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JOE BRANSFORD WILSON

## The International Association of Buddhist Studies and the World Wide Web

There is some risk in writing about the World Wide Web while off-line—that is, while not “on” the Internet. The web presents us with such a constantly changing terrain that words written in the winter for publication in the summer may well point the reader to information that either no longer exists, has moved to a new location (with no forwarding address), or is uselessly outdated. With that caveat, there are a few programmatic notes that I feel ought to be made about the World Wide Web and the direction in which it careens down the “information superhighway.”

It is hardly possible to open a magazine, listen to public radio or watch television in the United States without learning the World Wide Web address of the magazine (or television network), its subscription or public relations department, the author of the article one is reading or hearing, or - especially - the World Wide Web address of the advertisers (e. g., [www.toyota.com](http://www.toyota.com)). If this is not already the case for all of our members in Asia and Europe, rest assured that it will be soon.

As is well known, presence on the Internet had its beginning in the academic world—at first mainly among those who deal with numerical data, then among those who work with texts (especially collections of texts), but in more recent years virtually all academic disciplines have found some aspect of networked information valuable. (Jamie Hubbard has provided us with a well researched overview of the development of Buddhist Studies on computers and the Internet in *JIABS* 18.2, “Upping the Ante: [budstud@millenium.end.edu](mailto:budstud@millenium.end.edu).” In light of his title, I suppose the present essay could be renamed “<http://www.millenium-end.edu/budstud/>.”)

As of this writing there are a vast number of web sites that present information on Buddhism—most of them created either by interested amateurs or technologically literate Dharma Centers outside of traditionally Buddhist countries. The latter are a gold mine for those who track western Buddhism, the former a potential trap for the unwary web surfer.

The International Association of Buddhist Studies has had a fledgling presence on the world wide web (now at <http://www.uncwil.edu/iabs/>) for several years, but at the end of 1996 began a more extensive involvement when it took on responsibility for the Buddhist Studies Web Sites directory of one of the more venerable web institutions, the World Wide Web Virtual Library—created and up to then maintained by T. Matthew Ciolek of the Australian National University.

While the IABS web site is currently administered by its Treasurer, we hope to include input (including linked web sites) from members in their own areas of specialization. Indeed, a number of our members are already deeply involved in the Internet and the World Wide Web. In addition to Matthew Ciolek's huge cluster of pages with pointers to web sites on Asia (the *Asian Studies World Wide Web Virtual Library* at <http://coombs.anu.edu.au/WWWVL-AsianStudies.html>) and the on-line *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* (<http://www.cac.psu.edu/jbe/jbe.html> [see below]), a number of individual scholars have developed extensive web sites. Some that come to mind are Charles Muller's work on Korean Buddhism (<http://www2.gol.com/users/acmuller/Buddhism-Korean.html>) and on graduate schools of Buddhist and Asian Studies (<http://www2.gol.com/users/acmuller/GradStudies.htm>), Johannes Tuemmer's *Buddhistische Studien—Buddhist Studies* site (<http://www.uni-koeln.de/phil-fak/indologie/buddha.htm>), John McRae's peripatetic Chinese Buddhism site (see the IABS page, <http://www.uncwil.edu/iabs/vl/>, for its address), and my own *Mind-Only-Café* (<http://www.uncwil.edu/people/wilsonj/Mind-Only-Cafe.html>). I apologize for any omissions here; the list is necessarily not up to date and, at any rate, is intended merely as a set of examples. If its brevity serves as an incitement to readers to make us aware of their own web sites, please send e-mail to [wilsonj@uncwil.edu](mailto:wilsonj@uncwil.edu) with descriptive information.

It seems, however, that whatever else a web site sets out to do, it always includes an index of other related web sites. Each of the web sites mentioned above has some content—in words or in images—but all seem to descend from the original concept of having a home page that gives someone a web presence and then lists his favorite web sites. From the beginning of widespread use of the Internet, a central index or registry has been a desideratum (the World Wide Web Virtual Library was one such attempt), but this has been a hope never successfully fulfilled.

I mentioned earlier that much of the information on Buddhism that may be found on the web is created either by Buddhists (or by those interested in Buddhism) or by Dharma Centers located outside of traditionally Buddhist countries. This raises a number of problems for the academic Bud-

dhologist. First, is there anything useful out there useful for our own research—apart from access to library catalogs and on-line texts? (Regarding on-line texts, see, for example, the site of the “Group in Buddhist Studies at the University of California at Berkeley and the Berkeley Buddhist Research Center” at <http://garnet.berkeley.edu/yaoming/>.) Second, assuming, naturally, that we can ourselves distinguish objective description from proselytization, what can we tell our undergraduate students before we send them into the wilds of the Internet to do research? (The issue of copyright and the ownership of information is also a problem, but one that is outside the scope of this essay. The interested reader will find, however, that a cottage industry of position papers, studies, editorials and on-line debates now flourishes, some seeking to clarify the issue and set up guidelines, others arguing forcefully that no solution is to be found and copyright is dead.)

The answer to the first question—is there anything useful out there—will be found in our own willingness to introduce content to the web. One of the earliest and most successful examples of this sort of initiative is the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* (<http://www.cac.psu.edu/jbe/jbe.html>), a peer reviewed journal that is published only in digital format: it can be read on a computer screen or downloaded in preformatted form for the individual to print out as she desires. We are also beginning to see on-line syllabi for courses on Buddhism, although there is no true index of these.

On-line prepublication of papers for comment and criticism by peers might be one direction in which to go, and the IABS could perhaps provide a forum—distinct from the *JIAS*—wherein that could take place. (The *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* has done something like this in its on-line forums.) This requires a review process, however—and that is what the World Wide Web seems to lack.

We need not only links to pages on Buddhism and Buddhist Studies but—annotating those links—we need review, by qualified reviewers, of their content. This would be an aid not only to all scholars, whether Buddhologists or not, but especially to our students. I invite IABS members who do spend time retrieving networked digitized information (i. e., surfing the net) to consider reviewing the sites you find useful (or time-wasting) and helping us update our indices. (Send e-mail to [wilsonj@uncwil.edu](mailto:wilsonj@uncwil.edu)).

