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Buddhism in the United Kingdom:  
Socially Engaged Buddhism, a Case Study

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# The Sociological Implications for Contemporary Buddhism in the United Kingdom: Socially Engaged Buddhism, a Case Study

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## **Introduction**

Buddhist Studies has, for well over a century, been seen by many in the academy as the domain of philologists and others whose skills are essentially in the translation and interpretation of texts derived from ancient languages like classical Chinese, Pāli, Sanskrit, and its hybrid variations, together with the commentarial tradition that developed alongside it. Only in the last thirty-five years has there been an increasing number of theses, journal articles, and other academic texts that have seriously addressed the developments of a Western Buddhism as opposed to Buddhism in the West. As Prebish (2002:66) attests, based on his own 1975 experience of teaching Buddhism in the United States, “Even a casual perusal of the most popular books used as texts in introductory courses on Buddhism at that time reveals that Western Buddhism was not included in the discipline called Buddhist Studies.”

Fundamentally, this paper addresses Buddhist identity in contemporary settings, and asks what it means to be Buddhist in the West today. This is the overarching theme of my doctoral research into socially engaged Buddhism in the United Kingdom, which addresses the question of how socially engaged Buddhism challenges the notion of what it means to be Buddhist in the twenty-first century. The scope of this paper is to portray part of that work, and, in so doing, it suggests methodological approaches for students of West-

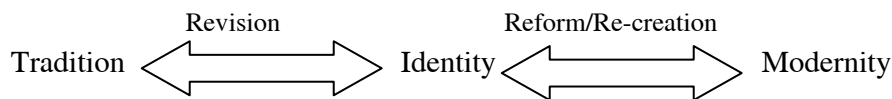
ern Buddhism, using my research into the identity of socially engaged Buddhists in the United Kingdom as a case study.

It is, however, divided into three themes. First, it presents socially engaged Buddhism and the difficulties that it presents to Western Buddhist Studies in the areas of identity, authenticity, and validity. Second, it delineates an assessment of the sub-discipline that has become the study of Western Buddhism in the United States, and its significance for the United Kingdom. In that context it addresses, briefly, the question of a globalized Western Buddhism, and, having made a case for it, explores a number of recent findings in U.S. scholarship, drawing on parallels with my own research. Finally, it examines how Western Buddhism is interpreted using sociological methods of investigation and suggests an ethnographic style of investigation appropriate for researchers in the field. As part of the case study evidence, I draw on the preliminary findings of a survey of socially engaged Buddhists conducted in the United Kingdom.

Sociology, when applied to studies of Buddhist groups and organizations (lay or monastic, ethnic or convert, or in combination), seeks to answer questions relative to both the place of Western Buddhism in contemporary society and what it means to be Buddhist in that environment. Of concern to scholars in the United States, and me, in my research, are questions about the nature of Western Buddhist identity. Queen (1999:xiv), indicates, in his description of Western Buddhism, that it can be seen as “religious identities in transition.” The question of identity is key in assessing what Hinnells (1997b:64) infers when he claims, “A religion is what it has become.” It is at this theme of identity in transition that (in part) my research is aimed. The debate addresses a number of phenomena that supports the notion of changing Buddhist identities in the West, which takes account of the sociocultural transmission of Buddhism into Western cultures. The apolitical, otherworldly stereotypes presented by Weber (1958) and others are not a feature of an engaged Buddhist worldview, which embraces social and political cultures, and acts out a Buddhist lifestyle challenging the moral and ethical infrastructure of society from a number of standpoints. Not least from the perspectives of human rights, ecology, and social degradation, as well as moral and ethical positions taken in relation to war and peace, including arms trading and the proliferation of the seeming “armed enforcement of democracy” in the world, as highlighted

by the unprecedented Buddhist support for the “stop the war” campaign in the United Kingdom over the Iraq war.

Western Buddhist identity is not only about situating individuals and groups in theoretical frameworks within the Western sociology of religion and investigating the nature of the individual-to-society orientation. It is also about the tendency of academic discourse to use so-called tensions between what they perceive as modernist and traditionalist<sup>1</sup> views within Buddhism, and in particular within socially engaged Buddhism. The difficulty with this type of analysis is in its theoretical understanding, often without empirical evidence to support it. This, however, is not the case in the context of the ethnographic field research into socially engaged Buddhism I have undertaken in the United Kingdom between January 2002 and January 2004. Evidence from the field both quantitatively and qualitatively presents a phenomenological view that does self-identify under the banner of traditionalist and modernist (categories that can be further subdivided). A conceptual model into which one can subdivide this model can be categorized under the three Rs: re-creation, reform and revision. *Re-creation* as in, “to reproduce something that formerly existed” as in the re-creation of a pristine Buddhism *vis-à-vis* a “new” Buddhism. *Reform* as in, “to improve as by alteration”, namely modernists who tend to a politicized view of engaged Buddhism as inherently new and improved, and *revision* as in, “modification” in line with a traditionalist view where engaged ethics and traditional forms are modified and treated equally as a single and continuous entity. This can be described as a continuum, with tradition at one end and modernists at the other, supported by revisionists and reform/re-creationists respectively, as described in figure 1.



*Fig. 1*

The reason for the more subtle division is to account for the nuanced understandings of practitioners. The basic differentiation between modernist and traditionalist is self-evident, but how practitioners see themselves in their interpretation of those categories is more complicated. In particular, the engaged Buddhist who sees his/her activity coming from a modernist stance is

likely to hold a desire for a pristine Buddhism of ancient (pre-modern) antecedents, which in effect may never have existed (at least as it is sometimes perceived in contemporary thought). This turning to a so-called pristine form is in fact a re-creation of an earlier tradition as opposed to a uniquely new Buddhism. This debate includes an overlap in some cases of all three categories, and clearly infers that what is sometimes seen as new is not perhaps new, or as new as it is understood to be. As Yarnall (2003:336) points out:

Many of our contemporary problems (and solutions) may not be so “new.” The modernist rhetoric of ‘newness’ seduces us into prematurely abandoning the rich mine of the Buddhist tradition and cheats us out of many jewelled resources from which we could have greatly profited.

This framework is not without its problems. In terms of identity, there is an ongoing debate about the politicizing of Buddhism from a soteriological perspective. This, however, is a debate, in the main, borne out by Western academic discourse,<sup>2</sup> an area where Asian Buddhists and scholars do not seem to have the same difficulties of reconciliation as do their Western counterparts.<sup>3</sup> What follows will reflect something of the academic position, and by integrating the empiricism of the practitioners in the research hopefully presents a preliminary understanding of the research phenomenologically.

It should be noted here that as author I am also a supporter of engaged Buddhist practice, being a practitioner/researcher (not uncommon in the study of Western Buddhism). I therefore present myself as such for the sake of reflexive validity in the work carried out, and in the context of identifying my own position as an insider researcher in adopting support for a style of Buddhist practice that suggests both insider and outsider at a number of different levels. At the level of a practicing Buddhist and as an engaged Buddhist I am obviously an insider. However, as Harvey (2001:4) points out, the multilayered nature of the practitioner/scholar is to be read in the context of, in my own estimation, the “content specific” area of research which, in my own case (and for others), works at varying levels. For example, at the level of understanding the positions adopted by all the elements of the groups case studied in my research, I remain a relative outsider, not least in the wide range of traditions some of the cases include. I do not suppose to present a value-free

version of events, rather to allow the empirical evidence to speak for itself. The resultant evidence is confined in the main to the quantitative survey material, as more in-depth ethnographic analysis is still ongoing.

The attempted politicization of Buddhism, despite its Asian antecedents, is often an area of discontent among Western Buddhists and academics, not least in its misconception. Christmas Humphreys (1968:82) (the then Chair of the Buddhist Society), responding to questions about Vietnam, declared, "I hold it folly for a Buddhist institution, lay or of the sangha, to become involved in politics of any kind." Similar sentiments can be found in the editorial of The Buddhist Society Journal, *The Middle Way*, 59:3 (Nov 1984). In the context of assertions like these, given Max Weber's still widely portrayed characterization of Buddhism as an "anti-political status religion" (Weber 1958:206)<sup>4</sup> and given "Melford E. Spiro's insistence that Buddhism is normatively concerned solely with the soteriological needs of individuals conceived in otherworldly terms" (Deitrick 2003:252)<sup>5</sup>, engaged Buddhism seems to have much to answer if it is to be seen as credible to a tradition to whom it looks for support for its social and political activities. Deitrick (ibid: 252) goes a stage further and questions the ethics of a socially engaged Buddhism as "being Buddhist at all."

### **Traditionalism Versus Modernism**

Despite Deitrick's rather extreme suggestion (probably intended to be more provocative than factual), he does in fact come to the heart of the matter, namely the question of what counts as Buddhism in the West today. The implications of the dichotomous debate between a Buddhist this-worldly or otherworldly orientation are, however, only part of the discussion. On another level, one group of scholars maintains that Buddhists have never accepted a dualistic split between "spiritual" and "social" domains (Yarnall 2003:286). For this group, who can be characterized as traditionalist/revisionist, *Buddhadharma* has always retained a reasonably articulated sociopolitical dimension in addition to the Weberian (supposedly otherworldly) soteriological orientation. A second group accept the latent tendencies of Buddhism towards a sociopolitical dimension, but insist these could not have been, or were not actually, actuated until Buddhism encountered a variety of Western elements unique to the modern era in the nineteenth century, namely the in-

fluence of Western sociopolitical thought (modernist-reformist/re-creationist). To this extent, figures identified as forerunners of an engaged ethic proffered by Christopher Queen and Sallie B. King (1996:20) include the American, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, who arrived in Ceylon in 1880, and his protégé, the Sinhalese *Anagārika Dharmapāla*, son of a wealthy furniture maker in Colombo. In addition, and more recently, is Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, politician and coauthor of the Indian Constitution, and founder of the neo-Buddhist revival of the late 1950s in the Indian subcontinent.

Queen's claim that these men were Buddhist activists is based on Olcott's agitation of the British in Ceylon by offering a resistance to the colonial Christianizing of the indigenous population, and the formation of the Buddhist Theosophical Society with Madame Blavatsky. This was a historical development recognized by Lopez (2002:xix) who refers to Olcott's interventions in Ceylon as part of the emergent modern Buddhism, an area also identified by Heinz Bechert (1972) investigating a tendency to universalize the sangha. *Dharmapāla* is described as a militant working to preserve and renovate the Buddhist shrine at *Bodh Gaya* in India, mounting not only a fundraising but a legal campaign which, with the help of the Maha Bodhi Society,<sup>6</sup> he won. Unfortunately, he died before completion of the legal action and never saw the shrine restored to Buddhism. Lopez (2002:54) credits *Dharmapāla* with creating the category of the "*Anagārika*," or wanderer, a layperson who studied texts and meditated, in a similar fashion to the monks, but remained socially active in the world. This is seen as a departure from the premodern Buddhist era where the king and monks held sway. This newly established role for the laity marked a break with a former age, which has been explained above by Lopez as the modern beginnings of Buddhism.

It is in this context that the critique of the modernization of South Asian religious experience is roundly summed up by King (2004:278) in his discussion of the discourse of religion in South Asia. Here he suggests that the colonializing influences of Europeans have "reconfigured the very territory that they are purported to be a representation of." This tendency to search for prescriptive statements within the sacred texts of a tradition (in our case, Buddhist tradition) led to a highly criticized (ibid: 278) "reformist spirit in both the colonizer and the colonized, grounded in an idealized 'nostalgia for lost origins'." It is to these lost origins, and influences of colonial involvement,

that Queen quite rightly refers in his citing of Olcott and others as the Euro-American colonial influence by which he determines the modernizing move towards a “new” Buddhism. It is, however, essential to remember that the construct of modernity within a Buddhist framework consists of a number of competing modernities overlapping, intersecting, and challenging each other for a vision of what it is to be modern. In most cases it can be seen as an indigenous attempt to theorize modernity as something other than European, not least as a response to colonialism in the nineteenth century. Olcott and others were catalysts to this tendency, and *Dharmapāla* a good example of the colonized inverting the colonizers’ understanding of religion, and adopting it as a method within indigenous worldviews to promote a modernizing agenda. For some this was limited to an elite few capable of reforming societies, as was the case in Sri Lanka, and elsewhere.<sup>7</sup>

There is little doubt that the interrogation of socially engaged Buddhism in a Western context should take account of the modernizing tendencies of Western academic thought, and of the way in which it tends to universalize religion itself, as deeply embedded and often separate from the sociopolitical backdrop, an area I contend it cannot be easily separated from. Queen’s own modernist stance for the new Buddhism is part of that process, and in using *Dharmapāla* as an example of it, takes a key figure in the modernizing of Buddhist discourse, using a number of key Protestant features, not least, as King (ibid: 280) points out,

notably the notion of recovering “pure” Buddhism from its “decadent” and superstitious village forms, in the emphasis placed upon scripture as the locus of real Buddhism, in the claim that Buddhism is compatible with modern science, and that it is significantly different from other traditions in its non-ritualistic emphases.

The significance here for the study of socially engaged Buddhism is in its inherent interrogation of the sociopolitical dimensions of Buddhist experience, that has been largely ignored in Western academic discourse over the last century and a half, or at least consigned to a nonwestern understanding of Buddhist thought. King (ibid: 280) supports this idea by pointing out that scholars of Buddhism are guilty of “miss[ing] key features and allusions within early Buddhist thought and imagery if we ignore the social and ideo-



logical struggles being played out in the texts, particularly in terms of the relations with mainstream Vedic and Brahmanical traditions of the time.”

Engaged Buddhists can be conceptualized within the framework of the two broad models outlined above as, a) Modernists who claim the Western influence in the modern era described by Lopez is what makes for a “new” Buddhism (a reformist view “altering to improve” in introducing the adaptations of Western political thought to the debate; it is here that overlaps of recreation and reform will occur, and can be “both/and,” more often than “and/or”); and b) Traditionalists who are seen to include a greater proportion of Asian, or Asian trained Buddhists, like Thich Nhat Hanh, the Thai activist Sulak Sivaraksa, and H. H. The Dalai Lama. They claim that to engage in the spiritual life of a Buddhist one automatically includes social engagement; it is not a reduction to such a phenomenon. For them the *Buddhadharma* has always had a sociopolitical dimension, only the levels of articulation are in question, these levels of articulation being part of the revision/modification (by degrees) in interpretation, depending on individual views. In other words, traditionalists see modern forms of Buddhism as essentially continuous with traditional forms. This has been widely claimed by Buddhists like Thich Nhat Hanh, who referred to socially engaged Buddhism in his 2003 Scottish tour, saying “all Buddhism is engaged.” He even dismisses the term he coined in 1963 as a misnomer, as Yarnall (2003:290) points out, “Engaged Buddhism is just Buddhism. If you practice Buddhism in your family, in society, it is engaged Buddhism.” When I asked Thich Nhat Hanh why he had coined the term, he responded, “At the time we were being bombed and there were bodies all around me, I was engaged in dealing with that situation, at the time I could do nothing else.”

The modernists’ claim to a pristine Buddhism of a premodern era, associated with the purity of the teachings of the Buddha, does not fit easily with the debate surrounding the early Indian Buddhist evolution. As Bailey and Mabbett (2003:34) suggest, there was no pristine form, in that the urbanization of early Buddhist cultures may or may not have influenced the popularity of Buddhism. The cultural influences however cannot be easily removed, when at the time of the Buddha and for several centuries thereafter the rise of urban kingdoms and cities continued to have pronounced effects on both the Buddhist and other traditions.<sup>8</sup> Much of the debate implies a kind of hermeti-

cally sealed purity to “Buddhist teachings,” but what if all traditions are “syncretistic” as suggested by Van Der Veer (1994:208), and in that sense “impure”? How might this affect the debate?

Both the continuous traditionalist model and that of the Buddhist modernists is referred to by Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988:241) in an analysis of a Sri Lankan engaged Buddhist movement known as Sarvodaya. They claim each is “perceived as a re-creation of a lost tradition or simply as an old tradition continuing.” This is a good example of the dichotomy between tradition and modernity, and supports my categorization in part. Early Buddhism arose in interaction with Brahmanical traditions; does that make it any less Buddhist? At issue here is whether one sees “Buddhism” as a hermetically sealed ancient tradition of the past, or as an ongoing and interactive tradition that is always adapting to changing circumstances in which it re-creates, reforms, and revises. Again it is a question of what counts as Buddhism and what counts as authority and authenticity for Buddhists involved in this adaptation<sup>9</sup> debate. It raises a further question: at what point is the Buddhist tradition stretched beyond recognition by institutional and conceptual change?

Could it be argued that engaged Buddhism is a step too far, as Deitrick suggests? If this is so, are liberal Protestant notions of social service and activism being dressed in Buddhist symbols and language, making engaged Buddhism no more than nominally Buddhist? This is an important question in terms of historical influence, but the counter-question arises, even if engaged Buddhism developed through interaction with Christianity (as the modernist view suggests) does that make it any less “Buddhist”? What is also of great importance to the debate over modernist and traditionalist perceptions of engaged Buddhism is in fact whose perceptions they actually are, as Loy (2000:2) infers in his critique of Yarnall’s analysis, stating, “Why do we need to decide whether Engaged Buddhism is new or not? Perhaps this issue is more important to scholars of engaged Buddhism who need something definite to deconstruct, than to engaged Buddhists themselves.” This is not an uncommon assumption, given the ability of the academy to create debate where none exists among the group (engaged Buddhists) being studied. However, the survey evidence below does reflect the relevance of the question, in that when asked how they (the practitioners) saw themselves, 41.1% of the sample adopted the traditionalist view that all Buddhism is engaged, and therefore re-

tained continuity with tradition, although when asked in interview, a number of interviewees saw revision within tradition as a normal part of cultural shift to Western environments. A further 41.5% of the sample was unable to find a suitable description in the list provided in the survey, which may reflect that they were indeed thinking about how best to describe themselves, or that they preferred not to, as Loy suggests. Of that group however, 12.6% were clearly of the modernist persuasion, seeing engaged Buddhism as a Western concept or as the result of Western influence in Asia.

### **Global Buddhism**

In keeping with the recommendations by Baumann and Prebish (2002a:5), I would like to emphasize that the West is not all geographic regions outside Asia. For the purpose of pragmatism here, and elsewhere, it can be defined with reasonable accuracy in the terms they use, as follows:

the west denotes non-Asian industrialized nation states where Buddhist teachings, practices, people, and ideas have become established.

A key aspect of global Buddhism has been the exponential increase in the movement of Buddhism in the last five decades of the twentieth century, from Asia to Western nations. Accepting that, in the United Kingdom, the movement has slowed considerably since the early nineties.<sup>10</sup> But despite this, there has been continued growth of Buddhist groups and organizations identified in *The Buddhist Directory* (2004), where organizations number in excess of 400. Migrant Buddhists settling in the United Kingdom have not only become established here, but in doing so have profoundly influenced a growing Western Buddhism.<sup>11</sup> This we see today in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, often as a multiform Buddhism embracing a number of traditional styles, and to a greater or lesser extent taking on syncretistic forms.<sup>12</sup> Until recently, however, little has been made of Western Multiform Buddhism moving to Asia and establishing itself there.

Interestingly, a number of those involved in movements into Asia from the West have a socially engaged Buddhist ethic underpinning their worldwide endeavours. Examples can be found in groups like the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, under the guise of the Karuna Trust, various West-

ern Pureland organizations, like the Amida Trust, Thich Nhat Hanh's Order of Interbeing, the Rokpa Trust as part of Kagyu Samye Ling and a number of others. In this context, the study of Western Buddhism must take account of global concerns.<sup>13</sup> In particular, it should be seen as a heterogeneous whole, where immigrant Buddhists and their progeny are as much a part of the Western environment as the Western convert Buddhist. For those Western groups moving to establish themselves in Asia, they will remain in the minority religiously (as they are at home)<sup>14</sup> and have to deal with that cultural shift appropriately. However, under these circumstances, rather than having "parallel congregations," alluded to by Numrich (1996:67), the Western convert group must engage their hosts if they intend to be effective, beyond a social service model, adding too the more profoundly spiritual practice with both an educational and organizational effort where shared values are fundamental. It will be interesting to see how they deal with issues of caste prejudice, which still exist even among Ambedkarite neo-Buddhists in India.<sup>15</sup> The wider implications for such a study would involve the generational identity of both immigrant children and children of the convert Buddhist, an area covered later. What is apparent is the lack of research into the nature of an emerging globalized Western Buddhism. This is also true of the development of the Asian Buddhist laity in diaspora Britain;<sup>16</sup> both areas require academic attention in future studies of Western Buddhism.

I do not propose to develop the sociohistorical perspective of the study of Western Buddhism in Europe and the United Kingdom as it is well documented elsewhere,<sup>17</sup> nor do I intend to present a view of the individual scholars (practitioners or otherwise) who are engaged in studying Western Buddhism, or indeed their individual research interests; that would be part of a wider United Kingdom survey, similar to the one Prebish (2002:187-205) conducted in the North American Academy, which, it could be argued, would be equally valuable to the subdiscipline in the United Kingdom. As Cabezon (1995:236) notes "No comprehensive history of Buddhist studies as a discipline exists."

### **The American Academy and Western Buddhism**

The motivation for this paper comes in part from seeing the way the American Academy has, in the last ten years, given serious consideration to Ameri-

can Buddhism (as opposed to Buddhism in America), as an emerging subdiscipline of Buddhist studies. Edited anthologies and monographs by Baumann and Prebish eds, (2002a) *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, Seager (1999) *Buddhism in America*, Prebish and Tanaka ed., (1998) *The Faces of Buddhism in America*, Williams and Queen eds, (1999) *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship*, and Numrich (1996) *Old Wisdom in the New World: Americanization in Two Immigrant Theravāda Buddhist Temples* have helped reinforce the study of Western Buddhism.

In these anthologies (containing numerous papers collected over five or six years) and both Numrich's and Seager's monographs, a number of methodological perspectives are investigated. Significant proportions are sociologically orientated, and attempts are made to reflect these areas of research within contemporary Buddhist studies across the globe. Accepting that the emphasis is generally on North America, it is hardly surprising, that, with the exception of Sandra Bell's (2002) *Scandals in Emerging Western Buddhism*, and Martin Baumann's (2002b) *Buddhism in Europe: Past, Present, Prospects*, and his (2002a) *Protective Amulets and Awareness Techniques, or How to Make Sense of Buddhism in the West*, there are few references of note if any to Buddhism in the United Kingdom. I am not suggesting that they should reflect United Kingdom developments in the study of Western Buddhism, but by highlighting the wealth of recent literature coming from North America it begs the question, where is the evidence of an equally vibrant Western Buddhism in the United Kingdom?

The fact is the study of Western Buddhism in the United Kingdom is alive and well. That there are no recent anthologies (with the exception of Keown's edited 1998 *Buddhism and Human Rights*), however, is also a fact. According to Baumann's (1996) comprehensive annotated bibliography *Buddhism in Europe* (version 1), from 1970 there have been some forty-nine scholarly works presenting general overviews and surveys of Western Buddhism (specifically European, most including the United Kingdom), thirty geographical studies (all United Kingdom based) and a dozen theses. A brief investigation of the British Libraries Thesis Service reflects only twenty Ph.D. theses on Western Buddhism since 1970, of those, more than half date from 1991. There is, however, evidence of the growing popularity of the study of Western Buddhism among research students in the last five years,

and currently there are eight Ph.D. candidates that I am aware of, working on dissertations on Western Buddhism in the United Kingdom.

The American experience, being the case in point, suggests a more comprehensive sociological analysis of recent findings in scholarship than is currently being reported in the United Kingdom. One reason for this might well be that the development of the study of Western Buddhism in the United Kingdom is by comparison to the United States, limited in terms of numbers of scholars working in the field, and specifically in the institutional lack of availability of significant job opportunities for those specializing in Western Buddhist studies. The established Universities with Buddhist specialists often fail to acknowledge the need for a specialist of Western Buddhism. To what extent this is a product of an under-funded higher education system, or a sign of a scholarly tradition that has not yet progressed to the stage where its subject of study is now being recognized, is difficult to say.

### **Sociological Analysis in the Academy**

Examples of recent evidence from America can be seen in the work of Thomas Tweed (1999:71-2) who, in examining Buddhist identity in a Western context, suggests moving on from a fixed view of religious identity, based on “adherents and non-adherents” to include (in the Buddhist case) “sympathizers,” or, as he also put it (2002:20), “Night-Stand Buddhists,” referring to those who read a how-to book on Buddhist meditation, and leave it on the night-stand until morning when they get up to practice what they have read. This is an area where, with socially engaged Buddhists in my own research, approximately 10% of the population are Buddhists with a small b as described by Sivaraksa (1988), the Thai Buddhist activist. A phrase meaning something similar to the one used by Tweed, who suggests (2002:20) as many as five hundred thousand of the six hundred thousand Buddhists in France are sympathizers. There are no known figures, which could give comprehensive indicators of the phenomenon in the United Kingdom. But it is interesting to note in my own research that most sympathizers who do not embrace the tradition are sympathetic to a Buddhist understanding of the world and, moreover, to the way Buddhist activists propose to change the world. It is often the case that they are activists before becoming Buddhists, as a result of finding spiritual support for their existential rage.<sup>18</sup>

As part of an investigation into Buddhist identity, and what that means for Western Buddhists, an appropriate methodological tool for understanding socially engaged Buddhism, and its sympathizers and affiliates, is identified by Peggy Morgan (2004:369) in the seminal work of scholar Michael Pye and his 1978, *Skillful Means: A Concept in Mahāyāna Buddhism*. She suggests skill in means as a key Mahāyāna explanation of Buddhist social activist and service movements. I concur with her suggestion and use upāya-kausālya, “skill in means” as described by Pye (1978:13), in my pending thesis. Skill in means is an appropriate tool, not only to explain what engaged Buddhists are doing, but who they are and to what extent they can be characterized under this rubric. As Morgan (2004:366) points out in her essay on socially engaged Buddhism, “some social activists just happen to be Buddhist.”

Tweed, however, getting back to our American example, deconstructs the norms of identity based on belief and practices and suggests a need to take account of the hybrid identities that are emerging, and to move away from an essentialized, normative view of religious identity, using self-recognition. An area where Simon Smith’s (1997) thesis, *Buddhism and the Postmodern: The Nature of Identity and Tradition in Contemporary Society*, provides a thoroughly worked example of Western Buddhism in a postmodern context. In my own research, engaged Buddhist participants often admit to a hybrid religious identity, laying claim to their Buddhist Jewish-ness, or Christian Buddhist sympathies, rarely removing these cultural and religious identities from their perspectives and outlooks.

In the “Two Buddhisms” typology originated by Charles S. Prebish, (who has been at the forefront of the study of Western Buddhism for over twenty years), both his 1979 work, *American Buddhism*, and *Luminous Passage: The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America* (1999a) are used extensively by scholars, including Baumann, (2002a:52-63) who has used the original dichotomy of “immigrant and convert”<sup>19</sup> Buddhist to develop a strand of thought that moves on from immigrant or ethnic, convert or white to suggest that “attention needs to be drawn to a contrast between traditionalist and modernist Buddhism, prevalent in non-Asian as well as in Asian settings.” This theme is a consistent one, as described above in my own research. The necessity to address the nature of “religious identities in transition,” (Queen, 1999:xiv) is a fundamental part of the investigation of Western Buddhism.

Numrich (1996:67) has added a further characteristic to the growing sociological descriptors in this discussion, when he talks of “parallel congregations,” in his work on two Theravāda Buddhist temples in America. Here Western and immigrant congregations can intersect without interaction. That is, they meet in the same place but work at different areas of Buddhist practice and study, according to their background and ethnic origin.

In keeping with Prebish,<sup>20</sup> and now Baumann’s revision of the “two Buddhisms” typology, it is being focused to deal with both migration to non-Asian countries and the indigenous Western population. First generation immigrants and a similar strand of Western converts may, as Baumann (2002a:54) points out, attract that typology, but what of later generations? Are they not citizens in the state? By the same rule, how long can the children of convert Buddhists who are brought up Buddhist be seen that way? From my own research perspective, there are few Asian immigrant or later generation Buddhists actively involved with the socially engaged Buddhist movement in the United Kingdom. A question they are asking of themselves is why that is the case. Is the likely traditionalist/revisionist model (described above) the answer? Is it that ethnic Buddhists in the West, like their Asian counterparts, have little interest in self-identity beyond the origins of their cultural background, accepting generational hybridity as the norm, and not something that challenges their identity? The problem of ethnic representation does not stop with the engaged Buddhists. A similar problem exists throughout United Kingdom Buddhism, an area currently being investigated by Sharon Smith (2003:220-236) in her investigation of *Communities of Color and Western Buddhist Convert Sanghas*.

I agree with Baumann that these labels are too transitory, also that the gulf between immigrants and converts has had and still holds challenges linguistically, culturally and socially. However, his proposed descriptor to supersede the immigrant–convert dichotomy, the “*more strictly religious*,” seems from my own experience, and supported by a good deal of empirical evidence,<sup>21</sup> to be incongruous with the United Kingdom experience. To use the typology of “traditionalist,” meaning more evotional, engaging with the cosmology and the ritualistic nature of their tradition, or “modernist,” meaning having a more meditative, rational, text-based understanding as to their orientation, explains a religious difference that does, as Baumann claims,



make for a viable explanation of that difference, or at least a more comfortable explanation of it, but it is not as clear cut as is being suggested. The explanation fails to take account of a wide-ranging harmonious coexistence and cross-cultural transmission between ethnic and convert Buddhists, either in America, or perhaps more evidently here in the United Kingdom. The two groups are not hermetically sealed from each other, there is more diversity to reality than is being suggested. Having visited, and spent time, at both a personal and research level, in many Theravāda temples in the United Kingdom<sup>22</sup> in the last twelve years, and having associated with, and in, other traditions, there is a sense that the practice and study suits each according to orientation (as Baumann suggests). But the ritual, practice, and study go on under the same roof. A convert Buddhist is just as likely to accept a sacred thread as an amulet, and wear it as a charm, as is a traditionalist from an immigrant Buddhist background or family. Similarly, Thai Theravāda festivals with folk origins, like Loy Kratong<sup>23</sup> are well supported by convert Buddhists.

One reason for this lack of noticeable differentiation may be that temples in the United Kingdom are smaller and less formally institutionalized than their American counterparts. In the United Kingdom, convert Buddhists are a small minority, but often see themselves as intimately connected with the temple they have ties to. A question of individualization, or as Tweed (1999:84) put it “self identification,” which I will address in more detail later.

### **The Case for a Sociological Approach**

What then is the rationale for the sociological methods being used to study and interpret Western Buddhism? In this section I will present a case for a well-documented social science methodology, using my own research as an example, that of triangulation (or multiple method research). This is not new to those studying Western Buddhism, but it is rarely formally presented in the context of the study of Buddhism, as it is often part of a more abstract view of social science methodology, as part of a research methods module. Methodologies are all too often subsumed into the density of the doctoral dissertation, rarely to see the light of the wider academic day. Consequently few methodological studies (within Buddhist Studies) ever reach the widest-read academic medium, the journal or periodical. That is with one notable recent exception in Buddhist Studies, when the *Journal of the International Association of*

Buddhist Studies (JIABS) devoted its entire winter 1995 Vol.18 (2) to the subject of "On Method," in which articles from Cabezon and Gomez prompted the 1997 conference that led to the 1999 publication of *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship*, the catalyst, in part, for this paper.

Despite criticism of an over-professionalized social science world, often divorced from society, sociology has become so much a part of everyday life that it is accepted as "just common sense" according to Giddens (1996:44). In that context sociology has become an accepted form of knowledge with which to study the social world. Giddens (ibid:44) defends sociology as actually being in a position of strength.

The sociology of religion can be located in contemporary society, and looks to determine a social location and role within that society. Religions as well as other institutions are profoundly affected by large-scale social change, and affect such change in certain areas of the world. In the latter stages of the twentieth century and the first few years of the twenty-first the changes in society have been profound and often catastrophic. The end of the Cold War, the Balkans, Israel and Palestine, nine eleven, Afghanistan and Iraq are only the tip of an ever-growing iceberg in terms of change that has deep and lasting effects on the way all of us live our lives. The threat of terror attacks is with us constantly and has implications for religion and religious adherents and sympathizers. The "Risk Society" as presented by Beck (1988, 1994, 1996, 2000) and others, is arguably a social reality.

"Is then legitimacy in modern society to be based on raw power and domination" as McGuire (2002:324) posits, or is the role of Buddhism, as well as that of other religions, still capable of influencing other aspects of society? In order to address these and other societal concerns on the sociological research agenda there is a necessity to look beyond the individual-to-society nexus (McGuire, ibid: 325). The globalized world requires that religion be understood in that context, as McGuire (ibid:325) poignantly points out: "Recent history suggests that religion is one of the foremost forces speaking to issues of legitimation of power and moral order at the global level."

That is a powerful statement, and one that only time can reflect on, but what at least we are aware of is a real sense that no matter how insignificant a

small scale research project may seem, the collective knowledge-base is capable of explaining society through the sociology of religion in a way that may ultimately shape modernity/post-modernity.

The notion of religious individualization mentioned earlier looks at the nature of the individual and the individual's connection to the larger group. It forms one of four major narratives of the sociology of religion, and together with secularization, religious reorganization, and the supply side of religious markets, currently dominates the sociology of religion. It helps to paint a picture of religion in a modern world and address how religion is involved in the legitimation of authority (McGuire 2002:300). In order to address these questions I will summarize briefly my own methodological position in relation to research into socially engaged Buddhism in the United Kingdom.

### **Triangulation: Ethnography, Interviews and Two Surveys**

The Buddhist organizations case-studied as part of my research are The Amida Trust, The Network of Engaged Buddhists, The Community of Inter-being, the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order's team based right livelihood businesses, and the Rokpa Trust. They were chosen as the most diverse mix offering the widest range of engaged applications. Taking account of the accessibility of all five groups, I began an ethnographic study in the field in January 2002, which was completed in January 2004.

The ethnographic style adopted is referred to as ethnography by social anthropologists, and participant observation or field research by sociologists. As Brewer (2000:13) points out there is little difference in the meaning as it affects the way research is conducted. Cultural description underpins the process, and as ethnography now deals in industrialized urban settings, with health, education and in this case religion, the exotic and peculiar label it once carried in investigating premodern worlds has been dropped.<sup>24</sup> Although ethnography may be criticized as mere description or journalism, this can be avoided in the research planning. Ethnographic research should be as rigorous as its quantitative counterparts in terms of sampling, and more flexible in the quality of thick description that reflects a wider understanding of the research phenomena than other quantitative survey methods can often portray. The extent to which one applies the term ethnography to research can have two basic orientations. Firstly, according to Brewer (ibid:18), it can be used as a syno-

nym for qualitative research as a whole “big” ethnography, or ethnography-understood-as-the-qualitative-method identified by Woolcott (1973) as a perspective on research rather than a way of doing it. Secondly, “little” ethnography, or ethnography understood-as-fieldwork, which is summarized by Burgess (1982:15) as

Field research involves the study of real life situations. Field researchers therefore observe people in the settings in which they live, and participate in their day-to-day activities. The methods that can be used in these studies are unstructured, flexible and open-ended.

The little ethnography is the method adopted here, and one I would advocate for the investigation of Western Buddhism. The style of ethnography I adopted may be termed *subtle realism*, taking account of a loosely postmodern perspective. It does not abandon the idea of rigorous, disciplined and systematic practice. As Hammersley (1990:61) indicates, “he believes in independent truth claims which can be judged by their correspondence to an independent reality . . . knowledge claims about [independent phenomena] can be judged in terms of their ‘likely’ truth.” This method is based on the claim that all knowledge is founded on assumptions and human constructions, but rejects the notion that we have to abandon the idea of truth itself (Hammersley 1992:52).

I began by talking personally to figureheads in each case study group to gain permission. Having obtained it I immersed myself into the life of the various groups and organizations, initially gaining confidence among informants by general conversation, and moving on to semi-structured and unstructured interviews over time. I took part in many ritual activities and discussions, marched on peace marches, spent time in soup kitchens, with the mentally ill, and engaged in demonstrations and festivals designed to encourage socially engaged understanding and awareness. Other activities involved meditation retreats; Buddhist Psychotherapy courses, mindfulness days and time spent working in and with right livelihood businesses. Fieldwork diaries were maintained throughout, and during the study I undertook 55 taped unstructured interviews with a variety of informants from each group in most parts of the United Kingdom. It would be true to say that the figureheads (or those with authority) in all the groups I studied were extremely helpful and

became gatekeepers<sup>25</sup> for the researcher, pointing out areas where useful observation and interaction could take place.

It should be stressed at this point that any useful ethnography should include the reflexive account of the researcher as to their own position in the study,<sup>26</sup> and the nature of the relationship with the researched group(s) as insider or outsider, (mentioned above) whether you are a participant observer or an observing participant, as outlined by Brewer (2000:61). He uses a four-way typology: “Pure Participant Observation and Variation of Participant Observation, Pure Observant Participation and Variation of Observant Participation.” I made use of an existing role as a Buddhist to research in an unfamiliar setting, that is, the Buddhist groups I worked with, in other words, using a “Variation of Observant Participation.” The data collected in the field is voluminous and requires early coding into indexes. This data management is essential and should involve index coding in conjunction with content analysis to determine what is in the data. What are the people in the field saying and doing? The data can then be open coded, sub coded and cross-referenced, using either the search facility of a word processor or a computer programme designed for the task. What is essential is the field researcher’s ability to describe and explain that which has been observed. Lofland (1971:7) advocates “six areas of description: acts, activities, meanings, participation, relationships and settings.” Brewer (2000:111) reflects “thick description must take in the context in which the phenomena are described, the intentions and meanings that organise it and its subsequent evolution or process.”

On conclusion of the case-studies, I designed a survey questionnaire, in keeping with the method of triangulation. This was piloted to 50 retreatants in Scotland on Thich Nhat Hanh’s tour in June 2003. The template for the questionnaire was based on Professor Hinnells’ Zoroastrian Survey 2003,<sup>27</sup> adapted to take account of Buddhist demographics, and the understanding of theory and practice notions of socially engaged Buddhism. On completion of the pilot 500 questionnaires were circulated, 100 to each of the five case study groups. The sampling and distribution was carried out on my behalf by members of the case study group distributing the survey questionnaire to 100 members on their mailing list. The reason for the questionnaire was to support the qualitative ethnographic evidence during the case study phase.

In February 2004, as the final piece in the methodological jigsaw, I prepared a single question control questionnaire which introduced the topic of engaged Buddhism in brief, and simply asked, "How Do You Understand the Term Socially Engaged Buddhism?" The reason for this third check and balance was to test the general knowledge of Buddhists in the United Kingdom who had no overt connection with socially engaged Buddhism. The response, positive or negative, would help infer the legitimate understanding of the concept among the general British Buddhist populace. The method of sampling and distribution was undertaken using a random sample taken from the 2004 Buddhist Directory. The directory works in a number of ways, the alphabetical list being the method chosen for the random sampling. By choosing every third entry in the directory a questionnaire was posted with a reply paid envelope. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed using this method. Of the 200 distributed, 148 (74%) were returned, of those 85% supported an understanding of socially engaged Buddhism as social action and as a dharmic solution in a new millennium.

### **Questionnaire Survey Analysis and Preliminary Findings**

I will give a brief demographic account of the wider quantitative questionnaire survey here. It is important to note that numbers of committed/organized engaged Buddhists in the United Kingdom is small. Of the five groups in the case study there is likely to be only about a thousand practitioners, and of that number perhaps only half are firmly associated and in that sense active in the groups concerned. It is not, however, possible to quantify sympathizers, or engaged Buddhists with a small b, with any accuracy, and the only way to effect such a task would be to carry out an extensive nationwide Buddhist survey to try to identify sympathizers or those with leanings towards socially engaged principles. The numbers involved in this survey are for that reason seen as a representative sample. The preliminary findings are sketched out below. Of the 500 questionnaires distributed among the five case study groups, 253 (51%) were returned.

Demographically the following can be extrapolated from the survey analysis:

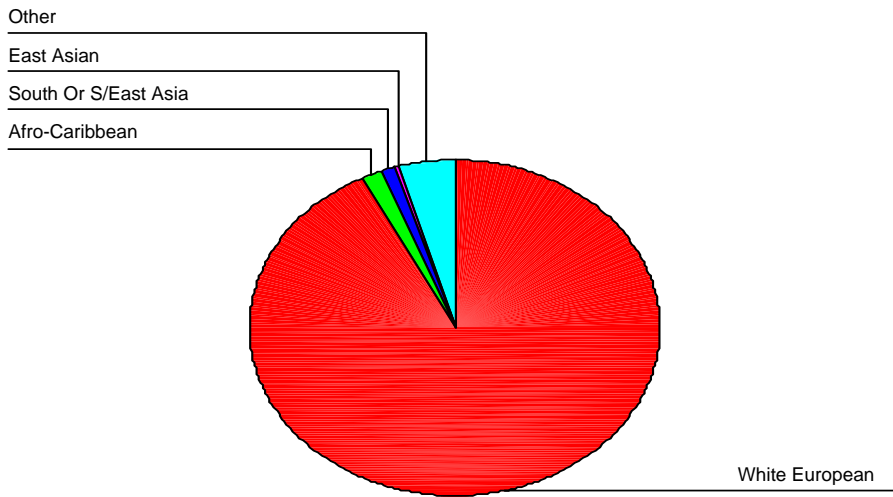
The ethnic origin of the sample was 92.5% white European, with only 1.6% Afro-Caribbean in origin, and 1.2% South or South East Asian, and

0.4% East Asian. The sample showed very few ethnic minority participants, the inference being that United Kingdom engaged Buddhists are fundamentally (92.5%) white European. See figures 2a and 2b below.

Ethnic origin

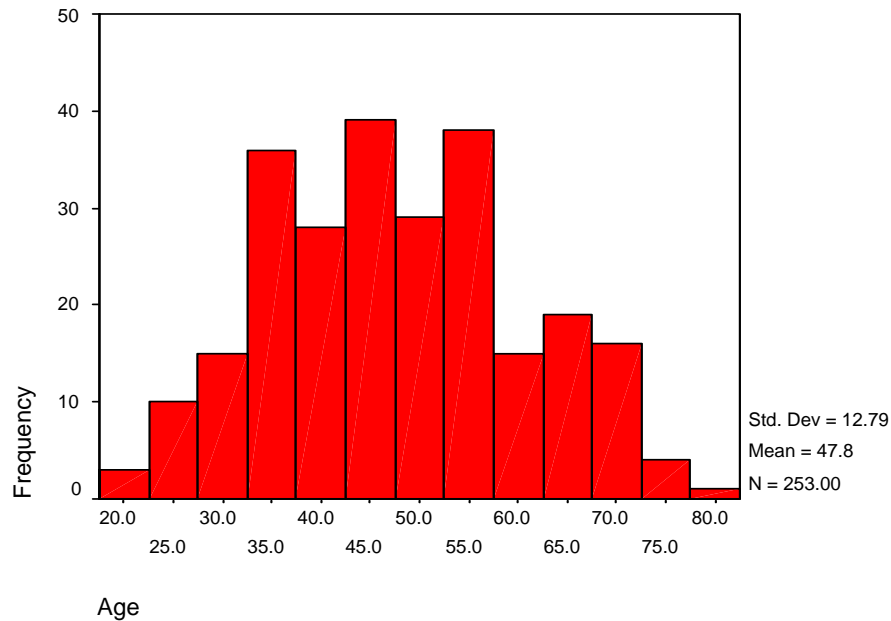
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1. White European	234	92.5	92.5	92.5
	2. Afro-Caribbean	4	1.6	1.6	94.1
	3. South Or South East Asian	3	1.2	1.2	95.3
	4. East Asian	1	0.4	0.4	95.7
	5. Other	11	4.3	4.3	100
	Total	253	100	100	

*Fig. 2a*



*Fig.2b*

The average age of the sample was 47.78. Of those 120 (47.4%) were male and 133 (52.6%) female making for a fairly representative sample compared to the wider population by age, evidenced by the chart in figure 3 below.



*Fig. 3*

Marital status revealed 37.2% of the sample were single, 29.6% married, 6.3% separated, 15% divorced, 2.4% widowed and 9.5% cohabiting. Compared with national figures from the Office of National Statistics, General Household Survey (GHS), the number of married participants in the sample is well below the 53% national average, single figures were about the same, while the sample figures combined for divorced and separated (to compare with the same category in the GHS) was much higher at 21.3% compared with a national figure of 14.9%. The sample reflected 18% of partners in relationships had been, or were, Buddhist, of those partners who were not Buddhist, 20% were Christian, 30% Agnostic or of no religion, 41% missing values and 9% Quaker, Jew, Sikh and Hindu. Only 4.7% of the sample were mixed race, while 57.7% had parents in the United Kingdom, 40.3% had children and 79.4% other relatives all in the United Kingdom. The likely inference here being over 80% of the sample had partners who did not consider



themselves Buddhist, and of those partners only 20% were identified as Christian, 30% of no religious affiliation. Educationally the sample shows a high level of achievement at both undergraduate level where 77.5% were undergraduates and 57.3% postgraduates: further evidence of a highly intellectual cohort. When addressing the question of accommodation the sample was seen to be composed of almost 60% of owner-occupiers, 20% in rented private accommodation, 4% in rented council accommodation, with only .4% in cooperative living but a significant 14.6% actually living in community with other Buddhists. This probably reflects the 20% of the sample drawn from FWBO right livelihood teams, suggesting almost two thirds of those are living in community.

### Engaged Buddhist Practice and Meaning

The question of how one identifies oneself in a Buddhist context revealed 79.1% of the sample identified themselves as Western converts to Buddhism, highlighted below in figure 4.

How would you describe yourself?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 Western Convert	200	79.1	79.1	79.1
	2 Indigenous Buddhist Culture	3	1.2	1.2	80.2
	3 Non-Buddhist	15	5.9	5.9	86.2
	4 Other Faith	10	4	4	90.1
	5 Other	24	9.5	9.5	99.6
	6 Missing	1	0.4	0.4	100
	Total	253	100	100	

*Fig.4*

Of those 80.6% attend retreats either sometimes or regularly (41.1 and 39.5% respectively). A high 92.9% of the sample meditate or take part in other Buddhist rituals, of these 60.9% meditate daily, and 29% meditate

sometimes. When asked about meditation as a lone subject almost all the sample 98% said they practice meditation, 71.1% engaged in chanting, 75.5% undertook Buddhist studies, 94.1% kept the five moral precepts of a Buddhist, 60.1% engaged in some form of pūja (offering ceremony) only 12.3 % practiced a Buddhist language, and 20% engaged in other Buddhist practice not listed.

Other spiritual influences in people's lives showed up positive for 64.8% of the sample, the majority of which were Christian influences, or earth ecology, music or friends. Over 50% had another faith before coming to Buddhism, 38.7% were formally Christian, 46.6% had no faith, 2% were Jewish, 1.6% Hindu and 9% other/not specified. When asked if they followed a Buddhist teacher or master 60% said they did, of those 26.9% saw him as a teacher while 7.7% saw him as a Guru, 11.5% an adviser, 10.3% as a *Kalyāṇa mitra* (spiritual friend), 16.6% as an informal teacher, and, perhaps most significantly, 24.5% as a *Bodhisattva*, and 9.9% as a Buddha. When asked about their teacher 47.8% of the sample said their teacher was skilful, 40% a Dharma practitioner, 19% a friend and 4% other/not specified. When asked if they were Engaged Buddhists, the majority (71.9%) said they were, as can be seen from the table below in figure 5.

Are you a socially engaged Buddhist?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 Yes	182	71.9	75.2	75.2
	2 No	60	23.7	24.8	100
	Total	242	95.7	100	
Missing	99.00	11	4.3		
Total		253	100		

*Fig. 5*

In defining what it meant to them, 41.1% saw all Buddhism as engaged (a traditionalist view). However, 52.2% disagreed (see figure 6 below).

Is all Buddhism engaged?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 Yes	104	41.1	44.1	44.1
	2 No	132	52.2	55.9	100
	Total	236	93.3	100	
Missing	99.00	17	6.7		
Total		253	100		

*Fig. 6*

Of those who disagreed, only 5.5% affirmed socially engaged Buddhism as being due to the influence of Western thought in Buddhist Asia (the modernist view). There were also a further 7.1% who saw engaged Buddhism as a wholly Western construct. The remaining 46.3% of the sample were unable to find an adequate answer to the question in the survey, or simply failed to answer. This is a reflection on the difficulties that labels present, and the limits of quantitative analysis in the lack of flexibility to investigate the grey areas of conscience. The interview material does hold answers to these questions, and may cast light on them on completion of their analysis.

On the question of what best describes engaged Buddhism, by far the most popular answer with 57.3% was “inner Dharmic work mirrored by outer action” – an area that a lot of interviewees reflect also. This can be seen in figure 7 below.

Inner Dharmic work mirrored by outer action

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 Yes	145	57.3	60.7	60.7
	2 No	94	37.2	39.3	100
	Total	239	94.5	100	
Missing	99.00	14	5.5		
Total		253	100		

*Fig. 7*

In an effort to see if engaged Buddhists were wholly committed to Buddhism with a social orientation they were asked if twenty-first century Buddhism needed a social orientation. The positive response “yes” was given by 67.2% of the sample. When asked to describe how they understood engaged Buddhism, the split was consistent between, helping/caring, social action and living a practical example of a dharmic lifestyle – approximately a third of the sample for each category. When asked if a social orientation in Buddhism today was the same as a premodern understanding or not, almost 50% said it was “not different,” (implying a traditional view) 23.7% said it was “different” (implying a modernist view) and 26.9% said they did not know. Finally on the soteriological question of how they understood nirvāṇa, 62.8% claimed to understand it in the Mahāyāna sense of “here and now,” as identified in figure 8 below.

Is nirvāṇa here and now?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 Yes	159	62.8	69.4	69.4
	2 No	68	26.9	29.7	99.1
	3 Don't Know	2	0.8	0.9	100
	Total	229	90.5	100	
Missing	99.00	24	9.5		
Total		253	100		

*Fig. 8*

In a separate question 30% thought nirvāṇa was attainable in this lifetime, and a further 58.9% said it was not attainable, only 1.6% said they did not know. This is reflected in figure 9 below.

Is nirvāṇa attainable in this lifetime?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 Yes	159	62.8	69.4	69.4
	2 No	68	26.9	29.7	99.1
	3 Don't Know	2	0.8	0.9	100
	Total	229	90.5	100	
Missing	99.00	24	9.5		
Total		253	100		

*Fig. 9*

### Concluding Remarks

The statistics do show correlation with the research questions in that they reflect associations and inferential statistics towards a general self-

understanding of socially engaged Buddhism as being both modernist and traditionalist. The sample clearly held the traditional perspective (almost 50%) as the stronger suggested method of self-identification, with only 12.6% aligning themselves clearly with a modernist view. However, the wider question outlined above, reflecting people's thoughts on how Buddhism and society can be considered "premodern" and effectively "postmodern," reflects a view of 23.7% who held that there was a real difference in orientation today, moving away from the more traditional continuous view. The notion of "inner dharmic work mirroring outer social action" seems to be the most common understanding of how one practices as an engaged Buddhist. In other words, one should practice introspection, through meditative and ritual experience that both supports and sustains an outward (this-worldly) endeavor in the form of a variety of social actions and service, based on compassion and understanding. These may be considered as two sides of the same coin, suggesting an incompleteness of practice if one is practiced at the expense of the other.

What is apparent is that the level of practice of the vast majority of engaged Buddhists (in the sample) leaves one in little doubt that the changing circumstances (identities-in-transition) in a globalized environment are no less Buddhist for the practitioners than at any other time in history. That may, however, be a conflicting view to that held by scholars in the debate like Deitrick. It would seem to answer Deitrick's assertion (2003:265) of engaged Buddhism being "only nominally Buddhist." Despite his claims that engaged Buddhists are mistaking the "boat" (social engagement) for the "shore" (personal liberation), engaged Buddhists would claim that their soteriological goal is not different to any other Buddhist, and clearly refute the notion that they are somehow missing the more profound "spiritual" suffering of *dukkha*, as Deitrick (ibid: 265) suggests. They would in fact lay claim to the Four Noble Truths as fundamental to liberation, which for many means a lifestyle that cannot be reduced to the personal, social, political, individual or collective. For socially engaged Buddhists "all-encounter" is, as Jones (2004:9) suggests, "indivisible from life."

The traditionalist view of a continuous pattern of Buddhism through time, supporting the notion that "all Buddhism is engaged," suggests that a distinction between tradition and modernity has validity with the practitioner, an-

other area where academic debate (Yarnall 2003) suggests a contrary view. The empirical position suggests such a self-understanding is principled on an “inner/outer orientation,” and the strength of feeling is for a continuous Buddhist form in line with tradition, which may accept some modification. The modernists in this sample are certainly in the minority of a demographic group that is essentially white European and highly intellectual, maintaining and retaining many characteristics of the Western societal environment associated with high modernity. To some extent the lack of support for a modernist perspective among the sample may be seen as a little surprising, given the demographics and the depth of academic discussion relative to the modernist view of some socially engaged Buddhists. Is there in that case a “new” Buddhism, or is it more likely a recasting in line with the descriptors above?

The complexities of self-identification are represented here in dichotomous fashion; they are, however, infinitely more subtle. The typologies set out above are being suggested to help present some preliminary understanding of how socially engaged Buddhists see themselves. The ongoing analysis will, it is hoped, present other areas of encounter for contemporary Buddhists in a Western environment that will further the discussion of what it means to be Buddhist in the twenty-first century.

The use of triangulation or multiple method research is commended to researchers of Western Buddhism, as a method to secure valid accurate and credible explanations for the population under investigation. That is not to say, however, that there is only one answer to such questions. The complex hybridity of identity that is supported, in part, by self-understanding should be reflected in any effort to grapple with identity, (Buddhist or otherwise) and the multiple layers that support such designations. Here, the fieldwork notes, anecdotes, paper information, in-depth interviews, quantitative survey of the population, and single question questionnaire of the wider United Kingdom Buddhist populace all act together as checks and balances in the search for authentic and valid reflections of the area being studied. It is also a method of enquiry that highlights the limitations of such a study, which is fundamental to the process of understanding it. There is always more than one answer to the complex question of Buddhist identity in contemporary society. A reflexive view of recent methods and findings in United Kingdom Buddhist scholarship would be an appropriate aid to future developments in the study of

Western Buddhism. Perhaps the time is right for a United Kingdom based anthology on that theme.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Lopez, D., jnr. (ed.). *Modern Buddhism: Readings for the Unenlightened*. London: Penguin, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> See *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, online conference on socially engaged Buddhism, 7th XXX 14th April 2000 and the volume based on the conference proceedings, *Action Dharma: New Studies in Engaged Buddhism* (2003) ed., Prebish, Queen and Keown.

<sup>3</sup> See Harris, Ian (ed.). *Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth-Century Asia*. London: Continuum, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Weber, M. *The Religion of India*, 206. Glencoe IL: The Free Press, 1958.

<sup>5</sup> James E. Deitrick. "Engaged Buddhist Ethics." In *Action Dharma*, edited by Queen, Prebish and Keown, 252. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Founded in 1891 as the result of Edwin Arnold's account of the sad state of the shrine at Bodh Gaya, and *Dharmapāla's* own visit there the same year.

<sup>7</sup> The modernization debate, and the extent to which Protestant (Christianized) Buddhism plays a part, is a wider discussion than can be presented here. See Bechert (1972) "Buddhist Modernism," King (2002), Unpublished paper to the American Academy of Religion, Toronto, *Response to Buddhism Panels on: Transnational Exchange and Buddhist Modernism in Asia*, Lopez (2002) *Modern Buddhism: Readings for the Unenlightened*.

<sup>8</sup> The influences were far-reaching and across developing cultural norms, which included both the developing ideologies of Buddhism and Jainism as well as established Brahmanical sources.



<sup>9</sup> An area covered by a number of scholars in recent years; see Bell (1991, 1996), Waterhouse (1997), Kay (2004).

<sup>10</sup> Government initiatives to streamline immigration and deal with asylum have contributed to this slow down. See Home Office website [www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk) for more information.

<sup>11</sup> For evidence of Western Buddhism and diaspora studies see Douglas M. Padgett. "The Translating Temple: Diasporic Buddhism in Florida." In *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, edited by Baumann and Prebish, 202-217. London and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> See Peter Van Der Veer's work on the politics of syncretism in *Syncretism/Antisyncretism*, edited by Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw, Routledge, 1994.

<sup>13</sup> For globalization theory, see especially Roland Robertson, *Globalisation: Social Theory and Global Culture*, London: Sage (1992), Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalisation*, London: Sage (1994).

<sup>14</sup> See Census, April 2001, Office For National Statistics, *Ethnic Group by Religion, April 2001*, England and Wales, All People Percentages, England and Wales, and *Religion By Ethnic Group, April 2001*, where white Buddhists make up 38.79% of the Buddhist population in the United Kingdom. Chinese Buddhists alone account for 47.31%.

<sup>15</sup> See Sangharakshita. *Ambedkar and Buddhism*. Birmingham: Windhorse Publications, 1986.

<sup>16</sup> For a good example of contemporary Diaspora Studies, see J. R. Hinnells, Coward *et al* (eds.), *The South Asian Religious Diaspora in Britain, Canada and the United States*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000. For evidence of Asian Buddhist Diaspora Studies in America see Padgett, D. M. "The Translating Temple: Diasporic Buddhism in Florida," in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, edited by M. Baumann and C.

Prebish, 201-217. London and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> See for example Baumann M. "Creating a European Path to Nirvāna: Historical and Contemporary Developments of Buddhism in Europe," in *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 10, no.1 (1995), 64. Bell S., unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, *Buddhism in Britain: Development and Adaptation*, University of Durham (1991). M. Baumann and C. Prebish "Paying Homage to the Buddha in the West." In *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, edited by M. Baumann and C. Prebish. Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 2002. Kerr G. R., unpublished M.Phil. Thesis, *The Nature of Buddhism in Britain*, London, Kings College (1975). De Jong J. W. *A Brief History of Buddhist Studies in Europe and America*. Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co., 1997.

<sup>18</sup> Jones, K. (2004) Network of Engaged Buddhists, unpublished *Retreat Notes*, and Jones, K. *The New Social Face of Buddhism: A Call to Action*, 173. Somerville MA: Wisdom Publications, 2005.

<sup>19</sup> It is pointed out by Baumann (2002a:53) that Prebish did not use the terms immigrant and convert in the original; this was inferred by the descriptive differences he chose and were later used by scholars like Numrich, Field and Seager.

<sup>20</sup> See Prebish, C. "Two Buddhisms Reconsidered," *Buddhist Studies Review* 10, no. 2 (1993), 187-206.

<sup>21</sup> See S. Bell. *Buddhism in Britain: Development and Adaptation*, 1991. H. Waterhouse. *Buddhism in Bath: Adaptation and Authority*, Leeds. University of Leeds Community Religions Project, 1997. Church A. M., unpublished M.A. Thesis, *Buddhist Groups in Britain: Adaptation and Development of Traditional Religious Forms Within a Western Environment*, University of Manchester (1982).

<sup>22</sup> As a practitioner-scholar, I have spent twelve years in the urban Thai Theravāda tradition. As part of my executive role in the Network of Buddhist Organisations, nationally I see and associate on a number of levels with convert and immigrant Buddhists, and although there is a differentiation in emphasis between study/meditation and ritual practices, it is hardly noticeable. I am as often likely to sit in meditation with British Thai Buddhists as I am with British convert Buddhists.

<sup>23</sup> The ritual floating of hand-made floats on water, symbolic of a myth relating to a princess, whose prince found her kratong (float) further downstream, and resulted in a happy ever after story, in somewhat fairy tale form.

<sup>24</sup> See Miller, D. *Modernity: An Ethnographic Approach*. Oxford: Berg, 1997.

<sup>25</sup> See Fetterman, D. *Ethnography*, London: Sage, 1998.

<sup>26</sup> See May, T. "Reflexivity in the Age of Reconstructive Social Science," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 11, no. 1 (1999), 7-24.

<sup>27</sup> See Hinnells, J. R. "Comparative Reflections on South Asian Religion in International Migration." In *A New Handbook of Living Religions*, edited by J. R. Hinnells, 818-848. Cambridge Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1997a.

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