

Within this section of the website, there is a fascinating collection of essays related to everything from differences in Christian denominations to questions about urban legends and folktales.

The final section, *Hot Topics*, contains articles that address the most controversial aspects of religious belief and practice. The website is continually updated; currently, the top four "Very Hot Topics" are homosexuality (biblical views and same-sex marriage), abortion access, global warming and the environment, and Wicca. Some of the other hot topics include assisted suicide, the death penalty, human cloning, stem cell research, women's rights, and issues of sex and gender.

The website also maintains up-to-date information concerning laws related to, or affected by, religious beliefs and practices. This includes information on Church-state separation, compulsory morality, and details of laws that are hostile toward NRMs and alternative religious beliefs and practices. The site also includes a section on current religious news, which includes a number of news feeds.

The Religious Movements Homepage Project at The University of Virginia (<http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/>)

The Religious Movements Homepage began its life on the World Wide Web in 1996 when Professor Jeffery K. Hadden adapted his course on NRMs to include a website. Initially, the site was developed with his students' input and contained their reports on a number of NRMs. Over time, the website expanded and included detailed information on NRMs and a variety of religious groups from a number of notable scholars. The format of the information presented makes the Religious Movements Homepage one of the most important and accessible sites for finding up-to-date and accurate information on over 200 religious and para-religious organizations.

Unfortunately, Professor Hadden passed away in 2003. However, the website is still maintained and updated, with the current editor-in-chief being Professor Douglas E. Cowan from Renison College at the University of Waterloo, Canada. The site relies upon an advisory board of internationally recognized scholars and continues to present accurate and up-to-date profiles on a vast number of religious movements.

It is important to note that the website is called The Religious Movements Homepage and *not* The New Religious Movement's Homepage. In their classification and profiling of religious groups, they recognize that they review a vast number of groups that are considered new in the West despite the fact that many of these movements are older than the major Western monotheistic traditions. They also profile groups that may be so new that they have relatively few members and exist primarily on the World Wide Web. Some of the profiles they provide are focused on sects and reform movements from traditional and mainstream religious organizations whose membership resists being considered anything but an established and legitimate religious movement. The website also includes information on a number of associations and organizations that are not always considered religious (and in fact may oppose the classification), yet they have the characteristics that qualify them as para-religious and quasi-religious organizations.

In order to address why certain groups are profiled on the website, Hadden provided a number of essays on this topic and drew upon his considerable expertise in the field of sociology of

religion to support the decisions of the site. This includes a useful section of key definitions and terms, articles on a number of cult controversies, and also articles from Douglas E. Cowan concerning anticult and countercult movements.

It must be noted, however, that the profiling of groups has changed slightly in that the website no longer uses the typology of cult in its system of classification. As Hadden stated on the website (to justify this shift in classification), "In time I came to understand that it is difficult to see one's faith referred to as a cult, even in the context of scholarly inquiry. More telling still was the realization that some readers of this site were using the information of our pages to 'prove' to someone else that a particular group really is a 'cult.'"

One of the greatest advantages of the Religious Movements Homepage website is the manner in which it presents its information. Each reference contains a wealth of knowledge concerning each religious movement, significant print bibliographies, and also links to primary source material and in some cases contact information for the group being profiled. Most of the profiles on the website also contain a very detailed history section that includes data on the founder of the movement and any pivotal moments in the group's formation. Historically, depending upon the group, this information may have been difficult to find, and it is extremely useful to have it presented on the website in such an accessible and concise manner. The profiles also contain information on the sacred or revered texts of the movement, often with excerpts and an analysis. This leads to a section on the group's beliefs and also to a section detailing any controversies surrounding the group.

The difficulty with the website at this time is that it is in the process of changing formats and being restructured. Unfortunately, this means that many of the regular functions of the website are not working. One of the most inconvenient outcomes of the ongoing construction is that the website search engine will not return any information. This means that navigating the site is slightly more difficult than it has been in the past. However, it is absolutely worth the effort, and all of the group profiles are accessible by clicking on the Group Profiles, Links, and Info hyperlinks.

THE EXPANDING PRESENCE OF BUDDHIST STUDIES ON THE INTERNET

Websites Reviewed

1. Comprehensive Sites

BUDDHIST DIGITAL LIBRARY & MUSEUM

<<http://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/BDLM/front.htm>>

2. Reference Works

DICTIONARY OF CHINESE BUDDHIST TERMS

<<http://www.hm.tyg.jp/~acmuller/soothill/>>

WIKIPEDIA

<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism>>

DIGITAL DICTIONARY OF BUDDHISM

<<http://www.buddhism-dict.net/ddb/>>

3. Listservs and Discussion Groups

H-BUDDHISM

<<http://www.h-net.org/~buddhism/>>

4. Other Online Resources

TIBETAN BUDDHIST RESOURCE CENTER

<<http://www.tbrc.org/>>

THE INTERNATIONAL DUNHUANG PROJECT

<<http://idp.bl.uk/>>

Websites in Brief

CHINESE BUDDHIST ELECTRONIC TEXT ASSOCIATION

<<http://www.cbeta.org/>>

JOURNAL OF BUDDHIST ETHICS

<<http://jbe.gold.ac.uk/>>

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The rapid growth of the Internet and related technological developments exert an ever-increasing influence on the conduct of research and on the dissemination of knowledge across the whole spectrum of academic disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. The relatively small but lively field of Buddhist studies—understood as the academic study of Buddhist texts, histories, doctrines, practices, traditions, and other related phenomena, undertaken from a variety of theoretical perspectives and by means of diverse research methods—is very much involved in these significant developments. Scholars working in various areas of Buddhist studies, as well as different Buddhist groups and individuals, have on the whole embraced the new world of the Internet even if often the scale of their engagement with digital technologies and the presence of Buddhist studies on the Internet might lag somewhat behind that of some of the larger and better-established academic disciplines.

In this article, I survey several of the major sources for the study of Buddhism on the Internet and offer preliminary assessments of the prospects and challenges posed by the ongoing transition to what is still a rapidly evolving medium. This brief review of Buddhist studies on the Internet is not meant to be exhaustive. In light of the space constraints and of the tenor of this special issue of *Religious Studies Review*, I have simply selected a few major sites related to the study of Buddhism and have used them to introduce some of the key types of online resources. Because of the multidisciplinary nature of the academic study of Buddhism, scholars working in the field also make an extensive use of resources developed within the contexts of other disciplines—such as history, literature, anthropology, and area studies—but an assessment of them is beyond the purview of this article. The same applies to religiously inspired websites set up by various Buddhist groups and individuals, which greatly outnumber the scholarly-oriented sites (although the lines of demarcation between the two are often ambiguous) and provide a vast amount of information (for an example, see <http://www.buddhanet.net/>).

Considering the fast pace of change on the Internet, any assessment of present realities and prospects for future development is tentative. However, it is safe to assume that the engagement of Buddhist scholarship with the Internet and its reliance on pertinent digital technologies will continue to grow, perhaps moving in new directions that are not yet envisaged. Notwithstanding the commendable efforts by various organizations and individuals, there is still a considerable scope for quantitative expansion as well as for an improvement in the quality of digital resources for the study of Buddhism. The following websites surveyed therefore exemplify not only present realities but also point in the direction of exciting new things to come.

Comprehensive Sites

Over the years, some websites have tried to serve as hubs or clearing houses of general information about Buddhism. One of the popular strategies was to create websites that serve as “link farms,” which direct traffic to other sites with original content. An example of this kind of site is the Buddhist Studies WWW Virtual Library (<http://www.ciolek.com/WWWVL-Buddhism.html>), which proclaims itself to be ranked number one among 12,200,000 Buddhist studies webpages worldwide listed by Google as of June 2006. While the site contains some useful links and search capabilities, unfortunately, it is not a reliable source of information about the academic study of Buddhism. Not only is the whole notion of “link farms” becoming eclipsed by the emergence of potent search engines such as Google, but many of the links on the site are broken. Moreover, the data contained on the linked webpages are of uneven quality; often, there is a mixing up of sites that disseminate inexact and/or biased sectarian information (that seem to predominate) with those that contain useful scholarly data.

While there is no general webpage on Buddhism that can be highly recommend without reservations, an example of a site with useful and wide-ranging information is the Buddhist Digital Library & Museum (<http://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/BDLM/front.htm>), operated by the Center for Buddhist Studies at the National Taiwan University. The site was initiated in 1995, the same year that the Center for Buddhist Studies was established by Professor Heng-Ching Hsieh and by other National Taiwan University faculty. In 1999 the database was renamed, and it adopted the present designation. At that time, the site also became a joint venture between the Center for Buddhist Studies and the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, which is associated with Dharma Drum Mountain, one of the main Buddhist organizations in Taiwan, noted for its engagement with Buddhist scholarship. Subsequently, the National Taiwan University Library took over the responsibility of maintaining the site in 2003. The site is available in both Chinese and English versions.

Although the English presentation at the Buddhist Digital Library & Museum is not of the best quality and although some of the links are broken, the site contains a wealth of material, including an extensive article database, with over 100,000 bibliographies and over 2,600 full-texts articles on various subjects related to the study of Buddhism. The site also contains simple lessons in Buddhist scriptural languages such as Pali, Sanskrit, and Tibetan, as well as links to various canonical texts, collections, and relevant reference works. It also features information about Buddhist institutes and societies, and a bulletin board of

news about Buddhist studies. The “museum” section of the site suggests some intriguing—even if at this point largely unrealized—possibilities; it includes a section on the Silk Road and the great Buddhist pilgrim and translator Xuanzang, although it is not very well designed.

Reference Works

Dictionaries and other reference works are among the academic tools most suitable for digitization and Internet use. A few Buddhist dictionaries originally published in paperback editions have been converted into an electronic format. One such example is the dated but still helpful *Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, which was originally compiled by William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous in the 1930s (and still in print). The dictionary can be used online or downloaded on a personal computer (see <http://www.hm.tyg.jp/~acmuller/soothill/>), although its interface is not very user friendly. There is also the eBook version of the comprehensive and up-to-date *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, edited by Robert E. Buswell, Jr., which was released in 2004 by Macmillan Reference (after the print version was published in 2003), although it is not freely accessible and must be purchased by institutional libraries. A considerable amount of information about Buddhism can also be found in online encyclopedias such as Wikipedia (for example, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism>; there is much more information about various Buddhist traditions and teachings in other parts of the encyclopedia). The range of articles, the scope of their coverage, and their accessibility are all commendable, although they are of uneven quality, sometimes mixing up scholarly descriptions with traditionalist apologetics that are poorly informed and reflective of sectarian sentiments.

Beside the wide dissemination of electronic versions of published works, the Web offers an exceptionally versatile and flexible platform for the creation of new reference works, with unprecedented possibilities for collaborations among scholars with different areas of expertise. A good example of that is the Digital Dictionary of Buddhism (<http://www.buddhism-dict.net/ddb/>). Its origins go back to 1986 when Charles Muller, now at Toyo Gakuen University, Japan, started to compile a Buddhist dictionary. The dictionary was first placed on the Internet in 1995. It has been updated regularly ever since. The steady growth of entries is based on user contributions, with Muller serving as a supervisor of the project. As of February 2006, the dictionary had 38,704 entries.

The individual entries in the Digital Dictionary of Buddhism provide information about Buddhist technical terms, texts, monasteries, schools, traditions, and persons that appear in Buddhist canonical texts and other relevant sources, compiled by experts working in various areas of Buddhist studies. A typical entry is divided into three sections. The first section gives the pronunciation of the term in the applicable East Asian languages (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese). The second section provides a brief definition and summary of the various meanings (along with Sanskrit and Tibetan renderings, if appropriate). The final section contains references to various Buddhist dictionaries. Access to the dictionary is password protected, with guest users limited to ten searches within a twenty-four-hour period; unlimited-use passwords are available for contributors and paid subscribers. Typically, the explanations are fairly brief, but the

dictionary serves as a useful resource for both scholars and the general public, with a considerable potential for continuing development.

Listserves and Discussion Groups

The Internet is well suited for various forms of academic communication and for the creation of online communities of scholars with shared interests. Among scholars working on Buddhism, the main online discussion group is The Buddhist Scholars Information Network, better known as H-Buddhism (<http://www.h-net.org/~buddhism/>). Part of the H-Net's international consortium of interactive newsletters or lists that are meant to serve as communication forums for scholars and teachers, the origins of H-Buddhism go back to an earlier listserv called The Buddhist Scholars Information Network, which was first set up by Charles Muller in 1999. After using a few commercial hosting sites (including Yahoo), the list transferred to H-Net in 2001 and was renamed H-Buddhism. Its membership has grown steadily, notwithstanding a stringent enforcement of membership criteria that preclude the joining by nonspecialists. At the time of writing, its membership stands at around 950 individuals.

H-Buddhism describes itself as a Web-based medium for the exchange of academic information among specialists in Buddhist studies. Its postings include information about various kinds of academic resources, research projects, new scholarly publications, and university job listings. The site also provides links to Buddhist studies sites and a list of graduate programs in Asian philosophy and religion. By design, the list is information oriented instead of focusing on freewheeling discussions. Accordingly, the posted messages tend to be fairly staid and technical. A typical posting will be a request for help with identifying sources on a particular topic, or with ascertaining the meaning(s) of an obscure term or passage in a primary source, such as a text from the Tibetan Buddhist canon. There are also announcements about new books, conferences, and the like. The list is thus not really a forum for an exchange of ideas on issues of theory and method as they pertain to the ongoing (albeit ad hoc) efforts at fashioning Buddhist studies into a coherent and distinct academic field.

The home page of H-Buddhism makes it clear that the list is not meant for religiously oriented discussions of Buddhism. To that end, membership in the list is restricted to faculty and graduate students affiliated with academic institutions. While the general public is thereby precluded from subscribing or posting on the list, anyone can access the messages posted by the members of H-Buddhism through its website. Moreover, the whole site, including all message logs, is searchable, thus making it a potentially useful source of information about the study of Buddhism.

Other Online Resources

While for reasons of space I cannot provide a survey of all relevant types of online resources for the study of Buddhism, I would like to mention a few additional sites briefly. An example of a well-designed Internet resource that focuses on a single tradition and geographical area is the website of the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center (<http://www.tbrc.org/>), which is engaged in arguably the largest project of digitizing Tibetan Buddhist literature. The digitized texts include the main scriptural

collection of Tibetan Buddhism, the Dege edition of the Kangyur canon, although the actual texts are not available online but need to be purchased on CDs. The site also contains a searchable bibliography of classical Tibetan literature and a biographical database of Tibetan religious figures accompanied with good-quality images. Other Buddhist canons are also available online. For instance, the Chinese Buddhist canon is freely available from the Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association, and the files can also be downloaded to personal computers, although the site is in Chinese only (<http://www.cbeta.org/>). Some Buddhist studies journals are also available online. One such example is the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* (<http://jbe.gold.ac.uk/>), which posts the full contents of its current and past issues.

Another website worth mentioning is The International Dunhuang Project, abbreviated as IDP (<http://idp.bl.uk/>), an international collaboration based at the British Library in London. Strictly speaking, the beautifully designed IDP site is not narrowly focused on Buddhism, but among its over 100,000 items, there is a vast array of useful information and high-quality images of ancient Buddhist manuscripts, paintings, and artifacts discovered at Dunhuang and at other Silk Road sites. The images and the associated information are searchable in the IDP database, and each item is presented in its pertinent historical context with the help of useful tools such as maps, photos, and bibliographical data.

RESEARCHING JUDAISM ONLINE: PATHS THROUGH THE MINEFIELD

Websites Reviewed

1. Primary Sources

HALACHA BRURA AND BIRUR HALACHA INSTITUTE
<<http://www.halachabrura.org>>

E SEFER
<<http://esefer.net/>>

SEFORIM ONLINE
<<http://www.seforimonline.org>>

COME AND HEAR
<<http://come-and-hear.com/talmud/index.html>>

MECHON-MAMRE
<<http://www.mechon-mamre.org/>>

2. Indexes

RAMBI: THE INDEX OF ARTICLES ON JEWISH STUDIES
<<http://jnul.huji.ac.il/rambi>>

INDEX OF JEWISH PERIODICALS
<<http://www.jewishperiodicals.com>>

3. Useful Nonacademic Sites

MY JEWISH LEARNING
<<http://www.myjewishlearning.com>>

JEWISH VIRTUAL LIBRARY
<<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org>>

E-JEWISH INFO
<<http://ejewish.info>>

AISH.COM
<<http://aish.com>>

CHABAD.ORG
<<http://chabad.org>>

4. Special Topics

ACADEMY OF THE HEBREW LANGUAGE
<<http://hebrew-academy.huji.ac.il/english.html>>

THE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE HEBREW BOOK
<<http://www.hebrew-bibliography.com/>>

HEBREW UNIVERSITY'S DINUR CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN JEWISH HISTORY
<<http://dinur.org>>

THE HOLOCAUST MARTYRS' AND HEROES' REMEMBRANCE AUTHORITY
<<http://yadvashem.org/>>

U.S. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM
<<http://ushmm.org>>

Websites in Brief

THE INTERNET SACRED TEXTS ARCHIVE
<<http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/index.htm>>

THE INDEX TO HEBREW PERIODICALS
<<http://lib.haifa.ac.il/www/libinfo/info.html>>

SHAMASH: THE JEWISH NETWORK
<<http://shamash.org>>

THE ORTHODOX UNION
<<http://ou.org>>

THE CENTER FOR JEWISH HISTORY
<<http://www.cjh.org>>

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The online research of Judaism, like that of other religions, is a rewarding and difficult journey through primary and secondary sources, often one masquerading as the other. There are a number of purely academic sites on the Internet, and a number of searchable library databases. There are also websites run by traditional institutions, or by religious/political institutions with equally important, although more difficult to detect, ideological preferences. And there are a number of sites that offer introductions to Judaism for the general reader, which may at times be more useful for basic background than the more specialized sites. Finally, there is a bewildering array of websites that offer useful information on selected topics of interest.

Complicating the general scholar's use of the Jewish Internet, however, are the ways in which Jewish sources have attracted and repulsed many users of the World Wide Web, particularly in recent years. In the former category fall the many sites on kabbalah and Jewish mysticism, which blend reliable and unreliable sources as