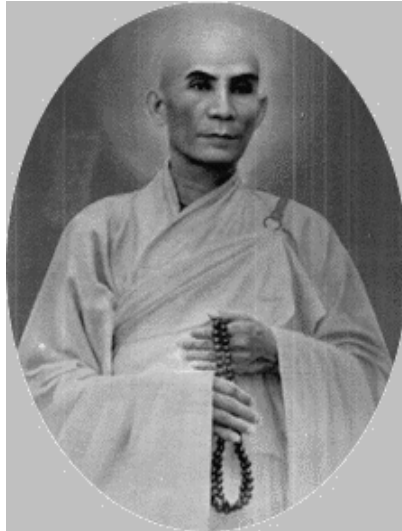


## E. The Heart of a Bodhisattva

*“Before closing eyes to go to the Buddha land, I respectfully send these words to President Ngo-Dinh-Diem: For the nation’s prosperity, to have great love, loving kindness and compassion toward the national people, and to apply a policy of religious non-discrimination.”*



**Bodhisattva Thich-Quang-Duc**

*“I sincerely call on venerable monks, nuns and lay Buddhists to unite with all our heart to protect Buddhism.”*

*“An-Quang Pagoda, the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the 4<sup>th</sup> month –leap- of the Cat year” (Lunar Calendar, 11 June 1963).*

(WWW.QuangDuc.com)

Until 1963, Vietnamese were living under a dictatorship regime of President Ngô-Đình-Điêm and his family. The government applied a policy of religious discrimination with a law under which only Christianity was considered as a religion, and the others, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Caodaism (Cao-Đài), Hoahaoism (Hoà-Hảo), etc. were treated as lay associations. Furthermore, many Vietnamese Buddhists were forced to relinquish their religions or their works.

A highlight event occurred during the Vesak (Buddha’s birthday) season in 1963. The government of Huế City (Central Vietnam), where more than 80% of its population were Buddhist, issued an order prohibiting Buddhists from displaying the international Buddhist flag at their houses. At 9:00 pm on the Vesak day, 8 May 1963, while Buddhists were assembling in front of the Huế radio station, waiting for a special Buddhist program on the Vesak celebration, they learnt that the program was cancelled at the last minute without reason. The assembly transformed itself into a demonstration requesting the government to broadcast the program as scheduled. The government replied with bullets. Eight young Buddhists (sparrow members -Oanh-Vũ- of GDPT) were killed; four others were wounded.

Later, a Buddhist delegation met with the central government to resolve the problem. The Buddhists requested the government to bring the persons who were responsible for the killing to the court, and to stop the policy of religious

discrimination. While the discussion was in progress, the government increased the terror level. Many Buddhists were put in prisons.



**Bodhisattva Quang-Duc:** On 11 June 1963, the most venerable Thich-Quang-Duc immolated Himself at the Phan-Dinh-Phung and Le-Van-Duyet intersection, Saigon, to awake President Ngo-Dinh-Diem and his government (Photo by Nguyen-Van-Thong).

The whole country was living in darkness. Suddenly, flashed a light, the light of love and courage originating from a heart full of loving kindness and compassion: The light of Bodhisattva Thích-Quảng-Đức. On 11 June 1963, on the way from Phat-Buu Pagoda to Xa-Loi Pagoda, a Buddhist procession stopped at the Phan-Dinh-Phung and Le-Van-Duyet intersection (Nguyen-Dinh-Chieu and Cach-Mang-Thang-Tam) of Saigon city, in front of the Kampuchea embassy. The most venerable stepped down from His car and sat calmly in the lotus posture. The venerable then immolated Himself among the praying of hundreds of venerable monks and nuns.

The Bodhisattva turned on the light to awake the conscience of President Ngô and his family:

*"Today I vow to immolate myself,  
As a torch to enlighten the ignorance."*

The light awoke Vietnamese and many others in the world. However, the light was not brilliant enough to get through the ignorance and passion of President Ngô and his family. The government continued repressing cruelly Buddhists. Some more immolations occurred, but the dark fog was too thick. On 20 August 1963, the

government's army and police attacked all important pagodas and monasteries in the country. Most of senior Buddhist monks and nuns were put in prisons. On 25 August 1963, while Buddhists were demonstrating in front of Bến-Thành Market, central Saigon, government's army and secret police fired many bullets. A youth member of GDPT, Sister Quách-Thị-Trang, lied down at the age of fifteen in the lament of millions of Vietnamese.

Finally, on 1 November 1963, the Vietnamese army stood up and overturned the Ngô's regime. Weapons suppressed ignorance, not destroyed it. This was a sad thing. The light of loving kindness and compassion could not overcome ignorance, even that light originated from the hearts of Bodhisattvas. Was that due to the karma of Vietnamese?

One marvellous thing was the heart of Bodhisattva Thích-Quảng-Đức. The most venerable was the founder and restorer of more than 30 pagodas in Saigon and other provinces. In 1963, He was the abbot of the Quán-Thế-Âm (Avalokitesvara) Pagoda, Phú-Nhuận District, Saigon (South Vietnam). On 11 June, with the love of a bodhisattva, the venerable set fire on Himself to awake President Ngo-Dinh-Diem. After the sacrifice, the Sangha brought the bodhisattva's body to Xá-Lợi Pagoda. On 20 June, the bodhisattva's body was cremated in Phú-Lâm (a western region of Saigon). His most senior disciple, Venerable Thích-Thông-Bửu, had close relations to the bodhisattva in His last days. The venerable was also the person in charge of the cremation of the bodhisattva's body after the immolation sacrifice. The cremation ceremony started from the early morning till 2:00 pm. The bodhisattva's body became dust except his heart, a symbol for compassion and loving kindness. The bodhisattva's heart later was brought to Xá-Lợi Pagoda. It was planned that whenever the Vietnam National Pagoda (Việt-Nam Quốc-Tự, Saigon) was completed, the heart of Bodhisattva Thích-Quảng-Đức would be worshipped there.



**Bodhisattva Thich-Quang-Duc's Heart:**

After the immolation, the bodhisattva's body was cremated. The cremation ceremony started from the early morning till 2:00 pm. The bodhisattva's body became dust except his heart, a symbol for compassion and loving kindness. ([WWW.QuangDuc.com](http://WWW.QuangDuc.com)).