



## **The Soteriological and Methodological Shifts of Engaged Buddhism - Renewing the Dharma and Reinventing Buddhist Studies**

The evolution of Engaged Buddhism constitutes a contemporary renewal of the religious heritage of the Buddha-dharma. Buddhism has traditionally been perceived as a socially inept religion of monastic meditative withdrawal. Engaged Buddhism, however, presents a new theoretical and experiential Buddhism, which is being actualised beyond monastic walls and off the meditation cushion. A 'soteriological shift' underlies these developments; the traditional spiritual quest for metaphysical liberation has been repositioned within the mundane world, emphasising the liberation of all beings from violence, injustice or oppression. Indeed, while Buddhism itself is being renewed, Engaged Buddhist praxis enacts attempts to transform and renew the cultural settings of its contexts.

The development of the discourse of Engaged Buddhism has occurred in conjunction with certain methodological advancements within Buddhist Studies. The 'post-Orientalist' deconstruction of the notion of 'original Buddhism' as an historic artefact recognises the multiplicity of 'Buddhisms' in the world. This has encouraged a methodological move away from the traditional textual and philological methods of Buddhology, towards the exploration of the relationship between Buddhism and its cultural contexts. The movements of Engaged Buddhism invite analysis from this new methodological perspective. Such investigations are contributing to the development of Buddhist Studies, which is becoming a multidisciplinary comparative endeavour, accepting and incorporating new kinds of source material and modes of discourse.

This paper will examine how the soteriological shift of Engaged Buddhism is renewing and repositioning the Dharma, while methodologically advancing the investigation of the contextual meaning and function of Buddhism as a living and evolving faith.