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## *Introduction to Buddhism in Tension: Identity, Power, and Representation*

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Highlighting significant themes and controversies surrounding various aspects of Buddhism and its practice, this special issue collectively underscores the complexity and richness of Buddhist traditions while addressing under-explored topics of identity, cultural preservation, and the negotiation of religious practices within modern contexts. This issue invites deeper engagement and critical discussion within religious studies, history, Tibetan studies, sinology, sociology, psychology, and neuroscience.

Jiří Holba, an expert in Buddhist studies with a focus on the philosophical, ethical, and religious dimensions of Mahayana Buddhism and the history of Buddhism in the Czech lands, describes in his contribution the remarkable life of Martin Novosad, who became *Ñāṇasatta Thera*, the first Czech Buddhist monk. Novosad's distinctive contributions to Theravāda Buddhism, especially in Sri Lanka (Ceylon), are also highlighted.

Luboš Bělka, expert on Tibetan Buddhism, recounts the history and significance of the Lhasa Tsuglakhang's Bathing Maitreya statue in the Jokhang Temple, detailing its enigmatic existence through historical photographs. The study aims to reconstruct this unique Tibetan artefact's visual and contextual background, offering insights into the impact of political upheaval on cultural heritage.

Petr Jandáček's analysis of Tibetan practical rituals in the grimoire or "spell-book" *Ba ri be'u bum* offers a novel perspective on their material and intangible components. By quantitatively examining these rituals, the research described in the study reveals that tangibility is dominant, but intangible elements are also important. Practical rituals favour tangible aspects, while those involving supernatural beings balance tangible and intangible components.



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In her study, the Sinologist and Tibetanist Jarmila Ptáčková examines China's "sinicisation" efforts, particularly in Tibet, as part of the Chinese Communist Party's strategy to promote patriotism and achieve the "Chinese dream." Under Xi Jinping, the party aims to build a unified Chinese culture, enforcing control over minority cultures through language, religion, and daily life restrictions. These efforts are not inclusive, but rather marginalise non-Han populations, aiming for the forced assimilation of Tibetans into a state-approved "Chinese" identity.

In her contribution, sociologist and religious studies scholar Tereza Menšíková explores the evolution and diversity of Ambedkarite Buddhism, rooted in B. R. Ambedkar's 1956 conversion movement. Through research in Maharashtra, she examines how competing processes of legitimisation, cultural blending, and hybridisation shape debates on authenticity and identity. The article argues that these dynamics have made Ambedkarite Buddhism adaptable in local and global contexts.

In her study, Silvie Kotherová, an expert in Buddhist and cognitive religious studies, critically examines the depiction of Buddhist meditation in contemporary science, exposing the overly positive narrative that often overlooks potential side effects. The article also discusses how engaged scientists and organisations like the Mind and Life Institute promote Buddhism under the guise of scientific inquiry, raising questions about the integrity and objectivity of such research.

This special issue would not have been possible had all the contributors not met on March 18, 2024, at a Tibetan-Buddhist studies workshop in Brno, organised by the Department for the Study of Religions at the Faculty of Arts of Masaryk University. The main goal of this event was to connect various researchers who use different methods and sources for their research on Tibetan culture and religion, and to create a platform for them to meet once a year and share their latest research in a friendly and collegial environment. After this event, the idea was born to create a single-theme issue, which we are now delighted to present to our readers.