Gregory Price Grieve and Daniel Veidlinger, eds., *Buddhism, the Internet,*
and Digital Media: The Pixel in the Lotus

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The aim of this edited volume is, as stated in the introduction, to address a lacuna
in the study of digital religion and religion and new media. While there have been
a growing number of publications analyzing online religion, they have overlooked
Asian religions and tended to overwhelmingly focus on North American and Euro-
pean contexts. While some works have discussed new media and religion, including
Buddhism, in East Asian contexts, this volume represents the first edited volume in
English language focusing exclusively on Buddhism, the Internet, and digital media.
This volume is therefore a welcome addition for scholars working in these fields. The
volume includes an Introduction and eleven (relatively short) chapters, divided into
four sections, Methodological Considerations; Historical Approaches; Buddhism, Me-
dia, and Society; and Case Studies.

   The first part on methodology opens with a chapter by Gregory Grieve. Building on
his work on Buddhist practices in *Cyber Zen: Imagining Authentic Buddhist Identity,*
Community, and Practices in the Virtual World of Second Life, Grieve proposes a "Bud-
dhist-informed virtual ethnographic method" (34) as a way to conduct ethnography
of virtual worlds. By describing how ethnography is conducted in virtual environ-
ments (including the use of participant observation, field notes, material culture and

"thick descriptions" and so on) the author maintains that the "ethnography of virtual words is made possible because of virtual embodiment" (25) and a virtual social field. In the following chapter, Laura Osburn considers the issues faced by many researchers working with online material, that is how to collect, store, and analyze a vast amount of data that is also in flux. By using Buddhist narratives as a case study, she stresses the importance of including web design and hyperlink connections in the analysis of on-line narratives, as they are integral part of them. The issues of dealing with a significant amount of data and of the ephemerality of the Internet are discussed also by Louise Connelly in the subsequent chapter on "Buddhist cyberspace." Connelly proposes a categorization of different types of sites. By building on previous typologies proposed by other scholars, she suggests a new typology based on four main categories (websites, social media, mobile apps and virtual words and games) and associated sites. In this way, she argues, the focus will be more on the infrastructure rather than on the content.

In Historical Approaches (the second part), Charles Prebish traces the planning and development of two online journal in Buddhist studies, the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, established in 1994 and a pioneer in the area of scholarly electronic journals, and the *Journal of Global Buddhism*, established in 2000, while discussing the potential offered by online publications. In the second chapter in this section, Gregory Grieve traces the historical background of the concept of "mindfulness", a central concept for Buddhist practice online, especially in virtual worlds such as Second Life. By tracing this geneal-ogy Grieve problematizes the concept of "authenticity" of online practice and of digi-tal Buddhism, and stresses the importance of the historical context for understanding the development of modern practices of mindfulness and their adaptation from the Asian context to the technological developments in post-war industrialized world.

The two chapters in the third part look at social effects of Buddhist digital practices. Daniel Veidlinger's chapter contributes to the debate about whether technology can shape human thought by asking whether the use of social media could foster an inter-est in Buddhism. By analyzing MySpace and Facebook profiles, as well as conducting a survey about religious beliefs, he argues that indeed "the more time one spends on the Internet, and in particular on social networking sites, the more likely one is to have an affinity for Buddhism" (128). In the following chapter Rachel Wagner and Christopher Accardo investigate several apps for mobile devices that offer support for Buddhist practices. They offer some preliminary comments on how the Dharma could be received and engaged through smartphone apps, while offering some areas for further study, in particular regarding issues of portability and the individualism of digital experience compared with more communal type of practices.

Finally, the fourth part includes four chapters focusing on specific case studies. Christopher Helland discusses another central issue in the study of digital religion: community/ies. By discussing the Tibetan diaspora as a case studies, he shows how the internet could create a new "form of connectedness" (169) that helps support the diaspora community and encourage the maintenance of its identity. Jessica Falcone discuss an interesting and somehow overlooked topic: objects in virtual worlds. In her analysis of virtual materiality, she explores the motivations for building Buddhist ob-jects in virtual words but also how Buddhist groups online interact with these objects. Although objects in Second Life are seen by some practitioners as less powerful than physical objects, they still have "a material quality that makes them substantially sig-nificant aspects of cultural practice" (187). In the following chapter, Allison Ostrowski

also focuses on the topic of community by looking at online information about Buddhism. By focusing on the American online Buddhist community, she discusses how users evaluate and access online religious information and how respondents delineate a difference between Buddhism as a religious tradition and Buddhism as a "spirituality." Finally, Beverly Foulks McGuire discusses Buddhist blogs written in English. Methodologically, the chapter proposes an approach that focus on the content of the blog rather than the blogger in order to define whether a blog is Buddhist or not. Therefore, Buddhist blogs are defined as "online journals updated frequently by a single author that reflects an interest in—or identification with—Buddhist traditions, people, concepts, or practices in their content and/or form" (209). This approach, the author argues, would allow us to explore the creation of online identities and therefore to contribute to the study of identity that can be seen in the study in digital religion in different contexts.

As shown in this brief outline, the chapters in the book address several of the central issues in the study of digital religion (such as identity, community, authenticity, relationship with larger tradition, portability, practice, materiality). The chapters, for the most part, focus on case studies from North American Buddhist communities and the examples are predominantly from websites or social media sites in English language. Despite this limitation, this collection introduces several areas where further study could potentially be encouraged and developed by looking at different cultural and linguistic contexts. For example, it would be particularly interesting to see whether similar conclusions or observations to the one made in this volume about online identities or practices remain valid in contexts where Buddhism is not a minority religion, or whether it could be argued that a global "cybersangha" is developing across different contexts.

This collection is an important addition to the field of Digital Religion and it will be also of interest to both students and researchers working on Buddhist studies and religion in contemporary society.

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