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## REVIEW ARTICLE

# Understanding Disability in East Asia Through the Lens of Bodhisattva Ideals: A Buddhist Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

The support services for individuals with varied disabilities in East Asia through the Buddhist perspective based on *Bodhisattva* ideals reveals a complex interplay between cultural, religious, and social factors. Buddhism, with its diverse interpretations and practices across East Asia, significantly influenced attitudes and policies towards disability. Initially, Buddhist teachings in the region emphasized compassion and the alleviation of suffering, shaping societal views on disability as an opportunity for spiritual growth and moral development. Over time, Buddhist monasteries and institutions played a crucial role in providing care and support to disabled individuals, integrating them into religious and communal life. This perspective contrasted with other regional attitudes that often marginalized or excluded disabled people. The evolution of Buddhist thought, from early acceptance and support to later institutional and philosophical developments, highlights shift in how disability was perceived and managed. This historical trajectory illustrates how Buddhist principles were adapted to address the needs of disabled individuals, reflecting broader changes in social and cultural attitudes. Understanding this development provides valuable insights into the underlying historical context of disability in East Asia and the role of religion in shaping social inclusion and support systems.

**Keywords:** *Bodhisattva ideals, Buddhism, Compassionate intervention, Disability, Educational Therapist*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Disability in East Asia encompasses a rich tapestry of socio-cultural and geopolitical-historical contexts, reflecting diverse attitudes and practices across countries such as China, Japan, North and South Korea, Mongolia, Taiwan and Vietnam (RAND, 2024). Historically, perceptions of disability in these societies have been shaped by a blend of indigenous beliefs, Confucian values, Buddhist teachings, and modern influences (Storch, 2015). When viewed through a Buddhist perspective (This author acknowledges that disability research through the lens of Buddhist perspective is sparse), the historical development of disabled individuals (both children and adults) in East Asia offers a unique lens on societal attitudes and care practices over the centuries. Buddhism, which spread through East Asia starting from India around the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE, profoundly influenced the region's cultural and ethical frameworks, including attitudes towards disability.

When speaking about disabled people in East Asia, these individuals are often referred to individuals with physical, cognitive, emotional, or sensory impairments that significantly interfere with their ability to perform everyday activities, particularly in varied educational as well as workplace settings. The varied disabilities include learning disabilities (LD), emotional disturbance (ED), intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), autism spectrum disorders (ASD), and many others. According to Jordan (2007), he explained that disabilities impact educational participation and, hence, there is the need for specialized interventions.

Tracing back to the times of the ancient East Asia, disability was often viewed through spiritual or moral lenses. In China, for instance, Confucianism emphasized societal roles and harmony, which sometimes marginalized individuals with disabilities. However, Buddhist and Taoist (or Daoist) philosophies introduced more compassionate approaches, with Buddhist monastic communities providing care and support to disabled individuals (Chen et al., 2015; Laliberté, 2022; Miles, 2002). Interestingly, Chen et al. (2015) in their study found that Thai Buddhists shows their spiritual well-being, age, number of years since diagnosis, and sex are significant in their self-acceptance of disability, while the self-acceptance of disability among American Christians includes hope, spiritual well-being, and number of years since diagnosis (Xie, 2020). Similarly, in Japan, Shinto beliefs and later Buddhist influences shaped the treatment of disabled individuals (Liu, 2024), with the initial focus targeting on providing these people with spiritual and communal support (Ninomiya, 1990; Stevens, 2013).

Throughout the colonial and modern periods, Western ideas and medical advancements began to alter the East Asian traditional views. With the introduction of modern medicine and rehabilitation or ancillary support services (such as those that can be seen in China and Thailand) led to new and better understandings of disability, focusing more on socio-medical models rather than purely spiritual or moral perspectives. East Asian countries, especially Japan and South Korea, have already developed comprehensive disability rights legislation and social support systems, reflecting a shift towards inclusion and equal opportunity.

More recently, East Asian countries (e.g., China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan) have made respective significant progress in advancing the quality in the orientation of life for the disabled, which has been very much influenced by global disability rights movements started in the West and international standards established by the International Disability Alliance (established in 1999), the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (established in 1953) and the World Health Organization. This includes the implementation of accessibility laws, enhanced educational opportunities, and greater public awareness. Despite these advances, challenges remain, including societal stigma and varying levels of support across different regions and communities. Understanding the evolution of disability in East Asia requires a nuanced appreciation of how historical, cultural, and modern factors converge to shape the experiences of disabled individuals in the region.

## 2. EAST ASIA AND SCHOOLS OF BUDDHISM

East Asia is a region in Asia that typically includes the following countries: China, Japan, South Korea, North Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia. Sometimes, the region is also extended to include other nearby areas like Hong Kong and Macau (Kort, 2006; RAND, 2024). Geo-politically speaking, this is the region which “has historically been of critical interest to the United States. In particular, China’s growing economic, military, and diplomatic power in the region and North Korea’s nuclear ambitions have long been a focus of U.S. foreign policy and of RAND research” (RAND, 2024, para. 1).

Traditionally, there are three main schools of Buddhism: *Theravāda* (Skilling, 1997), *Mahāyāna* (Clammer, 2022), and *Vajrayāna* (Herwindo & Salim, 2022). These three schools of Buddhist thoughts are prevalent in the East Asian countries. Firstly, *Theravāda* Buddhism, the oldest Buddhist tradition, is prominent in South and Southeast Asia and practiced by minorities in East Asia. It follows the historical Buddha’s teachings in the *Tipiṭaka* (*Pāli* Canon) (see Fung, 2003, for detail), which includes the *Vinaya Piṭaka* (monastic rules), *Sutta Piṭaka* (discourses on morality, meditation, and wisdom), and *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* (systematic analysis with psychological and philosophical clarity). It emphasizes the *arahant* ideal, focusing on four stages of liberation from suffering and ultimately attaining enlightenment. *Mahāyāna*, meaning “Great Vehicle,” is the largest school of Buddhism in East Asia, practiced mainly in China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Emerging around the beginning of the Common Era, it has greatly influenced and been influenced by Chinese culture. The Chinese Buddhist canon (大藏经, *dàzàngjīng*), maintained by the East Asian Buddhist tradition. Unlike *Theravāda Pāli* Canon, Chinese Buddhist canon incorporates translated Sanskrit Buddhist scriptures, including mantras. *Mahāyāna* Buddhism is characterized by its emphasis on the *Bodhisattva* ideal, the pursuit of enlightenment not just for oneself but for all sentient beings. *Mahāyāna* Buddhism as influenced by Chinese culture is a unique blend of Indian Buddhist teachings and Chinese philosophical, spiritual, and cultural elements. This fusion created a rich tradition that has shaped not only religious practice but also the broader cultural and social fabric of East Asia (Clammer, 2022). Lastly, *Vajrayāna*, the “Diamond Vehicle,” emerged in the 7th century as a branch of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, merging with Tibetan Bon religion and shamanistic traditions. Predominantly practiced in Tibet, Bhutan, and Mongolia, it incorporates the Tibetan Buddhist canon and employs esoteric practices such as tantric mantras, mudras, mandalas, rituals, and visualizations. The guru-disciple relationship in *Vajrayāna* Buddhism is profoundly significant, representing a unique bond of spiritual guidance and transformative learning (Phuntsho, 2022).

In the 20th century as a movement that integrates Buddhist teachings with social activism, e.g., advocating support services for the disabled (Laliberté, 2022), and also delivering welfare services to the needy with the state government, e.g., in Singapore (Kuah & Kuah, 2018). With the emergence of engaged Buddhism, the teachings of the Buddha is applied to social life in order to bring about social change (Gleig, 2021; King, 2009). It began notably gaining momentum through figures like Thich Nhat Hanh in Vietnam.

Moreover, in another example, such as Taiwan, socially engaged Buddhist groups have risen with a focus on societal improvement and aiding the poor and ill (Tsomo, 2015). There are several key Buddhist groups such as Fo Guang Shan and Tzu Chi that play significant roles in civil society through their humanitarian efforts. This approach, also known as “Humanistic Buddhism”, emphasizes caring for others and the society (Lu, 2023; Sui, 2014).

Whether in Southeast Asian Engaged Buddhism or East Asian Humanistic Buddhism, both are rooted in the *Bodhisattva* ideal. This engaged form of Buddhism does not escape the world’s suffering but actively seeks to alleviate both mental and physical suffering for all beings, engaging with the community and playing significant roles in society.

### 3. BODHISATTVA PHILOSOPHY FOR PERSONAL AND SOCIETAL GROWTH

Among these, *Mahāyāna* Buddhism is the most dominant in East Asia, while Humanistic Buddhism (see Lu, 2023, for detail, especially on Master Hsing Yun of Fo Guang Shan) groups such as Fo Guang Shan and Tzu Chi are also prominent, extending their teachings not just in East Asia but also across all five continents. This paper will primarily focus on the common Buddhist teachings of *Mahāyāna* and Humanistic Buddhism, especially on the *bodhisattva* concept.

The “*Bodhisattva*” concept in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism emphasizes a commitment to achieving enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, including individuals with disabilities. The Sanskrit term *bodhicitta* (菩提心 *pútíxīn*), meaning “mind of awakening,” signifies the commitment to embark on a path of spiritual awakening. It describes the mindset of a bodhisattva who pursues enlightenment with the intention of benefiting others (Powers, 2012).

The *Bodhisattva* path involves developing *bodhicitta*, a deep commitment to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. This commitment transforms an individual into a *bodhisattva*. To fully embody this path, a *Bodhisattva* must practice the six perfections (*pāramitās*, 波羅蜜 *bōluómì*), which are essential virtues in Mahayana Buddhism: generosity (*dāna* 布施 *bùshī*), moral discipline (*sīla* 持戒 *chíjiè*), patience (*kṣānti* 忍辱 *rěnrǔ*), effort (*vīrya* 精進 *jīngjìn*), concentration (*samādhi* 禪定 *chándìng*), and wisdom (*prajñā* 般若 *bōrě*). These perfections help cultivate the qualities needed for spiritual awakening and enable the *Bodhisattva* to assist others on their journey.

The six perfections of a *bodhisattva* are virtues to be cultivated and can significantly benefit educational therapists and/or counselors<sup>1</sup> working with disabled patients. Below is the tabulation of how each perfection can be applied (Table 1):

Table 1. Tabulation of the Six Perfections of a Bodhisattva

| Virtues   | Application  | Benefit   |
|---|--|---|
| 1. Generosity<br>( <i>dāna</i> 布施 <i>bùshī</i> )        | Educational therapists or counselors can practice generosity by offering their time, attention, and resources without reservation. This includes providing emotional support, sharing useful resources, and going the extra mile to ensure their patients have access to the best possible care. | This creates a supportive and trusting environment where disabled patients feel valued and cared for, which can enhance their overall well-being and engagement in therapy.   |
| 2. Moral Discipline<br>( <i>sīla</i> 持戒 <i>chíjiè</i> ) | Adhering to ethical standards, maintaining confidentiality, and demonstrating respect and integrity in all interactions with patients.   | It ensures a safe and trustworthy therapeutic relationship, which is essential for building rapport and encouraging open communication. This helps patients feel secure and respected, facilitating their progress.           |
| 3. Patience<br>( <i>kṣānti</i> 忍辱 <i>rěnrǔ</i> )        | Exercising patience with patients’ progress and challenges, acknowledging that therapeutic progress can be slow and requires time.   | It helps educational therapists or counselors manage frustrations and maintain a calm demeanor, providing a stable and understanding environment for patients who may face additional difficulties due to their disabilities. |
| 4. Effort<br>( <i>vīrya</i> 精進 <i>jīngjìn</i> )         | Putting consistent effort into understanding each patient’s unique needs, staying updated with best practices, and working diligently to tailor interventions that suit the patient’s condition.   | It demonstrates commitment to the patient’s well-being and can lead to more effective and personalized care, ultimately improving therapeutic outcomes.   |

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this article, when the terms ‘educational therapist’ and/or ‘counselor’ are mentioned, the author refers to such a professional with Buddhist faith.

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 5. Concentration<br>( <i>samādhi</i> 禪定 <i>chánding</i> ) | Practicing mindfulness and being fully present during therapy sessions. Avoiding distractions and focusing on the patient's needs and experiences.  | This enhances the quality of educational therapy or counseling by ensuring that patients receive undivided attention, which can improve their engagement and satisfaction with the therapeutic process.   |
| 6. Wisdom<br>( <i>prajñā</i> 般若 <i>chánding</i> )         | Applying knowledge and insight to understand the complex interactions between disability and psychological well-being. Using this understanding to make informed decisions about treatment and support. | It helps educational therapists or counselors provide more effective and empathetic care by recognizing and addressing the unique challenges faced by disabled patients, thereby fostering a more supportive and empowering therapeutic experience. |

The *Bodhisattva* ideal is marked by selfless compassion and a dedication to alleviating the suffering of all beings. Nevertheless, the essence of being a *bodhisattva* lies in the intention and actions directed towards helping others and pursuing enlightenment with the goal of universal benefit. Disabilities do not preclude someone from achieving great things, pursuing their passions, or contributing meaningfully to society. Each person has unique strengths and abilities, and with the right support and opportunities, they can overcome challenges and reach their full potential.

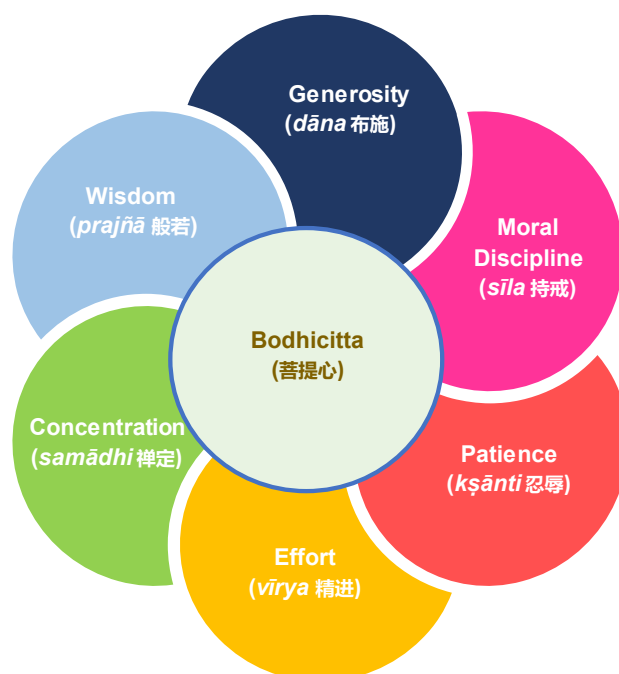


Figure 1. The Six Perfections

The six perfections - generosity, moral discipline, patience, effort, concentration, and wisdom - are essential virtues on the *Bodhisattva* path (see Figure 1 above). These practices aim to cultivate qualities that lead to enlightenment (Suzuki, 2007) and benefit all beings. Engaging in the Six Perfections fosters personal spiritual growth and embodies the distinctive virtues represented by the Four Great *Bodhisattvas* in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism.

In East Asia, the Four Great *Bodhisattvas* - (i) *Avalokiteśvara*, (ii) *Mañjuśrī*, (iii) *Kṣitigarbha*, and (iv) *Samantabhadra* - are particularly revered. The title of each *Bodhisattva* is often preceded by the word 'great' to highlight their unique qualities: 'Great Compassionate Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva,' 'Great Wisdom Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva,' 'Great Vow Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva,' and 'Great Practice Samantabhadra Bodhisattva.' The use of "great" corresponds to the term "Mahasattva," (摩訶薩埵 *móhé sāduò*, often simplified in 摩訶薩 *móhé sà*) (Buswell & Lopez, 2013) indicating a distinction in the level

of cultivation and realization between these Four Great Bodhisattvas and other Bodhisattvas in the general sense.

The Four Great *Bodhisattvas* hold profound significance in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism especially in the Chinese Buddhism, embodying key virtues that inspire and guide practitioners on their spiritual journey towards enlightenment. Each of these *Bodhisattvas* is associated with a sacred mountain in China, revered as sites of pilgrimage and spiritual practice. These mountains, known as the famous Four Sacred Mountains of Chinese Buddhism (refer to Table 2), serve as powerful symbols of the virtues each *Bodhisattva* represents. These mountains allow devotees to connect deeply with the qualities embodied by each *Bodhisattva*, such as compassion, wisdom, aspiration, and virtue. For educational therapists and/or counselors working with disabled individuals, the teachings of the Four Great Bodhisattvas offer valuable insights into how these virtues can be applied to support healing and personal growth. By embracing the compassion of *Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva*, the wisdom of *Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva*, the aspirational drive of *Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva*, and the dedication to virtuous actions represented by *Samantabhadra Bodhisattva*, educational therapists as well as counselors can cultivate a therapeutic environment that fosters resilience, understanding, and a deeper sense of connection for their clients. These characterizes of *Bodhisattvas* reflect unique facets of the Buddha's qualities and serve as guiding lights for both spiritual practitioners and those committed to the compassionate care of others.

Table 2. The Four Great Bodhisattvas: Names, Sacred Mountains, and Virtues

| Sanskrit Name                     | Chinese Name | Hanyu Pinyin        | Japanese Name         | Korean Name           | Associated Sacred Mountains | Virtues Representation |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva</i> | 觀音菩薩         | <i>guānyīn púsà</i> | <i>Kannon Bosatsu</i> | <i>Gwan-eum Bosal</i> | Mount. Putuo in Zhejiang    | Great Compassion       |
| <i>Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva</i>       | 文殊菩薩         | <i>wénshū púsà</i>  | <i>Monju Bosatsu</i>  | <i>Munsu Bosal</i>    | Mount. Wutai in Shanxi      | Great Wisdom           |
| <i>Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva</i>    | 地藏菩薩         | <i>dizàng púsà</i>  | <i>Jizō Bosatsu</i>   | <i>Jijang Bosal</i>   | Mount. Jiuhua in Anhui      | Great Vows             |
| <i>Samantabhadra Bodhisattva</i>  | 普賢菩薩         | <i>pǔxián púsà</i>  | <i>Fugen Bosatsu</i>  | <i>Bohyeon Bosal</i>  | Mount. Emei in Sichuan      | Great Practice         |

*Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva* (Chinese: 觀音菩薩, *Guānyīn púsà*) represents *Great Compassion* (大悲, *dàbēi*) and mercy, qualities that are incredibly supportive for individuals and those with disabilities. Guanyin's compassion reminds caregivers and educational therapists and/or counselors to approach their work with empathy, patience, and understanding. For those with disabilities, feeling understood and supported can significantly enhance their well-being and healing process. the belief in Guanyin's compassion plays a significant role in providing comfort and emotional solace to individuals, especially those facing difficult situations. For people with disabilities or those undergoing challenging times, the idea that a compassionate and merciful figure like Guanyin is always there to offer support can be incredibly reassuring. This belief can also encourage self-compassion. In therapy, reminding individuals to be merciful to themselves is crucial. Acknowledging that they are doing their best, even when facing hardships, can help reduce self-criticism and promote emotional healing. Guanyin's compassion serves as a powerful example of how individuals can cultivate kindness and patience towards themselves and others, fostering a sense of inner peace and resilience.

*Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva* (Chinese: 文殊菩薩, *Wénshū púsà*) represents *Great Wisdom* (大智, *dàzhì*) and insight, promoting understanding and dispelling ignorance, thereby contributing to a more inclusive society (Hoi, 2018). For educational therapists/counselors and caregivers, applying wisdom means adapting approaches to meet the unique needs of each individual, promoting inclusion and accessibility. For individuals with disabilities, wisdom can inspire self-empowerment, encouraging them to explore their abilities and strengths rather than focusing solely on their limitations. For educational therapists or counselors working with disabled individuals, integrating wisdom with compassion is crucial. Wisdom



integrates with compassion to enhance effectiveness by providing a deeper understanding of needs, avoiding superficial help, and balancing emotional responses with practical solutions. It empowers individuals, respects their dignity, ensures effective communication, and contributes to lasting positive impact. This synergy transforms compassion from mere emotion into meaningful and constructive action.

*Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva* (Chinese: 地藏菩萨, *dìzàng púsà*) represents *Great Vow* (大愿 *dàyuàn*) and is renowned for his vow to help all beings in the afterlife and those facing severe difficulties (see Nelson, 2015, for detail). The most famous aspect of his vow, expressed in the *Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva Pūrvapraṇidhāna Sūtra* (地藏菩萨本愿经 *decáng púsà běnyuàn jīng*) is that he will not attain Buddhahood until all hells are emptied. This vow underscores his deep commitment to alleviating suffering in the most extreme conditions and reflects his role as a savior for those in the hell realms and other challenging situations. *Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva*'s vow and representation of filial piety not only highlight his significant role within Buddhist tradition but also offer valuable lessons for addressing the needs of individuals facing significant challenges. His example serves as a source of inspiration for practicing perseverance in difficulties and selfless dedication to others' liberation, particularly when supporting those with disabilities.

*Samantabhadra Bodhisattva* (普贤菩萨, *pǔxián púsà*), known as '*Universal Virtues*,' embodies *Great Practice* (大行 *dàhèng*) (see Bailey, 1940, for detail). His famous ten vows include the importance of self-reflection, ethical conduct, and appreciation of others' achievements. These include confessing misdeeds, repenting, living harmoniously to benefit all beings, passing on merits and virtues for others' benefit, and rejoicing in and joining others' merits and virtues. For educational therapists/counselors, integrating these virtues means engaging in continuous self-reflection and improvement, celebrating clients' strengths, and fostering a supportive and empowering environment. By embodying *Samantabhadra Bodhisattva*'s virtues, educational therapists and/or counselors enhance their ability to provide empathetic care and create a positive therapeutic experience. This approach not only promotes the well-being of individuals with disabilities but also effectively supports their growth and development, making the therapeutic process more inclusive and beneficial.

When educational therapists and/or counselors integrate and actualize the qualities of the Four Great *Bodhisattvas*, they embody profound principles that resonate with the Six Paramitas, essential for their personal and professional development. By incorporating the virtues of *Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva* (Great Compassion), *Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva* (Great Wisdom), *Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva* (Great Vows), and *Samantabhadra Bodhisattva* (Great Practice) (see Dayal, 1932, 1970, for detail), educational therapists or counselors can align their practice with the Six Paramitas (Yen, 2001): generosity, moral discipline, patience, effort, concentration, and wisdom. This holistic approach enhances the therapeutic experience by fostering compassion, insight, ethical conduct, and perseverance. It supports clients' growth and well-being while reflecting the *Bodhisattvas*' virtues in practical and impactful ways, ultimately contributing to the alleviation of suffering and the promotion of holistic well-being.

The qualities of the *Four Great Bodhisattvas* – *Great Compassion*, *Great Wisdom*, *Great Vow*, and *Great Practice* - are also advocated in Humanistic Buddhism (Lu, 2023a). These virtues are applied through the practice of the "*Three Acts of Goodness*" (三好, *sān hǎo*):

- (1) Doing good deeds (做好事, *zuò hǎo shì*);
- (2) Speaking good words (说好话, *shuō hǎo huà*); and
- (3) Thinking good thoughts (存好心, *cún hǎo xīn*) ...

as well as the "*Four Givings*" (四给, *sì gěi*):

- (1) Giving others confidence (给人信心, *gěi rén xīnxīn*);

- (2) Giving others joy (给人欢喜, *gěi rén huānxǐ*);
- (3) Giving others hope (给人希望 *xīwàng*); and
- (4) Providing convenience (给人方便, *gěi rén fāngbiàn*).

These practices as mentioned above aim to attain the “Five Harmonies” (五和, *wǔ hé*) (Lu, 2023b):

- (1) Harmony within oneself (自心和悦, *zì xīn hé yuè*);
- (2) Harmony in the family (家庭和顺, *jiā tíng hé shùn*);
- (3) Harmony in interpersonal relationships (人我和敬, *rén wǒ hé jìng*);
- (4) Harmony in society (社会和谐, *shè huì hé xié*); and
- (5) Peace in the world (世界和平, *shì jiè hé píng*).

This modern interpretation of Buddhism emphasizes applying these values in daily life, promoting the well-being of all beings, and fostering a compassionate, wise, and socially engaged community (also see Master Hsing Yun, n.d., found in the References, for more detail; Lu, 2023a, 2023b).

## 4. HISTORICAL CONTEXT IN EAST ASIA

There are four key areas that Buddhism has impacted on how people with disabilities in East Asia are being treated by the fellow human beings. The author has labeled these four areas as (1) Ancient and medieval periods; (2) Medical and altruistic practices; (3) Social integration; and (4) Modern implications.

### 4.1 Ancient and Medieval Periods

The story of *Culapanthaka* is a powerful example from the Buddha’s era that illustrates compassion and the potential for spiritual progress, even among those with disabilities. *Culapanthaka*, a disciple of the Buddha, struggled with severe memory issues, making it difficult for him to remember even a simple verse. Despite his challenges, the Buddha encouraged him to persevere, teaching him a mindfulness practice that involved repeatedly cleaning a piece of cloth while reciting, “Removing dirt, removing dirt.” Through this practice, *Culapanthaka* eventually attained enlightenment, demonstrating that spiritual achievement is possible regardless of one’s mental or physical limitations. As mentioned in *Dhammapada* verse 25 about the story of *Culapanthaka* *Vatthu* stating as follows: “*Through diligence, mindfulness, discipline (with regard to moral precepts), and control of his senses, let the man of wisdom make (of himself) an island which no flood can overwhelm*” (also see Williams, 2000a).

Furthermore, in ancient and medieval East Asia, including China, Japan, and Korea, disabled individuals often faced marginalization. However, Buddhist monasteries and temples sometimes provided sanctuary and care for them. Monastic communities, adhering to the principles of compassion, often took in disabled individuals, providing them with basic needs and, in some cases, opportunities for spiritual practice.

### 4.2 Medical and Altruistic Practices

Buddhism has significantly influenced medical and altruistic practices for people with disabilities in East Asia. Socially engaged Buddhist group - Tzu Chi, through its mission to “relieve the sufferings of those in need and create a better world,” has established hospitals and medical services that cater to vulnerable populations, including those with disabilities. Their efforts align with their Four Missions of Charity, Medicine, Education, and Humanistic Culture. Similarly, Fo Guang Shan (founded by Master Hsing Yun in 1965) believes in Humanistic Buddhism (Lu, 2023) has also contributed to welfare initiatives, reflecting the Buddhist commitment to compassion and service. These organizations embody the integration of Buddhist principles into practical care and support for those in need.



### 4.3 Social Integration

In East Asia, the rise of socially engaged Buddhist groups has focused on societal improvement, particularly in aiding the poor and ill. The Bodhisattva's moral spirit is actualized in various cultural contexts (Sangharakshita, 1999). For example, in Japan, *Jizō Bosatsu* (*Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva*) has become a symbol of protection and compassion for vulnerable populations, including disabled children. Rituals and prayers to *Jizō Bosatsu* often include appeals for the well-being of lower realms, including hell and guardians of children, aborted fetuses, as well as disabled individuals, reflecting the deep integration of Buddhist compassion into social practices (see Lee, 1998, for detail).

### 4.4 Modern Implications

Modern implications of Buddhism in the developmental triangulation of (1) technology, (2) quantum mechanics, and (3) Artificial Intelligence (AI) for aiding individuals with disabilities involve integrating compassion and ethical principles (Doctor et al., 2022). The intersection of Buddhism with technology, quantum mechanics, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents intriguing implications for aiding individuals with disabilities (Betz, 2024; see Figure 2). By integrating Buddhist principles with advancements in these fields, we can explore novel approaches to enhancing accessibility and support for disabled individuals. Below are the potential implications based the developmental triangulation of technology, quantum mechanics and AI:

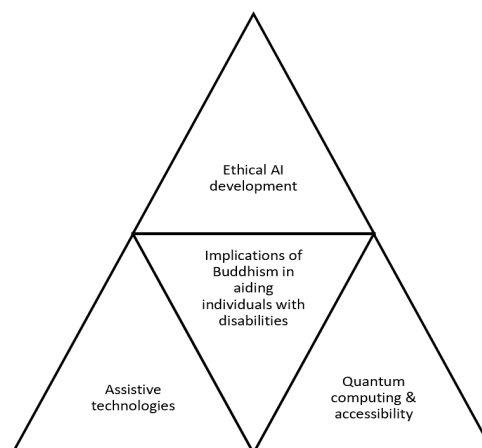


Figure 2. Implications of Buddhism in Helping the Disabled

(1) *Technology*: The emphasis of Buddhism on compassion and interconnectedness provides us a guide through the ethical development and deployment of technology for individuals with disabilities (Brown, 2017). For example, Buddhist values can influence the design of assistive technologies (AssisTech) to ensure they are inclusive, user-centered, and aimed at reducing suffering. Technologies like smart devices, wearable tech, and adaptive interfaces can be developed with a focus on enhancing users' well-being and fostering a sense of community. Furthermore, Buddhist principles of mindfulness and balance could lead to the creation of technologies that promote mental health and well-being (Brown, 2017), thereby supporting holistic approaches to disability (Zoloth et al., 2008).

(2) *Quantum Mechanics*: Quantum mechanics, whose focus is on fundamental particles and probabilistic states, can contribute to the development of advanced AssisTech that are more adaptive and responsive (Mamaeva, Shevchenko, & Ulyanov, 2020). Such invaluable insights from the quantum theory could lead to innovations in materials and sensors used in prosthetics, brain-computer interfaces, and other assistive devices. The teachings of Buddhism on interconnectedness and the nature of reality might inspire a more nuanced understanding of how quantum technologies could be used to enhance

sensory and cognitive functions, providing tailored solutions that address the unique needs of individuals with disabilities (Realpe, 2024; Thomas Kohl, 2007).

(3) *Artificial Intelligence (AI)*: The principles of Buddhism concerning the non-attachment and compassion can inform the ethical design and application of AI in AssisTech (White & Katsuno, 2023). AI has the potential to transform how disabilities are managed by enabling personalized support through adaptive learning systems and predictive algorithms. AI-driven tools can provide tailored interventions, improve accessibility in real-time, and offer more empathetic interactions through natural language processing and machine learning. Integrating the Buddhist ethics into AI development helps to ensure that these technologies prioritize user dignity, respect, and inclusivity, avoiding biases and promoting equitable access to support.

In summary, incorporating Buddhist principles into the developmental triangulation and application of technology, quantum mechanics, and AI can lead to more compassionate, ethical, and effective solutions for aiding individuals with disabilities. This integration fosters a holistic approach that aligns technological advancements with the core values of empathy, interconnectedness, and well-being (Seanburan, 2024).

Hence, Figure 2 summarizes the implications of Buddhism in assisting individuals with disabilities as follows:

- (1) Ethical AI Development: To ensure that AI systems are designed with empathy and support for disabilities;
- (2) Assistive Technologies (AssisTech): To create tools that enhance accessibility and independence;
- Quantum Computing and Accessibility: To leverage on quantum advancements to improve solutions for specific disability needs.

These three approaches align with Buddhist values, emphasizing alleviation of suffering, providing much needed care and support for all beings. Figure 3 argues that integrating care principles from Buddhism into AI design can lead to more compassionate and ethical technology, fostering improved human-AI interactions and addressing complex social needs (Doctor et al., 2022).

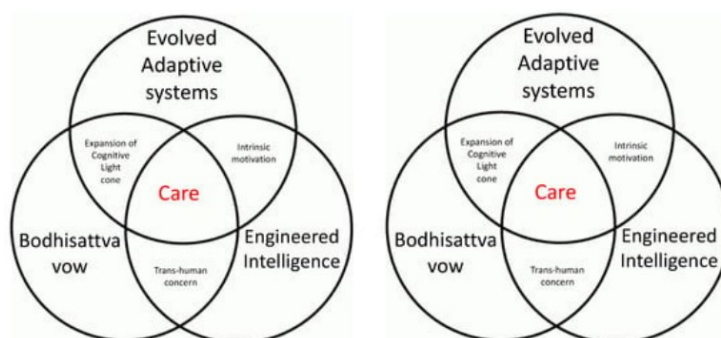


Figure 3. Care as the Central Invariant of a New Interdisciplinary Field (Doctor et al., 2022)

Furthermore, the Buddhism's emphasis on interconnectedness aligns with quantum physics principles. These insights inform assistive technologies (AssisTech), enhancing support for disabilities promoting holistic care and innovation (Yeung, 2022).

## 5. CONCLUSION

In East Asia, Buddhism's influence on the treatment of individuals with disabilities reflects a blend of compassion and spiritual understanding. Historically, Buddhist compassion provided sanctuary and

support, as illustrated by *Culapanthaka's* story. Despite societal challenges, Buddhist principles offered a counter-narrative that valued and cared for disabled individuals. Medically and altruistically, socially engaged organizations like Tzu Chi and Fo Guang Shan continue this legacy through welfare initiatives. The inspiring moral spirit of the Four *Bodhisattvas* embodies compassion, wisdom, commitment, and practice, reflecting key virtues that guide community practices. Modern approaches integrate Buddhist teachings and values with advancements in AI and quantum mechanics, fostering ethical and innovative solutions for disabilities. This integration underscores Buddhism's enduring influence on compassion and ethical responsibility, highlighting profound compassion and selfless service. By embodying these virtues, the qualities of the Four *Bodhisattvas* serve as models for living a life of moral integrity and altruism, influencing both personal growth and collective harmony.

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## 7. COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has declared that no competing interests exist.

## 8. FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

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## 9. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE DISCLOSURE

No generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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