

ngu 𠵼 g 𠵼 GIA- 𠵼 NH PH 𠵼 TỬ VIỆT-NAM

Lời Giới-Thiệu - Gia-Đình Phật-Tử Việt-Nam (GDPTVN) có một chiều dài lịch-sử 60 năm, trong khi đó cuốn Kỳ-Yếu này chỉ đề-cập đến khoảng thời-gian 30 năm cận-đại của một tổ-chức có những sinh-hoạt tương-đương tại Hoa-Kỳ, đó là GDPTVN tại Hoa-Kỳ. Như vậy, khi đề-cập đến tổ-chức này mà không nói đến nguồn gốc của nó thì là một sự thiếu sót lớn. Ban Biên Tập chúng tôi đã may-mắn nhận được cuốn Luận-Án Tiến-Sĩ của Thượng-Tọa Thích Nguyên Tâm "Contemporary Buddhism in Vietnam" trong đó có một phần giới-thiệu tổng-lược về nguồn gốc, cơ-cấu, và chương-trình giáo-dục giáo-lý nhà Phật của tổ-chức GDPT, một tổ-chức, theo tác-giả, được xem là một thành-phần học Phật chánh yếu và hiệu-quả nhất sau Tăng-đoàn Phật-Giáo Việt-Nam. Chúng tôi xin trích đăng phần này và giữ nguyên văn ngoại-ngữ của Luận-Án, vì nghĩ rằng như vậy sẽ giúp ích nhiều cho các độc-giả thuộc thế-hệ trẻ ngày nay. Riêng đối với những ai muốn tìm hiểu chi tiết về nguồn gốc của tổ-chức GDPT, chúng tôi xin Quý Vị hãy tìm đọc cuốn "Lịch Sử Gia-Đình Phật-Tử Việt-Nam " của tác-giả Kiêm-Đạt, do Phật Học Viện Quốc Tế xuất bản vào năm 1981.

Ban Biên Tập Kỳ-Yếu

The Gia 𠵼 nh Ph 𠵼 tử 𠵼

(An extract from the Ph.D thesis "Contemporary Buddhism in Vietnam " of Rev. Thich Nguyên Tâm)

In Vietnam, there are many Buddhist organization for propagating the Buddha's Dharma. However, the *Gia 𠵼 nh Ph 𠵼 tử 𠵼* (GDPT), which is a member of the Vietnamese Buddhist Sangha, is considered as the main and most effective of these after the Sangha itself.

The GDPT can be roughly translated in English as "Buddhist Followers' Family" or "Buddhist Followers' Association" and in Chinese as "佛子家庭". Here, I would like to use its original name. This organization plays every important role in supporting the sangha and is also a firm foundation for the birth of monks and nuns. However, up to now few books written about the history of organization can be seen. Through many its ups-and-downs, the GDPT still holds a firm and reliant position in the hearts of the Vietnamese Buddhists as well as the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha.

In this chapter I would like to refer to its periods of development of embryo organizations from the 𠵼 𠵼 *Đông Ấn Phật Tử* (童幼佛子團, The Buddhist Children Commission), The 𠵼 𠵼 *Thanh Niên Phật Học Đức Dục* (青年佛學德育團, Commission d'Etudes Bouddhiques Et De Perfectionnement Moral) to the *Gia 𠵼 nh Ph 𠵼 tử 𠵼* (佛化普家庭, Family of Buddhist Popularization), and then the birth of the present day *Gia 𠵼 nh Ph 𠵼 tử 𠵼* (佛子家庭, Buddhist Followers' Family). Moreover, it is necessary to introduce its program of Buddhist teachings for its members, its mode of organization as well as activities and its contributions to the Vietnamese as well as to the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha.

The Gia Đình Phật Tử (佛子家庭, Buddhist Followers' Family)

I. Its former organizations

The fundamental aim of the GDPT is training true Buddhists and establishing family happiness on the basis of Buddhist ethics⁽¹⁾ and making a contribution to building society in the Buddhist spirit.⁽²⁾

The GDPT was found in 1935 but up to now there are no basic books written about its history, only some materials for internal circulation.

1. Its first embryo period - The 佛子團 (Đoàn Đồng Ấu Phật Tử 童幼佛子團, The Buddhist Children Commission)

On May 15th, 1935 (April 8th, 1935 of the lunar year) a Buddha Jayanti Day was solemnly celebrated at 慈曇寺 temple (慈曇寺), Hue city in order to proclaim support for the movement of Buddhist promotion all over Vietnam. On this occasion, the 佛子團 (Đoàn Đồng Ấu Phật Tử (童幼佛子團, The Buddhist Children Commission) was established with only 52 members both male and female. Its purpose was merely to guide children to sing Buddhist and non-Buddhist songs such as 海潮音 (Hải Triều Âm (海潮音, The Sound of Sea Waves) which later changed its title to 燒沉香 (Trầm Hương) (燒沉香, Burning Incense Sticks) and some old-style court songs⁽³⁾. The later is still today the most popular of in GDPT.

Conditions for joining the group can be listed as follows:

1. A son or daughter of a Buddhist family, as well as any teenager who is from 12 to 18 years old and has the educational level of elementary school upwards, can join the group.
2. Always participating in all activities of the group.
3. Clearly understanding the regulated rite of reciting sutra and nembutsu (念佛, reciting the Buddhas' names), and understanding basic doctrines regulated for a Buddhist follower.⁽⁴⁾

Although its name is the Buddhist Children Commission, we can see that it is a group which consists of not only children but teenagers as well. This organization is considered as the first embryo of the present GDPT. However, it had no clear regulations of methods of activity, no correct methods of education, and poor leadership and organization.

2. The second period - The 青年佛學德育團 (Thanh Niên Phật Học Đức Dục) (青年佛學德育團, Commission d'Etudes Bouddhiques Et De Perfectionnement Moral)

In 1940, Professor Dr. Lê Đình Thám, an enthusiastic Buddhist follower and a well-known scholar who made great contributions to the Buddhist promotion movement of Vietnam Buddhism in modern times, gathered together some intellectual youngsters, most of whom were descendants of lay-followers who had taken part in activities of the 安南佛學 (Hội An Nam Phật Học (安南佛學, Annam Buddhist Studies Association)⁽⁵⁾, and then founded the 青年佛學德育團 (Thanh Niên Phật Học Đức Dục) (青年佛學德育團, Commission d'Etudes Bouddhiques Et De Perfectionnement Moral)⁽⁶⁾. Dr. Lê Đình Thám himself led and taught the Buddhist teachings for the commission. The youngsters did not study Buddhist teachings by Chinese texts, but were taught in Vietnamese by a new way of study, by which they could understand the teachings as quickly as possible. Beside Buddhist teachings, Confucianism and Taoism were also introduced into the teaching program.⁽⁷⁾

The birth of this organization marked a new step for Buddhism. The temporary youth generation could become aware that buddhist was something which is up-to-date and not old-fashioned. Their formal song, written in French and later translated into Vietnamese as Hoa Sen Trắng (White Lotus)⁽⁸⁾, is still used by the GDPT today. Members of this organization helped to guide and train members of the 佛子團 (Đoàn Đồng Ấu Phật Tử (童幼佛子團, Buddhist Children Commission). Basically, the first Buddhist book for educating the youngsters at that time was Elementary Buddhist Studies (佛教初學) compiled and published by the

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Đoàn Thanh Niên Phật Học Đức Dục (青年佛学德育團), Commission d'Etudes Bouddhiques Et De Perfectionnement Moral) in 1942. ⁽⁹⁾

Afterwards, Dr. Lê Đình Thám handed over to editing of the Buddhist magazine *Vi Âm Âm* (圓音, Full Sound)⁽¹⁰⁾ which was used as a means to build up a new generation of Buddhists. Therefore, the content of the *Vi Âm Âm* was completely changed from issue No.48 ⁽¹¹⁾ thanks to the eager contribution of the organization's members. Some years later, classes of Buddhist studies led by Dr Lê Đình Thám were opened for newly-studying youngsters during their summer vacation.

Thus, the appearance of such a Buddhist organization is a very important step to make the Buddhist teachings as up-to-day as possible in the first stage of the 20th century, with its scientific and technological progress. However, it still was not an organizational part of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha at that time. In order to meet the urgent need of contemporary youngsters in studying and understanding the Buddha's teachings, giving birth to another organization became an inevitable necessity.

3. The third period - *Gia Âm Phật Hóa Phổ* (佛化普家庭, The Family of Buddhist Popularization)

On March 14th, 1943, ⁽¹²⁾ an assembly of Buddhist youngsters was held at Quang Te Hill, Hue City through which a new organization, the *Gia Âm Phật Hóa Phổ* (佛化普家庭, Family of Buddhist Popularization, GDPHP), was founded. A first managing board ⁽¹³⁾ was elected and a first copy of its purpose and regulated rules was issued as following:

- a. Purpose: to train true Buddhists and build up family happiness on the basis of Buddhist ethics.
- b. Conditions of joining:
 - Children from 8 - 12 years old.
 - Boys and girls from 12- 18 years old.
 - Youngsters above 18 years old
 - Educational level: from elementary level above.

- Clear understanding of the regulated rite of reciting sutras and the Buddha's names (nembutsu. ..).
- Clothes: **brown** or black dress (áo dài).

- c. Program of practice and study:
 - Buddhist doctrine: including 3 levels, that is, primary, intermediate and high level.
 - Literature and art: songs and dance performance at solemn religious festivals.
 - Youth activities: group activities such as camping, etc.
 - Social activities: helping the poor, the unfortunate.
- d. The central managing board: 1 head of commission, 2 vice-heads of commission (for male and female branches). Heads of sections including section of literature and art, youth activities and social relief. An adviser of Buddhist doctrine assigned by the *An Nam Phật Học Hội* (安南佛學會, Annam Buddhist Studies Association). ⁽¹⁴⁾

In the first stage, the organization founded 12 groups each of which consisted of about 40 persons.

This event made such a big impact on the nation at that time that the Magazine *Vi Âm Âm* No. 59 (April 1943) gave a favourable comment that the *Quảng Tế* Assembly marked a launching of the movement of Buddhist youngsters in Vietnam. ⁽¹⁵⁾

Two months later, on May 16th 1943, the First Assembly was held also at *Quảng Tế* Hill with 412 participants to issue its regulations, rules and ways of acting reformed and amended by the *An Nam Phật Học Hội* (安南佛學會, Annam Buddhist Studies Association), to properly establish the structure of central leadership, and to debate effective methods for enlarging the development of the GDPHP in localities including rural areas.

During three years (1943-1946) the organization made considerable developments in establishing *Gia Âm Phật Hóa Phổ* (佛化普家庭, Family of Buddhist Popularization) in Hue City and its suburbs ⁽¹⁶⁾, and in opening a training campaign and friend-meeting camp at *Tây Thiên* Temple (西天寺). The first established GDPHPs in Hue City were Tâm



Minh, Thanh Tịnh, Tâm Lạc and Sum-Đoàn.⁽¹⁷⁾ The first Leading Board of Thừa Thiên province was founded by the nomination of the *Hội Phật Học Trung Việt* (中越佛學會, Buddhist Studies Association in Central Vietnam).

At the same time, in South Vietnam, a GDPHP named *Chánh Giác* was born in 1949. Then in the North, a group of Buddhist followers also established a GDPHP named *Linh Hoa* (...), and the Northern Vietnam Buddhist Studies Association (...) also founded another GDPHP name *Minh Tâm* (...) which frequently convened at *Quán Sô* Temple (...) in the capital of Hanoi.

Nevertheless, due to the many political events during that time such as the French rule over Vietnam,⁽¹⁸⁾ the Japanese coup d'etat,⁽¹⁹⁾ the August Revolution in the North,⁽²⁰⁾ the long decade of anti-French war,⁽²¹⁾ etc., this organization became defunct in 1947 and could not develop on a large scale.

4. Remarks

We can see that the period of 12 years from 1935 up to 1947, was one of highly developed movements of Buddhist promotion in Vietnam, especially in Hue city, with the appearance of Buddhist Youth Organization such as the *Đoàn Đồng Ấu Phật Tử* (童幼佛子團, The buddhist Children Commission), *Đoàn Thanh Niên Phật Học Đức Dục* (青年佛學德育團, Commission d'Etudes Bouddhiques Et De Perfectionnement Moral) and *Gia Nhân Phật Hóa Phổ* (佛化普家庭, Family of Buddhist Popularization). These were urgently needed to modernize and popularize Buddhism as effectively as possible, espically from the point of view of the young generation.

Along with many youth-and-children organization such as the French Ducoroy Movement, *Hội Hướng Đạo Việt Nam* (The Vietnam Boy Scout Association),⁽²²⁾ *Đội Thiếu Niên Tiên Phong* (The Young Pioneers Troop),⁽²³⁾ *Tổng Hội Sinh Viên Việt Nam* (The General Association of Vietnam Students),⁽²⁴⁾ etc., the birth of the above-mentioned Buddhist organization met the need of studying and

understanding Buddhist teachings in the first half of the twentieth century in Vietnam.

The appearance of the word *Gia Nhân* (family) in the GDPHP in place of the word *Đoàn* (Commission or Group) in the *Đoàn Đồng Ấu Phật Tử* (童幼佛子團, The Buddhist Children Commission) and *Đoàn Thanh Niên Phật Học Đức Dục* (青年佛學德育團, Commission of d'Etudes Bouddhiques Et De Perfectionnement Moral) marks a great progress in recognizing that the organization must be one which embraces family community of all ages and that each member in the organization must live in harmony and behave towards each other like blood brothers and sisters under the leadership of a spiritual father, Lord Buddha.

Thus the *Gia Nhân Phật Hóa Phổ* (佛化普家庭, Family of Buddhist Popularization) is considered as a pioneer in establishing the idea of social *Gia Nhân* (family) and is also a firm foundation for the construction of the GDPT later.

II. The birth of the *Gia Nhân Phật Hóa Phổ*

1. Its establishment

Over three days 24, 25 and 26 of April, 1951, a historial meeting was held at *Tôn Nhân* temple, Hue City, with participants of provincial associations⁽²⁵⁾ changing the name GDPHP into GDPT and passing a set of Rules and Regulations for the organization. At this time the organization was also for the first time considered a member of the Vietnamese Buddhist Association in Central Vietnam as stated in its By-law Regulations that:

In accordance with Articles 2 and 21 of the Rules and with Item 54 of the By-law Regulations of the Buddhist Association of South Vietnam (南越佛學會), we hereby found an organization named Gia Dinh Phat Tu with the aim of training children and youngsters on the basis of Buddhist spirit.⁽²⁶⁾

2. Its purpose and rules

As stated in Item 2 of the By-lay Regulations of the Vietnamese Buddhist Association in Central Vietnam, its purpose was to train Buddhist youth and children so that they can become true Buddhists and worthy members of the Association. ⁽²⁷⁾ Based on this purpose the GDPT also emphasized the aphorism as *Compassion* (karuna), *Wisdom* (panna) and *Courage* to youngsters, and *Harmony*, *Belief* and *Joyfulness* to children.

Rules regulated for youngsters and children were as follows:

- a. For youngsters:
 - Taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and strictly following the ordained precepts.
 - Expanding one's compassion and respect for living beings.
 - Cultivating one's panna (wisdom) and respect for truth.
 - Purifying one's body and spirit, one's words and actions.
 - Living in joyful giving (priti-upekṣa, . .) so that one can go forward bravely on one's way.
- b. For Children:
 - Memorizing the Buddha.
 - Loving and paying respect to parents, and living in harmony with brothers and sisters.
 - Spreading love to human beings and animals. ⁽²⁸⁾

Furthermore, if someone wishes to join the organization, he or she must have the permission of parents and the introduction of two members (over age 18). ⁽²⁹⁾

Then, to become a true Buddhist, first of all, one must vow to take the Three Refuges (trisarana-gamana, . .) and Five Precepts (paca veramani) and to eat a vegetarian diet on regulated days. ⁽³⁰⁾ These are considered as basic training steps for a Buddhist. Its rules and aphorisms were adapted in accordance with common psychology and kind of ages. Everyone should live in harmonious spirit and behave towards each other as blood brothers and sisters. Therefore, the elders, regardless of any age, are called elder brothers or elder sisters; the youngsters are called younger brothers or sisters. Sister Hoa`ng Thi. Kim Cu`c, a

well-known elder sister of the GDPT, gave a reasonable remark on the organization:

"The *Qia [anh] Ph[ật] T[âm]* is a place where all relatives, brothers, sisters, children and grandchildren live together from the age of 7, 8 up to 70, 80. The elders of the family have the responsibility to the youngsters to live in cordial and joyful harmony. .. The more Buddhism is believed, the more the *Qia [anh] Ph[ật] T[âm]* needs to be reformed and widened to welcome those who are looking forward to a true orientation to follow. .." ⁽³¹⁾

Up to now the above-mentioned purpose, aphorisms and rules are preserved and performed during up-and-downs of the nation.

3. About its badge

The regulated badge of the GDPT is a round badge of a white lotus with eight petals on the basis of green color. ⁽³²⁾

- The circle symbolizes the perfect harmony of Buddhism among all its differences, of unhinderedness (apratihata).
- The white lotus symbolizes the Buddha's light of perfectly enlightened wisdom.
- The eight petals: the lower three petals symbolize the Buddha (middle), the Dharma (left) and the Sangha (right); the remaining five petals symbolize diligence (virya, middle), joyful giving (priti-upekṣa, left), purification (visuddhi, right), wisdom (panna, left outwards) and pity-compassion(maitri-karuna, right outwards).

Virya symbolizes Skyamuni Buddha, priti-upekṣa Maitreya Buddha, visuddhi Amitabha Buddha, panna Manjusri Bodhisattva and maitri-karuna Avalokitesvara (Kwan Yin) Bodhisattva.

- Green symbolizes the colour of the future, of hope and of Buddhist youngsters and childrens.

4. About its song

The song *Hoa Sen Tr[ắng]* (White Lotus) was chosen as the main one of the organization. This song is always sung after the sutra recitation and before the beginning of activities of the organization every Sunday afternoon. ⁽³³⁾ It was translated into



Vietnamese from French when the **Thanh Ni** **Phật Học Đức Dục** (青年佛学德育團 Commission d'Etudes Bouddhiques Et De Perfectionnement Moral) was founded and the Vietnamese translation remains popular up to now. The French words of the song, of course, at that time aimed at propagating Buddhist teachings in accordance with the period when France ruled Vietnam. It can be translated into English as follows: ⁽³⁴⁾

*"Oh, look at the fragrant white lotus !
Thousands of radiant lights shining on the mud.
And the image of our Master,
With compassionate heart, wisdom and
awakening are infinite.
Altogether let's vow to follow the Buddha
heartfully,
And vow to cultivate ourselves as purified as
everyday.
Until whenever the fragrant lotus is pinned
It will spread its perfume of compassion as
endlessly as ever."*

Thus the white lotus is considered as the supreme symbol for one to wish for and as the sacred goal to aim at. The image of the white lotus with thousands of radiant lights shining on the mud is also an outstanding suggestion of a fully awakened Buddha who attains enlightenment from the sufferings, cravings and attachment in this world. In spite of growing in such dirty stinking mud, it selects and absorbs quintessences of mud and then delivers its perfume to the world. So it is a symbol of purity and uninfectedness. All Buddhists should in this way strive to deliver the perfume of happiness and peace to himself and everyone by the way of training and cultivating himself in the Buddha's teachings.

Therefore, as for a member of the GDPT, to have a white lotus badge pinned a badge to one's chest is considered a supreme honour and pride. It also symbolizes the sacred mission to be a true Buddhist.

5. About the way of greeting

When two members meet each other, they often greet by making the mudra of Laskmi (auspicious) with the right hand. Legend says that the Buddha became enlightened while sitting on a mat of kusa, auspicious grass, offered and spread by a child named Laskmi. ⁽³⁵⁾ Thus Laskmi means enlightenment, happiness. The mudra of Laskmi used to greet each other in the

organization aims at wishing the others auspiciousness and happiness and at awakening the Buddhahood in the others. This way of greeting is used everywhere and at any time when a member wears clothes of the GDPT. Normally, a junior must first greet a senior. **It is also used to greet in the case of meeting a monk or a nun in the street**, but when in th temple, the way of joining one's hands is used.

6. About the color of clothes

Light Grey is the official colour of the organization. Used only for shirts and dresses, it is considered as the color of mildness and harmony - the harmony of man and the universe, and of all pairs of contradictions. As a symbol of an open heart, it represents the harmony of all ideologies of the Vietnamese nation. It also symbolizes the spirit of the Six Points of Harmony. ⁽³⁶⁾ So the GDPT is always called the **Lam** (Grey Shirt) Commission. This color is the same as with the one which the Vietnamese nuns often utilise for their formal clothes, and also for the beginning practitioners as well as samaneras's formal clothes. Especially the formal clothes regulated for the Vietnamese layflowers to wear while reciting sutras or participating Buddhist ceremonies have the same color with the one of the GDPT's members.

7. About the organization of a GDPT

Based on Item 6 of the By-law Regulations of the Vietnam Buddhist Association of the Central Vietnam in 1957, members of the Leading Board of a GDPT are regulated as one family head, one chief of league, one secretary and one cashier. Members of troops consist of **Oanh Đố** ⁽³⁷⁾ (children, from 8-12), **Ngành Thiểu** (boys and girls, from 12-17) and **Ngành Thanh** (young mem and women and including seniors, from 18 upward), in which each troop includes 2 or 4 groups and each group 8 persons. In the siz troops, which are managed by the chief of league, a head troop and vice-head troop will be responsible for each troop. ⁽³⁸⁾ Further, the regional sangha appoints a monk who is responsible as an adviser of Buddhist teachings for each GDPT.

Rank titles of each troop are listed as followings:

- a. **Oanh Đố** (children):
 - Mở Mắt (Opening Eyes)
 - Cánh Mềm (Soft Wing)

- Chân Cứng (Solid feet)
- Tung Bay (Flying)

b. *Ngành Thiểu* (boys and girls):

- Hướng Thiện (... Towards Kusala)
- Sơ Thiện (... , Beginning Kusala)
- Trung Thiện (... , Midway Kusala)
- Chánh Thiện (... , Right Kusala)

c. *Ngành Thanh* (young men and women):

- Hòa (... , Harmony)
- Trục (... , Righteousness)

The main places of doing activities of the GDPT are temples, *Khu Lũ Hũ* or *Niệm Phật Đường* (place for Buddhist laity to recite the Buddha's names and sutras, NPD). As seen in Hue City, most *Khu Lũ Hũ* or NPDs and some temples have the existence of active GDPT's.

III. Its program of Buddhist teachings.

According to the classification into three kinds of age groups as stated above, the program of studying Buddhist doctrine was also classified into 3 levels in accordance with different ages.

1. *Oanh Đố* (Children)

- Building up faith by concrete actions such as paying respect to the Buddha, reciting the Buddhas' names before going to bed, reciting the prose of confession (apatti-pratidesana), visiting temples and monks and nuns, greeting them when meeting, creating a notebook of good deeds, etc.
- Building up faith by love such as expressing love to trees and grass, to animals and to all people through listening to Jataka and Buddhist stories.

2. *Ngành Thiểu* (boys and girls)

The *Ngành Thiểu* is classified into 4 ranks, that is, Rank of Hướng Thiện (Towards Kusala), Sơ Thiện (... , Beginning Kusala), Trung Thiện (Midway Kusala) and Chánh Thiện (Right kusala). Therefore, its studying program also consists of 4 levels.

a. Rank of Hướng Thiện (Towards Kusala):

- Understanding the life of Sakyamuni Buddha from his birth to renunciation.
- Understanding two Jataka or Buddhist stories.
- Understanding and memorizing the prose of confession (apatti-pratidesamna, ..)
- Understanding the aphorisms and five rules of the organization.

b. Rank of Sơ Thiện (Beginning Kusala):

- Understanding the life of Sakyamuni Buddha from renunciation to attaining enlightenment.
- Understanding the story of Amitabha Buddha and Avalokiesvara Bodhisattva.
- Understanding three Jataka or Buddhist stories.
- Understanding the meaning of the Three Jewels (triratna), Three Refuges (trisarana) and Six Points of Harmony
- Understanding and memorizing normal rites.

c. Rank of Trung Thiện (Midway Kusala):

- Story of Maitreya Buddha
- Story of Manjusri Bodhisattva.
- History of Quốc Ân Temple.⁽³⁹⁾
- History of Thuyền Tôn Temple.⁽⁴⁰⁾
- Meaning of Relational Conditions (hetu-pratyaya)
- Meaning of Cause-and-Result (hetu-phala)
- Meaning of Transmigration (samsara)
- Five Precepts (panca veramani)
- Ten Good Virtues
- Four Graces
- Four All-Embracing Virtues (catuh-samgraha-vastu)
- Sutra of the Eight Enlightenments of A Great Person
- About summer retreat (vasa)
- History of Vietnam Buddhism from the time of Buddhist introduction to the Ly' Dynasty,
- Understanding five Buddhist stories.

d. Rank of Chánh Thiện (Right Kusala):

- Biography of Mahakasyapa
- Biography of Ananda
- Biography of Ch'an Master Yuan Shao
- Biography of Ch'an Master Liễu Quán
- Morality (sila), Concentration (dhyana) and Wisdom (panna)
- Ten ox-herding pictures
- Four Noble Truths (catvari arya-satyani)



- Twelve Linked Factors of Dependent Co-Arising (dvadasanga pratityasamutpada)
- Noble Eightfold Path (aryastanga-marga)
- Sutra of Ten Good Characteristics
- Meaning of good and bad deeds and their karmic retributions
- Six Things or Paramitas (sad-paramita)
- Contemplating the Buddha in mind and reciting the Buddhas' names
- Eight Prohibitory Commandments (astanga-samanvagata-upavasa)
- History of Vietnam Buddhism from the Trần Dynasty to modern times. ⁽⁴¹⁾

3. Ngành Thanh (young men and women)

- a. Rank Hòa (Harmony) reviews the program of the Ngành Thiếu and studies some more problems as:
 - Buddhism with human kind.
 - Distinction among sutras, mantras and gathas.
 - Conceptions of friendship, of gratitude and rancour, of the good and the bad, of the good and the evil.
- b. Rank Trực (Righteousness) reviews the program of the Ngành Thiếu and studies some more issues such as:
 - Principles which can improve technics and occupation.
 - Relationship among Buddhist teachings, philosophy and science.
 - Great religions in the world.
 - Buddhist conception of human beings, of the world and of love. ⁽⁴²⁾

In addition, they are taught how to use first aid kits to perform medical aid in emergency cases, to make knots, to communicate news by Morse codes and semaphores, and to set up tents.

Through the above-listed program, we can see that the higher the rank is, the more difficult and complex the Buddhist doctrines are. This is the program of basic studies for Buddhists in which we can see that there are some similarities to the studies of monks and nuns. As normal lay Buddhists, they always study the meanings of The Three Refuges, Five Precepts and some very basic teachings as taking a vegetarian diet, reciting the Buddhas' names, worshipping, etc. Then this is also considered as

special program of studies for members of the GDPT. As stated in the purpose of the GDPT, in becoming a true Buddhist so as to make effective contributions to Buddhism, a member of the GDPT must be fully equipped with basic knowledge so that he or she can train and practice himself or herself and propagate Buddhist teachings to the others.

IV. Roles and contributions of the GDPT to the nation as well as to the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha

As a member of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha and a faithful messenger to bring the Buddha's teachings to life as closely as ever, the GDPT has been sharing ups-and-downs with the Sangha and is carrying out its sacred mission. It is the place where gathers together all kinds of ages, all levels of knowledge and understandings, but there are no distinctions among ages as well as knowledge. Therefore, Buddhists and non-Buddhists can become members of the organization. A member of the GDPT is trained to be a good citizen of society and to make contributions to bringing happiness to himself and to others.

Formerly, the Buddhist Association had a shortcoming that only the seniors and elders took part in the Association and that no attention was paid to the youngsters and children. The GDPT was born to fill this gap. From young to old, from rich to poor, they can unite in one family, the GDPT, to practise and study the Buddha's teachings in the spirit of love, sympathy, sharing and harmony.

In rural or municipal areas, the GDPT's members always take part in funeral ceremonies to pray for the dead. Especially in remote rural areas where one cannot manage to invite the monks or nuns to the ceremony, then the members usually take their place. The members to their duties as follows:

- Presenting gifts to other poor children in the area during the Tết (Lunar New Year) Festival, in the Buddha Jayanti Day or during the Ullambana Festival
- Helping to teach and nourish children at orphanages and disabled centers.
- Helping the farmers to plough, to harvest and anything concerning farming.

- Organizing rescue groups to help people in case of flood, fire or natural disaster.
- Establishing medical stations to deliver medicine to the sick.
- Urging people in the area on injecting vaccine to prevent and protect from infectious diseases.⁽⁴¹⁾

Further, especially during the Mid-Autumn Festival, the GDPT always organizes giraffe dancing groups to serve people in rural and municipal areas as well.

The GDPT is not an organization with the aim of political activities, but a good place for everyone of all ages to train and practice the Buddha's teachings. However, during the more than 60 years since its establishment, through many political and historical events, its members together with the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha has had to take part in the struggles for religious freedom. Ten senior members of the GDPT were killed and injured as a symbolic sacrifice for the sake of Buddhism and hundred of them have been exiled or imprisoned.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Especially 1963 mentioned the highest peak of the Buddhist struggle for religious freedom and justice against the dictatorship of Ngô Đình Diệm. The centre for launching the movement of struggle was Hue city. Members who sacrificed their lives such as Nguyễn thị Ngọc Lan, Huyền Tôn Nữ Tuyết Hoa, Dương Văn Đạt, Mai Tuyết An, Quách Thị Trang, Nguyễn Thìn, etc. are still honored and remembered in Vietnam Buddhism.⁽⁴³⁾

V. To sum up

The birth of the GDPT was a necessity to meet the need of propagating the Buddha's teachings to the young generation as effectively as possible. This young generation has needed to be equipped with Buddhist foundation of education so that they can be good citizens of society and true Buddhist followers. They have made and are making considerable contributions and support to the Sangha to develop and preserve Buddhist activities.

Many members of the organization have become Buddhist monks and nuns, in which Most Ven. Thích Minh Châu, present General Secretary of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha is an example. Hue city, where the GDPT was born, is considered as the cradle of the movement as well as Vietnamese Buddhism.

Though its forms of activities show some borrowing from the Boy Scout organization such as making knots, communicating news by Morse codes and semaphores, or forms of organizing tents;⁽⁴⁶⁾ its purpose is different. The original aims of the Boy Scout organization's founder, Rober Stephenson Smith Baden Powel (1857-1941) was to educate boys to endure hardship cheerfully, to understand self-respect,⁽⁴⁷⁾ to lead ethical and spiritual lives and to serve the community.⁽⁴⁸⁾ However, as stated above, the GDPT aims at training Buddhist youth and children to become true Buddhists and worthy members of the Association in the spirit of Buddhist ethics.

Nowadays, the GDPT has developed its activities all over the nation from the rural areas to cities and is gaining heartfelt support and sympathy of everyone. According to the report at the Fourth Nationwide Conference of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha held in Hanoi during two days, 22th and 23rd of November, 1997, at present there are about 650 GDPTs throughout the nation with 44,407 members and 5,409 senior brothers and sisters.⁽⁴⁹⁾

There have been some training courses for senior brothers and sisters, and many summer and traditional camps have been held under the leadership and assistance of the Buddhist Sangha of each region such as Saigon, Huc, Quảng Nam, Đà Nẵng, Đà Lạt, Khánh Hòa, Phú Yên, Bình Định, etc.⁽⁵⁰⁾ We can see the fresh color of the Áo Lam (Grey Shirt) here and there all over Vietnam. In spite of many changes through the years, I think, it can adapt itself to industrial conditions to make firm steps to development.

