

DOI: 10.54631/VS.2021.S-103-113

**THE GENERAL BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION OF VIETNAM 1951–1964
(TỔNG HỘI PHẬT GIÁO VIỆT NAM): A FORGOTTEN STEP TOWARDS
THE 1964 BUDDHIST CHURCH**
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Abstract. This paper provides an overview of the Buddhist community in the 50s and 60s, addressing the creation of the first national Buddhist association: the General Buddhist Association of Vietnam (Tổng Hội Phật Giáo Việt Nam, GBA). Most academic works sum up the GBA to the date of its foundation by three regional delegations of Buddhists believers in May 1951, and its participation in the political crisis of 1963, the so-called Buddhist Crisis. Its genesis, the internal structures of this first national association, the philosophy and new national narrative of its leaders, their conflictual and distant relationship with secular power and other Buddhists group, remains largely unknown. Providing a new set of contextual elements, this analysis of the GBA's history will contribute to our understanding of Vietnamese Buddhism history in the 20th century, in its continuities and inconsistencies. Essentially a failed first attempt to build a Buddhist “church” the history of the GBA is highly revealing of the long-standing aspirations of its creators and should be understood as a transitional step between early reform movement and the 1964 UBC. Emphasizing on cultural, social, and political matters, this paper is mainly based on barely used primary sources available in Vietnam.

Keywords: 1963, General Buddhist Association of Vietnam, Buddhism, Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, State of Vietnam, Republic of South Vietnam.

For citation: Cousin-Thorez Guilhem. The General Buddhist Association of Vietnam 1951–1964 (Tổng Hội Phật Giáo Việt Nam): A Forgotten Step Towards the 1964 Buddhist Church. *Russian Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Special issue: 103–113.

Introduction

In 1963, a political crisis erupted in the Republic of Vietnam (RVN)¹, when in May 1963, clerics and laymen of Central Vietnam, led by the monk Thich Tri Quang (*Thích Trí Quang*), began to protest loudly against the president Ngo Dinh Diem (*Ngô Đình Diệm*) (ruling from 1954 to late 1963) after an incident involving military and civilians in Hue, resulting in the death of 9 persons. A Catholic, Diem was accused of long-standing persecutions against the Buddhist majority. A month later, the crisis eventually spread to the South, in Saigon, with the public immolation of Thich Quang Duc (*Thích Quảng Đức*) on June 11, protesting the inaction of the government. In the capital city, Thich Tam Chau (*Thích Tâm Châu*), a northern refugee, had took the head of the struggle movement, and played a prominent role in the subsequent protests, eventually leading to the downfall of Ngo Dinh Diem, who was assassinated on November 2. The main actors of the Buddhist struggle then combined their forces and created a new Buddhist group on 4 January 1964, the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBC, *Giáo Hội Phật Giáo Việt Nam Thống Nhất*, 1964–1981). This new Church was soon involved in continuous political struggle with the successive governments of the RVN, a struggle which would continue until 1972. In the following decade, Thich Tri Quang and Thich Tam

¹ After the 1954 division of Vietnam, the southern half became the Republic of Vietnam. Ngo Dinh Diem was its first president from 1955 to 1963.

Chau would often be regarded as the leaders of politicized Buddhism, of the anti and pro-government tendencies respectively. What is called today the Buddhist Crisis of 1963 is one of the major political events that occurred in the RVN. The images of demonstrations, and especially the picture of Quang Đức's suicide being among the most striking of the Vietnam War. Yet, to this day, assessments on the origins of this Crisis remains elusive².

The three monks mentioned above, and numerous lesser known, but influential Vietnamese monks active during the Crisis and after, were trained and played a prominent role in the activities of an important, but highly overlooked Buddhist group, the General Buddhist Association of Vietnam (GBA, *Tổng Hội Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, 1951–1964), established more than a decade earlier in the days of the previous State of Vietnam (SVN, 1949–1955). During the Crisis, it was in their capacity as leaders of this association that they took the head of the movement. While the Crisis itself and the post-1963 Buddhist struggle in Vietnam was discussed in several academic writings³, the decade before this era appear as a significant blind spot, affecting our understanding of the crisis, but also of the whole twentieth century's history of Buddhism in Vietnam. The foundation of the GBA is often only briefly mentioned, at best, while many academic works focus on the most striking and tardy details of the community's history, its politicization and frontal opposition to the ruling power, analyzing it practically without regard for the preceding decades, as a spontaneous phenomenon. This article emphasizes on this largely unknown period of the 1950s, within the scope of the SVN and RVN.

This article is the outcome of two research trips to Vietnam (November 2019 – February 2020 and March 2021 – ongoing). These trips allowed us to gather a first set of overlooked documents on the GBA, preserved in the Vietnam national archive centers. The center n°2 (TTLTQG2) in Ho Chi Minh City preserves the archives of the southern administrations from the colonial era to the 1976 reunification. In this article, we mostly relied on the Prime Minister of the State of Việt Nam fonds (1949–1954, noted PTTQG) and the First Republic of Vietnam fonds (1954–1963, noted RNV1). The center N°4 (TTLTQG4) in Đà Lat preserves the archives of the local administrations covering Central Vietnam, for the same period. In this article, we mostly relied on the Central Governor of SVN fonds (1946–1954, noted CG) and Representant of the RVN in Central Vietnam fonds (1955–1969, noted TĐB). So far, because of the pandemic situation, it was impossible to access to Center n°1, where the northern administrations archives are kept.

Documents available in these centers are of two types. The majority deals with isolated, local events, and are too sparse and inconsistent to be used for a large, relevant comparative study. The second type, which is rarer, provided either by the main institutions of the GBA, or by the French and Vietnamese administrations, concerns general issues. Although few in number, it is these second type documents that we have sought to exploit in depth, the first type being used only to highlight practical situations. Of course, this article is also based on Vietnamese literature, some of it published by the Buddhist community itself during the period covered, often overlooked.

The sources available to study this time span are rather limited, which complicates the thorough analysis of the GBA. In their reports, French and Vietnamese administrations active in the 1950s focused their investigations and reports on other groups. These gap in documentation can be

² For an important and seminal historical work on the course of the Buddhist crisis, and a comprehensive state of the art of research on this matter, see [Miller 2015]. This article is one of the rare works using Vietnamese archives and has significantly shaped our research.

³ Among the main references on this topic, see [Topmiller 2002], [Mac Allister 2008].

explained by the lack of interest of the successive administrations towards a community often seen as politically weak, disunited, unable to represent a counter-power, nor a potential source of subversion. Consequently, the Buddhists received very little attention compared to other politically active institutional religions (Catholicism, Caodaism, and Hoa Hao Buddhism) or other political forces, like the Communist Party. Besides, most Vietnamese primary sources have only been truly accessible for about ten years.

As said, since we cannot study the activities of the GBA in depth, this article aims at shedding light on the outlines of the association, its genesis and its functioning and the background of its main actors, the monks. It also addresses the complex relationship of this organization with the Vietnamese power throughout most of the existence of the GBA.

Context of the GBA's formation: the Buddhist *milieu* before 1951

In the decades preceding 1951, Buddhist circles had been through a two-decade long reformist movement, usually referred to as the *Phong Trào Chấn hưng Phật giáo*, the Buddhist renovation movement. The renovation movement can be summarized by: the use of Latinized Vietnamese (*Quốc Ngữ*), which allowed the translation and wide circulation of texts, backed up by an intense printing activity. The use of new organisational patterns, on an associative model, often operating as local clubs, which notably permitted a rising involvement of the laymen, especially of the youth. The local associations who merged to the GBA in 1951 are the outcome of this reform movement. In some cases, this led to a modest but meaningful reorganisation of the *Sangha*, the Buddhist monastic congregation. Old influential monks would then take charge of the education of a new generation of apprentice, in connection with the Buddhist associations, united around a common teaching, which was provided in modern training institutions [DeVido 2007, Mac Hale 2003]. The monks of this new generation were mostly born in the early 1920s, like Thich Tri Quang and Thich Tam Chau. They were trained by these associations and matured in a deep rethinking of the place of Buddhism in the national Vietnamese identity, through the discovery of the most ancient and glorious roots of Vietnamese Buddhism. [Miller 2015: 1912].

Between the August 1945 revolution⁴ and the founding of the GBA in 1951, three of the main Buddhist associations of South, Central and North⁵ Vietnam were reorganized, following new guidelines. So far, we have been unable to find substantial documents addressing the process behind the meeting of 1951. The idea of a national association was more ancient, however. During the colonial period, some calls for a national approach to the renovation of Buddhism were made, revealing a rather old desire of the actors of the movement, never put into effect. It is known that different members of the regional associations were already in regular contact before the August Revolution and had been involved in common projects [Nguyễn Lang 1998: ch. 26–29; Ninh Thị Sinh 2016]. They were now heading towards a new, more ambitious project: the creation of a national association.

⁴ In August 1945, Hồ Chí Minh's Viet Minh troops took control of the country, ending French and Japanese rule in Vietnam and establishing the independent Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

⁵ In this article, the terms North, Central and South Vietnam always refer to the geographical limits of the three regions of the colonial era, respectively Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina, the first territorial perspective of Buddhist reformism during the colonial period. After the 1954 partition, Central Vietnam refers to the same area, minus the four provinces north to Quang Tri, part of the DRV.

The Meeting of May 1951

For 4 days, from 6 to 9 May 1951, delegations representing the South (10 members), Central (34 members) and North Vietnam (16 members) met in Hue at the Tu Dam pagoda. Some remarks are necessary regarding the participants of this first meeting. First, the Vietnamese monks held a more prominent place than the laymen, as they were the official heads of the delegation (*Trưởng phái đoàn*). Furthermore, alongside the elderly monks were several younger ones, who had received their training from the associations of the colonial era. This fact will prove important later, since many of the most active monks during the Buddhist Crisis belonged to this younger generation. Among the Central and North delegations, for instance, were Thich Tri Quang and Thich Tam Chau. Finally, it should be noted that the delegates were exclusively of Vietnamese ethnicity, and male. The inclusion of ethnic minorities living in Vietnam (notably Khmers, but one could also think of the Hoa, the country's Chinese minority) did not seem to be a priority at that time. This relationship would evolve later, with the inclusion of Theravada Khmer Buddhists in the UBC. The wider involvement of women in the GBA also came later and was never really achieved effectively [TTL TQG4, CG 1604, 1].

After the meeting, the first administrative committee (*Ban Quản trị Trung Ương*) of the GBA was elected (Table 1):

In total, we can count eleven members from the Central region (blue), four from the North (orange) and three from the South (green). The domination of the Central region does not stop here and will be discussed later. A first version of the charter governing the functioning of the GBA was drawn up at the end of this meeting. This initial project attracts several comments.

The GBA project

At first, it should be noted that the draft charter of the GBA don't emphasize on ritual practices, doctrinal questions, methods of ordination, etc. From a dogmatic point of view, the GBA does not manifest the will to break with the recurrent religious practices, only expressing a modest intention of modernization, in vague terms. For instance, the GBA often declared its intention to "abolish superstitions [*phế bỏ mê tín dị đoan*]", but never seemed to truly dedicate its program to that matter [TTLTQG4, TĐB 2314, 1]. This suggests that these purely religious considerations were not the main concerns that lead to the foundation of the GBA. The second charter published after the second summit of the GBA of April 1956 made little to no change to the previous one. Beside changing the headquarters of the GBA to Saigon, it mostly aimed at recognizing the special status of the northern refugees in the association. Indeed, after 1954, around 200 000 northern Buddhists chose to flee the communist DRV and would be incorporated into new sub-associations such as the *Giáo Hội Tăng Già Bắc Việt tại miền Nam* (Northern Sangha in South Vietnam) [Ibid., 2]. Original priorities of the GBA at that time appeared to be turned towards the laymen and the monastic congregation.

Table 1. Members of the Central Administrative Committee

President (<i>Hội Chủ</i>)	Venerable Tịnh Khiết	Commissioner for education (<i>Giáo Dục</i>)	Thầy Thiện Hòa
Vice president (Monk)	Venerable Tri Hải	Youth (<i>Thanh niên</i>) Commissioner	Võ Đình Cường
Vice president (Laymen)	Lê Văn Định	Finance (<i>Tài chính</i>) Commissioner	Lê Toại
Chairman <i>Tổng Thư Ký</i>	Tráng Đình	Art (<i>Văn Mỹ Nghệ</i>) Commissioner	Nguyễn Hữu Ba
Deputy Chairman	Tống Hồ Cầm	Propaganda (<i>Cổ động</i>) commissioner	Nguyễn Đóa
Treasurer (<i>Chương Quỹ</i>)	Lê Mộng Tùng	Social assistance (<i>Cứu tế Xã hội</i>)	Phạm Văn Vi
Budget control (<i>Kiểm Lý Ngân Sách</i>)	Phan Văn Phúc	Substitute commissioner	Nguyễn Hữu Huỳnh
Commissioner for the spread of <i>Dharma</i> (<i>Hoằng pháp</i>) and doctrinal (<i>Giáo Lý</i>)	Master Tri Quang		Đỗ Đình Cảnh
Commissioner for the ceremonies (<i>Nghi-Lễ</i>)	Venerable Tổ Liên		Tôn Thất Tùng

Source: [TTLTQG4, CG 1604, 1]

Involvement and supervision of the Buddhists laymen

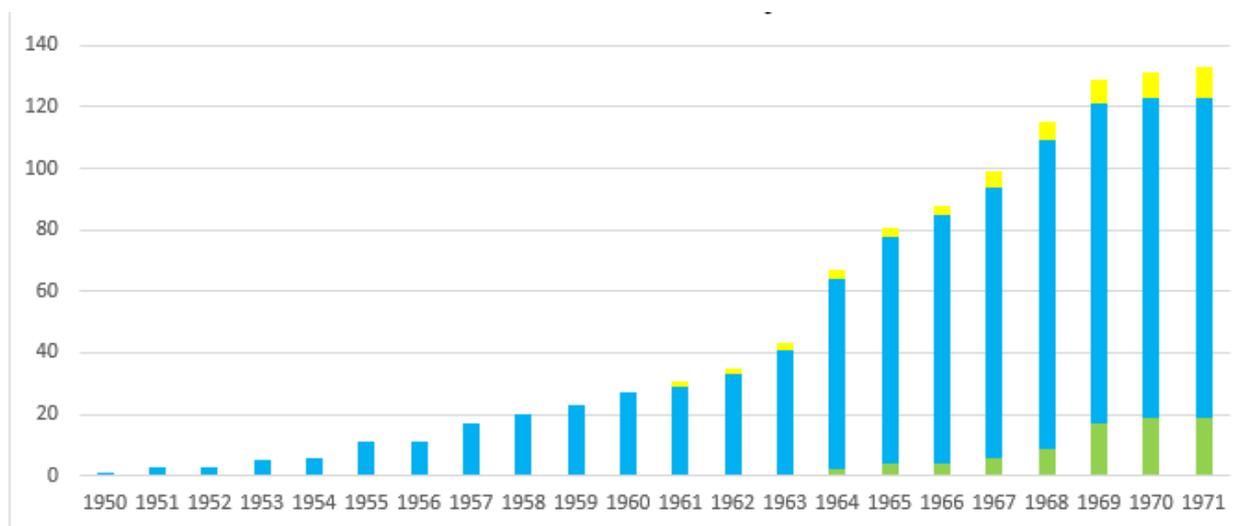
The charter emphasizes on the presence of the GBA in the public place, in touch with the society. In addition to the usual financial or purely administrative departments, new departments are dedicated to the organization of ceremonies (especially Vesak, in Vietnamese *Phật Đản*, the birthday of Buddha), but also to the supervision of youth, social services, and cultural affairs.

The Education Department (*Vụ Giáo dục*) for instance was charged to set up lay schools, called Bo De schools (*Trường Bồ Đề*). Between 1951 and 1963, 43 schools featuring the three levels of instruction had been founded. In 1961, a middle and high school had been opened in the capital city of Saigon, in the densely populated district 5 (formerly *Chợ Lớn*). This school network will be of great influence afterwards, as school and university students will play a major role during the Crisis and after it (Fig. 1).

To inform the members of the GBA about its activities, the association published a journal, the first nationwide Buddhism magazine, *Phật Giáo Việt Nam*, which had about thirty issues between 1956 and 1959, when its edition was interrupted. It also developed an innovative approach to its territorial structure, which to our knowledge is unique among the Buddhist communities of Vietnam. Under the Administrative Committee, at the level of the provincial capitals, *tỉnh hội* (provincial section) oversee all the missions, tasks, and duties of the association at the local level. At the level below, the *chi hội* (branches) provide a relay role, usually at the level of a *huyện* (district). All these components had their headquarters in pagodas. But the great strength of this association is at the level below. The *khuôn hội* (Cell⁶), a smaller entity, extends the GBA's reach to the village or hamlet level

⁶ The term *khuôn hội* is difficult to translate. *Khuôn* literally means “mold”, and seems to emphasize an idea of form, of a model, to be duplicated.

and ensures that the association has a foothold in the rural world, which is thus connected to the entire national structure [Ibid., 3]. In the late 50s, early 60s, around 1300 such Khuôn-Hội had been established in Central Vietnam alone [TTLTQG2, RVN1 8512, 1].



Cumulative chart of the number of Bồ Đề schools established every year. The blue lines represent the schools of the Center, the green those of the South, the yellow represents Saigon.

Fig. 1. The Bo De schools system. Source: [Thích Thiện Hoa 1971: 29–33]

Membership matters

To analyze the distribution of cells and members of the GBA in the field, we will use the case study of the Binh Thuan province, which is exceptionally well documented. In 1963, the *tỉnh hội* of the province capital Phan Rang had a membership of 6374 people, while the other 13 declared organizations had 548 members in total. In this city, more than 90% of Buddhists belonging to an institutionalized religious organization were members of the GBA. Outside the city however, the balance of power between the GBA and the other groups is significantly reversed. 5,500 Buddhist believers (lay people or monks) are listed, distributed among 70 pagodas or other Buddhist settlements, scattered throughout the province. The GBA had 1463 members spread over 8 *khuôn hội* and one *chi hội*, thus grouping around 20% of the rural membership. In other words, the GBA at the peak of its strength in 1963, was essentially in control in the urban area, with a decent foothold in the rural area [TTLTQG4, TĐB 2675, 1]. This urban/rural ratio was probably even more pronounced in the South. The news sections of the association’s journal *Phật Giáo Việt Nam* indicates that most of the activity in the South are in the major cities of My Tho, Ben Tre, Vinh Long and especially Can Tho. The lack of data regarding the Mekong Delta is probably indicative of a more restricted hold, related to the competition of the other organized groups mentioned above.

No clear data seems to be available to estimate the actual membership of the GBA and to describe in more detail its relationship with the laity. French ambassador Jean-Félix Charvet notes in 1959 that “The number of active registered members stood at 360,000 and that of active sympathizers at 58,500” [MFA, CLV, 150QO-47, 1]. The GBA was hence an organization with limited membership, in no way representative of the entire community, or even of the majority of the Buddhist population. Nevertheless, the testimony of prominent Sinhalese monk Narada Maha Thera, associated with the GBA, underlines the significant contribution of the association to the transformation of the Buddhist community: “Back then [mid 30s], there were no brochures about

Buddhism in Vietnam and only old people practiced the religion. Nowadays many young people practice Buddhism and strive to spread Buddha's doctrine among the masses" [Ibid.].

Restructuring of the Vietnamese Sangha

We note that the place of the monks is reassessed in this new organization. The charter of the GBA places the departments under the direction of a mixed committee of lay people and monks, whom the latter clearly dominate in 1956 [TTLTQG4, TĐB 2314, 2]. The latter occupy most positions in the administrative apparatus, breaking in that matter with the colonial era's associations. This sudden and gradual rise in importance of the clerics will culminate in the time of the Buddhist crisis, when the younger ones took the lead of the movement. The organization foresees the foundation of a national Sangha (*Tăng Già Toàn Quốc*) with its initial headquarters at the Quan Su pagoda, Hanoi. In 1959, it is estimated that 1,800 monks were linked to this Sangha [MFA, Ibid.]. Particular attention is paid to their training, since the GBA will found various centers, dedicated to monks, for intensive doctrinal study, through a special program. Besides the Institute of Buddhist Studies of Vietnam of Nha Trang in 1956, acting as the main training center, the GBA opened the important centers of Phuoc Hoa in Tra Vinh, Nguyen Thieu Institute in Binh Dinh and the An Quang pagoda training classes in Saigon [Nguyễn Lang 1998: 750–768].

The An Quang complex would be one of the headquarters of the opponents during the Buddhist Crisis but was above all the first major training centers for monks in Saigon. A valuable document lists the apprentice monks and their teacher for the 1951's class. We can see they came from all regions of Vietnam to study there. Among them, Thich Thien Dinh, Thich Tinh Duc and Thich Tac Phuoc, three apprentices, would soon hold important positions within the association. Thien Dinh joined the administrative board of the Southern Sangha component in 1955 as deputy secretary, and then became its co-director at the time of the crisis, combined with two other important positions in the same board. Tinh Duc also joined the 1956–1959's board as a secretary, so did Tac Phuoc, who also held important position in the An Quang pagoda, where he was involved in the printing house of the GBA. This indicates that the training centers also served an integrative function, the young monks being easily incorporated into the administration of the GBA [TTLTQG2, PTTQG 1686, 1; Thích Không Hạnh 2016: 203, 464; TTLTQG2, RVN1 18071, 1].

The GBA's relationship with ruling power

In the aftermath of the August Revolution, some of the Buddhist forces sided with the Viet Minh, thus joining the National Salvation associations (*Cứu Quốc*) that were set up. With the return of France in Vietnam, and the re-establishment of a non-Communist authority, the Buddhists seem to have sought to keep a low profile. At a time when the whole society was mobilized, amid the proliferation of new parties and other political gatherings that emerged between 1945 and 1955, the Buddhists were characterized by their absence and disengagement, despite their potential importance in the Vietnamese society. This distancing from national political life considerably isolated the GBA and undoubtedly contributes to the scarcity of documents on their activities. On the other hand, at the local level, the Buddhists connected closely with the regional governments. In the North for instance, Governor Nguyen Huu Tri (*Nguyễn Hữu Trì*) takes a direct part in the reorganization of the Sangha after the August revolution, founding a "Sangha Remodeling Association" to "attract and organize monks and nuns scattered after the tumult of the war" [TTLTQG4, CG 1242, 1]. However, the exacerbated will to stay out of mass mobilization and anti-communist effort would quickly become incompatible with Diệm's elaborated and authoritarian national project.

As a result, the GBA often had a conflicting relationship with the ruling power from its very founding until the explosion of the Buddhist crisis. For instance, the GBA had a troubled relationship with Nguyen Van Tam, fourth ruler of the state of Vietnam from June 1952 to January 1954. Tam refused to recognize the association for a long time, judging it illegitimate, infiltrated by the Communists, and authoritarian towards the other Buddhists organizations [TTLTQG4, CG 1479, 1]. He finally granted official recognition to its leaders, more than two years after the Meeting of May 1951, while expressing a certain hostility towards these same leaders [TTLTQG4, CG 1604, 3]. Facing difficulties to earn proper recognition from the government and freedom of action, the GBA complained explicitly about the legal limitations they encountered, as early as 1952, since they were under the same status as any other non-religious association (sports, artistic, etc.) [TTLTQG4, TĐB 2314, 4].

It would be wrong however to summarize the relationship between the GBA and Diem as a constant antagonism, inevitably leading to the 1963 crisis. For instance, in order to get a broader recognition of Vesak as an official holiday, the GBA had to get through bitter negotiations, the Vesak festival was granted a public holiday status in 1957, on the occasion of the 2500th anniversary of the birth of Buddha, compared to four to five public Christian holidays. But, the organization of Vesak did not seem to raise issues on the field. Complaints only emerged from May 1960 onwards, to the point that a formal letter of complaint is sent to the President by the GBA itself [TTLTQG4, TĐB 2413, 1]. These complaints would become more and more recurrent until the crisis.

It should be noted, however, that Diem's government had a special relationship with the GBA compared to the rest of the Buddhist community. The successive headquarters of the GBA, first the Phuoc Hoa Pagoda, then the Xa Loi Pagoda from 1956 onward, were the sites for the celebration of major official ceremonies, in the same manner as the Duc Ba Cathedral for the Catholic community [TTLTQG2, RVN1 17906, 1]. Diem did not seek to offer this “place” to any other Buddhist association, effectively acknowledging a different kind of legitimacy for the association. In 1962, for practical reasons, the GBA made a request to change the official date of Vesak's celebrations. This request was accepted by the presidency, which thus changed the date of a religious holiday, presumably without prior and thorough discussions with the many other Buddhist organizations. While the relationship with Ngo Dinh Diem's administration and with the president himself was not always smooth or profound prior to 1963, it is worth noting that the GBA occupied this special place among the other Buddhist communities [TTLTQG2, PTT 29570, 1].

Conclusion

The major failure of the GBA lied in its inability to federate efficiently its different components. At first, it should be noted that after 1954, the GBA was of course only representative of the Southern half of the previous SVN. Furthermore, the existence of a general association didn't lead to the merging of the previous associations into a single one. Soon, the leaders of the GBA abandoned that objective. This postponement is clearly stated in the letter to the President sent by the association to introduce the second national summit of 1956: “The GBA was founded with the will to unify Vietnamese Buddhist, belonging to the Mahayana sect, which is the traditional sect of the country, with a long and glorious history of more than a thousand years. But because the situation has not yet allowed to erase [*xoá bỏ*] the existing groups of monks and laymen and to establish a single Association, the Vietnam Buddhist Association has to operate temporarily as of a General Association” [TTLTQG4, TĐB 2314, 5]. In the first years of the association's existence, the French administration explained these difficulties by the persistence of “particularism[s]” and personal

interests, as well as the desire to preserve a certain autonomy: “If the Buddhists recognize the need for a union, their particularism is opposed to it, and the interests of the Buddhist clergy, which benefits from the current anarchy, each pagoda having all of its own income for its own clergy and not having to account for it to any higher authority” [Haut-Commissariat En Indochine 1952].

Beside this lack of unity, the organization is also heavily shaped by the influence of the Central community: the official symbol of the GBA, the structure in Tỉnh, Chi and Khuôn Hội, the choice of Huế as the meeting place in 1951 and first headquarters of the GBA, the repartition of the delegates and influential posts among the association, all these elements reveal the importance of the Central community in this project of association. With the partition of the country in 1954, the Northern community was reduced to only 200,000 refugees, officially incorporated in the GBA in 1956. Therefore, the influence of the Central community increased further to the expense of a greater inclusion of the South: Charvet notes in 1958 “[...] reformed Buddhism has in South Vietnam [RVN] 2,000,000 followers in the former Annam [Central Vietnam] and 100,000 in the former Cochinchina”. [MFA, *ibid.*] The graph depicting the Bồ-Đề school system above is another proof of this late inclusion of the South in the national project of the GBA. The first schools were only built, in limited numbers, after 1964, while the number of schools doubled in the next decade.

The Northerner refugees’ integration was difficult, and they would become a dissenting force after 1963, quickly adopting a pro-government stance, while the rest of the UBC remained fiercely opposed to all the authorities at the head of the RVN. Furthermore, some of the most important actors within the local associations of the South were in fact linked to the training networks of Central Vietnam. Southern born Thích Thiên Hoa and Thích Thiện Hoa, among the most influential and actives monks from the South within the GBA, involved in the Buddhist crisis, were trained in Central Vietnam before 1945 [Thích Đồng Bôn 1995: 164–167, 196–199]. The 1951’s class hosted in An Quang was supervised by Thiên Hoa and 8 other monks, seven natives from Central Vietnam, one from Northern Vietnam [TTLTQG2, PTTQG 1686, *ibid.*].

Finally, the shutdown of the national magazine *Phật Giáo Việt Nam* in 1959, and the persistence of regional magazine (*Từ Quang* in the South, *Viên Âm* and *Liên Hoa* in Central Vietnam) shows how the GBA failed to generate a profuse interest among the Vietnamese Buddhists and the inability of this association to effectively embody a national movement, to make the Buddhists of the country speak with one voice. This last detail is another harbinger of the challenges UBC would face in the following decade.

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Article history:

Received: 13 October 2021

Received in revised form: 8 November 2021

Accepted: 10 December 2021