



3

Buddhism Towards Ecological Sustainability: Critical Crisis and Lessons Learned from the *Lankavatara Sutra*

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Introduction

The global ecological crisis has reached a critical threshold, necessitating sustainable solutions that address not only environmental degradation but also the underlying human attitudes driving it (United Nations 2021). Religious traditions offer ethical and spiritual resources for reimagining humanity's relationship with nature (Tucker and Grim 2001). Among these, Buddhism—with its teachings on interdependence, mindfulness, and compassion—provides a valuable framework for ecological sustainability (Kaza 2008).

This study focuses on the *Lankavatara Sutra*, a foundational Mahayana text emphasizing mind, non-duality, and ethical conduct, to explore its relevance in confronting today's environmental challenges (Suzuki 1999). The Sutra's vision of interconnectedness offers an alternative to the dominant anthropocentric worldview, highlighting the mutual dependence between human and ecological systems.

The study is guided by two key questions: 1) How do the teachings of the *Lankavatara Sutra* inform ecological sustainability? 2) What ethical and philosophical insights can the text offer for addressing contemporary environmental crises?

By critically engaging the *Lankavatara Sutra*, this research aims to bridge ancient Buddhist wisdom with modern ecological imperatives, proposing a holistic model of sustainability that integrates physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions. In doing so, it contributes to the broader discourse on religion and ecology, demonstrating the potential of Buddhist philosophy to inspire both ethical reflection and practical action in response to the global ecological crisis.

The objective of this paper is to bridge ancient wisdom with modern ecological imperatives, offering a holistic perspective on sustainability that integrates physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions.

Ecological Sustainability in Buddhist Perspective

Ecological sustainability refers to the capacity of natural systems to maintain balance and health over time, ensuring resources remain available for present and future generations (Redman 2014). It involves responsible resource use, biodiversity protection, and minimizing ecological degradation, emphasizing the interdependence of all life forms (Meadows et al. 2004). In Buddhist thought, ecological sustainability aligns with core teachings such as *pratītyasamutpāda* (interdependence), *ahimsā* (non-violence), *karuṇā* (compassion), and *smṛti* (mindfulness) (Gurung 2023). These principles promote respect for all beings and encourage ethical living that minimizes harm to the environment (Kaza 2008; Harvey 2000). Thus, ecological sustainability in Buddhism is not merely a practical concern but a moral and spiritual imperative rooted in a worldview of interconnectedness and balance.

The Buddhist Approach to Ecological Sustainability

In Buddhism, ecological sustainability is fundamentally rooted in the concept of interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*), which asserts that all beings and phenomena are interconnected and arise in mutual dependence. This concept suggests that nothing exists independently; all things are interconnected through a web of causes and conditions (Harvey 2000). From this viewpoint, ecological sustainability is seen as the recognition that human beings are not separate from the environment but are intricately woven into the fabric of the natural world. The actions of individuals, whether driven by ignorance, greed, or compassion, have profound implications for the environment and other living beings. Acknowledging this interconnectedness encourages a moral and ethical responsibility to adopt behaviors that nurture the balance of ecosystems, avoid causing harm, and promote environmental preservation.

The *Lankavatara Sutra* aligns with this view by promoting mindfulness and awareness of the interdependent nature of existence. The Sutra discusses the concept of *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination) as a foundational Buddhist teaching, highlighting the interconnectedness of all phenomena. While there isn't a single direct quotation in the Sutra that explicitly links *pratītyasamutpāda* with mindfulness and awareness, the idea of interdependence and the continuous flow of cause and effect promotes mindfulness as individuals begin to realize the interconnected nature of all experiences (Ortega 2024).

Here is an interpretation based on the Sutra's teachings:

All things arise dependent on causes and conditions. When one understands the interdependent nature of all phenomena, one cultivates mindfulness, for it is through awareness of this interdependence that suffering can be

transcended. The mind, when clear of delusion and full of insight into the impermanence and interconnectedness of all things, becomes the instrument of liberation. (Lankavatara Sutra, translated by Suzuki 1999.)

This reflects the Buddhist perspective that mindfulness arises from the awareness of dependent origination, enabling individuals to see the true nature of phenomena without attachment or aversion. By understanding *pratītyasamutpāda*, one can cultivate deep awareness of how thoughts, actions, and events are interconnected, leading to greater wisdom and the alleviation of suffering. It encourages individuals to understand the consequences of their actions not only on themselves but on all other beings and ecosystems. The Sutra's teachings on non-duality (*advaya*) further emphasize the dissolution of the boundaries between humanity and nature, pointing to the illusory separation between self and other. In this light, ecological sustainability is not simply a matter of preserving the environment for human benefit but is about maintaining the well-being of all interconnected beings.

The *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*, often called the “Perfection of Wisdom” texts, offer another important perspective on sustainability, though they focus more explicitly on wisdom (*prajñā*) as a transformative force for transcending ignorance. The Diamond Sutra (*Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*) (Tuyen 2022), a key text in the *Prajñāpāramitā* tradition, teaches the concept of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), which suggests that all phenomena, including human beings and the environment, are empty of inherent existence and only arise due to conditions. This view of emptiness underscores the impermanence of all things, including ecosystems, and encourages a deep awareness of the fragile nature of the world around us. In the *Lankavatara Sūtra*, the teaching of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is closely tied to the impermanence of all phenomena. The Sutra highlights that all things are empty of inherent existence and arise dependently, which leads to the understanding that nothing is permanent. Here is a passage reflecting this:

All things are empty of self-nature, and thus they are impermanent, transient, and dependent upon conditions. When one realizes that all things are devoid of inherent existence, one sees the truth of their impermanence. (Lankavatara Sutra, Suzuki 1999, 55)

This quote underscores the fundamental Buddhist concept that the inherent emptiness of all phenomena leads to the realization of their impermanence. Emptiness, in this sense, refers to the lack of a permanent, independent essence in all things, which directly points to their transient and changing nature. It emphasizes the impermanence and non-self nature of all phenomena. Here's a relevant quotation from the Sutra:

All things are devoid of intrinsic existence; they are empty of self-nature. Just as a dream, a mirage, or an illusion, they arise dependent on causes and conditions. Hence, there is no permanent reality in them, and all things are impermanent. (Lankavatara Sutra, translated by Suzuki 1999, 73)

This passage highlights the idea that all phenomena, in their emptiness, lack inherent, permanent existence. The concept of emptiness underscores the fluid and impermanent nature of all things, suggesting that everything is in a constant state of change, dependent on various causes and conditions.

Comparing these Sutras—the *Lankavatara Sutra* and the *Prajñāpāramitā Sutras*—reveals their shared foundation in interdependence and impermanence, both of which are crucial for understanding ecological sustainability in the Buddhist context (Lepekhov 2022). However, the *Lankavatara Sutra* emphasizes the mind and consciousness in relation to the natural world, stressing the importance of meditation and mental clarity in fostering sustainable practices. The *Prajñāpāramitā Sutras*, on the other hand, place a heavier focus on wisdom and the realization of emptiness, which directly challenges the attachment to material forms and the selfish desires that often lead to ecological degradation.

Table 1 Comparison of aspects crucial for understanding ecological sustainability in a Buddhist context in *Lankavatara Sutra* and *Prajñāpāramitā Sutras*

Aspect	<i>Lankavatara Sutra</i>	<i>Prajñāpāramitā Sutras</i>
Interdependence	Emphasizes interdependence and non-duality, linking all beings in a web of causation (Suzuki 1999).	Emphasizes the interconnectedness of all phenomena through the realization of emptiness (Harvey 2000).
Ethical Responsibility	Promotes ethical mindfulness and non-violence (ahimsa), urging compassion towards the environment (Harvey 2000).	Focuses on wisdom and transcending attachments, including attachment to the natural world (Thurman 1997).
Environmental Perspective	Directly connects consciousness with the environment, urging sustainable practices through mindfulness (Suzuki 1999).	Advocates for letting go of attachment to all phenomena, which can indirectly support sustainable attitudes (Chodron 2002).
Impermanence	Teaches the impermanence of all things, urging care for the planet (Harvey 2000).	The realization of emptiness and impermanence highlights the fleeting nature of the world, fostering respect for it (Thurman 1997).
Practical Implications	Provides a framework for sustainable living based on non-duality and mindfulness (Suzuki 1999).	Focuses on wisdom and the realization of emptiness, which can lead to less attachment and more care for nature (Chodron 2002).

Critical analysis

While both the *Lankavatara Sutra* and the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* contribute significantly to the Buddhist view of ecological sustainability, they offer different approaches. The *Lankavatara Sutra*'s emphasis on interdependence and non-duality encourages a direct connection between human actions and the health of ecosystems, urging mindfulness in our treatment of nature. This aligns closely with contemporary ecological views that stress the interconnectedness of life and the need for ethical responsibility in environmental matters. On the other hand, the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*, through their teachings on emptiness, push beyond dualistic thinking, including the distinction between human and nature, which can inspire a profound rethinking of our relationship with the Earth. However, the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* may not provide as practical a framework for ecological action as the *Lankavatara Sutra* does, as they focus more on wisdom and detachment rather than actionable steps for environmental stewardship. In terms of ecological sustainability, both Sūtras emphasize that human beings must reconsider their attachment to material things, recognizing the interdependence of all beings, and adopting ethical practices that ensure the well-being of the planet. However, the *Lankavatara Sutra* offers a more direct path for integrating Buddhist ethics into sustainable living, while the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* inspire a deeper philosophical understanding that can guide more abstract, long-term ecological thinking.

The Buddhist emphasis on *ahimsā* and *karuṇā* extends ecological sustainability beyond mere conservation to encompass a moral and spiritual commitment to all forms of life (Kaza 2008). Compassionate living entails reducing one's ecological footprint, supporting biodiversity, and advocating for the ethical treatment of animals and ecosystems. Moreover, mindfulness (*smṛti*) promotes conscious consumption and reflection on the impacts of one's actions, aligning with modern principles of sustainable living.

Ecological Sustainability in the *Lankavatara Sutra*

The *Lankavatara Sutra* offers profound insights into ecological sustainability through its teachings on interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*), non-duality (*advaya*), and transformative wisdom (*prajñā*). By dissolving the artificial separation between humanity and nature, the Sutra fosters a sense of unity and shared existence, challenging exploitative attitudes toward the environment (Suzuki 1999). These teachings emphasize that all beings and phenomena are interconnected, creating a framework for ecological awareness that calls for ethical responsibility and environmental stewardship. Furthermore, the Sutra critiques material attachment (*tṛṣṇā*) and advocates for simplicity and contentment, directly addressing issues such as overconsumption, resource depletion, and environmental degradation (Harvey 2000). At the heart of the Sutra's ecological relevance is the concept of interdependence. According to *pratītyasamutpāda*, all things arise in dependence upon other things, and no entity exists independently. This perspective challenges the anthropocentric view that humans are separate from nature (Ferraro 2022). It underscores the need for a balanced relationship between human beings and the environment, as all life is interconnected. The principle of non-duality (*advaya*) further deepens this understanding by dissolving the

boundaries between self and other, subject and object, and humanity and the natural world. This principle advocates for a holistic view of existence, in which human well-being is directly tied to the health of the Earth and all its inhabitants.

The Sutra's critique of material attachment aligns with contemporary concerns about overconsumption and the depletion of natural resources. By teaching that attachment to material possessions leads to suffering (*duḥkha*), the Sutra urges individuals to adopt simpler lifestyles and cultivate contentment. In the *Lankavatara Sutra*, the teaching that attachment to material possessions leads to suffering is expressed through the idea that clinging to the impermanent and transient causes suffering (*duḥkha*). As one passage states:

The root of all suffering (duḥkha) is attachment. Those who are attached to material possessions, who cling to their bodies and to the fleeting things of this world, are bound by their desires and therefore suffer.” (Lankavatara Sutra, Suzuki 1999, 112)

This passage emphasizes that attachment to material things, whether it be to wealth, status, or even the body, is a primary cause of suffering. This aligns with the Buddhist understanding of *duḥkha*, which is caused by craving and attachment to transient phenomena.

This aligns with modern ecological principles that emphasize sustainable consumption, encouraging practices that minimize waste and reduce ecological footprints. By fostering mindfulness and detachment from excessive desires, the Sutra encourages a shift toward sustainability, where the well-being of the Earth is prioritized over short-term material gain. Although the Sutra does not directly mention “sustainability” in modern terms, it teaches the importance of non-attachment, recognizing impermanence, and focusing on spiritual and ethical values rather than fleeting material desires. One verse offers the following insight:

Those who understand the nature of the world see that all things are impermanent and ever-changing. They abandon the pursuit of temporary pleasures and material gain, recognizing that true peace and well-being come from liberation, not from attachment to fleeting things. (Lankavatara Sutra, Suzuki 1999, 108)

This passage suggests that, rather than focusing on short-term material success, one should shift their attention to understanding the impermanence of the world and cultivate inner peace and liberation. This shift is in harmony with the idea of prioritizing the well-being of the Earth and future generations over immediate, short-term benefits. The teaching of transformative wisdom (*prajñā*) further contributes to ecological sustainability by promoting a deeper understanding of the impermanent and interconnected nature of all things. Through wisdom and awareness, individuals can transcend the ego-centered worldview that often leads to exploitation and environmental harm.

This wisdom fosters a long-term perspective that takes into account the impacts of human actions on the planet, motivating practices that protect the Earth for future generations.

From a Buddhist standpoint, ecological sustainability is not just a practical necessity but a spiritual imperative. It reflects the aspiration to live in harmony with the natural world, respecting its inherent value and acknowledging humanity's role as a steward rather than a dominator. However, while the ethical principles in Buddhist teachings offer a strong moral foundation for ecological sustainability, their practical application requires integration with scientific knowledge, policy frameworks, and technological innovations to address contemporary environmental challenges (Purser 2019).

Critical analysis

While the *Lankavatara Sutra* offers a rich spiritual framework for ecological sustainability, its teachings are largely philosophical and abstract, requiring careful interpretation for practical application in contemporary environmental challenges. The Sutra's focus on interdependence and non-duality provides a solid ethical foundation for ecological thought, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all life forms. This perspective encourages individuals to adopt more sustainable practices and to reflect on the long-term consequences of their actions on the planet. The Sutra's insights align with contemporary ecological principles such as systems thinking, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of all components within an ecosystem.

The Sutra's teachings may face challenges when applied to the practicalities of modern ecological crises. For instance, the principle of non-duality encourages transcending dualistic thinking, but this can be difficult to implement in situations where pragmatic decision-making requires distinguishing between competing interests. Ecological sustainability often involves navigating complex trade-offs, such as balancing economic development with environmental preservation, where a more nuanced approach may be necessary. While the Sutra offers a philosophical framework, it lacks specific guidelines or practical strategies for addressing these real-world dilemmas.

Additionally, the Sutra's critique of material attachment calls for a shift away from consumerism, which is vital for ecological sustainability. However, such a transformation requires widespread cultural and institutional change, which the Sutra does not directly address. Mindfulness, as promoted in the Sutra, can be a powerful tool for fostering sustainable behaviors, but its individualistic focus may need to be complemented by collective efforts and systemic changes to address larger-scale environmental challenges such as climate change, deforestation, and biodiversity loss. Despite these challenges, the *Lankavatara Sutra* offers valuable ethical guidance for fostering a harmonious relationship with the environment. Its teachings on interdependence, non-duality, and transformative wisdom provide a philosophical foundation for developing more sustainable lifestyles. However, its practical application requires adaptation to contemporary ecological needs, incorporating both individual mindfulness and collective action to achieve lasting environmental sustainability.

In conclusion, the Buddhist perspective on ecological sustainability, as exemplified in the *Lankavatara Sutra*, provides a holistic framework for fostering harmony between humans and the environment. It calls for a paradigm shift from exploitation to stewardship, guided by wisdom, compassion, and mindfulness. By embracing these principles, humanity can work toward a sustainable future that honors the interdependence of all life forms.

The Teachings of the *Lankavatara Sutra* Align with Ecological Sustainability

The *Lankavatara Sutra*, a central text in Mahayana Buddhism, emphasizes profound spiritual and philosophical principles that resonate deeply with ecological sustainability. Its teachings advocate a worldview rooted in interconnectedness, ethical responsibility, and mindfulness, which are critical for addressing contemporary environmental challenges.

Interdependence and Non-Duality

At the heart of the *Lankavatara Sutra* lies the concept of interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*), which underscores the interconnectedness of all beings and phenomena. This teaching asserts that no entity exists independently; instead, all existence arises through a web of interrelated causes and conditions (Suzuki 1999). Such a worldview challenges anthropocentric attitudes by emphasizing that human actions are never isolated but have far-reaching consequences on the environment and all living beings (Harvey 2000).

The *Lankavatara Sutra*'s principle of non-duality (*advaya*) emphasizes the unity of all things, dissolving the artificial separation between humanity and nature. The Sutra teaches that distinctions between self and other, subject and object, and even humanity and the natural world are illusions. This principle is illustrated in the following passage:

When one sees the world as it truly is, without the distortion of concepts and attachments, there is no longer a separation between the self and the world. All distinctions are dissolved in the wisdom of non-duality, where subject and object are united in the awareness of interdependence. (Lankavatara Sutra, Suzuki 1999, 98)

This statement highlights the Sutra's view that the perceived divide between humans and nature is a false construct, and through the wisdom of non-duality, one can experience a harmonious unity with all existence. In this view, the well-being of the natural world is inseparable from the well-being of the individual and society, thus supporting ecological interconnectedness. It refutes dualistic thinking that categorizes the world into dichotomies such as self and other, subject and object, or humanity and environment (Suzuki 1999). By fostering a sense of unity and shared existence, this

principle promotes the realization that the well-being of humans is inextricably tied to the health of the natural world.

In context of the ecology, by recognizing the interdependent nature of all life, the teachings of the *Lankavatara Sutra* encourage sustainable practices that respect the delicate balance of ecosystems. These practices align with contemporary ecological principles such as systems thinking and resilience theory, which similarly emphasize interconnectedness and the ripple effects of actions within complex systems (Capra 1996). However, while the Sutra provides a spiritual and ethical foundation for ecological awareness, it is essential to critically examine its applicability in addressing the global ecological crisis.

Critical analysis

The Sutra's emphasis on interdependence and non-duality offers profound insights into the interconnected nature of ecological systems. By fostering an attitude of unity, it challenges exploitative and dominative relationships with the environment. However, the text itself does not explicitly address the practicalities of ecological management or the technological solutions needed to tackle pressing environmental issues, such as climate change or biodiversity loss. Its relevance lies more in shaping values and attitudes rather than offering direct policy or scientific guidance. Moreover, the principle of non-duality, while philosophically rich, may encounter limitations in modern contexts where practical decisions require clear distinctions and prioritization. For instance, sustainable development demands balancing human needs with environmental preservation, often involving difficult choices that rely on dualistic reasoning.

Nonetheless, the Sutra's teachings remain valuable for inspiring ethical frameworks that promote long-term ecological harmony. By encouraging individuals to adopt sustainable lifestyles and fostering collective mindfulness, the principles of *prāṭītyasamutpāda* and *advaya* can act as a complementary ethos to scientific and policy-driven approaches to sustainability.

Mindfulness and Ethical Action

The Sutra emphasizes mindfulness as a practice of heightened awareness of one's thoughts, actions, and their impacts. Coupled with ethical precepts such as non-violence (*ahimsa*) and compassion (*karuṇā*), the teachings promote a lifestyle that minimizes harm to the environment. The *Lankavatara Sutra* emphasizes the importance of ethical conduct, particularly principles such as non-violence (*ahimsa*) and compassion (*karuṇā*), as key aspects of spiritual practice. These ethical precepts guide one's behavior toward all living beings, promoting harmony and the well-being of others. The principles is encapsulated in the following verse:

The Bodhisattva who has realized the truth of the nature of all things does not harm any living being, for in understanding the interdependence of all beings, he sees that to cause harm to one is to cause harm to oneself. Compassion and non-violence arise naturally from such understanding, as one

seeks the welfare of all beings without distinction. (Lankavatara Sutra, Suzuki 1999, 85)

This teaching aligns with the Sutra's broader ethical framework, which encourages compassion and non-violence as essential to cultivating a harmonious relationship with the world and all sentient beings. These principles also underpin ecological sustainability, where respect for life and the natural world fosters the well-being of all. The *Lankavatara Sutra* emphasizes mindfulness (*smṛti*) as a practice of heightened awareness of one's thoughts, actions, and their impacts. The *Lankavatara Sutra* highlights mindfulness (*smṛti*) as an essential practice for cultivating awareness and understanding the nature of one's thoughts, actions, and their consequences. The Sutra reflects this emphasis on mindfulness in the passage:

The wise Bodhisattva, through the practice of mindfulness, perceives the true nature of all things, understanding that all phenomena are momentary and interdependent. By cultivating mindfulness, one gains awareness of the workings of the mind, and in this awareness, one ceases to cling to any notion of self or of the world as permanent. This realization leads to the cessation of suffering and the development of compassion. (Lankavatara Sutra, Suzuki 1999, 106)

In this passage, mindfulness is shown as a transformative practice, allowing the practitioner to recognize the impermanence and interdependence of all things. It underscores the importance of being aware of the impact of one's thoughts and actions, ultimately leading to greater compassion and a more harmonious existence. This mindfulness is not merely introspective but extends outward to encompass the consequences of actions on others and the environment (Suzuki 1999). When coupled with ethical precepts such as non-violence (*ahimsā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*), the teachings encourage a lifestyle that minimizes harm to all living beings and ecosystems. The Sutra's ethical framework invites practitioners to embody restraint, care, and kindness, which align with sustainable living principles (Harvey 2000).

Relevance to Ecology; Mindful living, as advocated by the *Lankavatara Sutra*, translates to conscious consumption, reduced waste, and an empathetic approach to nature. It encourages individuals to be aware of the environmental footprint of their choices, such as resource use and waste generation. By fostering an ethic of care for all sentient beings, mindfulness supports the creation of harmonious relationships between humans and the natural world, which are essential for achieving ecological balance (Kaza 2008).

Critical analysis

The practice of mindfulness and ethical action presents significant potential for ecological sustainability. By cultivating awareness and restraint, it challenges the consumerist and exploitative tendencies that drive environmental degradation. For instance, mindfulness encourages reflection on the lifecycle of products, fostering

practices like recycling, conservation, and sustainable consumption. Additionally, the ethics of non-violence can inspire movements against activities harmful to ecosystems, such as deforestation, animal exploitation, and pollution. However, while the *Lankavatara Sutra* offers a valuable ethical framework, it is important to critically examine its practical implementation in contemporary contexts. Mindfulness, as a personal practice, requires widespread cultural and institutional adoption to create measurable ecological impacts. Modern mindfulness movements, for instance, sometimes focus on individual well-being without addressing systemic issues like corporate practices, policy-making, or global inequities that significantly influence environmental outcomes (Purser 2019). Ethical action rooted in *karuṇā* (compassion) and *ahimsā* (non-violence) can face challenges in complex ecological dilemmas. While the Sutra offers a moral framework rooted in non-attachment and ethical awareness, it does not provide concrete guidance for navigating such competing priorities.

In conclusion, the *Lankavatara Sutra* offers profound insights into the ethical dimensions of ecology through mindfulness and compassion. While these principles are highly relevant for fostering sustainable practices, their transformative potential depends on their integration into collective, systemic efforts that address the root causes of ecological crises.

Compassion and Universal Responsibility

The Sutra's emphasis on compassion extends beyond human relationships to include all sentient beings. It encourages practitioners to cultivate a sense of universal responsibility, which is integral to ecological ethics. The *Lankavatara Sutra* places a profound emphasis on compassion (*karuṇā*), extending its reach beyond human relationships to encompass all sentient beings. This all-encompassing compassion is rooted in the understanding of interdependence and the intrinsic value of every life form (Suzuki 1999). The Sutra encourages practitioners to cultivate a sense of universal responsibility, urging them to act with awareness of the interconnected web of life. This principle aligns with the ecological ethic that emphasizes stewardship and care for the planet and its inhabitants (Harvey 2000). The *Lankavatara Sutra* encourages practitioners to cultivate a sense of universal responsibility by emphasizing the interconnectedness of all life. One relevant passage from the Sutra states:

The Bodhisattva, realizing the interdependence of all beings, takes upon themselves the responsibility to liberate all sentient beings. Through the practice of compassion and mindfulness, they act in harmony with the world, understanding that all actions reverberate through the web of life, and therefore, they work to bring peace, freedom, and wisdom to all beings, knowing that their liberation is tied to the liberation of others. (Lankavatara Sutra, Suzuki 1999, 114)

This passage highlights the concept of interconnectedness, encouraging practitioners to recognize that their actions affect the broader web of life. It calls for a sense

of responsibility that is aligned with the well-being of all beings, inspiring ethical behavior and a commitment to universal liberation.

Relevance to Ecology; a compassionate worldview inspired by the Sutra motivates actions that prioritize the well-being of all life forms. Massarella et al. (2022) mentioned this perspective aligns with principles of biodiversity conservation, which seeks to protect diverse species and ecosystems from harm. Furthermore, the ethic of universal responsibility resonates with the growing global advocacy for sustainable practices, ethical treatment of animals, and climate justice (Tucker and Grim 2001). By emphasizing care for all beings, the Sutra provides a spiritual and ethical foundation for initiatives aimed at fostering ecological harmony.

Critical analysis

While the Sutra's emphasis on compassion offers a compelling ethical framework for ecological sustainability, its practical implementation requires critical examination. The principle of universal responsibility challenges anthropocentric perspectives, advocating for the intrinsic value of non-human life. This is particularly relevant in addressing environmental challenges such as habitat destruction, species extinction, and climate change. Compassion-driven approaches can inspire policies that protect vulnerable ecosystems and advocate for more humane practices in industries such as agriculture and fishing.

Compassion as an ethical ideal must contend with the complexities of modern ecological dilemmas. For example, reconciling the needs of human development with the conservation of biodiversity often requires difficult trade-offs. While the Sutra encourages practitioners to act with care and responsibility, it does not provide explicit guidance on navigating these conflicts, leaving room for interpretation and adaptation in diverse contexts. Additionally, the universal responsibility advocated by the Sutra requires collective action on a global scale. Individual efforts, while valuable, are insufficient to address systemic issues such as industrial pollution and deforestation. Integrating compassion into broader socio-political and economic frameworks remains a critical challenge. The growing discourse on eco-Buddhism highlights potential pathways for applying Buddhist ethics to modern environmental advocacy, emphasizing the need for a balance between individual practice and structural change (Kaza 2008).

In conclusion, the *Lankavatara Sutra* offers a transformative vision of ecological ethics through its teachings on compassion and universal responsibility. While its principles inspire a deep respect for all life, their practical application requires contextualization and integration into contemporary ecological efforts. By bridging spiritual values with ecological imperatives, the Sutra provides a valuable foundation for fostering sustainability and planetary well-being.

Transformative Wisdom (*Prajñā*) and Inner Realization

The *Lankavatara Sutra* places great importance on *prajñā* (wisdom) as a means to transcend ego-centered views and realize the deeper truths of existence. This wisdom fosters an awareness of the impermanence and fragility of life, urging care and

stewardship of the Earth. The *Lankavatara Sutra* emphasizes *prajñā* (wisdom) as a central tenet for transcending ego-centered perspectives and realizing the deeper truths of existence (Scherer 2020). This wisdom involves seeing through illusions of separateness and permanence, fostering an understanding of the impermanence and interdependence of all phenomena (Suzuki 1999). Such insight challenges materialistic and short-sighted worldviews, urging individuals to adopt a more mindful and ethical approach to life. The Sutra encourages practitioners to cultivate this transformative wisdom, which naturally extends to care for the Earth and its ecosystems. By recognizing the fragility of life, *prajñā* nurtures a sense of responsibility for the stewardship of the planet (Harvey 2000).

Relevance to Ecology; transformative wisdom, as articulated in the *Lankavatara Sutra*, inspires a long-term perspective essential for ecological sustainability (Keown 2020). It urges humanity to transcend immediate self-interest and consider the broader implications of their actions for future generations. This aligns with key principles in ecological ethics, such as sustainability, intergenerational equity, and environmental justice. By fostering a deeper awareness of life's impermanence, *prajñā* motivates a commitment to protecting the planet's finite resources and fragile ecosystems (Immer 2021).

Critical analysis

The principle of *prajñā* offers profound philosophical insights that can inform ecological attitudes and behaviors. By challenging ego-centered and consumer-driven paradigms, the Sutra encourages a shift toward values of simplicity, moderation, and interconnectedness. These values directly address root causes of environmental degradation, such as overconsumption, resource exploitation, and unsustainable development. For example, cultivating wisdom about the impermanence of resources can inspire individuals and communities to prioritize renewable energy, conservation efforts, and sustainable agricultural practices.

The Sutra's teachings on *prajñā* remain largely theoretical and spiritual, requiring interpretation and adaptation to modern ecological challenges. While the wisdom it promotes inspires a paradigm shift, its abstract nature may not directly translate into actionable strategies for addressing complex environmental crises like climate change or habitat destruction (Rocha, et. al. 2022). To bridge this gap, ecological practitioners and policymakers could integrate the principles of *prajñā* into educational initiatives and environmental campaigns, fostering a culture of mindfulness and stewardship. T. Ma (2023) mentioned the Sutra's focus on inner realization highlights a potential limitation as its primary emphasis on individual transformation may overlook the systemic and structural changes necessary for large-scale ecological impact. While transformative wisdom is crucial for shifting attitudes, collective action and policy-driven interventions are equally necessary to address global issues such as deforestation, pollution, and biodiversity loss (Purser 2019).

In conclusion, the *Lankavatara Sutra* offers a valuable framework for ecological ethics through its emphasis on *prajñā* and inner realization. By fostering a deep understanding of impermanence and interdependence, the Sutra provides a philosophical

foundation for sustainable living. However, its potential impact depends on the extent to which its principles can be adapted to address the practical and systemic dimensions of the ecological crisis. Holistic view of suffering and liberation on the text's approach to suffering encompasses not only personal or spiritual anguish but also the collective suffering caused by environmental destruction. It frames liberation (*mokṣa*) as a process that includes freeing all beings from harm and promoting harmony in the natural world. Relevance to Ecology as the holistic view aligns with the sustainable development goal of achieving ecological balance alongside human well-being.

Table 2. The *Lankavatara Sutra* offers a valuable framework for ecological ethics

Teaching of the <i>Lankavatara Sutra</i>	Core Concept	Relevance to Ecology	Critical Analysis
Interdependence and Non-Duality	Emphasizes interconnectedness (<i>pratītyasamutpāda</i>) and dissolves the artificial separation between humanity and nature (<i>advaya</i>).	Promotes sustainable practices by respecting the delicate balance of ecosystems and understanding the ripple effects of actions (Capra 1996).	Challenges anthropocentric attitudes but does not address practical solutions for global environmental crises. Non-duality, while profound, may conflict with pragmatic decision-making in modern contexts.
Mindfulness and Ethical Action	Advocates mindfulness (<i>smṛti</i>) and ethical precepts such as non-violence (<i>ahimsa</i>) and compassion (<i>karuṇā</i>), encouraging awareness of one's impact.	Supports conscious consumption, reduced waste, and empathy toward nature, fostering harmony with the environment (Kaza 2008).	Effective for personal transformation but requires widespread cultural and institutional adoption to create systemic change. Individual efforts may fall short in addressing global-scale environmental issues like corporate practices and policy-making.

Compassion and Universal Responsibility	Extends compassion (<i>karuṇā</i>) to all sentient beings, fostering a sense of universal responsibility.	Aligns with biodiversity conservation and ethical treatment of animals, advocating for sustainable practices and environmental stewardship (Tucker & Grim 2001).	Inspires ethical actions but lacks explicit guidance for navigating conflicts between human development and conservation. Requires integration into global frameworks for systemic ecological impact.
Transformative Wisdom (<i>Prajñā</i>)	Encourages realization of impermanence and interdependence, fostering care and stewardship for the Earth.	Inspires long-term ecological perspectives, addressing sustainability, intergenerational equity, and environmental justice (Suzuki 1999; Harvey 2000).	Profound for shifting attitudes but abstract and theoretical. Needs interpretation to address practical challenges like climate change and habitat destruction. Focus on individual realization may overlook systemic changes necessary for large-scale impact (Purser 2019).
Reframing Desires and Material Attachment	Critiques material attachment and craving (<i>tṛṣṇā</i>), advocating simplicity and contentment.	Supports reducing consumerism and promoting sustainable living, addressing resource overexploitation and environmental degradation.	Highly relevant to addressing overconsumption but may require contextualization in modern economic systems that prioritize growth. The simplicity

			advocated may not appeal broadly without cultural shifts in values.
Holistic View of Suffering and Liberation	Frames liberation (<i>mokṣa</i>) as encompassing the well-being of all beings, including the natural world.	Aligns with the goal of achieving ecological balance alongside human well-being, promoting harmony between humans and ecosystems.	Valuable for fostering an inclusive view of liberation but lacks direct strategies for achieving ecological goals. Requires integration into actionable frameworks for environmental sustainability.

**Bridging Ancient Wisdom with Modern Ecological Imperatives
and Critical Perspective on Sustainability Based on
Buddhism in the *Lankavatara Sutra***

The escalating modern ecological crises, such as climate change, deforestation, and biodiversity loss, present urgent challenges that demand multifaceted solutions. These global crises are not only driven by human activity but also exacerbated by an industrialized society focused on growth, consumerism, and resource exploitation. To address these crises effectively, a comprehensive approach is necessary, one that integrates both contemporary scientific insights and ancient spiritual wisdom. The *Lankavatara Sutra*, a profound Mahayana Buddhist text, offers a philosophical foundation that can help guide the modern world toward ecological sustainability. This integration of ancient Buddhist wisdom with modern ecological imperatives, which calls for a holistic approach that encompasses physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions, offers a compelling framework for understanding and mitigating environmental harm.

Integrating Physical, Mental, and Spiritual Dimensions of Sustainability

At the heart of the *Lankavatara Sutra* are the principles of interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and non-duality (*advaya*), which together offer a holistic lens for understanding ecological sustainability. These teachings challenge dualistic views that separate humans from nature, instead emphasizing the intrinsic interconnectedness of all beings. The Sutra dissolves boundaries between self and environment, inviting a

shift from exploitation to unity and shared existence. Environmental issues, therefore, are not isolated problems but manifestations of a deeper ontological interconnection. Although the Sutra does not prescribe explicit ecological actions, its non-dual perspective urges a transcendence of binary thinking—even as modern environmental decisions often require navigating complex and competing demands. This highlights the need for a pragmatic integration of Buddhist ethics with science-based environmental strategies.

The Sutra's advocacy of mindfulness (*smṛti*) and non-attachment (*tr̥ṣṇā*) further aligns with sustainable living. Mindful awareness encourages ethical consumption and environmental care, resonating with movements toward ecological mindfulness. Likewise, its critique of desire and materialism supports a Buddhist economics of simplicity and sufficiency, challenging the consumerist drive behind ecological degradation (Kinhide 2022). Still, while personal transformation is vital, systemic change—political, economic, and institutional—is essential for addressing structural causes of the climate crisis. Buddhist teachings can inform local and individual practices, but broader reform is crucial for global sustainability.

Mindfulness and Ethical Action with Integrating Physical and Mental Dimensions

The Sutra's teachings on mindfulness (*smṛti*) and ethical action (e.g., non-violence or *ahimsa*, and compassion or *karuṇā*) offer a bridge between spiritual and practical dimensions of sustainability. Mindfulness, as emphasized in the Sutra, extends beyond internal awareness of one's thoughts to encompass an awareness of one's actions and their impact on the world. This mindfulness encourages a deep awareness of the physical environment, promoting conscious consumption, reduced waste, and an empathetic approach to nature. By fostering an ethical commitment to reduce harm, the Sutra advocates for a lifestyle that minimizes exploitation and resource depletion, principles that align closely with modern sustainability movements (Harvey 2000). Non-violence and compassion, in particular, can inspire efforts to protect ecosystems, conserve biodiversity, and promote animal rights, crucial areas in contemporary ecological discourse. However, while mindfulness can lead to individual behavioral changes, its transformative potential may be limited without broader societal and institutional adoption. Ecological sustainability requires systemic changes in how industries operate, how policies are enacted, and how resources are distributed. The Sutra's ethical framework may provide a moral compass for individuals, but its effectiveness in addressing large-scale environmental crises depends on its integration into policy-making, education, and collective action. Modern environmental problems are global in scale, requiring coordinated international efforts that go beyond individual actions or personal mindfulness.

The Role of Transformative Wisdom in Addressing Ecological Crises

Another key teaching in the Sutra is its critique of material attachment (*tr̥ṣṇā*), which is seen as a root cause of suffering (*duḥkha*) and environmental degradation.

The Sutra encourages simplicity and contentment, urging individuals to reduce their desires and attachments to material possessions. In the context of ecological sustainability, this critique aligns with the modern call to reduce overconsumption and the unsustainable exploitation of resources. By fostering a lifestyle of moderation and simplicity, individuals can minimize their environmental footprint and contribute to the long-term health of ecosystems. This aligns with modern sustainability practices, which advocate for conservation, recycling, and sustainable consumption. While the Sutra's teachings on simplicity provide an ethical foundation for reducing material consumption, economic systems built on growth and consumerism present a significant challenge. Capitalism and industrialization have driven a global economy that relies heavily on consumption and resource extraction. Thus, while the Sutra's call for non-attachment can inspire personal behavioral changes, large-scale economic and structural transformations are necessary to address the root causes of ecological crises. Bridging ancient Buddhist wisdom with modern economic and political systems will require a shift toward sustainable development frameworks that prioritize long-term ecological health over short-term profit. Another critical contribution of the *Lankavatara Sutra* is its emphasis on transformative wisdom (*prajñā*). In the Buddhist context, transformative wisdom involves transcending the illusion of permanence and recognizing the impermanence of all things. In terms of environmental sustainability, this understanding encourages a long-term perspective that values ecological health over short-term economic gains. By acknowledging the impermanence of natural resources and ecosystems, the Sutra advocates for a long-term vision that prioritizes sustainability over immediate consumption.

This long-term perspective is crucial in addressing the ongoing climate crisis and other environmental issues. In modern society, decision-making is often driven by short-term economic interests, which can perpetuate environmental degradation. The *Lankavatara Sutra* urges us to think beyond immediate profits and consider the intergenerational consequences of our actions. Ecological sustainability requires policies that account for future generations, ensuring that natural resources are preserved for those who come after us. Transformative wisdom, in this regard, offers a moral imperative for making decisions that benefit not just the present generation but all future beings. The application of transformative wisdom requires a radical shift in the way modern economies and governments operate. Achieving this shift will involve integrating Buddhist ethical teachings into public discourse and policy-making, something that poses both philosophical and practical challenges. Global cooperation, driven by shared ethical values, will be necessary to create the structural changes needed to address ecological crises on a global scale.

Ecological Wisdom in the *Lankavatara Sutra*

The *Lankavatara Sutra* provides deep insights into the interconnectedness of all life, which is a cornerstone for understanding the necessity of ecological sustainability. According to the Sutra, all beings, whether human, animal, or natural elements, exist in a web of interdependence, a concept central to Buddhist philosophy (*pratītyasamutpāda*). This interdependent worldview emphasizes that actions toward one aspect of

the environment inevitably affect others. For example, deforestation, driven by the overexploitation of natural resources, disrupts the delicate balance of ecosystems, harming plant and animal life. The Sutra's teachings encourage an awareness of this interdependence, advocating for responsible actions that reflect our mutual relationship with nature.

One of the critical aspects of Buddhist ecology that the *Lankavatara Sutra* emphasizes is the principle of non-duality (*advaya*). This principle challenges the conventional dichotomy between humans and nature, urging a mindset where humans are seen as part of the natural world, not as separate or superior to it. In this light, ecological sustainability becomes not only a practical goal but a moral and spiritual obligation. When humans are seen as intrinsically connected to the earth, harming the environment becomes akin to harming oneself. This non-dualistic view advocates for ethical and harmonious interactions with the natural world, a central tenet in fostering long-term ecological health (Suzuki 1999). However, while the Sutra offers deep philosophical insights, its direct application to contemporary ecological issues is complex. Modern environmental crises, such as climate change, require scientific solutions and technological advancements that may not be directly addressed by the Sutra. For example, the Sutra does not offer specific guidance on how to tackle the global carbon emissions or the over-exploitation of fossil fuels, which are at the heart of the climate crisis. Therefore, while the Sutra provides a profound ethical and philosophical foundation, it needs to be integrated with scientific research and policy measures in order to create actionable strategies for sustainability.

Finally, the Sutra's emphasis on transformative wisdom (*prajñā*) can inspire a long-term perspective on ecological sustainability. By recognizing the impermanence of all things, the Sutra urges individuals to adopt a mindset that transcends short-term self-interest and considers the well-being of future generations. In ecological terms, this wisdom advocates for sustainable resource management, intergenerational equity, and environmental justice, principles central to modern sustainability movements. The Sutra's wisdom challenges the short-termism prevalent in modern economic and political systems, which often prioritize immediate gains over long-term ecological health. The transformative wisdom alone may not be sufficient to address the scale of contemporary environmental issues. The *prajñā* promoted in the Sutra is primarily an individual spiritual practice, but large-scale ecological crises require collective action and policy-driven solutions. Integrating spiritual wisdom with scientific knowledge and policy advocacy is crucial for achieving meaningful environmental change.

Implementation of Bridging Ancient Wisdom with Modern Ecological Imperatives

The *Lankavatara Sutra* offers profound insights into interdependence (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and non-duality (*advaya*), challenging anthropocentric and materialist views that underlie much of modern ecological degradation. Bridging these teachings with

contemporary ecological science can generate an integrative model of sustainability that honors physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions of environmental well-being.

Integrating Physical, Mental, and Spiritual Dimensions

The Sutra's core principles promote a holistic worldview, wherein humanity and nature are inherently interconnected. Implementing this view involves actions such as resource conservation, cultivating mindfulness, and embracing non-attachment and compassion. These values encourage ethical consumption, long-term ecological responsibility, and a shift away from short-term economic priorities. Yet, translating such teachings into policy requires collaboration between Buddhist ethics and ecological science.

Mindfulness and Ethical Action

Mindfulness (*smṛti*) and ethical conduct are practical applications of Buddhist thought to environmental action. Mindful awareness supports sustainable behavior—conscious consumption, waste reduction, and empathy for all life. These can be integrated into environmental education and sustainability programs. However, systemic transformation—not just individual action—is essential. Mindfulness must inform institutional frameworks and policy agendas that support ecological resilience.

Transformative Wisdom and Sustainability

The Sutra's emphasis on transformative wisdom (*prajñā*) and impermanence urges a departure from unsustainable economic models driven by attachment and excess. Its ethical critique of material desire aligns with the need to reduce overconsumption. Sustainable policymaking informed by this wisdom can shift focus from endless growth to long-term ecological stewardship, intergenerational equity, and natural limits.

Toward a Practical Framework

While the *Lankavatara Sutra* offers a philosophical foundation for ecological ethics, it lacks explicit responses to specific modern crises like climate change. Thus, a hybrid approach is needed, one that fuses Buddhist principles with scientific tools and policy innovation. Integrating spiritual values with ecological modeling and sustainable development strategies offers a path forward that respects both ethical and empirical dimensions.

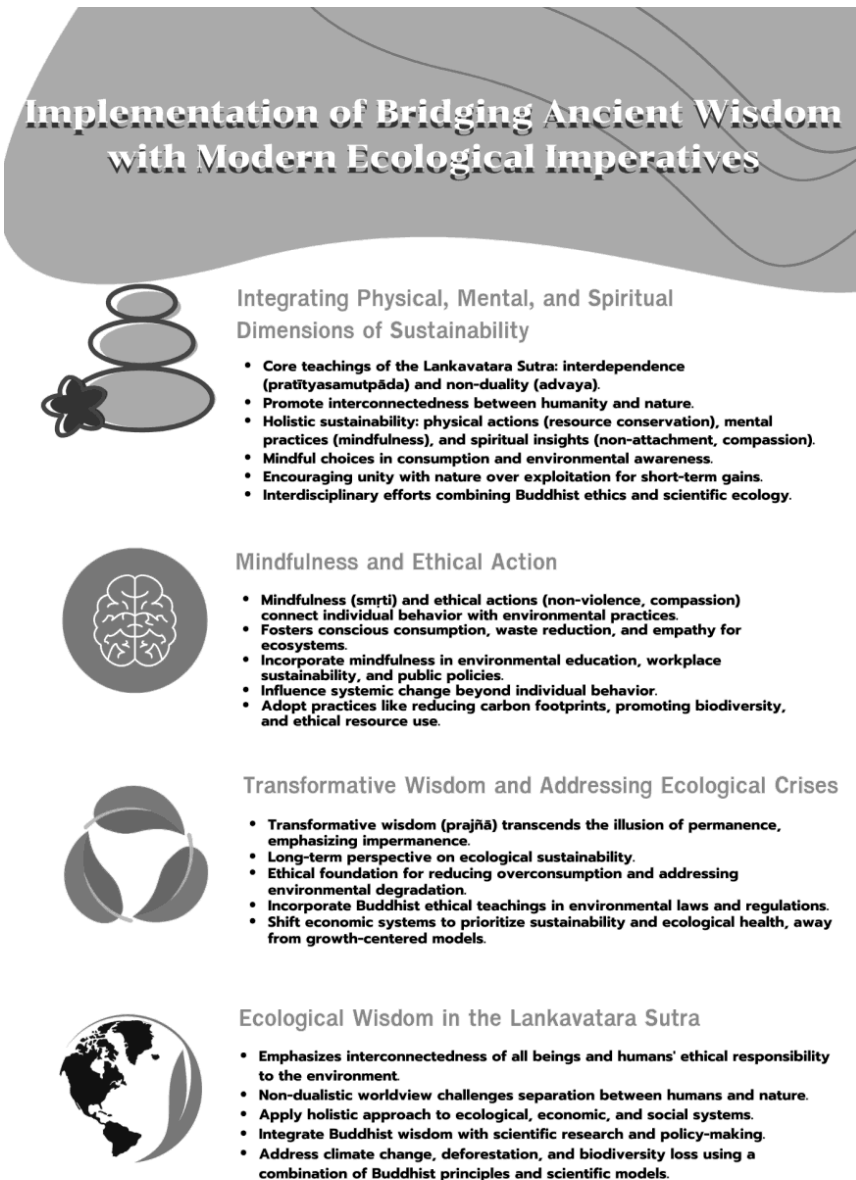


Figure 1. Implementation of Bridging Ancient Wisdom with Modern Ecological Imperatives

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