



ESSAY TITLE:

Examine reasons why Buddhism is popular in Britain.

- All the early figures were united by various sociological factors, all of which helped cement Buddhism firmly into the intellectual and religious framework of 20th century Britain:
 1. they were all wealthy, middle/upper-class with financial influence
 2. they all were well educated and of an intellectual frame of mind
 3. they were all professional people (Christmas Humphreys was a barrister)
 4. their views and interests carried credibility amongst their peers.
- Buddhism, then, was clearly perceived to be a serious intellectual and religious pursuit.
- This tradition of intellectual curiosity and appreciation prepared the way for later missions and monastic developments.
- Early Buddhist literature includes Sir Edwin Arnold's "Light of Asia" (1879), the works of the Pali Text Society (founded by T.W.Rhys Davids in 1881) and F.Max Muller's translation of the "Dhammapada" into German (1862).
- Buddhism was first known Britain in the 19th century through translations of scriptures from the various schools in different parts of Asia.
- There has been an intellectual interest in Buddhism in Britain which persists to this day. However, the practice of Buddhism in Britain developed over time, with significant individuals being ordained in Asia.
- One of those, Allan Bennett, went to Sri Lanka in 1898 and returned as Ananda Metteyya, the first Englishman to be ordained as a Buddhist monk (Bhikkhu) of the Theravada tradition.
- In 1907 The Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland was formed. This was succeeded in 1924 by The London Buddhist Society, founded by Christmas Humphreys. It was the first really successful organisation in Britain to provide a platform for all schools and traditions of Buddhism. It stood alone for almost fifty years as the focal point for Buddhists in Britain.
- Sixties Britain brought Asian religions into fashion for the first time, including Buddhism.
- Many celebrities became interested in Buddhism boosting its profile.
- The Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950 eventually led to the exodus of thousands of Tibetans with



Buddhism

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the Dalai Lama in 1959. This brought lamas to the west.

- The founding of the Friends of the western Buddhist Order in 1967 by Sangharakshita (which was to become Triratna in 2010) was another significant event which shaped the landscape of Buddhism in Britain.
- In recent decades migration from China and Hong Kong has significantly increased the numbers of people practicing Chinese religions, which includes Buddhism.
- Other reasons include:
 - Change in society
 - Secular nature
 - Focus on self-development and meditation
 - Intellectual need
 - Non judgemental
 - Non dogmatic
 - Focus on praxis



QUOTATIONS

The 1960s was certainly a time of transition, and it was also a time when Western societies were increasing influence by eastern religion and philosophy. (Burnett)

Instead of authoritative narratives of truth, “truth” is seen in terms of “what works for me”. (Burnett)

People no longer feel obliged to heed the traditional boundaries of religious authorities, but are encouraged to exercise their autonomy to draw on what has diffused through the culture. (Burnett)

Buddhism does not demand a commitment to it alone, to the exclusion of anything else, and there are many who happily harmonise more than one faith or way of life within themselves. (St Ruth)

Indeed Buddhism is now part of the lives of many people with its meditation techniques used in secular settings, from mindfulness courses in the Houses of Parliament to stillness classes in schools. (Skilton)

A combination of idealistic optimism, full employment, the social confidence nourished by the welfare state, and a rejection of the mind-set behind the Cold War allowed lots of young people to look for something different. (Skilton)

There has been much debate about whether a ‘Western’ Buddhism is emerging, and what characteristics it might have. Smart, for example, suggested that the West is absorbing Buddhist ideas such as rebirth, non-violence, concern for animals and the environment, and an experiential rather than a dogmatic approach. (Bluck)

Rawlinson argued that Western Buddhism is starting to become ‘a new kind of Buddhism altogether’ as Western teachers develop new and varied teachings and practices, sometimes derived from outside Buddhism. (Bluck)