Origins and Development of Buddhism in Poland

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Abstract

According to the data provided in 2016 by the Polish Main Department of Statistics (Główny Urząd Statystyczny), the Buddhist Diamond Way Association of Karma Kagyu Lineage was one of ten most popular religions in Poland with more than 8200 adherents. Currently there are 19 officially registered Buddhist religious groups in Poland with ca. 14000 members, and what is noteworthy, this number increases in time, against the general declining trend, that can be observed in the majority of Polish religious groups. The article will show how Buddhism (which till the end of the 1960s. was practically unknown in Poland) became one of the most significant religious traditions in this country. It will present its constant development in the difficult times of anti-religious communist regime and in free Poland after 1989. It will also give an overview of various Buddhist traditions, that are active in Poland nowadays.

Keywords

Polish Buddhism – religions in Poland

1 Introduction

At first glance Poland is rather religiously homogeneous. According to the official data provided by the main department of statistics (Statistics Poland), 87% of the population belongs to the Catholic Church, and only 2.2% to religious minorities.¹ Yet this small share of minorities does not imply a lack of diversity on the Polish religious stage, because this 2.2% contains 171 officially

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¹ Ciecieląg, Wyznania religijne w Polsce, pp. 29–31.
registered religious communities and 14 churches. Among these, Buddhists are significant in number; in 2022 there were 19 registered Buddhist groups (including Bon), with ca. 14,000 adherents. The largest among them – the Karma Kagyu Buddhist Association (Buddyjski Związek Diamentowej Drogi Linii Karma Kagyu), with 8284 adherents, is the eleventh largest religious community in Poland, and in 2015 it was in the top ten. Two others – the Buddhist Mission in Poland (Misja Buddyjska “Trzy Schronienia” w Polsce), with 2560 adherents, and the Benchen Karma Kamtsang Buddhist Association (Związek Buddyjski Bencien Karma Kamtsang), with 2038 followers – are also significant in number, considering the Polish context. In view of this we may ask the following questions: how did Buddhism, which until the end of the nineteenth century was unknown in Poland and up to the 1970s did not have any adherents in Poland, become one of the most popular religious traditions in this country? Why did it develop so dynamically during the anti-religious communist regime and why does it continue to develop nowadays? Who are the Polish Buddhists and what does the situation of this religion in Poland look like today? This paper will help find answers to these questions, based on the materials published by Buddhist communities, academic papers and data provided by Statistics Poland. It should be underscored that it is not easy to find information about all of the Polish Buddhist communities, even the officially registered communities which are the subject of this paper. The best known are the oldest or the most popular ones, but some are apparently not interested in publishing any information – they do not have websites and are not the object of scholarly research. Academic interest in Polish Buddhism has increased in recent years with the growing popularity of this religion. In the 1990s very few academic papers concerning Buddhism in Poland were published, but the situation changed in the twenty-first century; especially after 2010 we can observe a significant increase in the number of publications. Nevertheless, there are still no publications presenting the whole history of Buddhism in Poland up to the present day, and therefore this article will try to fill this gap.

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2 Kościoły i związki wyznaniowe wpisane do rejestru kościołów i innych związków wyznaniowych; Kościoły i inne związki wyznaniowe, których stosunki z Państwem są uregulowane ustawami partykularnymi.

3 Official statistics and English names of the Buddhist communities in Poland according to the publication of Statistics Poland: Ciecieląg, Wyznania religijne w Polsce, pp. 265–280. It should be underscored that the statistics provided by this institution are based on the declarations of the religious groups and are not verified.
2 Orientalism and Buddhism in Poland

The model of reception of Buddhism in Poland was very similar as in Western Europe, where knowledge about this religion was first spread by scholars such as Eugène Burnouf (1801–1852), T. W. Rhys-Davids (1843–1922) and H. Oldenberg (1854–1920), and in wider society by the Theosophists.4 The Theosophical Society, founded in 1875, undoubtedly contributed massively to the popularization of knowledge about Buddhism in non-academic circles, but because this knowledge was filtered through the concepts of Helena P. Blavatsky (1831–1891) and Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907), Buddhism came to be perceived by Christian theologians as a threat to Christianity.5 In Poland the first works on Buddhism were not written by academics, but by Catholic priests who presented a faulty image of the religion as it had been shaped by theosophical ideas. In 1896 Władysław Dębicki (1853–1911) – a Polish Catholic priest – published a book entitled *Filozofia nicości. Rzecz o istocie bud- dyzmu* (*The Philosophy of Nothingness: On the Essence of Buddhism*), in which he collected almost all of the false interpretations on Buddhism existing at that time and presented Buddhism in a poor light and as inferior to Christianity.6 Very similar in tone was a booklet of the Jesuit Jan Czuj (1886–1957), entitled *Buddyzm* (*Buddhism*) and published in 1917.7 At the end of the nineteenth century, Buddhist conceptions became a source of inspiration for the writers of the *Młoda Polska* (*Young Poland*).8 These individuals, however, were not involved religiously and did not have in-depth knowledge about this religion; rather, they were fascinated with certain Buddhist ideas, usually known through Western writers or philosophers, mainly Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860).9 Serious academic interest in Buddhism began in Poland at the beginning of the twentieth century. At that time some scholars started their research on religions of India, such as Andrzej Gawroński (1885–1927), a professor at Jagiellonian University in Cracow and the University in Lviv and author of a manual of Sanskrit, Stanisław Schayer (1899–1941), the founder of the Orientalist Institute at the University of Warsaw, which became an important center of research on

6 Dębicki, *Filozofia nicości*.
7 Czuj, *Buddyzm*, pp. 7–82.
8 Young Poland, dated 1890–1918, was a Polish version of modernism in literature, visual arts and music.
9 Szymańska, *Młodopolski mistycyzm*, pp. 132 et seq., 143.
Buddhism, and Stanisław Franciszek Michalski (1881–1961) from the University of Łódź, a translator of Buddhist texts.  

Although the activity of Polish orientalists was undoubtedly valuable, it was rather limited to academic circles. The wider popularization of knowledge on Buddhism was the contribution of the Polish Theosophist Wanda Dynowska (1888–1971). Born into a noble family, she was interested in various religions since a young age, but most fascinating for her were the religions of India. At the end of the 1920s, she was involved in the formation of the Polish branch of the Theosophical Society, and as a Theosophist she popularized knowledge on the religions of India – Buddhism and Hinduism. Her growing fascination with these religions led her to move to India in 1935, take on a new name – Umadevi – and become involved in the movement for the independence of India, cooperating with Ghandi. In 1944, together with Maurycy Frydman (1901–1977), she founded the Indian-Polish Library, which published Polish translations of religious texts and Indian translations of Polish literature. In 1960 Dynowska became involved in aid for Tibetans, focusing especially on the children of Tibetan refugees. This activity brought her closer to Buddhism, and when she died in 1971, she was buried according to the Tibetan rite at the Catholic monastery in Mysore. 

Wanda Dynowska surely was a pioneer in popularization of knowledge about Indian religions in pre-war Poland, but after World War II the crucial role was played by another Theosophist – Władysław Misiewicz (1910–1997), who focused exclusively on Buddhism. Different to Dynowska, this librarian from Lviv first became interested in Buddhism during the war in a prison camp in Austria, where he met a guard who was deeply fascinated with this religion. After the war Misiewicz moved to Radom, where he worked as a librarian, and in his free time he deepened his knowledge of Buddhism by collecting books and corresponding with Buddhist associations in Western Europe. In the days of the communist regime, when all contact with the West was limited, such activity was especially difficult and even dangerous. In 1949, together with Piotr Boniński from Gliwice, who translated Buddhist texts from German, he founded the Circle of the Friends of Buddhism (Koło Przyjaciół Buddyizmu), which existed underground due to the anti-religious politics of the communist authorities. After the end of the Stalinist period (1956), members of this organization started to act more openly, organizing public meetings and lectures. In 1962 they started to publish “Ehi passiko” Newsletter of the Circle of the Friends

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10 Kosior, Buddyzm w Polsce, p. 189; Kowalczyk, Buddyzm na Zachodzie, p. 23 et seq.; Mejor, Stanisław Schayer, pp. 11–74.
11 Trzcińska, Stań się rodzajem mitu, pp. 166–177; Tokarski, O Wandzie Dynowskiej-Umadevi.
of Buddhism in Poland (“Ehi Passiko” Biuletyn Listowy Koła Przyjaciół Buddyzmu w Polsce), which was copied in secret and distributed among the small group of trusted friends which ranged between 20 to 30 people. After the death of Boniński in 1968, Misiewicz continued the activity of the Circle alone, and after retiring in 1977 he spent all of his time on his passion. At that time he started to translate Buddhist texts from the original languages. Despite his great knowledge, Misiewicz never became a Buddhist. He died in 1997 as a Catholic, and his impressive Buddhist library (comprising several thousand volumes) was donated to the Orientalist Institute of the University of Warsaw.

3 The First Communities

The first Buddhist religious community in Poland emerged independently from the circle of Misiewicz. It was formed in Katowice by artists gathered around the painter Andrzej Urbanowicz (1938–2011), who in 1967 started the informal artist group Oneiron. Its members were interested not only in the arts but also in philosophy and religion, while also experimenting with drugs. Their fascination with Buddhism began when one of the members – Henryk Waniek (b. 1942) received from his American friend Philip Kapleau (1912–2004) The Three Pillars of Zen. In December 1971 Urbanowicz embarked on Zen meditations in his studio in Katowice, but at the beginning the members of his group still experimented with drugs, mainly LSD. However, in 1973 Urbanowicz radically changed his life; he gave up drugs and transformed his studio into a place of regular Zen practice. Trying to deepen his knowledge of Zen Buddhism, he contacted Kapleau and invited him to Poland. The first Zen sesshin in Poland led by Kapleau in Katowice in 1975 attracted more than 100 people from all around the country. His visit also encouraged Polish Buddhists to apply for official recognition as a religious community. The application was rejected by the communist authorities, but Urbanowicz still continued the activity of his group, which was deemed illegal by the authorities. He organized meditation sessions and even started an underground printing house to publish the periodical Droga Zen (The Way of Zen). The communist secret police started regular surveillance of his Buddhist group and recruited secret informers among the neighbors of Urbanowicz and even among the members of the group itself. No further repressive actions were taken, however, due to the fact that

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12 Ehi passiko in English means “come and see”.
13 Tracz, Zen na poddaszu, pp. 204–206; Kosior, Buddyzm w Polsce, p. 190 et seq.
Urbanowicz was politically neutral and this political indifference became a rule in his Zen community.\(^\text{14}\)

The second Buddhist community in Poland was founded by Władysław Czapnik (1927–1988) from Cracow, who knew Urbanowicz and also practiced Zen based on the books of Kapleau. In 1976, however, he learned about Lama Ole Nydahl (b. 1941) and sent a letter to him, along with an invitation to Cracow. Nydahl answered the letter, and the same year he arrived in Cracow with his wife Hannah (1946–2007), where Czapnik organized a meeting for people interested in Tibetan Buddhism. After this visit the first Tibetan Buddhist group was formed, under the leadership of Czapnik, who started to organize regular meditation sessions; he also gave lectures and translated books. His small, two-room apartment in Cracow became the first center of Tibetan Buddhism, which gathered adherents from all over Poland. Apart from Czapnik's activity, regular visits of Ole Nydahl also substantially contributed to the dynamic development of the group. The latter visited his Polish adherents in 1977, 1978 and 1983.\(^\text{15}\) The activity of Tibetan Buddhists also attracted the attention of the communist secret police, whose officers, during Nydahl's lecture in Gdańsk in 1983, tried to intimidate the organizers, fearing that the Danish teacher might try to discredit the communist authorities.\(^\text{16}\)

At the end of the 1970s, Buddhism as taught by its Western teachers became insufficient for many Polish adherents. This ushered in the beginning of a new period in the history of Polish Buddhism, characterized by a focus on the original sources. In 1978 some members of the Katowice sangha started to criticize Kapleau and decided to follow the masters from Buddhist countries.\(^\text{17}\) This idea of reaching to the sources was first put into practice by Antoni Szoska (b. 1949), an artist from Cracow, later professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in this city, who in 1978 invited the Korean Sŏn master Seung Sahn (1927–2004). His visit in Cracow resulted in the formation of the third Buddhist community in Poland, which practices the Korean version of Zen. Its first centers emerged in Cracow and Warsaw, but soon also other cities followed.\(^\text{18}\)

The 1980s – the last decade of communism in Poland – was a period of intense growth of Buddhism. Undoubtedly, it was facilitated by the shift in policy of the communist authorities, who focused on the struggle with the anti-communist Catholic Church and mitigated their attitude towards

\(^{14}\) Tracz, Zen na poddaszu, pp. 206–218; Tracz, Katowicka Ścieżka Zen, pp. 151–156.

\(^{15}\) Krajewska, Buddyzm diamentowej drogi w Polsce, pp. 63–66, 83–89; Czapnik, Związek Buddyjski Karma Kagyu, p. 150.

\(^{16}\) Krajewska, Buddyzm diamentowej drogi w Polsce, p. 78.

\(^{17}\) Tracz, Zen na poddaszu, p. 218; Kosior, Buddyzm w Polsce, p. 194.

\(^{18}\) Kosior, Buddyzm w Polsce, p. 193; Historia Krakowskiego Ośrodka Zen.
other religious groups, especially those not involved politically. In the case of Buddhism, the crucial event was the visit of Kapleau, who in 1980 visited his Polish adherents again. After the resignation of Urbanowicz, who soon after moved to the USA, the group was led by Janusz Korbel (1946–2015), who professed cooperation with the communist authorities but in fact never helped them. During this visit Kapleau, together with Korbel, met with the director of the Office of Religious Denominations, Jerzy Kuberski (1930–2007), asking for his support for official recognition of the first Polish Buddhist group. The Minister decided to help, and in December 1980 the community was officially registered as the Zen Buddhist Union Sangha in Poland (Związek Buddystów Zen-Sangha w Polsce). Its center moved to Warsaw, because since the end of the 1970s, the majority of adherents lived in this city. In 1983 the movement had 215 members in ten cities, where meditation sessions were organized in private apartments.\(^19\) In 1985 it received a generous donation from the Rochester Zen Center and bought a house in Falenica near Warsaw, which is the official center of the community to this day.\(^20\)

The change in the attitude of the authorities opened the way to official recognition also for other Buddhist groups. In 1982 the above-mentioned Sŏn community was registered as the Buddhist Association Zen Czogie (Stowarzyszenie Buddyjskie Zen Czogie).\(^21\) Soon the Tibetan Buddhist community followed and was legally recognized in 1984 as the Buddhist Association Karma Kagyu in Poland (Stowarzyszenie Buddyjskie Karma Kagyu w Polsce).\(^22\) The 1980s brought not only the legalization of the already existing Buddhist communities but also the emergence of new groups specifically within the Zen tradition. In 1983 Poland was visited by the American Zen teacher Dennis Genpo Merzel (b. 1944), a disciple of Maezumi Hakuyū (1931–1995). Merzel accepted the first Polish students – mainly people who had already practiced in two Polish Zen groups. They formed the third Zen community in Poland, which was officially registered in 1987 as the Buddhist Association Kanzeon Sangha (“Kanzeon” Związek Buddyjski).\(^23\) In the same year another Zen group was formed in Poland by the German master Klaus Zernickow, who in 1971 had founded the *Rinzai-Weggemeinschaft Mumon-Kai* in Berlin. His disciples created the Eiwa Zendo Center in Szklarska Poręba and were officially registered in 1990 as the “Community Without Gates” Rinzai Community Mumon-Kai in the Republic


\(^{20}\) Kosior, *Buddyzm w Polsce*, p. 194; Karczewski, *Budyzm japoński i tybetański w Polsce*, p. 82.

\(^{21}\) Historia Krakowskiego Ośrodka Zen.


\(^{23}\) Kosior, *Buddyzm w Polsce*, p. 194; Krajewska, *Dżinsy, t-shirt i mnisque szaty*, p. 129.
of Poland (‘Wspólnota bez Bram’ Mumon-Kai Związek Buddyjski Zen Rinzai w RP).\textsuperscript{24} In 1988 Poland was visited by the Chinese-American Sōtō Zen master Jakusho Kwong (b. 1935), the founder of Sonoma Mountain Zen Center in California. A year later, the group of his followers was officially recognized as the Zen Kannon Buddhist Community (Buddyjska Wspólnota Zen Kannon).\textsuperscript{25} Although the 1980s were dominated by Zen, Tibetan Buddhism was not left behind. The Buddhist Association Karma Kagyu was also developing dynamically, in constant cooperation with Lama Nydahl, who regularly visited Poland. In 1985 Polish Tibetan Buddhists, with the help of their Danish master, bought a dilapidated manor with a large seven-hectare park in Kuchary near Płock, which became the center of their community.\textsuperscript{26} The number of adherents was also growing constantly: in 1986 there were 334 registered members and some 1500 sympathizers.\textsuperscript{27}

At the end of the 1980s, the Dzogchen tradition also arrived in Poland. The first person seriously interested in it was Marek Has (b. 1951) from Cracow, a member of Czapnik’s Tibetan Community, who at the end of the 1970s attended a lecture of Namkhai Norbu (1938–2018) while he was abroad. In 1988 he translated Norbu’s autobiographical book \textit{The Crystal and the Way of Light} and together with four friends from Cracow and Katowice created the core of the first Dzogchen community in Poland. Soon they started to cooperate with foreign Dzogchen centers in England, Italy and in the USA and began to publish their periodic \textit{Smok Wadżry} (The Dragon of Vajra). At the same time, Warsaw-based musician Maciej “Magura” Góralski (b. 1957) became interested in Dzogchen, independently of the Cracow group. In 1988 he contacted Oliver F. Leick (b. 1955) – the Austrian disciple of Namkhai Norbu – and invited him to Poland. The next year Leick arrived and led the first meditation training in Przesieka.\textsuperscript{28}

\section{Developments after the Freedom of Conscience Act (1989)}

As we can see, in the 1980s Buddhism in Poland was growing constantly, despite all the limitations imposed by the communist system. The situation of Polish religious communities changed significantly in 1989. That year, on the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Kosior, \textit{Buddyzm w Polsce}, p. 194; \textit{Co to jest Mumon Kai?} (The website is no longer available).
\item Ciecieląg, \textit{Wyznania religijne w Polsce}, p. 272; Roshi Jakusho Kwong.
\item Karczewski, \textit{Budyzm japoński i tybetański w Polsce}, p. 90 et seq.
\item Sieradzan, \textit{Dzogczien i bon w Polsce}, p. 143 et seq.
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17th of May, the last communist parliament passed the Freedom of Conscience Act, which introduced liberal regulations concerning the legal recognition of religious groups. According to this act, in order to be officially recognized, a religious community had to prepare a charter and a confession of faith and collect 15 signatures. If the 1980s belonged to Zen, the subsequent decade was dominated by Tibetan Buddhism. In 1992 the Dzogchen community for the first time invited Namkhai Norbu to Poland. After his next visit in 1994, they applied for legal recognition and were registered as the Dzogchen Community in Poland (Wspólnota Dzogczen w Polsce). Today, the group is called the International Community Dzogchen-Namdagling (Międzynarodowa Wspólnota Dzogczen-Namdagling) and has three centers in Poland (Cracow, Warsaw and Dukla). In 1992 a group of Polish Buddhists from Szczecin, who had practiced since the late 1970s (also in Asian monasteries), founded the Buddhist Mission in Poland (Misja Buddyjska “Trzy Schronienia” w Polsce), which was registered in 1995. Its head, Jeremi Szcześni Maślankowski (Kanzen 観禅, b. 1958), is a Buddhist monk ordained in Japan in the Sōtō Zen tradition. Different than in the case of other groups, the Buddhist Mission does not represent any specific tradition. According to the official declaration, its main aim is to support and promote the education of Polish monks in Buddhist countries and to spread dharma in Poland in a “clean form.” To realize these aims the Mission collaborates with various Buddhist monasteries, to which it sends students. It also publishes religious texts, books and periodicals and organizes meetings with teachers. Its organization is also untypical, being a kind of federation of autonomous centers (numbering 35 today), whose members practice in various Buddhist traditions but within a framework of cooperation.

The first half of the 1990s brought a serious conflict within the more and more popular Buddhist Association Karma Kagyu, with some members wanting to practice Tibetan Buddhism in its “clean” form without modifications of Western teachers. Nydahl became the source of controversies, alongside the issue of the incarnation of Karmapa. As a consequence, the community split – on one side the followers of Nydahl and Trinley Thaye Dorje (b. 1983) as the incarnation of Karmapa, and on the other those accepting Ogyen Trinley Dorje (b. 1985), who received the support of the Dalai Lama. The latter group

29 Ustawa z dnia 17 maja 1989 r. o gwarancjach wolności sumienia i wyznania.
30 Sieradzan, Dzogczien i hon w Polsce, p. 144 et seq.
31 Wspólnota Dzogczen w Polsce.
32 Kosior, Buddyzm w Polsce, p. 196.
33 O Misji.
34 Ośrodki Misji Buddyjskiej; Ciecieląg, Wyznania religijne w Polsce, p. 269.
founded their own independent community, registered in 1994 as the Benchen Karma Kamtsang Buddhist Association (Związek Buddyjski Bencien Karma Kamtsang). The followers of Nydahl changed their charter, in which it was stated that their main teacher was Nydahl and that all important decisions must be made in consultation with him.\(^\text{35}\)

The interest in an apparently non-Westernized form of Tibetan Buddhism was not limited only to the members of the Karma Kagyu association. In 1994 a group of people practicing in the Nyingma school under the guidance of Chime Rigdzin Rinpoche (1922–2002) from the Khordong monastery in Tibet registered their community as the “Khordong” Buddhist Association in Poland (Związek Buddyjski “Khordong” w Polsce). In 1998 they built a gompa in Lewin Klodzki in Lower Silesia, thus creating their center called Drophan Ling, which is a place of practice and retreat.\(^\text{36}\) Today Khordong has 80 members and around 200 sympathizers.\(^\text{37}\) It promotes the Nyingma tradition through printed and Internet publications.\(^\text{38}\)

In the middle of the 1990s, the community of people practicing Bon was officially formed. The beginnings of their activity date back to the end of the 1980s, when people interested in Dzogchen learned about Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche (b. 1961) and decided to invite him to Poland. Before their plans were realized, they translated and published Wangyal’s book *Wonders of the Natural Mind* in 1994. The next year, Tenzin Wangyal, the founder of the Ligmincha Institute in Charlottesville (Virginia), arrived in Poland, where he gave lectures in Warsaw. As in the case of earlier groups, this visit encouraged Polish adherents of Bon to register their community. In the autumn of 1995, it was officially recognized as the Khyung Dzong Union in Poland (Związek Khyung Dzong w Polsce), today the Garuda Union in Poland (Związek Garuda w Polsce [Ligmincha Polska]).\(^\text{39}\) The center of this community is Cziamma Ling, which is located in Wilga near Warsaw, where a gompa and stupa were erected on an area comprising four hectares. The current number of adherents is unknown, but in 1995 the community had 68 members.\(^\text{40}\) In 1997 a small group of people from Łódź, who practiced Tibetan Buddhism of the Kagyu school according to the teachings of Kalu Rinpoche (1905–1989), founded a community that was registered as the Dak Shang Kagyu Buddhist Association in Poland (Związek

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\(^{36}\) Ośrodek Dropan Ling.


\(^{38}\) Modlitwy i inne teksty do pobrania.

\(^{39}\) Sieradzan, *Dzogczien i bon w Polsce*, pp. 145–147.

\(^{40}\) Ciecieląg, *Wyznania religijne w Polsce*, p. 277; Witamy w Cziamma Ling.
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Buddhist Dak Shang Kagyu in Poland). The founders practiced in a small circle and did not want to recruit new members. In the same year Chinese Chán, in the shape of Fāgūshān (Dharma Drum Mountain), arrived in Poland when a group of people practicing in this tradition invited the Taiwanese master Shèngyán (1931–2009). After his visit in Warsaw, Polish disciples registered their community as the Association of Buddhists Czn (Związek Buddystów Czn). It was the only Zen group established in the 1990s.

The 1990s brought also the formalization of cooperation between the Polish Buddhist groups, which had begun at the beginning of the 1980s with the meetings of the Polish Buddhist leaders known as intersangha. The new liberal religious law of the 1990s gave the opportunity to formalize this activity, and thus in 1995 a new interdenominational organization called the Polish Buddhist Union (Polska Unia Buddyjska) was formed. It unites eight out of 19 Polish Buddhist communities, and its main aims are to represent the member organizations in contact with the state authorities, other religions and international Buddhist associations, as well as in the coordination of cooperations and charity. In 1997 the Dalai Lama took honorary patronage over the Union.

5 Buddhism in the New Century

The twenty-first century brought changes in the situation of religious communities in Poland. The number of newly registered groups dropped significantly, due to the modified religious law (since 1998 the application for registration must be signed by 100 people) and to changes in the attitude of the Polish people towards religion. While in the 1990s 115 new religious groups were registered, in the first decade of the twenty-first century this number dropped to 22, and in the 2010s to 14. Many religious communities started to lose adherents because of the growing secularization of Polish society. This serious problem, however, did not reach Buddhist communities, in which one indeed

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41 Ciecieląg, Wyznania religijne w Polsce, p. 277; Pytanie o Związek Buddyjski Dak Shang Kagyu w Polsce.  
42 Nauczyciele.  
43 Although the document Kościoły i związki wyznaniowe wpisane do rejestru kościołów i innych związków wyznaniowych provides the date 10.03.1998 as the date of registration, the official website of the Polish Buddhist Union gives the date 09.05.1995; see: O unii; see also: Piszczy-Czapla, Organizacje międzykościelne, pp. 157–159.  
44 Ustawa z dnia 26 czerwca 1997 r. o zmianie ustawy o gwarancjach wolności sumienia i wyznania.  
45 Ciecieląg, Wyznania religijne w Polsce, p. 24 et seq.
observes an opposite trend. It is most clearly visible in the case of the Karma Kagyu Buddhist Association (Nydahl's group), in which the number of members grew between 1998 and 2011 from 1028 to 8284.46 Today this community has 43 centers across Poland. It also runs the foundation Stupa-House, aimed at popularization of Diamond Way Buddhism in its Western form.47 The second largest community is the Buddhist Mission in Poland, which grew from 415 members in 2000 to 2560 in 2018.48 Third place belongs to the Benchen Karma Kamtsang Buddhist Association, which now has 2038 adherents, compared to 1655 in 2000.49 This community closely cooperates with the Benchen monastery in Nepal and is led by Lama Rinczen (Waldemar Zych, b. 1957), who started his practice in the 1970s.50 Their main center is located in Grabnik near Warsaw, home to the temple Lhakhang Jinlab Trinpung, the stupa with the relics of Tenga Rinpoche and a major retreat center.51 These three most popular communities, with a total of 12,882 members, comprise more than 90% of all Buddhists in Poland. In the case of smaller groups, the situation looks different, and the increases in the number of adherents are not so impressive. The oldest Buddhist community in Poland, founded by Andrzej Urbanowicz and since 1991 known as the Zen Buddhist Union “Bodhidharma” (Związek Buddystów Zen “Bodhidharma”), experienced growth from 47 to 82 members between 1999 and 2018. It still cooperates with the Rochester Zen Center, and its master is Sunya Kjolhede (b. 1951) from the USA, who visits Polish disciples several times a year.52 Chronologically, the second Zen (or Sŏn) community, the Kwan Um School of Zen in Poland (Szkoła Zen Kwan Um w Polsce, formerly Stowarzyszenie Buddyjskie Zen Czogie), observed a decrease in the number of adherents from 218 to 123 between 2000 and 2018. It is led by the Zen master Bon Shim (Aleksandra Porter, b. 1953), who has practiced since 1978.53 A slight increase in the number of members can be observed in the case of the Buddhist Association Kanzeon Sangha (from 118 to 130 between 2000 and 2008), the Zen Kannon Buddhist Community (from 87 to 121 between 2000 and 2008), and the “Khordong” Buddhist Association in Poland.54 In the case

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46 Ciecieląg, Wyznania religijne w Polsce, p. 266 et seq.
47 Krajewska, Buddyzm diamentowej drogi w Polsce, p. 52; Krajewska, Dżinsy, t-shirt i mnisze szaty, p. 130.
48 Ciecieląg, Wyznania religijne w Polsce, p. 269.
49 Ciecieląg, Wyznania religijne w Polsce, p. 267.
50 Lama Rinczen – główny lama Centrum w Grabniku.
51 Centrum Bencien Karma Kamtsang w Grabniku.
52 Ciecieląg, Wyznania religijne w Polsce, p. 274; Rosi Sunya Kjolhede.
53 Ciecieląg, Wyznania religijne w Polsce, p. 270; Mistrzyni zen Bon Shim.
54 Ciecieląg, Wyznania religijne w Polsce, pp. 271–273, 276.
of the Association of Buddhists Czan and “Community Without Gates” Rinzai Community Mumon-Kai, statistics are unavailable. As we can see, almost all of the Buddhist communities experienced growth in the number of adherents in the twenty-first century, which shows that in the new millennium Polish Buddhism continues to develop, breaking from the general declining trend together with Muslims and Pentecostals.

Apart from the growth in the number of adherents, the twenty-first century also brought the formation of new Buddhist communities. In 2009 Sangha “Dogen Zenji” was registered. It was founded by Alain Krystaszek (b. 1950) – a Frenchman born in Poland – who started to practice Japanese Zen in 1968 under the guidance of the master Deshimaru Taisen 質田丸泰仙 (1914–1982). After the fall of communism in 1989, he visited Poland many times, which led to the formation of a new group (today with 115 adherents). At the end of the 2000s, two new Bon groups (representing Yungdrung Bon) were also formed. The first was founded in 2007 by Nyima Dakpa Rinpoche from the Latri Monastery in Tibet at the request of his Polish followers. It was registered as the Institute of Sardza Ling (Instytut Śardza Ling) and has two centers in Poznań and in Pyszk. A meditation center in Żydowo is under construction. The second is the Tibetan Bon “Sa Trick Er Sang” Association (Związek Tybetańskiego Bon “Sa Trik Er Sang”), founded in 2010 by Chongtul Rinpoche (b. 1967), which has 15 members from Warsaw and its vicinity. In the 2010s, two new Dzogchen communities were also formed. The first one – the Dzogchen Kunzang Buddhist Union Cziuling in the Republic of Poland (Związek Buddyjski “Dzogczien Kunzang Cziuling” w RP) – was registered in 2011. Its presently 15 members follow the teachings of the nineteenth-century master Patrul Rinpoche (1808–1887). The second one, called the “Yeshe Khorlo” Buddhist Union in the Republic of Poland (Związek Buddyjski “Yeshe Khorlo” w RP), represents the Bhutan line of Dzogchen. Its adherents practice according to the teachings of Gangteng Tulk Rinpoche (b. 1955), who visited Poland for the first time in 2007. In 2014 the group was officially registered. A year later, the first Vietnamese Buddhist community was registered as the Vietnamese Buddhism Center in Poland Um School of Zen (Ośrodek Wietnamskiego Buddyzystu w Polsce). The Vietnamese community built their first temple in the 1990s. It was located in the neighborhood of the 10th-Anniversary Stadium in Warsaw, which at that time housed

55 Ciecieląg, Wyznania religijne w Polsce, p. 279; Mistrz Kaisen.
56 Ciecieląg, Wyznania religijne w Polsce, p. 278; Budowa centrum medytacyjnego Śardza.
57 Sa Trik Er Sang; Ciecieląg, Wyznania religijne w Polsce, p. 279.
58 Ciecieląg, Wyznania religijne w Polsce, p. 279; Centrum Dzogczien w Polsce.
59 Yeshe Khorlo Polska.
a huge bazaar where many Vietnamese worked. In 2010 the temple was closed due to the construction of the new National Stadium. The new temple was built in Łazy near Warsaw. The Vietnamese community has 250 adherents and cooperates with the Karma Kamtsang Association.

6 Conclusions

As we can see, the process of formation of Buddhist religious communities in Poland was similar as in other Western countries, where Buddhism first attracted artists and writers such as Jack Kerouac (1922–1969), Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997) and Aldous Huxley (1894–1963). The first Polish Buddhists were also artists – Andrzej Urbanowicz, Antoni Szoska, Tadeusz Sławek (b. 1946), Jerzy Ilg (b. 1950), Edward Stachura (1937–1979). The majority of members of the first Polish Buddhist community were young, well-educated people, graduates of the art academies or universities, mainly in the humanities. The situation looked similar in the case of the Tibetan community founded by Andrzej Czapnik. Buddhists usually lived in big cities, which were more secularized and which ensured anonymity. Apart from painters and writers, also musicians were attracted by Buddhism. Buddhist influences are most clearly seen in the case of the World Music band Osjan, founded in 1971 by Jacek Ostaszewski and Marek Jackowski, but also today many musicians from the alternative scene openly profess Buddhism and practice the religion. The Buddhist communities in Poland were founded mainly by Poles who became interested in this religion, despite all the obstacles in the flow of knowledge, literature and teachers that existed in the days of the communist regime. It is surprising that a marginal role in this process was played by immigrants from Buddhist countries, especially by Vietnamese, who started to settle in Poland in the 1950s and whose population today is estimated between 20,000 and

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60 Staniszewska, Kultura i życie religijne migrantów wietnamskich w Polsce, p. 92.
61 Ciecieląg, Wyznania religijne w Polsce, p. 280.
63 Kalinowski, Polska kontrkultura w aspekcie buddyjskim, pp. 177–183; Kosior, Buddyzm w Polsce, p. 191.
64 Tracz, Zen na poddaszu, p. 216; Tracz, Katowicka Ścieżka Zen, pp. 148, 155.
65 Karpowicz, Ścieżki Dharmy, p. 76; Kossakowski, Diamoentowa Droga, p. 73. Krajewska, Buddyzm diamentowej drogi w Polsce, pp. 70–77.
66 Krajewska, Dżinsy, t-shirt i mnisze szaty, p. 126.
It seems that they did not want to spread Buddhism in Polish society and preferred to practice in their own circle. Also noteworthy is the significant role in Polish Buddhism, since the very beginning, played by women, who were not simply adherents but very often teachers and masters. The best known is Małgorzata Braunek (1947–2014), the famous Polish actress, who started to practice Buddhism in 1979 in the Korean Sŏn group in the tradition of Seung Sahn. In 1983 she moved to the Japanese Zen group of Dennis Genpo Merzel, and in 1992 became the leader of the Kanzeon Sangha. In 2011 she became master or rōshi 老師 in her own right and continued to lead the community until her death in 2014. The above-mentioned Aleksandra Porter (Bon Shim) also played an important role in Polish Zen Buddhism, as the co-founder of the Buddhist Association Zen Czogie. In 2006 she received the dharma transmission from the master Wu Bong (Jacob Perl 1950–2013), and today she is the leader of the Kwan Um community. The master of the oldest Polish Buddhist group, as stated above, is the American Sunya Kjolhede. Maria Moneta-Malewska, who started her practice there in 1978 after a long training at the Kyōto-based Hōkōji 方広寺, received the dharma transmission in the Rinzai tradition from Roshi Ōi Saidan 大井際断 (1915–2018). These representative cases only illustrate the general trend.

Polish Buddhism developed dynamically since the beginning of the 1970s, and neither the policy of the communist government in the past nor increasing secularization in the present times has been able to stop it. Considering this and drawing on recent statistics, we may expect that this increasing trend will continue also in the future.

Bio

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68 Staniszewska, *Kultura i życie religijne migrantów wietnamskich w Polsce*, pp. 84–86.
69 Małgosia Roshi.
70 Mistrzyni zen Bon Shim.
71 For more on the role of women in Polish Buddhism, see: Kalinowski, *Matki, żony i mistrzynie*, pp. 25–47.
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