

Research Article

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The Role of Buddhist Monastic Education in China, 2012-2022: A Case Study of Lingdong Buddhist Academy

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Abstract

Background/purpose. Since the establishment of New China in 1949, traditional monastic education has played a pivotal role in Chinese Buddhism, encompassing cultural dissemination, social welfare, and environmental consciousness. This study rigorously examines Guangdong Buddhist monastic education of Lingdong College from 2012 to 2022, meticulously analyzing its developmental trajectory and transformations across distinct periods.

Materials/methods. The research design employs an exploratory sequential mixed method to confirm and interpret the qualitative result. In the first phase, qualitative method, the data-gathering process involved conducting in-depth interviews and engaging in participant observation by scrutinising policies, students' teacher qualifications, college employees and leaders of the Chaozhou Buddhist Association. In the second phase, a questionnaire was designed that was based on qualitative themes. A total of sixteen participants were interviewed during the study in the Guangdong Province, China, followed by a total of 355 participants for the quantitative stage.

Results. This study proves that religious education towards curriculum diversification and innovative training methods plays an important role in influencing students' Buddhist temple moral courage and scouting behaviour. Education and religion are possible to facilitate moral development among students; there is also a possibility that it will exacerbate the existing dichotomy between majority and minority in the religious field.

Conclusion. Lingdong College's trajectory lies at the intersection of tradition and innovation. By preserving the essence of Buddhist culture while adapting to societal needs, the college remains committed to shaping compassionate, informed, and socially conscious leaders for the ever-evolving world.

1. Introduction

In the era of globalisation and social conflict, which is often spiced up by misunderstanding and prejudice, universities are required to be more than just educational institutions; they should also be a small laboratory for a harmonious and peaceful society (Al Halbusi et al., 2021). This study not only seeks to identify and promote best practices in creating an attitude and behaviour climate but also contributes to improving the quality of dialogue across regions and religions (Bowling, 2022). Human perfection has two dimensions, namely the physical and spiritual aspects (Junaidi, 2022; Knoetze, 2022). Buddhist education, integral to the future of Buddhism, experienced shifts during this era. Additionally, it inspires people to embrace societal changes and form strong communities. Conversely, the ritual of saving ghosts overseas that has been established thus far has been limited to prayer activities and ascending requests to education and spiritual entities, all of which lack a comprehensive understanding of the fundamental cultural and spiritual context.

In recent years, there has been an increasing prevalence of religious radicalism and intolerance (Metcalf et al., 2023). Discrimination is known to flourish at a number of educational institutions. The underlying reasons and issues of intolerance in the worldwide educational system are intricate and multidimensional. The issue has surely been exacerbated by historical elements, including sociopolitical unrest, ingrained prejudice, and mistrust amongst religious and ethnic groups. Human existence is controversial because their personal experiences usually contradict their beliefs. Therefore, individuals' transformation must be in line with religious law (Perry & Longest, 2019). The sensation of attachment is further strengthened when group members grow to experience a strong sense of brotherhood with one another. Geary and Shinde (2021) found that Buddhist pilgrimage and ritual ecology have positive and significant effects on Buddhist attitudes and behaviour in India and Nepal. Although existing research has examined various aspects of leader characteristics that promote Buddhist behaviour, improvisational morals towards religious education are one personal characteristic of Buddhists that is not adequately investigated. Wong (2018) examines the social and political aspects of Chinese ethnic identities; however, the contribution of religious rituals to the preservation of experiential learning and morals is not extensively investigated.

Nai (2015) and Wang (2023) provide a historical view on the influence of Chinese monastic education; their study is retroactive and does not go into the modern dynamics of religious practices and moral aspects of students in Buddhist colleges. Perera (2023) likewise encounters comparable constraints, since the emphasis on the economic impact of the Chinese population takes precedence over the significant parts of their religious practices. Hill and Wooley (2022) focused on the interaction among childhood without mentioning the modification of religious ceremonies like. It also occurred in England, where religious education has a pivotal role among students in increasing engagement and personal response on social issues (Bowling, 2022; Parker, 2020). This phenomenon leads to a knowledge gap about the interconnectedness and dynamics of ethnic and religious identities within the Chinese. However, the authors neglect to consider investigating the role of religious education on Buddhist morals among students. A robust system is essential for showcasing teachers' scientific research achievements. Guangdong Buddhist University places significant emphasis on enhancing and fostering the scientific research capabilities of its faculty.

The urgency of this research is based on two main problems that have been identified. First, the high number of acts of violence in the name of religion that are still a reality in China indicates that efforts to prevent and eradicate religious-based intolerance still require serious attention. This phenomenon not only has a negative impact on social life but also has the potential to hinder the process of building a just and harmonious nation. Second, the weak academic climate that is moral courage and scouting behaviour in the higher education environment adds to the complexity of this problem. Higher education institutions, which should be a place for the creation of open and knowledge-based inter-religious dialogue, are still not optimal in developing an environment that supports freedom of thought and mutual respect for differences in beliefs. Specifically, there are three main focuses that form the basis for the formulation of this research problem: (i) This study attempts to describe how the level of tolerance and a tolerant academic climate are formed in the Chinese Buddhist monastic environment through the implementation of religious and peace education. This study includes an evaluation of the attitudes of students and academic staff in the context of pluralism and how peace education programs are implemented to create a harmonious environment. (ii) The second focus of this study is to identify factors that influence the formation of a tolerant academic climate in Chinese Buddhist monastic. This strategy involves developing curriculum, teaching methods, and religious literacy programs that can directly increase awareness and understanding of the importance of tolerance in academic life. This study aims to explore the extent to which the religious and peace education approach plays a role in strengthening attitudes of tolerance through religious literacy in strengthening a tolerant academic climate in school or higher education.

Additionally, the current study examines and validates the mediating role of moral courage on religious education, moral courage and scouting behaviour. Moral courage makes people stand for ethical decisions when facing opposition and rejection in retaliation (Evans & Karl, 2022). The kind of ethical people and cultural agents is moral courage, which means a willingness to confront unethical actions and systems regardless of the resulting penalties (Yuan et al., 2023). However, most of the religious education studies have investigated socio-demographic variables in the context of Christian and Buddhist religious education, and few observed the differences in the context of religious education and monastic. Therefore, this study further focuses on and intends to assess if education stakeholder differences (e.g., academic affair offices, deans, provosts, teachers, students, and volunteer teams) played a distinguishable role in developing Buddhist morals. Hence, this study offers the following research questions:

RQ1. Does religious education impact moral courage?

RQ2. Does religious education impact scouting behaviour toward moral courage?

To answer these questions, this study offers some contributions. First, it addresses religiosity and morality in the education field, particularly in Chinese Buddhist monastic education. It includes religious education and moral courage, which influence their scouting behaviour. Second, the exception of literature and studies concerning the effect of religious education on moral development is still limited. The result from this analysis uncovers the relationship between religious education and education stakeholders and offers a detailed view of the impact on mediator variables that have been neglected in preliminary studies. It can better understand the aspects that affect Buddhist attitudes, behaviour, and commitment to moral development. Third,

the result of a recent study has significant practical implications for boosting the moral development for the religious school.

2. Literature Review

Currently, the most common methods of preserving supernatural beings from foreign lands involve conducting religious ceremonies and beseeching spiritual creatures nearby. Traditional monastic education has played a pivotal role in Chinese Buddhism, encompassing cultural dissemination, social welfare, and environmental consciousness. Religious education plays an important role in the formation of a modern order of life in the midst of a complex social life toward peace action. Religious education is useful for: (i) increasing students' understanding of the importance of tolerance in religious and multicultural life; (ii) implementing peace education in an academic environment can strengthen the climate of tolerance in higher education; and (iii) increasing attitudes of mutual respect, mutual respect, and love for others among students (Fonseca & Jovchelovitch, 2024). Religious and moral education is a fundamental study to understand and apply the values of tolerance and moral development in an academic context.

2.1. Religious Education

One of the most important aspects of overall human development and well-being is moral and spiritual growth (Niklová & Hanesová, 2024). In this regard, the school enhances the influence of the family of origin and individual changes in the young person's emerging autonomy, but the process of moral formation begins with the family environment. There are plenty of challenges that religious education (RE) teachers are facing now, including how RE, as a subject in college, should effectively fulfill its role in promoting the development of profound humaneness, specifically of social skills, social information, social skills, and social competences (Liu & Liu, 2024). In addition to developing people's ties with religion, God, and themselves, it has a strong correlation with their communication patterns. As a result, it fosters spirituality, empathy, assertiveness, and cooperative partnerships. China's current educational reform can be characterized as a departure from the conventional educational model of memorization of information to the development of critical thinking abilities, social competency, and fundamental life skills, most of which are social.

Moral development can be mediated by spiritual growth and religious education involvement (Horowski, 2020; Steć & Kulik, 2021). Furthermore, independent personal spirituality has a good impact on societal conduct. The religious context can promote a sense of identity that transcends the self towards the social good (Nelson & Yang, 2023; Shamad et al., 2023). The process of promoting students' moral development also takes into account the instructor's own beliefs, morals, and religious affiliation but only if the teacher is receptive to criticism and open to dialogue. Religious and ethical education shouldn't be taught solely through traditional techniques, which aren't appropriate for the person as an agent. This also holds true for religious education, which needs to be focused on each student's unique spiritual requirements and soft skills.

During the Tang Dynasty, Chinese Buddhist monastic education was formed as Confucian scholars sought refuge in Buddhist temples amidst societal turmoil (Fayi, 2015). These temples evolved into educational institutions, offering courses in Buddhist scriptures and traditional Chinese culture (Borchert, 2020; Chen, 2021). The Opium War in 1840 marked a period of national

sovereignty loss for China, with Western powers introducing religious culture and establishing schools (Dongchu, 1974). The Qing Dynasty government felt threatened, fearing that foreign influence would destabilize the country. Buddhism, losing followers and facing a decline, was further impacted by the temple-based education movement initiated by Zhang Zhidong, which used temple property to fund schools (Forest, 2020). This pushed Buddhism into a dark abyss and paved the way for its revival and reform (Barrett, 2018; Kuan, 2016). The development of Buddhism was ironically facilitated by Christian missionary methods, such as school establishment and publication distribution (Schicketanz, 2017; Sheng, 2023).

In 1903, the “Temple Industry and Education” movement led to the establishing the first modern monk school in Changsha’s Kaifu Temple (Guo & Li, 2012). This sparked a wave of Buddhist education, with numerous schools and associations being founded, including the government-run Buddhist Teachers College (Isshiki, 2022; Keyworth, 2021). After the 1911 Revolution, the provisional government’s new education policies led to a surge in Buddhist colleges across China. However, the 1937 Japanese invasion severely damaged Buddhist education, leading to high dropout rates and faith crises. Despite these challenges, six new Buddhist colleges were established during this period (Sheng, 2021; J. Shi, 2019).

The Communist Party of China, adhering to Marxist principles, emphasizes freedom of religious belief, as outlined in the Constitution of the Chinese Soviet Republic adopted in 1931 (David, 2008). In the early days of the People’s Republic of China, the party continued to implement religious policies, deepening its understanding of religious issues. However, during the “Cultural Revolution,” the party made severe mistakes in implementing these policies. The Buddhist Association of China was established in 1953, marking a new stage for Buddhism. In 1957, “Left” ideas began to rise, leading to significant changes in the party’s guiding ideology in 1961. From 1961 to 1965, the central tasks in religious circles focused on education, implementing religious freedom policies, and adjusting relations with religious figures. However, religious policies were again attacked during the Four Cleans Up Movement in 1964.

Post-1965, extreme “left” ideas infringed upon religious rights, culminating in the 1966 “Cultural Revolution” that led to the closure of religious venues and the cessation of spiritual activities. Buddhist education stagnated until 1980 when the Chinese Buddhist Association, capitalizing on Deng Xiaoping’s reform and opening up, resumed teaching at the Chinese Buddhist College (Zhengguo, 2009). From 1980 to 1992, the Association held meetings and symposiums to develop Buddhist education at elementary, middle, and high levels (Deng, 1999). In 1986, a national seminar was held with representatives from various Buddhist colleges and the State Council’s Religious Affairs Bureau. Despite impressive development trends, gaps remained between Buddhist education and the goals of cultivating talents. A proposed solution was an education system connecting high, middle, and elementary schools with graduate classes at the Chinese Buddhist College. This system influenced curriculum setting, school construction, and monk training. Many Buddhist colleges were restored and established nationwide from the late 1980s to the early 1990s (Zhengguo, 2009).

Chinese Buddhist temple education, distinct from national education, can be considered religious (Loc, Tan, 2022). In a broad sense, religious education encompasses all religion-related educational systems and activities, while in a narrow sense, it refers to the education directly

undertaken by religious organizations (Stefania, 2017). According to Chinese regulations, religious schools are separate from the national education system, with qualifications applicable within religious circles (Lai, 2017). This separation respects and protects freedom of religious belief, preventing conflicts arising from promoting specific religious beliefs. Enrollment in higher religious colleges requires a secondary religious college or ordinary senior high school education (Hammerstrom, 2017). The role of Chinese Buddhism in the new era involves guiding Buddhist values to adapt to socialist society, requiring both tradition inheritance and innovative development. Scholars have researched how to guide religions to keep up with the times and meet new challenges while ensuring freedom of religious belief.

This study explores the historical development and educational reforms of Lingdong College of Guangdong Buddhist University from 2012 to 2022. To achieve this, historical research methods, documentary research, field surveys, and interviews will be employed to analyze the college's educational changes and its role in social change. Data and information will be collected and interpreted. The early research phase involves extensive collection of original documents, literature, and data from various sources, including online platforms and archives. This will provide insights into the college's educational history, including crucial time nodes, policies, cultural system changes, and social evolution. Interviews with relevant stakeholders will also be conducted to ensure the research's scientific validity and practicality.

3. Methodology

This research aims to produce a new learning model in the subject of Pancasila Education. This study describes the development process and feasibility of the new learning model and testing its effectiveness. The new learning model integrates the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), Local Wisdom, and Gamification (CERITALOGAM) approach. This research uses a research and development (R&D) approach to produce a learning model (Creswell, 2012). The learning model produced in this study is to develop students' multicultural competencies.

In this part, we begin by summarizing the data collection process. Subsequently, we conduct a descriptive analysis to elucidate the transformation of Buddhist temple education during a specific period. We explore the role of temple education within the context of Chinese characteristics in the new era and compare the operation of temple schools across different historical periods in Guangdong Province, China. Additionally, we integrate survey results, discuss the validity and credibility of the data analysis, and conclude by summarizing the research objectives and corresponding findings.

3.1. Descriptive Method

From 2012 to 2022, a transformative decade has marked the evolution of socialism with Chinese characteristics into a new era. During this period, various facets of society—including livelihoods, religion, education, and science—underwent significant changes. While China upholds religious freedom, it recognizes that religion must adapt to contemporary developments without compromising national unity. Consequently, religious education has emerged as a crucial topic.

Buddhist education, integral to the future of Buddhism, experienced shifts during this era. Our research delves into the evolving trends in monastic education, examining their specific manifestations and impacts within Buddhist monasteries in Guangdong. We conduct comparative

studies on student demographics, teaching staff, training models, and effectiveness. By analyzing these changes, we gain insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by Buddhist monastic education in Guangdong. Our focus extends to emerging concepts and roles within monastic education and its relationship with broader social change.

Through meticulous comparative and descriptive analyses, we unveil the transformation process of Buddhist monastic education in the new era of China. This contributes to a deeper understanding of Buddhist monasteries' role in Chinese society and fosters comprehensive insights into the development of monastic education.

3.2. Data Sources and Collection Methods

With its rich history of Buddhist temples, Guangdong Province faced challenges in preserving historical documents due to talent shortages and administrative ambiguities. However, recent advancements have eased data collection difficulties, particularly in temple archives management and online platforms. Our study draws from diverse sources, including Lingdong College archives, Guangdong Buddhist College's WeChat platform, official government websites, and Buddhist forums. We analyze admission brochures, real-time course news, policy documents, scientific research, and participant observations. Through this comprehensive approach, we explore the evolving landscape of Buddhist education in Guangdong, shedding light on its role within Chinese society.

From 2012 to 2022, the author engaged in participant observation to gather valuable insights. As an employee of Lingdong College at Guangdong Buddhist College, the author had access to publicly available information within the institution. During this period, the author actively communicated with colleagues, including college deans, faculty members, current students, and leaders of the Chaozhou Buddhist Association (the list of exchange partners is in Table 1). These interactions provided a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by Buddhist temples running educational institutions across various periods. By studying these experiences, the author aimed to uncover effective coping strategies and shed light on the complexities inherent in this unique context.

Table 1. The list of exchange partners

Unit	Position	Name
Lingdong Buddhist University Headquarters	Academic Affairs Office	Master M
Lingtung College	Dean	Master D
	Provost	Master T
	teacher	Master X
		Master Y
	student	Master M
		Master X
		Master F
	Master J	
Nun college	Provost	Master C
Caoxi college	Provost	Master C
Cloud Gate College	Provost	Master X
Chaozhou Buddhist Association	office	Mr. F
Chaozhou Kaiyuan Temple	Volunteer team	Mr. C
		Mr. L
		Mr. D

During data collection, we encountered challenges related to unclear information, particularly regarding detailed college data. The author's research focuses on Buddhist temple education, aiming to comprehensively discuss its role and characteristics in Guangdong during the new era. Despite these difficulties, the author actively explores development trends and contributes ideas for future research. By collecting relevant literature, books, and news, the author has developed a research concept to understand critical issues in this field.

Master Taixu's innovative approach revolutionized Buddhist education in the Republic of China, breaking away from traditional models (Chen, 2021). Over time, Buddhist education has evolved, encompassing historical development, school management models, educational content, ideas, and target audiences. Chinese Buddhist sects, including exchanges with Tibetan and Southern Buddhism, contribute to this rich diversity (Kuan, 2016). While this study provides a macro-level summary, further research is needed to explore educational content in greater detail and present the distinct characteristics of Chinese Buddhist education.

3.3. Data Analysis

In our data collection and analysis process, we systematically classified relevant literature from 2012 to 2022. We categorized research materials based on policies, teaching content, faculty, student demographics, and training outcomes. To delve into the variables' motivations, processes, and results, we divided the decade into two two-year periods and selected five data groups. Our analysis focuses on several aspects:

1. Contextual Integration: We consolidate and compare data variables across different contexts, revealing the evolving trends in Buddhist monastic education in Guangdong.
2. Motivation Analysis: We explore the driving forces behind changes in Buddhist monastic education, including policy shifts and societal needs.
3. Process Examination: We investigate the implementation of Buddhist monastic education, considering the evolving roles of teachers and students.
4. Impact Assessment: We assess how these changes influence Buddhist monasteries and Chinese society by evaluating cultivation effectiveness.

Our comprehensive analysis aims to provide valuable insights into the shifting concepts and roles of Buddhist monastic education in Guangdong during China's new era.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. The Concise Historical Evolution of Lingdong College

Lingdong College, founded in 1928, began as the Jueshi Primary School within Guochan Temple in Kaiyuan Town, Chaoan County. It marked the inception of Guangdong's first Buddhist educational institution. In 1933, the Lingdong Buddhist Academy was established at Kaiyuan Zhenguo Zen Temple, led by Dharma Masters from the Minnan Buddhist Academy. Their mission was to spread Buddhist wisdom across society. Despite challenges, Lingdong College persisted. In 1951, it opened a public night school, teaching topics like "Political Current Affairs" and "Modern Buddhism." Reestablished in 1988, Lingdong College now thrives as a bastion of knowledge, offering 4-year undergraduate programs and nurturing devoted monks and scholars.

The Evolution of Religious Policies in China has significantly impacted religious freedom and practice in the People's Republic of China. From the Republic's early days to the present, key milestones have shaped this landscape. In 1949, the Common Program of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference laid the groundwork for evolving religious policies, emphasizing fundamental rights and ethnic minority autonomy. In 2004, the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution recognized religious believers as contributors to socialist development, safeguarding religious freedom while balancing state interests.

From 2012 to 2022, the Chinese government has issued limited policies and regulations specifically addressing religious education. These include six departmental regulations, six normative, and six regulatory documents. While the landscape remains dynamic, these policy developments underscore the ongoing dialogue between religious institutions and the state as

China navigates its path toward a harmonious coexistence of faith and governance (refer to Table 2).

Table 2. Number of Policies and Regulations (2012 to 2022)

Years	Departmental rules	Normative documents	Government information topics
2012	"Measures for the Awarding of Degrees in Religious Colleges" (Trial Implementation), "Measures for the Qualification Recognition and Professional Title Review and Appointment of Teachers in Religious Colleges" (Trial Implementation)	"Notice on Further Solving Social Security Issues for Religious Clergy" and "Opinions on Encouraging and Regulating Religious Circles to Engage in Public Welfare and Charitable Activities"	"2012 National Religious Work Conference", "The Third World Buddhist Forum," "Religious Policies and Regulations Study Month"
2013		Implement the "Opinions on Properly Solving Social Security Issues for Religious Clergy"	
2016		"Recommendations on carrying out in-depth training and practicing socialist core values activities in the religious community"; Notice on the issuance of the "Seventh Five-Year Plan for Legal Publicity and Education of the National Religious Work System"	
2017	"Religious Affairs Regulations"		
2019		The "Notice of the General Office of the United Front Work Department of the Central Committee on Strengthening the Teaching of Public Courses in Religious Colleges" was released; based on this notice, Guangdong Province formulated the "Work Plan on Organizing Ideological and Political Education and Other Public Courses into Religious	

	Colleges" and carried out "delivery of courses to schools" Activity.
2021	Measures for the Management of Religious Faculty; "Measures for the Management of Religious Colleges". According to the relevant provisions of the "Measures," the Guangdong Provincial Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission established an administrative entrustment management mechanism for religious colleges. It explored innovative management models for religious colleges.
2022	"Measures for the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services"

Table 1 shows that in the intricate landscape of religious education policies in China, a series of pivotal documents and regulations have significantly influenced the training of spiritual professionals and the management of religious institutions.

The concise overview of key policy developments related to religious education from the early 21st century to the present: In 2013, the "Measures for Qualification Recognition and Professional Title Review and Appointment of Teachers in Religious Schools" established rigorous standards for selecting competent educators within religious schools (Zuoan, 2013). These measures emphasized ethical conduct and pedagogical excellence. Between 2013 and 2017, additional policies addressed practical aspects of religious life, including elderly care and medical support for clergy (Keqiang, 2017). These holistic approaches reflected a commitment to the well-being of religious personnel. The landmark "Regulations on Religious Affairs" in 2017 comprehensively reshaped religious governance, covering groups, institutions, venues, clergy, and practices (Yuan, 2013a, 2013b). Specific provisions have been focused on managing religious properties (Zuoan, 2021). In 2021, the "Religious College Management Measures" release marked a critical shift, particularly for Buddhist monastic education (Zuoan, 2022). In 2022, the "Internet Religious Information Service Management Measures" impacted online educational dissemination,

safeguarding orthodox religious information channels (Wang, 2021). Temples received information licenses, fostering ongoing reform within religious education.

In short, China's evolving religious policies reflect a delicate balance between tradition, modernity, and governance, shaping the contours of religious education and practice in the 21st century.

4.2. Teacher Team Construction

The teaching team plays a pivotal role within an educational institution, significantly influencing the quality of education and post-graduation recognition. In 2012, measures were introduced to certify teacher qualifications, leading to the first assessment conducted in 2016 for 101 applicants from Guangdong Buddhist College in Guangdong Province. This assessment occurred across five sites, each overseen by representatives from the Guangdong Provincial Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission and the Bureau of Ethnic and Religious Affairs. The current teaching team at Guangdong Buddhist University has been meticulously optimized, ensuring a well-balanced distribution of age, academic expertise, and research focus. Comprising 146 full-time faculty members and 51 external instructors, many of whom hold academic positions at esteemed universities, the team strives for excellence. However, it is essential to note that despite the high caliber of Buddhist colleges, they lack a dedicated Ministry of Religious Education, rendering teacher evaluations incomparable to those conducted in conventional colleges. To address this disparity, Guangdong Buddhist College has established its own internal teacher evaluation system (refer to table 3).

Table 3. Five-year plan for the teaching work of Guangdong Buddhist University

Years	The goal of building	Safety precautions
2009--2013	<p>Infiltrate professionalism into the teaching of professional courses and combine professional quality training with professional education;</p> <p>Improve the professional quality of the teaching team and provide teacher guarantee for the cultivation of professional quality of monks; educate students to pay equal attention to practice and practice;</p>	<p>Establish a two-level management mechanism of one primary and one auxiliary; establish a teaching incentive mechanism; establish a teaching quality assurance mechanism.</p>
2014--2018	<p>Establish Buddhist specialty majors; build high-quality courses; build public elective courses; compile lesson plans and teaching plans; innovate talent training models; and create digital teaching resources. Integrate professionalism into the teaching of professional courses, combine professional quality training with professional education to improve the professional quality of the teaching team, and provide teacher guarantee for the cultivation of professional quality among student monks.</p>	<p>Establish a teaching funding mechanism ;</p> <p>Establish a teaching incentive mechanism ;</p> <p>Establish a teaching quality assurance mechanism</p>
2019--2023	<p>Add more patriotic education courses to improve students' patriotic spirit.</p> <p>Establish Buddhist specialty majors such as Madhyamaka major and Abhidharma major to reserve reserve force for the teaching team of Lingdong College;</p> <p>Build high-quality courses represented by courses such as "Middle Way," "Explanation of the Deep Tantric Sutra," and "Kushashastra"; build high-level public video courses;</p> <p>Based on the previous five-year plan, a more professional syllabus and teaching plan were compiled for each course;</p> <p>Based on the previous five-year plan, we will continue to innovate the talent training model.</p> <p>Add patriotic education courses.</p> <p>Strengthen professional quality training.</p>	<p>Improve the incentive distribution mechanism based mainly on the number of courses, number of monks, teacher structure, and resource utilization efficiency.</p> <p>Further, strengthen the construction of teacher ethics and vigorously commend teachers who have made outstanding contributions to teaching and talent training.</p> <p>Actively promote "evaluation of teaching, evaluation of learning, evaluation of courses, and evaluation of management work" to form a three-dimensional and multi-level operating mechanism for joint management of teaching work.</p>

This study examines critical variables related to teacher management and security within the context of Guangdong Buddhist University. Notably, an analysis of the institution's five-year plans reveals a discernible shift in approach. Specifically, the post-2014 five-year plan demonstrates a marked emphasis on systematic rigor. This strategic evolution aligns with the university's commitment to adapt to contemporary developments.

A robust system is essential for showcasing teachers' scientific research achievements. Guangdong Buddhist University places significant emphasis on enhancing and fostering the scientific research capabilities of its faculty. To this end, educators are encouraged to engage in scholarly pursuits, including the interpretation of teachings and canons and academic research. These endeavors align with the overarching goal of adhering to the direction of the Sinicization of Buddhism.

In recent years, the university has implemented several proactive measures. Annual ideological conferences and political training sessions are organized across various colleges. Additionally, faculty members are selectively enrolled in specialized training courses focused on enhancing their professional knowledge and teaching skills. These initiatives collectively contribute to elevating the institution's overall teaching and management standards (refer to table 4).

Table 4. Guangdong Buddhist University Teacher Training Status List

Type	Training Content	Time	Join Personnel	College	Place
Political	"Religious Affairs Regulations"	2018	All	Colleges	Colleges
	"Religious Policies and Regulations"	2019	All	Colleges	Colleges
	"Measures for the Administration of Religious Groups"	2020	All	Colleges	Colleges
	"Religious School Management Measures"	2021	All	Colleges	Colleges
Professional and Teaching Skills	Buddhist lectures and seminars	2017	Zhenchen	caoxi	Hangzhou Buddhist College
	Education, educational psychology	2019	Longzhao	caoxi	South China Normal University
		2019	Guo Gang		
	library cataloging	2019	Macroscopic	caoxi	Hangzhou Buddhist College
	National Buddhist Ancient Books Restoration Technology Training Course	2017	Chang Le	caoxi	Chengdu
	School leaders and teachers	2017	Macroscopic	caoxi	Guangzhou Society of School Socialism
Religious School Management System Training course	2021	Chang Hao	caoxi	Guangzhou	

In pursuing educational excellence, Lingdong College has implemented a robust system of continuous professional training for its faculty. Teachers elevate their academic standards through targeted training and scholarly studies and cultivate innovative teaching methodologies and educational philosophies. As a result, students benefit from a more enriching and high-quality learning experience.

This ongoing professional development mechanism serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it enhances the individual capacities of teachers, equipping them with the latest pedagogical insights and research findings. Secondly, it collectively strengthens the teaching team, fostering collaboration among educators. Consequently, Lingdong College's commitment to instructional improvement remains steadfast, ensuring a sustained trajectory of enhanced teaching quality.

4.3. Curriculum Design

Several critical factors, including historical context, cultural influences, and the professional backgrounds of educators, shape monastic education courses. Lingdong College, affiliated with Guangdong Buddhist College, exemplifies this interplay. During its inception in the Republic of China, Lingdong College was significantly influenced by its core team of teachers, including the inaugural dean and provost (Leibold, 2024). Esteemed disciples of Master Taixu, such as Zhifeng, Tongyi, and Jichen, spearheaded the reform of Buddhist education in China. Their commitment led to the establishment of the school magazine "Renhai Deng," which featured articles on Buddhist reform and monk education. These articles, characterized by their incisive language and clear perspectives, reflected the changing times. Against this backdrop, the development of Buddhism emerged as the central theme in Lingdong College's educational framework, as evidenced by shifts in the curriculum.

In the early years of the People's Republic of China, Lingdong College aligned its curriculum with the guidelines set by the Buddhist Association of China. Precisely, it adhered to the third-level study curriculum, emphasizing the dissemination of fundamental Buddhist inner scriptures. However, in the contemporary era, Lingdong College has witnessed an expansion of its talent pool, resulting in a more specialized and professional curriculum. This comparative analysis examines the courses offered during the college's initial establishment, its subsequent re-establishment, and the present day (He, 2024). Focusing on Buddhist and social courses, we explore the institution's transformative journey and the evolving landscape of monastic education (refer to Table 5 and 6).

Table 5. Horizontal comparison chart of Lingtung College’s Buddhist major courses

Course Period	Initial Period	Resumption Period	New Era Period
Type of study system	Class A (junior high school), Class B (senior elementary school), Research Department	Undergraduate	Undergraduate, graduate
Curriculum	Theory of the Hundred Dharma Mingmen, Novice Laws, Introduction to Buddhism, Practice, Dharma-Appearance Consciousness-only, Dharma-Nature Prajna System, Hinayana Kusana System, Chinese Buddhism Department, Integrated Application Department, and Research on the Five Systems.	Basics of Pure Land, History of Indian Buddhism, Essays on Encouraging Bodhicitta, Novice Rituals, Basics of Buddhism, Universal Doors, Basics of Pure Land Studies, Miscellaneous Agama Sutras, History of Chinese Buddhism, Interpretation of Deep Esoteric Sutras, History of Tiantai Teaching, Four Commentaries on Sutras	An outline of eight sects, history of Indian Buddhism, novice rituals, the path to Buddhahood, a brief introduction to the stages of practice, basics of Buddhism, meditation, Brahma Chan, Mahayana theory on the Five Aggregates, Jungle Rules, Yinming, Zhonglun Qingmushi, and the process of Pure Land religion, Photographs of Mahayana, Selected Readings of Agama, Theory of Belief in Mahayana, Fundamental Management of Buddhism, Thirty Verses of Consciousness Only, Reading at Home, Brahma Net Sutra, Interpretation of Deep Esoteric Sutras, Vitanology, Selected Readings of Tantra Sutra, Miscellaneous Collections, religious ethics

Lingdong Buddhist College initially focused on social courses, reflecting the low cultural level of monks and the need for primary education. In 1935, a research department was established to provide specialized Buddhist training. Post-resumption, the curriculum expanded significantly to meet the demand for more professional Buddhist teachings. The new era saw an increase in ideological and political courses, reflecting a shift in talent cultivation strategy. Over time, the curriculum has diversified and deepened, focusing on religious and social courses and emphasizing political ideology and physical training (Edelglass, 2003; Kaplan, 2020). The introduction of modern courses like “Computer Theory and Practice,” “Psychology,” and “Speech and Eloquence” showcases the college’s commitment to cultivating diversified talents and keeping pace with the times.

Table 6. Horizontal comparison chart of Lingtung College's Buddhist Society Courses

Course Period	Initial Period	Resumption Period	New Era Period
Type of study system	Class A (junior high school), Class B (senior elementary school), Research Department	Undergraduate	Undergraduate, graduate
Curriculum	Education, Geography, Civics, Physical Education, Composition, Art, Arithmetic, National History, Chinese Language, Chinese Language, Perception Conversation, Calendar, History, Chinese Conversation.	English, history, college Chinese.	China's United Front theory and practice, situation and policy, Mao Zedong's Thought and the theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics, English, physical education, college Chinese, computer theory and practice, introduction to Chinese culture, speech and eloquence, Chinese religious patriotism, overview of contemporary China and world religions, thesis guidance, psychology, outline of modern Chinese history, selected Chinese religious literature since modern times,

Monastic education at Lingdong College has undergone significant transformations, shaped by historical context, cultural shifts, and educational imperatives. In this analysis, we explore the changing landscape of courses offered at Lingdong College, tracing its evolution from its early establishment to present.

Foundational Years and Cultural Popularization Courses: During the initial phase of Lingdong College, social courses constituted a substantial portion of the core curriculum. These courses primarily focused on cultural popularization, reflecting the prevailing cultural milieu. Notably, the monks' overall cultural proficiency during this period was modest. The college's primary objective was to provide basic education to young monks while enhancing their understanding of Buddhist teachings. It was not until 1935 that Lingdong Buddhist College established a dedicated research department. This department, staffed by eminent scholars of the time, exclusively focused on Buddhist courses, laying the groundwork for specialized talent training.

Resumption and the Rise of Buddhist Education: Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Lingdong College witnessed a notable shift. The proportion of Buddhist education courses significantly increased. This change can be attributed to societal advancements—where cultural literacy improved—and the growing acceptance of professional Buddhist studies. The scarcity of proficient Buddhist scholars at the dawn of New China prompted

the college to diversify its curriculum, transcending traditional sectarian boundaries. Consequently, an academic Buddhist education system emerged, emphasizing a broader range of courses.

The New Era and Strategic Adjustments: Recently, Lingdong College has further enriched its course offerings. Ideological and political courses now occupy a larger share of the curriculum. Additionally, the selection of specialized Buddhist courses has expanded, laying a robust foundation for nurturing talents in the contemporary era. The college's commitment to adaptability is evident in its inclusion of modern subjects such as "Computer Theory and Practice," "Psychology," and "Speech and Eloquence." These innovative courses align with Lingdong's evolving educational philosophy and underscore its dedication to cultivating multifaceted talents in response to societal demands.

In summary, Lingdong College's curriculum reflects a dynamic interplay between tradition and progress, emphasizing religious studies and broader intellectual pursuits. As the institution continues to evolve, its commitment to holistic education remains steadfast, ensuring that it equips students with the knowledge and skills needed to thrive in a changing world.

4.4. Changes in enrollment and training models

In social and religious education, the significance of policy guidance, teacher development, and the cultivation of exceptional student cohorts is paramount. Guangdong Buddhist University Lingdong College has undertaken progressive modifications in its enrollment process to meet the escalating demands of talent training in the contemporary era, with the transformations being elucidated through a comparative analysis of admission prerequisites across various academic years (refer to Table 7).

Table 7. Enrollment and Training Model

Years	Class	Admissions Requirements	Number of People	Entrance Exam
2012	Undergraduate studies last four years; Preparatory studies last for two years.	Have a junior high school diploma or above or equivalent education; be between 18 and 28 years old.	There are 30 monks each in the undergraduate class and the preparatory class.	Buddhist knowledge, practical politics, Chinese language, history and geography, English, lesson recitation, etc. There are two forms: written test and oral test.
2015		Student monks are required to have been a monk for more than one year, have a junior high school education or above, and be aged 18-30 years old.		Written test (Buddhism, Chinese, current affairs, and politics), interview.
2016		Applicants should be between 18 and 32 years old and not in a relationship (can be relaxed appropriately for those with expertise); those with professional expertise (such as art, architecture, foreign languages, vocal music, sports, etc.) will be given priority in admission.		
2017	The undergraduate course lasts four years	Memorize morning and evening homework (newly added)	30 student monks	
2018	The three-year study period of the Zhongguo postgraduate course	The age is between 22 and 35; the age limit can be relaxed to 40 years old in particular circumstances. Applicants should have a previous undergraduate degree from a Buddhist college or a social university undergraduate degree	10 students (no limit to male or female)	Submit a recent academic paper and mail it with the above materials to the Buddhist College. (Academic papers must comply with educational standards and must not be plagiarized. They must be mainly about Buddhist content and more than 5,000 words.
2021	The undergraduate course lasts four years Abhidharma Teacher Class lasts three years The three-year schooling system for Mahogany Teachers' Classes	Age between 18 and 35 (can be relaxed appropriately for those with expertise), no marriage relationship.	Undergraduate enrollment: 30 students; A total of 30 students are enrolled in the teaching class	Examination Content Written test: Fundamentals of Buddhism. Interview: morning and evening homework, daily dignity.

Guangdong Buddhist University Lingdong College has adapted its curriculum to meet the demands of talent training in the new era. Despite maintaining a stable enrollment quota, the college has made significant adjustments, such as introducing a Mathematics seminar and canceling the preparatory class. Reflecting on the need for monk education to align with contemporary knowledge, the college refines teaching strategies to integrate societal needs and enhance Buddhist education. Policies enacted between 2012 and 2022 have safeguarded religious freedom while fostering correct school management. This unique approach promotes Buddhist ideals of equality, harmony, compassion, and kindness, contributing to social progress and harmony. The college's teacher training plan ensures the welfare of the Buddhist teacher group and provides a standardized basis for learning and life in small Buddhist schools.

Guangdong Buddhist University Lingdong College ensures healthy operation through scientific and sound system construction, guided by the Chinese proverb "There is no circle without rules." These regulations provide robust support for teaching and management, laying the groundwork for sustainable school development. Over time, this process is expected to continue improving. In teacher training, the college enhances curriculum design, challenges the proportion of social courses, and introduces special courses based on societal needs. However, course content still faces the challenge of being out of touch with society. Future research should quantitatively study the output of monastic education talent training and the outcomes of Buddhist monastery education to understand the actual effects of education fully.

The current curriculum design reveals that education in Chinese Buddhist monasteries progresses slowly and seems to have lost its initial reform drive. To better meet future challenges, reviewing and adjusting the curriculum content is necessary, making it more relevant to modern societal needs and ensuring the education system keeps pace with the times. This will inject new vitality and innovative spirit into monastic education. Regarding student enrollment and training, Guangdong Buddhist College Lingdong College adopts a relatively fixed enrollment number, equivalent to elite training. This intensive education model has performed well, especially in establishing the Madhyamaka and Abhidhamma Studies classes. This recruitment and training strategy has brought significant achievements to the educational career of Guangdong Buddhist College Lingdong College.

4.5. Interview Results

4.5.1. Purpose of School, Kinds of Training, and Characteristics of Buddhist Education

The excerpts highlight the core objectives of Buddhist education, emphasizing the cultivation of monks with a proficient understanding of Buddhism and ethical and political integrity. Additionally, the training aims to foster meaningful interactions between Buddhist college students and society. The characteristics of Buddhist education encompass a holistic approach that integrates spiritual development, intellectual inquiry, and practical skills.

Teacher Y: Patriotism education is a crucial part of our curriculum at the school. Alongside core courses like "China's United Front Theory and Practice" and "Mao Zedong Thought," students engage in extracurricular activities, applying diverse teaching methods to nurture

patriotism. Our institution also hosts themed events and cultural activities, fostering civic consciousness and informed citizenship (Discussion time: April 12, 2023).

Teacher C: Lingdong Buddhist University's schools have the autonomy to create distinct platforms, continually learn from experience, innovate models, and nurture Buddhist talents. By embracing ongoing experimentation and innovation, we can advance Buddhism in the new era, expanding its reach and depth. Patriotism education is an integral part of our curriculum at Guangdong Buddhist University. In addition to core courses like "China's United Front Theory and Practice" and "Mao Zedong Thought," students actively participate in extracurricular activities, applying diverse teaching methods to cultivate their sense of patriotism. Our institution hosts themed events and cultural activities, fostering civic consciousness and informed citizenship. Recently, teachers and students have engaged in social welfare practices such as poverty alleviation, elderly care, and nursing home visits. (Discussion time: 9:00 on June 18, 2023).

The individual schools within Guangdong Buddhist University have the autonomy to create unique platforms, continuously learn from experience, innovate models, and nurture Buddhist talents. Embracing ongoing experimentation and innovation can propel Buddhism into a new era, expanding its influence and depth.

4.5.2. The practical content and the dropout rate

Deputy Dean Master D: Buddhist College students delve into scriptures while acquiring essential religious research skills, interpreting catechism and rules, and engaging in religious education. Upon graduation, they can lead sermons, oversee temple activities, and guide believers in practices such as chanting Buddhist chants, teaching the three refuges, and applying their knowledge effectively (Discussion time: 15:00 on April 1, 2023).

Master M: Since its establishment in 2012, Lingdong Buddhist College has trained approximately 3,000 graduates. Notably, nearly 900 of these graduates have received annual outstanding graduate awards. Most graduates excel in employment, with many remaining within various colleges, engaging in educational work, or holding significant positions in monasteries, Buddhist colleges, and Buddhist groups across different provinces. Overall, Lingdong Buddhist College's performance in student training, which is aligned with contemporary needs, is commendable. The student pass rate is 94.25%, with 98% completing their studies. However, the dropout rate for boys' schools exceeds 15%, while for girls, it remains at 3% (Discussion time: 10:00 on May 2, 2023).

The dropout rate highlights the need to optimize the educational model in Buddhist colleges. To address this, colleges should prioritize student well-being, adapt to the evolving needs of young individuals, and refine teaching strategies. Real-time data collection and monitoring of graduate employment outcomes are crucial. Fortunately, Guangdong Buddhist College boasts positive employment statistics, with a high rate of outstanding graduates. Most exceptional students remain within the college or pursue roles in other Buddhist institutions or education. While the

college has achieved commendable educational outcomes, ongoing attention to dropout rates and continuous model optimization is essential for student satisfaction and overall educational quality.

4.5.3. Academic contributions and training results

The Sinicization of religion significantly influences Buddhist colleges by integrating Buddhist concepts into Chinese society and fostering unique Chinese Buddhist schools.

Master B: Our college mainly carries out intensive study months and daily courses related to policies and regulations. Moreover, I saw that a cultural landscape of Chinese Buddhist patriotic and religious stories was added to the campus, and there were some promotional signs for cultural concepts (Discussion time: 15:20 on May 4, 2023).

Lingdong Buddhist College has implemented strategies to enhance the quality of its educational programs, including increasing academic activities, enhancing teacher training, improving curriculum management, and encouraging student participation in competitions and publications.

Master Z: Since 2014, Guangdong Buddhist College has been attentive to curriculum adjustments. Following the merging of four Buddhist colleges, they harmonized course proportions across branches. The current curriculum emphasizes ideological and political courses (e.g., Mao Zedong Thought, current affairs politics, legal knowledge, religious regulations), cultural and artistic subjects (such as college Chinese, calligraphy, music, and general history of China), and practical training (including meditation and martial arts)(Discussion time: 16:07 on May 8, 2023).

Lingdong Buddhist University takes a multifaceted approach to enhancing the quality of its educational programs. Internally, they optimize the curriculum by emphasizing ideological and political courses, refining cultural and artistic subjects, and enhancing practical training. The college also encourages student participation through scholarships, campus improvements, and legal education. Externally, they collaborate with various sects to supplement course materials and employ modern management practices for teaching material construction. During this period, Buddhist colleges embraced information technology, aligning with the “Chinese Dream” concept and elevating teacher standards. Additionally, they focus on nurturing patriotic, religious, and professional students while promoting institutional awareness and legal compliance.

6. Discussion

In 2017, the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China incorporated Xi Jinping's Thoughts on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era into the Party Constitution, serving as a guiding principle for achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation (Rowe et al., 2024). This thought emphasizes comprehensive economic, political, cultural, social, and ecological development. Additionally, it underscores the importance of unity, adherence to law, and strict party governance (Lu & Sheng, 2024). Meanwhile, religious institutions, including monasteries and Buddhist academies, have responded by resisting commercialization, promoting environmental awareness, and actively embracing Sinicization (Xu, 2024). These efforts align with the broader goal of contributing to a modern socialist China and realizing the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation.

Lingdong Buddhist College and its affiliated branches have adapted their educational approaches to align with national policies and cultivate responsible citizens. Their focus includes (1) Collaborating with social universities, the college hires professional teachers to elevate students' Buddhist literacy and enhance their social and cultural awareness (Edwards, 2024; J. Li et al., 2023); (2) a dedicated team translates essential Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit into Chinese (Z. Li, 2023), promoting cross-cultural exchange and preserving China's heritage; (3) through lecture exchanges and debate competitions, the college invigorates its educational environment and identifies monks capable of spreading the Dharma (Vu et al., 2023). The curriculum follows a 7:2:1 arrangement, with students engaging in 7 Buddhist professional courses, 2 cultural courses, and 1 ideological and political course (Peng et al., 2024). This ensures their understanding of national and religious policies, equipping them for responsible temple work. Since its merger in 2012, the college has refined its systems, building upon earlier foundations.

Lingdong Buddhist College has systematically enhanced its operations, emphasizing scientific management from daily administration to teaching practices. Despite its smaller size than other Buddhist schools, our comprehensive system benefits educators and students by providing clear standards for learning and life. Traditional Chinese educational principles underscore the importance of well-defined rules, contributing to the institution's health and growth (L. Shi et al., 2023). As we continue to evolve, further refinements in scientific construction lie ahead. Analyzing the reform concepts from 2012 to 2022, Guangdong Buddhist University prioritizes nurturing four types of talents: those who are politically reliable, religiously accomplished, morally grounded, and capable of serving the masses during critical moments (Lu & Sheng, 2024; Vu et al., 2023).

Regarding overall institutional development, our school adheres to regulations governing religious schools. Our educational policy emphasizes cultivating expertise in Buddhist studies alongside robust ideological and political education. Religion and politics significantly impact human life and production (J. Li et al., 2023; Rowe et al., 2024). Equipping students with both knowledge domains empowers them to make meaningful contributions to society.

7. Conclusion

In the dynamic landscape of the new era, Guangdong Buddhist University Lingdong College has adeptly steered through a decade marked by both challenges and opportunities. Its strategic responses have been multifaceted, encompassing curriculum diversification, enhanced training methodologies, community engagement, and a commitment to continuous innovation. However, despite commendable efforts, Buddhist institutions continue to grapple with several critical issues, including talent diversity, technology integration, and societal impact.

Talent Diversity and Training: Lingdong College recognizes that a diverse talent pool is essential for the vitality of Buddhist education. As societal expectations evolve, the college has proactively broadened its curriculum to accommodate a broader range of student interests and backgrounds. While maintaining a solid foundation in Buddhist studies, Lingdong College now offers interdisciplinary courses that intersect with philosophy, psychology, and cultural studies. This deliberate diversification aims to nurture well-rounded graduates who can engage with contemporary challenges while upholding traditional values.

Technology Integration and Educational Avenues: The digital age demands an agile response from educational institutions. Lingdong College has embraced modern technology, integrating it seamlessly into its pedagogical practices. From online learning platforms to interactive virtual classrooms, the college leverages digital tools to enhance student engagement and facilitate lifelong learning. Furthermore, Lingdong College has expanded its educational avenues beyond the physical campus. Collaborations with international universities, virtual exchange programs, and open-access resources ensure that Buddhist education transcends geographical boundaries.

Strengthening the Interplay: Buddhism and Other Disciplines: Lingdong College recognizes that studying Buddhism cannot exist in isolation. To enrich students' intellectual experiences, the college actively fosters interdisciplinary dialogues. Courses now explore intersections between Buddhist thought and fields such as ethics, environmental studies, and social justice. By encouraging critical inquiry and cross-disciplinary exploration, Lingdong College prepares its graduates to engage meaningfully with contemporary global challenges.

Social Values and Harmonious Progress: Beyond the classroom, Lingdong College emphasizes cultivating Buddhist social values. Students actively participate in community service, environmental stewardship, and interfaith dialogues. These experiences reinforce the principles of compassion and altruism and empower students to contribute positively to society. Lingdong College envisions a future where graduates bridge tradition and modernity, fostering social harmony and sustainable progress.

In short, Lingdong College's trajectory lies at the intersection of tradition and innovation. By preserving the essence of Buddhist culture while adapting to societal needs, the college remains committed to shaping compassionate, informed, and socially conscious leaders for the ever-evolving world.

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