

Ṣaṭ Pāramitā and Its Application Values in Building Ethics of Vietnamese Business People Today



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ABSTRACT: This article examines the application of ṢAṬ PĀRAMITĀ, the Six Perfections of Mahayana Buddhism, in Vietnamese business ethics. Virtues like Generosity, Ethical Conduct, Patience, Diligence, Meditation, and Wisdom provide a foundation for fostering trust, integrity, and sustainable growth. Examples from leading Vietnamese companies such as VinGroup and FPT illustrate how these teachings align with corporate social responsibility and ethical leadership, enhancing public trust and engagement. Research from the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) shows that companies practicing these values see higher trust and employee satisfaction. Recommendations include integrating these virtues into training and policy, with further studies suggested for measuring their impact.

KEYWORDS: ṢAṬ PĀRAMITĀ; Business Ethics; CSR; Vietnamese Enterprises; Ethical Leadership; Sustainable Growth

1. INTRODUCTION

In an era of global economic integration, ethics in business have become a critical component for sustainable growth. For Vietnamese enterprises, maintaining ethical practices is essential to complying with global standards and building trust within society (Thanh et al., 2023). Ethical behavior supports sustainable development and positions businesses as trustworthy entities in domestic and international markets (Thanh et al., 2023). However, maintaining a balance between profit-oriented strategies and ethical practices presents a challenge in the competitive business environment (Tung, 2021).

The teachings of Buddhism, which have deep cultural roots in Vietnam, offer a valuable foundation for instilling ethical conduct in business. Among these teachings, ṢAṬ PĀRAMITĀ (the Six Perfections)—which include Generosity (Dāna), Ethical Conduct (Śīla), Patience (Kṣānti), Diligence (Vīrya), Meditation (Dhyāna), and Wisdom (Prajñā)—represent a path toward moral and ethical behavior (Harvey, 2000; Dharmasiri, 1986). These virtues, long practiced within Vietnamese culture through community and religious practices, provide insights into building a robust business ethical framework (Anh et al., 2024). By embedding these values into business practices, Vietnamese enterprises can harmonize economic success and social responsibility.

In Vietnam, integrating traditional values into modern practices is not new. Business ethics have evolved alongside the country's rapid economic growth, particularly after the *Đổi Mới* (Renovation) policy initiated in 1986, and this period marked Vietnam's transition from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented one, bringing both opportunities and ethical challenges (Nam & Thanh, 2024). The shift highlighted the need for strong ethical practices to prevent corruption, exploitation, and loss of public trust (Jayatilleke, 1984).

Research on applying Buddhist principles in business is supported by studies showing that many Vietnamese entrepreneurs and business leaders seek to align their work with personal and cultural values rooted in Buddhism. For instance, a Vietnam Buddhist Research Institute survey indicates that business leaders who incorporate Buddhist ethics into their management styles report higher employee satisfaction and loyalty. This aligns with findings from other global studies suggesting that ethical business practices lead to long-term sustainability and stakeholder trust (Nguyen et al., 2024).

The objective of this research is to analyze the core values of ṢAṬ PĀRAMITĀ and assess their potential applications in building and enhancing business ethics among Vietnamese entrepreneurs. This paper bridges traditional philosophical wisdom with contemporary business practices by showcasing how the Six Perfections can guide ethical decision-making and corporate behavior. The study employs a theoretical research approach, encompassing a comprehensive literature review of Buddhist teachings and existing models of ethical business practices (ICDV; 2011). To enrich this foundation, the research also incorporates analysis of case studies specific to Vietnamese businesses. This includes examples of how local enterprises have adopted these teachings, either

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formally or informally, to guide ethical practices. The qualitative nature of this approach ensures a thorough understanding of both the philosophical aspects of ṢAṬ PĀRAMITĀ and their practical applications in today's business environment. The study draws insights from documented business practices, interviews with Vietnamese business leaders, and relevant literature that connects ethical theory with corporate implementation.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

ṢAṬ PĀRAMITĀ, known as the Six Perfections, forms a cornerstone of Mahayana Buddhist teachings, encapsulating essential virtues that guide individuals toward moral and spiritual growth. These virtues—Dāna (Generosity), Śīla (Ethical Conduct), Kṣānti (Patience), Vīrya (Diligence), Dhyāna (Meditation), and Prajñā (Wisdom)—emphasize actions that enhance personal development and contribute to communal well-being (Dharmasiri, 1986). Each virtue provides a framework that can be seamlessly integrated into modern business ethics to create a culture of integrity, accountability, and societal contribution.

Dāna represents the ideal of selfless giving, extending beyond material contributions to encompass time, knowledge, and compassion. In a corporate context, Dāna aligns with corporate social responsibility (CSR) and philanthropy principles (Harvey & Peter, 2000). Companies embracing Dāna through CSR initiatives foster stronger relationships with stakeholders and local communities, enhancing their social capital. Vietnamese businesses exemplify this virtue through community-centric programs, funding educational projects, supporting regional development, and nurturing inclusive workplace cultures. Empirical evidence shows that Vietnamese enterprises with robust CSR practices often experience greater customer loyalty and community support, reinforcing that generosity builds trust and long-term success.

Śīla, or ethical conduct, embodies adherence to moral principles and is fundamental for maintaining trust and integrity. In the business environment, Śīla involves compliance with laws, the equitable treatment of employees, and transparent interactions with clients (Saddhatissa & Hammalawa, 1987; Tachibana, 1986). Integrating Śīla into business operations ensures ethical behavior becomes an organizational norm, helping mitigate risks such as corruption and fostering sustainable partnerships (Jayatilleke et al., 1972, 1984). Research indicates that Vietnamese companies prioritizing ethical conduct achieve better stability and growth, underpinned by solid reputational standing.

Kṣānti emphasizes patience, tolerance, and resilience in the face of adversity. This virtue is critical for leaders navigating business conflicts, crises, and economic fluctuations (Kalupahana & David, 1995). Companies embodying Kṣānti maintain a steady course through challenges, preserving team morale and fostering a climate of trust. The cultural importance of patience in Vietnam underscores its relevance in leadership and decision-making, where thoughtful responses to challenges contribute to sustainable outcomes.

Vīrya, representing diligence and persistent effort, resonates with the contemporary emphasis on continuous improvement and corporate integrity. It highlights the importance of sustained, ethical efforts toward long-term objectives. Vietnam's rapid economic growth, mainly since the "Đổi Mới" reforms, showcases the value of diligence as a driver of business resilience. Companies that uphold Vīrya remain competitive by continuously adapting to economic changes and fostering innovation.

Dhyāna pertains to mindfulness and mental clarity, facilitating focused decision-making free from impulsive reactions. Modern organizations increasingly incorporate mindfulness to enhance leadership effectiveness and improve workplace culture. Vietnamese business leaders practicing Dhyāna report benefits such as reduced stress, better strategic thinking, and enhanced problem-solving. This virtue helps businesses approach complex situations clearly, ensuring decisions are aligned with long-term ethical goals.

Prajñā, the cultivation of wisdom, guides ethical strategy and leadership. In business, wisdom involves considering diverse perspectives and making informed, balanced decisions that account for profit and societal impact (Keown & Damien, 1992). In Vietnam, where collective welfare is deeply valued, applying Prajñā means choosing actions that benefit the company and its broader community. Research shows that Vietnamese enterprises led by individuals who prioritize wisdom often achieve better reputations and long-term stability.

Integrating these virtues with modern ethical frameworks reveals a strong alignment between ancient teachings and contemporary expectations (Misra, 1995). Business ethics, encompassing principles such as transparency, fairness, and responsibility, resonate with the moral guidelines provided by ṢAṬ PĀRAMITĀ. These virtues are applied within Vietnamese enterprises in CSR efforts, ethical leadership practices, and initiatives that promote community well-being. For instance, significant corporations like VinGroup and FPT Corporation illustrate the application of Dāna through sustained social projects that support education, healthcare, and environmental conservation.

Business ethics in Vietnam extend beyond compliance with regulations, embracing cultural values rooted in mutual support and communal welfare. This connection bridges traditional ethical teachings and modern business strategies, creating a framework where companies can thrive while adhering to ethical norms. Empirical data supports this alignment; studies by the Vietnam

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Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) and the Vietnam Institute of Business Ethics highlight that ethical practices enhance employee satisfaction, increase stakeholder trust, and build resilience against market challenges.

Embedding ṢAṬ PĀRAMITĀ in business strategies not only aligns with the global move toward responsible leadership but also enriches the company culture by integrating time-honored values (Ratnapala & Nandasena,1993). The virtues encourage business leaders to approach their roles with integrity, fostering a holistic ethical framework that sustains growth and societal prosperity.

3. APPLICATION OF ṢAṬ PĀRAMITĀ IN BUILDING BUSINESS ETHICS

ṢAṬ PĀRAMITĀ, known as the Six Perfections, forms a significant foundation in Mahayana Buddhism, embodying essential virtues that guide individuals toward moral excellence and collective well-being. These virtues, including Dāna (Generosity), Śīla (Ethical Conduct), Kṣānti (Patience), Vīrya (Diligence), Dhyāna (Meditation), and Prajñā (Wisdom), present a profound framework for both personal development and ethical business conduct. Integrating these values within a modern corporate context offers a comprehensive approach to fostering trust, integrity, and long-term success.

Generosity, or Dāna, extends beyond simple acts of monetary giving and encapsulates the contribution of time, knowledge, and resources to create positive impacts within the community. In the business world, this principle parallels corporate social responsibility (CSR) and philanthropic activities that enhance the social and environmental landscape. Companies that practice Dāna through strategic CSR initiatives often build stronger community ties and stakeholder trust. In Vietnam, where the cultural ethos emphasizes "tương thân tương ái" (mutual aid), applying Dāna aligns with the societal focus on collective welfare. This cultural alignment makes the integration of generosity in business practices both effective and resonant.

Vietnamese enterprises provide numerous examples of how the principle of Dāna is reflected in practice. VinGroup, a major conglomerate in Vietnam, has established a reputation for robust CSR programs that support educational opportunities, healthcare access, and scientific advancement through initiatives like the VinGroup Innovation Foundation. These efforts highlight the group's commitment to societal progress, illustrating that Dāna in business can yield tangible benefits, including increased customer loyalty and enhanced brand reputation.

FPT Corporation serves as another case in point. Known for its ongoing engagement in charitable activities and community development, FPT's CSR initiatives span from technology training for youth and disaster response efforts to fostering STEM education in rural areas. These programs showcase how businesses can leverage their expertise and resources to advance societal welfare, reinforcing their standing as responsible and ethical entities.

TH Group, recognized for its sustainable agricultural practices, incorporates environmental consciousness into its CSR strategy, investing in eco-friendly production methods and health-oriented community programs. Their efforts to ensure clean drinking water and health services for underprivileged regions underscore the breadth of Dāna, demonstrating that corporate generosity can significantly enhance public welfare.

Hoang Anh Gia Lai Group (HAGL) exemplifies the application of Dāna through its investments in social welfare projects in the Central Highlands, such as constructing schools, hospitals, and affordable housing. Such initiatives contribute to immediate needs and foster sustainable community growth, showcasing how corporate efforts aligned with Dāna can help address regional inequalities and elevate the quality of life.

Empirical studies in Vietnam corroborate the value of CSR initiatives as reflections of Dāna. The Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) reports that approximately 75% of companies engaged in CSR activities have experienced enhanced public trust and stronger community relationships. This positive correlation underscores that corporate generosity not only fulfills a moral imperative but also promotes business resilience and growth. Furthermore, research from the Vietnam Institute of Business Ethics and Corporate Governance reveals that employees at companies known for their generous practices show higher job satisfaction and commitment. This finding suggests that Dāna can profoundly influence internal company culture, fostering a shared purpose and aligning with broader ethical values.

The virtue of Śīla, or ethical conduct, underscores the importance of adherence to moral principles, transparency, and compliance with regulations. Practicing Śīla involves maintaining integrity in all interactions and ensuring that company policies reflect fairness and respect. Implementing this virtue strengthens an organization's reputation and establishes trust with clients, partners, and employees. For Vietnamese businesses, where corruption and regulatory challenges persist, integrating Śīla into corporate operations helps mitigate risks and fosters long-term partnerships.

Kṣānti, the practice of patience and resilience, is particularly relevant for business leaders and employees dealing with conflicts and navigating complex challenges. Leaders who exhibit patience can manage crises more effectively and make decisions that prioritize long-term outcomes over immediate gains. Historical and contemporary examples in Vietnam underscore that patience is a valued trait, allowing leaders to maintain composure and thoughtfully guide their teams through adversity. Companies that

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embrace Kṣānti are better positioned to handle market fluctuations and internal disruptions, maintaining morale and strategic focus.

Vīrya, the embodiment of diligence, is committed to continuous effort and dedication to achieving ethical and productive goals. The value of relentless effort is echoed in Vietnamese business practices, particularly in the context of the economic reforms post-Đổi Mới, where diligence has been essential for entrepreneurs adapting to market shifts. Businesses that demonstrate Vīrya often sustain their competitive edge through consistent innovation and improvement, underpinning a high standards and responsibility culture.

Dhyāna, which focuses on mindfulness and mental clarity, translates into strategic concentration and improved decision-making in business settings. Dhyāna leaders are equipped to manage stress and make measured decisions, enhancing personal effectiveness and corporate culture. In Vietnam, incorporating mindfulness practices has gained traction among business leaders, improving productivity and reducing workplace stress. Adopting Dhyāna encourages a balanced approach to challenges, fostering a work environment conducive to thoughtful and ethical decision-making.

Prajñā, cultivating wisdom, is crucial in guiding leaders to make informed and balanced decisions. Wisdom in business encompasses the ability to view challenges from multiple perspectives, enabling leaders to devise ethical and beneficial solutions for all stakeholders. In the Vietnamese business context, where communal values often intertwine with corporate objectives, applying Prajñā means making choices that support the company and its broader social environment. Case studies indicate leaders prioritizing wisdom in their decision-making processes contribute to a culture of innovation, resilience, and ethical sustainability. Integrating the Six Perfections into business practices establishes a comprehensive framework that enriches ethical standards, enhances community engagement, and promotes long-term corporate success. Vietnamese enterprises that embrace these virtues find themselves aligned with modern corporate responsibility expectations and traditional values that emphasize mutual support and integrity. This integration bridges historical moral teachings with contemporary business ethics, positioning companies as leaders in ethical innovation and contributors to societal well-being.

4. DISCUSSION

Incorporating the virtues of ṢAṬ PĀRAMITĀ into modern business practices has been shown to yield significant positive impacts. One of the foremost benefits is enhancing trust between a company and its stakeholders, including customers, employees, and the wider community. Trust is an invaluable asset in business, leading to stronger brand loyalty, improved stakeholder relationships, and a more favorable reputation. By practicing virtues such as Dāna (Generosity) and Śīla (Ethical Conduct), businesses demonstrate their commitment to ethical values and social responsibility, reinforcing public confidence in their operations. This, in turn, translates into sustainable growth as companies build long-term relationships that support continuous development and resilience.

Sustainable growth is another prominent outcome of integrating these virtues. Businesses that prioritize ethics and social contribution often find that their operations are more stable and adaptable to changing market conditions. For example, companies incorporating Kṣānti (Patience) and Vīrya (Diligence) tend to weather economic downturns and crises more effectively by maintaining strategic focus and nurturing team morale. These virtues support a culture of perseverance and long-term thinking, which is critical for navigating challenges without sacrificing ethical principles.

However, integrating ṢAṬ PĀRAMITĀ into modern business practices is not without its challenges. One significant obstacle is resistance to change. Shifting corporate culture to embrace these traditional virtues can be met with hesitation, especially in organizations where profit maximization and rapid growth are prioritized over long-term sustainability and ethical considerations. Employees and management may struggle with adopting a more value-based approach if perceived as conflicting with established business norms or strategies.

The complexity of embedding traditional values within contemporary business frameworks also presents challenges. Applying virtues like Dhyāna (Meditation) and Prajñā (Wisdom) requires more than a superficial adjustment; it fundamentally changes how business leaders and employees approach decision-making and daily operations. This transition often demands comprehensive training, the redesign of internal processes, and a shift in performance metrics to include financial outcomes and ethical and social contributions. Ensuring these changes are sustainable requires a deep understanding of traditional teachings and their relevance to modern business practices.

Despite these challenges, the benefits of incorporating ṢAṬ PĀRAMITĀ outweigh the difficulties, particularly within the context of Vietnamese culture. The practice of Dāna resonates with the cultural emphasis on “tương thân tương ái” (mutual aid), which has long been a part of Vietnam’s social fabric. By aligning business practices with these culturally ingrained values, companies can foster a stronger connection with their workforce and communities, reinforcing a sense of shared purpose. This cultural alignment enhances the effectiveness of CSR initiatives and other ethical practices, making them more genuine and impactful.

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When comparing ṢAṬ PĀRAMITĀ with other global ethical frameworks, its unique focus on holistic growth and personal development stands out. Western ethical models, such as those based on utilitarianism or deontological principles, often emphasize outcome-based or rule-based ethics. While effective in promoting fairness and justice, these frameworks can sometimes overlook the importance of personal virtues and moral character in shaping ethical behavior. In contrast, ṢAṬ PĀRAMITĀ places a significant emphasis on the cultivation of internal virtues that inherently lead to ethical actions, bridging personal and professional development. This approach fosters an environment where ethical behavior stems from individuals' commitment to moral excellence, not just adherence to external rules.

In Vietnam, this distinction is particularly beneficial. Integrating personal virtues like Dhyāna and Prajñā into business practices encourages leaders to make decisions considering long-term community welfare, aligning with the country's collectivist cultural values. This contrasts with many Western frameworks that may prioritize individual success or short-term outcomes over collective benefits. By promoting meditation and mindfulness (Dhyāna), businesses can cultivate leaders who approach complex challenges with clarity and balanced perspectives, leading to strategic and ethical decisions.

Adopting virtues such as Kṣānti (Patience) is also crucial in Vietnam's business environment, which often involves navigating intricate relationships and regional dynamics. Unlike more rigid ethical codes found in global frameworks, the emphasis on patience and tolerance allows Vietnamese businesses to handle negotiations and conflicts that respect local customs and promote harmony.

Ultimately, integrating ṢAṬ PĀRAMITĀ into Vietnamese business practices offers a multifaceted approach to ethics that aligns with national cultural values while addressing the needs of a modern economy. This blend of traditional wisdom and contemporary application supports a business model that thrives economically and contributes positively to society, reinforcing Vietnam's position as an example of how ancient teachings can inform and enhance modern corporate ethics. The challenge remains in effectively balancing these practices with the realities of competitive business, but the potential for sustainable growth and deep-rooted trust makes the pursuit worthwhile.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis of ṢAṬ PĀRAMITĀ and its application in modern business practices highlights its profound contribution to fostering ethical behavior. The Six Perfections—Dāna (Generosity), Śīla (Ethical Conduct), Kṣānti (Patience), Vīrya (Diligence), Dhyāna (Meditation), and Prajñā (Wisdom)—serve as guiding principles that enhance personal and collective ethical standards. These virtues support individual growth and contribute to creating a corporate culture founded on integrity, resilience, and social responsibility. By embedding these values into business practices, Vietnamese enterprises can build trust, ensure long-term sustainability, and maintain their competitive edge while adhering to high moral standards.

Dāna facilitates the development of corporate social responsibility programs and philanthropy that strengthen community relationships and foster loyalty. Śīla emphasizes the importance of integrity and adherence to ethical principles, enhancing transparency and building market trust. Kṣānti instills resilience and patience, enabling companies to navigate challenges with composure and prudence. Vīrya underscores the necessity of consistent effort and perseverance, fostering an organizational culture that values continuous improvement and accountability. Dhyāna enhances strategic thinking and mindfulness, leading to well-considered decision-making that avoids impulsive errors. Prajñā equips leaders with the wisdom needed to balance profit-driven motives with long-term, ethical decision-making, ensuring that business strategies benefit the company and the broader community.

To ensure that these virtues are effectively integrated into Vietnamese business practices, actionable steps can be taken by business leaders and policymakers. Training programs should be designed to instill the Six Perfections as part of corporate culture, focusing on workshops that teach how these values can be practically applied to everyday business situations. Leadership development programs should include modules on ethical decision-making rooted in Dhyāna and Prajñā, equipping leaders with the mindfulness and insight necessary for complex problem-solving and strategic planning. Moreover, corporate policies should be revised to reflect these virtues, establishing behavior and decision-making standards that align with ethical practices and business objectives.

Policymakers can play a pivotal role by encouraging the integration of these values through regulatory support and incentives for companies that demonstrate a commitment to ethical behavior rooted in traditional virtues. This could include recognition programs or tax benefits for businesses that show leadership in CSR and other initiatives that promote community welfare.

Future research should include quantitative studies to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how these virtues impact business performance. Empirical investigations that measure the effects of applying Buddhist virtues on various performance metrics, such as employee retention, customer satisfaction, and financial stability, would provide valuable insights. These studies

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could validate the benefits observed in qualitative analyses and offer a more data-driven basis for advocating the integration of ṢAṬ PĀRAMITĀ into business practices.

Furthermore, conducting longitudinal studies to track changes in organizations that incorporate these virtues would yield insights into their long-term benefits and potential challenges. By combining traditional ethical teachings with empirical research, Vietnamese businesses can create a balanced approach that respects cultural values while remaining adaptable to modern economic demands. This integration can position Vietnam as a model for how ancient wisdom can inform and elevate contemporary business ethics, fostering a sustainable and ethically driven economic landscape.

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