# Digital Humanities and Buddhism: An Introduction

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The first volume in the series Introductions to Digital Humanities – Religion, *Digital Humanities and Buddhism* is an essay collection created for the purpose of tackling the various ways that Buddhologists can and have accessed resources in a digital environment, how they are created, and the methods by which they are used. While the back cover of the book clearly states that the audience for this text is scholars at all levels interested in the use of technology in the study of Buddhism, it is important to clarify this statement. Scholars on all level will find something in this volume to take away and use; the essays, however, vary widely in their necessity for understanding the technologies used, and a depth of knowledge of Buddhism is essential for much of it to make sense beyond a computational understanding.

Beyond the two introductory essays, which, in themselves, offer an extensive set of information on the variety of digital spaces one can engage in the study of Buddhism, this collection is broken into three major themes: theory and methodology, conservation and archiving, and digital document analysis. Carefully constructed and arranged, in most cases the essays follow one another in a logical progression of knowledge. However, that does not always mean that the required background knowledge of the field remains consistent and, in some cases, the reader still might choose to pass by essays that range in the highly technical areas or, alternatively, focus their study in technical specifics.

The two essays contained in theory and methodology could not be more different. The first essay, written by the volume editor, requires some level of advanced knowledge of computational linguistics to be understandable, analyzing term frequency within the Buddhist corpus through the utilization of different methodologies. In contrast, the second is a case study using a traditional methodology applied in a digital environment. Specifically, it is an ethnographic study of Zen Buddhist communities in the environment of Second Life. This particular essay requires little background knowledge in Buddhism, digital humanities, or even ethnography, but is still an informative and interesting read.

The essays in the section on conservation and archiving all provide similar, useful information on the history of digital preservation and conservation of Buddhist texts in their original languages. The essays are separated by the languages of the Buddhist texts' origins: Chinese, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Thai/Lao, and Chinese/Japanese/Korean. These essays will be of interest to anyone focusing on digital archives regardless of the field. What makes these essays of greatest use to Buddhologists is the extensive information on the variety of digital sources created and still available.

The three essays of the final section are devoted to digital analysis of Buddhist documents. Similar to the ethnographic study in an earlier section, these essays show a more practical application of particular systems and methods, rather taking a theoretical and historical stance. Each focuses on a different lens. The first essay utilizes a particular set of Chinese digital resources to build a geospatial map of history. The second uses a purely computational analysis, contrasting terminology without meaning by searching by syllable rather than word within Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese texts. The final essay considers the Tibetan canon through the methodology of phylogenetics. The

author analyzes and compares different versions of the Kangyur in an effort to trace how the text itself evolved over time, thus painting a picture of how and why texts differ across tradition.

In the end, what the reader is left with is an excellent academic work that captures the broad array of what the digital humanities can and has to offer in the study of Buddhism. Is it an essential read or essential to a library collection? This answer to both is not so straightforward. For a researcher interested in the intersection of digital humanities and religion, it is an excellent source and a worthwhile read. For those working in the field of Buddhist Studies, however, it is a mixed bag. The appendix of digital resources alone is worth keeping this on the shelf for the modern researcher. The essays can offer history and some level of guidance when using the resources described, but most would not be something a researcher in Buddhism would return to in order to peruse again and again for insight. That being said, this collection is a useful tool due to its identification of where to find resources in the digital environment and the insights it provides about the differing manners said resources can be manipulated to extract data.

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