on Buddhist eco-ethics, as described above, brings attention to three crucial inquiries. The initial inquiry examines the potential for deriving a genuine environmental ethic from a historical analysis of Buddhist literature. Based on literary analysis, scholars like Harris and Ives challenge the assertion that Buddhism inherently advocates for environmental friendliness. They argue that Buddhist eco-ethics primarily arises through Buddhists' active involvement in societal matters. The second inquiry delves into the possibility of meaningful interactions between Buddhism and other theories of environmental ethics. Apart from the aforementioned example of Buddhism and deep ecology, there are also connections between Buddhism, land ethics, and environmental virtue ethics. Anyhow, a continuing debate seeks to clarify the relationship between Buddhism and other environmental ethical frameworks. The third inquiry, concerning the attitude of Buddhists towards nature, encompasses factors such as their spiritual practices and the particular socio-historical circumstances in which they exist. This topic has undoubtedly garnered significant scholarly attention, with more and more experts actively participating in the ongoing discussion.

Of course, these inquiries sometimes overlap. For example, Collin H. Simonds mingles the first and second inquiries together by claiming that the tension between Buddhism and "the kind of environmental ethics found in the land ethic and deep ecology" will be relieved "if we begin from Buddhist philosophical principles and construct an environmental ethic from the ground up" (Simonds 2023, p. 223). Indeed, many standpoints arise from the rigorous examinations and discussions surrounding these three inquiries. To delineate them, some scholars (Swearer 2006; Sahni 2008) propose detailed classifications of Buddhist eco-ethics, offering a valuable reference for our discussion. Building on their contributions, we put forth our own framework for Buddhist eco-ethics, with an emphasis on the importance of macro perspectives.

3.1. Classifications of Views

The subtle categorization proposed by Pragati Sahni (2008) provides a valuable framework for understanding different views within the discourse on Buddhist eco-ethics. Generally, Sahni classifies such views into four distinct groups: partisan, positivist, sanguine, and skeptic (Sahni 2008, p. 12). Drawing on scholarly approaches to early Buddhism and their varying degrees of optimism towards Buddhist environmentalism, Sahni's typology centers around the first inquiry discussed earlier: can an examination of Buddhist literature yield an environmental ethic? According to Sahni, the "partisan" uncritically claims that Buddhism is environmentally friendly. Then, through a controversial analysis of Buddhist resources, the "positivists" support the environmental aspects of Buddhism. By analyzing different Buddhist texts and their contexts, the "sanguine" examines the extent to which Buddhism can be considered environmentally conscious. However, the "skeptics" categorically assert that achieving an environmental Buddhism is implausible (Sahni 2008, p. 12). From this classification, we can discern that Sahni actually adopts an internal macroscopic perspective in examining Buddhist eco-ethics. Although she does not explicitly approach the second and third inquiries from a macro perspective, her typology still provides a valuable framework for further investigation and advancement.

3.2. Classifications of Macro Perspectives

Swearer's typology categorizes environmental thinkers into five groups: eco-apologists, eco-critics, eco-constructivists, eco-ethicists, and eco-contextualists (Swearer 2006, p. 124), which provides a thorough examination of Buddhist eco-ethics and its implications for environmental thought. The first three groups of scholars, who, respectively, advocate, criticize, and attempt to construct Buddhist eco-ethics, primarily speak from an internal macro per-

spective. They explore the extent to which Buddhism can be regarded as environmentally oriented. By analyzing eco-ethicists, Swearer examines the interaction between Buddhism and virtue ethics, considering Buddhist eco-ethics as a field infused with environmentally friendly Buddhist virtues. In this sense, Buddhist eco-ethics exhibits characteristics such as emphasizing human agency, making it akin to environmental virtue ethics. Therefore, we can also argue that the concept of "eco-ethicist" pays attention to the interaction between Buddhism and environmental virtue ethics. In general terms, Swearer observes from an external macro perspective. By incorporating the eco-contextualist viewpoint, Swearer expands his views to touch upon the adaptability of Buddhism. Simultaneously, he elucidates an approach that explores Buddhist eco-ethics in relation to specific time and place, aligning with our claims regarding whether Buddhists are environmentally friendly.

Swearer's taxonomy, with its consideration of different macro perspectives, exerts a significant impact on the research conducted by other scholars. Nan Kathy Lin, for instance, borrows Swearer's concepts of Buddhist eco-apologists and Buddhist eco-critics (Lin 2022, p. 1192) to examine the gap between them. Likewise, we also draw inspiration from Swearer's typology to investigate Buddhist eco-ethics from various macro perspectives.

3.3. Different Perspectives for a Holistic Buddhist Eco-Ethics

The underpinnings for the exploration of Buddhist environmental ethics can be broadly distilled into three fundamental points. Firstly, the intricacies of political and economic problems naturally perpetuate ecological problems, which need to be noticed and addressed. Secondly, Christianity, although influential, fails to fully meet the expectations of environmentalism within the Western context. Thirdly, the inexorable tide of Buddhist secularization obliges it to confront the exigencies of the tangible world. Consequently, the necessity of Buddhist involvement in the development of environmental ethics is manifested.

These three points collectively necessitate the development of a holistic Buddhist eco-ethics that emphasizes various macro perspectives. Firstly, the intricate nature of political and economic challenges calls for a meticulous examination of the specific temporal and spatial context when Buddhist eco-ethics is discussed. Secondly, the discordance between Christianity and Western environmental ethics fosters the interaction between Buddhism and diverse views on environmental ethics in the West, thereby giving rise to the issue of theoretical adaptation between them. Additionally, the secularization of Buddhism raises concerns about the coherence of Buddhist traditions, prompting scholars to conduct historical investigations on Buddhist eco-ethics. Therefore, it is crucial to propose a holistic concept of Buddhist eco-ethics that encompasses diverse macro perspectives and addresses multifaceted issues.

4. Mediating the Dispute over Buddhist Eco-Ethics

For the disputes over the feasibility and classification of Buddhist eco-ethics, scholars have devoted their efforts to elucidate the evolutionary trajectory of Buddhist eco-ethics, attempting to construct a systematic framework to establish its conceptual foundation and navigate its inherent potential for optimization. However, despite their endeavors, there is still no unanimous consensus on the concept of Buddhist eco-ethics, which requires further discussion. Currently, ongoing discussions and debates persist, but academic perspectives aimed at mediating these debates have emerged through two distinct approaches. One approach views Buddhist eco-ethics as a manifestation of virtue ethics, while the other sees it as an achievement of engaged Buddhism. Swearer also discusses the former perspective when investigating eco-ethicists (Swearer 2006, pp. 132–35). But in contrast to Swearer, we interpret the virtue approach as a means to reconcile disputes regarding Buddhist eco-ethics. The latter approach elucidates the feasibility of Buddhist eco-ethics by affirming its historical consistency, seeking to progress from an internal macro perspective. The position of these two mediation methods in Buddhist eco-ethics will be clearly shown within the context of our framework. Here, we attempt to show that our holistic framework

of Buddhist eco-ethics emerges from debates while providing an alternative approach to examining existing methods of dispute resolution.

4.1. Regarding Buddhist Eco-Ethics as Virtue Ethics

Viewing Buddhist eco-ethics as a form of virtue ethics arises from the interaction of Buddhism with environmental ethics. Its fundamental principle can be succinctly delineated as follows: Buddhism's prominent contribution to environmental ethics resides in its nurturing an array of virtues that facilitate environmental preservation. These virtues, including self-discipline, benevolence, amicability, interbeing, and more, are essential within Buddhism. Hence, the virtue ethic approach effectively addresses the interaction between two categories and contributes to Buddhist eco-ethics from an external perspective, thereby coexisting with the current harshest reproach from the internal macro perspective that asserts Buddhism's lack of authentic environmental ethics. In addition, its emphasis on character transformation (Swearer 2006, p. 135) and rejection of ecological holism (Swearer 2006, p. 134) provide some defense against criticism in this regard.

4.1.1. Resorting to Virtue Ethics to Mediate the Dispute over Buddhist Eco-Ethics

Some scholars suggest that to mediate the ongoing dispute over Buddhist eco-ethics, one viable approach is to classify it as a form of virtue ethics. For instance, when David Cooper and Simon James explore the idea of interpreting deep ecology as an environmental virtue ethic, they propose that the Buddhist "account of the role of environmental concern for human well-being" (Cooper and James 2005, p. 33) resonates with deep ecologists. In doing so, they advocate for incorporating a virtue-based approach to navigate the complexities of Buddhist eco-ethics. Pragati Sahni (2008), another prominent advocate, in her *Environmental Ethics in Buddhism: A Virtue Approach*, argues that ancient Buddhism can be construed as an embodiment of environmental virtue ethics due to its pervasive emphasis on virtues that promote environmental harmony. This claim encompasses two intertwined inquiries: the existence of authentic environmental ethics within early Buddhism and the feasibility of integrating Buddhism with environmental virtue ethics. In this regard, Sahni tackles the controversy surrounding Buddhist eco-ethics by employing diverse macro perspectives. Therefore, Sahni's research methodology, though rooted in the rigorous studies of early Buddhist texts, effectively coexists with potential critiques and enhances the feasible formulation of Buddhist eco-ethics. However, despite attributing tangible significance to nature, early Buddhism's "cosmological understanding is an inadequate basis for an environmental ethics" (Sahni 2008, p. 164). To overcome this inadequacy, Sahni proposes embracing Buddhist virtues as integral drivers of environmental ethics. Through the influence of meditation, the viability of Buddhist eco-ethics can be reinforced. For instance, the term "karuna" (meaning "compassion" or "empathy"), one essential virtue within Buddhism, embodies a fundamental concern for the suffering of all sentient beings. When "karuna" is applied as a virtue within the context of environmental ethics, it gives rise to a specific form of environmental virtue ethics belonging to the category of "Buddhist eco-ethics".

As a matter of fact, many scholars, including Sahni, are actively involved in similar efforts to explore the relationship between Buddhism and environmental virtue ethics. They argue that the virtues nurtured within Buddhism can be taken as the fundamental basis for environmental ethics. These virtues, deeply embedded in Buddhist teachings, play a significant role in guiding individuals towards environmentally conscious actions and behaviors. Also, these scholars cautiously challenged the prevailing notion that deems the Buddhist teaching of dependent origination as the essence of environmental ethics. This concept of dependent origination fosters our intrinsic connection with nature, thereby even warranting the identification of humanity "with the Great Pacific Garbage Patch" (Javanaud 2020, p. 390) as a reasonable proposition. Similarly, Simon P. James, a proponent of Buddhist eco-ethics as virtue ethics, emphasizes that Buddhist environmental ethics cannot be justified for the fundamental Buddhist beliefs, like "a holistic view of the world"

and the "teaching of emptiness;" instead, he suggests that the underlying principles of Buddhist eco-ethics can be deduced from the recognition of "certain dispositions to treat the natural environment well" due to their important role as "an integral part of human well-being" (James 2007, p. 447). These virtues are deeply rooted in the Buddhist understanding of the essential nature of being human, providing crucial pillars for environmental ethics, complementing the principles of dependent origination, and the contemplation of emptiness, which are inherent in Buddhism. By incorporating such virtues as compassion, mindfulness, non-harming, equanimity, generosity, gratitude, and interbeing into the ethical framework, Buddhist eco-ethics advocates believe that individuals have the potential capability of developing a more harmonious and sustainable relationship with the environment, eventually leading to environmental preservation and well-being.

On the whole, scholars who endorse Buddhist virtues aim to establish a foundation for Buddhist eco-ethics on the premise that the virtues espoused by Buddhism can make invaluable contributions to environmental preservation. As renowned American eco-poet and environmentalist Gary Snyder articulates, "[w]hatever sense of ethical responsibility and concern that human beings can muster must be translated from a human-centered consciousness to a natural-systems-wide sense of value" (Snyder 1995, p. 210). Nonetheless, when it comes to the applicability of Buddhist cosmology and its metaphysical outlook, which is rooted in the theory of dependent origination, these scholars have reservations about its capacity to serve as a robust ethical framework for addressing the pressing environmental challenges of today's world.

4.1.2. Contributing to the Holistic Buddhist Eco-Ethics from the External Perspective

One of the main critiques of Buddhist eco-ethics is that Buddhism, as traditionally practiced, has not explicitly developed a comprehensive framework or a set of principles specifically to address environmental issues. For instance, traditional Buddhist teachings normally emphasize renunciation and detachment from worldly matters, which might inadvertently lead to a lack of engagement with environmental concerns. Also, the focus on personal liberation and the transcendence of suffering may overshadow the importance of ecological stewardship. Confronting such an unresolved and yet historically existing dilemma raised from the first aforementioned inquiry, it is valuable to resort to virtue ethics to mediate the dispute and contribute to the holistic Buddhist eco-ethics from another angle.

In the ongoing debate, Asian scholars, following Sahni's step, are playing an instrumental role in advocating for the mediation approach through virtue ethics. Notably, Chinese American professor Dan Smyer Yü (2023) contributes to this discourse when discussing "new Buddhism." While questioning the existence of a conscious ecological framework within Buddhism, Yü addressed "new Buddhism," seeking to integrate environmental practices with environmental virtues. In his mind, "it is possible that current Buddhist environmental trend will eventually culminate in a new Buddhism—a substantiated eco-spiritual system dedicated to the wellbeing of the ecological worlds of the Earth" (Yü 2023, p. 114). Here, his idea of "new Buddhism" incorporates both spiritual environmentalism and outer environmentalism, in which the former places some emphasis on the cultivation of environmental virtues, whereas the latter underscores environmental actions. By integrating these perspectives, we can seek to harmonize the moral and practical dimensions of Buddhist eco-ethics, making "new Buddhism" more defensible. Coincidentally, Thai researcher Anthony Le Duc (2018) also investigates Buddhist eco-ethics by skillfully integrating the concept of virtues, arguing that two dimensions—the horizontal and the vertical—are needed when addressing Buddhist eco-ethics. In his opinion, the horizontal dimension, also called the relational one, draws upon Buddhist cosmogony and fundamental theories such as dependent origination and interbeing. The vertical dimension, referred to as the developmental one, posits that those Buddhist virtues, though cultivated through the Noble Eightfold Path, not only foster harmoniously interpersonal connections but also contribute to "environmental well-being and flourishing" (Duc 2018, p. 178).

Today, a number of scholars are exploring Buddhist environmentalism by incorporating virtue ethics, which enriches the holistic concept of Buddhist eco-ethics. This virtue approach encompasses different dimensions of environmentalism but it can also exist harmoniously alongside existing criticisms. One of these criticisms pertains to the lack of explicit support for Buddhist environmentalism within fundamental Buddhist teachings and scriptures, as addressed in the first inquiry of our holistic Buddhist eco-ethics framework, while the historical fact that some Buddhists have harmed the environment is discussed in our third query. The virtue approach suggests that while there may be controversy regarding the adequacy of the foundational principle of dependent origination in safeguarding environmental ethics, Buddhism encompasses an external aspect and embraces a virtuous dimension that has the potential to contribute to environmental ethics. As a result, this approach helps to mitigate conflicts concerning Buddhist eco-ethics. Notably, the current second wave of environmental crisis is characterized by its "global in scale" (Callicott 2021, p. 27), necessitating the development of an environmental ethics that goes beyond the traditional boundaries. This new environmental ethics must encompass broader scales and perspectives to effectively address the global nature of the challenges we face today. In essence, it becomes imperative to reconcile different perspectives and encourage the holistic concept of Buddhist eco-ethics, thereby fostering harmony in addressing environmental concerns.

4.2. Regarding Buddhist Eco-Ethics as an Achievement of Engaged Buddhism

Based upon the above discussion, this article advocates that engaged Buddhism can be taken as another mediation approach to sort out the viability of outer environmentalism. In fact, in the past decades, engaged Buddhist practitioners and organizations have adopted various adaptations to the social environment throughout the world, which, in turn, evidence that Buddhist eco-ethics is valuable and helpful for addressing the current environmental problems. There are many fruitful engaged Buddhist mediation activities in the field of environmental protection, such as social activism for climate justice and environmental conservation, social service for the subsistence of marginalized communities in the wilderness, interfaith dialogue for green and dark green religion, mindfulness for open-field child education and spiritual guidance, and environmental stewardship for sustainable living practices. More specifically, for example, the Buryat Buddhist community in Russia has proposed a "Social Flock" project to revive nomadic cattle breeding. This initiative not only satisfies "the practical needs of people" but also has the potential to address "environmental problems of global importance" (Dondukov et al. 2021, p. 1). Chinese Buddhists have actively responded to the government's call for the establishment of ecological monasteries in Zhejiang Province and other regions, as part of an effort to promote an ecological civilization. Simply put, engaged Buddhism encourages Buddhists to be actively involved in society, charting a course of social acclimation. It currently accentuates the harmony and uninterrupted progression of Buddhism, wherein modern Buddhism complements rather than contradicts its ancestral counterpart, infusing it with fresh interpretations while preserving its integral essence. This uninterrupted aspect, as illustrated in David R. Loy's "Ecodharma," is considered valuable by us for mediating the dispute over Buddhist eco-ethics. In short, scholars' emphasis on either historical or socialized aspects may differ, but the view of Buddhist uninterrupted progression potentially contributes to harmonizing them, thereby alleviating the internal macro-level dispute.

4.2.1. Resorting to Engaged Buddhism to Mediate the Dispute over Buddhist Eco-Ethics

From the standpoint of engaged Buddhism, the concept of Buddhist eco-ethics can be illuminated by highlighting its internal consistency within Buddhism. In reality, contemporary Buddhist eco-ethics does not contradict its traditional roots; instead, it embodies a consistent progression. This enables us to reconcile conflicting perspectives on Buddhist eco-ethics and transcend the dichotomy between historical objectivity and societal progress. Ultimately, it fosters the holistic advancement of Buddhist eco-ethics.

In recent years, some scholars have argued that the contemporary Buddhist environmental movement should be seen as a form of religious change, suggesting that "the study of religious history should better account for how it is that religious change occurs" (Lin 2022, p. 1191). Concerning the connotations of religious change, two explanations may arise. One intends to consider it as an embodiment of Buddhist adaptability, similar to the viewpoint of eco-constructivists. The other embraces both Buddhist uninterrupted progression and its adaptability, harmonizing the viewpoint ingrained in a historical emphasis that early Buddhist scriptures lack support for an authentic Buddhist eco-ethics with the inclination to "construct" a Buddhist environmental ethics. By combining these various connotations, Loy's approach propels the holistic concept of Buddhist eco-ethics and highlights its dynamic progression throughout history.

4.2.2. Justifying the Holistic Buddhist Eco-Ethics from the Internal Perspective

When considering the term "engaged Buddhism" from an internal macro perspective, one burgeoning notable theory is "Ecodharma," "a new concept for a new development of the Buddhist tradition" (Loy 2019, p. 5), put forward by renowned American philosopher David R. Loy in his insightful book *Ecodharma: Buddhist Teachings for the Ecological Crisis*. Loy boldly claims that "Ecodharma" is "the Buddhist response to our ecological predicament," which "combines ecological concerns (eco) with the teachings of Buddhism and related spiritual traditions (dharma)" (Loy 2019, p. 5). For its feasibility, American researcher Jessica Locke argues that Buddhist tradition, in light of the ecological challenges we face, urgently requires "a novel concept that can rearticulate and expand Buddhist ethical principles" (Locke 2022, p. 156). To achieve this, Loy proposes three components or aspects within the framework of Ecodharma: "practicing in the natural world, exploring the eco-implications of Buddhist teachings, and embodying that understanding in the eco-activism that is needed today" (Loy 2019, p. 5). Facing the issue of climate disruption, Loy advocates his Buddhist adaptation approach, namely "sixteen core dharma principles to address climate" (Loy 2019, pp. 164–67). For instance, for the Buddhist teaching of "renunciation and simplicity," Loy mediates this principle and directly applies it to "resolve climate disruption," deeming that "we must be willing to renounce attachments to things that contribute to the problem and live more simply" (Loy 2019, p. 165). In some sense, his concept of "Ecodharma" sets his interpretations apart from other perspectives. That is why Loy openly acknowledges that his elucidation of "engaged Buddhism" transcends conventional doctrines.

Nevertheless, Loy's portrayal of "Ecodharma" also harbors a connotation of Buddhist uninterrupted progression, which "is consonant with the 2600-year history of Buddhism's various traditions" (Locke 2022, p. 156). For Loy, "Buddhism is not just what the Buddha said but what he began" (Loy 2019, p. 3). This conceptual framework is unique as it effectively counters the critique that Buddhist eco-ethics is solely driven by Westerners who are pursuing environmental agendas. It also partially bypasses the ongoing debate about whether early Buddhism inherently contains an authentic ecological dimension. Instead, Loy perceives the convergence between Buddhism and environmental ethics as an inherent progression within Buddhism, considering it as a consequence of engaged Buddhism that aligns with the historical trajectory of Buddhism and resonates with environmental movements. From this internal perspective, we can safely infer that the Buddhist tradition is experiencing rapid advancement and continuously refining its Dharma principles. Also, it is embracing a widespread cross-cultural implementation to adapt to the ever-evolving society. Within this context, the emergence of Buddhist eco-ethics can be viewed as a natural progression within Buddhism, justifying its holistic nature from an internal standpoint. This understanding highlights the organic development of Buddhist thought and practice as they respond to the pressing ecological challenges of our time.

In line with the awareness of Buddhism's consistency, some scholars express their optimistic views on the possibility of Buddhist scriptures expanding to include new environmentally conscious material in the future. For example, Dan Smyer Yü proposes

his hypothetical notion of "Earth Sutra" as the foundational text of Buddhist eco-ethics (Yü 2023, p. 111). He argues that unlike canonical texts in Western religions, which are considered fixed and resistant to supplementation, Buddhist scriptures have historically embraced an open attitude towards future doctrines and texts. For example, the influential scripture *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* transcends the teachings of the Buddha in ancient India. This expectation of scriptural supplementation is now strongly supported by some engaged Buddhist scholars, which actively promotes the holistic concept of Buddhist eco-ethics.

4.3. Different Perspectives for Mediating the Dispute over Buddhist Eco-Ethics

Regardless of the external or internal lenses employed to reconcile the dispute, scholars strive to mediate the disagreements within scholarly inquiry on Buddhist eco-ethics. Their endeavors have, to some extent, mitigated the dispute and contributed to the development of a more holistic concept of Buddhist eco-ethics. In addition to considering Buddhist eco-ethics as a form of virtue ethics and a result of engaged Buddhism, this article argues for the importance of taking into account the perspective of Buddhists and their activities. This multilateral consideration of how to mediate disputes and promote a concept of pan-Buddhist eco-ethics may be better suited to addressing the pressing global environmental challenges we face today. Currently, the environmental issues associated with the first wave of environmental crisis, such as industrial pollution and beach contamination, have been overshadowed by the catastrophic consequences caused by the second wave of environmental crisis, such as climate change, ozone depletion, and biodiversity loss. Adapting to these global challenges appears extremely difficult, requiring the consideration of different macro perspectives on Buddhist eco-ethics in order to better promote environmental protection.

Mediating the dispute from various macro perspectives is gaining importance. In fact, whether we approach Buddhist eco-ethics from an internal or external macro perspective, it is significant to observe Buddhists themselves and their activities. Especially when resorting to the method of engaged Buddhism, it is imperative to contemplate how Buddhists' interactions with nature influence the progression of Buddhism. This necessitates an examination of their environmental attitudes and activities. Nevertheless, scholars who adopt the method of engaged Buddhism often bypass the perspective of Buddhists and instead focus primarily on the adaptability and continuous progression of Buddhism. Therefore, the process through which Buddhist transformations manifest remains somewhat inadequately explored. Generally speaking, mediating the dispute from various macro perspectives will furnish substantiation, thereby elucidating the favorable adaptations that Buddhism undergoes in the context of environmental preservation.

5. Conclusions

In our examination of Buddhist eco-ethics, we have found that this concept is an evolving discourse that continues to enrich environmental ethics. Indeed, the integration of Buddhist values into contemporary environmental preservation has made a significant contribution to the global movement towards sustainability, ecological balance, and the well-being of all beings. Though this is the case, Buddhist eco-ethics also faces some challenges in its efforts to promote environmental conservation, such as balancing traditional beliefs with modern pressures, addressing socioeconomic factors, encouraging behavior change, and collaborating with diverse stakeholders. Despite these challenges, numerous scholars persist in their endeavors, drawing on enlightenment from various perspectives while promoting the feasibility of Buddhist eco-ethics in guiding current environmental conservation initiatives.

Based on a comprehensive exploration of Buddhist eco-ethics, this paper argues that a holistic framework is much needed to explore the intersection of Buddhist eco-ethics with environmental issues. In this respect, three perspectives are examined in the text: ecological ethics in Buddhism, Buddhism in ecological ethics, and Buddhists' environmental activities. Firstly, we underscore the importance of ecological ethics in

Buddhism by delving into historical Buddhist scriptures and doctrines to determine their potential as a foundation for environmental ethics. This exploration enables us to have an assessment of the compatibility of Buddhism with ecological principles. Secondly, we recognize the contemporary relevance of Buddhism in the realm of environmental ethics. This perspective enables us to examine the tangible effectiveness of Buddhist principles and teachings in promoting other environmental and ethical views. Thirdly, we address the issue of Buddhists' environmental activities, which makes us rethink how to build a more environmentally responsible community. By analyzing the initiatives and actions of Buddhists concerning the environment, we can gain insights into the practical implementation of Buddhist eco-ethics.

Accordingly, it is claimed that adopting a holistic understanding of the concept of Buddhist eco-ethics through this inclusive approach can provide valuable insights and guidance for addressing the current environmental challenges of our time. By engaging in meaningful dialogues, collaborations, and actions, we can harness the wisdom of Buddhism to inspire conservation and forge a path towards a more harmonious and sustainable world. Finally, to quote American Buddhist philosopher William Edelglass, we are not "suggesting that all the theoretical debates be set aside, for practical policy determinations are inevitably grounded in metaphysical systems. Nevertheless, when environmental philosophy takes place primarily at the level of metaphysics and abdicates the realm of policy to social and natural sciences, it abandons much of its capacity to contribute to a more sustainable future" (Edelglass 2006, p. 13). Given the current global environmental crisis, it is more urgent to explore an inclusive concept of holistic Buddhist eco-ethics for relieving disputes and enhancing the effectiveness of Buddhism in environmental protection.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, J.W. and J.Q.T.; methodology, J.W.; software, J.W.; validation, J.Q.T.; formal analysis, J.W. and J.Q.T.; investigation, J.W. and J.Q.T.; resources, J.W. and J.Q.T.; data curation, J.W. and J.Q.T.; writing—original draft preparation, J.W.; writing—review and editing, J.Q.T.; visualization, J.W. and J.Q.T.; supervision, J.Q.T.; project administration, J.W. and J.Q.T.; funding acquisition, J.Q.T. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, China: 2022 Social Science Premium Support Program, Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, "Interpreting and Mediating Chinese Culture within Western Texts Since the 20th Century".

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

Callicott, John. 2021. The land ethic and the Earth ethic(s). *Ethics, Policy & Environment* 24: 27–43.

Capper, Daniel. 2022. *Roaming Free Like a Deer: Buddhism and the Natural World*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Cavazza, Elisa. 2014. Environmental ethics as a question of environmental ontology: Naess' ecosophy T and Buddhist traditions. *De Ethica: A Journal of Philosophical, Theological and Applied Ethics* 1: 23–48. [CrossRef]

Chimedsengee, Urantsatsral Cripps, Amber Finlay, Victoria Verboom, Guido Batchuluun, Ven Munkhbaatar Khunkhur, and Ven Da Lama Byambajav. 2009. *Mongolian Buddhists Protecting Nature: A Handbook on Faiths, Environment and Development*. Bath: The Alliance of Religions and Conservation.

Cooper, David, and Simon James. 2005. *Buddhism, Virtue and Environment*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Darlington, Susan. 2012. *The Ordination of a Tree: The Thai Buddhist Environmental Movement*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Dondukov, B., O. Dorzhigushaeva, and G. Dondukova. 2021. Socially engaged Buddhism: Cattle-breeding initiative of the Buryat Buddhist sangha and its ecological significance in the Baikal region, Russia. *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* 776: 012009. [CrossRef]

Duc, Anthony Le. 2018. A framework for Buddhist environmentalism: The horizontal and vertical dimension. *International Journal of Buddhist Thought and Culture* 28: 177–203. [CrossRef]

Edelglass, William. 2006. Moral pluralism, skillful means, and environmental ethics. *Environmental Philosophy* 3: 8–16. [CrossRef]
Elverskog, Johan. 2020. *The Buddha's Footprint: An Environmental History of Asia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
Frazer, James. 1983. *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion*. New York: Macmillan Press.
Gross, Rita. 1997. Toward a Buddhist environmental ethics. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65: 333–53. [CrossRef]
Harris, Ian. 1995. Buddhist environmental ethics and detraditionalization: The case of ecoBuddhism. *Religion* 25: 199–211. [CrossRef]
Henning, Daniel. 2002. *A Manual for Buddhism and Deep Ecology*. Bloomington: 1st Books Library.
Holder, John. 2007. A suffering (but not irreparable) nature: Environmental ethics from the perspective of early Buddhism. *Contemporary Buddhism* 8: 113–31. [CrossRef]
Ives, Christopher. 2013. Resources for Buddhist environmental ethics. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 20: 541–71.
Ives, Christopher. 2017. Buddhism: A mixed Dharmic bag: Debated about Buddhism and ecology. In *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*. Edited by Willis Jenkins, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim. London: Routledge, pp. 43–51.
James, Simon P. 2000. "Thing-centered" holism in Buddhism, Heidegger, and deep ecology. *Environmental Ethics* 22: 359–75. [CrossRef]
James, Simon P. 2007. Against holism: Rethinking Buddhist environmental ethics. *Environmental Values* 16: 447–61. [CrossRef]
Javanaud, Katie. 2020. The world on fire: A Buddhist response to the environmental crisis. *Religions* 11: 381. [CrossRef]
Kaza, Stephanie. 1997. American Buddhist response to the land: Ecological practice at two west coast retreat centers. In *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection between Dharma and Deeds*. Edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams. London: Harvard University Press.
Keown, Damien. 2003. *A Dictionary of Buddhism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Keown, Damien. 2007. Buddhism and ecology: A virtue ethics approach. *Contemporary Buddhism* 8: 97–112. [CrossRef]
Lin, Nan Kathy. 2022. Buddhist environmentalism as seen through religious change. *Religions* 13: 1191. [CrossRef]
Locke, Jessica. 2022. The varied trajectories of engaged Buddhism: New works on Buddhist environmental ethics, interdependence, and racial karma. *Journal of Religious Ethics* 50: 147–66. [CrossRef]
Loy, David. 2019. *Ecodharma: Buddhist Teachings for the Ecological Crisis*. Somerville: Wisdom Publications.
Naess, Arne. 1998. The deep ecology movement: Some philosophical aspects. In *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*. Edited by Michael Zimmerman. Upper Saddle River: Printice Hall.
Sahni, Pragati. 2008. *Environmental Ethics in Buddhism: A Virtue Approach*. London: Routledge.
Schmithausen, Lambert. 1997. The early Buddhist tradition and ecological ethics. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 4: 1–74.
Schmithausen, Lambert. 2000. Buddhism and the ethics of nature—Some remarks. *The Eastern Buddhist* 32: 26–78.
Scicot, Phramaha Sangvech, Apaporn Bulsathaporn, and Thaweesak Chooma. 2017. Buddhist ethics with solving the environmental problems. *Cultural and Religious Studies* 5: 54–60.
Simonds, Colin. 2023. The trouble of rocks and waters: On the (Im)Possibility of a Buddhist Environmental Ethic. *Environmental Ethics* 45: 223–45. [CrossRef]
Snyder, Gary. 1995. *A Place in Space*. Burkley: Counterpoint.
Sørensen, Henrik. 2013. Of eco-Buddhas and dharma-roots: Views from the East Asian Buddhist tradition. In *Nature, Environment and Culture in East Asia*. Edited by Carmen Meinert. Leiden: Brill.
Strain, Charles. 2016. Engaged Buddhist practice and ecological ethics. *Worldviews* 20: 189–210. [CrossRef]
Swearer, Donald. 2006. An assessment of Buddhist eco-philosophy. *Harvard Theological Review* 99: 123–137. [CrossRef]
Wu, Yansheng. 2006. Implications and practical significance of deep ecology and Buddhist ecological perspectives. *China Religion* 6: 22–25.
Xu, Wenfang, and Baowei Wei. 2015. Buddhist ecological thought and its influence on Dunhuang environmental protection. *Journal of Arid Land Resources and Environment* 7: 24–28.
Yü, Dan Smyer. 2023. Freeing animals: Sino-Tibetan Buddhist environmentalism and ecological challenges. *Religions* 14: 110. [CrossRef]