

Abstract

The subject of this thesis is self-immolation in Buddhist countries. The author shows examples from both history and the present and interprets them as a ritualised pattern passed on from the fourth century until the present time, the continuity of which was based on literary tradition as well as on historical occurrences. She demonstrates that self-immolations in Vietnam and Tibet also follow the centuries long tradition and prove to have the same components. The author intends to answer the question of the origin of the tradition in Buddhism and its broad popularity compared to other forms of self-sacrifice. Reasons for self-immolations among the Buddhists might have been manifold: to demonstrate their loyalty to the buddhist doctrine and the Buddha, to use it as means of attaining enlightenment immediately or as a form of a political protest. All of the above can be understood as a sacrifice to the Three Jewels of Buddhism, i.e. the Buddha, the *Dharma* and the *Sangha*. The author also handles self-immolation in Buddhism as a question of ethics in order to present the problem in its completeness. In doing so, she concentrates on the point of view of the followers of Buddhism themselves. The phenomenon proves to have many forms and therefore even the Buddhists are not united in their opinions. Although it is difficult to use western psychological categories of suicide and self-sacrifice in the problem of self-immolation in Buddhism, moral evaluation of such an act resembles the western notion in the fact that understanding the act as a suicide or, on the other hand, as self-sacrifice is reflected in its approval or its negative evaluation.

Key words

Buddhism, self-immolation, suicide, Lotus Sutra, Vietnam, Tibet.