

**BUDDHIST GUIDANCE ACTIVITIES
IN ĐỒNG THÁP PROVINCE TODAY**

Abstract: *Buddhist guidance is one of the basic activities of Buddhism. This activity not only guides Buddhist practice and lifestyle for its believers but also contributes to the realization of purpose and guidelines of Buddhist Sangha as a religious organization. Since 1981 when the Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam established its Buddhist Guide Board, this activity has increasingly promoted its effectiveness, contributing significantly to maintain the vitality of Buddhism in the new period. However, so far, special studies of Buddhist guidance activities on national scale in general, and in each local area in particular have been few. The article concentrates on clarifying Buddhist guidance activities in Đồng Tháp province today through the main aspects, including subject, object, content, implementation types and efficiency.*

Keywords: *Buddhism; Đồng Tháp; Buddhist guidance.*

Introduction

Buddhism has been interested in guiding its followers on every matter related to their cultivation, personality improvement, and peaceful living. Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings to common people in general, and his followers in particular, were written in Buddhist sutras, which contained some about the Buddhist guidance. Over the centuries as Buddhism spread out off India and integrated with other cultures in the world, the Buddha's teachings have been deeply explained and relevant to specific social contexts.

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Buddhism since its imported into Vietnam, many Buddha's advices and warnings for ordained and lay Buddhists has been received and explained in various forms, such as: verses, idiom, lyrics, verses, and stories,... They are all about helping Buddhist believers to understand and follow what Buddha said. Buddhist guiding activities have contributed to deepening Buddhism, at the same time make it persistence in lives of the Vietnamese people.

Back in history, when the Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam was founded in 1981, the Buddhist Guide Board was also established. The Board's purpose of is to manage and guide monks, nuns and Buddhists to practice according to Buddhist Dharma and comprehend the thought of Dharma-Nationalism-Socialism. Over the past years, Buddhism has developed significantly in many provinces and cities in Vietnam. Along with the increase in number of monks, nuns and lay Buddhists, there is also an increase of Buddhist practice activities, including Buddhist guidance activities. A research has generalized that over the past decades, the Central Buddhist Guidance Board of the Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam has promoted 3 main groups of activities, including: 1) Guiding Buddhists to study Buddhist Dharma (cultivating and take the refuge of the Three Jewels, rituals of preaching Buddhist dharma, educating ethics and disciplines); 2) Guiding Buddhists to participate in social work, especially social charity activities; 3) Strengthen the exchange with international Buddhism¹. This also replies for the question: What does the Buddhist Guidance activity mean? In reality, the achievements of Buddhist guidance activities have been shown through their changes in better knowledge about Buddhism and their correct way of practicing in accordance with the Dharma. This both eliminates non-believers and lack of practice, and at the same time enhances the quality of Buddhists, the efforts to revive Buddhism in the current stage. This may be the basis for another study to assert that Buddhist guidance activity is a "key" "decisive" activity for the development of Vietnam Buddhist Sangha².

In practice, however, Buddhist guidance is a job that faces many challenges. On the one hand, Buddhists in modern society are

influenced by many global cultural and lifestyle trends that emphasize the need to assert the self (ego); consumption, entertainment, and lifestyle prefer foreign things... which negatively affects the cultivators' mentality and faith. On the other hand, because of lacking good guidance timely, Buddhists are easy falling away from the Dharma and fading their faith in the Three Jewels, and they can waste time and money on wrong beliefs and practice of not Buddhism.

Đồng Tháp, a province in the Southwest region, has witnessed the excitement of Buddhism, especially through activities of supporting, guiding Buddhists to practice and implement Buddha's teachings in their daily life according to the direction of the Central Buddhist Church of Vietnam. But so far, the issue of Buddhist guidance activity in Vietnam in general, and that one at Buddhist places in Đồng Tháp province, has been little studied. This is a gap in the study of contemporary Buddhism that needs to be supplemented. What are the concrete activities directly towards Buddhist guidance in Đồng Tháp? What are the characteristics? These are questions that need clarification in order to get a more detailed view of Buddhist guidance activity at the monasteries belonged Dong Tap Buddhist Association.

To carry out this study, the author combined both the qualitative and quantitative methods. Regarding the quantitative study, the author had 310 questionnaires for Buddhists who attended Buddhist guidance activities at pagodas in Đồng Tháp Province, such as: Từ Quang, Kim Huê, Phước Huệ and Quê Hương. To supplement the quantitative study, the author also did more depth interviews and field notes about those person who are in charge of guiding Buddhists and lay Buddhists participating in these activities at the four chosen Buddhist pagodas as mentioned above. The author also collects other researches directly or indirectly related to this activity in Đồng Tháp province, thereby analyzing the current situation of Buddhist guidance activities through basic aspects such as: subject, object, content, form, impact and efficiency. This study contributes in part to the scientific knowledge on Buddhism in Đồng Tháp nowadays.

1. Overview of Buddhism in Đồng Tháp province

Đồng Tháp is a province in the Southwest region, established and developed for more than 300 years together with the Viet ethnic who came to Sa Đéc to reclaim and establish their hamlets. Before that, Sa Đéc was known as Phsar Dek (in Khmer language means Iron Market). Đồng Tháp is located in the heart of the Mekong Delta region, it is an easy-to-live land, and also the center of cultural, economic and social exchange³.

Buddhism has been present in Đồng Tháp since the beginning of the 17th century, along with other believes, religions that make up a religious diversity here. Đồng Tháp is one of the Southwestern provinces that established the first Buddhist Association in 1982, together with the establishment of the Buddhist Guidance Board⁴.

According to 2017 statistics of the Central Committee of Mass's Mobilization, Đồng Tháp have 117,804 Buddhists, among them 525 are religious dignitaries⁵. Statistics in 2017 according to the 8th Đồng Tháp Provincial Buddhist Congress (2017-2022), it is 1,267 monks and nuns are in Đồng Tháp province⁶.

Regarding Buddhist worship facilities, statistics of the relevant authorities in 2018 show that the whole province has a total 238 pagodas, in addition there are 12 temples applying to join the Buddhist Province. Among these 250 pagodas, notably 233 ones are belonged Mahayana, 14 monasteries belonged to Khát Sĩ (Alms) sect, 3 Sino pagodas (in Sa Đéc City including: Kiên An Cung, Thiên Hậu and Minh Nguyệt Cự Lam), 14 monasteries and 19 individual purify hut. The number of pagodas in rural area is double as many as the number in urban area, corresponding to 165 and 85. In Đồng Tháp there are 69 ancient pagodas built since the 19th century, which are considered as local Buddhist heritage. Out of a total of 250 pagodas, 138 ones are abboted by monks and 112 by nuns⁷. This figure shows that there is not much gender disparity in religious dignitaries in Đồng Tháp Buddhism.

In recent years, Buddhism in Đồng Tháp has developed well. It is obvious with its number of Buddhists, worship places, well-trained

monks and nuns, as well as Buddhist social philanthropy. In addition, there are traditional festivals held solemnly by Buddhism, such as: the Great ceremony of Buddhist transmission, Buddhist's Arama (Rainy Season Dwelling for monks and nuns), Buddha's birth day, Ullambana festival, and Buddha's important days,... including other regular ceremonies for Buddhist follower, such as: refuting the Three Jewels, Buddhist wedding ceremony, ceremony of installing Buddha statues in pagodas or in believer's home,... The Provincial Buddhist Guidance Board has organized different courses of Buddhist practice, course for Buddhist cultivator's retreats, and Dharma preaching,... especially the Summer course of Buddhist training for teenagers. Buddhists in Đồng Tháp are active in social philanthropy, such as: building bridges and roads, protecting environment, responding to climate change,... In Đồng Tháp, the spirit of equality among the four kinds of Buddhists (monk, nun, male and female Buddhist) can be seen obviously while they all together doing Buddhist guidance activities. The following part of this article will further clarify the current situation of Buddhist guidance activity in the province.

2. Current situation of Buddhist guidance activity in Đồng Tháp

2.1. Subject of Buddhist guidance activity

Today, the Buddhist Guidance Board of Đồng Tháp Province Buddhist Association operates under the direction of the Central Buddhist Guidance Board. In Đồng Tháp, the main force who conducts Buddhist guidance activities are of leaders and members of the province Buddhist Sangha, especially members of the Buddhist Guidance Board. Have established since 1982, the Buddhist Guidance Board currently has 24 persons who are assigned concrete tasks, in order to implement the 5-year period plans. In the present period, the Buddhist Guidance Board of Đồng Tháp province is actively developing its personnel, methods of organizing and implementing the Buddhist Sangha's strategy of rejuvenation⁸. For young people, the general orientation is to develop teenage clubs, helping young people to start up in a good way, benefiting themselves and the community.

Đồng Tháp Province Buddhist Association focuses on training and fostering monks and nuns and human resources for local Administration Board as well as for the next generations. The report at the 8th General Congress of Đồng Tháp Provincial Buddhism said that each year the Administration Board organizes an administrative training course for 180 members to the District/Urban/City Administration Board and for monks and nuns who are the abbots of pagodas in the province; at the same time a course of Buddhist rainy season is organized for nearly 400 monks and nuns each year at 5 pagodas in the province. The Monk and Nun Education Board has implemented 2 intermediate Buddhist training courses for 150 monks and nuns⁹.

To support the Buddhist guidance activity, the Buddhist Administration Board of Đồng Tháp province has set up a website to share information, that is in line with the new lifestyle. It is *www.phatgiaodongthap.com site* which has been in operation since July 2013 with 8 members in charge, providing information and pictures of all Buddhist activities of the Buddhist Association in province, supporting Buddhists to update information of the Buddhist activities in Đồng Tháp. It is a flexible way to take advantage of technology's convenience and prevalence in order to both support members of Buddhist guidance activity, and also help them to share their knowledge and information about Buddhism to the common people quickly and conveniently.

In general, since its establishment, after over 7 terms of the congress, the Buddhist Guidance Board of Đồng Tháp province has done many strategies in order to innovate the content and diversify the types of Buddhist guidance activities. In addition, their efforts to increase the number and quality of the ordained monks, the diversification of the content of courses of Buddhist practice and their focus on training young Buddhists are implemented. All what has been done has produced an expansive cultivating movement, which promotes the Buddhist community's better changes from awareness to creativities and to diversification of social-oriented activities.

In Đồng Tháp, not only Buddhist dignitaries implement the guidance activities for Buddhists, but also Buddhists themselves involved in these activities. For example, Mrs. Dieu Kim is an active participant in teaching at Buddhist classes for teenagers in Đồng Tháp. As a devout Buddhist, the books written and published by her are often used to teach teenage classes inside and outside Đồng Tháp province. She said: “I am a Đồng Tháp person, having the opportunity to go on business trips to many rural areas, not only in my home province but also in many other places, I found that Buddhists in rural areas have not enough knowledge of Buddha’s Dharma, and the work of preaching Dharma in rural areas has been very little. So I cherished a dream that I would bringing the Light of Buddhist Dharma to remote countryside...” (Deep interview, female, 50 years old, in Đồng Tháp). This is the case of a university lecturer who is not a member of the Provincial Buddhist Management Board but she actively has participated in Buddhist guidance activity.

In summary, from the real survey, it is possible to draw some of the following comments on the subject of Buddhist guidance activities in Đồng Tháp province, such as: *Firstly*, in terms of age, the majority of people who carry out these activities are ordained monks associated with pagodas, and they are already middle-aged (over 40 years old). Even some elderly people who still do this work through their daily life. They are as the main fulcrums of activities in the pagodas. *Secondly*, it is the rejuvenation of the subject who guides Buddhists. Monks and nuns involved in Buddhist guidance activity are getting younger. This group is largely school-trained, with their new elucidation of Buddha’s teaching, as well as having knowledge and skills of modern communication technique. They also have created and innovated Buddhists guidance activity. *Thirdly*, in terms of gender, both monks and nuns do this work equally. *Fourthly*, the active participation of Buddhists in Buddhist guidance activities as well.

2.2. Objects of Buddhist guidance activity

The objects of Buddhist guidance activities in Đồng Tháp are quite diverse and with number increasing. It is obvious that in

addition to the number of old people participating in these Buddhist guidance programs, there are more and more young faces. In urban areas, Buddhist guidance activities tend to be more vibrant and attractive for young people, partly because of high population in city, and they have more free time than in rural area. Another reason is that most of famous pagodas are often in urban, with well-known monks and nuns having great prestige along with their more interest and investment for Buddhist guidance activity, thus it attracts more Buddhists in urban areas.

Table 1. Statistics on the number of Buddhists attending the courses of Buddhist cultivating in Đồng Tháp pagodas from 2012 to 2016

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Number of participants	16.590	23.531	25.891	19.618	31.019

Source: Documents of the 8th Congress of The Vietnam Buddhist Sangha of Đồng Tháp Province at the term 2017 – 2022.

This table shows that the number of Buddhists participating in the course of Buddhist cultivating in pagodas almost steadily and increase each year. Comparing after 5 years, from 2012 (16,590) to 2016 (31,019), the number of Buddhists participating the course nearly doubled. This number shows that Buddhists followers are more interested in joining Buddhist courses of cultivation in the province pagodas. It is possible to predict that these activities provide significant effects, which should create an attraction for Buddhists in particular, and for common people in general.

In addition, Buddhists not only participate the traditional Buddhist courses, they also do in many other training courses that are designed for different purposes. For example, “The one day cultivating happiness” is for many kinds of the followers, such as: businessperson, doctors, workers, employees...; “The course of chanting mantras” or “Zen/meditation” for Buddhists who shares the

same religious practice, such as: Pure Land sect, Esoteric (Tantra) sect, Zen sect, etc.

Below, we present the results of the quantitative research on Buddhist guidance activities at 4 pagodas in Đồng Tháp province. The results showed that among the respondents, a majority (91.1%) the participant have the refuge of Three Jewels, and not refuged of Three Jewels (8.9%). This shows that after having become a Buddhist, they are conscious of participating in Buddhist guidance activities. On the other side, Buddhist guidance activities attract potential Buddhists followers who have sympathy for Buddhism. *In terms of accommodation*, 59% of the survey respondents lived in urban areas, while 41% lived in rural areas. *In term of religion*, 97.7% of the respondents identify themselves as Buddhists, while others said they are practicing traditional belief. *In terms of marital status*, 37.7% of the respondents were unmarried, 44.7% were married and 17.5% were divorced/widowed. *In terms of education*, the group with high school qualification accounted for the highest proportion (44.2%), followed by the next group with lower secondary education (38.1%). Groups with intermediate or higher qualification accounted for 17.7%. Thus, most participants in Buddhist guidance activity have only finished high school program. *In terms of occupation*, the “housewife” accounted for the highest proportion (32.4%), followed by worker (18.4%), retired, lost strength (15.2%), business, small trade, office worker (12.3%), the rest were not significant, mainly agricultural worker, student, free workers or people currently out of work. As such, the majority of participants in Buddhist guidance activity are those who have a lot of free time or no longer working.

While researching on the source of information that help the respondents to know about the program of Buddhist guidance activity, the results showed that the majority were introduced to this program by relatives and friends (80.3%). Few of them said they found information in the press or social media. This result also partly reflects the activeness of participants in current programs of Buddhist guidance activity.

The result of question about the reasons for participating in program of Buddhist guidance activity showed that the abbot's credibility had a significant influence on participants in each the program of Buddhist guidance activity. Accordingly, 54.7% of the participants said they chose the program at the pagoda because the abbot is a great prestige and this reason accounted the highest proportion. In addition, 44% of respondents said they chose pagodas which have interesting and practical content of Buddhist guidance activity. And because of the factors, such as: pagodas near home, convenient travel (37.9%), or pagodas with enthusiastic monks/nuns, actively doing the program (34.3%), or pagodas with beautiful and spacious view (31.4%) ... are also the reasons for their choice to participate in the Buddhist guidance activity at the pagoda. However, on the subjective side of the respondents, the desire to learn more about Buddhism is also an important reason for their choosing a Buddhist place to participate in a program of Buddhist guidance activity, accounting for 47.6% of the respondents. Besides, other reasons such as: Buddhists followers are required to participate in programs of Buddhist guidance activity, or more opportunities to exchange and expand social relations... are chosen by few people, respectively 15.2% and 10.7% of the respondents. Thus, participants in Buddhist guidance activities are not only by purely religious motives, but also by worldly motives.

Now the participants of Buddhist guidance activity in Đồng Tháp have a wide choice of contents organized by provincial pagodas. The survey shows that there are at least 10 different options.

Table 2. The choice of programs of Buddhist guidance activities

#	Programs of Buddhist guidance activity	Percent (%)
1	Youth Camp	100.0
2	Reciting Buddha's Name	88.0
3	Great Compassion	77.0
4	One day cultivating happiness	43.0

5	The Eight religious precepts	22.7
6	Zen/Meditation	14.2
7	Class of Buddha's Dharma	6.1
8	Medicine Buddha	5.2
9	Lotus Dharma	4.9
10	Summer course of cultivating	2.6

As can be seen, 100% of respondents said they attended the Youth Camp program. Then, 88% said they participated in the program of Recite Buddha's Name and 77% of them in the Great Compassion program. The "One Day Cultivating Happiness" proved suitable for mass of people, while up to 43% chosen. This type of program is in short time, it can be organized flexibly and continuously. At the same time, the observations show that Buddhists followers can participate in various Buddhist programs in one year. Through these activities, Buddhists who have took the refuge of Three Jewels and the potential ones will have more opportunities to contact regular with Dharma teaching and they can develop deeper relationship with the local Buddhist community.

The last notable information was that the majority of respondents said they had participated in programs of Buddhist guidance activity, about 91.2%. Only 8.8% of the respondents said it was their first time participating in the program. With rather good review of the Buddhist guidance activity, the respondents said that in the future they would continue to participate in Buddhist guidance programs, accounting for a large proportion, with 94.4% of the respondents.

In general, the objects of Buddhist guidance activity in the surveyed pagodas are quite diverse in age, occupation, education level and area of residence. At the same time, they can be those who have taken the refuge of Three Jewels, ordained Buddhists, or who have sympathy with Buddhism and start participating in Buddhist guidance activities at pagodas. These person also have different opinion when choosing the types of Buddhist guidance activity provided by the province pagodas.

2.3. Content of Buddhist guidance activity

The contents of Buddhist guidance activity are often written according to Venerable Thích Thiện Hoa's book of *General Buddhism*, which focuses on some points, such as: doctrine (Dharma), Buddhist propagation, Buddhist benefit, Shaky Buddha history, rituals, benefits of taking refuge of the Three Jewels, the five precepts, ways of penitent, the development of good deeds, the ways and benefits of Buddha worship,... the reasons and benefits of chanting and reciting Buddha's name and chanting the Buddhist scriptures, the reasons, ways and benefits of vegetarian, the duties of a lay Buddhist...

The sutras that are usually taught to lay Buddhists who participate the courses of Buddhist guidance activity as: *The Heart Sutras (Prajñāpāramitā Sutra)*, *The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment (Mahāvaiṣṭyapūrṇa-Buddhasūtra-Prasannārtha-Sūtra)*, *The Lotus Sutra (Saddharmapundarika-Sutra)*...

For typical pagodas, as Kim Huê pagoda, most the elderly and well-educated Buddhists are given short lectures connected with basic sutras, such as: *The Collection of Middle-length Discourses (Majjhima-Nikāya)*, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha (Digh Nikaya)*, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha (Samyutta Nikāya)*. Meanwhile the monks and nuns at Quê Hương pagoda often teach fundamental contents for young Buddhists in program of Buddhist guidance activity, such as: on understanding Buddhism, general history of Buddha, meaning of the Four Great Graces (graces for: parents, Three Jewels, master, nation and society), the religious wedding party for young Buddhists, the content of filial piety in *The Ullambana sutra*, and the roles and responsibilities of young Buddhist towards Dharma... For teenagers, the textbook *Dharma for skill of living* is used, which introduces the basics content of Buddhism, the principles of ethics, the names, and images of Buddhas and the Buddhist guardians... as well as other skills for camping and cultivating oneself. These contents aim to help Buddhists to get the

basic understanding of Buddhism in order to become the good one in family and useful citizen for the community.

We interviewed a number of dignitaries who had experience of years doing Buddhist guidance activity. The abbot of Linh Quang pagoda in Sa Đéc city, Đồng Tháp province, said that at the pagoda he was in charged, regularly manage various programs of Buddhists guidance activity: “The pagoda has arranged courses for the Eight precepts practice¹⁰ in every 2 days per month on the 7th and 21st. In every summer some classes of teaching Buddha’s Dharma for children are held, on every Saturdays and Sundays. At the beginning, there were only about 20 children, but since 2013 more and more children, now nearly 300 children each year”. Regarding the specific contents which Buddhists are absorbed from the program of Buddhist guidance activity, the abbot said: “The lectures usually focus on some basic teachings and guidelines for practice. For children, they talk about cause and effect, filial piety, the faith of Three Jewels, personality, life skill ...” (Interviewed monk, 54 years old, Sa Đéc city). Another high-level abbot of Phước Đức pagoda (Tân Khánh Đông commune, Sa Đéc city), said that he more focused on teaching monks and nuns. But when teaching lay Buddhists he focused on the basic religious teachings and Buddhists’ duties at home and expanded the meditation/Zen hall for their practice. He also said: “In addition to teaching at the religious courses, I also teach at the Rainy season religious settlement and we often remind monks and nuns to take part in the courses of Administration as well as the course of Law for Belief and Religion in order to practice properly in religious life”. (Interviewed, monk, 55 years old, Đồng Tháp province). Thus, the work of teaching has a combination with Buddhist discipline and state law.

In general, the content of the programs of Buddhist guidance activity at the surveyed pagodas in Đồng Tháp is quite rich. In addition to the basics content of Buddhist doctrine, some contents are compiled for specific groups. Not all content is about Buddhism, but

there are also open contents, suitable for the needs of education of people in present society.

2.4. Types of Buddhist guidance activity

Types of Buddhist guidance activities at places in Đồng Tháp province are shown through Dharma preaching right at the pagoda or by videos indirectly. Recently appeared type of preaching over the internet, mainly on Youtube. Some pagodas established their own websites, such as Từ Quang, Tây Hưng (Sa Đéc city), Thiên Phước (Lấp Vò district), Hội Phước (Châu Thành district). On these websites the Dharma lectures have been shared freely. The Provincial Đồng Tháp Buddhist Administration Board regularly distributes preachers for Dharma study courses among 12 districts, towns and cities. The Dharma preachings are usually held on traditional great Buddhist ceremonies¹¹.

According to the *Report on Buddhist Work in 2018 and Direction for 2019 of Đồng Tháp Buddhist Association*, we can see the types of Buddhist guidance activity, such as:

Table 3: Types of programs of Buddhist guidance activity

Order	Type of religious course	At pagodas	Participants
1	Course of Eight precepts practice	20	1940
2	Zen practice	3	150
3	Preaching Lotus Sutra	4	120
4	Reciting Buddha's name	67	4.585
5	Great Compassion	5	450
6	The One day cultivating happiness	19	600
7	Dharma lecture hall	28	5.250
8	Dharma teaching class	6	800
9	Club of Youth	Not yet	10
10	Summer religious course	15	1.860

Source: Vietnam Buddhist Sangha of Đồng Tháp Province (2018), *Report on Buddhist Work in 2018 and Direction for 2019*, Office of The Administration Department of Đồng Tháp Province.

According to the above statistics, it can be seen that the course of Reciting Buddha's name appear in most of pagodas (67) and it attracts the number of Buddhists participating (4,585) only after the type of the Dharma lecture hall (5,250). Meanwhile, few pagodas hold Zen/Meditation practice (3). There are few pagodas organizing contents such as: Great Compassion, Dharma Lotus sutra, or Dharma Teachings. The program with the least number of Buddhists participating is the Youth Club (10). It is not popular one because it is a new type which requires the Buddhist guidance as well as their students to be well educated and have gone through the course.

The Buddhist Guidance Activity Board of Đồng Tháp province has informed about Buddhist guidance activities in 2014: there are 6 classes for teaching Buddhist youth with 795 youngsters at Thiên Quang pagoda (Hồng Ngự), Giác Quang pagoda (Hồng Ngự), Thiên Phước (Lấp Vò), Phước Đức (Lấp Vò), Kim Huê (Sa Đéc City), Linh Quang (Sa Đéc City); The Summer camping festival “The Young Age and Life” held at Quê Hương pagoda with the keynote “Connection for Love” has involved 12 units including 4 provinces with more than 1,000 campers¹².

Types of Buddhist guidance activity are of two main classifications: *The first*, the direct type of Buddhist guidance activity that can be seen through Dharma teaching for members at the course of religious practice; concrete guidance through the activities of Buddhist members belonged to the Buddhist Families, and through Buddhist and non Buddhist activities organized by monks and nuns,... *The second*, the indirect type of Buddhist guidance activity through sharing well prepared materials, Buddhist cultural and artistic activities, information and videos online, social networks,... At the same time, monks and nuns apply the method of speech teaching (teaching by Dharma speech) and the method of body teaching (teaching by Dharma behavior). This is an educational method using living example that requires much more meticulousness and patience. Thus, under the general guidance of the Buddhist Guidance Activity Board of the Central Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam, all pagodas

belonged to the Provincial Đồng Tháp Buddhist Administrative Board have implemented various types of Buddhist guidance activity at the same time. There are types that prove to be very appealing and practical, that attracts many Buddhists to participate.

2.5. The Impact and effectiveness of Buddhist guidance activity

Thanks to efforts to innovate contents, create programs and renew forms of performance, Buddhist guidance activities in Đồng Tháp have provided remarkable changes in Buddhism, thereby helping Buddhism in the province to make new steps of development. When asked about the effectiveness of Buddhist guidance activity, as well as about the hope to achieve, the abbot of Linh Quang Pagoda said: “Most Buddhists are happy because there is more or less good transformation in their thinking as well as in their living circumstances. The number of people practicing this program is more and more. Especially for children, many parents are happy when their children are more obedient at home and they want the pagoda open more Dharma teaching classes in summer for their children. If the pagoda cannot afford the cost, parents will contribute on their own”. This fact means the parents give high valuation to the Buddhists programs offering their children. More than anyone else, parents are the people who can realize the changes in their children’s life as quickly as possible.

The impact and effectiveness of Buddhist guidance activity can also be seen through Buddhist’s awareness and actions for peacefulness of social community, in general. This is also obviously in the fact that Buddhists have actively participated in many humanitarian programs for social security. According to the Report on Buddhist Works during the 7th term (2012 - 2017) of Đồng Tháp Buddhist Association, the Social Philanthropy Board has mobilized and contributed to charity with a total amount of VND 12,641,000,000. This number shows the very meaningful contribution of Buddhists in the province while under the limited economic condition.

Through the selected pagodas, we also studied the effectiveness provided by the Buddhist guidance activity. The table below shows what participants in Buddhist guidance activity programs have appreciated.

Table 4. Correlation between the surveyed pagodas and the highly rated points in the program of Buddhist guidance activity there (%)

Surveyed pagodas Evaluate	Từ Quang pagoda	Kim Huê pagoda	Phước Huệ pagoda	Quê Hương pagoda	General
Type of Dharma lecture	16.1	35.9	36.2	14.7	26.9
Content of Dharma preaching	45.2	53.8	55.3	32.0	47.2
Extracurricular activities	8.1	42.3	9.6	37.3	24.3
Teaching how to apply Buddhism to real life	56.5	75.6	56.4	62.7	62.8
Teaching Buddhist ethical principles	64.5	43.6	23.4	30.7	38.5
Teaching how to do charity, merit	72.6	59.0	42.6	37.3	51.5
Teaching life skills	6.5	19.2	7.4	21.3	13.6
Guidance for vegetarian and exercise for health	45.2	32.1	3.2	13.3	21.4

Analysis of the correlation points that respondents highly evaluated for the Buddhist Guidance activity programs at selected pagodas show that the majority of participants appreciate the program of teaching how to apply Buddhism to real life. This content was selected by followers at three selected pagodas (Kim Huê, Phước Huệ and Quê Hương) with the highest rate in comparing with other content (from 56.4%). For the participants in the Buddhist guidance activity program at Từ Quang Pagoda, 72.6% of the respondents gave the highest score for teaching program of make charity and merit at this pagoda. In this study the data partly reflects the positive side of the Buddhist guidance activity program at each pagoda.

Another way for us to measure the effectiveness of Buddhist guidance activity programs is to ask the participants about the program participated by them with their own expectations. The result is as follows:

Table 5: How to meet the expectations of program

Level of meeting the expectations	Frequency (person)	Percentage (%)
Good response	245	87.2
Some side is good, some side is not good	24	8.5
Not well response	2	0.7
Unknown/not answered	10	3.6

As can be seen that: the majority of the respondents answered the program had met their expectations, with 87.2%; Some side is good and some is not good response, with 8.5%; Small number rated the program did not meet their expectations (0.7%).

To verify the above opinion, we study on the frequency of their participation in these programs. The results showed that 91.2% of the respondents had participated in Buddhist guidance activity programs heretofore; while only 8.8% said it was the first time they participated. At the same time, 94.4% of respondents said they would continue to participate in these programs in the future. Thus, it can be said that Buddhist guidance activity programs in the surveyed pagodas have promoted practical benefits of program and met the expectations of participants. It is obvious to confirm the positive and noticeable effect of this activity.

Conclusion

This study shows that Buddhist guidance activity is one of the rather popular and vibrant activities in Đồng Tháp province. Together with the increase in quantity and quality of the teams of Buddhist guidance activity, it is an innovation tending to diversification of the content and programs of Buddhist guidance activity. At the same time, these Buddhist activities attract various kind of participants, especially

young people. The highly evaluation by the respondents in the surveyed pagodas shows that those activities have been making a positive change in Buddhists' knowledge and life style.

In the context of a unstable society and the appearance of many new -found cultural trends that can negatively affect Buddhist's process of cultivating, the Buddhist guidance activity programs in Đồng Tháp province have made a remarkable contribution for preservation and development of traditional culture of the ethnic, for Buddhist guidance on moral lifestyle and supporting them to improve their personality. On the basis of identifying the advantages and limitations, the Buddhist guidance activity program in Đồng Tháp can promote their strengths and speed up the development of Buddhism in Đồng Tháp in the near future. /.

Notes:

- 1 Thích Thanh Điện (2019), "The Central Buddhist Guidance Board of the Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam and the sustainable Development" in Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (2019) *Proceeding of the Conference on Buddhist Activity with the sustainable development of the country*, in Hanoi.
- 2 Thích Chân Tín (2019), "Central Buddhist Guide Board: Its History of Formation and Some Basic Characteristics" in: Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, Central Buddhist Guide Board (2019), *Proceeding of the Conference on Buddhist Activities and Sustainable Development of the Country*, in Hanoi, p. 50.
- 3 Thích Phước Huệ (2017), *Buddhist Places in Đồng Tháp Province in the Past and Present*. Phuong Dong Publisher, HCM City.
- 4 The Buddhist Administration Board (2014), *The Central Buddhist Guidance Activity Board of the Vietnam Buddhist Sangha Visited Đồng Tháp*, accessed at: <https://www.phatgiaodongthap.vn/2014/10/dong-thap-ban-huong-dan-phat-tu-trung.html>, February 3, 2020.
- 5 This data is quoted from *The Ministry – level project on "The Situation of Religion in Vietnam Today* Institute of Social Sciences Information, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (2020).
- 6 Thích Huệ Nghiêm (2017), "The 8th Congress of Đồng Tháp Buddhist Sangha", *The Enlightenment online*, <https://giacngo.vn /thoisu/2017/03/16/72C2CB/>, accessed on December 15, 2020
- 7 Thích Phước Huệ (2017), *Ibid.*
- 8 The Buddhist Administration Board of Đồng Tháp Province (2014). *Ibid.*
- 9 Thích Huệ Nghiêm (2017), *Ibid.*
- 10 The course of Eight Precepts is a religious practice for lay Buddhist to observe 8 precepts.

- 11 Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam, Sa Đéc city, The Administration Board (2016), *General Report on Buddhist Work in 2015, Direction of Buddhist Work in 2016*, Office of The Administration Board of Sa Đéc City, Đồng Tháp.
- 12 Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam, The Buddhist Guidance Activity Board of Đồng Tháp province (2014) *The Report of Buddhist Works in 2014*.

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1. Thích Thanh Dien (2019), “The Buddhist Guidance Activity Board of the Central Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam with the sustainable development of the country”. In: Vietnam Buddhist Sangha (2019), *Proceeding of the conference on: Buddhist’s Activities and the Sustainable Development of the Country*, Hanoi.
2. Thích Chân Tín (2019), “Central Buddhist Guidance Activity Board: History of Foundation and Some Basic Characteristics”, in: Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, Central Buddhist Guidance Activity Board (2019), *Proceeding of conference on: Buddhists’ Activities and Sustainable Development of the Country*, Hanoi, p. 50.
3. Thích Phước Huệ (2017), *Buddhist foundations in Đồng Tháp in past and present*, Phuong Dong, Ho Chi Minh City.
4. The Buddhist Administration Board of Đồng Tháp Province (2014), “*The Central Buddhist Guidance Activity Board of the Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam visits and works in Đồng Tháp*”, accessed at: <https://www.phatgiaodongthap.vn/2014/10/ong-thap-ban-huong-dan-phat-tu-trung.html>, dated 3/2/2020.
5. Institute of Social Science Information, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (2020), *Ministry-level project: “The Current Situation of Religions in Vietnam”*, Appendix.
6. Duong Quang Dien (2017), *The Process of Formation and Development of the Central Buddhist Guidance Activity Board of the Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam, from 1981 to present*, The Publisher of Religion, Hanoi.
7. Buddhist Guidance Activity Board of Đồng Tháp Province (2016), Buddhism contributes to the orientation of Human Ethics in Society, *Proceeding of the conference on: The 35th Anniversary of the Founding of the Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam: Achievements - Stability - Development*.
8. Thích Huệ Nghiêm (2017), *The 8th Term of Đồng Tháp Buddhist Congress, The Enlightenment - online*, accessed at: <https://giacngo.vn/toisu/2017/03/16/72C2CB/>, accessed December 15, 2020.
9. Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, Sa Đéc city, Administration Board (2016), *Report on Buddhist Works in 2015, Direction of Buddhist Works in 2016*, Office of The Administration Board of Sa Dec City, Đồng Tháp.
10. Vietnam Buddhist Sangha, Đồng Tháp Buddhist Guidance Activity Board (2014), *Report on Buddhist Work in 2014*.