

Buddhism in Canada

More Canadians are self-identifying as Buddhist. According to the 2001 census, the number of people in Canada who self-identified as Buddhists increased by 84% from 1991, to approximately 300,340, or about 1% of the Canadian population. By 2011, according to the 2011 National Household Survey, the estimated Buddhist population in Canada was 366,830 or about 1.1% of the population, of which 252,585 were of immigrant backgrounds.

Buddhists in Canada come from two basic sources. The first is those with Buddhist roots. Those Canadians born into Buddhist families and individuals, groups, and institutions established by immigrants and their descendants from Asian countries with strong or majority Buddhist populations. The second is through those who have learned about Buddhism through travel, study, or personal contact with Buddhists and who have adopted Buddhist practice or converted to Buddhism.

Japanese and Chinese immigrants were the first Buddhists to arrive in Canada. It is believed that the first Buddhists to arrive in Canada probably came from Macao. They were Chinese artisans, part of the expedition of Captain John Meares, who arrived on Vancouver Island in 1788. In 1858, exactly seventy years later, the first Chinese arrived in substantial numbers from the goldfields of California. They came north along with an influx of American miners who were following rumours of a great gold find along the banks of the Fraser River. When the gold ran out and most of the Americans headed back south, the Chinese workers stayed behind finding work in the forests and in the towns as day labourers. (Pew Research Center).



Figure 7: Okinawan and Japanese immigrant families, Vancouver, British Columbia, 1924

These settlers were followed by Japanese immigrants who arrived during the late 19th century. The first Japanese Buddhist temple in Canada was built at the Ishikawa Hotel in Vancouver in 1905. Over time, the Japanese Jodo Shinshu branch of Buddhism became the most prevalent form of Buddhism in Canada and established the largest Buddhist organization in Canada (Barber).

During the late 1800s, Japanese Canadians usually gathered at members' homes and some time later more formal gathering places began to be established. Historical records reveal a "shrine" on the top floor of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of Victoria, built in 1844, with an "ornately carved altar, altar table, screens and images." One can assume that Buddhist and Confucian images were included. (Pew Research Center) According to Prof. David Lai of the University of Victoria, the first Buddhist house of worship in Canada was the Tam Kung Temple, located in a rented small wooden structure in 1876 located at 1713 Government Street in Victoria, British Columbia.

Nonetheless, the first recorded gathering of Japanese Buddhists in Canada took place in Vancouver, in 1904, when 14 Buddhists met to request a minister from the Honpa Hongwanji Temple in Kyoto, Japan (mother temple of this Jodo Shinshu sect). This was followed in October of 1905 by the arrival of the first resident minister, Reverend Senju Sasaki. In December of 1905, the first Buddhist temple in Canada was established in a rented room at the Ishikawa Ryokan (hotel) in Vancouver. In the following year, the temple was moved to a house in Vancouver. (Canadian Encyclopedia)



Figure 8: 1932 Raymond, BC Dedication of Buddhist Church—Rev. Nakatomi is seated in the middle with a rectangular cloth.

By 1926, the mother temple in Kyoto sent seven ministers to the Vancouver area and by 1941, 11 ministers were serving 16 temples in British Columbia.

The first temple outside of British Columbia was established in Alberta in 1929. From that point on, southern Alberta would play a major role in the development of Canadian Buddhism from the 1940s onward.

WWII had a deep and profoundly negative impact on Buddhism and Japanese Canadians: the declaration of Japanese Canadians to be 'Enemy Aliens' under the War Measures Act, the internment of Canadians of Japanese ancestry, the seizure of these individuals' property, and these individuals' dispersal to remote internment and labour camps in other provinces. On 14 January, 1942,

Prime Minister King ordered the removal of all adult males of Japanese ancestry from the coast. The government ordered that the men be sent for work in road labour camps. Many of the Japanese Canadians were sent to internment and work camps in Alberta. These actions nearly eradicated Japanese Canadian Buddhism and institutional Buddhism from Canada.

As a result, Alberta would also become an important hub for Buddhism in Canada and the birthplace of the academic study of Buddhism for the whole of North America. With the lifting of the War Measures Act in 1949, Japanese Canadians were again free to move throughout Canada. Some Japanese Buddhists returned to British Columbia, many stayed in Alberta, and others settled elsewhere, including Manitoba.

Buddhist Temples of Canada (formerly Buddhist Churches of Canada [BCC]) emerged from a national conference of Japanese Buddhists held in 1955 in Toronto. The Buddhist Temples of Canada, like the temple that opened in 1905 in Vancouver, are Jodo Shinshu Buddhist temples based on the teachings of Shinran (1173–1262).

From these beginnings Buddhism in Canada experienced a significant period of growth, beginning in the second half of the 20th century. Changes in Canadian immigration policies and practices resulted in more immigrants from Asian and Southeast Asian nations, countries such as Sri Lanka, Tibet, Nepal, Thailand, and Japan, all of which have strong Buddhist histories and populations. In addition, the immense popularity and goodwill ushered in by Tibet's Dalai Lama (who has been made an honorary Canadian citizen) put Buddhism in a favourable light. Many non-Asian Canadians (Namgyal Rinpoche, Glenn H. Mullin, and Richard Barron, for example) have embraced Buddhism and some have become leaders in their respective schools/sects (Barber).

In the latter part of the 20th century, growth in immigration to Canada from China and Korea has led to the founding of more Chinese and Korean temples in a number of provinces. Chan/Zen Buddhism, which was historically associated with the Japanese in North America, is now a much more diverse community.

As noted earlier, following the reduction of exclusionary immigration policies and an increase in immigration prospects for Asians, during the 1970s and



Figure 9: First Nations Longhouse, UBC, Vancouver, British Columbia, Lotus Speech Canada Author Matthieu Ricard and Changling Rinpoche, Buddhist monks, listening to song, with honour guard, at the Centennial of Blessings

1980s, Chinese and Vietnamese arrived in Canada in increasing numbers and established temples in most provinces. Although groups such as the Koreans, Thai, Sri Lankans, and Burmese arrived in smaller numbers, they also established temples. Many temples have dual functions as Buddhist institutions and as community centres. Although some of these temples have attracted members of other cultural backgrounds, the cultural and linguistic focus of such temples often act as an impediment to the participation of Canadians of other origins and limit opportunities for expansion of membership.

Tibetan Buddhism developed out of later Indian Buddhism. Buddhism was brought to Tibet around 650 CE and flourished there. In 1959, the 14th Dalai Lama, the temporal head of the country, fled to India from the invading Communist Chinese army. With him came about 100 000 monks, nuns, lamas, and lay people. Canada was one of the first western countries to offer new homes to the people fleeing the oppression of their countries.

Before Tibet became an “autonomous region” of the People’s Republic of China, there were four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism (Gelugpa, Sakyapa, Nyingmapa, and Kargyupa). Of the four schools, the Kargyupa and Gelugpa are best represented in Canada. (See the section in this document on the diversity of Buddhism for more information on these schools of Tibetan Buddhism.)



Figure 10: Ryokan Nishimura (3rd from left) and wife, Setsuko (first on left)

The first lama to come to Canada was the Venerable Gyaltrul Rinpoche. He was a lama in the Palyul tradition of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism and was assigned to accompany the first group of Tibetans to be resettled in Winnipeg. The Dalai Lama requested the Venerable Gyaltrul Rinpoche to aid the resettlement process in 1972. After working for many years in Canada, he was asked by H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche, the head of the Nyingma School, to be the abbot of several temples on the west coast of the USA, to where he was relocated.

One of the largest centres in Canada, Shambhala International (Kargyupa), is headquartered in Halifax, and the Gelugpa founded the Gaden Choling in Toronto in 1980. Venerable Kalu Rinpoche, after founding many centres across Canada, established the first retreat centre on Salt Spring Island, British Columbia. One of the centres that studies, practises, and promotes the teachings of the Kargyu order of Tibetan Buddhism is the Marpa Gompa Meditation Society, founded in 1979 in Calgary. Other Kargyu centres are

located in St. Catharines, Toronto, Montreal, and Burnaby. Many meditation centres were organized under the late Venerable Chogyam Trungpa (died 1987). His centres, located across the country, are easily identified by the name Dharmadhatu and members are predominantly Kargyupa (followers of Kargyu) in meditative practices.

At the Gaden Choling Mahayana Buddhist Meditation Centre in Toronto, founded in 1980, members practise the Tibetan Gelug school of Lama Tsongkapa meditation practices and philosophy. Other centres affiliated with the Gaden Choling are located in Vancouver and Nelson, British Columbia, as well as Thunder Bay, Ontario. The Temple Bouddhiste Tibétain (Chang Chub Cho Ling) was established in 1980 in Longueuil, Quebec, to preserve the Gelugpa tradition. This temple has now relocated to Montreal.

The Victoria Buddhist Dharma Society and the Sakya Thubten Kunga Choling, follow the Sakya school of Tibetan Buddhism.

Two of the “new” Japanese Buddhist schools are found in Canada. The first, Reiyukai (Spiritual Friendship Society), with head offices in Vancouver, is based on Buddhism but considers itself a humanitarian organization. The second, Soka Gakkai, which developed out of the Nichiren order, has centres in most major cities across Canada.

Other Buddhist groups include the International Buddhist Foundation, formed in 1982 to encourage scholarly research in studies related to Buddhism; the Toronto Buddhist federation, founded in 1982, resulted from an earlier gathering of Buddhists in Toronto who were preparing to attend a peace conference. Membership to the latter is limited to registered Buddhist charitable organizations and includes Buddhists from Burma, Cambodia, Canada, China, India, Japan, Korea, Laos, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tibet, the United States of America, and Vietnam. Other major metropolitan areas, such as Toronto, already have or are creating umbrella organizations.

One of the notable features of North American Buddhism is that there is a strong anti-establishment orientation. When coupled with the decentralized temple organizational feature traditional in Buddhism, it creates an interesting situation for Canadian Buddhism. Throughout Canada there are many uncounted groups, small in composition, who form informal organizational structures, although they meet on a regular basis at the home of a teacher or mentor, or at a local community place.

There are also large numbers of unaffiliated individuals who intentionally refuse to join any particular temple or group, but visit various temples and join group activities for only a short time.

There are now more than 500 Buddhist organizations in Canada, including temples, centres, associations, retreats, charities, businesses, and so forth (Sumeru Guide to Canadian Buddhism). All lineages (Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana, and newer schools) are represented. Several universities offer extensive programs in Buddhist Studies.

As immigrant communities construct temples in Canada's urban centres, and Buddhist ideas and practices such as meditation, vegetarianism, and non-violence are increasingly popular, Buddhism has influenced new religious movements in Canada as well as other aspects of our national culture. Today, Chinese, Tibetan, Lao, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese Buddhists flourish and, through intermarriage and the attraction of Buddhist philosophy and practice, increasingly Canadians of Christian and other faiths are turning to Buddhism (Barber).

Buddhism in Manitoba

The Buddhist community is growing in Manitoba. In 2001, 5,745 Manitobans identified themselves as being Buddhists (Statistics Canada); however, by 2011, about 7,000 Manitobans identified as being Buddhist (Statistics Canada, NHS 2011). The community is expected to exceed 9,000 persons by 2031 (Statistics Canada).

The development and growth of the community is summarized in the quote that follows. "Buddhism came to the Prairies in the late 1800s with Chinese immigrants who moved from Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario, and some who also arrived from the United States. Chinese communities observing

Buddhist rites and practices formed in Saskatoon, Regina, and Winnipeg

by the early 1900s (Li 1990). A small number of Japanese also migrated to the Prairies during this period, but there was little growth or expansion of Buddhist communities until after World War II. Increased Asian immigration from the early 1970s onward saw the arrival of new Canadians from many Buddhist lands, including Burma, Cambodia, Korea, Laos, Sri Lanka, Tibet, and Vietnam." (Mullens 2014)

There is evidence of a Buddhist presence in Manitoba dating back to the early 1900s (Conrad). At this point, Buddhists were of primarily Chinese and



Figure 11: The Manitoba Buddhist Church in Winnipeg Celebrating its 72nd Anniversary. It is a Mahayana Temple in the Jodo Shinshu Tradition.

Japanese origins who immigrated to British Columbia and then migrated across Western Canada.

Chinese workers and entrepreneurs began to immigrate to Manitoba in the late 1870s, leading to the foundation of the first Chinese community association in the 1880s (Mullens). There is an enduring and growing Chinese presence in Winnipeg and Chinese-Canadians are one of the largest Asian groups in the city. The Chinese community has a number of cultural and business institutions, as well as a Buddhist temple.

The Japanese Buddhist community in Manitoba grew during the Second World War as a result of the displacement from the East Coast of the Japanese Canadians who were classified as enemy aliens. Japanese Canadians in British Columbia had their property seized, were detained, and were sent to remote labour camps in British Columbia and Alberta. Later, many of these Japanese Canadian families were sent to work on farms in Manitoba (Gopin) and stayed after the war. The Manitoba Buddhist Temple has its origins in this dispersal. Over 1000 Japanese-Canadians arrived in Manitoba seeking to keep their families together. They faced and survived many hardships including racial, religious, and cultural persecution.

The Buddhist presence in Manitoba and Winnipeg, especially, grew with the expansion of immigration from Asia that began in the 1970s and has continued to this day.