THE LINEAGE PROJECT

# Buddhist Denomination Family Tree

107 traditions and communities, from early Indian fraternities to contemporary Buddhist movements.

PANEL INDEX

- A Origins
  - B Theravāda
  - D Mahāyāna
    - C Vajrayāna
    - E Pure Land
    - F Chan & Zen
    - G Korea & Japan



## Followers by tradition

GLOBAL ESTIMATES / 2010

Each full figure represents 10 million people.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Mahāyāna** |  | **263 million** |
| **Theravāda** |  | **177 million** |
| **Tibetan Buddhism** |  | **28 million** |

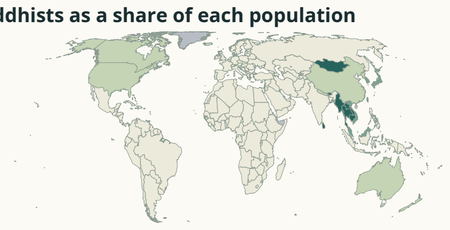
The 2010 estimates count Tibetan Buddhists separately from Mahāyāna.

Johnson & Grim, The World's Religions in Figures (2013), p. 36, table 1.33.

## Where Buddhists live

POPULATION SHARE / 2020

**Buddhists as a share of each population**




Pew Research Center, appendix B (2025) · Boundaries by Natural Earth

**Four places in the tree**




1. **Bodh Gaya** — Mahābodhi Temple
2. **Anurādhapura** — Mahāvihāra
3. **Lhasa** — Drepung Monastery
4. **Mount Hiei** — Enryakuji

**Node colors** Broad traditions · Early Indian schools & Theravāda · Indian Mahāyāna, China & Vietnam · Korea · Japan · Himalayas & Mongolia · Revivals & global networks

## A Early communities & Indian revivals

### Buddhism
**c. 5th c. BCE · Buddha taught**

Communities trace their teachings to the Buddha in South Asia.

CONTINUES IN D

### Early Indian fraternities
**c. 300 BCE · Traditional date of first division**

Monastic communities preserved different disciplinary codes and accounts of their origins.

··· Early monastic communities compiled different Vinayas.

### Sthavira
**c. 300 BCE · Traditional date of division**

Traditional accounts identify the Elders as one side of an early division.

··· Traditional narratives distinguish the Elders from the Great Community.

CONTINUES IN B

### Sarvāstivāda
**Early 1st c. CE · Mathurā inscription**

Its scholars argued that phenomena exist in past, present and future.

— Traditional school lists place Sarvāstivāda among Elders' lineages.

### Mūlasarvāstivāda
**5th–6th c. CE · Gilgit Vinaya manuscripts**

Its Vinaya still governs ordination in Tibetan and Mongolian monasteries.

··· Related Vinayas, disputed ancestry

### Vibhajyavāda
**3rd c. CE · Name appears in inscription**

Ancient sources use this name for different groups and doctrinal positions.

··· Some sources apply this doctrinal label to Elders' groups.

### Dharmaguptaka
**1st c. CE · Attested in Gandhāra**

Its Four-Part Vinaya remains a basis for East Asian ordination.

··· Several school lists trace Dharmaguptakas through the Mahīśāsakas.

### Chinese Vinaya schools
**410–412 · Four-Part Vinaya translated**

Teachers studied monastic discipline and taught ordination using the Four-Part Vinaya.

- · The translated Four-Part Vinaya supplied a Chinese ordination code.

### Mahāsāṃghika
**c. 300 BCE · Traditional date of division**

The "Great Community" included schools that flourished in southern India.

··· Early division with the Sthaviras

### Lokottaravāda
**Early centuries CE · School already active**

The Mahāvastu preserves this school's accounts of the Buddha's lives.

··· School lists associate Lokottaravāda with the Great Community.

### Bāmiyān communities
**1st c. CE · Buddhist activity attested**

Xuanzang reported Lokottaravāda monks; manuscripts attest a wider range of traditions.

··· Xuanzang describes Lokottaravāda monks living at Bāmiyān.

### Indian Buddhist revivals
**Late 19th c. · Modern revivals**

Tamil, Bengali and Ambedkarite initiatives arose in different social settings.

··· Modern Indian communities organized distinct religious and social revivals.

### Maha Bodhi Society
**31 May 1891 · Society founded**

Dharmapāla and colleagues founded the society in 1891 to reclaim Bodh Gaya.

··· Dharmapāla organized a campaign for the Buddhist sacred site at Bodh Gaya.

### Navayāna
**14 Oct 1956 · Nagpur conversion**

Ambedkar's 1956 Nagpur conversion linked Buddhist revival with opposition to caste.

··· Ambedkar's Nagpur conversion, 1956

### Triratna Buddhist Community
**6 Apr 1967 · London launch**

Sangharakshita founded a British community drawing on several Buddhist traditions.

··· Cross-tradition movement founded in London, 1967

## B Sri Lanka & the Theravāda world

### Theravāda
**3rd c. BCE · Traditional Sri Lankan roots**

The Pāli canon and shared ordination rules connect several monastic orders.

··· A · Sthavira Elders' heritage via Sri Lanka

### Sri Lankan fraternities
**3rd c. BCE · Early monastic settlements**

Ancient monasteries and later overseas ordinations shaped different generations of fraternities.

··· Anurādhapura supported several distinct monastic fraternities.

### Mahāvihāra
**3rd c. BCE · Founded, per chronicle**

Anurādhapura's Great Monastery supplied the model for later reforms.

··· The Great Monastery anchored one ancient Anurādhapura fraternity.

### Abhayagiri
**1st c. BCE · Monastery founded**

This Anurādhapura monastery cultivated ties with Indian Mahāyāna communities.

··· Abhayagiri maintained a separate fraternity until medieval monastic reforms.

### Siyam Nikāya
**1753 · Founded at Kandy**

Siamese monks helped restore higher ordination at Kandy in 1753.

— Siamese ordination renewed a Sri Lankan fraternity.

1 Ordinations at Kandy, 1753

### Amarapura Nikāya
**1803 · Established in Sri Lanka**

Sri Lankan candidates ordained in Burma established new chapters at home.

— Sri Lankan ordinands returned from Burma to organize chapters.

### Rāmañña Nikāya
**1864 · Order founded**

This Burmese-derived ordination tradition includes Sri Lankan forest monasteries.

— A separate Burmese ordination line took root in Sri Lanka.

### Sri Lankan bhikkhunī revival
**Dec 1996 · Sarnath ordination**

International ordinations helped Sri Lankan women regain full monastic ordination.

- · Several 1990s ceremonies renewed women's higher ordination.

4 Bodh Gaya ordination, 1998

### Burmese Theravāda
**c. 5th–6th c. CE · Pyu Pāli texts**

Monastic fraternities coexist with meditation networks taught by monks and laypeople.

··· Burmese monasteries preserved Pāli study and Theravāda ordination.

### Shwegyin Nikāya
**Mid-19th c. · Reform order emerged**

Reformers under King Mindon emphasized stricter observance of monastic discipline.

··· The Shwegyin reform emphasized stricter monastic discipline.

### Mahāsi tradition
**1949 · Yangon centre opened**

Mahāsi Sayadaw trained meditators to note experiences as they arise.

- · Yangon's Sāsana Yeiktha became a centre for noting practice.

### U Ba Khin lineage
**1950 · Teaching association founded**

This lay teacher taught insight meditation at his centre in Yangon.

- · A Yangon lay teacher transmitted insight practice internationally.

### Goenka Vipassanā
**3 Jul 1969 · First course in India**

S. N. Goenka took U Ba Khin's insight method to international audiences.

- · Goenka studied with the Burmese lay teacher U Ba Khin.

### Sudhamma Nikāya
**1782 · Royal reform begins**

Myanmar's majority order retains the older Sudhamma monastic hierarchy.

— Sudhamma retained the older hierarchy after Shwegyin gained separate jurisdiction.

### Thai Theravāda
**13th c. · Sukhothai royal patronage**

National orders and forest teachers organize distinct aspects of monastic life.

··· Thailand's main monastic orders follow the Theravāda Vinaya.

1

### Dhammayuttika Nikāya
**c. 1833 · Mongkut's reform**

Prince Mongkut organized a reform order emphasizing close observance of discipline.

— Mongkut drew on Mon ordination and ritual precedents.

### Thai Forest tradition
**c. 1900 · Modern forest revival**

Ajahn Sao and Ajahn Mun revived ascetic meditation in forest monasteries.

- · Ajahn Sao and Ajahn Mun trained forest meditators.

### Ajahn Chah lineage
**1954 · Wat Nong Pah Pong founded**

Ajahn Sumedho helped establish this Thai forest lineage in Britain.

- · Ajahn Chah's students established monasteries beyond Thailand.

### Thai Mahā Nikāya
**19th c. · Collective name adopted**

This name groups the majority of Thai monasteries outside Dhammayut.

— A majority-order designation distinguished monasteries outside Dhammayut.

### Wat Phra Dhammakāya
**20 Feb 1970 · Centre begun**

Pathum Thani's temple mobilized large lay communities around Dhammakāya meditation.

— Temple affiliation and Wat Paknam teaching

### Cambodian Mohanikay
**1880 · Order recognized in the royal hierarchy**

Cambodia's majority order debated teaching methods and textual authority under colonial rule.

··· Mohanikay became Cambodia's largest Theravāda order.

### Lao Theravāda
**14th c. · Fa Ngum in Lao tradition**

After 1975, two earlier orders came under a common national organization.

··· Lao Theravāda included Mahānikāy and Dhammayut monastic orders.

### Mekong Khmer Theravāda
**c. 1533 · Kh'leang temple in Sóc Trăng**

Khmer temples in Sóc Trăng and An Giang sustain delta communities.

··· Khmer-speaking communities sustained Theravāda monasteries in the Mekong Delta.

### Insight Meditation Society
**1975 · Society founded**

A Massachusetts retreat centre made intensive residential insight practice widely accessible.

··· Asian insight teachers trained the American retreat founders.

## C Esoteric Buddhist transmissions

### Vajrayāna
**7th c. CE · Emerged in India**

Teachers confer initiation and pass on tantric texts, rituals and meditation practices.

··· D · Mahāyāna Tantric practice developed within Mahāyāna ritual and doctrinal settings.

### Tang esoteric lineages
**716–720 · Tantric masters arrived**

Translation and initiation established tantric ritual lineages at the Tang court.

- · Tantric texts and initiations reached Tang China.

3 Tang imperial patronage

### Shingon
**806 · Kūkai returned from Tang China**

Kūkai studied with Huiguo in Chang'an and transmitted tantric rites to Japan.

- · Huiguo initiates Kūkai in Chang'an

### Newar Vajrayāna
**By c. 900 · Kathmandu Valley a tantric centre**

Kathmandu Valley householders maintain Sanskrit traditions and hereditary monastery communities.

··· Newar household saṅghas preserved Sanskrit tantric rites.

### Nyingma
**8th c. · Traditional transmission**

Early translations and revealed "treasure" teachings sustain several monastic lineages.

··· Older translation lineages acquired the collective name Nyingma.

### Kadam
**c. 1057 · Reting Monastery**

Dromtön founded Reting Monastery to carry on Atiśa's teachings.

··· Dromtön established a Tibetan seat for Atiśa's teaching.

### Gelug
**1409 · Ganden Monastery founded**

Tsongkhapa renewed Kadam teachings; the Ganden Tripa holds the school's throne.

- · Tsongkhapa incorporated Kadam teachings into the Ganden tradition.

### FPMT Buddhist centres
**1975 · Foundation established**

Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa founded an international network of teaching centres.

- · Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa established centres for Gelug teaching.

### Sakya
**1073 · Sakya Monastery founded**

Khön Könchok Gyalpo founded the monastery in 1073; Lamdré became central.

··· The Khön family established the Sakya seat in 1073.

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### Jonang
**1294 · Jonang Monastery founded**

Dolpopa taught "other-emptiness"; Kālacakra meditation remains central to the tradition.

··· The Jonang monastery gave this tradition its name.

### Tibetan Buddhism
**7th c. · Buddhism gained imperial support**

Tibetan monasteries combine sūtra study, tantric initiation and Vinaya ordination.

··· Sūtra and tantra entered Tibet through successive translation movements.

### Shangpa Kagyü
**11th c. · Khyungpo Neljor's lineage**

Khyungpo Naljor received teachings from both Niguma and Sukhasiddhi.

··· Niguma's independent transmission

### Kagyü traditions
**11th c. · Lineages take root in Tibet**

This family includes Marpa and Shangpa transmissions with distinct Indian teachers.

··· Different teacher–disciple lines came to share the name Kagyü.

### Dagpo Kagyü
**1121 · Gampopa's monastery**

Gampopa combined Milarepa's meditation instruction with earlier Kadam training.

- · Milarepa's teachings reached Gampopa through direct discipleship.

### Karma Kagyü
**1139 · Traditional lineage date**

Gampopa taught Düsum Khyenpa, later recognized as the first Karmapa.

— Gampopa's disciple Düsum Khyenpa began the Karmapa line.

### Drikung Kagyü
**1179 · Drikung Thil founded**

Two reincarnate lines, Chetsang and Chungtsang, share leadership responsibilities.

- · Drikung belongs to the later branches associated with Phagmodrupa.

### Drukpa Kagyü
**1206 · Namdruk gives the lineage its name**

Tsangpa Gyaré's lineage spread through Tibet, Ladakh and Bhutan.

- · Lingrépa transmitted Phagmodrupa's teaching to Tsangpa Gyaré.

### Mongolian Buddhism
**13th & late 16th c. · Two transmissions**

Mongolian communities supported Tibetan teachers and developed local monasteries and liturgies.

··· Mongolian patrons supported teachers from several Tibetan schools.

2 Mongol patronage of Sakya teachers

## D Mahāyāna in India & East Asia

### Mahāyāna
**c. 1st c. BCE · Mahāyāna emerged**

Bodhisattva teachings circulated among Indian monasteries of different affiliations.

··· A · Buddhism The bodhisattva path spread across multiple monastic lineages.

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### Madhyamaka
**c. 200 CE · Nāgārjuna's foundational works**

Nāgārjuna's analyses of emptiness inspired Indian, Tibetan and Chinese commentaries.

··· Nāgārjuna examined emptiness through arguments about dependent arising.

### Sanlun
**Early 5th c. · Three treatises translated**

Jizang explained Indian Madhyamaka through three treatises translated into Chinese.

- · Chinese translations of three Indian treatises underpinned Sanlun study.

### Yogācāra
**4th–5th c. CE · Teachings systematized**

Asaṅga and Vasubandhu developed Indian accounts of cognition and experience.

··· Yogācāra thinkers examined how cognition shapes experience.

### Faxiang
**659 · Xuanzang completes Cheng weishi lun**

Xuanzang and Kuiji developed a Chinese tradition of Consciousness-Only scholarship.

- · Xuanzang and Kuiji teach in Chang'an

### Chinese Buddhism
**65 CE · Buddhist worship recorded in China**

Monasteries often share several teachings, ordination lineages and devotional practices.

··· Sūtras translated in Han Luoyang

CONTINUES IN E F 3

### Tiantai
**575 · Zhiyi settles on Mount Tiantai**

Zhiyi brought Lotus Sūtra interpretation and meditation into one system.

··· Zhiyi organized scripture and meditation around the Lotus Sūtra.

### Goryeo Ch'ŏnt'ae
**1097 · Üich'ŏn opened courses at Gukcheongsa**

Üich'ŏn organized a Korean school around Tiantai learning under Goryeo.

- · Üich'ŏn adapted Tiantai learning to a Goryeo monastic setting.

### Modern Cheontae Order
**24 Jan 1967 · Modern order founded**

Sangwol founded Guinsa in 1945; a Cheontae mission followed in 1967.

- · Sangwol proclaims a revival, 1966

### Tendai
**806 · Court authorized Tendai ordinands**

Saichō combined Tiantai study, precepts, meditation and esoteric practice on Mount Hiei.

- · Saichō studies on Mount Tiantai

### Huayan
**7th c. · School takes shape in China**

Fazang used the Flower Garland Sūtra to explain how phenomena interpenetrate.

··· Commentators developed a school around the Flower Garland Sūtra.

### Korean Hwaŏm
**676 · Üisang founded Buseoksa**

Üisang taught Flower Garland Buddhism; Buseoksa became an important seat.

- · Üisang studies under Zhiyan

### Humanistic Buddhism
**Early 20th c. · Reform movement emerged**

Taixu emphasized Buddhist practice in this world; later teachers developed different interpretations.

··· Taixu urged Buddhists to address concerns of ordinary life.

### Fo Guang Shan
**1967 · Fo Guang Shan founded**

Hsing Yun founded this Humanistic Buddhist order in Kaohsiung in 1967.

··· Hsing Yun gave Humanistic Buddhism a new institutional home.

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### Tzu Chi
**1966 · Charity founded in Hualien**

Cheng Yen founded a charitable association in Hualien in 1966.

··· Cheng Yen put Buddhist teachings into practice through charitable work.

### Vietnamese Mahāyāna
**By 3rd c. · Mahāyāna at Luy Lâu**

Devotional, tantric and Thiền practices often coexist in Vietnamese temples.

··· Indian and Chinese teachings met in northern Vietnam.

### Vietnamese Thiền
**c. 580 · Traditional date of Vinītaruci's arrival**

Local transmission histories record distinctive Vietnamese lines of Chan teaching.

··· Thiền developed alongside devotional and esoteric practices.

### Trúc Lâm Yên Tử
**1299 · Trần Nhân Tông founded Trúc Lâm**

Trần Nhân Tông, Pháp Loa and Huyền Quang shaped medieval Trúc Lâm.

- · Trần Nhân Tông cultivated a Vietnamese lineage at Yên Tử.

### Bửu Sơn Kỳ Hương
**Late 1849 · Movement founded**

Đoàn Minh Huyên's 1849 movement taught gratitude and established farming communities.

··· Southern Vietnamese reformers linked religious practice with farming communities.

### Hòa Hảo Buddhism
**4 Jul 1939 · Founding ceremony**

Huỳnh Phú Sổ founded a Mekong Delta movement in 1939.

- · Huỳnh Phú Sổ drew on earlier Mekong Delta reform teachings.

## E Pure Land traditions

### Chinese Pure Land
**402 · Huiyuan's community vows rebirth in the Pure Land**

Devotion to Amitābha crossed the boundaries of individual monasteries and schools.

··· D · Chinese Buddhism Amitābha recitation spread through temples and lay associations.

### Mao Ziyuan's White Lotus
**Early 1130s · Mao's community active**

Mao Ziyuan organized lay and monastic Amitābha devotees at Dianshan.

— Mao Ziyuan organized an Amitābha community at Dianshan.

### Hōnen's nenbutsu community
**1175 · Hōnen established his teaching**

Hōnen advocated exclusive recitation of Amida Buddha's name.

- · Hōnen drew on Shandao's interpretation of reciting Amitābha's name.

### Jōdo Shinshū
**c. 1224 · Shinran drafted his principal work**

Shinran developed his Pure Land teaching after studying with Hōnen.

— Shinran first studied the nenbutsu under Hōnen.

### Hongwanji-ha
**1602 · Eastern and western branches divided**

This Shin Buddhist denomination is based at Kyoto's Nishi Hongwanji.

— Nishi Hongwanji became the head temple of this Shin denomination.

### Shinshū Ōtani-ha
**1602 · Eastern branch established**

Kyoto's Higashi Honganji is the principal temple of this Shin denomination.

— Higashi Honganji became the seat of the Ōtani branch.

### Buddhist Churches of America
**1 Sep 1899 · Ministers arrive**

A mission begun in 1899 linked US mainland temples to Kyoto's Hongwanji.

- · Kyoto's Hongwanji sent ministers to the United States in 1899.

### Jōdo-shū
**1175 · Hōnen founds the school**

Benchō's Chinzei lineage became the principal institutional heir to Hōnen's teaching.

— Benchō's Chinzei succession

## F Chan, Sŏn, Zen & Thiền

### Chan
**6th c. · Chan emerged in China**

Patriarchal histories traced teachings through Bodhidharma, Huike and the East Mountain masters.

··· D · Chinese Buddhism Lineage histories linked Chinese Chan masters through patriarchal succession.

### Linji
**851 · Yixuan settled at Linji Temple**

Linji Yixuan's tradition later developed the Yangqi and Huanglong branches.

- · Linji Yixuan's disciples transmitted a distinct Chan lineage.

### Vietnamese Lâm Tế
**c. 1633 · Chuyết Chuyết taught in the north**

Chinese Linji teachers helped establish lineages in southern Đại Việt.

- · Linji teachers established local lines in southern Đại Việt.

### Plum Village
**1982 · French community founded**

Thích Nhất Hạnh established a French community rooted in Vietnamese Thiền.

- · Thích Nhất Hạnh's ordination descended through the Liễu Quán line.

### Rinzai
**1191 · Eisai brought Linji teaching to Japan**

Eisai helped transmit Linji Zen to Japan; several temple branches followed.

- · Returning Japanese monks transmitted Chinese Linji teachings.

### Caodong
**9th c. · Dongshan and Caoshan taught**

This teaching lineage is associated with Dongshan Liangjie and Caoshan Benji.

- · Dongshan and Caoshan gave their names to a Chan lineage.

### Sōtō
**1227 · Dōgen returned from Song China**

Dōgen and Keizan's school treats wholehearted sitting as an expression of awakening.

- · Dōgen returns from Song China, 1227

### Korean Sŏn
**821 · Toŭi returned to Silla from Tang China**

Mountain monasteries cultivated Chan transmissions that reached Korea from China.

- · Korean monks transmitted Chinese Chan into mountain monasteries.

### Medieval Chogye
**1172 · Chogye name attested on stele**

Goryeo Sŏn histories connect this tradition with Chinul and the mountain schools.

— Goryeo sources connect Chogye with earlier mountain-school traditions.

### Jogye Order of Korea
**1962 · Unified order constituted**

The current order took shape in 1962 and maintains celibate monastic clergy.

··· The modern order invokes Chinul and earlier Korean masters.

### Taego Order
**1970 · Separate order established**

Clergy who accepted marriage formed a separate Korean order in 1970.

— Marriage dispute led to a separate order, 1970

### Dharma Drum Mountain
**1989 · Dharma Drum Mountain founded**

Sheng Yen founded this institution in 1989, building on Dongchu's work.

- · Sheng Yen carried Chan teaching into a modern Taiwanese institution.

## G Korean and Japanese lineages

### Korean Buddhism
**372 · Official reception in Koguryŏ**

Scriptural study and meditation flourished in distinct Korean schools and monasteries.

··· D · Mahāyāna Mahāyāna scriptures circulated in the kingdoms of the Korean peninsula.

### Won Buddhism
**1916 · Sot'aesan founded movement**

Sot'aesan taught laypeople using new scriptures and a circle as a symbol.

··· Sot'aesan founded a Korean movement open to lay practitioners.

### Japanese Buddhism
**538 or 552 · Court introduction in early accounts**

Korean and Chinese transmissions helped shape new Japanese schools and institutions.

- · One early route via Baekje's court

### Nichiren traditions
**1253 · Nichiren proclaimed his teaching**

Nichiren's Lotus Sūtra teaching inspired temple lineages and lay movements.

··· Nichiren made the Lotus Sūtra central to his teaching.

### Nichiren Shōshū
**1290 · Head temple Taisekiji founded**

Taisekiji is the head temple of this Fuji-line denomination.

— The Fuji lineage established its principal temple at Taisekiji.

### Nichiren-shū
**28 Apr 1253 · Nichiren proclaims his teaching**

Mount Minobu is the spiritual centre of this Nichiren denomination.

— Minobusan became a principal centre of Nichiren-shū.

### Sōka Gakkai
**1930 · Educators' association founded**

Makiguchi's educational association grew into a lay Nichiren movement.

- · Former lay affiliation ends, 1991

### Reiyūkai
**13 Jul 1930 · Inaugural assembly**

Kubo Kakutarō and Kotani Kimi combined Lotus devotion with ancestor rites.

··· Lay practitioners joined Lotus Sūtra devotion with ancestor remembrance.

### Brazil Soka Gakkai
**19 Oct 1960 · Founding commemorated**

Studies of Black Brazilian practitioners document their experiences in this movement.

- · Brazilian members developed a local Soka Gakkai organization.

### Risshō Kōsei-kai
**5 Mar 1938 · Society founded**

Small lay assemblies studied the Lotus Sūtra and developed interfaith ties.

— New lay society, 1938

## Reading the branches

Follow the panel letters to continue a branch. Matching diamonds mark an additional historical connection. Select an entry to open its source.

——— Institutional branch · ------ Teaching transmission · ····· Historical or regional setting · -·-·- Past or present affiliation · → Additional historical connection

Dates identify the event recorded for each entry, such as its founding, earliest evidence or revival. Select a date for its source.


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