

## **Buddhism and Human Development**

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The societies of South, Southeast, Central and East Asia are, despite their considerable diversity, historically united in sharing a common cultural basis of profound, and in most cases formative, Buddhist influence. Fundamental aspects of their world-views have consequently been strongly shaped by Buddhist ideologies, which in turn and symbiotically have evolved within particular cultural contexts. This might seem to entail a dichotomy of ‘Asian’ versus ‘Western,’ and in turn create difficulties for us in framing questions of Asia from a Western perspective. However, while clearly there is no single unitary ‘Asian’ view or attitude, any more than there is a unity ‘the West,’ part of what ‘Buddhism and Social Justice’ seeks to explore is whether the pervasion of Buddhist ideology through most Asian civilizations has led to some uniformity of views with respect to issues of social justice. Utilizing the methodologies, we consider two basic questions:

- What ideals are articulated in Buddhist writings regarding questions of social justice?
- What are the economic and social realities of relations between Buddhist institutions and the wider society

This research is consequently situated not only within the realms of Buddhist Studies and Asian History, but also at the crossroads of Religious Studies, Economic History, Political Science and Anthropology, as it engages issues including those of Church and Society, Slavery Studies, the study of Race, Ethnicity and Caste, and the very definitions of justice and freedom. ‘Buddhism and Social Justice’ differentiates itself from most previous work by its starting point, overall stance, and its utilization of sources. Since the lens through which the project will focus its gaze is one of Buddhist Studies, the way in which it asks questions and the type of answers it seeks differ both from those of apologists from within the tradition, and scholars in other disciplines.