

Buddhism in Canada: A Statistical Overview from Canadian Censuses, 1981-2001¹

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Abstract:

A demographic analysis of Buddhism in Canada, based on statistical data from the 1981 to 2001 decennial Canadian census. The main features of Buddhism in Canada identified include: the doubling in numbers of Buddhists in Canada every ten years, mainly because of continued immigration; Buddhists' residence in the largest Canadian cities, and disproportionately in Western Canada; the persistence of a decidedly "Vietnamese" flavour demographically of Buddhism in Canada, although Chinese Buddhists are becoming more and more dominant; the second-generation offspring of Buddhist immigrants generally exhibit high levels of integration into dominant Canadian society; only a minority of these generally still quite young Canada-born children of Buddhist immigrants appear to be retaining their parental Buddhist identity; and so-called "Western" Buddhism is a significant if minority aspect of Canadian Buddhism.

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In terms of the number of declared adherents, Buddhism is now the fourth-largest religion in Canada, surpassing 300,000 people in the 2001 Canadian census. Although that represents only a tiny 1% of the overall Canadian population, it is more than double what it was as

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recently as 1991 and almost six times the figure for 1981. By the next decennial census in 2011, if the pattern of the last 30 years continues, the current number will in all likelihood have doubled or more as the result of continued high levels of immigration from areas of the world where Buddhism is a dominant religion. And Buddhism will have attained the number three position behind only Christianity and Islam. As is almost always the case, however, such inclusive statistics hide as much as they reveal. Above all, they tell us nothing about the nature of this Buddhism, its depth, its personal and institutional strength or weakness. The Canadian census question from which they derive asks only to what religion a person adheres, irrespective of whether or how they actively practise that religion. It is a subjective identification that is being measured, nothing more. Nonetheless, by looking more closely at various other characteristics of its adherents over the last few decades, ones targeted by other census questions, it is possible to gain a somewhat more complex, if not clearer, picture at least as concerns such issues as the national origin of Canada's Buddhists, their gender distribution, their level of education, and the patterns of identification among the Canada-born children of these Buddhists. In addition, one can look at where they live in Canada, where they are concentrated, and thereby have an idea of where the possibilities for further institutional growth are highest, namely in the areas of highest concentration. It is to this sort of contextual analysis that this article is devoted.

Canada has been asking census questions about religious identification since the 1840s. During the nineteenth century, the categories recorded were all varieties of Christianity, with the single exception of Jews. In the 1901 census, two additional non-Christian religious identifications make their appearance in the statistics, Confucianism and Buddhism. These reflect the then significant numbers of migrants who had arrived in the late nineteenth century in Western Canada from China and Japan respectively.² Buddhism is in fact a heavily "Japanese" category until well after the Second World War. As late as the 1971 census, almost two-thirds of Buddhists in Canada gave Japanese as their ethnic origin. This strong relation between religious and ethnic identification is further revealed in that the number of Buddhists in 1951 was roughly half of those recorded in the 1941 census—dropping from about 16,000 to about 8,000—a probable consequence of the harsh treatment of Japanese Canadians during this global conflict.³ Among the implications of these earlier statistics is that the story of Buddhism in Canada, both statistically and more generally, will be dramatically different after the change in Canada's immigration laws in the late 1960s.

With the end of the exclusionary policies that essentially restricted immigration to Europeans, people have been coming to Canada from all over the world. That includes large numbers of self-identified Buddhists from the various Buddhist heartlands of South, Southeast, and East Asia, China and Vietnam in particular.

TABLE 1. Buddhist Population of Canada, 1901-2001

	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
Buddhists	10407	10012	11281	15784	15635	8184	11611	16175	51955	163415	300345

Source: Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics n.d. (for 1951); n.d. (for 1961); Statistics Canada 1980; 2003a

A look at the Buddhist growth patterns and the ethnic composition of that growth since 1971 can put some flesh on this observation. Table 1 shows the overall situation clearly. We note very low numbers of no more than 15,000 until 1971. Then in only three decades, the numbers climb to the aforementioned 300,000 of the 2001 census. In terms of ethnic origin, already by 1981, the percentage of Japanese Buddhists had declined to roughly 20% of the total. This figure then shrinks to 8% in 1991 and only 4.5% in 2001, a reflection of the fact that few immigrants in recent decades have come from Japan and many more from other Asian regions. Correspondingly, the percentage of Buddhists of Southeast Asian origin (mostly Vietnamese) increases from negligible numbers in 1971 to 39% in 1991, only to give way slightly to the ever increasing numbers of Buddhists of Chinese ethnic origin. This latter category went from about 14% of Buddhists in 1971 to almost 55% by 2001. Given the sheer number of immigrants coming to Canada from China, this Chinese dominance is almost certainly still increasing, inevitably lending Canadian Buddhism at the level of the general population an increasingly Chinese flavour. Whether this will lead to Chinese dominance of Buddhist institutions in Canada remains to be seen. Certainly the population base for such ascendancy is there.

Looking at the ethnic composition of Canada’s Buddhists somewhat further, Table 2 shows some additional significant trends over the last three decades. These have to do with the increasing and significant minorities of Buddhists who consider themselves ethnically Canadian, the consistent and growing presence of “Western European” Buddhists, and the growth in South Asian (mainly Sri Lankan) and Korean Buddhists. The table gives the raw numbers in addition to percentages so that the growth of these minority categories will be more

TABLE 2. Ethnic Composition of Canada's Buddhists, 1971-2001

	1971	1981	1991**	2001**
Chinese	2310 (14.3%)	15520 (29.9%)	74715 (45.7%)	163570 (54.5%)
Southeast Asian	n/a	19285 (37.1%)	63265 (38.7%)	100635 (33.5%)
Japanese	10320 (63.8%)	10510 (20.2%)	13320 (8.2%)	13380 (4.5%)
Korean	n/a	495 (1.0%)	1060 (0.7%)	3875 (1.3%)
South Asian	285 (1.8%)	1050 (2.0%)	3290 (2.0%)	7105 (2.4%)
Western European	2210 (13.7%)	4040 (7.8%)	10795 (6.6%)	22215 (7.4%)
Canadian	65 (0.4%)	105 (0.2%)	1570 (1.0%)	15685 (5.2%)
<i>Totals</i>	16175 (100%)	51955 (100%)	163420 (100%)	300345 (100.00%)

n/a = not available

** Includes single and multiple ethnic origins; therefore totals of individual categories are more than overall total

Source: Statistics Canada 2003a

evident. In particular one notes the significant growth in the ethnically European Buddhists, not in percentage but in absolute terms. Also quite evident is the large increase in ethnically Canadian Buddhists from 1991 to 2001. While not unimportant, it probably has more to do with the increasing popularity of this ethnic category in the overall Canadian population—in part a somewhat delayed response to permitting multiple answers for the ethnic identity question as of 1991—than it reflects the conversion of longstanding Canadians to Buddhism or a change in ethnic identification among the Canadian-born children of immigrant Buddhists. I deal with the issues of “Western Buddhism” and the Buddhist second generation in greater detail below. By contrast, Korean and South Asian Buddhists, while still tiny minorities, are clearly increasing both in absolute and percentage terms. Their comparatively small numbers nonetheless point to two of the many peculiarities of recent Canadian immigration patterns: immigrants from Sri Lanka have been overwhelmingly Tamil Hindus, not Sinhalese Buddhists; and Korean immigrants still, as it were, “self-select” for Christianity.⁴

Looking at Canada's immigrant Buddhists in terms of country or region of birth reveals another significant dimension. Among the increasingly dominant ethnically Chinese component, as Table 3 shows, the single largest group here is actually those who were born in Southeast

Asia, mostly Vietnam, not China. Even though the sheer numbers of immigrants from the People’s Republic, from Taiwan, and from Hong Kong are eroding the percentage dominance of these Chinese Southeast Asians, in 2001 they still constituted over one-third of all Chinese Buddhists. In fact, if we add these Southeast Asian Chinese Buddhists to the ethnically Southeast Asian Buddhists, the degree to which Canadian immigrant Buddhism is still a heavily “Vietnamese” Buddhism becomes even more evident. Instead of the distribution between Chinese and Southeast Asian Buddhists being 54.5% to 33.5% of all Buddhists, it reverses to a ratio of 38.5% to 49.5%. Currently, about half of all

TABLE 3. Ethnically Chinese Immigrant Buddhists in Canada, 1981-2001

	1981	1991	2001
<i>Born in:</i>			
(PR) China	2,885 (20.1%)	20,930 (31.6%)	45,520 (33.0%)
Taiwan	2,760 (19.2%)	5,130 (7.8%)	22,270 (16.1%)
Hong Kong	1,095 (7.6%)	8,025 (12.1%)	18,285 (13.3%)
Southeast Asia	6,720 (46.8%)	30,415 (45.9%)	47,975 (34.8%)
Elsewhere	910 (6.3%)	1,790 (2.7%)	3,855 (2.8%)
Total	14,370 (100%)	66,290 (100%)	137,905 (100%)

Source: Statistics Canada 2003a

immigrant Buddhists in Canada are Southeast Asians, either ethnically or in terms of place of birth.

To a certain degree, this continued Southeast Asian dominance is also a reflection of how people from different world regions typically characterize themselves, and not just or not simply a difference in religious adherence and practice. When immigrants from different regions read the Canadian census question “what is your religion?” they will tend to understand it in different ways, at least initially. People from parts of the world where a particular religion or particular religions are an accepted aspect of general cultural identification are more likely to give those religions as their religions, even if their level of involvement or practice is marginal or minimal. In Canada, for instance, it is still the case that far more people identify themselves as one or another variety of Christian than actually practice that religion with any depth or regularity (see e.g. Bibby 2002). Something similar might be said about people from

Muslim majority countries and the identification as Muslim. In many countries of Eastern Asia, by contrast, this kind of “cultural” identifying of oneself as the adherent of any particular religion is far less prevalent. Thus, in China (including Taiwan), Japan, Korea, or Vietnam, the percentage of people who identify as having no religion is much higher than it is in most other places in the world (Pas 1989; Reader 1991; *The Republic of China Yearbook* 2002; Cho 2004). We may interpret this simply as a comparative lack of religiousness, but it is probably more accurate to say that the standards for considering oneself an “adherent” of a religion are different. Nonetheless, even among these countries, there are differences in how strong this penchant towards non-identification is. Of those mentioned it appears to be strongest in China, and then in descending order, less strong in Japan, Taiwan, Korea, and finally Vietnam. Accordingly, we should expect these differences to be reflected to some degree among immigrants to Canada who come from these countries. Table 4 shows how this is the case. There we see that the tendency to identify with no religion is strongest among all the ethnically Chinese except those who were born in Southeast Asia. It is comparatively weaker among the Japanese and then even more so among the Koreans and Southeast Asians. The ethnically Chinese from Southeast Asia almost seem to be influenced by both elements in that designation, being less non-religious than the other Chinese, but more so than the other Southeast Asians. With the Koreans, their historical self-selection for Christianity must be kept in mind. This is a factor for all the groups listed, but it is strongest among the Koreans. Most important for our

TABLE 4. Religious Identity of Selected Immigrant Ethnic Groups in Canada, 2001

	Chinese				Japanese	SE Asian	Korean
<i>Born in:</i>	<i>PR China</i>	<i>Hong Kong</i>	<i>Taiwan</i>	<i>SEAsia</i>	<i>Japan</i>	<i>Southeast Asia</i>	<i>Korea</i>
Buddhist	13.0%	7.7%	31.7%	37.8%	26.7%	53.3%	4.3%
Christian	15.7%	34.3%	20.1%	31.7%	13.5%	25.3%	75.0%
No Religion	70.6%	57.4%	47.4%	29.7%	56.9%	19.4%	20.3%
Other	0.7%	0.6%	1.8%	0.8%	2.9%	1.3%	0.4%
<i>Population</i>	<i>348915</i>	<i>236375</i>	<i>70285</i>	<i>126980</i>	<i>25170</i>	<i>141725</i>	<i>81575</i>

Source: Statistics Canada 2003a

purposes here, however, is that the two subgroups born in Southeast Asia are those that identify most readily with Buddhism. Thus the Southeast Asian dominance of Canadian immigrant Buddhism may be as much a matter of differing habits of identification as it is something that will be reflected at the institutional and personal practice level.

This subjective component of Buddhist identity among Canada’s immigrants is further evidenced by changes in patterns of religious identification over time once people have arrived in Canada. Table 5 shows such changes for Chinese ethnic immigrants who arrived in Canada between 1981 and 1990. It compares their religious identification in 1991, from one to 10 years after their arrival, with that of 2001, after they had been in Canada from 10 to 20 years. Although these changes can and should in part be attributed to actual changes in religious identity through conversions or greater involvement in religion – and it is well established that immigrant populations often increase their level of religious involvement as an aspect of their adaptation to new circumstances and a different societal context – the consistency of the change in pattern across groups from different regions or countries of birth signals that we are probably also dealing with a simple shift in subjective identification, in other words, a shift in how the census question is understood and how “approved” answers are perceived. Accordingly, whether these immigrants were born in Taiwan, the People’s Republic, Hong Kong, or Southeast Asia, in each case Buddhist and

TABLE 5. Religious Identification of Ethnically Chinese Immigrants, 1991 and 2001
(Immigrated to Canada between 1981 and 1990)

	1991				2001			
<i>Born in:</i>	<i>PR China</i>	<i>Hong Kong</i>	<i>Taiwan</i>	<i>SEAsia</i>	<i>PR China</i>	<i>Hong Kong</i>	<i>Taiwan</i>	<i>SEAsia</i>
Buddhist	13.8%	5.0%	30.1%	34.4%	19.0%	8.4%	33.0%	42.6%
Christian	14.4%	32.3%	21.0%	25.1%	16.6%	38.4%	26.6%	26.3%
No Religion	71.4%	62.4%	48.5%	39.5%	63.9%	52.4%	39.6%	30.5%
Population	69695	89905	11450	48735	63255	65055	8450	52140

Source: Statistics Canada 2003a

Christian identifications increase from one census to the next and “no religion” identification decreases correspondingly.

These different and changing religious identifications among these immigrant groups lead to questions of the overall numerical

strength of Buddhism in Canada and its geographical distribution. A look at these dimensions will prepare the ground for a subsequent and more detailed consideration of the issues of the second generations and levels of education among Canada's Buddhists.

As noted at the outset, Buddhism in 2001 ranked fourth among Canadians in terms of identification with generally recognized world religions. Christianity, of course, was by far the most common such identity, with 77% of the total population of a little under 30 million still declaring themselves Christian in one form or another. Among Christians, as has historically been the case since the arrival of Europeans in Canada, Roman Catholics are the dominant group. In 2001, about 43.5% of the Canadian population said they were Roman Catholic, while Protestants comprised a further 32%, and Eastern Christians a modest 1.5%. As for non-Christian identities, Muslims had risen to around 2% of the population (about 580,000), while Jews (about 330,000), Hindus (about 300,000), and Sikhs (about 278,000), like Buddhists, hovered in the range of 1% each. To say that Buddhists ranked fourth, therefore, is to put them in a group of minority religions, each of which with similar numerical strengths.

Leaving aside Christians, who make up a substantial majority in almost all parts of the country – the one notable exception is the greater Vancouver area where Christians in 2001 were a bare majority of the population – a look at the geographical distribution of the adherents of the five other world religions reveals some notable concentrations. Overall, Canada's Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs are overwhelmingly concentrated in the major urban areas, especially Vancouver/Abbotsford, Calgary, Edmonton, the Golden Horseshoe (Hamilton to Oshawa, including Kitchener/Waterloo, Guelph, and the Greater Toronto Area [GTA]), Ottawa-Gatineau, and Montreal. In 2001, around 90% of the adherents of each of the five religions lived in these six urban areas. Within those overall figures, however, we find some interesting distributions, including with respect to Buddhists. Table 6 summarizes the statistical picture. Of potential significance is that Buddhists are disproportionately located in Western Canada. Even though more live east of the Manitoba-Ontario border than west of it, 43% of Buddhists live in the west, yet only 30% of the Canadian population does. Moreover, the Vancouver area has 70% as many Buddhists as does Toronto, and yet the Toronto region has almost three times as many inhabitants. The only religious group more heavily western is the Sikhs, 60% of whom live in the west. There are more Sikhs in the Vancouver region than in the entire Toronto area. The adherents of the other three non-Christian religions are all more heavily concentrated in the eastern half Canada. Over two-thirds of Hindus live in the Toronto region alone; and 80% of Jews are located in either Montreal or Toronto. Even 80% of

TABLE 6. Geographic Distribution of Religious Identities in Canada, 2001

	Muslims	Jews	Buddhists	Hindus	Sikhs	Total
All of Canada	579,645	329,990	300,345	299,655	278,415	29,639,035
Toronto†	280,670	170,705	107,530	203,240	97,980	6,146,450
Vancouver*	53,030	17,435	75,630	28,430	115,785	2,112,465
Montreal	100,185	88,765	37,840	24,185	7,930	3,380,640
Calgary	25,915	6,530	16,640	7,315	13,320	943,310
Edmonton	19,580	3,980	14,045	7,920	9,405	927,020
Ottawa‡	41,725	11,325	9,985	8,215	2,645	1,050,755
Rest of Canada	58,540	31,255	38,675	20,355	31,350	15,078,395
Eastern Canada**	466,820	283,710	172,325	244,245	113,505	20,696,525
Western Canada**	112,820	46,285	128,030	52,960	164,900	8,942,500

* Includes Vancouver & Abbotsford

† Includes Golden Horseshoe area including Hamilton, Kitchener-Waterloo, Halton, Peel, York Region, Metropolitan Toronto, and Oshawa

‡ Includes Gatineau

** East and west of Manitoba/Ontario border

Source: Statistics Canada 2003a

Muslims, the second largest religion in Canada by number of adherents, live in the east, again, especially in the Montreal and Toronto urban areas.

When populations migrate, especially voluntarily, they often do not do so in equal gender proportions. Historically, in the Canadian case, migrants from Asia—the continent of origin of most Buddhists—were until recently in sometimes great majority male, due to the primarily economic reasons for migration and because Canada's highly restrictive immigration policies before the late 1960s made family unification or the subsequent arrival of wives and families difficult. Although there has been a significant change in this regard in the recent period of a relatively open immigration policy, Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus in Canada were still in slight majority male in 2001. In 1981, 53.6% of all Muslims were male; in 2001 that figure was still 52.4%. For Sikhs the corresponding figures are 51.6% and 50.7% and for Hindus, 51.5% and 50.5%. Somewhat in contrast, Buddhists were majority male in 1981, but had become majority female by 2001. The corresponding male percentages

were 52.1% and 47.4%, the most significant shift in either direction among the four religions. In fact, this shift to majority female has been an accelerating process. The small numbers of Buddhist immigrants who arrived before 1961 were in majority men. Thereafter, the majority were women. Between 1961 and 1970, 54.3% of the very small number of Buddhist immigrants were women. Between 1971 and 1980, only 51.2% were women, but thereafter the percentage female increases along with the absolute number of Buddhist immigrants: 52.4% of the 78,000 who arrived in 1981-90 were women, as were 57.0% of the 84,500 who arrived in 1991-2001. By contrast, Muslim immigrants have been in majority male throughout the post-1970 period; while Hindus and Sikhs have been fairly evenly divided between the two sexes. In addition, the Buddhist gender imbalance also appears to be slightly more of a western than eastern Canadian trend: Buddhists in Vancouver/Abbotsford, for example, were in 2001 over 55% female and immigrants were consistently over 56% women for every decennial cohort after 1960. The Toronto region really only experienced the shift in the most recent decade, when 57.5% of Buddhist immigrants were female. The numbers hover less dramatically just over 50% in the three preceding decades.

The reasons for all these imbalances and differences must remain speculative in the absence of focussed research on the question, but given that gender in matters religious, as in most other domains of life, tends to make a difference, they are worth keeping in mind. This is especially the case when we consider that overall, 52.1% of Canada's immigrants in the post 1970 period have been women as were about 51% of the total population in 2001. Table 7 summarizes the overall national picture with respect to the four religions and the overall population.

TABLE 7. Post-1970 Immigration Gender Balance in Canada, 1981-2001 (Percent Female*)

	1971-80	1981-90	1991-2001	Total Population in 1981†	Total Population in 2001†
Canada	—	—	—	50.3%	50.9%
All Immigrants	51.1%	51.0%	52.3%	51.1%**	52.1%**
Muslims	47.6%	44.7%	48.2%	46.4%	47.6%
Sikhs	51.1%	49.8%	51.2%	48.4%	49.3%
Hindus	50.7%	49.7%	50.4%	48.5%	49.5%
Buddhists	48.5%	52.4%	57.0%	47.9%	52.6%

* Figures in *italics* indicate a female minority

† Includes those born in Canada

** Post-1970 immigrants only

Source: Statistics Canada 2003a

One of the more common questions asked in research on religion and migrant populations is what happens among the second, native-born generations. In the case of Canada's Buddhists, the vast majority of them are either first generation or the relatively young second generation. This latter group, demographically, is becoming increasingly important. In 2001, 24.4% or 73,350 of Canada's Buddhists gave Canada as their country of birth. Although a sizeable minority of these are not the children of more recent immigrants (I discuss "Western Buddhists" below), the clear majority are. Thus breaking this group down by declared ethnic origin, we find that 25,700 are of Chinese ethnic origin, 23,300 of Southeast Asian origin, and a further 7,000 or so of either Japanese or South Asian origin.⁵ Together these constitute about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the Canada-born Buddhists. Here I will concentrate only on those of Chinese and Southeast Asian origins since they are the most significant, making up two-thirds of the overall group; and because the vast majority of Canada-born Buddhists of Japanese background (about 6,300) are not the children of more recent immigrants.⁶ A closer look at religious composition, educational attainment, and, in the context of these two, gender, will give a sense of how this generation is different from their parents.

The first observation to make in this regard is somewhat obvious but needs to be underlined: the overwhelming majority of this generation was still quite young in 2001. Over half of second-generation Chinese and Southeast Asian Buddhists were still 10 years old or younger and over 90% under the age of 21. It therefore remains to be seen how they will finally relate to this religion of their heritage when they, in turn, raise the succeeding generation. Some indication emerges from very recent research conducted by myself and several colleagues on second-generation Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus in Canada.⁷ With very few exceptions, the relation of these young adults (18-27 years old) to Buddhist heritage was minimal. Many of them did not identify themselves personally as Buddhist, most had little knowledge of Buddhism, and of those that did consider themselves – as opposed to their parents or grandparents – to be Buddhist engaged in little meaningful Buddhist practice. Most, however, were also open to future exploration of Buddhism and, given that they had not yet embarked on their careers nor founded their own families, it is possible that at least a sizeable minority will in the future re-identify and become involved in some sort of regular Buddhist practice. That, of course, from a Buddhist perspective, is an optimistic scenario.

Although the future may thus be uncertain with regard to the relation of the second generation to Buddhism, what is far more secure is their level of education. Looking only at the small percentage of the

TABLE 8. Post-secondary Education for Buddhists in Canada, 2001
(SE Asian or Chinese Ethnicity, over 20 years old)

	Chinese Ethnicity		SE Asian Ethnicity	
Place of Birth	Post-secondary	Total Number	Post-secondary	Total Number
<i>Women</i>				
China (PRC)	23.7%	25,295	—	—
Taiwan	71.3%	9,415	—	—
Hong Kong	49.5%	9,140	—	—
Southeast Asia	34.7%	23,845	36.0%	35,455
Canada	85.8%	1,755	83.8%	340
Average (all religious identities)	58.1%	71,000	36.5%	36,200
<i>Men</i>				
China (PRC)	33.1%	17,800	—	—
Taiwan	78.9%	7,765	—	—
Hong Kong	61.3%	6,750	—	—
Southeast Asia	42.1%	20,935	46.2%	32,390
Canada	80.1%	1,555	63.8%	345
Average (all religious identities)	66.2%	56,350	46.4%	33,050

Source: Statistics Canada 2003a

Canada-born Buddhists who were over 20 years old in 2001, they appear to be at the leading edge of a generation with very high levels of formal education. Overall, over 80% of this older age group had at least some post-secondary education by 2001, a significant contrast with the Buddhists of the first generation in this regard. Table 8 contrasts the level of postsecondary exposure of Canadian Buddhists, restricting itself to those over 20 years old and those of declared Chinese or Southeast Asian origin. It breaks down the overall pattern to show some very significant intra-Buddhist variations. Perhaps the most obvious fact that reveals itself is how small the Canada-born group was in 2001, especially among Southeast Asians. And among these, a potentially troubling difference is the relatively low level of post-secondary attainment among Southeast Asian, Canada-born males. This group had only about 64% post-secondary education, whereas the corresponding figure for Chinese and Southeast Asian Canada-born females and Chinese Canada-born males

was 80% or more. A further gender difference is that first-generation women in all the categories listed have less postsecondary exposure than their males counterparts, whereas the women of the second generation are reversing that trend. The fact that Canada-born women in these groups have higher levels of postsecondary education than the men conforms to the overall Canadian pattern in the younger age groups (Beyer 2005). It is a small indication of how well integrated the second generation is becoming into the general Canadian social and power structure.

The data in Table 8 also show various differences with respect to the first-generation Buddhists of these two ethnic backgrounds. Two seem of particular note. First, in terms of place of birth, the two largest subgroups, those born in Southeast Asia and on the Chinese mainland are both the largest subgroups and the ones with the lowest percentages of postsecondary education. The majority of them are also women, who have the lowest levels. Second, the Chinese born in Southeast Asia have similar levels to those of Southeast Asian ethnicity (again, to be noted, these are mostly Vietnamese), indicating that it is probably the relative lack of opportunity for postsecondary education in these regions that is making this difference, again especially for women. Correspondingly, those born in Hong Kong and especially Taiwan show much higher levels. For the Southeast Asians, the fact that many of them were refugees and entered Canada as such would also have to be taken into consideration, but further analysis reveals that even those arriving from Southeast Asia well after the era of the "boat people" show lower percentages of postsecondary education than other immigrants (see Beyer 2005).

Finally, the contrasts between the first and second generation is also reflected in differences in overall religious composition. Again staying with only the majority groups of ethnically Chinese and Southeast Asians, it is notable that the presence of self-identified Buddhism is significantly lower in the second generation than it is in the first. Table 9 shows the contrast in summary fashion. It gives data for first and second generations of the ethnically Chinese or Southeast Asian and parallels the data presented in Table 4 for the first generation. Beside the lower percentage of Buddhists among the Canada born, one also notes a corresponding increase in Christian identification. With respect to those that declare no religious identity, this figure increases for the Southeast Asians and decreases very slightly for the Chinese. One must, however, be careful in how one interprets any of these differences. Since the second generation is still so young, their religious identities are more likely to reflect that of their parents, and therefore the changing composition of successive immigrant cohorts must be taken into consideration.

TABLE 9. Religious Identities of 1st and 2nd Generation Chinese and SE Asians in Canada, 2001

	Chinese		Southeast Asian	
<i>Born:</i>	<i>Outside Canada</i>	<i>In Canada</i>	<i>Outside Canada</i>	<i>In Canada</i>
Buddhist	16.6%	9.1%	51.9%	37.7%
Christian	26.6%	35.4%	25.7%	33.1%
No Religion	55.9%	54.3%	19.9%	27.1%
Other	0.8%	1.2%	2.5%	2.1%
<i>Population</i>	<i>829,130</i>	<i>283,125</i>	<i>148,880</i>	<i>61,895</i>

Source: Statistics Canada 2003a)

Especially ethnically Chinese immigrants are arriving less and less Christian in percentage terms in favour of either Buddhist or no religious identity. The more Christian earlier cohorts may well account for more of the Canada-born generation, having thus passed their Christian religious identities on to the next generation, a fact that would in part explain the higher percentage Christian and lower percentage Buddhist segments in that Canada born group. Further analysis of the census data would be required to know how much this is the case. With regard to the no religious identity category, the past three decades have seen the rise in the overall Canadian population, and therefore the second generation, being more integrated into the dominant culture as a result of their socialization, may be more likely to reflect that increase than their parents' generation. Yet all this in no way excludes more obvious explanations, especially that there may be a net conversion of the second generation to the dominant Christianity and a net abandonment of Buddhist identity, the latter perhaps for the reasons mentioned above and reflected in the qualitative research project on second-generation immigrants: the Canada-born are simply not being socialized as effectively into Buddhist identification and practice.

Any attempt to isolate the "Western" Buddhists from among Canadian Buddhists is fraught with certain difficulties relating to both the nature of the statistical data here under review and the category itself. On the one hand, it is relatively clear that Buddhism, especially of the Tibetan and Zen variety has been enjoying a period of significant growth in Western countries like Canada over the last few decades (see, e.g. Prebish

1998; Prebish & Baumann 2002), specifically among those of non-Asian cultural and ethnic backgrounds. On the other hand, this “Western” Buddhism does not exclude people of Asian backgrounds, in particular not those of the second and subsequent generations. Quite aside from the question of precisely what forms of Buddhist institutions, movements, and practice should actually count as Western Buddhism, it is not nearly as clear as observers might sometimes assume as to *who* should count as a “Western” Buddhist.

In the context of those questions, the Canadian census statistics at least have the advantage that they cut through all these ambiguities because they are based on a single question that asks only

TABLE 10. “Western Buddhists”:
Buddhists in Canada by Ethnic
Identity, Place of Birth, and Visible
Minority Categories, 2001

	Buddhists
<i>Visible Minority*</i>	
“White”	24,070
Other “non-Asian”	2,340
<i>Ethnicity</i>	
European	22,215
Canadian	15,685
<i>Place of Birth</i>	
Europe	3,135
Other “non-Asian”	1,435
Canada	73,350

* Excludes “multiple” visible minority
** “Non-Asian” = not East, South, or
Southeast Asian
Source: Statistics Canada, 2003a, b

subjective identification: people are only listed as Buddhist, not according to whatever subtype they may or may not have also included on their census form. In most cases, one can safely assume that the response was Buddhism, not otherwise specified. Nonetheless, that virtue becomes somewhat tempered when we then ask which of those Buddhists might count as Western from a cultural or ethnic perspective. There are three Canadian census variables that one could use, namely ethnic identity, place of birth, and what is called “visible minority” status. But each of these is not clear enough by itself. Thus, for instance, Buddhists who give Canadian as their ethnic identity might still have significant Asian background, whether because they are multiply ethnic or because they simply choose to declare themselves Canadian, as anyone who lives in this

country can do. Something similar, but less so, goes for those who give one of the variety of European ethnic identities. Place of birth is the least reliable because one cannot separate the Canada-born second generation of Asian immigrant Buddhists from other Canada-born Buddhists. In addition, those born outside both Eastern/Southern Asia and Canada could also be of Asian Buddhist background. And finally, although “visible minority” is in certain ways more promising in that one could focus especially on “white” (i.e. non-visible minority) Buddhists, it is less reliable than one might think given evidence that some people who one might consider “objectively” Asian will “subjectively” identify themselves as “white” on the census. Indicatively, therefore, in 2001 there were somewhat fewer “visible minority” Chinese in Canada than “ethnically” Chinese; somewhat fewer “visible minority” Southeast Asians than “ethnically” Southeast Asian; and so on for Koreans, Japanese, South Asians and most other categories (Statistics Canada 2003a; b).

To “find” the numerical strength of Western Buddhists, therefore, one must of necessity guess a bit or get at the number indirectly. It thus seems advisable to approach the question using all three of the ethno-cultural variables. Table 10 gives statistics for the number of Canadian Buddhists in 2001 who gave various answers for these three. There are few consistencies here, but the one exception is the roughly similar numbers for “white” and ethnically “European” Buddhists, both of which are in the low to mid 20,000s. Place of birth seems entirely unreliable. If one had to guess therefore, a conservative estimate of the number of Western Buddhists in Canada in 2001 would be somewhere in the low 20,000s, a greater number by far than similar categories of “white” and “European” Muslims, Sikhs, or Hindus.⁸ Overall then, one can tentatively conclude or confirm from the statistics what the qualitative literature indicates as well: Euro-Canadian Buddhists (to use another title) are still a statistical minority in Canada when compared to those Buddhists who are of recent immigrant origin, but the former still constitute a significant number which is apparently growing—in 1991, there were, for instance, only 10,800 ethnically European Buddhists in Canada (Statistics Canada 2003a). Moreover, if our current research on second-generation immigrants of Buddhist background is any indication, then it is unlikely that this group will contribute significantly either to the Buddhism of their parental generation or to the “Western” Buddhism of their co-citizens. The second generation functioning as a kind of bridge between the two categories of “Western” and “Asian” therefore seems equally as unlikely—at least for the time being.

Attempting overall conclusions from the 2001 Canadian census

data is somewhat risky given the sorts of ambiguities in the numbers that I have reported here. Nonetheless, some conclusions do seem quite solid, even if their significance will have to await the future and further, more focussed research. They can be summarized as follows:

- Numerically, Buddhism is growing in Canada, at least doubling in number of declared adherents every 10 years, even though in 2001 these still only constituted barely 1% of the Canadian population.
- The bulk of this growth reflects continued high levels of immigration from regions of the world where Buddhism has historically been a strong presence.
- Since the source of Canada's immigration is a modest reflection of the distribution of world population, it is unsurprising that Buddhism is demographically increasingly dominated by people from China or of Chinese ethnic origin. In this context, immigrants from the People's Republic of China will probably constitute an ever larger portion of Canada's Buddhists simply because that country has so many people, regardless of religious identity. In the meantime the large influx of refugees from Southeast Asia during the late 1970s and the 1980s still gives Canadian Buddhist a decidedly "Vietnamese" flavour, whether ethnically those Buddhists are Vietnamese or Chinese.
- The Canada-born children of self-identified Buddhist immigrants in large proportion do not appear to be retaining or carrying forth their parental Buddhist identity, with the qualification that this generation is still quite young and may, in its more mature years, evidence a different pattern.
- Using education as a measure, the children and youth of Canada's immigrant Buddhists are integrating rapidly into the mainstream, showing high levels of postsecondary exposure as well as reflecting the overall Canadian situation in which women have postsecondary education in greater percentages than do men, both measures in express contrast to the immigrant generation of their parents.
- Canada's Buddhists live disproportionately in the western part of the country, even though a majority live in the eastern part, mainly because of large numbers in the two largest urban areas of Montreal and Toronto.
- So called "Western" Buddhism is a significant if minority aspect of Canadian Buddhism, probably constituting from 6-

9% of self-identified Buddhists, and thereby making Buddhism the Canadian religion attracting the highest number of outside converts in absolute numbers or in percentage terms, after Christianity.

Each of these conclusions is, if perhaps intriguing, only a surface measure. As is usual with such statistics, they do not answer questions so much as frame them. And it is in this spirit that they are offered here. Further research and careful observation are needed in order to discover what patterns of institutions, practice, and transformation are behind these numbers.

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NOTES

¹ The data reported in this article derive substantially from the results of a research project, *Trends in Religious Identification among Recent Immigrants to Canada, 1961-2001*, conducted by the author in collaboration with John H. Simpson, Leslie Laczko, Wendy Martin, Kyuhoon Cho, and Rubina Ramji. The project was financially supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

² Of note is that migrants of South Asian origin who arrived during the same period, especially Sikhs, are not similarly recognized in the 1901 census. Along with Islam, Hinduism, and various other religions, Sikhism had to wait until 1981 before its census numbers were recorded and published by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics/Statistics Canada.

³ A parallel phenomenon can be observed in the number of ethnic “Germans” recorded before and after the First World War. In 1911 Canada had about 400,000 people who declared themselves to be German. In 1921, this number had decreased to around 295,000 only to rebound to slightly over 470,000 in 1931. Meanwhile, the number of “Austrians” jumped from 44,000 to 108,000 between 1911 and 1921, only to descend again to 49,000 in 1931 (Statistics Canada 1980). The situation demonstrates that the “subjective” component of all these identifications must always be kept in mind.

⁴ Thus, in 2001, of the 101,715 ethnic Koreans in Canada, only 3.8 % declared themselves Buddhist, while 75.2% were Christian, with “no religion” taking up the remaining fifth (Statistics Canada 2003a). By contrast, in Korea, Christians only make up some 25% of the population and about half declare that they belong to no religion (see Cho 2004). The custom data from which the Canadian figures are

calculated do not allow me to isolate Sri Lankans from South Asians more generally. From other available data, however, we see that 87,000 immigrants said they were born in Sri Lanka and about 65,000 identified themselves as ethnically Sri Lankan or Sinhalese. Even if all the South Asian Buddhists noted in Table 2 were among these, that is still a small minority of this group.

- ⁵ Not surprisingly perhaps, given the dominance of Christianity among them, there were in 2001 only a very insignificant number of Canada-born Korean Buddhists, 260 (Statistics Canada 2003a).
- ⁶ The Canada-born children of post-1970 immigrants could be no older than about 30 in 2001. In that year, 26,500 of the 56,000 Canada-born and ethnically Japanese in Canada were over 30; and of the 6,300 Japanese Buddhists, almost 4,700 were over 30 and of those, more than 3,200 were over 50. Since, however, only 1,740 of the Canada-born Japanese Buddhists also had parents who were both born in Canada, the second generation story of Canada's Japanese Buddhists is simply a rather different story compared to the one that I am addressing here. See Makabe 1998.
- ⁷ *Religion among Immigrant Youth in Canada* was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and carried out by the author in collaboration with Shandip Saha, Rubina Ramji, Nancy Nason-Clark, Lori Beaman, John H. Simpson, Leslie Laczko, Arlene Macdonald, Carolyn Reimer, and Marie-Paule Martel Reny. It interviewed about 200 youth from the three religious backgrounds, youth who grew up in or were born in Canada to immigrant families. A little less than a quarter of these youth were of Buddhist background. The interviews were conducted between spring of 2004 and spring of 2006 predominantly among current university students in Ottawa, Toronto, and Montreal.
- ⁸ The number of "white" and "European" Hindus and Sikhs is far lower than the number of Buddhists in these categories, but neither of these has a reputation or a self-identity as a proselytizing religion. For Islam, which does actively seek converts, the situation is somewhat more complicated because many people who identify as Arab ethnically, do not categorize themselves as Arab visible minority, but rather, it seems, as "white". These will therefore increase the number of "white" Muslims, but will for the most part not be converts, especially when one considers the sizeable number of Muslims from ex-Yugoslavia in Canada, who are "white" but also not generally converts. Thus, the number of "white" Muslims, 82,000, is much higher than the number of "white" Buddhists, but the number of ethnically "Western European" Muslims, 18,000 is quite a bit lower when one considers that there were almost twice as many Muslims in Canada in 2001 as Buddhists (Statistics Canada 2003a; b).