

## CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN CANADIAN BUDDHISM, 1970 – 2021: THE GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

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### ABSTRACT

This article focuses on studying published literature on Buddhism in Canada. The research analyzed the different factors attributed to the continuity of Buddhism and change from the hostile era when the Japanese were physically displaced to the period where more people can express their Buddhist faith freely in the public sphere. Some of the major contributing factors to the growth of Buddhism include the adoption of multicultural policy, ease of access to the internet, emergence of secular Buddhism, decrease in faith in religious leaders, and the increase in agnostics and atheists. The continuity of change is evaluated using the census data from 1971- 2011, an oral history from a person who has been at the center stage of Buddhism's changes in Canada, and an evaluation of Buddhism in the different provinces in Canada. The study found that the number of Buddhists in Canada has been increasing gradually with the development of various schools, which form the branches that portray the nature of Buddhism in the country. Buddhism has evolved into different schools in different regions depending on the immigrants that first settled in those areas. New interest has been on the rise as secular Buddhist practices have taken form in the Canadian population, such as mindfulness meditation which has helped various people to live in peace and harmony. Buddhism has grown to be a religion deeply rooted in the multiculturalism of Canada, with adherents being both natives and immigrants. An area for future study is a subsequent research after the release of the 2021 census statistic to continue mapping the progress and the future of Buddhism in Canada.

## Introduction

The Buddha's teachings use ethics (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*) to transform the lives of its followers.<sup>1</sup> Buddhism is not a theistic religion but a human religion that agrees with the existence of gods, but not as the world's creators, but as the human concept of perfection that humans seek to achieve through religion.<sup>2</sup> The Buddha did not claim that he was a god. Instead, his teachings aim to ensure that his followers live harmoniously free from the beginningless cycle of repeated birth (*samsāra*). The Buddha originated in India from a prince, *Siddhārtha*, who started sharing his teachings after awakening and was referred to as *Śākyamuni Gautama*. His teachings are preserved in Buddhist languages, including Pali, Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese. Various monastic Buddhist groups arose after the death of the Buddha (c. 483 BCE or 400 BCE), which follows the early groups: Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana.<sup>3</sup> Theravada Buddhism is also referred to as the "teachings of the elders" and focuses on maintaining the early teachings of the Buddha, whereby they seek to attain awakening (*nibbāna*) through one of three channels of perfection (*arahant, pacceka Buddha, sammā sambuddha*). Theravada teachings focus on ethics, concentration, insight, and wisdom, aiming to understand the *samsāric* suffering of all beings. This group of Buddhism is mainly taught in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos. Mahayana Buddhism officially arose during the Christian Era, which reinterpreted the initial texts of the Buddha and contents of discourses (*suttas*), disciplinary rules (*vinaya*), and Abhidhamma. Finally, Vajrayana Buddhism is a popular Buddhist group in the Himalayan nations of Tibet, Mongolia, Nepal, and Bhutan introduced in the seventh century but only took root in the eleventh century.

Buddhism has spread worldwide, with the number of adherents ranging from 200 million to 600 million followers. According to World Population Review (2021), 85% of the world's population identifies with a religion, with Christianity claiming the top spot where 33% (2.38 billion people) of the population globally are Christians. The Islamic religion is the second most popular religion, 24% (1.91 billion people), while Hinduism is the third most popular religion (1.16 billion people). Buddhism has 507 million followers, which makes it the fourth most popular religion. It is more prominent in China (244 million adherents), Thailand (64.4 million adherents), and Japan (45.8 million adherents). However, the highest percentage of Buddhists is in Cambodia (96.9%), followed by Thailand (93.2%) and Myanmar (87.9%). The introduction of Buddhism to other parts of the globe was initially due to interactions between European scholars, merchants, clerics, soldiers, and colonizers from Buddhist-influenced regions migrating to other areas.<sup>4</sup> The introduction of Buddhism in North America was facilitated by changes in transport, communication, and capitalism, thereby allowing people from Buddhist-influenced regions such as the Chinese and the Japanese to migrate to North America. Countries like Canada in North America had policy changes after World War II that re-evaluated the immigration rules and culture that allowed the Buddhist culture to take root.

<sup>1</sup> A.W Barber, 'Buddhism in Canada | The Canadian Encyclopedia', 2020, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/buddhism>.

<sup>2</sup> West End Buddhist Cultural Centre, 'An Introduction to Buddhi', 2021, <https://westendbuddhist.com/standby4/index.php/multi-media/dhamma-articles/61-an-introduction-to-buddhi>.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Enstedt, *Handbook of Leaving Religion* (Brill, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Bruce Matthews, *Buddhism in Atlantic Canada* (Routledge, 2006).

## Buddhism in Canada

Canada is a multicultural country due to the multicultural policy introduced in 1971 by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau.<sup>5</sup> Immigration laws accepted immigrants into Canada based on points accumulated from a person's educational qualifications, work-related experience, and proficiency in one of the languages spoken in Canada. These changes resulted in reduced racial discrimination and improved immigration laws such that the acceptability moved from ethnic and racial backgrounds to a merit-based system. These policy changes opened doors to people from various religions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhs. Buddhists' immigration to Canada was also increased by refugees from the Vietnam war (1955-1975), the Cambodian genocide (1975-1979), and the Chinese Invasion of Tibet (1959). However, this was not the first group of Buddhists in Canada.

The first entrants of Buddhism date back to 458 AD when a group of Buddhist monks arrived in North America. The monks had visited Fu-sang (Mexico) and had presented their visit to the Chinese Emperor.<sup>6</sup> Later in 1781, Chinese artisans landed in British Columbia with Captain John Meare, who wanted them to help him build vessels for fur trade along the Northern Western coast of Canada. The other recorded arrival of Chinese in Canada was during railroads construction, where they were imported labor. However, the Chinese were not entirely Buddhist, and therefore they did not establish formal Buddhism in Canada.<sup>7</sup> The Japanese, on the other hand, launched formal Buddhism in Canada in 1905 in British Columbia. Initially, the Japanese migrated to Canada from North America. They were considered "enemy aliens" during WWII and subjected to physical injustice and displacement, which resulted in their displacement from British Columbia to other provinces. The Japanese and the Chinese were the people who introduced Buddhism in Canada.

Buddhism is one of the minority religions in Canada, and it has seen many changes during its progression for over five decades. Since its introduction by the Japanese and the Chinese, it has grown from being a foreign religion in a Christian country to becoming deeply ingrained in Canadian culture. The Buddha's philosophy has been widely used and accepted to the extent of being used in schools, the police force, and some mental hospitals to aid people to live mindfully. Over the years, Buddhism has changed through the development of new schools in different places in Canada. Other changes include the growth of western, modernized, and secular Buddhism. Below are some of the factors that have significantly affected the continuity and change of Buddhism in Canada.

## Factors Affecting Continuity of Canadian Buddhism

### Religious Diversity

Multiculturalism in Canada has enabled different demographic realities, ideologies, and a series of laws and policies. Before the official adoption of the multicultural policy in 1988, Canada comprised mainly Protestants and Catholics. The policy was added in the Multiculturalism Act

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<sup>5</sup> Matthews.

<sup>6</sup> Suwanda HJ Sugunasiri, 'Buddhism in Canada-an Oral History', 2017.

<sup>7</sup> A.W Barber, 'Buddhism in Canada | The Canadian Encyclopedia'.

and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom.<sup>8</sup> It states that “This charter shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the presentation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of the Canadians (Beaman, 2017, p. 4).” After policy adoption, the Christian religious denominations have been eroding while the other regions have been steadily growing, including Buddhism, as shown in figure 1 below.<sup>9</sup> Religion has not been left out, with research showing that different religions, such as atheists, feel free to express their atheism in Canada, citing reasons for its multiculturalist nature.<sup>10</sup> Buddhism has been favored to grow in Canada compared to other countries like the United States. Other religions in Canada have increased from 4% in 1981 to 11% of the entire population in 2011 compared to 3% to 6% in the United States between the same period.<sup>11</sup>

### Canada’s Religious Composition, 1971-2011

% of Canadians who identify as ...

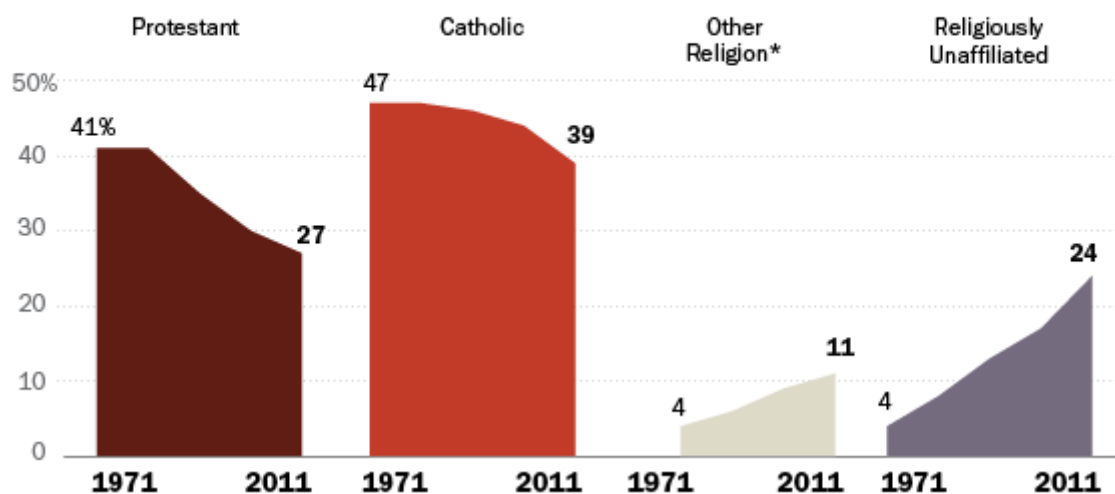


Figure 1: A figure showing the changes in Canadian religions between 1971 -2011 according to the census data.<sup>12</sup>

### Decreasing Disapproval of Religion and God-centric World

Multiculturalism in Canada has improved the freedom within its law and even more favorably within the public spheres where Canadians could talk openly about their religion and diversity without discrimination. The decrease in disapproval of different religious denominations

<sup>8</sup> Peter Beyer and Lori G. Beaman, ‘Dimensions of Diversity: Toward a More Complex Conceptualization’, *Religions* 10, no. 10 (2019): 559.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Canada’s Changing Religious Landscape’, *Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project* (blog), 27 June 2013, <https://www.pewforum.org/2013/06/27/canadas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

<sup>10</sup> Beyer and Beaman, ‘Dimensions of Diversity’.

<sup>11</sup> NW, Washington, and inquiries, ‘Canada’s Changing Religious Landscape’.

<sup>12</sup> NW, Washington, and inquiries.

has been boosted by the supportive environment and friendly immigration laws, making Canada a destination for people from different backgrounds.<sup>13</sup> Initially, Canada had laws favoring Protestants and Catholics, stemming from policies that gave the residents rights to practice the roman region, such as the Articles of Capitulation for Montreal (1760) and Quebec (1759). Reforms in these policies have enabled Buddhism to grow and progress from Japanese and Chinese immigrants who introduced Buddhism in Canada to having natives being Buddhist adherents. The decrease in disapproval of the God-centric world is attributed to the fact that Canada's founding principles believe in the supremacy of God and have protected within the law against discrimination of any religion. Therefore, religious expression is fostered, and Buddhism is neutral and promotes its growth and progression.

Canadians who consider themselves religious continually live according to the standards established by the various religious institutions and the parameters laid out.<sup>14</sup> Even those who selectively practice religion still do it according to the precepts set by the religious institutions. Therefore, the institutions established in Canada are responsible for the progress and continuity of different religions. Different Buddhist institutions have been founded in Canada and hence the progression of Buddhism along religious institutions lines.

### **Declining Confidence in Leaders of Organized Religion**

Confidence in religious leaders has been on the decline since 1940 across foremost religious leaders except for some conservative religious denominations.<sup>15</sup> Reduced confidence is evidenced by reduced attendance in religious gatherings and a transition to people who subscribe to no religion. Some religious leaders have contributed to this phenomenon by being reported in scandals, such as visiting sex shops during religious conferences, more divisions regarding same-sex marriage, and claims of sexual harassment in religious institutions.<sup>16</sup> These instances result in a decline in church attendance over the years in Canada. Most people who stop attending religious congregations during their teens do not return later due to the reduced confidence in the leaders and what they can teach.<sup>17</sup>

In Canada, some religious inclinations have resulted in a decline in confidence. The belief that morality and good morals are related to church-going or people attending other religious institutions has been endorsed and rejected by the religious and non-religious, respectively.<sup>18</sup> When theistic adherents tend to act immorally, the confidence of their leaders reduces, which has been happening as a result of digitization. Some Canadians also believe that spiritual leaders should only be concerned with spiritual matters and cease to involve themselves in economic, cultural, and other political issues.<sup>19</sup> The involvement of these leaders in these spheres has resulted

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<sup>13</sup> Alex Fielding, 'When Rights Collide: Liberalism, Pluralism and Freedom of Religion in Canada', *Appeal: Rev. Current L. & L. Reform* 13 (2008): 28.

<sup>14</sup> Beyer and Beaman, 'Dimensions of Diversity'.

<sup>15</sup> Brian J. Zinnbauer, Kenneth I. Pargament, and Allie B. Scott, 'The Emerging Meanings of Religiousness and Spirituality: Problems and Prospects', *Journal of Personality* 67, no. 6 (1999): 889–919.

<sup>16</sup> Gallup Inc, 'Why Are Americans Losing Confidence in Organized Religion?', Gallup.com, 16 July 2019, <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/260738/why-americans-losing-confidence-organized-religion.aspx>.

<sup>17</sup> Reginald W. Bibby, 'Religion in the Twenty-First Century: The Canadian Case', 1986.

<sup>18</sup> Bibby.

<sup>19</sup> Joel Thiessen, *The Nature and Significance of Religion and Spirituality in Canada: Examining Reginald Bibby's Renaissance*. MA Diss (University of Waterloo, 2006).

in a decline in confidence. Buddhism has maintained its leaders' belief among adherents because even the Buddha allowed people to question his teachings and were at liberty to leave if they didn't resonate with his rationality.<sup>20</sup> In addition, Buddhism is a liberal religion that concerns itself in understanding human thinking and enabling them to live apart from the cycle of suffering. Therefore, Buddhism has set itself apart from other denominations, leading to boosted confidence of its leaders and thereby its growth as other religions such as Catholics and protestants are losing followers in Canada.

### Secular Buddhist Practices

A study conducted by Vang, Hou, & Elder sought to establish whether religious denominations in Canada impacted participants' satisfaction in Canada.<sup>21</sup> The authors conducted the study based on a general social survey representing the Canadian population older than 15 years. The study re-sampled the immigrants and produced a sample size of 21,890 respondents. The study found no statistically significant relationship between Buddhists' life satisfaction and religious discrimination and religiosity. This was attributed to Buddhists' emphasis on non-attachment (*nekkhamma*); therefore, material possessions and social experiences do not support their perception of life satisfaction. This study supports the argument that Buddhism is not like other religions. People can adapt to different forms of this religion. A sect of secular Buddhism asserts that it can benefit from Buddhist practices such as meditation without being concerned about supernatural things of traditional Buddhist practices.<sup>22</sup> Batchelor goes to great lengths to explain why some people choose to be secular Buddhists.<sup>23</sup> Some suggested that secular Buddhism gave them the power to be more present, living ethically without causing harm, citing that the only disadvantage of such practices would be discrimination from people who didn't understand what that meant. Psychology has also adopted some of the Buddhist practices such as mindfulness meditation (*satipaṭṭhāna*: four establishments of Mindfulness) without focusing on the supernatural element to help in treating mental health disorders such as depression. Buddhist practices help people reduce stress while gaining more wisdom and kindness.

Adopting Buddhist philosophy and psychology excluding the supernatural elements of Buddhist teachings has continually enabled Buddhism to spread in North America, including Canada. Specifically, meditation has been infiltrating the public schools in Canada, with its roots in 1940 and 1960, when the Buddha's teaching intersected with psychology.<sup>24</sup> Secular Buddhist practices have adopted different forms, including mindfulness and other mindfulness methods, including yoga, mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), and sometimes awareness through

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<sup>20</sup> Bodhi and Ñanamoli, 'The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya,' 415-418.

<sup>21</sup> Zoua M. Vang, Feng Hou, and Katharine Elder, 'Perceived Religious Discrimination, Religiosity, and Life Satisfaction', *Journal of Happiness Studies* 20, no. 6 (2019): 1913–32.

<sup>22</sup> Stephen Batchelor, *Secular Buddhism: Imagining the Dharma in an Uncertain World* (Yale University Press, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> Batchelor.

<sup>24</sup> Catherine Gidney, "'Breathe In... Breathe out": Contextualizing the Rise of Mindfulness in Canadian Schools', *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation*, 2020.



listening.<sup>25</sup> These secular practices positively impact people in Canada, resulting in better perceptions of Buddhism as a religion and consequently improving its continuity.

### **The Changing Nature of Buddhist Religious Practices**

According to Bramadat & Seljak, different Buddhist denominations have developed in Canada over the years, each emphasizing certain doctrines and practices.<sup>26</sup> However, some universal beliefs include the anniversary of birth, enlightenment, and death of *Śākyamuni* Buddha (*Vesak*). This Vesak ceremony falls on a full moon but differs in the months and depending on the different traditions (preferably between April and May). The Tibetan, Vietnamese, and Theravada celebrate Vesak in April, May, and June, respectively; however, the months may change in different years. During this festival, the Buddhists seek to obey the basic principles of the Buddha (*pañcasīla*: five precepts), including not killing, not stealing, refraining from sexual misconduct, not lying, and not taking intoxicants while offering food to the monks and nuns. The Vesak is the only common celebration, with each tradition having different ceremonies. Other celebrations specific to different traditions are held all year-round, with teachings in Buddhist temples being held throughout the week but not limited to the weekends (*kaṭhina* robe offering, full moon precept observances, dhamma talks, and discussions). Some of the Buddhist festivals are annual ceremonies such as the Vietnamese New Year (*Tết Nguyên Đán*), Sri Lankan New Year (*Sinhala Aluth Avurudda*), Cambodian New Year (*Choul Chnam Thmey*), Lao New Year (*Pi Mai*), and Thai New Year (Songkran). Weekly celebrations usually depend on the country of origin where they have teachings in the temples throughout the week (*Mindfulness Meditation Retreats* and *Buddhism Classes*).

Some of the contemporary issues and concerns that have risen in Canadian Buddhism include women's gender roles and generational changes. In traditional Buddhist societies, the roles of monks were reserved for the monastics who undertook decision-making. In contrast, the women's roles were dedicated to worshiping, caring, and domestic service during religious traditions. However, in recent years, women have taken different roles, for example, teaching the Buddhist cultural languages and other practices in youth programs in the various temples. Regarding generational changes, the changes are a result of educated monastics. Traditionally, monastics lived in seclusion (*suññāgāra*) in a monastic environment where people approached them to ask for advice regarding day-to-day struggles. However, the new generation of monastics consists of a young and educated community who are likely to challenge and be critical of some stereotyped Buddhist traditions.

### **Increase in Agnostics**

Agnosticism is a form of irreligion that claims that it is impossible to know God's existence or supernatural acts.<sup>27</sup> They differ from atheists who claim that there is no God, which receives criticism from believers. Agnostics argue that it is impossible to answer the questions of God,

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<sup>25</sup> Chandima, Gangodawila, 'Explicating Mindfulness-based Intervention: Theoretical Insights and Empirical Applications', *Journal of International Buddhist Studies* 12, no. 1 (2021): 21–36.

<sup>26</sup> Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> Jesse M. Smith and Ryan T. Cragun, 'Secularity and Nonreligion', Bloomsbury Academic, 2021.

which is assumed that agnostics are either spiritual seekers or apophatic theists or religious factionalist or full-blown religious believers.<sup>28</sup> Irreligion has increased over the past decades. Figure 2 below shows non-religion in Canada, the US, and Mexico. The figure shows that non-religion in Canada is the highest. The growing community of non-religious people in Canada can be attributed to non-religious actors keen on challenging the long-standing Christian values, which has forced the government to regulate religious diversity, thereby increasing religious diversity.<sup>29</sup> Most irreligious people have opted for agnosticism which is more socially acceptable than other forms of non-religion. The gradual increase in Buddhist adherents can be attributed to the conversion of agnostics to Buddhist considering, Buddhist teachings suggest that gods are human creations on their way to seeking awakening but do not dispute their existence. Secular Buddhist practices are another avenue of introducing agnostics to this teaching through the rampant introduction of numerous secular Buddhist practices such as mindfulness meditation.

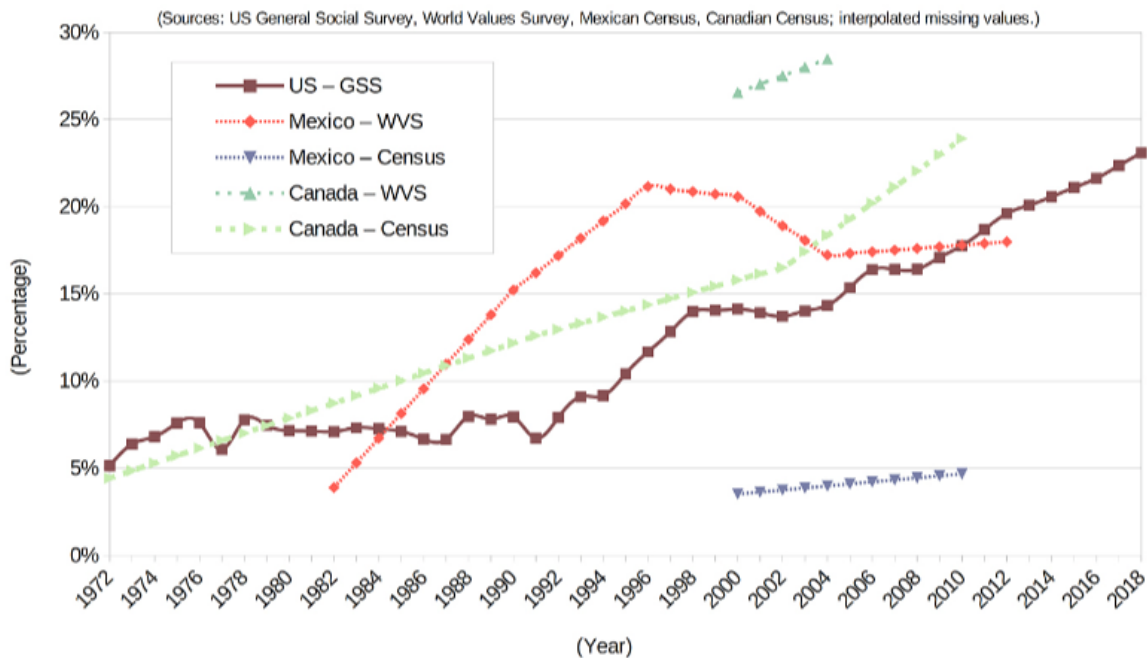


Figure 2: A figure showing the percentage of non-religious people in the US, Mexico, and Canada – 1972 – 2018.<sup>30</sup>

### Easy access to the Internet

According to Gandhi, the vast access to the internet could revolutionize online religion to be the dominant form of religion in the world.<sup>31</sup> Online religion has massive adoption, with even Christians sending prayer requests online and various religious practices being carried online.

<sup>28</sup> Sylwia Wilczewska, 'Teaching & Learning Guide for Agnosticism', *Philosophy Compass* 15, no. 6 (2020): 1–4.

<sup>29</sup> Zachary A. Munro and Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, 'Nonreligion and Secularity in Canada: Introduction', *Secular Studies* 3, no. 1 (2021): 1–6.

<sup>30</sup> Smith and Cragun, 'Secularity and Nonreligion'.

<sup>31</sup> Rutika Gandhi, 'Spiritualizing the Internet: Exploring Modern Buddhism and the Online Buddhist World.', *Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies*, no. 14 (2019): 1-25.



Online religion is characterized by the use of digital or news media, tied to human creativity and triumph in ease access of information, and help people cope with the busy work schedules. Some of the online media that have been used include video games, digital audio or video, websites, and various social media sites. Buddhism has not been left behind when it comes to integrating and using technology to spread its teachings. Some Buddhist religious rituals, such as mindful meditation, dhamma talks, and discussions, retreats are being transmitted online, aided in its growth. There are concerns regarding the authenticity of online Buddhism because it advocates against consumerism and capitalism, which are ingrained in the use of technology. These concerns have been addressed because virtual reality resonates with some Buddhist thinking of a lack of a fixed soul, which allows for various identities to be formed on the internet. A study by Negru found that most Canadian Buddhist organizations have adopted the use of the internet through having emails and websites for their organizations.<sup>32</sup>

Online forums and avatars have mainly helped spread Canadian Buddhism, aiding the creation of a different personality on the internet and free sharing of Buddhist beliefs. Thereby, the principles of Buddhism are not limited to a geographical location. Avatars offer people a second life to create personalities for the online scene, enabling them to have fluidity and learn more about themselves. The avatars help Buddhists, including those living in Canada, identify and communicate through avatars specifically marked for Buddhist audiences.<sup>33</sup> Online forums, such as Dhammawheel, Stackexchange, Suttacentral, international Buddhist web forums, have also enabled the spread of Buddhism, where avatars can still be used. These platforms have established the veracity and authenticity of Buddhism both online and offline among followers from different geographical regions. Therefore, easy access to the internet has contributed to the continuity and change in the number of Canadian Buddhists and how Canadian Buddhism is transferred or practiced.

## Methodology

The research methodology section may be primary or secondary research.<sup>34</sup> Primary research deals with data collected or produced in real-time, while secondary research deals with data collected retrospectively and discusses past events. Secondary data is collected from published literature, including books, journals, government records, websites, private sources, and newspapers. In this research, the methodology that will be adopted is the secondary research method, where secondary data sources will be subjected to rigorous analysis to establish the answers to three research questions: (1) How has Buddhism changed and continued in Canada from 1970 -2021?; (2) What is the nature of Buddhist practice geographically different in Canada?; (3) To what extent is the nature of Buddhist Practice in Canada affected by questions associated with geography, continuity, changes, and demographic differences?. Rigorous analysis of published census and data on the topic will be sought from databases such as google scholar, and other relevant websites will be used. The secondary research method will ensure that the research will provide vast information

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<sup>32</sup> John H. Negru, 'Highlights from the Survey of Canadian Buddhist Organizations', *Journal of Global Buddhism* 14 (2013): 1–18.

<sup>33</sup> Gandhi, 'Spiritualizing the Internet'.

<sup>34</sup> Rikke Ørngreen and Karin Levensen, 'Workshops as a Research Methodology.', *Electronic Journal of E-Learning* 15, no. 1 (2017): 70–81.

on the research questions due to the various authors' different perspectives by relying on previously published research questions.<sup>35</sup>

## Findings

Buddhism has come a long way since its introduction, where it posed a threat to the residents of the West. They were reluctant to the foreign religion to its acceptance and integration in the Canadian culture.<sup>36</sup> Following that, Canada developed into a multicultural country with about 108 different denominations as of the 2011 census.<sup>37</sup> Table 1 below shows the progress of the major religions in Canada according to the census data from 1971,<sup>38</sup> 1981,<sup>39</sup> 1991,<sup>40</sup> 2001,<sup>41</sup> and 2011.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Melissa P. Johnston, 'Secondary Data Analysis: A Method of Which the Time Has Come', *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries* 3, no. 3 (2017): 619–26.

<sup>36</sup> Brian Somers and Kaitlyn Evers, 'A Review of Wild Geese: Buddhism in Canada', *Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies*, no. 7 (2011): 183-187.

<sup>37</sup> Statistics Canada Government of Canada, '2011 National Household Survey: Data Tables – Religion (108), Immigrant Status and Period of Immigration (11), Age Groups (10) and Sex (3) for the Population in Private Households of Canada, Provinces, Territories, Census Metropolitan Areas and Census Agglomerations, 2011 National Household Survey', 8 May 2013, <http://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/cb7cc5f4-d518-4775-b9e5-eef9db9e7558>

<sup>38</sup> Public Services and Procurement Canada Government of Canada, '1971 Census of Canada: Population : Vol. I - Part 4 = Recensement Du Canada 1971 : Population : Vol. I - Partie 4.: CS92-729/1971-PDF ; CS92-730/1971-PDF ; CS92-731/1971-PDF ; CS92-732/1971-PDF ; CS92-733/1971-PDF ; CS92-734/1971-PDF ; CS92-735/1971-PDF ; CS92-736/1971-PDF ; CS92-737/1971-PDF ; CS92-738/1971-PDF ; CS92-739/1971-PDF ; CS92-740/1971-PDF - Government of Canada Publications - Canada.Ca', 1 July 2002, <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.834359/publication.html?wbdisable=true>.

<sup>39</sup> Public Services and Procurement Canada Government of Canada, '1981 Census of Canada : Volume 2 - Provincial Series : Population; Language, Ethnic Origin, Religion, Place of Birth, Schooling = Recensement Du Canada de 1981 : Volume 2 - Série Provinciale : Population; Langue, Origine Ethnique, Religion, Lieu de Naissance, Scolarité.: CS93-925/1981-PDF ; CS93-926/1981-PDF ; CS93-927/1981-PDF ; CS93-928/1981-PDF ; CS93-929/1981-PDF ; CS93-930/1981-PDF ; CS93-931/1981-PDF ; CS93-932/1981-PDF ; CS93-933/1981-PDF ; CS93-934/1981-PDF - Government of Canada Publications - Canada.Ca', 1 July 2002, <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.838030/publication.html?wbdisable=true>.

<sup>40</sup> English name of the content author / Nom en anglais de l'auteur du contenu, 'English Title / Titre En Anglais', Date published (YYYY-MM-DD) / Date de publication (AAAA-MM-JJ), <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/English/census91/>.

<sup>41</sup> Statistics Canada Government of Canada, 'Religions in Canada, 2001 Census (Religion and Age Groups for Population) - ARCHIVED', 8 April 2004, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/catalogue/95F0450X>.

<sup>42</sup> Government of Canada, '2011 National Household Survey'.

| Religion/Years              | 1971    | 1981       | 1991       | 2001       | 2011       |
|-----------------------------|---------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Christianity                |         | 21,678,745 | 22,503,365 | 22,851,825 | 22,102,745 |
| Buddhism                    | 16,335  | 51,955     | 163,420    | 300,345    | 366,830    |
| Hindu                       |         | 69,505     | 157,010    | 297,200    | 497,960    |
| Jewish                      | 276,020 | 296,425    | 318,070    | 329,995    | 329,500    |
| Islam                       |         | 98,165     | 253,265    | 579,640    | 1,053,945  |
| Sikh                        |         | 67,715     | 147,440    | 278,315    | 454,965    |
| Traditional<br>(Aboriginal) |         | 361,565    | 387,395    | 37,545     | 64,940     |
| Other<br>Religions          |         | 24,015     | 65,120     | 63,975     | 130,835    |
| No religious<br>Affiliation |         | 1,783,495  | 3,386,365  | 4,900,090  | 7,850,605  |

Table 1: A table showing the progress of the major religions in Canada according to the census data from 1971,<sup>43</sup> 1981,<sup>44</sup> 1991,<sup>45</sup> 2001,<sup>46</sup> and 2011.<sup>47</sup>

### The Continuity of Canadian Buddhism: A Documented Oral History

Sugunasiri has been at the center stage of the milestones and changes in Buddhism over the years since the eighties, which he has documented as an oral history.<sup>48</sup> This section will summarize the oral history that has been published under the title “*Buddhism in Canada- an Oral History*” by *Suwanda H J Sugunasiri, Ph.D.* The author discusses from its origin through to the current state of Buddhist practices in Canada and all the milestones Buddhism has made over the years.

The early introduction of Buddhism in Canada was through the Chinese and the Japanese who came to North America as imported labor. The Chinese were not the first people to introduce institutional Buddhism, but the Japanese were. During World War II, the Japanese were subjected to historical injustices and physical displacement. The displaced lead to the migration of the Japanese from British Columbia to other provinces such as Alberta.<sup>49</sup> After world war II, the Canadian government changed policies that allowed multiculturalism, and therefore Buddhism started spreading again. However, the Second growth started from Central Canada, in Toronto and Montreal. After that, several centers of the different sects of Buddhism started being opened across Canada. The growth resulted in the development of different schools, branches, and doctrinal differences within Canada.

<sup>43</sup> Government of Canada, ‘1971 Census of Canada’.

<sup>44</sup> Government of Canada, ‘1981 Census of Canada’.

<sup>45</sup> contenu, ‘English Title / Titre En Anglais’.

<sup>46</sup> Government of Canada, ‘Religions in Canada, 2001 Census (Religion and Age Groups for Population) - Archived’.

<sup>47</sup> Government of Canada, ‘2011 National Household Survey’.

<sup>48</sup> Sugunasiri, ‘Buddhism in Canada-an Oral History’.

<sup>49</sup> A.W Barber, ‘Buddhism in Canada | The Canadian Encyclopedia’.

Various Buddhist leaders showed up during the World Conference on Religion for Peace (WCRP), an interfaith dialogue (1980-1981). After the conference, they decided to continue coming together, which resulted in the birth of the Buddhist Federation of Toronto. The Buddhist community continued growing and holding more events. Therefore, the Buddhists' community's voice was heard in various provinces across Canada dealing with interfaith and multicultural issues. The continued growth of Buddhism enabled it to be involved in interfaith TV, Vision TV, which aided in the recognition of the Buddhist movement nationally and gave it a voice. Then the Buddhist Federation of Toronto transitioned into the Buddhist Council of Canada (BCC) in 1985.

Consequently, the growth of Buddhism was associated with challenges where different sects did not need each other to survive due to significant adherents, teachers, capital, and English-speaking members, which undermined the necessity of BCC. However, the growth of the different schools strengthened Buddhism with dedicated followers from each school. This strength was to be seen and appreciated later in 2012 to 2014 when Buddhists started coming together again, sharing their growths and showing the variance in Canadian Buddhism. The regained Buddhist Unity drew attention to the political scene, where leaders sought to get the votes of Buddhist adherents and were educated about Buddhism in the process. Buddhism became more prevalent where there were books displayed in Robarts Library, University of Toronto.

The spread of Buddhism was continued by strategic initiatives that promoted temples being left open to enable non-Buddhist people to meet with the teachers at any time. Interactions with other people from other denominations also helped spread Buddhism and promote secular Buddhist ethics. The government involvement, such as in the interfaith committee, ensured that non-religious people were also represented in the constitution of Canada. Finally, the last strategic plan was to spread Buddhism through the media. Buddhism was spread through the use of television, where the Buddhist teachers conducted live Q&A sessions. The print media was also instrumental in spreading Buddhism and creating an audience for publications, seminars, courses, and meditation. In summary, Buddhism has stood the test of time, and it is in Canada to stay and continue to progress.

## **Provincial Buddhism**

This section will discuss the changes in Buddhism in Canada's different provinces.

### **Buddhism in British Columbia**

According to the 2011 census data, there were 90,620 Buddhist adherents in British Columbia. Placzek & DeVries discuss Buddhism in British Columbia from geographical, historical, ethnic, and conservatism contexts in the book edited by Matthews<sup>50</sup>. British Columbia is divided into three regions; the lower mainland, the Islands, and the interior. The lower mainland has the highest Buddhist population, with roughly 64 groups located there as of 2004. British Columbia was historically one of the first provinces to settle Asian immigrants who spread Buddhism following an influx of skilled Japanese and Chinese laborers. After the American Cultural Revolution, the adoption of multicultural policy in Canada led to the further spread of Buddhism in British Columbia. Freedom of expressing Buddhist faith was characterized by

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<sup>50</sup> James Placzek and Larry DeVries, 'Buddhism in British Columbia', *Buddhism in Canada*, 2006, 1.

increasing Buddhist organizations and Buddhist education studies at the University of British Columbia. There are numerous Buddhist schools, including the Theravada community, the Vipassana community, Mahayana, Zen, Tibetan, and the Vajrayana Buddhist group. The Theravada community was developed by people from Thailand, Sri Lanka, Burma, Laos and, Cambodia, whereas the Mahayana and Vajrayana communities were developed by Japanese and Chinese who have a long history in British Columbia. However, some of the Mahayana communities are associated with the Taiwanese, Vietnamese, and Koreans. The Zen Buddhist community also has ties with the Japanese, either from the USA or Japan. The multiculturalism and enough flow of people in British Columbia favored different Buddhist schools' growth.

### **Buddhism in Alberta**

As shown by the census data, the number of Buddhists in 2011 in Alberta was 44, 410 people. Kawamura discusses the continuity of Buddhism in Alberta, focusing on the progression in the two main metropolitans in the lower half of the province and the different Buddhist denominations.<sup>51</sup> Despite Buddhism starting in British Columbia, it was in Alberta that it first thrived among the immigrant communities starting with Jodo Shin Shu, who brought Buddhism to Alberta in the 1930s. During the displacement of the Japanese inland, they were scattered in southern Alberta, which led to the establishment of Buddhist temples to cater to their needs. Most of the Buddhists are in Calgary, which has groups that practice Buddhism from a Theravada basis. These groups include meditation groups and temples. Another school in Alberta is the Tibetan Buddhist group which is characterized by western converts and local communities. The increase in Buddhists in Alberta has seen Tibetan institutions such as the Edmonton Gaden Samten Ling group, the Akshobya Kadampa Buddhist Centre, Marpa Gompa Changchup Ling, and the Diamond Way Centre. All the different centers seek to ensure that the members are taught Buddhist philosophy and weekly meditation practices. The East Asian Buddhist school is another prominent school in Alberta that started under the influence of Vietnamese immigrants in Calgary and Edmonton. These different schools lead to the growth of more followers and more temples in Alberta, with Theravada and Tibetan schools at the front.

### **Buddhism in Saskatchewan and Manitoba**

There were 4,265 Buddhists in Saskatchewan and 6770 in Manitoba, according to the 2011 census data. Mullens discusses Buddhism in Saskatchewan (SK) and Manitoba (MB) based on ethnic divisions focusing on Asian-ethnic Buddhist and Euro-Canadian Buddhist groups. Chinese and the Japanese were the major Asians who migrated to SK and MB, and they used the Buddhist religion to retain their culture.<sup>52</sup> This led to the renting of spaces to aid Buddhist congregants to meet in one place. However, other smaller groups such as the Tibetans, Las, Koreans, Cambodians, and Burmese are available in SK and MB. Still, they do not have a large following that would enable them to establish independent temples. The majority of the Asian population is mainly the Chinese, who settled in Saskatoon and Regina as contract laborers, and Vietnamese, who established intuitions to hold prayer gatherings in the 1980s. In MB, the Chinese arrived as entrepreneurs who established a Buddhist profile followed by the Japanese. The growth of

<sup>51</sup> Leslie Kawamura, 'Buddhism in Alberta', in *Buddhism in Canada* (Routledge, 2006), 52–64.

<sup>52</sup> James G. Mullens, 'Buddhism in Saskatchewan and Manitoba', in *Buddhism in Canada* (Routledge, 2006), 65–80.

Buddhism led to the construction of temples and other Buddhist centers, increasing the number of adherents. Converts of the Euro- Canadian ethnicity started learning about Buddhism in theology schools. After World War II, some of them went to the Asian countries to acquaint themselves with the Buddhist traditions. The progression of Buddhism among Euro-Canadian people resulted in services conducted in English, thereby resulting in more conversions and expansion of Buddhism's reach.

### **Buddhism in Ontario**

According to the 2011 census data, there were 163,750 Buddhist adherents in Ontario. These statistics show that Ontario has the most significant number of Buddhists among all the provinces in Canada. Koppedraye & Fenn suggest that census data does not fully represent the number of Buddhists in Ontario, just the number that agrees to tick the box during the census survey.<sup>53</sup> Buddhism in Ontario is rich in a manner that allows people who want to have a deeper understanding of Buddhism can interact with adequate information in the temples. The temples and other Buddhist centers have spread is due to the expansion of the religion to people who are not Buddhists by birth. The highest fraction of the Buddhists in Ontario is from a non-Buddhist origin. Ontario's culture has accepted Buddhism such that even non-Buddhist Canadians gravitate towards Buddha's teachings.

Various Buddhist traditions are represented in Ontario, including Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana, and eclectic forms. The centers that emphasize the Theravada tradition have different forms due to their affiliation with the various ethnic traditions. Asian and non-Asian Ethnic groups have helped propagate Theravada Buddhism in Ontario by establishing Laotian, Burmese, Cambodian, Thai, and Sri Lankan temples. Buddhists who also migrated from India, specifically Bangladesh, practice Theravada Buddhism in Canada. In contrast, the Korean and the Chinese helped spread Mahayana Buddhism, and the Japanese and some Koreans practice and spread Vajrayana, Won Buddhism, and Zen Buddhism. The establishment of many Buddhist denominations has resulted in numerous diversities.

### **Buddhism in Quebec**

The census data shows that the number of Buddhists in 2011 throughout Quebec was 52,385 people. According to Dorais, the initial Buddhists in Quebec were Chinese who migrated from British Columbia in the 1870s.<sup>54</sup> Later, after the removal of immigration restrictions, there was an influx of Buddhist immigrants, including Japanese, Korean, Sri Lankan refugees, Vietnamese, Tibetan, and Hong-Kong executives who brought Buddhism and constructed various Buddhist religious institutions. The most prominent school of Buddhism in Quebec is the Mahayana Buddhist school, with other schools such as Theravada Buddhism having a smaller following. The spread of Vietnamese Mahayana Buddhism is associated with the numerous Vietnamese festivals often held in Quebec. The social and cultural events aim to preserve Vietnamese Buddhism by teaching their children religion; Vietnamese language and geography classes are offered together with Buddhist classes in some Buddhist centers and temples in Quebec,

<sup>53</sup> Kay Koppedraye and Mavis L. Fenn, 'Buddhist Diversity in Ontario', in *Buddhism in Canada* (Routledge, 2006), 81–106.

<sup>54</sup> Louis-Jacques Dorais, 'Buddhism in Quebec', in *Buddhism in Canada* (Routledge, 2006), 142–63.



for example, Montreal. The landscape of religion has changed in Quebec, with women's roles shifting from house chores, where they are allowed to conduct meditation classes and teach the young people Vietnamese. The changes result from the few numbers of monks and nuns due to the increased Buddhist population.

### **Buddhism in Atlantic Canada**

According to the 2011 census data, there were 3840 Buddhist adherents in Atlantic Canada, 975 in New Brunswick, 400 in Newfoundland and Labrador, 2,205 in Nova Scotia, and 560 in Prince Edward Island. Matthews suggests that Buddhism in Atlantic Canada consists of different ethnicities, including Chinese, Vietnamese, and Sri-Lankan communities.<sup>55</sup> The Chinese community has the most extended-standing Buddhist history in Atlantic Canada. However, only two temples are teaching that is associated with the Chinese community. Despite Buddhism and Meditation being new in Atlantic Canada, Shambhala international, Atlantic Theravada Buddhist Cultural and Meditation Society, and Smaller Zen Meditation centers are dominant in Atlantic Canada. The schools that have developed thereof in Atlantic Canada have their roots in Asian countries but providing a western reach allowing for modernized Buddhism that still respects and follows the traditional principles.

### **Buddhism in Northern Territories**

According to the 2011 census data, there were 170 Buddhists in the northern territories (Yukon, Northern Territories, and Nunavut). Although there do not appear to have been many significant Buddhist works in these three arctic regions of Canada, there are a few meditation groups and various Buddhist temples of multiple denominations operating in their capacities. These Buddhist centers include Northern Vajrayana, Northern Buddhist Centre, Yukon Mindfulness Center, Snare River Meditation group in Yukon;<sup>56</sup> Yellowknife Shambhala Meditation group in Yellowknife;<sup>57</sup> and Iqaluit Soto Zen group in Nunavut. Buddhism has spread to arctic Canada sparingly due to low immigration and few jobs for Asians. However, the neighboring US state of Alaska appears to be a welcoming hub for many Thai Buddhists.

### **National Buddhism**

Canada is home to over 600 Buddhist organizations, including meditation centers, temples, groups, associations, and resources.<sup>58</sup> According to the 2011 census data, Buddhism has acquired 366,830 adherents, representing 1.1% of the Canadian population despite being one of the smallest religions. The growth in Buddhists numbers in Canada is one of the many accomplishments of Canadian Buddhism. From its introduction by the Chinese and the Japanese, Buddhism has spread

<sup>55</sup> Matthews, *Buddhism in Atlantic Canada*.

<sup>56</sup> BuddhaNet, 'World Buddhist Directory - Presented by BuddhaNet.Net', accessed 9 August 2021, [https://www.buddhanet.info/wbd/province.php?province\\_id=21](https://www.buddhanet.info/wbd/province.php?province_id=21); Whitehorse Daily, 'Whitehorse Daily Star: Buddhist Rites Mark Cremation of Climbers In Quiet Yukon Valley', Whitehorse Daily Star, accessed 9 August 2021, <https://www.whitehorsestar.com/History/buddhist-rites-mark-cremation-of-climbers-in-quiet-yukon-valley1>.

<sup>57</sup> Shambhala, 'Find a Shambhala Centre', *Shambhala* (blog), accessed 9 August 2021, <https://shambhala.org/centres/find-shambhala-centre/>.

<sup>58</sup> Sumeru Guide, 'Canadian Buddhist Organizations', accessed 8 August 2021, <http://www.directory.sumeru-books.com/>.

all over the country, with Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, and Alberta being the provinces with the highest number of Buddhists. The progression of Buddhism in Canada from being an alien religion in a Christian country to a widely accepted religion with recognition in the media, universities, and by the law. In Canada, the multicultural policy and regulations that protect religious diversity have enabled many people to be openly and comfortably be Buddhist in the public sphere, which was not the case during World War II for the Japanese.

According to Todd, Buddhism in Canada has become associated with peace and other nice things, which has not always been the case with rival religions: Christianity and Islam.<sup>59</sup> Todd explains that the representation of Buddhism has been under-represented because national statistics do not account for the Buddhists who spend time reading books on Buddhism and other Asians who practice duo religions where they can attend Christian church services and Buddhist temples. The growth of Buddhism and the positive stereotype has not been without flaws. Some of the contentions were completed from different schools that strive to achieve superiority and gain more followers. Some authors, according to Todd, point to the futility of new American converts trying to make changes to the religion in their pursuit to understand the teachings of the Buddha, pointing them as distortions in the Buddha's teachings.

Regardless of the contentions from the different schools, Buddhism has become a religion strongly rooted in Canadian soil. There is acceptance of various Buddhist practices such as mindful living through mindful meditation being introduced in the public sphere, where it is practiced at workplaces, such as in the police force, prisons, and schools.<sup>60</sup> The Buddha's teachings can be cataloged by tradition, types of practice, adaptations, teaching styles, and the ethnicity of the followers. Despite the increase in the different schools of Buddhism, there has been a rejection of the idea of Canadian Buddhism with the groups holding tight to their cultures.

## **Discussion**

The study found consistent results in the published literature and reliable statistics showing the growth of adherents over the decades. However, Todd suggests that the census data is an under-representation of the number of Buddhists in Canada because the studies do not consider the number of people with duo religion and people who read and employ Buddhist philosophy from various books.<sup>61</sup> Consistent data collected shows that Buddhism was introduced to Canada by Japanese and Chinese immigrants, and the adoption of the multiculturalism policy aided the spread. During the American Revolution, the Japanese were displaced from British Columbia, where they migrated to other areas such as Alberta. After introducing the multicultural policy in 1971, Buddhism started spreading from central Canada as opposed to the coast where there were the first immigrants. The growth in different schools of Buddhism in the 1990s resulted in disunity, which is echoed by Sugunasiri.<sup>62</sup> Financial expansion, growth of members' base, and increase in

<sup>59</sup> Douglas Todd, "'Nice' Buddhism Growing in Canada, but with Competition', Vancouver Sun, 2010, <https://vancouversun.com/news/staff-blogs/nice-buddhism-growing-in-canada-with-rivalry>.

<sup>60</sup> Matthew King, 'On Canadian Buddhist Engagement with Religious Rights Discourse and the Law | Ontario Human Rights Commission', 2012, <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/creed-freedom-religion-and-human-rights-special-issue-diversity-magazine-volume-93-summer-2012/canadian-buddhist-engagement-religious-rights-discourse-and-law>; Sugunasiri, 'Buddhism in Canada-an Oral History'.

<sup>61</sup> Todd, "'Nice' Buddhism Growing in Canada, but with Competition'.

<sup>62</sup> Sugunasiri, 'Buddhism in Canada-an Oral History'.

English-speaking teachers and members provided an environment where the different schools did not need each other to survive. The separation turned out to be a strength because the different schools strived to increase their following aiming for superiority against other denominations, therefore laying a strong background of Buddhism in Canada.

An increase between 1981 and 1990 in the census data can therefore be explained by the adoption of the multicultural policy that allowed people to express their religion. The multicultural policy also created avenues for Buddhist teachers to be involved in interfaith events in a primarily Christian country, which has also increased Buddhism's outreach in the visual media, TV media, on the internet, and in public institutions. The reduced rate of increase in Buddhist members could be associated with the low unity between the different schools, which was rekindled in 2010.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, the rapid increase in the number of Buddhists in Canada may resume during the 2021 census data.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, Buddhism has continued to change and increase in numbers over the decades. The changes that have been encountered include the increase in the number and diversity of adherents. The earliest Buddhists, the Japanese and Chinese, tried to maintain their culture through religion in multicultural Canada, which acted as a base for Buddhism's spread. Over the years, Buddhism has seen followers from various ethnicities, including natives and immigrants, such as Koreans, Japanese, Vietnamese, Chinese, Thai, Lao, Cambodian, Sri Lankan, Nepalese, and Tibetans. Buddhism has also developed from being called a foreign religion to being represented in the constitution, visual and print media, universities, and the political scene. Changes that have occurred include the development of new schools such as secular and modernized Buddhism. Secular Buddhism has been adopted by agnostics and atheists who enjoy Buddhism's benefits without focusing on the supernatural issues of Buddhism. Practices like mindfulness meditation have been continually used in the public spheres to cure mental health disorders and improve people's ability to live in peace, harmony, and awareness. Modern Buddhism has employed the internet in the forms of web forums and avatars to spread and discussions about Buddhist philosophy and culture. However, another study needs to be conducted after the release of 2021 census statistics to map the progress and the future of Buddhism in Canada. Buddhism is a religion that focuses on enabling people to live free from the cycle of suffering. Therefore, its progression and growth would improve cohesion and unity among the Canadian population both the natives and the immigrants.

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<sup>63</sup> Sugunasiri, 'Buddhism in Canada-an Oral History'.

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