

# FACT SHEET

## Thich Quang Duc

**Buddhist:** A follower of the teachings of Siddharta Gautama (Buddha).

### THE ACTION

**On 11th June, 1963, Thich Quang Duc travelled by car to a crossroads in central Saigon (in Vietnam, now Ho Chi Minh City). He was surrounded by other Buddhist monks and nuns. A day earlier, a spokesperson for the Vietnamese Buddhists had warned American journalists that something would happen.**

Thich Quang Duc sat down in the lotus position. Another monk poured petrol onto Quang Duc who said a final prayer before striking a match. He sat unmoving as he burned. No one was able to intervene.

### BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

Quang Duc was protesting against the suppression of Buddhists by the South Vietnamese government. It is estimated that 70 per cent or more of the Vietnamese population at this time were Buddhists, but the President was Christian and he acted with bias against the Buddhists in political and religious matters. Buddhists had to apply for permission to mark any religious occasion in public. In May 1963 they were forbidden to fly flags in celebration of the Buddha's birthday. The President was partly supported by the US government.

### THE EYEWITNESS

Malcolm Browne photographed Quang Duc's death. He explains:

"I've been asked a couple times whether I could have prevented the suicide. I could not. There was a phalanx of perhaps two hundred monks and nuns who were ready to block me if I tried to move. A couple of them chucked themselves under the wheels of a fire truck that arrived. But in the years since, I've had this searing feeling of perhaps having in some way contributed to the death of a kind old man who probably would not have done what he did — nor would the monks in general have done what they did — if they had not been assured of the presence of a newsman who could convey the images and experience to the outer world. Because that was the whole point — to produce theater of the horrible so striking that the reasons for the demonstrations would become apparent to everyone. And, of course, they did. The following day, President Kennedy had the photograph on his desk, and he called in Henry Cabot Lodge, who was about to leave for Saigon as U.S. ambassador, and told him, in effect, 'This sort of thing has got to stop.' And that was the beginning of the end of American support for the Ngo Dinh Diem regime."

From *Reporting America at War: An Oral History*, compiled by Michelle Ferrari, with commentary by James Tobin, published by Hyperion, 2003. Copyright ©, 2003 Goodhue Pictures.

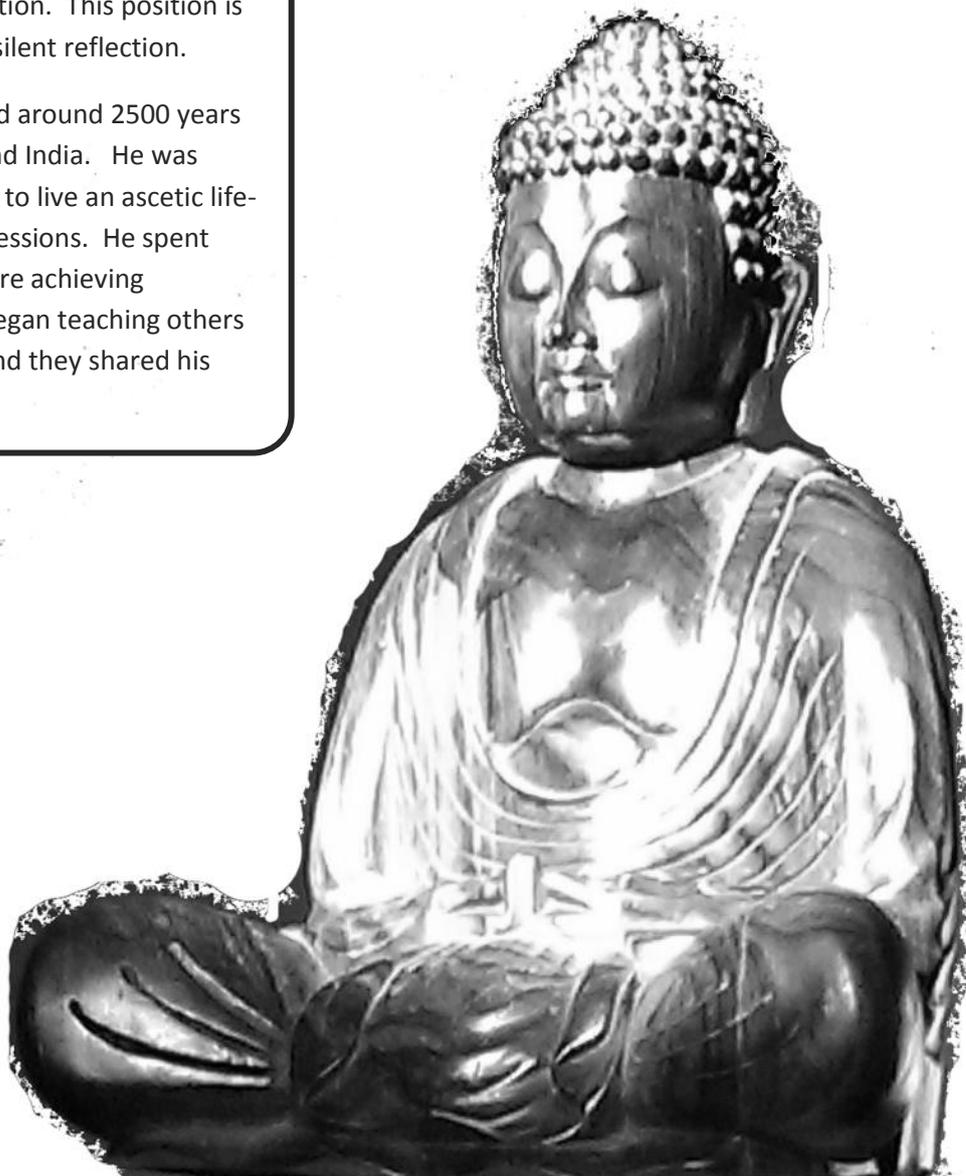
## AFTER EFFECTS

In Vietnam and China the picture was used as propaganda to oppose the involvement of the United States in Vietnam. In the United States, people saw Quang Duc as a martyr. During 1963, five Vietnamese monks followed Quang Duc's example. During US protests against the Vietnam War, five people burned themselves in protest against the government.

*Quang Duc was not the first Vietnamese monk to die in this way, but the image of his protest forced people to pay attention.*

**Siddharta Gautama** (*Buddha*, "the Enlightened One") and his followers are often depicted in a cross-legged posture known as the lotus position. This position is used for meditation or silent reflection.

Siddharta Gautama lived around 2500 years ago in modern Nepal and India. He was born wealthy but chose to live an ascetic lifestyle, giving up his possessions. He spent time in meditation before achieving "enlightenment". He began teaching others what he had learned, and they shared his simple way of life.



Buddha seated in meditation.  
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