

BRINGING SĀDHĀRAṆADHARMA TO THE EDUCATIONAL ENDEAVOURS: A CASE STUDY OF THAN HSIANG TEMPLE IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract: This study examines the concept of *Sādhāraṇadharmā*, or common *dharma*, as a form of life education that nurtures holistic human development through values, ethics, character, positive emotions and spirituality. Using Than Hsiang Temple in Malaysia as a case study, it explores how a contemporary Buddhist temple integrates traditional teachings with modern educational practices. Guided by the Four Convictions – “The Young to Learn; The Strong and Healthy to Serve; The Aged and Sick to be Cared for; The Departed to Find Spiritual Destination” – Than Hsiang has developed a range of educational initiatives that promote moral development and community well-being. This qualitative study draws on participatory observation and interviews with temple leaders, educators and volunteers. The findings reveal how *Sādhāraṇadharmā* underpins Than Hsiang’s efforts to embody and transmit Buddhist values, reinforcing the temple’s role in preserving and propagating Buddhism in a multicultural, modern society.

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1. Introduction

In Buddhism, *dharma* refers to the doctrine and universal truth proclaimed by the Buddha that is timeless, applicable to all individuals, and foundational to right living. Although the concept of *dharma* has evolved across different eras and religious traditions, it transcends the confines of any single religion. Rather than denoting a specific faith, *dharma* embodies the ethical core common to all religions. It encompasses duties to society, moral principles, social customs, and religious practices, forming the distinguishing mark of humanity. Without *dharma*, human life loses its direction, impeding societal development, prosperity, and the pursuit of the ultimate goal, the liberation (Khan, Shahrukh, & Mishra, 2023).

Historically, Buddhist temples have served as vital centres for both spiritual practice and community engagement. In post-independence Malaysia, Buddhist organizations and temples have become increasingly proactive in propagating the Buddha's teachings. Most of these organizations were formally established after 1957, following Malaysia's independence. One of the most prominent bodies, the Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia (YBAM), was founded in 1970 and today coordinates over 270 member organizations through 13 State Liaison Committees nationwide.

As Malaysia has experienced profound transformations in its political, economic, and educational sectors, shifts in family structures from extended to nuclear households have affected the transmission of traditional religious practices. This has led to a disconnect between younger generations and their religious heritage. In response, Buddhist modernism has gained traction as a significant movement reshaping contemporary Buddhist understanding and practice. Emphasizing rationalism, social engagement, and lay participation, this movement has positioned temples as key institutions for religious education and moral

development. A unique characteristic of Malaysian Buddhism is that, aside from a few temples, most religious activities are conducted through independent Buddhist organizations. According to a 1995 YBAM report cited by Ang (2020), there were over 700 such organizations in Malaysia. These groups not only promote religious education but also provide social welfare services and spiritual support for the broader Buddhist community.

This paper focuses on the educational initiatives of Than Hsiang Temple, which embodies the principle of *Sādhāraṇadharmā*, the universal ethical duties that guide individuals toward wisdom, compassion, and social harmony. Rooted in the belief that all life is interconnected, *Sādhāraṇadharmā* encourages adherence to righteous conduct to achieve societal balance and personal transformation. The central questions explored in this study include: How is *dharma* promoted through educational programmes at Than Hsiang Temple? How are the temple’s convictions and the practice of the Ten Good Deeds translated into efforts to foster a harmonious society?

Drawing on fieldwork and interviews with the temple’s founder, committee members, educators, and volunteers, this study highlights the temple’s role in preserving and transmitting *dharma* through education. It argues that these initiatives are essential in sustaining the ethical and spiritual foundations of Buddhism in contemporary Malaysian society.

2. Buddhist Modernism in Malaysia

The evolution of Buddhist practice in Malaysia reflects broader trends in Buddhist modernism, shaped by colonialism, Western influence, and reformist movements. Since the 17th century, colonial narratives began redefining religion as rational, institutional, and scientific—an idea promoted throughout Asia by colonial administrations and Christian missionaries (Tambiah, 1990). In response, Buddhist communities initiated reforms marked by the rise of lay leadership, the formation of associations, expanded social welfare, and rational reinterpretations of Buddhist thought.

By the 21st century, modern Buddhism has come to emphasize lay participation, women's expanded roles, national *sanghas*, scholarly engagement, and ethno-nationalist discourses. It adopts a demythologized and scientific outlook, acknowledging empirical knowledge while distancing from superstition (Turner, Cox, & Bocking, 2013; McMahan, 2012). These reformist trends represent a reimagining of Buddhism that is spiritually authentic yet intellectually aligned with modernity.

Anne Blackburn (2010) uses terms such as “Buddhist Modernism,” “Buddhist Revival,” and “Protestant Buddhism” to describe the lay-led, rationalist religious movements that emerged during Sri Lanka's colonial period – models later extended across Asia (Yulianti, 2020). In Southeast Asia, including Malaysia, the modernization of Chinese Buddhism has drawn considerable academic attention.

The Buddhist modernization movement since the 19th century has driven significant reforms within Buddhism. This broader Buddhist revitalization is evident in Malaysia's religious landscape, marked by rationalization and reinterpretation of doctrine (Tan, 2013). Trevor Ling describes it as a “quiet revival,” free from overt revivalist rhetoric (Ling, 1992), while Lee, Ackerman, and Tan use “Buddhist revitalization” to denote its organized, reformist character.

Contemporary Chinese temples in Malaysia reflect this modernist transformation. No longer confined to devotional practices, they have become centres for *Dhamma* education, sangha consultation, and inner cultivation – aligning their mission with *Sādhāraṇadharmā*. This Sanskrit term, composed of *sādhāraṇa* (universal) and *dharma* (ethical duty), refers to common moral principles that transcend time, place, and identity. According to *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* (Chapter 40), *Sādhāraṇadharmā* represents the universal moral ground from which the Buddha's “lion's roar” of truth arises.

Unlike *svadharmā*, or individual duty, *Sādhāraṇadharmā* encompasses ethical imperatives such as non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), truth (*satya*), self-restraint, and purity, virtues applicable to all, regardless of background. These shared values are vital to both

Hindu and Buddhist ethics, forming the moral core that supports spiritual development and social cohesion.

V. F. Vineeth (2004) reflects on the dual dimensions of human existence—religious and secular—arguing that genuine spirituality must engage meaningfully with the realities of modern society. Contemporary interpretations increasingly associate *dharma* with concepts such as law, morality and social responsibility, underscoring its significance for both ethical governance and individual liberation (Khan & Debanjan, 2023).

In Malaysia, the intersection of Buddhist modernism, *Sādhāraṇadharmā*, and the evolving functions of temples illustrates Buddhism’s capacity for dynamic adaptation. By integrating ethical education into temple life, the tradition sustains its spiritual depth while addressing contemporary societal needs. This paper examines how Malaysian Buddhist temples, particularly Than Hsiang Temple, fulfil *Sādhāraṇadharmā* by embodying universal values such as compassion, moral responsibility, and interdependence, affirming their role not only as sites of ritual but also as active agents in fostering personal development and communal well-being in a rapidly changing world.

3. Case Study Research Design

This paper presents a case study of Than Hsiang Temple to examine the modernization of Buddhism in Malaysia. Founded by Venerable Wei Wu, a Penang-born Chinese Buddhist, Than Hsiang Temple represents a locally rooted Buddhist organization committed to preserving the authentic teachings of the Buddha and promoting the wisdom of the *Dharma*. It serves as a compelling example of how Buddhist institutions can evolve to address contemporary societal needs while upholding their spiritual foundations. Today, temples like Than Hsiang extend beyond their traditional role as places of worship; they function as centres for holistic education, nurturing moral, spiritual, and personal development.

A case study, by definition, involves an in-depth exploration of a specific unit—be it an individual, group, or

organization—to derive insights applicable to broader contexts. As Cousin (2005) notes, the method is not solely focused on individual analysis but aims to understand a case within its real-life setting. Creswell (2013) further describes case studies as detailed investigations of contemporary, bounded systems, drawing from diverse sources over time to uncover patterns and emerging themes. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of an organization's internal dynamics and educational practices.

The present study draws on multiple data sources to construct a well-rounded picture of Than Hsiang Temple's evolution and educational mission. Historical documents, scholarly literature, news articles and digital archives form the basis of the secondary data. Fieldwork was conducted between September 2022 and March 2023, during which 23 individuals—including committee members, staff and volunteers—were interviewed.

Among the participants, 91% received primary education in Chinese schools, with educational attainment ranging from the Malaysian Certificate of Education (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia, SPM) to master's degrees; notably, 57% held bachelor's degrees. Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were used to explore their involvement in the temple's educational initiatives.

A central component of this study is an in-depth interview with Venerable Wei Wu, whose visionary leadership and commitment to compassionate service offer profound insights into the temple's educational philosophy and its dynamic approach to Dharma propagation. In addition, researchers engaged in participatory observation of the temple's various departments, rituals, and outreach programs. This immersive methodology, complemented by data collected from the temple's official website and social media platforms, reveals how Than Hsiang Temple embodies Buddhist modernism by harmonizing traditional values with contemporary educational and social imperatives. It also serves as a living example of how Buddhism adapts to modern contexts while retaining its core spiritual essence.

4. Than Hsiang Temple and The Four Convictions

The origins of Than Hsiang Temple date back to 1985, beginning humbly within the meeting room of Hewlett-Packard in Penang, Malaysia. Its founder, Neoh Kah Thong, a graduate in Electrical Engineering from Canterbury University, New Zealand, began sharing Buddhist teachings with colleagues during lunch breaks. His vegetarian lifestyle and gentle demeanour piqued their curiosity, eventually inspiring many to embrace Buddhism. These informal gatherings led to the establishment of the Bayan Baru Buddhist Association, which formalised with the purchase of a house in July 1985.

Under Neoh’s visionary leadership and the dedicated support of fellow practitioners, the association flourished. This growth culminated in the formation of the Than Hsiang Foundation in January 1990, dedicated to promoting Buddhist education, cultivation, and charitable initiatives in alignment with the compassionate teachings of the Buddha. The temple's physical relocation over time, from Medan Mahsuri to Jalan Tengah and ultimately to its current premises on Jalan Sultan Azlan Shah, symbolizes its expanding role in society.

Figure 1

The Building of Than Hsiang Temple is located on Jalan Sultan Azlan Shah, Penang, Malaysia



Source: Than Hsiang Foundation 2012 Annual Report

Although Neoh founded Than Hsiang Temple in 1985, he formally entered the monastic order in 1992 to honour the four debts of gratitude to parents, teacher, country and the three treasures of Buddhism. He received full ordination at Hsi Lai Temple in the United States. There, immersed in the forest monastic tradition, he deepened his understanding of Buddhist practice and the vital importance of education in sustaining the Dhamma. Upon ordination, he became known as Venerable Wei Wu. His experience reaffirmed a lifelong commitment to nurturing the younger generation as the future custodians of Buddhism.

Venerable Wei Wu has since established multiple Buddhist initiatives under the Than Hsiang Foundation, all guided by the Four Convictions: “The Young to Learn; The Strong and Healthy to Serve; The Aged and Sick to be Cared for; and The Departed to Find Spiritual Destination.” These convictions encapsulate a life-affirming vision that spans every stage of human existence, providing moral direction and social responsibility through Buddhist values.

This vision echoes Confucian ideals found in the Record of the Ritual, which calls for the care of not only one’s family but all members of society, ensuring support for the elderly, opportunities for the strong, growth for the young, and dignity for the vulnerable. Venerable Wei Wu observes that while Confucianism tends to avoid the subject of death, Buddhism addresses it directly, embracing it as part of the natural cycle. His reformulation of this classical ethos into the Four Convictions integrates both Buddhist and Confucian moral philosophies, grounded in the realities of birth, ageing, sickness, and death.

In line with the modernization of Buddhism, Than Hsiang Temple continues to evolve. While maintaining its role as a site for rituals and devotion, it has also become a centre for education, spiritual cultivation and social welfare. As a non-profit organization, the temple depends on the generosity of the Buddhist community to carry out its mission. Its primary aim is to preserve the Buddha’s authentic teachings and to transmit wisdom for the benefit of present and future generations.

5. Bringing *Sādhāraṇadharma* to the Kindergarten

Situated in the heart of the Bayan Lepas high-tech industrial zone in Penang, Than Hsiang Temple recognized an urgent need for quality early childhood education among the growing local population. Responding to this, Venerable Wei Wu initiated the establishment of Than Hsiang Kindergarten to provide a nurturing environment where children could receive both academic education and early exposure to the Buddha’s teachings. The kindergarten opened with 90 pupils and was housed in the Great Compassion Hall of Than Hsiang Temple. From its inception, the institution aimed to integrate holistic learning with moral and spiritual development.

What distinguishes Than Hsiang Kindergarten is its focus on the Ten Good Deeds (*Fu Zhi Shishanfa*), which serve as a core component of its moral education framework. These teachings instill virtues such as kindness, patience, honesty, and the development of bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment, through storytelling and experiential learning. Teachers like Madam Lee and Madam Teoh, with decades of service, highlight the fusion of Eastern wisdom and Western pedagogical methods, combining recitation of Buddhist texts with play-based learning to engage and nurture young minds. Madam Lee said:

“Eastern educational concepts introduce ancient Eastern wisdom to children, such as teaching them to recite the Heart Sutra and incorporating the teaching of the “Ten Good Deeds” to instill good values from an early age. Western education forms are also incorporated, using games as a means for children to learn and enhance their interest in learning”.

Madam Teoh, 45, with two kids studying in the kindergarten, expressed:

In Than Hsiang Kindergarten, the teachings of the Ten Good Deeds are emphasized. The National Preschool Standard Curriculum emphasizes communication skills, spirituality, attitudes and values, humanity, physical and aesthetic development, science and technology and self-skills to prepare the children for primary (formal) education. The teaching of Ten Good Deeds is to complement the children’s good qualities in spiritual support, attitude, and value.

The kindergarten's curriculum follows Malaysia's National Preschool Standard Curriculum (KSPK), while incorporating the Ten Good Deeds as an added layer of moral instruction. These deeds are presented through positive affirmations and stories that are culturally sensitive and adapted to Malaysia's multiracial and multireligious society. For example, where teachings on "belief in cause and effect" may be specific to Buddhists, a more inclusive phrase such as "faith in religion" is used in broader settings to ensure respect and acceptance among diverse student backgrounds.

The Ten Good Deeds approach was introduced to the temple by Venerable Hui Tian in 2004 and further adapted by Venerable Wei Wu to align with the temple's educational mission. While distinct from the Ten Wholesome Ways of Action in *Mahāyāna* scriptures, which focus on avoiding harmful behaviour, the Ten Good Deeds emphasize proactive cultivation of virtues such as respect, gratitude, and non-harming, making them more relatable and accessible for young learners in daily life.

The implementation is supported through structured tools like logbooks, allowing teachers and parents to collaboratively monitor and encourage each child's moral development. Teachers like Ms. Tan noted that this method strengthens the home-school connection and reinforces values through active parental involvement. She explained,

To enhance putting knowledge into practice, Than Hsiang Kindergarten has designed a logbook for checking the child's progress. The teachers will put a tick in the assessment forms, and the parents will put their comments in the feedback. Another purpose of having a logbook is that children need support and encouragement from parents to inculcate good conduct.

Veteran educators such as Madam Wong affirm the kindergarten's Buddhist atmosphere and character-building influence, stressing the importance of compassion and empathy as core virtues nurtured from an early age. She mentioned:

I believe the kindergarten's Buddhist influence contributes to positive character development in children. I appreciate the Buddhist values and supportive atmosphere of the

kindergarten, and thus I can work long time in the kindergarten. The teachings encompass practical aspects of daily life and help children develop positive values and behaviours in daily life. It is important to instill compassion and empathy in children through these teachings.”

Overall, Than Hsiang Kindergarten stands as a model of how *Sādhāraṇadharmā*—universal ethical values—can be seamlessly integrated into early education. By fostering moral consciousness and inner growth alongside academic learning, the kindergarten provides children with a strong foundation for personal development and harmonious living in a diverse society. The Ten Good Deeds are listed in Figure 2.

Table 1: Various Versions of the Ten Good Deeds in Than Hsiang

Ten Good Deeds Original Version (2004)	Ten Good Deeds 2nd Version (2006)	Ten Good Deeds 3rd Version (2011)
1. Be filial to parents.	1. Be filial to parents.	1. Be filial piety to parents.
2. Honour teachers and elders.	2. Honour teachers and elders.	2. Honour teachers and elders.
3. Take refuge in the triple gem.	3. Believe in cause and effect.	3. Have faith in a religion.
4. Study diligently.	4. Study diligently.	4. Study diligently.
5. Avoid bad companions.	5. Avoid bad companions.	5. Be friends with the virtuous.
6. Do not kill and mistreat animals.	6. Do not kill and mistreat animals.	6. Love and respect life.

7. Do not rob and steal.	7. Do not rob and steal.	7. Be grateful and contented.
8. Do not tell lies and say abusive words.	8. Do not tell lies and say abusive words.	8. Speak politely and lovingly.
9. Do not take cigarettes, alcoholic drinks, and drugs.	9. Do not take cigarettes, alcoholic drinks, and drugs.	9. Love others as you love yourself.
10. Do not read and see unbeneficial materials.	10. Do not read and see unbeneficial materials.	10. Spend time wisely.

Source: Summarized and translated by the authors

6. Expanding *Sādhāraṇadharma* to the Sunday Dhamma School

The concept of Sunday Dhamma Schools (SDS) in Malaysia can be traced to American monk Venerable Sumaṅgalo, who launched the first such class at the Penang Buddhist Association on 29 December 1957, the same year the country achieved independence. The initiative received an enthusiastic response from the public, drawing over 200 children, and soon inspired similar efforts across Malaysia as Buddhist associations recognized the importance of Dhamma education for youth.

Than Hsiang Temple established its own Sunday Dhamma School in 1986, grounded in the conviction to nurture faith in the Buddha Dhamma while cultivating wisdom, compassion, and gratitude. According to Ms. Chan, the school's coordinator and a long-serving volunteer, the SDS offers free admission to children from the age of seven and aims to foster wholesome character development, strengthen family bonds, and instil a proper understanding of Buddhist teachings.

The curriculum of Than Hsiang SDS encompasses Buddhist history, ethics, family values, and reflections on

suffering and humanity. Central to the program is the Ten Good Deeds, which provide children with accessible moral guidelines to complement the formal teachings on the Triple Gem and Five Precepts. Teachers and parents alike are encouraged to embody these values, ensuring that the moral education of children extends beyond the classroom into the home.

Initially, materials were distributed informally, but by 2017, Than Hsiang adopted the structured 6-year textbook series published by the Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia (YBAM), including Always Follow the Buddha to Study. These resources offer a comprehensive introduction to core doctrines such as the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the enlightenment of the Buddha.

A typical SDS session begins with a Morning Service involving chanting, paying homage to the Triple Gem, and meditation, rituals that instill reverence and mindfulness. This is followed by age-appropriate Dhamma classes and concludes with merit transference and reflections on good deeds. As Mr. Lim, a long-time volunteer and parent, reflects, this structured flow fosters not only religious knowledge but also values such as respect, gratitude, and personal responsibility.

The Sunday Dhamma School is sustained by a dedicated volunteer group known as the Aixin Jiazuo (Loving Family), composed of Aixin teachers, parents, and elder siblings. This community organizes and facilitates all SDS activities while embodying the spirit of the Bodhisattva path—serving both self and others. Their devotion extends beyond teaching, encompassing community outreach and spiritual cultivation. Activities include family bonding events, parenting workshops, charity visits, Sangha offerings, and interactive parent-child programs that strengthen communal harmony.

To further enrich the teaching quality and spiritual maturity of volunteers, SDS provides training under the Fu Zhi Teachers Fellowship and hosts regular Dhamma sharing sessions led by monastics. These platforms deepen their understanding of Buddhist teachings and equip them to serve with greater insight and compassion.

Many volunteers have remained committed to SDS for over a decade, finding meaning in both the spiritual journey and the strong sense of belonging fostered by the temple's close-knit environment. The unwavering support from monastic leaders and fellow practitioners continues to create a nurturing space for spiritual education and moral formation, ensuring that *Sādhāraṇadharmā* remains a living practice within Malaysia's Buddhist community.

7. Extension of *Sādhāraṇadharmā* to the International Buddhist College

Than Hsiang Temple's educational vision spans all levels – from early childhood to higher education and lifelong learning. A key embodiment of this vision is the International Buddhist College (IBC), a pioneering institution that offers academic programs rooted in Buddhist philosophy and ethics. Emphasizing *Sādhāraṇadharmā*, the universal *Dharma*, it provides a platform for rigorous scholarship and spiritual cultivation across major Buddhist traditions. The conceptual seed for IBC was planted in 1996 during a visit to Penang by Sri Lankan scholar Prof. Yakupitiyage Karunadasa. Observing the rich diversity of Buddhist traditions in Malaysia, he proposed establishing a university dedicated to the comparative and non-sectarian study of Buddhism. After fruitful discussions with Venerable Wei Wu and leading monastics such as Ven. Anuruddha and Ven. K.L. Dhammajoti, the idea gained momentum. In 1999, a land donation in Southern Thailand marked the beginning of IBC's development.

According to Venerable Wei Wu, Southern Thailand was chosen for its cultural alignment with Buddhism, geographical proximity to Penang, and Thailand's liberal higher education policies. These factors made it an ideal setting for a Buddhist institution aiming to foster academic freedom and intercultural exchange. Since its founding in 2004 with just 30 students, IBC has expanded its enrollment to over 100 students across its BA, MA, and PhD programs. The curriculum adopts a comprehensive, non-sectarian approach, covering Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and

Tibetan traditions. Courses range from Early and Indian Buddhism to Chinese, Tibetan, and contemporary Buddhist thought. Language and culture modules, coupled with studies in Buddhist ethics and philosophy, offer students a holistic understanding of Buddhist traditions and their relevance in today’s world.

IBC also incorporates Basic Education, equipping students with English proficiency, research skills, and digital literacy. These foundational competencies are essential for engaging with modern scholarship and accessing global Buddhist literature. True to the spirit of *Sādhāraṇadharmā*, IBC integrates service and practice into academic life. Students actively participate in community outreach, including Weekend Dhamma Classes, religious festivals like Wesak and Kathina, and humanitarian efforts through the Metta Mobile Free Clinic. In times of natural disaster, IBC mobilizes resources to support affected communities, demonstrating compassion in action.

The institution also embraces technology to extend learning beyond campus. An online MA program run through Than Hsiang Temple allows international students to pursue Buddhist studies remotely. Annual academic conferences co-organized with Than Hsiang Temple in Penang, Kuala Lumpur, or Hatyai further reinforce IBC’s role in Buddhist scholarship and dialogue. With campuses in Sadao (Songkhla Province) and Pakthongchai (Nakhon Ratchasima Province), IBC continues to promote intercultural understanding, drawing staff and students from across Asia and beyond. The institution’s symbols and motto reflect a commitment to cultivating wisdom, service, and moral development for the benefit of all beings.

Mr. Chan, an IBC graduate and long-serving Than Hsiang committee member, praised the curriculum for its integration of historical depth, doctrinal breadth, and ethical reflection. He noted how the institution blends traditional Buddhist learning with modern academic disciplines, creating a unique space for ethical inquiry and personal growth. In essence, the International Buddhist College exemplifies how Buddhist education can transcend sectarian lines and national borders to promote

Sādhāraṇadharmā—a shared path of wisdom, compassion, and universal responsibility. It stands as a living testament to Venerable Wei Wu’s vision of education as a vehicle for inner and social transformation.

8. The Value of *Sādhāraṇadharmā*

Than Hsiang Temple stands as a dynamic and engaging hub of Buddhist learning, where spiritual cultivation is seamlessly integrated into daily life. Its educational initiatives span across all age groups and are designed to meet the evolving needs and interests of its community. By offering diverse opportunities for involvement, ranging from academic programs to volunteer work, Than Hsiang encourages meaningful participation rooted in the Buddhist ideal of *sīla* (ethical conduct). This hands-on approach fosters not only individual spiritual growth but also a deep sense of fulfilment among volunteers, who find purpose through acts of merit and community service.

The temple’s educational philosophy is grounded in the principles of *Sādhāraṇadharmā*, often translated as “common *Dharma*.” This concept refers to the universal ethical values shared across Buddhist traditions, values that are especially relevant in our multicultural, modern world. Than Hsiang’s structured educational programs, from kindergarten through tertiary education, aim to instil these core values at every stage of a learner’s development and can be presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Core Teaching of Buddhist Studies and Outcomes in Kindergarten, Sunday *Dharma* School, Bachelor's Degree and Master's Degree

Level	Core Teaching of Buddhist Studies	Outcomes
Kindergarten	Ten Good Deeds; Heart Sutra	Offer profound insights into Buddhist ethics and their practical application in daily life, laying the groundwork for ethical behaviour from an early age.
Sunday <i>Dharma</i>	The Life Story of	Equipping students with the

<p>School (Primary)</p>	<p>the Buddha; The History of Buddhism; Fundamental Buddhist Concepts; Ethics and Morality; Family and Society; The Nature of Humanity and Suffering; Ten Good Deeds</p>	<p>knowledge, skills, and values necessary for leading a meaningful and ethical life grounded in Buddhist principles.</p>
<p>Sunday Dharma School (Secondary)</p>	<p>The Life of Prince Siddhartha; Three Refuges; Five Precepts; Four Noble Truths & Eightfold Path; Karmic Forces & Reincarnation; Law of Dependent Origination; Transmission of Buddhism; Generating the Bodhi Mind; Practice of the Six Perfections; Zen Meditation; <i>Theravāda</i>, <i>Mahāyāna</i>, and <i>Vajrayana</i> Traditions; Buddhism in India and Its Adaptation to Western Buddhism in Malaysia; Ten Good Deeds</p>	<p>Providing a comprehensive understanding of fundamental Buddhist concepts and fostering a deeper appreciation for the history and development of Buddhism. Offering profound insights into Buddhist ethics and their practical application in daily life.</p>

<p>Bachelor of Arts (Buddhist Studies)</p>	<p>Early Buddhism; Indian Buddhism; <i>Theravāda</i> Buddhism; Mahāyāna Buddhism; Chinese Buddhism; Tibetan Buddhism; Buddhism and...; Buddhism in...; Language and Culture; Basic Education</p>	<p>Undergo a comprehensive exploration of Buddhism's historical development and philosophical foundations, covering various traditions such as early Buddhism, Indian Buddhism, <i>Theravāda</i> Buddhism, <i>Mahāyāna</i> Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism, and Tibetan Buddhism. They also examine Buddhism's influence on language and culture, fostering a deeper understanding of its adaptation to various contexts.</p>
<p>Master of Arts (Buddhist Studies)</p>	<p>History of Indian Buddhism; <i>Theravāda</i> Buddhism; Mahāyāna Buddhism; Buddhist Thought; Buddhist Canonical Language; Buddhist Literature; Regional Buddhism; Buddhist Culture; Research Methodology; Special Topics in Buddhist Studies.</p>	<p>Gain a comprehensive understanding of Indian Buddhism, <i>Theravāda</i> Buddhism, and <i>Mahāyāna</i> Buddhism, coupled with a deep exploration of Buddhist thought, canonical language, and literature. They refine their research methodology skills and engage with special topics in Buddhist studies, preparing them for advanced research and scholarly pursuits in the field.</p>

Source: Summarized and translated by the authors

As shown in Table 2, Than Hsiang’s curriculum progressively deepens students’ understanding of Buddhist ethics, history, and philosophy. Foundational teachings such as the *Ten Good Deeds* and the *Heart Sutra* are introduced at the kindergarten level to

cultivate basic virtues like kindness, patience, and mindfulness. As students advance, these teachings expand to include more nuanced aspects of Buddhist thought, reinforcing moral integrity, compassion, and wisdom. This holistic and developmental approach ensures that learners not only understand Buddhist teachings intellectually but also embody them in their daily conduct.

9. *Sādhāraṇadharmā* in Propagating Buddhism

Than Hsiang’s educational initiatives, guided by the Four Convictions, demonstrate how Buddhism can enhance children’s learning. The integration of values such as diligence and time management—reflected in the fourth and tenth of the Ten Good Deeds—fosters a positive attitude toward learning. In a loving and supportive environment, children are not only prepared academically but also encouraged to develop resilience, focus, and a lifelong love for knowledge. These principles, when internalised early, lay a strong foundation for academic and personal success. At the heart of all Buddhist precepts lies the guiding triad: Avoid evil, do good, and purify the mind. These universal tenets form the bedrock of ethical living. The Ten Good Deeds operationalise this moral framework in simple yet profound ways, making them accessible to young minds through storytelling and active engagement. By promoting values such as honesty, respect, and non-violence, *Sādhāraṇadharmā* serves as a moral compass that transcends cultural and religious boundaries, appealing to a global audience in need of ethical clarity.

Buddhist education, as life education, seeks not only intellectual enlightenment but also spiritual maturity. In today’s materialistic world, inner peace is increasingly recognised as more vital than external success. Through the Ten Good Deeds, Than Hsiang instils qualities such as filial piety, respect for teachers, compassion, and self-restraint. These teachings nurture well-rounded individuals who understand life’s deeper purpose and live in harmony with others. Than Hsiang’s educational programs extend beyond the classroom to strengthen family relationships. Activities that involve both children and parents—

such as temple visits, family days, and collaborative learning—reinforce the Buddhist view that the family is the foundation of society. Research and experience alike show that children whose parents actively participate in their education exhibit better behaviour and academic performance. By cultivating harmonious families, Than Hsiang contributes to building a compassionate and stable society.

In a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country like Malaysia, Than Hsiang's Buddhist approach provides a valuable model for social harmony. Teachings centred on mutual respect, compassion, and tolerance foster understanding among diverse communities. The Ten Good Deeds serve as a practical moral code that encourages peaceful coexistence and altruistic action, aligned with the Buddha's vision of a society where everyone works for the happiness and well-being of others. From a Buddhist standpoint, identifying as a Buddhist or performing religious rites alone does not constitute true religiosity. Authentic religious life requires vigilance over one's thoughts, speech, and actions, aligning daily conduct with ethical and spiritual principles. As the Buddha taught, one must *avoid evil, do good, and purify the mind*. While rituals and doctrinal beliefs serve as entry points to the religious life, they must be followed by sincere practice and personal transformation. Without proper guidance and understanding, followers risk being exploited by those who misuse religion for self-interest. Hence, religious institutions must provide ongoing education and opportunities for genuine spiritual practice.

In the Malaysian context, fostering mutual respect among religious communities is imperative. A true religious life entails not only devotion to one's faith but also tolerance and appreciation for the beliefs of others. This ethos is echoed by all great spiritual traditions and is essential for cultivating national unity and peaceful coexistence. Than Hsiang Temple, through its emphasis on *Sādhāraṇadharmā*, exemplifies how Buddhist education can contribute to the moral and spiritual renewal of society. Nurturing ethical individuals from childhood and promoting values that unite rather than divide, it plays a vital role

in building a compassionate and harmonious world.

10. Conclusion

The educational initiatives of Than Hsiang Temple, embodied in the kindergarten, Sunday *Dhamma* School (SDS), and the International Buddhist College (IBC), exemplify a dynamic and evolving vision of Buddhism that prioritizes ethical development, spiritual cultivation and social engagement. Far from being confined to ritualistic practice, Buddhism at Than Hsiang has been reinterpreted as a living tradition that responds meaningfully to the developmental needs of children, youth and adults within a multicultural society. In doing so, the temple has successfully fostered moral integrity, emotional intelligence and spiritual awareness, which are vital not only for individual transformation but also for social harmony.

The approach taken by Than Hsiang Kindergarten, grounded in the *Ten Good Deeds (Fu Zhi Shishanfa)*, exemplifies an early childhood education model rooted in Buddhist ethical values. This foundation promotes not only academic readiness but also character development, kindness and a sense of gratitude—values universally appreciated and easily integrated into Malaysia’s multireligious educational context. Likewise, the Sunday *Dhamma* School plays an equally vital role in providing children and adolescents with a structured platform for exploring Buddhist teachings through interactive engagement and age-appropriate methods. On the tertiary level, the establishment of the International Buddhist College (IBC) marks a significant contribution to global Buddhist scholarship. IBC’s inclusive, non-sectarian curriculum fosters critical engagement with Buddhist doctrines across various traditions—*Theravāda*, *Mahāyāna* and *Vajrayāna*—while promoting cross-cultural understanding through its bilingual instruction and international student body. In response to contemporary demands, the college’s flexible learning platforms, including online learning, further democratize access to Buddhist education, enabling broader participation in both local and global contexts. These efforts reflect a forward-thinking approach that embraces educational

innovation without compromising doctrinal depth.

Underlying all of Than Hsiang's educational ventures is the guiding framework of *Sādhāraṇadharmā*, or common *dharma*—universal ethical principles that transcend sectarian, ethnic and cultural boundaries. This ethical core enriches learning, reinforces moral grounding and enhances religious sensibility. More importantly, it cultivates interpersonal harmony by promoting respect, non-violence, compassion and self-discipline. Thus, within the Malaysian context, *Sādhāraṇadharmā* proves particularly effective as a unifying value system capable of addressing the ethical and emotional needs of a pluralistic society.

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