

## **I Like to Make Merit**

When I reached the 6th grade, my parents began to notice my patience and my talent for drawing, painting, and reading. I liked to draw or paint animals, houses, cars, trees, and landscapes of the countryside, the seaside, or the riverside, etc., often using watercolours. But most importantly, I painted the Buddha in different versions and in different actions from his holy life. My grandmother and my mother were very enthusiastic when they saw my paintings. They encouraged me to paint more so that I could distribute my works to the older adults in the village. They said this was a great deed that could take me to heaven in my next life. I was also good at reading, as I read the Buddhist teachings in the same way as any Buddhist monk did.

One day, I was on a trip to a neighbouring village with my grandmother. In the guesthouse, I found an old Buddhist textbook. I chose one chapter and started to read loudly, clearly, but slowly, with correct punctuation and intonation. While I was reading, a dozen elderly ladies came and sat down respectfully and quietly

around me. One of them lit a lighter to burn a scent and put it in front of me, giving the impression of being in a real session of a religious ceremony. They were treating me like a real monk. In this situation, I dared not stop, but continued reading until the end. Once again, my grandmother told me that my actions were a great deed. I was attracted to Buddhism to the point where I was about to choose between entering monkhood as a novice or furthering my studies in high school at the age of 13. Finally, I chose the latter. Even though I was always ready to do good deeds in a Buddhist way, I often drove my father's "Mobilette" and when I saw an elderly person or a Buddhist monk walking alone under the hot sun, I would volunteer to carry them to their destination. I was always ready to render service at the drop of a hat.