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The basic truths on Caodaism

Nguyễn Ngọc Châu
Paris, 21 December 2020

Since the dawn of time, man has sought not to feel abandoned by giving himself explanations for the phenomena of nature that regulate his life. He assigns them a form and a name, then he divinizes and worships them. Thus, gods were created, in the form of elements of creation, thunder, rain, etc., then animals, and even, half-animal half-human entities, then human.

Finally, the monotheistic conception of a single God took over in the Middle East with Abraham, the ancestor of Moses in Judaism, as of Jesus in Christianity, and of Muhammad in Islam. These three religions worship the same God, God among Christians, Allah among Muslims and among the Jews, an ineffable name that can only be spelled Yod-He-Waw-He. His followers live their faith in Him, the Almighty, the Creator, and lead their lives to His Glory until they waged war between them. For there is a long history of killings and misleads in the name of God, due to extremism, intolerance and the ambition of men.

1. BIRTH OF CAODAIISM

The three amnesties

For the Caodaists, twice already, the Almighty had wanted to bring the human being back to the path of wisdom and happiness which is the right one. The first amnesty refers to the time of the advent of Judaism (Moses according to a divine Caodaist message) in the West and Primitive Confucianism (Emperor Phuc Hi), Primitive Taoism (Thái Thượng Đạo Quân) and Primitive Buddhism (Nhiên Đăng Cổ Phật, the Ancient Buddha) in the East. The second amnesty refers to that of Christianity (Jesus Christ) and Islam (Mahomet) in the West, and Confucianism (Khong Phu Tseu), Taoism (Lao Tseu) and Buddhism (Cakya Mouni) in the East.

For this third amnesty, He no longer wanted to go through intermediaries as He did before. He revealed himself directly to man through the evocation of spirits, spiritism, a practice common in both the East and the West. Under the name of *Cao Đài Tiên Ông Đại Bồ Tát Ma Ha Tát*¹, He came as *Thầy* (Master) to teach to human beings whom He called *Con* (Child), transmitting Himself the road to human "deliverance", the Great Universal Way which could reconcile all the beliefs.

The first Caodaist

The one who is considered to be the first caodaïst is Mr Ngô Văn Chiêu (1878-1932), a civil servant who went through the Mỹ Tho high school as a fellow and who obtained numerous degrees in "French-indigenous" studies. He practised the Three Ways for many years as a follower of the Minh Sư association. He was involved in the evocation of the superior spirits (*Cầu Tiên*) since 1902 when, during a session at Thủ Dầu Một, he was advised by a spirit to persevere in the path he had set out.

In 1920, Ngô Văn Chiêu was in Phú Quốc, where he was a Prefect, a district chief (quận trưởng) responsible for the administration of the island. Among the spirits with whom he corresponded in the company of a small team of young mediums, including the 8-year-old Lê Ngung, there was one in particular who named himself "Cao Đài Tiên Ông" (Immortal Cao Dai) and whom he had already met in 1919 with a friend during a session in Tân An. The teachings received were of great wisdom, and prompted Mr Chiêu to ask permission to venerate him. He

¹ There are 12 words in the full invocation in the prayers *Nam Mô Cao Đài Tiên Ông Đại Bồ Tát Ma Ha Tát*, 12 is a sacred number. *Cao Đài* refers to Confucianism, *Tiên Ông* to Taoism and *Đại Bồ Tát Ma Ha Tát* to Buddhism.

also asked him about the form in which he might do so. He received no reply, but a few days later he saw a resplendent left eye in front of him. The *Thiên Nhãn*, the Divine Eye, was thus adopted and venerated since that time in all Caodaist temples.

The “*Thiên Nhãn*” (Divine Eye)

In his message of February 26, 1926, the Almighty expressed himself as follows on the “*Thiên Nhãn*”:

French	Chữ Nho (Vietnamese Chinese)	Vietnamese
The Eye is the engine of the heart, The sovereign master of visual perception.	<i>Nhãn thị chủ tâm</i> <i>Lưỡng Quang chủ tế</i>	<i>Mắt là chủ tâm,</i> <i>Hai ánh sáng trong mắt là chủ tế.</i>
Visual perception comes from the intelligent principle,	<i>Quang thị Thần</i>	<i>Ánh sáng là Thần.</i>
The intelligent principle derives from the divine principle,	<i>Thần thị Thiên</i>	<i>Thần là trời,</i>
The divine principle is Me.	<i>Thiên giả, ngã giả</i>	<i>Trời là Ta vậy</i>



Thus, the Left Eye is the symbol of the truth of life (*chân lý cuộc sống*), the omnipresence of God at all times, the witness to all the good or evil acts of His creatures. The Caodaists see in it, above all, the Almighty who supports them, who helps them and who brings them his teachings and strength to keep themselves on the path to their deliverance.

Throughout Vietnam, and in particular, in Sài Gòn, many groups practised spiritism. In 1925, in Sài Gòn, three civil servants – Phạm Công Tác, Cao Huỳnh Sang and Cao Huỳnh Cư - spent their leisure time conjuring up spirits and, like most of these groups, they used the *striking table* (also called *turntable*), a slow and inconvenient process which came from France. Known as the *Phò Loan* group, they regularly spoke with the spirit of a woman, with whom they exchanged poems. One day she asked them if they did want to meet someone very special. To do this, they had to be vegetarian for a month and present themselves with their body and mind completely clean. Thus, they became acquainted with the entity that had made himself known to Mr Ngô Văn Chiêu on the island of Phú Quốc and who called himself here AĂĂ the first three letters of the Vietnamese alphabet. When questions were raised to this entity, the answers were so right, so true, so profound, especially when they related to personal family stories, and also so imbued with wisdom and great philosophy, that the number of people attending the sessions increased each day.

The conversion of the Colonial Counsellor, Lê Văn Trung (1875-1934) had a great impact and attracted more people to the groups of mediums. One of his sisters, who was married the future lieutenant-general (trung tướng) Chief of Staff of the South Vietnamese Army and Minister of Defence Nguyễn Văn Vỹ, confirmed to the author that both were from a Catholic family for generations. He was a former civil servant turned public works contractor, very attached to the enjoyments of this world. He became an ascetic leaving aside opium and the female gent after attending a spirit session of a group of Taoists in Chợ Gạo in June 1925. The spirit of Lý Thái Bạch, a Chinese poet of the ancient time, whom the Caodaists would later

venerate as their virtual spiritual *Giáo Tông* (Superior Grand Master), appeared to him and encouraged him to live a more spiritual life.

This new religion attracted many civil servants and intellectuals. It was difficult to regard it as a simple religion of superstitious peasants or any reaction against the French colonizers. To understand it, it was necessary to possess a certain level of knowledge and understanding of the traditions, since it was based on the three paths Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism that everyone practised traditionally for centuries without them being considered globally as a specific religion. At the Tết, the Vietnamese New Year, people go to the Taoist temple to find out about the future. Funerals and remembrance ceremonies for the deceased are carried out according to the Buddhist rite. Children are educated in Confucian morality. Among the 28 signatories to the declaration of the birth of religion were a Colonial Councillor, 11 administrative officials including three provincial and district chiefs, 5 landowners, 3 religious, 2 principals, 4 teachers and one employee.

Subsequently, the groups of mediums were instructed to meet, to merge, to be organized and to use the Taoist tool, the *Ngọc Cờ* (Moving Jade), the beaked basket. Thus, on 18 February 1926, on the instruction of Cao Đài during a spirit session, Lê Văn Trung and Phạm Công Tắc went to meet Ngô Văn Chiêu.

The “*Ngọc Cờ*” (Jade beak basket)

The beak basket was a basket twenty centimetres in diameter, which was turned over, which was held by two mediums seated face to face and to which was attached a stick with at its end a sculpture in the shape of a phoenix head with a beak. After prayers and as soon as they were in communication with a spirit, the mediums made movements in the basket, and the beak, to which was attached a brush or pencil, traced signs that a Reader (*Đọc Giã*) interpreted, while a Transcriber (*Điền Ký*) transcribed on a paper the message thus traced according to the principle of automatic writing. The beak of the phoenix could also peck at an alphabet drawn on a painting thus denoting letters that, put end to end, formed a message.



The *Ngọc Cờ*, the Jade beak basket

The first separation

On 14 April 1926, a message received by Cao Quỳnh Cư, Phạm Công Tắc and Lê Văn Trung confirmed the title of *Giáo Tông* (Superior Grand Master) attributed to Ngô Văn Chiêu, and recommended the making of a sumptuous ceremonial garment that would correspond to this function.

Mr Chiêu, known for his modesty, refused to accept such a distinction. His vision of the religion was different from the one of the group.

He retired to his home in Cần Thơ, where he founded the *Chiếu Minh* branch which had the specificity of withdrawing completely from life in society, of not having activities to spread the religion, and of focusing solely on inner-life, that is to say, to apply and practice the principles of *Vô Vi* (No Action) and Taoist meditation. Followers of this branch sleep seated to continue

to maintain the state of meditation during their sleep because the mind must lead the breath following the great circulation *Đại Châu Thiên* with the spine in a vertical position. They are also buried in this vertical position in their grave to rise directly to the sky. And those who reach Awakening die with their left eyes open ². They are said to be dedicated to the practice of esotericism of Caodaism.

The other group that focused on the spread of the new religion was considered to practice the exoteric part of Caodaism, although, in reality, exotericism and esotericism were both present.

The five divisions of the Great Way

On April 24, 1926, the following message was delivered by Cao Đài:

<p>In the past, people did not know each other and lacked transportation. I then founded, at different times, at different places, five branches of the Great Way:</p> <p>1/- <i>Nhơn Đạo</i>: The Way of Humans (which was taught by Khong Phu Tseu), 2/- <i>Thần Đạo</i>: The Way of the Genies (which was taught by Khương Thái Công), 3/- <i>Thánh Đạo</i>: The Way of the Saints (which was taught by Jesus Christ), 4/- <i>Tiên Đạo</i>: The Way of the Immortals (which was taught by Lao Tseu), 5/- <i>Phật Đạo</i>: the Way of the Buddhas (which was taught by Buddha).</p> <p>each based on the specific habits and customs of the breeds of the place of origin called to practice them.</p> <p>Today, all parts of the world are explored: humanity, which knows itself better, aspires to real peace. But because of the very multiplicity of these religions, men did not always live in harmony with each other. That is why I have decided to unite all of them into one, the Great Way Cao Đài .</p>	<p><i>Xưa kia các dân tộc vì thiếu phương tiện xê dịch nên xa nhau, không quen biết nhau. Đức Chí Tôn đã tạo nên trong những thời kỳ khác nhau, ở những địa phương khác nhau nên ngũ chi Đại Đạo :</i></p> <p>1/- <i>Nhơn Đạo (Khổng Tử)</i> 2/- <i>Thần Đạo (Khương Thái Công)</i> 3/- <i>Thánh Đạo (Giêsu)</i> 4/- <i>Tiên Đạo (Lão tử)</i> 5/- <i>Phật Đạo (Thích Ca mâu Ni)</i></p> <p><i>Mỗi chi đặt trên những phong tục riêng biệt của nơi phát nguyên.</i></p> <p><i>Ngày nay, giữa năm châu sự giao thông trở nên thuận tiện. Nhân loại hiểu biết nhau hơn, ước mong cảnh thanh bình thực sự. Nhưng vì sự hiện hữu của các giáo phái khác nhau mà loài người không sống hòa hợp với nhau được. Cho nên, Đức Chí Tôn quyết định hợp nhất ngũ chi để đưa về Đại Đạo Cao Đài duy nhất.</i></p>
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The creation of Caodaism

On 7 October 1926, the creation of Caodaism, the Caodaist religion, was officially announced and a Declaration signed by 28 followers was sent to the Governor of Cochinchina, Mr Le Foll. It was accompanied by a list of 247 names of those who were present at the decision-making meeting on the 23rd of the 8th month of the year Bính Dần (year of the Tiger 1926) at Mr Võ Văn Tường home (see Appendix 1).

² The Divine Eye is a left eye, a symbol of the Yang.

The official name of the new religion, **Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ**, means “*The Great Way of the Third Amnesty*”, implying also “*of God towards humanity*”. A more modern name is “*The Third Universal Era of Divine Salvation of the Great Way*”.

For the advent of Caodaism, grandiose feasts were celebrated from 18 to 20 November 1926 at Tứ Lâm Tự, a Buddhist pagoda whose construction was financed in large part by Mr Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ and Mrs Lâm Thanh Hương³ (who soon became Caodaist dignitaries), and whose superior the venerable *Thích Như Nhân* was in favour of the new-born Caodaism. A priesthood was established and a religious code promulgated. It was decided to establish the religion in Tây Ninh on a vast territory purchased with the financial help of Mrs Lâm Thanh Hương.

2. SPIRITISM AND DIVINE MESSAGES

2.1 The Evocation of Spirits

It was in May 1855 that the Frenchman Allan (or Alan) Kardec, whose real name was Hyppolite Leon Denizard Rivail (1804-1869), discovered the turntables whose practice had come from the United States. He then incorporated Parisian spiritual circles, founded the magazine *La Revue spirite* (1858) and published a 180-page summary on spiritism *What is Spiritism* (1859), a small paper *Spiritism with its simplest expression* (1861) and the five books that constitute the fundamentals of spiritism, *The Book of Spirits* (1857), *The Book of Mediums* (1861), *the Gospel according to Spiritism* (1864), *Heaven and Hell* (1865) and *Genesis according to Spiritism* (1867).

In *The Book of Spirits*, Allan Kardec writes:

« *Man is not only composed of matter; there is also in him a thinking principle connected to the physical body that he leaves, as one leaves a used garment when his present incarnation is completed. Once disembodied, the dead can communicate with the living, either directly or through mediums in a visible or invisible way. [...]*

« *By leaving the body, the soul enters the world of the Spirits from which it came, to resume a new material existence after a more or less long period during which it is in the state of Wandering Spirit.*” [...]

« *The Spirit having to go through several incarnations, the result is that we all have had several existences and that we will have more, more or less perfected ones, either on this earth or in other worlds.*” [...]

« *The Spirit is not thus an indefinite abstract being, which the thought alone can conceive; it is a real, circumscribed being that, in some cases, is appreciable by the senses of sight, hearing and touch.* [...]

« *Spirits belong to different classes and are not equal in power, intelligence, knowledge, or morality. Those of the first order are the Superior Spirits who are distinguished from others by their perfection, their knowledge, their closeness to God, the purity of their feelings and their love of good: they are the angels or pure Spirits. The other classes are moving further and further away from this perfection; those of the lower ranks are inclined to most of our passions: hatred, envy, jealousy, pride, etc.; they like evil.*»

In the introduction to this book, Allan Kardec warns: “*A fact demonstrated by observation and confirmed by the Spirits themselves is that the Lower Spirits often borrow known and revered names. Who can assure us that those who say they were, for example, Socrates, Julius*

³ Mrs Lâm Thanh Hương became the first *Phối Sư* (Master) woman.

Caesar, Charlemagne, Fénelon, Napoleon, Washington, etc., have really animated these characters? This doubt exists among some very fervent followers of spiritual doctrine; they admit the intervention and manifestation of the Spirits, but they wonder what control one can have of their identity. This control is, in fact, quite difficult to establish; if it cannot be so authentic as by an act of civil status, it can at least be so by presumption, according to certain indications. »

2.2 Caodaist divine messages

Spiritism has existed in China and Vietnam since the dawn of time, so it is difficult to think of any influence of Allan Kardec on the creation of Caodaism.

But the remarks of this specialist are important. Naturally, we should not trust all the messages received through the spiritist sessions with our eyes closed. Selections are necessary, which are based on the knowledge of the selectors.

Thus, a divine caodaist message received on the 13th of the 8th^e month of the year Quý Hợi (year of the Pig 1923) at the pagoda Cung Toàn Hoa from the Spirit *Tôn Ngô Không* was most surprising. *Tôn Ngô Không*, known as *Monkey King*, is the most prominent figure in a fictional novel *The Peregrination to the West* by Wu Cheng En (1500-1582) recounting the journey of the bonze *Tâm Tạng* to Tibet in search of sacred documents. This monkey (*Tôn Ngô Không*), a pig (*Bát Giới*) and an indefinable character (*Sa Tăng*) accompanied this bonze in his journey and symbolize the qualities and defects of Man, as well as the temptations and desires that disturb him in his search for deliverance. The bonze symbolized Buddhism, the pig, Confucianism and the monkey, Taoism. Some at the time did not know that they were characters of a novel and revered *Tôn Ngô Không* as if he existed. Even now others defend this message and continue to recognize the Spirit that appeared to be that of *Tôn Ngô Không*, affirming his coming as a “symbol” of what he represented...

Another equally surprising message, but one can understand, was the manifestation of the Almighty on the night of December 24-25, 1926, who claimed that it was « *the night of His coming to Europe* », which was believed to be true at the time. Being himself the Almighty, He should know better than anyone that this date was a symbolic one, and it's a pity that he did not bother to specify it. For the true day of Jesus' birth is still unknown to us even today and is estimated to be between the year -4 and the year -7, and towards the end of March or the beginning of April, at least before autumn. The Christian Church had taken as the date of birth of Jesus Christ, the one of the god Mithra, a Persian god who became *Sol Invictus* (Undefeated Sun) in the Roman Empire, which takes place on the winter solstice, at the time when the duration of the day is the shortest before it begins to lengthen.

In a message of 17 December 1926 referred to in the *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển* of Tây Ninh, the Almighty affirmed in French: « *It is sufficient to convince you that I am indeed the Jehovah of the Hebrews, the God of the armies of the Israelites, the Unknown God of the Jews and the true Father of Jesus Christ, to pray to Me by this alias Cao Đài for your wishes to be fulfilled.* ». Did this sentence come from the Almighty or was a personal interpretation of the mediums? For Jews under any name, Jews, Israelites or Hebrews, the name of God is known but deemed ineffable because of the Third Commandment: « *You will not invoke the Name YHWH your God in vain* » and it could only be spelt Yod-Hé-Waw-Hé יהוה (Hebrew is read from right to left) or designated by specific metonymies⁴: Elohim, Jehovah, El, etc.

The evocation of the Spirits, to be plausible, needs the mediums to be sincere and not manipulators with the aim of revealing what they had in mind, and that communication is made

⁴ A metonymy is a figure of style that, in language or its use, uses a word to signify a distinct idea but which is associated with it (Wikipedia).

with a truly Superior Spirit and not a malignant one. To avoid problems, the Ban Chinh Đạo (Bến Tre) and Mr Ngô Văn Chiêu used young, intelligent and still innocent mediums of 7, 8 years old. The selection of messages is a difficult exercise that is subject to misinterpretations based on the personal knowledge not always exhaustive of the selectors. Mistakes were very possible...

Towards the end of June 1927, the Almighty instructed Tây Ninh to stop the spiritism sessions because everything that had to be transmitted had already been transmitted. But not everyone listened to this. People interpreted this instruction in their way. Those who wanted to continue the spiritism sessions that contribute greatly to convince and initiate many new followers explained that the instruction concerned only the appointments of dignitaries. For others, the instruction had been given to avoid possible malicious manipulation from both man and evil spirits, as politic began to meddle with religion. Today, spiritist evocations continue in some Caodaist organizations, because they attracted new vocations and developed belief: the Superior Spirits kept coming with their messages of encouragement to practice virtue.

The content of the messages

Few documents common to the religion had been constituted, for the original Caodaism was divided very early into many branches.

The messages revealed during the early years were compiled in collections that constituted in a way the “Bible”, the common “trunk” of the Caodaism of all branches of the religion at the time.

- The *Pháp Chánh Truyền* or the Transmitted Constitution details the religious constitution of Caodaism with its organizational structure in three *Đài* (Towers or Palaces), the *Cửu Trùng Đài*, the *Hiệp Thiên Đài* and the *Bát Quái Đài*, and the responsibilities of everyone, dignitaries and followers, received during the two spiritism sessions of 10 November 1926, and 13 February 1927. The *Tân Luật* or New Code that became *Thiên Luật* (Code of Heaven) for some, is the secular and monastic code of conduct, approved by Cao Đài on 16 January 1927.
- The *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển* (Collection of Selected Divine Messages) is the collection of messages chosen by Tây Ninh until the time (end of June 1927) when the Almighty decided to stop spiritism communications. Since that date, it has been revised several times and adapted to the policy of the moment, with many messages missing due to censorship. The *Thánh Ngôn Dạy Đạo* (Messages Teaching the Divine Way) which is that of the Ban Chinh Đạo of Bến Tre contains many communications that have been eliminated from the *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển*. The other branches have also their collection.
- In general, each branch has its own teaching materials, some based on the instructions of the divine messages of the visiting Superior Spirits, the others written by its followers. Thus the Tòa Thánh Thiên-Thiên Châu Minh (*Caodaist Temple Tiên-Thiên Châu Minh*) has its *Thánh Huấn Hiệp Tuyển* (Selection of Divine Instructions), the Tòa Thánh Tây Ninh, the *Thánh Ngôn Hiệp Tuyển* (Collection of Selected Divine Messages), the *Giảng Đạo Yếu Ngôn* (The teaching of the religion) by Nguyễn Văn Kinh and other documents; the Hội Thánh Ban Chinh Đạo in Bến Tre, his *Thánh Ngôn Dạy Đạo* (Messages Teaching the Divine Way), his *Sách Phần Đạo Cao Đài* (Book on Caodaism) by Nguyễn Khắc Bích and other documents.
- The *Đại Thừa Chơn Giáo* (the Great Cycle of Esotericism) - which brings together the messages received by the *Chiếu Minh* branch created by Ngô Văn Chiêu - forms the foundation of the Caodaist Esotericism practised by the Caodaists who have withdrawn

from life in society and who devote themselves entirely to meditation and Taoist work on oneself. It evokes the practice of the Taoist *Vô Vi* and the search for awakening through the Buddhist way.



The reference to the virtues of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, the three paths of the Chinese Culture, is what immediately jumps out to the eye in the messages received. These are mostly short teaching texts given by the visiting Superior Spirit but which are not sufficient to express all things. And they focus above all on the primary virtue of the Caodaist, that is to say, the part accessible to all, the exoteric part where morality and virtue are in the spotlight. They do not go to what is considered secret, reserved for high-level practitioners, which is the esoteric part. When the Tao, Buddha, Yin, Yang, Vô-Vi are evoked, a further explanation must be found elsewhere. Deep knowledge of the Three Ways is needed to complete these Superior Spirits teachings and truly understand Caodaism. For example, Yin and Yang are often mentioned, and it is through the Yi King of the Chinese tradition and the Tao Te King of Lao Tseu that we can understand what they are.

2.3 The practice of worship

Worship is practised four times a day (*tứ thời*), at 6 am, 12 pm, 6 pm and 12 am, or at 5 am, 11 am, 5 pm and 11 pm, as meditation sessions start at 6 am, 12 am, 6 pm and 12 pm.

“Civilian” clothing

The Caodaist civilian clothes include the black turban and the white traditional Vietnamese dress and trousers. The Bạch Y branch (bạch means white) wears a white turban. The turban of the simple follower is different from that of the venerable dignitaries: it has the word “nhân”, 人 which means man, human being.



A dignitary and the author

Joint hands

The following description shows the spirit of Caodaism: it evokes the Almighty, the triple Way and the revered traditional deities.

The two hands are joint as follows:

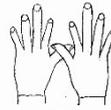
- the left hand is arranged by placing the thumb at the foot of the ring finger (Rat's position at Creation, the first of the twelve signs of the Chinese/Vietnamese horoscope) and

- closing the other four fingers;
- the right-hand surrounds the left hand with the thumb pressed at the foot of the index finger of the left hand.

The left hand represents the moon, the Yin, the right, the sun, the Yang. The union of the two generates the universe that extends to infinity, constituting the Tao.



When bowing, both hands are placed on the ground in the following position:



We start standing, putting both hands on our foreheads and then bowing them down. Then we get down on one's knee, the left knee (spiritual side) first⁵.

The invocations of the deities in prayers

The joint two hands on the forehead, we whisper “*Nam mô Phật*” (Homage to Buddha), on the left near the temple, we whisper “*Nam mô Pháp*” (Homage to the Dharma, Religious Laws and Spiritual Precepts), on the right near the temple, we whisper “*Nam mô Tăng*” (Homage to the Bonze, the Buddhist Priest, who represents the faithful followers). Then the joint two hands placed in front of the chest, we whisper “*Nam mô Cao Đài Tiên Ông Đại Bồ Tát Ma Ha Tát*” (Homage to the Almighty Cao Đài, the Immortal, the Buddha). The head is lowered and we continue, whispering “*Nam mô Lý Thái Bạch Kim Linh, nam mô Quan Âm Bồ Tát, nam mô Quan Thánh Đế Quân, nam mô chư Phật, chư Tiên, chư Thánh, chư Thần*” (Homage to Lý Thái Bạch Kim Linh (the virtual Giáo Tông - Superior Grand Master - of Caodaism, symbol of Taoism), to Bodhisatva Quan Thế Âm (symbol of Buddhism), to Quan Thánh Đế Quân (the virtuous Chinese general Quan Công, symbol of Confucianism), and to the four paths of Buddhas, Taoist Immortals, Saints and Genies). Every time we do an invocation, we lower our head. Tributes are so paid to the entire official Caodaist pantheon defined in the original documents of 1926-27.

The deity Diệu Trì Kim Mẫu or Tây Vương Mẫu

It is noted that the Queen Mother (or Buddha Mother) Diệu Trì Kim Mẫu or Tây Vương Mẫu (Queen Mother of the West) is not one of those deities of Caodaism systematically invoked at each prayer and defined by the spiritism sessions of the early years of the birth of religion. This is one of the characteristics of the today Caodaism. With its early break-up into many branches, in some of these, some own deities were added to those initially officially recognized.

The Queen Mother Diệu Trì Kim Mẫu has a special role in the pantheon of Tây Ninh where there are Victor Hugo, Sun Yat-Sen and Nguyễn Bình Khiêm (representing a French a Chinese and a Vietnamese) and even Joan of Arc. In other branches, especially at the Ban Chính Đạo of Bến Tre, the veneration of Diệu Trì Kim Mẫu is not mandatory.

This deity is actually the **Xi Wang Mu 西王母, Xi Wangmu, Hsi Wang Mu**, or Queen Mother of the West, a character from ancient Chinese mythology who became a Taoist deity

⁵ Note that adepts enter a Zen dojo with the left foot first, and exit backwards with the right foot first.

during the Tang Dynasty. Originally goddess of epidemics in the form of a half-human, a half-animal demon with tiger's teeth and a leopard's tail, resident in the west of the world and commanding the demons of the plague, she became under this dynasty the goddess who protects from epidemics and heals. Towards the end of the 1st century BC, a terrible epidemic was announced and would be protected only those who would place on their doorstep the charms of the Queen Mother of the West. « *There was the habit of drawing her image on the top beam of houses and funerary temples, as was commonly done at the end of the 1st century AD, and this habit gave birth to her consort, the Lord King of the East. This is only a creation for symmetry: in the well-oriented houses (the entrance in the south), the ridge beam of the main hall being directed from east to west, the figure of Xi Wang Mu occupied all the more naturally the side corresponding to the region that she lives in, the West, that this side being yin a figure of woman suited it perfectly; but the other end of the beam was devoid of figure: the East being yang, it was a figure of a man who was placed there, and thus was born the person of the Lord King of the East, whose role remained not very clear* »⁶.

It would be the clan *Thượng Thanh* (上清, clan or school Shangqing, Supreme Clarity) of Taoism in China, in particular one of its Grand Masters *Đỗ Quang Đỉnh* (Tu Kuang-Ting 杜光庭 (850-933)) who spread its mystical history during the Chinese Tang Dynasty (618-907)⁷ with the Taoist poets of this period, including Li Po (701-762) known in Việt Nam as Lý Thái Bạch who became the virtual *Giáo Tông* (Superior Grand Master) of Caodaism.

The deity Xi Wang Mu became for these Taoists an immortal, then the feminine counterpart of the Almighty considered of male sex, the Yin which completes the Yang. On the order of this one, she would have combined the two energies Yin and Yang and created the Universe and the whole world. The human being thus has, in addition to his biological father and mother, the Almighty and the Queen Mother Xi Wang Mu as divine Father and Mother. In the sacred world, he possesses a “*Chơn Linh*” (Pure Spirit) provided by the Almighty which comes from his own *Đại Linh Quang* (Spirit) and a “*Chơn Thân*” (Pure Body) from the Queen Mother.

What intrigues is that if Creation had indeed taken place with the intervention of the Queen Mother *Diệu Trì Kim Mẫu*, she already existed before Creation and was already with the Almighty. In the other part, she only appeared billions of years later, through this Queen Mother of the West first demon half-animal and half-human, then an immortal, then this deity, by the grace of the writings of the Taoists of the clan or school of Shangqing and the Tang poets. This does not prevent spiritist sessions where she comes back to advise on Morality and Virtue, and some female adepts venerate her with fervour and firmly believe in her real existence. It should be noted that most of them do not know the period of the history of this deity before she became a Taoist Immortal.

The Queen Mother *Diệu Trì Kim Mẫu* is not evoked in the *Yi Kinh* (*Kinh Dịch*) the book of divinations and wisdom that expresses creation with Yin and Yang and the multiplication of their combinations, nor in Lao Tseu's *Tao Te King* (*Đạo Đức Kinh*) which explains Taoism. But two sources indicate the encounter of the deity with the latter considered a god at the time, one placing the first hierarchically above the second (Tu Kuang-Ting, a Grand Master of the clan or school of Shangqing) and the other the reverse (a Tang poet)⁷.

Caodaism expresses now some additional views

The evocation of spirits which had been suspended in Tây Ninh in 1927 by order of the Almighty to avoid human manipulation and the visit of evil spirits, has resumed today in some Caodaist organizations. More than ever, the Superior Spirits are present, and among them, the

⁶ https://chine.in/guide/xiwangmu-reine-mere-occident_2741.html.

⁷ *The Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China*, Suzanne E. Cahill, Stanford University Press, 1993.

Queen mother Diệu Trì Kim Mẫu and surprise !!! Lenin, Hồ Chí Minh, etc... Their teaching on morality and virtue abounds. And even Buddha had revealed himself, which is astonishing, for one should not find traces in this world of those who were able to reach the Origin (Quy Nguyên). Queen Mother Diệu Trì Kim Mẫu is called Buddha, probably because she is considered by some Buddhists to be a Boddhisatva who prefers to stay in the world to help it.

Most of the branches obeying the instructions received did not take up the evocation of spirits. This is the case of the Ban Chính Đạo (Committee for the Rectification of the Religion) in Bến Tre, which was founded in 1935 by a majority of the oratories of the time (88, then 95 oratories out of 135)⁸ to bring Caodaism back to its origins and rule out the deviations added to Tây Ninh which had incited most of the founders to run away. This original Caodaism is characterized by a spirituality purely based on the *Tam Giáo*, the Triple Way already practised by its initial founders before its creation, except the two of the Catholic religion, Mr Lê Văn Trung and Mr Phạm Công Tắc.

The division of Caodaism into many branches had allowed important development through them, but the consequences are not all happy for its unity. Each branch evolves according to its convictions and its faith which are the same for some, but not for all. Thus Tây Ninh who originally defined itself as “Renovate Buddhism” (*Bouddhisme rénové*)⁹ now emphasizes Queen Mother Diệu Trì Kim Mẫu, a Taoist deity during the Tang Dynasty. Catholicism is put forward there as a Fourth Way, probably to facilitate the development of Caodaism in Christian circles abroad.

The Altar

The altar erected in the houses of the Caodaists follows several symbolic rules.



It includes:

- 1) A spherical glass lamp in front of the Divine Eye which symbolizes the Universal Monad (Thái Cực).
- 2) 3 small glasses of alcohol, each glass containing 3 cl, making a total of 9 cl symbolizing the Cửu Thiên Khai Hà, the immortals of the 9 levels of heaven who came to teach humanity. The 9 levels of followers are the image on earth of these 9 immortals.
- 3) two filled cups, one of natural water (Yang) and one of tea (Yin), which represent, combined, the Way, the Tao or Đạo. Each cup is filled with 8 “lượng” (Vietnamese weight unit), and 16 correspond to a unit of weight “cân” that symbolizes that the creation is balanced,
- 4) fruits on the left and flowers on the right of the Divine Eye (seen from the front)
- 5) an incense burner with 5 incense sticks representing the 5 energies (Ngũ Khí). For some, they represent the 5 degrees of initiation: 1) Giới hương (purity), 2) Định hương (meditation), 3) Huệ hương (wisdom), Tri kiến hương (superior knowledge), 5) Giải thoát hương (karmic liberation).
- 6) two candles one symbolizing the Sun, the Yang, the other the Moon, the Yin

⁸ See Chapter V on the history of Caodaism.

⁹ See Section 5.1 The «History and philosophy of Caodaism » of Gabriel Gobron.

The offerings of flowers, alcohol and tea symbolize respectively the offerings of the three elements of the human being: the **Tinh** (the essence, the cosmic sperm without which no life could manifest itself), the **Khi** (energy, the breath) and the **Thần** (the spirit).

Prostrations

The *lay* (prostrations) are

- 2 for the living (humans are created from the Yang and Yin combination)
- 4 for the dead (2 for humans, 1 for Heaven, and 1 for Earth)
- 3 for the Thần (Genies) and the Thánh (Saints)
- 9 for the Immortals and Buddha
- 12 for the Almighty

Flag and symbols

The Caodaist flag is made of three colours: yellow, a symbol of Buddhism; sky blue, a symbol of Taoism; and red, a symbol of Confucianism.

For Ban Chinh Đạo, the yellow, Buddhism, the highest level of the three Ways, is where the divine Eye, symbol of the Almighty, is, i.e. in the middle; the blue contains the words "Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ độ" and the red the three symbols of the Three Ways: the book Xuân Thu (the Annals of the kingdom of Lu) which represents Confucianism, the Buddhist patra (alms bowl, *bình bát vu*), Buddhism, and the *phất chử*, feather duster, Taoism.

For Tây Ninh, from top to bottom there is a decreasing order of the level of the three Ways, and the divine Eye and the three symbols are in the middle in the blue of Taoism.



Flags of Ban Chinh Đạo (left) and Tây Ninh (right)

In the early years of the creation of the religion, the flag of Tây Ninh had the color yellow in the middle as in the Ban Chinh Đạo flag of today.



Tây Ninh in the early years

(<https://www.flickr.com/.../in/album-72157624045564437/>)

3. THE SPIRITUALITY OF CAODAISM

3.1 Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ

Caodaists do not claim that their religion **Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ** is new. They regard it as a universal religion that is called to have a leading role in the world since it does not deny anything of the essentials of the various existing doctrines, which it does not formally reject, believing that they all have a divine origin. It is the actions of man that have caused the degeneration of their practice, and he needs to return to the path set by God. Revealed by the latter using the evocation of spirits, Caodaism expresses this path.

Caodaism is the religion of God (*Đạo Trời*) whose guiding principles are « Three Ways lead to Origin, the Five Divisions come together into one Unit » (***Tam Giáo Quy Nguyên, Ngũ Chi Hợp Nhất***).

These guiding principles are clear. From now on, there is only **one religion which is Caodaism** which covers all stages of the evolution of man in search of his deliverance. This religion is based on the Triple Path which is taught to Man, Immortals and Buddhas and its objective is the return "to the origin", that is to say the return to before the Creation, to the Creator, to the Tao.

3.2 the Five Divisions come together into one Unit (*Ngũ Chi Hợp Nhất*)

Caodaism is simply the Chinese Triple Way with the belief in an Almighty - already present by the Tao, the "Principle" of Taoism - who has revealed Himself to show this Way to the still lost man.

The words "***Ngũ Chi Hợp Nhất***" (*ngũ* means five, *chi* division, *hợp* unite, and *nhất* one) refer to the message received during the spiritist session of 24 April 1926, on the five ways created in the old time by the Almighty: Ways of Man, Genies, Saints, Immortals and Buddhas. These five Ways are unified into one, that of Caodaism.

It can be noted that the words *Ngũ Chi* in the expression *Ngũ Chi Hợp Nhất* can also refer, as mentioned at the spiritist session of 5 September 1926, to the five "*Minh Hội*" (Minh Associations)¹⁰ which practised the triple path Confucianism-Taoism-Buddhism at the time in Việt Nam, most of whose leaders had joined Caodaism and whose future unification could be a good thing:

- *Minh Sư* at Linh Quang Tự pagoda, An Nhơn, Gia Định (Trần Đạo Quang)
- *Minh Tân* at the Tam Giáo Điện pagoda, Vân Đồn quay, Vĩnh hội, Sài Gòn (Lê Minh Khá)
- *Minh Thiện* at the Minh Thiện pagoda, Thủ dầu Một, Bình Dương (Phan Văn Tý)
- *Minh Đường* at Càn Giuộc, Chợ Lớn (Nguyễn Văn Lịch)
- *Minh Lý* at Tam Tông Miếu pagoda, Cao Thắng street, Sài Gòn (Âu Kiệt Lâm)

Let us also know that, at the time of the arrival of Buddhism in China, the terms *Ngũ Chi Hợp Nhất* were already used to describe the dream to unite one day the five Taoist schools (of the north, south, east, west and centre), whose differences were mainly related to the degree of influence of Buddhism on each of them and the way of working on the "essence" (*jing* 精 in Chinese, *tin* in Vietnamese) in the practice of internal alchemy in Taoist meditation: female presence more or less important to activate the *tin*, the essence, especially when the subject is at an advanced age (for that time, 60 and more).

¹⁰ Originally, these associations were Chinese, created by the Chinese diaspora of the Ming dynasty who were refugees in Vietnam after the hands-up Qing on China.

Christianity

In Caodaism, although Christianity is mentioned as one of the Ways created by the Almighty, there is none of its specificities that are original sin which requires baptism to wash it away, the sacrifice of the Son of God and God Himself¹¹ to save mankind from its sins, or the resurrection of Christ of which the apostle Paul says: “*And if Christ is not resurrected, our preaching is in vain, and in vain also is your faith*” (1Cor 15:14.)?

There is not, as in the ways of the West, a message from God hidden secretly in documents considered sacred, such as the Old and New Testaments, which would help man find the way to reach the Almighty. And so there is no “quest” like those symbolized by the search for the Grail, the Golden Fleece or the Philosophical Stone, nor search, through the texts, for a meaning other than that which appears to everybody. There is no Mystery, neither Small nor Large, everything is revealed, enough to practice with masters ready to follow and to help.

Love that is often attached to Christianity as a specificity, is present in all doctrines, and to degrees as in Buddhism where harming every living being, including animals and plants, is avoided. Had not Buddha said, « *Since hatred will never cease with hatred, hatred will cease with love* »? In Christianity, the importance of love stems from a famous passage from the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians on the three theological virtues: « *Now, therefore, this three remain, faith (pistis), hope (elpis) and love (or charity: agape); but love is the greatest. Because faith will no longer have a reason to exist at the end of time, it is no longer necessary to ascertain the existence of God who will have revealed himself; hope will no longer be the order of the day, while everything was accomplished and nothing left to hope for; the only theological virtue that will survive will therefore be charity or love* ».

In 24 April 1926, on the religions that he had created, the Almighty said « *...But because of the very multiplicity of these religions, men did not always live in harmony with each other. That is why I have decided to unite all these religions into one, to bring them back to the primordial unity*».

Thus, the mention of Christianity in Caodaism is not it only to remind that it is one of the five paths created by the Almighty in the past? And not that it's a part of Caodaism? What more would it bring when none of its characteristics is considered – the original sin and baptism to wash away it, the sacrifice of Jesus, God and at the same time son of God to save humanity, and his resurrection -, and when its esoteric part has always remained mysterious and unknown to its followers while the two exoteric and esoteric parts of Caodaism are well defined? Where Christianity is a religion of action and combat, with evil to be destroyed, light to be obtained by continuous search, and the self to be valued towards the Almighty, others and oneself, while Caodaism emphasizes acceptance of opposites, detachment, search for serenity, work on and in oneself through regular practices with the support of experienced masters to attain the state of no more an “oneself”? When the symbol of Christianity is Jesus suffering on the cross, and that Buddhism of the Caodaism's triple path is a serene and peaceful Buddha free from all suffering?

¹¹ Credo defined then completed and confirmed at several ecumenical councils of Christianity (« I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ the only Son of God, born of the Father before all ages, He is God, born of God, Light, born of the Light, true God, born of the true God, begotten, not created, of the same nature as the Father, and by Him everything was made.»). The first one was organized in 325 in Nicea, in Turkey by the Emperor Constantine to counter the Bishop of Alexandria, Arius and his followers for whom only the Father is God. sJesus Christ was begotten by the Father, the Son of God cannot be fully God, he thus becomes inferior and posterior to God, that is to say, there is subordination of the Son to the Father.

The Almighty

Before, in the Middle East, the God of the three monotheistic religions – including Christianity - went as far as to create a flood to effectively rid himself of a humanity that He considered, according to the Sumerian civilization (before that of Judaism, which had been much inspired by it), as « *too noisy* » or, according to the Old Testament, because it « *had become wicked* ». Did He not say (Genesis 6,7,8): « *I will erase from the surface of the earth the men I have created [...] because I repent having made them*» and to Noah: « *The end of all flesh has come, I have decided it, for the Earth is full of violence because of men and I will make them disappear from the Earth. Make yourself an ark [...] For me, I will bring the flood of waters to Earth to exterminate from under the Heaven any flesh that has breathed life. [...] But I will make my alliance with you and you will enter the ark [...] Of all that lives, of all that is flesh, you will bring into the ark two of each species to keep them alive with you.* »?¹²

God in Caodaism is much simpler, He does not intervene in the lives of men. He can scold them, but He has revealed Himself only because their actions cause them the need to return to the way He has made. He arose in Thầy (Master) who came only to teach and transmit to man the road to his “deliverance”, the Great Universal Way which could reconcile all beliefs. Thus, in the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Executive Body, the Cửu Trùng Đài (Tower of the Nine Levels) we find at levels 3 to 5, a *Đầu Sư*, a *Phối Sư* and a *Giáo Sư*, titles of dignitaries ending in “*sư*”, a term of which one of the translations is professor, master which can be found in the titles in the Taoist Clans (or Schools) of the old-time in China.

The Caodaists do not work for the “Glory of God” or “in His Name” as in the monotheistic religions of the Middle East. They work on themselves following His teaching to deliver themselves. He is not there to be honoured, idolized and prayed for mercy.

<i>Since Eternity, the whole universe is under My Commandment,</i>	Muôn kiếp có Ta nắm chủ quyền,
<i>Be pious in joy to benefit from the graces of GOD;</i>	Vui lòng tu niệm hưởng ân Thiên.
<i>Miraculous, the Tao spread all over every continent,</i>	Đạo mầu rưới khắp nơi trần thế,
<i>A thousand years, ten thousand names, keep it perfectly.</i>	Ngàn tuổi muôn tên giữ trọn biên.

Freemasonry

Because the Divine Eye, the Sun and the Moon are exposed, some believe that Freemasonry played a role in the creation of Caodaism¹³. Especially since the acting *Giáo Tông* Lê Văn Trung¹⁴ and the son-in-law of *Hộ Pháp* Phạm Công Tắc of Tây Ninh were part of this organization, and many French Freemasons on the spot were in favour of this new religion.

This interpretation stems from ignorance of what each of these two organizations really is.

¹² It should be noted that in China the flood was contained by the hero Yu without any mention of an ark saved from the waters with pairs of each species of living beings.
https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/D%C3%A9luge#Un_D.C3.A9luge_chinois_.3F.

¹³ *Hội Tam Điểm* (Free Masonry), Trần Thu Dung, Pub Sáng, Illuminati, Paris 2013, *Sự hiện diện của các thành viên Tam Điểm tại Việt Nam* (The presence of Free-masons in Việt Nam), Trần Thu Dung, pub Hội Nhà văn, Omega+, Hà Nội 2020.

¹⁴ Lê Văn Trung the future *Giáo Tông* (Superior Grand Master) by interim of Caodaism of Tây Ninh put on his apron and made the sign of Masonic distress to the director of the remand center where he had been taken, also a Freemason.

Freemasonry was born in the first third of the 17th century in the United Kingdom and Ireland from the mutation from operative lodges where members were builders of churches, into speculative lodges where members were intellectuals. These ones came to share a rite and to search together to improve morally and spiritually. They take the Almighty as an example of having created the Universe as a Great Architect and aim to be their proper architect for the construction of their inner temple. Their backdrop is the construction of the repeatedly destroyed Temple of Jerusalem and 70 years of Jewish history which led to the writing of the Old Testament between the 8th and 7th centuries BC. The Square and the Compasses, the working tools of operative masons, became for speculative masons symbols of the rectitude and the scope and consequences of the acts of each in his daily life. The Eye, in principle a neutral eye, symbolizes the Grand Architect of the Universe, the Creator of all that is. The Sun and the Moon represent the Lights which respectively illuminate the day and the night.

In Caodaism, there is no square and compasses, but there are, coming from the Chinese tradition, the square, which can be drawn with a square, which symbolizes since the dawn of time the Earth, the Temporal world, Yin; and the circle, which can be traced with compasses, which symbolizes the Universe, the Heaven, the Spiritual world, the Yang. Ancient Chinese coins were round with a square hole in the centre to express the Heaven (the Universe) and the Earth, the Spiritual and the Temporal worlds, the Yang and the Yin. The revered Divine Eye of Caodaism is a left eye that appeared to the first Caodaist, Mr Ngô Văn Chiêu, but it should be noted that the eye is revered in many cultures. The Sun and the Moon respectively symbolize the Yang and the Yin always present as parts of Creation. The Yin and the Yang, the Circle and the Square, the Sun and the Moon and the Eye have existed as symbols for a long time, long before the birth of Freemasonry.

The objectives and the ways to practice of the two organizations are not at all the same. One works in the Name and/or the Glory of the Creator for his moral and spiritual improvement and is always in search of what the sacred books have not revealed to men, and the other aims to bring the lost man back to the Way which leads him to his deliverance by well-defined practices transmitted by experienced masters.

3.3 The Three Ways Lead to the Origin (*Tam Giáo Quy Nguyên*)

The principle of Caodaism is to unite all the existing doctrines through the Three **Ways** (*Tam Giáo*, 三教 *san jiào*) that have dominated the spirituality of China for millennia, which the Vietnamese themselves have adopted since the thousand years of domination by this country.

These Three Ways cover the whole process of obtaining a life in harmony with each other, living in full serenity with oneself, with the ultimate goal of ending all suffering and reaching complete deliverance. These Three Ways are Confucianism with Confucius (Khong Phu Tseu 孔夫, 551 to 479 BC), Taoism with Lao Tseu (老子, mid VI century BC – mid V century BC) and Buddhism with Buddha (Sakya Mouni, 563-483 BC).

“The Three Ways lead to the Origin” expresses what all the spiritualities of the world are looking for, in a more or less equivalent way, in their esoteric thinking. Originally, there was nothing, neither in God nor outside of God, that could serve as material for the creation of the world. Creation is not a change, since any change presupposes something that changes, which is also present at the start and at the end. But then, if Creation is not a change, what remains? Before Creation, there was only the future Creator. Therefore, Creation and Creator were one. For Saint Thomas, « considered in nature, Creation is nothing other than its Relation to God the Creator, who is the total and Unique Principle of being ». The Return to Origin, the “Deliverance”, is the return to before everything was created, to the Creator, to the Tao.

For a long time already the three Ways lived in harmony in China and Vietnam after the

introduction of Buddhism in China in the 6th century by Bodhi Dharma from India. The Chan Buddhism created by Bodhi Dharma, which bore the mark of the Indian Chan which paid great attention to meditation, and which was imbued with a certain influence of Taoism, had become part of the Chinese tradition (*chan* in Chinese, *dhyāna* in Sanskrit, means meditation).

The Chinese bonze Fu Da Shi (497-569) said more than one thousand and five hundred years ago when he once stood before the emperor: « *With a Taoist cap, a Buddhist dress and a pair of Confucian shoes, I have harmonized the three houses into one large family* ¹⁵. »

3.4 Confucianism

Confucius (Khong Phu Tseu, Khổng Tử 孔夫, 551-479 BC) taught how to live in harmony with others, with oneself and with Heaven. « *For him, the good functioning of a society requires the believing on a higher cosmic order bearing universal precepts and the recognition of an intimate order specific to human nature. For, when a man feels that he is the bearer of the greatest Virtue that he calls “nobility of heaven”, he discovers himself united to infinity as with others and understands that the social order can only emanate from his desire to develop the perfection that is in him.* »¹⁶.

In this sense, Confucius considers that it is up to each one to develop in himself the wisdom essential to maintain the harmony between Heaven (Yang), Earth (Yin) and Man (Yang and Yin), the triad resulting from Creation, that is to say, to keep a certain number of essential principles based on the love of others as of oneself to always remain in conformity with the “*will of Heaven*”.

He advocates respect for family order, strict morals in society, and the practice of the Middle Way, avoiding anything extreme. So, for example, the perfect man must possess the five essential qualities of goodness, righteousness, decorum, wisdom and loyalty (in Vietnamese *Nhân, Nghĩa, Lễ, Trí, Tín*). He must, in order of priority, know how to work on himself to remain in Virtue, take good care of his family, before thinking of governing the country, and govern the country before dreaming of pacifying the world (in Vietnamese *Tu thân, tề gia, trị quốc, bình thiên hạ*). A young girl must know how to be skilful with her hands, to make herself beautiful, to express herself well and to behave well (*công, dung, ngôn, hạnh*). As a child, a woman takes care of her father; married, she takes care of her husband; widowed, she takes care of her children (*Tại gia tông phụ, xuất gia tông phu, phu tử tông tử*), etc.

On the political level, the well-being of the subjects must be the priority, taking precedence over his own, thus setting the example so that prosperity and happiness become the concern of the greatest number.

His teaching is based, among other things on the “classics books” published overtime in China: the *Ngũ Kinh* (the Five Annals), namely the *Kinh Thi* (the Classic of Documents), the *Kinh Thư* (the Classic of Verses), the *Kinh Lễ* (the Classic of Rites), the *Kinh Dịch* (the Classic of Mutations), the *Kinh Xuân Thu* (the Annals of the Kingdom of Lu). And his spiritual heritage is made up of the *Tứ Thư* (4 Books): the *Đại Học* (the Great Study), the *Trung Dung* (the Invariable Middle) produced by his grandson Khổng Cấp, the *Luận Ngữ* (the Interviews), and the *Mạnh Tử* (Meng Tseu). The examinations at the time consisted of a dissertation on the texts of the *Ngũ Kinh* and the *Tứ Thư*.

¹⁵ Quoted in *La Voie du bambou, bouddhisme Chan et taoïsme* (Way of Bamboo, Chan Buddhism and Taoism) by Yen Chan, ed. Almore, 2008, which refers to *L'Âge d'or du zen* (The Golden Age of Zen) by John Wu, Marchal, 1987, page 237.

¹⁶ <http://www.ledifice.net/6006-6.html>.

« As Chinese medicine is primarily concerned with treating the cause of disease and not only the disease, Confucian doctrine proposes to cure the root cause of social disorders ».

3.5 Taoism

The objective pursued by Taoism is the acquisition of wisdom that provides the mind with pure, clean and complete serenity, and the attainment of the immortal state through the practice of inner alchemy.

Before leaving the country of his birth¹⁷ for a final spiritual retreat in western China, **Lao Tseu** left for posterity the only document of his teaching, the *Tao Te King*, 道德經, in Vietnamese Đạo Đức Kinh, the Book of the Way and of the Virtue (which some translate as Straightness), or rather *the Book of Tao and Virtue*, because the translation of *Tao* in Way seems restrictive. The 81 chapters of this collection which is inspired by the *Yi King (Kinh Dịch)*, the *Canonical Treaty of Mutations* inherited from the Chinese tradition and dating back several thousand years B.C., are divided into a *Thượng Kinh* (or Upper Book) of commentaries on the word Đạo (Tao), and a *Hạ Kinh* (or Lower Book) on the word Đức (Virtue).

It contains the description of the Creation and the Way which allows to return towards the One, at the front of the Two of Yin and Yang

The other two Taoist grandmasters, **Lie Tseu** (Liêu tử, 列子, 5th century BC) and **Tchouang Tseu** (Trang Tử, 莊, 4th century BC.), completed the *Tao Te King* with their prose teachings, which were collected and transcribed in respectively, *Tchoung Hu Tchenn King* (True Classic of the Perfect Void) and the *Zhuāngzǐ* or *Nan Hoa Tchenn King* (True classic of Nanhua, named after the Hunan mountains, where it was said that Tchouang Tseu had taken refuge at the end of his life). These two books give detailed explanations of the Way with short stories full of meaning.

The Tao

Lao Tseu spoke of the Tao in the *Thượng Kinh* (Upper Book) of *Tao Te King* as follows:

The Tao that can be named is not the eternal Tao, The name that can be named is not the eternal name. Unnamed, it represents the Universe With a name, it constitutes the Mother of all beings.	<i>Đạo khả Đạo phi thường Đạo, Danh khả Danh phi thường Danh. Vô Danh Thiên Địa chi thủy, Hữu danh vạn vật chi mẫu.</i>
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(Chapter 1)

The "*Tao*" evoked by Lao Tseu is translated literally as *Way*. But it is the Supreme Principle that is both the Origin and the End of all beings. It has the shape of what has no shape, and the image of what has no image. It does not create the world as something distinct from it, for he is never separated from nature and beings, it "is" nature and beings. It doesn't create, it breeds. And no proper name can be associated with it.

道

Tao

The Tao gave birth to One One gave birth to Two Two gave birth to Three Three gave birth to the ten thousand beings Each being carries the darkness on its back and holds the light in its arms	<i>Đạo sanh Nhất, Nhất sanh Nhị Nhị sanh Tam, Tam sanh vạn-vật Vạn vật phụ âm nhi bảo dương,</i>
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¹⁷ Chu Country, Kingdom of Zhou

(Chapter 42)

The “*One*” represents the *Primordial Breath*, the first Unity/Totality, the Universal and Original Vital Energy, the past and the present, infinite and eternal, without opposite, born of the Tao the Supreme Principle.

The “*Two*” that corresponds to the *Yin* and *Yang* produced the three energy breaths: the pure, the unclean and the mixed, which in turn constituted respectively the *Heaven* which is Yang, the *Earth* that is Yin, and the *Man* who is a mixture of Yang and Yin.

The “*Three*” is the Great Chinese Triad, Heaven, Earth and Man that generates all Creation by combining Yin and Yang.

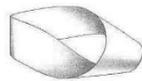
The Yin et the Yang

To understand the Yin and Yang duality that comes from the *Yi King* (I Ching), some explanations are necessary.

Yang is the masculine, active, creative, luminous principle that is associated with Heaven, the Sun. The *Yin* is the feminine, passive, existential, obscure principle that is associated with the Earth, the Moon.

The Yin and Yang principles are present in all things and are continually balanced dynamically. Many ancient coins from China are round with a square hole in the middle, and many mythical or legendary stories of this country revolve around these two geometric figures, one of which, *the square* (which can be drawn with a square), represents the Earth, the temporal world, the Yin, and the other, *the circle* (which can be drawn with a compass), Heaven, the spiritual world, the Yang.

In Yang, there is Yin and, vice versa, in Yin, there is Yang. There is no absolute Yang or absolute Yin, and this is quite rightly represented by the ribbon of Möbius. Take a ribbon at both ends, and paste these by twisting one of them a U-turn, and you get a ribbon of Möbius. While a single sheet always has two sides, the ribbon of Möbius has only one face — and this is its paradox — as can be said by going through it with the tip of a pen. At any level of the ribbon, we see the presence of the two faces in one, as Yin and Yang are present in every aspect of life and what is created.



Everything that exists can be described in terms of Yin and Yang because these are found in everything according to three types of relation: (1) the relation of Opposition, although one carries within it the germ of the other ; (2) the relation of Interdependence because one cannot be conceived without the other, the excess or the deficiency of the one leading to consequences on the other as well as an imbalance of the whole; and (3) the relation of Engendering and Mutation from one to the other.

Thus, traditional Chinese medicine doctors are devoted in maintaining and restoring the balance between Yin and Yang in their patients' bodies, as the disease is the result of an untreated imbalance which may not be in the very place where is the pain.

Nothing is fixed, there is no dogma

It must be added that nothing is fixed, there is no dogma because the law that governs everything is Change. Indeed, the *Tai Ki* or *Tai Ji* (太極 *Thái Cực*), which can be translated as *Supreme Top*, and which is considered as the symbol of Chinese esotericism, is not *immobile*.



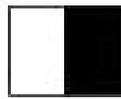
It is represented graphically by the diagram of *Tai Ji* or *Tai Ji Tu*, which is a circle divided in two by a symmetrical curved line with a small white circle in the black partition and a small black circle in the white partition.

By increasing the radius of the small inner circles, we see a transformation: the white circle will merge with the white part, and the black circle with the black part, to form the *Tai Ki* again, but in the opposite position.

The possibility of questioning is symbolized by the small circles: nothing is fixed, everything evolves, there is no dogma, there is no absolute, what we think is true here may not be true elsewhere or at another time.



Without these small circles, the figure would be a square separated by a straight line in a white part and a black part, a pattern of dualism, a binary composed of Zero and One, two distinct but also differentiated elements, two absolute principles, paradise and hell, good and bad.



The eastern way of thinking does not advocate a perfectionism of thought that leads to living in terms of true or false, good or bad, of “I’m right, you’re wrong”, good and evil, without nuances or intermediaries. The real is not totally true, and the false step not totally false, purity is only an abstraction. Thinking in absolute terms, of attaching labels, of making assertions of truth are avoided.

For example, in a family consisting of a mother, a father and a son, the mother is Yin (of female essence) compared to the husband. But she is Yang (of male essence) compared to her son as long as she feeds him. As for the child, Yin (of female essence) at birth compared to his father and mother, he becomes Yang (of male essence) compared to his mother in his teens. But he remains Yin (of female essence) compared to his father, until adulthood. Whereas, for any stranger to the family circle, this male offspring is Yang (of male essence) from birth to death.

Duality is thus inseparable from creation.

The objective of going back to the One

In the face of this, what should we do?

We have to be able to get back to the One. The One, let us remember, is the Primordial Breath, the First Unity.

Since the beginning, beings have reached the One.	<i>Tích chi đắc Nhất giả</i>
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<p>The Heaven having reached the One became pure, The Earth having reached the One became peaceful, The spirits in accessing the One became efficient, The valleys as they reached the One filled up, The beings in accessing the One multiplied, The princes and lords in acceding to the One became the example of the Universe, Because they all got to the One, they realized themselves.</p>	<p><i>Thiên đắc Nhất dĩ thanh, Địa đắc Nhất dĩ ninh, Thần đắc Nhất dĩ linh, Cốc đắc Nhất dĩ doanh, Vạn vật đắc Nhất dĩ sinh, Hầu vương đắc dĩ vi thiên-hạ trinh, Kỳ trí chi Nhất dã.</i></p>
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Chapter 39

<p>Let reaching supreme vacuity And keep yourself in peace, In the face of the teeming agitation of beings, Only contemplate their return. Indeed, each being achieves its growth Then go back to its root.</p>	<p><i>Trí hư cực, Thủ tịnh đốc, Vạn vật tịnh tác, Ngô dĩ quan phục, Phù vật vân vân, Các phục quy kỳ căn.</i></p>
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Chapter 16

It is therefore not a question of putting ourselves in one of the two positions of duality to fight the other, of making the Yin the black to disappear, to keep only the Yang the white. Because the black, the Yin, would come back as the white, and the white Yang would leave as the Yin, and the perpetual cycle would continue. Because this would be to remain in the contradictions of what has been created, without really seeking to escape from it to begin the road back to the One.

The Way is to seek to find no more difference between evil and good, to receive and accept quietly love and hatred, white and black, joy and sorrow, not to feel, see, or live from the Yin and Yang differentiated, from what is created, to access the intimate communion of oneself with all that surrounds us.

It is a Way that proposes a lifestyle, meditative practices and exercises that connect and harmonize Yin and Yang within ourselves, Earth and Heaven, the visible and the invisible.

The Vô Vi (Wu Wei)

The *Wu Wei (Vô Vi* in Vietnamese), which is often translated as “No-Act”, “No-Effort” or “Act by No Act” (*Wei Wu Wei*) is¹⁸ “*the principle of action of the wise always in harmony with the Tao, both outside and inside*”.

According to John Blofeld, the aim is « *not to go beyond the spontaneous action adapted to the needs as they arise, not to engage in cleverly calculated actions and not to act to exceed the bare minimum necessary to achieve the desired results.* »

It is in a way to let things go naturally and nature acts, to merge with the latter, not to go against it and to leave aside what is ultimately only illusory and illusion, an “Act by the No

¹⁸ http://www.radio-canada.ca/par4/ind/guerrier/wu_wei.htm.

Act”¹⁹. It assumes that « *we develop the feeling of being a channel through which the Tao acts.* » As the *Yi King* suggests, « *man achieves eternity in that he does not want to do everything for himself by glorifying himself in his own strength, but opens himself peacefully and at every moment to the impulses emanating from the depths of the creative forces.* »

The *Vô Vi*, therefore, consists in being “internally available”, “abandoned to the heavenly will” which proceeds from the higher dynamic. « Like Nature, the “heavenly will” is everywhere, it is the universal Intelligence: in becoming outside and still inside within everyone. On the outside, it manifests itself through events, circumstances, conditions of life - to which one has to adapt. Because it is necessary to be like water, which follows the meanders of the river, which undergoes all the transformations - not of its deep nature which is to be water, but those imposed on it by the meanders which are the events, the circumstances, the conditions - before merging into the ocean from which it originated²⁰ ».

For Lao Tseu, everything has a cause. Because there is life, there is death, because there is action, there is non-success because there is a contest, there is competition.

When you know that beauty is beauty, it means that there is ugliness,	<i>Thiên hạ giai tri mỹ chi vi mỹ, tư ác dĩ;</i>
When we know that goodness is goodness, it means that there is the opposite of goodness.	<i>Giai tri thiện chi vi thiện, tư bất thiện dĩ</i>

Chapter 2

To be quiet, we must not compete, fight, because then no one will oppose us (*Phù duy bất tranh, cố thiên hạ mạc năng dĩ chi tranh*). It is, therefore, necessary, in order not to have to suffer the consequences of failure, to rule out the cause. And the cause is *Hữu vi*, to Act.

But, then, how can we avoid the causes that lead to evil? Humans tend not to pay attention to small things until they get bigger and become difficult or impossible to eliminate. Therefore, these causes must not become important.

The *Vô Vi* aims to eliminate evil causes before they exist, relying on Virtue.

Lao Tseu says: :

Act by the <i>Vô Vi</i> (The No Act) (apply the No Act),	<i>Vi Vô Vi</i>
Do the <i>Vô Sự</i> (the No Event) (don't create Events),	<i>Sự Vô Sự</i>
Enjoy the <i>Vô Vị</i> (No Flavor) (Don't put Flavor in what you do).	<i>Vị Vô Vị</i>
You have to take Virtue to respond to small or large oppositions,	<i>Đại tiểu đa thiểu báo oán dĩ đức</i>
Dealing with difficult things when they are still easy,	<i>Đồ nan ư kỳ dị</i>
To achieve great things while they are still small.	<i>Vi đại ư kỳ tế</i>
The difficult things in life must be solved from the time when they are still easy to solve,	<i>Thiên hạ nan sự tất tác ư dị</i>

¹⁹ It is also to act without waiting for the action to give one fruit rather than another, but only those that arise from just action.

²⁰ These quotes were extracted from texts whose references were misplaced.

The great things in life must be achieved while they are still small.	Thiên hạ đại sự tất tác ư tế
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Chapter 63

Lao Tseu's idea is not to cross our arms and do nothing, but to act to eliminate evil things before they go off. This is the case with the action of Taoist doctors works on prevention by checking if imbalances are not somewhere in their patient's body before they get sick.

The Virtue

Virtue, which goes hand in hand with *Vô Vi* (the No Act), is far from the virtues advocated by Khong Phu Tseu, which are based on *Act*. For Lao Tseu, man has lost the Primordial Virtue because he has too many desires and is too full of knowledge. There is no greater calamity than not knowing that it is *already enough*, and there is no greater fault than wanting *to possess*. Goodness (*Nhân*) and righteousness (*Nghĩa*) of Confucianism are harmful to Tao and Virtue because, if one already possesses them naturally, one does not need to act to acquire them.

The Tao generates beings, Virtue nourishes them, life makes them form, Nature (climate, environment, etc.) completes their creation.	<i>Đạo sinh chi, Đức xúc chi, vật hình chi, thể thành chi.</i>
This is why beings worship Tao and cherish Virtue.	<i>Thị dĩ vạn vật mạc bất tôn Đạo nhi quý Đức.</i>
Tao is revered and Virtue is cherished because they do not interfere with beings, and let them grow naturally.	<i>Đạo chi tôn, Đức chi quý, phù mạc chi mệnh nhi thường tự nhiên.</i>

Chapter 51

He who is naturally virtuous does not need to ask to have Virtue, which is why he is virtuous.	<i>Thượng đức bất đức, thị dĩ hữu đức.</i>
Because the not virtuous wants to have Virtue, he will not get it.	<i>Hạ đức bất đắc đức, thị dĩ vô đức.</i>
The virtuous that practices <i>Vô Vi</i> (the Non Act), does not act and adapts to what is natural.	<i>Thượng đức vô vi, nhi vô dĩ vi.</i>
The not virtuous who practices <i>Vô Vi</i> (the Non Act), acts.	<i>Hạ đức vi chi nhi hữu dĩ vi.</i>
He who is good practices Goodness without having the idea to do so.	<i>Thượng nhân vi chi nhi vô dĩ vi.</i>
Whoever is righteous applies righteousness naturally (after comparison between what to do and what not),	<i>Thượng nghĩa vi chi nhi hữu dĩ vi.</i>

Chapter 38

3.6 Buddhism

Confucianism and Taoism entered Việt Nam with its colonization by China in 111 BC.

Buddhism was established in Việt Nam at the beginning of our era, especially in Giao Châu, coming from India by sea. It arrived in China in the 1st century by land, and many schools

developed there, including Chan Buddhism (chan in Chinese, dhyāna in Sanskrit, means meditation), created by the Indian bonze Boddhi Dharma, in the 6th century, and which still bore the mark of Indian Chan which paid great attention to meditation.

It was in 580 that the Indian bonze Vinitaruci, coming from China, established in Việt Nam the first order of the most important school of Vietnamese Buddhism, the *Thiền Tông* (Thiền in Vietnamese corresponds to Chan in Chinese), strongly inspired by the Chinese Chan of the time. In 892, the Chinese bonze Vô Ngôn Thông (Vô Ngôn means without speech and designates this bonze who spoke little), also coming from China, created the second order, which bore the imprint of a Chinese Chan having the changes made by Huệ Năng, the 6th patriarch after Boddhi Dharma²¹.

Buddhism *Thiền Tông* in Vietnam, Seon Buddhism in Korea and Zen Buddhism in Japan originated from Chinese Chan Buddhism, which is a Mahayana Buddhism, or Buddhism of the Great Vehicle, now called Innovative Buddhism (*Phát triển*). It aims at an altruistic development, that is to say, to work for self-salvation at the same time as that of others and in it, the laity as well as religious can have access to Awakening. It is in this Buddhism that there are Bodhisattvas, like the Bodhisattva Quan Thế Âm in Caodaism, who, having experienced an awakening, did not go to achieve complete deliverance, but remained to help the world. Hinayana Buddhism (Little Vehicle), which is now referred to as Theravada (School of Elders) and found in Myanmar (formerly Burma), Thailand, Laos, Sri Lanka, is aimed at personal liberation.

Prince Siddharta Gautama his real name and his real position, or Sakya Mouni²², a name given by his disciples, Buddha, the Awakened one, gives us the means to find answers to the big questions of life like “*Who am I?*”, “*Why do I exist?*”, “*What is the meaning of life?*”, “*Why do we suffer?*”, “*Where am I going to go?*”²³ He advises us not to simply place our faith blindly in what we are told, but to use our mental, emotional and spiritual faculties and our intelligence, to find the right and perfect path which leads to the very essence of things, by separating ourselves from all false conceptions. Didn't he recommend that we do not listen to him, but experience what he said first, and then decide whether to listen to him or not?

According to Buddha, men are subject to the *Samsara*, the cycle of rebirths. The state of consciousness (*loka*) in which they will be reborn after their death will depend on their *karma*, that is, on their past actions. This rebirth, even if it takes place in good conditions thanks to laudable past actions, will prolong suffering, for life goes hand in hand with suffering.

From conventional truth to ultimate truth

What man feels, sees and defines comes from human conventions. This is the “**conventional truth**” (*chân lý quy ước*) that he has before him, not what is really there. It is by convention that the green leaf in front of him is defined and understood as “leaf” and “green”.

The “**ultimate truth**” (*chân lý tối hậu, chân lý bát nhã, prajñā truth, Atakkāvākara*) is the truth where all impurities, any “taint” (*lậu hoặc*) had been removed.

The still verbal Knowledge of the human being uses the mental basis (*ý cãng*) which allows us to reflect, to calculate, which is from the mind of the past; the discriminatory knowledge (*ý thức*) which leads to compare, to distinguish, which is from the mind of the present, and the intellect (*ý năng*) which leads to deduce, to embroider, which is the mind of the future. The three revive one's “self” (*ngã*) and promote conflicts with other “selves”, generating self-

²¹ *Le Bouddhisme au Việt Nam* (Buddhism in Việt Nam), Minh Chi-Ha Van Tan-Nguyen Tai Thu, éd. Thế giới, Hanoi, 1998.

²² Sakya means full of gentleness, and Mouni, serene, peaceful, that nothing hurts.

²³ *Le bouddhisme pour les Nuls* (Buddhism for the dummies), Jonathan Landaw et Stephan Bodian, éd. First.

centeredness on both sides and creating habits, addictions difficult to remove, which constitute taints, smears, impurities (*lâu hoặc*). It represents the mind of the ordinary man.

From there, one must be able to move on to non-verbal Knowledge, which is composed of sensory faculties (natural vision, natural hearing, natural touch) and cognition, and which is called in Pali the Bouddhita (*Tánh Giác*), of the mind of Saints.

Do not attach oneself to the form that would induce discursive thoughts (false mind),	<i>Bất ưng trụ sắc sanh tâm,</i>
Do not attach oneself to sounds, smells, tastes, touches, phenomena (mental objects) that would induce discursive thoughts,	<i>Bất ưng trụ thanh, hương, vị, xúc, pháp sanh tâm</i>
For lack of attachment point, the wonderful mind (the mind of Buddha or the mind Tathà) will reveal itself.	<i>Ưng vô sở trụ nhi sanh kỳ tâm</i>

So it is (Ainsité in French), Impermanence, Illusion and Vacuity (Emptiness)

To arrive at the ultimate truth is to reach the « So it is » (Ainsity in French from the word « ainsi » which means « it is so ») (*chân như*) which is all that remains after what is used to designate, to define, has completely disappeared, it is the authentic, unconditioned nature of all things, it is “all this”, beyond any conceptual definition, it is "that", it is “so it is” (*như vậy*). It is said that “if the “so it is” can be named, it is no longer the “so it is”, the “so it is” is an unnamed (*chân như có tên thì không phải là chân như, chân như là cái không tên*).

It is also to find that there is a fundamental difference between the way man perceives the world (including him) and the reality of that world. To see the world as populated by autonomous, separate and sustainable entities, objectively existing, is a metaphysical error.

For *the Impermanence* (*vô thường*) is the rule, the present exists only the time of the passage from the past to the future, and everything is evolving at every moment. What we think that exists is only an *illusion* (*huyễn ảo, mǎy ǎ*), because of this constant impermanence.

The reality is that everything is just **Emptiness (Vacuity)** (*Tánh không, Sunyata*), that means that phenomena are defined not by a “proper nature”, something in itself that would belong to itself, but only by all the relationships, they have with each other. Phenomena arise from the process of interdependence of causes and conditions, but nothing exists in itself or by itself²⁴.

Thus, the being is not a well-defined stable entity with an immortal soul or a vital principle, a “permanent self”. It possesses an “empirical self” (mind-body) composed of the five aggregates of attachment (*Ngũ Uẩn*), and it is, therefore, necessary to succeed in separating them, to break the attachment and the belief that they are “self”²⁵, because the “self” is a source of conflict, impurity, smear.

²⁴ <http://www.buddhachannel.tv/portail/spip.php?article6098> And <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sūnyatā>.

²⁵ 1) The body, the material part (*rūpa*) ; 2) Feelings (*vedanā*) physical and mental, whether pleasant, unpleasant or neutral; 3) Perceptions (*samjñā*) that bring subjective factors into the perception of the outside world: networks of concepts in the brain, with speech and without words, strong impressions, ideas and associations of ideas; 4) Mental training (*samskāra*) which form memories, tastes, habits, attachments and conceptions of the present (including nature, partly conscious and partly subconscious, ensures a certain psychic continuity in the series of successive existences); and 5) discriminative consciousness (*vijñāna*) which analyzes, synthesizes and decides, which distinguishes subject and object.

Buddha thus proposes to awaken man from his nightmare, to drive away confusion and illusion to be illuminated by reality. The ultimate goal of his teaching is “non-attachment”, “liberation from suffering”, “**Deliverance**”, the end of the karmic cycle, or *nirvana* which is a state rather than a paradise.

Meditation is the practical way in which Buddha achieved his goal, that is to say, to find out why there are sickness, old age and death, and to know what to do before the fate of every human being: to attain the ultimate Truth, to arrive at Enlightenment, and then to complete Deliverance, to fulfil the “*Quy Nguyên*” - that is to return to the Origin, the Tao if one refers to the Yi King or God the Creator of monotheistic religions.

Meditation is not defined as a concentration of one's thoughts and reflections on a given subject, as one might understand. It is to seek to have nothing in his thought, so, first, to reach, to enter into the *sammādhī*, the true meditation. This is not easy, for the mind is always disturbed by so-called mental murmurs and inner dialogues; many methods are taught to get rid of them. We can begin by focusing on our breathing by whispering “I inspire“, “I exhale” ... This “knowledge with words” allows to keep away any unnecessary thought by focusing only on what we are doing, breathing and whispering. Or we focus only on the sound of a bell, being aware of what we are doing. Then we gradually abandon the use of such media.

After practising many methods without success, Buddha remembered the spiritual experience he had had when he was 10 years old: his breathing, made of slow inspirations followed by slow exhalations, had given him a deep peace and immense joy. He then decided to resume this experiment and he put himself under a tree.

Awakening came into him after four stages of meditation:

- that of the **Samatha** (*Chi*), meditation with mental murmur and inner dialogue [*Định có tâm (Vitakha) có tư (Vicana)*], then with mental murmur without inner dialogue (*Định có tâm không tư*), ensuring tranquillity, calm and serenity of the mind - which can be called **Verbal Awareness**;
- that of the **Sammādhī** (*Định*) without mental murmuring and inner dialogue (*Định không tâm không tư*) ensuring the stability of the mind, without disturbing words and without awareness of what is happening - which can be called **Non-Verbal Awareness**;
- that of **clear and complete** (non-verbal) **knowledge** not attached to sensations (*Chánh niệm tỉnh giác*),- which can be called **Awakening Awareness**, and finally,
- that of the **Sammādhī of immobility** (triple immobility of talk, thought and body) (*Định bất động, tâm bất động*), the mind of “**So it is**” (*Chân như*), the *TaThā mental* (*Tâm TaThā*)- which can be called **Nonverbal Cognitive Awareness**.

The non-formation of speech had been obtained at the end of stage 2, that of thought at the end of stage 3 and the body was already immobile in the sitting posture of meditation. Only non-verbal cognition remained.

Buddha's mind (*TaThā mental*, “So it is” mental) was revealed and it was then that the *Tam minh* (the Triple Knowledge) appeared to him:

- *Túc mạng minh* (Knowledge of his own previous lives, later recounted in one of the Sutras, beginning with the lives of animals, then of human beings before the last life, where he became the Buddha),
- *Thiên nhân minh* (Knowledge of birth and rebirth according to their karma of living beings), and
- *Lậu tận minh* (Knowledge of how to eliminate all the smears that are the cause of the cycle of rebirths and the trilogy “birth, old age and death”).

The Four Noble Truths (Tứ Diệu Đế) and the Noble Eightfold Path (Bát Chánh Đạo)

He then discovered the Four Noble Truths (Tứ Diệu Đế) on suffering and the Noble Eightfold Path (Bát Chánh Đạo) for the cessation of suffering, while through the first two knowledges he brought to light the law of causality and the cycle of rebirths (*samsāra*). Buddha then attained the first Awakening, Total Awakening, *Abhisamaya*, which leads to the state of Arahán (A La Hán), of a “deserving”, “one who has overcome the enemy” (here, the enemy is ignorance, delusions, etc.), *ari* meaning enemy, and *han* meaning to kill.

The supreme Illumination (*Vô thượng Chính Đẳng Giác*)

The fifth week that followed the previous four of meditation, he resumed the meditation *Sammā Sammādhī* (just concentration) with the mind of Buddha (*Tathā* mental). His gaze embraced the surrounding phenomena. During this fifth week, he obtained the *Anuttarā Sammā Sambodhi*, the Supreme Enlightenment (*Vô thượng Chính Đẳng Giác*) which is the awareness of the true nature of things.

Buddha’s teaching was a transmission of his own experience when he sought and found enlightenment himself. It is in no way related to faith in some higher being. He was just a human being who wanted to understand why there are diseases, old age and death, and to know what to do in the face of the plight of every human being. Meditation is the practical way in which he arrived at his goal, which is to reach the ultimate Truth, awakening, and then complete deliverance. This corresponds to the completion of “*Quy Nguyên*”, the return to the Origin, the Tao or God the Creator of monotheistic religions.

3.6 The Caodaist of every day

Relying solely on the instructions of visiting Superior Spirits to understand Caodaism is not enough. Their messages mainly target the moral life and the search for virtue in the exoteric world and are too short to express everything. The whole esoteric side, which is not accessible to everyone, is not revealed. It is by delving into both the exoteric and the esoteric sides of the Three Ways that one can truly experience the full spirituality of Caodaism.

Caodaist Exotericism (*Ngoại Giáo Công Truyền*)

The exoteric part (*ngoại giáo công truyền*) that is accessible to everyone and the esoteric part (*nội giáo tâm truyền*) that is accessible to some only, are well distinguished in Caodaism, as usual in the traditions of the world.

In the West, the Jewish and Muslim religions have their two exoteric and esoteric parts well defined and distinct, the esoteric part being respectively the Kabbalah and the Sufism. Catholicism is regarded by many as a religion that teaches only its exoteric part to its followers. And the goal of this exoteric path is a good life beside the Almighty in Heaven, in Paradise, a wonderful place, as in all exoteric paths. Its esoteric part, if it exists, would be known only to its monks and its priests and their hierarchy. Attempts to create a Christian Cabal using the example of the Jewish Kabbalah had not been successful. Some Christian mystics, including René Guénon²⁶, anxious to go further than what the Catholic Church had taught them, became Sufis practising the esoteric teaching of Islam that recognized masters could pass on to them.

In Caodaism, *the teaching of Khong Phu Tseu* (moral of living in society in harmony with what Heaven advocates) and *the part of that of Buddhism* that leads to the cessation of suffering

²⁶ René Guénon (1886-1951) is a French author renowned for his books on spirituality, metaphysics and esotericism and what he calls "Tradition". He considers that Confucius had taken up in his teaching what constituted the exoteric part of the Chinese tradition, and Lao Tseu the esoteric part (*The symbolism of the Cross*). In order to move forward, as a Christian he became a Sufi until his death to practice the esotericism of Islam.

(*giải khổ*) through the Four Noble Truths (*Tứ Diệu Đế*) and the Noble Eightfold Way (*Bát Chánh Đạo*)²⁷ constitute the exoteric part. It is also the foundation, the basis of the “*Phổ Độ*” branches (*Phổ Độ* can be translated as “bringing all beings to salvation”), the ones whose action is oriented towards the spread of religion. These branches, which have an imposing hierarchical organization, combine the practice of exotericism and esotericism, the latter being however reserved for qualified people with the capacity to advance in this direction.

Caodaist Esotericism (*Nội Giáo Tâm Truyền*)

The *teaching of Lao Tseu* (serenity with and for oneself through the *Vô Vi* (wu-wei 爲無爲 in Chinese, the Non-Act) and the resolution of the duality Yin and Yang that accompanies Creation, by the return to the One) and *the part of Buddhism* that aims to reach *total deliverance* (*giải thoát*) correspond to the esoteric part of Caodaism.

"Deliverance" is a great word that expresses the return to the forward creation sought by all spiritualities. The delivered no longer exists as a “separate self”, getting out of the wheel of karma, breaking the cycle of reincarnations, returning to the Tao.

The everyday life

In the West, a good man must, like a knight of the old days, strive to fulfil his duties to himself, to others and to the Creator.

The Caodaist seeks to be at peace and serene with himself, to live harmoniously with others and to work for the cessation of his sufferings and to arrive at his spiritual realization and his complete deliverance. He achieves this through constant and sincere personal efforts (*chí thành* in Vietnamese), starting with the Three Caodaist Practices (***Tam Công***), which are 1) self-improvement (*Công Trình*), 2) beneficence (*Công Quả*) and 3) practice and meditation (*Công Phu*) to rediscover one's True Essence, transmitted confidentially and with the help of the Almighty, his Master, his Teacher, his God, and the Superior Spirits of the invisible world.

The moral rules of Caodaism are classic: they tend to improve the individual, to the practice of virtue, to the reign of universal love. For this, the Caodaist observes the ***Ngũ giới Cấm*** (the five prohibitions): not to kill any living being, not to be greedy, not to get too much good meals, to refrain from the act of lust and to avoid sinning in words; it respects the ***Tứ Đại Điều Qui*** (the four commandments): obedience, modesty, honesty, respect; and it follows the rectitude of the eight paths (knowledge, will, word, action, life, effort, thought, recollection), etc., which originate from the Three Ways.

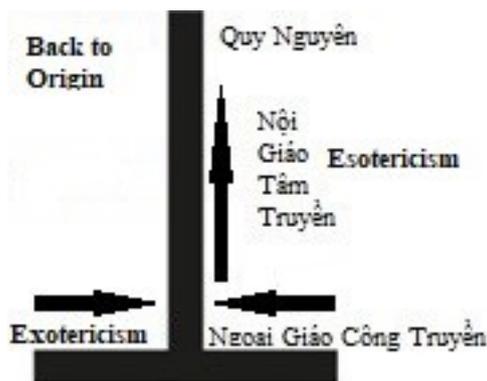
The Caodaist also practices esotericism, the *Vô Vi*, retreat, and above all, meditation that transforms man from within.

For René Guénon²⁵ a prolific author on spirituality, metaphysics and esotericism,

- Confucianism has three levels: the Literate who looks at the Savant, the Savant who looks at the Wise, and the Wise who looks at Heaven;
- Confucianism is as on the horizontal of the cross, and Taoism on the vertical of it. The Confucianist seeks to get closer to the middle of the cross, where the Middle Way is located and where the Wise is placed, which merges with the lowest level of Taoism;
- The Way of Taoism is on the perpendicular that rises upwards and allows the return to the One;

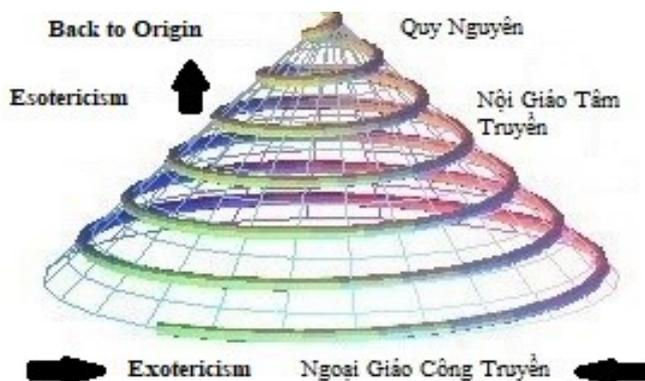
²⁷ The Four Noble Truths are “Suffering, Cause of Suffering, Cessation of Suffering and Path to the Cessation of suffering” and the Noble Eightfold Way is “right view, just thought, right word, just action, just livelihoods, just effort, just attention (*Sati*), just concentration (*Samadhi*)”.

- Confucius is said to have expressed, through his teaching, the exoteric part of the thousands-year-old Chinese Tradition, and Lao Tseu, the esoteric part.



The practice of Caodaists therefore requires the completion of the exoteric path (going to the middle of the Cross) and the esoteric way (going up) to arrive at deliverance. This can take one or several lives.

Some prefer to finish the exoteric path first, others to go straight down the esoteric path, such as the Chiếu Minh branch of Mr Ngô Văn Chiêu. In reality, the approach to return to the Origin is usually done at the same time by both channels. The path thus becomes a conical spiral: the more one advances in the practice of religion completely and harmoniously, the closer one gets to the centre (for exoteric realization), and one goes upwards (for esoteric realization).



In reality, we can consider that the beginning of the process towards deliverance is done with “crutches” which are concepts, symbols, allegories, prayers, revealed instructions of Superior Spirits, etc. that help open our eyes and discover what is not always easy to understand. As we move forward, the usefulness of some of these support tools fades. They are often confused with reality, and the danger of becoming extremists drowned in superstition, due to misunderstanding of discoveries, is always present in those who easily fall into a passion. The progress towards enlightenment is done by continuous work on oneself, by removing everything that clutters and hides reality, while remaining on the ground. We leave cluttered and we arrive lightly, loaded with nothing.

The following story, extracted from Lie Tseu's *True Classic of the Perfect Void*, illustrates in some way the practical path to the disappearance of duality. Practise what is told after a while, not as long as presented, provides unimaginable consequences of well-being. We go through moments when we no longer feel like ourselves but part of a whole, an element of nature and belonging to it, in the middle of the wind, the song of birds, the rustling of the trees leaves...

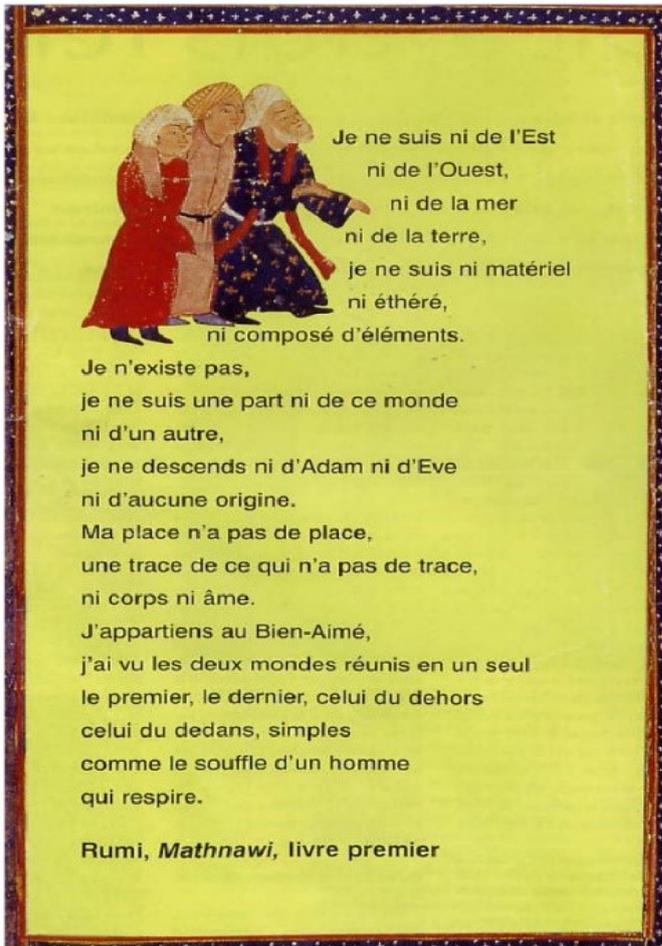
It was at the time when Lie Tseu himself was still trying to learn from the great master Lao

Chan.

<p>When I became a disciple of my master, Ba Cao's friend, he said, it was only after three years of being afraid to judge inwardly and externally and to describe anyone with words that he honoured me for the first time with a glance.</p> <p>After five years, when I manage to judge in my heart what is right and what is not, and to distinguish by word between what is good and what is bad, my master then smiles at me for the first time.</p> <p>After seven years, when of course the distinction between righteous and bad is erased in my mind, and in my words the distinction between advantage and disadvantage, my master, for the first time, made me sit on his mat.</p> <p>After nine years, when I had lost the notion of righteousness and the unjust, of good and evil, in myself as well as towards others, then in me the perfect communion between the outside world and my intimacy was established, I no longer distinguished the Master as a Master, nor a friend as a friend.</p> <p>No longer distinguishing inside and outside means feeling the sight as hearing, hearing as smelling, smelling as tasting, all integrated into one whole. My heart is like no longer beating, my body as completely delivered, my flesh and bones as dissolved, I no longer feel that my body is leaning on something or that my feet rest on the earth. I am the wind passing from east to west, like a leaf detached from its branch, like a fruit out of its tree, I do not know if it is the wind that carries me or it is I who carries the wind.</p>	<p><i>Từ khi ta là môn đệ của thầy ta, là bạn của Bá Cao, sau ba năm, lòng không dám cân nhắc đến phải trái, miệng không dám nói đến lợi hại, lúc đó mới chỉ được thầy ta liếc mắt nhìn thôi.</i></p> <p><i>Sau năm năm, lòng ta mới lại cân nhắc phải trái, miệng ta lại nói đến lợi hại, lúc đó thầy ta mới tươi tỉnh cười với ta.</i></p> <p><i>Sau bảy năm, lòng ta tự nhiên suy tư, không thấy gì là phải trái nữa; miệng ta tự nhiên nói ra, không biết gì là lợi hại nữa, lúc đó thầy ta mới cho ta ngồi cùng chiếu.</i></p> <p><i>Chín năm sau, giải thoát được ý nghĩ trong lòng và lời nói ngoài miệng, đã không phân biệt cái phải trái lợi hại của ta ở đâu mà cũng không phân biệt cái phải trái của người ở đâu, cũng không phân biệt thầy ta là thầy, bạn ta là bạn nữa.</i></p> <p><i>Hết phân biệt nội và ngoại (mình và vạn vật) rồi, thì cảm giác của mắt cũng như cảm giác của tai, của tai cũng như của mũi, của mũi cũng như của miệng, hết thấy đều hoà đồng với nhau. Lòng ta ngưng lại, hình hài ta được giải thoát, xương thịt như tan rã, ta không cảm thấy thân thể ta dựa vào cái gì cả, không cảm thấy chân ta đạp đất nữa. Ta theo gió mà qua đông qua tây, như lá lìa cành, như hạt lìa cây; không biết ta chờ gió hay gió chờ ta nữa.</i></p>
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With the abandonment of all that unnecessarily clutters, the vision that all religions converge on the same thing is formed. The following Sufi poem in French, English and Vietnamese is an example

Poème Soufi



Je ne suis ni de l'Est
ni de l'Ouest,
ni de la mer
ni de la terre,
je ne suis ni matériel
ni étheré,
ni composé d'éléments.

Je n'existe pas,
je ne suis une part ni de ce monde
ni d'un autre,
je ne descends ni d'Adam ni d'Eve
ni d'aucune origine.
Ma place n'a pas de place,
une trace de ce qui n'a pas de trace,
ni corps ni âme.
J'appartiens au Bien-Aimé,
j'ai vu les deux mondes réunis en un seul
le premier, le dernier, celui du dehors
celui du dedans, simples
comme le souffle d'un homme
qui respire.

Rumi, *Mathnawi*, livre premier

Bài thơ Sufi

(phần Nội Giáo Tâm Truyền của Hồi Giáo)

NNChâu lược dịch

Tôi không gốc từ phương Đông hay từ phương Tây, từ biển khơi hay từ lục địa, tôi không hữu hình, tôi không thanh cao, tôi không được hợp từ nguyên thể gì.

Tôi không hiện hữu, tôi không thuộc thế giới này hay thế giới khác, tôi không thuộc dòng dõi ông Adam hay bà Eva, tôi không có gốc, tôi không có cội.

Chỗ tôi không có chỗ, dấu vết tôi là của cái gì không có dấu vết, tôi không là thể xác, tôi không là linh hồn.

Tôi thuộc đấng Yêu Thương, tôi đã thấy hai thế giới hợp lại thành một, cái nhứt, cái chót, cái của bên ngoài, cái của bên trong, tất cả đơn giản như hơi thở của một người đang thở.

Thiện Chí hóa thành thơ

Tôi chẳng từ Đông, cũng chẳng Tây,
Cũng không từ biển, đất đai này.
Không là thể chất hay thanh khí,
Không bởi hợp thành nguyên tổ chi.

Tôi không hiện hữu thế giới nào,
Dòng dõi Adam chẳng phải đâu!
Nguồn gốc không hề nơi phát xuất,
Đó đây nào phải chỗ tôi cầu !

Dấu vết từ nơi không vết gì,
Linh hồn thể xác có màng chi!
Tình Thương là thể tôi an trú,
Thế giới dù hai cũng nhất qui.

Sau trước trong ngoài chẳng biệt phân,
Giản đơn tất cả mãi xoay vần;
Cũng như hơi thở người đang sống,
Hô hấp vào ra lẽ tự nhiên.

Sufi poem, Janet Hoskins's translation

I'm not from either the East or the West, not from either the earth or the sea, I am neither material nor ethereal, I'm not made up of any single element, I do not exist, I am not a part of this world or any other, I'm not a descendant of Adam and Eva, nor do I have any origin.

My place has no place, a trace of something that has not trace, neither body nor soul.

I belong to the beloved, I saw the two worlds united in one, the first, the last, the outside, the inside, as simple as the murmur of a person who breathes.

Meditation

Meditation is inseparable from Buddhism and Taoism. « *The true object of meditation is not to soothe the mind, nor to become detached or indifferent. On the contrary, the goal is to gain a deep and intimate understanding of the nature of reality and oneself, to come into contact with parts of oneself that we did not know before, to transform our vision of what is, and to move towards obtaining a vision that is liberating. A deep and intimate vision that allows us to discover who we really are, and in doing so, to put an end to our restless quest and dissatisfaction.*»

The two Ways teach, each in its own way, its own method of meditation.

Certain death-haunted emperors of China, wanting to obtain from them medicine that would make them immortal, urged them to manufacture it and thus die, executed or poisoned when tests of their products failed. This is how the external alchemy to achieve Immortality, which had become too dangerous, gave way to internal alchemy, more linked to each person's own

ability to achieve the right result and which was practised through meditation. This internal chemistry was not passed on to just anyone, because of the number of people who wanted to obtain it by any means. It was a transmission from master to deserving and faithful students possessing the Faith necessary to always advance, transmission which was tinged with mystery, unlike what happens in Buddhism, where everything is accessible to all. In Caodaism, Taoist meditation is done in stages. Progression is subject to the approval of the Superior Spirits based on the work that has been done and the accompanying Faith, which is called “xin keo” (asking for approval).

This inner alchemy aims at the fusion of Yin and Yang of the three essential components of the human being (three jewels, sanbao, 三寶, tam bảo in Vietnamese) which are the essence (jing 精 in Chinese, tinh in Vietnamese), breath/energy (qi 氣 in Chinese, khí in Vietnamese) and spirit (shen 神 in Chinese, thần in Vietnamese).

These three components must return to their original state through asceticism and meditation with many internal exercises - changing the essence into breath/energy (link jing hwa qi, *tinh hoá khí*), breath/energy into spirit (link qi hwa shen, *khí hóa thần*), and pass from the spirit to the void (lien shen hwan shiu, *thần hườn hư*), the ultimate step of which is to obtain what is called the great elixir of return (dahuandan 大還丹), a purely Yang cosmic embryo that will go to Heaven, a symbol of eternity, to return to primordial unity, pushing what remains of Yin towards Earth²⁸. This cosmic embryo is called “*Đệ nhị xác thân*” (the Second Spiritual Body) by the Caodaists and will become a kind of “immortal” living in a heavenly place in the most complete serenity.

Taoist meditation thus leads to a return to the One²⁹, to the state of the Taoist Immortal, abandoning the Two, duality, which is linked to Creation.

The *Quy Nguyên*, the return to the Origin, is another step, which is achieved by Buddhist meditation following the example of Buddha.

Caodaist meditation

The new religion was quickly divided into more than twelve branches during the first years of its existence (see the chapter on its history). Each of these branches has, therefore, its own way of practising meditation whose principles come from the same one strain.

The *Hộ Pháp* Phạm Công Tắc and the *Quyền Giáo Tông* Lê Văn Trung being of Catholic origin³⁰, Taoist and Buddhist meditations were unknown to Tây Ninh when they were its leaders. Those of the followers who practised meditation had learned it from the other branches or former founders of the original Caodaist Temple.

Didn't *Hộ Pháp* Phạm Công Tắc say: « *There are the followers of Mr Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt³¹, who learn to meditate and fall asleep. There are those who follow as students Mr Giác Hải³²*

²⁸ *Traité d'alchimie et de physiologie taoïste* (Taoist alchemy and physiology), Zhao Bi Chen, éd. Les Deux Océans.

²⁹ See the Chapter 39 of the *Tao Te King*: « *Tích chi đắc Nhất giả, Thiên đắc Nhất dĩ thanh, etc.* » (From the beginning, beings have reached the One, etc.).

³⁰ The *Hộ Pháp* was baptized at Tây Ninh Catholic Church in 1900, and the *Quyền Giáo Tông* was from a Catholic family from generation to generation.

³¹ Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt is Lê Văn Lịch, one of the founders of Caodaism, the one who was appointed to the highest office of Đầu Sư in parallel with Lê Văn Trung at the birth of the religion. He left Tây Ninh at the same time as Nguyễn Ngọc Tương and Lê Bá Trang in 1934 and retired to his pagoda in Cần Giuộc.

³² In 1926, the venerable Thích Như Nhân, the Superior of Giác Hải Pagoda, joined the new religion and gave it his new Từ Lâm Tự pagoda in Gò Kén to commemorate his birth. He left it and reclaimed his pagoda

(the venerable Thích Như Nhân) *who spent his time tapping the bell and tirelessly praying Di Đà*³³ »³⁴. Didn't he also specify as follows: « *to practice religion without seeking glory is really to follow the Way (Tu không thủ lợi cầu danh mới là có Đạo)* », « *one who practices religion and who can abandon reputation, interests and power, will attain Dharma and will be realized spiritually* » (Người tu bỏ được danh, lợi, quyền, sẽ đạt pháp đắc Đạo)³⁵?

Before becoming Caodaist, Ngô Văn Chiêu, Nguyễn Ngọc Tương and most of the founders of the Caodaist branches frequented the Minh associations (Minh Hội) or pagodas where meditation and vegetarian meals were the rules; they, therefore, possessed knowledge about meditation which they could, later on, transmit to their followers.

The Chiêu Minh branch founded by Ngô Văn Chiêu, the first Caodaist, practices Taoist meditation and has its way based on Buddhism to not stay at the level of the Immortals and go further to achieve complete deliverance.

Nguyễn Ngọc Tương who founded with Lê Bá Trang the Ban Chinh Đạo in Bến Tre completed his spiritual realization in the Taoist way and continued with the Buddhist meditation for 9 years (like Boddhi Dharma who introduced Buddhism in China) plus 81 days of “visit of the spirit” (*Cửu niên diện bích* (nine years in front of a wall) and *cửu cửu thần du* (9 x 9 days of visit of the spirit)). He passed away during his meditation as he had said in advance.

The other branches certainly have their method of meditation not far from the ones of these.

It is not uncommon to find Caodaists like *Giáo Tông Nguyễn Ngọc Tương* and many venerable Buddhist bonzes, who choose the death and leave life during a meditation session as planned.

4. ORGANIZATION OF CAODAIISM

The Caodaist Church is organized in three *Đài* (Towers or Palaces) representing the 3 essential components of the human being, and also of religion, which are the **Tinh** (the essence), the **Khí** (the energy) and the **Thần** (the spirit).



The pattern of a Caodaist temple

4.1 The *Cửu Trùng Đài* (Tower with nine levels)

The *Cửu Trùng Đài* or the Tower with nine levels, which symbolizes the *Tinh* (essence), is

following a spiritism session that went wrong with demons that revealed themselves and not Superior Spirits while the construction of this new pagoda had been largely funded by two fervent followers of the new religion.

³³ Buddha.

³⁴ “*Nào kẻ đi theo ông Ngọc Lịch Duyệt học trì thoàn (thiền), niệm chuỗi từ bi, ngồi lần hột lim dim ngủ gục. Nào người theo làm học trò ông Giác Hải (Hòa Thượng Thích Như Nhân) đánh mõ chuông tụng mãi Di Đà...*”: Extract from a *Hộ Pháp* Phạm Công Tác sermon in Tây Ninh on the 15th of the eighth month of the year Quý Dậu (Rooster - 1933), <https://daodoiquinguyen.com/thang-hoa-cua-tinh-khi-than/>

³⁵ *Bí Pháp Tu Chơn* (Secrets of the practice of religion) according to the book *Nguyên lý và cơ chế hiện tượng thăng Hoa tinh khí thần* (Principles and mechanisms of the transformations of essence, energy and spirit) (Sổ tay tu luyện- memento of work in religion), by Tây Ninh.

the Body of the Đại Đạo (Great Way), the Executive Body of which the head is the *Giáo Tông*.

The *Cửu Trùng Đài* is itself organized into three branches. The Confucian branch *Nho* (named *Ngọc*) represents the *tin* (essence) and the colour of the dresses and hairstyles of high dignitaries is red. The Taoist branch *Đạo* (named *Thượng*), represents the *khí* (energy) and the colour is sky blue. The Buddhist branch *Thích* (named *Thái*), represents the *thần* (spirit) and the colour is yellow. The dignitaries have a name made up of the name of the branch (*Ngọc*, *Thượng* or *Thái*), their own first name, and finally the word *Thanh* (pure). There are two exceptions: the name of the first two *Đầu Sư* ended with *Nhật* (Sun) and *Nguyệt* (Moon): *Thượng Trung Nhật* (*Lê Văn Trung*) and *Ngọc Lịch Nguyệt* (*Lê Văn Lịch*).



Red, Confucianism, blue, Taoism, and yellow, Buddhism

At the request of the *Hộ Pháp* Phạm Công Tắc, Gabriel Gobron translated the titles at the nine levels into pope, cardinal, archbishop, bishop, priest, etc. as in the Catholic Church. Since there is no parallel between the two organizations and, above all, the Almighty revealed Himself as a Master, our translation largely uses the word “Master” like in a Taoist organization with which Caodaism is close, or a Buddhist one. Master is the translation of “*Sư*” which appears already in three existing titles: *Đầu Sư*, *Phối Sư* and *Giáo Sư*.

The Almighty is therefore, the Supreme Master and the nine levels in the executive body are as follows, in decreasing order of importance:

- 1- *Giáo Tông* (Superior Grand Master), who is the *Anh Cà* (Elder Brother) of all
- 2- *Chưởng Pháp* (Grand Master): reviewing the laws before they are promulgated
- 3- *Đầu Sư* (Superior Master): guidance of followers from all points of view (secular and religious)
- 4- *Phối Sư* (Master) under 3 *Chánh Phối Sư* (Principal Master) who can replace a *Đầu Sư*
- 5- *Giáo Sư* (Professor): religious and secular teaching and helping the good practice of rituals in oratories
- 6- *Giáo Hữu* (Teacher): instruction for the new conversions in the oratories
- 7- *Lễ Sanh* (Dedicated to Ceremonies): in charge of religious ceremonies
- 8- *Chức Việc* (Supervisor)
- 9- *Tín đồ* (simple adept)

The word “*nữ*” (which indicates the female gender) is added to the title of a woman dignitary, and a woman can only reach the level of *Đầu Sư*.

The followers are of two kinds: those of the *Hạ thừa* level (lower degree) remain in normal life, observe the rules of religion, are vegetarians up to 10 days a month (first 2, then 6, then 10); those of the *Thượng Thừa* (higher degree) are the religious who devote their lives entirely to religion, are vegetarians, live in the territory of the temples, wear the clothes of the religion

(Vietnamese dress and white trousers, black turban, except at the branch Bch Y where the turban is white). The Ban Chính Đạo (Bến Tre) has introduced a middle degree of followers (*Trung Thừa*) who devote half their time to religion (and also half of their income) and who are vegetarian 15 days a month. The *Chức Việc* (Supervisor) and the *Lễ Sanh* (Dedicated to Ceremonies) are at this *Trung Thừa* degree while the simple followers are at the *Hạ Thừa*, and the dignitaries from *Giáo Hữu* and the equivalent in the Hiệp Thiên Đài are at the *Thượng Thừa* one.

Cửu Trùng Đài (Tower with nine levels) symbolizes the Tinh (the essence, the body), the physical body of the Almighty Executive body		
Giáo Tông (1)		
<i>Nho</i> (Confucianism), red <i>Ngọc, Tinh</i> (Essence)	<i>Lão</i> (Taoism), sky blue <i>Thuộng, Khí</i> (Energy)	<i>Phật</i> (Buddhism), yellow <i>Thái, Thần</i> (spirit)
<i>Chương Pháp</i> (1 person) <i>Đầu Sư</i> (1) <i>Phối Sư</i> (12) of which 1 <i>Chánh Phối Sư</i> <i>Giáo Sư</i> (24) <i>Giáo Hữu</i> (1,000) <i>Lễ Sanh</i> (unlimited) <i>Chức Việc</i> (unlimited) <i>Tin đồ - simple follower</i> (unlimited)	<i>Chương Pháp</i> (1 person) <i>Đầu Sư</i> (1) <i>Phối Sư</i> (12) of which 1 <i>Chánh Phối Sư</i> <i>Giáo Sư</i> (24) <i>Giáo Hữu</i> (1,000) <i>Lễ Sanh</i> (unlimited) <i>Chức Việc</i> (unlimited) <i>Tin đồ - simple follower</i> (unlimited)	<i>Chương Pháp</i> (1 person) <i>Đầu Sư</i> (1) <i>Phối Sư</i> (12) of which 1 <i>Chánh Phối Sư</i> <i>Giáo Sư</i> (24) <i>Giáo Hữu</i> (1,000) <i>Lễ Sanh</i> (unlimited) <i>Chức Việc</i> (unlimited) <i>Tin đồ - simple follower</i> (unlimited)
<p>In Caodaism, all followers, regardless of rank, consider themselves brothers and sisters. They call dignitaries "<i>Anh lớn</i>" (Big Brother) or "<i>Chị Lớn</i>" (Big Sister). The <i>Giáo Tông</i> is the <i>Anh Cả</i> (Elder Brother). There is no "Mother" or "Father" or "sheep" like in the Catholic Church. The <i>Giáo Tông</i> has no other power than to help the followers in their temporal life, and he can do nothing for their soul, while the Catholic pope can decide whether a deceased can be sanctified or beatified, or not.</p> <p>Accession to a higher position is decided by a vote by the same-ranking members unless the appointment comes from an instruction received through spiritism. Thus, a <i>Chánh Phối Sư</i> can become a <i>Đầu Sư</i> only by a positive vote of the 36 <i>Phối Sư</i>. The <i>Giáo Tông</i>, a title to which only a <i>Chương Pháp</i> or a <i>Đầu Sư</i> can claim to compete, must be elected by the whole Temple, dignitaries and simple practitioners, at a <i>Hội Vạn Linh</i> (The Vạn Linh Assembly).</p> <p>There are four types of assemblies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The <i>Hội Vạn Linh</i> (<i>The Vạn Linh Assembly</i>) which brings together the whole Temple, dignitaries and simple practitioners. – The <i>Hội Nhơn Sanh</i> (Assembly of Followers) which brings together representatives of the oratories, 2 or exceptionally 3 per oratory (<i>Họ Đạo</i>)³⁶, the Supervisors (<i>Chức Việc</i>) and those dedicated to ceremonies (<i>Lễ Sanh</i>). – The <i>Hội Thánh</i> (Temple Assembly) which brings together the dignitaries from <i>Giáo Hữu</i> to <i>Chánh Phối Sư</i> included of the <i>Cửu Trùng Đài</i>, and the <i>Bảo Quân</i> and <i>Bảo Đàn</i> of the <i>Hiệp Thiên Đài</i>. – <i>the Thượng Hội</i> (High Assembly), where meet the dignitaries from <i>Đầu Sư</i> and from <i>Thượng Sanh, Thượng Phẩm</i> to the <i>Giáo Tông</i>. 		

4.2 The *Hiệp Thiên Đài* (Tower of Union with the Almighty)

The *Hiệp Thiên Đài* or the Tower of the Union with the Almighty is built with 3 roofs, the one in the middle lower than the other two, under which, for the one on the left, there is a bell,

³⁶ A *Họ Đạo* is a community of followers who attend the same Temple. The number can be very large.

and, for the one on the right, a drum. It symbolizes the **Khí**, the energy/breath of the *Đại Đạo* (the Great Way) and is headed by the *Hộ Pháp* (the Protector of Laws and also the Grand Master of the Mediums). It is in charge of communication with the Almighty and the Superior Spirits as well as the protection of the laws and constitutions of the Caodaist Temple.

The *Hộ Pháp*, assisted by a *Thượng Phẩm* and a *Thượng Sanh*, is responsible for ensuring that the law is respected in the religious and civil life of the followers. Each of these three dignitaries has four collaborators, who are called:

- **Pháp** (dealing with doctrine) when they are those of the *Hộ Pháp* (*Bảo Pháp, Hiến Pháp, Khai Pháp* and *Tiếp Pháp*),
- **Đạo** (taking care of religious life) for those of the *Thượng Phẩm* (*Bảo Đạo, Hiến Đạo, Khai Đạo* and *Tiếp Đạo*), and
- **Thế** (taking care of civilian life) for those of the *Thượng Sanh* (*Bảo Thế, Hiến thế, Khai Thế* and *Tiếp Thế*).

These fifteen dignitaries form a Council having the right to justice and control. They take care of the communication with the Almighty and the Superior Spirits and are helped for this by twelve *Bảo Quân*.

The high dignitaries of the *Hiệp Thiên Đài*, who are legislators, are in charge of religious justice and the control of the acts of those of *Cửu Trung Đài*, without, however, the power to interfere in their government and their administration.

<p>Hiệp Thiên Đài (Tower of the Union with the Almighty) symbolizes the Khí (energy/breath), the astral body of the Almighty Communication with the Almighty and the Superior Spirits Preservation of the Laws of Temporal Life and the Code of Religion</p>		
<p>Hộ Pháp (1) Protector of the Laws Grand Master of the Mediums</p>		
<p>Thượng Phẩm (Religious Superior) (1 person) Preservation of the religious law in the <i>Tịnh Thất</i> and the <i>Thánh Thất</i> (meditation houses, temples and oratories) (<i>Đạo</i>) <i>Bảo Đạo</i> (1) <i>Hiến Đạo</i> (1) <i>Khai Đạo</i> (1) <i>Tiếp Đạo</i> (1)</p>	<p>Preservation of temporal and religious laws (<i>Pháp</i>) <i>Bảo Pháp</i> (1) <i>Hiến Pháp</i> (1) <i>Khai Pháp</i> (1) <i>Tiếp Pháp</i> (1)</p>	<p>Thượng Sanh (Secular Superior) (1 person) Preservation of morality of the temporal life (<i>Thế</i>) <i>Bảo Thế</i> (1) <i>Hiến Thế</i> (1) <i>Khai Thế</i> (1) <i>Tiếp Thế</i> (1)</p>
<p><i>Bảo Quân</i> (12) <i>Bảo Đàn</i> (unlimited)</p>		
<p><i>Bảo</i>= to keep, <i>Hiến</i>=to renovate, <i>Khai</i>= to reform, <i>Tiếp</i>= to receive.</p>		

4.3 The *Bát Quái Đài* (Octagonal Tower)

The *Bát Quái Đài* (*Octagonal Tower*) symbolizes the contents of the Universe, the **Thần**, the spirit, the soul of the Great Way, the spiritual side of man. It is the entity that is responsible for issuing the Constitution and the Laws received from the Almighty. This is where the **Thiên Nhãn** (The Divine Eye) representing the Almighty and the representatives of the 5 Ways: Ways of Man (Khong Phu Tseu), the Genies (Khuong Thái Công), the Saints (Jesus Christ), the Immortals (Lao Tseu) and Buddhas (Buddha), and the important Spirits of Caodaism: Bodhisatva Quan Âm representing Buddhism, Lý Thái Bạch (Taoism) and Quan Thánh

(Confucianism) were venerated.

Bát Quái Đài (Octagonal Tower) symbolizes the <i>Thần</i> (spirit) Issues Constitution and Laws		
Thiên Nhãn (Divine Eye)		
The Three Ways		
Lao Tseu	Buddha	Khong Phu Tseu
Administrative Representatives of the Three Ways		
Lý Thái Bạch	Bodhisatva Quan Âm	Quan Thánh
Way of the Saints		
Jesus christ		
Way of the Genies		
Khương Thái Công		
The 5 Ways are represented		
1/- <i>Nhơn Đạo</i> : The Way of Man (Khong Phu Tseu's teaching),		
2/- <i>Thần Đạo</i> : The Way of the Genies (Khương Thái Công's teaching),		
3/- <i>Thánh Đạo</i> : The Way of the Saints (Jesus Christ's teaching),		
4/- <i>Tiên Đạo</i> : The Way of the Immortals (Lao Tseu's teaching),		
5/- <i>Phật Đạo</i> : The Way of the Buddhas (Buddha's teaching).		
The important saints and spirits of Caodaism (Note: Victor Hugo, Sun Yat Sen, Nguyễn Bình Khiêm and Joan of Arc introduced by the <i>Hộ Pháp</i> Phum Công Tắc are mentioned only in Tây Ninh, and in no other branches of Caodaism)		
Since the Constitution and the Laws had already been issued at the end of 1926, beginning of 1927, this Tower no longer had any activity (case of the Cao Đài Ban Chính Đạo). It is just a place where the Almighty and the representatives of the five Ways are revered. In Tây Ninh, it was first dedicated to Charity ((Cơ Quan Phước Thiện).		

5. HISTORY OF CAODAIISM

Officially created by the Declaration of 7 October 1926 sent to the governor of Cochinchina, Caodaism began to spread rapidly thanks to the enthusiasm aroused by the sessions of spiritism and the spirituality of this religion which is new without being new.

It brought many people from a society where from a certain age people look to what might help to acquire wisdom and serenity. The discovery of Taoism generally little known, more explained in Caodaism, with its method of meditation that was transmitted only mysteriously by steps and its *Vô Vi* (Acting by the Non-Act) of a much higher level than current Confucianism moral, prompted many intellectuals to get closer to the new religion.

Periods of war, uncertainty and disasters have always led man to turn more to religion for comfort, support, or to forget reality. And we were in the middle of this period in the 1920s: demands for more rights and freedom from patriots such as Phan Châu Trinh, Nguyễn An Ninh, Bùi Quang Chiêu, incitement to acquire new knowledge, armed struggle for the independence of Phan Bội Châu, etc...

The non-distinction between the followers who are all brothers (huynh) and sisters (muội) up to the highest dignitaries brought together the members of a society where the notion of hierarchy still weighed heavily. The prefects, the heads of provinces who were among the dignitaries rubbed shoulders with the simple peasants.

The duty of adepts to devote part of their life to religion greatly aided its development. The organization in oratories, where practitioners came with their families to participate in the celebrations, created numerous small communities active and dynamic that met and helped each

other and grew together. The children were present from an early age, brought by their parents, constituting the generation of Caodaists of tomorrow. The Caodaist temple of some oratories also became a place where consultations by traditional doctors, the practice of acupuncture and the distribution of the Chinese pharmacopoeia were completely free. In other places, vegetarian meals with unlimited rice were available to everyone at a ridiculous price.



The new generation of Caodaists

5.1 Gabriel Gobron's “*History and Philosophy of Caodaism*”

A French spiritist enthusiast, Gabriel Gobron (1895-1941), left a document written between 1937 and 1939 and published after his death entitled “*History and Philosophy of Caodaism - Renovated Buddhism - Annamite Spiritism - New Religion in Eurasia*”. He represented abroad the Caodaism of Tây Ninh. His knowledge of Caodaism came directly from the *Hộ Pháp* Phạm Công Tắc with whom he corresponded regularly in letters. His book is thus interesting because it can be considered to reflect the thoughts of the *Hộ Pháp* on the new religion. Gabriel Gobron was sick and had never been to Vietnam. What he knew of Caodaism had been blown from Vietnam by the *Hộ Pháp* who was among the founders.

This book argued that « Caodaism was to Buddhism what Protestantism was to Catholicism », and called it « Bouddhisme rénové » (Renewed Buddhism). These two terms expression can be found on the header of the official papers of Tây Ninh, including on the letter sent on 4 July 1931 by Mr Lê Văn Trung to the Governor of Cochinchina the Fol announcing the Direction of the Religion by Mr Nguyễn Ngọc Tương (see 5.2). It can be noted that these terms are absent from the official declaration of the birth of Caodaism on 7 October 1926.

For him, Caodaism was a synthesis of religions, which makes many say that it is syncretism.

5.2 The direction of Caodaism until 1933

The following five dignitaries led the newly founded religion:

- 1- The *Hộ Pháp* (Protector of Laws) and also Grand Master of the Mediums **Phạm Công Tắc** (1890-1959).
- 2- The *Thượng Chánh Phối Sư* (Principal Master) Thượng Tương Thanh who was the Phủ (Prefect) **Nguyễn Ngọc Tương**, was in charge of internal affairs, ensuring the religious and moral education of the followers, the instruction of the children, the follow-up of the administration of oratories, the smooth running of medical service and the development of land belonging to the community. While still active in the public service, he had a replacement dignitary, the *Phối Sư* Thái Ca Thanh, who represented him.
- 3- The *Ngọc Chánh Phối Sư* (Principal Master) Ngọc Trang Thanh, who was the retired Đốc Phủ Sứ (Governor) **Lê Bá Trang**, was responsible for spiritual affairs, that is, for the spiritual conduct of dignitaries and adepts, for Justice, for the resolution of disputes arising between the co-religionists and for the organization of ceremonies and festivals.

- 4- The *Thái Chanh Phối Sư* (Principal Master) Thái Thơ Thanh, who was the honorary Huyện (sub-prefect) **Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ**, was in charge of the many construction works because he had to start from nothing to treat more than one hundred hectares of land.
- 5- The *Nữ Phối Sư*³⁷ (Master) Hương Thanh, who was Mrs **Lâm Thi Thanh**, who had made an important donation for the purchase of the land of a hundred hectares in Tây Ninh, took care of the budget.

The *Đầu Sư* (Superior Master) Thượng Trung Nhựt, who was the colonial councillor **Lê Văn Trung** acted as superior of Caodaism, but during the first years, he devoted himself more to his spiritual life. Although he came from a traditional Catholic family, the spirit of *Lý Thái Bạch*, an ancient Chinese poet, who introduced himself as the “spiritual” and “virtual” *Giáo Tông* (Superior Grand Master) of Caodaism, had told him that he was called to become the “temporal” *Giáo Tông*. His induction into the office of *Quyền Giáo Tông*, acting Giáo Tông, took place on March 12, 1933.

In 1927, on the instructions of the virtual *Giáo Tông* (Superior Grand Master) Lý Thái Bạch, the *Thượng Chánh Phối Sư* (Principal Master) Thượng Tương Thanh and the *Nữ Phối Sư* (Master) Hương Thanh became the official owners of the new lands purchased in the village of Long Thành in Tây Ninh, in the name of the religion which was not yet a legal person. On the 30th of the tenth month of the year Canh Ngọ (year of the horse, 1930), *Thượng Chánh Phối Sư* (Principal Master) Thượng Tương Thanh was appointed acting *Đầu Sư* (Superior Master) in addition to his existing function.

5.3 The turmoil in Tây Ninh and the division into many branches (1927-1930)

During the period 1927 to 1930, many dissensions appeared in Tây Ninh, the seat of the new Cao daist Temple, ending with the rejection of it by most of its founders.

Disagreements were hidden from outsiders out of respect for one another, but the facts were there, most of the venerable Taoist and Buddhist founders withdrew from Tây Ninh. It was even said, to cover up that there were disputes, that the Almighty himself had programmed the division into twelve branches to make religion stronger.

The *Thượng Phẩm* Cao Huỳnh Cư, one close friend of *Hộ Pháp* Phạm Công Tắc since they were both members of the group of mediums Phò Loan - who received a visit from the Almighty presenting Himself for the first time under the name de A, Ẫ, Ậ - left Tây Ninh in 1928 and retired. The same year, the school principal Đoàn Văn Bản and the Phủ (prefect) Vương Quang Kỳ, who were among the very first Caodaists, left Tây Ninh, each leading their small group of followers. In 1930, the *Phối Sư* Thái Ca Thanh returned to his town of Mỹ Tho and founded the Minh Chơn Lý branch in opposition to Tây Ninh. The oratories of Hậu Giang province followed the *Chương Pháp* Trần Đạo Quang and created with him the Minh Chơn Đạo branch in Bạc Liêu. In Sài Gòn, the oratory of Cầu Kho and most of its dignitaries separated from Tây Ninh.

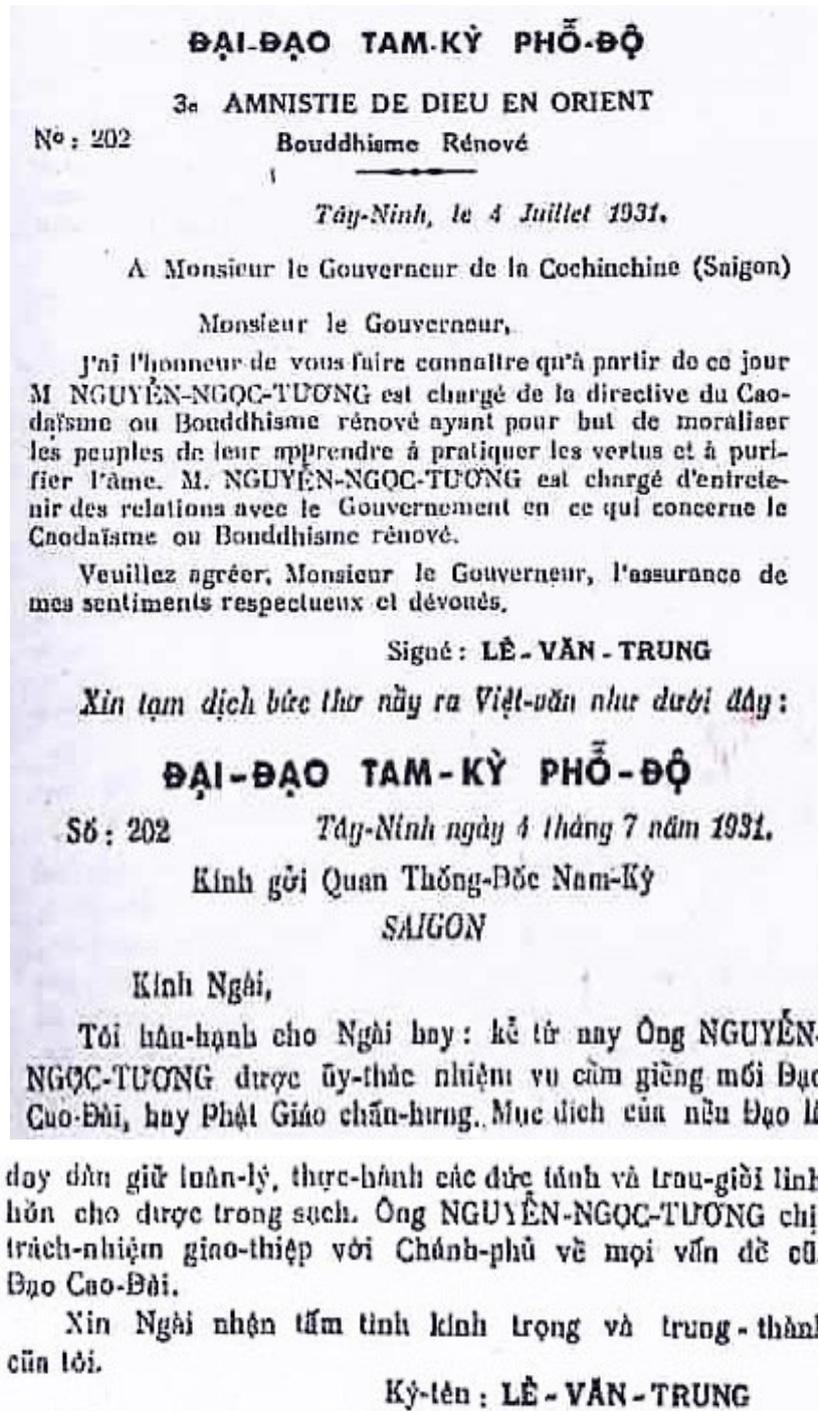
Meanwhile, in Tây Ninh itself, Phạm Công Tắc created the Phạm Môn, the Phạm clan, composed of nearly five hundred people entirely to his devotion, who donated their goods to the clan and shared the products of their work according to individual needs. He also founded various organizations which worked exclusively for him and this clan: Phạm Từ, Phạm Nghiệp, etc.

The *Thượng Chánh Phối Sư* Nguyễn Ngọc Tương, called by a spiritist session to come and reside in Tây Ninh to solve the problems, resigned from his function as administrator of Xuyên

³⁷ The word “nữ”, which means female, is placed in front of the title of the female dignitaries. Women form a hierarchy of their own, parallel to that of men.

Mộc, in Bà Rịa, and arrived in February 1931 in Tây Ninh. His prestige and influence were to be used to calm the spirits and restore calm. He stayed there until 1934.

On 4 July 1931, on the further instruction from the Almighty, the *Đầu Sư* Lê Văn Trung sent a letter to the governor of Cochinchina officially announcing the take over of Tây Ninh by Nguyễn Ngọc Trương.



A second letter with the signatures for approval of Lê Văn Trung and Lê Bá Trang to confirm the first letter was sent on 1 September 1931 by Nguyễn Ngọc Trương to the Governor of Cochinchina.

ĐẠI-ĐẠO TAM-KỶ PHỒ-ĐỘ

N^o 284

Tây-Ninh, le 1er Septembre 1931.

A Monsieur le Gouverneur de la Cochinchine (Saigon)
Monsieur le Gouverneur,

J'ai l'honneur de vous faire connaître qu'en obéissant aux instructions divines, je prends effectivement aujourd'hui la direction du Caodaïsme ou Bouddhisme rénové en Cochinchine.

En acceptant cette charge très délicate et lourde, je pense bien servir l'humanité dans la participation à sa régénération morale et spirituelle.

Avec l'aide du Très-Haut, je m'efforcerai de réagir de telle façon à pouvoir bien mériter la complète confiance du Gouvernement et à étaler devant le monde la vraie figure du Caodaïsme, telle qu'elle nous est apparue par la volonté céleste.

Le Caodaïsme est la synthèse des trois principales religions existant en Indochine (Bouddhisme, Taoïsme, et Confucianisme). L'altruisme pris dans son sens le plus large, l'amour universel, est le point principal de sa doctrine. Il nous est enseigné par des messages spirites reçus de Dieu et de ses ministres les saints esprits évolués, qui nous éclairent et nous guident constamment dans la grande voie conduisant à l'apogée de la perfection morale et spirituelle.

Le Caodaïsme sera appelé à devenir une religion universelle qui amènera la paix mondiale.

Le jour où les Annamites, du Nord au Sud, le pratiqueront avec toute la liberté d'un culte national, le Gouvernement n'aura plus aucun souci de troubles ou de désordres quelconques, car tout vrai Caodaïste est sincèrement respectueux de l'autorité et amoureux de la paix.

.....

Veillez agréer, Monsieur le Gouverneur, l'expression de mes sentiments bien respectueux et bien dévoués.

Approuvé :
Signé : LÊ-VĂN-TRUNG
LÊ-BÁ-TRANG

Signé : NGUYỄN-NGỌC-TƯƠNG
Chargé de la Direction du
Caodaïsme en Cochinchine.

ĐẠI-ĐẠO TAM-KỶ PHỒ-ĐỘ

Số : 284

Tây-Ninh ngày 1 tháng 9 năm 1931

Kính gửi Quan Tổng-Đức Nam-Kỳ,
SAIGON

Kính Ngài,

Tôi hân hạnh cho Ngài hay : vâng theo các Thánh-giáo, kể từ nay tôi chánh-thức cầm giềng mới Đạo Cao-Đài trong Nam-Kỳ.

Nhận lãnh trách-nhiệm rất khó khăn và nặng nề này, tôi thiết tưởng phụng sự đúng đắn hơn loại bằng cách tham-dự vào sự chỉ-lạo Đạo-Đức và linh-hồn.

Với sự ủng-hộ của Đấng-Tối-Cao, tôi sẽ cố gắng hành động chính-đắn lại như thế nào cho được xứng đáng với sự tin-nhiệm hoàn toàn của Chánh-phủ, và phó bày trước mọi người chân-tướng của Đạo Cao-Đài đúng y như lời Cơ-Trên mới giảng dạy chúng tôi.

Đạo Cao-Đài là sự hóa-hợp ba tôn-giáo chánh đĩ có ở Đông-dương (Phật-giáo, Lão-giáo và Khổng-giáo). Sự thương yêu trân-trẻ và rộng-rãi, tình bác-ái, là trọng-diểm trong tôn-chỉ của Đại-Đạo. Đại-Đạo được giảng dạy cho chúng tôi do những bài cơ-bút của Đức Chúa Trời và các Đấng thừa liệch Người. tức là các phẩm Chơn-linh trọn lành, luôn luôn soi sáng và hướng dẫn chúng tôi trên chơn-dạo đưa đến cực diểm : chí-thiện và chí-thành.

Đạo Cao-Đài sẽ được trở thành nền Đạo đại-dồng, sẽ đem lại hòa-bình cho thế-giới.

Ngày nào mà người Việt-Nam, từ Bắc chí Nam, được giữ Đạo Cao-Đài với trọn quyền tự-do của một Quốc-Dân, Chánh-phủ sẽ không còn một sự lo ngại nào về biến động hay loạn-lạc nữa, vì người tin-dễ Cao-Đài chơn chánh rất thật tâm kính-trọng chánh-quyền và yêu-chuộng hòa-bình.

.....

Xin Ngài nhận tấn tình rất kính-trọng và trung thành của tôi.

Chữn y :

Ký - tên :

LÊ-VĂN-TRUNG

NGUYỄN-NGỌC-TƯƠNG

Ký tên :

LÊ-BÁ-TRANG

Người cầm giềng mới Đạo Cao-Đài ở Nam-Kỳ

5.4 The split into two trends (1933)

Everything went well during the first two years 1931 and 1932. Everything had to be done or redone and the responsibility for internal affairs and relations with the government were not

easy³⁸. Concerning the French authorities, the *Thượng Chánh Phối Sư* Nguyễn Ngọc Tương did all he could to enlighten them of the purely religious intentions of the Caodaists. About internal problems, he and *Ngọc Chánh Phối Sư* Lê Bá Trang together undertook actions to restore orthodoxy and confidence.

But the resulting gain in prestige was at the expense of the *Đầu Sư Lê Văn Trung* and the *Hộ Pháp Phạm Công Tắc*. Two tendencies then emerged and clashed.

For the ultras, led by these two dignitaries of Catholic origin, religion had to serve first the country, the homeland, which had priority over the people, because everyone wanted to fight to regain the independence from the French colonizers. Caodaism had to become a power that matters in the country, just as Catholicism had been in the West in the past. And to make it, to hold power was essential. Not to mention that their vision of the religion was different from that of others.

For the moderates led by **Nguyễn Ngọc Tương** and **Lê Bá Trang**, religion must first help to train good citizens and to deliver man regardless of his condition, his origin, his skin, his ideas. So Caodaism had to stay out of politics.

The confrontation reached its peak when, at the ceremony of his installation at the office of *Quyền Giáo Tông* (Acting *Giáo Tông*) on 12 March 1933, Lê Văn Trung appointed the three *Chánh Phối Sư* Tương, Trang and Thơ to a higher rank, that of *Đầu Sư*, while these were already at this rank, decided by the spirit of Lý Thái Bạch and the *Hộ Pháp* Phạm Công Tắc and formalized by a decree of 22 November 1930. At the same time, three dignitaries of the *Hiệp Thiên Đài* of the *Hộ Pháp* Phạm Công Tắc were appointed as the new acting *Chánh Phối Sư* with all the powers of the executive corps to lead the whole Temple and to replace Trang, Tương and Thơ. Three other dignitaries, also from the *Hiệp Thiên Đài*, gained the titles of *Chương Pháp* on an interim basis, all without Trang, Tương and Thơ having been consulted. He had even specified that from 26 March 1933, any action to spread religion could not be done without the permission of the first three new dignitaries mentioned above.

On 1st April 1933, the *Quyền Giáo Tông* (Acting *Giáo Tông*) and the *Hộ Pháp* issued the *châu tri* (communication) n°1 (without the signature of the three elders *Chánh Phối Sư* Trang, Tương and Thơ) stating that, because of the urgency in carrying out the Temple's program of activity, there was no need to go through the elections and the Assemblies (as required by the Constitution and the Laws).

On April 14, 1933, the *Thượng hội* (the High Assembly), after studying the *châu tri* n°1, concluded that the latter was contrary to the Code and the Constitutions of the Temple, and therefore it was cancelled, that the new appointees coming from *Hiệp Thiên Đài* had to return there, that the behaviour of *Quyền Giáo Tông* had made him unworthy to keep his functions, and that he would soon be judged by the *Hội Vạn Linh* (Assembly of all the followers including the dignitaries). This one, held on 12 June 1933, despite the impediments caused by the *Quyền Giáo Tông*, confirmed the latter's faults and asked the *Tòa Tam Giáo* (Tribunal of the Three Ways) to decide.

On 28 July 1933, the *Quyền Giáo Tông* and the *Hộ Pháp* issued to all the followers a decree to cease the duties of the acting *Đầu Sư* Nguyễn Ngọc Tương et Lê Bá Trang because they were leaving Tây Ninh without seeking permission and that at each time they step out, they would hold meetings to create trouble against the Temple.

³⁸ The *Thượng Chánh Phối Sư* Nguyễn Ngọc Tương who served as prefect, enjoyed great consideration from the public authorities and this could be beneficial for the hoped-for official recognition.

On 26 December 1933, a conciliation meeting between the two parties concluded with the cancellation of the termination of the duties of Nguyễn Ngọc Tương et Lê Bá Trang, the temporary withdrawal of the *Quyền Giáo Tông* Lê Văn Trung due to health reasons, and the handing over of powers to the five remaining highest dignitaries (Phạm Công Tắc, Nguyễn Ngọc Tương, Lê Bá Trang, Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ and Mrs Lâm Thanh Hương).

But spectacular turn of events, on 24 February 1934, the *Quyền Giáo Tông* sent a letter to all the followers, telling them that Nguyễn Ngọc Tương and Lê Bá Trang were at fault, that they were still dismissed from their duties as Thanh and that everyone had to obey the orders of the new *Chánh Phối Sư*. At the same time, the *Hộ Pháp* declared that he could not work with the four dignitaries mentioned with him to continue the leadership of the religion. The offices of Nguyễn Ngọc Tương and Lê Bá Trang were cleared of all furniture and files, confiscated and they could no longer access them, prevented by guards.

Finally, disappointed and disgusted, *Ngọc Đầu Sư* Lê Bá Trang left Tây Ninh, followed by *Thượng Đầu Sư* Nguyễn Ngọc Tương, leaving Tây Ninh in the hands of Lê Văn Trung and Phạm Công Tắc.

Nguyễn Ngọc Tương retired and went on a retreat on Mount Kỳ Vân in Đất Đỏ, Bà Rịa.

Gabriel Gobron's book

Gobron's book also evokes the dissension within the new Caodaism, and we can discover what the author and the *Hộ Pháp* themselves thought.

Thus, he spoke of « *the persecutions unleashed against all those who attached themselves to the late Pope, while Nguyễn Ngọc Tương and Lê Bá Trang, as well as their supporters, were taboo* » as if these two persons were still in Tây Ninh after the death of Lê Văn Trung. In reality, they left Tây Ninh in the spring of 1934, many months before the death of Lê Văn Trung on 14 November 1934.

Gabriel Gobron recounted Nguyễn Ngọc Tương and Lê Bá Trang's trip to Tây Ninh to attend the funeral of the Acting *Giáo Tông* Lê Văn Trung with these few words completely far from the truth: « *The new pope thus named, accompanied by a crowd of followers presented themselves at the temple of Tây Ninh, to take up his functions and also to attend the funeral of the great deceased* ». Lê Văn Trung's death took place on 19 November 1934. Nguyễn Ngọc Tương and Lê Bá Trang found the doors closed when they went the day after to Tây Ninh to attend his funeral (November 1934). Nguyễn Ngọc Tương was installed as *Giáo Tông* on 9 May 1935, six months later, not before. Were these date changes introduced inadvertently or intended to harm?

5.5 Creation in Bến Tre of the Ban Chính Đạo (Committee for rectification of the religion), the Caodaist organization that will become the most important after Tây Ninh

Asked to return to take care of the religion by many followers who came alone or in a delegation to meet him, Nguyễn Ngọc Tương left Bà Rịa where he had retired.

He and Lê Bá Trang organized a *Đại Hội* (Grand Assembly) at An Hội, Bến Tre on 20 November 1934, where each of the 135 oratories (*Hộ Đạo*) of the country was invited to send a representative, the objective being to constitute a **Ban Chính Đạo**, a **Committee for the Rectification of the Religion** formed by these representatives.

The resetting of the Caodaist religion was necessary: the deviations introduced and imposed by the *Hiệp Thiên Đài* (the Tower of Union with the Almighty), the structure led by the *Hộ Pháp* (Guardian of the Laws) Phạm Công Tắc were among the reasons why most of the founders had left Tây Ninh. For Tây Ninh which was led by two dignitaries of Catholic origin (Phạm Công Tắc and Lê Văn Trung), Caodaism was a “Renewed Buddhism” (Bouddhisme rénovée in

French), and the Taoist and Buddhist meditations of the other founders who were Buddhists or/and Taoists were not practised. Some followers went so far as to say that the advent had changed the classic Triple Path (Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism) into a new Triple Path (Path of Saints, Immortals and Buddhists) with Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam in the Path of Saints; Taoism in the Taoist Path; and Balamon, Buddhism, Pythagoras, etc. in the Buddhists path³⁹. Others advocated adding a fourth way, Christianity. These deviations at Tây Ninh from the first years of the birth of Caodaism were part of the grievances which made most of the founders leave.

85 oratories out of a total of 135 existing from the 18 provinces of South Việt Nam sent their delegate. About 1,300 people were present that day. The same evening, a telegram from Tây Ninh announced the news of the death of the *Quyền Giáo Tông* Lê Văn Trung the previous day. Extraordinary coincidence !!!

Nguyễn Ngọc Tương and Lê Bá Trang went to Tây Ninh to attend his funeral but found the door closed, the guards reporting the words of their superiors that Lê Văn Trung had made it known that he wished not to see them at his funeral. They stayed all day and night, hoping that their request to be able to pay him homage for the last time would be accepted. Finally, they returned to Bến Tre without having been able to set foot in the Tây Ninh's compound

On December 21, 1934, another Grand Assembly proposed to constitute itself in a true organization of religion to advance and continue the work for the propagation of the Way, while waiting to be able to return to Tây Ninh. This Assembly advanced the date of a Vạn Linh Assembly on the 8th of the first month of the year Ất Hợi (year of the pig), that is to say, 11 February 1935 to choose the Superior of Caodaism whose post was vacant after the death of the acting *Giáo Tông* Lê Văn Trung. The *Đầu Sư* Lê Bá Trang was promoted to the rank of *Chưởng Pháp* to hold the reins of the religion in the meantime and to prepare for the future.

In his speech, *Chưởng Pháp* Lê Bá Trang recalled that, with the death of *Quyền Giáo Tông* Lê Văn Trung, *Hộ Pháp* Phạm Công Tắc had decided, by decree of 12 December 1934, to combine the functions of *Giáo Tông* with his own of *Hộ Pháp*. This was against the law since he had in hand at the same time the Cửu Trùng Đài, the Executive Body which deals with the temporal, the body, and the Hiệp Thiên Đài, the Tower of Union with the Almighty, which deals with the spiritual, the spirit; that considering the rules, the seniority and the hierarchy, the three people who could succeed Lê Văn Trung were the three *Đầu Sư* Nguyễn Ngọc Tương, himself and Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ; that several spiritist messages from the Almighty had already spoken of the important role that Nguyễn Ngọc Tương would have to play in religion; and, finally, that he had unsuccessfully asked the *Hộ Pháp* Phạm Công Tắc for authorization to organize this Vạn Linh Assembly in Tây Ninh. In short, he suggested in half-words that Nguyễn Ngọc Tương should take the reins of the religion.

The vote lasted from 11 to 13 February 1935, and the results were pronounced on 14 February 1935.

- out of 5,353 votes, 27 were for the *Thượng Chưởng Pháp* Lê Bá Trang and 5,326 for the *Thượng Đầu Sư* Nguyễn Ngọc Tương;

³⁹ Huệ Khải, a Tây Ninh follower, writes this in his article "*Tam Giáo trong Cao Đài*" (The Triple Way in Caodaism): "Tam giáo được đạo Cao Đài phát triển thành Tam giáo đạo có phạm vi rộng hơn. Tam giáo đạo bao gồm Thánh đạo, Tiên đạo, và Phật đạo. Thánh đạo gồm có Thiên chúa giáo, Tin lành, Hồi giáo...; Phật đạo gồm có Bà-la-môn giáo, Thích-ca giáo, Pythagore giáo..." (Caodaism developed the Triple Path which now covers a wider field: [...] The Triple Path covers the Path of the Saints, the Path of the Immortals and the Path of Buddha. The Path of the Saints is composed of Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam,...; the Path of Buddha of BalaMon, Buddhism, Pythagoreanism,...)

- 5,325 votes were in favour of returning, as soon as possible, to Tây Ninh, to which everyone remained attached;
- 296 votes came from the male and female dignitaries present;
- 3,522 votes came from the male and female followers serving in the religion present;
- 1,535 votes came from the representatives of the followers, one vote for 100 followers;
- the total amount represented 157,318 votes from 88 oratories (out of 135 existing) in 20 provinces.

The Assembly approved the proposal of *Thượng Chương Pháp* Lê Bá Trang to send a delegation to negotiate with Tây Ninh the return to its lands and the installation ceremony of the new *Giáo Tông* in Tây Ninh. The negotiations took time without a glimmer of hope for success being seen, the people at Bến Tre then decided to organize the ceremony of taking office of Nguyễn Ngọc Tương on 9 May 1935 (the 7th day of the 4th month of the year of the pig Ất Hợi) in An Hội, Bến Tre. That same 9 May 1935, 96 oratories out of 135 had placed themselves under the banner of the Temple of Bến Tre, which already had more than half of the followers.

The ceremony for the completion of the work of *Chỉnh Đạo* (Rectification of the Religion) took place from January 7 to 15, 1938 (from 8 to 15 of the 1st month of the year Mậu Dần (year of the Tiger 1938)). The Cao daist Temple Ban Chỉnh Đạo (of the Committee for the Rectification of Religion) renamed itself “*Hội Thánh Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ*” (Temple of the Great Way of the Third Amnesty), but, in practice, on the signs of temples and the administrative papers, there is the mention “*Hội Thánh dưới quyền ủng hộ của Đức Giáo Tông Nguyễn Ngọc Tương*” (Temple supported by *Đức*⁴⁰ *Giáo Tông* Nguyễn Ngọc Tương).



Đức Giáo Tông Nguyễn Ngọc Tương

The Great Meditation of the *Giáo Tông* (Superior Grand Master) of Ban Chỉnh Đạo (Bến Tre)

Đức Giáo Tông Nguyễn Ngọc Tương had been meditating every day for a long time and often undertook long meditations of 9, 18, 27, 36 days, etc., including periods of days of continuous fasting, as reported in his diary. In particular, he had undertaken eight 120-day long periods of meditation in 1935, 1936, 1937, 1939, 1940, and 1941. He could not be disturbed during his meditation. Sometimes his mind would leave his body for several hours or an entire night, leaving the impression that he was no longer alive.

⁴⁰ *Đức Giáo Tông* is used rather than *Giáo Tông*. The word *Đức* is a title of veneration which has the meaning of “virtuous”.

He lived in a small room on the second floor⁴¹ of the *Thiên Lý Mật Truyền* tower, which he only left for important celebrations, two or three times a year.



The room where *Đức Giáo Tông* Nguyễn Ngọc Trương lived is on the 2nd floor

On 7 April 1942, *Đức Giáo Tông* Nguyễn Ngọc Trương began his *Đại Tĩnh* (Great Meditation) of 9 years 81 days, “Cửu niên diện bích” (nine years facing the wall), “cửu cửu thân du” (9 x 9 = 81 days of travel of the spirit).

History says that the Indian monk Boddhi Dharma, the legendary founder in the 6th century of the Chinese Chan Buddhism, a contemplative current (dhyāna) of Mahāyāna Buddhism, once arrived in China had meditated in front of a wall for nine years.

The Caodaists began their meditation at 6 a.m., noon, 6 p.m. and midnight. They could stop for food, to freshen up, etc. and resume meditation at the start of a group of next 6 hours. They could continue to meditate without stopping during one or more whole days.

On 8 June 1951 (5th day of the 5th month of the year of the Cat, Tân Mão), *Đức Giáo Tông* Nguyễn Ngọc Trương explained to the two *Thanh Đồng* (young adepts) who took care of him, that he would join the Almighty for seven days, that it was necessary to make sure that its room remained very calm, and that if he did not return after seven days of apnea, it was necessary to go to warn the persons in charge of the Temple.

On 11 June 1951, he began his day and night meditation. On 16 June he stopped drinking. On the night of 17 June, he stopped breathing. On 19 June, the two young *Thanh Đồng* seeing that he hadn't been breathing for a long time, put him in a lying position on his bed: the meditation was done sitting in the lotus position on a special chair protected by a mosquito net.



Meditation chair and bed of *Đức Giáo Tông* Nguyễn Ngọc Trương

⁴¹ It's the 3rd floor for the Vietnamese, because in Vietnam the ground floor is counted as 1st Floor

On 21 June, the two *Thanh Đồng* seeing that his arms and legs were cold, were afraid and went to warn the Temple authorities, although only four days had passed since *Đức Giáo Tông Nguyễn Ngọc Tương*, was no longer breathing.

On 22 June, three doctors, one from the government and two private, invited by the Temple, gave their diagnosis: *Anh Cả* (Eldest Brother) had been dead for two days, but, his spirit being strong, there was no degradation of the body. For them, the latter could not come back to life.

Despite these words, the Temple waited another 24 hours, until almost midnight of 24 June 1951, that is to say, until the 7th day of the period of his apnea, to have the body brought to the Great Temple.

Born on 22 June 1881, Anh Cả was just 70 years old at the end of this 9-year and 81-day Great Meditation that began on the night of 7 April 1942.

It is remarkable that, by regularly practising meditation, he had never been ill. Concerning this Great Meditation, two days after the cessation of breathing, his body remained flexible, the two Thanh Đồng having been able to put him on the bed without a problem, and no odour emanated from his body several days later.

For Caodaism, *Anh Cả* had well-travelled the five Ways, had realized well spiritually at the end of his meditative practice of each of them and had achieved his goal of obtaining his complete deliverance.

5.6 The break-up of the Holy See in Tây Ninh

So, a few years after its birth, Caodaism broke out into many branches, with 12 officially used to denote their number. The first organizations to be created from the starting Tây Ninh Temple (1926) were:

- 1) **Chiếu Minh Tam Thanh Vô Vi** (1927- Ngô Văn Chiêu),
- 2) **Cầu Kho** (1930-Vương Quang Kỳ) at Cầu Kho, Sài Gòn, today **Nam Thành Thánh Thất**
- 3) **Minh Chơn Lý** (1931-35 *Phối sư* Thái Ca Thanh) at Mỹ Tho,
- 4) **Tiên Thiên** (1932–Nguyễn Hữu Chính, Lê Kim Ty, Phan Văn Tông, Nguyễn Thế Hiển, Nguyễn Bửu Tài, Trần Lợi, Nguyễn Tấn Hoài et Phan Bá Phước) at Cai Lậy
- 5) **Tây Ninh** new management (1934-Phạm Công Tắc), in Tây Ninh
- 6) **Ban Chính Đạo** (1934-Nguyễn Ngọc Tương and Lê Bá Trang) at Bến Tre,
- 7) **Minh Chơn Đạo** (1935-Trần Đạo Quang, *Đầu sư* Ngọc Nhiên Thanh and Cao Triều Phát) at Bạc Liêu,
- 8) **Bạch Y Liên Đoàn Chơn Lý** (Nguyễn Văn Tông),
- 9) **Trung Hòa Học Phái** (Phan Trường Mạnh and Huỳnh Văn Thảo),
- 10) **Tịch Cốc Tây Ninh** (Nguyễn Ngọc Điền alias Soái Điền and Ngô Đức Nhuận) which lives only with fruits,
- 11) **Nữ Chung Hòa** (Mrs Ngọc Nhiên Hương and Lê Thị Trinh) at Sài Gòn,
- 12) **Tam kỳ Nguyên Nguyên Bản Bản** (*Đầu sư* Ngọc Kiên Thanh),
- 13) **Thông Thiên Đài** (Dr. Nguyễn Văn Nhả, Lê Quang Hộ, Quách Văn Nghĩa, etc.) at Gò Công and Sài Gòn⁴²

etc.

All branches used the same basic documents on organization, prayers, and code of conduct revealed in 1926 and 1927 while arranging them according to their own points of view.

⁴² Ref: *Sách-Phần Đạo Cao Đài*, quyển II (Book on Caodaism volume II) l'Eglise Caodaist Temple of An-Hội (i.e. Ban Chính Đạo) (Bến Tre)

The Ban Chỉnh Đạo Temple

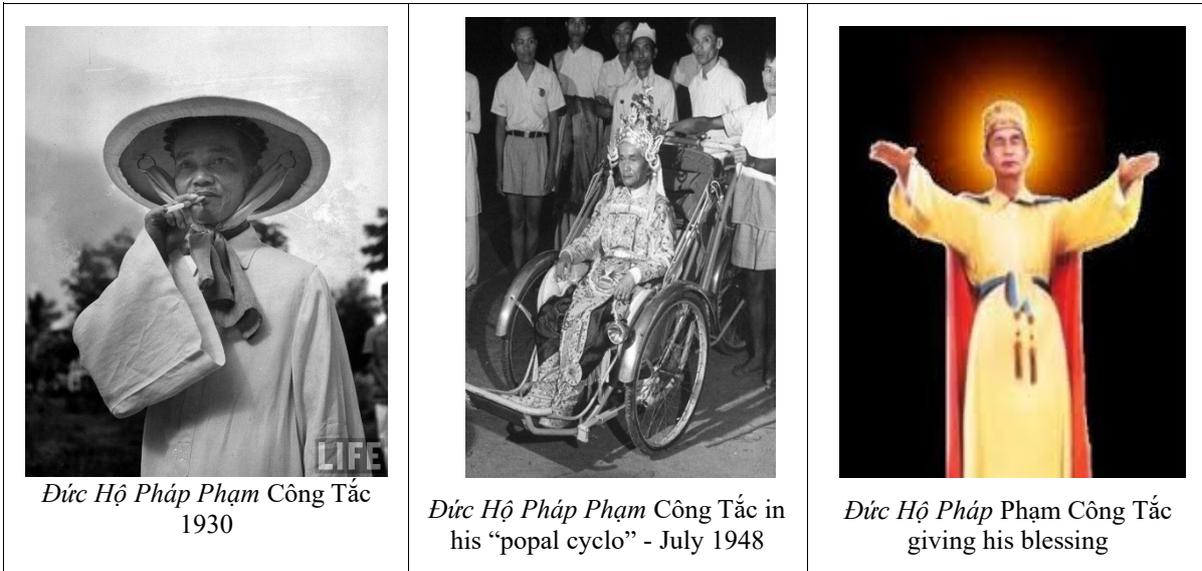
Only the Ban Chỉnh Đạo (Committee for rectification of the Religion) initially considered itself to be still part of Tây Ninh and had repeatedly sought to be reinstated there. It always found a closed door, and finally had to found its religious organization which became the second-largest Caodaist Temple after Tây Ninh.

The Tây Ninh Temple

Tây Ninh became a separate entity engaged in political activities and the creation of an armed force, and not recognizing any of the other branches, officially considered evil (*tà đạo*). These, without exception, focused solely on religious activities.

At the Holy See of Tây Ninh, one could see the images of Victor Hugo, whose spirit had come to “talk” to the *Hộ Pháp* Phạm Công Tắc when he was in Phnom Penh (Cambodia), Sun Yat Sen, Nguyễn Bình Khiêm and Jeanne D'Arc, figures absent from the temples of the other branches of Caodaism.

Tây Ninh will one day support Prince Cường Để who wanted to fight the French by relying on the Japanese who had a policy of supporting him. The result was the French sending *Hộ Pháp* Phạm Công Tắc in exile in Madagascar in 1941.



The Caodaist generals of Tây Ninh negotiated with the French an agreement signed on 9 June 1946 allowing the return on 21 August 1946 of the *Hộ Pháp* Phạm Công Tắc from Madagascar, in exchange for the commitment to fight the Việt Minh (Vietnamese communist resistance) who had massacred several thousand Caodaists, especially in Quang Ngãi at the Centre of the Country.

The Tây Ninh Temple attracted many people with its involvement in politics and with its Cao Đài army. By joining this army, people were exempted from the national military service imposed on 13 July 1952 by Bảo Đại at the insistence of General de Lattre. It was a defensive, not an attacking army as was the National Army of the State of Việt Nam. One consequence of this was the high number of Tây Ninh Caodaists abroad after the fall of Sài Gòn on 30 April 1975 compared to the one of the other branches. They are today the most active in opening temples and expanding Caodaism in other countries than Việt Nam.

In 1951, General Trịnh Minh Thế and some other Tây Ninh Caodaists left Tây Ninh and created a *Mặt Trận Quốc Gia Liên Minh* (Nationalist Alliance Front), known as *Cao Đài Liên*

Minh or Alliance Cao Đài, which aim was to fight at the same time the French colonizers and the communist Việt Minh⁴³.

The Tây Ninh Caodaists were present in all movements which brought together the nationalists including the Hòa Hảo⁴⁴ and Bình Xuyên⁴⁵ forces: the **Mặt Trận Quốc Gia Thống Nhất** (Unified Nationalist Front) created on 14 August 1945 at Sài Gòn, which included the Việt Minh; the **Mặt Trận Quốc Gia Liên Hiệp** (United Nationalist Front) created on 20 April 1946 at Sài Gòn with Hoàng Anh (war name of Huỳnh Phú Sổ, the Hòa Hảo leader) President ; the **Liên Minh Quốc Gia Việt Nam** (Việt Nam National Alliance) created on 1948 at Sài Gòn with the Caodaist Lê Văn Hoạch as President.

In March 1955, the *Hộ Pháp* Phạm Công Tắc created with the Hoà Hảo and Bình Xuyên forces the **Mặt Trận Thống Nhất Toàn Lực Quốc Gia** (United Front of all Nationalist Forces) with him as President, to put pressure on the Prime Minister Ngô Đình Diệm who wanted to unify the military forces of the country in one national army. These private military forces which were armed by the French who used them to fight the Việt Minh wanted to create a place for themselves in the governance of the country.

Their war with the government ultimately resulted in the crushing of the Bình Xuyên forces after their attack, the same year, on the National Police Staff, the execution of General Hòa Hảo Lê Văn Vinh (Ba Cụt) and the flight in 1956 to Cambodia of *Hộ Pháp* Phạm Công Tắc who died there in exile in 1959.

Tây Ninh even had a political party, the *Đảng Cộng Hòa Xã Hội* (Republican-Socialist Party) created in 1955. The Việt Minh itself had its Caodaist organization, headed by Cao Triều Phát. The name of this organization had changed several times before becoming *Cao Đài cứu quốc Mười một phái hiệp nhất* (Cao Đài saviour of the homeland Eleven unified branches) created in 1947. Cao Triều Phát was one of the dignitaries of the Minh Chơn Đạo branch created by Trần Đạo Quang in 1935.

6. AND AS OF TODAY

In 1955, the Democratic Republic of Việt Nam created a Ban Tôn Giáo (Committee of Religions) organized from national level to level of towns and villages to monitor, control, censor and authorize everything related to the activity religious (Nghị định số (Decree number) 566 / TTG of August 2, 1955). In 1975, after the victory of the communist Democratic Republic of Việt Nam over the nationalist Republic of Việt Nam, the religious activities were suspended throughout the country and religious returned to their homes.

As early as 1997, this *Ban Tôn Gio* issued Decrees recognizing the legal personality of the branches of Caodaism which requested it and which can be authorized to exercise.

In 2016, the number of Caodaists in the country is estimated to be 3 million. They are part of the following groups of organizations:

⁴³ Resistance organization to fight the French colonisers created by Hồ Chí Minh and led by the Communist Party of Indochina

⁴⁴ The Hòa Hảo is a Buddhist organization born in the village of Hòa Hảo in South Vietnam which has an army and a political party, the “Dân Xã Đảng” (Socialist People's Party).

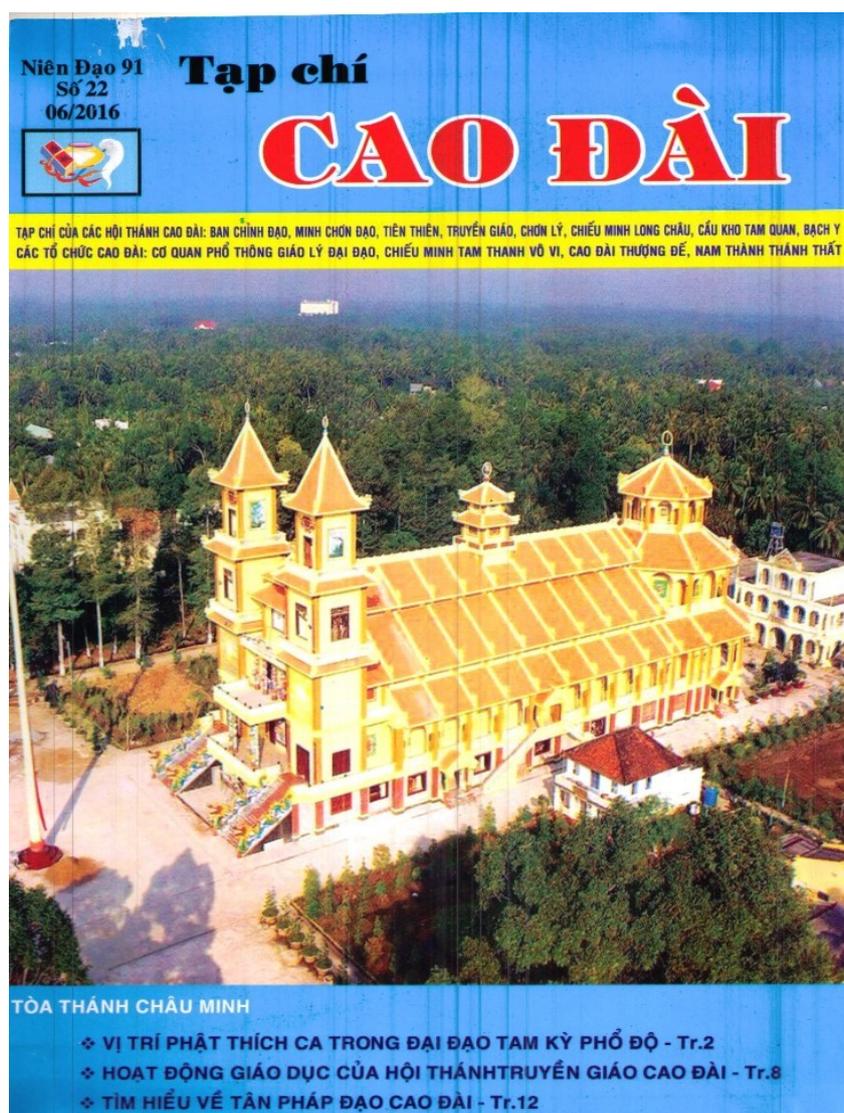
⁴⁵ The Bình Xuyên are a kind of brotherhood or armed mafia engaged in criminal activities, legal and clandestine gambling and pimping. They were for a time in charge of a Việt Minh Zone (the VII) when General Việt Minh Nguyễn Bình directed dissent in the South. They then joined the French, who armed them and entrusted them police in some neighbourhoods of Sài Gòn and the management of the *Đại Thế Giới* (The Great World), a great lupanar where prostitution and games were legal, and left them unharmed on the condition that they fight the Việt Minh.

1) Organizations in close cooperation and having a joint journal, the “*Tạp Chí Cao Đài*” managed by Ban Chính Đạo:

- Caodaist Temples: 1) Ban Chính Đạo (nearly one million followers and more than 300 oratories), 2) Minh Chơn Đạo, 3) Tiên Thiên, 4) Truyền Giáo, 5) Chơn Lý, 6) Chiếu Minh Long Châu, 7) Cầu Kho Tam Quan, 8) Bạch Y.
- Caodaist organisations (without hierarchical religious organization): 9) Cơ Quan Phổ Thông Giáo Lý Đại Đạo, 10) Chiếu Minh Tam Thanh Vô Vi, 11) Cao Đài Thượng Đế, 12) Nam Thành Thánh Thất.

2) Others

- Caodaist Temples :1) Tây Ninh (more than one million followers), 2) Cao Thượng Bửu Tòa at Bạc Liêu, 3) Hội Thánh Tam Quan, 4) Tòa Thánh Nhị Giang at Châu Đốc, 5) Tòa Thánh Tiền Giang, ...
- Caodaist organisations: 1)Thánh Thất Bàu Sen, 2) Tam Tông Miếu, 3) Cao Đài Việt Nam (Bình Đức), 4) Thánh Tòa Vô Vi Huỳnh Quang Sắc, 5) Vĩnh Nguyên Tự,...



Abroad, Caodaism is beginning to develop timidly by the presence of temples in some countries such as France, Belgium, Australia, the United States, Taiwan, ... mainly welcoming Vietnamese Caodaists resident in the country.

Appendix I

Official declaration of the birth of Caodaism

DECLARATION OFFICIELLE ADRESSEE PAR LES FONDATEURS DU CAODAIISME
A M. LE FOLL, GOUVERNEUR DE LA COCHINCHINE.

Saigon, le 7 octobre 1926

Monsieur le Gouverneur,

Les soussignés,
ont l'honneur de venir respectueusement vous faire connaître
ce qui suit :

Il existait en Indochine trois Religions (Bouddhisme, Taoisme, Confucianisme). Nos ancêtres pratiquaient religieusement ces trois doctrines et vivaient heureux en suivant strictement les beaux préceptes dictés par les Créateurs de ces religions.

On était, pendant cet ancien temps, tellement insoucieux qu'on pouvait dormir sans fermer les portes et qu'on dédaignait même de ramasser les objets tombés dans la rue (Gia vô bẻ hồ, lậ bát thập vi, tel est l'adage inscrit dans nos Annales).

Hélas ! ce beau temps n'existe plus pour les raisons suivantes :

1° Les pratiquants de ces religions ont cherché à se diviser tandis que le but de toutes les religions est le même : faire le bien et éviter le mal, adorer pieusement le Créateur.

2° Ils ont dénaturé complètement la signification de ces Saintes et précieuses doctrines.

époque nouvelle tellement heureuse qu'il est difficile de la décrire.

Au nom de très nombreux Annamites qui ont entièrement approuvé ces études et dont la liste est ci-jointe, les soussignés ont l'honneur de venir respectueusement vous déclarer qu'ils vont propager à l'humanité entière cette Sainte Doctrine.

Persuadés d'avance que cette nouvelle religion apportera à nous tous la Paix et la concorde, les soussignés vous prient de recevoir officiellement leur déclaration.

Les soussignés vous prient d'agréer, Monsieur le Gouverneur, l'assurance de leurs sentiments respectueux et dévoués. "

Bà Lâm ngọc Thanh, nghiệp chủ ở Vũng Liêm.

Ông Lê văn Trung, Cựu Thượng nghị viên, thường thị Ngũ đảng bửu tinh, Chợ lớn.

Ông Lê văn Lịch, thầy tu làng Long an, Chợ lớn.

Ông Trần đạo Quang, thầy tu, làng Hạnh thông Tây, Gia định.

Ông Nguyễn ngọc Tương, Tri phủ, chủ quận Cần giuộc.

Ông Nguyễn ngọc Thơ, nghiệp chủ Sài gòn.

Ông Lê bá Trang, Đốc phủ sứ, Chợ lớn.

Ông Vương quan Kỳ, Tri phủ, sở thuế thân, Sài gòn.

Ông Nguyễn văn Kinh, thầy tu, Bình lý thôn, Gia định.

Ông Ngô tướng Văn, thông phán sở tạo tác Sài gòn.

Ông Nguyễn văn Đạt, nghiệp chủ Sài gòn

Ông Ngô văn Kim, điền chủ, đại hương cả, Cần giuộc.

Ông Đoàn văn Bản, đốc học trường Cầu kho.

Ông Lê văn Giảng, thơ toán hàng Ippolito Sài gòn.

Ông Huỳnh văn Giới, thông phán sở Tân đảo Sài gòn.

Ông Nguyễn văn Tường, thông ngôn sở Tuần cảnh Sài gòn.

Ông Cao quỳnh Cư, thư ký sở hoả xa Sài gòn.

Ông Phạm công Tắc, thư ký sở thương chánh Sài gòn

Ông Cao hoài Sang, thư ký sở thương chánh Sài gòn.

Ông Nguyễn trung Hậu, đốc học trường tư thực Dakao.

Ông Trương hữu Đức, thư ký sở hoả xa Sài gòn.

Ông Huỳnh trung Tuất, nghiệp chủ, Chợ đũi, Sài gòn.

Ông Nguyễn văn Chúc, cai tổng Chợ lớn.

Ông Lại văn Hành, hương cả Chợ lớn

Ông Nguyễn văn Trò, giáo viên Sài gòn

Ông Nguyễn văn Hương, giáo viên Dakao.

Ông Nguyễn văn Kinh, giáo tập Cần giuộc.

Ông Phạm văn Tĩ, giáo tập Cần giuộc.

(trích Đại Đạo Căn Nguyên trang 23-24-25)

l'ancien temps de paix et de concorde. On sera ainsi dirigé vers une

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Table of contents

The basic truths on Caodaism

1. BIRTH OF CAODAISM	1
The three amnesties	1
The first caodaist	1
The “ <i>Thiên Nhãn</i> ” (Divine Eye)	2
The “ <i>Ngọc Cờ</i> ” (Jade beak basket)	3
The first separation.....	3
The five divisions of the Great Way.....	4
2. SPIRITISM AND DIVINE MESSAGES.....	5
2.1 The Evocation of Spirits.....	5
2.2 Caodaist divine messages.....	6
The content of the messages.....	7
2.3 The practice of worship.....	8
Joint hands.....	8
The invocations of the deities in prayers.....	9
The deity <i>Diệu Trì Kim Mẫu</i> or <i>Tây Vương Mẫu</i>	9
Caodaism expresses now some additional views	10
The Altar.....	11
Prostrations.....	12
Flag and symbols.....	12
3. THE SPIRITUALITY OF CAODAISM.....	13
3.1 <i>Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ</i>	13
3.2 the Five Divisions come together into one Unit (<i>Ngũ Chi Hợp Nhất</i>).....	13
Christianity.....	14
The Almighty.....	14
Freemasonry	15
3.3 The Three Ways Lead to Origin (<i>Tam Giáo Quy Nguyên</i>).....	16
3.4 Confucianism	17
3.5 Taoism	18
The Tao.....	18
The Yin et the Yang	19
Nothing is fixed, there is no dogma	20
The objective of going back to the One	20
The <i>Vô Vi</i> (<i>Wu Wei</i>).....	21
The Virtue.....	23

3.6 Buddhism	23
From conventional truth to ultimate truth	24
So it is (Ainsité in French), Impermanence, Illusion and Vacuity (Emptiness)	25
The Four Noble Truths (Tứ Diệu Đế) and the Noble Eightfold Path (Bát Chánh Đạo) ..	27
The supreme Illumination (<i>Vô thượng Chính Đẳng Giác</i>)	27
3.6 The Caodaist of every day.....	27
Caodaist Exotericism (<i>Ngoại Giáo Công Truyền</i>)	27
Caodaist Esotericism (<i>Nội Giáo Tâm Truyền</i>)	28
The everyday life.....	28
Meditation	31
Caodaist meditation.....	32
4. ORGANIZATION OF CAODAISM	33
4.1 The Cửu Trùng Đài (Tower with nine levels)	33
4.2 The Hiệp Thiên Đài (Tower of Union with the Almighty).....	35
4.3 The Bát Quái Đài (Octagonal Tower)	36
5. HISTORY OF CAODAISM.....	37
5.1 Gabriel Gobron's "History and Philosophy of caodaisme"	38
5.2 The direction of caodaism until 1933	38
5.3 The turmoil in Tây Ninh and the bursting into many branches (1927-1930).....	39
5.4 The split into two trends (1933)	42
Gabriel Gobron's book	44
5.5 Creation in Bến Tre of the Ban Chính Đạo (Committee for rectification of the religion), the Caodaist organization that will become the most important after Tây Ninh.....	44
The Great Meditation of the <i>Giáo Tông</i> (Superior Grand Master) of Ban Chính Đạo (Bến Tre)	46
5.6 The break-up of the Holy See in Tây Ninh	48
6. AND AS OF TODAY	50
Appendix I	52
Official declaration of the birth of Caodaism.....	52
Table of contents	55