A Literature Review on the Ethics of Using ChatGPT in Buddhist Religious Education

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Abstract

The rapid adoption of ChatGPT in education raises various ethical concerns, especially within the context of Buddhist Religious Education, which emphasizes moral and spiritual values. This study aims to examine the ethical use of ChatGPT in Buddhist Religious Education based on the principles of the Dhamma. The research employs a literature review method with a descriptive-comparative approach, analyzing Buddhist canonical texts such as the Tipiṭaka and recent scholarly articles on AI ethics. The findings reveal that Buddhist ethics differ from secular ethics by focusing on intention, mental awareness, and spiritual transformation, rather than merely consequences or rule-based obligations. Comparatively, secular ethics tend to be consequentialist and deontological, while Buddhist ethics are rooted in inner qualities and moral harmony. Based on this comparison, the proposed solution is to promote the wise and mindful use of ChatGPT as a supportive tool—rather than a replacement for teachers—while upholding the teacher's role as a moral and spiritual guide. Furthermore, the integration of core values such as wisdom (paññā), honesty (sacca), and mindfulness (sati) is essential in the learning process. Future research is recommended to empirically examine the effectiveness of these ethical guidelines in the context of Buddhist education.

Keywords: *Ethics, ChatGPT, Buddhism, Education*

INTRODUCTION

The world of education has undergone numerous developments in line with technological advancements. One of the most prominent and widely discussed recent innovations is artificial intelligence (AI). Among various AI technologies, ChatGPT has experienced a significant surge in global usage. This is evident from the fact that ChatGPT reached 100 million users within just two months of its launch at the end of November 2022, and surpassed 200 million users by mid-2023, making it one of the fastest-adopted technologies in history (UBS Chief Investment Office, 2023). Interestingly, Indonesia has emerged as one of the fastest-adopting countries in the world, surpassing many developed nations and

ranking sixth globally in terms of ChatGPT user numbers (Balaji et al., 2024). These findings reflect the rapid adoption of ChatGPT in Indonesia.

Moreover, the use of ChatGPT in the field of education has seen a massive increase. Recent research indicates that 71% of students from 109 countries and regions have used ChatGPT (Ravšelj et al., 2025:13). This finding highlights the strong relevance of AI in education. This is further supported by other studies showing that the use of ChatGPT has a significant impact on improving students' Grade Point Averages (GPA) (Sujatmiko et al., 2024:24). AI offers various benefits for education, such as promoting more efficient and personalized learning and assisting students in completing their assignments (Theresa et al., 2025:488; Ramadhan et al., 2023:25). However, the implementation of AI in education still faces several challenges, particularly regarding privacy concerns, ethical use of technology, and worries about the decline in human interaction (Marlin et al., 2023:5200). Therefore, there is a need for ethical guidelines in the use of AI in education, especially in religious education, as religion plays a crucial role in shaping ethics, morality, and spiritual values (Parjono, 2022).

Several studies have been conducted on this matter; however, existing research remains limited to the ethics of AI usage in higher education in general and primarily adopts perspectives from Christian teachings (Abdilah, 2023:69; Sianturi et al., 2024:790). Although there are studies discussing the role of Buddhist values in addressing the ethical challenges posed by artificial intelligence more broadly (Yan, 2024), there has been no research specifically exploring the ethical use of AI—particularly ChatGPT—from the perspective of Buddhist teachings and within the context of Buddhist Religious Education. This research is necessary to provide an ethical foundation for the use of AI in education, especially within Buddhist Religious Education. Furthermore, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a guideline for students in using AI wisely in educational settings, particularly in Buddhist Religious Education. Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine the ethical use of AI in education, with a specific focus on Buddhist Religious Education.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach, as its main focus is to understand the meaning and ethical values in the use of artificial intelligence (AI), particularly in the context of Buddhist Religious Education. This approach was chosen to allow the researcher to explore in depth the ethical perspectives that cannot be fully explained through quantitative data. The method used is library research, which involves collecting data from various written sources such as books, scholarly journal articles, and Buddhist scriptures (*Tipiṭaka*). The data collection was conducted through platforms such as Google Scholar, DhammaCitta, and other literature sources related to AI ethics and Buddhist teachings. The collected data were analyzed using a descriptive-comparative

approach, which involves describing the content of the sources and comparing them to identify similarities or differences. The goal is to identify ethical values aligned with the Dhamma and examine how these values can be applied to the use of AI in education. To assess the consistency of the information with Buddhist teachings, this study also applies the *Mahāpadesa* principle—a guideline taught by the Buddha for evaluating the truth of teachings after His *Parinibbāna*. This principle, taken from the Anguttara Nikāya (AN 4.180) and the Dīgha Nikāya (16), serves as the basis for determining whether a technological application aligns with the Dhamma and Vinaya.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Potential and Risks of Using ChatGPT in Buddhist Religious Education

The use of ChatGPT in education brings various conveniences, such as assisting with assignments or problem-solving, and even offering more personalized, interactive, affordable, and accessible learning experiences (Suharmawan, 2023). In the context of Buddhist religious education, ChatGPT can be utilized to help students understand Tipitaka texts such as the *Dhammapada*, *Jataka*, or other concepts explained within the Tipitaka. This type of use has the potential to expand access to religious literature, especially for students who do not have direct access to mentors or teachers, and enrich the learning process through a technology-based approach. However, from an ethical perspective, these conveniences come with certain risks. Among them are dependency, a decline in critical thinking skills, misinformation, vulnerability to privacy breaches, and a potential deterioration in the quality of teacher-student relationships (Abdurrahman et al., 2024:201; Yan, 2024:301; Aly et al., 2025:1). These risks touch on critical aspects of religious education—namely the development of morality and moral awareness, which are at the heart of the learning process in Buddhism.

An Ethical Evaluation of ChatGPT Usage Based on Buddhist Teachings

Buddhist ethics do not evaluate actions solely based on their outcomes, but rather on *cetanā*—the intention behind the action. In this regard, the *Ambalaṭṭhikā Rāhulovāda Sutta* (MN 61)provides highly relevant moral guidance, as the Buddha explicitly emphasizes the importance of reflecting on one's actions before, during, and after they are performed. If an action is likely to cause suffering to oneself, others, or both, then it should be abandoned. This teaching not only underscores the significance of ethical awareness in every decision but also reminds us that even seemingly beneficial actions must be evaluated based on their underlying intentions and potential consequences.

Although technically neutral, since ChatGPT is merely a tool (Abdilah, 2023:69), its usage still requires deep ethical consideration—particularly in the context of Buddhist religious education. In Buddhism, things are not judged solely by their function or form but also by their impact on the mind and the intentions behind their use. Therefore, it is essential to reflect: does the use of ChatGPT foster laziness and sluggishness (*thīna-middha*), confusion regarding the meaning of the teachings (*moha*), or does it instead cultivate wisdom (*paññā*) and right view (*sammā diṭṭhi*)? If AI is used to replace the student's processes of creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, and reflection, its use may conflict with ethical speech (*sammā*

vācā) and the principles of *sīla*. Moreover, when the information provided by AI is inaccurate but accepted and believed to be true by students, it risks fostering wrong view (*micchā diṭṭhi*), which is a serious obstacle in the practice of the Dhamma. This approach highlights a key distinction between secular ethics—which often emphasize actions with legal or social consequences—and Buddhist ethics, which are more profound as they concern inner transformation and their relation to *kamma.*

Social Ethics and the Teacher-Student Relationship in the *Sigalovada Sutta*

Furthermore, the *Sigalovada Sutta* provides a framework for social ethics in Buddhist teachings through the worship of the six symbolic directions, each representing essential relationships in life. One of these is the southern direction, which symbolizes the relationship between teacher and student—a relationship grounded in respect, willingness to learn, and moral guidance. If ChatGPT is used in a way that replaces the role of the teacher—for instance, when students or educators believe that learning can be sufficiently done independently without moral guidance from a teacher—these values risk being neglected. This concern is reinforced by findings from Jarmini et al., (2024), who demonstrate that the values in the *Sigalovada Sutta*, such as responsibility, honesty, and respect, are highly relevant to character education in the modern era. However, these values often conflict with the instant-gratification mindset that can be unconsciously shaped by technology use, such as the desire for quick answers without careful filtering of information.

Therefore, it is crucial to emphasize that ChatGPT should serve only as a supporting tool—not a replacement for teachers or a primary source of learning, especially in Buddhist religious education. Teachers continue to hold a central role as moral and spiritual guides who assist students in cultivating the mind, training awareness, and shaping attitudes in accordance with the Buddha's teachings. By preserving the role of the teacher within the learning relationship, the symbolic values embedded in the *Sigalovada Sutta* can remain alive and relevant in today's technology-driven educational landscape.

An Evaluation Based on the Five Buddhist Precepts and the Noble Eightfold Path

Furthermore, in considering the ethics of using ChatGPT in Buddhist religious education, it is essential to take into account the application of the Buddhist *Pañca Sīla*, or the Five Precepts, which serve as the fundamental moral foundation for ethical living among Buddhists. These precepts are not merely guidelines for outward behavior but also reflect deep-seated intentions and inner awareness in daily life. While the use of ChatGPT may not technically violate any of the precepts directly, unwise usage could potentially lead to a breach of the fourth precept—for instance, when students use ChatGPT to complete assignments dishonestly, such as copying answers without understanding their content. This constitutes a form of academic misconduct that contradicts the values of honesty and integrity. Moreover, the unmindful use of AI also risks weakening the internalization of

spiritual values. When students regard AI-generated answers as absolute truth without questioning their sources, context, or underlying meaning, it may hinder the cultivation of wisdom (*paññā*) and ethical awareness in the learning process. Thus, while AI may offer practical assistance, it is not morally neutral if its use is not accompanied by wisdom and mindfulness.

In a broader framework, *sīla* is not an isolated entity but is part of the Noble Eightfold Path—the central framework in Buddhist teachings that leads to enlightenment. The Eightfold Path is divided into three core groups: *Paññā* (wisdom), *Sīla* (ethics), and *Samādhi* (mental discipline). In this context, the use of technology like ChatGPT must be evaluated based on whether it supports or deviates from these principles. If the use of AI encourages actions that conflict with Right View (*sammā diṭṭhi*), Right Action (*sammā kammanta*), or Right Speech (*sammā vācā*), then it directly opposes the direction of Buddhist spiritual practice. Internally, such deviations may prolong suffering (*dukkha*) by reinforcing the three mental poisons: delusion (*moha*), attachment (*lobha*), and mental sluggishness (*thīna-middha*). Therefore, the use of ChatGPT should not be evaluated solely based on its technical utility, but also on the extent to which its usage aligns with the moral and spiritual principles taught in Buddhism. Deep ethical reflection is necessary to ensure that this technology genuinely supports spiritual progress rather than becoming an obstacle to it.

A Comparison of Buddhist and Secular Ethical Approaches
In ethical studies, secular approaches generally rely on either consequentialism— which judges right and wrong based on the outcomes or consequences of an action—or deontology, which focuses on moral duty and adherence to laws or rules (Windiarti, 2025:27; Kim, 2022:3). From this perspective, the use of ChatGPT is considered ethically acceptable if it leads to learning efficiency, improved academic performance, or does not violate academic regulations such as plagiarism. Ethical judgment in this view tends to emphasize external behaviors or measurable social impacts. However, from the perspective of Buddhist teachings, ethical evaluation does not stop at outcomes or rules; it penetrates deeper into intentions, inner awareness, and the mental processes underlying the action. In Buddhism, an action that appears outwardly correct may still have negative consequences if it is driven by harmful intentions or wrong views. Buddhist ethics view intention (*cetanā*) as the root of morality and the primary factor that determines the karmic value of an action.
Comparatively, this highlights the distinctiveness of the Buddhist ethical approach. For example, if a student uses ChatGPT to answer questions in a Buddhist education course solely to obtain a good grade—without any intention to understand the content or internalize the Dhamma values contained within—then the action, while not formally violating any rules, is still considered unethical within the Buddhist framework. More than that, such an act may even harm the student spiritually, as it overlooks the opportunity to cultivate wisdom (*paññā*), honesty, and mindfulness (*sati*) in the learning process. Thus, ethics in Buddhism not only ask, "Is this right?" but also, "Why is this being done?" and "With what intention is this action being carried out?" Reflecting on intention becomes essential in determining the moral quality of an action. In the context of using technology such as ChatGPT, this teaching invites us to assess not only its

usefulness but also whether its use supports inner development, ethical awareness, and the strengthening of spiritual values in students.

CONCLUSION

The use of ChatGPT in education, including in Buddhist Religious Education, offers various conveniences such as broader access to learning and personalized instruction. However, these conveniences also carry ethical risks that cannot be ignored—especially when technology is used without full awareness of its impact on spiritual and moral values. From a Buddhist ethical perspective, the evaluation of an action is not based solely on its outcomes or conformity to rules, as in secular ethical approaches, but rather emphasizes *cetanā* (intention), inner awareness, and its impact on one's spiritual development. In Buddhist ethics, an action—including the use of technology—can only be considered right if it aligns with wisdom (*paññā*), right speech (*sammā vācā*), and right view (*sammā diṭṭhi*).

If the use of ChatGPT distances students from reflective processes, academic honesty, and moral relationships with teachers, then its usage contradicts the noble values found in the Dhamma. Therefore, ChatGPT should be positioned as a learning aid that is used mindfully and wisely—not as a substitute for the teacher's role or for the contemplative process of understanding the Buddha's teachings.

Moreover, Buddhist religious education must continue to uphold the role of the teacher as a moral and spiritual guide and ensure that values such as respect, honesty, and mindfulness remain at the core of learning. With the right and ethical approach, technologies like ChatGPT can be harmoniously integrated into religious education without compromising the profound and transformative principles of the Buddha's teachings.

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