

BUDDHA BROWSING: AMERICAN BUDDHISM AND THE INTERNET

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Introduction

During a rare excursion outside of my bungalow I was bombarded with images of the Lord Buddha. Movie posters featuring Chow Yun Fat as a Tibetan monk littered the theater walls, a small incense-laden shop on the corner was selling a stack of pillowcases with the Buddha's face, and, finally, Walmart was displaying a cherry-scented Buddha head candle right next to an 'authentic' monastery bell. No, this did not occur in Buddhist-rich Taiwan or Japan, but in a small city in Upstate New York. Buddhist iconography and paraphernalia is increasingly seen in American pop culture and new media. For example, the Buddhist presence online is growing at a rapid rate, providing users with access to information about the religion, means to contact other adherents, and ways to shop for Buddhist-related items. But how does the increased presence of Buddhist resources online influence the interpretation and continued development of American Buddhism? This paper will explore Buddhism online, determining who the users are and why they choose to interact with religious information in an online context.

Buddhism arrived in the United States during the World Parliament of Religions, part of the Chicago World's Fair in 1893 (Coleman 2001). Since that time, the tradition has expanded to include nearly six million Buddhists in the United States, and currently all three major traditions of Buddhism (Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana) are represented (Vipassana Foundation 2006). The numbers of North American meditation centers in 1997 included 152 Theravada, 423 Mahayana, 352 Vajrayana and 135 Buddhayana; out of these, 22% were located in California (Morreale 1998). Buddhayana is an informal term used for mixed and non-sectarian Buddhist centers and organizations. Despite this seemingly large number of adherents, American Buddhists comprises only 3.6% of the 1.5 billion total Buddhist population worldwide (Vipassana Foundation 2006).

There is not a definitive type of a Buddhist practitioner in America, but scholars tend to agree on a few broad categories; namely, white Americans who have embraced the teachings of the Buddha, immigrants and refugees who continue to practice their tradition from their mother country, and, finally, Asian

Americans who were raised in the United States as Buddhists (Seager 1999). 'For our purposes as scholars, Buddhists are those who say they are' (Tweed 2002, 24). What is interesting about using this self-disclosure as a means for identification is the fact the Buddhist label often elucidates aspects of the cultural and social sphere of the person.

Stark and Bainbridge (1985) offer a very different means of classifying Buddhists in America, and their categorizations include those who attend formal teachings and participate in other group endeavors, those who have a relationship with a teacher of Buddhism, and those who have an interest in Buddhism and choose to label themselves as a Buddhist. Coleman (2001) asserts that in the search for that one area that will unite American Buddhists, it is the practice of meditation. He conducted a survey based on student and teacher interviews from seven Buddhist centers in North America and concluded that American Buddhists tended to be middle class or upper-middle class, white, from a former Christian background, equally male and female, and highly educated. In fact, 'it may be that the participants in new Buddhism represent the most highly educated religious group in the West today' (Coleman 2001, 193).

Despite the religious aspirations of these converts, an aspect of the tradition remains, making it difficult for Buddhists practicing in America. There is also an ethnic component to the acceptability of American Buddhists in American social culture. For example, 'an Asian Buddhist nun is more easily accepted, because Buddhism is viewed as a legitimate aspect of Asian culture. By contrast, a Caucasian Buddhist nun represents a rejection of mainstream religious and cultural values, which may arouse resentment or hostility' (Tsomo 2002, 261). Furthermore, Tanaka (1998) argues that the ethnic Buddhist temples also serve cultural needs beyond spiritual ones, and these are especially important for recent immigrant communities.

Another tension in American Buddhism is the sense of illegitimacy seen by some Asian-born Buddhists. There is sometimes a feeling of resentment on the part of South/Southeast Asianists with respect to Americans converting to a traditionally eastern religion. For instance, writer Pankaj Mishra suggests that westerners who come to India for enlightenment are 'indulging their privilege—the unique license offered to them by the power and wealth of their countries—to be whatever they wished to be: Buddhists, Hindus, Missionaries, Communists' (Lattin 2005).

In a similar vein, it has been argued whether a religious tradition developed in an eastern cultural realm can be translated into western thought and practice. Do certain cultural differences prevent the religion from being observed as it was in the country of origin and do concessions responding to societal requirements need to be incorporated? American Buddhism has widened the boundaries in two areas of the Buddhist tradition; namely, egalitarianism in worship and the inclusive role of women.

In Asia Buddhism was primarily hierarchical and authoritarian. Wisdom, knowledge, and practice were handed down from elders to juniors, and the

running of monasteries and the *sangha* (community of practitioners) at large rested in the hands of a small core of senior monks. What they decided was the way things were, and there was no questioning of their authority: students just followed' (Kornfield 1988, xiii–iv). Another distinction lies in the separation between the monastics and the laity in traditional Buddhist countries. 'All in all, the distinction between the monk and the layperson in the new Buddhism is a fuzzy one. Monks are not set off by an aura of holiness and reverence as they are in Asia' (Coleman 2001, 13).

One of the greatest changes that has occurred to Buddhism as it has developed in the United States is a greater democratization of the tradition, both in the creation of a more egalitarian structure of the faith but also in the promotion of inclusive ideology for such groups as women and gays and lesbians (Tanaka 1998). Women have had an extremely influential impact on the evolution of Buddhism in American society, and are suggested to be some of the most serious converts (Seager 1999). In a sense, the structure of Buddhism does not discriminate between sexual orientations, only sexuality in general. 'Any monk who engaged in sexual intercourse was to be expelled from the order regardless of the gender of his or her partner' (Coleman 2001, 164).

Perhaps prompted by the sense of openness to spiritual forces or perhaps the egalitarian nature of the translation of Buddhism into American culture, people are converting to Buddhism. Religious conversion and religious identity are very difficult concepts to define and describe, in American religious life in particular. There are very few finite lines between tradition, belief, and practice and people often select aspects of other traditions they might believe in, some that they practice, and others yet that they choose to define themselves by. For instance, it would not be unusual to meet an American who describes themselves as Methodist but also attends a Passover seder with Jewish friends and tends to subscribe to some of the beliefs of Buddhism such as karma and issues of rebirth. 'Religious identity also can be complex for converts. Conversion involves a more or less (often less) complete shift of beliefs and practices. The old tradition never fades completely; the new one never shapes exclusively' (Tweed 1999, 73). It is for this reason that religious self-identification is difficult to measure, particularly in situations concerning religious conversion. 'In periods and places where conversion has high social *value*, the number of self-announced converts might multiply, even though their spiritual practice might retain many elements of the denounced tradition' (Tweed 1999, 73). The question then is whether the association between Buddhism in America and a wealthier and more educated group of practitioners has any effect on whether someone chooses to identify themselves as a Buddhist or chooses to proceed with a formal conversion to the Buddhist tradition.

This issue is also related to access to Buddhist resources and the community with which a person is able to become a part. Not everyone has equal access to information, and this is particularly an issue with respect to online information access. Buddhist communities, or 'cybersanghas', exist in cyberspace and

comprise of Buddhist teachers, students, practitioners, and others interested in the tradition. Cybersangha refers to the online Buddhist community and was first used by Gary Ray in 1991 (Prebish 1999). However, Buddhism did not make its online appearance as a chat room, but began with textual resources of Buddhism information, some discussion forums, and many databases of dharmic and teaching material. In the late 1990s, as the Internet evolved into a greater two-way communicative forum and less of a library resource, Buddhist forums and chat rooms also increased in prominence (Prebish 1999).

Prebish (1999) discusses three primary categories of Buddhist presence on the internet; websites created by American Buddhists as a means of communication with others, virtual temples created by traditional Buddhist sanghas, and cybersanghas that have no physical home and exist solely in an online environment.

While some question whether the Buddha would sanction monastics and lay Buddhists participating in an online Buddhist gathering, others see the cybersangha as a means of truly uniting Buddhists worldwide. 'Perhaps the most consequential impact of the aggressive spread of Buddhism into cyberspace, along with the creation of a new kind of American Buddhist sangha never imagined by the Buddha, is the uniting of all the Buddhist communities or sanghas described above into one universal sangha that can communicate effectively in an attempt to eliminate the suffering of individuals throughout the world' (Prebish 1999, 232).

In some respects, cyberspace brings some challenges closer to the Buddhist practitioner than their general practice might provide. For instance, while a Buddhist temple generally can restrict access to members only or approved visitors, in general cyberspace is open with free access. And while chat rooms and other Buddhist online communities can opt for a password entry, this seems to negate the teachings of detachment and maintaining practice even in the face of adversity. In this project exploring online Buddhism in Korea, Kim (2005) suggested that the features of the Internet can provide a particularly welcoming venue for the development of a cybersangha. For example, the Internet offers a wide range of religious information and space quickly, provides space for conversing without influence of religious authorities, and allows for interactivity and discussion of private and focused topics in a relatively free environment.

Laney (2005), based upon uses and gratifications theory, explored the motivations of users to access online Christian resources. This project found that people use the Internet to satisfy a desire for knowledge, but this is not the only reason. Respondents indicated that they use media to overcome loneliness, to escape from daily life, for relaxation. People also indicated that sometimes they use media to create a divide between themselves and other people. To determine these motivations, Laney administered an online survey with Likert-scale measures to self-selected church website visitors. Since there are relatively few projects that have explored online Buddhist communities, Laney's exploration into Christian webspaces provided an interesting building block for doing so. Adaptations were made, however, to the methodology and Likert-scale questions were replaced

with open-ended interview-style questions to allow the participants more freedom in their responses. Since there is relatively little literature available concerning online Buddhist communities, assumptions about use could not be drawn and it was left to the participants to define the spectrum of uses.

Furthermore, Hayes (1999) was one of the first to begin asking these questions and probed the discussions on Buddhist newsgroups and electronic discussion lists. His conclusions are multifarious and have interesting implications for the understanding of the practice of Buddhism in America. Hayes believes that the Internet provides a forum for American Buddhists to discuss issues and aspects of the religion with other practitioners that may not be as simple or comfortable to discuss with a formal religious teacher. 'The use of electronic mail and news groups enables people to express their more shadowy thoughts and doubts—ideas to which they might hesitate to give free expression in the presence of a *lama* or a Zen master' (Hayes 1999, 168). Some of the most prominent recurring discussions centers on whether American Buddhists believe that having a formal teacher is necessary to properly practice the religion, the notion of rebirth and how literally the textual teachings should be interpreted, and the correct manner of practicing the Buddhist religion in America (Hayes 1999). The issue of identity is not one that is lost in the electronic forum and remains ever-present for American Buddhists. Hayes suggests that many of the e-mail discussion groups do delve into issues of religious identity and 'people asking themselves and each other what it means for a person of Western cultural background to take up the practice of a religion that has developed primarily in Asia' (Hayes 1999, 176). All of these discussions, questions, and concerns indicate that Buddhism is still a fresh entity in America and practitioners are still working to find their place and the place of the tradition in society—and the Internet is an excellent venue for participants to work out these issues of identity, observance, and belief. 'Few other media offer such a combination of intimacy, immediacy, and anonymity' (Hayes 1999, 176). It is in this direction that this study has been conducted, to understand *how* American Buddhists and those interested in the tradition are using the Internet to access Buddhist resources and the effect this is having on the development of the religious tradition in America. To assess these issues, the following research questions and hypotheses were derived.

Based upon a dearth of theory on Buddhist communities online, the research questions are exploratory in nature and seek to determine who the individual users are and why they are accessing Buddhist resources. Furthermore, the final question looks at the relationship between currently practiced religious tradition and the ways individuals of different traditions might use Buddhist resources. It is possible that those of a specific Buddhist lineage might be looking for different information to that of 'general' Buddhists or those users who are of another religious tradition.

Research Question 1: Who are the people accessing online Buddhist resources?

Research Question 2: For what purposes are online Buddhist resources used?

Research Question 3: What relationship does the current religious tradition have on the use of online Buddhist resources?

Research on American Buddhism does indicate that there is a difference in practice and worship between Caucasian Buddhists and Asian Buddhists in the United States (Hayes 1999). Therefore, this project asserts that Caucasian Buddhists who are displaced because of the small number of practicing Buddhists in the nation will be more likely to use the Internet for access to an online Buddhist community, while Asian Buddhists in the United States will probably have a stronger face-to-face faith community on which they can rely.

Hypothesis 1: Caucasian Buddhists use the internet for Buddhist community purposes more than non-white Buddhists in the United States.

The second hypothesis suggests that those who are older and utilizing online Buddhist resources will also be more likely to visit Buddhist chat rooms. Older people could potentially have a more difficult time in locating other practicing Buddhists of their own age and therefore enter the cybersangha for community support, while younger people might have greater access to practitioners of their own age or at least have more mobility in order to physically locate other Buddhists.

Hypothesis 2: The older a respondent is, the more likely they will be to visit Buddhist chat rooms.

Methods

This project implemented a dual approach to explore these questions, with a survey and interviews of Buddhist website users. A sample of websites concerning Buddhism was collected and an online general survey was administered through advertisement on these sites. Some of those respondents were further selected for interviews to obtain more nuanced understandings of Internet use and religious affinity. Questions were asked concerning the type of resources respondents utilized online and for what purpose, suggestions for improving their online religious experience, how their online religious experience related to their offline religious lives, and their attitudes toward the presence of an online Buddhist community. Furthermore, demographic questions were asked regarding gender, ethnicity, age, location, and religious affiliation.

Sample and procedure

For this study, the first 10 pages of results from the search engines Google, Yahoo, and AOL for the word 'Buddhism' were used. This yielded 30 sites and while not all were necessarily located in the United States, they were all in English and were the highly accessed online Buddhist resources in America. Fifteen of

these sites were repeats of each other and were only listed once; one site was not applicable as it was just a directory to more yahoo Buddhist sites, leaving 14 Buddhist websites as the sample frame. Next, each of the site managers from the websites listed in these results were asked whether they would allow a link to the survey to be posted on their site. Six responded to the requests and eventually two complied and allowed the survey link to be posted (Buddhism.about.com and www.ship.edu/~cgboeree/buddhaintro.html). Respondents took the survey online via a Web-based survey provider and subsequent interviews were conducted as e-mail exchanges.

Results

Research Question 1: who are the people accessing online Buddhist resources?

Based on this study, the profile of those using the Internet to access information on Buddhism tended to be white (72%), raised as Catholics (27.2%) or Protestants (26.1%), and *not* members of a Buddhist temple or meditation center (74.5%). Respondents were evenly distributed between 23 and 40 years old and in locations throughout the United States. Participants indicated a wide range of current religious traditions, but tended to affiliate with no religion (21.2%), Buddhism of an unspecified sect (19.0%), a sense of spirituality (11.4%) or were still searching for a religious tradition (11.4%). Gender of respondents was equally divided between male and female, and the education attained was predominantly above the college level.

Research Question 2: for what purposes are online Buddhist resources used?

In general, respondents provided varied reasons for using Buddhist resources on the Internet (see Table 1). Most indicated that they lived in an area of the country where Buddhist temples or teachers were not easily accessible (32.6%), but this was not the only reason. 'Being totally disabled, I am somewhat

TABLE 1
Use of Internet resources

| Reason to access websites | % |
|----------------------------------|------|
| Lack of temples/teachers in area | 32.6 |
| Convenience of Internet | 20.1 |
| Information on Buddhism | 12.5 |
| Low risk to find information | 8.7 |
| Conducting research | 3.3 |
| Other | 8.2 |

confined to my PC. And this site [Buddhism.about.com] has brought a wealth of information and hopefully I have gleaned something from it'. In fact, 20.1% of people surveyed indicated that the convenience of the Internet was the main reason they accessed online sources; this includes convenience of obtaining large amounts of information and having access to resources without the requirement of traveling a physical distance.

Respondents also searched for a full spectrum of Buddhist resources available on the Internet. The majority (52%) sought *dharma* teachings online while others tended to use Internet resources on Buddhist teachers, temples, culture, and other practitioners (Table 2). Respondents also valued being able to contact other Buddhists and hear different perspectives on the tradition. 'It's nice to know that I am not the only American that practices Buddhism. At first, I was very reluctant to let anyone know. I was afraid others would think I was a "crackpot." Knowing that other Buddhists are out there has given me the ability to be proud of my choice and to not hide how I feel about issues regarding my religion'. Not all respondents sought those with similar perspectives and utilized the Internet to develop a broader understanding of the religious tradition. 'I use internet resources to get a different perspective, particularly perspectives from outside my own tradition. I use it for new ideas'.

Despite the fact that 16.3% of those surveyed indicated they used the Internet to look for Buddhists in America, the majority of respondents have not participated in Buddhist-oriented chat rooms (81%) while 11.4% admit to frequenting the rooms only a few times. Furthermore, of those who have frequented a Buddhist chat room at least once, 33% indicated that they felt a sense of a Buddhist community online, while 14% said sometimes and 28% indicated that they did not. For those who did partake in Buddhist chats, however, and feel part of the cybersangha, they suggested that community affiliation and being able to share ideas with like-minded people were the reasons they continued to frequent Buddhist chat rooms. 'There is a sense that the internet can help connect people to a loose world wide sangha. I can ask spiritual questions to a Buddhist internet group and someone always responds and even if an answer is not readily available I am wished support in my quest for answers'.

TABLE 2
Internet resources used

| Type of website information | % |
|-----------------------------|------|
| Dharma teachings | 52.7 |
| Asian culture | 18.5 |
| Buddhist culture | 22.3 |
| Temples | 23.9 |
| American Buddhists | 16.3 |
| Buddhists worldwide | 23.4 |
| Buddhist teachers | 26.1 |

One respondent also suggested a theological rationale for online interaction and suggested that, by doing so, her practice as a Buddhist was enhanced. 'It is easy for me to develop some arrogance ("I understand this and teacher agrees") or "my meditation seems superior to the other students here;" fortunately, when I go online (because there are so many wonderful and experienced people) the arrogance is shaken and I realize how much more diligent my practice must be'. Other respondents indicated that online Buddhist resources were important for self-verification and also to harness the medium to spread the word of the Buddha and influence others to consider mindfulness.

Not everyone agreed that Buddhism online offered a spiritual connection to others. One respondent said that they only felt community online as they would with the rest of the world and that the Internet was for information and not communion. Another respondent said 'I feel a sense of community when I look into one's eyes'. It appears as if there is a growing interest in participating in online Buddhist communities, but this aspect of online interaction does not appeal to everyone and, despite the bridging of distances that the Internet offers, this does not replace the in-person contact of communal discussion and worship that some seek.

Research Question 3: what relationship does the current religious tradition have on the use of online Buddhist resources?

Current religious tradition and its relationship to the use of online Buddhist resources only yielded marginal significance, and only among the Buddhist respondents. Those who identified themselves as current practitioners of the Buddhist religion tended to use Buddhist chat rooms, access online resources on Asian and Buddhist culture, temples, other American Buddhists, Buddhists worldwide, and Buddhist teachers more often than current adherents to other religious traditions. This is not necessarily surprising since they are searching for information about the particular religious tradition with which they affiliate themselves. It is nonetheless interesting to note that, for those who do not identify themselves as being practicing Buddhists, the respondents who were online were searching for different information.

When exploring Buddhist respondents by their specific denomination, one correlation was found between tradition and the use of online Buddhist resources. Those who identified themselves as practitioners of a specified sect of Buddhism (i.e. Mahayana, Theravada, Zen, or Tibetan) were more likely to use online resources to obtain information about Buddhist temples ($r(48) = 0.35$, $p < 0.05$). It is apparent that the location of the subject in processing the religious tradition is indeed related to the way they use Buddhist resources online. This indicates that those who were born Buddhist or have chosen to become Buddhist have evolved into a particular sect, while those who are interested in or are new to the religion tend to identify themselves as Buddhists only and do not affirm any

particular sect within the religion. Those Buddhists who declare themselves a part of a Buddhist sect as opposed to Buddhism in general were more likely to seek a specific temple or teaching lineage, probably because they knew specifically what type of temple, doctrine, and teachings to search for.

Hypothesis 1: Caucasian Buddhists use the Internet for Buddhist community purposes more than non-Caucasian Buddhists

Based upon assumed differences in the communities of Caucasian Buddhists versus Asian Buddhists in American society, it was hypothesized that the two groups would utilize online Buddhist resources in a different manner. However, this assertion received only partial support. There was a correlation between ethnicity and the frequency of Buddhist chat room use, asserting that Caucasians were more likely to visit Buddhist chat rooms than Buddhists of other ethnicities ($r(163) = 0.22, p < 0.01$) (see Table 3)—although, in general, there was not much visitation of Buddhist chats across all the ethnicities.

Despite the fact that Caucasian Buddhists were more likely to frequent the chat rooms, they were not more likely to express a feeling of community for Buddhists online. It is interesting to note that respondents overwhelmingly expressed the lack of Buddhist community online, regardless of the theoretical discussions concerning the development of a cybersangha. Buddhists using the Internet in general expressed a sense of disconnection from community and instead used the technology to locate specific resources for their practice, such as the e-mail address of a teacher, location of a temple, or webpages that give the necessary overview of the tenets of the tradition. No correlation was found between ethnicity and the types of information accessed by the respondents.

Hypothesis 2: the older a respondent is, the more likely they will be to visit Buddhist chat rooms

Eighty-one per cent of the respondents never visited a chat room, while 11.4% visited a few times, only 3.3% visited often, and 2.2% visited daily. However, a correlation between age and other Internet use was established. Older

TABLE 3
Ethnicity and chat room use

| Ethnicity | Daily | Often | A few times | Never | Total |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Caucasian | 3 | 1 | 16 | 110 | 130 |
| Black | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Asian | 0 | 1 | 0 | 14 | 15 |
| Hispanic | 1 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 11 |
| Native American | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Mixed | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Total | 4 | 5 | 20 | 134 | 163 |

respondents tended to seek contact information for other Buddhists, while younger users were looking for general information about the Buddhist tradition ($r(184) = 0.26, p < 0.01$). This is intuitive in the sense that older practitioners would most probably already be familiar with the basic tenets of the religion than younger users. Furthermore, older respondents were also more likely to be using the Internet to locate a teacher of Buddhism ($r(128) = 0.23, p < 0.01$). While the hypothesis was unsupported, related correlations indicate that age is a factor in the ways in which users access the Internet for Buddhist resources.

Discussion

The results of this project portray a complex picture of Internet users seeking information about a minority religion in the United States. In general, the survey respondents were typical of American Internet users; white, educated, raised Christian, and had the economic resources to obtain Internet access (Pew Internet and American Life Project 2001). In other ways, however, this survey population was unique. Some users were more inclined to use the Internet to locate other beliefs, while others were seeking information about the basic tenets of the religion.

This is interesting considering the minority status of the Buddhist religion in America. It could be presumed that those adherents might use a technology that specifically offers communication across distances to bridge the gap between the practitioners, yet only the older respondents tended to use online resources in that way. Overall, respondents accessed Buddhist resources for information about various aspects of the religion and emphasized the wealth of information immediately available in a convenient manner as their motivation.

However, not all users seemed pleased with the online Buddhist information, and indicated a few changes in the presentation that would facilitate their location of desired information. 'What would be wonderful, and what exists to some extent, is a single clearinghouse of all Buddhism sites'. Many reiterated this sentiment and felt that while there is a diversity of resources available, at times it is cumbersome to locate all of the necessary information in a centralized location. Furthermore, there was a definite distinction that many respondents delineated between Buddhism as a religious tradition and 'Buddhist'-style, new-age spirituality. 'Truly Buddhist sites need to be identified and differentiated from "new age" touchy-feely sites that are as mish-mash of trendy ideas'. This differentiation between 'traditional Buddhism' and perceived new-age expression of Buddhist ideas is indeed a tension found in American Buddhism, and it continues into the discussion of online resources. However, it is precisely this widening of the boundaries of what may be considered Buddhism that makes the tradition's adoption and practice in the United States so interesting.

This study is not without its limitations. While the participants were visitors to Buddhist webspaces, many were very new to Buddhism on the Internet and therefore could not comment at length about chat rooms and the online Buddhist

community. Also, as Buddhism is practiced in the American context develops further, more nuanced differences between Internet use and sect could be explored. Interesting questions could include whether Tibetan Buddhists in the United States utilize the Internet for Tibetan advocacy whether American Theravada or Mahayana Buddhists might contain their social engagement to activities within the United States.

As more traditionally Buddhist nations cross the digital divide and become active participants in the cybersphere, online Buddhism very well might change. As more practitioners and resources outside the United States provide information about Buddhism it is possible that this tension between Caucasian and Asian Buddhists will grow, or perhaps through this growth the notion of a cybersangha will develop into a strong online community force and ethnic and cultural differences will dissipate. These issues cannot be known, however, until more work is carried out exploring the representations of Buddhist community in an online context. This project served as an initial glimpse inside an emerging religious tradition in America as well as its presence in cyberspace. Through this and future work, we seek to understand how and why some people continue to browse the Buddha.

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